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JOTTY JO'S NOTEBOOK

Josephine was one of those girls who had difficulty fitting in. Perhaps it was to do with her interests which may have seemed a little odd to others. She was very particular about the way things ought to be. In her mind, order was everything and she had a routine that never varied. School friends often made fun of her when she set up her desk: pen and pencil to the back, glasses on the left and directly in front her notebook. She was always writing things in it which earned her the nickname Jotty Jo. She would spot a bird on the grass in the school playground. First she would check her watch and note the time - 12.05 pm; then in went the description - magpie with damaged wing. For Josephine, everything had to fit in with the way she saw it and wished it to be. Even her lunch was always the same. The other children would laugh, and one in particular Carly who was very mean said: "Look, Jotty Jo's having her same-same lunch - a cheese sandwich, an apple, an orange, and a plastic bottle of water. She'd have to be the most boring person on the planet!"

Her mother didn't think it funny at all. In fact she was concerned that her daughter wasn't like other girls of her age and had suggested she might like a change, but Josephine wouldn't hear of it. In the hopes that it could be helpful she suggested she join an out-of-school group, maybe the Girl Scouts. "They have all sorts of interesting activities," she explained.

"Like what?" asked Jo.

"Well..." Her mother paused to recall what she had done when she was a girl scout. "They teach you to make a fire without matches; how to tie different knots; and they go camping."

Josephine was reluctant at first, but she supposed it wouldn't hurt to give it a try. The first time she went to a Scout meeting, the young girl was both wary and nervous, not knowing what to expect. She imagined the girls in the group would be the same as the pupils at school and they would start making fun of her; but she was quite surprised when they didn't. "The girls I met first were really happy to welcome me," she told her mother that evening. "Then, who should arrive but Carly from school, and she was mean as usual."

"Maybe she'll change over time," suggested her mother encouragingly. Her daughter was obviously doubtful about that, but she said nothing. "Anyway, did you learn anything on your first day?"

"Oh, yes," said Jo. "The leader, Swamp Hen, was very friendly; and she taught us how to make a bowline - that's a kind of loopy thing you do with rope. I can show you, if you like." Her mother found an old length of clothesline and Josephine set about tying a bowline with it. Before she did, however, she checked her notebook. "I wrote down the way to do it so I wouldn't forget," she explained, "And I did a little drawing, see..." Her mother glanced at the notepad and smiled, thinking to herself that this was one of her daughter's habits that would never change. Not that it mattered.

A few weeks passed and Josephine reported back to her mother after each of the Girl Scout meetings, checking her notebook to make sure she didn't miss something new she'd learned.

"Yes, I am enjoying it," she replied to her mother's question, "Well, almost, but I haven't managed to earn a badge yet. All the other girls have some, and, Carly has at least five."

"I'm sure you'll earn a badge soon, dear," said her mother. "Perhaps you'll get one on the camp next weekend."

As the time for the camp came closer, Josephine was becoming quite excited, which was strange really because sports and activities at school had never appealed to her. This Girl Scout camp, though, promised to be different; at last she liked to think it would. Her mother dropped her off at the hall where the group held its meetings; and gave her a final wave as her daughter climbed onto the bus. "I hope she'll be alright," she whispered to herself; then: "Stop worrying, of course she will."

The camping ground was a grassy field where the girls began putting up the tents. Josephine and one of the other girl scouts were struggling a bit with theirs. They had all they needed - the tent itself, tent pegs, guy ropes and a number of plastic rods. Wilma was fiddling with them and frowning. "I can't figure how they go together," she said.

"Hang on a minute," said Josephine, and she pulled out her notepad. "Here, look," she said pointing to the open page. "That's the way to do it - steps one, two, three and four."

"Good one, you," chirped Wilma. "At least now we won't look like a couple of ninnies."

Swamp Hen certainly didn't think so when she came round to inspect. "You two put up your tent quicker than all the rest, and it looks absolutely perfect."

"That's thanks to Jo and her notebook," said Wilma.

Once all the tents were set up it was time to prepare the evening meal, and to do that they had to light a fire. Carly was ready and waiting. "That's my job," she declared proudly, "And I've got the badge to prove it. All I need now is a piece of bark and some dry grass." She panned her gaze around the group and paused when she spotted Jo. "Could you get them for me, Jotty?"

No please or thank you, thought Jo as she walked to the edge of the bordering bush land. Still, she decided, Carly having been a girl scout for a long time, she probably imagined herself to be very important. And she did seem to know a lot more than most, so Jo figured she could learn something from her; in this instance, how to make fire with a piece of bark and some dry grass. She found what was needed and gave Carly the piece of bark which she set on the ground; then she rubbed the bunch of dry grass between her fingers so that it dropped like crumbs onto the bark. Next she produced a stick. One end of this sat in the grass crumbs. Carly closed both of her flat palms on either side of the stick and began moving them back and forth very fast, spinning the stick. "It's about friction," she informed anyone who cared to listen.

Josephine for one did, and as she watched Carly performing her fire-making skills, Jo wrote every detail in her notebook. It seemed to be taking a long time for little result. At one point, Carly paused with her stick-spinning to look up. "I see you're still scribbling, Jotty. You never know, you might get a badge for it." As she went back to her fire-making, she muttered: "But I very much doubt it." A few long minutes later there was no sign of fire, not even a puff of smoke. Carly thought the grass might have been damp and she glared at Jo as if it was her fault, before resuming her labours. Finally she gave up. One of the girl scouts, Sharon, was disappointed: "I guess that means cold stuff for tea." Hearing this, the others groaned.

Not Josephine, though. Hurrying back to her tent, she dived in, rummaged in her bag and came out with the solution - a box of matches. "That's like cheating," grumbled Carly.

Jo handed her the matches. "Not if *you* use them, seeing as you're the fire maker. Your choice. I don't really mind - I brought a cheese sandwich, just in case."

Thanks to the matches, there was soon a small fire blazing. "You might like to help with the cooking, Josephine," suggested Swamp Hen. "You could earn a badge for that."

As it happened, there was no badge for Jo. Because she spent too much time writing everything down, she managed to burn the sausages; and the baked beans almost dried out in the pan. Most of the girls didn't mind, and with the addition of some slices of bread which

Josephine wasn't allowed to toast, everyone was satisfied. Once the washing up was done, Swamp Hen had them sit in a circle as she explained: "Tomorrow you will be doing some orienteering: put simply, that's finding your way using a map. Certain items have been placed in the bush and you have to solve the clues to find them, then bring them back. That way I'll know that you have followed the instructions I am about to give you..."

This was the part where Josephine came into her own, jotting down whatever Swamp Hen said. "I'm glad you did that, Jo," said Wilma that night when the two girls were settling down in their tent. "At least we won't have to rely on memory. Mine's shocking - I've already forgotten most of the instructions."

The following day, the group of girl scouts set off; on their own, though, because Swamp Hen wasn't going with them. Naturally, Carly was reading the map; another skill she had a badge for. "First we have to follow the track until we come to a thicket," she said, "And in case anyone doesn't know, that's a clump of skinny trees so dense that you can't push through them..."

"Which is why we have to walk left around the thicket to find another track," said Jo, reading from her notes.

"Thank you, Jotty," sneered Carly, "And if you don't mind, I'm the leader of this expedition, and I say where we have to go." Then she went on to repeat exactly what Josephine had said. Smiles appeared on the faces of the girls; and they quickly disappeared when Carly looked in their direction. "Right," she ordered, "Follow me, and stay together."

To find the first item they had to leave the track and work their way through the bush. Every so often, Carly would halt to check all the girls were still with her. Usually the rest were, except for Josephine who kept pausing to write things in her notebook. Carly called out: "Come on, Jotty! You're holding everyone up." And once Jo had caught up, she asked irritably: "What have you been doing?"

"Just writing things down," replied Josephine, waving her notebook. "There are lots of flowers and other really interesting things."

Carly scowled. "Whatever. Can you try to keep up? We're close to where the first item is. We have to look for something and the clue is Y." As they walked on, one of the girls spotted a strip of yellow ribbon hanging from a tree branch and she pointed to it. "Well done, Tess. Now, eyes peeled everyone as we look for the second item."

Jo checked her notebook and said: "The clue is B."

Off they went again, turning this way and that; Carly following the route of the map, trying to ignore Jotty who kept falling behind as she wrote more things in her book. They found the next item which was a blue sock; then the final one - a red bandana. By this time they were deep into the bush and it was decided they should take a break before heading back to camp. Carly was behaving strangely. She kept turning the map around, made a quick scan of the surroundings, looked up to the sky; then frowned at the map and turned it again. Finally, she announced: "We may have a problem. I know from the map how we got here, but the sky's clouded over and I can't see the sun, so I don't know which way's north." With a long sigh, she added: "I think we may be lost."

Hearing this, the girls were really worried and one of them had begun to cry. Josephine went to her and crouched down. "It's okay Sharon. We aren't really lost, and we don't need to know where north is. We don't even need a map. I know the way back to camp." She patted her notebook. "The route we came by is in here. All we have to do is follow it backwards."

"Yeah, right," sneered Carly. Strutting over, she thrust out a hand. "Let me see." Opening Josephine's book, she thumbed through a few pages and declared: "I don't see any route in here. It's just the names of plants and what they look like. And what's DOC-TBRA-VP supposed to mean?"

"Those are the first letters of what I saw on the way here; and they are all listed in the order that I saw them," explained Josephine. She pointed to a gap in the bush. "See just through

there is a pine tree. We walked right past it and it's the last letter in DOC-TBRA-VP. We go back past the pine..." she paused to read her notes. "...then we'll eventually come to a patch of Aloe Vera - that's the A-V. Once we get there..." She paused again. "...We turn left at the rock - R - and keep going until we come to a big tangle of bracken - B. That wasn't looking too well, by the way," she commented in passing.

Much to Carly's disgust, the group set off; relying not on her map-reading skills, but Jotty Jo's notebook. Once past the bracken they turned right and continued for a while until they came to a track lined by a long strip of clover - C-T for clover trail. Next was a real find for Josephine - a wild orchid, O. And finally the group was approaching a carpet of yellow dandelions, D. "The camp's just the other side of those trees, said Josephine with a beaming smile." Carly merely scowled and muttered under her breath.

Swamp Hen was delighted as her girl scouts returned; and particularly so since they had solved the clues and found the three items. The leader was also very amused as the girls chattered excitedly about how Josephine had led them safely back to camp. "And without using the map?" she commented in surprise. "That was clever. I think maybe we need to award a badge for that..."

Back home, Jo's mother was so pleased when she listened to her daughter's account of the events. "And what are those two bits of paper safety-pinned to your sleeve?" she asked.

"They're the badges I won," said Jo proudly. "Well, they'll have to do for now until the cloth ones are made." She touched the top square of paper. "This will be replaced by the Pathfinder's badge."

"And what about the other?" asked her mother.

Josephine grinned. "Camp Notetaker. Some of the girls suggested Jotter, but Swamp Hen thought that didn't sound important enough and was a bit silly. I didn't care either way because I doubt any girl scout in the whole world has a badge like that."

Her mother smiled. "No, dear, I don't expect they have."