

## TEN

### Love-Hate

**K**at grabbed the camera from me and held it in the palm of her hand. 'When you took that last photograph,' she said, 'in the queue for tickets . . . You must have put it away in your jacket pocket without thinking, Ted.'

I reached my hand over to take the camera back. She held it away from me.

'How did you feel, Salim,' she whispered, as if he was in the room, 'when you realized you'd got into the pod without your camera?'

I tried to take it again. She slapped my hand away. 'Keep away, Ted! It's my find.'

Typical Kat. One moment she's saying how brainy I am, the next she's assaulting me and telling lies. Predicting what Kat is going to do next makes predicting the weather seem easier than counting to three. Kat is not only more unpredictable than the weather, she is also more unpredictable than a) volcanic eruptions or b) lunatics or c) terrorist



attacks. It is a fact that her name sounds like the first syllable of words like:

Catastrophe  
Cataclysm  
Catatonic

In other words, Kat is a *walking disaster story*, which is what Kat says about me when I drop things, but I think it applies more to her.

But sometimes, when you least expect it, Kat is nice. When I was small, she'd read stories to me about talking bears and magic wardrobes and take me over to the pond in the park to show me the ducklings. At school, she'll stick up for me in the playground when the rough boys pick on me.

Mum says we have a love-hate relationship. She says that when I was baby and Kat was two, she found Kat leaning into my buggy one day and kissing me all over my face. Maybe I squirmed, because the next thing Kat did was grab a hairbrush

and thump me on my head. Mum had to drag her away to stop her from murdering me.

When we got older, Mum was always telling us to play nicely together. Kat's idea of 'nice play' was to line up her naked Barbie dolls with their savage haircuts and strange biro markings and play hospitals. She used toilet roll as bandages and cut into them with nail scissors and squirted tomato ketchup on them. She would tell me to help her as the patient was dying. 'Pass me the scalpel!' she'd order me.

'What scalpel?'

'Any scalpel.'

I looked about. 'There is no scalpel.'

'A pretend scalpel, Ted.'

'There is no pretend scalpel, Kat.'

'There is. It's right by your hand.'

'Kat. There is no scalpel by my hand. Only a toilet roll.'

'You're supposed to be the nurse!' she shouted.

I blinked. Nurses are supposed to be women and I was a boy. I could not be a nurse.



'Try to play, Ted!' Mum said, looking on.

So I went, 'Mnee-mna, mnee-mna, mnee-mna!' and turned the lamp switch off and on, and after that I was always the ambulance. But Kat always wanted me to be the nurse and maybe that was why she went on being angry with me. Then my syndrome was diagnosed by the doctors.

'Why does he have to get all the interesting diseases?' she moaned to Mum and Dad.

I don't remember what they replied.

Right now, Miss Katastrophe was examining Salim's camera and I swallowed the hot huffy feeling I had back down my oesophagus.

'He used up eighteen shots,' she said. 'He kept clicking as we crossed over the bridge, remember?'

'He took one of you and me, Kat. And I took one at the Eye, just before the strange man came up who gave us the ticket.'

'The strange man,' Kat said, looking up. 'I wonder ...'

I nodded. I'd been wondering about him too.

'Do you think these pictures might be a clue, Ted?'

'I don't know.' I tried to touch the camera one last time, but again Kat snatched it away.

She turned its sleek silver sides around in her hand. 'I wish it was digital like Dad's,' she said. 'Then we'd be able to see the pictures now. With this old-fashioned kind, you've to open it somehow.' She shook the camera and shrugged. 'Dunno how. You get the film out and take it to the camera shop to have it developed. It costs money and you have to wait. What a bloody palaver.'

She started fingering buttons and shaking it.

'I think we should give the camera back to Aunt Gloria,' I said. 'Because she is Salim's next of kin.'

'What's that got to do with it?' Kat said.

I was about to explain how the next of kin inherits the property of people who have died and how perhaps this also applies to the property of people who have disappeared, when the doorbell rang. Kat and I jumped up.

'Salim!' Kat said.

She dropped the camera on the bed and we ran out of the room and down the stairs. But in the



hallway, just coming in through the front door, which Mum was holding open, wasn't Salim, only two grown-up people, a man and a woman. The man was in uniform, the woman wasn't, and this meant the opposite of what you might think: that the woman was in charge. This was because she was 'plain clothes'; he wasn't.

It was the police.