

18. Widdershins*

The park was very quiet at this time of evening, hardly anyone would be present or active. Across more than two square kilometers, there might be a couple, necking, or worse, a sports nut or two, and the occasional walker. Denby was one of the latter, walking at a pace with a stick. He was in his fifties, a careerist who had managed to retire early, financially and due to his back and limp. He felt sorry about his physical condition, he had been fitter. He had spent so much time in this park. It was beautiful, a lake in the centre, so many varieties of trees, birds, and wildlife. In this early autumn evening, there was the hint of the leaves changing, and a slight chill presaging the winter to come. His evening constitutional was a time to unwind from the day, start the process of cleaning out his mind before home and sleep, after the upstairs attic had been swept out, so to speak. The path, kept in good order by the local council, was tarmacked and his stick beat a steady staccato beat as he walked along it. A rhythm he found comforting.

As he marched along with his stick along part of the path nearest the lake, trees arching over it as a canopy, he noted first a shadowy figure which became more defineable, coming towards him. He instantly bristled, irritated that there was someone despoiling his solitude. Denby always walked counter-clockwise, against the sun, and was the least bit superstitious, so the figure, coalesced into a jogger, was running towards him to his right, clockwise around the park. The man was jogging in beat up trainers, red shorts and a blue vest, and most curiously he was wearing very old looking headphones with a lead to a large yellow box on his left hip. As the jogger ran past him he at least had the courtesy to nod at Denby, but the walker had taken a bit of a start, recognising the yellow box as an old Sony Walkman, with its waterproof case. That must have been a model from thirty-five years ago! Meanwhile the jogger had passed him and was already ten metres or more behind him. Denby could not help feeling a slight sense of *deja vu*, a familiarity with the jogger, but he could not quite place him. He walked on a bit further, his stick beating the same cadence, and as he started to get to the end of the trees lining the path, he noticed a shimmering in the air, almost like a heat haze. At this time of the year that could not be, surely?

Denby took some measured steps towards and then through the shimmer. For a moment, a minute fraction of time, it seemed as if everything stopped, the wind, the trees and branches, birds, and all activity on the lake. And then he passed through it, and he walked on, his stick beating regularly on the path. He would carry on around a few more times before heading home he thought.

Denby was jogging, his pace even, he would easily best his time from earlier in the week, the chill air keeping him cool, and the music just at the right tempo to run to. It was a new tape, a compilation of some of the New Wave bands he was currently into. He loved the electronic rhythms, synths, e-drums, and strange vocalisations, and he felt quite hip getting down with the 80s crowd, far less pot-heads than in the 70s. His new Walkman was also a great addition to his running gear, even though the flimsy headphones didn't quite stay in position on his head as he jogged. He was coming up to the tree arched tunnel near the lake, and as he entered, picking up his pace a little, he noted a dark figure coming in the opposite direction to his right. He could start to discern a man with a walking stick, probably middle-aged and walking with a regular rhythm. As he passed him, he looked slightly at him, nodding in his direction. He thought the walker acknowledged him, and then he passed him. He was a little off the beat, owing to the distraction, so he upped his pace, so focused he didn't see the shimmer across the path in the air. He passed through it rapidly, a tiny sensation of stillness, and he ran on around the park. He might pass the walker again, perhaps.

Jeremy Denby, student, disappeared in the mid-80's while jogging in his favourite park one evening.

Jeremy Denby, businessman, disappeared 2015 while walking in his favourite park one evening.

*Widdershins: cited c.1513 as a first use, it means to go counter-clockwise. Thought to be unwise around particular sites or buildings. Originating from Middle Low German ('*against the way*').