



The Scent of Death

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It had been a long day. Jamie turned to thoughts of food when he got back to the 'hotel', as he followed the satnav onto a side road to the right - showing 18 minutes to The Anchor in Wooler. Today's job trying to fix the Armstrongs' automated farm field sensor system had created more problems that he'd need to add to next week's Northumberland schedule.

Jamie caught the colours sunset above the hills to the west, flashing in his mirrors as he drove into deep standing water in the road.

Rounding the next bend in the road passed the entrance to a woodland. As he did, the dashboard flickered and went blank - followed by the lights as the engine died and he coasted to a halt.

He knew he could try and check under the bonnet and still be none the wiser. Ironical eh? You spend all day working on automation but auto electrics are a closed book!!

Pulling up the map on his phone he discovered that he'd not plugged the charger in properly when he got

back to the car and it was nearly dead. As the maps app opened, the screen blanked - oh joy - dead car - dead phone! "Damn - can't even phone the RAC!" he said aloud to himself.

Jamie tried the ignition one more time - nothing. He got out and listened for any sounds of traffic.

Nothing, just the sound of a curlew some way off on the moorland.

Wishing he'd taken more notice of the satnav map, he peered over the hedges either side for any clues. The colour in the sky was fading behind him, so walking away should lead him out of the hills and down towards the main A697 and find civilisation.

The darkness was starting to close in as he walked along and he started imagining shapes on the roadside which disappeared into shadow as he came upon them. Rounding a curve alongside another wood, yet another shadowy shape appeared to his left.

Looks like someone had been flytipping in the entrance to the wood, a rolled carpet, with branches piled over it. The unmistakable scent of putrefaction hit him as he got closer. He tried to rationalise it - something had died, maybe an escaped sheep.

The muddied Adidas trainer beside the carpet told a different story. Getting closer, the smell became more pungent - whatever was rolled in that carpet had been there a while.

His first thought was to alert someone. There were few clues as to what this place was and he'd not seen a sign recently, so he headed off down the hill hopefully towards Wooler. He'd find it when heading back to his car.

Eventually he reached the main road and as he tried to work out which way to go, a beaten up Land Rover slowed down beside him. "Nice evening for a walk?" The driver was in the usual country uniform of flat cap, checked shirt and gilet, "not much round here, are you lost?"

"Which direction is Wooler?" asked Jamie.

"I've just come from there but I can take you back - hop in". Climbing in, he sat on what looked like a sack and ropes. "Where've you come from?"

"I've come from Mindrum, but my car died up in the hills" said Jamie.

"Armstrong's place?"

"Yes, I've been checking the field sensors for them."

“Ah, beyond me all that tech stuff, I’m afraid” as he made a u-turn back towards Wooler.

The Land Rover turned off into the town and pulled up on the main street, across from the Anchor pub. Jamie thanked him and walked into the bar and asked to speak to Kevin, the manager who he’d chatted to when checking in last night. Maybe he could put him in touch with the local police.

Kevin came round the corner of the bar and Jamie told him his fears about the carpet in the wood. Kevin called out, “Hey Stuart” to a guy watching the TV Darts, “he’s our local sergeant”

Stuart came across and nodded to Jamie “What’s up Kev?”

“This fella came across something up towards Mindrum” gesturing to Jamie.

Jamie related what he’d seen and smelt on his way down from the hills and that his car was stuck up there.

Stuart moved off and made a call. Jamie used the pub’s phone to call the RAC as well; the patrol would meet him at the Anchor first thing and take him back up to the car to sort it out.

Stuart came back over and let Jamie know a patrol would be heading up to find the place he'd described and cordon it off.

The next morning, Jamie came down to breakfast to the usual over generous full English, with local sausage and black pudding. He reckoned that he'll not need any lunch.

Stuart the sergeant called into the Anchor and poured himself a tea chatting to Kev the landlord. He came over to Jamie's table and sat down. "Thanks for your information. Our guys were up there again at first light and you'll be pleased to know that it wasn't human. There was a dead badger behind the hedge".

He added, "It was of interest to us as the carpet covered a load of other rubbish. The address on some of the papers let us know who'd dumped it. Thanks anyway and good luck with your car."

Jamie reflected on how things play with your perception when the light's fading. Today looked a lot brighter as he noticed the RAC pulling in outside the window. He finished off and went out to meet the patrolman.

Heading back up into the hills in the RAC van to find his dead car, they passed the police at the wood and the sergeant looked up and waved. Jamie looked forward to

being mobile again and getting to his next job up in
Coldstream - and avoid running into any more standing
water!

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