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# FINALLY

**Phil Parker**

‘Have you seen Mrs Moggs? I can’t find her anywhere?’

Olly didn’t look up as he rummaged in the packing crate.

‘No, I haven’t. Where did you put the house phone?’



Kate sighed loud enough for him to pick up on her frustration, he ignored that too.

‘What do you want that for now? It’s almost midnight, we’ve only just got the power back on and I want to find the cat so I can go to bed and get some sleep.’

Mumbled curses rose from the depths of their ‘practical items’ crate.

‘Oliver!’

His head jerked up like it was on elastic and hit the edge of the crate, he cursed even louder and glared at her. He’d blame her for that in the morning.

‘What?’ Rubbing his head and checking for blood.

She took a breath. She’d been doing that a lot over the last three days.

‘Have you seen the cat? I haven’t seen her for two days now. I’m worried about her.’

He started to roll his eyes but thought better of it. ‘She’s a cat, Kate. She’ll be out hunting somewhere. She’ll come back when she’s ready.’ He tried a smile. ‘You were the one to pack the phone.’

The implication being that she was the one to have left in behind. She took another deep breath, this time he got the message.

‘I want the phone connected. The mobile signal is lousy. This place is so isolated.’

The shared look said it all. He hadn’t been happy with the choice of their new home, she’d been the instigator. A solitary house, edge of a forest, a long track to get to the road, her rural idyll. A wonderful place to raise kids. Once Mister Selfish had come around to that way of thinking.

Kate allowed her expression to soften, she sniffed quietly and swallowed hard.

‘Well. Not isolated. Wrong word. Secluded.’

She ran over and hugged him. He’d caved in as usual. She patted his bum.

‘We’ll find the phone tomorrow. Let’s go to bed eh?’

He agreed. Obviously.

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‘Olly?’

He groaned and turned on to his back. ‘What? A resentful snap.

‘Did you hear that?’

He sat up instantly, listening in the powdery darkness of secluded night.

‘What’s that knocking sound?’

She was glad he’d heard it straight away. She hadn’t imagined it.

It took a little persuasion, directed at his masculinity mainly, to get him to investigate. He stumbled downstairs, floorboards creaking like ancient bones, wielding one of his golf clubs. He was back three minutes later, she’d timed him.



‘I can’t see anything.’

She labelled him a coward, he maintained female equality meant women could investigate. More knocking led them downstairs, now a two-golf-club team, she dressed in her dainty laced pyjama shorts, he in his tatty boxers. Hardly the outfits for confronting intruders but she couldn’t call a halt to this now.

She shone her torch along the corridor to the kitchen, keeping the lights off had been a strategic joint decision. Moonlight flooded through the glass panels of the back door, creating a rectangle of silvery light. Olly tried the door. Locked.

Kate shone the torch along the kitchen counter. A window was open.

‘I thought you shut that!’ Olly hissed.

‘No. I thought you did.’

The plastic bottle of tomato ketchup lay on its side. She’d meant to put it away. Something had knocked it over. Moved it too, it was on the edge of the sink now. She pointed at it. Olly nodded, the whites of his eyes opened wide.

When the knocking happened again, they both jumped. Kate dropped the torch. It rolled along the floor and under the kitchen table.

‘You get it!’ she snapped.

Olly dropped to his knees. She could just make out his outline as the torch’s beam reached out to welcome him into the darkest corner of the room. The knocking sound was louder, nearer suddenly. Olly jerked upwards, banging his head against the table top, restraining himself to whispered curses.



‘It’s coming from those cupboards,’ Kate said, pointing at the three tiers of ancient doors that stretched from floor to ceiling. She’d decided they were getting replaced with a new Magnet kitchen as a top priority so she’d never looked inside them.

‘Be careful sweetheart.’

He stood up, rubbing his head and gave her a baleful look. With the torch and club firmly gripped in her hand, she helped Olly to lift the table away from the cupboard doors.

‘Look,’ Olly said as he took a steadying breath. ‘There isn’t going to be an intruder hiding in there.’

‘How do you know?’

‘Because it’s less than a metre high, Kate! There’s no room.’

‘It could be a kid.’ His puzzled expression made her justify herself. ‘They pay kids to break into houses and let the adults in. He could have crawled through the kitchen window.’

His condescension evaporated and she stretched her shoulders with greater certainty. Between them, they could handle a kid. A small one.

Olly flung the door open. 'Come out!'

A mouse scampered past Olly. Kate screamed like a banshee and leapt on to a chair with the grace of a gazelle. The knocking echoed across the kitchen but now it was at the other end, in the old pantry.

'How does a noise move, Kate?'

They stood in the middle of the kitchen, motionless, hardly breathing now. They both looked around the room, at the array of floor to ceiling cupboards, the wooden drying rail hanging from the ceiling, the iron door to the old baker's oven that they'd both said was a lovely feature. The ancient Aga in its alcove, with pipes stretching to who knew where, smiled back at them from its yellowed drawers.

'Kate?' Olly's voice held that tone she knew well. The same one he'd used when he'd voiced his doubts about this place. 'Do you remember that story the estate agent told us?'

She did. It had just occurred to her. She shivered. It was a warm summer's night but she was cold.

'That was just a tale to give the place character.'

She didn't believe it but hoped Olly might. His expression said otherwise.

'So why had no one bought this place for fifteen years?'

If she wasn't careful, they were going to rehash the same argument, what a foolish decision she'd forced him into making.

'Which is why we could afford something so big. You know that.'

'And with its own uninvited guest. Or an intruder that's hiding from us. Take your pick.'

Olly snatched the torch from her and strode towards the pantry. Its door needed to be prised open, it scraped across the stone-flagged floor with the finality of a burial vault. Kate hovered on the other side of the door.

'Look,' he said.

His tone told her she wouldn't like it. She peeked in. The torch's beam lit up the trail of something goey with the colour of an Australian merlot. It disappeared into the darkness beneath a marble slab.

'Before you say it, I am not crawling under there,' Olly said with the finality she knew not to challenge.

'That wasn't there this afternoon. I looked in here. It was remarkably clean.'

Olly pushed her away from the door. 'Well, it's not now.'

Kate squeaked as the knocking resumed. The club in her hand felt useless.

'The woman they killed here, she sacrificed animals, didn't she?'

'So you're not discounting that story then?' He shone the torch in her face, like an interrogation. She slammed it aside angrily but he wore his expression of patronising superiority. 'Just as likely as your teenage criminals.'

This time the noise came from behind the Aga. Despite herself she gripped Olly's hand. Tears blurred her eyesight, all of a sudden, her throat burned with the need to cry. She'd promised herself she wasn't going to be the emotional woman, she was normally so strong, so independent. Her breath escaped her for an instant and she gulped in air.

Olly pointed the torch downwards this time, it offered just enough light for him to look at her properly. He threw his arms around her, she inhaled his scent, felt the firmness of his chest pressed against her breasts. He kissed her.



'Don't worry my love. We'll get to the bottom of this.'

A loud, high-pitched screech echoed around the kitchen. The most unearthly sound possible. It came again and again. The sound of pain and anguish. Kate gripped Olly and held him so tightly she could hardly breathe.

Olly spoke into her ear. 'And we'll do that in the morning. When it's light.'

'What? But where will we go until then?'

‘To my brother’s. It’s only forty minutes away. Come on. Get dressed.’

He led her by the hand to the staircase. Another screech, even louder this time, made the hairs on the back of her neck stand on end. She shook her hand loose and snatched the torch.

‘I’m not leaving my new home.’

Heart thumping, like an entire percussion section of an orchestra performed in her chest, she strode back into the kitchen and stared at the Aga. Olly waited at the doorway, shaking his head.

‘I am a rational woman. I am not going to be spooked. There is a sensible explanation for this.’

She whispered it under her breath over and over again as she surveyed the side of the kitchen. The cupboards at one side, the pantry at the other, the Aga in the middle. She shone the beam into the corner of the alcove. Noticed, for the first time, a small wooden shutter that the agent said gave access to the flue.

She knelt down and slid it open.

A black and brown blur flashed past her. She screamed.

Sat in the silvery moonlight was Mrs Moggs, bedraggled and with the bloody remains of a bird in her mouth. She glared at Kate with feline resentment that said, ‘Finally! You let me out!’

