A Very polite murder

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Chapter 1

He loved Si 100 percent of the time and Sandra pushing about 95. This evening she was turning on the five.

Still in his badminton sneakers and barely touching the two steps from the road, Tommy Scot reached his front door whilst taking a glance at the commotion coming from his neighbour's semi-detached house. It would have been so much better sometimes if they weren't connected at all.

Inside, Tommy rubbed his palm flat against the increasing lines of his forehead. He was convinced that now he could put all four fingers between his eyebrows and hairline, when he swore only months before it was just three. He peered into the full-length mirror at the base of the stairs, trying to see any indication of where the hair used to be. Sandra was shouting from next door, her control going and her voice rising in pitch.

Tommy moved towards the kitchen, down the slim hallway, and within three paces bumped into his wife who was heading out at that exact moment. "At it again," she said, dropping a half-smile, not knowing what to really do about it. "They started up about twenty minutes ago; I'm guessing Sandra must be on her whole vodka craze again." She turned on the spot wondering why each time it kicked off next door she started talking in whispers and tip-toed around her own house. "Tea?" she called out in her normal voice as Tommy kicked off his trainers and placed them neatly under the stairs.

"Shouldn't you be out picking up Ells?" He checked his watch to confirm that it was just after half nine and the trip from the sports hall had taken the usual half-hour. Every Friday he dropped their daughter at the village hall on his way out and

Rachel, his wife, would walk the few hundred yards around the corner and up the slope to collect her.

Moving two mugs from the tree, she dropped a tea bag in each. "It’s her friend, Mabel. Her parents are picking them up and walking them home. I think they've become friendly since starting comprehensive and Mabel's mum is keen that they hang out."

Tommy fell back against the work surface, the pain in his head increasing as his body reached exhaustion after a week at work and an evening getting thrashed at badminton. Maybe he was getting a bug, or more likely, he was dehydrated. "Which one is she again?" Tommy asked.

"The one with a ponytail, brown hair, somewhat taller than Elly." She looked at his blank face, staring back at her. "…Like the other fifteen in her class, don't worry about it."

Something hit the wall on the other side of the kitchen, followed by Sandra screaming at her husband. His low rumbling reply lost itself in the layers of bricks that separated the two houses. "Get off me!" she screeched louder before his heavy steps moved them away from the joining wall and further into their side.

Rachel looked at her husband. "I'll pop over in the morning, take Si out for a stroll, and perhaps you could have a tea and a chat with Sandra. I know she's got her problems, and I do feel for her, but poor Si…"

Rachel nodded, her lips tight in thought and her brain trying to find a fresh approach to the same conversation she had last month with Sandra. "Goes to show," she said with a smirk, "that size is no match for mouth." She winked at her husband as a knock at the door announced Elly was home.

Tommy gave a one hand salute to Mabel's parents, trying to place them in the case he ever met them again. He reached out to Elly, but his hand was immediately shaken off in an air of disgust and embarrassment at his sheer presence at the front door.

A foot away, his neighbour's door flew open and the gigantic shadow of Si launched out. He stood still, in shock that anyone else should be around before slamming the door against the frame. Tommy opened his mouth, but Si shouted him down. "Not now, mate, not now," before Tommy had the chance to say anything. The man-mountain took one step out of his gate, purposely turned right, and pounded off. His fist still clenched, his mouth working fast as Si talked to himself with scratch marks drawing blood on his left cheek.

Elly shot upstairs, her mobile dialling and a text pinging through. Tommy stopped a foot from his wife in their kitchen. "Si has gone to cool down, probably to give Sandra some space." They both listened to the silence. "I'm sure he'll be back in half an hour and she'll be apologetic. You know how it goes."

Rachel sucked in her cheeks. "You reckon I should go over?" she asked, hoping he would think that there was no point.

"Wait till the morning, it'll be the same story as last time." He sipped his tea. "If you leave her alone, she might just fall asleep."

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Sandra sipped a triple vodka, her eyelids melting and the weight of them making it hard to keep her eyes from closing. She dropped her head to one side, removing the strand of bleached hair that lay over her face and let it fall behind her ear. Her brain still made her mouth move and with it drops of vodka spilled all

over her black dress. Her hand stroked the alcohol deeper into the threads. She flicked her neck with a jerk, bringing her back to some sort of life for a second before everything gave up, and her chin rested on her upper chest.

Sandra woke just past dusk with the light faded into night. Her vision was struggling to focus. "Si," she murmured. The room had become dark as the time moved on. “I’m sorry, Si," she raised her face to the large man who stood tall in front of her. "Si?” she questioned. Something was not right. The shadow was large, but where Simon grew at the middle, this shadow drew in at the waist with a broader frame.

Her brain sobered her, her pupils exploded in size, and her skin bristled. "You are not my Si…" The shadow moved in towards her quickly, the left arm raised, grasping a tool. Before her instincts reacted, the fist came down hard and fast.

*

His legs moved at light speed. He was out of there as hurriedly as he could, stomping along his road. Si’s fist still pumped and his body tense. "Every time," he mumbled, "every time she gets drunk." On each stride his arms shot out short, his head bowed and his large back hunched over. He needed some space, time for him to cool down, and for her to stop attacking him.

Si turned at the end of the road and headed up the slope. Under the last streetlamp of the village, he took another right as he entered the cul-de-sac that was lined both sides with garages. Each had an up and over painted in different colours and exclusively allocated to one house in his street. Not one had a car parked in them.

Still in his work boots with the laces undone, Si pushed on over the gravel and towards the small gap at the far end, and into the overgrown alley that ran the full length behind the houses. His large body squeezed in, his breath now shallow and both his cheeks bright. His veins bursting from the power he had to use to move this far.

After fifteen years living in the same village, he knew the gaps, the trees and all the silent places he might go, where he could find some peace. Si turned at the end. Using the last power in his quads he pushed his heavy trunk up the backfield. On towards the old oak, and after raising to the view over the top of the houses, he turned to face where he had come from. He sat his body down hard.

Si blew out, getting rid of some of the heat. His eyes red and clouded, and his mind at a loss of what he was supposed to do with Sandra. Rubbing his palms dry on his work combats, he left them fall to his side. Unconsciously he dug his fingers into the topsoil that was still soft after a small shower, but not too wet to disturb him.

This village and the surrounding area were his home. From left to right he took in the one pub which was too large for today's clientele. Behind and before the river sat the church, not old, but built to fake it. He had only been inside once, and that was eleven years ago. Next to it was the long green hedge that brought him from the graveyard and stopped slightly short of the village hall. Next door was the school. It was a small school with only four classrooms but enough outside space to make up for its lack of size. It was the very reason why Sandra had chosen to live here.

Mud moved through his fingers as he sieved the small stones from it. From his back garden during the summer days, he could

hear the sound of children fighting, laughing, and growing. The noise floating easily and brought this quiet land to life. Maybe they should move to a new house?

Over at the hall, the lights went out. The last of the adults locked the door and said their goodbyes. Their conversation carried like the children's to all ends of the village. Si shook his head as he realised everyone must have heard his Sandra lose it, and lose it on a regular basis. He dug his fingers in a little deeper. If they moved, it wouldn't stop their problems, just create new people to have to explain to. No, he would stay put and let it blow over and carry on until the next time. The scratches on his face stung now the anger was fading.

Bearings going, he mused as the car from the hall rolled gently down the slope to the main road, indicated to no one, and headed south, along the valley. Another engine started up from below. His neck craning forward, but it fell below the angle of the roof and out of his sight line. He didn't recognise the engine. It too pulled to the junction with the main road, Si contemplated as the dark estate came into view. It wasn't one of the locals. This time the car headed north.

The glow of streetlights now took over from the dusk as night covered the village and announced bedtime. Overhead the constellations popped up, and even in the middle of summer the place was remote enough to give a fairly good show.

With the noise of a very large man making a move, Si stood up. He leant back slightly to balance out the hill as he wiped the dirt from his hands. He had given it enough time. She would be asleep by now.

Back through the alley, over the gravel that lined the gap between the garages and down the slope following where the first car had travelled, Si ambled back along his road. He headed

through his gate and pulled the already opened door forward to let him in. The sound of nothing hit his ears. He breathed out in relief and kicked his boots off.

Her head was leaning awkwardly back over the arm of the sofa with her mouth hanging wide open, her legs apart, and bent slightly at the knees. Sandra didn't look comfortable in the dark of the room. Si reached over, ready to move her down. Hungover with a cricked neck, life would be smoother without the latter in the morning.

One of his large hands moved in and slipped between her neck and the leather of the chair. Si leaned in close and was caught off-guard by the smell. A sweet mix of alcohol and something else he didn’t quite recognise. A thick liquid dripped through his palm; sticky and heavy.

Si looked at her dress that had damp patches spreading across it. "Sandra?" he whispered, as it became clear that everything was not how it should be. With his free hand, he reached out and turned on the lamp a few inches from her head.

"What the?" he exclaimed as he tried to work out what he was looking at. Her bleached hair was now stained dark black with bright red patches and what he guessed was white skull meshed in. Down the side of her face ran a steady stream of claret. It hooked onto her neck and flowed around to the back, to where it joined a small raised red skin line.

His eyes followed down to her body. Two large dark patches were growing from her central line, and below her hanging white arm lay a small tumbler of vodka.

In a panic, he grabbed her shoulder, shaking her wildly. Her limp body flowing with his every move. Si's mouth opened, but his vocal cords were lost. Grabbing fragments of her skull, he frantically tried to work out the jigsaw of putting it back together.

His hand came over his wide-open mouth, smothering his lips and chin with bits of Sandra's skull. His shirt was covered in her blood and a wet patch spreading from his trousers.

Si shot out of the house and flew over the small red brick wall that separated him from Tommy and Rachel’s home. Banging loudly on the neighbour’s door, a light came on three doors away.

"Quick Tommy!” he screamed. “It’s Sandra, she’s had a fall, she's had an accident." Si dropped his eyes to the letterbox, shouting again, "Quick Tommy!"

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It still wasn't that late when Tommy planted himself in his armchair. A glass of cool water was resting on the rounded armrest and his toes wiggling in his beige socks. Rachel had her legs tucked up as she curled into a ball, her long straight hair falling over one of her brown eyes. The ten 'o'clock news had finished its headlines and moved onto the first in-depth story.

Tommy slipped her a glance from time to time and still couldn't believe his luck. Rachel was smart, easy going, and exceptionally good looking. It had taken him weeks to muster the courage to ask her out. Every night he had gone over that day's conversation, and she had made it very clear that he should. It added up except for that fact that he stood at only 5’9”, was built for long distance running, and whichever way you wanted to see it: his nose was way too big for his face. But as Si had told him, you can’t stop yourself from falling for the one you fall for. That was life, and he was pleased with the way it was turning out.

He had heard others remark that perhaps Rachel was a little too conservative. Always favouring the balanced approach and

never voicing her opinions to others. However, when they were alone together, she would always speak her mind. It impressed and also scared him a little.

She dressed to blend and rarely wore more than a touch of make-up. Rachel remained slim with little effort, and always had an air of calm around her. Beneath this plain exterior he saw she had another side, she was very sharp. Her brain worked in quick logic and her ability to problem solve was way above his.

Si's voice and thumping exploded through the house. Tommy's heart leapt in his shirt and with reactions that surprised him, he caught his water as it toppled. On his feet he lightly sprinted towards the voice shouting through the door. Pulling the door open, Tommy spotted Si walking backwards and lifting a long leg over the dividing wall. His large hands were covered in blood and dirt as he beckoned Tommy on quickly.

Behind both men came Rachel. Her eyes focused, squinting and reaching for the phone that sat in the hall while shushing her daughter back up to her bedroom. She dialled as her husband leapt over to his neighbours.

Instinctively Tommy flicked the light switch, and with the spotlight of the lamp, the full picture appeared. The room was like it was on any other day. Everything in its place. The odd coffee mug sat making rings on the surfaces. The wedding pictures still perfect with a fine line of dust and Si's toolbox from the boot of his car pushed up against his chair. Everything was as it should be except one corner of the sofa.

Sandra's head fell back with her mouth hanging open and refusing to stay closed. Her skin was now mottled as the life drained from her skull and over her clothing. Her lips were a purple-blue, with her blood now soaking her short dress.

Tommy took a step back. His stomach cramping, and all the oxygen leaving his body. Nausea overcame him, and he doubled over and vomited on the carpet. The smell of Sandra's blood filled his nostrils as he desperately tried to catch his breath, causing him to vomit again.

He took a few seconds, burped the last of his air out, and raised his watering eyes to Si. His concentration wobbled and his focus wavered. Tommy couldn't stop staring at the woman, her face, but worse, the right side of her skull. His intestines moved again, but with nothing left, he retched, extending his arm for balance.

Rachel came past and moved towards Sandra, grabbing her wrists, pushing hard. Desperately trying to find a pulse. Finding nothing, she moved her two fingers to the clean side of her neck. "The ambulance is on its way, sweetheart," she whispered to Sandra before taking notice of the two men. One bent over and of no use, the other stood like a very large goldfish, mouth gaping.

“Both of you get out and wait for the ambulance and show them in. Tommy, this is certainly not from a fall, you’d better ring the police as well." Turning back to her friend, Rachel held on to the cold hand, ignoring the silence behind her.