



Curiosity Killed The Cat

by Asha Patterson
Daramalan College

“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.

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. Hazily 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.

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

“...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.