

Mountain Rescue

When the call came, the sound was so loud that Perry jumped, startled. He barely knew where the device was, clawing at blankets on the musty sofa before he found it, battery almost at zero.

“Yeah?”

“Perry Sampson? Mountain Rescue. We’ve found something, you might want to get here.”

Perry crumpled into the sagging cushions of the ancient sofa where he spent his silent, empty days. He lay for a while in the gloom, a clenched mess of hope and dread, almost wishing the call had never come.

He flinched like a vampire as spring sunlight came and went behind the scudding clouds. So many years since his father had vanished on a routine hike. So many years since his own life had taken a fall and still lay crushed at the bottom of a deep crevasse in his head.

Two hours later he stood at the door of Mountain Rescue, a battered grey building on the edge of town with the hills rising behind it. He took a deep breath and pushed the door open, hardly knowing how he would speak, let alone what he would say. A tall balding man in his sixties wearing a North Face t-shirt and brightly coloured rope bracelets looked up from a display where he was sorting maps.

Perry shuffled. “I had a phone call. I’m Perry Sampson.”

His voice sounded odd to him, rusty with disuse and awkward uncertainty.

“Perry, right. I’m Col, it was me that called. Listen, it’s weird, but, well, a hiker found something. This way?”

Perry followed him into a tiny office. On the desk, a manila folder labelled ‘*Missing Person: Charles Sampson*’.

Beside it, a knitted woollen hat.

Col explained the hat had been found the previous day on a well-used hiking trail, dry and in good condition, but Perry barely heard the story through his shock.

“My dad’s hat,” he whispered, afraid to touch it. “Is he...?”

Col shook his head. “Just the hat, mate. No sign of your dad. Sorry.”

“But...” Perry reached for it, squeezing the soft knitted wool, pressing it to his face, letting a hot tear sink into it. It smelled of green spaces and woodsmoke. Col placed a sunburned hand on his shoulder.

“I don’t get it either, mate. I wish we could reopen the search, but it’s been eleven years.”

A surge of energy crashed through Perry’s long emotional hibernation. “It’s my dad’s hat! He must be alive!”

Col shrugged. “Nothing to stop you searching. Take some mates along?”

Perry looked down and an awkward silence settled between them. Eventually, Col spoke.

“Perry, I knew your dad. If you went missing he’d never stop searching. We can go now if you like, I can put out a call for help.”

“I’m scared.”

“Perry, you have us. And look, you have his hat.”

Perry looked up, resolve forming for the first time in a decade. With unfamiliar determination, he tugged the hat onto his head then smiled at Col.

“Make the call. Let’s go.”