

A Walk on Plowden Moor

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The bus began to slow down. “Langston next stop ladies” the bus driver called out.

“Come on Syl, this is it,” Beth said, jumping up and dragging her rucksack from the luggage rack.

“Great; what’s the distance, twenty five miles?”

“Not quite.” Beth headed down the aisle towards the door.

“Better you than me darling.” the bus driver laughed, levering the door open, “there’ll be rain before tea time, looking at that sky”

“And a good morning to you too, driver.” cooed Syl.

“Say good morning to Mrs Brown for me.”

Beth and Syl tripped down the bus steps and dropped their rucksacks on the pavement. Opposite them was a single storied building displaying a large sign:

Mother Browns Caff
Drinks and snacks
Your last stop before Plowden Moor

“It’s a bit early Beth; do you think she’s open?”

“There’s a light on.” The girls looked at each other and headed for the door. Coffee and a snack were essential with such a long walk in front of them.

The sneaked door opened with the clink of a bell, and the café's heat hit them like a blast furnace. The café was airy, with big windows looking over the dam to the moor high above. Blue and White checkerboard tiles shone like the toes of dancing shoes, reflecting the red morning sky.

Mrs Brown was sitting behind the counter, she stood up as they entered. "Good morning girls, and what can I get you?" she asked, her round motherly face beaming a welcome.

"We'll have two injections of caffeine and toasted current teacakes to go with them, please," heading for a table by the window, with a view across the dam wall and the steep path to the moor.

Mrs Brown came to their table with a tray of coffee and toast. "You'll be tackling the moor today then," she asked.

"Yes," they chorused, their infectious laughter bringing a smile to Mrs Brown's mouth, if not her eyes.

"Done it before have you?" She asked wiping her hands on her apron.

"I did it a long time ago with my parents," Syl answered, "but this the first time on our own."

"Well you be careful; there was a nasty accident a couple of years ago." She added, "It's very boggy and some people say there's pools twenty feet deep." She nodded to the notice behind the counter.

STICK TO THE PLOWDEN PATH

Beth and Syl smiled at her, and giggled to themselves knowing they never kept to paths.

“Yes. OK Mrs. Brown, thanks for the tip. We don’t want any search parties looking for us do we?”

They tucked into their morning snacks, and then hoisted the rucksack on to their backs and made for the door. “We’re off now Mrs. Brown; if anybody does need to come looking for us we are heading for Woodlea, but it could be an eight hour walk.”

Beth and Syl paced off across the top of the dam wall towards the kissing gate, pausing for a moment to gaze at the reflection of the early rising sun in placid surface of the water. Beth glanced back towards the café; Mrs. Brown was at the window watching them. She gave Beth a nod and picked up the phone.

Beth nudged Syl, “I wonder who she’s phoning at this ungodly hour on a Sunday morning.”

“Yeh, all sane people are still in bed.”

They moved on, through the kissing gate, and began the steep slog up the path to the plateau. “God, this is a climb Syl!” Beth gasped, clamping the toe of her boot on to the rough stones.

“Short and steep, then flat as a cricket pitch,” replied Syl, trying to dig the point of her walking stick into the hard ground.

“Except a cricket pitch won’t be peaty, wet, and have puddles twenty feet deep.”

They rested as the path reached the plateau and petered out. “Beth, which direction do you think from here?” looking across the featureless sward of stubby heather.

“We are heading for Woodlea so get out the map and your compass and get us a heading.”

Syl laid the map down on the springy heather. “Due east in a straight line.”

“Fat chance of that.” muttered Beth. “There’s not a marker in sight; get the bearing and we’ll work on the compass. We’ve done it before.”

They set off at a hard pace across the virgin heather as though no man had stepped there before. Their boots stamped on tussocky tufts or sank into sucking soggy peat, every stride becoming a victory as they heaved their boots from the black mud.

“Oh Beth, my calves are bursting let’s rest a bit.”

“No keep going; we’ll have done an hour and a half soon.” Beth replied determinedly.

“OK” said Syl, breathing a sigh of resignation.

“I guess we’ll need to do two hour stints to catch that six o’clock bus Syl.”

They lurched on over the silent moor, only the curl of a curlew or a panicking flap of a disturbed grouse broke the absolute silence.

“OK Syl, let’s have a coffee; I reckon we’ve done two hours.”

Beth plonked down on to a dry mound, the heather pricking through her pants. Syl walked forward to edge of the large pool which balked their progress.

“This is a big pool Beth. I wonder how deep it is; we’ll have to skirt it, we can’t risk walking through it.”

“Right, then you’ll just have to reset...”

“Beth,” Syl interrupted, “Someone’s been here before.”

“How do you know?”

“There’s an old boot over here; come and see.”

Beth poured her coffee and walk over to her friend.

“Oh yes. I wonder how they got home,” she joked.

Beth stopped as though struck by thunder. She dropped her cup. “Syl” she screamed. “There’s a leg in that boot!”

Terrified, they gazed at the horrifying sight.

“What shall we do Syl,” her voice a terrified whisper.

“Nothing,” said a harsh male voice behind them.

They spun round. A tall slim man, dressed in a black anorak and trousers, a black scarf covering his nose and mouth. He carried a thick rope which he cracked backwards and forwards rhythmically. Another rope hung from his belt. “You’ve found my waterbabies I see,” a dead smile across his mouth. He slowly began to walk towards them.

“Which of you first?” he asked himself.

“Now mister, you stay right there and we’ll get on with our walk.” Beth said nervously.

He laughed without a smile or a light in his eyes, and he continued snapping his rope backwards and forwards. Syl and Beth looked at each other and began to relax. They eased apart, they'd practiced this situation.

"I'll take the tumble" whispered Syl, "You take the head."

They separated to about a metre apart and raised their walking sticks in front of them like quarter staffs.

"Those won't help you my darlings," he said coming towards them with slowly measured steps. Looking first at Syl and then at Beth he said out loud. "Which one of you first?"

Two hour later Beth and Syl walked back into Mother Browns. "Two injections of caffeine, Mrs. Brown please," called Beth.

Mrs Brown jumped from her seat, horror and amazement fusing her features a cement gray. "You two!"

"Yes, Mrs. Brown, and we've just dialled 999," Beth said cheerfully. Mrs. Brown's cement face turned white.

"A man followed us, and attacked us by that deep pool where those people drowned, but I think you know all about that."

Mrs. Brown nervously raised her hand to her mouth, her eyes fixed on the two girls. "He said something about we'd found his waterbabies."

Mrs Brown sank to her stool. "A relative of yours is he? Well, he sort of, fell, didn't he Syl? He'll need an ambulance; would you call one?"

The wailing police siren stopped in the car park. A burly policeman burst through the door. "And just what is going on here" his eyes switching from the girls to Mrs. Brown.

Beth and Syl both shrugged. "You'd better ask Mrs. Brown, officer, but not before she's brought our coffee."

"Oh, officer," asked Beth, "Do you know when the next bus is back to town? We need to get back for our Karate session."

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