



THE REAL THREAT

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He was there again.

Outside. Looking in through the window. A peeping tom.

This time I wasn't going to be intimidated. No more hiding behind the sofa. No more frantic calls to the police, they never believed me anyway. I grabbed the cricket bat I'd bought from the charity shop, held it ready as I stood in the centre of the room and shouted as confidently as my beating heart allowed.

'If you come anywhere near me, I'll use it! Do you understand? I'm not afraid!'



They're cowards of course. Everyone knows that. It's why they hide in the dark. Suddenly my bravado inspired me, I wasn't going to feel frightened in my own house, like some meek little mouse, I'd dealt with troublesome teenagers throughout my career, even been threatened with a knife on one occasion, none of that had scared

me.

I ran to the front door, threw it open, cricket bat ready to knock him for six.

'Come on then! Cowards like you don't scare me!'

Nothing. A rectangle of light spilled on to my garden path and last year's dahlias that I'd forgotten to take in before the frosts arrived.

'Bloody coward!' I muttered and slammed the door shut.

After a long, hot bath I felt more relaxed. I glanced at the book on the bedside table but left it there, I couldn't concentrate on it these days. The bottle of antidepressants and sleeping tablets stood next to the book, I left them alone as well, they didn't work and left me with a lousy headache in the morning. My GP kept telling me I was stressed, not surprising after losing my husband and my job. I'd run that department for five years, got great results from students no one else wanted, until college management said my behaviour was too unpredictable. I called it defending myself against a kid who'd tried to attack me. Such ingratitude.

The following day I made the mistake of going for a walk in the park to clear my head. I liked feeding the birds, being at one with nature and it helped to distract my dark mood. That all changed when I returned. I knew he'd broken in because the front door was ajar. I wanted to teach him a lesson but my cricket bat was in the hall, I thought about creeping in to get it but I knew he'd be waiting for me to do that.

I'd fool him. I'd get in through the back door. I sprinted down the side of the house and through the back gate. I picked up the back-door key from beneath its plant pot, grabbed a spade from the garden shed, ready to smack him. I smiled at the idea.

It faded when I saw what the swine had done.

He'd dug a hole by the back door, deep enough for me to fall in when I stepped out from the kitchen. It was a trap, thankfully I'd ruined his plans.



I edged around the hole, clinging to the wall until I could unlock the door and let myself in. I must have made too much noise because he'd gone when I reached the lounge.

I shut the front door, locked it securely and sat down. The police had asked me who held enough of a grudge to want to stalk me, I hadn't had an answer then. I did now. The hole was the clue.

It was that bastard who'd caused me to lose my job. He'd said I was trying to dig myself out of a hole when I described why I'd hit him. He'd wanted me to fall in to the hole as an act of revenge. At least now I could go to the police with solid evidence.

My mobile rang. Caller display told me it was Pete. I thought about not answering but my discovery gave me the confidence to handle his criticisms and accusations.

'What do you want Pete?'

'And hello to you Amanda. Just phoning to find out if you're OK?'

'Why do you care?'

There was a heavy sigh at the other end. I'd show him I wasn't going to grovel for him to come back.

'Because you're still my wife and I care about you.'

'You only care about me now, do you. I suppose you love that bimbo though?'

'Amanda, there is no bimbo. There isn't anyone. I told you.'

'I saw you with her in the car. You were all over her.'

Another sigh, longer this time.

'I've told you. There was no woman. I was struggling to get that huge yucca plant you'd been badgering me about, out of the car. I don't know why you'd think it was another woman.'

'Because it was. I'm not mad, despite what you think. It was a woman, in a brown sweater and blonde hair. You're just a liar!'

He didn't like that. He never does when I confront him.

'Have you been to the doctor this week?'

'Yes. He said now I'd got rid of my cheating husband, I'd be more relaxed.'

'And are you?'

'Yes.' I decided to tell him about my intruder again. He'd insist I was mad but the hole by the door changed things.

'I know who's stalking me. I've got proof now.'

The silence on the end of the phone told me I'd surprised him. I grinned.

'What kind of proof? You haven't attacked anyone again, have you?'

I let that one go. It was typical of him, he couldn't bear to admit I'd proven him wrong.

'Come round and see for yourself then.'

I ended the call and threw the phone across the room. I was sick and tired of no one believing me.

Sure enough, ten minutes later he was knocking on the door. He clocked the cricket bat leaning against the coat stand but didn't say anything. I strode into the kitchen, threw open the back door and flung my arm out to indicate the hole. He stood there, looked at it

and turned to face me. He had tears in his eyes. The last time he'd cried was the night he left, when I threw him out for his infidelity. Obviously he felt guilty for not believing me. I couldn't help myself, I felt pleased.

He closed the door and walked back through the house, stopped in the hallway. He glanced at the cricket bat, then at me.

'I'll go to the police for you darling. I'll let them know. OK?'

It came as a surprise but now the proof was there, what else could he do?

'Thank you, Pete. It's felt horrible, not having anyone believe me. He was in the house today. I went for a walk in the park, that must have been when he dug the hole. I've been so frightened. Can you imagine what it's like? Being so afraid and not having anyone believe that you're in danger.'



He smiled and hugged me. I smelled the cologne he wore, I'd bought it for his birthday. We'd gone to Paris for the weekend. It had been the last time I'd felt truly happy. We'd talked about having kids. I was thirty-five, still young enough. Just.

Tears welled up out of nowhere and I hugged him tightly.

'I miss you, Pete.'

'Miss you, too.'

We stayed like that for a while, until I wondered if he said the same things to his fancy woman. I pushed him away.

'I thought you were going to the police?'

I slept a little better that night.

The next day Pete arrived just before lunch. He looked pale, washed out. He tried to smile but I knew something was wrong. The police probably hadn't believed him either. He asked me to make him a cup of tea and we chatted in the kitchen until he took a deep breath. I knew he was planning to say something important, he was nervous.

‘I’ve got you an appointment, darling. With a specialist. A private one. I spoke to him on the phone yesterday. He sounds nice.’

‘I’m not seeing a psychiatrist. I’m not mad. I told you.’

He smiled. ‘I know. I shouldn’t have accused you of that. I’m sorry.’

This wasn’t the Pete I knew of late. It worried me.

‘You might have a condition that makes you see things that aren’t there.’

He smiled at me and gently took my hand, opened the back door, stepped out. He held up the black rubber mat with his spare hand.

‘You thought this was a hole. It’s a mat. You mistook it. That’s all.’

I looked at the ground by the door. The hole had gone. Pete led me into the lounge, pointed at the window.

‘The peeping tom? I think it was your reflection. You mistook it for someone outside. That’s all. Just a mistake.’

He didn’t believe me after all. I was on my own again.

‘I suppose there wasn’t a woman in the car either?’

He shook his head. ‘It was the yucca plant, darling.’

I set my jaw. He still insisted on lying. ‘What is this condition I’m supposed to have?’

Tears were in his eyes and he squeezed my hand.

‘The specialist thinks your brain is changing what you see. It’s a symptom of something called Young Onset Dementia. We’ll know for certain when he runs some tests.’

I’d never heard of it. Dementia was what old people got. He was trying to prove I was mad so he could claim the house for him and his bimbo. I snatched my hand away. I knew what I saw and right now, I was looking at a liar and a cheat.

‘Get out Pete! Go on! Leave me alone!’

I wasn’t seeing things. He was manipulating me. I told him to leave, pushed him out the door and locked it. No one was going to get me now. I’d make sure of that.

This story was inspired by a genuine case study provided by The Alzheimer's Society.