

## The Presence

### Chapter 1 - Arichoke Gill

**“There was a police siren going off in his bedroom, or maybe there had been some kind of disaster and it was an ambulance. It took him a minute or two, to realise it was just his phone and the usual ring tone. Three in the morning according to his bedside clock, three minutes past three to be precise. No one phoned him during the night, no one, ever.”**

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“Thank you for confirming.....See you Wednesday night.”

Dating sites could be so impersonal and his experiences with them hadn't been good. Considering they all claimed to match you with your perfect partner, it didn't say much for whoever did the matching. Probably not a computer algorithm. No computer would have matched him with the divorcee in Southgate. She'd followed him down her garden path as he'd left, hurling some pretty hard core obscenities at him. After recent events, Nick Rees had become generally pessimistic about life. His confidence had gone and although he didn't think he'd said anything inappropriate to the divorcee in Southgate, he wasn't ruling it out. If in doubt, he tended to blame himself. He looked again at the message from Drew Benton who lived in Clapham.

“Thank you for confirming.....See you Wednesday night.”

Was Drew short for something ? He wasn't sure and wasn't going to look it up on Google. It was Wednesday and it'd make a nice breaking the ice question. Harmless, with no chance of being inappropriate. Drew Benton who worked in marketing and was in her mid-twenties. Not much in her bio, but it all sounded good. The picture was nice, with her blouse unbuttoned just enough to see a tiny bit of cleavage.

“I bet one her friends talked her into that.” Nick muttered.

His friends had tried to talk him into looking like all their favourite members of rock bands. In the end Nick had gone into a local photographers, who'd taken a very nice picture of him for the dating site. A bit dull maybe, but he liked it. Drew must have liked it well enough to want to see him.

“You will love Carmella's.....They have a club downstairs.”

Drew had told him, as part of a small flurry of messages the previous weekend. Ur Soul Mate, the dating site, had underlined Carmella's, which meant it was known and there were directions on how to get there. A glitch in the system somewhere, had its address as Arichoke Gill in London, E1.

Looking the bar up himself, he found the right address was Artichoke Hill.

“Another conversation saver if her first name and the weather begin to get old.” He mumbled.

Nick had an old, but much loved BMW motorcycle. Great for just about everything, though not for a first date. Nothing to do with drinking, or not drinking. Turn up in a biker jacket and crash helmet and there was unlikely to be a second date. When a car beeped from the street outside his Islington flat, Nick knew it was the cab he'd booked. A quick look in the mirror and he did look a little plain vanilla.

“Better than looking like Axl Rose.” He mumbled.

Second floor flat with no lift. The guys delivering his new fridge had really hated that. Into the street and the obligatory question.

“Cab for Nick Rees ?”

“Yep.”

The driver was quiet the whole way there, using the car’s navigation device to find Artichoke Hill.

“No Carmela’s, must be new.....I can see it though, the place on the corner.” Said the driver.

“Yeah.....I see it.” Said Nick.

Artichoke Hill wasn’t that steep a hill and the street was quite short. A few office buildings, but only one place with a large neon sign above the doors. There it was and impossible to mistake for anywhere else. Carmela’s was the perfect choice for a first; getting to know one another, type of date.

“This.....Might actually be fun.” He mumbled.

Dates had always been fine, even first dates. Then there had been the recent events in his life. Nick honestly wondered if technology had now become another enemy and the Arichoke Gill error had been deliberate. There was the saying that being paranoid, didn’t mean they, or it, wasn’t out to get you. Still.....Life had to go on. Nick found Drew at the bar, smiling at him as he approached.

“You look exactly like your picture.” Said Drew.

“So do you.”

Raven haired with brown eyes and still that button undone to reveal a tiny amount of cleavage. Her smile was nice, there appeared to be genuine warmth in it. Maybe it was going to work this time.

Nick bought them both a drink.

“Food is downstairs.” Said the barman, without being asked.

“Have you been here before ?” Nick asked.

“No, first time.”

“Shall we give their food a try ?” He asked.

“That sounds great.....I’m starving.” Said Drew.

Nick asked about her first name while going down the steps to the lower floor.

“No, not short for anything. My mother is American and Drew is quite common over there. Even some of the guys are called Drew.”

Not so much a club as a restaurant area, but Nick knew a lot of places survived on what their food side brought in. It was clean and lit well enough to see what you were eating, but still look intimate and romantic. They were given a table well away from the stairs and the kitchens. Something niggled at his memory, as they looked at the menu.

“You said I’d love it here.” Said Nick. “I assumed you’d been here before.”

“I was hoping it would be alright.....Wishful thinking, Nick.” Said Drew. “I’ve not had much good luck with dating sites.”

It was at that moment, when something changed for Nick. With that simple admission, Drew had gone from being an unknown first date, to a kindred spirit. They were eating dessert before he mentioned recent events in his life, but the decision to tell her, had been when Drew had mentioned her lack of good luck.

“Oh, my cheesecake is perfect.” Said Nick. “We must come here again.”

Confidence without being clingy or making assumptions, he knew the commandments of online dating sites. Coming there again assumed there’d be more dates.

“Yes, we must.....I think my luck has finally changed.” Said Drew.

They talked briefly about her job, mainly Drew saying how much she hated being in marketing.

Suggesting she found a job she did like, was probably guaranteed to piss her off, so he simply nodded and tried to sound sympathetic. Drew had a small flat in Clapham and a cat called Suki. He liked cats and felt on safe ground, until she did the polite thing.....

“Enough about me, your bio said you’re a writer.” Said Drew. “That must be interesting ?” Interesting was one way of looking at it, if you didn’t mind the occasional decapitation and strange deaths in Epping Forest. Nick wasn’t yet thirty, though he was getting close to it. He’d been quite successful, with one of his books being made into a movie. That had provided the money to buy the flat in Islington. He didn’t want to brag to Drew, but he was proud of that book and even quite liked the subsequent movie. ‘The Expert,’ hadn’t had a general release, but it had been loved on the small artsy cinema scene. It even had four and a half stars on a horror movie streaming service.

“I write horror books mostly, with the occasional novella about the supernatural.” Said Nick. “Most of them sell a few copies, but barely pay the bills. One though, was made into a movie and has been my most successful to date. Have you seen ‘The Expert’ ?”

Drew stopped chewing and her fork stopped moving more cheesecake towards her face. Nick didn’t see the shocked face as often as he’d have liked, but it was nice when it happened.

“I have, an old college friend persuaded me to go and see it.” Said Drew. “One of those single screen places that look like someone’s front room. It was brilliant, though so.....Scary. You must be him.....The Nick Rees ?”

“I am indeed The Nick Rees. Not a Nick Rees, but definitely, The Nick Rees.”

“Wow.....I never thought I’d meet someone famous on Ur Soul Mate.” Said Drew.

Fame was nice, but Nick felt the need to dial it back a little. Drew might expect him to turn up in a Ferrari and whisk her away to Monaco on his private jet. Most of the money from the movie had gone on the deposit for his flat and there was still a hefty mortgage to pay off.

“Not sure I’m famous, but I’m hopeful.” Said Nick. “I’ve one movie under my belt, but I need something else now.....I’d love a really good book deal. Betsy is good, but she tends to specialise in screen writers.”

“Who is Betsy ?” Asked Drew.

“Betsy Nagle, my agent. She looked after a friend of a friend and I was introduced to her.....It happens a lot in publishing. I have an agent that specialises in screen writers, though I really write novels. Can you keep a secret ?”

“Always.” Said Drew, while holding up her right hand, as though giving an oath.

“The movie company hired a screenwriter to adapt my novella.” Said Nick. “So much was changed, that I barely recognise some of it. Some key lines of course and....The basic idea is still mine. There was a priest though, a Father Jerome. A major character, but he never made it into movie.”

Drew actually reached across and held his hand, after giving it a quick squeeze. Nick knew the industry of course and that even the writing big names complained about studio enforced changes to their work. If they could cut Tom Bombadil from the Lord of the Rings movies, they could cut anything.

“You could find another agent.” Said Drew.

“No, Betsy found me the movie people.” Said Nick. “Something else will turn up and she’s always finding new opportunities. Plus....I feel I owe her some loyalty. I’m sure she thinks some unpleasant events are partly my fault. Perhaps they are ? I do feel responsible for the death of Amy, her PA.”

“How did she die ?” Asked Drew.

She was still holding his hand, which was good. She had to let go as the waiter took away the dessert plates and asked about coffee. They both ordered a really frothy cappuccino. The break was useful; it gave Nick a chance to pick his words, really carefully.

“Amy Tynes died in a traffic accident.” Said Nick. “I wasn’t there, but I do feel responsible.....It was horrific, Amy was decapitated as she was thrown through the windscreen. I keep getting the idea that my actions caused her death.”

The coffee arrived with a plateful of really nice looking biscotti. Drew kept looking at him, as she sipped her cappuccino.

“Don’t be hard on yourself, Nick.” Said Drew. “We all know people who’ve died in terrible ways. That doesn’t make you a bad person. I’ve only known you for a couple of hours, but I trust you. I’ve never been tempted to get the pepper spray from my bag.”

“You brought pepper spray.....On a date ?” Asked Nick.

“Yes.....We all know online dating can be a bit of a lottery.”

Drew squeezed his hand again, which was encouraging. In for a penny and all that, he decided to tell her about poor Paula.

“There was one other.....What the police called a freak accident.” Said Nick. “Paula was a friend of a friend, a post grad student looking for some extra cash. Paula was doing a paper to get her doctorate, something on behavioural psychology. When not working on that, she helped me with several things, mainly promoting my books on social media. I’d known her for some time.....It was Paula who persuaded me to use online dating sites. Told me I’d go peculiar if I went too long without.....You know.”

“How did Paula die, Nick ?”

“No one is really sure what happened.” Said Nick. “She was in Epping Forest with a couple of friends. Just wandering about and getting a little exercise. Paula had mentioned to me that she liked spending time there. There was some tree cutting equipment, probably left there by the maintenance people. How it started up.....Why she was anywhere near it. Her friends were watching the fish in one of the large ponds. My friend Paula March was almost cut in two and no one seems to know what really happened.”

“Crap.....No wonder you’re jumpy.” Said Drew. “It’s dreadful of course, but none of it is your fault. Writing horror doesn’t mean every horrific thing is your fault.”

“I know.....It’s just that in this case.” Said Nick. “I was at a party; a company I used to work for had booked a back room in a pub for someone’s leaving do. I was drunk and a woman I’d hoped to see there.....She treated me like crap. Stupid.....So stupid. I went into the gents toilets, found an empty cubicle and. Don’t reach for the pepper spray. I summoned something, an entity I can’t name, or you might be hurt. I summoned it and opened myself up to it. I believe it’s still inside me.....Sometimes in my dreams, it taunts me.”

Drew began laughing; she even playfully thumped him on the arm.

“Oh, Nick.....You idiot. You actually believe all the shit you write.” Said Drew. “There is nothing to summon, it’s all nonsense. No devil, probably no god either, though my mum would cut me out of her will for saying that. Horror stories are just fiction.”

He’d would once have agreed with her, before research for a book had taken him to some very strange places. Most if it was rubbish, lies and self-aggrandisement, put about by charlatans. There were one or two names that had kept coming up in ancient book, after ancient book. The name of one particular entity, was mentioned in almost hushed tones, by some known to have wielded real power.

Aleister Crowley was said to have the magical ability of a rabbit, after things had gone wrong one dreadful night in Paris. At least he’d survived, though many had died that night. He’d attempted to summon the deity Nick had called into himself but Crowley had made an error in his incantations.

Nick had read about Paris and found the correct incantation in a scroll buried in the Libyan desert. Could he tell Drew about what he'd learned during his travels? No, her life might be over very soon, if he dragged her into it.

"You may be right." He said. "I spend so many hours writing my tales of the supernatural. It may be that I've ending up believing some ridiculous things."

A lie of course, he just wanted to end the potentially dangerous conversation. He was hoping to see Drew Benton again and not read about her horrific death in the papers.

"Good.....There's no harm in telling me now. Who was the entity you summoned?" Asked Drew. Almost caught by his own dishonesty, but Nick was an expert liar, most writers are. It's almost a required skill for the job.

"Humour me.....I won't say it, but I will write it down." Said Nick. "I'll ask the waiter if he has something I can write on."

"No need, I have something."

When Drew opened her small bag, Nick wondered if the pepper spray was coming out. Luckily it didn't make an appearance. Drew handed him a tiny leather notelet holder, complete with its own tiny pen. She quickly took it back and wrote something. There in front of him was her address and telephone number.

"Thank you.....I will call you, soon." He said.

"Your turn now.....And add the name of the mysterious entity." Said Drew.

Nick pulled off the note with her details on it and put it in his pocket. He wrote his own address and phone number on the next notelet. He included the second mobile, the one he usually only gave to publishers and literary agents. He hesitated over writing the name of the demon that he suspected still had a hold over him in some way.

"Read this name, but never speak it." Nick said. "Please promise that you will never speak its name. You may not believe in angels and demons, but give me your promise."

"Yes.....If it means so much to you.....I promise."

Nick wrote the name of the demon, Aiwass. With some nervousness, he handed her notelets back to Drew. It was like handing a grenade to a child. She was smiling and obviously didn't believe the name could harm her.

"For me.....Please." He said. "Never speak that name."

"I won't, you have my word."

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Next day was a work day; something Drew mentioned a couple of times. Nick remembered such things from his days on the nine to five treadmill, but now everyday was pretty much the same as any other. There had been an agreement for him to call her the following evening.

"Next time we'll do something on a Friday night, so I can stay up late." Drew had said.

She'd called for a cab and they'd kissed as she'd turned towards him, after opening the cab's door. A kiss that started off as a touch of lips, before becoming a proper kiss. Open mouths and their tongues had briefly touched. He'd spoiled it of course, by waving like a crazy person as her cab vanished into the traffic. Nick Rees had felt happy, a feeling he wasn't used to.

Nick didn't have Uber on his phone and didn't have the number for a cab company. He knew London though and that the main road at the top of Artichoke Hill, would have black cabs driving along it all night. He waved at every cab with its for hire light on, until one pulled over. Never the first cab he waved at, or even the second. It was usually the third or fourth cab, but he had no idea why. During the drive home, he had one thought on his mind.

“Why did I tell her the real name of the demon ?” He’d muttered.

“Sorry gov.....What was that ?” Asked the cabbie.

“Nothing, just talking to myself.”

He could have told her any old rubbish, she’d have never known. Something that had a bit of a Latin feel to it, that didn’t sound the kind of name, you’d call your kid. He was good at making up those kinds of names; his books were full of them.

“I’ll avoid Old Street.” Said the Cabbie. “It was grid lock there earlier.”

“Fine.”

It was because Drew had said she’d trusted him, that was it. He hadn’t drunk that much, it definitely wasn’t the booze. She’d trusted him and he hadn’t wanted to lie to her. And.....he liked her; he already liked her a lot. Nick hadn’t wanted what he hoped would turn into a relationship, to begin with a lie. Giving Drew the true name of the demon had been really stupid, but now he understood why. He’d given the cabbie a ridiculously huge tip.

“She’ll never say it, she gave her word.”

He’d muttered while going up the stairs to his flat. There had been two messages on his answerphone, both from Betsy, his agent. A notorious motor mouth wanted to interview Nick for an online podcast. He’d say yes of course, he said yes to just about everything.

“All publicity is good publicity.” He’d mumbled.

Nick had a routine, preparing for bed was how he thought about it. Anyone else would have probably called it fussing about. By the time his head had hit the pillow, it had been just after one on Thursday morning.

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There was a police siren going off in his bedroom, or maybe there had been some kind of disaster and it was an ambulance. It took him a minute or two, to realise it was just his phone and the usual ring tone. Three in the morning according to his bedside clock, three minutes past three to be precise. No one phoned him during the night, no one, ever. Actually there had been one guy, but he’d been drunk and had called the wrong number.

“Yeah.” Nick coughed after saying it, his mouth felt totally dry.

“Nick.....It’s Drew.”

There was a moment, when he still felt half asleep and wondered if he was half in and half out of a dream. There was screaming at her end of the call, loud and terrible screaming. Either something dreadful was happening where Drew lived, or he was still partly dreaming.

“Are you alright ?” He asked. “What’s happening ?”

“They’re dying.....Everyone will soon be dead.”

More screams and most worrying was the sound of someone thumping hard on a door. Were they trying to get to Drew ? Nick blinked and shook his head, but nothing changed. He usually felt groggy for a while after waking, but he definitely wasn’t half in a dream.

“Get out of there, Drew.” He said. “You need to get out of that place.”

“I spoke its name, Nick.....Soon everyone will be dead.”

The sound of thumping became a crash and more screaming. It was almost a relief when the call disconnected. Nick used dial back and the number refused to connect. At about the fourth attempt, he was connected to a strange squealing sound.

“Shit.” He muttered.

He was going to Drew's place in Clapham; his motorbike would get him there in no time. Out of bed and he turned on the PC in the corner of the room. It needed a while to warm up, or whatever it did. Try to use it straight from a cold start and it was useless.

"Wake up you asshole." He muttered at himself.

No shower, but his head went under the cold tap in the kitchen, until he felt more awake. Instant coffee to help him wake up and lose the feeling that something had taken a dump at the back of his throat. Nick pulled on the clothes he'd be wearing the night before and.....

Time to hurry his PC a little, by looking at a street map site. Motorbikes didn't have SatNav, though they might one day. He found Drew's street, enlarged the area a little and sent it to his colour printer. A really old school way of getting about, but he rarely got lost.

"Jeezzz, Nick.....Wake up." He yelled at himself.

The printed map was folded carefully and went into a pocket of the coat her thought made him look like a biker. Leather of course, it wasn't a biker coat if it wasn't leather. He almost had his crash helmet on, when he realised he was about to go out in just his socks. Another scream at himself to wake up and the cup of coffee he'd forgotten to drink. On with a pair of trainers he liked to wear on his BMW and he was out of the door and almost running down the stairs. The bike started at the first try, it nearly always did.

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Past Clapham High Street tube station, left down Voltaire Road and Nick was within the area of the map he'd printed. He wasn't sure how long the journey from Islington had taken, but it didn't feel to have taken long. Some traffic, but even London tended to slow down between three and four in the morning. Nick found her address, a purpose built small block of flats. Four floors, so Drew probably had an elevator. No moans from delivery guys for her. Grills over ground floor windows, but that tended to be normal these days. If it hadn't been for the open front door and the flicker of flames in a third floor window, the block would have looked quiet, maybe even tranquil. Nick put his motorbike on its centre stand, just as it happened. There was a popping sound and a second floor window blew out in a cloud of plastic covered aluminium and flames.

"Fuck !" Said Nick.

A naked light had found a gas leak somewhere, or maybe the gas had found the flame. If none of the good people of Clapham across the street had called the emergency services, they would now. Nick removed his crash helmet and gauntlets and put them in the lock box behind his bike's seat. It was crazy; he could have gone home and got back into his nice comfy bed. Instead, he walked through the open door to the flats where Drew might be lying on the ground somewhere, hurt. Drew needed help or she wouldn't have called and.....Once again, Nick felt responsible.

"Why did I give her the right name ?" He muttered.

He hadn't brought a flashlight, but the light function on his phone worked quite well. Nick looked at the name board just inside the door and Drew's flat was on the first floor and to the right. Up the stairs and there was a body. Lots of blood around the male body at the top of the stairs.

"She said they'd all soon be dead." Nick muttered.

Someone or something, had ripped open the man's clothing and then his chest. The light on Nick's phone showed him a mass of blood and ripped blood vessels and tissues. If something had been eaten or removed, there was too much bloody mess to see.

"Crap.....I've seen enough of that." Nick mumbled.

Nick squeezed past the dead man, noting that from his face, he looked to have been in his fifties.

He'd been just a harmless neighbour of Drew's, minding his own business. Nick felt responsible and

the feeling didn't go away after he headed towards Drew's flat. There were two more bodies; the closest one was a woman wearing a short skirt and a white blouse. Nick briefly closed his eyes and froze.

"Shit.....Shit.....Shit." He muttered.

Nick could see a door that had to be for Drew's flat. The dead woman wasn't Drew; she was taller and heavier built. Whatever had gone through her blouse and into her chest, had gone in through her back, as she'd been lying on the ground.

"Oh, so much blood." Nick mumbled.

Writing about horror was all about fiction, but seeing it in real life.....One bloody body had been more than enough blood and gore for one day. His phone's light showed him vertebra cracked and broken, as something had dug into her chest. It had to be a something; no human could have done such a thing. He had to step over the woman to get to Drew's flat. The other body was further along the corridor, too far to see if it was male or female.

Another popping noise and a door not that far away, exploded into the corridor, in a flash of flames and broken wood. The really disturbing thing wasn't the sound or smell of burning. It was the lack of screaming people running for the doors, or yelling at their neighbours to get out of the building. There was none of that, not a single human voice.

"Maybe.....Everyone here, really is dead." Nick mumbled.

It had happened before after Paula had died, and he still wasn't sure if it was the demon tormenting him, or his own body reacting to the stress. Heart attack or panic attack, the difference was staggeringly important. Nick felt pain deep in his chest, as though the demon was squeezing his heart.

"If you're going to kill me, do it now." Nick said. "Get it over with."

The pain lessened and he saw something coming through Drew's front door, without opening it. Just the merest hint of a shadow, heading away from him. Was it her, had she died and her ghost now walked the corridors ?

"Drew.....Drew." He called out.

The pain returned and if the demon was squeezing his heart, it didn't seem likely to stop. Nick fell to the floor right in front of the door to Drew's flat. He was unconscious as he hit the carpeted floor.

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"It's not that we don't believe you Miss Benton." Said Jennings. "It's just that we need to clarify a few things."

There were two male detectives with her in an interview room at Lavender Hill Police Station. She'd been told their ranks and names at the start of the interview, but just remembered that one was Jennings and the other was Barlow. Barlow acted like the senior guy in the room. They knew all about her of course, while she knew nothing about them. No caution had been given and Drew hadn't been charged with anything.

"Am I under arrest ?" Drew Asked. "Surely you can't suspect me of killing all those people ?"

"No.....Of course you're not under arrest." Said Barlow. "We just need to understand why you called Nick Rees shortly before the incident occurred. You have to admit, it does look a little strange."

Drew had once dated a man who liked to be thought of as an activist. He'd seemed exciting at the time, though she'd come to realise he'd protest about anything. Paul had loved demos. He'd once been arrested on the way to a demo, which was pretty hard to do. Paul had his own views on how to deal with the police and he'd been arrested often enough to be something of an expert.



“The police aren’t after the truth.” Paul had once told her. “What they’re looking for is confirmation of the nice and tidy version of the truth, which they believe to be true.”

Basically, keep your story simple, believable and likely to coincide with what the police already believe. Easy-peasy.....Drew was in marketing, which meant lying daily, on an industrial scale.

“As I mentioned before, Nick and I met for a meal after I saw his profile on an online dating site. We got on really well.....So well that I wanted to..... Are you really going to embarrass me, by making me admit to a booty call ?”

“People have died, Miss Benton.” Said Barlow.

“So, you called Rees at around three in the morning.....To invite him to sleep with you ?” Asked Jennings.

“Yes, I did.” Said Drew.

They might be giving her disapproving looks, but it was a story they’d be more than happy to believe. She could hardly tell them that Nick Rees had been stupid enough to summon something he couldn’t get rid of. That there had been deaths before the entity had turned up to slaughter everyone in her block of flats. Ending her signed statement with hearing the voice in her head, the one saying everyone was going to die. No.....Drew didn’t fancy being dragged away, to spend the rest of her life being given antipsychotics and mainline tranquilisers in a secure facility for the insane.

“Again, just to confirm.” Said Barlow. “Until you met for a meal at Carmela’s in E1, you’d never actually met Nick Rees in person ?”

“That was our first meeting.” Said Drew.

“Will you be seeing him again ?” Asked Jennings.

“Maybe.....After all, wasn’t he trying to rescue me ?”

“That is what he’s told us.” Said Barlow.

They were finished with her for now; Barlow was collecting his papers together in a buff folder. They probably thought Nick and her knew more than they were saying, she’d have thought the same in their place. The only survivor of the incident where she lived; romantically linked to the potential knight in shining armour, on his trusty motorbike. Oh yes, the police would think they were up to something.

“Can I get back into my flat ?” She asked. “I can book into a hotel, but I need my things.”

“Forensics are still there and the clean-up people will be next.” Said Jennings. “Not pleasant there at the moment, I’m sure you understand.....Can you manage for a few days ?”

“I’m not the sort to get a fit of the vapours over a little blood.” Said Drew. “I need my things and I can pick up poor Suki. She must be terrified.”

“Who is Suki ?” Asked Barlow.

“My cat.”

“The forensics team haven’t mentioned seeing a cat.” Said Barlow.

“Lots of strange people and she’ll hide, it’s what cats do.” Said Drew. “Suki will probably be on top of the wardrobe in my bedroom. Niki in number seven had a cat too.....He might be hiding.”

“Thank you, I’ll get someone to check on that.” Said Jennings.

“So.....Do I get access to my flat ?” Asked Drew.

They looked at her as though she’d spoken in a foreign language. Jennings actually whispered to Barlow. Something was even scribbled on a post-it note.

“I’ll call the forensics team.” Said Barlow. “You will be given access to your things and the cat. A police officer will need to be with you at all times. This is highly irregular for an ongoing crime scene....I hope you understand that ?”

"I do and I'm extremely grateful." Said Drew.

Nothing to sign for, even the clothes she was wearing were provided by the police. Her dressing gown and pyjamas were still being looked at by a laboratory somewhere. It would have been nice to have had a fanfare playing as she left the police station; it all felt such an anti-climax. There he was and it didn't surprise her. Nick was sat on a grubby wall, around a raised bed of grubby looking bushes. Drew sat next to him and put her arm through his.

"A police woman told me you'd be out soon." Said Nick.

"I thought you'd still be in hospital."

"Everyone has the right to refuse treatment." Said Nick. "Though I'm guessing that doesn't include crazy people. Anyway.....I discharged myself. Took two steps out of the hospital doors and the police grabbed me for a friendly chat. Did I mention them taking my bike away to be examined ? Bastards, no telling when I'll get it back."

"Were you charged or cautioned ?" She asked.

"No, they didn't seem to know what to do with me." Said Nick. "Was I a hero or up to something ? I still think they're not sure. They obviously contrived for us to meet here.....Be prepared to be followed around by the police, until they get bored with it."

Drew kissed him on the cheek and entwined her fingers around his.

"For a while.....When they told me there were no survivors." She said. "I thought you might be dead."

"It was close I think.....So, what do we do now ?" Nick asked.

"WE.....You're asking what WE do next." Said Drew. "When did we become a WE ?"

"Oh, come on Drew. All the years we've know one another, everything we've been through. Don't start giving me a hard time."

She laughed and rested her head on his shoulder.

"I can get my things from the flat and pick up my cat." Said Drew. "We could get a cab and do that together. It'd be useful to have another pair of hands."

"Poor Suki, she must be scared and hungry." Said Nick.

"You remembered her name."

"Of course I did.....I'm sure she'll love my place." Said Nick. "I also have a nice spare bedroom you can use."

"You seem to have it all worked out." She said.

"Oh, that tone of voice again." Said Nick. "It makes sense when you think about it."

Drew had already decided to say yes, but she deliberately looked about and pretended to think about it. Lavender Hill Police Station was busy, with lots of people coming and going. Drew would have bet a year's wages on her and Nick being the only two being stalked by some kind of demon.

"Your flat.....Is it clean ?" She asked.

"Well.....Sort of.....Not bad for a guy living on his own, or so I've been told."

"Alright Nick Rees, you have a temporary flat mate." She said. "Let's go and pick up my things and poor Suki."

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