

WASTE PRODUCTS

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Crime, Thriller

Amy is an office cleaner, beset by home problems she discovers a world of information from the rubbish bins of the office staff. At first a source of amusement, soon turns into a discovery that a crime is being committed. After gathering enough information Amy and her husband set about righting wrongs and helping some of the staff - without their knowledge.

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WASTE PRODUCTS

It was her first day on the job and Amy was nervous. She'd put on a decent skirt with matching top and wore old comfortable shoes, but not too old. Her hair was pulled back in a ponytail and she wore make-up just for the first meeting. She was very short and slight and looked as though she wouldn't last the shift, but she was a hard worker and her references glowed in the dark.

She was more distracted than she wanted to be. Before leaving home she received a call to visit her Auntie Joan, who had been taken ill and rushed into hospital. She was very fond of her sole relative and wanted to visit her as soon as possible. But she also needed this job.

Simon Klein was waiting and looked like he was in a hurry. She knew she wasn't late and yet he seemed to be waiting for her. He opened the office main door and switched on the bank of lights.

"Welcome to Marsh & Co. Two keys for the front door locks. Six individual offices and two open plan areas. Toilets are communal in the stair well, you don't have to worry about them." He walked down the entrance corridor. "Off here are the six executive offices. Glass panelled and single key entry. One to Six, key tags match." He walked out into the open area. "Twenty desks in this area. Don't touch any desk surface, that's up to them. If you see a cabinet or table surface that can be wiped over, do it. If it's not cleared, it isn't your responsibility."

He pushed open a door at the far end of the office and said, "Kitchenette. Wash up any cups and mugs you find. Put them in the cupboards there. Common sense really. If you break anything, leave a note. They'll replace it, not us. Just be careful. Remember, your bonus is dependent on how few complaints I get."

He walked out of the kitchen and back past the six offices to another door which was locked. "Single key, tagged Area Two." He opened the door and the room contained more desks. "Six desks. Same story as before."

He turned and looked at her for the first time. "It's a big responsibly working for CleanIt. We take pride in our work and in the honesty of our staff. You're replacing a cleaner who had three complaints and she had to go. Any questions?"

Amy took her time answering. She took a long look around.

"Well?"

"Hours? Any time to suit me you said at the interview."

He nodded and said, "Anytime after seven in the evening and before eight in the morning. There's never anyone in here between those hours. Anything else?" Amy was running through everything in her head. "You have my mobile number if there's a problem. But I've got to dash now. You okay to start?"

"All materials in a store cupboard?"

He nodded, "The tall cupboard in the kitchen, there's a key for that on these." He handed her a key ring with all the relevant keys. "If you run out of anything, buy it and we'll reimburse you. Once a month I'll come round a check on your progress and quality of work. Naturally you won't know when that is, so you need to be on your

toes. Welcome to CleanIt, Amy. I'm sure you'll enjoy working with us. Must go." He smiled briefly and left her alone in the silent office.

She stood and absorbed the atmosphere. She loved this moment. Absolute silence and solitude. No one to disturb her thoughts, or hear you what she did. With a sigh she headed for the kitchen and made herself a cup of tea. She opened the cupboard and removed all the materials she might need. The large bucket contained a mop and inside was a bag of cleaning cloths and sprays. The vacuum cleaner was old, but looked serviceable enough.

She started on the smaller open plan office and tried to time herself. The six tables were quite close together so the hovering took a little time and effort. She checked her progress and made sure she hadn't missed any area. She dusted where she could and then went round each desk clearing away the cups and glasses left behind. She dumped those into the kitchen, finished her tea and started on the larger open plan office.

This took considerably longer and by the time she'd finished she decided to have five minute rest. She sat at a desk and looked at the computer. A large in-out tray was piled high with paper and she idly looked through it to see what Marsh & Co. did as a trade. From the few sheets she felt she could look at without disturbing, they seemed to be something to do with financial advice.

Her break over, she started on the locked offices. Starting at number One for neatness sake she opened the door and went in. The lights were separate in here, so she switched on and the phosphorescent tubes stuttered, then banged on. A standard office she'd seen hundreds of times before. One large desk. Two visitors' chairs, one large leather executive chair. Two filing cabinets, locked, and a small conference table with four smaller chairs.

There was something easier about cleaning small offices. Everything was contained and took little time. The hovering was corner to corner and easy to catch everything quickly. The tables had some paperwork, but to show willing she cleaned where she could, moving the pile and then replacing it in the same place. The contents of the bins went into the larger sack that she would dump in the building's refuse container on her way home. She made a final check on the office then switched off the lights and locked the door. Five more to go.

Office Six was the last and she ran through everything in her mind to make sure she hadn't missed anything as this was her last hurdle. It had taken over two hours, but with practice she could get that down to two flat. The lights flickered on and she could see that this office was a lot messier than the others. Wads of paper had been loosely screwed up and thrown in the bin. Some had missed, others fallen out because the bin was full. Piles of paperwork and files littered the desk and some were thrown on the floor. This made her job more difficult. She sighed and said, "Men!" and began to tidy up as best she could. Neatening the piles, she reduced the amount of floor space they occupied.

She started to pile all the paper into her sack and emptied the bin into it and put the bin on the table. She noticed paper under the table and had to go on hands and knees to get it all out. She threw the paper into the sack and one piece bounced out. In frustration it rolled away, back under the table and on her knees she went again. She grabbed the paper and was about to throw it into the sack when she realised what it was. It was a pay slip. Despite being totally on her own, she still looked around to see if anyone was watching before slowly smoothing it out and reading it.

It was a natural human inquisitiveness to know what other people earned as a salary. When she read the monthly amount her jaw dropped. What did this slob do to warrant that amount? She calculated the annual

salary and gasped. She thought of her pitiful hourly rate and screwed the slip up in disgust. She threw it in the sack and carried on.

She hovered around the mess and knew she should do no more than that. Perhaps this wasn't typical and it would be tidy another time. She finally finished, switched out the lights and locked the door. She took the six mugs off the table with her and washed up all the cups in the sink. This took another fifteen minutes, including cleaning the kitchen surfaces and floor.

She'd finished her first night. It hadn't been a problem, just a little physical at times, but she would soon get used to that. She turned off the last of the lights and double locked the front door. The stair lobby moaned as the air moved up inside the empty lift wells. Other than that there was no sound. She hefted the sack onto her shoulder and pressed for the lift. It came quickly and she pressed for the ground floor and put the sack on the ground and waited.

The doors opened and she entered the main lobby of the building. The night guard smiled at her and she went across to introduce herself to him. His name was Raj and he was the regular night shift guard. She wished him goodnight and asked where the waste should go. He grinned at her and said he would sort it out for her. She smiled back and said goodnight.

She walked to the car park and got into her Fiesta and turned the engine over. It caught first time and she put on her seatbelt. She drove out of the car park, waving at the camera to Raj as the bar lifted. She drove off into the night. It was nearly ten and Dave would be expecting her at any time. She called him on her mobile and told him she'd just left the building.

"How'd it go?" he asked.

"Fine. No probs. See you in ten minutes. Bye, love."

She turned onto the dual carriageway and smiled at getting her first day back at work over with.

Dave was mildly curious about her job and asked all the normal questions, Amy giving all the normal answers. They sat together on the sofa with a plate of beans on toast as they watched the evening news finishing. Dave mopped his plate with the bread and sighed contentedly.

"It's good you're back in work again, Aim. Apart from us needing the money, you needed to get out more."

She picked up both plates and walked into the kitchen. She knew he was right, but it sounded so cold and callous to say it in those words. 'Needed to get out more'.

"Do you know how much one of those bigwigs earns in that place?" she shouted through the doors.

"No. How much?"

"Hundred and twenty thousand a year."

"How much!"

"Hundred and twenty!"

“What does he do for that?”

“No idea.”

“Keep your eyes open and find out. Hundred and twenty thousand. Makes my twenty look pitiful.” He said quietly.

The hospital had the typical smell to greet visitors and patients alike. Amy wound her way along corridors and through various floors before reaching the ward. After that, finding her Aunt was easy. To her surprise, Amy saw that Joan looked older. She was only seventy-five and looked ninety.

It sounded stupid asking how she was feeling, when she was lying in a hospital bed punctured with tubes. But it was the obvious thing to say and was well meant.

At least Joan managed a smile before saying. “Not good. Felt better. How are you, dear?” Amy deflected the change of subject and tried to get more details from her Aunt about her collapse. “They say it’s my heart, dear. What do they know? Never had a bit of trouble before. I’ll be home tomorrow, you’ll see.”

“Anything you need? Drinks, fruit?”

“No. I’ll be out tomorrow.”

“Where’s Daniel and Lionel?”

Joan shook her head. “No idea. I gave the nurse their phone numbers and we’ll just have to wait and see.”

Amy shook her head. She’d always had a slight dislike for Joan’s two sons. To call them wayward may be a little strong, but attentive and loving sons they were not. Both in their late forties, they’d sponged off Joan and Eric until in their late thirties. In the end, Eric had told them to get somewhere to live, then threw them out of the house. This had upset Joan, who could see little wrong with her treasures. Amy had once spent hours while Joan had cried about their loss as if they were dead.

Once thrown out, they rarely returned. Joan had never stopped blaming Eric for that, until the day he died in 1986. Despite her anger at her husband, she never loved another and was determined to remain alone for the rest of her life.

“I’ll give them a call when I get back.” Amy offered.

“Don’t bother, dear. If they come, they come. I’ll be out of here tomorrow.”

Amy stayed until later in the afternoon. She told Joan she had to go and get Dave’s supper.

“Send him my love, won’t you?”

Amy nodded, “He sent his too . And said get well again and do what the doctor’s say.”

Joan laughed, “Of course he did. Take care. I love you both.”

There was a look in her Auntie’s eyes that Amy didn’t like. There was resignation there. She knew she wasn’t coming out of hospital.

In the evening Amy opened up the office and started on the open plan sections again. She placed her small radio on one of the desks and listened to the music and chat as she worked through the office. The work was straight forward and would soon become repetitive and boring. Her radio helped and the thought that Dave had planted in her mind added a little extra 'spice' to this office.

Once again she left office Six until the end and opened the door to the same amount of mess as before. This time Amy picked up all the screwed up pieces of paper and opened them out first. They were going to be thrown away anyway, so no one was going to miss anything she took. She looked through them quickly and saved the few that looked interesting. She pushed them into the back pocket of her jeans and carried on cleaning. The office looked significantly better than when she'd entered and so she took one last look on the desk to see if anything could be tidied up.

The screen was covered in post-it notes from other people in the office. Most of them were address to 'Robin', so that was his name! Most of the notes asked him to contact them on his return tomorrow. He must have been out of the office for the last part of the day and still there was so much mess!

She said goodnight to Raj and drove home. This time Dave had prepared fried egg on toast and they sat and ate in silence. As they finished their light meal Dave said, "Anymore on your rich client?"

"He's not my 'client'. His name's Robin."

"What a poncey name that is. Robin!"

Amy returned from the kitchen with two cups of tea and placed them both on the coffee table. "I got these though." She threw the few pieces of paper onto the table and Dave picked them up.

"Credit card statements. He shouldn't be leaving these around."

"He wasn't. He was throwing them away. And missed the bin." They both laughed.

"Robin Banks. His address and everything, all here. Posh area too. Look at the number of entries in this. Christ! He knows how to spend."

"We shouldn't be looking at that. It's private. If Simon ever found out..."

"Whose to know, Aim? Look at this...a meal out, three-hundred quid!"

"It could be a company credit card." Amy said, looking over his shoulder.

"Nah. No petrol purchases. I assume at hundred and twenty grand a year he'd have a company car at least. If this was a company card, it'll be on here."

"If you say so."

"I know. The ponces at work who've company cars have to record everything. Private and business mileage now. Serve them right. Look at this!"

Dave pointed to an entry and said, "A clothing store, fifteen hundred pounds!"

"I don't spend that a year. Perhaps it's a special occasion."

"Some suit for Fifteen hundred quid! Pity he didn't throw away the receipt too."

"He might have. I didn't bring everything home. What else have we got there?"

Dave flicked through the papers, "Nothing much. A list of phone numbers, handwritten. By him I suppose. One underlined and ringed. Important. Wonder who that is. His fancy piece on the side."

"Stop it. We don't know anything about him."

"We know more than we did yesterday. Keep your eyes open on this fella, Aim. He could be good for a laugh."

"I've my job to consider, Dave. Don't bugger it up for me now."

He gave her a hug and kissed her on the cheek. "It's only a bit of fun. We won't do anything stupid." He picked up the list of numbers again and said, "I wonder who this is. Let's call and find out."

"Dave! I just said don't bugger it up for me."

"They won't know whose phoning. We'll say it's a wrong number. Bet you a quid it's a woman. Bet ya."

Amy smiled and said, "A quid? You're on. It's a bloke. I just know it."

Dave tapped in the number and both listened to the handset, heads pressed together giggling.

"Hello?" It was a woman.

"Is this....Rachael?"

"No. Norma. Sorry. You may have the wrong number."

"Sorry to disturb you." Dave hung up.

"Norma! You owe me a quid."

Amy pretended a sulk until Dave burst out laughing and couldn't stop.

"What's the matter?" she said.

"His parents must've had a sense of humour." He said through bursts of laughing.

"Why?"

"His name. Robin Bains!" He laughed again and couldn't stop.

That next evening Amy was in the office working, radio turned up loud so she could hear it throughout the length of the office. This evening she'd brought her own cleaning cart. An aluminium bucket on wheels. It was

something she'd bought years ago and found extremely useful. It had compartments for everything, so she could move around the office with all her materials easy to hand.

She followed the standard procedure, start at the top and move down. Dust sweep and vacuum. She also had some other tricks of the trade and kept them a secret – although someone must know them because she had learned them from others. Simple things like putting furniture polish on the broom and mop, it picked up dust faster and easier. She always paid special attention to the main entrance door. It was cleaned from top to bottom, even the architrave was dust free. This was the first impression anyone had of entering the company and had to look clean and nice.

She worked smoothly and efficiently through the main office. She was thinking about Joan for most of the time. She'd visited her earlier in the day and Joan had looked a little better. She was more alert and smiled a lot more. She still thought she would be out in a day or too and that was keeping her going. Amy had received no answer to the calls she'd made to Joan's two sons.

She took breaks when she needed to and worked on through the executive offices, leaving number Six to the last. She pulled her cart through the door and closed it behind her. The place was the usual mess.

"Well, Robin Bains. What have you left us today?"

The radio played faintly in the background as she started to pile all the paper material into a small plastic bag, she would look through that later. She rummaged around in the bin and removed all paper references and left the more solid items like an apple core. She held the core up in her gloves, the flesh already brown. She looked closely at the bite marks.

"Nice even teeth, sir."

She emptied the bin into the sack and tidied up the office, before cleaning properly. She was aware that this was becoming a distraction to her. Although it didn't matter how long it took her to clean and go home, she normally liked to get everything done, properly, but quickly. No point spending longer in the office than necessary. It had become a distraction, but it also added interest to an otherwise repetitious and boring job. There was no harm done to anyone if she took an interest in her 'client', as Dave called him. She finished her regular cleaning and took the time to sit in the executive chair and get the feel of the office.

She was convinced every office had its own character. A 'feel' to it. Of course that 'feel' changed throughout the day and it was dependent of who was in the office and the impact that personality made to the combination of the other staff. But once the office was devoid of staff, it definitely had a 'feel'. She sat and absorbed the office's 'feel'. It was warm and cosy. Because it was in such a mess it lacked the sterility of the rest of the building. Amy liked the feel of number Six.

Amy resisted the urge to tidy up the items on the desk. She knew that staff rarely liked anything moved, for whatever reason. So Amy had learned to be observant and note where everything was. Often she made the extra effort and cleaned anyway, ensuring everything went back as it was. She'd never had a complaint before, so it must work. Left to their own devices, people would let the dust and grime build up until their stations were unworkable and a health hazard. People were incredibly lazy at the office and often obsessive at home with cleanliness. There was no accounting for taste.

She swivelled the chair and rocked it back and forth. It was comfortable, with a lumber support and padded arms. She sat in a natural position and looked at the computer screen. It was a little high for her, so Mr. Bains

was taller than her, not surprising, she was short by anyone's standards. She leaned forward. The screen was full of finger marks and she looked carefully at them. They were very small and neat. Taking a cloth from her apron she wiped the screen, cleaning them off. That was better! Now the rest of the casing looked grubby so she sprayed the universal cleaner on the cloth and set to work. Once she finished it looked almost new. She was satisfied.

The table was full of papers and looked a nightmare to work from. But everyone had their own methods. Although apparently random, there might be a logical pattern Amy just couldn't see. She dare not tidy these up. There was a stack of trays that were overflowing with paper. The signs for in and out were well hidden. The usual six used mugs were there and Amy sniffed them. All coffee. From the half finished cup she could see it was milky and she smelt it and was sure there was sugar in there too. So he liked milky coffee with sugar and drank a lot of it.

Did he have a secretary, or assistant? If he had, surely they'd clear away the cups? Perhaps he liked the mess. That was more likely. Slob! Idly Amy tried the three drawers and each was locked. She ran her fingers under the desk edge and realised it probably hadn't been cleaned in an age. That had certainly been her impression from the first evening. The office was not properly attended to in the past. Whoever the person was that she replaced, she now had a good idea why they were fired.

She ran her cloth under the edge of the metal desk and back again. Something clinked and fell onto the carpet. Her heart raced, had she broken something? She looked down and saw a box, slightly smaller than a matchbox. She picked it up. It was metallic and when she shook it, it rattled. It was a magnetic key holder. She'd seen these before. They were mainly used on cars as spare key holders, you put them under the wheel arch and they clung on until you needed them. Where had it come from? Where had it been placed? She ran through her actions and guessed it had been on the right hand side. That made sense, he was probably right handed. She put it back and made a mental note to look the following day to see where he'd placed it. Just in case she knocked it free again by accident.

She stood up and collected all her materials and pushed the cart through the door. Lights off and lock up. She was finished for the day. Time for something experimental tonight. Cheese on toast, with marmite and Worcester sauce.

Dave seemed eager to see her and asked how she got on. It took her a moment to realise he was taking about her 'client' and gave him the plastic bag full of discarded papers. He sat on the sofa and emptied it onto the coffee table.

"I'll get the supper tonight then. Shall I?" she said with a grin.

They ate in silence with Dave reading the scraps of paper and throwing them away, or putting them to one side. Amy watched the news and finished her toast with a smile. She must try that again. Dave was non committal which meant he enjoyed it. She cleared the dishes away and began to wash up.

"Anything of interest, love?" she said from the kitchen. There was no reply. She walked back into the lounge and saw him throwing away the last piece into their waste bin.

"Nothing." He said disappointedly.

“Never mind. Tea?” He nodded and started to pull all the papers out again. She shook her head and went back into the kitchen to see if the kettle had boiled.

It was raining and Amy’s hair was soaked, as she pushed open the toilet door. She felt miserable and hated getting her hair wet. It was heavy and thick and took an age to dry, so she would look a fright until she could wash and dry it properly. She dumped her handbag and radio on the tiled floor and tried to dry her hair using the hot air blower.

The restroom had an eerie quality in a deserted building. She rapidly finished and got out of there. The office seemed to be a sanctuary compared with the echoing hollowness of the toilets. The lights flickered on and she turned up her radio. Jon ‘The Don’ Davis was abusing the listeners and broke off his tirade to play a Country and Western song. She stopped mid walk and smiled. She loved C&W. She walked back and turned it up further. Dolly Parton. Her favourite.

“You’d be surprised how much it costs, to look this cheap!”

Her hair forgotten as she sang along to ‘Islands in the Stream’ and her cart was pushed with a degree of artistic flair.

“I look just like the girl next door...if you happen to live next to an amusement park.”

There was a major spillage of coffee in the main walkway of the open plan office and Amy cursed the carelessness of the staff.

“It wouldn’t happen in your own home, would it!”

She mixed up her special cocktail of stain remover, soap and vinegar and soaked the area stained. She would come back later and work the buggers out. The song had finished and Amy felt a little cheated. Never mind ‘The Don’ would harass some poor sucker who called in and she would be distracted enough not to notice the time slipping away. Why did these people call in anyway? They know they’re going to be criticised and abused. It took being dumb to a new level. Perhaps that was exactly why they called. People were strange. Time for a cuppa.

Amy felt tired by the time she got home. The rain hadn’t let up and her hair was wet again. She must remember to leave an umbrella in the car. She threw her handbag on the hall stand and walked into the kitchen and switched on the kettle. A large plate was sitting on the Formica surface, wrapped in cling film. She could see several sandwiches underneath and she smiled. Dave was experimenting again.

There was a message on the phone and Amy’s heart went cold. It was going to be her Auntie Joan. With trembling fingers she pressed the button and Joan’s voice came through strong and clear.

“I’m out, dear. Back home. Feeling fine. Speak to you soon.”

Amy called straight back and chatted for half an hour. The heart attack had been real, but they thought not threatening. At least she was home in her own house and sounded happy. Still no sign of Daniel and Lionel.

She ate alone as Dave's note had said he would be back later. It was good for him to get a break away from her and the home, every now and again. During her bad time he'd little chance to have any time to himself. He didn't spend time down the pub. He didn't drink alcohol at all. Neither of them smoked. Not any more. A lesson was learned the hard way.

The news finished and she turned the TV off and went into the kitchen to clear away. With a fresh cup of tea in her hand she sat on the sofa and emptied the plastic bag onto the coffee table. The usual pile of hand written notes to himself. A list of people to call, all crossed off. Very efficient. A mobile phone statement, loads of calls. A hairdresser's appointment. She knew what Dave would say about that. A receipt from Boots for a new hairdryer. What a coincidence. It was a pity he hadn't left it behind in the office, she could have used that.

Dave came in and sat next to her. He gave her a kiss on the cheek and said, "What've got tonight?"

He rummaged through the papers and made cryptic comments. He picked up the hairdresser's appointment, "Ponce." Amy smiled.

He grinned at the mobile statement, "Great. Numbers. I'll add them to the rest."

"What 'rest'?" she said.

Dave picked up a folder from the side of the couch and said, "I've started a file. I've called it, 'Profile of a rich man'. Alternatively known as Robin the rich, to feed to poor." He handed it to her and she opened it. Inside were sheets of paper with lists and details so far gleaned from the private life of Robin Banks.

"You can't do this!" Amy was incredulous.

"Why not. Only we are going to see it. What's wrong in a little harmless fantasy detective work. He'll never know."

"But we're documenting his private details. Isn't that illegal? Or at least immoral! What if someone got a hold of this?" she waved the folder at him. "We'd be in deep trouble. Not the least, I'll lose my job!"

"Don't worry. We'll keep it locked up here.

"I don't like it, love. I really don't. Aren't you taking this a little too far?"

"It's livened up your interest up in your job, hasn't it?" She nodded and was about to speak. "Well then. A bit of fun. See what we can get every day. Added interest for you. Okay?" She still seemed uncertain. "Just for a while. Until we get bored. Okay?" Reluctantly she nodded.

He hugged her and kissed her on the mouth. She kissed him back.

"Early night, love?" He asked with a grin.

She recognised the look in his eyes and smiled at him. She felt tired and stressed. An early night was just what she needed, but only after a bout of Boys and Girls first though. She went upstairs and Dave switched off all the lights. He picked up his folder and slipped the more interesting scraps of paper inside it. Tomorrow he'll add all the phone numbers and try to match names against the numbers in the future. An interesting case for the 'Cyber Detective'.

Last day of the week, time for a little Dolly. Amy slipped the CD into her machine and wound up the volume.

“My husband said 'show me your boobs' and I had to pull up my skirt... so it was time to get them done! Plastic surgeons are always making mountains out of molehills.”

The Country and Western music rocked the office and then another two CDs finished the job. Office Six was all that was left to do.

Amy sped through office Six and made sure everything was perfect. Amy wanted to be faultless in this office particularly. As she finished, she turned off the radio/CD player and sat in the leather chair. For tonight, SHE was the boss. She ran her fingers under the table to touch the metal key holder. Yes, the same place. It came away in her hand and she studied it.

She pulled out the sliding flap and saw the gold key nestling in the box. She tipped it into her hand and slowly slid it into the lock on the top drawer. It turned easily and the drawer opened at the slightest touch. She looked inside. It was a mess. No matter what Amy touched, Robin would not notice anything had been moved.

The drawer was full of pieces of paper and odd stationery items. There was a large bunch of keys and a note book. Dave would like that. Guilt swept over her as she thought of the idle photocopier just outside the door. But if it pleased Dave to delve into something supposedly forbidden, who was she to deny him! Gently she lifted the little black book from the drawer.

She carefully opened it, dreading something falling out and not knowing where it should go back. It was an address book. Hand written in a very legible hand. Despite being a slob, Robin could be neat and methodical too. A strange mixture that. Did that indicate a confused psyche?

Dare she photocopy this? She took the book to the copier and stood beside it. Years since she worked one of these. It came on as she approached and shocked her, almost dropping the book. She lifted the lid and placed the book face down on the platen. She saw the large round print button and pressed it.

“What do you mean, incorrect sized paper! What does that mean?” She gently tapped the button again and sighed with relief when the machine whirred into life. A page slid out at one end and she looked at it. A perfect copy. She looked at her watch. Nearly nine-thirty. She would do a few pages and then get off home.

It took her ten-minutes, but she finished the book. She took the book off the platen and closed the lid. Back in the office she slid the book back into its place and closed the drawer.

“Amy?”

The key slipped out of her hand and landed on the floor.

“Amy, you there?” Louder this time.

Amy fought to recover her composure.

“In here. Just finishing up.”

She stood up and moved to the other side of the desk and was just dusting the edges as Simon walked through the door.

“Good you’re here, I thought I’d missed you. I’m running late. Everything all right?” Amy nodded. “Good, good. Your wages.” He handed her a small brown envelope. She opened and counted the forty pounds in notes.

“You’re on an emergency tax code until they can catch up. You’ll get any overpaid tax back later. Lump sum and all that.”

Amy smiled and nodded again.

“Good. Must dash. I’ve spoken to the office staff and they seemed pleased with your work. Well, no complaints anyway. Any questions? NO. Okay, see you next week. Have a good weekend. Bye.” He was gone. Amy let out a long sigh of relief then froze in horror. She looked out of the door and saw the photocopier screen was still alight. Simon couldn’t have noticed, he would have said something. That was a close call. Now where was that key?

Dave was delighted with the copies. It would keep him busy for hours entering all that data into his sheets. It was sandwiches again and Amy began to doubt the wisdom of keeping Dave occupied on this project. She took her food and drink and sat with him at the table as he began to enter all the names, addresses and details he could see on the sheets.

“Any more stuff from the bin?” Dave said.

“I’ve looked through them. Nothing relevant, I think. I left them on the table.

“Good. Wonderful job, love. Wonderful. Isn’t this exciting?”

“Not really, but you knock yourself out, sweetie. I’m early to bed.”

“I checked on those phone numbers by the way.”

“What phone numbers?”

The one’s he wrote down. You know...we called the ringed one. I checked on the rest.”

“You what!”

“I called them all up and got their names.”

“What!”

“Easy. I just said, ‘Who is this please?’ and they normally tell me. Joe Bloggs, or whatever. I then say, ‘Isn’t that the Plastic Windows company?’ and they say ‘no, its – whatever’. So I get a name and a company name if it’s a company. Easy.”

“You can’t be doing that, Dave. Take it easy. This is going too far, isn’t it?”

“No harm done. No one to know. Just interested that’s all. Don’t worry.”

“But I am worried. If you carry on like this I’ll have to stop bring stuff home.”

Dave looked crestfallen. “Okay. Sorry. I just find it...exciting. That’s all.”

She shook her head and said, "I'm going up."

"I'll be up soon."

He wasn't.

The weather brightened up for the weekend and they went for a walk in the park. They held hands and laughed at the antics of the ducks on the lake. A shared ice cream was a treat and they went back home to fall asleep in the chairs for the afternoon. Dave had a part time job to do later that afternoon. It wasn't much more than labouring, but every penny counted. He was on call and the shift could last an hour, or four. He never knew, but was grateful for the work and the chance to earn desperately needed extra cash.

Amy took the time to quickly visit Aunt Joan and see how she was coping. She looked well and was delighted to see her niece. Once back home, Amy prepared a full roast dinner for the evening while Dave was still at work. Later, they sat and ate with two candles on the table and spoke softly about a range of subjects. They watched a reality TV programme on the television later and wondered what so many people watched them for. Real life was so much more complex and interesting. At least that's what Dave thought, thinking about Robin Bains.

They stayed up late to watch the end of the movie and were disappointed at the ending. They went to bed and Dave couldn't sleep. He was restless and kept Amy awake. She cuddled up to him and asked him what was wrong.

"Nothing wrong. Just can't sleep."

"Can I suggest something to make you tired? Then you'll sleep."

Half an hour later both were fast asleep and Dave gently snoring.

The next morning they had breakfast in bed and read the Sunday papers. It was past noon before Amy was dressed and ready to enjoy her day of leisure. Dave disliked Sunday evenings, all too soon the weekend was over and work loomed on the near horizon. He was bored in his job as a jobbing electrician. Each day was the same, just the houses changed.

Amy fell asleep in the afternoon and Dave stood over her and just watched her sleep. She looked beautiful when relaxed and simply wonderful when awake. There was nothing he wouldn't do for his wife. He knelt down and kissed her lightly on the cheek and went into the kitchen to look at his file on Bains.

He worked through the address book list and finally sat back with his hands behind his head. He had everything written and accessible . now, to cross check the earlier phone numbers with the new. None of them matched. Not surprising, he thought. If they were hand written they were probably new to Bains.

That was as far as he could go. He needed something meatier now. A thread he could run with. He had an idea,

It was a stretch too far for Amy, but Dave won her round. It was something they were doing TOGETHER. It didn't cost them anything. He promised not to touch anything and leave when she told him too. It was a one-off visit and she need not let him back again - ever.

Dave sat in the leather chair and spun it round until he saw her glaring at him. He stopped and said, "Key?"

She stood over him as he carefully rummaged in the drawer. He looked at the keys and said, "This is a Yale and this is a deadlock. Both front doors, I should think. This...could be a garage? These...don't know." He put them back and sifted through the sheets of paper.

He found two small separate keys in the bottom of the drawer. He studied them carefully and put them back. "Don't know what they're for. Christ! Is the photocopier on?" He whispered.

"Why?"

"There's loads of credit cards statements here, going way back. I'd like to see those."

"Dave!"

"While we're here."

He looked deeper and produced another pile he wanted copied. Gas Bills, Electricity, even a Mortgage statement. He piled them onto of the others as Amy started copying.

"Oh, no!" Amy said, hand over mouth.

"What?" said Dave hurrying out of the office.

He looked the copier. "It's only out of paper."

"Yes, but I don't know how to put it in. Do you?"

Between them they worked out how to replace the paper and used an opened ream lying by the side of the machine.

"I hope no one notices its been used over the weekend." Said Amy.

"I shouldn't think so. Who cares about office materials."

Dave returned to the drawer and joined Amy later with a triumphant smile on his face. "Gold dust. His bank statement. Last month's. Yes!"

Amy was now getting nervous. "Okay, but that's the last. Put everything back and lock up. Now!"

Dave recognised the tone and did as he was told. He was pleased with his visit and couldn't wait to look in detail at the statements. That could tell them a lot more about Bains.

The weekly grind started once again. Seemingly never ending, never changing. Dave snipping wires and fitting plugs, Amy driving to the office with Dolly Parton for company. Office Six was a mess again. Amy now used a

larger plastic sack and loaded everything into it and put it by the door for taking home. She then cleaned the rest of the offices and returned to Six for her final effort.

Dave had studied the Bank Statements the previous night and had discovered a few interesting things about the high flyer Robin Bains. The particular areas that interested Dave was the Standing Orders and Direct Debits the man had. About forty! Almost all his household bills were paid that way, as monthly, quarterly, bi-annually, or annual payments. There were several S.O.s to accounts, which would need to be checked later. There were no car payments at all, so that proved it was a company car. Never any doubt there. There was a whole list of cheques that needed to be looked into. But overall the man was paid a lot, but paid out a lot too.

“Do you know how much he pays as a mortgage a month!” Dave had shouted down the stairs.

“No. But I think you’re going to tell me.”

“Over two grand!”

“About what I earn a year.” Amy had mused.

She looked at the clean office and realised she should be worth a lot more than that. She sat in the chair and looked at the key.

“Let’s try the second drawer tonight.” She slid it open. On top of the untidy pile of papers was a photograph. She noted how it was laying in the drawer before picking it up by its edges and looked carefully at the image. It was a man and woman in their late forties. This must be the Bains’. She looked at him. Slightly overweight. Kind face, clean shaven with dark blue eyes. The hair was thinning and going grey, making him look older than he probably was.

The wife was slimmer and very attractive. Her hair was coiffured well and she had good dress sense. Amy took an instant liking to the couple as she walked to the copier.

Below the photo was a folder and she eased it open carefully. It contained press cuttings, the top one showed a photograph of a young couple about to get married. As she read the short copy, Amy realised the boy was called Marcus Bains and the woman Debbie Taylor. This must be Robin’s son. She looked for further details and found the wedding day was set for a few weeks time.

“So we’re going to have a wedding in the family are we? Could that be the fifteen-hundred pounds for top hat and tails? Most probably. I wonder what Mrs. Bains will be wearing? Cream? Has to be.”

Amy took the folder to the copier and began to copy the twenty or so clippings. Some dating back to when Marcus was a very young child. Here was a history of his son. Dave will love this. She finished the copying and reset the drawer. Enough for one night, she thought. Time to go home.

Dave studied the press cuttings while she ate her bowl of soup and slice of bread. “These are great. Look at this. The young Marcus. Top of the school. University. Top degree. Great future in store for this lad.”

The cuttings covered his progress through University, his pranks during rag week, his scholarship to study mathematics in the USA and his success at being the youngest Director for a scientific company in London.

“It mentions the parents rarely in here. It’s all Marcus. Here’s one. ‘Mr and Mrs Bains are proud of their son.’ Of course they are. Who wouldn’t be. Now he’s getting married, Robin will want some time off then. It doesn’t say where. We’ll have to find out.”

“I reckon she’ll wear cream.”

“If it’s nearby, we can go and watch.”

At that point it dawned on Amy just how far they were willing to go into this man’s life.

The next evening Amy’s thoughts were on her ‘client’ and the soon-to-be wedding. Dave wanted the date and somewhere amongst all that paperwork he must have something with the arrangements on, that would give the date and hopefully the venue. Tonight was the turn of the second drawer. This time she was going to look at everything in it.

The previous evening they had checked on Robin’s address book and found Marcus Bains and his details. He lived in Wimbledon, which wasn’t far from Croydon, where Amy lived. Logic suggested the wedding would be in the Wimbledon area, unless the wife-to-be came from further afield and wanted to be married nearer home. It was a piece of information that became increasingly important to Amy to find out. Half way round the main open office she decided she couldn’t wait. Office Six was calling to her.

She resisted the urge until she had finished the main areas. She forced herself to take the time to make a cup of tea and sat in the leather chair with the drawer open. Carefully she removed the contents, layer by layer.

In the top folder was a pile of receipts and tickets. Clearly a collection of items as expenses to be claimed back from the company. Some of the dates on them were a month old. He hadn’t got around to them yet. That pile of photocopying may have to wait for another evening. The next folder contained details of his mortgage. Amy never understood these forms and technical details, so that could wait even longer before copying. Two folders remained. The next was full of old credit card statements and bank statements. Dave would be in his element with those. She put them back and removed the last folder. Tonight she was only interested in the wedding.

The final folder contained a single photocopy of a birth certificate. Amy held it at an angle to read it. It was obviously a copy of a copy, maybe several generations of copies. But the name of the child was Marcus Bains. His son. She took the time to copy that, replaced everything in the drawer as it had been before and slipped the key into the last drawer of the desk. It wouldn’t fit. She tried again and then bent close to the lock to see it was a different lock. It looked newer. The lock had been replaced.

Amy rocked back in the swivel chair and thought. Here was a man careless to leave personal details on the floor and in the rubbish bin, yet needs to lock something away he doesn’t want anyone to see. What could be in the drawer? Where was the key? Key? Key? She opened the first drawer again and lifted out the bunch of keys. After a careful search, she decided the key was not on that ring. These were keys for the home. Door keys, a car key. A spare set! An idea came to her and she could not shake it off. She forced it to the back of her mind.

Tonight she’d drawn a blank and it bothered her. Somehow it was spoilt. Robin made everything else so easy. Why couldn’t she find the wedding details? It was an irritating puzzle, she needed to solve.

“Come on Robin! Where are they?”

Amy stood and walked around the room. There was a three-drawer filing cabinet in the corner. The grey metal looked uninteresting, but what did it hold? She looked at the labels on the drawers. The top one said ‘Personnel’, the next ‘Accounts’ and the third said, ‘Miscellaneous’. So where were the keys?

She reluctantly returned to the small open plan office to finish her job. It would be nearly an hour before she finished and she wanted to think about all this. She left the radio off and beavered away as her mind made circular tours of the new problem areas she’d been presented with. She switched off the Hoover and picked up a telephone. The single tone was comforting and she tried to dial her home number. It gave her the message unobtainable. She thought for a moment and remembered when she’d worked as temp receptionist years before she had to give up work. An outside line needed a number. Nine, wasn’t it? She tapped the nine and the line went silent. She dialled the number and Dave answered.

She told him in detail everything that happened in number Six and he listened with growing frustration.

“We need to see inside that miscellaneous drawer. And you can’t find the keys?” Dave sounded disappointed.

“I don’t remember seeing any other keys in the drawers do you?”

“No luck, love.”

“No. Wait a minute. There’re two small keys in the.....top drawer. Check them first. I’ll hang on.”

Amy put the phone down and ran back into Six. She opened the top drawer and carefully pulled aside the top layers of paper and saw the two keys Dave had found on Sunday. She took them both to the cabinet and realised they looked wrong. Neither fitted. She returned them to the drawer and went back to the phone.

“No? Never mind, love. Pity. How about.....if he used that magnetic key box once. He might use it again.”

“Good idea. I’ll have another look. I’m running late. So see you later. Bye, love.”

She put the phone down and went straight back to Six. She bent down and looked under the desk, only the one box stuck under there. Metal! Metal! It had to be on metal. The only thing left in the room that was metal was the filing cabinet itself. Surely not! The cabinet stood a few centimetres away from the wall and Amy ran her fingers gently down the right hand side of the rear. Nothing. Then the left. Her fingers touched something. She noted its rough position from the top of the cabinet and slowly prised it away. Another key box. She opened it and the key fitted. She opened the ‘Miscellaneous’ drawer.

There were hundreds of hanging files, but only a few had name tags. They did seem to have personal types of titles. Like ‘Holiday’, ‘Tax returns’, ‘Letters’, ‘Accountant’ and ‘Bills’. Amy was disappointed. She was hoping for ‘Wedding’. On reflection, it would probably be his wife that was making all the arrangements. All Robin needed to know was the date and when to turn up.

Amy was just about to close the drawer when she noticed a tag right at the back. It was untitled, but had a white card in it, where some of the other files hadn’t and were empty. She pulled it out and opened the folder. Inside were scraps of paper with words written on them. None made sense so she put the folder away. She closed the drawer, locked the cabinet and put the key back. An overall disappointing result, but at least they had a copy of the son’s birth certificate. There may be more information on that.

She returned to her work and hurried through the rest of the office. It was past ten o'clock by the time she left and Raj said, "Late tonight?"

She grinned at him and answered, "Had to take a break, knee playing up. See you tomorrow. Night."

Dave was waiting at the door for her and she kissed him briefly and hurried indoors. "I'm starving. What have we got?"

"I thought cereal tonight. Hot, or cold milk?"

"Hot, I think. Thanks."

"Tea?"

"Could murder one. Thanks, love."

As they slurped at their Corn Flakes, Amy detailed her night's research. Dave picked up the certificate and started to read it. He poised, spoon half way to his mouth. He finished chewing before he said, "What made you think Robin Bains was a man?"

"I don't know. No reason to think otherwise. Why?"

Dave read aloud, "Father, James Bains. Mother, Robin Bains."

Amy went into the office early. She had a lot to do and had decided she must allow time to copy everything from the drawers. She'd bought a ream of photocopying paper and intended to put this in the machine and use it. She didn't want anyone getting suspicious about the lack of paper in the morning. It would only take one person to realise the tray was emptier than when they used it the day before. Someone with a little concern for the well-being of the company and its profits. It wouldn't take much. She could not be too careful.

It took her over an hour to copy everything because she had to be so careful about how she put everything back in its place. As the pile reduced she began to get nervous. What if her boss came in now? There was no way she could cover up her actions. A client's drawer wide open, files on the photocopier, machine churning out copies. No excuse for that. Fired and no references. It had taken her years to get a job, and she could be out after a week or two. She felt stressed and agitated. Perhaps she should leave the rest of another night. The problem would still be there. She checked she'd locked the office front door.

As she stood waiting for the slow machine to do its work she reflected on their discovery that Robin Bains was a woman. That said a lot for their detective skills. They really must read these statements more clearly. Though she did agree with Dave that at times a 'Ms' could look like a 'Mr'.

The copying was finally over and Amy took care in replacing the files in the drawer. The spare house keys haunted her again. Once more she put the thought to the back of her mind. She had a job to do and she'd better just get on with it.

Once again Dolly got her through the night and her actions became smoother, more rhythmic as the songs progressed.

"I hope people realise that there's a brain underneath the hair and a heart underneath the boobs. Good old dolly. Always rely on you for a good one-liner"

Sometime later her mobile chimed and she jumped. She looked at the screen and pressed the green button.

"Dave?"

"Where are you? I was getting worried. It's gone ten-thirty."

She looked at the wall clock, "Christ! Is that the time. I'll be home soon. Bye."

She hurried through the rest of the work as quickly as she could, without dropping her standards.

They had a very late supper and Amy watched as Dave sifted through the mass of information she'd copied. She knew it would keep him quiet for days as he cross-referenced accounts, people and details. She was a little concerned he was getting obsessive about it, then she realised she was almost as interested as him, in the growing enigma that was Robin Bains.

She called Joan and chatted for a long while. When she returned to the lounge, Dave was still studying his treasures. "Leave it until tomorrow, love. I'm going to bed." She said.

"I'll have to leave it to the weekend. I've loads of info here that needs to be copied onto the files. Well done."

"I was nervous copying. I don't want this to get out of hand. You do understand that, don't you?"

He nodded and kissed her cheek. "Of course. Come on, Let's help get you to bed."

She looked at him and a faraway smile touched her lips. "That sounded just like the old days."

Amy sat in the leather chair and felt depressed. She knew she'd gone as far as she could with Robin Bains. Dave had cajoled her into getting all the information possible from office number Six. There was nothing here left to photocopy. The keys taunted her and she forced the thought away. It was over. Fun while it lasted, but Robin Bains was not the exciting person Amy hoped she would turn out to be. She looked at the photograph again and the smiling woman next to her husband. That would be James Bains. How old would that photograph be then?

Amy looked closely at it and for the first time noticed the background. It was a pier, by the seaside. The photograph was very sharp, even the detail in the distance, but it was too small to see clearly. On impulse she went to the photocopier and touched the screen. She selected enlarge and set it to hundred percent. She selected the photo setting and pressed the go button. An A3 sheet slid out onto the tray and her photograph was enlarged.

The detail was much easier to see now. But still, there were some words on the hoarding she couldn't see. It was a pier with a theatre. She could just make out the words 'Pier Theatre Bournemouth'. Beneath it was a show, the name was indistinct. She placed the A3 sheet on the platen and pressed for another enlargement.

"That's better."

She could make out the name of the play "Run for Your Wife". It meant nothing to Amy, but it may provide a date. There was still some indistinct lettering. Once more an enlargement. The image was now very grainy, but more letters were just legible. 'Finishes September 5th 1998'. There was a date! Five years ago.

The photo was no use to them, the trail had run cold. Amy wished Robin a fond farewell and would miss her time in the chair, looking through someone's personal data. A voyeur at best, a snoop at worst.

"Have a good wedding, Robin."

Amy locked the door and made a final check she'd completed everything. It was early, not even nine-thirty. She walked down the corridors lined with the six offices and stopped in her tracks. There were five more offices in the row. Perhaps each had a story to tell? Tomorrow we start again. Who knows what we may find. Amy switched off the lights with a grin. Now she felt better.

"Good detective work, sweetheart." Said Dave impressed by the enlarged images.

"How about this then." She handed him a copy of the office telephone list.

He looked down it and shook his head, "What am I looking for?"

She leant over him and pointed, "Main office. Annex. Offices One to Six." Still he shook his head. "Total employees, thirty-two. Thirty two waste paper bins, Thirty two drawers. Thirty two people to have a little look at. We may have finished with Robin Banks. It's their turn now."

She was delighted to see the smile on his face. She had to admit to herself that she'd enjoyed the game. She'd felt as disappointed as Dave when it looked like it had run its natural course. But now the prospect of further 'clients' made them both smile.

"Look at this." Dave pointed. "Marsh, Barry. M.D. Isn't that the name of the company?"

Amy nodded, "So he could be the owner. Office One. That's where we'll start tomorrow then."

It was Friday and Amy expected Simon to deliver her pay at any time. She would have to be extra careful this evening. The thought of a new subject excited her, to the extent Dolly Parton wasn't even considered. Amy went straight to Office One and opened the door. This office was fairly tidy and Amy had never really thought to look closely at anything in it. She scanned the walls and saw the usual lists, reminders, calendars and framed pictures. None of the people that could be Barry Marsh, just boring old products. A secure key box on the wall and a schedule for work-in-progress completed the line up.

The desk was a large wooden one and looked new. It had three drawers either side of the foot well and all were locked. Now where would the keys be? Amy tried under the top panel, but realised it wasn't a metallic desk so the same key box wouldn't work here. She looked under the desk and couldn't see any compartments or holders of any description. Not under the desk – in the desk? Without disturbing the papers and items on the desk she tried to see if the keys were placed in an accessible place for easy access. The file rack proved empty of keys of any description, just invoices and paperwork. She would look into that another time.

She sat in the leather chair and swivelled. If she were working here, where would she put the keys? She ran her eyes across the desk and could see nothing. She swivelled further and looked at the walls. No where to hang keys, except the security box. She stood up and moved to the box. She pulled the cover gently, but it was locked. Where was the key to this little puzzle?

An idea came to her and she went across the corridor to Six. In the top drawer were the two keys, she took them both to the office opposite and tried them. The first one worked, it opened the security box. Inside was a row of about ten keys. Each key had a tag. Amy found 'Barry's Desk' and lifted it from its position number four. She pushed it into the top drawer, held her breath and turned it. The drawer opened to her light touch. She felt elated.

No sooner had she reached a high in doing something she shouldn't be doing, than she realised the implications of being caught at it. Simon came to her mind and she knew she was vulnerable right now. Although it meant a lot more effort she knew she had to cover her tracks in everything she did. So before she could get caught unawares she went back to the wall box and closed and locked it. She put the key in her apron pocket and sat to examine the contents of drawer one. If Simon came in now, she would only have to close the drawer and it would all look untouched. It was the best she could do. Simon was always in too much of a hurry to do any serious checking.

The top drawer contained six folders all titled in neat handwriting. They were all business related and mainly concerned new business and portfolios. Two contained the business financial details and accounting reports of Marsh & Co. All of which were above Amy's head. Even Dave wouldn't be interested in that. At least it was worth remembering they were there for the future. She replaced them carefully and felt disappointment. This man was boring.

Desk drawer two contained more personal items. A calculator, desk clock, small handheld computer, a small bunch of keys and a mobile phone. There was one folder which Amy slowly withdrew and opened it carefully. Holiday stuff. Antigua. Very nice, very expensive. She put it back and opened drawer three.

She looked at her watch. Time was getting on. A box of tissues, an old newspaper and a sheet with shorthand notes on it. Nothing of interest. Carefully she locked everything away, including keys where they should go. A last look around the office and she locked the door. Simon could arrive at any moment and she wanted him to find her working rather than resting. She dragged her cart out of the cupboard. After half an hour Dolly's voice filled the office.

Amy felt a tap on her shoulder and nearly jumped. She held her hand to her chest and glared at Simon.

"Don't ever do that to a woman alone at night in a deserted building! Christ! You nearly gave me a heart attack."

"Sorry, but your radio is on very loud. I did call."

She nodded acceptance of his apology and excuse. He handed over her wages. "Another good week. Well done. Keep it up. Anything you need?"

She shook her head and smiled. He nodded and moved to leave. "You're feeling okay? Not too hard for you? All this..." he waved his hand to indicate the office.

"Fine. No problems."

“Good. Good. Goodnight. See you in the week.” He left.

She sighed with relief and carried on working, with Dolly turned down low. She needed an early warning system on Fridays. Dave could stand watch. That was a good idea. She ran to the front door and out into the stairwell. The lift was descending so she pressed the button and waited for the second lift to arrive. She got in and pressed the ground floor. As she exited the lift she saw through the front glass doors, Simon walking to the car park.

She was aware of Raj at the desk and didn't want him to see her spying on her boss. She moved to one side, out of sight of the guard and looked through the window. She couldn't see Simon. She got back into the lift and went up one floor. The window there had a good view of the car park. She saw a car driving away. A large green Volvo, but she couldn't see the number plate. She returned to the office and continued with her work.

Now that the threat of Simon disturbing her had come and gone, Amy felt more relaxed. She was also aware that she had little to take home to Dave. The dark thought returned to her mind and this time would not go away. Could she risk it? SHOULD she risk it? The sound of the Hoover and Dolly disappeared into the distance as her mind worked overtime.

Dave was watching the news when she came in and smiled at her. “How was your night?”

Amy shrugged, “As usual.”

“I thought an omelette for tonight. Get anything?” A strange look came into her eye. Dave's heart raced, what did that look mean? “Well?”

Amy held up a bunch of house keys. “I thought we should get copies of these tomorrow.” She smiled nervously.

The key cutters never questioned the bunch of keys. There was nothing there that demanded security cards, or written authorisation. Dave blanched at the cost and questioned whether this was all worth it.

“Forty quid, sweetheart! And what exactly are we going to do with them?”

“See if they work.”

“Break into her house!”

“Not exactly. If we have a key it's not breaking, just entering.”

“You told me not to get carried away, but this is

“Calm down. Only kidding.”

“So what are we going to do with them then?”

“Wait and see.” Her smile was mischievous and he had smiled back. He loved her in this mood. For some years a smile was a rarity on her face.

“We’d better get them back today.”

She nodded. After lunch, I got us some nice rolls and bacon. Okay?” His mouth started watering already.

The office felt stuffy and warm. The air-conditioning was switched off during the weekend and came back on in the early hours of Monday morning. Amy opened Six and took out the key. She placed the keys in the drawer and locked it again. She was about to go when Dave sat in the chair and turned on the computer.

“What ARE you doing?” Amy said in a whisper, as if anyone could hear.

“Just looking. You never know. We gave her up as lost, but I’m not so sure. Let’s give it a try, eh?”

The computer whirred quietly into action. “Windows 2000. Same as ours at work. Good. Here we go. Bugger!”

“What?”

“Password required. What would be her password. ‘Overpaid’? ‘Marcus’? Let’s try Marcus. He tapped in the word and hit enter. He got the wrong password notice. “This may have three tries and lock out. So we can’t have more than one more go before starting it up again.”

Amy looked thoughtful. “What were all those words in her cabinet there? Hang on.” She pulled the key box from behind the cabinet and opened the Miscellaneous drawer again. She found the folder and handed it to Dave. Inside was a scrap of paper with four words written on it.

“Let’s try this first one.” He typed Hyena. Wrong password. “One more go.” Dingo. The screen cleared and established the desktop pattern Dave was familiar with. “What do ya know!” He felt pleased with himself. “Make a note of that, love. Dingo gets into her computer.

He clicked his way through her file structure and clicked on her email icon. The Password box came up and he typed in ‘Dingo’. The wrong password message came up. He tried Hyena and the box disappeared and her In Box appeared.

“Should we be doing this, Dave?”

“Sure. Switch the printer on, over there. Let’s see what she’s got here.”

Amy pressed the on button and saw it had plenty of paper in it, all letter headed for Marsh & Co. She moved back to lean over Dave’s shoulder.

“Nothing from Marcus in here. Strange. I’d a thought there’d be something. Where’s that staff list, let’s see who these people are here.”

They discounted all the possible staff members and printed out the rest of the emails to read later. “Let’s go, Dave. I’m getting nervous.”

He looked up and saw the strain on her face and realised he was being a little too aggressive. “Okay. Did you follow how we got into the email there?”

Amy nodded, “Hyena as the password. I can do that.”

“Good. Perhaps we can check her email daily from now on. You’d better make a note of those other two words on that sheet. I bet their passwords for something else.”

“Like what?”

“I don’t know. Probably Marsh’s computer. Anyway, let’s tidy up and get you home. A cup of tea would be nice.”

The hospital programme had just finished and Amy got up to make the tea. Dave picked up the sheaf of emails and began to go through them.

“A couple of friends in Scotland. Cheap holiday for her then. Some man down south. Could be an old school friend. Her mother. A silver surfer, eh?”

Amy put his mug on the table and picked up the discarded sheets. She folded her legs underneath her and sipped at the hot tea. She read in silence. They put the finished sheets into three piles. Friends, relatives and miscellaneous. Their favourite word of the day, ‘Miscellaneous’.

“Nothing about the wedding. I was convinced we’d find something in an email about that.” Dave shook his head.

“Perhaps we misunderstood the wedding bit?”

“Where does her son work?”

“Marcus?” she nodded. “Says here somewhere.....London. A scientific company called, Thornville and Brown.”

“Good. We’ll give them a call on Monday.”

“Why?”

Amy put on her receptionist voice, “Sorry to bother you, but we’ve got an order to send flowers to a Mr. Marcus Bains’s wedding. But, silly me, I’ve lost the date, church address and time. Can you help?” Amy fluttered her eyelashes and made Dave smile. He loved it when she put on the dumb girlie act. He had to cuddle her and she fluttered here eyes even more. Soon they were locked in a deep embrace and it was time for Boys and Girls.

On the following morning, Amy felt she had a cold coming. She sniffled and felt tired. She knew she had to take care of herself and not let anything get so bad she couldn’t control it. Her immune system was damaged and she had to be aware of oncoming colds and flue.

“A summer cold, that’s all I need!” She smiled at Dave. “Perhaps you’d better come in with me one day. I’ll show you ropes in case you have to take over if I’m ever sick.”

Dave nodded and carried on reading the paper. It’d be company for her anyway and he wasn’t doing anything Tuesday night. Amy sat back on the sofa and drifted off into sleep. From behind his paper he watched her.

Any rise in temperature, or signs of deterioration, and he would need to call the doctor. But for now, she seemed to be coping.

She called Joan later for an update and was pleased to hear she was doing great. As she talked, Dave got quietly out of his chair and went to work on his files. He now had a list of email addresses to add to his growing list of associations with Robin Banks.

Amy felt excited as she entered the office. How different from last week when she thought the fun was all over. Eager as she was to continue with the little 'game', she decided she had to work first. If her work suffered, the game would be over anyway. Work HAD to come first in everything. She needed this job, especially now it had an added interest.

Her sniffles seemed to be held at bay, but she still needed Dave to watch what she did in case he had to take over at any time. He needed to do it a few times in the past and he was very efficient. He took twice as long, but the job was done well. He'd shrugged off the suggestion that he could do the same at home. He considered his own job physical enough for two men anyway. Amy knew he was genuinely concerned about her health and didn't want her ever to go back to work. But things change.

To make the time slip past quickly it had to be Dolly. Amy mimicked the Southern drawl, "*I was the first woman to burn my bra - it took the fire department four days to put it out.*"

The Hoover sang across the carpet and the dust retreated in fear from the broom and duster. There was a spring in her step and strength in her gait. Before she realised it, the job was complete and it wasn't nine-thirty. She was definitely getting faster at this job, without compromising quality of work. With a hot cup of tea she headed for the last office. Number Six.

It seemed a little tidier than normal, less paper on the floor around the bin. She piled all the paper into the sack and sorted through the bin and added all the papers to her collection. A quick look on the desk and check all the paperwork there. Only business related material, so that was of no interest. Amy finished cleaning the office and sat down to finish her tea. With shaking hands, she switched on the computer.

She held her breath as she entered the password and let it out when the machine responded positively. She opened the email and held her breath again as she entered the password. It worked!

Dave had taught her never to open the email if it had not been read. This would alert Robin that someone was reading her mail. Anything that looked interesting could be printed off and digested later. Amy began to print.

She sat and drummed her fingers on the table as she waited for the printer to do its work. Idly she opened the Windows Explorer and looked at the Folder structure. Dave had shown her this several times. She wouldn't regard herself as computer literate, not like Dave, but she grasped things very quickly. She was on familiar ground now and knew what she was attempting couldn't be traced. She opened the 'Recent' file list.

The screen showed a list of the last files Robin had opened. Amy slowly read the names and realised most were in connection with the work of Marsh & Co. Three seemed different. Taking the disk out of her apron pocket she slipped it into the 'A' drive. Dave had asked her to copy anything worth looking at and bring it home for study. She copied the files across and removed the disk. She inserted another disk and moved to the temporary Internet folder. She sorted the files by 'Type' and began to copy all the files with the HTM extension

across from there. This took several disks, but it would show them all the Internet sites Robin had visited since the last clear out of the temporary folder.

Amy began to get fidgety. She hated spending long periods snooping. She thought she might get careless the longer she spent at it. She stood up and moved around the office, shaking off her nervousness. Eventually the last of the files were copied and she shut down the computer. With a sigh she turned off the lights and locked the door.

“How’re you feeling, love?”

Amy flopped into a chair and sighed, “Okay. Really. Just a little tired. What’s for supper?”

Dave had tested his culinary skills to the limit and had a Lasagne ready for when she came home. The microwave had provided the cooking expertise and the local supermarket the ingredients, preparation and even the packaging. But it tasted good enough.

They sat in silence, watching the TV as they ate out of the steaming cartoons. The News had finished and a programme about birth control in the sixties pushed images onto the screen that couldn’t be shown any earlier. They turned the TV off and Dave looked expectedly at Amy. She smiled and gave him the sheaf of emails.

“Let’s get them in date and time order.” Said Dave, being efficient. “There. Okay, this lot is between Barry Marsh and Robin. You do Robin and I’ll do Barry.” They swapped papers and settled back into the sofa.

“These are all the emails without a ‘Subject’ I could find on her machine.” Said Amy. “Here goes. I’m Robin, right?” Dave nodded.

“I don’t believe you said that.” Dave said reading slowly.

“Well it’s true. You CHOSE not to believe it.” Said Amy in high pitched voice.

Dave laughed and pulled himself together. In a slightly lower and gruffer voice he read, *“I’ve NEVER ignored you. Certainly not deliberately. You know me better than that. I feel insulted you even think that!”*

“Be insulted, but be aware you ignored me and it wasn’t the first time.”

“Let’s talk about this later.”

“No. Now. I want an apology and dinner out, for a change.” Amy slapped her thigh in mock anger.

“Okay. I’m not sure what I’m apologising for, but whatever it is I’m sorry.”

“Typical man.” Mocked Amy in her normal voice. *“That’s no apology. I want a proper one.”* Back into character for Amy.

“Typical woman. Never satisfied.” Grinned Dave. Reading, *“You’re just being difficult!”*

“No, I’m just reading this email.” Giggled Amy. She straightened herself and continued. *“You’re being a pig!”*

“Fuck you!” Said Dave with mock horror.

"I wish you would." This brought a wave of hysterical laughter from the both of them. Amy was in tears and Dave was curled up on the sofa.

"They're having an affair!" Dave finally managed to say.

It was Tuesday night and the office loomed dark ahead of her. She opened the door and a shiver of excitement slipped through her. The lights came on and the eeriness of the rooms receded.

"Come in." Amy said and Dave followed her. "Hit all the lights, you'll need them."

She led the way to the kitchen and began to instruct Dave in everything she did. It took her longer than normal, because she had to stop and show Dave how to do things he was not familiar with. Like cleaning.

"Generally, love, you need to dust all high areas such as corners for cobwebs, ceiling vents, hanging lights, tops of picture frames and all that. Then.....move to middle range dusting. That's tops of file cabinets, tops of partitions, windowsills, and all that good stuff. Are you listening?"

Dave nodded and smiled at her.

"Good. Then you move down to the low dusting, such as base of chairs, low shelves. Right?" He nodded again.

"Wipe all horizontal surfaces such as table tops, desk tops and counters with a clean rag and a general cleaner, like this one." She held up the green bottle and he nodded.

"We use that at home, don't we?"

"I do, yes. Right, also, vacuum inside window sills and make sure the base boards are cleaned. Baseboards are these..." She tapped the board with her foot. "Spot clean walls, particularly around doors and switches. Are getting al this? Am I going too fast?"

"It's all common sense really. Isn't it."

She nodded her head and continued with pointed instructions as an aide to his understanding. "Begin cleaning an area, by first visually inspecting the area from high to low. Start in one area and move in a clockwise, or counter clockwise direction. Also, empty all waste paper bins and replace the liner as needed. Okay so far?"

"I have done most of this stuff before you know."

"I know, love. But this is important job for me. I've got to get it right and if you have to do it, so must you."

He nodded, "I know. I'm listening. Carry on."

"Desk Groups. Pull the chairs away from the desk foot well. Dust the desk from?"

"High to low." He said laughing. "I got that bit along time ago."

".....making sure to dust any electronic devices such as computers, monitors and keyboards. Wipe surface of the desk with a clean folded cloth for surface dirt, body oils, fingerprints, coffee rings, ink marks and

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