

## NEWS REPORTER

It all started when he began to believe the weather forecaster was secretly talking to him. It all started off with the usual; him, alone as usual, imagining that the woman on the TV with the blonde hair would wear the outfits which he preferred on the days he was feeling lowest. He would daydream at work of what she would wear that evening and he maintained a careful record of her choice. She only had a pre-agreed set of 24 outfits so the chances of a correct prediction increased as he paid more attention to the patterns, until the point that he began to believe she was following *his* pattern, and not the pattern assigned by the production team. It was easy to imagine that she was targeting him and him alone with every gesture and word. In his mind he mistakenly believed that her ability to correctly forecast the weather was equal to her ability to predict his life. The fact that the weather in the city he lived in now was immensely predictable was lost upon him. The connection was never made.

She began to embellish her forecasts with various proverbs and sayings; she believed this was displaying an amount of personality and expressing herself and it seemed to help the ratings and no one felt the need to tell her otherwise. In the meantime, he began not only using these sentences as often as possible at work and on public transport but he began believing that she was able to predict his life. Three things happened which led him to this conclusion: after she read the proverb 'A fool and his money are soon parted' he accidentally overpaid at the local stripclub, handing over £30 instead of the £20 he'd meant to give the man on the door. You couldn't really ask for a refund for something like that. The day after she'd said 'It never rains but it pours' and he'd been caught in a sudden flash flood of a shower walking home from the bus stop. The next day she'd said 'Let sleeping dogs lie' and his dog had died.

He had begun to tape the broadcasts and once he'd tired of watching and re-watching the weather forecast he began watching other news. When by a chance coincidence one evening he saw himself in the background of a news report by local news journalist Marcus Leinman outside a building near his work he was unsettled somehow. He started to watch the news reports over and over looking for signs. There were references to local stripclubs and a story about a dog cemetery. Somewhere along the way he became convinced that the news reporter was also speaking directly to him and he set about trying to get filmed as part of a report a second time - after he'd managed that a few times he began just turning up to watch the breakfast report get filmed. It got to the point that Marcus was sometimes a little nervous to come out of the studio with the small crew. The man would turn up and just watch him do the early morning outdoor field report and then leave. Marcus had mentioned the man to all his colleagues but no one really took it that seriously.

Marcus had a colleague, Neil, who had bought a new car but couldn't afford the payments. He had a new girlfriend and the car had impressed her but Neil had neglected to tell her that he also had a longer-term girlfriend, and the situation was starting to really kill his paycheck. Marcus had told Neil about the man and Neil somehow came up with a plan where the man would steal his new car, so that Neil could get the insurance money and maybe pay the man a few hundred pounds too. Neil was convinced that this was a good idea, declaring it fool-proof.

Neil accompanied Marcus to an 8am report outside a local restaurant which was celebrating having been open for 90 years. The man turned up and watched the report and then left to go back to the underground train system. Neil followed the man - not mentioning this to Marcus - and on the carriage Neil looked at the man and asked him if he wanted to make some extra money. The man recognised Neil immediately but played it cool. Neil outlined his plan and asked him to steal his car and the man went along with it. Neil was pleased with himself up until the point the man had asked Neil if he wanted to see something pretty cool.

Neil felt a jolt of nervousness but he'd said sure, what was it and the man had unzipped the bag he was carrying and showed Neil crossword after crossword carefully torn from a variety of newspapers, each one totally filled out with often random letters. There must have been five hundred ripped out crosswords and they were sort of damp toward the bottom of the bag and the man explained how he got caught in some really bad rain recently but overall the dampness didn't seem to bother him.

On the Thursday evening as agreed, Neil parked his car up at night in full view of the set of apartments which he lived in. The man was to approach the car and notice some keys on the ground and then take the car and drive it to an industrial estate twenty minutes away then set fire to it soon after. Meanwhile, Neil would realise he didn't have his car keys and go to look for them with the doorman of the apartments. The two of them would go outside and the car would be gone at which point Neil could call the police. Neil said jokingly to the man that it was to be reported as 'Mindless Teen Joyride Ends In Flames'. The man approached the car. Neil had reassured the man that the police would not expect him to drive to a nearby industrial estate with a stolen car and he was unlikely to come across the police but that if he did he could tell them that Neil was doing a story about poor emergency service response times or something. The man had seen this kind of plan before on the TV and he thought it was pretty good.

The man got in the car and reversed perfectly fine except he was wearing new shoes that day which he'd just bought with the money advanced by Neil and he somehow misjudged the pedals a little – he shot forward, slammed on the brakes, then shot forward again but this time the steering wheel jerked to the side and the car, in one powerful leap, smacked straight into one of the streetlights outside the apartment block and the man jumped out of the car and ran off. Neil came out with the guard and saw his beautiful new car with the corner of it mangled into a concrete lamppost and Neil's heart sank realising everything that had just happened. A few days later Neil saw the man hanging around outside the studios and the man had approached Neil and had said nothing at first and then had said 'I think it was a bad omen' without even a 'Hi' which made Neil immensely unsettled and he avoided any chance of conflict and prolonged contact with the man by telling him to keep the money and even offered him more, when the man had asked to discuss it further over a coffee.

Meanwhile Marcus had seen the ratings boost that the weather girl had when she began being *very slightly* more expansive and personable in her reports and he starts to do the same. Things get stranger when the man somehow begins turning up at every single report he ever does. All the man is really doing is waiting outside the studio and then following the van they use to get around town, but it seems to Marcus as though the man can turn up to locations before even he and his crew get there. The man began to write things down on a piece of paper, he seemed to more or less transcribe the entire report. He would take the notes home and try to decode the report further and understand more, looking for patterns and clues, and he would watch the reports – which would occasionally be heavily edited – over and over, comparing them to his own notes to see what was left out, which takes were used. Marcus began ending his reports with the sign off phrase '...and that's all folks, enjoy the rest of your day'.

The man takes this personally. He's seen the way Marcus nervously looks at him, casting the occasional glance aside at him mid-report, particularly if he is searching for a new piece of paper or something. He becomes to believe that Marcus is mocking him and convinces himself that Marcus sounds *insincere*.

This is pretty much exactly what the man says in person to Marcus after putting up with this ignominy and these *insults* for several weeks and the man says he's sorry and Marcus nervously asks what's the sorry for, what does he mean? And the man leans forward and puts his hand on Marcus's shoulder and says 'You don't understand' and that's when he stabbed Marcus just once. He dropped the knife and walked to a nearby bench and sat down and later the local mental healthcare team agree it would not be acting in the patient's best interest if he was allowed to watch TV.