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# 1

## A Funny Smell

‘That’s a funny smell, Mum,’ said Ambrose, flaring his nostrils.

His mother raised her head and sniffed the air. ‘I can’t smell anything funny,’ she said.

She turned to the rest of her litter. ‘Can you smell anything funny?’ she asked.

Ambrose’s three siblings raised their heads and sniffed.

‘No, Mum,’ they said.

Ambrose’s mother hopped forward to the wire front of her hutch. ‘Roland!’ she shouted.

On the opposite side of the shed was another hutch belonging to Ambrose’s father, a large white rabbit with red eyes and very long floppy ears that lay upon the floor at right angles to his head. Roland was rather elderly, having come to fatherhood late in life. He was also rather hard of hearing (he blamed this on the shape of his ears), which meant that his family often had to shout at him.

Privately his wife – a pretty little prick-eared rabbit with a soft blue coat, whose name was Woodsmoke – was of the opinion that her husband heard what he wanted to hear and paid no attention to what he didn’t.

At this moment he obviously didn't want to hear, as he continued to chew a large carrot without any attempt to answer.

Once again his wife shouted his name, even more loudly, and this time Roland looked up, dropped his carrot, came to the front of his hutch and, with a jerk of his neck, threw one of his long lop ears back over his shoulder and turned his head a little sideways.

'Did you speak, my dear?' he said in his deep voice.

Woodsmoke sighed. She had seen this performance of her husband's so many times; it was a pantomime designed to present to the speaker his 'good' ear. But sometimes it was the left one, sometimes the right.

'Can you smell anything?' she asked.

‘Yes, my sweet,’ said Roland. ‘Carrot. Hay. And, of course, rabbit.’

‘No, no. A *funny* smell. Ambrose says he can smell a funny smell.’

‘Funny?’ said Roland. He stared with his red eyes at the four young rabbits in the opposite hutch.

The first and by far the smallest of the litter was Roly, a little lilac-coated runt named after her father. The second, April, was white with prick ears and bore, in Roland’s opinion, a great resemblance to Woodsmoke. The third, Archibald, was plump and grey-blue with lop ears. The fourth was white with grey-blue patches, and had one ear that stuck up and one that flopped down. This was Ambrose.

‘When you say “funny”, Ambrose, lad,’ said Roland, ‘do you intend to convey that this

aroma of which you are aware is an amusing one, calculated to send us all into fits of laughter? Or do you mean that it is uncommon, unusual, out of the ordinary, peculiar?’

‘Peculiar, Dad. You see, it’s not just one smell that I can smell; it’s a mixture of several.’





‘Such as?’

‘Well, there’s cat.’

‘Nothing odd in that,’ said Roland. ‘That’s the Human – he always reeks of it.’

The rabbits’ owner, whose name was Jim Johnson, kept several cats in his cottage. The cats would often snooze on Jim’s bed and as a result their smell clung to him, which, though he did not know it, was most offensive to his rabbits.

‘Yes, I know that,’ said Ambrose, ‘but it’s stronger than usual. And I think there’s another human with him, one that smells of something quite different.’

‘Like what?’ asked April.

‘I can’t smell anything,’ said Archie through a mouthful of carrot.

‘Peppermint,’ Ambrose replied thoughtfully. ‘And I can smell onions. And

bread. And some sort of flower – daisies, I think.’

‘Ambrose has a very sensitive nose,’ said Woodsmoke with a touch of pride.

‘I should think he must have a nose like a bloodhound,’ Roland said with a snort.

‘What’s a bloodhound, Dad?’ April asked.

‘A hound, my dear, is a dog, and a bloodhound is a breed of dog with an incredibly sensitive nose. If it gets a whiff of something niffy, it can track it for miles and miles.’

‘Dad,’ said Archie, ‘what’s “niffy”?’

‘Means smelly, dear boy. Pungent. Stinky. Malodorous. Anyway, Ambrose, you must try not to tell fibs. How could any rabbit possibly detect such a mixture of unrelated aromas as onions and bread and cat and peppermint and daisies all at the same time?’

At that moment footsteps were heard outside the garden shed. The door opened and in came the rabbits' owner. In one hand he carried a trug filled with onions and in the other a hunk of stale bread for his pets. Behind him came a small girl. She was holding a kitten and sucking a Polo mint. On her head was a garland made from a daisy chain.

Woodsmoke looked fondly at Ambrose, and bent her head to his upright ear. 'A nose like a bloodhound,' she whispered.



## 2

### Rabbits Just Aren't That Clever

The man set down the trug of onions and opened Woodsmoke's hutch.

'Look here, Biddy,' he said to the girl, 'Woodsmoke's had four new kits!'

Jim Johnson lived alone except for a large number of pet animals. Around his cottage, and sometimes in it, were cats and goats and hens and Muscovy ducks, and there was an

aviary full of singing birds, and a very, very old donkey in the orchard.

Biddy was Jim's niece, who had come to stay with him for part of the school holidays. Her visits to the cottage tended to involve a lot of card games, crossword puzzles and bike rides, plus a great deal of puddings. This was no great hardship for Jim. In truth, he and Biddy were mostly interested in the same sort of activities.

Biddy was almost as mad about animals as her uncle. The difference was that he had lots and she had none. Her parents said she was too young to have any pets of her own.

She sighed, peering into the hutch. 'Oh! Uncle Jim, aren't they lovely!'

Since Woodsmoke had produced her first litter a few years before, Biddy had grown very fond of rabbits. When she was younger,