

## The Two-Faced Culprit

Rory O'Connor

'He's struck again.'

*She's a woman.*

'The victim was murdered on 24<sup>th</sup> street.'

*23<sup>rd</sup> street actually.*

'The victim was stabbed once in each kidney.'

*And the dagger was coated in poison in case stabbing didn't kill.*

'But he left seven footprints.'

*Strange, I don't remember it being that messy.*

'Are you up for the case, Detective O'Brien?'

'Yes sir.'

*After all, finding myself will be easy.*

I retrieved the case files and hurried through the precinct towards the exit. The station was erupting with chaos, and the front desk bustled with hysterical civilians. I chuckled as I exited the building. How could one woman cause such a commotion?

The streets of Dutton were quiet compared to the police station. The sky glittered with stars, and the streetlights cast a dim light across the empty roads. I turned the last corner to my house and saw her sitting on the front steps. My first instinct was to run.

'Hello Scarlett.'

'Detective O'Brien, I have a job for you.'

'No, I cannot. You promised that was the last.'

I was risking everything, concealing her identity, covering her mistakes, and killing innocent people. Yet, she didn't care for me; all she desired was the thrill of killing. She got satisfaction from the screams of terror and the shrieks of agony. Scarlett was sadistic, but she was smart, using me to blame innocent people for her murders.

'This is the last. You won't be required after it is completed. Meet me behind the studio on 54<sup>th</sup>,' Scarlett said, her tone growing impatient.

I was stunned, and my stomach churn. I couldn't hurt anymore people, but I couldn't risk losing my job. Blinded by tears, I rushed inside, overcome by grief.

'What have I done,' I muttered.

Six innocent civilians had lost their lives, and I hadn't even acknowledged them as people. I believed I had done the right thing to save myself, but I was wrong.

'It's all her fault. She forced me to do this.'

Rage coursed through me. Scarlett had made me commit these heinous crimes, and I despised her for that. How could she be so demented and devote herself to such disturbing beliefs?

'I'm going to kill her.'

I grabbed a dagger and hid it in my trench coat. I hurried out the front door, wiping my tears and trying to compose myself. I attempted to blend within the darkness, but my coat billowed in the wind, and my steps echoed through alleys. It was dark and the streets were empty, but I felt as though I was the focus of the public eye. I chuckled to myself at the irony. My heart was pounding, and my body tingled with anticipation, as I counted the streets, getting closer to 54<sup>th</sup>.

When I could see the studio, I scurried into an alley. A woman emerged from behind a large bin. I jumped and yelped.

'Be quite O'Brien,' Scarlett snapped.

I tensed, reaching for my dagger. Mortified, I realised what I was about to do, and I stopped myself. Scarlett slipped into a gap between apartments. She stopped in a large opening; a single light flickered, casting a sickly yellow light around me. As my eyes adjusted to the darkness, I could see the outline of large apartments. Scarlett began scanning the area.

'What are we going to do?' I managed to ask

'I'll shoot them once, and you will make it look like a suicide.'

Scarlett snuck behind an old run-down building. Studying the place, I noticed patches of brick crumbling away and shattered windows. I brought my attention back to Scarlett, but she was already entering the building. I followed, reassuring myself this is the last time.

The inside of the apartment was even worse than the outside. It was a mess. The furniture was scattered and destroyed, the paint was chipping, and there was mould and cobwebs in every corner.

'They're sleeping in the room to the right. Give me thirty seconds,' Scarlett whispered.

I nodded. I counted to thirty silently, then I began moving the furniture. I grimaced as I heard a pistol being fired. I looked to see Scarlett dragging a corpse towards me. Something about the scene enraged me. I thought of how she took advantage of me, how she forced me

to kill innocent people, and how she showed no remorse for such unhinged actions. I pulled my dagger from my coat and charged at her.

Scarlett turned to me.

I thrust the knife towards her. She dodged the strike, but not without a cut to her left thigh. We cried out in pain. I glanced down to see that, somehow, I had cut my left thigh.

Scarlett pulled the gun, but I was already upon her. I lunged, smacking the gun away. We tumbled to the floor, and I managed to overpower her. Knees to her stomach, I lifted the dagger and drove it through her chest. I screamed and fell to the ground, grasping at my chest. I looked at my hands to see them covered with blood.

‘Scarlett!’

Looking away from my bloodied hands, I saw a figure emerge from the darkness. The apartment morphed and transformed into a white tiled room. Small pills were scattered across the floor.

A woman rushed to my side. ‘Scarlett, are you okay?’

‘It’s just tomato sauce, silly.’ I cackled as I licked my fingers.

‘Scarlett O’Brien, that’s unacceptable behaviour,’ she said. The woman was wearing a white coat. On her chest, she wore a small badge that read: Dutton Psych Ward Administrator.