

No man is an island.

This was the life, working on the scout-camp service crew and earning merits for at least three badges. So far today, Daniel had served in the tuckshop, fired the incinerator and cleaned the toilets.

The refrain that now echoed around Poggle's Wood Scout Camp Site on this Indian-summer afternoon was, 'if it moves, salute it; if it stands still, paint it'.

The flagpole and the A-frame that the camp bell hung from, received their slap and dash – time to freshen up the Chapel.

Stripped to the waist, Daniel dipped his brush into the gallon pot of white-wash. Fully loaded, he slapped and smeared the paint onto the rope and picket fence before moving on to the altar, crafted out of a single tree-trunk. As he toshed, thin snails' trails of white, danced in the air, then fell to adorn the parched grass.

An hour later and he lent back on a beech tree and surveyed his labour. A good job, but what had he missed?

The cross.

High above the altar, the lichen-stained cross desperately needed a lick and a spit. Ah, that was what the ladder was for. He pitched it, ascended and hooked the paint-pot over the ladders-horns. Lost in the pleasures of chasing away earwigs with the brush, Daniel dribbled white-wash into all the cross' weathered canyons.

CRACK.

'Shit... Oh God...Stupid....'

Daniel immediately spotted his mistake.

The top rung of the ladder was pitched against the cross not against the tree itself. His weight had dislodged the cross, which had fallen and was now crucifying him.

He dug in his shoulder and hugged on for dear life.

No bolt from the blue, just his own cock-up.

The cross lurched, the ladder shuddered, a tremor ran up his ham-string

Why? What had he done to deserve this?

Closer in more ways than one to the almighty, Daniel's guilt racked mind triggered overdrive.

'Sorry God; Sorry.'

Invocation shadowed benediction.

'Please.'

'Sorry for nicking that Crunchie from the tuckshop, cos the miser Camp-Warden, never thanked you for anything.'

'Sorry for walking in on the Akala in the lady's toilets when she was washing in just her bra. I promise I knocked first; twice!'

'Sorry for subsequent immoral thoughts.'

Divine prayers soared; Daniel breathed deep.

Tacky white-wash anointed his torso. He had to relieve the crush of this Crystal Maze predicament.

What would Bear do?

Plan B, he bounced the ladder away from the tree.

Nearly.

Again, but not quite.

Third time lucky and gravity pulled the cross earthwards. The floating island ladder, hung in time, before finally crashing back against the tree, on which Daniel immediately planted a smacker. Through bark splintered lips he exhaled.

'Thaaaank you.'

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The camp bell tolled, proclaiming the Sunday service.

Chapel was heaving so Daniel stood at the rear.

On the last dong, the Vicar began his liturgy.

'Ask not for whom the bell tolls...'

Daniel's cracked lips smiled wryly up to the resplendent cross.

He swore it winked. 'Not yet for thee.'

500 words

An alternative narrative to Ernest Hemmingway's – For whom the bell tolls.