

The Right Way

"You are going *where*?" said Issaker

"The Tinnners' Way!" said Eric.

They had met by chance near Kenidjack one bright summer day. Eric Marshall the slightly overweight, retired schoolteacher and Issaker Binney, the Cornish-and-proud-of-it Piskey. They had known each other since Issaker's house had appeared suddenly in Eric's garden a year previously – but that is another story.

"What kind of Tinner is that?" said Issaker

"Tin miners!" said Eric.

"I thought you meant a Tinner who coats the inside of copper saucepans"

"Now you are just being awkward."

"I *am* a metalworker," said Issaker. "– so maybe I ought to go with you."

They both smiled, and Issaker waved his Hazel stick.

They walked along the path together, Eric picking his way carefully, watching his footing, while Issaker moved quickly and lightly, a small sprightly figure little more than four feet tall. Eric noticed that although he carried a stick, he seldom used it when walking. They headed up the Kenidjack valley, following the river, and inland to Tregeseal Stone Circle, lying mute and inscrutable in the sunshine at the edge of Carnyorth Common, a sharp shadow cast from each stone. They stood for a while, appreciating the silence.

"Where now?" said Issaker.

"Don't you know?"

"No I don't," said Issaker.

"But I was following you!"

"No, I might have been in front but you said you were following the Tinnners' Way – so I followed you."

"You must know it, it's an ancient trackway," said Eric.

Issaker shrugged, "Everything here is ancient – the ocean, the cliffs, the stones, the hedges, the moors, the footpaths...." He lifted his arms to indicate the sweeping landscape, the sleeves of his soft leather jacket flapping in the breeze. "Where did you learn about the Tinnners' Way?"

"People talk about it," said Eric. "I've read about it, but I've never managed to find a map – just a written description."

"Well, what did it say?"

"It was an ancient route to St Ives. The Tinnners used it to take their tin to the nearest port."

"Quicker to go to Penzance."

"It depends on where you start from," said Eric defensively.

"You wouldn't mine tin in Kenidjack or Botallack and take it all the way to St Ives, when Penzance is much closer. Don't make sense."

"Look I didn't invent it!" Eric was almost shouting. "All I know is there's a trackway along the high ground, but it isn't shown on modern maps!"

"Hmm," said Issaker. "Well it must be that way then, over the carn. There's a lot of high ground that way."

He pointed to the right of Carn Kenidjack. They set off walking up hill, between low gorse, bracken and heather, Eric stumbling occasionally when he caught a foot under wiry brambles, or tripped over clumps of Moor grass. They could smell the coconut perfume of the gorse.

"I didn't mean to annoy you," said Issaker eventually.

"I didn't mean to get annoyed," said Eric.

Issaker – who was in the lead – turned and they shook hands cheerfully.

The path took them over the hill, and down to the road on the other side, at which point Issaker disappeared with a faint crack like the sound of a twig snapping under foot, time-shifting as Piskeys do to avoid being seen. Eric crossed the road and walked on alone. Twenty yards further on, Issaker reappeared.

"I wish you wouldn't do that," said Eric.

"It isn't a loud noise."

"I don't mean the noise, I mean disappearing without warning."

"You know I don't like to be seen," said Issaker.

"There was nobody there, and there weren't any cars."

"But there might have been. Let's keep on this line with Chun Castle on the left."

Eric smiled and gently shook his head.

"So you *do* know the way."

"No I don't – but you said keep to the high ground," said Issaker.

"I did, didn't I," said Eric as they pushed on across a broad moorland landscape.

Past the bulky summit of Watch Croft they stopped for a while to admire the sharp rocky teeth of Carn Galver and the distant blue Atlantic.

"It looks like a mountain to me," said Eric, "Especially from the road on the other side."

Issaker nodded. "There's a lot of up and down on your Tinners' Way. Hard work carrying tin – it's as heavy as iron you know."

'It's not *my* Tinners' Way,' said Eric.

"Nor mine."

They walked down hill to cross another road, where Issaker vanished and reappeared, much to Eric's irritation. But he made no comment, even though once again there was nobody to be seen and no passing traffic.

They walked for a while, sometimes on a track, sometimes on footpaths – walking under a vast sky – crossing the long borderland between the dark green moors and the bright green farm land with its small and oddly shaped fields.

Issaker gestured with his stick. "The whole landscape was like this at one time – moorland as far as the eye could see. Then you folk came and ploughed it up."

"I suppose we did," said Eric meekly.

They walked steadily on with hills and moors to their left, and cultivated land to the right, until Issaker stopped abruptly. Eric was tiring but plodded to catch him up. The sun was lower in the sky. "Are you alright?" said Eric.

"Can't go any further," said Issaker, "too many houses and roads. We're nearly there now anyway."

"Why give up now?" said Eric, clearly disappointed.

"The route is all roads now – too many people."

"So you do know the route then!" said Eric accusingly.

"If that's the Tinners' Way, I know it – but I didn't know it was."

And there we will leave them – as the sun begins to set – figures in a landscape still bickering, still short of St Ives, but still good friends.