

The Presence

Chapter 5 – Islington South Library

“Drew had been concentrating so hard, that she hadn’t noticed the woman approach. No point in closing the pad, she’d seen everything. The drawing of the thing did look terrifying. Somewhere in the dream Drew had connected with the Presence, enough to get its evil essence down on paper.”

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Drew had seen the building while out shopping in Essex Road. Old world ornate with an entrance that looked like something out of somewhere like Blenheim Palace. All carved stone and more than a little over the top. Definitely a gothic feel to the place, but it took her a while to realise the grand old building was the home of Islington South Library. She’d wanted somewhere away from the flat, to draw the Presence as she’d seen it in her dream of the tomb in Libya. For some reason drawing the entity where they lived, felt like a bad idea. Maybe not as dangerous as naming it out loud, but still a very bad idea. The library didn’t open every day, but when it was open, they didn’t close until eight pm.....

“Are you an artist ? We don’t get many artists in here.”

The woman, who’d given Drew a form to get a library card, was friendly and chatty. Greying hair, with a mischievous twinkle in her eyes, when Drew would have preferred offish and sullen. She obviously wanted to show an interest, but Drew had no real idea about how the Presence was triggered. Was looking at its image enough ? She definitely didn’t want to be reading about the gruesome death of a librarian in the local paper. Drew closed the cover on the A3 sketch pad she’d recently bought.

“Yes, I’m putting together a few ideas for illustrating a book on the paranormal.” Said Drew.

“Can I see what you’ve drawn ?”

“Sorry, I’m superstitious.....I never let anyone see my work until it’s finished.” Said Drew.

“Just remember we close at eight.”

Drew didn’t feel she’d just created a new enemy. The woman would probably be a lot less perky though and eager to please. The library was larger than it looked from the outside, with a whole row of tables to read at, or use to draw on. The sketch pad had been expensive and the paper looked so nice. Drew felt as if she was vandalising it with her scribbles. She looked at her last attempt to draw the Presence, the being of smoke and shadows.

“That.....Is shit.” She muttered.

The lady librarian was talking to a male colleague, which meant she wasn’t likely to come over and see what Drew was doing. Drew opened the pad to a new page of wonderful paper and closed her eyes. She concentrated, willing her memory to call up the memory of that dream about the tomb. It was hard, with part of her not wanting to clearly remember the entity, the Presence.

“Do it.....It’s important.” Drew mumbled.

It had actually been in her view for a minute or so, as the only living creature in a tomb full of the dead. It had moved among the bodies, which looked recently killed. She’d seen its eyes and heard its voice, yet its body seemed to be nothing but smoke and shadows. There had been a moment though, when it had moved towards her. Then and only for a few seconds, there had been a definite shape to it, even a little symmetry.

“Yes.....Now I remember you.” Drew muttered.

She opened her eyes and began using pencils for the outline and fine marker pens to fill in the details. There was no fear now, just a determination to draw the most accurate memory she had of the demon. If it was a demon, Nick and Travis seemed unsure about what it might be. It had terrorised poor Marsha and cut her arm. By the time Drew added the last area of shading around those dreadful eyes, the drawing was finished.

“Oh, that is terrifying.....What is it ?” Asked the lady librarian.

Drew had been concentrating so hard, that she hadn’t noticed the woman approach. No point in closing the pad, she’d seen everything. The drawing of the thing did look terrifying. Somewhere in the dream Drew had connected with the Presence, enough to get its evil essence down on paper.

“As I said.....I’m trying out ideas for illustrating a book.” Said Drew.

“Well.....That one will scare the crap out of people. Is it a horror book ?”

Later, Drew had no idea why she gave the librarian so much genuine information. Bringing back the memories of Libya had been traumatic; there was even a little sweat on her forehead. Plus, the woman was a librarian and she’d always liked librarians.

“Yes, for a book Travis Givens will be writing.” Said Drew. “Have you heard of him ?”

“Oh yes, the real life exorcisms guy.....I love his books, they should give him a series on Netflix.”

“You never know.....If they do; my drawings might be in it.” Said Drew. “While you’re here.....Am I allowed to photograph the drawing on my phone ? I want to send it to Travis.”

“Yes, of course you can. And, If you need more time.....It always takes me a while to close up and get my coat on.”

“Thank you, that is much appreciated.” Said Drew.

Drew took a picture of the drawing and after trying several filters, sent it out in its original state. One each to Marsha, Nick and Travis. James would get one too, once she had a number for him.

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Nick didn’t think his threats had anything to do with it. He had called the police several times, eventually threatening them with a call to the Islington Gazette. They were probably simply disorganised and had a lot of boxes to tick on umpteen forms. As Barlow had mentioned more than once.

“People have died, Mr Rees.”

The notification that his BMW motorbike could be collected, had arrived in the same post as a note to Drew. It seemed that all the rumours about demolishing the block were nonsense. The police had finished with her flat and she was free to return to it, whenever she liked. Drew had read the note to him and there had been a few awkward looks.

“I’m used to you now.” Nick said. “I don’t want you to go.”

“I don’t want to leave.”

“That’s settled then, you’re staying.” Said Nick, “What will you do with the flat in Clapham ? You could rent it out, if you want to keep it.”

Even Suki seemed pleased to be staying. Drew’s cat climbed up onto his lap, wanting to be petted. An ideal moment for Nick and Drew to use the L word, but neither of them did. For Nick at least, the important thing was that Drew wasn’t leaving.

“No, I’ve known people who’ve rented their place out.” Said Drew. “Sometimes it’s fine, but if you get the wrong renter, it can be a nightmare. I’ll sell the place.....Even with the recent history, I’m sure it will sell.”

“I’ll declare a holiday for myself and help you move.” Said Nick.

“We should go over there one night this week.” Said Drew. “Looking it over would be nice, no telling how the police might have left it. I can decide what furniture goes in store and what.....I was hoping to bring a few things here, if that’s alright ?”

“Of course it is, this is your home now.” Said Nick.

“I was thinking about my dressing table and.....But only if there’s room.” Said Drew.

Getting up meant moving Suki, but he really had to hug Drew.

“I love you, Drew.” Nick Said. “I’m sure we can find a spot for anything you want to bring here.”

Drew had used the L word too and there had been mention of Drew leaving work early one afternoon. Two days later, they were outside the block of flats in Clapham, looking up at the windows.

“When I moved in, I loved my flat here.” Said Drew. “Now I can’t sell it quickly enough.”

“It looks quiet.....Do you think many have returned ?” Asked Nick.

“I’ll knock on a few doors, but I’m guessing the few who survived won’t be keen to move back in.”

It was required by law now, to inform potential buyers of anything significant in the history of a property. Mass murder was definitely something significant. Clapham was a sought after area and there would be the morbidly curious, those keen to live in such a place. Even so, Nick couldn’t see Drew getting a full market price for her flat.

“I suppose we should go inside.” Said Drew. “Come on.....Let’s get it done.”

Drew had to fiddle with the outside door lock, which she said wasn’t a new problem. Once inside the block looked fine, no blood stains on the hall carpet, or obvious damage. The fire had mainly been in one flat and hadn’t spread that far. The note from the police mentioned some water damage by the fire brigade, though that was at the far end of the block.

“I never did get to see your flat.....That night.” Said Nick.

“Take some pictures if you like.” Said Drew. “I doubt if we’ll be back here that often, if ever. Oh.....I must remember to grab Suki’s toys and her cat bed.”

“Will she stop sleeping on my head ?” Asked Nick.

“No, of course not.”

That night, the night of the killings; Nick had passed out in front of the door and had expected to die. Drew opened her flat door which went straight into a small hallway. All the internal doors were open, which gave the flat plenty of air and light.

“Everything looks fine.” Said Drew. “The fire was right down at the other end of the hallway. Have a look around while I put Suki’s things in a suitcase.”

Nick noticed smoke marks around a vent, but that was about it. Nothing that would affect the price more than mass murder, with the perpetrator still on the run. Drew had mentioned letting an estate agent sell the property for the best price they could get. Drew quickly returned with a suitcase that didn’t look to be too heavy.

“Alright.....I’ll take notes on what can go where in Islington.” Said Drew. “Don’t say yes to anything you know won’t fit, Nick. Most of it will end up in storage. Ahh, now I think of it; I’ve a nice standalone freezer and there is room for it in our kitchen.”

They went from room to room, with Drew writing comments on a list. Nick could see why she wanted her dressing table; it was a beautiful piece of antique furniture. There was a framed picture on the dressing table, of Drew arm in arm with a man about her age. An ex ? Nick decided not to ask unless it was still there when the furniture arrived in Islington.

“And there’s a stool my grandad gave me.....It’s only small.”

“Bring what you want to bring.....We’ll make room for it all.” Said Nick.

“Damn.....We will need to come back.” Said Drew. “The rest of my clothes will fill three suitcases and.....I’ll need my wardrobe for them. I’m sure it’ll fit near the window in the spare bedroom.” Nick was behind her and hugged Drew by putting his arms around her shoulders. Kissing her neck was irresistible.

“We’ll need to come back anyway, to clear the food out of the freezer.” Said Nick. “I don’t mind spending weekends here if we need to. We can pack your clothes now though and tell the cab company we need an estate car to pick us up.”

“Yes, I can dress straight out of suitcases for a while, I’ve done it before.”

Nick had his phone in the top pocket of his jacket, set up and ready to take pictures. He’d already taken several pictures of every room in the flat, purely for nostalgic reasons. One day Drew would want to look at them and remember the good times in Clapham. Assuming there had been some good times.

As the letters in red appeared on the wall, he took a picture. It seemed the obvious thing to do. Large script of some kind in a sticky looking red liquid that might have been blood.

“What does it say ?” Asked Drew.

“I know a fair amount of Arabic, a little Hebrew and a smidgen of Aramaic.” Said Nick. “I can with certainty tell you that.....Whatever is written on your wall, isn’t written in any of those. It’s quite crude looking.....Probably a much older language.”

“It might be just an illusion.....Something it put in our heads.” Said Drew.

“You’re right; it may not be real at all.” Said Nick.

As he watched the strange script faded away and eventually vanished. Nick looked at his phone and the picture was still there, still red and sticky looking. He showed it Drew.

“So.....It was real enough to photograph.” Said Nick.

“It all seems.....Impossible.” Said Drew.

“I have no idea what it says.” Said Nick. “I’ll send it to Travis, who I’m sure, will have once written a treatise on the mystery language.”

“Hmmmmm, you seem a bit jealous of our new friend.” Said Drew.

“Resentful, Drew.....More resentful that he’s another horror writer....But he seems to have far more if depth knowledge of the occult than I do. If I wasn’t a bit bitter, I’d be crazy.” Said Nick.

“Your book was made into a successful film.” Said Drew. “As far as I know.....None of his books have even been looked at for a movie.”

“That does make me feel better, Drew. Don’t worry.....I’m an adult and when we’re all in Libya, I promise to play nice with the other kids.”

Drew was leaning back into him, almost folding her body into his. He kissed her neck and she felt so good in his arms.....

“Come on, you were right about the freezer.” Said Drew. “The power was only off for a few hours, but long enough to make the food a bit iffy. We can dump it all in the communal bins, which are probably almost empty.....Fun comes later, Mr Rees.”

“Do you have some bin liners ?” Asked Nick.

“Cupboard under the sink.....There are dozens of them.”

Nick sent the picture of the strange language that had appeared and then vanished. He sent it to Travis and James, hoping that James was the one to crack it. Nick knew James, they worked well together. They each respected the areas of expertise of the other. Travis on the other hand.....It was a relationship Nick knew he was going to have to work at.

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James Lerner still enjoyed visiting London, though he was determined never to move back permanently. He didn't fancy sleeping on Nick's sofa while in Islington, though he did know people who would have gladly let him use their spare room for a while. James actually liked the vibe of staying in small hotels. Nothing flashy and expensive, the kind of hotel where there might be a travelling salesman in one room and a lady of the night in another. As long as there was enough peace and quiet for him to sleep, James was happy. He knew of a place near Archway and, after a decent night there, he was currently at the end of the street, looking up at Nick's block of flats.

"I can feel you.....Out here in the daylight, I can feel you." James muttered.

A demon, a powerful one and Nick had summoned it while drunk. James had been tempted to leave Nick to get on with it, but others were now involved. There always were others involved in these things. Demons had no morality, no ethics. The idea of non-combatants probably never occurred to them. Every human was fair game and a potential source of power. James had brought just a phone and a notebook. Once he'd seen Denise and looked around her home.....Then and only then, would he formulate a plan for her protection. As he pressed the button on the entry phone, James could feel the darkness, which was slowly building in the block.

"Hello."

"It's James."

"I'll be down."

James knew that Nick wasn't the best people person in the world. It would have been nice if Drew had been there, another female face and all that. She had what Nick called a proper job in town though, from nine to five thirty. It would be just him and Nick trampling through her home, though according to Nick, Denise didn't want too many people knowing about the problem, the apparent haunting. Nick opened the outside door to that staircase of the block.

"She's home and waiting for us." Said Nick. "The chair I mentioned.....It's come back."

Up the stairs Nick had moaned about since moving in. Denise was on the landing below Nick's flat, or more accurately their flat now that Drew was there. Denise let them in the instant Nick tapped on her door. No one spoke until the door was closed behind them.

"This is James." Said Nick.

"The scratching began again last night." Said Denise.

James had started a file on Denise Morgan, mainly from what Nick had told him. A friend in the police had helped and it was amazing what could be learned legally, from public records of one kind or another. Denise was as law abiding as most, just one warning for cannabis use in her teens. Apart from that, she was the same as most people.....Plain vanilla ordinary, to the point of being a little dull. Denise shook his hand and took them into her lounge.

"This time, I will get up there and smash it to bits." Said Denise.

The chair looked old and probably valuable. James ignored the mop handle leaning against the wall and reached up to grab the back of the chair. It moved around the ceiling with ease, but pulling as hard as he could only brought it down about an inch. As soon as he let it go, the chair returned to resting on the ceiling.

"It won't come down.....I've hung from the damn thing." Said Nick.

"I've a friend coming over tonight." Said Denise. "That.....Thing, can't be hanging up there."

James had seen the look on her face far too often on the faces of others. Denise thought she was on the edge, maybe on the brink of breakdown. Sadly things were likely to get worse, far, far worse. Not that he'd tell her that. Everyone always claims to want the truth, when they really seek reassurance.

The bulk of what James would do was to ensure her safety. As for getting rid of whatever haunted her home.....That had to come second.

“Smashing it is likely to make it worse.” Said James. “You’ll end up with bits of chair stuck to your ceiling. Shove it into a corner and turn it into a piece of art. Stack other chairs under it and buy a hanging plant of some kind. I saw you have a garden centre over the road. Place the plant on top and your guest will think it’s something expensive and a bit avant garde.”

“Yes.....I’ll do that.” Said Denise.

She was pulling him over towards the front windows, well away from Nick. There was that look in her eyes still, the need for some kind of reassurance. Denise whispered to him as though they were lifelong friends.

“Will Ben be safe ?” Asked Denise. “He’s been here before and.....Usually stays the night. Will he be safe.....What do you think ?”

An impossible question to give a definitive answer to. Some would tell her not to give in to the thing that was making a chair float around her ceiling. Others would tell her to take the guy to a hotel for the night. Both answers were equally valid. James decided to give her the answer most likely to keep her and Ben safe. He leant forward and whispered into her ear.

“Make a special treat of it.....Take him to a hotel for the night.” Said James. “Just a local place, you can buy champagne and things to nibble on the way. Trust me he’ll love it.”

“Yes and no explaining about.....The haunting. I’ll do that, a night in a small hotel.”

Her mood had gone from desperation to happy excitement, in a heartbeat. The demon would love that about her and use it. Poor Denise.....James could only offer her protection. Once he knew what had invaded the block, he could do something about getting rid of it.

“Good.....But I do need to look around your home.” Said James.

“Of course.....Go where you want, look at everything.”

Denise was well past puberty, which was another trigger he could tick off his mental list. James wandered from room to room, feeling the atmosphere of the block. No kids, no permanent male presence. Just Denise living on her own, the way so many others lived. He’d seen cases of young girls reaching puberty and all hell breaking out. Some thought that was a poltergeist, but James didn’t even like that term. Invariably it was something demonic, a creature born out of darkness. For some reason such entities fed on the energy of girls crossing over into womanhood. Usually the problems went away quite quickly, but sometimes.....They got worse. No books on Satanism on her shelves, no weird demonic posters on her walls. As he’d already guessed, Denise was just unlucky with her neighbours. Not that she’d had any say in Nick summoning something he couldn’t get rid of. James took a few pictures of the flat for his file on Denise Morgan.

“I’m finished for now, Denise.” Said James. “I’m in London for a while, so if you get any problems.....Call me.”

“I will.....Thank you James, I feel a lot happier now.”

Nick in the lead, they headed upstairs and into Nick’s flat. James was hoping for a cup of tea and a chat about protecting Denise. Nick had other ideas.....

“We should really go and see Mary next.” Said Nick. “I know she hasn’t been hurt, but the Presence did deface the much loved pictures of her family.”

“I know it’s a loaded question, but we’ll get a lot of those before we’re through. Do you think Mary is in immediate danger ?” Asked James. “I think Denise is, so we should concentrate on her.”

Poor Nick, he looked so upset by the question. Leaving aside being a complete asshole on the night of the summoning, he was actually a pretty decent guy. James had to keep reminding himself that his long term friend, might have a demon still lurking inside him.

"No, I don't think so." Said Nick. "There'd be no harm in talking to her though. Just five minutes to look around her place and get the latest on any weird happenings."

"I might agree if you hadn't told me Mary Seeley is the local area busy body." Said James. "If she spreads the news about what we're doing, it could cause a lot of problems. Unless she is hurt in some way, we have to keep Mary very much at arm's length."

"Just five minutes and we can ask her to keep it secret." Said Nick.

James didn't mean to give a derisive laugh; it just seemed to pop out of him.

"Do you really think Mary could keep that a secret?" Asked James.

"Probably not."

Poor Nick.....He'd probably been the sort of kid who collected every injured bird in his area and then got upset when every one of them passed on.

"Marsha is in London next week, Nick." Said James. "We have to help her; the Presence cut her really deep. Concentrating on Marsha and Denise makes sense, for now."

"Damn.....I hadn't thought about Marsha." Said Nick. "You're the expert James; it was why I called you. We'll put all our effort into helping Denise and Marsha stay safe....It makes sense. Do you fancy tea and.....Drew bought some fruit cake."

"Tea and fruit cake....Sounds like heaven." Said James

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"I feel bad that James is using a hotel." Said Drew. "We could have tidied up the spare bedroom and made it presentable."

"He likes the place at Archway and he can afford it." Said Nick. "James like his own space.....I think we'd have driven him nuts."

Drew was beginning to realise that having a proper job was actually a problem when it came to knowing what Nick and James were up to. They had all day to get up to mischief and she'd only hear about it in the evening. The good news had been James really liking her drawing of whatever it was. She'd caught something of the entity, its deep malevolence....Or so James had told Nick. Again, she'd heard the comment second hand after getting home.

"I might give in my months' notice at work." Said Drew. "I'd have to leave anyway; we could be in Libya for months. I'd feel less like a spare wheel if I was here all day."

"You never seem that happy with being a marketing person." Said Nick.

"I'm not, but I promised myself.....My first few jobs after college didn't last long. I walked out of one after just three days. I didn't want to be the girl trying to lose a dozen iffy jobs from my CV. So, I've made a thing out of sticking with a crap marketing role."

"Two can live as cheaply as one, or so the saying goes." Said Nick. "There is enough in the kitty so that neither of us will starve. Leave the job if you want to."

"I won't be a burden.....The broker I used to buy the flat, has said I can borrow against the proceeds of a future sale. Sounds complicated and expensive, but I'll be able to pay my way until the flat sells."

"Walk then, don't even give notice" Said Nick. "Get up late in the morning and dump the job by phone."

"No, there is my mum to consider." Said Drew. "She yelled at me down the phone for at least half an hour, every time I walked out of a job. I really don't want her yelling at me again, ever."

“Were there a lot of walkouts ?” Asked Nick.

“We can deal with my murky past, after we’ve talked about the full and unexpurgated history of Nick Rees.” Said Drew.

Suki chose that moment to bump her head against Nick’s nose, which felt very apt. Nick laughed and Drew joined in. Drew loved her mum, but she was dreading the day Nick met her. They were going to hate one another, Drew knew it.

“Marsha called and confirmed next Wednesday for a pizza and beer night.” Said Nick. “She’ll be staying at a hotel in Chelsea Harbour.....There is definitely money in shouty podcasts. She’ll get a taxi over here for about eight.”

“Be nice if we could get her to go to Libya.” Said Drew.

“I thought that, but Eric pays her too well.” Said Nick. “The hospital gave her wound the all clear, by the way. No infections and healing well.”

“Good.....I know it sounds weird, but I’m starting to feel responsible if someone gets hurt.”

“No, that’s my job.” Said Nick. “Feeling guilty for everything since the Napoleonic wars is definitely my thing.”

Suki heard it before they did. Drew’s cat became very erect, with her face looking in the direction of the flat’s front door. Suki had just begun a low growl, when the doorbell rang. It seemed a strange thing, sat in a cosy flat in Islington, but Drew really didn’t want the door to be opened. Nick was up on his feet.

“Be careful.....Use the peephole.” Said Drew.

Everyone she knew who lived in a flat had a lens in the door, though no one ever seemed to use them. The long terrified scream from the landing, probably caused Nick to look through the peephole.

“It’s Mary.....She’d been hurt.” Said Nick.

Mary Seeley wasn’t screaming as she came through the door, but she looked terrified. There was blood on her face and what looked like several deep scratches. Her usually well brushed grey hair was in a mess and there were at least two rips along the side of her dress. Drew’s first thought wasn’t about demonic entities.

“Who did this to you, Mary ?” Asked Drew. “We can call the police, they won’t hurt you again.”

“No police, not yet.....He’s still in there.” Said Mary.

Nick found an old metal first aid tin from somewhere that looked old and battered. There was a bottle of medical cleaner in it and quite a few wipes. While Nick cleaned up the elderly lady, Drew was becoming quite angry.

“Who is still in your flat, Mary ?” Asked Drew. “Did a man hurt you ?”

“What ? There’s no harm in it.....We just chat for a while.” Said Mary.

“I know.....It’s not what you think, Drew.” Said Nick. “Mary likes a brandy.....Get her a brandy.”

It was strange that a woman Drew was actually beginning to hate, became someone to help when she was an injured elderly lady. It was the blood that did it and the constantly scared look on her face. When Drew returned with a glass of brandy, Mary was giving her flat keys to Nick.

“I saw it.....He was being thrown about.” Sobbed Mary. “It was doing things to him, awful things.”

“Drew will look after you.” Said Nick. “I’ll go and have a look.....I’m no hero, never claimed to be one. If things look bad I’ll call the police from your flat.”

“Oh, the police again.....They’ll think I’m a crazy person.” Said Mary.

Mary settled down after the first sip of brandy. Now her face had been wiped over, the deep scratches were more visible. One was still bleeding and might need stitches. Drew followed Nick to the door.

"Who is in her flat?" Asked Drew.

"There's a window cleaner who does the outside once a month." Said Nick. "A guy called Bert, honest....Bert looks past retirement age, but he gets up and down the ladders really well. He calls for his money in the evening and when he calls on Mary, he's there for a while. Everyone knows and as Mary said.....There's no harm in it."

"Good for her.....Be careful in there." Said Drew.

Nick nodded in the direction of Mary.

"I will.....Once the brandy does its thing, call for an ambulance." Said Nick. "If things are really bad in her flat.....I'll call the police from there."

"Oh, shit.....Another dead body and Barlow will have us arrested." Said Drew.

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Something was wedging the door open, as Nick crossed the landing to Mary's flat. Men's clothes in the doorway, including a shirt and a pair of smart looking trousers. Wherever Bert might be, alive or dead, he was probably naked. Why hurt Mary's gentleman friend? It was another piece of demon motivation that was incomprehensible to the sane human mind, or as sane as Nick's mind was ever likely to be. Jealousy maybe? Nick would talk it over with Travis and James. Nothing could be ruled out though, even some kind of sexual jealousy. Nick shoved the clothes to one side with his foot.

"Bert!" He shouted. "Are you in there? Are you hurt?"

James had stopped them talking to Mary about her intruder who might well turn out to be the Presence. Nick quickly decided that they could have spent hours with Mary and poor Bert was still likely to have been hurt. What had Mary meant by doing awful things to him? Nick entered the small hallway in the flat that was basically the same shape as his. Nick had a larger lounge and a longer kitchen, but the layout was the same.

"Come on Bert.....Talk to me old buddy." Yelled Nick.

Left into the kitchen, mainly because Nick had seen blood on the tiled floor. Something had happened in there, a lot of the contents of Mary's crockery cupboard was now a smashed pile of bits on the floor.

"Her much loved Noritake plates, that only came out for Christmas." Muttered Nick.

Not much blood on the floor, but something violent had occurred. Nick almost walked back into the hall, but noticed something on the drainer next to the sink. When he looked it was an ear, a human ear, probably Bert's ear. Why was he thinking like a TV court drama? There was no burden of proof involved; it was obviously Bert's ear. No cut marks, no sign of being bitten.....It looked as though the ear had been torn from Bert's head.

"Fuck!" Nick muttered.

Out of the kitchen and he had intended to enter the lounge next. Nick crossed the hallway and into Mary's bedroom, purely because he'd seen blood on the floor. Quite a lot of blood on the beige rug next to the bed. Had Mary been in there, having what she called a chat with Bert? The violence might well have begun in the bedroom, though there was no sign of Bert. It had struck Nick before; he'd even used it in one of his novellas. The amount of bright red blood was shocking, but supposing human blood had evolved to be a clear liquid? Would it still cause so much shock and fear?

"Bert.....If you can make any kind of noise.....Make it now." Nick shouted.

There was a sound, like a quiet giggle mixed with a sigh. Really, there was only the lounge to look at. The spare bedroom was tiny and he'd already looked in the bathroom as he'd gone past the open door. Whatever nastiness had befallen the window cleaner, most of it had to have occurred in Mary's lounge. Out into the hallway and into the lounge. The smell hit him before he saw the first pool of blood.

"You don't need to do this.....You don't need to look." He muttered at himself.

No use, he'd started the whole fucking mess and now felt duty bound to look at every piece of resulting carnage. Nick had written about an autopsy for a short story. An experienced coroner had once described the smell of a freshly opened corpse, to the smell of almonds. A career police detective had noted that was only if the almonds had been marinated in shit for a fortnight. There was no mistaking the smell coming from the lounge.

"Do it.....Do it.....Then you can throw up and call the police." Nick mumbled.

Bert was among the ruins of a coffee table, which Mary had brought with her when moving in, many years before. Bert must have been slammed down onto it with some force. The body looked to be all there, but it had been torn apart. No sign of any sharp weapons or tooth marks. The flesh appeared to have been torn apart by something with claws. In some parts of the USA it would have been put down to a wild animal attack. Nick didn't think there were wild animals in London N1. Certainly none who'd go up to a second floor flat with no lift, to tear apart a window cleaner. Of course Nick felt guilty; it had become his default state of mind.

"Crap.....I'm sorry Bert." Nick mumbled.

Fear can affect different people in a variety of ways. Seeing Bert didn't make Nick want to vomit, it made him desperate for a pee. He'd had it happen in his teens, once with disastrous results. His bladder wasn't full; he'd been to the toilet less than an hour before. Yet Nick knew that if he didn't sit and pee, he'd soon drench his trousers. Yes, sit.....Nick always sat to pee when he was somewhere he knew, though even he hadn't found a logical reason why. He ran into the bathroom and it was there, the thing of smoke or shadows. It was in Mary's shower cubicle, pointing at Nick and making a weird giggling sound. It was there less than a minute, before vanishing.

"Damn.....What the hell does it want ?" Nick muttered.

He managed to undo his trousers and be sat on the toilet, before his agitated bladder emptied itself. Nick sat there for a while, letting his body drain itself. By the time he got up his heart had slowed down and the sweat on his forehead had just about dried up. Blue lights outside, an ambulance had probably arrived for Mary.

"Now.....Time to call the police." Said Nick. "Messrs Barlow and Jennings are going to love this." Would they arrest him and Drew ? They just might, there was definitely enough circumstantial evidence to drag them in for another interrogation. Maybe under caution this time. Nick had his own phone, but used Mary's. The 999 people would see her number and address come up, which made things easier. The number rang for a few seconds, before a woman asked him which service he required.

"Police.....And probably an ambulance to collect the body."

Nick was sure he wasn't imagining it. They had to get bored with cats up trees, stolen cars and all the other mundane things the public called them about. The operator on the line definitely perked up at the mention of a body being collected. She asked if the injured party was still breathing.

"There's not enough of Bert in one piece to breathe." Said Nick.

The police would arrive soon and in force.....And yes, he and Drew were probably going to be taken to Islington cop shop for questioning. Not a huge problem, they were bound to be let out well before they wanted to go to Libya.

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