

## **Kate**

Neville recognized the smell instantly. Painfully familiar. It curled inside his nostrils and set up camp like a particularly obnoxious squatter. The last time it was like walking through a wall into an alternative dimension and he wore the stench like a cloak that attached itself to his body and could not be removed. No matter how many times he scrubbed his skin raw. That was only nine years ago.

‘Hey, what’s the matter? Don’t be sad.’

He knew that voice he thought, but it sounded muffled and coming from somewhere else. Kate had been beside him a moment ago and it was her that had spoken. Or was that a long time ago? He could barely think straight with that ghastly smell crawling all over him. He had to get away from here. Was that a movement, a hand reaching to his, that registered in his periphery and pierced the layers within his brain enough to sweep aside the curtains of fog that had layered between him and rational thought.

‘I’m coming,’ he managed to reply. Why did his voice sound like he had a mouthful of cotton wool?

He tried to move but he felt suddenly weak. What had Kate said again? Something about...

Before he could muster his thoughts, he was overwhelmed by an olfactory tsunami that threw him to the ground as mercilessly as if it had been a real wave. The oppressive weight of the stench pinned him to the ground and proceeded to invade every cell of his body and tear his mind apart.

Forty dead rats mixed with dog shit and pureed with rotten eggs and a touch of cheap perfume. Then triple it. Then use it as a body balm. Smear it on.

The voice came again,

‘You look funny.’

‘Kate! Wait. I’m coming. Just wait.’

But Kate could not wait. She had to go. She was gone.

He had only been a few minutes late. Why did she have to go? He just had to finish the tax return and then he would go. A minute, that’s all. Just a minute.

The search for Kate was on all the news channels and the neighbours organised groups to go out and help the police. Pictures of Kate were posted on

lampposts and walls. Neville could see people looking at him, trying to make sense of what they saw. If he looked back, they would turn away as if ashamed. What was it he saw in their faces? Disgust, anger, pity. Did it even matter now?

It was Neville that found Kate 15 days after she went missing. His beautiful little girl lying under a pile of twigs and branches. It had been the smell that had brought him there. Pulling a branch aside, he could see what had once been his daughter, but was now unrecognisable now except for the t-shirt she had worn to the party. A picture of a hedgehog on the front and the words, 'Why can't hedgehogs share the hedge?' He registered this and so much more before he seemed to be floating, then falling, then retching, then nothing. It had only been a minute.

Roger Rambles

**530 words**