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## Who Needs Friends?

by Stuart Carruthers

- August 17<sup>th</sup> 09:45

The car weaved between the rush hour traffic and came to a stop on the High Street. Grace tapped her fingers on the hardened plastic steering wheel while gazing at the red traffic light. Her mind frantically trying to make the right choices. “God give me strength,” she repeatedly told herself.

As the slow-moving traffic passed the numerous empty shops, Grace pulled the car onto the kerb. Engaging the hazard lights she abandoned her car and walked into the local hardware shop. The passing traffic warden smiled as his first customer of the day arrived.

In the time it took the Traffic Warden to write out his ticket, Grace picked up the essential items she needed. Placing her tray onto the shop assistant’s counter they made small talk as the tall skinny teenager filled the blue plastic bag. His shocking dyed red hair brought a smile to her face. Saying her goodbyes Grace opened the door and emerged onto the pavement. The Warden, ashen faced looked her straight in the eye and placed his ticket neatly under the screen wiper. As he turned his back to walk away, the volley of abuse that followed him down the street brought a smile to his face.

- August 17<sup>th</sup> 13:56

The kids would be home in an hour. The black bags at the bottom of the stairs were overflowing with clothes. In the kitchen Grace emptied the cupboards of what food they had. She hadn't stopped all morning. Sitting down at the table she lit her last cigarette and blew perfect smoke circles towards the white kitchen ceiling. Before she had time to finish her cigarette, the front doors swung open and the children came screaming and laughing into the hallway.

"Are we going on holiday?"

"Mother... are we going on holiday?"

"Yes tomorrow, Auntie Violette's, now run upstairs please and change."

No sooner had the children arrived home, than Kate the neighbour appeared at the back door. Babysitting duties.

- August 18<sup>th</sup> 16:27

He knew she was coming.

As the car pulled into Crescent Road, Terry stood up from the table walked to the window and watched Grace emerging from the car. They had business to conclude.

The two envelopes on the table were the main points of their conversation. Grace checked their contents and that's when she made up her mind. Walking across the room she stopped by the table.

"Shall we play?"

"Why not...but no cheating this time."

The weather outside turned nasty and the old friends opened a bottle of Terry's homemade wine, positioned the chess board in the middle of the table and got down to business.

- August 18<sup>th</sup> 18:08

The force of his disfigured fist as it crashed into the kitchen table, shook the foundations of the house. Rage emerged from his sparkling blue eyes.

Grace Sullivan didn't flinch.

Pushing the Knight across the chessboard she looked him straight in the eye and announced with a smile "checkmate."

At five feet nothing and with a temper like her fathers, she wasn't to be messed with.

- August 18<sup>th</sup> 18:09

As Terry turned his back and headed into the kitchen, Grace stood up removed the knife from her inside pocket and followed her old friend. Leaning against the doorframe she watched as he placed his hands on the countertop, lowered his head and exhaled aggressively. His annoyance at loosing his temper was evident.

Stepping forward Grace showed no emotion as she raised her left hand to shoulder height and in one quick movement it was over in seconds. By the time Terry knew something was wrong, his last breath was long gone. Kneeling over her friend she carefully removed the large purple stone ring from his index ginger, this would fetch a handsome price to help her on her journey. Over the course of the next hour she searched for the photos Terry had shown her earlier, his black book and making sure she left no evidence behind.

Outside as the heavens opened, Grace pulled the hood of her coat over her head, picked up her bag and emerged onto the deserted street. The few souls running for shelter were too busy to notice her.

The journey home was unlike any other. Struggling to hold back her emotions Grace knew for the first time in her life she was on her own. All she had to do now was disappear.