

Lets Just Leave It

The corpse lay hidden amongst the weeds and brambles, dew kissed and frozen when we found it.

Crags hunkered down and poked at it with a stick. Flies flew up and buzzed around our heads.

A squeal escaped from my throat but I managed to disguise it with a cry of 'Gross!'

'You gotta spit now and hold your breath.' Riley said.

Me and Crags looked at him doubtfully.

'Why?' I asked.

'Germs.' He was a boy of few words.

'Germs?' I queried.

'Yep, we're breathing in dead germs.' Riley answered, spat and held his breath.

'You're turning blue.' I pointed out.

Riley turned his head away, exhaled and took in a lung full of dead germ free air. He grinned at me around inflated cheeks.

'What do you think happened?' I asked Crags.

He was our unelected leader, not because he was the biggest or the smartest, in fact he was smaller than most boys, skinny too and he had been my best friend since forever, but because Crags always had the best ideas, so when he had suggested we go up to the Moor for a mooch around, we went happily knowing that a mooch always led to an adventure.

'Car.' Exhaled Riley.

'We are on the Moor idiot, no cars up here, nearest road's miles away.' I raised my eyes heavenwards, man Riley could be dumb at times, he could also be hot headed.

'Don't call me an idiot!' He shouted, hands curled in to angry fists.

Crags stood up.

'He's not, he's sorry – but he's right. No cars up here Riley.'

'What then?' Riley demanded.

'Dead germs Riley.' I smiled, teasing him.

Riley clenched his fists once more, but breathing undead germs was more important to him right now than fighting, he turned away, spat and took another lung full of air.

Crags and me smiled at each other. Crags knelt back down and I knelt beside him.

'Jeez, that smells bad.' I said.

'Yep, it's rotting. You'll smell that bad one day.' Crags grinned at me, I shook my head laughing.

'Jeez Crags, you is sick sometimes!'

Crags shook his head.

'Nope, just a realist. Everything dies.'

'Not me!' Riley exclaimed, standing far enough way in his opinion from the polluted air. 'I'm going to live forever.'

'Not if you keep stuffing your face with egg and chips every night you're not. Your heart will pop and your soul will wander the earth searching for someone who will feed it fresh fruit once in a while.' I liked teasing Riley, he was an easy target.

Of course we were friends but sometimes when his belly swayed underneath his t-shirt and his backside wobbled whenever he ran I wondered why we let him hang out with us, he made us look like losers.

'Leave him alone, not his fault if his mum ran out on them.' Crags mumbled just loud enough for me to hear.

Riley's face was turning beetroot and his hands were getting fidgety looking to thump. I held my hands up in surrender.

'Sorry man, you know I'm only playing with you.' I declared, feeling guilty, Crags had a way of making me feel guilty.

Riley was our friend because Crags had made him our friend, that day in the school yard when we found him red eyed and alone, he had wanted to hit us both, to push us away, to leave him alone and I had been quite happy to play along but Crags had asked him if he could play marbles, he needed someone who could play the game properly because I was rubbish at it. He acted as if he did not even notice Riley's tears but he had noticed that he was hurting and needed a friend. Crags had put his hand out and Riley had taken it like a boy drowning.

'Go grab some sticks Riley, we'll make a den here. Build a fire.' Crags declared and Riley ran to do his bidding.

'You got any matches on you then?' He asked me.

'Yep, managed to sneak them out of my brother's room. Now he's 18 he can smoke in the house, just not in mum's parlour.' I pulled the prized matches out of my pocket, along with one solitary cigarette and handed them triumphantly to Craggs.

'Only one?' He asked.

I was a bit miffed, with him being a single child he obviously could not appreciate the danger I had placed myself in by going in to my big brother's room, let alone swiping a cigarette out of the packet.

'He only had a couple left, couldn't risk him spotting any going missing could I?' I asked defensively.

Craggs shrugged his skinny shoulders as if it did not matter to him either way, but it bothered me although I did not want him to see it.

Riley came running back through the brambles.

'I've got some sticks and kindling, got any matches?' He was out of breath just jogging a couple of paces. I tutted and Craggs looked sharply up at me.

'Um, Craggs, are we going to set up a fire by that thing?' Riley pointed towards the rotting corpse, the flies had begun to settle back over it.

'I figure we should give it a funeral pyre Riley, least we can do. Nothing should be left to rot up here alone. Wonder if it was scared before it died? Wonder if it felt lonely?' He said the last part quietly, almost to himself.

'Like a Viking?' Shouted Riley, still standing safely back.

'Jeez, you really are a dumb ass sometimes Riley, Vikings get pushed out to sea on their longboats then set on fire. Do you see any longboats around here or sea for that matter!' I waved my arms around the trees and brambles that surrounded us.

Craggs stood up to face me

'Actually dumb ass,' he said to me 'when a Viking died on land, say oh I don't know, say in battle away from the sea, the rest of the Vikings didn't drag the dead Viking around until they found water now did they? No they burnt them on a funeral pyre – on land. So, yes Riley, we are going to set up a funeral pyre just like the Vikings.'

I wanted to punch his smug little lights out right there and then, but he was Craggs, he was my best friend since forever so I turned away and began to collect more fire wood.

'Well, we are going to need a hell of a lot more wood if we are going to burn that thing.' I huffed.

Together we collected the wood and then stones to make the fire pit, I struck the match and held the burning flame to the kindling. At first I doubted if it would take at all, it was still quite early and the small sticks we had collected were slightly damp, but then the smoke began to turn and the flames began to lick and curl their way into and around the wood.

'So, who is going to move that thing? Because I am not going to touch it, it might have a disease.' Riley stated and this time I did not think he was so dumb, in fact what he said made an awful lot of sense.

'And the flies Craggs, Jeez I do not want to go near those flies again.' I said.

Craggs sat by the fire, gazing in to its flames, lost in his own thoughts.

'Lets just leave it, may be we should just leave it there?' Riley suggested hopefully.

Craggs nodded and I breathed a sigh of relief.

'You two can leave it if you like but I can't.' He said.

'What do you mean you can't? It's simple, we smoke the fag, we have a laugh, we go home and forget about it. It's nothing to us - is it, not really – not as if we killed it or anything!' Craggs was beginning to irritate me.

He looked at me, said nothing and continued to stare in to the flames.

'Jeez Craggs sometimes ...' my words trailed off, I did not know what else to say to him, I could not put in to words that sometimes he just made me so bloody mad.

'School next week.' Riley interrupted, breaking the awkward silence between us. 'Can't believe we get to go to the Comp.'

'I'm not.' Craggs said.

'What do you mean Craggs?' Riley looked stunned, he would be lost without Craggs.

'Light the fag and pass it over will you?' Craggs asked me.

He took a drag on the cigarette and coughed slightly as he exhaled the smoke.

'Not sure how I was going to tell you boys, but the thing is I passed it, I passed my 11 plus, my parents are going to send me to the Grammar School.'

I looked incredulously at him, Riley's mouth fell open and he turned pale as if he had taken a blow to the stomach.

Jumping up I kicked out at the fire.

'So just when were you going to tell us Craggs? Or did you think it would be a good laugh if I turned up at the Comp alone with just fags there as a mate? Jeez Craggs I thought you would always have my back, I thought you were my friend!' I shouted.

'I am your friend, I will always be your mate. We can still meet up, it's not as if I am leaving or dying or anything. We can meet up after school – can't we?'

I turned away from both of them and from the rotting corpse.

'Where are you going?' They shouted after me.

'Away from you that's where!'

That was the last time I saw Craggs. Me and Riley we started at the Comprehensive the following week but I quickly discovered that although I was rubbish at marbles I was bloody good at football, so I made the team in the first year and by the second year I was made captain of the team, I was popular.

'Cover that up tubs!' Ben threw the towel at Riley's stomach and the rest of the boys guffawed as Riley went red and hurried to dress.

Ben came and sat beside me on the bench on the other side of the changing room, I did not bother talking to Riley any more, he was just a face in the crowd to me now.

'Did you hear about what happened up on the Moor over the weekend?' Ben asked me.

'No.' I replied.

'They found a kid's body hanging from an old tree up there.'

'Jeez, that's gross. Why would anybody do that? Any idea who it was?' I asked.

'Some local kid who went to the grammar school. Here, Joe your dad he works on the local paper, what was the name of that kid up on the Moor again?' Ben called over to Joe.

Joe turned and shouted back.

'I think, yep, certain it was Robert something or other. Robert Craggsworth I think.'

Riley turned slowly round and looked directly at me, this time I did not turn away.

'Craggs.'

END

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