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## A contract is still a contract – even if it is a contract to kill

By ALAN HAMILTON

**A woman who hired a hitman to kill her has been awarded £2,000 because she is still alive**

IT SOUNDS like the law of 1920s East Side Chicago, but it is also the law of England.

A contract is a contract, even if it is a contract to kill.

Break it, and if the mob don't get you, Maidstone Crown Court will.

Kevin Reeves, 40, was jailed for 15 months and ordered to pay £2,000 compensation after accepting £20,000 from a friend so depressed that she asked him to find a hitman to murder her. He even offered to do it himself, but got no further than pocketing the money.

There could be no prosecution for murder or manslaughter because nothing ever happened. But the intended victim, clearly annoyed at being still alive, filed a complaint for breach of contract. A jury found Reeves guilty of deception at the end of a case that even the prosecution conceded was bizarre.

Christine Ryder, 53, met Reeves when both were being treated for mental health problems at Medway Maritime Hospital in Gillingham, Kent, in 2003. Mrs Ryder, from nearby Strood, had been admitted after attempting suicide. She formed a friendship with Reeves and told him that she was depressed and desperate to end her life. Could he find her a hitman? Reeves, from Snodland, near Rochester, made a telephone call and told her that he could get a professional killer for £2,500.

Nothing happened.

After they left hospital she contacted Reeves and repeated her request. The price, Reeves told her, had gone up to £5,000. She wrote him a cheque.

Reeves banked the money and told Mrs Ryder that she would be killed in a drive-by shooting on June 11, 2003. She wasn't; Reeves telephoned her to cancel the arrangement, saying that he had had to kill the hitman himself and pay Mrs Ryder's money to his widow, the court was told.

Mrs Ryder, growing increasingly keen to depart this life, asked Reeves if he would do the deed himself. Reeves agreed, but said it would cost her another £10,000; she wrote him another cheque. But then she lost contact with him for some time. When he eventually contacted Mrs Ryder, he claimed that her £10,000 had been seized

by his bank because he was bankrupt, but he could still kill her if she gave him another £10,000. She refused but agreed to pay him £5,000; Reeves promised to kill her on November 28.

The day before the promised killing, Mrs Ryder received a letter from Reeves saying that the situation had changed, but “things are still on, so don’t panic”. At the end of the appointed day Mrs Ryder was still alive.

Fiona Moore-Graham, for the prosecution, told the court that once again there was a period of no contact, largely because Reeves had taken his wife, Jean, on an expensive holiday to Tenerife. “You may think, therefore, that there was no intention of killing Mrs Ryder on November 28.”

Ever more frustrated at being still alive, Mrs Ryder contacted Reeves’s wife, who said that her husband had told her that his windfall had come from a lottery scratch card, a maturing insurance policy and an Isa. “He simply had the money for his own purpose and had no intention of using it for the purpose she directed: to have her killed or kill her himself,” Ms Moore-Graham told the jury.

Steven Hadley, for the defence, conceded: “It is a mean offence, preying on somebody who is vulnerable.”

Judge Veronica Hammerton told Reeves: “This was a calculated deception, repeated three times. While it is clear you had no intention of arranging for someone to kill Mrs Ryder and didn’t propose to yourself, you deceived her into believing it would happen. It resulted in a substantial sum being paid to you; none of the money was repaid. In all the circumstances, these offences are so serious that a custodial sentence is unavoidable.” She ordered Reeves to hand over as compensation the £2,000 he had saved up to repay Mrs Ryder.

Had Reeves been as good as his word he would have found himself facing far more serious charges. Or, in 1920s Chicago, sleeping with the fishes in concrete boots.

## **STRANGER THAN FICTION**

- Armin Meiwes, a self-confessed cannibal, was jailed for eight years in 2004 for killing and consuming a man who had begged to be eaten.

Meiwes, 44, met a Berlin computer engineer on the internet in 2001, cut him up in his house and ate 44lb (20kg) of his flesh. Meiwes confessed to the killing but said that he was fulfilling the victim’s desire. His lawyers are seeking a conviction of “killing upon request”, a form of euthanasia, which carries a lesser sentence

- A Manchester boy of 14 who wanted to commit suicide tricked a boy of 16 into stabbing him, a court was told two years ago.

The stabbed boy pretended to be a glamorous woman spymaster and promised sex, money and a life as a secret agent if the elder boy carried out the task. The wounds were not fatal

- Jules Lowe, 32, was cleared of murdering his father last May when a Manchester jury accepted that he carried out the attack while sleepwalking.

Mr Lowe, from Walkden, faced a life sentence for killing his father,

## Edward, 83. He was found not guilty of murder

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