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## Widdicombe Fair

by Sue Hitchcock

The year without a summer? 1960 had a summer, of course, but a summer without sun. The spring had been beautiful and I had tanned nicely while revising for my A-levels in the garden. Now the exams were over and three long months stretched away until the beginning of the University term, if my studies paid off, so a schoolfriend and I planned to hitch-hike to Devon and find a holiday job. We must have achieved the journey and found work in one day. If I had spent the night with Dave, I would have found out far sooner that he was gay. I hardly saw him after that.

Goodrington Sands was a caravan site, just west of Paignton and the facilities included a central cafeteria, fish and chip restaurant and a bar. At the east end of the beach was an ice-cream parlour and there were three ice-cream kiosks. My job was mainly clearing tables and washing up in the cafeteria. I lived in with two glamorous girls from Halifax and a crazy ex-nurse from Liverpool called Cassie, who was my friend.

The lack of sun was irrelevant to me, though business was slack. For long days when I worked alone in an ice-cream kiosk, I knitted a jumper, read “Grapes of Wrath” and dozed.

One day Cassie came up with a ruse – to see the sunrise over Widdicombe Moor. Might the sun break through at dawn? We set out at four in the morning on her vespa into the hinterland, singing “Widdicombe Fair” to entertain ourselves:

“Tom Pearce, Tom Pearce, lend me your grey mare!

All along, down along, out along, lee,  
For I want for to go to Widdicombe Fair,  
With Bill Brewer, Jan Stewer, Peter Gurney, Peter Davy,  
Dan'l Whidden, Harry Hawke, Old Uncle Tom Cobley and all.”

In the last verse the old grey mare is nothing but a ghost. In the dim dawn we were chuntering up a country lane, when a cow stepped into the road in front of us. Cassie braked. We rolled backwards down the hill. We caught our breath, relieved there was no grey mare, no following traffic and laughed at our silliness. I don't remember a sunrise. Maybe we just went back to work.

The summer passed and I never swam in the cold sea, but it had been fun and I had saved some cash to start my university term.