

THE WALLET

Jack Waite, a small-time crook, was hiding behind a large skip in a dark alley. The rain lashed down and he pulled his jacket tightly around him as he shivered in the cold. He threw the smouldering remains of his cigarette onto the damp ground and stamped it out with his heel. He trembled. Not only with the cold but also with fear. The fear shook violently in his chest as he recalled the evil deed he was about to commit.

He poked his head out from behind the skip and glanced into the bleak darkness of the alley. He could just make out a pub called the Rose and Crown at the end of it. The time was eleven-o'clock, and he knew that soon, a drunk from the pub would use the alley as a shortcut home. Jack had it all planned out. When the drunk passed the skip Jack would jump out, hit him with a brick, grab his wallet, and then run back to his flat. And so, he stayed hidden. Watching and waiting for his victim.

Suddenly, a sound made him jump. The sound of an object clattering against the wall. He looked. Then he breathed a sigh of relief. It was only a cat in a bin looking for food.

With cold shaky hands, Jack fumbled for a cigarette. Suddenly the sound of drunken roars made him jump. He looked up the alley again. In the dark shadows, he could make out a shape. The shape of a man. A drunk who was staggering from side to side, obviously the worst for a drink. His arms and body swayed as he sang a drunken ditty. Jack waited with bated breath. The drunk was getting closer. The tension in Jack's chest rose to bursting point. The drunk had passed the skip. It was now or never.

Jack grabbed hold of brick and jumped out. He raised the brick above his head. The drunk stopped singing and his face locked in horror. Jack smashed the brick into the drunk's forehead and watched him collapse into a heap on the ground. Sweating feverishly Jack grabbed the drunk's wallet from his jacket and ran away from the alley.

Back in the safety of his small pokey flat Jack locked the door and leaned against it breathing heavily. When he had caught his breath, he opened the wallet and smiled. Inside was fifty pounds and an ID card which said "Harry Gorse". Jack put the money in his back pocket and examined the wallet in the hope of finding some more money. It was an old battered brown wallet with a zip on the side for loose change. Apart from the ID card, it was empty, so Jack threw it on the table and went to the drinks cabinet to pour himself a large whiskey.

He sat on his battered old couch and looked around the room. The walls were bare, the carpet was ragged, and the little furniture he had was the couch, the drinks cabinet, and an old coffee table. His joy quickly turned to sadness as he remembered how his life used to be. He was married to a beautiful woman and had two healthy children. He also had a good job with prospects. But it all went wrong the day he stole money from the till. He was caught on the video camera and fired on the spot.

In his anguish, he went to the nearest pub to drown his sorrows. There he met an attractive prostitute. He got completely drunk and spent the night with her. In the morning he felt so guilty he went home and told his wife everything. She was so upset she packed her bags and left him, taking the children with her. Life got worse. Jack couldn't find another job so he turned to a life of crime. Robbing people and selling drugs. Anyway, he could get money. And now here he was, alone in a pokey little flat with no friends and no hope.

He polished off the rest of the whiskey and fell asleep on the couch.

The morning came and Jack was awoken by the clatter of the letterbox. The morning paper had arrived. Jack picked it up and glanced through it as he walked back to the couch. A piece of news caught his eye and caused him to gasp in shock.

"A man was found dead last night in an alley near the Rose and Crown. The man, identified as Harry Gorse, was killed by a blow to the forehead by a brick. A man was seen running from the area around about 11:10 pm. "

The shock hit Jack like a bullet. He couldn't believe it. He had only meant to knock him down. But kill him! It was an accident! Jack's hands were trembling as he reached for a full bottle of whiskey and poured a large measure. He took a deep swig and looked at the table. The wallet was there. The wallet of a dead man. Jack cupped his hands over his head. He had to get rid of it. He opened the door after grabbing the wallet and threw it into the nearest skip, making sure his fingerprints were wiped off it first.

As he emerged from the alley, he saw a cafe and decided a hot cup of coffee would help calm him down. He ordered his coffee and sat down as he waited for someone to bring it. As he sat at the table trying to recollect his thoughts, his memory flashed a vision of last night. The horror of his victim's face as the brick crashed down on him. It was the last sight poor old Harry Gorse would ever see. The reality of the horror hit Jack with force as he realized something about himself. He was a murderer.

Suddenly he noticed a presence before him. He gazed up slightly. His vision lined up with someone's stomach. He allowed his eyes to trail slowly up the person's body before resting them on the face. Jack blinked. There was something familiar about this face. It supported a large black bushy beard and cold eyes. The forehead was caved in, with streams of blood dripping over the eyes. The mouth started to move. Slowly forming into an evil grin. The eyes narrowed and fixed themselves on Jack. Suddenly he recognized the face. It was the face of Harry Gorse. Jack covered his eyes and screamed.

"Are you alright sir?" a voice said.

"Huh." Jack looked up.

"Are you alright sir?" the voice repeated.

There stood the cafe owner holding a cup of coffee. He looked at Jack concerned.

"Oh Err, I'm fine, thanks," said Jack taking the coffee and cupping it in his hands.

With shaking hands Jack swiftly glanced around the room and raised the coffee to his lips. He took a swig and stopped. This coffee tasted funny. He looked inside the cup. It was full of blood! He jumped up screaming and dropped the cup, which smashed all over the floor. He looked again to see no blood but spilled coffee mixed with the shattered remains of the cup. He looked around to meet the gaze of the startled cafe owner and then quickly left.

Back home he reached for the whiskey and quickly sank two doubles. Leaning over the drinks cabinet he took a good long look at himself in the mirror. Trying to make sense of what just happened. After a third double he convinced himself that his mind was

playing tricks on him. He glanced at the table and dropped his glass in fright. The wallet was back on the table.

How could this be? He had thrown it into the skip in the alley. Now here it is back in the room. Suddenly he heard a deep throaty laugh behind him. He spun around. The image in the mirror was transforming into something different. Jack gazed in terror as the grinning face of Harry Gorse looked back at him.

Jack rushed into the bedroom and locked himself in. He went to the window to close the curtains, only to see Harry's face in the reflection. Grinning at him. Laughing at him. Then it spoke.

"I want my wallet, give me back my wallet."

"No!" cried Jack. "You're dead, leave me alone." The bedroom door was only yards away so Jack unlocked it and escaped back into the living room. He stopped in his tracks as the television switched itself on. A game show was playing and the host was talking to a winner.

"Well done. You've won the game. What would you like as a prize?"

"What I would like is...."

"Yes?"

"My wallet...I want my wallet.' The evil face of Harry popped up again. "You have my wallet, give me my wallet."

Jack grabbed the wallet and ran into the kitchen. Shaking with fear he quickly filled a bucket with paper and threw the wallet in. Then he set the bucket on fire and watched it burn. He left the flat to throw the ashes in the skip. He got halfway down the alley then stopped to get his breath back. He placed his hand over his heart and felt a lump. He reached into his pocket. Oh no, it was the wallet! How was this possible? He'd only just burnt it. The next thing he saw was a brick crashing down on his head and everything went black.

The next day two muggers were counting the money they had stolen whilst reading the news about the murder of Jack Waite in the local alley. They were so busy counting that they didn't notice something strange. An old brown battered wallet on the table.