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HEADLINE: GIRL COP FACES SACK AS PSYCHO IS CAGED;

Policewoman Constable Shirley Cardwell's evidence could have wrecked the trial of scissors killer David Asbury

Iain Ferguson Exclusive

A policewoman's evidence could have wrecked the trial of scissors killer David Asbury.

The twisted 21-year-old was caged for life yesterday for murdering lonely spinster Marion Ross.

She was stabbed in the EYE in a frenzied attack.

During the trial, the court was told Detective Constable Shirley Cardwell's thumbprint was found in 51-year-old Marion's house.

But in the witness box, the policewoman denied SEVEN TIMES that she had ever been there.

Detectives were terrified her story would put doubt in the jury's minds and Asbury would be freed to kill again.

Now Cardwell, 34, faces police disciplinary action.

And insiders say she may be charged with perjury - lying under oath. She will be carpeted at a police disciplinary hearing later this month.

A senior police source said: "Her actions put this case at serious risk.

"It would have been a disaster had Asbury walked. In our opinion he was a serial killer in the making.

"We caught him after his first murder - but that was put in jeopardy because of that detective's bizarre behaviour."

Cardwell had found a vital piece of evidence in the case. She and a colleague discovered a biscuit tin in Asbury's bedroom, with his and Marion's fingerprints on it.

Police were convinced Asbury had taken it from Marion's house.

But they feared that if the jury didn't believe Cardwell's story about the thumbprint in the bathroom, they might distrust her other evidence.

She admitted in court that she'd twice been refused permission to attend the murder scene.

Crown counsel Alan Dewar accused Cardwell of going to Marion's house after "your curiosity got the better of you".

Cardwell admitted the thumb-print was hers and agreed fingerprint evidence was never wrong.

But she still insisted: "I was never in the house. I have no reason to lie."

Mr Dewar warned her about the dangers of perjury.

The court heard Cardwell had been off work for four months with stress.

She also admitted contaminating evidence in 1993, when she left her palm print on a bag containing a baby's body.

Cardwell, a policewoman for 10 years, is separated from her policeman husband David and lives alone in Troon, Ayrshire. She went on holiday to the USA after giving her evidence, and has not yet returned.

Asked about possible perjury charges against Cardwell, a Crown Office spokesman said: "No decision has been reached."