

Mason

Mason realised something was wrong as soon as he came into the house. Call it instinct, a hunch, whatever you like, but he had been around long enough to sense that element of the unknown and danger which added up to trouble. He didn't expect to come across this in his own place – his home had always seemed a refuge from work – but here it was and he had to be on his guard. Shaking off the tiredness that came at the end of a long day, he forced himself to be extra alert and face whatever was coming.

The living room seemed normal, exactly as he left it – a mess – and he was just crossing to the bedroom when he saw it in the corner of his eagle eye. A letter, white and neatly folded. The letter was lying on the table in the corner. It was a wonder he saw it amongst all the other stuff there. Mason knew better than to touch the letter and destroy what fingerprints might be on it so he gingerly prised it open with a pencil. The message was stark and simple: 'Don't bother looking for her'.

Quickly but thoroughly Mason searched the rest of the house. Of course, she wouldn't be there but his trained mind knew that the first hours after a crime were absolutely vital and couldn't be wasted. There were no tell-tale signs of a struggle, nothing to suggest anything unusual and in fact the house seemed chillingly normal, as if his wife had just stepped out for another pint of milk. Her things were untouched, nothing had been taken, not even the rather valuable pearls in the jewellery box right on top of the dressing table.

Mason sat down for a moment, his mind a whirl. His wife had gone and all he had was a five-word message to go on. It wasn't much. The first question was who could have done it and then what the motive could be. In his line of work there was a long line of rogues who might be interested in hurting him. He remembered Neil Hunter, who he had put in prison for five years for stealing artwork from a gallery; Janet Kersey, who had just come out of an asylum after poisoning her neighbour with a cupcake; Trevor Timms, who he had imprisoned for setting on fire a bakery. There were others too, all with a personal grudge against him and equally likely to want to settle scores.

His mind went back to the letter. The handwriting was very careful and deliberate, as if someone was trying to disguise it. The paper itself was taken, not torn, from a proper notepad, the kind you can buy at any stationer's. Clearly, the note had not been written in a hurry and whoever had done it had had plenty of time. It could have been done on the spot, it could have been done elsewhere. The strange thing was why they had left the note in the first place, why not just let him find out his wife was missing himself? Possibly it was to taunt him, turn the screw as it were, which increased the likelihood that this was a crime with a very personal motivation.

It was time to get some help and Mason was reaching for the mobile in his back pocket when it rang of its own accord. 'Number unknown' read the display so the hair on the back of his neck bristled as he accepted the call. They knew he had found the note. Mason kept silent, heart pounding, waiting for the caller to speak first and reveal as much as possible. The silence was agony but then the voice came. It was his wife. 'Tony, it's me. I'm not hurt. They say that if you do everything they want, I can come back.' She spoke clearly and calmly, as if reading from a prepared script. Again, Mason kept silent but this time it was much more of a struggle. A pause and then another, rougher, voice came on the line. 'We'll be in touch.' The phone went dead.

A15 Which adjective best describes how Mason felt when he opened the door?

- 1) shocked
- 2) exhausted
- 3) cautious
- 4) annoyed

A16 The message in the letter means

- 1) don't worry about where she could be hiding
- 2) she could be hiding anywhere
- 3) it will be difficult to find her
- 4) you will never find her

A17 Why did Mason search the house?

- 1) to try and find his wife
- 2) to look for evidence
- 3) to see what had been stolen
- 4) to check if his intuition was right

A18 In the fourth paragraph 'to go on' means:

- 1) to read several times
- 2) to explain everything
- 3) to have as a clue
- 4) to remind him of his wife

A19 What is the connection between the three criminals mentioned?

- 1) They all might like to take revenge on Mason.
- 2) They have all been sent to prison by Mason.
- 3) They are the only people capable of taking revenge on Mason.
- 4) They have all committed terrible acts of violence.

A20 Mason could tell from the letter that the writer

- 1) was in a hurry when he wrote it
- 2) had written it at the house
- 3) had forgotten to hide it
- 4) didn't want his writing to be recognised

A21 Why didn't Mason speak immediately when he answered the phone?

- 1) It was a tactic to get more evidence
- 2) He knew it was going to be his wife
- 3) The number of the incoming call was unknown
- 4) He felt very nervous and worried