

The Rendezvous

A solitary, salty bead of sweat made its way slowly down Dan's nose. He tried to focus on it without moving any part of his body, other than his eyes. It finished its journey and fell downwards from the tip of his nose, kissing his lip as it passed out of view.

Dan stood, stock still. Blinking more rapidly than usual and daring to edge his head forwards his eyes darting from side to side, up and down, trying to take in everything in rapidly before considering his next move.

He could feel the increase in the pace of his heart, beating against his chest wall. There was tension in his hands so he gently waggled his fingers, ready for action, if required.

His mind raced. What had possessed him to come here alone? Into this neighbourhood? Under the cover of darkness? God knows who or what lay in wait for him!

Churchill Park was a different beast by night. In the daytime, especially at weekends, it was a throbbing mass of people passing through on their way to work or the shops and schoolchildren thronged through happily in playful groups. Mothers brought their children to the fulsome adventure playground while other adults sat relaxing or reading on park benches. It was a joyous place.

At night it was transformed into a fearsome place where drug dealers, graffiti artists and the like plied their trades; where others lay in wait for their victims to threaten and mug them to fuel their own lifestyles.

The police occasionally patrolled but they were powerless to stem the tide of crime. Yet here was Dan, an experienced CID officer, coming alone, without the knowledge of his superiors, pursuing a lead and hoping to gain valuable information about the case on which he currently was working. Logically, it was stupid thing to do but his informant has insisted he come alone and tell no one. It was a calculated risk by Dan but a risk he felt worth taking.

He edged forward, looking constantly around him. Did he imagine a movement in the nearby bush? Was that the shadow of someone moving behind the bandstand? Dan tried to compose himself and took a few deep breaths and wiped the sweat from his brow. He was still close enough to dash back to the entrance. Would the information, if he got any, be of any use in solving the case?

He had come this far and the meeting place with his informant at the bandstand was close. He silently slipped forward to the steps of the bandstand. His informant was there, sitting on a stone seat. Dan was quick to realise that something was not quite right. Creeping closer he saw the informant's eyes were wide open staring into space and Dan's eyes were drawn to the large knife handle protruding from his back.

Dan whipped around, frantically searching the landscape for signs of movement. It had been a mistake to come, especially alone. Someone else obviously knew he was coming and was probably following his movements right now.

Looking back from the bandstand to the park entrance, it seemed a long, potentially treacherous way. He froze for a moment. He had no option. No point now taking out his mobile to summon help; the light and the noise would draw greater attention to himself. He had to try and get back to the park entrance.

Nervously, he took his first step.

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