

One Bright Summer's Day

Where do I start?

Shall I start with the dust motes dancing in the bright summer sunshine streaming through the office window? Or, perhaps, with the hum of the air-conditioning unit fixed to the wall, high above my desk; or again, with the long ribald tale that Andy, the office clown, was halfway through telling? Just where exactly? Where *do* you start to describe a day - a moment - that should have been your last?

A fractured moment was all that it took. Gas explosion? Terrorist bomb? I didn't know. The desk came up fast to meet me, my head crashing into the keyboard with a force that is impossible to convey. Years before, I had been in a car crash, saved by the airbag coming between me and the boot of the car in front; but that was nothing – like a quick slap compared with the knockout punch that darkened my world, blew out the windows, and made sure that none of us would ever hear the end of Andy's bawdy joke.

Sometime later – minutes or hours, I cannot be sure, as you do not look at your watch when you think you are dying – I opened my eyes. The bright sunshine was gone, everything was black save for the glare of my cracked computer screen which was pressing hard against my face; I had a close-up of the email that I had been typing when the end of the world seemed to have finally arrived. It said
//////////////////// They say that it's strange what you remember, and it's true.

Everything was heavy. Something pinned my right arm to the side of my body, each breath was an agony, and I couldn't tell if I was upright or hanging. I wriggled my fingers, did the same with my toes, and realised I was still in one piece. I said a silent 'thank you.' And then, I heard a muffled cough and knew I wasn't alone. And somewhere, in the distance, I could hear sounds – men's voices, the sound of a siren, a helicopter, I think, a loud-hailer. And then, I must have gone to sleep because when I next opened my eyes, I was cold and there was no light, not even from my screen which must have died ... as I feared I was going to do.

I flinched when he touched me, then stared unseeing as his hand closed gently around mine. The spot of a flashlight roamed the gloom and I caught brief glimpses of what now surrounded me: a broken chair, a crushed waste-bin, a pile of scorched papers...whatever was left of the tidy office I had known so well. Then I felt a stranger's breath: warm, close, too intimate – but I embraced it like a parent's.

'Don't worry love, you're safe now. We'll get you out. You're the first, but I promise, you won't be the last.'

485 words