

The Defective Detective : The Curious Case of the Kilchester Courier

by Adam Maxwell

It was typical. I had gone to the shops to get some coffee, came back and there, on the mat was note from Kilchester Couriers.

'We're sorry we missed you.'

Yeah, right. I'm sure you are.

Small mercy then that at least they had managed to leave whatever it was with someone in a neighbouring flat. It looked like '4a'. Could be worse. 4a was the residence of the lovely Dorothy Wordsworth, a woman who I had admired enormously ever since moving into these dingy flats.

There had been conversation, I'd tried to impress her with my intellect, charm and wit and was pretty convinced that it was working. That was until there was a party we both attended in 3b. A few drinks down and we were standing outside talking on the stairs. I started to get nervous, the narcolepsy kicked in, I dropped down on top of her, knocking her over and sending her flying down six flights of stairs.

She never did have the same enthusiasm for hallway repartee after that. Still, there was time to build bridges. Perhaps this was my opportunity. Perhaps she would be impressed by my new found status of detective. And perhaps she wouldn't remember the ten stitches she'd needed to the back of her head.

I pressed the doorbell of her flat and could immediately hear the sound of muffled movement on the other side. I waited, pulling my phone out of my pocket to fill the seconds until Dorothy answered.

'There should be two packages for you arriving today. One of them is your business cards. Give me a shout if you need anything.'

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Agatha.'

The sounds on the other side of the door continued and I wasn't sure but I thought I could hear the muffled sound of a man's voice in there. This was an unexpected development. A boyfriend perhaps? Or a brother?

Unless he was a policeman. Crap. I bet it's a policeman.

The door opened a crack and Dorothy peered out, the chain on the door hanging across her face like a metallic moustache.

"What do you want?" she said as her left hand lifted up and scratched the back of her head.

So she remembered the stitches.

"It's just," I said and waved the courier card at her. I remembered I should be smiling and over-compensated, leering wildly through the gap. It probably wasn't a massive surprise that she had the door on the chain. "It says they left a package here."

"What?" she frowned. "No."

"No? Oh, sorry," I pointed at where her number was written. "It says the courier came here."

"The courier?" she stepped back slightly. "Hang on, there might have been a package. Wait there."

She disappeared from view and I stood, waiting for a second when the door began to move and swung open. Dorothy mustn't have put the chain on properly which was clearly a subconscious invitation. Obviously. Anyway, I just took the opportunity and stepped inside the flat a couple of paces.

Technically, the layout of the place was the same as mine. Open plan living area with kitchen diner to the right hand side and four doors to the left leading to a large bedroom, a small bedroom, the front door and a toilet. As you'd expect, I suppose, there were a lot more feminine touches here and the place was a lot more... what's the word?

Tidy. That's the word.

There were other things that my flat was lacking, of course, the scatter cushions, the small dining table, the man sitting at the dining table with a sheet covering him.

Or perhaps it was more taxidermy. Or a sculpture of some sort. I don't know, I'm not exactly an expert at identifying that sort of thing.

Dorothy came back into the room from one of the bedrooms with what was presumably the package she had signed for in her hands and instantly jumped with fright.

"How the hell did you get in?"

"The door wasn't on the latch so--"

"Well get out! Now!" There was panic in her voice. She pointed at the door but glanced at whatever was under the sheet.

"Okay, listen I'm sorry, I didn't mean to intrude," I took a step towards her and she jumped again.

"Go!" she screamed.

"I will," I said and took another step towards her.

"Why do you keep coming towards me?" she spat. "Get out. GetoutoutOUT!"

I took a step back.

"In your hands," I said softly. "My parcel?"

"Oh, right, yes," she said, calming almost instantly. "Of course. Sorry. Silly of me."

She handed the parcel over to me and smiled. Not an affectionate 'let's have a chat and a cup of tea smile' but a 'now piss off I'm done with you' smile.

Not one to take a blind bit of notice of subtle hints I flew in the face of such unbridled lack of interest and persevered.

"Bet you can't guess what's in here?" I wagged the brown paper wrapping at her with a grin and threw my eyes around the apartment once more. There had to be something of note, a reason apart from the stitches in the back of her head that she was so humiliatingly disinterested in me.

"Honestly. Not really in a shit-giving mood, Clint," she pointed at the door behind me. On the plus side at least she remembered my name which meant that all was not lost in the impressing her stakes and that the fall hadn't caused any permanent damage to her brain. Although she did seem to be displaying high levels of anger. And her

right hand kept darting back to scratch what must now be the scar on the back of her head.

"They're my business cards," pressing on was the only way this was going to come out, the only way I would definitely get a reaction. "I've got a job as a detective."

It was odd to watch what happened to Dorothy right then. It was as if someone had released a roller blind at her feet, the realisation that I was a detective clattering up her nervous system from the toes, to the knees and hips (cue mild stagger), up through her not entirely unpleasant lady-torso and smacking her hard in the face, whereupon it triggered another reaction and drained the blood from her and leaving her gaunt and agog with her mouth opening and closing as if she was miming bobbing for apples.

Finally. The upper hand. I smiled in as not-smug way as I could muster, fixed her with my best stare and tried to raise my eyebrow in a way I imagined a detective might.

She kept staring. Not speaking.

I felt like I should say something but wasn't sure what so I just nodded and kept smiling.

She kept staring. Not speaking.

I stopped smiling, then stopped nodding, then turned around, looking for somewhere to sit. If I'd triggered some sort of episode in her I couldn't leave her here but I wasn't going to touch her and I couldn't be bothered to stand up for much longer.

She kept staring.

I coughed.

Nothing. Still not speaking.

I looked over again. Under the sheet, sitting on a chair. It wasn't taxidermy. Or a sculpture. It was a real, actual person.

I wasn't sure at first, I mean when I first walked in it really could have been a sculpture. Or anything. I mean, generally speaking your neighbours don't keep bodies under sheets. Well, mine don't anyway. Except apparently they do. Or Dorothy does because not only was this definitely body-shaped but there was a blood stain in the head-

region. The sheet that had been a bright white now had a blood stain that was, maybe two inches in diameter.

I tilted my head towards it, "So, who's you're friend?"

The bubble of Dorothy's silence popped and she started crying, sobbing. Big tears rolling down her cheeks like you see in the movies.

"Please, Clint," she said, big bubbles of snot welling in her nose exactly like you don't see in the movies. "Don't arrest me, it..."

"Arrest you?"

"You wouldn't would you?"

"Wouldn't? Erm, no. Wouldn't."

This seemed to placate her a little and she turned the volume down on the sobbing. Which was a blessing.

"Wouldn't," I said again. "Couldn't actually."

"Couldn't?"

"Couldn't. I'm a private detective so-"

And then she hit me with something. I don't know what it was but it was hard and small and in the palm of her hand. Hit me hard and fast and I fell backwards, my arms going out to stop myself falling, grabbing at the sheet and pulling it loose to reveal a man in the distinctive red and purple uniform of Kilchester Parcel Deliveries, unconscious and handcuffed to

* * *

Funny really, it wasn't the smack in the head that put me out. It was the narcolepsy.

No, really.

I mean she did have what turned out to be a snooker ball in her hand and that could have caused it but it was the narcolepsy. The stress triggered it.

Fine, if you don't believe me then you can piss off but it was.

Anyway, if you're still listening, when I woke up she'd tied my hands and feet with some sort of flimsy rope. Took me about thirty

seconds to get my hands free and half that to get my feet then I stood up and she did that roller-blind thing again.

I've got to say, by this time I was past the point of trying to impress her.

"Listen, Dorothy, what the fuck is going on with sleepy here?" I reached up and tentatively touched my temple. Not too bad. See, I told you it was the narcolepsy.

Her eyes widened, angry, and she made a half-step towards me.

"Piss off," I said, rocking back on my heels. "Tell me and I might help you out, otherwise..."

That's what detectives do isn't it?

She looked at me. Looked at the bloke handcuffed to her dining room chair. Looked at her feet.

"He stole something," she said. As if that explained everything.

"Oh, right, fair enough then."

Dorothy raised her head and flashed the angry eyes at me again. Best to take a step back then.

I reached up to my forehead once more. It was probably going to bruise I shouldn't wonder. Time to take my mind off it perhaps. I stood up. "I should probably search the bathroom. You know, in case he's stashed his booty in there. Erm, the memory card I mean."

She waited a moment and touched the back of her head in what I hoped was a sympathetic manner before gesturing towards the bathroom door and I walked in. Once more I was struck by the femininity of it all, there were mats on the floor and one of those brushes that you clean the toilet with and bubble bath and shower gel and cotton wool!

I grabbed some of it and dabbed it first at the tap then at my temple.

"There were photographs," she said, quietly leaning into the bathroom. "I took some photographs of a man who didn't want his photograph taken and he..."

I looked at her in the mirror and tried to be a brave little soldier and not wince in the face of a potential client. Touching the cotton

wool to my brow I immediately failed as a tiny little squeak escaped from the corner of my mouth.

"He came into my flat and took the memory card. Twice."

"Twice?" I turned around and lifted the toilet seat. Dorothy looked appalled. I dropped the cotton wool into the toilet. "How could he have taken it twice?"

I put the toilet seat down and was about to flush it when I realised that could be one of the places fake-Xander had hidden the memory card. I tentatively got down onto my hands and knees and gave the bowl an eyeful and was happy to find no reason to get any closer to it.

As it transpired the rest of the bathroom proved to be equally lacking in concealed memory cards. I mean, it didn't make sense that he would leave it in there. Once Dorothy had sprung his scheme there was no way he was getting back into the flat in a hurry. But if not in the bathroom then... where?

Rifling through the small room's nooks and crannies brought up plenty of trinkets, bubble baths, spare toilet rolls and... a tube of lubricant left conveniently next to the sink. Seeing that tube sitting there just took my misunderstanding of women and multiplied it exponentially. There really was nothing to be found in there so I gave up, flushed the toilet and left the bathroom.

Looking at him now, the man at the table looked just like any other delivery driver to me. I was about to point this out but decided not to bring this to the attention of my mildly unbalanced lady-friend.

"You were saying..." I prompted Dorothy, not entirely sure of what it was she was saying but figuring it would get her chatting again.

"I don't know who sent him but he definitely took the memory cards," she said obligingly and kicked his shin for good measure.

I nodded and, not sure what else to do, walked over to the kitchen and started making a cuppa.

Dorothy flopped backwards on to the sofa then began to properly spill the beans. She had been working for a local councillor — the same local councillor who was so prominently featured on the front

page of the Kilchester chronicle. And certain facts had come to her attention. Prostitution-shaped facts. So she had taken photographic evidence.

"And it was that easy?" I said, the disbelief hanging like a purple fog in the air between us. "You just lay in wait and... Clickety click?"

She sipped the tea I had just handed her and winced at its heat. Seemed like the right thing to do when people recount things to you. Cup of tea, you know the drill.

"No. It wasn't what you could call easy," she said.

I nodded and smiled, shifted myself back into the chair a little. She seemed to be a bit more comfortable now, more likely to open up. It was as if the two of us were having a nice cosy fireside chat. If you replaced the fireside with a six foot handcuffed man who occasionally grunted in a manner that could have been a snore or could have been pain.

Dorothy looked over at the man and frowned. I was worried that looking at him might shift her back into the crazy zone but I needn't have worried.

"I found out about his goings-on but I couldn't prove it. He thought I could and he was going to get me sacked so I organised for my sister to pose as a prostitute. I took the photos of the two of them."

I became acutely aware that my eyes had widened and my mouth was hanging open. I made a mental note never to do that in public again.

"I didn't let him sleep with my sister if that's what you're thinking."

I shook my head a little too hard, perhaps. "The furthest thing from my mind. So you would edit these photos to conceal your sister's identity and then leak them to the press.

"And then the courier arrived," she blew the surface of her cup of tea.

"Him?"

"Yes," she said and tried to sip her tea again but drew her mouth away at the last moment, the heat getting the better of her once more.

I looked over. This courier had 'Xander' on his name badge. Thankfully the head injury he had sustained prior to my arrival had stopped bleeding but the hair around the wound was now matted with rapidly drying blood.

"He came to the door, brought your parcel but he wanted me to show him some identification. I'm not sure why in retrospect since it was your parcel not mine. But he was in uniform and, well, that's the sort of thing delivery people ask. Isn't it?"

"Right. Go on..."

"So I said no problem, wandered into the other room and got my driving licence for him, cursing you all the while."

"Of course. Standard practice really."

She scowled. "But after he left I got to thinking. It's rather an odd thing isn't it? Asking for an ID for someone else's parcel. Just a bit weird. And then I looked over and I saw my camera had been moved."

This seemed a vaguely preposterous thing to notice but also just the thing a detective should notice. I smiled knowingly at her.

"I checked it and the memory card was missing." she said.

"And you knew he'd taken it?" I asked.

"I wasn't 100% sure. It was the spare card, it was blank and... well you know what it's like... you live on your own too. Sometimes you put things down and you can't remember where you put them."

"But in this case you hadn't."

She shook her head.

"Then five minutes later another knock at the door and he's back again."

I nodded, "Could be two parcels?"

"No. Well, that is, yes. That's what he claimed. Pushed his way into the flat. Except this time he said he didn't have a pen. And that just made me plain angry."

"Well it would, wouldn't it?"

"Don't try to be funny, Clint. It doesn't suit you."

I just waved my hand for her to go on.

"But I just wanted him to go so I could feel safe again, you know, in my own home?"

"Why on earth did you let him in the second time?" the words fell out of my lips before I could stop them.

Dorothy stared at me and I stopped talking. She reached back and scratched the back of her head

"Well anyway, to cut a long story short when I turned my back I heard him move so I whipped around and noticed immediately that the memory card on the desk was gone."

"Which one?"

"The one with the photos on."

Dorothy nodded slowly, as if I was the idiot.

"Oh, right. Thought that was obvious. I didn't leave it in the camera, I put it next to my laptop over there," she pointed. I didn't bother looking. I knew what a laptop looked like. "So the first time he must have looked in the camera and found a blank and when he realised he came back for a second attempt."

"Seems far-fetched," I said. If Dorothy had incriminating photos of the councillor then, in all likelihood false-Xander or whoever sent him would use them to blackmail him. Whether or not they were genuine it would still work. I suddenly noticed Dorothy who was apparently waiting for me to say something. I couldn't think of anything so just said, "but plausible nonetheless."

Dorothy nodded, happy and apparently ready to continue.

"Then I may have started screaming at him."

"Screaming? Ah."

"And I grabbed my hockey stick."

"Hockey stick. Right."

"He started backing away from me."

"Not surprised. Completely sympathise with that," I said then, with self-preservation in mind added, "given the circumstances."

"He tripped over something and fell backwards into the toilet," Dorothy allowed herself a tiny smile at the thought of it.

"But why didn't he just turn around and leave by the right door?"

"Well first I barricaded him in."

"Barricaded, eh?"

"Then there may have been additional screaming involved."

"May have been?" I asked.

"Then he said he would break the door down if I didn't let him out. So I calmed down a bit," she replied.

"But not so as you would notice."

"What? Erm, no. Shut up. So then I said I was going to call the police."

"Smooth moves. I bet that shut him up."

She smiled and nodded. "Bit too well actually. He just went really quiet and..." she trailed off.

I waited, assuming this was part of how she wanted to tell the story. Except apparently she needed external input to move the narrative along. I obliged and asked her what happened.

"I think he was so nervous he did a poo."

"Eew."

She nodded. "Not a hundred percent sure, I mean the door was barricaded shut but... The smell."

"The smell?"

She nodded again. "And the noises."

I frowned, trying hard not to imagine it.

She stopped nodding and we bonded over a momentary shared disgust in someone else's ability to apparently evacuate into a strange toilet.

"I told him the police would get my property back. But then I thought better of it because what if the police realised I had set the whole thing up?"

"Well then either the case against the accused would be dropped or your sister would be arrested as a prostitute."

Neither option was particularly appealing and so it appeared the alternative was assault and battery.

"So then you brained him and tied him up?"

"Handcuffed him."

"Right. Then what?"

"Then you showed up."

"So my other parcel?"

"Over by the door," she said.

Sure enough, was another parcel sitting unattended by the door.

Opening up my package revealed a book. It was a book entitled 'The Agency's Foundation in Private Investigation : Home Study Edition'. It was a flimsy pamphlet of book that certainly didn't warrant the over-sized package it had arrived in. I tentatively opened it and on the first page was a quote.

'When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.' A.C. Doyle.

Doyle. I'd heard that name somewhere before.

There was a splashing sound and a scream as Dorothy hurled her untouched cup of boiling tea over fake-Xander. This was clearly a woman with issues.

I coughed.

She turned around.

"Well you obviously aren't going to find my memory card any time soon so I'm going to have to do it myself."

This bothered me slightly. I mean, let's be honest, most people would have walked out after finding a man under a sheet but apparently I had more to prove than most people.

I held up my hands and smiled.

"It would be my pleasure to take your case. My fee is..."

"Negotiable."

"Afraid not. Actually, I'm not sure what it is but I'll find out and the Agency can bill you afterwards."

"You're serious aren't you?"

I nodded. "Look. Business cards."

She sighed loudly but nodded and skulked back to the sofa.

"You've checked his pockets I take it?"

"Yes. Nothing except the van keys on the table behind him."

I reached over the man, his breathing was relatively shallow and I could smell something on him, perhaps the alcoholic remains of a

couple of pints at lunchtime. I pocketed the keys and turned to speak to Dorothy when fake-Xander exploded into consciousness, rising up onto his feet and swinging the chair Dorothy had conveniently cuffed to his wrist high into the air I

* * *

The noises came back first. A piñata perhaps. Or that noise tennis players sometimes make when they hit the ball. I opened my eyes to find that it was the same noise that a man being beaten with a hockey stick makes.

Dorothy swung back and I staggered forward, grabbing the weapon at the apex of its swing and damaging another perfectly serviceable part of my body in the process.

"Help me get him back on the chair. And cuff his hands behind his back this time, alright?"

"Where are you going?" Dorothy shouted as I moved as purposefully as I could manage towards the door.

"To see what happened to real Xander and to retrieve your memory card."

"What? Really?"

I paused my purposeful posturing and turned back to face her.

"Why does no-one think I can do this? Check out the job title on the business cards, lady."

* * *

By the time I reached the pavement outside the flats I was regretting calling her 'lady'. Seemed a bit on the cheesy side but it was either that or a torrent of expletives. I wasn't entirely convinced that leaving the unstable Miss Dorothy alone with my only potential lead outside of the van was the greatest idea I had ever had but, on this occasion I was going to have to risk it if I was going to eliminate the impossible and find the memory stick with the photos on it.

As I wandered down the stairs it occurred to me that I should probably get The Agency involved. It bothered me slightly, not knowing the right way to do things but I knew Agatha would be her usual helpful self so I sent her a text.

Think I'm going to need some Agency bods at my flat. Woman downstairs has hostage. Investigating now. Btw — got the cards + book, cheers.

I pressed send and almost instantly regretted it. Was this the sort of thing I was supposed to ask them? I patted my pockets as I walked onto the street but I'd left the home study detective guide in Dorothy's flat so I couldn't even check in there.

It wasn't difficult to spot the van, as it was sporting the same God-awful red and purple colour-scheme as the uniform fake-Xander was wearing. Well, that and the fact that it was parked two metres down the street from the flats. There was no remote central locking system so I slid the key into the door and unlocked it. Opening the door I clambered into the driver's seat.

The cab smelled of cardboard and sweat. There was an air freshener hanging from the mirror and I leaned forward to sniff it but somehow that too had taken on the sweaty-papery aroma. Unless that was where the smell was coming from. It seemed unlikely.

There was a buzz and a couple of beeps from my phone. It was Agatha.

Very funny. You in the pub or something?

Brilliant. So the only person who I was sure didn't think I was an arsehole was entertaining the possibility that I was merely a pissed-up beermonkey. I shoved my phone back in my pocket. Succeed first, worry about the consequences second.

It wasn't a great stretch to locate the first stolen memory card. There was a camera on the seat. I turned it on and it beeped and said 'No Images Saved'. When I took the memory card out of the back of the camera it had a sticker on it and an email address scrawled on the sticker.

crazy_dotty_woowoo@lostbookemporium.com

Crazy Dotty Woo Woo? Let's take a leap of faith and assume it's Dorothy's shall we? I shoved it in my pocket and was about to head back upstairs to break the news when there was a thud on the side of the van. From the driver's seat I could see both wing mirrors and there was no-one there. I glanced left then right, looking for movement but all that happened was my breathing quickened and that let more of the musky stink into my system.

There was another metallic bang. It was definitely someone hitting the van but it wasn't someone who showed up in mirrors.

When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.

Vampires briefly flickered in my mind before being firmly kicked to death by the boots of sanity. I jumped out of the van and walked around to the back. No-one there, vampire or otherwise, so I slid the key into the lock and opened the heavy door and squinted into the darkness of the back of the truck.

There, stripped to his underwear and with a jiffy bag pulled on his head like some sort of makeshift blindfold-cum-S-and-M-Christmas-Cracker-hat was a man. I clambered into the back of the van and he panicked, pushing himself further inside and in the process thrusting his groin in my general direction to reveal green boxer shorts with apparently photorealistic drawings of various zoo animals on there.

I assumed they were zoo based as I could see no reason why lions would be socialising with peacocks, penguins and what appeared to be some sort of gerbil. All sense of scale had been abandoned by the illustrator and so the lion was dwarfed by the erroneous rodent.

"Xander?" I said, as non-threateningly as I could. His head jerked upwards towards the noise and he let out a grunt. "It's alright. I'm here to help you."

Perhaps sensing the kindness in my voice or perhaps ashamed by his strangely adorned boxers his shoulders dropped slightly, the tension apparently falling out of them.

I carefully removed the jiffy bag and he spat out a wad of sticky tape from his mouth and blinked me into focus. When he was happy

I wasn't whoever he suspected I may have been his fear turned to embarrassment at his state of undress.

"Wh... where's the other bloke — did you see him?"

"Do you know who he was?" I said.

"I know he was single minded. Vicious. Said he was going to do terrible things to me. Terrible things."

He looked genuinely appalled at whatever threat had been made. I mentally moved him from the possible-accomplice list into the not-a-suspect list.

"I'm a detective," I said, digging deep to muster some gravitas. "And a bloody good one."

I waited for a second. He didn't laugh. Which made a refreshing change.

I scrambled behind him, noting the presence of an elephant and a hippopotamus on his respective bum cheeks. On the boxers, that is, not his actually bottom which was, thankfully obscured by the eccentric fabric.

It was then, gazing at the strange and disturbing sight of another man's choice of underwear that, for reasons I am unlikely to share, the location of the stray memory card became apparent to me. Well, if you're honest would you share your process if it involved solving crimes by staring at someone's arse?

No. I thought not.

"I've got your attacker subdued. If you wouldn't mind just waiting here with the van, myself or one of my colleagues will be along shortly."

"Thank you," he managed. "Thank you detective."

I nodded acknowledgement and stepped out of the van. There was no point in texting Agatha. She wouldn't believe me. It was time to wrap it up and then... Well, whatever detectives do after a case.

"Oh and you might want to try to find some clothes to put on too," I added before partially closing the van door.

Back inside the building, I hurtled through the unattended hallway and bounded up the stairs back to Dorothy's flat.

What I found there was not a pretty sight.

Apparently Dorothy had the same fascination with naked hostages that plagued fake-Xander and had chosen to inadvertently follow his example. As I entered the flat fake-Xander sat with nothing covering his dignity but a pair of threadbare boxers. And they looked like they had been removed and re-applied by a less diligent hand. In contrast to the sophisticated zoophile undergarments I had witnessed in the back of the van, fake-Xander had plumped for threadbare yellowed boxers whose defining pattern of brown splodges one could only decipher the meaning of when the words above the crotch were read.

'Stud Muffin'

Apparently my own underwear choices, which at this time I will not go into, were a touch more pedestrian than the two Xanders.

"What are you doing?" I said to the increasingly sheepish looking Dorothy.

"Well, I, er..." her eyes flicked from her quarry to me, to her camera on the table and back again. "I was looking for the memory card."

"But you didn't find it did you crazy Dotty Woo Woo?"

"What?" she snapped.

I plucked the memory card from my pocket and held it up.

"Clint," Dorothy beamed. "I could kiss you."

I smiled and opened my arms wide.

"But I'm not going to," she added. "I am, however, impressed by your apparent detective skills."

My attention suddenly snapped back to fake-Xander and I shook my head. "What were you thinking?" I asked.

"I was going to torture him but... well, I didn't really know where to start."

"So you just stripped him and..." I waved my hand in the air absently.

She nodded, caught herself doing it, then shook her head.

"No," she added for good measure.

"Because it wasn't in your pockets was it?" I picked up the hockey stick and prodded the stud muffin. He grunted but didn't open his eyes.

"Well if you'd rather I gave Miss Wordsworth a few pointers and left you alone together?"

His eyes opened and began staring at me. I waited, staring back. He snorted then spat on the carpet.

"I know where the memory card is and you're going to give it back to me."

"And why would I do that?" he snorted again, ready to spit.

I slowly shook my head the tiniest amount and leaned in to whisper in his ear. "You can get it yourself or I can get it out for you. And I have to warn you I have very big hands."

He looked up at me, swallowed and nodded.

"Dorothy, do you have a plastic bag by any chance?"

"What? Why?"

"You remember what you were talking about earlier?"

"You're going to suffocate him?" she moved into the kitchen and started rummaging around.

"Oh I don't think it'll come to that," I smiled as reassuringly as I could.

"Uncuff him too will you?"

"What? What did you say to him? What if he runs off?"

I glanced over at his lack of dignity.

"No," I said. "He's not going anywhere."

He got up and started walking to the bathroom.

"It's on the shelf next to the toilet roll if you need it," I added as Dorothy handed him the plastic bag.

"What is?" she said as the toilet door closed. "The memory card?"

I shook my head and tried not to imagine what was going on in the toilet whilst Dorothy tried to put it all together in her head.

"Where is it then?" she said and stamped her foot.

There was a sound of a toilet flushing then a tap running. And running. And running. We both listened, staring at the door until eventually the tap was turned off, the door opened and false-Xander

walked out holding the plastic bag Dorothy had given him at arms length.

She snatched it from him eagerly.

"Ha," she laughed. "Mine now."

"Just as I suspected," I said, mustering as much authority as solving the case had given me then adding a bit more for good measure.

Dorothy shook her head. "Where was it?"

"Well you know the quote. When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth."

She nodded, the smile fading from her face.

"Well all I can say is our friend here has learned an important lesson today," I leaned slightly toward fake-Xander. "Bottoms are not pockets. Are they, sir?"

Dorothy's grip on the bag changed, going from gripped in her fist to held at arms length by her fingertips so fast you could barely see her move.

"Eeew! You mean...?"

"However improbable."

"Even if I eliminate every probable explanation," the corners of her mouth turned down as she spoke, dropping further with every word. "There is no way I would have reached a conclusion like that."

"Finely tuned detective mind."

"Deeply disturbed sick mind more like."

I brushed off her lack of faith and ploughed on regardless.

"So now we know that the photographs of your sister won't fall into the wrong hands. You'll need to get them edited and leaked and deleted fast. Really fast. You don't want anyone else making a play for them do you? Someone slightly less inept than Mr stink-palm here."

Fake-Xander cleared his throat and Dorothy and I both looked at him. "Who are you," his voice was deep and cracked as he spoke.

"You idiot little man."

I took one of my business cards out of my pocket and handed it to him.

"I work for the Agency."

"Oh."

He stared at the card for a second then put it in his pocket. I picked up my home study guide and took my mobile from my pocket. It was going to be more difficult than I could have imagined to get Agatha to believe me and send someone to clean everything up.

I took my phone out and began to dial. Time to get this mess cleaned up. And then time to find myself a new flat.

