

Piece of Cake

“Damn.” I was running late. It was my first day at work (well kind of...I’ll explain later) and needed to impress. Yeah right...Like that was going to happen. Pausing briefly in front of the mirror to recheck my hastily applied make-up, I ran out of the door. The neighbours watched the spectacle of flailing limbs and flying red hair with a mixture of barely concealed disdain and pity. I resisted the urge to stick my tongue out and headed for the bus stop.

My name is Laura Keane (my colleagues liked to joke, Keane by name, keen by nature...yeah original) My flat is situated in a strictly upper middle class area, all well kept lawns and trimmed hedges. People were pretty comfortable and I don’t mean soft slippers and fluffy blankets either. I’m talking enough to keep the wife, children, grandchildren, the pets even the troublesome in laws in Prada with enough change to buy a Bentley. There was no real need to work unless you really had to, hence the withering stares. Round here, working girl took on a whole new meaning... I figured out very quickly that I was never going to be flavour of the month but there only so much silent bitching one could take. One more contemptuous sneer, disparaging stare and I would take their well-cut sandwiches and shove it first into six layers of make up then into their neat little flower beds. So why would a 30-something, independent, semi-intelligent, fairly streetwise 21st century woman end up exiled outer suburban hell? Well the answer is far from simple. Firstly, there was the nasty split from the ex-husband, (the less said about that, the better), then was the stalking – by his new girlfriend who seemed to think that I wanted him back...some people. So this meant, change of number, change of address (well I was not going to live in such a big house on my own), basically a change of my life as I knew it. So when my superiors suggested a change of scene and a juicy case to boot, I grabbed the bull by its proverbial horns. A new place in manicured and slightly creepy suburbia is a small price to pay...and the fact that the biggest and most complex case was, literally, in my back yard and I had just cracked it...well almost.

Ah yes. The Great (Irish) Scouse Detective otherwise known as undercover police investigator specialising in fraud and organised crime. A job which I love but doesn’t always love me. It was murder, almost literally. All was not well on the Western Front (or in this case, Parker Lane). Something in this picture perfect world was more rotten than month old milk and it was my job to find out what it was. People here seem to be making (or getting) money very quickly and, as far as I could see no one went to work. There was no manic rush, no noisy children to negotiate and no mad dogs barking as their masters and mistresses set out for the day ahead. That, to me was odd...and my superiors agreed. So Operation Candid was launched, with me going undercover to unearth what the hell was going on. The normal method of barging in waving warrants, and shooting guns was not going to work here. Something more...discreet was needed. So I went to every social event in this community - village fete, Halloween parade, even the tea morning – which, over here was the highlight of the social calendar. While this was going on, my colleagues were busy applying ‘advanced technology’ to the homes (read bugging phones, rooms and computers). For months, we gathered information, listened to thousands of hours of calls, examined thousands of bytes of memory on hard drives and got some good stuff but nothing we could make stick. It was only when I attended (read crafty gatecrashing) the October 28th coffee morning (well coffee morning was a bit of a misnomer as very little coffee was consumed, gallons of other beverages imaginable but coffee...nope) that I cracked it. As the tea flowed, so did the clues...it appears that the key is in the name of the street (yeah that stumped me too at first...but it all makes sense, trust me).If you want to know how, well that’s another story, you’ll be surprised where tea and cake will get you....