

Beth

An Eddie Collins short story

By

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— One —

Eddie pulled on the handbrake, looked across at her. “Well?”

It was a wide road, smooth as a billiard table with verges like bowling greens; trim hedges between sliding black wrought iron gates. The neighbours’ houses were the same, just as opulent as this one, some even larger, some even had castellations on their roofs, others had massive glass protrusions like ornate greenhouses or conservatories. This village was so lavish it was rude.

“Well what?”

“Heads or tails.” He dug a coin from his pocket.

Beth unbuckled her belt, thought for a moment. “Heads.”

He flipped and it came down on the back of his hand. He grinned at her, “Tails.”

“I always lose. Have you got a double-sided coin?”

“Wanna buy it?” He was about to reach for the door handle, but instead, studied her.

“Go on,” he said, “I’m listening.”

“What?”

“You. You’ve got that giddy look in your eyes.”

“Nonsense.”

“You have!”

She thought for a moment and then whispered through a smile, as though she had some dark secret. “Our anniversary today. Me and Tony.”

“Oh yeah, how long?”

“Thirty years. He thinks I’ve forgotten. I haven’t mentioned it at all.”

“You’re a cruel woman, Beth Robinson.”

Eddie slammed his door, and Beth met him at the back of the van, and began pulling out the stepping plates.

“So you got a nice cosy evening planned? Bottle of vino, pork scratchings and Dirty Harry on the telly?”

Tangled scene tape flapped in the breeze twenty yards either side of the house, and on the gate was a bored PCSO with a clipboard; white wires dangled from his ears and his foot tapped a rhythm. The air smelled of geraniums and chrysanthemums.

“Maybe a game of naked Twister a little later, eh?” He nudged her, and winked.

“It’s a celebration; Josey and Alex, and the girls, are in on it too. They’re coming up later and we are all eating at La Grillade. Tony will be thrilled; I’m so excited—”

“La Grillade? The kebab house on Albion Street?”

A shadow fell across them, and Eddie turned.

“Eddie,” Benson nodded. “Who’s this?”

Beth looked up at him, “Beth Robinson.”

His moustache, like a furry slug hanging on to his top lip, moved in waves and then emphasised a sneer, like a question mark lying down. “Is she new?”

Eddie’s mouth opened, about to reply.

“No. I’m not new. Transferred in from North Yorkshire—”

“Do you know what you’re doing, Becky?”

She closed in on him. “The name’s Beth not Becky. And yes, I know what I’m doing so stay out of my way.”

Benson showed his crooked teeth in what could have been a smile, and looked across at Eddie. “You got your hands full there, mate.”

Eddie shrugged, “It’s been like this since they let them vote.”

Benson walked away. “Make it a quick one,” he called over his shoulder.

“Cheeky git.”

Eddie laughed, “Who, me or him?”

“Both of you. Now come on, give me a hand.”

“You know he’s a DCI, don’t you?”

“I respect the man, not the rank.”

They carried gear up the cobbled driveway, past a sleek BMW and a rugged, but fully tricked Range Rover with mud on the tyres. “Oh the shame of it,” Beth said.

“Surprised he was allowed to drive on the roads round here.” Eddie peered into the Range Rover, saw a pair of gardening gloves and a green and yellow sweater on the passenger floor, and shook his head. “I hate gardening. All the nice things die, and all the shit things thrive. How’s that fair?”

“Out of tax,” Beth said.

“What? Eddie peered over her shoulder at the tax disc, then across to the BMW. Its tax had expired too. “I have a mate who’s a traffic cop. Bernie, he’s called. He reckons these mega-rich folk don’t tax their cars because it’s cheaper to pay the fine than the road fund licence.”

— Two —

In white plastic suits and overshoes, with masks across their faces, they stood in the spacious lounge on stepping plates, Eddie with his arms folded, Beth bent forward, hands on knees looking at the body. “So what’s the deal?” asked Eddie, staring at the projection screen hanging on the wall where a chimneybreast would have been in a normal house. Fawn leather suites were scattered around like litter, palm trees in the corners of the room, and a row of chrome balls with diffused pastel light blinking softly inside made it look like a tacky hotel reception or a tasteless brothel. It smelled vaguely of Shake ‘n’ Vac.

“The deal is, you come to the briefings and you find out all kinds of stuff.”

“I hate briefings.”

“So I noticed. You’re going to have to make more of an effort, Eddie.”

“Okay, okay. Just tell me what’s supposed to have happened.”

“Her name’s Megan Riley; married to Mick Riley?” She looked across at Eddie.

“That’s supposed to mean something, I can just tell.”

“Riley Sports?”

He looked at her. Blinked.

“Mick Riley, bad guy turned good. Now he owns a chain of six sports shops across Leeds and Wakefield. Bright yellow and green logo—”

“You wouldn’t get the full effect of an exaggerated yawn because of this mask, so I’ll just say I’m bored and leave it at that.”

“There’s a gym in the back next to the conservatory. She came in here probably to answer the front door since it was found wide open, and someone shot her.”

“Husband did it.” Eddie walked out of the room.

“Oi!”

“Now you know why I don’t go to briefings,” he called back.

“Tosser!”

— Three —

Eddie marched into the bedroom. He could hear Beth downstairs in the lounge kicking a tripod into position and muttering something profane. The bedroom was like the rest of the house – showy, glitzy, ultra modern. Not to his taste at all. It smelled of long dead joss sticks and didn't have that welcoming feel that a bedroom should have. It felt cold like a hotel room. Sterile like a morgue.

At one end of the room was an enormous round bed, mirrors right across the headboard wall with trendy chrome lamps seemingly growing from them, and a TV the size of a dining table on the wall opposite. At her side of the bed, a glass-topped cabinet held books, at his side, remote controls.

The wardrobe doors were open; something in there was blinking red. Eddie crossed the carpeted floor, unhooking his torch.

He crouched and shone the light upon a small safe with its door wide open. The handle, a flimsy plastic thing, was broken, but not recently judging by the dust across the break, and the blinking light was a low battery warning light on the keypad. There were two shelves inside; the top shelf was empty, and the bottom had leather binders on it containing deeds to the house, and stocks, and statements. Outside the wardrobe, wide open and empty was a cash box, its tray hanging out like a tongue on the sheepskin rug.

“Bollocks,” he said, heading for the door. “There’s always something needs fingerprinting.”

— Four —

Beth had finished the photography; had also photographed the body. At the briefing, they said she was thirty-eight but Beth guessed that countless sun bed sessions, a few gallons of hair dye, and more than the odd tequila had been very unkind to the poor woman. She was lying on her back, eyes wide, false lashes fixed open like black Venus flytraps. Right between her eyes was a nice neat bullet hole, with a speckled black powder burn surrounding it.

She was well into recovering footwear marks from the floor when Benson coughed. “What?” she said.

“You gonna Low Copy this door?”

She turned and looked at him, standing there in a worn out grey suit that was a size too small for him, sweat glistening on his brow and among the thin clumps of hair that smeared his forehead. He reminded her of Selwyn Froggitt. “No.”

“Why not?”

“Is there a TV crew out there?”

Benson looked puzzled, then said, “No. Why?”

“I just thought you were picking out random phrases to make yourself sound good.”

He pointed a stubby finger. “You better be careful, Becky, or you and me are gonna fall out.”

Beth put down the black gelatine lifters, and beneath the mask, smiled across at him. “I’m not going to Low Copy the door because there have been two paramedics, four police officers, and one SIO in here, none of whom understands the concept of preserving trace evidence.”

Entering the lounge from the stairs, Eddie laughed and approached Benson on his way out to the van. “I think that means you’ve collectively buggered up our scene, Boss.”

Benson took a step back into the hallway, cleared his throat and squinted at her, “So what *have* you got for me, then?”

“Nike Tuned Eight.”

Benson raised his eyebrows. “Anything else?”

“Haven’t turned her over yet, but there’s a lot of blood, so I’m guessing the bullet passed right through. With a bit of luck, we might be able to dig it out for you later.”

“PM is jacked up for later this evening, okay?”

Beth pulled down her mask, stared at him, a kind of forlorn look on her face. “Okay,” she sighed eventually.

— Five —

Twenty minutes later, Eddie came back in carrying his fingerprint kit and a body bag. “You okay?”

Beth packed the bullet in sterile tissue and screwed the cap on the universal container. “9mm,” she smiled. “It’s always 9mm; when are they going to get original?”

“Just need to find the shell casing now,” Eddie said.

Beth pointed to the neat pile of exhibits bags by one of the leather sofas. “Already found it, swabbed it, bagged it.” She pulled up the sleeve of her scene suit and glanced at her watch.

“My, we *are* quick!”

“Where’ve you been, anyway? Been gone a long time.”

“Benson mentioned the PM. I made some calls. Colin’s taking it, so we can crack on here.”

Beth’s eyes lit up, “Really? Oh that’s fantastic news.”

Eddie grinned at her, “Thought you’d be impressed.”

— Six —

Half an hour later, they had taped the dead woman’s exposed flesh, hoping to collect any remnants of trace evidence, and then they tied clear plastic bags over her hands and head, squashing her nose so she looked like a 60s bank robber in a pair of his wife’s tights.

The leather sofa squeaked when Beth sat down. Eddie’s eyebrows raised.

“So,” Beth laughed, “we got cotton glove marks from the cash box upstairs, footwear marks in here, some in blood, a 9mm shell and the bullet.”

Eddie nodded.

“What else?”

“Apart from flatulence?”

“That was the sofa!”

“Hey,” he said, palms out, “I thought it was a good effort, but quite dangerous in a scene suit; they tend to follow you around. Longwinded,” he winked.

Beth was about to protest when the lounge floorboards creaked and Benson loomed in the doorway again. “Finished?”

“Think so,” Eddie said. “You got her husband in custard yet?”

“He’s at the nick, yeah. Just giving a statement.”

“Body snatchers on their way?” Beth asked.

Benson nodded, fingers playing with loose change in his pockets, glaring at Beth.

She stood, “Right, we’ll hand these exhibits over—”

“And then make your way up to the cricket club.”

Both looked at him.

“The cricket club?”

“Well I’m up for a game of rounders if you are,” Eddie smiled.

“Another body.”

“You taking the piss?” Eddie strode across the lounge. Benson didn’t move. “We’ve done one stiff today, that’s—”

“Half of the murders in this division. You’re it. Both of you.”

“Some of us have lives, Benson,” said Eddie, ripping the mask off his face, not looking at Beth on purpose, knowing it would only exacerbate his mood.

“Bollocks, Collins. Since when did you have a life?” And then he looked past Eddie, to Beth, sitting in silence, staring at the floor. “Be there in thirty minutes.”

— Seven —

“Want a Polo?” Eddie glanced at her.

She shook her head.

“Have you eaten anything today?”

“No.”

“Me neither. Oh I have, I’m lying. Had a couple of Rennie’s earlier. Stuffed now.” He looked at her again, no reaction. “That was supposed to be funny,” he said. And then he whispered, “Losing my touch.” They drove in silence for a while and then Eddie asked, “Can’t you ring him?”

Beth shook her head. “He won’t be home till later. He doesn’t carry a phone, can’t work them, he says.”

“I’m sorry, Beth. Benson’s always been an asshole—”

“Don’t apologise for that stupid ignoramus!”

“Hey,” Eddie said, “cut out the bad language will ya.”

Beth smiled at him, nudged his elbow.

— Eight —

Down at the far end of the cricket club was a metal container where they kept the bats and stumps and the rest of the gear. Behind it, where the drainage was at its worst, was the

body of a twenty-three year old male on his back, a small revolver in his right hand, and a blackened hole in the centre of his chest. The t-shirt he wore was ragged, charred. He lay among trampled nettles and rough grass on a slight incline, like an island. Next to it was a seldom-used and muddy track that was squelchy underfoot.

Traffic noise and buzzing insects, police radio, and the wind hissing through the hawthorn and blackberry bushes nearby, filled the air.

Beth ignored the temptation to go and harvest some blackberries for a jam session later on. Tony loved blackberry jam. She shook her head, tried to concentrate on the job, and pressed the shutter release. She checked her watch, and sighed. It was almost five. Three hours until she should be sitting down and reminiscing over the last thirty years with her man, and with the kids and the little ones too. Bastard Benson, she thought.

And as if by magic, he was at her side. “Firearms officers will be here shortly to make the weapon safe.”

“Two rounds missing,” Eddie said.

“You always were good at maths, Eddie, I like that.”

“What about him?” Beth nodded to the dead kid. “Who is he?”

“Name’s Marcus Wright. Local gang member. Lived a hundred yards away.”

“And?”

“Put it this way, Becky, I won’t shed any tears over him.”

She turned to face Benson, glared at him. “Call me Becky—”

“Just get on with it.” Benson walked off, pulling a Mars bar from his pocket.

“Don’t let him wind you up.” Eddie mixed the casting medium in a bucket, like stirring a Yorkshire pudding mix. “He does it on purpose.”

“Yeah, well. How often do you have a thirtieth wedding anniversary?”

“I know, I know. Look, let’s just crack on.” He glanced around and saw Benson by the fence, talking into his radio, Mars wrapper on the floor. “Soon as he pisses off, you go; I can finish up here.”

“Really?”

“No. I just said that to make you feel better.”

Beth laughed with him; he had a way of lightening the mood, even though when Benson had mocked him, about him not having a life, she wondered how far from the truth it was. The thought made her a little sad. “Okay,” she said, “thanks, Eddie.”

Eddie poured the casting medium into the two types of footwear marks, while Beth was kneeling at the kid’s side taping his exposed flesh for fibres and gunshot residues. She

finished his hands and was about to make a start on his neck and face, when she stopped. “Eddie.”

Eddie squelched over. “What’s up?”

“Look here,” she pointed to his neck.

“Not seeing any... Oh, yeah.”

Beth looked at Eddie, “We’d better tell him.”

Eddie nodded, “I’ll go. Might lick his Mars wrapper while I’m there.”

“And Eddie?”

Eddie turned around.

“Tell him that this kid was clever enough to shoot himself in the chest *after* he died.”

“No blood, right?”

“No blood.”

“Right.”

“And Eddie, tell him the kid had five grand in his pocket.”

“Aw, do I have to. I’ll go halves with you.”

Laughing, Beth took a fresh length of tape and got to work. The clock inside her head kept ticking, and the longer it ticked, the louder it ticked. And the louder it ticked, the faster she worked. By the time Eddie got back, she had finished taping the kid’s neck and face, and had bagged the hands and head.

“He thanked me for my honesty, and he thanks you for your diligence.”

“I bet,” she said. “Look here.” She pulled aside the kid’s jacket, found mud underneath on the t-shirt. She rolled his jacket sleeves up and noted mud smeared right up to his elbows.

“This is getting weirder than a weird thing.”

“Well, the good news is we’ve just about done,” she looked across to Eddie, just as Eddie started to shake his head. “What now?”

“I made a mistake, I’m afraid.”

“You?”

“I know it’s virtually unheard of, but yes, I did.”

“What mistake?”

“I found tracks in the mud. Tyre tracks. Chunky tyre tracks. Made by tyres you might find on a Range Rover.”

“And why is that a mistake? I’d say it was good—”

Eddie cocked a thumb behind him, “I told him that this scene and the Riley scene were linked by the tyres. He wants them casting, and he wants soil samples taking from here, and from the Range Rover’s tyres. And then he wants tyre impressions taken.”

“That’ll take all bastard night!”

Eddie cringed. “Told you I’d made a mistake.”

“Never mind,” Beth sighed. “I want to tape his jacket for GSR too.”

“Why?”

“I’m starting to build a theory.”

“I already told you the husband did it. Your job is to cut this short and bugger off sharpish.”

Beth dabbed lengths of tape across the cuffs of the jacket, and more across the collar. “I can’t and I won’t leave you to do it all.”

“Hey,” Eddie laughed, “I’m thinking of the overtime.” He was about to begin work on the tyre casts when he stopped, whispered to Beth, “He’s leaving, look. Off to interview the husband. Give it ten minutes, then get gone; I’ll finish up here.”

Beth stared at him. The clock in her head was Big Ben. The watch on her wrist said that she could still make it if she rushed. Back to work, dump the stuff in the office, collect her car, rush home, shower, and surprise Tony with a secret trip to La Grillade where Andre would show them to a table. And already at the table would be Josey, Alex, and the little ones. She didn’t know it, but she was smiling already. And then she was looking at Eddie, “You sure you don’t mind?”

“Not one bit. It’ll be good to have some peace and quiet.”

Beth laughed as she stood, snapped the gloves off her hands, and felt good for the first time today. It could work, it *would* work. “Get those GSR tapings to the lab asap, okay?”

Eddie saluted.

“And the gardening gloves—”

“And the gardening gloves.”

“And don’t forget—”

“I won’t. Now go before I call Benson back here.”

Beth beamed at Eddie. She had her scene suit half off before she’d even reached the cordon, where she bent and picked up an empty Mars wrapper.

Eddie watched her go, and then he took out his mobile phone.

— Nine —

Beth dumped the exhibits into the store, threw the radio down, and sat at her desk, knowing she had almost a full half hour before she had to leave. A full half an hour to copy her paperwork into the greedy computer. It would be a squeeze, she knew, but if she did the minimum, there would still be time. She uploaded her images of both scenes from a flash card and began writing the title sheet.

Eddie radioed her, and when she looked at the clock on the computer screen, she almost shrieked. “What!” she yelled.

“It’s me, Eddie.”

“What, Eddie?”

“Thought you might like to know that I got the GSR results.”

“Yes, go on, quickly.”

“You’re still running late aren’t you?”

“By ten minutes. I could kick myself.”

“Jacket sleeves and collar – positive. Face and hands – negative.”

“Well that’s—”

“Now get out of there, woman!”

Beth dropped the radio, grabbed her handbag, took a last snatched glance at the clock on the wall and burst out of the office and into the corridor. She was three yards away from the exit door of the building when he shouted.

“Becky!”

She froze. She turned and stared at Benson.

“Going so soon?”

“I have to—”

“Never mind that now. I need you in the interview room. Photograph him.”

“But—”

“Now!” he turned and left her there.

She was seething; her hands turned white as she wrung the handbag straps.

— Ten —

With the camera slung over her shoulder and her kit bag in her hand, Beth almost smashed her way into the interview room. Mick Riley jumped, and Benson looked around so quickly he almost snapped his neck.

“Stand up,” she shouted at Riley.

Riley looked at Benson. Benson shrugged.

“You can’t talk to me like that,” he said. “Remember innocent—”

“Shut up, and stand up.” She glared at him.

He slowly rose from his seat, looked at Benson with a kind of pleading in his eyes.

“Oh, I get it,” he said, smiling eventually. “Good cop, bad cop, right? I’ve seen the movies.”

“I’m not a cop. I’m civilian. And that means I don’t have to follow the same rules he does. Get that, mister?” Beth flicked the switch and the flash buzzed, the camera belched into life. “Keep still.”

She aimed and pressed, turned him gruffly, took another shot, turned him again, took another. And when she had finished, they faced each other. “He been in a dry cell?” she asked Benson, eyes never leaving Riley’s face.

“Yep.”

“We got the results back from the gunshot residues off the kid.”

“And?” Benson asked.

She reached into her kit bag, took out a sealed GSR kit, a pair of scissors, mask and gloves. “His jacket is covered in residue.”

Riley smiled at her, turned to Benson, and smiled again.

“We already guessed he killed your wife, Mr Riley,” Benson said, “So no prizes for guessing who killed him.”

“I never went near him.”

“Your Range Rover tyre tracks at the kid’s scene say you *did* go near him,” Beth said.

“It’s where I park when I go see the cricket.”

“And you get out and watch from behind a metal container I suppose. You have mud on your shoes.”

“I like gardening; it’s mud from my flower bed.”

Benson grimaced, closed his eyes.

“I’m going to swab you for gunshot residues, Mr Riley.”

“I ain’t done nothing wrong!”

“Then you won’t mind cooperating will you?”

“I don’t have to do anything; my brief ain’t arrived yet.”

“Really. I have Superintendent’s authority—”

“Becky’s right.”

She stared at Riley, gritting her teeth, and then slowly turned and looked down at Benson in his ill-fitting suit, cup of spilled coffee next to a Mars bar wrapper on the desk before him, and she began with a whisper, that built quickly to a climax, “Call me Becky once more and I’ll ram these scissors so far up your arse I could trim your moustache!”

Benson blinked.

When she turned back to Riley, he whimpered, “Okay.”

“If these papers turn blue within five minutes,” she said, “it’s a positive reaction to gunshot residue. Is that clear?”

He nodded, looked worried.

“And while I swab you let me share my theory with you.”

“Beth—”

“Shut it, Benson,” she snapped. Then to Riley, she said, “Since you used to be a criminal, you knew the local scum and you knew where they lived. You waited behind the container for Marcus Wright.” She dabbed a thumbnail-sized piece of white tape across his face. “And when he walked by, armed as all the gang members round here are, you stopped him, maybe engaged him in some chit-chat. Then you knocked him out and you strangled him with one of your own shops sweaters.”

Riley glanced at Benson.

Benson looked away.

Beth saw the clock on the wall, and her heart sank. She was late, too late for her own thirtieth wedding anniversary. She would never make it on time. Tony would be so disappointed; he’d think she’d forgotten, and the surprise would be ruined. All because of him, Mick Riley.

Riley glanced at the GSR tapings lying on the desk. He swallowed.

The heat of anger ignited in her chest. “And then you took his jacket off him, put it on. And then you took off his trainers and put those on too. Nike Tuned Eight. You took the

little six-shooter out of his pocket and drove home. You put your gardening gloves on and you—”

“This is—”

“Keep watching the tapings, Mr Riley.” Beth smiled at him, but it came out looking like a deformed sneer. Riley swallowed again and looked at her. “Then you got your wife into the lounge, and up close, up really close where you could even smell the booze on her breath you pulled the trigger.

“Then you went upstairs, straight into your bedroom, straight into the broken safe where you kept a bundle of five grand. You didn’t search anywhere else, you weren’t thinking like a stranger to your home, you were thinking like you. You got the cash and you drove back to the cricket ground.”

The interview room door opened, and a police officer entered, closed it behind him. He and Benson shared perplexed looks.

“And then you swapped your clothes back again, because you knew we’d check for GSR, and you were right, we did, and he was covered in the stuff. Except for his hands. And his face.”

They all looked at the GSR swabs. Had they changed colour? Difficult to see under this lighting.

“And to finish it off, you tried to make it look like a guilty suicide by shooting him in the chest.” She tutted, rolled her eyes to the ceiling. “Completely the wrong angle. He’d need arms five feet long with two elbows each to have shot himself like that.”

“Beth,” said the officer.

“Just a minute, dear,” she kept her eyes on Riley. “Are they turning blue?”

Nervously, Riley tried to peer over her shoulder.

“Wasn’t me,” he said, “I never did it. Couldn’t have been me.”

“Why couldn’t it?”

Riley smiled at her.

“Beth,” said the officer.

“What!” She screamed in Riley’s face.

“I washed it off,” he shrieked. And then he grinned at her, the triumph alive in his face, and then his face crumpled slightly as though his cleverness at washing away the gunshot residues had just been shot to bits by his stupidity at admitting it.

Beth stood still, panted, glaring at him. Then her face softened and she began to smile, as Riley's grasped the full implications of grassing himself up. She turned to Benson. He tapped the table, nodded his head, and winked at her.

"Beth?" whispered the officer.

"Michael Riley," Benson began, "I am arresting you for the murder..."

Beth walked into the corridor, and the officer stood there looking worried.

"What?" she asked. "What's wrong?"

"Come with me," he said. "Now."

— Eleven —

The Volvo sped through the evening traffic, splitting it down the middle with the shrieks of its sirens and its pulsing blue lights. Beth closed her eyes, held onto the seat, and squeezed out a single question, "Is Eddie alright?"

"Do those GSR papers really turn blue?"

"I told a little fib," she said. "He needed some coercion, that's all."

They roared into the city centre, rushing through red lights, where people stopped and stared. Then the officer reached out, turned a switch and the noise and the lights ceased, and he cruised gently to a stop. And when Beth relaxed, opened her eyes and looked over at him, the officer was already out of the car and was opening her door, smiling at her. He took her hand, helped her out, and said, "My name's Bernie. Happy anniversary." He handed her a small bouquet, and she grinned at him. "You gotta read the card," he said. "Eddie was quite explicit."

She tilted the flowers, and the card read: 'Heads was for Carnations, tails was for Roses. E.'

Beth stood outside La Grillade. The lamps here on the pavement were alight, and they shone across the restaurant's noble façade and the subtle lighting inside glanced across a long table. Bernie opened the door for her and Beth straightened her blouse, tucked a wayward strand of hair back behind her ear and strode into Tony's arms. Around them, Josey and Alex stood clapping. Sarah and Issy jumped up and down with excitement, squealing and cheering, "We had a ride in a police car, Nanny!"

"Happy anniversary dear," Tony said. "I thought you'd forgotten."