

Two Wrongs.

I watched the drunk take a few uneasy steps before pitching face-first into rain-drenched concrete. From my vantage point, the shadowed window of an abandoned cinema, I could easily hear his gruff stream of muttered profanities. Morbidly fascinated with his almost comedic display, I stared on as he shuffled toward the support of a lamppost, pulled himself into a sitting position and began patting down his jeans searching, I guessed, for his tobacco.

Through the sights of my rifle, I could pick out every hair and scar on the old man's face, every wrinkle around his rheumy, blood-shot eyes and every puke stain on his filthy woollen jersey. For the first time in fifteen years of my professional life, I questioned whether my client had been justified in purchasing my services. Sat in a gutter and barely able to lift a cigarette to his lips, Colin McFarlane looked more like an extra in a bad zombie movie than the brutal, twisted maniac I knew him to be. Vaguely aware of a film of sweat coating my trigger-finger, I let my thoughts drift back to the meeting that had sealed McFarlane's fate.

Like all my other clients, I met Deirdre McFarlane in a motorway restaurant. After checking she was without 'company', I bought a coffee and joined her at a previously arranged table. Other than a large manila envelope resting beside her pot of tea, she looked like any other road-weary traveller stopping for refreshments before continuing a long journey.

Deirdre appeared to be in her mid to late fifties, she wore her mostly-grey hair in a neat perm, and her clothes looked like they'd had at least one owner before her. I guessed, in her younger days, she would have been described as pretty, but the dark circles around her eyes caused by having her sockets smashed, and a nose squashed flat from too many beatings, gave her the look of a boxer that had never known when to quit. I felt a strange mix of sorrow and joy at meeting this woman who, despite the signs of brutal abuse etched into her face and an obvious fear of being alone in an unknown place, managed to present an aura of quiet dignity.

“Hi.” I said as I took the seat opposite her. “How was your journey?” I said, reaching into my pocket for a packet of Marlborough. It wasn't my usual way of greeting clients, but something about the woman made me want to show her at least the semblance of respect.

“Please,” She said, her eyes flashing with a hint of strength she probably hadn't felt for many years. “I appreciate your pleasantries John, but I need your help and I'd like to waste as little time as possible.” Taking a sip of coffee, I gave Mrs McFarlane a brief nod. As I slipped a cigarette from the packet, she pushed her envelope toward me.

“The man in these photos, the man I want you to take care of, is my husband Colin.” She paused for a moment, taking a sip of her otherwise untouched tea as a young waitress proceeded to clear an adjacent table. When the girl moved off, arms laden with a

tray of dirty crockery, Mrs McFarlane leaned forward and plucked a cigarette from my packet.

“If you don’t mind, I’d like you to examine the photographs. Let’s say it would ease my conscience if I thought you knew what kind of a man you were dealing with.” For a moment, I entertained the idea of telling the woman that I had killed men for nothing more than carving up the wrong driver. Looking into her eyes, I decided it was a piece of information she didn’t need to know.

After sliding my lighter across the tabletop, I emptied the envelope and began sifting through the pictures. Despite the path my life had taken, I couldn’t help but feel a twinge of sickness as I thumbed through the twenty or so images.

Each of the photos showed McFarlane’s basement. They displayed various scenes of what could only be young prostitutes of either gender performing sexual acts on a tattooed, middle-aged man. As I flicked through, the acts became more and more depraved. I felt a flash of anger, something almost completely out of character, when I noticed that at least four included a battered and bloody Deirdre McFarlane tied to a hospital bed whilst her husband abused her and whatever young man or woman had been unfortunate enough to take his fancy. After getting less than halfway through the stack of Polaroids, I slipped them back into the envelope and lit another cigarette.

“I don’t think I need to see any more.” I said, sliding the parcel back across the table. “And I suggest you burn those at the first opportunity.” Deirdre nodded, looked over my shoulder, and then stubbed her cigarette.

“Thank you. The money will be delivered as arranged and may God see this act as His work.”

Feeling uneasy at her last few words, I watched Mrs McFarlane scoop up the envelope, put on a tatty tweed coat, and disappear from my life.

The gurgled sound of retching pulled me back to the moment. Focusing the sights of my weapon, I watched my target cover his jeans and jersey with the contents of his stomach. For a moment, my lips curled in a sneer of disgust, I tried to match the powerful sadist in the photographs with the hateful creature sprawled in his own juices. If I hadn’t spent my life in the company of cowards such as Colin McFarlane, it would have been a far harder task.

Slowly, I watched the piece of inhuman filth stagger to his feet. As he swayed in the night breeze, his hands slowly moved to scrape puke from his clothes. Whilst McFarlane filled the air with a string of obscenities, I centred my crosshairs on the ridge of flesh between his eyes. As I tightened my sweat-slick finger around the trigger of my Parker-Hale M-85, two half-whispered words escaped my lips into the night.

“Goodnight Dad.”