



(Exit, pursued by a bear.)

Shakespeare at the zoo

“We’re supposed to be rewriting Shakespeare, not messing about researching Polar Bears.” Amy was always grumpy before the keepers brought their morning fruit.

“Not rewriting, writing all over again. But Polar Bears are more interesting. I saw some in the zoo once.” Adam always had a reply for Amy. Of course, he was the leader and was expected to keep everyone in order.

“When?” Amy was brave, questioning him, but then she was always brave. “When you went to the hospital?” Adam just sniffed but Antony looked admiringly at him. A trip to the hospital was an adventurous thing to have undertaken, even if occasioned by a septic toe. The grand outing had spawned enough tales to keep Adam’s image glowing with glory.

“They eat sheep.” Alan looked up from his research and announced this fact to the assembled group. “Well, they eat meat of any kind really, but at the zoo they eat sheep meat. It says here.” He gestured towards the screen. There was a silence, broken by Adam scratching his head.

“Any meat? You mean...” Perhaps a Polar Bear wouldn’t make such a good hero for their story after all. He shuddered and remembered the delicate look of the railings around the enclosure.

“But you’d keep us safe, wouldn’t you?” He knew without looking that that was Antony, so certain and trusting.

“It’s only a story, Antony,” he said, and Amy laughed, pointing at Antony and chuckling, her sides heaving with mirth.

“But you really would?” Antony was insistent and Adam reached out to fondle his head.

“I’m not God, Antony, even in the story,” he reminded him. “But I’d do my best. You know I would.” They all nodded, even Amanda, who was, as usual, distracted by the antics of baby Bill.

“None of us believe in God,” said Charles, leader of one of the other groups. There were about a hundred of them in the huge room and sometimes rivalries and tempers threatened to wreck the supposedly literary atmosphere. “I’m not sure,” he went on, “that we believe in you, Adam, or even in your hospital trip.”

There was a brief but extremely loud scuffle. When order had been restored Adam watched Charles walk away, cowed for the moment but hardly defeated. Charles looked, he thought, a little like a goat, with his wispy beard and the way his ears stuck up like horns. And those slitty eyes... He looked out of the window towards the enclosure where the petting animals grazed and browsed contentedly in the children’s corner. Yes, a goat. Perhaps the next stage in the plotting of the story would involve tethering Charles as bait for the bear. It was turning into quite an epic, with villains and heroes and suspense.

Antony was tugging at his arm, chattering in excitement at seeing his own hero defeat a rival. Antony’s attentions were very satisfying, Adam decided. He fondled the youngster again in a proprietorial manner and they settled to grooming each other, only half aware of Alan and Amy, who were considering a sub-plot of romance.

“If we had Adam and Antony...” Amy began.

“But we thought in terms of a Romeo and Juliet theme,” said Alan.

“Romeo and Romeo would have been just as intriguing,” Amy told him. “And now that you’ve introduced bears I think we have a bestseller on our hands.” And so saying, she grinned before peeling and munching noisily on a banana. The fruit had arrived and all was well with her world.



Frustration

It was really extremely annoying.

He had been studying the new layout all day. Previously, when food had been loaded onto the platform it had been the work of moments to climb the pole and demolish the pile of goodies. Then, for some bizarre reason, they had greased the pole.

It had taken a few days to work out a route. There was a rope strung across the area diagonally. Sometimes it hosted an array of damp cloth and he found it hard to negotiate but usually he could simply skim along, leap to the feeding platform and indulge. He thought they might move the rope so that even a prodigious leap would not take him to the platform, but really, why should they?

He was sure the changes, like the greased pole, and the occasional cloth hangings could not be directed at him. The food was still put out regularly and even though some birds came to peck and play there was always plenty left. He knew he didn't frighten the birds, much; they knew he was not a predator so it was a case of live and let live.

And now, today, there were new hazards.

The rope was still there. There were no damp cloths. But there were strange translucent plastic shapes with the rope running through them. When he tried to navigate one it skittered and whirled so that he was decanted to the ground. He tried again. Same result. A starling was, he thought, laughing at him.

The platform was full of delicious snacks and besides, he was hungry. He chittered angrily and felt that the snap and click from the stone hole near the feeder was perhaps the last straw. He had a vague idea that the food providers were laughing at him, too, and somehow recording his despair.
