

Prologue

It was like something out of a nightmare, for a moment - he tried to convince himself that it WAS just a bad dream. He stared and stared unable to process the actual scene, he could hear the blood pumping in his ears, his heart felt as if it was going to burst out of his chest. He still had a head rush - he stared at her - her frightened face, the bloody knife still in her hand. They stared at each other, her eyes were pleading with him "help me." they said. He stared at the phone in his hand - he knew he had three options, he dialled and waited, struggling to prevent himself from throwing up.

'999 emergency services - which service do you require?'

Chapter one

Six months earlier...

Robin opened his eyes and stretched - he slowly reached for his watch, 9 am, he stared down at the sleeping woman who was still snuggled into him, fast asleep, he rested his head against the pillow, dreaming then, once again, his awful task came back to him. Having decided to move, both him and his wife had decided on a fresh start, he turned and looked at his lover, still fast asleep and felt a twinge of guilt. It wasn't that he wasn't happy with his wife - it was just that things had become a bit hum-drum and he had found himself feeling a lot older than he was, however, things were starting to change; they had recently moved house - it was going to be a fresh start.

'What are you thinking about?'

He came out of his thoughts and reluctantly addressed the situation in hand.

'Hey! You're awake!'

She stretched and smiled sleepily. 'Hello.'

'Alison I-'

'Yes?'

'...Cup of tea?'

'Oh you don't have to.'

'Oh I don't mind!'

She kissed him. 'Well...thank you.'

'Won't be a moment.'

Alison frowned, she wasn't stupid! Biting her lip furiously, she watched him go downstairs before reaching for his mobile. Ha! She THOUGHT so! He'd changed it! She quickly jotted down his number and then lay back with a contented smile on her face - suddenly, a thought occurred to her and she quickly flicked through his photos and found one of his wife. Jealousy burned within her - quickly, she sent the photo to her own phone. Suddenly another thought occurred to her and she examined the phone more closely -it was a new address so she knew that, with anything new he kept a note on his phone - sure

enough, there it was. She quickly entered it into her phone and grinned slyly to herself.

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Liz breathed in the fresh air and looked at the front garden; it was so pretty around here and quiet. This fresh start had been a great idea and she was looking forward to a new chapter - she had thought that the spare room would be perfect for a baby's room but there was no rush; they were only twenty-five, they had both decided to discuss this sort of thing later - for the moment, she was just enjoying moving into her first home with her husband, they had got married last year. Everything was so perfect and had gone so smoothly that it was almost too good to be true; she looked at her watch - he had gone out shopping, he had also said that he had a bit of business to attend to so he would be a couple of hours at least; he should be back soon.

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Alison sat in her dressing gown, watching him get dressed. 'Are we clear?' No answer. He turned round to face her. 'Alison?!'

'Crystal.'

'Good.' He was relieved.

'Although...considering the fact that you always seem to come to *me*; emotionally I mean, don't you think that *you* may be the one who will have trouble letting go?'

He stared back at her, hating the uncertainty that he was now feeling. 'I'm sorry Alison, really I am - this has to stop and it has to stop now.'

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Liz smiled as she heard the key in the lock. 'Hello?'

'Hello!'

She came out as he was taking his jacket off. 'How did it go?'

'Fine! All sorted!'

'Great!'

He smiled. 'You look very nice!'

‘Thanks! I’ve just finished unpacking for the kitchen.’

‘Oh, let’s have a look.’ He smiled. ‘It looks great; you’ve done wonders.’

She smiled. ‘It was a great idea moving here wasn’t it?’

Robin kissed her. ‘Absolutely! A fresh start is just what we need.’

...

It was a nice neighbourhood - that, she had to admit; it had been just under a year - it hadn’t taken her that long to sell the flat, four months at the most. She looked at the address in her phone and smiled to herself as she stopped outside her new home; it was very picturesque - she then looked at the other address she had jotted down - it wouldn’t be far from here. She stopped and looked at her new home - she had to admit, it *was* beautiful, she scanned the area oh well - she had the address on her phone - she could check it out later. She smiled at the decor; it was light and homely, she would settle in - they would be plenty of time to make herself “acquainted.” She opened the window and wondered whether she should begin looking - no! Too obvious, she would just have to wait.

...

It was a glorious day and Liz had just about finished unpacking; she smiled and decided to make a drink and take it outside.

‘Enjoying the weather?’

She stopped and looked up to see a dark haired woman, smiling at her.

‘Oh! Hello!’

‘Hello! Just moved in?’

‘Yes.’

‘What a coincidence! I have too, a week ago in fact.’

‘How funny!’ She laughed. ‘I was going to rely on you as a guide.’

‘Sorry! We’ll have to learn together.’

‘Yes! Anyway! Best get on! My husband will be back soon.’

‘Oh dear! Must have his dinner on the table?’

She laughed. 'Oh no! Nothing like that thank goodness! Robin couldn't be like that if he tried!'

'You're lucky! I've just got out of a relationship.'

'Oh?'

'Yes, my fault really.'

'Oh, not necessarily.'

'Well, you know.'

'Well... this must be a fresh start for you too then.'

'Yes! Hopefully!'

'Well - I must get on, nice to meet you...'

'Alison.'

'I'm Liz.'

'Pleased to meet you.'

....

'Hello? I'm home!'

'Hello darling!'

'How was your day?'

'Fine! How was yours?'

She smiled. 'I've been quite busy actually.'

'Oh? Do tell!'

'Well - I've done some more unpacking and I've just met some of our new neighbours!'

'Oh! What are they like?'

‘Well - there’s this one woman - very nice, seems very independent.’

‘That’s nice.’

‘Yes - she lives not far from us.’

‘Oh I see!’

‘Nice woman - I think we’ll be seeing a lot of her.’

‘What’s her name?’

‘Alison.’

He remained nonchalant. Of course it was! It *had* to be didn’t it?!

Chapter Two

Saturday, that was a usual day for going shopping wasn't it? Although she hadn't seen the car leave, Alison guessed that that was where they had gone. Cautiously, she stepped out into the front garden and stared at the empty garage space, jealousy built up within her as she imagined them laughing and talking together. Looking around, she casually walked on to the empty space and stood there, thinking.

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'I like this shopping centre.'

'Yes! It's very nice.'

'A lot bigger too!'

'I think I read somewhere that they had expanded it.'

He laughed. 'Well...you'd best get on with the browsing then!' Suddenly he caught a glimpse of brown hair and his eyes widened. 'Tell you what - why don't you have a browse round the most expensive shops.'

'Are you sure?' She grinned mischievously.

'Yes I am - you've got a card; go on!'

'I'll see you later then!'

'Bye!'

She grinned as he approached her. 'Afternoon!'

'What do you think you're doing?'

'Sorry?'

He angrily grabbed a chair and sat down. 'I said what do think you're doing here?'

'Having a drink, want one?'

Looking around quickly, Robin sat down. 'You know what I mean!'

'I don't actually! Shouldn't you be with the old ball and chain?'

'She's shopping.'

'Want her out of the way then?'

‘Don’t change the subject!’

‘I didn’t think I was!’

‘Look! Grab a coffee!’

‘I don’t want to drink with you; I want to know what you’re playing at?’

‘Just doing some shopping.’

‘Oh? What about the house?’

‘Sorry?’

‘The-the house you’ve just moved into!’

‘Oh relax!’

‘It’s right next door!’

‘So?’

‘I’m not stupid! You didn’t need to move!’

‘How do you know what I needed to do or didn’t?’

‘Oh pull the other one! How did you find out where we were?’

‘I didn’t! Honest!’

‘To be honest - I don’t care, just stay away from us!’

‘That’s not very friendly! Especially as your wife and I are becoming good friends!’

‘Look - I am going to say this to you one last time - we. Are. Over!’

...

It seemed to have worked, for the next week or so, Robin and Liz lived peacefully - there was no bumping into her at the shops, they didn’t even see her in the garden, he couldn’t quite believe it. It was finally over! Every morning,

after kissing her, he could finally go out into the sunshine and actually enjoy going into work. At first, he dreaded stepping a foot outside in case he saw her; was *this* supposed to be their fresh start??!! Up till now though, he had seen neither hair nor hide of her, well that suited him just fine! At the back of his mind thought - he *did* wonder whether or not this was some kind of trick. So the days passed until one day.

Robin smiled to himself as he put the key in the lock; Friday! Two days of rest.

‘Is that you?’

‘Yes! Hello?’

Liz appeared, smiling. ‘Oh you *are* adorable!’

‘Well, that’s a nice greeting!’

‘Well, I could say the same for you; you with your lovely gestures!’

‘Well, I try!’

‘Try? They’re gorgeous!’

‘They?’

‘The roses silly!’

His smile faltered. Roses? He never sent her any roses! His eyes fell on them and then suddenly; it clicked Alison! He struggled to remain calm and pulled her into his arms. ‘Well what else would I do for my beautiful wife?’

‘And the card! “Can’t and never will stop thinking about you.”’

He shrugged. ‘Well...I know it’s a bit sappy but-’

‘Oh it’s lovely! *They’re* lovely!’

‘Well you’re very welcome my darling! Let’s have a look then!’

‘Haven’t you seen them?’

‘Well...I phoned up and asked to have them delivered, spur of the moment thing.’

She laughed. 'Come on then!'

He followed her and stopped dead - in front of him were a dozen red roses, his blood ran cold, she was nuts! Completely nuts! He felt like screaming - instead, he smiled and kissed her deeply. 'You are most welcome!'

...

It was evening and they had just finished watching the news. Robin stretched and looked at his watch. 'I'd better put the bin out.'

'Okay. Thanks.'

He headed out into the back garden and waited for a while before getting out his mobile phone and dialling.

'Hello?'

'What do you think you're playing at??'

'Sorry? Who is this?'

'Don't play games!'

'Didn't you like the roses?'

'My *wife* did!'

'They were for you!'

'Yes, I know they were!'

'Why are you phoning me? I'm only next door! Come round!'

'I wouldn't touch you with a barge pole!'

Silence. Then, he heard her start to cry. Oh for god's sake! He thought.

'I-I'm sorry! Truly I am! I didn't mean...It's just...'

'Alison-'

‘I didn’t mean to make you angry, it’s just that I thought you would like the roses.’

Against his better judgement, Robin suddenly hung up and marched round, she opened the door before he could knock. ‘You’re insane!’ He whispered.

‘Thanks! You coming in?’

‘No way!’

‘Look - they were my way of apologising! I-I didn’t mean...’

‘Listen to me - let me make this abundantly clear. We. Are. Over!’

Her bottom lip wobbled and she looked down at the ground. ‘There’s no need to shout!’

He felt his resolve weakening, to his annoyance. ‘Look - I’m sorry, I’m as much to blame as you.’

She looked at him, hopefully. ‘No, you’re right - I *am* a nutter!’

‘Hey! I never said that!’

‘No, but I know what you mean - I’ll put the house on the market and go somewhere else.’

‘You’d do that?’

‘In a heartbeat. If-if that’s what you want.’

He stared at her, unsure whether to believe her or not.

‘Look - I really didn’t mean any harm; let me take you out for a drink to make up for it.’

‘No.’

‘Are you deaf?’

‘For goodness sake! Not just you! I’d like to take *both* of you out!’

‘No.’

‘Look just ask you wife will you?’

‘I said “no”!’

...

‘Hi!’

‘Hello!’

‘I’ve just had a chat with Alison.’

He froze. ‘Oh yes?’

Yes!’ She turned to him. ‘Why didn’t you tell me that she had invited us over for a meal?’

‘Didn’t I?’

‘No!’

‘Oh it-it must have slipped my mind!’

‘She told me that you said no!’

‘Well - I just thought that we were busy settling in that’s all!’

‘How could you be so rude?’

‘I’m sorry I-’

‘We’re going to make this up to her - I’m going to ring her and say that we’d be glad to accept.’

...

Alison smiled to herself as she checked the dinner; everything was going smoothly, she would have him back in no time. Suddenly there was a knock at the door. They stood the perfect couple! God, it made her feel sick!

Liz smiled warmly. ‘Hello! Sorry we’re a bit late!’

‘Don’t worry! Come in!’ She smiled as she saw Robin, gingerly step in. ‘Hello Robin!’ He handed her a bottle of wine. ‘Oh thank you! Take your coats off!’

‘It’s very kind of you to invite us.’

‘Not at all! Please - go through.’

To Robin, it was like stepping into a nightmare, finally, he could keep quiet no longer, he angrily grabbed her arm. ‘I know your game!’

‘What? Inviting you in for a meal?’

‘Don’t play the innocent with me! I know what you’re up to!’

‘Oh? What is that then?’

He grabbed her by the arms. ‘I just don’t know how many times or ways I have to tell you this; leave me alone! Do you understand??!’

She nodded, shaking slightly.

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‘Well, thank you for a lovely evening!’

‘Oh it was my pleasure!’

‘We really enjoyed it, didn’t we Robin?’

‘Oh yes! Lovely meal.’

Alison smiled warmly. ‘Oh it’s my absolute pleasure!’

‘You must come to us!’

‘Oh I’d love that.’

‘Right well... good night.’

‘Good night.’

She held out her hand to him. ‘Good night Robin - take care!’

‘Good night Alison; thank you for the dinner.’ As he left, Robin was sure that he felt a chill going down his spine.

Chapter Three

‘Darling! I’ve been thinking.’

‘Yes?’

‘I don’t think it would be a good idea to have her round for dinner just yet.’

She looked at him. ‘Why ever not?’

‘Well...she might still be settling in, you know...’

‘So are we!’

‘Yes - I know, but, well it would be best if we weren’t in each other’s pockets don’t you think?’

‘One meal and all of a sudden we’re in each other’s pockets?’

‘You know what I mean!’

‘No! I don’t actually!’

‘Look I just-’

‘No, you listen! She’s a nice person and she’s new here just like us - I think it would be a good idea to be friends with her - start as we mean to go on.’

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‘I was thinking of nipping down to the shops.’

‘Alright! Would you like me to accompany you?’

She laughed. ‘What, as my bodyguard?’

‘No, I just thought you’d like the company.’

‘Aren’t you busy?’

He stretched. ‘Well - I have to get this e-mail off..’

‘Well there you are then.’

‘Well - if you’re sure.’

‘I’m sure! Go on, I’ll see you later.’

He waited until she had gone; he sat at his laptop and stared at his work; but they were just words. It was time to nip this in the bud once and for all.

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He knocked and waited, the adrenaline was rushing through him, he knew that this wasn’t the best idea, that perhaps he shouldn’t confront her like this but he was so filled with rage and exhaustion that he felt he had no choice; after all, it was HIS fault that this was happening in the first place.

‘Robin! What a lovely surprise! Come in.’

‘I’m not going to beat about the bush.’

‘The best way I’ve found.’

‘Stop texting me, e-mailing me and phoning me - we are over.’

She raised her eyebrows. ‘Wow! Okay! I-I just wanted to retain some contact.’

‘You wanted to-’ He sighed and rubbed his eye, wearily. ‘Alright - look, I admit that I shouldn’t have led you on.’

‘You didn’t though.’

‘Excuse me?’

‘You didn’t lead me on.’

His eyes narrowed. ‘Right.’

‘Yes, I always knew what was happening.’

‘Then why are you -’

She smiled and stepped forward, slipping her arms around his neck. ‘I know - just as YOU do - that you did this out of duty.’

‘Sorry?’

‘You did what you had to do for your wife’s sake - I appreciate that.’

He stared at her; she truly *was* crazy.

‘Why do you think I sent you the flowers?’

‘Sorry! You think I broke up with you and *moved* because I just thought that it was the right thing to do?’

‘Exactly!’

His head spun. ‘So - you think that I did *all* of this out of duty?’

‘Yes.’

This couldn’t be happening. He grabbed her by the shoulders. ‘You’re insane! The reason I moved here was to be with my wife - for a fresh start!’

‘Yes, because you felt guilty!’

He paused, there she had a point. ‘Maybe, but look - what good will this do you? It’s over between us?’

She stroked his cheek. ‘Really?’

Slowly but surely, once again he felt her chip away at his determination, his resolve weakening by the second. ‘I am going to say this for the final time. Leave. Us. Alone.’ She stared at him, it was hard to tell whether he had made a breakthrough or not.