



Everyone has a blind spot

But they aren't always where they seem.

THE BLIND SPOT

Good Morning, you must be Mr Brown? You are? Wonderful, and you're waiting for your guide? Good. I'm Maureen, I'm from the Centre. Now if you don't mind, could you please put out that cigarette, I have very delicate lungs and even the slightest bit of second-hand smoke can inflame my bronchioles. Yes, that's it, stub it out, marvellous, and I'd very much appreciate it if you don't smoke again on our walk. You aren't going to leave it there on the pavement are you, Mr Brown? Oh, you can't see it can you, never mind, let me put it in the bin for you. Now do take my arm and we can begin. Careful of the curb, easy does it, well done.

Do you know this is my first trip as a sighted guide for the blind and visually impaired? I finished my training last week. It was very thorough you know, but I have to say I wasn't entirely impressed, there were no biscuits you see. *Cuts to budgets* they say, but one does wonder.

- Now we're going to walk straight for about 50 yards but there's a raised curb at the end. Don't worry though, I'll take it slow - please don't just stop like that or we could both take a tumble! That's better.

So, as I was saying, *cuts to budgets* that was their excuse. But you hear all the time about the amount of money charities are wasting. If I donate to a charity I expect it to go to the people it tells us it is helping, not to pay for *social media* consultants or *diversity officers*. Does anybody even know what these people do? Do you? No, I didn't think so.

- Here's the curb I told you about - ah now didn't you do that well Mr Brown! I can see you are going to be a very easy...now what did they say you were? Service user? Or was it client? I know you're not a patient, they told someone off on the course for saying that; perhaps it was mentee? Well, let's stick with *client* shall we? At least I know what that means.

So we are just skirting the park now. I've been told to describe the scene for you, apparently it will help your neural pathways, whatever they are. When they took a scan of Derek's brain after he was diagnosed, I can't say I could see any *pathways* in it. Anyway, I digress, it's a very nice park.

- Careful here some of the paving slabs are a bit uneven, no doubt the council will say that's down to cuts too but goodness knows what they are spending their money on if they can't even keep the pavements safe and the bins empty - that's it, very well done.

So apparently this park was gifted to the local authority in 1893 and has two of the country's oldest Beech trees in it. I bet you didn't know that, did you Mr Brown? When I told the volunteer trainer that I was going to research accompanying historical facts for my walks she did

everything she could to undermine the idea, said we should focus on *the mindfulness elements of the walk, the colours, the way the trees move in the breeze, la-di-da*, I ask you. What a lot of nonsense. Luckily for you, however, I held fast and followed my instincts and you'll be pleased to know that I have prepared some pertinent nuggets of historical and cultural information to accompany our walk. No, no need to say anything, it's my pleasure.

- Ah now, there's a tricky bit coming up, three steps and the middle one is a little cracked. No, don't let go of my arm, if you let go I'm sure we're no longer insured or something; that's one step, well done, now the second...excellent.

So now I can tell you that we are approaching the old well. There's a myth around this well. That for decades it had been dry, and was about to be abandoned, until a young local woman, who was sad because her beau hadn't returned from a perilous sea voyage, filled it with her tears and that it has provided fresh spring water ever since. It's a silly story, I know, but rather sweet. Do you know it was turned into a giant (now I hope this won't offend you but I don't know how else to tell you without being specific) it was turned into a *giant breast* for some festival or other last year, a festival for *LBGP* people or something. I forget now, it's a terrible abbreviation and is constantly growing. I believe there's a plus sign on there now as well. They did explain it at the training, some more diversity nonsense or other; and do you know the trainer referred to it as an acronym instead of an abbreviation! I ask you! And she seemed most displeased when I pointed out her error; you would think she'd be grateful, but that's young people for you. Can't take criticism these days.

Now, back to our walk. We have a nice straight stretch down this path now. You might be able to hear the tennis courts on our left. My neighbour has taken up tennis again after thirty years. Every day she leaves the house in a ridiculous white mini skirt and a sweat band. Goodness knows what she's thinking. She spends too much time in the sun and her knees look like prunes. No sign of her on the courts today though, thank goodness.

I believe there is a sensory garden at the bottom of this path; the trainer said it was an excellent spot for our *mindfulness practice*. Apparently, you should rub your fingers on the herbs in the raised beds and enjoy the aroma. One can only hope that someone hasn't let their dog relieve itself on them but I don't suppose our trainer would bother herself with details like that.

Here we are. Now, Mr Brown, please be careful, there is a low gate, I'm going to lead you through it; it will take about five steps – that's it, well done, you're through. Why on earth would they put a gate on a sensory garden that's designed for blind people like yourself? It's hardly

accessible is it. Or maybe they're worried that some thug is going to run off with their municipal Rosemary bushes?

Look...ah, sorry, I mean...*feel* here, it's sage, I do love sage. Don't be shy, Mr Brown, let me take your hand. There it is, now give it a good rub. That's it. Now get it right under your nose – oops, sorry, I didn't mean to make you poke yourself in the eye, let me get you a hanky – no? Well, if you're sure you're all right. Derek, he loved a bit of sage, I'd put some in my Yorkshire puddings. Now, I know what you're thinking, Sage in a Yorkshire pudding, when there's beef on the table! But can I make a confession to you Mr Brown, I feel like I know you now that we have spent this time together; Derek and I were partial to roast pork with our Yorkshire pudding. I know! I'm a rebel at heart! *You always have to be different* Derek would say; *you have an opinion on everything*, ah, how we would laugh. No one knew me as well as Derek did.

How lovely, here's some marjoram. Ah, before you touch it let me clean the smell of the sage from your fingers or you won't get the benefit of it. No, I insist, I've brought some wipes. Do keep still or I can't do it properly, that's better, all clean now; you can get right in there and give it a good rub. Rather undervalued herb, Marjoram, it's become a bit old fashioned but I like it. Now, I know what you're thinking, *why does she keep referring to Derek in the past tense?* I'm right aren't I? Of course I am. Well, you see, Derek died last year...I do apologise, bear with me a moment I just need to... where's my handkerchief, ah, there it is. That's better.

Yes, he died of a stroke. Rather unexpected, he was a man of few vices. His sister said she thought he died of exhaustion but I don't know where she got that from, he'd been retired for five years. So here I am. Have you finished with that sprig of Marjoram Mr Brown? Do be careful, you've virtually ground it to a pulp. I'll have to pull that bit off now or the plant will look scruffy. That's it, let go...ah...got it.

As you may have worked out by now, Mr Brown, I'm not one for moping about doing nothing so when Derek had gone and I found I had time on my hands I immediately thought of volunteering, and here I am! It is satisfying to know that one can do good for others, gives one a warm glow if you know what I mean.

Sorry, quiet a moment, Mr Brown, I believe that is my phone, excuse me. Ah, it's my daughter. Humph, just a text, I *hate* texts. What's that, Mr Brown? Sorry, I can't talk and text at the same time, do be quiet for a moment...There, that's that done. She's just reminding me about the cake for my grandson's birthday; quite unnecessary, when have I ever forgotten anything? And she's suggesting I make a vegan cake, I ask you. The day will never come that I replace butter for vegetable oil and cream for coconut milk in a Victoria sponge and that's all I have to say on the matter!

I don't like to say it, but my daughter is what one calls a *scatty* person. She is forever losing or breaking things, her hair is always in a mess and she has the most appalling taste in clothes. I would help out more but the silly girl decided to go and live a three-hour drive away. Goodness knows why.

I don't know if you ever feel like this, Mr Brown, but sometimes, at the end of the day, I sit at the kitchen table and everything is so very quiet, that I feel like I may just fade away. There's that strange argument, isn't there, if a tree falls in a forest and there is no-one there to witness it, does it make a sound? Sometimes I feel like the tree in the empty forest, that without someone in the kitchen with me, maybe all that is there is an empty chair.

Anyway, listen to me waffling away. We must press on, if we are to have time to go to the café and get a nice cup of tea; and perhaps some cake if you are so inclined. Please take my arm again, that's it, hold on nice and tight. Off we go.

'Please!'

Mr Brown, don't stop suddenly like that, you've made my glasses fall off!

'Please, just stop talking and listen to me for a moment!'

What do you mean, Mr Brown? All I've done for the last forty-five minutes is listen to you.

'I'm - not - blind!'

But you are Mr Brown?

'Yes.'

And you were waiting for a guide?

'I was waiting for a guide to *show me around the centre.*'

Not a *sighted* guide?

'No, my wife has macular degeneration and I was visiting to find out more about how the centre may be able to help.'

Well for goodness sake, why didn't you say so?

'I tried! Look, Maureen, thank you, I had a very....interesting walk with you and I'm sorry to hear about your husband, but I must go now. My wife will be getting worried.'

It was just a silly mistake, there's no need to go. Why don't we go to the café anyway? I don't know about you but I've worked up a terrible thirst.

'I really should go - '

Of course, you must go, don't you worry about me. I'm sure there's something I can find to do at home - '

'Ah...I...ok then. I suppose another ten, fifteen minutes or so won't make any difference.'

'Wonderful! This way Mr Brown!'

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