



## Curiosity Killed The Cat

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“Can someone get that bloody light to stop flickering? The buzzing is going to give me a brain aneurysm.”

Our breath was sticking to the walls, the condensation feeding the black mould manifesting in the damp corners. The dank odour seeping from the sagging brown roof hung thick in the air, settling deep into the fibres of the worn and yellowing carpet. I had never liked calls to the flats; their derelict nature was a reminder of the deep-rooted inequality that I so desperately tried to ignore.

Miller was obscuring my vision of what lay ahead, his swirling tendrils of smoke licking at me, the silver wisps burning my nose and throat.

“Uh Rook, you sure you want to see this one?” Miller said snickering, stopped in the bathroom doorway, the wrinkled cigarette hanging in the corner of his mouth. Pushing past him, I stepped into the sour room with its dirt-caked grout and bug-filled lights.

**Dialogue** for **orientation**, rather than using setting or background information. There isn't even a speech tag, which adds to intrigue. The **tone** of the character talking is direct and wants action. Who is talking? Where are we? What is going on? This is an excellent example of a way to open a crime story.

**POV** is first person. 'Our' indicates the narrator is part of a team. The **style** and **tone** is distinctively detective noir, so the writer is adhering to the **conventions of the genre**. “I had never liked calls to the flats” is our first hint at **setting**. The setting or 'scene of the crime' is an essential element of crime fiction. The writer uses the senses to create **atmosphere**, and uses adjectives of colour to create **visual imagery**.

'Swirling tendrils of smoke' is quintessential detective noir **imagery**, in keeping with the **genre**. Again colour (silver) is used for effect. Discomfort is created with the sense of touch 'burning my nose and throat'.

That Miller is 'snickering' helps characterise our narrator as a rookie. Well-chosen **vocabulary** is used: **adjectives** such as 'sour', 'dirt-caked' and 'bug-filled'. Using the hyphenated adjectives makes the writing tight, (rather than describing as 'grout caked with dirt', and 'lights filled with bugs').

It was as if looking in a mirror, a youthful and slight woman, her delicate hand curving over the edge of the aged porcelain bath to brush the floor. Head tilted back as if having dozed off in the warm embrace of rainbow-slick bubbles. Yet she couldn't afford this luxury. The devil's hand had left his blood-red imprint from ear-to-ear, a deep burgundy smile where her neck was supposed to be. I could see the desperation on her face as she looked her assailant in the eye, drowning in her own blood. The shredded and slashed webbing between her fingers was the worst part. Worse than the dark purple and yellow bruising mottling her pale skin and the burst veins creeping across her forehead. It exposed the fruitless struggle against her already sealed fate.

My initial shock was overwhelmed by the foul stench of death, amplified by the claustrophobic and windowless room. So stuffy and thick was the scent that I could feel the acidic sting of that morning's breakfast clambering up my throat, threatening to spill into the slickened bathtub. The retching wouldn't stop, an awful and demonic shuddering beckoning to be exorcised.

As I caught myself staring into her blackened and bottomless eyes, I couldn't help but notice the lack of soul. Unending voids of emptiness. They were drawing me in, their magnetic pull encompassing my now weightless body. I could sense the aura shift, could feel the transfer of trauma. I was falling, falling into the destitute abyss of the dead woman's eyes.

"Holy shit."

My heart was pounding, the peeling vinyl Beatles shirt clinging to my sweat-drenched skin. A disorientating fog hung over my head, trapping me between two realities. The grey room around me came into focus, and a fleeting sense of relief washed over me. It was the same every night, a vivid and twisted reliving of a week prior, the moment seared onto my retinas. An invasion of my subconscious, the spiny fingers of my own memories piercing both my waking and sleeping existence, leaving me unable to escape.

The initial dizziness subsided, giving way to a persistent throbbing at my temples. Hazy slapping the collection of pill bottles next to me, a glowing red 8:55 sliced through the fuzziness. In a dazed hurry, I threw on the crumpled cream blouse, flared brown pants and coat from the day before, grabbed the keys for my VW Bug, and hightailed it down to the carpark. Speeding down Northbourne in a bid to get to work, the twisting knot of guts in my stomach contorted as the flats approached. And as the looming block of bricks faded in my rear-view, I couldn't help but accelerate, running from its dark shadow chasing me.

'It was if looking in a mirror, a youthful and slight woman': is a well-crafted way of **showing us**, rather than telling us, that the narrator is a woman too. Until this moment we are not sure. Again, author uses rich colour for **visual imagery** and to create **mood**: introduced with 'rainbow-slick bubbles', then a 'blood-red imprint', 'a deep burgundy smile' (a **metaphor** for the slashed neck); 'dark purple and yellow bruising'.

**Sensory imagery** is employed to create **atmosphere** such as stench and scent (smell); 'acidic sting' (touch) 'that morning's breakfast clambering up my throat' (taste). A **metaphor** of an evil spirit being present is created with the retching described as 'demonic shuddering beckoning to be 'exorcised'.

The **metaphor** is continued with 'the lack of soul'. The prose begins to lean into fantasy here. The narrator feels they are assuming the identity of the victim. **Motif** of eyes begins here and is continued through the narrative. Eyes symbolise revelation, eye-opening, surveillance amongst other things.

**Rising action**: The narrator recognises something disturbing is occurring.

The narrator is 'trapped between two realities' building on the previous paragraph's slip into fantasy genre. **Sensory imagery** based on touch by describing the bodily sensations, creates further discomfort, ('heart pounding', 'sweat-drenched skin', 'fog in the head', 'seared onto my retinas'). **Personification** with piercing memories described as 'spiny fingers'. A continuing **atmosphere** of claustrophobia and entrapment is conjured, as it is revealed that the narrator is actually in her own room awakening from a dream.

**Atmosphere** of discomfort is continued with more physical descriptions. Competent **showing not telling** of the alarm clock alert. Some physical description to extend **characterisation** of narrator. 'Speeding down Northbourne': reveals a Canberra **setting** and it can put into **context** the previous reference to 'the flats'. A continuation of **rising action** leading to the **climax**, maintaining the **pace** and **tension** through a series of well-crafted complex sentences, replete with detail.

My tyres slid across the frosty road as I pulled into London Circuit, my familiar yet somehow distant destination before me. Bounding up the station stairs, coat tails flapping in the icy wind, I could feel the pink sting splashing my cheeks and nose.

“Rook, you’re late. You’ve got files to look over.” Miller said.

“Yeah sorry. I – uh, overslept.” Unamused, he began to turn away, but the sensation of falling into the eyes of the dead willed me to stop him. “Hey Miller, that murder in the Lyneham flats last week, I don’t know what it is, but something seems off. Something about the details just doesn’t add up.”

“I don’t understand what’s confusing you. A young woman in her 20’s who lives alone in a low socioeconomic area winds up dead. All I’m saying is that she fits the victim demographic perfectly. Her previous partner has a history of violent crime, a few assault charges. It’s a closed case Rook, move on.”

“But what about the complete lack of evidence? If it was domestic violence, it would’ve been frantic, passionate. The scene was pristine. Maybe someone with experience for this kind of thing.” I leaned in, lowering my voice. “Her throat was slit and there wasn’t a single bloody fingerprint, not even partial. That can’t be coincidental.”

Miller’s face eclipsed, a grave shadow of apprehension crossing over him. Eyes darting nervously past me to the senior detectives in the breakroom. “Look, Rook, I don’t mean to be crude, but you’re new, and you don’t understand anything. Leave it to us. We can deal with it. Just go to your desk and finish filing.”

With an air of pure puzzlement, I turned away, stopping as I heard Miller whisper in my ear, “And Rook? Remember that curiosity killed the cat.”

Unnerved, I was greeted with a teetering pile of musty manila files, the Lyneham flats murder case a noticeable absence. Sitting at the cracked leather desk, disassociating from the eerie situation, I couldn’t help but feel an overwhelming sense of paranoia. Piercing eyes were burrowing into my skull, eating into my brain and stealing my secrets, a lingering and unsettling knowing.

Straining my eyes, I could see the culprits in my peripheral. Through the slats in the Venetian blinds peeked stares of icy hostility. Huddled whispering and hushed voices squeezed through the gaps, the thick waves of secrecy and concealment washing over me

Further embedding of Canberra **setting** with Police Station in London Circuit and Canberra’s icy wind and the ‘pink sting’ (**colour imagery**) of the cold.

The dialogue conveys the power structure within the police team and the way the rookie detective is treated without sympathy or support.

As the plot reaches its **climax**, the **tension** and **suspense** is created between the characters, through Miller being ‘unamused’ and with the rookie’s sensation of ‘falling into the eyes of the dead’. Rookie’s **dialogue** reveals that she is suspicious of foul play.

A **trope** of noir detective fiction is being employed here: a rebuttal of suspicion, case closed. Authentic detective noir **dialogue**.

Exasperation of the rookie is conveyed realistically through authentic and detailed **dialogue**.

**Vocabulary** choices such as ‘face eclipsed’ and ‘grave shadow of apprehension’ add to **imagery** of darkness and death. Eyes **motif** repeated. ‘Senior detectives’ emphasise the rookie’s subordination and lack of power. The ‘rookie knows nothing’ trope is continued.

Reference to title and context. Some students might not be familiar with this **idiom**.

Good examples of **complex sentences** to provide rich detail continuing in the **genre**. Eye **motif** repeated.

Eye **motif** repeated. Venetian blinds, very noir, as is using vocabulary such as ‘huddled’, ‘whispering’, and ‘hushed’ to create an **atmosphere** of paranoia and claustrophobia. **Metaphoric language** ‘thick waves of secrecy and concealment washing over me’ is then depicted visually in next paragraph...

“...shut her up...before...”

“too obvious...”

“...the rookie?”

It had begun to make sense. The haunting dreams of a seemingly solved case, the missing file, Miller's strange warning. The probing eyes of every senior detective within the precinct falling upon me. As he broke from the group and walked to his desk, in the brief second of passing, Miller's eyes revealed all I needed to know.

He was right in that I genuinely did know nothing. And while I feared the truth, those men knew as well as I did that this wasn't a case of domestic violence, and that the perpetrator was much closer to me than first thought.

Clever **device** to shape the text into the waves washing over the narrator, also creating visual silence, building **tension**. Spacing of text can shape sound and language to create a poetic field.

In **crime fiction genre** it is the revelation of whodunit that is the **climax**: rookie reveals and lists all clues provided beforehand to reach a **conclusion**. **Motif** of the eyes used for the last time to both 'probe' and 'reveal'.

**Sudden resolution/denouement** following **climax**. The ending hangs, giving the reader enough a space to infer and complete the puzzle, without it having to be delivered literally.