

An Ungodly Murder

By David Kempf

God either exists or he doesn't. It's that simple. Jack Smith was a skeptical atheist. Martin Wesley was a true believer. They were two detectives that had very different world views. They were constantly arguing about something that's impossible to prove or disprove. One thing they had in common was they knew how to solve a crime. Smith and Wesley were experts at catching murderers. I should know. They caught me and now I'll spend the rest of my life in jail.

Granted that's what happens when you're convicted of murder. My name is Thomas Bram. I didn't have a very eventful life until about a year or so ago. That's when I married Sarah Howard. Yes, that Sarah Howard of the Howard family. That's a family with a lot of money. The only thing they had more abundantly than wealth was distaste for someone like me. Sarah and I met at college. My family was just middle class and could not ever belong to the high society world of the Howard's. Sarah's mother hated me the most. Maybe I would have never tried to do what I did if it wasn't for her. I mean it's one thing to be treated like a second class citizen. It's another to have your daughter write up a prenuptial agreement.

Sarah and I had some happy times before she died. The wealth her family's pharmaceutical business produced made for some unbelievable vacations. Europe, Asia and the Caribbean were all just a private flight away. Please don't let me get started on how much fun an African safari can be! I guess as far as second class citizens go, this was a pretty great way to live.

The other great thing was all the envy. Everyone I grew up with in the same neighborhood, former friends, relatives and people who didn't like me were jealous. All my old friends were working hard knowing that I never had to work. They were very, very jealous. I didn't blame them. It looked from all outward appearances that I was out of their league. Was I really out of their league? No. You can't really marry your way into the upper class, the American caste system. You're either born into it or people laugh at you behind your back. Sarah could never leave her family behind for the sake of our marriage. She was happy they didn't disown her for marrying me.

I couldn't take people constantly taunting me in private. I wanted to leave this family for that. The problem is that it didn't much time before I grew very accustomed to my new lifestyle. Did I love my new standard of living? I loved it more than anyone or anything. I loved it more than my parents, my friends and my lovely wife.....I loved it so much I would kill to protect it.

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How often I felt like killing her when she put me down. She would tell me how lucky I was and how much better she could do. I hated her for that. This was not about passion. This was a pragmatic matter. If I was to get divorced I would get nothing. In the event of a tragedy, I would be rich and happy for the rest of my days.

This is how it happened. I asked my wife to give the servants the night off. I told her I would make her dinner. I knew I had to plan everything just right.

Sarah was impressed that I wanted to make her dinner. She said that it was unusually unselfish of me. I prepared dinner for her. Then I asked her to go to the wine cellar and choose a vintage bottle. She asked me why I didn't have the wine out already because this was a special night I

was creating just for her. I told her that she had far more refined taste than I did. If I chose the bottle then it may ruin this unique and special occasion. She reluctantly agreed.

Sarah opened the cellar door and began walking down the stairs.....

I summoned up my courage. Once I did what I had to do, my life would start getting a whole lot better. One ugly chore would make all the difference. I ran behind her and pushed her as hard as I could. There was a brief scream. Then I looked at her laying there on the cellar floor. She was dead. I was free.

The two detectives only grilled me for a few hours the night I killed my wife. Detective Smith asked the most questions. Wesley asked fewer questions but looked like he was trying to second guess me. He wanted to figure me out. I stuck to my story. My beautiful wife fell down the stairs. There was no one to blame and it was nobody's fault. She fell. She died. It was a tragic accident.

"We'll get back to you as soon as we get the coroner's report," said Smith.

Wesley looked at Smith in a way that told me they would be saying things about me I wouldn't want to hear after they left.

The coroner's report came back. It was inconclusive. Not enough to clear my good name or for me to go to trial. I was hoping at the time that this would be the last time I would hear from them.

It was about a month later that I heard the doorbell ring. I opened the door and low and behold it was Wesley and Smith. It was Smith who spoke first.

"You and I know that you killed your wife. My partner knows it too. The evidence hasn't mounted the way I wanted yet. If there is any way to gain what I need to put you away, I'm on it!"

"Jack, let me talk to him."

"Okay, Marty. I've said all I need to say for now."

Smith looked at me. It was very obvious that he knew I was guilty. He shook his head and then began to slowly walk away from Wesley and me.

"Look, Thomas. You need to know that I'm not that worried about whether or not we are going to get enough evidence to convict you."

I looked at Wesley like he was crazy.

"There is a much more important manner than that you will have to deal with. Someday you will be judged for what you did. You will also be judged for how you never owed up to what you did. There is no unforgivable sin. Not one. That is unless you never repent and persist in the evil thing you did."

Was he joking? Did he think I was going to let his Sunday school lesson drive me to confess killing my wife?

That night my mind was filled with the worst night terrors of my life. It would have been far better if I would have not been able to sleep. I was too exhausted not to sleep. The events of the past few days overwhelmed me.

Everyone dies eventually. My wife was dead. Someday I know I will die. If this is the only life we will ever have then I knew I was off the hook. If there was the hell I grew up learning about in Sunday school then I knew that I was going there. My parents always raised me to be a man of the world but also to not hurt other people. My conscience was getting to me. I was tormented by visions of my wife lying in a coffin. She was dead because of me. She was dead because of my selfishness and greed. Sarah was gone and she would never be returning. If there was a hell, I

was surely going there. If this life is it then I took away the only life that she will ever have. I was guilty.

The two detectives were stunned when I turned myself in and confessed my crime. They should have been. The only one more surprised by my conscience than them was me. Smith and Wesley were very glad to hear my confession. When they stepped out I could hear them talking about me.

“I don’t get it. He could have gotten away with it. We would have never had the evidence to put him away.”

Wesley had a different point of view.

“He may have gotten away with it for now. Eventually he would have had to pay for his crimes. Now he has a real chance at redemption.”

Incidentally, I didn’t have to spend the rest of my life in jail. I thought that I would prior to my sentencing. I thought that I would have to spend the rest of my life in jail. That was forty years ago. I made parole. My behavior was good in prison. I worked hard and helped the prison chaplain with his ministry. Now that I’m out I know the first place I’m going to go. I’m going to visit my wife’s grave. I need to go there to ask for her forgiveness one more time.