

## M for Mud

School summer holidays and I am wearing my playing-out clothes....too short cotton dress from last summer and wellington boots. Mum has given me a brown paper bag with jam sandwiches inside and a bottle of Tizer. She said she doesn't want to see me till tea-time. Mick and Paul and Dorothy and I meet at the lamp-post on our corner. Oh no, I have to take our John with me. He'd better not moan.

We slither down the hillside, roll underneath the barbed wire fence, check the drain for rats and splash our way upstream. The brook is full after the night's rain. Great for damming. We start collecting stones and rocks. John's too little. We make him guard our sandwiches and look out for the farmer.

"Trespassers will be prosecuted" I read the sign.

"Forgive those who trespass against us "I remember this from Sunday school.

The sun is hot on our backs. Bees drone in the grass. The dam across the brook is getting high and a lake is forming behind it. I pick ragged robin and dandelions to float on the water. John is digging away with a stick. It's too hot for wellies. I take them off and fling them into the long grass. I step into the water. It's deliciously cool. I move slowly, the sun glinting, the water lapping at my ankles. Mud oozes between my toes.

"There's leeches in there," Dorothy shouts. "They suck yer blood"

"Yer'll catch polio, "Mick warns. "Cows have peed in the brook"

I dash for the shore. My shrieks are deadened by the steam train passing on the embankment overhead.

John has loosened a pile of dirt. I cup my hands in the water, then let it pour over the dirt. We mix it up with the stick and then begin to fashion cups and bowls. If we leave them in the sun, they'll harden off and they'll be real pots made of clay.

"The Beaker Folk made pots like this, "I tell John. "Mr Solan told us in History"

John looks at me as if I am mad.

Paul and Mick are flinging mud balls at each other. Dorothy squeals as a mud ball hits her on the leg.

I can't resist. I step back into the water. My foot slips off a moss-covered stone. I fall. Splash. I am sitting in the brook. My dress, once white with green flowers, is streaked with brown mud and I am soaking wet.

My Mum's going to be so mad.

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