

## THE PERFECT MURDER

Nick was sat down at his desk working away on his new story. Hiding on the balcony was a man holding a scarf. As Nick typed the man slowly crept out from his hiding place. The man's eyes were glazed and his staggering walk indicated he was drunk. With a sudden leap forward, he wrapped the scarf around Nick's neck from behind and the two started a struggle. As Nick fell to the floor the man released the scarf and smiled at him.

"There you go, Nick." He said. "The murderer emerges from his hiding place on the balcony, sneaks up behind his victim, and strangles them with a rope or something similar."

Nick stood up and sat back on his chair. He looked at Tom, his writing partner of ten years, who had too much to drink. "Tom." He said. "That storyline has been done many times before. Surely you can come up with something better. If only you could stay sober once in a while."

"I'm not drunk," Tom said swaying slightly.

"You are!" Nick told him. "Look, you can't even stand up straight!"

Tom tried to stand straight. "Yes, I can" and stumbled onto the couch.

"Look, Tom – remind me again," said Nick. "Why do I put up with you?"

Tom finished the last few drops of whiskey from the glass he was holding and face an angry-looking Nick.

"Well, you may be the actual writer, but I'm the one with all the great ideas and that's why we are such a good partnership. All those great films and plays we wrote. They are all my ideas." Tom decided to have another whiskey and stumbled over to the drinks cabinet.

"There you go again!" groaned Nick. "Straight on the booze. All that money we earned writing. Mine has been invested wisely while you've thrown yours away on women and booze.?"

"What do you mean?" Tom asked sinking his whiskey and pouring another.

"We've been writing partners for ten years now," Nick replied. "I have bought this beautiful house overlooking the sea and I have a few thousand pounds invested. You live in a small boarding house, three months behind with your rent and not a penny saved."

Tom just glared – "It's my money and I'll spend it as I see fit."

"Look, Tom," Nick said. "I'm going to be straight with you. I'm thinking of dissolving the partnership."

Tom nearly choked on his whiskey. "Why?"

"Because you are a constant embarrassment with your drinking," Nick said. "How many times have you been thrown out of book signings because you've let the beer do the talking? In fact, how many times have you failed to even turn up?"

"Oh, come on, you love me really," said Tom blowing drunken kisses.

"I'm being serious Tom." Nick glared at him. "I'm better off writing on my own."

Tom realized Nick was serious. "You can't do this. We need each other. My talent is thinking up good ideas. Look. How's this for an idea. Two friends right. One is blackmailing the other, so the other hatches a plot to kill him. This other man is an expert mountaineer. He leads the blackmailer on a mountaineering holiday. and when he gets high enough, he leaves the blackmailer and alerts the police. Because the mountain is so high and cold and because of the snow the police take days to find him. When they do, he has died from the cold."

"Interesting!" said Nick. "But I still think I would be better writing by myself. Since you obviously won't change your ways, I think we should dissolve this partnership."

Tom was upset as he sat down on the couch and tried to take in what Nick had said to him. Suddenly Tom had an idea. Not a storyline but one that could ensure his survival in the partnership.

"Maybe this will change your mind. Ten years ago, when you were an accountant, you swindled the bank out of £10.000."

"What?" Nick shouted. "That's rubbish."

"No, it isn't," Tom shouted back. "I have documents from a former friend of yours that prove you stole the money. They show payments of £500 a time going straight into your bank account." He hands Nick a brown envelope. "Here, take a look at this. You can keep them if you want. They are only copies. The real ones are stashed away in a safe place."

Nick studied the documents for a moment and realizes that Tom is not bluffing. If this got out, he would be jailed for sure. He had little choice but to agree to keep the partnership together and Tom celebrated with yet another drink.

Nick suddenly felt the urge for fresh air. He stepped out onto the balcony being careful not to lock the glass door behind him, for he knew that the door could only be opened from inside the apartment. He watched the sea crash against the rocks below as he tried to clear his head. How could he deal with this problem? How could he get rid of Tom for good? Suddenly he had an idea. He remembered Tom's story idea. Nick also remembered that he and his wife Jean were going away on a six-week holiday.

Walking back into the lounge he saw Tom looking for peanuts. "Listen, Tom," he said. "I was a bit harsh with you so I would like to make it up to you. How would you like to stay here while Jean and I are on holiday? We'll leave plenty of food and a few bottles of whiskey for you."

"Sounds good to me," Tom said.

The next morning Nick went into the front room where Jean is reading the paper. She noticed that he was deep in thought and a little troubled.

"What's the matter love?" she asked.

"Tom knows about the transfer scam. He got documents to prove I stole that money."

"Oh no! What are you going to do?"

"I don't want him as a partner and I can't risk him taking those documents to the police. There is only one solution. He has to die."

"You mean murder?"

"I've given it a great deal of thought and I've come up with the perfect murder," Nick said. "We'll get him completely drunk until he passes out and then leave him outside on the balcony with an empty bottle of whiskey. We are sixty feet up and there is no way of escape. With the rocks and sea down below, he can't jump or climb down. There is no way to climb up onto the roof and no one will be able to hear him over the sounds of the wind and waves. It's so cold out there that he won't last long. When we come back from our holiday, we will discover his corpse and call the police."

"Do you think they will suspect anything?" Jean asked.

"No," Nick said. "They will think he was drunk and he wandered out onto the balcony and closed the doors – locking himself outside. That door only opens from the inside as I never got round to getting the lock and handle fixed. There is nothing outside he can break the glass with so he can't escape."

Tom arrived and the plan was put to action. Within half an hour Tom had drunk a lot of whiskeys and passed out on the couch. Nick carried him outside to the balcony and locked the doors. He and Jean took one last look at him and left the apartment to catch their taxi.

Six weeks later Nick and Jean returned from their holiday and entered the flat. Nick headed towards the closed curtains of the balcony doors.

"I can't look." Jean cried.

"What are you afraid of? A six-week-old corpse?" said Nick. "Look, leave it to me."

He threw back the curtains and gasped in shock.

He's not there! "He's gone!" Nick yelled.

They both looked outside. No sign of Tom, just an empty balcony.

Suddenly there was a knock at the door. Jean panicked but Nick remained calm as he went and answered the door. It was a detective.

"Can I help you?" asked Nick.

"I'm looking for your writing partner Tom Horton. Have you seen him?" the Detective asked.

"Probably down the pub knowing him," replied Nick. "We've just got back from holiday and he is supposed to be looking after the flat."

The detective nodded. "Well, when he comes back could you get him to ring me?" He hands Nick a card. "His landlady wants to find him. He'd cleared his flat and left without paying any back rent."

"Empty!" said Nick, "He only came with a few clothes. How can his flat be empty? He was only coming for six weeks. He wasn't moving in with us."

"We don't know Sir." said the Detective. "That's why we are trying to find him. Oh, and another thing. We had a report of a body being washed up on the beach here. I don't suppose you'll have heard anything about that Sir?"

"A body!" cried Nick. "Any idea who it is?"

"We won't know until we've identified the body." the Detective said. "Look, I have to be going now. Let me know when Mr. Horton turns up will you?"

"Sure," Nick said, a hint of panic in his voice. The detective left.

Jean started to panic. "Oh, Nick I'm scared. What's going on?"

"I don't know?" said Nick. "Maybe he jumped off the balcony onto the rocks below. Yes. Suicide. Even better. There is no way off that balcony. He must have jumped down to end it quickly. It's the only way."

Suddenly the phone rings and Jean answers it. She listens for a moment and then gasps.

"What is it?" asked Nick.

Jean started shaking. "It's someone asking to speak to a murderer."

A few days later Jean was reading a book while enjoying a glass of wine. They had heard nothing from Tom. The detective had been and told them that the body belonged to a young woman who had decided she had nothing more to live for.

Nick was in the kitchen making their supper. Her reading was suddenly interrupted by a knock on the door. She opened it and screamed. A figure stood motionless at the door; face smeared in blood. It was Tom.

As Jean stepped back Tom fell forward and landed face down on the floor. He was motionless.

Nick came running in from the kitchen. "Oh my God!" he cried when he saw the body.

"It's Tom." Jean cried. "He's dead."

"We had better call the police," said Tom walking towards the phone.

"Not so fast my friend." a voice said behind him.

Nick spun around and found himself face to face with Tom.

"So, you decided to kill me hey?" said Tom as he went to pour himself a drink. I knew all about your little scheme so I hatched one of my own.?

"How did you get off the balcony?" Nick asked.

"Why don't you ask Jean? he replied.

Nick turned to Jean and saw she was smiling. "Remember as we were heading for the taxi and I told you I'd forgotten something? Well, I returned to open the balcony doors. I knew Tom was alive all along." she said. "I also know you have a life insurance policy worth two million pounds."

"What are you saying, Jean?" Nick inquired.

"I did love you," she said. "But I love money more. With you dead, I would inherit two million pounds plus all future royalties on your existing books."

"That's right," Tom said. "She promised me a lump sum if I used my creative mind to find a way to kill you. Funny how you decided to use my idea as a plan to kill me."

"And I am going to use the same plan to kill you both," Jean said producing a gun.

"You mean you used me!" Tom said surprised.

"That's right," Jean replied. "Oh, Tom did you think I would share that money with a loser like you." She pointed the gun at them. "Get onto that balcony."

As they walked to the balcony with Jean right behind them Tom suddenly had an idea. Quick as a flash he grabbed the gun out of Jean's hand and pushed her and Tom out onto the balcony and then locked the door trapping them both outside.

As Nick went to leave, he said: "You were right Tom. This is the perfect murder."