

Past Lives

A short story of about 1,900 words. A romance, wrapped up in a mystery, wrapped up in something.....

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Dianne was angry, she'd been angry for quite some time.....

It wasn't even her car. Dianne hated the driver in front, mainly because he was towing a caravan at a ludicrously slow speed. The four year old Prius she'd borrowed from Stuart had been handling her erratic driving style quite well. She floored the accelerator.

"Bloody idiots shouldn't be on the road." She muttered.

She swung out, hoping to pass the idiot and his caravan, before something came the other way. Dianne Bull was about an inch under five feet tall, with olive skin and dark eyes. Add the pretty features and long curly dark hair and people tended to think of her as sweet. Until they did something to bring out the darker side of her temperament. She gave the driver the finger as the Prius hurtled past.

"I can't be late." She yelled.

She slammed a clenched fist onto the edge of the steering wheel to add emphasis; she'd been doing it quite a lot since leaving London. There was something driving her, pushing her, though she had no idea why getting to a beach in Cornwall was so damned important. It was the dreams of course the recurring dreams she'd been to see her doctor about. He'd merely smiled and given her happy pills.

"Arsehole." She spat. "I didn't need happy pills; I needed the dreams to stop."

A short length of dual carriageway gave her the chance to get past two cars moving far too slowly and a tractor. A tractor.....Why were they even allowed on the road? The speedometer was just going past eighty when she noticed it and slowed down.

"I can't be pulled up by the police. If I'm late he won't wait."

The realisation hit her like a punch to the face. He, she was going to meet him. A face filled her mind, a strong face, his face. How many times had she made the same trip, on the same day of the year? Her mind filled itself up with memories, some of them unwelcome.

"Oh Christ.....Not now."

Luckily there was a firm grass verge. Dianne drove off the road as she felt the dream begin while she was awake. The dream, the one about.....

The real world vanished and she was waking up in a bed that smelt of him. He was on her skin too, reminding her of how they'd enjoyed a night when it was too hot to sleep.

"Are you ever getting up?"

His voice, that wasn't always part of the dream. The children were always there though, playing outside on the sun baked veranda. A boy and a girl, both difficult to see through the ripples caused by the heat. Hot, always so hot.

She went to the open door and saw the sand dunes reaching out to the ocean in the far distance. So blue that ocean, it looked too blue to be real. The sand shimmered in the morning heat, which would increase as the day wore on. Hot, it was always so hot.

Not that the heat bothered her. She called out to him, wondering where he could have gone. The little girl ran up to her, her little girl, their little girl. The child's arms went up, she wanted to be carried. Wings.....The girl had wings.....

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Dianne came back to the real world just as the idiot towing the caravan went past. There was a child in the back of the car, a boy child. He made faces at her as they sped past.

“Oh, a child with wings.....Maybe I am crazy ?”

She looked at her watch and realised she had no idea if she was early or late. She had to meet him, she'd been trying to meet him on the same day on the same beach for years, maybe decades. He'd never been there though, never, not once.

“Bastard.....Stuart is a bastard too, I always choose bastards.”

Actually Stuart wasn't a bastard, it had been her decision to sleep with him after someone's leaving do at work. It had been a while and she'd been a bit drunk. Stuart was no Don Juan, but the sex had been pretty good. She'd never repeated the experience, pushing Stuart straight into the friend zone. He still had a bit of a look in his eyes though. Semi-stalkers could be useful, he had lent her his car. She gave it a while before pulling back onto the road, allowing the idiot with the caravan to get a mile or two further along the road. No more dreams, just flashes of images. None of him, she couldn't even really remember much about how he looked. The children filled the top of the windscreen for a while, constantly changing images, snippets that often showed wings. If they were her children where were they ? Who was looking after them ? A dreadful thought forced itself into her already troubled mind.

“Supposing they're dead ? No, not my children.....Please, no.”

Crying settled her, the images ceased. She caught up with the caravan just as she passed a 'Welcome to Cornwall,' sign. By a piece of rare good luck, the idiot and his caravan turned off down a side road. Actually every road looked like a side road. Dianne had no idea where she was, but she knew where she was going. Every mile brought fresh memories and again, not all of them were good.

“Meet me, promise me that at least.”

She saw his face and remembered his words. It had all been her.....Leaving their home, leaving the children. Grudgingly she'd agreed to meet him, but he'd never shown up. Her speed was creeping up again, she gently braked. Her phone rang and for about the tenth time that day, Stuart's number was showing. Crap ! If she didn't answer he might report her missing or something, he did love his car.

“Hi Stuart.....Your car is fine..... Promise.”

“Who ?..... No I don't know why.”

“The police.....Yes, I did have an argument with my landlady.”

“Look..... Can we sort this out when I get back ?”

“Oh, did you tell the police where I was going ?”

“Thank you Stuart, I owe you.”

The dreadful woman was always causing trouble, wanting to know all her business. A slap across the face hardly constituted assault and the bitch deserved it. The police probably just wanted to give her a slap over the wrist, but she needed to find a new place to live.

“I'll kill her if she's thrown my stuff out.”

More memories the closer she got to that place, the beach where she'd agreed to meet him. She remembered other jobs, other landlords. Everything changed every year. A new job, a different apartment, some fine, some little more than slums. Her life began afresh every time he wasn't there and he had never been there. The final memory caused her to find a parking place.

A line of cars and a man selling coffee and burgers out of a caravan. She bought a coffee but decided to avoid the burgers. She leant on the Prius and groaned.

“Are you alright ?”

A child, a girl, about the same age as her little girl in the dreams. No wings though.

“I’m fine, just feeling tired.”

Her phone rang again, a withheld number. The police or someone wanting to talk about PPI, she didn’t want to talk to either. If she was about to reset her entire life, she’d start with her phone.

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The field next to the road was full of something lush and green she didn’t recognise. Her arm went back and she threw her phone, watching as it joined the lush greenness.

“Weeeeeeeeeee.” Said the little girl.

Her name wasn’t Dianne Bull, nor was it Juliet Adams the name she’d used the year before. All fake, all made up, she had no idea what her real name was. The girl child showed no sign of going, she obviously thought anyone throwing their phone away was worth watching.

“My name is Eleanor..... You can call me Ellie.” She said.

“I have no idea what my name is, but I know it isn’t Dianne Bull.”

“You’re silly.”

“Ellie.....You might be right.”

She was still agitated as she drove away, almost colliding with a delivery van. Dianne who now knew she wasn’t really Dianne, cried quite a lot. There were so many reasons to cry, that it felt like crying for no reason at all.

“How many times I have done this ?”

The small car park was at the top of the cliff, with a narrow path leading down to the beach. More memories, she knew the car park rarely changed. There had been a machine to buy a ticket from for several years, but that had been taken away. No one used it she guessed, it had been long before local councils started clamping people.

Her anger was going, it always did when she there, just a short walk from where she was supposed to meet him. She locked the car and put the keys on top of the offside rear wheel. Stuart wasn’t a bastard, she hoped he’d get his car back.

“If I don’t need it to drive back of course.” She muttered.

Back to where though ? The chance to reset her life was tempting her, just as it had done every year before. This time would be different though. He’d be there.

The path down the cliff was steep and all her memories came back as she approached the bottom. His name, her name, the names of the children she’d abandoned. Not abandoned, that was being too hard on herself. He knew she had to get away..... If only it hadn’t been for so long. She knelt on the pebbly sand and cried. The beach was deserted, only the gulls heard her cry out.

“I’m so sorry !”

Names she couldn’t pronounce filled her head. His family, her family, the children who she hoped would forgive her. No regrets, she regretted nothing, never had, never would. She craved understanding and forgiveness, but most of all..... She wanted to go home.

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“Are you going to kneel there all day ?”

He was there, she’d known this time would be different. Rising from the sand drained her; she fell against him, loving the way he held her in his arms. Wings too of course, he had similar wings to their children. His were adult wings, less transparent and colourful than those of their children.

“Why did you never come here ?” She asked. “We agreed, but you never came.”

“I was here every time. I saw you walk around the beach, heard you curse me. You never seemed to see me waiting.”

She held him for a long time, wanting to be sure he was really there. Not all the fault had been hers, but her anger was forgotten.

“I love you.” She said.

“I love you too.....Are you ready to go home ?”

“Yes, take me home.”

Only the gulls saw the flash of yellow light, as the two winged beings vanished from the beach.

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~ The End ~

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