

The Walk

By Alice Griffin

Enid sunk her feet into her pair of well-worn boots. Sitting on the bottom step of the hallway stairs her fingers carried out the well-practiced routine of threading laces through the eyes before passing them around the hooks and tying a neat bow. Monty, her playful spaniel, nudged her arm in eagerness. The wind was howling outside the cottage, but the Yorkshire sky was blue. Enid's hand hovered for a few moments before lifting the warm but non-waterproof coat from the brass hook on the wall. She zipped up the jacket, opened the heavy wooden door and braced herself for the elements.

Walking along the lane Enid buried her chin into a warm scarf knitted by her granddaughter, Holly, Christmas just gone. Holly, at 11 years old, had been so pleased with her creation that she was jumping with excitement for Enid to open it before she could even pass her own gifts out to her only grandchild. The rainbow of colours, the softness of the yarn and the sweet wooden buttons sewed on askew, meant it was cherished with even more love and fondness for this little girl, so shy and unsure and yet so strong and definite. Monty ran on ahead, the stone walls and bare trees of winter that flanked the lane unnoticed by him, as bouncy and as enthusiastic as if it were spring.

Spring sighed Enid as she remembered with fondness walking this same track as a young child with her mother alongside. Red Campion, Primroses; an aroma of life filling the air, back then Enid had skipped barefooted and now, as she

snuggled further into her scarf, she smiled at the memory of soft grass between her small delicate toes. They would take their first picnic of the year further up into the hills, eating their hard-boiled eggs in silence, all the while looking out across the Dales with a contentedness that felt smooth and slippery as it glided down from soft smiles and inwards toward warm hearts.

It had been the summer of Enid's twelfth year when a chink appeared on this sweet un-encumbered childhood. Her father didn't want to be a farmer anymore, her mother had said. *"Now it's just you and me, love"*. Enid had felt confused, but in those days there was no discussion of affairs or growing apart, not like now. So on they went, mother and daughter, tending to the sheep, working quietly alongside each other, united by their love for this landscape.

And what a sweet life it had been here in the hills. A life of wild flowers and hay bales, evening light and laughter and it was the autumn that became Enid's favourite season for it was October when her beautiful daughter, Laura, had been born. A child so sweet with the warmest of auburn hair, a child so wanted, so cherished and borne of nothing but love between Enid and her beloved Michael. Michael, thought Enid fondly as she picked up a damp gnarled stick to throw for Monty. Michael had brought such joy to her life and she missed him every day.

This winter would be the third without him and though she still longed for him with a deep ache, it was the landscape that drove her on. For 76 years this had been her home; this white rendered farmhouse on a remote Dale and her spirit was at the centre of it all, in tune with each season: watching, learning, loving,

losing, remembering, laughing, yearning. She was a well-worn woman in well-worn boots, walking a well-worn path that knew her so well, and for that she was glad.