

Love

'Of course I still care about you. I'm just busy at work, that's all. By the time I get home in the evening and have had dinner and checked some last bits and pieces for work the next day I'm flat out. So yes, sometimes I do prefer to sit in and veg in front of the TV instead of getting dressed up to go out again. Is that such a big deal?'

Comment [AO1]: Dialogue can be a good way to start a story as it draws the reader in. We have joined the couple in mid-argument.

Paul didn't reply. He stared ahead as they walked, his hands in his pockets and his shoulders hunched. Sarah thought irritably that if he were trying to play the role of the put-upon boyfriend in a soap opera he couldn't have been more dramatic. She bent and picked up a flat stone, skimming it across the still, murky waters of the pond. Why did Paul have to ruin what was supposed to be a relaxing summer evening's walk? He was making such a fuss, just because she had said she wouldn't make it to his friend Dan's barbeque the following night. She had told him to go without her and she knew for a fact that most guys would be quite happy to head off and spend some time with the lads. But no. He had been sulking since she picked him up and she had no time for this sort of neediness.

This essay is based on a true story in that one of our dogs did jump into a filthy pond and my daughter's boyfriend – in an act of great kindness – waded in and lifted her out. However, they were not having any sort of fight before the event! I added the argument in order to frame the anecdote and give the story a theme which is that love can show itself in the oddest ways and deserves to be rewarded.

Comment [AO2]: Show, don't tell. We know Paul is miserable without it having to be stated. His posture lets us know.

Up ahead, the dogs rushed about, sniffing everything, tails in the air. Sandy, the golden retriever, kept to the path for the most part but Missy, the shaggy little mongrel, darted up grassy banks and dived into bushes, barking hysterically at imagined enemies. That was another thing. Paul had rolled his eyes when he saw she had brought the dogs in the car and she knew he thought they were scruffy and embarrassing. The memory made her frown and she felt more annoyed with him than ever. He was so unreasonable. She could feel his eyes on her but she didn't feel like talking to him so cast around on the ground for another stone to skim. She found one and hurled it across

Comment [AO3]: Sarah is being a little unreasonable, but because we are seeing things from her perspective (she is the main character) we are inclined to agree with her at this point.

the green surface of the water with all her might. It didn't skim but spun up into the air before plopping loudly into the middle of the pond. The noise distracted Missy from her investigation of a particularly fascinating pile of leaves and before Sarah could react, she had bounded to the water's edge and thrown herself in. Helplessly, Sarah watched the little dog swim valiantly towards the point where the stone had sunk.

Missy, to give her her due, found the stone after a number of dives to the muddy bottom of the shallow pond. She paddled back triumphantly, the stone clasped tightly between her teeth. She ran into difficulties, however, when she reached the steep bank at the pond's edge. It had been easy to jump off, but not so easy for a short-legged mongrel to get purchase on the slimy, weedy concrete and get out again. Sarah was distraught. She knelt and reached down as far as she could but couldn't get hold of the dog. Missy's heavy coat was soaked through and clearly weighing her down. Only the top of her head was visible above the water now.

Suddenly, there was a loud splash and Sarah saw to her astonishment that Paul had jumped into the pond. He was up to his waist in the water and, as Sarah watched, he waded purposefully towards Missy. The little dog, blissfully unaware of the danger she was in, was convinced that Paul's appearance beside her meant that he had finally seen the light and was joining in the fun. With a turn of speed Sarah would not have thought possible, Missy spun round and swam vigorously out to the middle of the pond. Grimly, Paul sloshed after her. For all her enthusiasm, Missy found that she ran out of steam long before she reached the other bank and Paul was able to grab her by the collar, haul her into his arms and clamber up to safety with an ecstatic, filthy, wriggling dog licking his face all the while.

Comment [AO4]: 'Haul' is more descriptive than 'pull' as it implies effort. 'Clamber' implies awkwardness and shows the effort Paul had to put into the task. 'Ecstatic' and 'wriggling' are appropriate when describing a dog who sees the whole event very differently to the humans!

Sarah's relief was such that she was almost unable to speak for fear she would cry. Missy was a scruffy little thing, but Sarah loved her dearly. She mumbled her thanks and suggested they run back to the car and head home for a hosing (Missy) and a hot shower (Paul). Chilled, despite the warmth of the evening, Paul readily agreed.

There was a slight problem when they reached the car in that Paul was clearly in no fit state to sit on the fabric seat, but could hardly be asked to hop into the boot with the dogs! Paul, in another heroic gesture, said he would push back the front seat and sit in the passenger foot well as the rubber mats there would be a good shield against the slimy sogginess of his soaked tracksuit bottoms.

Comment [AO5]: Be as descriptive as possible.

As they weaved their way back home through the suburban streets, Sarah glanced over at Paul. He had drawn his knees up to his chest and was clasping them with his arms, shivering slightly. 'So,' Sarah began. 'What time do you want to pick me up for Dan's party tomorrow night?'

Comment [AO6]: Show, don't tell. Sarah is clearly very grateful and has realised that Paul has gone out of his way to do something for her, even though it was awkward and inconvenient (to say the least). Sarah now sees that she has been a bit thoughtless in refusing to go to the barbeque the following evening and has finally understood that true love is shown in the strangest of ways. Paul saved Missy for her, even though it cost him to do it. She decides, therefore, to return the favour by going to the party with him.

Startled, Paul looked up at her. Something about the set of her jaw made him think that it would be better to skip over their earlier argument. He thought rapidly. 'About eight?'

Comment [AO7]: In real life, people often wisely understand that it is better to let things go than to thrash them out. Paul jumps to this conclusion and instead of making a big deal of Sarah's change of mind, decides to stick to the practicalities while the going is good.

'Perfect. That'll give me plenty of time to get ready.'

The last rays of summer sun were vanishing beneath the horizon when they reached Paul's house but as he sloshed towards the front door in his sodden clothes, Paul was surprised to find that the chill had gone and that he felt quite warm.

Comment [AO8]: Again, show, don't tell. Paul is happy and this is clear when we learn that he feels warm despite being soaked and chilly. He is warmed by love. (Cheesy? Maybe...)

955 words.