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A House to Let

by Sho Botham

The baby screamed. The mother looked at him as she pushed her hair out of her eyes. She leaned over and picked him up and gently bounced him up and down in her arms as she turned around. "Fuck it," she shouted as she banged her toes against the corner of the dresser. "This house is driving me nuts. Not you my sweet, not you. Mummy's just pissed off banging into everything. We need to move. How can such a gorgeous poppet, like you, take up so much room?"

He felt his mother jump when the loud ring of the doorbell startled her. She opened the front door. A policeman and a WPC stood together. She stepped back towards the sofa and flopped down clutching the baby, her eyes never leaving the two officers.

They invited themselves in. The compassion in their faces told her that it was bad news. It was bad news but not as bad as it could have been. "He's alive," she shouted to the bewildered baby in her arms. He's alive."

She didn't notice banging her toes on the dresser this time as she grabbed her bag and a blanket for the baby. With sirens blaring and blue lights flashing they sped through the crowded afternoon streets. From the police car she noticed people going about their day and wanted to shout in anger to them, "how dare you, how dare you go about your day when my baby's father is fighting for his life in hospital?"

Soon she was running along corridors smelling of disinfectant - her baby bouncing in her arms.

The sun streaming in through the glazed doors ahead blinded her for a second. She pushed them open and found herself staring at a body covered in wires and tubes surrounded by people in pale blue scrubs. She couldn't see a face. She couldn't see anything she recognised. The police arrived behind her and firmly but gently led her to one side. All she knew was that he had been in a crash in Magnolia Street. Her mind was racing wondering why he was in Magnolia Street. That was miles away from work. Panic began to rise in the back of her throat.

A high-pitched sound made all the scrubs move like choreographed characters around the table, dodging others and effortlessly doing their bit. But it was futile. She could see the sweat on their brows as they fought hard for him but all too soon the sound changed. He was gone.

She would never know that he saw a house to let in the paper at lunchtime. She would never know that he thought he could surprise her with a bigger house. She would never know that he drove to Magnolia Street to look at the outside of the house to let in his break. She would never know that it was because he spent so long gazing at the house to let and visualising the three of them living there that he left himself too short of time to get back to work.