

AMONG THE DEPARTED

A Constable Molly Smith Novel

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"I hate you."

"That's too bad because I love you, but you still have to take a timeout."

"No!"

"Jamie, go into the tent and stay there until you're told you can come out."

"No."

"I'm going to count to three and if you are not in that tent, you won't be allowed out for hot chocolate. One..."

Jamie wanted to stick out his tongue but he didn't dare. That really made his mum mad.

Poppy pulled a face at him from behind their mother's back.

Poppy could stick out her tongue. Poppy could do whatever she wanted. It was her stupid fault he was in trouble. It was always her fault.

"Two..."

Jamie turned and stomped across the campsite to the tent, stamping his feet as loudly as he could. He stretched as he entered, but still didn't quite brush the top of the door.

Stupid tent. Stupid camping. Stupid Canada.

He wanted to go home.

He gave his sleeping bag a good satisfying kick before throwing himself onto it.

He wanted to cry, but at five years old Jamie Paulson was too old to cry.

This was supposed to be an adventure. Dad had said they'd see grizzly bears and hear wolves and catch fish and cook over a fire and live like Indians.

Yesterday they saw a squirrel.

He heard a wolf last night, after he and Poppy went to bed, when Mum and Dad were sitting around the fire, but Poppy said it was Dad trying to be scary.

Stupid girls. Ruin everything.

Fishing was boring. Dad stood on the side of the river and threw a line in and pulled it out again. So far he hadn't even had a bite, never mind catching enough fish to feed the whole

family. And take some back to Granny, which is what he'd said he'd do.

When Jamie had thrown a stone into the water, Dad got mad and said he was scaring the fish away.

"Fishing is stupid."

"It's not the fish, Jamie," Dad said with that sigh that meant he was not happy, "It's the fishing. Peace, quiet, relaxation."

Peace and quiet were stupid. Jamie stared at the roof of the tent. He didn't know why adults wanted peace and quiet anyway. Dad wouldn't let them bring their new DVD player on the camping trip, and Poppy got in a snit when ordered to leave her iPod behind.

They were in Canada for a whole month, them and Granny, visiting Aunt Maureen and Uncle Henry. Jamie expected it would be more fun than this. He'd bragged to all his mates back home that they were going to be having adventures in Canada, riding horses and climbing mountains and staying in really big houses. Instead Aunt Maureen and Uncle Harvey lived in a middle unit of a townhouse row in Abbotsford, a home even smaller than Jamie's family's new bungalow in London.

He grudgingly had to admit that the mountains, some with snow still on the tops even though it was late summer, were pretty neat, and the Vancouver aquarium was brilliant, and so were the totem poles at the museum. He'd asked why no one was looking

after the totem poles, just letting them rot and fall down. The museum guide said the Haida (Jamie said the word out loud, to hear it on his tongue) believed totems should have a natural life, like people and animals. Jamie liked that. His dog Rusty died before they came on this stupid trip, and Dad had told him death was part of life.

If Rusty had been here, this would have been a great vacation.

Dad asked Poppy to come down to the lake with him and get water to boil for coffee and hot chocolate. Poppy huffed and puffed, but Jamie heard branches break as she got up off her fat arse and followed him.

He smelled smoke and heard the pop and hiss of the campfire.

Mum wasn't a very good cook, nowhere near as good as his friend's Michael's mum who'd worked in a restaurant before she got married, but Jamie had to admit the food was pretty good cooked over a fire. They ate Canadian food like hot dogs and hamburgers, and before going to bed they drank hot chocolate and toasted marshmallows on sticks over the fire. He liked to let his marshmallow catch fire, and watch the flames leaping into the darkening sky. He couldn't eat them like that, burned black, and Mum said he was wasting food, but he still did it.

They had not caught and eaten any fish.

They had not seen grizzly bears or wolves.

Jamie pushed the sleeping bag aside and sat up.

If Dad didn't spend all his time trying to catch a fish, and Mum wasn't always reading and saying stuff like "It's so lovely and quiet" maybe they would have seen some bears. Bears aren't going to come to where people are making fires and talking. And Poppy used so much of her stupid perfume the bears wouldn't come within a mile of the camp.

He could find bears. They'd been told grizzly bears were dangerous and sometimes attacked people, but he was little so he could be really quiet. He'd find a bear fishing in the river and sit behind a rock and watch. Maybe the bear'd throw the fish onto the rocks and he could grab a couple to bring back to Dad.

He'd show them that he wasn't a baby to be sent to the tent for a time out.

Jamie rolled up his blanket and stuffed it into his sleeping bag, and then he put Pinky, his elephant, into the bag. He pulled off his cap and put it on the elephant and adjusted the toy so only the top of the brown head lay on the pillow.

Then he crawled to the tent door and peeked out. Dad and Poppy were down by the river and Mum had her head in the car's boot, searching for something.

Jamie dashed for the woods.