

THE DANGER OF DIY

“So what have you been up to lately?” enquired Harry, our jovial but inquisitive milkman.

“Not a lot really,” I’d said. Well, what else could you say when only yesterday, you’d just done away with your wife of twenty-five years? Given the circumstances I was surprised just how calm I was. If only he knew I’d thought.

To be honest, my now late wife Sylvia had been asking for it for nigh on twenty-three years. The first two years of our marriage hadn’t been too bad I seem to recall, but then it seemed to get slowly worse as each day went by. It was the constant nagging, moaning, and complaining. Sylvia had the uncanny knack of being able to complain and whinge, 24/7. You probably know what I mean, a constant barrage of whinging of gargantuan proportions, guaranteed to get beneath your skin. At first, I’d been able to light heartedly rebuff the barbed comments by answering sarcastically ‘yes dear’, or, ‘of course dear’, from behind my newspaper or over my shoulder as I walked away. Slowly, but surely, she’d ground me down.

I suppose that in order to keep her happy and thus stop her whinging, I took up DIY and home improvements in a big way. As my skills developed and my tool kit got bigger, I took on more complex jobs and over the years had completely transformed the house. It was like a palace. Her sister Sadie was really envious. I think that deep down, Sylvia had appreciated my talents but she was very slow in coming forward with praise for me. Unfortunately, she just took me for granted.

Perhaps the thing that had got to me most though, was her compulsive tidiness and her constant use of the expression ‘cleanliness is next to godliness’. Sadly, that’s probably why we never had children. Even when I was in the middle of a

DIY project she'd insist on tidying and cleaning up. For instance, several weekends ago, straight after I'd finished painting a skirting board and when the paint was still wet, she started vacuuming. The dust and fluff had settled nicely on the wet paint, ruining my efforts. She had been oblivious to the fact that all my work had been ruined.

Anyway, I had hoped that the weekend just passed would have been different. Yesterday, being Sunday, I'd got up early and was stripping the wallpaper at the top of the stairs. Twenty four pounds a roll it had cost and it had only been up a year. Sylvia had tired of it quite quickly. She was like that. If it hadn't have been changed then she would have whinged until it was changed. Naturally, when stripping wallpaper, some of it will fall to the floor. Therefore, with Sylvia's problems, I always used plenty of dustsheets so that I left no mess or ammunition that she could use to whinge about.

After an hour or so, Sylvia had come upstairs and started tut-tutting about the mess on the floor. Despite my exhortations to desist, Sylvia had carried on, whittering that cleanliness was next to godliness. She'd even started picking up some of my tools from the floor and saying, 'a place for everything and everything in its place.'

What happened next, I still vividly remember but I am unable to explain why it happened. Something finally snapped in my mind. Reaching for my hammer in my tool belt, I remember hitting her once on the back of the head as she was stooping down to pick up the wallpaper shreds off the floor. I can remember that she'd just said to me, 'A place for everything and everything in its place,' and that at that moment, I'd thought the right place for my hammer would be in the back of her head. Slowly, she had lurched forward and rolled down the stairs, coming to rest gently against the umbrella stand in the hall.

Nor knowing what to expect, I'd run down stairs quickly. Despite the circumstances, I remember I was quite calm. Picking up her warm plump wrist, I checked for a pulse but there wasn't one. She was dead. Strangely, there had been no fear or remorse in my mind. I'd felt as if a blindfold had been removed from my eyes and that for the first time in my life I could see clearly. A sense of freedom enveloped me. Even Sylvia seemed to have a small, faint smile on her face.

Despite my initial calmness, the enormity of the situation had quickly hit me. Already in my mind a plan of action was forming. If I was careful, really careful, I could get away with what I'd just done and enjoy my freedom, unshackled from the burden of Sylvia. But I had to be meticulous.

I'd carried Sylvia upstairs to our bedroom and laid her on the bed. She'd looked almost calm and serene, as I'd taken off her clothes. She was certainly silent. I knew I'd have to work fast before rigor mortis set in. Fetching an old trunk from the loft, I'd bundled her in, just like a ventriloquist's dummy and then sat on the lid to close it. There'd been a satisfying snapping sound as I closed it as if to emphasise that if she wasn't dead before she went in the trunk, then she certainly was now. Luckily, Sylvia had only been a little over five foot and one hundred and twelve pounds. Some of her clothes I put in the dirty washing basket and the rest I'd cut up as if they were rags.

I'd quickly finished stripping the wallpaper and then along with the rags and her handbag burned the lot in the garden incinerator, making sure that everything had burned to ash. I'd watched too many television police dramas to risk being careless in that area. The rest of the day I went over my plan again and again, to make sure it was fool proof.

It had been fortunate indeed that Sylvia hadn't bled when I'd hit her. Well, she wouldn't I'd thought to myself, she wouldn't want to make a mess. The only

traces of her in the house would be the normal signs of habitation. There was no evidence of any skulduggery. To explain her absence was going to be easy. Sylvia, in her own inimitable way, had used to leave notes to me when she wanted to leave a message, but instead of throwing them away afterwards, saved them in one of the kitchen drawers in case they were ever needed again. The one I needed was still there. It read: 'Have gone to visit mother, as she's not too well - probably back at the weekend'. So, I need not raise any alarm with the police that my beloved wife was missing until six or seven days hence.

Getting rid of the body was going to be quite simple too. I had at least six clear working days. You see I'm a butcher with my own business and I never opened on a Monday. I normally used the day to boil the hams, make sausages and faggots and place orders for the week ahead. My plans for Sylvia were simple. She was destined for the industrial mincing machine. By the end of the day she'd be mincemeat and sausages. Could I make Sylvia burgers? Perhaps not. Not even her bones would present a problem. They would be cut up, unidentifiable amongst all the other bones that would be collected on Wednesday, to be dried and ground up for fertiliser or whatever they did with them. The bits of poor old Sylvia that I couldn't use in my wonderful delicacies would be collected on Thursday for pet food. By the end of the week there would be no physical trace of Sylvia, just as if she'd never existed.

"Happy Holidays," said Harry, looking at the trunk. "Going anywhere nice?"

"Oh, the trunk," I said. "No, just taking a few things to the tip on my way home from work tonight. You know what she's like with tidiness and clutter. You can give me a hand with getting it in the car if you like."

I'd duly informed the police the next weekend that Sylvia hadn't returned from her mothers or apparently hadn't got there in the first place. They were pretty thorough in their investigations. I even did an appeal on Crimewatch, the grieving

husband. The police thought that it might have helped. I even managed a tear. I thought I was very convincing. Detective Chief Inspector Wilkinson, who was in charge of the case had been particularly kind and said that he and his wife had sausages from my shop every Friday and very nice they were too. He'd said that last Friday, his wife had even bought a couple of pounds for the freezer. I chose not to dwell on that latter point too much.

All that had been ten years ago. The insurance money did eventually come through. I sold the house and the business, remarried and retired to Spain. My new wife appreciates my DIY, not that I do a lot now. She isn't obsessed with tidiness, thank God, although she does have one or two annoying little habits.

And how do I feel now? To be honest, I occasionally feel a bit of remorse for what I did, but I comfort myself with the thought that it was just a one off, that I'm not really a hardened murderer. After all, it wasn't planned was it? It just happened.

The case isn't closed of course but I'm sure by now that DCI Wilkinson and his wife have eaten the last bit of evidence.