

# KALE VILANDRE

## AN EXCERPT FROM *CAMPFIRE SMELL*

Seated on a log at what I decided was a more than safe distance from the flame, I deliberate over the peculiarity of the word log. I mean it is a quite unflattering word, lackluster even, it would seem to me that just using tree plus a sufficient adjective would give a better image than log, but what do I know; I'm just a lowly mathematics major entering the second half of my first year at some state university or another, 1 in 1.3 million students my age making congruent waves in their life. Maybe that's where my distaste for the word stems, logarithms, just some advanced arithmetic that was fed to me over and over since my second year of high school. I can't be sure really, I suppose there might be an awful memory of some meager teacher I had who mispronounced the common abbreviation for logarithm, log, and that somehow shaped my outlook on the word. More likely it is just one of the innumerable quantities of subconscious communications that we will never be able to quantify. I don't give psychology much credit, actually I have deemed it worthless, it couldn't stop my mother from climbing into a pint of whiskey to help wash down her fistful of antidepressants. I suppose I could make a cynical quip about the irony of that situation, but I don't have the literary experience to know if that situation even qualifies as ironic. Hell, I don't even know if there is a difference between using imagery like handful or fistful. I assume that they each hold their own connotations, both being wholly disconnected but in some unknown way are synonyms simultaneously. I mean I don't even know the disparity between psychology and psychiatry, I've been told that they are different, and in a way that could probably be described, but I am still unsure of what it is. I infer that by the end of the semester I will probably know; assuming I don't drop Psych 101, a class I am guaranteed to be uninterested by.

Just before coming to this beach, I finished reading an article on how sensory stimulation helps to increase the intensity of memories, an article that the professor had assured us would be interesting, but I found it mostly speculative and dreamy, as if the writer was composing a work of fiction not an expose for a science journal. They stated that the infliction of a sight, sound etc. could bring upon a recollection so great it could put the afflicted in psychiatric duress and could even lead to mental deterioration or straight out insanity. The piece gave me the impression that they were allowing those under psychiatric duress to do the writing, so in an attempt to relieve my frustration at having signed up for a class that will no less than torture me for the coming months I came to the beach with some friends. The engagement was not created due to my distaste for this class, my friends were planning on coming out here and had invited me, but I had declined stating mounds of homework as an excuse, however, after struggling to keep focus through the fifteen pages of outlandish guesswork I decided that I had earned a reprieve. Although now that I am here I can't help but feel a bit segregated from the others, watching them scuffle around mingling, having to talk a little louder because of the iPod boom box Jeremy had brought. Jeremy is a business major, but music is his passion, he tells everyone he is going to own his own record label someday. I used to fall quite often into these brief moments of desired seclusion, had even before my mother passed, but they have depleted in frequency since I began college. We had finally gotten the bonfire going after about a half-hour of trying by using half a bottle of vodka as accelerant. The bonfire we had made to fulfill multiple practical purposes such as heat and light, it is, you may be surprised, neither very warm or very bright along pacific coast beaches at around eleven o'clock at night, as well as simply being 'supremely cool' Randall the art major had pointed

out.

We had all brought either some booze, or some form of wood, or both for those of us who weren't paying for their own education, and luckily Jeremy's father is the manager of some shipping company and he had brought well over twenty pallets which had our bonfire much taller than I was, which is six feet on a good day. I was staring at the ground just in front of the fire, because the fire itself was almost too bright to look at and I wasn't going to chance any form of blindness, whether it be temporary or not, when I noticed Melinda staring at me half-concentrated on her conversation with Jennifer. They were both older than the rest of us, into their third and fourth years respectively, and were majoring in medicine. They had managed to pick up jobs as nurses at the local hospital just this year and hardly ever got time to just hang out. Melinda, noticing I was returning her stare excused herself from the conversation and began making her way over to me, taking a wide arc around the fire. I always call her Melinda, everyone else calls her Mel, but I have decided that a far too unattractive name for a girl as beautiful as she is.

"What are you doing way over here Scotty?" She asks as she gets close enough to speak without raising her voice.

"I don't know, just needed some time to myself I guess," I answer as she stops three feet away.

"Oh, do you want me to go then?" She asks putting a pouty look on her face.

"No, you might be just the company I needed," I reply smiling.

"So you don't mind if I sit down?" She asks playfully.

"I'd prefer it," I reply, knowing this game all too well. She sits down on the log and then inches as close to me as possible without scooting me out of my spot.

"What are you thinking about?"

"How nice it is that alcohol increases a girl's libido while concurrently lowering her judgment," I reply truthfully in a sarcastic tone.

"Hey," she says nudging me, "I've had a kind of crush on you ever since we met."

"You did?" I ask honestly startled.

"Yes I did. Why don't you have a drink?"

"I had a couple, and walked over here with one, but when I finished it I didn't feel like getting up to get another."

"Well, will you walk over with me and get another one?" She asks batting her luscious milk chocolate eyes.

"The beautiful damsel asks of the ugly servant," I narrate.

"Stop that," she says, laughing in spite of herself. "I'm serious, come get a drink with me."

"I'd be stupid to say no," I reply standing up.

"Good, I'd have been cranky if I hadn't gotten my way," she says, smirking as we make our way back to the other side of the fire. The wind, which had been at my back while I was seated on the log, seems to follow us around the fire. We arrive at the two coolers that we have all the drinks collected in and Mitch walks over from his place next to Jennifer.

"What'll it be friend?" he asks, reaching his fist out for me to bump mine on. Mitch and I have been friends since our junior year of high school after I tutored him so he wouldn't fail his math class.

"What do you have?" I ask smiling bumping his fist.

"I've got just the thing for you ... and one for your lady friend too," he says, smiling his, as every girl in our high school had said, irresistible smile. Mitch had gotten into college on a baseball scholarship, he has a wicked fastball, and is still undeclared as far as his major goes, but if you ask him he'll tell you his future is in baseball. I was apt to believe him because from what I learned about him in high school he didn't have much going for him academically, but he could make a wicked mixed drink. He sits down on a fold out chair flanked by the two coolers

and begins grabbing bottles and cans and things interchanging them between coolers pouring a little of each into two cups on the ground in front of him. After a couple of minutes of ‘Mitch’s mix-o-logy’ (his words for it not mine) he grabs a couple of plastic stirrers from a bag and put a final spin into the drinks before picking them up and handing them to us. “So you finally got up the courage to talk to Mel huh?” Mitch asks winking at me. I flash him a why-the-hell-would-you-say-that-aloud look and he laughs and pats me on the shoulder. “You kids have fun now you hear?” he says, returning to his spot next to Jen.

“Oh we will,” Melinda says and links her arm around mine as we both turn around. “What did he mean by that?” she asks smiling.

“Who knows, Mitch is a crazy customer,” I reply trying to sound cool as she leads me in the direction of the water.

“Oh come on Scotty, you can admit it. Did you have a little thing for me too?”

“You’d be hard pressed to find a guy who isn’t attracted to you Melinda.”

“Then why didn’t you act on it? I gave you plenty of opportunities.”

“You did?” I ask perplexed.

“God, Mitch said I’d have to be obvious about it, but I didn’t think I’d have to spell it out for you. I thought you were a genius.”

“I am, and chief attribute amongst geniuses is that we are socially awkward.”

“Wait, are you saying you don’t know how to flirt?”

“No, I can flirt just fine, but I wasn’t the chick magnet Mitch was in high school. Meaning I have trouble deciphering when the girl is flirting back.”

“Probably because you use words like deciphering,” she points out to which I nod, “Why do you think I invited you here in the first place?” And for the first time I take a look around. Mitch and Jennifer seated at the top of the beach tongues masterfully shoved down each other’s throats, Randall and Jeremy toward the middle of the beach, but still quite a distance from the fire, talking to Ashley and Ashleigh, although Ashleigh prefers to be called Rachel or at least she does since she got to college and was roomed with Ashley, then finally at Lisa and Graham just a few feet away from us who were playfully kissing while also removing each other’s clothing.

“This is a couple’s thing?” I say more than ask.

“You’re lucky the social awkwardness just enhances your cuteness, otherwise I don’t know how you’d get a girl,” Melinda says, leaning her chin on my shoulder as Graham and Lisa run into the waves, Lisa half-shrieks and half-laughes at the chill. For the first time I take real notice of the ocean, watching waves roll in, hearing the current flow back out, and while I take a drink of whatever concoction Mitch mixed up I feel the world get a little less clear. “What’re you thinking about?” Melinda whispers into my ear, but I barely hear her, in fact the question sounds like she’s asking it through some kind of sheet. I see the waves breaking and the resulting froth glimmer at my feet, I watch a medium size wave, which started way out at sea as a ripple making its way toward the shore, but the flat of Graham’s back gets in its way and ...

SMASH.

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