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## Ms Tarpleman

by Martin Bourne

“What do you mean, she’s dead?”

“As I said, Ms Jo Tarpleman is dead, found this morning, and it seems you were the last person to see her alive.”

“How do you know that?”

“Your car was seen driving away at about 7pm last night. We’ll need you to come into the station for questioning.”

“Am I a suspect, I mean how did she die?”

“Can’t discuss that at this time. Myself and another officer will be with you in about half an hour. Please stay at your office until we arrive.”

“Julie, is Clive in?”

“Yes.”

I quickly found the file and hurried into the manager’s office. He was on the phone and beckoned me to sit in one of the chairs in front of his desk. I hated those bloody chairs. Always reminded me in a way of Reginald Perrin when he would sit in the chair in CJ’s office and there would be a loud fart noise, except in this case, the chairs were particularly low giving Clive an immediate sense of authority over whoever was sat opposite him. I didn’t like Clive, he was an arse and revelled in micro-management. He finished his call.

“Whatever it is I can only spare you five minutes. I’ve got a conference call starting soon.”

“I’ll keep it short then. Went to see a claimant last night. Straightforward insurance claim for theft of possessions from a vehicle. No issues as far as I could ascertain, but I was going to do some more digging today, because she said she was an author, but I couldn’t find any record of her and usually an author would at least have some sort of media presence.”

“So why are you bothering me?”

Like I said, he was an arse.

“Well I’ve just had a call from the police and the policyholder was found dead this morning.”

“Dead. What the fuck did you do to her? You’re only supposed to make sure the claim is legit, negotiate a settlement and make sure you don’t get any complaints. You’re not supposed to bloody kill them. You’d better let me have a look at the file before you do anything else. I’ll deal with it after the phone call.”

“There won’t be time for that. The police are going to be here in about twenty minutes to take me to the station for questioning. Apparently I am the last person who saw her alive.”

“Right, call the insurance company. Explain the situation as best you can, and try to be tactful. I’ll try and get out of the conference call but I’ll have to wait until it starts. Make sure your file is in order before the police arrive.”

I started searching the internet but kept drawing a blank until. Well that is weird. Jo Tarpleman is a character in a book written in 1920 by a long dead American author.

Two men appeared at the office doorway. One of them called out my name and as I stood up he announced himself as Detective Sargeant Kinsell. The police officer approached followed by two burly uniformed officers. I reached out intending to shake hands, but was immediately seized and handcuffed. Kinsell read me my rights and told me I was being arrested for the murder of Jo Tarpleman. As I was being marched out of the office Julie called out.

“I’ve got a telephone message for you.”

“Best leave it on my desk love,” I said.

As I was driven away in the police car, Julie placed the small post-it-note on my desk bearing the words ‘Please call Ms Tarpleman.’

Over the coming days I would come to believe everything out of the common. The only thing to distrust would be the normal.