

The sun shone through the split in the curtains, a narrow glow radiated across the bedroom, before shining onto Helena's face. The light gently teased her from her slumbers as she laid in the king size bed alone. As she roused, she broke her dream; Alan and her, back on the sun drenched Cornish peninsula. She stretched out her arm onto Alan's side of the bed, only feeling the coldness of the empty sheets. The bitter realisation of that emptiness next to her, matched only by the emptiness in her aching heart.

She sat bolt upright, now fully awake, knowing that the beautiful dream was just that. The full sickening horror of the painful memories that daybreak brings, now all too clear in her mind. Alan wasn't next to her, nor would he be ever again, because Alan was dead.

Every night since the accident, Helena had the same dream. Cornwall was their special place. They holidayed there every year, twice a year. Every morning she awoke the same dreadful way, made even more painful today as she reached out to the man she loved and adored. They had only been together for five years; it should have still been the beginning, not the end.

She dragged herself to the bathroom to clear the tears from her face; then she made her way down the stairs to the large kitchen at the rear of the cottage. She composed herself as best she could and sat down with a cup of tea to contemplate the events of the previous week. The only thing she could not understand about the car crash that robbed her of her husband was what was he doing at those crossroads?

The police had told her that he was about to enter the hospital grounds when a stolen car had raced through the traffic lights on red from the other direction. Alan's car had been the first to enter the crossroads from his direction. The lights facing him would have been on green, but he hadn't stood a chance. According to the police accident investigator, the stolen car had been doing nearly 90mph. But still, what was he doing going to the hospital? And at 7.30pm, when he should have been home hours earlier?

The sudden trill of the telephone released her from her thoughts. She dragged herself to the hall table to answer the phone. The rickety old table that Alan had promised to repair, wobbled when she picked up the receiver, she guessed it would never get repaired now; she wouldn't want it to be, not now. "Hello, who is it?"

"Mrs Helena Smith?" The male caller asked.

"Yes, who is this?"

"Mister," Helena didn't catch the name - the connection sounded fuzzy in her ear. "From the insurance company," he continued, "just ringing to let you know how your claim is going on; your insurance pay-out has been fully approved and we are posting you a cheque out today."

Helena had forgotten all about her mishap on holiday, she thanked him, trying hard not to sound too ungrateful, without the strength to explain why. After the call was over Helena went back into the kitchen to finish her cold cup of tea, she sat back down at the old oak kitchen table and mused over the call from Mr. 'whatever his name was'. There was something surreal about it. Maybe that's why she had been dreaming about Cornwall; of happier times. It was on their last visit there only a few weeks ago when her mishap happened. Her memory was still very vague about it all; she remembers going on the jet skis with Alan, they had hired one each; it was a beautiful sunny day, clear blue sky without a breath of wind. Alan had told her to go first and he would follow her, that way she could go at whatever speed she was comfortable with. She remembered looking down through the crystal clear blue waters and marvelling at the marine life swimming all around her, many metres below.

And then, 'bang', and everything went black after that, she still could not remember any details.

She was feeling tired again so Helena decided to take herself back to bed. She closed the gap in the pretty yellow curtains to keep the sun out, and soon fell back into a deep sleep.

But this was a very different kind of sleep; it was as if she was looking down on herself lying slumbering on the bed, but whose bed? It wasn't hers. The bedroom wasn't hers either. Nothing looked familiar, in fact she couldn't clearly make any of it out, everything was fuzzy, and she knew it wasn't her bedroom. Was her subconscious mind playing more tricks on her? After all, she had been through such a lot, first the holiday mishap, and then Alan's accident, was it any wonder.

Helena's mind drifted back to the question that had been nagging her waking hours, what was Alan doing visiting the hospital? And at 7.30 in the evening? She could almost visualise it all in her dream. The police accident investigator had been very detailed when he'd visited her with the police family liaison officer. She knew the junction well. Infirmary Street was a long straight road maybe a mile long, and just before it led straight into the hospital grounds, there was a crossroads. The junction was controlled by traffic lights, the road that crosses Infirmary Street was a long fast urban dual carriageway, drivers often sped along it, and it was well-known locally as an accident hot spot.

Something very strange started to happen. Not only was Helena still looking down on herself, she was still able to see what dreams were taking place inside her prostrate body, and still able to visualise the notorious crossroads on the entrance to the hospital; but also, it was as if she was watching the scene in real time.

She was still hovering, but instead of looking down on herself dreaming in the unfamiliar bedroom, she was looking down on the crossroads junction. Everything she could see was with clarity now, the fuzziness had gone. As she hovered, she looked down Infirmary Street as it approached the hospital.

She could see a car coming from the distance, only one car. The image of it grew larger as it approached, it looked familiar.

"Oh my God, it's Alan's car," Helena screamed as she sat up in bed, no longer looking down on herself; this was herself. Wide- awake now, she took in her surroundings in an instant. She was in the hospital, sat up in a hospital bed. Not at home, not on holiday, and definitely not dreaming. Somehow she knew this was real, as if to confirm it, a nurse ran towards her shouting at others to get the Doctor.

"Nurse, NURSE," yelled Helena.

"Don't worry, Mrs Smith, I'm here, everything is going to be fine now," the Nurse said.

Suddenly Helena remembered everything, what had gone on and why she was here.

"Please nurse what's the time," Helena pleaded.

"Don't worry about that now," the nurse replied.

"The TIME you've got to tell me the time," Helena screeched. She knew she had no time to explain, she knew this was real, and happening now.

The bemused nurse answered quickly, "7.27pm, I don't know why you ask, but you should rest, you've been in a coma."

“No time to explain, just lend me your phone, it’s a matter of life and death, please just do it,” Helena begged.

The nurse looked stunned and can’t have known why Helena wanted her phone; she’d probably never seen a patient waking from a coma act in this way before. But whether it was the urgency and fear in her Helena’s voice, or its sincerity, Helena didn’t know, but she acquiesced to her demands. She handed over her phone, and watched curiously as Helena frantically dialled.

The ring tone sounded in Helena’s ear at what could only have been a few seconds long, but it seemed like an eternity. As it was answered, she instantly recognised the ‘Hello’ on the other end. “ALAN,” she cried.

“Helena, you’re awake! You’ve come round!” His voice trembled with emotion as he continued, “Save your strength, I’m’ just outside the hospital, I’ll be with you as quick as I can, I’m going to hang up now as the traffic lights are changing to green.”

“NO,” Helena screamed, “Don’t go through those lights, stay still, don’t move. TRUST ME, ALAN DON’T MOVE, PLEASE GOD MAKE HIM STAY STILL, ALAN? ALAN? ARE YOU THERE?”

The telephone line was still open, but Helena could only hear silence in the fraction of a second that followed her pleas. Then she heard the sickening sound of car tyres squealing. She pressed the phone ever more tightly to her ear as she screamed into it, “ALAN, ALAN, ARE YOU THERE, WHY DIDN’T YOU LISTEN?”

“I, I did. But, but how could you have known?” His voice stuttered and trembled as he continued, “I stayed stopped, like you said, even though the lights had changed, and then this car came the other way, fast. But how could you have—?”

Helena cut gently across him, “Just park the car and walk the last few yards.” Helena ended the call and handed the phone back to a very startled looking nurse, who took it in her hand, first staring at her phone then staring at Helena.

“What was all that about?”

“Just saving my husband’s life.”

“Sorry? How? What?” The confused nurse stuttered.

“My accident: the coma must have shown me into a place,” she paused before continuing, “A place where dreams and nightmares collide, a place I never want to see again.”

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