

# Wendy

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We had decided we were not meant for each other.

Perhaps we had waited too long to get married, my mother said.

Anyway, after six months of hoping, it was over, time to move on to pastures new.

The weather forecast for the early May holiday weekend was looking good, lots of sun, light winds and dry.

I looked out my old single tent and applied a waterproof spray to the flysheet. When I dug out my biggest rucksack and began packing, a leaflet dropped out of the map pocket. It had been issued by the National Park Authority. As I studied it, the memory came back. I had been part of my YF group on a challenge to climb Ben Lomond for charity when I first met Susan. Her YF group was doing the same thing. When we discovered we were all walking for Christian Aid, we joined up into one long noisy gaggle, taking the easy route up and down.

The YF groups had been racing each other on the final stretch. Susan had twisted her ankle. My friend Iain and I had helped her down to the minibuses, piggy-backing her in turns.

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Early on the Friday morning I set out in my Mini Estate van and headed to Rowardennan where I called in at the hotel and made a booking for the Sunday night to stay over. This allowed me to park my car.

After a large helping of lentil broth with crusty bread, they made me a huge batch of sandwiches packed into a Tupperware box and filled my second flask to the brim with the other soup of the day, cream of broccoli.

I set off, taking the long way around the base of Ben Lomond, following the map on the leaflet. I was on the West Highland Way for the first part of the walk and it was busy.

After an hour or so, I turned to my right at the signpost and started to climb. Ahead I saw something, stopped, crouched behind thick bushes, focused my binoculars on the area where I had seen the movement.

Three big hairy feral goats, standing stock still, chewing the cud.

Years earlier I had read of a man who had obtained permission from the Park Authority to capture twenty females and take them to a large enclosure near Inverness where he started a herd of cashmere goats, introducing a new Cashmere Billy every other year.

I watched them browsing and then, standing right in front of me was a tiny newborn.

I fiddled in my rucksack for my camera but this spooked my new friends.

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'Billy the Kid', I decided he was called, bleated, turned and scampered back to mum and suddenly I was alone again.

Moving on, the trail wound up above the tree-line.

I turned to view the scene below me: Loch Lomond and its islands. Tiny waves glinting in the bright sunshine, a few white sails and a small group of jet skiers racing towards Luss on the far side.

I took around a dozen shots using wide angles and zoom.

I resumed my walk and after a further hour or so, The wind began to increase and out of a clear blue sky spits of rain began to fall. I decided it would be best to look for a flat area to set up camp and found a level piece of ground beside a tiny burn.

This turned out to be a good decision. The clouds raced in from the southwest and with them, heavier rain began to fall.

Inside my one-man tent I zipped myself into my sleeping bag and delved into my rucksack thinking:

*Time to have a snack and a cup of soup.*

I found my soup flask but the mound of sandwiches from the hotel were missing. Kicking myself, I realised I had probably left them behind when I pulled out my camera to try to capture the goats. Or perhaps when I was taking the photos of Luss and Loch Lomond.

Instead I had to make do with a banana, an apple and a bar of mixed nuts.

I lay back, plugged in my earphones and listened to my favourite tracks.

The rain turned heavier and the wind started to howl.

It was only just after seven but it was dark outside. I hung up my tiny storm lantern and fished out by latest novel and tried to read, hoping it might tip me over into sleep.

It worked. I drifted off.

Then a voice I thought I knew shouted over the storm.

'Hello. Is there anyone in there?'

I pushed myself up into a sitting position, put on my head torch and unzipped.

Standing in the downpour was Susan:

'Hi, fancy meeting you here!'

'Donald, is that really you?'

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'No, It's my twin, actually. Donald is safe and dry at the Rowardennan Hotel.'

'Donald, stop larking about, it's serious. Fiona has broken her ankle, we think. Can you come and help, please?'

'OK, give me a minute.'

My BB Badge training kicked in. I re-loaded my rucksack with the first aid kit and the space blanket on top, wiggled out of the tent, zipped it up and off we set.

Ten minutes was all it took. Fiona, ( Susan's younger sister), was sitting inside a domed two-person tent. She looked quite chirpy, despite her injury.

'Donald! Where did you spring from?'

'Well, I was doing a charity parachute jump near Cumbernauld Airport and the wind got up and well, here I am.'

Fiona replied:

'Oh Donald, stop it. Look, I think we panicked. Actually, it's not that sore, not really.'

'Well, let me have a look. Wiggle your toes. Any pain?'

'No, not much, not really. But I've had two paracetamol. '

'When was this?'

'About an hour ago, just after Susan went off to find help.'

'I think we should bind you up and try to get you comfortable. It's too risky to go out in this storm. In fact, I don't think I should go out either so, if you don't mind, I'll stick with you guys until it's light enough. If it gets painful again, you could try another two paracetamols.'

Susan spoke, suspicion in her tone:

'Donald, why are you away up here? Are you alone in that wee tent?'

'No, not really.'

'Who is it?'

'Do you remember Wendy?'

**'Wendy?'** Wendy who?

'Wend-dee Red, Red, Robin comes Bob, Bob, Bobbin.'

'Donald, will you ever grow up?' she said, giggling and poking me in the side.

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'Probably not. Anyone hungry? I have two bashed bananas, three wrinkled apples and one huge orange. Oh, yes, and some fruit and nut bars that come with a warning from the British Dental Association.'

Fiona said:

'Donald, would you like a sandwich? We found these by the path earlier. Just lying there. They're absolutely delicious. The tuna mayo with red onion filling is excellent. And we've still got some nearly warm coffee left.'

'Hey, it's Party Time!'