

In the 4th form at Scarborough Boys High

we were set an essay on the proverb:

It is always darkest the hour before dawn.

I wrote a story about a poor family, the dad a shepherd living in a shabby tied house in the wilds beyond Broxa.

One spring Sunday morning they got up early about 4 am while it was yet dark and dressed the sleepy children, a baby, a toddler, two little boys and two little girls.

For breakfast just some stale bread with a bit of Stork marg.

Can you tell the difference?

Then they set off walking in the dark,

dad carrying the toddler and chivvying the two lads,

mum carrying the baby and chivvying the two lasses.

Their short cut through the forest turned into a long cut with stinging nettles and briars and brambles tearing their skin.

They reached a sleepy Hackness at 8 am, the children splashing in the stream, cooling themselves in the hot morning sun.

Some lambs had escaped and were running amok on the road: the kids helped their dad, a truly good shepherd, drive them back into the fold.

They plodded up and over the steepest of hills, at Scalby Nabs the tired and tetchy children heartened by the peal of bells.

They sped down Hay Brow and reached St Laurence's a minute after ten, crashing through the door, just as the hymn struck up: Jesus Christ is risen today.

All eyes in the church turned and stared at this family, poor, sweaty, hungry, bedraggled: not quite the Scalby look.

Lots of people tutted, but then the kindly churchwarden greeted them, showing them to the front pew, pride of place, usually reserved for members of the invisible men society.

Though tired the family sang the Easter hymns lustily.

One girl, no doubt hallucinating after the long hot walk,
claimed that as the sun shone through the East Window
Jesus himself came down from the cross, risen from the dead,
giving her a beaming smile, greeting her with open arms.

I suppose Mary Magdalene and Tabitha called Dorcas
set the bar for dark hours springing resurrection.

All lost lambs hearing the true voice
of Christ the Good Shepherd calling them home

Back to my essay, our teachers at the Boys High were stellar.
Les Brown, head of French, was sidesmen here, a tad forgetful.
In the 4th form he awarded me 85% in the French exam
even though I had never ever studied a word of the subject.
He was so respected that the mark held, despite my protesting.
Jim Lawson was our form teacher, also a church attender.
He went on to be head of Geography at Pindar in Eastfield
where a 15 year old thug set on him.

Jim could handle himself, so threw the thug out of the window.

Fortunately they were on the ground floor.

I connect him, though, with another window.

In Christian Aid week 1971 he pencilled a massive C & A

on our class window, got out a roll of sellotape and said

‘I want you to cover the letters with 10p coins.’

And we did, twenty quid’s worth, a week’s wages back then.

Not all our teachers were Christian.

Mr Kopp the Russian teacher refused to say grace before lunch.

Mr Rice, our English teacher, had had faith beaten out of him

in a Japanese POW camp and often mistook us for his torturers.

He could be very scathing, even violent,

so I was not sure how he would greet my essay.

But he totally raved about it. That’s the thing about Easter.

Surrounded by sorrow, expecting only darkness and death

you are surprised by light and life in all its fullness.