

Prologue

I park the car on a grass verge at the hospital, ignoring all the signs warning me that it will be clamped.

I don't care about clamping. I have to get into the emergency department. What does a car matter?

I half run because the heaviness in my chest since I got the phone call from the hospital won't allow me to run properly. Or breathe. I need deep, calming breaths.

Screw deep calming breaths.

I need to be with him.

Now. Sooner.

I can keep him alive. No doctor can do it: he needs me, holding his hand, willing him back to life.

I don't have time for the information desk – I know this hospital, see the double doors leading into the actual A & E itself, see a man pushing out of them, and I race, grabbing one swing door just before it shuts.

And I'm in.

Scanning. Peering in past half-drawn cubicle curtains. A man throwing up vile black stuff.

Two cops standing outside another cubicle. A woman on a heart monitor.

And then there he is.

I see his hand lying limply. A hand that's caressed me so many times.

I stand at the edge of the already-full cubicle, about to speak when a doctor hangs her stethoscope round her neck and says: 'I'll talk to the wife.'

She's gone instantly and I follow her, see her approach another woman. The doctor puts a comforting hand on the woman's forearm.

'I'm the wife!' I say, my voice frantic.

And then, as the doctor spins round, I see the other woman, recognise her, see the horror on her face.

'I'm his wife,' I say, 'not her.'