

# The Bracelet



Free Story from  
**ROSEBROOK CHRONICLES**

By Helen J. Christmas

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**A Free short story from  
ROSEBROOK CHRONICLES  
The Hidden Stories**

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## 14. THE BRACELET

February 1985

“Christ, what is it about the men in my life that they have to be such a bunch of no hopers?”

She is at the end of her tether, staring at her little girl in dismay. Clutching the same ragged old teddy bear she brought with her from the convent all those years ago, Katie forces a smile, but it is her seventh birthday.

*Is this the only childhood possession she has to show for her sorry life?*

Bibi slams down the telephone. “I’m sorry, darling,” she whispers in a softer tone, “but we can’t go to the magic show after all. Mickey got the sack!”

This is nothing new. It isn’t the first time Mickey has been giving his marching orders. His latest job as a postman would be a doddle if he could be arsed to get up on time but today of all days, isn’t it strange that the post doesn’t get delivered? Where one visit from the postmaster is all it takes to discover the useless, lazy ball-sack couldn’t handle it, the all-important mail people are waiting for stashed under his bed, undelivered.

Deep down she is fuming but the sight of Katie’s widening eyes snaps her out of it. They glitter with tears. Moving away from the table, she scoops her into her arms, cherishing the fresh, clean smell of her hair. Warm from her bath, she looks sweet as an angel in her party dress, a moment Bibi is gripped by a sudden impulse.

“I know,” she says, “I’ll call Auntie Becky. She was so disappointed we turned her down when she suggested a trip to the zoo but we can still go out for a burger!”

Bibi adopts a stern look as she steps into the elevator, head held high. With her blonde hair pulled back into a ponytail and little makeup, she is not such a target. Anyone who crosses her path is levelled with a blank stare, since it is the frightened ones here who get picked on.

With her hand clasped around her daughter’s, she exits the lift into the foyer with attitude. She carries a rape alarm now, all set to detonate if anyone dares try it on with her.

As for Dorset Tower, very little has changed. Despite regular visits from the council, the graffiti defacing the walls turns evermore racist, the foul mouthed punks long gone, though replaced by an even nastier gang of skinheads.

Grateful to escape this hellish place, they take the bus ride to Hackney and sure enough, Becky is waiting for them.

Her fiance, Derek, lingers. Bibi allows herself a thin smile. While delighted to see her sister in a relationship and soon to be married, he is hardly 'a catch' with his ginger hair and beard. Dressed in an unfashionable tweed jacket and a wide, multi-coloured tie, he looks the typical academic. But despite his obsessive left wing ideology, he seems kind; someone whose aim in life is to fight injustice while forever gunning for the underdog.

Tailing Becky, he is happy to go along with her plan as she leads them to the nearest 'Burger King.' Little Katie is delighted. Tucking into her mini-whopper and fries, and the creamiest strawberry milkshake, she thinks it's a lovely treat, all promises of the magic show Mickey offered to pay for forgotten.

Only when they insist on driving back to their slummy neighbourhood, does Bibi tense up. She has never stopped feeling guilty about her circumstances. Furthermore she doesn't want to rely on their generosity yet what choice does she have? These are the only people who come close to being family, the only people she can confide in.

Rolling down the familiar stretch of road, Bibi is hit with a sense of impending doom before the stark monolithic tower rears up ahead of them.

"It's okay, Derek, I can get out here," she mumbles.

"Don't be silly," he coaxes her, "you can't walk though there in the dark."

Bibi sighs to herself, her hand slipping into her daughter's. That's the trouble with February, it is not yet 7:00 and already the labyrinth of pathways dissolves into the inky blackness. Just before they reach the car park, her heart sinks lower. If only she didn't have to witness those figures weaving around the cars. The dim yellow gleam of a lamppost is enough to illuminate their legs, sticklike in drainpipe jeans and heavy Doc Martens, the domes of their shaven heads just as distinguishable.

Derek hasn't yet spotted them. He is momentarily distracted by the glint of over a hundred tiny windows watching them.

"No wonder there's so much inner-city violence," he shudders. "Better housing would be the solution."

"Let's not get into politics, Dear," Becky reacts a little sharply.

"But it's appalling that people should have to live like this," he persists. "This is what sparked the Brixton riots. Overcrowding breeds aggression!"

"It's more than just housing though," Bibi argues. "A lot of kids 'round here have had a crappy upbringing. Put 'em in a palace and they'd turn it into a rat hole!"

She gazes down at Katie and strokes her hair.

"We're lucky to have you," she smiles indulgently at Becky, "and cheers for tonight, it's been great and thanks for Katie's beautiful charm bracelet. What do you say, Katie?"

"Thanks, Auntie Becky," she echoes.

"We'd best be going. Don't bother driving into the car park..." The words dry on her lips as her gaze is drawn to the gang of youths again.

Only now does she notice that some of them wield baseball bats. Too late to shield their ears from the explosion of glass as they smash a car window.

"Oh my God!" Becky gasps. "Call the police!"

"No!" Bibi yelps. "Just let us out of the car and go, we'll make a dash for it!"

"But what about Katie?" Becky protests. "You can't expose a child to that mayhem. At least let Derek walk with you."

Bibi grits her teeth, sensing the weight of a dozen hostile stares. Fearing for Derek with his silly ginger beard, there is no question they are the focus of interest now. Her worry intensifies as one of the youths morphs out of the shadows, his face twisting into a grimace of hate as he caresses his bat.

"What you lookin' at, you ginger twat?"

"Derek, please, just go!" Bibi whimpers. "It might be your windscreen they smash next!"

Spotting another man on the war path, she leaps out of the car. Tall and slim with sinewy arms on show under a padded gilet, he seems to beckon her, his hand tight on the leash of a ferocious-looking Staffordshire Bull Terrier.

“Alright, Bibi?” he calls out to her.

The tug of Becky’s grip on her jacket is the only thing that restrains her now, as she prepares to face the newcomer.

“Jimmy!” she gasps and turning to her sister, gives a reassuring nod. “It’s okay, he’s a neighbour. Best get away while you can!”

An eerie silence falls over the car park. Nobody speaks all the while Bibi and her escort make their way towards the tower block entrance. With a final glance over his shoulder, Jimmy waves at the gang of skinheads before ushering her inside.

Katie looks numb. Perhaps it is due to tiredness, given the heaviness of her eyelids. With a full tummy and a sense that in few minutes time she will be tucked up in bed with a cup of warm milk, she seems unfazed by the incident.

Pressing the button, Bibi summons the lift for level twelve.

“You’re keeping some strange company there, gal,” Jimmy teases her as he follows in her wake. “Posh clothes and all that... ain’t ol’ Bill are they?”

“Don’t be silly,” Bibi laughs. She pats him affectionately on the shoulder. “Derek isn’t ‘old Bill,’ he’s a lecturer at London University and teaches sociology. As for the lady he’s with... You do know I was adopted? She used to be my sister.”

“Sound,” Jimmy nods.

“Becky works for the government,” she ponders. “She’s got an admin job in Social Services.”

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Rebecca feels a shiver of excitement, amused by Derek’s reaction to the hideous environment her sister is confined to. He is right of course. This is no place to raise a child.

She won’t deny she loves helping them out occasionally and given her good Catholic upbringing, feels triumphant to have separated Bibi from that criminal brother of hers. Further investigation reveals he is long gone, a notion that confirms her every suspicion. His influence would be nothing but harmful.

Six years on and she relishes the control she has over Bibi’s life. Yes, working in the DHSS is a blessing. Unlike a social worker, she is not in

direct contact with some of the disgusting dregs in slum housing, yet has access to all their records. Carefully examining the files on Dorset Tower, she knows exactly where the trouble lies and which families fall under the radar. Her eyes narrow as she recalls the cases she has read about. But she feels no loyalty towards Bibi. Despite their camaraderie, she has never stopped blaming her for her turmoil. A girl who destroyed her family, tore her father's love away and drove her mother to neurosis.

Lost in the tangle of thoughts though, she harbours an unusual love for her baby half-sister. She has always upheld the opinion that Bibi can protect her from the horrors of Dorset Tower. That is until tonight. With images of thugs and baseball bats lurking, she wishes there was a way of getting her out of that place. Somewhere closer to home in Hackney perhaps, where she can keep a closer eye on them.

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Bibi meanwhile has no concept of how her life is being monitored. The months working as an 'Avon Lady' brought in a little pocket money but with Katie at school, she has enough spare hours to take on a part time job.

Working for a mail order cosmetics company, she loves her busy role in the warehouse, selecting goods, packing them into boxes with curls of polystyrene, free samples and leaflets filled with offers. Enough people are employed to provide a bustling, cheerful environment.

As soon as her shift is finished however, she must do some shopping before picking up Katie from her primary school.

But she has no concept what tonight holds in store, not until darkness falls and Katie is tucked up in bed again.

Bibi is accustomed to noise. Tonight though, something worse shatters the peace, a relentless, deafening pound of music from next door that has the mugs on her shelf rattling. Bracing herself, she feels a rise of anger, helpless to wonder how the bastards can be so thoughtless. But it is not until Katie staggers sobbing from her room, hands pressed against her ears, she finally boils over.

"Can't sleep, Mummy!" she squeals.

"I'm so sorry, love," Bibi croons, wiping the tears from her little face. "It's not on! Not when there's kids living here!"



*Is it unreasonable to call the police?*

Fear rises with the unspoken rule *it is better not to*, leaving her no choice but to confront the residents herself. Bibi rises. Tucking her little girl back into bed, she flings on her coat and pocketing her keys, banks up her courage.

A mean-faced teenage girl confronts her.

“Will you turn your bloody music down!” she says through gritted teeth. “You’ve woken my daughter up and she’s got school tomorrow!”

“Fuck off!” the obnoxious creature spits and the brutal slam of the door leaves her quaking.

Next morning they are exhausted. Spending the night cuddled up in bed with Katie, she has dim recollections of the music fading away in the early hours but she is in no way fit for school. Nerves in shreds, Bibi phones to explain the situation.

*Maybe she should inform the council. There are noise pollution laws, surely.*

Moving around the flat in a daze, she fights to control her tears as she pours cereal into Katie’s bowl. She barely has enough strength to hold her thoughts together when a rap on the door shakes her out of her reverie.

Bibi struggles across the floor to answer it but recoils in panic. Usually she can discuss things with the residents but there is something almost deranged about the dishevelled woman on her doorstep.

“Yes?” she asks wearily.

“You dare to ‘ave a go at my daughter!” she rasps. “She can play ‘er music as loud as she wants!”

Clocking the lank hair and red rimmed eyes, Bibi fights to control her temper.

“Your daughter? What about my daughter? She barely slept a wink because of that racket! I’ve a good mind to report you...”

Only the loping approach of Jimmy prevents her from taking the threat further. She sees him emerge from a few doors down, his expression darkening to a scowl.

“Enough, Stella, you slag!” he shouts. “Leave her alone, otherwise I’ll see to it you don’t get no supplies for a month! You got that?”

To her surprise the woman’s face turns grey as putty.

“That’s right!” Jimmy keeps sniping. “Give her any more hassle and you scumbags’ll be doing cold turkey until I say otherwise, now piss off!”

Bibi collapses against the wall. Nothing but the grip of her neighbour’s hand can stop her from falling, as she watches the hideous crone go sloping back to her flat.

Bibi is crying and she is not the only one. In another corner, her daughter huddles in fear against the window, the trail of tears shining wetly on her cheeks.

“Katie, it’s okay,” she whimpers, scooping her into her arms. “The nasty lady has gone now.” She glances at Jimmy.

Quick to pop a cartoon on the TV, she manages to distract her daughter, so they can have a few words in private.

“Thanks so much! Can I make you a coffee?”

Jimmy smiles. She observes his tight leather trousers, his arms on show with their network of tattoos. He has a thin foxlike face and mousy dreadlocks tied in a ponytail. Yet his blue eyes are friendly, bringing a ray of sunshine into her home.

“What exactly did you mean by ‘supplies,’ Jimmy?” she challenges him.

He gives a non-comital shrug. “You know.”

“Don’t tell me you’re a drug dealer.”

Jimmy shrugs again. “We do what we do to get by, love. It’s only a bit of hashish. As for Stella, that old bitch would do anything for a fix. Speed, coke, skag... Put the right words in the right ears and she won’t get nothing. I’ll see to that.”

Bibi raises her eyebrows, intrigued by his bravado.

“I know who her suppliers are,” he sniggers. “Handy to have a few mates higher up the chain, like Solly.”

“Solly?” Bibi frowns. She lowers a mug of strong black coffee onto the table in front of him. “Who the hell is Solly?”

The shine in his eyes dwindles. “Best you don’t mention him. Big face in the East End. You don’t wanna know what happens to people who get on the wrong side of Solly Roberts.”

“So how do you know him?” she plugs.

He looks at her intently. “Don’t hurt to have connections, Bibi.”

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Three weeks have passed since that day and Bibi has suffered no further problems with her junkie neighbours. Things have quietened right down, a situation where she feels indebted to Jimmy. He may be a few years younger but this isn't the first time he has got her out of a tight spot.

Inviting him round for coffee each day is the least she can do. She smiles, cheered by the sight of his thin frame. So maybe his teeth are a bit stained but she puts it down to the amount of black coffee he drinks.

She even finds herself growing to like him a little.

Today though, he is like a cat on hot bricks, which leaves her wondering what he does with his life. He seems to be out all night, never lacking in energy, bounding around the block with more exuberance than her seven year old!

“So what's all this in aid of, Jimmy? Why are you helping me?”

His eyes slide shiftily in her direction. “Why not?” he mutters. “You're one of the hottest girls on the estate, Bibi.”

She senses an awkwardness in him and as if to displace the tension, he rolls another cigarette.

“Are you saying you fancy me?” she presses. “I'm a few years older than you.”

“Older or not, I'd love to see you get your titties out!”

Just the teasing look on his face suggests he is flirting with her. So Bibi contemplates the proposal. With Katie at school she is happy to play along with his banter and why not? Her inner voice tells her she can trust him.

That aside, it's been four weeks since she dumped Mickey and not only does she relish the attention, she feels protected.

*Handy to have a few mates higher up the chain.*

April 1985

“So who is he?” Becky keeps pestering her.

Bibi is a little cagey about the latest man in her life though nothing stays hidden forever. She detects a change in her during their phone chats, the loving undertones tucked in her voice whenever she mentions him. What's more, the last time she made an impromptu visit, she caught a glimpse of him leaving.

“Jimmy and I have known each other for years,” Bibi shrugs.

*She thought there was something familiar about that thin, loping figure from the night of Katie’s birthday. A so-called ‘neighbour’ who reached out to her when they were confronted by those skinheads.*

The fact that he waved at them did not go unnoticed.

“What does he do then?” she presses.

Bibi takes a moment to contemplate her answer.

*She isn’t entirely sure.*

With a tendency to stay out until the early hours, what Jimmy’s does for a living is a mystery, where threads of another conversation come back to her.

“His mate runs a second hand car lot in the East End,” she muses, “an area where the crime rate has soared...”

*He told her it was surrounded by a chicken wire fence but it didn’t hurt to double up as a night watchman.*

“He carries out security patrols around the compound.”

“I see,” Becky nods to herself.

Bibi frowns, wondering what it is about her tone that sounds so sceptical.

“He’s okay!” she springs to his defence. “He’s always looked out for us, so stop worrying!”

Becky takes a moment to study her.

*Poor naive Beatrice. She really has no idea how much she knows.*

The one and only time she has met this Jimmy, she has made her own judgement, given his gauntness, the hollow cheeks and stained teeth. Further research has uncovered a criminal record for drug possession. What Bibi also doesn’t know is that he is mixed up with a much feared gangster known as Solly Roberts and not only that, he is a speed freak. *Sad really.* Ever since the night of the skinhead threat, she has resolutely campaigned to get her and Katie transferred from this slum and into a better area.

This latest ‘boyfriend’ proves to be an obstruction.

“Is something wrong?” Bibi pipes up.

Looking down from her window from twelve flights up, Becky experiences a wave of vertigo. The noise and activity resonating on all floors never recedes, the area around the lifts as terrifying as ever. Despite the kids dangling on the swings in the playground, a couple of burnt out vehicles depict an air of menace; a warning to anyone who dares cross over into ‘no man’s land.’

Becky takes a swallow, her anxiety rising. Bibi has no knowledge of the nights she has driven past the block, foot hovering over the accelerator. On some of those nights she has spotted Jimmy stalking around the area and with his savage-looking dog, he appears to unofficially ‘police’ it.

*If only she didn’t have to witness those other transactions.*

“It’s nothing,” Becky sighs. “I’m just worried about you and Katie.”

Her eyes drift across to Bibi’s daughter.

“That reminds me, I haven’t seen her wearing her charm bracelet lately.”

“She doesn’t wear it to school,” Bibi fusses, “it’s too precious! I tucked it into the drawer of our dressing table for safe keeping. Isn’t that right, Katie?”

As if prompted, the little girl rushes over to the drawer, hauling it open.

“It’s gone, Mummy!” she shouts.

Bibi freezes. “What do you mean ‘gone?’ Oh, please don’t tell me you’ve lost it! I thought I told you never to wear it outside.”

“I haven’t, Mummy, honest!” Katie insists. “You said not to!”

“And with good reason,” Bibi scolds her gently. She bites her lip, risking another glance in Becky’s direction. “You know what a bunch of thieving bastards live around here. It’s not valuable is it?”

Becky gives her a withering look. “Yes, it is actually.”

Bibi has no idea where it came from, an abandoned gift to her mother from her father on one of their wedding anniversaries. Such treasures are confined to a box now, things Melissa no longer wants to be reminded of. She won’t miss it.

“Who have you invited round lately?” she probes.

Bibi turns pale. “Only a few mates. I can’t believe any of them would steal it.”

“Anyone else?” Becky adds with calculating coldness.

Hidden in her mind is another answer. One Bibi isn’t going to like.

Bibi stares at her, panic rising like a barometer.

She doesn't like what her heart is telling her but damned if she's going to voice it.

Katie sits quietly, head bowed. Yet fate has a nasty way of sneaking up when she least expects it. Before another word is uttered, there is a distinct tap on the door.

Katie leaps up to answer it. "Uncle Jimmy!" she gasps.

The two women sit still as statues. Their eyes lock. Bibi watches in a dream as Jimmy ruffles Katie's corn blonde hair.

Swooping over to where Bibi is sitting, he plants a kiss on her lips.

"Alright, doll?" he mutters casually.

A frown creases his forehead and raising his eyes, he sees her sister.

"Got company, I see. Hello, Becky."

Becky gives him a polite nod, her smile cool.

Deep down though, Bibi is quaking. *If only Jimmy's clothes didn't look so shabby and he could be bothered to brush the mud off his boots.* Under the steel hard gaze of her sister, every flaw seems magnified.

"Jimmy, you remember my sister."

"That's right, love," he smiles. "Shall I stick the kettle on?"

Bibi watches in fear as the two of them survey each other. As if to add to her embarrassment, the tang of stale cigarette smoke wafts from his clothes as he moves. For several minutes they endure a light but forced conversation until the killer subject rears its sordid head again.

"Is something the matter?" Jimmy snaps.

"Katie's lost her bracelet," blurts Bibi. "It was a present from Becky."

Jimmy shrugs in a manner that seems petulant.

"I don't suppose you've seen it, have you?" Becky's says. Her tone drips acid.

"No, what does it look like?" Jimmy spits back.

"You know," Bibi whispers. "You saw it on the night of her birthday. A gold chain, dangling with charms..."

The dislike he exudes is almost palpable. "What are you saying, Bibi?"

"Nothing," she breathes. "I was only asking!"

She clings to his stare, her heart thumping. Yet Jimmy cannot hide the muscle pulsing in his jaw and the atmosphere turns to ice.

By the time she walks Becky back to her car, her world is crumbling. *What a mess*. If only she didn't have to be there to witness Jimmy's reaction at the mere mention of that bloody bracelet!

"What are you going to do, Bea? You can't trust him."

Seated in her car, doors locked, Bibi stares far into the distance.

"I wish you'd let me handle it," she snaps. "Jimmy's been good to us and Katie adores him. Whenever he pops round, he always brings her sweets."

"Really?" Becky snipes. "Well, given what that bracelet is worth, I'm sure he can afford a few sweets."

"You think he stole it, don't you?"

"Well, don't you?"

"Jimmy hasn't done anything!" Bibi shouts at her. "I know you don't like him but to insinuate he's a thief... you've got no proof. Not that it matters, you've clearly got his card marked. There seems no point carrying on does there?"

"With what?"

"You want me to dump him! As far as you're concerned, he's guilty!"

"I only want what's best for you," Becky sighs. "I never meant to upset you."

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Bibi's mind spins in circles. Two weeks have passed since that fateful day yet she hears nothing more from Jimmy. Her bed feels cold, an unsettling chill that leaves her craving the warmth of another human-being to snuggle up to.

She never imagined him as a life partner but if only they could have talked. It would be nice to clear the air.

Hearing the prompt on his answer phone, she tries to get through to him again.

"Jimmy, if you're there, please pick up." There is nothing but a yawning silence.

Convinced Becky has scared him off, she can no longer deny how furtive he looked that day. Thinking of the times he visited, he must have seen Katie's bracelet.

*He knew where she kept it.*

She would have confronted him herself if Becky hadn't interfered.

Vulnerable and edgy, she nonetheless misses his protection. Other women in the block smirk as she passes and guessing she is the fuel of their gossip, she avoids contact, wishing there was a way to resolve this.

Next day however, something jolts her, a distinctive tap.

“Katie at school?” a voice on the other side echoes.

“Jimmy,” Bibi sighs, pulling the door open. “Where have you been?”

Striding into her flat, he shuts the door but the thunderous scowl on his face unnerves her.

“Is something wrong?” she adds fearfully.

“Yeah, you could say that,” he snaps. “What the fuck are you playing at, Bibi? Did you know I’ve been busted?”

“For what?” she asks numbly.

He releases a harsh laugh. “What do you think? Pigs followed me back from the car lot and pulled me over. Found the stash in my pockets, a bit of blow, a bit of speed, what does it matter? They’ve got me down as a drug dealer!”

Bibi sags into her chair, her arms crawling with goosebumps.

“You grassed me up, didn’t you?”

“No!” she screeches. “Why would I do that? You’re my boyfriend!”

“Am I?” He looks at her with contempt, his lip curling into a sneer.

“You as good as nailed me for that fucking bracelet going missing and if it wasn’t you, I bet it was that uptight bitch of a sister!”

The cold snaking through her veins is replaced by a rising anger.

“Don’t talk about her like that!” she gasps. “No-one was accusing you, Jimmy, all you had to do was deny it. That is unless you did steal it.”

She meets his eye, the force of her misery dragging her down like quicksand.

“You did, didn’t you?”

His blue eyes pierce into her like shards of ice.

“If that’s what you wanna think, so be it,” he says. “You never gave me a chance. She comes round, looking at me like I’m shit and I ain’t the only one who’s seen her sniffing around either.”

“What the hell is that supposed to mean?”

“The lads on the estate have seen her,” he smirks. “Drives a VW Polo does she, a pale blue one? Strange, innit, no sooner d’you hook up with me and she comes snooping. Did that cow put you up to this?”



Bibi is gripped by a new horror. "I have no idea what you're talking about!"

"No, I don't suppose you have," he finishes nastily. "Thing is, I can't protect you no more. If I go down and the dregs on the estate don't get their supplies, it'll be your problem, girl and that's not the worst. I 'ope Solly don't get wind of this, 'cos if one of his dealers goes down, there's gonna be consequences."

"Are you threatening me?" Bibi shudders.

He moves towards the door.

"For God's sake, Jimmy, I never grassed! Whatever you've done, I would never do that!"

"So long, babe," he finishes, melting into the shadows. He blows her a kiss. "If I mean that much, you can always visit me in prison."

Worse is to come. Creeping back and forth from her apartment, she meets the stares of strangers at every turn. They lurk in the corridors and around the stairs, columns of beady eyes following her.

Fear and paranoia push her almost to breaking point.

Next come the insults; nasty, threatening words.

"You've got some front showing yer face 'round 'ere."

"You're dead meat, bitch!"

Everywhere she goes, the atmosphere is barbed with hostility.

"Why, Becky?" she sobs down the phone. "Why did you have to report him?"

*Jimmy is right. It has to be her. She was all for calling the police when the skinheads were loitering and now they have seen her car.*

"He was dealing drugs," Becky says, her pious tone another irritation. "I'm only trying to protect you."

"Protect me?" she breaths. "Have you any idea of the knife edge me and Katie are living on right now?"

*Yes, this is ten times worse. She and Katie are unquestionably the victims of a hate campaign.*

She grits her teeth as Becky keeps rabbiting on in the background, convinced she can ease their transfer to a nicer neighbourhood.

She doesn't yet know about the car that's been tailing her. A sinister BMW with blacked out windows.

“But I’m being watched, Becky,” she splutters.

“They’re just trying to intimidate you,” Becky argues. “You’ve done nothing wrong. Let me help you!”

Except she is yet to be faced with her worst nightmare, one that will stay with her for a very long time.

It happens next day.

She is about to pick Katie up from school when she feels a fist close around her arm. Thugs dominate the car park as usual, all silent, all staring, as that ominous BMW pulls up to the entrance.

She watches in dread as the passenger door swings open and a man steps out.

“Beatrice Raven?” he calls, extending a leather gloved hand. “Finally we meet. Name’s Soloman. ‘Spect you’ve ‘eard of me.”

Clocking his rough-hewn features, Bibi feels her blood run cold. With cropped black hair and razor sharp cheekbones, he looks almost corpse-like. That is before he removes his shades, eyes like deadly nightshade berries as they bore into her soul.

“Y-yes,” she falters.

He pulls out an envelope.

“Silly girl! Lost one o’ me dealers ‘cos of your big mouth.”

“I’m not a grass,” she whimpers. “You’ve got it all wrong.”

He takes her chin, his gaunt face looming closer.

“Not according to my sources. Whether it was you or not, bitch, you’ve caused me enough hassle. I don’t want you livin’ here no more.”

Her lips start quivering. “Y-you’re t-telling me to leave?”

He slides the envelope into her hand with a nod.

“I want you off my patch.” His mouth lowers to her ear, “and don’t even think about calling the cops. Look inside. Might make you think again.”

Frozen on the spot, she watches the crowd peel away. The man jumps into his car, only to disappear just as abruptly.

Today no-one is lurking in the corridor. There are no filthy looks, nor mutterings of abuse, it is as if the whole block is holding its breath.

Bibi feels numb as she settles Katie into her bath.

Content to hear her splashing around with her toys, she tugs out the envelope and opens it. There is no message, just two photographs.

The first picture is of her and Katie, playing on the swings.

*Who could have taken it?*

On the other hand, she remembers plenty of unpleasant people hanging around the area recently.

She takes a moment to study it, brushing it aside to view the second picture. This one is a photocopy of the first, though an image that stalls her breath. Their faces are mutilated with vicious knife slashes. Even more gruesome are the holes of a cigarette burned through her little girls' eyes.

"Oh my God," Bibi moans to herself.

*There is no questioning the evil resonating in this message.*

Conversely, she hears Katie's chuckle from the other side of the door, a sound that chills her to the bone.

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"Everything's going to be alright, Bea, calm down," Becky gushes, fighting to get a word in. "I told you I'd fix things."

"But how?"

"It so happens there's a vacancy on an estate near Columbia Road. It's a lot nicer than where you are now."

"Oh, thank God!" Bibi sobs down the phone. "How soon can we move?"

Listening to her plight, Becky experiences a moment of hubris.

How hard she has worked to secure this transfer, and help her she will, especially as the estate lies just a mile south of where she and Derek have established their new home.

When the day finally comes, Becky steps into the elevator of Dorset Tower for the last time. Today she arrives with reinforcements, pleased to have Derek by her side, along with a social worker and a WPC in case there's trouble.

Bibi looks pale and withdrawn as she gathers up their belongings, Katie a picture of innocence clutching the same shabby old teddy bear. Leaving their apartment, she freezes mid-step. For there lurking in the corridor is none other than her neighbour, Stella, foul as ever with her deadly gargoyle grin.

Bibi lowers her eyes and clinging to her escorts, they silently exit the block.

For Becky however, it is hard to suppress her joy, conscious of Bibi cowering next to her. In a strange sort of way she is totally at her mercy now, about to be moved to an area where she will be much closer to home.

What's more she'll be forever indebted to her for getting her out of this hole.

Stepping away from the block, she is trying not to think too hard about the charm bracelet, now back in its rightful place, tucked in the box under her mother's bed.

It was never missed in the first place.

## **AUTHOR'S NOTE**

I hope you enjoyed this short story. If you want to know more about what happens to Bibi and her daughter, my new book can be pre-ordered from Amazon via the link below.

[Rosebrook Chronicles, The Hidden Stories](#)

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For further information, you can visit my website which contains regular updates about my books and my writing with links to social networking pages. I also have a blog, where I post articles from time to time to keep everyone up to date with the research and inspiration behind my writing.

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