

And in the End

by Rosalyn Hurst

The room struggles to appear as if it is in a seaside hotel, admittedly on the wrong side of the pier - faded prints of flat seas, grey cliffs and fishing boats lying listlessly near the harbour wall. Even the plastic flowers (fresh flowers forbidden) wilt in the dry silence of the room. And in the centre, a bed, not a dubious double bed made for tiny people or for short hourly occupation, but a single bed, white sheets, tubes and fenced in by machines, throbbing with more life than the woman struggling to keep conscious.

A man enters.

'You're awake.'

She begins to twitch,, she tries to control her breathing.

'It's me.'

She is confused although she knows it is him. But was his opening statement at question, a statement, an order? He approaches the bed.

'My poor love, still nice room, must have been a private.' he pauses, 'We're not paying. You haven't agree to paying?,' silence then 'Can you remember who did it?' He bends over her, 'Speak up my pet I cannot hear what you are saying. Maybe it's for the best.'

The door opens a nurse approaches the bed. She thinks it is a nurse, uniform yes, but something familiar with her. Has she met her before?

The nurse checks the machines, sighs, searches in her pocket for pen, a scrap of paper and makes a note.

'I must ask you to leave, the doctor is on his way.'

'No! And you are?'

A rapid response, 'I know who I am, but who are you?'

He hesitates, turns to the window, casually picks at the plastic flowers and eventually moves with,

'Remember what I said.'

Machines pulse, she drifts on tropical currents - be careful there are sharks out there.

The door opens she watches the doctor approach, there is something so familiar about him.

‘Nurse tells you have visitors at last, that is nice...’

He lifts her arm.

‘Tell me how did you get those bruises, what caused these marks on your back? You know we found arsenic in your blood, tell me ... tell me, we won’t hurt you.’

She twitches, she flinches, she struggles against the stupor that threatens to overwhelm her.

‘What is it, his voice? Yes. And the same black hair.’

The machines spring to life, a line previously lethargic, now bounces around the monitor.

She sees the nurse move closer, she feels the touch on her hair, She hears the murmur ‘Be still my pet, be not afraid.’

She wants to scream,

‘That is what I said to my babies, to my sweet sweet Abby, who gave you those words? They are mine, mine.’

She looks again at the nurse, there is something so familiar about her, she tries to remember if she had a twin, a sister she knows that she looks like as she used to, oh so long ago.

The doctor shouts,

‘Nurse how could you have been so careless, we need more antidote, why is it not here.’

He approaches the nurse who backs away, the plastic flowers crash to the floor. He takes her arm, he pushes her through the door, get it immediately. He turns, is his look triumphant. She keeps as rigid as though in the moments after death.

The door opens, the man returns.

‘My poor love, ‘ he starts again as info time had passed. ‘and here you are all warm and fed, not like me. House is cold and nothing I the fridge.’

He leans over her, ‘Well done, heard you said nothing.’

She doesn’t hear his viper words that slither from his mouth, but looks at his eyes, his black hair, and knows.

Is he aware of the look. He leaves the room.

The doctor enters, he lifts the syringe, she tries to struggle, she sees his tongue flicker, she sees the serpentine movement of his fingers. It is

‘It is the same, they eyes the hands the mouth the voice.’

She tries to scream, She looks for help for the nurse, that now stands guard and stands silent and realises and she sees that the nurse is not familiar, not a twin, but herself.