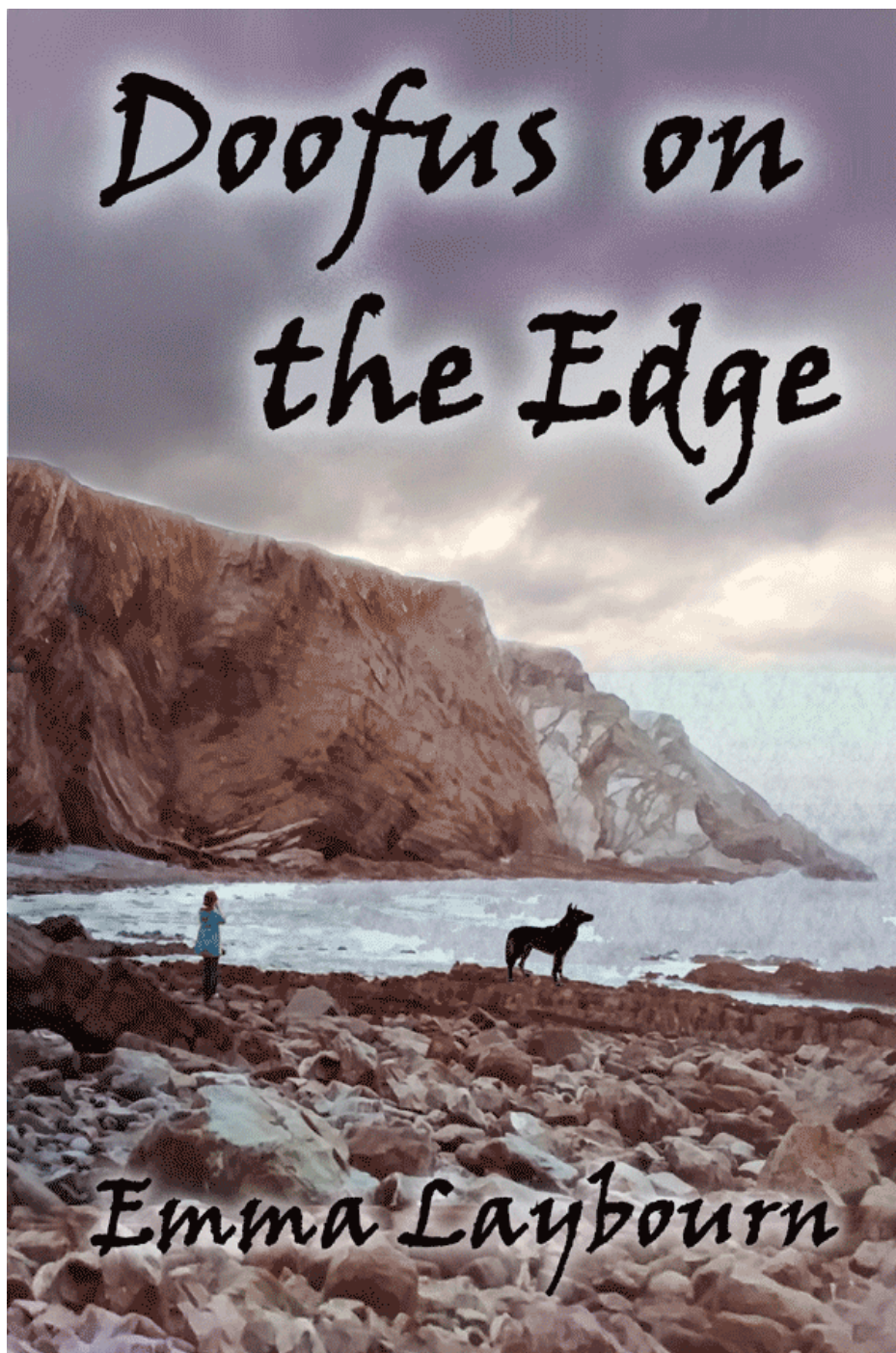


Doofus on the Edge



Doofus on the Edge

Emma Laybourn

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Table of Contents

[Chapter One](#)

[Chapter Two](#)

[Chapter Three](#)

[Chapter Four](#)

[Chapter Five](#)

[Chapter Six](#)

[Chapter Seven](#)

[Chapter Eight](#)

[Chapter Nine](#)

[Chapter Ten](#)

[Chapter Eleven](#)

[Chapter Twelve](#)

[Chapter Thirteen](#)

[Chapter Fourteen](#)

[Chapter Fifteen](#)

[Chapter Sixteen](#)

[Chapter Seventeen](#)

[Chapter Eighteen](#)

[Chapter Nineteen](#)

[Chapter Twenty](#)

[Chapter Twenty-one](#)

[Chapter Twenty-two](#)

[Chapter Twenty-three](#)

[Chapter Twenty-four](#)

[Chapter Twenty-five](#)

Doofus on the Edge

Chapter One

Holly was worried about Doofus.

For days now, the great black dog had been restless. He did not howl like he used to, but he prowled darkly around the house like someone awaiting bad news.

Holly did not know why. She felt she did not understand her pet – although *pet* seemed the wrong word for Doofus. It was seven months since she had picked him out at the dogs' home; a lonely, aloof, abandoned puppy. That sombre puppy had grown at an alarming rate, and had shown some even more alarming abilities. Holly had learnt to love him, but he remained a mystery to her.

So now she was worrying about Doofus, and resenting having to worry. The summer holiday should be a carefree time, she thought, especially when they were about to go away. She should not be carrying this knot of anxiety inside her stomach – although she knew, secretly, that the worry was not only about Doofus. It was also about Nan.

These thoughts revolved in Holly's mind while she was in her bedroom stuffing T-shirts into a holdall. And when she heard the crash downstairs, the anxious knot in her stomach immediately developed several more tight coils.

"Nan!" she exclaimed. Had Nan toppled out of her wheelchair?

But when she ran down to the living-room to check, Nan was dozing peacefully by the window, her thin hands clutching at her blanket. Holly looked wistfully at her great-grandmother, wishing that the old lively Nan could come back, with her jokes and hugs and chatter. But that would never happen now.

Carefully she moved a silky wisp of hair from Nan's crumpled face. Then she looked through the window for the source of the crash. She could see Mum and Dad beside the car, trying to squeeze Dad's suitcase into the boot. But there was nothing broken on the drive.

The crash must have come from the back garden; so Holly hurried through the kitchen and out of the back door. There she found Doofus amidst a heap of bits of broken pot and soil and rosemary bush.

Black as a shadow, he stood over the remains of the plant, guarding it. He was waiting for her. Holly's old dog, Pancake, would have squealed and rolled over pathetically with her paws in the air, pretending she was hurt to cover up her guilt at breaking a flower-pot. Doofus did not squeal or roll or look pathetic. He looked inscrutable.

“You clumsy pup,” said Holly, and was at once aware of how little the term suited him. “What did you do that for?”

But she already knew. Doofus put down his massive black head into the pile of soil and roots. With his teeth, he pulled the rosemary bush out and cast it aside.

Beneath it was a glint of polished stone. Holly caught her breath. Ever since she’d buried it two months ago, this had lurked at the back of her thoughts.

A smooth, grey, oval stone the size of her hand, with a hole drilled through it. A stone eye.

She didn’t want to touch it; but Doofus nosed it out of the soil and dropped it on her foot.

“All right,” she said reluctantly. “If you insist. I guess it’s probably safer with us anyway.”

She had been planning to leave the stone hidden in its pot by the back door while she was away; but then what if foxes knocked it over, or if Mum decided to replant the rosemary bush? And Holly dared not hide it anywhere in the house, because Mum was staying behind to look after Nan, and Mum was a demon tidier, and did not know about the stone eye.

She picked up the stone without looking at it. She certainly did not want to look through the hole pierced in it, in case she saw a golden eye look back.

The memory chilled her. The stone was a window into the past. It had been discovered on top of the wild moor not far from where Doofus had been found. It allowed creatures from the past to crash through time into the present: Holly knew that much, but she did not know how the stone eye worked.

However, Doofus seemed to think that she should take it, and she trusted Doofus. So, running upstairs with it, she wrapped it in a T-shirt and plunged it deep into her holdall.

“Leaving in ten minutes,” called Dad up the stairs.

“Coming!” Now her bag wouldn’t close. Holly pulled out a skirt and threw it back in the wardrobe. What would she need a skirt for, in Cornwall? Or possibly Devon – Great-Uncle Ted was a bit vague about where his house actually *was*. She tried to forget the stone eye by thinking about the holiday to come.

She’d been to Ted’s house once before, but she had been not quite five and didn’t remember it. All she remembered of that holiday was a dropped ice-cream. The horror: the white splat on the pavement. Now she visualised a low, snug cottage by a golden beach.

She knew it was near the sea. There would be sand. Rock-pools. And, this being an English summer, probably rain.

Holly zipped her holdall and lugged it down the stairs, stepping over Doofus who now lay in the kitchen doorway.

“You’re lucky,” she told him. “All *you* need is a collar and lead.”

Doofus stood up, yawned, and leaned casually against her, pinning her to the wall. He was so big now that if he pinned her in that way, she stayed pinned. There was no pushing him aside. He sniffed at the bag before releasing her. He was checking.

Holly dropped her bag in the hall, laid her raincoat on top of it and then hurried into the back garden again to clear up the rosemary bush before Mum could see it. She had found a spare pot and was settling the battered bush into its new home when a voice addressed her.

“Will I need a torch?”

It was Clive. He came clambering awkwardly through the fence from next door. As well as his school rucksack, he was carrying a supermarket bag with clothes spilling out of it; another bag full of clanking, empty jam-jars; and a small glass tank.

“I expect Great-Uncle Ted will have a torch. And jam-jars,” Holly told him.

“But they might be full of jam,” said Clive.

“What are you going to put in the tank?”

“Anything I can find,” he said, somewhat sadly. He was in mourning. His most beloved pet, Mr Finney, had died on their last day of primary school.

It had been a day of silliness and celebration at the school, of awards and cake and signing each others’ t-shirts in felt tip; and they had come home together, laughing, to find Clive’s mother at the gate with a dead hamster in a box.

“I’m sorry, Clive,” she’d said, almost gentle for a change. Although Clive’s mum didn’t like his pets, and usually called them a waste of time and space, she had lined the box with kitchen paper.

Clive had said nothing at all. He’d taken Mr Finney in his hand and walked off in his signed T-shirt to his shed.

He’d been mourning ever since. Holly suspected that was one of the reasons why Dad had offered to take Clive on holiday with them.

There were just the three of them going – Clive and Holly and Holly’s father. Her older brother Matt was staying at home for a basketball course. Both mothers were staying too. Clive’s mother claimed to want a bit of peace; Holly, indignant, felt like telling her that Clive wasn’t half as noisy as his little sister Lily, who had lately discovered how to sing. Her own mother would not leave Nan, who had brought her up from babyhood. It was Mum’s turn to look after her grandmother now.

“Nan!” said Holly, with a gasp. “I need to say goodbye.” She turned and ran inside, with Doofus padding after her.

“Nan?”

Nan’s eyes slowly opened. She seldom seemed more than half-awake these days. The last few months had shrunk and withered her like a winter leaf. Nonetheless Holly loved her dearly, for the sake of the Nan before the stroke, the Nan who used to bake her biscuits and tell her tales and laugh at nothing sixteen times a day.

“We’re going in five minutes, Nan,” she said. “I’ll bring you back a present. What would you like? Would you like fudge? Or chocolate?”

“Ah,” said Nan, which meant, Holly knew, that she would like a turnip if it was a present from Holly. Doofus put his head under Nan’s thin hand. Nan had always liked Doofus. She made a faint attempt to pat him.

“We’ll see you in two weeks,” said Holly, kissing Nan. But when she turned at the door to wave, Nan’s eyes had already closed again. Holly felt faint tears behind her own eyelids. Nan was so *old*.

She blinked away the tears and thought instead about Great-Uncle Ted, Nan’s brother: really Great-Great-Uncle Ted, only that was quite a mouthful. He was old too, but not as old as Nan, and he acted much younger. He still had his loud laugh, and a booming voice and beard to match.

And a house only minutes from the sea. Might it be an old smuggler’s cottage? she wondered. Perhaps it would have secret passages where barrels of rum were once concealed, and ships in bottles on the windowsills. It might have an attic with an airy gable window and a telescope to watch boats out at sea; a wilderness of a garden with rabbits gambolling at dusk. That would be nice for Clive – and for Doofus, although he had never chased a rabbit in his life. He had only chased much bigger prey.

Holly shivered and tried to put it out of her mind. Then she picked up her holdall – which seemed suddenly heavier with the knowledge of the stone inside it – and hefted it outside to Dad, who wedged it in the car.

Chapter Two

A smuggler's cottage it was not. It was immediately clear to Holly that there was little chance of finding secret passages in the thin grey house at the end of an increasingly narrow and overgrown lane. Dad had driven more and more slowly along this green tree-lined tunnel, muttering under his breath at every bend. There was barely enough room for their own car and Holly could not imagine how they would pass if they met another.

But they met no-one. The tunnel emerged into grassy farmland and a little row of houses sitting patiently by the road, which snaked away between fields seemingly to nowhere. Although Holly knew the sea was somewhere around, it was not visible.

"I need to get out," said Clive. Dad stopped the car at once so that Clive could struggle out and stand taking deep breaths. He had already been sick once into his glass tank, about thirty miles ago. Holly and Doofus unfolded themselves stiffly from the back seat and stood not too near him. The air smelt wild and salty.

"I was okay on the motorway," said Clive. "It's the winding roads that do it."

Holly looked at the terrace of tall, narrow houses, which bore the sign *Karrek Row*. It was a very short row; there were only four of them, surrounded by fields. The two houses in the middle looked dilapidated, with boards over some of the windows. But the house at the far end was bright with pots of geraniums. From this one Uncle Ted came out to meet them, bandy-legged and cheerful.

"My word," he said, "You've grown, the lot of you. I'm sure you've put on two inches in two months."

This was possibly true in Holly's case. Her jeans seemed to get shorter, and her shoes tighter, daily. She felt herself shooting up far above Clive although they were both eleven. And Doofus had only stopped growing during the last month.

"Let's show you round," said Uncle Ted, and he began to haul bags out of the car, unfazed by Clive's jam-jars and even his tank of vomit.

"I remember this!" said Holly, amazed at herself, as they entered the front room. There were no ships in bottles, but there were old photographs of ships hanging on the walls; and maps. Every wall held maps. The stairwell was covered with them. Ted had travelled the world.

As she went into the cramped kitchen, memories from seven years ago arrived in her head and slipped into place, adjusting themselves to fit. Everything had been bigger then.

Doofus pattered alertly across the kitchen to the back door.

“He seems to know his way around,” said Dad.

“He’s checking it out,” said Holly. Doofus took this patrol seriously. He examined doorways and sniffed assiduously in corners.

Dad carried the bags up the narrow stairs. At the top there were two bedrooms, one on each side, with low doors. One was Ted’s room. When Dad entered the other one, he had to duck.

Inside, a map of the world covered an entire half-wall. There were two narrow beds, with an even narrower space between them, currently filled by Doofus. The whole house, in truth, was very narrow.

“Two of you will need to share,” said Uncle Ted to Holly. “Up to you which two. I thought maybe you and your Dad. Or Clive and your Dad.”

“Hmm,” said Dad.

“And the third will go up here. Gets a bit chilly at nights. But you’ll be all right this time of year,” said Ted encouragingly.

He opened what Holly had thought was an airing cupboard on the landing, to reveal a set of even steeper stairs. At the top was an attic; just as Holly had imagined, it had a gable window tucked into sloping mint-green walls.

Dad could not stand up in here without hitting the ceiling. The walls held bowed and faded shelves, mostly empty apart from one pile of old books. No telescope, just a pool of lemon light from the window, in which Clive stood, looking caught.

A salty draught meandered past them; the window did not fit its frame. Doofus stalked over to it and gazed out.

So did Holly, laying her hand on the dog’s neck. The sense of his strength was very reassuring – although why should she need reassuring in this airy place?

And there, at last, was the sea. It was not far away at all: the fields suddenly stopped and there was a grey-violet, speckled band beyond and around the green. Now that she could see it, she could hear it too; a steady, hushing breath.

“You’d better draw lots for this room,” said Dad.

“We’ll take it in turns,” said Holly. “Clive can have it first.” She really wanted the room for herself, with its view and waiting shelves and sunlight on the yellow coverlet: but she thought Clive liked it too, and he needed it more because of Mr Finney.

Clive let out a long breath. “Okay,” he said.

They went back down the steep staircase to collect the other bags. As soon as Holly put her holdall on her bed and unzipped it, Doofus was beside her, rooting in it with his nose. When he raised his head, his jaws held something hard and smooth. He nudged Holly with it.

“Really?” she said. “But why do you want me to take it? It’ll be safer in the bag.”

He simply stood still, pressing the stone into her hand, his black eyes as unreadable as ever.

“Whatever you say.” Holly slid the stone into her jeans pocket. It just fitted. With it lying heavy on her thigh she ran downstairs to the kitchen. Clive was sitting at the table, still looking a little sick and sad, as he had ever since the death of Mr Finney.

Ted regarded him with some anxiety. “I’ve got ice-cream in the freezer,” he suggested.

“No, thanks,” said Clive, wincing faintly. “I think I just need a bit of fresh air.”

“Good idea! You two go and have an explore while I make tea,” Ted said heartily. “Take the dog out for a walk. You can go two ways. There’s a footpath going inland to Hulverton and the shop.”

“Hulverton?”

“Our village. It’s a mile and a half, but safer walking on the track than on the road. Well, you’ve just driven down the road, you know what it’s like. Have to climb into a hedge if a car comes. But you might prefer to go down to the beach. Just follow the road all the way to the end. It doesn’t go anywhere else.”

“Will they be safe?” asked Dad. “What about the cliffs?”

Ted studied the two children with bright, cheerful eyes. “They’re not given to jumping off cliffs, are they? They’ll know to keep away from the edge. You won’t go beyond the coastal path, will you? You’re sensible children.”

“Sure,” said Clive without enthusiasm.

“Tea in an hour,” said Ted, and Clive winced again.

“Do you want to bring your notebook?” Holly asked him.

“No.”

But Clive cheered up a little once they started walking. Agreeing that they weren’t very interested in the village or the shop, they went the other way, towards the sea. The road was empty: on either side, fields stretched away, also empty but for dozing cows amidst low, stunted bushes. There was no sound but the wail of seagulls and the long sigh of the waves.

Then Doofus began to trot ahead eagerly. The road dived suddenly downwards to their right; but Doofus, swerving left, began to run along a narrow, wiggling track that led around the cliff-top like a brown rope thrown carelessly upon the ground.

“That’ll be the coastal path,” said Clive. Holly began to run after her dog.

“Doofus! Come back from that edge!” For although the path was a good two or three metres from the cliff edge, Doofus had left it and was standing on the brink, looking out to sea.

Holly did not go too near him. “Doofus,” she said quietly, “come back, please. You might slip.” He was alarmingly close to where the grassy edge tipped down into nothing – a long way down. Seagulls circled beneath her.

But Doofus did not move except to shift his gaze from sea to shore, studying the beach.

“We’re going to the beach next,” Holly pleaded. A long moment later he retreated from the edge, and she breathed again.

They returned to the road, which snaked downhill between cliffs rearing up on either side. When they turned a corner the sea was laid out before them like a crumpled, ever-shifting tablecloth.

“Oh,” said Clive, frozen. After a moment he added, “It’s not a bit like Rhyl.”

There was a small beach, made mostly of slabs of rocks studded with limpets. Away to their left the tarmac of the road was broken up with potholes, and then disappeared altogether. A storm must have washed it away at some time in the not too distant past, for a ragged line of orange tape showed where it ended, along with a sign lying on the ground. A little further on was a ruined building, also cordoned off with tattered orange tape.

“That’s an eyesore,” Holly said; it was what her mum would say.

But Clive turned to stare at the dark cliffs that dipped into the sea.

“Oh, my,” he said in awe. “Oh, wow.”

“What is it?” Holly screwed up her eyes, expecting a seal or perhaps even a dolphin. Nothing less would put that tone of reverence in Clive’s voice.

“Geology,” breathed Clive; and then she saw.

The cliff was made of zig-zags. Layers of rock were concertinaed, folded up and over on themselves like stone blankets, going up and down along the massive cliff face. Then she saw that the rock slabs on the beach followed a similar pattern; they heaved up out of the sea at unlikely angles.

Clive began to pick his way over these slices of rock towards the cliff face. Between the slices were rock pools, in which Doofus was nosing. On squatting down to look, Holly saw that they were full of crabs and shells and anemones – all perfect Clive-bait. She watched them for a while. But Clive showed no interest. He kept staring at the cliffs as if hypnotised.

“Come on, Doofus,” Holly said. Doofus ignored her. He was stepping over rock-pools, surprisingly delicately for a dog so big; padding further and further out until his feet were washed by incoming waves.

“Doofus? This way!”

Then Holly reflected that the sea was new to Doofus. He would not know how dangerous big waves and slippery rocks could be. Those long foam

fingers were gentle here, softly probing every cranny; but further out the currents might be strong. So, picking her way over the rocks after her dog, she took hold of his collar and tugged.

She might as well have tried to shift a cart-horse. When Doofus didn't want to go, there was no moving him. But he was seldom this stubborn. She jumped back before the next wave sloshed over her shoes.

"What is it, Doof?" she asked. "What's out there?" For he was studying the waves intently, an ear cocked as if interpreting their sighs and whispers. He turned back to her and nosed at her pocket.

"Yes, I've got the stone," said Holly. "What about it?"

Doofus looked out to sea again, before nudging at her pocket once more.

"You want me to throw it in? *Here?* Why?"

He merely stretched his nose out at the waves, as if he was a pointer.

"Well," said Holly doubtfully. "You know best."

She thought about it for a moment. Perhaps the sea was the safest place for the stone eye. Lost on the seabed, it wouldn't conjure up anything from the past except maybe the odd jellyfish. Certainly nothing as dangerous as the wolves it had allowed to roam the moors back home... and the other thing.

The golden eye. The stench of blood. The soft, heavy footfall. Remembering that terror, she suddenly wanted to be rid of the stone. She drew it from her pocket.

"Are you sure?"

In answer, Doofus shoved against her legs. So Holly hurled the stone as far as she could across the water. She was good at throwing, having spent the last few weeks practising for cricket.

Nothing untoward happened. Nothing shone through the stone's eye for a dazzling moment, the way it had the last time she had thrown it. The stone fell into the sea with a liquid *thunk*.

She hadn't thrown it very far, in truth: it was much heavier than a cricket ball. But far enough. Too far to wade out there and find it again. And it was surely too heavy to get washed up on the beach.

"Is it safe now?" she asked.

But Doofus just went back to his rock-pool and investigated an indignant crab, as if the stone had never existed. He seemed content, so Holly had to be.

Clive had noticed nothing; he had his back to the hissing waves, and was studying instead the huge, silent, petrified waves of the cliff-face.

"Okay," said Holly. Her pocket felt light. Was it really that easy to be rid of fear? That quick?

Well, why not? The stone had lain buried in the moor for hundreds, maybe thousands, of years before it had been found. Why should it not lie harmlessly in the sea for just as long?

But something was worrying her, nagging at the fringe of her mind. As she turned away, wondering what it was, a sudden movement on the cliffs above her made her jump.

Someone had been watching her. Someone who ducked out of sight the instant she turned round.

Holly stared up at the cliff-top for a moment. Then she deliberately bent down as if searching the rocky beach. But all her consciousness was fixed on that cliff-top.

Sure enough, she saw a slow movement at the corner of her vision. She waited, pretending to inspect stones, until she was sure.

Then she looked up with a swift, sharp jerk. The watcher was not so swift nor sharp. She had a glimpse of a red t-shirt and red hair – short – before they ducked out of sight again.

Holly thought of waving, in an ironical, knowing way. But now there was nobody to wave to. She did not like being spied on. It made her angry; and anxious, again, as if the knot inside her had never really untied.

“Come on,” she called over to Clive. “Let’s head back to Ted’s. Tea’ll be ready soon.” She thought that if they went up the road quickly enough, she might see who was on the top.

However, Clive was in no hurry. When he eventually drifted over to her he had a dreamily excited look that she hadn’t seen on his face since a string of molehills appeared across his garden.

Holly was pleased for him – sort of. If geology could make up for a dead hamster, that was fine. Not that it would do for her. Nothing had ever made up for the loss of Pancake; not even Doofus.

And nothing, she thought now for the first time, would ever make up for the loss of Doofus. But he was a young dog. He would live for years and years. Her thoughts veered towards Nan, white and frail in her bed, and skidded away as if on ice.

“I’m going back, Clive,” she said. “Come on, Doofus.”

She began to hurry along the broken road with her hand on his collar. She wanted the watcher to realise that she had this large, strong, ferocious-looking dog at her beck and call. The fact that Doofus had never bitten anyone was beside the point. He had confronted far more dangerous things than humans.

But once they reached the top of the road and she could see along the cliffs, there was no watcher visible: nobody but the dozing cows. The coastal trail was empty. She stared hard at the bushes that lined the path. Though stunted by the wind, they were still big enough to hide behind if somebody crouched down.

Holly shrugged, deciding that she didn’t care enough to go and check. She wasn’t going to let some red-haired idiot spoil the first day of her holiday.

Doofus was gazing out to sea again, so she joined him. The waves chanted a repetitive, insistent spell, calling her back down.

She thought she recognised the rock that she had been standing on when she threw the stone. A wave broke over it as she watched. Perhaps it might have been better to wade out and drop the stone into deeper water.

“I did the right thing, didn’t I?” she asked her dog.

Doofus merely turned away and trotted inland. Clive came panting up to her.

“I’ll take my notebook next time,” he said, sounding more like himself than he had all day. As they trudged back to Uncle Ted’s along the sandy road, Holly heard the sea-spell calling softly, and then more softly, far behind them.

Chapter Three

Holly woke and listened to the sea again. It was like having some giant creature sleeping not far from the house, its faint, long snores drifting through the half-open window in the restful dark.

Dad’s snores were not so faint. She thought they were probably what had woken her, until she heard the faint scratching at the bedroom door, and then a sigh.

That was Doofus. He never whined when he wanted something. He never barked either. He no longer howled, thank goodness. He only sighed.

Holly got out of bed and went to see what he wanted – which was, of course, to be let outside.

“You should have been before you went to sleep,” she told him in a severe whisper. Creeping downstairs, she found the back door wasn’t locked; so she opened it, and Doofus shot out into the darkness of the garden like a cannonball.

And, like a cannonball, it seemed that he collided heavily with something. Holly heard a thump, and the sound of tussling – but no cries – and then feet thudding away across the grass.

“*What?*” she said. In the clouded moonlight all she could see was a shadowy figure – a person, fairly small, or maybe only appearing small because it was running stooped and low until it clambered over Ted’s back fence. Doofus did not follow it. He didn’t seem bothered at all as he sauntered back to Holly and rested his bulk against her leg. He yawned.

But she was horrified. Was this a burglar? A child-snatcher? The watcher on the cliffs again? And the back door unlocked!

“We might have been murdered in our beds,” she said to Doofus, and for the second time in two days heard that disconcerting echo of her outraged mother.

“All right,” she amended, “maybe not murdered. But who was it?”

Doofus nudged her into the house. He was quite calm, so Holly tried to be calm too. Even so, after carefully locking the back door – the key was stiff – and watching Doofus settle down in the doorway in front of it, she could not relax. She went back up to bed and lay there, her eyes open to the darkness and her mind open to the other darknesses she had so recently known.

Forget it till morning, she told herself. Doofus was a good guard dog. If anything seriously dangerous were around, he would show more concern. It was probably a tramp, looking for food. A rather small and stocky tramp.

* * *

“That’ll be the piskey,” said Great-Uncle Ted over his toast and marmalade. “The frisky piskey.”

“You mean a pixie,” said Holly with polite disbelief.

“That’s it. One of the little folk. Was it wearing proper clothes?”

“I couldn’t tell,” she said, startled. “I expect so.”

“Because they often don’t, you know, just rags. They’ll come and steal clothes off the washing line and pies out of the pantry.” Ted winked at her.

“I didn’t hear anything,” said Clive, reaching for the jam. He had already hoovered up his cornflakes and was on his third slice of toast.

“There was nothing to hear,” said Holly. “It was only Doofus who heard anything wrong. But, Uncle Ted, don’t you think you should keep the back door locked?”

“Ah, the piskey might not like that,” said Ted. It was impossible to tell how far he was joking.

“How big is a piskey?” demanded Holly.

“About *yay* big.” He held his hand out, not far from the floor.

“All right. Then it was not a piskey. It was a person, a small person, or maybe somebody about my age.”

“There are one or two around,” said Uncle Ted. “Children, I mean. You’re not unique. He’s probably just a nosy parker, whoever he is. I don’t usually bother locking the door, but maybe we should. I’ll leave a bit of milk outside it for the piskey.”

“Really?” said Clive. “You really leave out milk?”

Uncle Ted looked at him. “Don’t speak too light of them,” he said. “Ask anyone in Ireland. Or on the Isle of Man. Or Iceland. They’re elves there, of course.”

“Of course,” said Clive. “So did the piskeys bend the rocks down by the sea?”

Uncle Ted looked at him a little harder. “That’s been done a long, long time ago.”

Clive sighed. “I *am* eleven,” he said.

“All right. About three hundred million years ago, the rocks began pushing into each other—”

“You mean tectonic plates collided,” said Clive.

“I do.” Uncle Ted was now staring quite hard at Clive. “I’ve got some geological maps if you’re interested.”

Clive’s face lit up. Ten minutes later he had maps spread out amongst the breakfast crumbs, and Uncle Ted was pointing with a gnarled finger.

“Sandstones and mudstones,” he was saying. “Even better up at Hartland Quay. Your dad could take you there.”

“Not *my* dad,” said Clive automatically, studying the maps. “Is this the Carboniferous Period?”

“Permian,” said Ted. “The one just after.”

Holly wondered how Clive knew so much, seeing as he could barely read. “That map looks nothing like the right shape for Cornwall,” she pointed out.

“Coastlines change,” said Ted. He pushed a huge slab of a book over to her. “You’ll see in there.”

Holly leafed through it, and saw. The book was full of maps of Britain through the ages – and the coastlines did shrink, and grow again as she turned the pages, ebbing and flowing and occasionally, during ice ages, disappearing altogether under seas of ice.

She didn’t particularly want to see those slow tides in the books. They made her uneasy, although she wasn’t certain why. Suddenly she wanted to be doing things; to be running along the beach with Doofus, carefree and dodging waves, not stuck in this narrow grey house.

She pushed the book away. “Can I go out?”

“You can go to the shop for me,” said Ted. “Get some food for lunch.”

Because I’m a girl, thought Holly, as she trudged along the track that led away from the sea, towards the village shop at Hulverton. Because I’m a girl I get to do the shopping.

But that wasn’t really fair. She was the one who was desperate to be outside; and she could have said no. Anyway, Doofus was as eager to go out as she was. She did not put him on the lead, knowing that he would not chase anything he was not supposed to.

The sound of the waves diminished behind her as she walked. The path cut through an undulating sea of green, flecked with the foamy blobs of sheep. She could hear them munching. Half way across one field, three big stones stood leaning over one another. They were much taller than she was; she stopped to look at them over the low hedge.

But Doofus wriggled through an opening in the hedge, and trotted over to the stones, so she followed him. He walked around them, sniffing intently at their cool flanks and their dark roots in the grass.

“Standing stones,” Holly said aloud. Dad had told her that there were standing stones in Cornwall that were three or four thousand years old. He had not mentioned the fact that there might be some in Ted’s back yard, more or less. All three stones were higher than a tall man; two of them leant against each other, the third stood upright, and a fourth, which she had not noticed from the track, lay on the grass.

The stones made her feel vaguely uncomfortable. Not just because the air felt very chilly in their shadow, but because they reminded her of that other ancient stone that had rested in her pocket until she flung it into the sea. Something was still bothering her about that, and she didn’t know what.

But Doofus was interested in the standing stones. She walked round to their sunny side, away from the path, waiting for him to finish sniffing at them.

She basked in the warmth, relaxing for a moment – but it was only for a moment. Between the stones’ high, leaning walls, she glimpsed another person walking on the path, beyond the hedge. A second later the walker was out of view again, but she knew what she had seen.

Someone with a red T-shirt and red hair.

Holly lurked behind the stones, hoping whoever it was had not noticed her and would not walk towards her. By the time she peered out again a few minutes later, the red-haired person had gone.

Doofus seemed satisfied by whatever his sniffing had told him. When he returned to the track, she followed him with her heart beating a little faster than usual. Soon the path met a thin gravelly road which wandered down to a small grey excuse for a village: a clump of tired houses and the shop.

The village looked entirely closed, with blank windows and two empty streets; not a sign of life. As Holly ordered Doofus to sit outside the shop, she wondered if this would be closed as well. But the door rang like a bicycle bell when she pushed at it.

Three heads turned as she went in, and one of them had red hair. It was a boy about her age or perhaps a little older. Holly felt him staring and did not want to look at him, but then decided to. Why shouldn’t she? Especially if he’d

been spying on her from the top of the cliff yesterday. So she gave him a brief expressionless stare back, before she turned to study the shelves.

There was not much to study. Tins, tissues, soap. And half a dozen fish staring back at her from on top of a crate of ice. The shop-keeper and the old lady by the counter resumed their chat.

“Did they take anything else, Anita?” said the old lady. The shop-keeper, who was plump and middle-aged, replied,

“Just the beef. I’d left it in the pantry to defrost. And they stuck their grubby fingers in the butter.”

“Ah!” said the old lady wisely. “Fingerprints! What did the police say?”

Anita snorted. “You think they’ll send detectives all the way out here for the sake of a joint of beef? They said some one will stroll down from Barnstaple this afternoon. I’ll believe it when I see them. Meanwhile, I’d lock your door at night, Madge.”

“Ah,” said Madge. It was a proper pirate’s *arr*. “I always do this time of year, in the tourist season. It may be spriggans in the winter but in the summer I’d know who to blame.” The old lady picked up her shopping bag. Before she left, she cast a steely glittering eye over Holly, coolly saying, “Good morning.”

“Good morning,” mumbled Holly, as the bell rang Madge out.

The red-haired boy was inspecting biscuits. The plump shop-keeper turned to Holly. She looked friendlier than Madge.

“Well! You’ll be staying with Ted,” she declared. “It’s Holly, isn’t it? I’ve seen your photo.”

“Yes,” said Holly, taken aback. “Please do you have some bacon?”

“In that chiller cabinet. Are you liking it here?”

“It’s lovely,” Holly said politely. “And a dozen eggs, please.” Anita began to check eggs for cracks before putting them in boxes. To fill the space, Holly asked,

“What are spriggans, please?”

“Oh, don’t worry about Madge,” said Anita. “Full of old stories, she is. Spriggans are just naughty little sprites.”

“Piskeys,” Holly said. “Okay.”

“Bad ones,” said Anita. “And how’s your brother Matthew?”

“He’s fine,” said Holly, taken aback again. She added hastily, “He’s not here. *That’s* not him.” She nodded her head towards the red-haired boy, still browsing biscuits.

“Oh, no, that’s Otto. Your neighbour, from the other end of Karrek Row. Has he not introduced himself yet? Otto? This is Holly. Aren’t you going to say hallo?”

Otto emerged from behind the shelves. "Hallo," he said, unsmiling. His voice was unbroken. She judged him to be about twelve.

"Hallo. I saw you yesterday at the beach," said Holly, equally unsmiling.

"I often go there," Otto said. He had a narrow, pale, rather blank face with a few random freckles. A forgettable face, unlike his hair. It was the most remarkable thing about him: very red, with curls trying to burst through the wax that slicked it down. Holly felt quite envious of it.

"Are your other two houses rented out this week?" Anita asked.

Otto blushed slightly. "Not this week. Dad's still doing them up."

Anita tutted faintly and turned to Holly. "Will you be all right carrying those eggs all the way back?" she asked.

"Yes, thank you," Holly said. "I've got a rucksack." It turned out she had to stuff a newspaper and a large envelope for Uncle Ted into it as well.

Otto came out of the shop after her, without buying anything, and began to walk alongside her. He did not ask if she wanted his company, nor did he offer to carry her bag. Instead he flicked at the long grass-heads that they passed, as if he was teasing them. Holly was glad when Doofus shouldered his way in between them so that she could feel the protective bulk of his body by her legs.

"That's a big dog," said Otto. This remark was so obvious that it did not seem to deserve a reply.

"I'm staying here with my father for the summer," he added after a while.

"My parents are divorced. I spend most of the summer holidays with Dad.

He's an architect. And a developer. He's bought the two houses in the middle of Karrek Row and he's doing them up for holiday lets. He's already done our house up. It's really smart. He paints too. Oil-paintings. He sells them. He's got a boat." As he spoke he began to torment the cow parsley, pulling at every lacy head. Holly did not answer. Her father had nothing comparable to offer.

"What year are you?" asked Otto. "At school, I mean. Are you Year Eight? I'll be in Year Eight in September."

"I'll be in Year Seven," she said reluctantly.

"Oh! You're not in High School yet, then?"

Again, this was so obvious that she did not bother to answer. She wished he would go away.

"I could show you our boat," said Otto. "It's a motor cruiser."

"No thank you," said Holly instinctively. She added, "I think we'll be busy. Dad has a list."

"Where are you from?"

"Derbyshire," said Holly shortly. He had nothing to say to that. He had probably barely even heard of Derbyshire, she thought. "You're from down south," she said. "Near London."

"Surrey. How did you know?"

“It’s the way you talk.”

“Me? I just talk normally.”

“Well, you can’t hear yourself,” said Holly distantly.

“Who’s the other boy?”

“That’s Clive,” she said. “He’s my friend. He lives next door back home.”

“Is he a nerd? He looks like a nerd.”

“He’s my *friend*,” she said with a snap. Clive was undoubtedly a nerd of sorts with his notebook and his strange enthusiasms, but there was no way she was going to denounce him to Otto.

“You needn’t be so prickly,” Otto said, sounding prickly himself.

She put her hand on Doofus’s broad shoulder and looked away over the hedge. “What are those stones?”

“I don’t know. They’re just stones.”

“They’re standing stones,” she corrected him. “*Why* don’t you know? I thought you came here every summer.”

“Yeah, but they’re only stones. Why would I be interested in stones?”

Holly felt herself grow warm with annoyance. “Because seeing as they might be thousands of years old, I thought you might have bothered to find out. I mean, you like to find out about everything else, don’t you?”

“What do you mean?”

“I saw you spying on us from the cliff.” There, she’d said it.

After a minute he said, “Well, it’s a free country.”

“And who was creeping round our house last night?”

“What are you talking about?”

“Somebody was in our garden last night. Doofus chased them off.”

“That wasn’t me,” he said more confidently. “Didn’t you hear Anita in the shop? A burglar got in through her pantry window and stole her beef. Probably the same person. Why would I want to go creeping round your garden?”

Holly had no good answer to this, so she said, “I’m going to give Doofus a run,” and clapping Doofus on the shoulder she set off.

Doofus raced off after her like an eager greyhound, overtaking her within two seconds. It gave Holly an excuse to run at full pelt after him. She was fairly sure that if Otto did follow, he wouldn’t be able to keep up. On sports day she’d proved faster than all the boys except one; and her legs seemed to have grown a bit even since then.

Spider-legs, her brother Matt unkindly called them. Still, they could run. She knew she could keep going for a good while, even with her rucksack.

Sure enough, when she eventually raced up to the house and looked back, panting, Otto was gone.

“Two of these eggs are cracked,” said Ted, unpacking the bags.

“Sorry. That was me. I ran.”

“Not to worry, we’ll be using them soon,” said Ted easily.

“Uncle Ted, what are those standing stones in the field on the way to the shop?”

“That’s the Benns. They were probably a dolmen once – a tomb with a stone on top till it fell off.”

“How old are they?” she demanded.

“Nobody’s too sure. There’s a good dolmen down Penzance way that’s four thousand years old, if your Dad fancies a day trip.”

“I’ll put it on the list,” said Dad.

“Where’s Clive?”

“He’s gone down to the sea,” said Dad. “If you’re going after him, take your phone.”

“It won’t work,” said Ted. “Take the dog.”

“I was going to,” said Holly. “Are you coming too, Dad?”

“Maybe later. I’ve got cricket on the radio and a crossword that needs doing,” said Dad with a happy yawn.

“And I’ve got a sink that needs mending and grass to cut,” said Ted, looking at him rather pointedly. He was tearing open the fat envelope that Anita had given Holly for him.

“Take some sun-cream for Clive,” said Dad. “He ran off without it. He was in too much of a hurry to catch low tide.”

“He won’t miss low tide,” said Ted. “It’s not till mid-day. But you need to be back for lunch by one.”

“Low tide?” repeated Holly. “When was it high tide last night?”

“About six yesterday evening. Then again around six this morning. There’s a tide table on the door.” Ted frowned at the contents of his package. “What on earth,” he said, although it only seemed to be a sheaf of documents.

“Let’s go, Doofus,” said Holly, throwing the sun-cream and a water-bottle in her rucksack. Ted’s words had filled her with a sudden panic that rushed over her in a wave of heat. She could feel herself turning red.

How stupid was she? As she ran out of the house again with Doofus at her heels, she berated herself fiercely.

Tides! How could she have forgotten about tides?

It had been high tide when she threw the stone eye in the waves. She had foolishly imagined it would stay submerged for centuries. She had thought it was a safe end to the stone and all that it could do.

And instead, a few hours later, the tide would have gone out – and left it lying high and dry for anyone to see...

Chapter Four

By the time the sea boomed into view, Holly had talked some sense into herself.

Low tide must have been at midnight. Even if the stone eye had been exposed by, say, nine or ten o'clock yesterday evening, who would have been around to see it? And supposing there *had* been some late wanderer on the beach, what were the odds on them stumbling across it? Let alone picking it up. She was worrying about nothing. Doofus would not have let her throw it in if it had not been safe to do so.

All the same, she headed straight for the outcrop of rock from which she had hurled the stone eye into the water. The waves were subdued and twinkled in the sunshine. The sea was retreating, leaving a multitude of pools full of seaweed and small, darting, shrimps. Stacks of mussel shells were clustered on the rocks, decorated with ragged tangles of plastic rope in blue and orange. It was awkward to scramble over them.

Holly scrambled none the less. But look as she might, she could not see the stone eye anywhere on the craggy landscape revealed by the tide. She didn't know exactly how far she had thrown it. Maybe it had gone further than she'd thought: she would have to check again when the tide was fully out.

But if she couldn't see it, that meant it probably was safe. Meanwhile, in the course of her search, she found a large dead crab, three plastic bottles, lots of shells and an interesting cobble-stone like an orange cut in half.

She looked around for Doofus. He stood on the rocks gazing at the steadily incoming waves as if he was trying to work them out. When a bigger wave rolled in, his ears went back and his shoulders bunched.

As she watched, Doofus leapt out into the coming wave. He floundered and went under, and then came up swimming, briefly, before the water withdrew. He clambered back on to higher ground with a piece of seaweed draped across his shoulders and shook himself. At the next big wave he plunged in a second time to swim a few more strokes. He did not look as if he was playing. He looked as if he was practising.

But then Doofus had never really *played*. Even when he ran for a ball or a stick, Holly felt that it was more out of duty than for fun. He always looked like a dog with things on his mind. She wished she could get him to romp and joke with her, the way Pancake had, pretending to steal her shoes. Pancake had been fun. Doofus was many things, but he was seldom fun. Romping was not his way.

"Doofus!" she called, throwing a plastic bottle into the waves. "Fetch, boy!"

His ears went up, but not at her call. He turned his head and fixed his austere black gaze on something behind her.

Holly turned too. Was that a faint scuffle she had heard, above the hissing of the waves? She stared suspiciously at the cliff-top: there was nobody there. Most probably she had just heard Clive, who was pootling around at the bottom of the zig-zag cliff. She skipped from rock to rock to reach him.

“Dad says sun-cream!” She waved the tube.

“I don’t need it,” said Clive, intent at the cliff-face. “I’m already brown.”

“You can still burn,” said Holly. Pouring a dollop of sun-cream on her hand, she began to slap it on to Clive’s bare arms.

“Give over! That’s cold,” said Clive, trying to pull away. “All right! All right! I’ll do it myself. Get off. You’re worse than my mum.”

“Really?”

“No. I take that back. Nobody’s worse than my mum. Though at least she doesn’t go on about sun-cream.”

Holly wanted to ask him about his Dad, from whom Clive had got his slight brownness; why hadn’t he been to see Clive for so long? It must be months now. She bit the question back. It would not be fair.

“What are you collecting?” she asked instead, seeing a jam-jar.

“Rock samples.”

“Good rocks, are they?”

“Mostly sandstones.”

“What’s this one, do you know?” She held out her orange cobble. Clive pushed his glasses up his nose and glanced at it.

“Flint,” he said. “Must have been washed up. There’s none in these cliffs.”

“It’s been cut in half.”

“Not cut. Broken,” he said. “Flint does that.”

“How are the notes going?”

He showed her his damp notebook: some rather spiky sketches and equally spiky writing. Holly could not see why the rocks attracted him so much, even zig-zag ones. Clive had always been more interested in animals than anything.

“Are there fossils?”

“I haven’t seen any yet,” said Clive.

“There are lots of little creatures in the rock pools by the water,” she suggested.

“Later,” he said briefly.

So Holly left him to his rocks and went to explore the other side of the cove, picking her way across the craggy beach to the old road. Its surface had been ripped open and munched by the sea, and was scattered with surprisingly large boulders, which she assumed had fallen from the cliff

above. She thought again of the stone eye. Could the waves throw stones this far up the beach?

Pushing the worrying thought aside, she continued along the pot-holed road. It led to the building, a long low ruin which stood with its back against the cliff. Behind it were the remains of what might have been a car park before its tarmac had been devoured by the waves and weather.

“Are you coming, Doofus?” she said. It was a comment, not a command, for Doofus was already padding over to sniff around the ruins with interest.

Holly stepped across the tattered strip of orange tape and inspected the sign lying on the ground. DANGER KEEP OUT it said in hand-painted letters.

So where was the danger? The top of the cliff was more dangerous than this, thought Holly, eyeing the abandoned building. It was like a shipwreck, but perched just out of reach of the sea. A house-wreck.

But no, it was definitely too big to be an ordinary house. It had once had two storeys – judging by the window openings – although all the ceilings seemed to have disappeared. The brick walls had lost their top courses and went up and down like battlements. She supposed it might be dangerous if you tried to climb them, but not otherwise.

Walking round the outside, Holly found a heavy, scarred door. It was locked – pointlessly; for the window next to it, empty of glass, was just asking to be climbed through.

So she climbed through it. She wasn't the first, of course: crisp packets and lolly sticks in a drift of sand on the floor told of previous visitors. Doofus sprang effortlessly through the window after her and nosed in the corners. The room was open to the sky and the cries of gulls.

Holly went to the inner doorway. It led into a long, roofless corridor, with a line of doorways down either side. Most of the doors were missing; but one, rotten and hanging off its hinges, bore the brass number 7 amidst its flakes of paint.

“It's a hotel,” she said aloud in realisation. These were bedrooms, though now they held no furniture, not even the rubble of the missing upstairs. Somebody had cleared them. Maybe somebody owned this place.

Right now, though, it was empty but for the sand and shells scattered everywhere and the strangely echoing noise of the sea, as if it was trying to get in on all sides. At times it must have succeeded: there was sea-weed in the second room she entered.

And a noise. A soft skittering through the wall.

Holly froze. Somebody was in the next room.

She stood thinking. It was probably one of two things: a seagull, or a person. And if it was a person, most likely it would have red hair.

Well, she wasn't afraid of Otto, or of seagulls; so she marched out of the doorway and into the next room.

Somebody had just scrambled out of the window. She only glimpsed them for half a second; and they didn't have red hair – or did they?

Her first thought was that they were wearing an oddly patterned, reddish wetsuit the colour of rust. She ran to the empty window-frame and saw a figure scuttling low and awkwardly along the front of the building. An instant later it had vanished round the corner.

Holly stood with her mouth open. A rusty wetsuit? *Really?*

Doofus followed her into the room. He did not leap out of the window to chase the strange intruder. Oddly, he did not seem interested.

But something else did interest him. It lay on the floor, sand-specked, but unmistakable: a gnawed, half-eaten joint of beef.

[Chapter Five](#)

“Probably a tramp,” said Clive. “I didn't see anyone.” Holly had searched around the outside of the hotel, but not very thoroughly, in case somebody leapt out at her from behind a rock. She had called Clive over and eventually he had come to see what she was shouting about.

“But he looked really weird,” said Holly. “It was – I don't know. Maybe it wasn't a wetsuit. Maybe he was in pyjamas. Or a onesie. He wasn't very tall. Quite broad, though.” She thought of the figure she had half-seen in the garden at night, escaping over the fence. That person had been a similar shape and size, so far as she could tell.

But Clive snorted. “A tramp in a onesie? That's a new one. It's probably some kid mucking around.”

“But what would a kid want with raw beef? What would anyone want with it?”

“Maybe they have a dog,” said Clive.

They both looked at Doofus, who was already half-way through the remains of the meat. He put one paw on it to steady it while he tore another chunk off with his strong, sharp teeth, and gulped it down.

“Anyway,” said Clive, “they’re gone now. I wonder why this place got abandoned.” He gazed around at the cracked walls. The room they stood in still had part of a roof, which gave some shelter from the wind.

“That’s obvious, isn’t it?” said Holly. “It’s too close to the sea. It probably has a terrible time in storms. And just look at the road.”

“But it’s an old building,” said Clive. “It says 1898 over the door at the end, didn’t you notice?” Holly hadn’t. “So it must have been fine here for a long time.”

“So?”

“Global warming,” said Clive darkly. “Rising sea-levels. More storms. It’s getting worse fast.”

“Yes, I know,” said Holly, who had heard him on the subject before. “We’ll all be growing grapes and olives.”

“Don’t joke. It’s serious.”

“I know it is,” she said, “but people are doing things about it.”

“Not enough,” said Clive in a voice of doom. “Sooner or later there’ll be a PNR.”

“A what?”

“A Point of No Return. When everything gets so bad that no matter what we do, we can’t make it better. We’ll have changed the earth for ever and we won’t be able to change it back. It’ll just get worse and worse and it’ll be too late to stop it.”

Holly felt a faint, cold sickness deep in her stomach. But she said what she had heard her mother say:

“Nothing bad will happen for years. And by that time, they’ll have got rid of petrol and coal and all that greenhouse stuff. They’ll use wind farms instead. And solar power. And tides,” she added, hearing the rush of the sea. “Don’t worry about it, Clive.”

“I do,” he said. “I can’t help it.”

“You’re just feeling bad because of Mr Finney,” Holly told him. “Everything seems worse after something like that. Believe me, I’ve been there.”

Clive began to answer, when another, deeper voice cut over his.

“Hey! You kids, you’re trespassing!”

Doofus raised his head from the meat. The man standing in the doorway took a step back at the sight of him.

“And that dog should be on a lead,” he said forcefully.

“On the beach?” said Clive.

“You’re not on a beach,” said the man. “You’re in a building. Which happens to be my property.” He was about Dad’s age: a balding, angry man in

heavy glasses. He seemed vaguely familiar although Holly could not think why.

“Sorry. We didn’t know,” she said. “It’s just a ruin.”

“Not for much longer. It’s going to be developed. Meanwhile it’s not safe! I can’t be responsible for kids who don’t read warning signs. And what about your mates? Where are they?”

“There are only two of us,” said Holly.

“Then who did I see disappearing up the beach in funny gear? And the other one scooted off upstream at the inlet.” He glared at them. “Where are you from? You’re not local, I can tell by your voice.”

Neither was he, thought Holly. “There are only two of us,” she repeated. “We’re staying with Ted Johnson up the road.”

The man looked confounded. “Ted? But he’s my neighbour. I didn’t know he had kids staying.”

“We arrived yesterday,” said Clive.

The balding man glanced at Doofus, who throughout this conversation had stood perfectly still, watching him without so much as a flicker of an eye. The man looked unnerved by the dog’s steady gaze. When he spoke again it was with an extra note of warning.

“Keep that dog under control,” he said. Holly wanted to protest, Does he look out of control? For politeness’s sake, she kept quiet.

“I don’t want you coming in here again,” he said emphatically. “And you can tell your mates that too.”

“There are only two of—”

It was pointless. He had turned on his heel and left. The children looked at each other.

“What other one?” said Clive.

“What inlet?” said Holly.

“That’s easy. It’s on the far side of my cliff. It’s just a little valley full of bushes where a stream comes out to the sea.”

“*Your* cliff?”

“I’m adopting it,” said Clive. “I’d like to take it home with me.”

“Will it fit in your tank?” Holly thought for a moment. “The one in funny gear must have been the person I saw. But I bet the other one was Otto. I bet there’s two of them sneaking around together.”

Then she had to explain who Otto was and how she’d met him at the shop; and how he had more or less admitted spying on her.

“Hang on,” Clive said, “then that guy must be Otto’s father! There aren’t any other neighbours. Ted says the two middle houses are empty.”

“Otto told me his father’s doing them up,” said Holly. “He’s a developer. You’re right – it must be him.” She realised why the man had seemed familiar: it was his accent. He had Otto’s southern, faintly belligerent drawl.

“So if Otto was sneaking around down here, why would he run away from his own father?” demanded Clive.

“I expect he’s told Otto off in the past for messing around here.”

“Developing the hotel,” said Clive. “That’s a mistake. He ought to know. The sea’s only going to keep rising. Maybe I should tell him.”

“Maybe you shouldn’t,” said Holly. “Come on, Clive. Let’s find some crabs.” She wanted to take his mind off global warming, floods, Points of No Return and all things doomful.

“I’m going to collect some of the rubbish off the beach and take it back with us,” said Clive. “Have you not noticed all the plastic that’s been washed up? Bottles and bags and all sorts.”

Holly thought guiltily of the plastic bottle she’d thrown back in the water for Doofus. She looked down at the dog, busy with the remains of the beef.

“Leave that, Doofus. It’s not ours,” she said, and he immediately raised his head. He understood her; but then he understood a lot of things that no dog ought to know.

“Would Doofus howl for a Point of No Return?” she wondered aloud. It was partly a joke, but Clive did not smile.

“Not just Doofus,” he replied. “The whole world will be howling.”

Chapter Six

They went back to the house for lunch carrying a plastic bag full of bottles and bits of rope, and a jar of tiny flitting shrimps: Holly's, for a change, since Clive did not seem keen on shrimps. In truth, they didn't really do a lot for her either. But she had thought Clive might like them once the glamour of the rocks began to pall.

"I'll take a bigger sketchbook back to my cliff this afternoon," said Clive through a mouthful of brown sauce sandwich. He had declined bacon. Holly wondered if she ought to decline meat too, but she *did* like bacon butties. It was a problem.

"Photographs would be easier," said Dad, but Clive shook his head.

"I see better when I'm sketching. I can't really draw very well, but drawing makes me look."

"Good idea," said Uncle Ted approvingly.

"I thought this afternoon we could explore the inlet," said Holly. If that was where Otto was hiding, she wanted to smoke him out.

"You mean the reserve? There's badgers in there," said Uncle Ted.

"You hear that?" said Holly. "Badgers, Clive!"

"Not by day," said Clive dampeningly.

"Roe deer as well," said Ted. "It goes a long way inland." But even deer failed to move Clive.

"I'll be sketching," he said.

By the time they finished lunch, however, the sun had disappeared and rain had begun to fall. So Clive settled down with a sheaf of Ted's maps while Holly wandered through the house, gazing despairingly through the narrow windows at the dripping landscape.

She tried, and failed, to ring her friends back home. Her phone didn't work. There was no signal.

Going up to Clive's room, she waved her phone at the ceiling, where she got the smallest, briefest sign of a phone signal before it vanished again. Rain drummed on the roof as if trying to hammer its way in. The view from Clive's window was shrouded by it, a series of thin grey curtains one behind the other.

This was unfair. It was not what her holiday was meant to be. Holly had warned herself to expect rain, but not on their second day. Disgruntled, she ran downstairs and asked to use Ted's house phone to ring her friends.

"Ten minutes max," warned Dad. "It costs."

"*Ten minutes?*"

But even ten minutes turned out to be too long, because Ted's old-fashioned corded phone was in the hall where everybody in the house could hear her. Holly was almost relieved that Zoe didn't answer, and that when Natasha did, she said she was about to go out to the cinema.

Holly traipsed back into the kitchen.

"Where's the nearest cinema?"

"That'll be Bude," said Uncle Ted. "Not fed up already, are you?"

Holly, realising that he was a little hurt, said quickly, "No, no, of course not! Clive, if it doesn't stop raining in half an hour, shall we go out anyway?"

"I can't sketch in the rain," muttered Clive, poring over a map.

"But your rocks might look different when they're wet."

After a moment's thought, Clive agreed to this. So half an hour later, with raincoats on and hoods up, they trudged down to the beach.

Although the tide was still low, the sea had turned dark and restless, a surly, snarling, petulant beast. It made her think of wolves. *That* made her think of Doofus. She watched him patter down to the water's edge and then gallop up the stony beach just ahead of the coming wave, like a sprinter in training. He was oblivious to the rain that streamed off his black coat. Doofus had never minded rain.

"Doof!" she called, but he kept on hunting waves, or being hunted by them. *Practising*, she thought again. For what?

Clive said, "Leave him be. He's just being normal for a change. He can't always be a dog of doom. He hasn't howled for ages."

This was true. Doofus used to howl for the death of any creature – she remembered Clive's stick-insects – but the full, blood-curdling howls he used to make had muted down to yawns, and then gradually faded away entirely.

"Maybe he's growing out of it," Clive added.

"Then what's he growing into?"

"A dog." Clive studied his cliff. Holly studied Doofus. Doofus studied the sea, as if he was trying to learn it. The wind spattered her with a mixture of rain and spray, and she shivered.

"Where's this inlet?" she said. "Let's go and explore it. It might be more sheltered."

"Beyond those rocks. I'll show you."

Holly yelled at Doofus and gestured at the rocks. He looked up only briefly, but she knew that he would follow when he was ready. So she set off after Clive.

They went in the opposite direction to the ruined hotel, trudging past the zig-zag cliffs towards a small craggy point. There was a sign here for the coastal path; it came down to the beach, rounded the point, and went over a little footbridge before heading back up the cliff again.

Under the footbridge flowed a small stream, looking thin and timid as it ventured towards the growling sea. Yet it had cut a deep valley out of the cliff; a valley that was a green tangle of bushes and undergrowth and tough, gnarled trees.

As they followed the stream up the valley and away from the sea, the wind dropped. The snarl of the waves softened. A little further upstream, it was almost quiet. The sea sounded far off, merging with the pattering of the rain. A bird sang; a branch cracked. Leaves dripped.

“Stop,” breathed Clive. “That’s a pied wagtail.” It was skipping around the stream, surrounded by prickly shrubs and ferns and brambles.

They sat silently beneath a bush to watch it. Holly was glad of the protection from the rain, and didn’t mind sitting still for a while although wagtails held no fascination for her. But it was a relief to see Clive take an interest in the bird. Birds had to be more cheering for him than cliff faces.

So she sat listening to the distant waves which were now reduced to a hushing murmur. She watched the raindrops making the leaves shiver, and decided that she liked this quiet, hidden spot. The wagtail bobbed and teetered on a rock.

Then, beyond it, slowly, another rock began to move.

What? thought Holly, although she did not speak. She was stunned into stillness. What she had thought was a grey-brown boulder half-hidden in bushes was slowly unfolding itself into a different shape. How could a rock come to life? she wondered for an instant, before realising that this had never been a rock. It had just been very still.

A deer, she thought bemusedly, though it was the wrong colour, and she realised almost at once, the wrong shape too. Its shape was human. It was a dirty greyish-yellow brown; very well camouflaged until it moved. It was walking, gliding almost, slipping between bushes, moving further up the valley without a sound.

Holly had stopped breathing. She thought of piskeys and of spriggans. Who *was* it?

A minute later, without having made any noise that she could hear, it was out of sight. The wagtail hadn’t even noticed: it still bobbed on its rock.

“Clive?” she whispered.

“Yes,” he said, and from the suppressed excitement in his voice she knew he’d seen it too. “It looked like an ape. A Cornish ape.”

“It can’t be an ape.”

“No. It looked like one, but it can’t have been. The arms weren’t long enough. The legs weren’t short enough. It was too upright.”

“Somebody in an ape suit,” she said, thinking of Otto.

“Not hairy enough for an ape suit,” said Clive. “That only leaves one answer.”

“What answer? Another tramp in a onesie?”

“Is that what your tramp in the hotel looked like?”

“It was a different colour,” whispered Holly, thinking. “More rusty coloured, sort of orangey. But yes, the same shape. This one was bigger, I think.”

“Bigger?”

“Quite a bit,” she said.

Clive stood up abruptly. “Shall we follow it?”

“I’m not sure.”

“We’ll just go a little way,” said Clive.

Holly looked around for Doofus, in vain: he had not yet decided to join them. She would have been much happier with Doofus beside her, but she did not want to shout for him, not with that strange greyish person just up ahead somewhere.

So she said, “Okay. But quietly.”

Clive was not great at stalking. If there was a twig to be trodden on, he would tread on it. He crunched his way up the side of the stream until Holly began to think anything nearby would have been scared away long since.

But scared away to where? The narrow valley seemed to go inland for miles; she could see no end to it. The bushes thickened and the trees stood up straighter to receive the rain, making a jungle, a little slice of hidden rainforest. A prickly rainforest, with arched thickets of bramble that might as well have been barbed wire. There were blackberries everywhere but most were guarded by huge loops of thorny stems. A path had been beaten through them, however, so other people must have pushed through here.

The sudden buzzing of multiple bees told Holly of a nearby hive. But Clive did not stop to look for it. It was another minute before he halted suddenly.

“What is it?”

Clive pointed to a tree-trunk. There were four long, deep gashes cut in it, quite high up, dark in the wet.

“It’s been here,” he whispered. She knew: she could smell it. It took her back to that terrifying day when she’d been buried underground, alone in an earth tunnel with something that she could not see, with the rank, sour stink of blood and fur.

This was, thankfully, a different smell. Still animal, but not so sour. More earthy. “Poo,” she murmured.

“Yes,” said Clive. “It’s over there.” He pointed at a small pile in a patch of undergrowth. “Have you still got a jam-jar?”

“Clive, you cannot take a sample,” she began to say, when she saw movement on the far side of the undergrowth. Leaves stirred – no, not just leaves, branches – no, a whole bush. They’d disturbed something.

Something big. That was all she could take in before a flying black body charged sidelong into her: a missile made of black fur.

“Doofus!” she gasped. He was gripping her coat in his teeth, dragging her forcibly away from the bushes, back downstream. He had never done anything like that before.

If that was what Doofus wanted, she had better obey.

So Holly began to run back down the path. At once, Doofus released her coat and loped ahead of her. Clive hurried behind her, thudding and stumbling. Beyond him Holly thought – no, was sure – she heard something crashing heavily after them. There was the sound of snapping branches: but there was no time to turn and look.

They raced and slithered back along the overgrown path which the rain was gradually turning to mud. Only when the sea was in sight did Doofus let them stop. He paused at the mouth of the inlet, turned, and gazed back past them into the valley.

Holly looked back too. Nothing emerged from the undergrowth. The crashing and snapping seemed to have stopped. All she could hear was the pounding of the sea, and Clive panting.

“Doofus was scared,” he gasped, as if he needed an excuse for running away, “so I thought I’d better be scared as well. Only sensible.” He bent over to pant harder.

“Yes. But Doofus doesn’t get scared,” said Holly. She looked at her dog, who was also panting, though not as hard as Clive. His tail was down and his ears were up and alert. *Did* Doofus get scared?

He was certainly wary. Whatever was back there in the bushes might not be too much for Doofus, but clearly Doofus thought it was too much for *them*.

“Otto in a wetsuit,” she said, disbelievingly. A spriggan. What *were* spriggans? That unseen shape behind the bushes had given her only a glimpse of bulk, a sense of size, before Doofus had dragged her away. “What was it?”

Clive shook his head. “Let’s go home. I need to look something up.”

They walked home, dripping in the rain that had reappeared with force as soon as they were out of the shelter of the inlet. When they trudged back across the beach and up the pitted road, it looked wonderfully safe and familiar.

But every minute of the way, Holly turned and checked over her shoulder. And every other minute Doofus turned and looked back too.

Chapter Seven

“The internet takes forever here,” said Clive with mild complaint, prodding at Ted’s antique computer.

“I only use it for email,” said Ted apologetically. “I never thought about you wanting to do much more than that.”

“You need a dongle,” said Holly, and then wished she hadn’t as Ted looked both bewildered and embarrassed.

“You could use my tablet,” Dad told her, “if you take it down to the shop. That seems to be where the nearest wifi is.”

“Wifi? Oh, Paul at the other end of our row has wifi,” said Ted with relief. “You could ask to borrow some off him.”

“Is he Otto’s Dad?” asked Holly.

“That’s the one. Have you met Otto, then?”

“In the shop,” she muttered.

“It’s all right, we won’t bother his dad,” said Clive. He gave up his chair at the computer to Holly and asked to hunt through Ted’s book collection. While Holly emailed Mum, Clive buried his head in a book called *The Quaternary Period in Britain and Europe*. His lips moved as he read; his brow was furrowed in intense concentration. Holly almost felt she should offer to read it aloud to him, except that he would hate that.

She peered over his shoulder at the pages of dense text. The words *interglacial* and *auroch* caught her eye.

“What’s an auroch?” she whispered.

“Prehistoric cow,” said Clive.

“Whatever we saw, it wasn’t a cow,” she murmured, squinting at the page. “What are you looking for?”

“I’ll tell you if I find out.” He moved the book away from her gaze and curled his hand around it, as if it was a maths test.

Holly went to help Ted make a casserole for tea. Without her help, she thought, it would have taken him hours. Ted did everything very slowly, except for talking. He talked about the history of the village, which seemed to involve smugglers after all, and storms. A lot of storms. One of them had done for the old hotel six years ago, when the roof blew off and the rooms flooded. The hotel had closed down after that, and the sea had done the rest.

Holly listened, but only half her mind was on the ruined hotel. The other half was on the inlet, its close nets of brambles, a heavy shape crashing through the leaves.

“Uncle Ted,” she said, “what’s the biggest wild animal you get in this area?”

“Deer,” said Uncle Ted, and he was off again, this time around Scotland where he had worked for several years.

Holly had already discounted deer. The knot of worry in her stomach returned, and kept tightening through the evening, while she watched Ted’s vintage, fuzzy television and tried to read. Clive wasn’t talking; he was still hunting through Ted’s books for something but would not say what, just repeating “I’ll tell you when I’ve found it.”

Holly lay awake that night listening to the rain, a faint, constant patter behind Dad’s gentle snoring. She did not mind the snoring. It was quite reassuring, having Dad sleeping opposite. She decided that if Doofus tried to get her up tonight, she would get Dad up as well.

But Doofus was quiet. Apart from the soft orchestra of rain and snores, everything was peaceful. Reluctantly, she began to think about the stone eye.

It had let animals through from the past. Wolves weren’t the worst of it. That was why Holly had decided to hide the stone away, in its tub under the rosemary bush.

But the tub could only ever have been temporary. It had seemed a much better idea to throw it in the sea, and lose it for ever. Could something, somehow, have been allowed through the stone eye yesterday?

Perhaps throwing it away had been a stupid thing to do. Yet Doofus had been so keen for her to bring the stone eye here. And he understood it better than she did. He and his forbears might have guarded it for centuries. So why had he allowed her to fling it into the waves?

She couldn’t work it out. Nobody saw me throw the stone, she thought, except Otto, up on the cliffs. But he wouldn’t have known it was anything important. Just a stone. He wouldn’t have tried to find it.

Then she thought about Otto spying on them, and the way he’d talked about his dad and his houses, showing off. That made her so indignant that she managed to forget about the stone, and instantly fell asleep.

Next day it was still wet: a fine, almost invisible rain was falling. And Clive was still reading, with books piled on the table while he munched his way through breakfast.

Mum rang up early, causing Dad to answer the phone in a hurry. But everything was fine at home. When Holly was handed the phone, Mum repeated this to her. Everything was fine. Matt was enjoying his basketball. Nan was asleep.

Nan was always asleep. This added another layer to Holly’s worries.

She looked at Doofus, standing by the kitchen door listening to the rain. The weather was heartless; it did not care about her holiday. Doofus put up a foot and scratched at the door, although he had already been let out that day. The restlessness that she had noticed back at home was still evident.

Holly went over and knelt to put her arms around him. Doofus did not lick or even nuzzle at her as another dog might, but he stood still patiently and let her hug him. Her fingers traced the long ridge of scar beneath his fur; the wound that he had suffered two long months ago, when he had saved her – had maybe saved them all – by sending the creature from the past on into the future, with the help of the stone eye.

It occurred to her that maybe someone far in the past had been in danger from those animals. Perhaps they had been saved when the animals had moved on through time. Then when Holly was in danger, she was saved in turn.

Doofus had always looked after her. She ought to let him go where he wanted; where he needed to. She was just afraid of where that might be. Taking a deep breath, she stood up.

“Uncle Ted,” she said, “You know that inlet off the beach? You called it a reserve. Where does it go?”

“The combe?”

“The what?”

“C, O, M, B, E,” spelt Ted. “Rhymes with room. Means a little valley. That one’s a nature reserve. You can see it on here.” He ambled over to one of the many maps on the wall, and pointed.

Holly studied the map. The nature reserve was a thin green worm about three kilometres long, leading from the coast towards the village. Perhaps there was a way into it from the village end.

So what? She didn’t even know what she was looking for.

“Where do they sell wetsuits?” she asked without thinking.

“Bude or Barnstaple, I expect,” said Ted, looking slightly alarmed, “but you don’t want to go surfing round here, not with all the rocks and currents.”

“I don’t want to surf,” said Holly. “I was just thinking about wetsuits.”

As she spoke, Doofus whined; a sound so startlingly unlike him that she stared at him open-mouthed. Doofus *never* whined. Standing beside the door, he fixed his eyes on the wood as if staring through it.

He whined again, with a desolate note that swirled through her head like cold sea-mist. She felt a sudden fear that the whine might turn into a howl. And what then?

“Does he want to go out?” said Ted. “He’s a big dog to be cooped up in here. But it’s a bit wet outside.”

“I’ll take him for a walk,” said Holly. “It’s only mizzle. I won’t go far. Are you coming, Clive?”

“Busy,” said Clive, his head down. “Later.” Reading took him a lot of effort.

Holly pulled on her coat, still damp from yesterday. As soon as she stepped outside, Doofus set off like a bullet towards the sea. Hurrying after him, she

prayed he would not head into the combe. She had no wish to face that heavy body crashing through the undergrowth, whatever it might be.

But on arriving at the beach, Doofus slowed, and turned – to her relief – not right, towards the combe, but left, towards the old hotel. As he approached the ruined building he stopped, waiting for her to catch up. Once she had stepped across the tape he put his nose against her leg to slow her down.

Why are we back here? wondered Holly, but the answer came to her at once. Something strange had been here earlier. Doofus had come to investigate. He wanted to know what it was no less than she did.

Or maybe he already knew.

Or maybe he just wanted the rest of the beef, she thought, as he picked his way deliberately over to the hotel. She followed, the rain and fractious waves concealing any noise she made. She wondered how people living by the sea coped with the continuous roar and rush of its presence. It would be like living with an enormous dog, a much noisier and needier one than Doofus, constantly panting and licking and pouncing and wanting notice taken of it.

Doofus, in contrast, was as silent as a dog could be. If a dog could ever look stealthy, he did: almost panther-like in his sinuous caution as he stalked around the ruined building.

She followed him along the far side to a second doorway, with a bruised sign saying *Marine Hotel 1898*. This one had no door; Doofus entered noiselessly. Holly went in after him, hearing the sea's insistent demands at once become more muted and dream-like. Anxious to make no extra noise, she stepped carefully amidst cockles, inky mussel shells, and crab cases that littered the floor. When Doofus led her along the hotel corridor it was like the bottom of the sea.

He halted by the room that still had half its ceiling – the one where the joint of beef had been left. So maybe that was what he wanted after all. The rain tapped softly on the remnants of the roof while the sea sang to her. She thought of mermaids as she went in.

She stopped half way. Somebody was already there, squatting in the most sheltered corner, the furthest from the window. Somebody stopped in the act of prising open a clamshell.

Holly stared at somebody, and somebody stared back.

Brown eyes and reddish hair. Reddish hair all over; the colour of an orang-utan, though not as long or thick as an orang-utan's hair, thought Holly, for the paler skin beneath was clearly visible. Why was she not surprised? She felt that she had known this all along.

Not a wetsuit. Just a hairy somebody about her size. She noticed that somebody, who wore no clothes, was female, and that reassured her although she knew that it should not.

The female somebody had heavy eyebrows and wide cheekbones, although her jaw was not especially wide. Her forehead retreated from her frowning brow to a low hairline. The hair on her head was thicker and longer than on her body.

Instead of standing up, somebody stayed where she was and grimaced at Holly with something like a smile. It occurred to Holly that somebody was not surprised by her; that somebody had probably watched her previously and felt her not to be a threat.

So after a moment Holly carefully knelt down opposite. There was a pile of clams and mussels between them: somebody had been collecting them. The sea whispered agelessly. The breeze blew through the window, bringing a hint of rain. Somebody brushed hair out of her eyes and pushed a mussel towards Holly.

Holly realised what she ought to do. So she picked the mussel up and tried to open it. It was firmly shut, until she got out her penknife and prised it wide.

Somebody watched this intently. Holly held out the open mussel and after a few seconds, somebody reached out with long, delicate fingers and took it.

Somebody tipped back her head and arm to eat the mussel straight from the shell. Holly now realised there was dried blood all down the other arm, in matted streaks of brown. And somebody was shivering.

All the same, there was another grimace – or smile – before somebody took up a cockle and used a thin flake of stone to prise it open.

The cockle was held out to Holly, who took it – her fingers brushing reddish hair – and pretended to eat it. She did not like cockles even when cooked. But she mimed swallowing and smacking her lips, and was rewarded with another sort-of-smile.

Somebody might have a medical condition, Holly thought. Somebody might have been born like this eleven years ago.

But she knew that was not the case. Eleven years was not long enough ago; not by a long, long way. She felt faintly dizzy.

“You’re a Stone Age girl,” she said quietly. “You’re prehistoric. Am I right?”

She did not expect any sort of answer she would understand. She expected perhaps hoots like a chimpanzee’s. Instead the girl made a series of brief, sing-song, up-and-down sounds, something like: “tiss, dee, tiss, dow,” repeated and followed with a soft hiss. Was this language? Or was the girl just trying to copy Holly’s speech?

Holly looked round for Doofus. He had brought her here: what was she supposed to do now?

But Doofus was staying out of their vision. Perhaps this morning it had been the sight of *him*, and not of Holly, that had scared the strange girl away.

"You're hurt," she said, and pointed to the blood. The girl just looked at her and then went back to prising open a clam.

"You're cold," added Holly, for the girl was decidedly shivering, as if she was used to warmer temperatures.

Holly began to take off her raincoat. The girl jumped to her feet and backed away. But when Holly had taken off her thin jumper too, stripping down to her T-shirt and dropping the jumper on the sandy floor, the girl looked interested. She made a croaking noise. Was she laughing?

"Tiss dow," she said.

"Put it on," said Holly. She tried to put the jumper over the girl's head. Hands gripped hers with long, tough fingers, and set them very firmly aside. The girl was strong. Holly saw now distinct gashes scored down her arm. The blood was dark and dry.

But did somebody not understand clothes? "I thought you wore skins," muttered Holly as she put the jumper over her own head, then took it off a second time and held it out.

She did it twice more before the girl took it from her. Holly tried to help, and they wrestled for a while, the girl hissing and panting, until the jumper was on her. It was back to front and rather tight across the shoulders, but otherwise a good fit if somewhat short. The girl plucked at it but did not try to get it off again.

"Seen, seen," she said.

"Warmer?" said Holly. She wondered where the girl usually sheltered from the cold and rain.

But what was Holly herself supposed to do next? Was she supposed to lead this girl out of the hotel and take her home to Uncle Ted's? Feed her egg and bacon? Teach her English? Shave her hair and make her go to school?

A dozen possibilities flitted across her mind. None of them seemed the right one, here in these airy ruins with the breeze whirling and the sea whispering.

She watched the girl, and listened. The girl prised open shellfish, ate carefully, and when Holly refused another cockle, appeared to ignore her.

Standing up, Holly held out her hand. The girl did not take it. She remained squatting, reaching for a clam. Eating seemed to be the most important thing. Beneath the red hair her body was lithe and powerful but had no extra fat. It was all sinew and muscle.

"Well," said Holly. "I can bring you some antiseptic for those cuts."

She edged out. It was the only thing she could think of to do just now. She could come back later with food and Germolene.

When she turned in the doorway the girl was not even looking at her. She was picking over her pile of shells.

Doofus was waiting just behind the door. He began to stroll away as casually as if they were leaving a neighbour, not somebody from – how many centuries? No, centuries were too short. How many thousands of years ago?

It must have been the stone eye, thought Holly in a kind of rueful panic. There was no other explanation. The stone eye must have brought the girl through time the way it brought those animals back home in Derbyshire.

It was all her fault. Her responsibility.

But what should she do now?

Chapter Eight

Back at Ted's house, there was a kerfuffle. Nobody noticed that Holly had returned minus her jumper. Dad was running around with a bucket, while Clive was shifting boxes under Ted's direction.

Apparently Ted's cellar had begun to flood. Holly hadn't known there was a cellar. It was behind a low door in the kitchen: a set of worn stone steps led down to a windowless room, which was dark, dank, and awash with dirty water.

"No barrels of rum in there, I'm afraid," said Ted, "just all my old stuff." He seemed so remarkably calm that Holly suspected this had happened before. She and everybody else spent the rest of the morning running up and down the cellar steps with plastic boxes and mouldy, collapsing cardboard cartons full of Ted's old things. Then they ran up and down all over again with mops and buckets.

It wasn't until the afternoon that Holly got the chance to talk to Clive in private.

"I saw somebody," she began, and at once he put his finger to his lips and motioned her up to his attic.

Clive was turning the attic into a cross between a junk-shop and a library. He had already filled half the shelves with lumps of rock and hammers and books borrowed from Ted. He sat down on the bed with an expectant look.

"You saw somebody?" he asked. Holly began to tell him about the morning's expedition and the girl. It turned out that Clive did not need to be told.

“I knew it,” he said, when she was a few hesitant sentences in. “I *knew* it. Hairy person. Or girl. Whatever. I knew as soon as I saw it in the combe. Either it’s been here all along, or it’s just arrived.”

“Been here all along?”

“A sort of little Bigfoot,” said Clive, “hiding from people for thousands of years.”

“A spriggan,” said Holly. “A piskey.”

“More like a yeti. But I don’t think it can have been here since prehistoric times. This place is far too small. People would have noticed. They would have found them. It’s not like Bigfoot in America or yetis in the Himalayas, with all that wilderness to hide in.”

“I think she just arrived,” said Holly, her voice small. “I brought the stone eye with us, Clive. You know, the stone with the hole through it, from up on Whitten Moor.”

He stared at her, his mouth open. “*That* stone? You brought it *here*? Why?”

“Because Doofus wanted me to. It’s what let the girl come here, just like it let those animals come from the past.”

“We don’t know that for sure,” said Clive. “There’s no real evidence.”

“But you know it’s true all the same,” insisted Holly. “Doofus made me bring the stone eye here. Then he made me take it to the beach, and throw it in the sea.”

Clive looked sceptical. “Doofus *made* you do all that?”

“I thought that was what he wanted,” she said, dejected. “I thought it would be safe underwater, and couldn’t bring anything back from the past except maybe an ancient fish or two. But I guess I didn’t throw it deep enough.”

“Ah,” said Clive. He let out a long, almost happy breath. “Sea levels change. Continents move. In ice ages the sea level goes down. But when the ice melts, sometimes the land bounces back up.”

“Bounces?”

“Slowly. Over thousands of years, once the weight of the ice has gone. So it might have been land when the girl lived here. Hang on: let me find some pictures. Which one did she look most like?”

He took down a fat volume and began to leaf through it. A double page of hairy and not-so-hairy faces stared out at Holly, all somewhat glowering and grim.

“What are these?” she asked.

“Reconstructions from ancient skulls. Homo sapiens, Neanderthal, Heidelbergensis, Australopithecus,” recited Clive.

“They don’t have red hair,” objected Holly. Then she realised that of course skulls wouldn’t tell the colour of their owners’ hair.

She studied the pictures. “I suppose... if I had to pick one, *that* one.”

“Yes! That’s what I thought too,” he said triumphantly. Then he frowned. “Are you *sure* yours had red hair? That person we saw in the combe was sort of dirty grey.”

“I just spent half an hour with her,” Holly pointed out. “Let me finish the story.” She went on to tell Clive about the jumper and the wounded arm and the girl’s odd, sing-song voice. “So if she’s the same as that picture, what is she?”

“Early Neanderthal. They’ve found fossils of them in Wales. They’ve never found any here, but they probably haven’t looked very hard.”

“Okay. Tell me about Neanderthals,” she said.

Clive’s eyes lit up. “Sort of our cousins: cousins to modern humans, I mean. They might have had some language, they might have had reddish hair, they might have buried their dead and put flowers in their graves.”

“That’s a lot of *might haves*,” Holly pointed out.

“Well, some of that is guess-work from DNA. Neanderthals must have mixed with modern humans because Europeans all have a bit of Neanderthal DNA, about three per cent I think, but the actual Neanderthal people died out thousands of years ago.”

“How many thousands?” whispered Holly.

“I’ll check. But, Holly, the ones in Wales were—”

“Clive, this is all my fault!” she wailed in dismay. “I brought the stone here. What am I going to do now?”

“I’ll have a think,” said Clive. He sounded happy in a way he had not since the death of Mr Finney. But Holly felt the weight of worry descend on her again.

She gazed out of the attic window at the horizon fading imperceptibly into the rain. A sea of time, stretching for thousands of years. And now she’d brought some poor, rusty-haired, wounded girl across that unknown sea. How could she ever get her back to where she belonged?

All she could do, for now, was what she had already thought of: give her food and antiseptic. Maybe some warm clothing that would fit her better. It wasn’t enough.

“What did Neanderthals eat, Clive, apart from shellfish?”

“Pretty much anything they could get,” said Clive. “But, Holly—”

However, Holly had already jumped up and was running back downstairs to look for a first aid kit and spare food. She wanted to go straight back to the girl, but she couldn’t. She had to wait, because of Uncle Ted and his drowned cellar.

That afternoon, they helped Ted sort through all his stuff. The damp boxes were emptied onto the kitchen table, one by one, while Ted decided what should be thrown away – which turned out to be nothing. Old crockery and biscuit tins, dog-eared textbooks, rusty tools and battered saucepans were carefully set aside. There was a cereal carton full of ancient photographs which appeared to have been made into a mouse nest. Holly would have tossed the whole lot in the bin.

But she was too kind to say this to Uncle Ted, who was already down in the mouth at the nibbled state of his photographs.

“That was us in London,” he said. “Look, there’s your Nan.” Nan was too tiny to make out properly in the clump of solemn children. Behind them was a ruined street.

“Bombed,” added Ted. “That was during the war.”

“When the doodlebug came down and blew up your house?”

“Not long after. And here I am twelve years later in the merchant navy. Smart, eh?”

“Very smart,” said Dad. “Where was this one taken?”

“Hong Kong harbour,” said Ted, “and here’s Singapore, and that one I believe is Makassar although I could be wrong.”

Dad leafed through the photos. “Why, here’s Doofus!” he said in surprise. “Standing in front of a load of sailors.”

“I’d forgotten all about that one,” said Ted, peering. “It does look like Doofus, doesn’t it?”

“That’s not Singapore.”

“Nowhere so exotic,” answered Ted. “That’s Peel, on the Isle of Man, fifty-odd years ago, and that’s our ship behind us which got delayed, and just as well.”

“How do you mean?” asked Clive.

“We were all ready to sail and the captain never turned up, so we missed the tide. When he eventually came running down to the harbour he told us that this big black dog had trapped him in his lodgings and wouldn’t let him leave. Meanwhile a storm blew up which would have made matchwood of our boat, if we’d been out at sea. So that dog might just have saved our lives.”

Holly stared at the picture. It did look very like Doofus. She turned to study her dog, sprawled across the doorway.

“The captain insisted on me taking that photo,” said Ted. “Funny it being a big black dog like Doofus, and like Rex back in the blitz. Black dogs must be lucky for me, eh, Doofus?”

Holly remembered the research she had done on black dog legends. The Isle of Man had its own tales...

“Moddy Dhoo,” she murmured. Doofus’s ears twitched.

“You need a plastic box for all these photographs,” said Dad. While he and Ted were drawing up a plan for new shelving in the cellar, Clive pulled Holly aside into the kitchen. He said in a low voice,

“I was trying to tell you, upstairs, earlier. The last Neanderthals probably died out about thirty thousand years ago, in Spain.”

“Thirty thousand!” Holly’s eyes widened. “Did modern humans kill them off?”

“Maybe. I don’t know. That’s not the point,” said Clive. “The point is, from what it says in those books, I think she’s older. I mean from longer ago.”

“Okay,” said Holly. “How much longer?”

Clive pulled a face. “Um... about another two hundred thousand years.”

There was a short silence.

“Say that again,” said Holly, and Clive repeated it.

“The ones in Wales,” he added, “were from nearly a quarter of a million years ago, between Ice Ages. I think she might be from the same time. Not just her.”

“What do you mean?”

“The other one as well, in the combe. The bigger one.”

Holly was silent. She was trying to work out exactly what two hundred and thirty thousand years meant. She had nothing to compare it to apart from Ancient Rome and the birth of Christ two thousand years ago, and even that seemed enormously distant.

It’s more than a hundred of *those*, she thought. It didn’t really help. Never mind a sea of time; it was an ocean, unfathomable and endless. There was no way across it.

She pictured the girl as she had seen her, in the ruined building; the wind singing outside, shells scattered on the floor. At least she had food and shelter for the moment.

But she wasn’t safe. She could easily be found there. Something had already found her. Something had wounded her.

The other one. Holly had almost forgotten it for the moment. Now it seemed clear that the person in the combe was a second ancient Somebody. So had the two Somebodies arrived together? And if so, why weren’t they together now?

She recalled how, in the combe, Doofus had pulled her away urgently just before the second Somebody came charging through the bushes. Doofus knew it wasn’t friendly.

And it had left those slashes on the tree. So it must be armed.

Chapter Nine

“Is that your dad’s jumper you’re wearing?” asked Clive. It was the next morning, and he stood poised to go with a bulging carrier bag.

“Dad brought three, so he won’t need it. I bet he won’t even miss it. It’s hideous anyway,” said Holly. The jumper was sludge-green but thick and warm. She put on her raincoat over it and fastened it up.

“Let’s go, then.” When they went into the kitchen to collect Doofus, Uncle Ted and Dad were still eating breakfast.

“You’re out early,” Dad remarked.

“Rock-spotting on the beach,” said Clive. “Is it all right if I take a couple of your books, please, Uncle Ted?” He waved the carrier bag.

“Certainly. Glad they’re getting some use,” said Ted. He looked a little wistful, as if he would like to join them. Holly thought briefly about asking him: but his legs might not be up to scrambling. In any case, much though she liked Uncle Ted, she was not sure if he could be trusted with a secret like the girl.

Even Dad... What would Dad do, if he knew? Call Social Services, most likely. The girl would get put into a home, or a hospital with doctors staring and wondering what condition she’d been born with. They’d think she was some sort of freak.

No, that was out of the question. Holly could not think of anything to do except what they were already doing; marching down to the abandoned hotel with a bag of biscuits, apples and antiseptic wipes.

Their feet slapped on the wet road. It was still raining, a soft and steady drizzle that seemed to have lulled the sea into obedience. A faint mist shrouded everything, like a filmy veil.

They descended to the beach and approached the hotel cautiously. Holly made Doofus wait outside the door of the room lest the sight of him should alarm the girl; but when she entered, the girl was not there. The room was washed by the sound of the waves.

“But you can see all the empty shells,” she told Clive. “And there’s the stone she used to prise them open, or one like it.”

Clive picked up the flake of stone and peered at it thoughtfully. He wiped the rain off his glasses and peered again.

“That’s flint,” he said. “And it’s been knapped. Shaped into a knife. She’s not somewhere else in the building, is she?”

They searched the other rooms without finding anything other than drifts of sand and shells. At last Holly thought to hold out the flint tool to Doofus.

“Where is she, Doof? Can you find her?”

“You’ll be lucky,” said Clive. “I don’t think a stone would hold any scent.”

However, Holly believed that Doofus went by more than just smell. He had some other, more mysterious sense. After sniffing the stone he wandered out of the building and down the beach. The children followed.

Doofus stopped and raised his nose in the direction of the combe. Holly wondered what he smelt on the wind other than the ever-present cabbagey odour of damp seaweed.

But then he turned with a decisive movement in the opposite direction, heading south beyond the hotel. He kept going further around the shore than Holly and Clive had yet ventured because the cliffs were in the way, dipping into the sea at a ruggedly forbidding point. This was a much bigger headland than the one near the combe. Doofus turned and looked at them expectantly.

Holly studied the rocky point. You could probably scramble round it, she judged, though not without getting your feet wet. She hung back.

“Doofus wants us to go round that way. But what if we get cut off by the tide?”

“We won’t,” said Clive. “It’s going out. I checked before we came.”

So Holly put her trust in Doofus, and in Clive’s tide-checking skills, and clambered around the point. Sure enough, her trainers were quickly swamped with sea-water. But other than that, it wasn’t too difficult.

On the other side of the point, the shoreland opened up again into a small, cliff-encircled bay. It seemed deserted. There were no paths down the rock face to it.

“Inaccessible Cove,” Clive muttered.

“Is that what it’s called?”

“It is now. I just named it.”

“I think there’s a cave in the cliffs,” said Holly, squinting. “Do you think that’s where Doofus means us to go?”

“No,” said Clive, his voice strange. “She’s *there*.”

She was squatting by the water, quite still, in Holly’s blue-grey jumper. Holly had not spotted her against the blue-grey sea. As they walked cautiously towards her, she looked up several times but did not stand nor try to run away.

“Hallo,” said Holly, and the girl glanced up fleetingly again, then looked down at the rock-pool from which she plucked something small – a shrimp, maybe – and put it in her mouth.

“I brought you another jumper,” Holly said. “A bigger one. It should fit you better.” She removed her coat and peeled off Dad’s sludge-coloured jersey. The girl looked interested. As Holly held it out she took it carefully from her hand and began to put it on quite skilfully over the blue-grey one.

“That isn’t actually what I meant,” said Holly, who had been intending to do a swap. “And how can I do your arm?” She tried to get both jumpers off the girl and another small wrestling-match ensued. The girl began to croak and hoot as if she was laughing.

She *was* laughing. Clive was open-mouthed, staring at her. Even though Holly knew the girl’s nakedness wasn’t what he was interested in, she felt she should cover the girl up – although you could hardly call her naked with all that body hair.

Finally Holly was left panting with a jumper in each hand. She tossed the sludge one on a rock and the girl grabbed it up again.

“Your arm,” said Holly, seizing the limb. Beneath the silky hair it felt as strong and firm as a tree branch. “Where are those wipes, Clive?”

As soon as Clive began to open the packet of antiseptic wipes, the girl’s attention was held. Holly gave her a wipe to sniff and look at while she used another to dab at the blood-smeared arm.

“That’s not good,” she said, alarmed at what she saw. “Some of these cuts are really deep, Clive. What do you think made them?” There were four gashes, two gaping; two not so bad. But bad enough.

Clive moved forward to inspect them. The girl put out a cautious hand to touch his glasses, and he pulled back again.

“Um... claws?” he said. “Or a knife? You’d be surprised how sharp stone knives can be. I don’t think it’s jagged enough for teeth.”

“I should have brought a bandage.”

“Next time,” said Clive. “How did you get her to talk before?”

Holly couldn’t remember. She addressed the girl. “Me Holly. Him Clive. *Clive*. You?”

The girl just looked at her, and passed the wipe between her long reddish fingers.

“Holly. Clive. Clive. Holly.” Holly pointed at them each in turn, then at the girl.

“E-do,” said the girl, or almost sang it. The *E* was much higher than the *do*.

“E-do,” said Holly and Clive together.

“Tiss. Tiss. Don. Chhh.”

“Oh wow,” said Clive.

“Oh wow,” said the girl, with exactly the same intonation. She put out a tentative hand again towards his glasses. Clive held on to them, and let her touch them.

“How old do you think she is?” he said.

“About my age,” said Holly without thinking. “Only she’s older. I mean she’s more grown up.”

Carefully Clive got his book out of the carrier bag and opened it at the page of reconstructions. "Okay. I think we were right. Early Neanderthal is the closest."

He turned the book round for the girl to see. She looked at the pictures without interest.

"She doesn't recognise them," said Holly.

"I expect they're too small," said Clive. He closed the book before it got wet; the rain was beginning to fall harder. Replacing it in the bag, he brought out Uncle Ted's shaving mirror.

"What the...?"

For answer, Clive held it up for the girl to look at.

"Tiss," she said in some bewilderment, and looked behind the mirror and then back in it, raising her heavy eyebrows and opening and closing her mouth. Her teeth were big.

Clive put down the mirror and used his finger to draw in a patch of damp sand: a circle, eyes, nose, mouth. It was a face.

The girl ignored it. She wanted the mirror. When Clive put it back in the bag she tried to grab it and tussled with him in the rain.

"Hey," said Clive, "she's strong!"

"I know."

"And look, she knows the mirror's still there, even though she can't see it!"

"Well, of course she does," said Holly. "Have you done playing with her?"

Before Clive could answer there was a sudden clatter of falling stones from the cliffs above them.

The girl moved so quickly that Holly was doubly startled. The girl snatched up the sludge jersey and in an instant was darting across the sand towards the cave that Holly had seen earlier.

"There's somebody up there," said Clive, sounding horrified.

"There's nobody there now."

"I'm sure I saw a head!"

"A red head?" said Holly, immediately thinking *Otto*.

"I don't think so. It moved too fast to be sure but I don't think it was red. More greyish."

"A bald head? With glasses?" she demanded. If not *Otto*, his bad-tempered father...

"No," said Clive. "It could have been a hiker."

"We need to find out," Holly said. She felt angry and scared: angry because *Otto* might have been spying on the half-naked girl down on the beach.

Scared because she did not know what he would do. She would have to swear him to secrecy, or something. But she had to catch him first.

She hadn't yet given the girl the biscuits or the apples. She ran a little closer to the cave and threw them at the dark entrance. The pack of biscuits split as it landed, but that might save the girl having to work out how to get it open.

The girl – no. *Edo*. Edo was now hidden deep within the cave.

“Come on, Clive!” commanded Holly. “We need to get back up to the top.”

Chapter Ten

Holly raced across the beach, clambering recklessly round the headland and filling her shoes completely with water in the process.

“Hurry!” she urged Clive, who was lagging behind. “We need to see who it was up there!”

“They’ll be gone by now.” Clive looked around. “Wait. Where’s Doofus?”

Holly stopped short at the water’s edge. On seeing the girl, she’d forgotten all about Doofus. Maybe he had stayed away from Edo in case he frightened her.

Now Holly scanned the beach for him, and then in sudden fear gazed out to sea, her head flooded with turbulent images that came out of nowhere: Doofus being swept away by waves. But the sea was quiet. To her relief she spotted him half-hidden by a rock, nosing at a piece of driftwood in the sand.

Her relief turned to consternation when she saw what he had found. It was not driftwood: it was a bone. A long, solid bone, deep notches cut along its length with some sharp tool.

“That’s...” said Clive behind her, and his voice tailed away.

“Yes. Probably cow or horse or something. Leave it, Doofus.” Perhaps the sea would wash the bone away. She hoped so.

However, Doofus picked the bone up in his jaws, and carried it higher up the beach. He put it down carefully on the stones where the waves would not disturb it, before accompanying Holly and Clive back up the hill.

It was raining harder now. Nobody was visible along the cliff-edge. Yet if it had just been some ordinary hiker on the cliff trail, surely they should still have been in sight...

Holly stared suspiciously at the hedges of gorse and hawthorn which lined the cliff. Then she strode out along the coastal path to examine them, determined to catch the culprit this time.

However, nobody was hiding in the hedges. She paused above the Inaccessible Cove, where the watcher had been. Here, the path was only a couple of metres from the precipice; gingerly she moved closer to the edge.

“Don’t,” said Clive. So she lay down on her stomach to look over.

A seagull swayed beneath her, as if surfing on the rain: a wave crashed far below. There was no sign of the girl, though she could see the tiny trails of all their footprints down there in the sand. There were definitely no steps leading down: the bay and the cave could be reached only by the sea.

“I bet it was Otto,” she muttered.

“Can you come away from there?” begged Clive. “Cliff-edges can collapse, especially after a lot of rain. And that one’s cracked already.”

“Where?”

“*There.*”

They were only thin cracks. All the same, hearing the panic in his voice, Holly shuffled back to the path and sat up to wipe raindrops off her face. Her thoughts were many and confused. Was Edo living in that cave? How safe was it when the tide came in? Who had been watching her? And who had ripped open her arm?

On top of all that, there was the bone that Doofus had discovered. She hadn’t liked the look of it. She didn’t understand what was going on. This was meant to be a holiday, for goodness sake.

“There’s a footprint over here,” said Clive.

It was a single footprint in a patch of mud. A bare foot, quite wide, but blurred by rain.

“That could be anybody’s,” she said.

“Barefoot? In this weather?” Clive stared at the print. Although he had been full of excitement about Edo, he now looked bedraggled and unhappy. He did not like puzzles that he couldn’t solve.

Holly felt a sudden sympathy. This was meant to be a holiday for Clive as well as her. Clive didn’t need stress, she thought. He needed a fun holiday. He didn’t get much fun at home.

“Come on,” she said. “It’s raining too hard now to stay out. Edo will be fine inside her cave. Let’s go back and eat Uncle Ted’s ice-cream.”

So they trailed back to the house, where a repeated banging echoed from the damp cellar. Dad was putting up shelves to hold Ted’s stuff. As well as the banging, they could hear quite a lot of muffled swearing. Carpentry was not Dad’s strong point.

Meanwhile Uncle Ted sat at the kitchen table, frowning at a pile of documents – the ones, thought Holly, that she had brought him from Anita. Whatever they were, Ted was not enjoying reading them.

“I don’t know,” he muttered as they came in, “you’d think at least he could have delivered them in person. What a soulless, stuck-up...” He frowned at the children before his face cleared.

“Well, hallo, drowned rats! Sorry about the weather,” he said, putting down his papers. “Wish it was better for you.”

“I don’t mind it,” Holly said. “It’s nice here. Especially down by the sea – it’s lovely. Even that old hotel.” Clive pulled a warning face at her.

Ted said, “Hmm. Better stay away from that hotel. It’s private property.”

“Who does it belong to?” Holly asked.

“Otto’s father.” Ted’s frown had returned.

Clive mouthed at her, *Stop talking about the hotel!*

Holly rolled her eyes at him. “Did you say you had ice-cream, Uncle Ted?”

“Plenty of it. It won’t get eaten in this weather,” said Uncle Ted with a sigh. “Tomorrow should be brighter, though. Tomorrow you could go to see Tintagel.”

“I like it here,” said Holly. She did not know what Tintagel was, and did not particularly want to go and see it. “And we don’t mind eating ice-cream in the rain.”

Ted did not take the hint. “If it’s still wet this afternoon, we can play board games,” he offered. “I’ve got Monopoly.”

“Lovely,” said Holly, trying to sound enthusiastic.

“Lovely,” said Dad, on emerging from the cellar, and he actually meant it. “The cricket’s been rained off. Monopoly’s just the thing. Ages since I played it.”

“I’ll ask that lad, Otto, to come round and join us,” said Uncle Ted. “He could do with some company.”

Dad looked surprised. “Really, Ted? I thought you didn’t...”

“The father and the boy’s two different things,” said Ted. “Never mind what Paul’s up to, there’s no reason to take it out on Otto. The lad’s at a loose end. Paul’s always busy. And no other kids his age round here.”

Holly wanted to object, but could not think of a good reason. Still, she reflected, if Otto was playing board games with them, he wouldn’t be out spying on Edo. She might even get a chance to ask him what he thought he was doing.

So that afternoon she found herself sitting round a Monopoly board with Otto staring at her from across the table, and Clive with a book resting on his knee.

Clive was only pretending to play. He was really reading about *Geomorphology for Beginners*, his lips moving slightly. Holly had to elbow him whenever it was his turn.

Dad and Ted were determinedly jolly, as if they were both practising to be Father Christmas. They exclaimed over every Chance card or trip past jail. Otto cheated.

At first Holly thought she was mistaken. Otto was the banker. Surely he hadn't really given himself three hundred pounds instead of two?

She began to watch him carefully without looking directly at him, and sure enough, he did it again next time round. And then when he bought some houses he snaffled a couple of extra ones as well.

"Where did those come from?" said Holly sharply as he put them on the board. "How many did you buy?"

Otto muttered something about counting wrong, and put two back in the box. Holly gave him her coldest narrow-eyed stare. Clive didn't notice anything: he was still lost in his book, head down and walking through geological ages.

"Tintagel should be good tomorrow," said Dad, to cover the awkward moment. "Do you think your father will let you come with us, Otto? There's room in the car."

Holly was indignant. She was even more indignant when Otto said Yes. How dared he, after trying to bankrupt Dad with his stolen houses? She did not speak to him again during the game, and was just sorry that he probably never noticed how he had been snubbed. She didn't even have a chance to confront him about the spying, because afterwards he declined invitations to stay to tea and went straight back to his own house.

"I should think he's lonely there," said Ted once he had gone.

"Why? He's got his dad," said Holly with a sniff.

"Yes, but Paul's a grumpy b— I mean, Paul's always working. He works from home. Be good for Otto to get out for the day. He's a bit sad and lost, that lad. Glad you asked him to go along tomorrow."

I didn't ask him, said Holly silently. Whatever Tintagel was, she did not want to see it in Otto's company. She would rather go down to the beach and try and find Edo again. If the girl wasn't in the cave, Doofus would surely be able to track her down. She looked at the dog, sprawled hugely across the doorway next to his water-bowl, and a wave of affection rippled through her.

But then she realised something. "Dad, if Otto comes tomorrow there won't be room for Doofus in the car! We can't leave him behind."

Dad obviously hadn't thought of that. But Ted said,

"I don't need to come to Tintagel with you. I've seen it before and I can see it again any time I like. Leave the dog at home with me."

“I’d rather take him,” pleaded Holly.

“Not sure if they allow dogs on Tintagel,” Dad warned her. “It could be dangerous for them. All those cliffs.”

“But then I...” However, Holly could not think of an excuse to stay behind with Doofus. She bit her lip, and said no more.

Chapter Eleven

Otto was no substitute for Doofus, in Holly’s opinion. What was worse, she had to sit next to him in the back of the car, because Clive needed to go in the front to stop him feeling car-sick. Clive sat there grim-faced clutching his binoculars and a stout plastic bag.

On the drive, Dad quizzed Otto. Holly cringed at his weird adult idea of making conversation, although she ought to be used to it by now. Where do you go to school? What’s your favourite lesson? Do they have a football team?

Otto’s school sounded posh. It was boys only. It had a seventeenth century chapel and a rugby team instead of football. It taught Latin.

“I’m good at Latin,” said Otto, “although French is more useful. I like languages. I’m planning to start German next year.”

“Good for you,” said Dad. “Ich bin ein Yorkshireman, by gum.” Holly closed her eyes in pain.

“Do you speak Cornish?” Clive said abruptly to Otto.

“Cornish?”

“I thought, spending so much time down here, you might have learnt it.”

“It’s Devon,” said Otto.

“Only just. It’s right on the border.”

“But Cornish isn’t a living language.”

“If people use it, it’s living,” said Clive, and “No more is Latin,” said Holly, both at the same time. She realised that Clive enjoyed Otto’s company no more than she did. She looked out of the window and observed,

“S black ower Bill’s mothers, sithee.”

“What?” said Otto and Clive, together.

“It’s Derbyshire,” said Holly. “It’s a living dialect.”

“I don’t know that one,” said Dad. “Who’s Bill’s mother?”

“It means *over there*. The lady in our newsagent says it,” Holly told him. “You don’t know it because you’re from Yorkshire. You’re just a nesh tyke.”

“Eyup, yer narky bairn!” said Dad. “Less of the *nesh*.”

Holly turned to Otto. “Does Surrey have a dialect?” she demanded.

“I doubt it,” Otto said. *Smarmy sket*, thought Holly, but she kept that to herself.

She missed Doofus. It turned out that dogs were allowed on Tintagel after all; and she thought that Doofus would have liked it, even if he did have to go on a lead. To her surprise, she rather loved it herself.

Tintagel was a ruined castle on a cliff-top. King Arthur was supposed to have lived there. Despite the fine rain – or perhaps because of it – there was a misty enchantment over the place, with its steep flights of steps veering down and then rising up again to the ruins overlooking the grey sea. Holly stood as if on a ship’s prow and let the wind spatter her face.

“It wasn’t really King Arthur’s castle, you know,” Otto said behind her. “It’s not old enough.”

Holly walked away from him. This was where Doofus would have been useful; it was easy to ignore someone by paying attention to a dog. Just walking away seemed rude. But she didn’t care.

Otto followed her. “It’s medieval. What’s he looking at?”

“*He?* You mean Clive?” Clive was a little distance away, with his over-sized binoculars trained not upwards on the wheeling seabirds but down into the dip where the steps were.

“Is he spying on people?” Otto said.

“*Clive* doesn’t spy,” she answered, with all the scorn that she could manage. She thought Clive was probably looking for geology but saw no reason why she should enlighten Otto. “Not like you.”

“What? I wasn’t spying,” said Otto.

“What about yesterday morning, up on the cliffs? What were you looking at?”

“Yesterday? I wasn’t there.”

“And why do you keep staring at me?”

“I don’t.”

“Yes, you do.”

“Well – why shouldn’t I look at you? You’re pretty,” he said.

It was Holly’s turn to stare at him, in disbelief. She knew she was not pretty. Her friend Natasha was pretty. Holly knew that she herself looked very ordinary. So Otto was lying. He was trying to get round her, the smarmy sket.

“Even if I *was*,” she said, “why would that make it all right to stare?”

Otto did not try to answer. He just looked away, back at Clive.

“So where’s he from?”

“Who?”

“Clive. Is he from India or Pakistan or somewhere?”

“He’s from Sheffield,” Holly said.

“You know what I mean. Where are his parents from?”

“Clive’s parents are none of your business.” She said it vehemently, because she did not want Otto to go asking Clive about his parents. Clive missed his father, whom he saw rarely. Holly had seen him only once or twice: a thin, dark, shy man who had waved at her tentatively over the garden fence. Clive’s mum, by contrast, was blonde and stout and loud, with nothing tentative about her.

To steer him off the subject, she demanded, “Why did you cheat at Monopoly?”

Otto’s face flamed red. “I... I didn’t want to lose.”

His honesty surprised her. “At Monopoly? Why not? What’s wrong with losing?” She decided that Otto was just weird. Maybe it was his school that had made him so. But she didn’t like him. He was a cheat and probably a liar.

“Why were you spying on us yesterday morning?” she demanded again.

“I wasn’t, I told you. Not yesterday.”

“Really? But you were before. So why should I believe you?” Without waiting for an answer, she turned away to march around the castle. Otto followed, at a distance.

He was ruining Tintagel for her. Eventually she went over to Dad and stood next to him, slipping her hand into his.

“All right, love?” said Dad. “Shall we find a café in a bit?”

Even the café was spoilt by Otto. He ordered a cappuccino and Holly thought that she was supposed to be impressed. She was pleased when Dad started telling him about the Roman relics in the area. It was much older than medieval, then. Otto didn’t know everything. She turned to Clive.

“Did you find out anything interesting about the geology?”

“There’s copper in the slate here,” said Clive. “It’s supposed to turn the sea green.”

“It didn’t look very green.”

“Too cloudy.”

“See any ravens?” asked Dad. “There might be Cornish choughs.”

Clive shook his head. “I wasn’t looking. I was looking for fault zones and overthrust strata.” At least that was one language that Otto didn’t know.

After the café they walked along the coast path for a bit. Otto spoilt that as well. She couldn’t forget that he was there, and she was sure he was privately sniggering whenever Clive pointed out a sea-bird.

“At least Tintagel will be safe from global warming,” she said to Clive. “It’s so high up above sea level.”

Clive looked gloomy. “It won’t be safe, though. Storms will knock it over. It’s going to get windier and windier in Britain. We might get hurricanes.”

“Oh, we don’t know that,” said Dad cheerily.

“We don’t *know*,” said Clive. “We’re guessing. That’s half the trouble. Nobody *knows* for sure. That’s why nobody bothers doing anything.”

Holly began to protest that she always sorted the recycling, when Dad said, “So what would you do about it, Clive?”

Clive stared moodily out to sea. “More wind power. We won’t be short of wind. Tidal power. Solar farms. Stop eating cows. Have less babies. Plant more trees. Paint all the roofs white.”

“Why the roofs?” said Otto. Holly glanced at him to see if he was sneering.

“White reflects heat,” said Clive. “It’ll cool the cities down. They’ll need cooling down, believe me.”

“Sounds like you’ve got it all sorted,” said Dad.

“It’s not down to me, though, is it?” said Clive. “And all new houses should be carbon neutral. That goes without saying.”

“Absolutely,” said Holly, although she wasn’t entirely sure what carbon neutral meant. Not needing too much heating, or something like that; but she wasn’t going to confess ignorance in front of Otto.

Otto cleared his throat. “If the sea level rises—”

“*When*,” said Clive. “It’s not an *if*.”

“When it rises, how much will it rise round here?” Holly thought this was a trick question. He didn’t expect Clive to know.

But Clive said promptly, “Up to a metre and a half by the end of the century.”

“Who says?” asked Otto.

“NASA.”

That silenced Otto for a moment. Then he said, “It’s not really that much. Is it?”

“I suppose it is if you live by the sea,” said Dad, “and you get storm surges.”

“How do they measure it anyway?” said Otto. “Sea level, I mean. It changes all the time with the tides. It’s never the same.”

“I think they measure the tides with sticks,” said Dad.

Clive gave Dad a pitying glance, and added, “Also laser pulses from satellites. But the rise in sea level could be worse. Even now the ice at the poles is melting at about five hundred billion tons a year – and growing.”

That shut you up, thought Holly at Otto.

They spent the rest of the afternoon in gift shops where she tried and failed to find a nice present for Nan without resorting to fudge. She sent Nan a postcard but nothing she wrote on it seemed true, apart from *Uncle Ted is*

very well. Was she really having a lovely time? She didn't know. Even as she posted the card she felt a sudden terrible surge of fear, as if something somewhere was going horribly wrong, quite apart from melting ice-caps.

"Shall we get some fish and chips for tea?" asked Dad. "Save us cooking. Fish are okay, aren't they, Clive?"

"If they're sustainable," said Clive.

"I'm sure they are," said Dad. "We'll buy them here and reheat them in the oven when we get home. I'll give Ted a ring while I've got a signal, and see what he says."

He rang Ted, but there was no answer.

"He's probably taking Doofus for a walk," said Dad. "Will you join us for fish and chips back at home, Otto?"

Although Holly silently willed him to say No, Otto said Yes. Again.

So they drove back through the rain with the warm paper-wrapped bundles of fish and chips on Holly's knee. The smell drove her crazy. She was desperately hungry and couldn't even steal one chip. She felt tired and unreasonably fed up and the memory of that dreadful pang of fear was still sharp within her.

Close to Uncle Ted's house, it began to rain again. Dad got lost in the lanes. He took a wrong turning and had to back up round a blind bend, sweating and muttering, "Hope we don't meet a tractor now..."

"Don't *you* know these lanes?" Holly asked Otto accusingly. He should have been able to warn Dad about the wrong turning.

"No," said Otto.

The chips were cool on her lap when they finally drew up outside Ted's house. The front door was open.

"Get the oven on, Ted!" called Dad as he climbed out of the car. "We've brought tea home with us!"

Holly carried the fish and chips in behind him. "Ted?" called Dad. "Doofus? Where are you, boy?" The house felt deserted.

Dad ran upstairs, and down again a minute later. "They're not here," he said, looking anxious. "I looked through the window, and they're not in the garden either. But something else has been out there."

Holly ran through the house and straight through the back door. She could do this without having to open it, for the door already stood open. It was at a strange angle, dangling from one hinge.

Otto and Clive came hurrying after her. They stopped to stare.

"Who's done that?" said Otto.

High up on the torn-off door were four long gouges, side by side, scored deep into the wood.

Chapter Twelve

“A knife? A pickaxe?” suggested Otto.

“I don’t know,” said Clive, frowning. “I suppose it could be a stone tool.”

“*Stone?*” said Otto disbelievingly.

“Or metal, obviously,” Clive added quickly. “A claw-hammer, maybe. It’s almost like a giant claw-mark. But I don’t know what sort of animal would make it.”

“It can’t be an animal,” objected Otto. “Not even your dog’s that big.”

“But Uncle Ted!” cried Holly. “Where is he? What’s happened to him?”

She ran out into the garden, in case Ted was lying unnoticed there. He wasn’t. The grass was muddied and trampled, and one of the shrubs had been uprooted. Beyond it, the fence was broken down.

“Someone came through the fence here,” said Clive behind her. “Pulled up the shrub, went for the door...”

Holly scanned the scuffed ground without seeing any clear prints. After a couple of minutes Dad joined them.

“If Ted and Doofus heard someone smashing in the back door,” he said, “they would have gone out the front way. They might have gone in such a hurry that they left the front door open. I’m guessing that’s what happened. I’m calling the police.”

“My Dad!” said Otto with a sudden gasp.

“He’s fine,” said Holly’s father. “I just knocked at your house and spoke to him. He was working with his headphones on. Didn’t hear a thing. But you’d better go home, Otto.”

Otto blinked wordlessly. Then he hurried away.

Dad used the phone in the hall to ring the police. Meanwhile Clive and Holly looked carefully round Ted’s house for any clues. There was a bowl of tomato soup on the kitchen table, half-drunk, and quite cold. It must have been there for a while. Doofus’s lead was on the back of a chair. Ted’s coat hung on its hook.

“He’s out without his coat,” said Holly, her heart wrung with anxiety at the thought of Uncle Ted out in the rain. What would she tell Nan if Ted caught pneumonia? If he got ill? If he disappeared? Nan would not be able to bear it. Her baby brother.

“We’ve got to go and find him,” she said frantically.

“He’s with Doofus, remember,” said Clive. “Doofus will look after him.”

But Holly was worried about Doofus too. As soon as Dad had finished phoning, she pulled at his sleeve.

“Can we go out and look for Uncle Ted now?”

“The police said to stay here till they arrive,” said Dad. “Might not be safe outside.”

“But we can’t just do nothing! Anyway, the back door’s off its hinges – so we’re no safer inside the house than out,” cried Holly.

Dad considered this. “True. You two had better go round to Otto’s. I’ll go out and look for Ted.”

“But then *you’re* not safe!” objected Clive.

“Shut up,” said Dad, which was most unlike him. “Bring those chips.”

Clive grabbed the bundle of fish and chips and carried it to the other end of Karrek Row. When they knocked, Otto answered the door. As soon as the children were safely inside, Dad departed.

Otto began to hunt out plates.

“We’ve got a microwave,” he said. Clive shoved the package into it.

Otto’s house was the same size as Ted’s, but much smarter and tidier; and, thought Holly, not half so cosy. The kitchen table was glass. The counters looked like black marble. Everything clattered and echoed.

“We’ve got to go out and look for Ted,” she insisted.

“After we’ve eaten,” said Clive, checking the microwave.

“*Now!*” cried Holly. She turned to Otto. “Will your father help us?”

Otto hesitated. “I’ll ask him to drive down to the shop and see if your uncle’s there,” he said, and went out of the room.

Clive set the steaming package of fish and chips down on the glass table, ignoring the plates. He opened it and began to eat hot, soggy fish with his fingers.

“Where would we look anyway?” he said with his mouth full.

“I don’t know!” said Holly in despair. She shoved chips into her mouth. She felt sick with hunger and worry: she had to eat, and she had to search for Ted.

“We could go to the cliff and look down along the beach,” suggested Clive.

“Fine! Let’s do that!”

Otto’s dad appeared. His eyes narrowed slightly on seeing Holly and Clive stuffing themselves with chips.

“Hallo, you two,” he said coolly, and picked a stray chip off the glass table rather pointedly, leaving a smear of grease. “What’s all the fuss about? Otto’s telling me I’ve got to drive to the shop to look for your Uncle Ted. But didn’t Ted just take the dog for a walk?”

Clive was beginning to tell him about the back door being ripped out of its frame, when Holly interrupted.

“That would be good if you could. We’re a bit worried about him,” she said. “Because of his age. We’re about to go and check if he’s on the beach. Come on, Clive.”

Clive seized another fistful of chips before he made for the door. Holly grabbed a lump of fish which immediately began to disintegrate in her hand, dripping more grease across the spotless floor.

Outside she explained, "I didn't say anything about the door to him, because we don't want him stopping us." She wondered why Otto hadn't mentioned the torn-off door to his father.

They hurried down to the sea. Thunderous grey clouds lay heavy just above the cliffs: Holly felt that she would only have to reach a little higher to touch them. When she knelt at the cliff edge, the restless sea looked even darker than the sky, as if it held sinister secrets beneath its evasive surface. Never mind sea-monsters, she thought distractedly; the sea itself was like a vast, shape-shifting, ever-changing monster...

"Nothing there," said Clive, who was well back from the edge.

"Yes, there is! What's that? Down on the beach?" It was something long, with fabric flapping in the wind.

"It's an umbrella," muttered Clive.

Without another word they ran over to the road and down its twining curve. A growl of thunder rumbled, like an animal prowling through the dark clouds out at sea. As they reached the shore, the clouds grew even darker. Bad-tempered squalls buffeted them, pelting them with sudden bursts of rain.

Holly hurried over to the hotel and went through it, checking rooms. Nobody was there. It boomed and echoed. She wondered briefly where Edo was; but that wasn't the most important thing right now. She ran out again to meet Clive, who was heading for the umbrella which lay further out, by the headland. Here the jostling waves were angry, splashing recklessly against the rocks.

"Is it Ted's, do you think?" The umbrella looked clean, and it worked when she opened it. So it wasn't just flotsam washed up by the sea.

"Give it here," said Clive, whose glasses were specked with rain and whose hair was streaming. "Yes, I think it's Ted's. I saw it in the house. So he can't be far away." He raised the umbrella over his head and shouted, "Ted!"

The waves roared louder, blocking out his voice.

They both drew breath to shout for Ted again: but instead a sudden clap of thunder filled the air, making Holly gasp. Thunderstorms did not usually frighten her. However, the thought of Ted, alone and out in this one, did.

Not *alone*, she told herself. Ted had Doofus. She whistled, long and loud; but no familiar black figure appeared, racing along the shore.

"Oh, please take care of him," she muttered, meaning Doofus take care of Ted. She didn't know who would take care of Doofus. He had always looked after himself. But what if Doofus needed her now, when she couldn't find him?

“Let’s go round the headland into the Inaccessible Cove, and check there,” suggested Clive.

Holly looked at the waves rushing against the rocks. “It’s high tide.”

“Not yet, not for an hour or two. But if Ted’s round there he might get cut off. We need to warn him.”

“If we go round to look for him, *we* might get cut off!”

“Not if we’re quick,” said Clive. He was already starting to scramble over wave-drenched rocks. Holly clambered after him, as fast as she could, desperate to get round, look for Ted, and get back again within ten minutes.

Once round the point they had to wade, for the Inaccessible Cove was already awash with shallow water. When Holly ran up the sand towards the cliff, long fingers of seawater pursued her, clutching at her feet. Ahead of her the cave entrance was black, a tall split in the rocks like a narrow, leaning doorway.

Suddenly lightning filled the sky. The cliff-face lit up for a second like a huge, crazy, monochrome painting. The thunder rolled after them, as heavy as a bowling ball pounding along the beach.

“Wow,” said Clive. “That’s getting close.”

But, by the lightning, Holly had glimpsed something just inside the entrance to the cave. The image stayed imprinted on her vision: somebody sitting with head bowed.

“Uncle Ted!” she cried.

She ran up to the cave’s mouth. And there a little way inside was Ted, perched on a narrow ledge, his hands resting on his knees, with Doofus standing guard behind him.

Doofus looked unsurprised to see Holly and Clive appear. He ignored Holly’s reaching hand and gazed out past her, then back into the cave as if checking for something. Uncle Ted, on the other hand, looked mightily relieved.

“Well,” he said, and seemed to find no other words to say.

“Are you all right?” Holly huddled into the cave next to him. It actually went much further back into the darkness, echoing with the sound of waves.

“A bit shaky, to tell the truth,” he said.

“Why are you here? What happened?” asked Clive.

“Rex. I mean Doofus,” said Ted, his voice strained. “He made me get out of the house. Led me down here.” Holly could barely hear him over the restless noise of the waves. “I didn’t argue,” he went on. “There was someone at the house. They tried to break in at the back.”

“Who?”

“I didn’t see. But tall,” said Ted. “Someone big. I was just having a bit of soup, when I heard a bang on the door, high up, and scuffling noises, and then

it sounded like they were trying to wrench the whole back door off its hinges. Doofus grabbed my sleeve and pulled me to the front door.”

The sea hissed, reminding Holly that the tide was coming in. She thought Ted’s face looked even older than before.

“Don’t worry,” she said, clasping his arm, “it’s all right now. Dad’s called the police. It’s safe to go back home. But we have to go now, before the tide gets any higher.”

In answer, Ted looked at Doofus, who padded out of the cave into the rain, looking up and down the beach. He seemed to be listening, although Holly did not see how he could hear anything beyond the roaring sea and growling thunder.

“If he thinks it’s all right,” said Ted. He tried to stand up, and winced. “I’m stiff,” he said apologetically. “Must have been sitting here for an hour. My knees seize up.”

“It’s a good cave, this,” said Clive, peering into the midnight darkness.

“Clive, we’re not exploring,” said Holly sharply. “We’ve got to go back *now*. Take Ted’s other arm.”

Ted did not protest as the children began to guide him across the flooded beach towards the headland. They had to stop and wait a few times while he gathered his strength: which meant that they were both looking back at the cave when the lightning struck again.

It flashed repeatedly for many seconds. The thunder followed hard on its heels, with an enormous drumbeat. It sounded as if the sky were being split in two. The narrow interior of the cave was lit up as though with a flare.

And back in its depths they saw someone looking out at them.

Chapter Thirteen

It wasn't Edo. Holly knew that at once. But it was someone similar.

Similar, but bigger, heavier. Someone with longer, different coloured hair and brows more overhanging and fiercer than Edo's. It was carrying a long club.

No, *he* was carrying a club; for before the cave fell dark again, Holly realised that this somebody was male.

"What?" said Clive. He jumped backwards. Holly realised that she had yelped.

Doofus stared intently into the cave. His lip curled, very slightly, in a warning snarl; but he did not move.

Ted put their reaction down to the lightning. He was facing the sea and not the cave, and had seen nothing.

"Horrible weather. And that tide's coming in fast," he said, sounding a little more like himself. "We'd best get out of here."

Holly was glad to obey. They hurried Ted to the rocky spit, and helped him climb over the rocks. Doofus went ahead to lead the way, which was already partly under water.

Waves threw themselves at Holly's legs, clawing past her knees. She lost her footing once and almost sat down in the sea; luckily she did not pull Ted down with her. She was not entirely sure who was helping who, but together they made it round the rocky headland and back onto the hotel beach.

It felt like a haven. Holly, helping Ted struggle to the road, noticed that the long notched bone was no longer lying where Doofus had placed it. However, that was the least of her problems. Ted was getting slower and slower.

They stopped again. Looking backwards, Holly saw a branch – no, a whole upside-down tree of lightning – blaze in an instant from sky to sea.

Clive counted before the thunder came. "Four kilometres," he said, and then Ted had to sit down on a boulder.

It took him a while before he felt able to continue. They crept up the road like snails. Doofus galloped ahead to the house and a minute later Dad came hurrying to meet them.

"Thank God," he said. "Where did you go, Holly? Paul said you just disappeared."

Holly was too tired and wet to answer. The question didn't need an answer, anyway: they had found Ted, that was obvious.

Ted wasn't up to talking, either, until Dad had sat him down in the kitchen with a blanket round his shoulders and a mug of hot tea in his shaky hands.

Holly had to go and change her clothes. She ran back downstairs to find Ted telling his story at more length.

He hadn't seen whatever pounded at the back door, he said, although he couldn't miss hearing it. Doofus had pulled and pushed him to the front door without even letting him get his coat. He'd only had time to grab the umbrella before Doofus dragged him out and made him run away.

"Or hobble away, rather," said Ted, looking at Doofus who now lay steaming by the stove, like a large wet black rug. "He knew what it was, I reckon. More than I did. I think it followed us. When we got down to the beach I saw something higher up the road."

"What was it?"

Ted shook his head, looking troubled. "I don't know. Big. I almost thought... but no, I couldn't see. Too much rain, and Doofus kept pulling me away."

"There were more than one of them, I should think," said Dad. "They must have thought the house was empty, once the car had gone."

"But what did they want? I've got nothing worth stealing," said Ted in bewilderment.

"Who knows? Anything they could find. I'd better ring the police again, and tell them to call off the search for you." Dad disappeared into the hall.

On his return he muttered to Holly, "I'm not sure the police had even started to look for Ted. But they say they'll come down here tomorrow. I'd better get that door back up if I can. It's too bad if the police want fingerprints – we can't leave it hanging off its hinges overnight."

As Holly helped Dad prop the door up, he tutted at the gashes in the wood.

"Wonder what they did those with? I'll have to fill them and repaint. Honestly, what is the world coming to? You did well there, Holly – you should have told Paul where you were going, but I'm glad you found Ted. Can't tell you how relieved I am."

"Me too," said Holly. She had not mentioned the face she'd seen inside the cave. She was waiting until she could talk it through with Clive. He had gone round to Otto's house to retrieve the remains of the fish and chips, only to report back that Otto (according to his father) had eaten them all.

So they made beans on toast for everyone, especially Ted. Once he had emptied his plate, and was looking less creased and grey, Holly and Clive left him dozing and retreated upstairs to talk.

"So there *are* two of them," said Clive, sitting on his bed by his draughty window. Rain spat on the glass. "At least two. That one in the cave was the same one we saw in the combe."

"Are you sure?"

"Fairly sure."

“So he might have attacked Ted’s house.”

Clive pondered this. “He couldn’t easily have got down to the cave before Ted, so I don’t know if it can have been him. You saw it was a him?”

“I noticed,” Holly said. “He didn’t look friendly, did he, with that club?”

“I think that was the bone,” said Clive. “The one that Doofus found. It was big and bone-shaped, anyway.”

“What sort of weapons would they have, those Neanderthal people – as well as clubs?”

“Stone knives. Spears. Axes.”

“How sharp would those be?”

“Sharp enough,” said Clive grimly.

“That man in the cave was tall enough, too,” reflected Holly. “Those gashes on the door were right up at the top.”

“Four swings of a stone axe?” But then Clive shook his head. “Like I said, I don’t think it could be him.”

“Then maybe there’s another one we haven’t seen yet,” she murmured.

She recalled the combe, with the rain dripping off every leaf; the heavy crunch of undergrowth as she had fled with Doofus. The sense of bulk. But she’d seen nothing more than the bushes shuddering.

And four long, vicious slashes, side by side, high up on a tree.

Chapter Fourteen

Early next morning the police came round: two of them, young constables with curly hair and curly accents. They spoke very loudly and slowly to Ted, although he was not deaf, only somewhat shaken. When he could not give proper answers they just asked again, even more loudly and slowly.

Then they wrote in their notebooks and took pictures of the door, and after staring at Doofus, and asking whose he was, they made more notes.

“They think it’s *him*,” said Holly after they had gone to interview Otto’s dad. “They think Doofus made those marks. Did you see how they looked at him?”

“It must be obvious his claws aren’t that big,” said Dad.

“Not obvious to those two,” said Ted. “Tweedledum and Tweedledee. They looked about sixteen. And they didn’t take any of it seriously.” His hand trembled slightly. He was upset.

Holly put her hand over his. So big, so old: more than eighty. Yet it seemed he could get upset just like an eight-year-old.

“But *we* know something was here,” she said. “We’ll investigate. We’ll ask around.”

“What if it comes back?” said Ted.

“They won’t,” said Dad confidently. “They’ve probably got one doozie of a hangover right now. Nobody would do that sort of damage unless they were drunk or off their head on drugs. And if they’re still in the neighbourhood, seeing the police car here will scare them off.”

“I’ll go down to the shop and ask Anita if they’ve seen anything there,” Holly offered. “You said we needed bread. Clive can come with me. And we’ll take Doofus.”

However, ten minutes later she realised that she needed to go to the shop for another reason. Because when she went to the toilet, there was blood.

“Oh,” said Holly blankly. She hadn’t bargained for this.

She knew all about monthly periods, of course, from Mum as well as from school. She knew it was just a sign of her body developing: her womb was getting ready to hold a baby, but if there was no baby for it to hold, it would shed its lining every few weeks before starting to grow a new one. Hence the blood.

Holly knew of two girls in her class who had already started their periods. But for her, the lessons had been theoretical. Something for the future. She hadn’t expected this for another year at least.

I’m only eleven, Holly thought. Mum didn’t start her periods till she was thirteen. I’ve got enough to worry about. And I’m on holiday. This isn’t fair.

She sat there for a while. She had sanitary pads back in her bedroom cupboard at home, bought with Mum on a giggly supermarket trip, in the happy knowledge that she didn’t need them yet. Now she needed them and didn’t have them.

She felt a bit weepy. She wanted to talk to Mum. But she couldn’t, because the only place she could phone Mum was in the hall with everybody listening.

So, letting out a long breath, Holly dabbed her eyes with toilet paper and blew her nose, and then stuffed another fat wodge of toilet paper in her knickers. That would have to do for now.

“Okay, I’m off to the shop,” she said downstairs, and bent down to put Doofus’s lead on. She feared Doofus would sense something different and wrong about her, but if he did he didn’t show it. Instead, he nuzzled at her neck in an unusual demonstration of affection. Holly hugged him in gratitude, and pulled on her wet trainers.

“I’ll get my coat,” said Clive.

“You don’t really need to come with me, Clive.”

But Dad insisted they go together, in case of drunken burglars lurking on the path. He also insisted on walking half the way with them, until they could see the village in the distance. Then he went back to the cottage to look after Ted.

As she led Doofus past the standing stones, Holly wondered what she should say to Clive. If she was going to tell him before buying the necessities, she needed to do it now.

But she wasn't sure how to tell him, or how Clive might react. He might blanch and wince and look horribly embarrassed, and stop his ears.

So Holly said nothing. She wondered if she was waddling. The wodge of toilet paper seemed to be slipping and she feared it was no longer doing its job.

As she left Doofus by the door and waddled into the shop, she thought, What if they don't sell sanitary towels? but almost immediately saw that they did. Only two types, not twenty like the supermarket. Rather than stop and read the packs, she picked up one of each, along with a bottle of milk, a packet of cheese and two tins of beans.

"And don't forget the bread," said Clive. He saw what was in her basket and stopped for about a second. Then he turned round and looked at the shelves. "Hmm," he said.

That was quite useful, decided Holly. Now she didn't have to tell him. She paid Anita, who bagged everything up as if it was perfectly ordinary, and said, "And how's your Uncle Ted?"

"He's a bit shaken. Did you hear what happened to him last night?" said Holly.

Anita had already heard, it seemed, by some mysterious process. But she was happy to have Holly repeat the story of how they had returned from their day out, to find the back door broken down and Ted hiding on the beach.

Anita tutted and pursed her lips. "Vandals! They'll be the same ones that stole my joint of beef," she said. "You don't expect it round here. Nowhere's safe, is it?" But she sounded more interested than worried.

"Not spriggans?" said Holly. She was feeling a little bouncy with relief now that she had successfully bought her pads.

"Spriggans wouldn't try and break down doors," said Anita, quite seriously. "Did Ted's neighbour not see anyone? Did he not hear anything?"

"He had his headphones on," said Holly.

Anita raised her eyebrows. "Did he now?"

"He was working. He's an architect," said Clive.

"He's a developer," Anita said, quite sharply.

"Has he really bought the old hotel down by the sea?" asked Clive.

“So he says.” She compressed her lips, and then went on, “There’s a few people I expect Paul would like to see out of his way.”

“What do you mean?”

“I just mean not everyone agrees with his developments,” said the shopkeeper evenly. “He’s pushing for a dozen houses down there, did you know that? Not that I’m against new houses. In the right places.”

“Houses? Where?” exclaimed Holly.

“He wants to turn that old hotel into them. Town houses, he calls them. As if there was a town within miles! And he’d like to buy up Ted’s house too, and own that whole row, only Ted’s not keen. Anyway. Nothing to do with you, my lover. Did you need anything else?”

“No thanks,” said Holly. “Oh, just one thing. Is there an entrance to the combe, I mean the nature reserve, from this end?”

Anita put her head on one side. “Well, there is and there isn’t. If you keep going past the back of the shop about a hundred yards, you’ll see a signpost and a stile leading into the reserve. The path’s all overgrown, though. Nobody uses it – it’s full of bramble. You’d have to hack your way through. If you want to get down to the beach, the road’s easier. It’ll be easier still if Paul gets his way.”

“Thank you,” said Holly.

As soon as they were outside, Clive said, “She thinks Otto’s dad is involved. She thinks he’s trying to scare your uncle Ted into moving out. She thinks he might have been the one banging on the door to give Ted a fright.”

“What? She didn’t say all that!”

“I deduced it,” said Clive. “And I deduced something else. I didn’t know you’d started your periods.”

“It only happened this morning.” The words were difficult to get out.

“Really?” Clive looked alert and eager. “Did you get any warning signs? How much blood is there? Does it hurt? How long is it likely to go on for?”

Holly blanched and winced, feeling horribly embarrassed. “Stop it, Clive!”

“Why? It’s just biology.”

“It’s *my* biology,” she protested. “I don’t go asking you about private stuff, do I?”

“You can if you like.”

“No! Don’t tell me! I don’t want to hear!” She clapped her hands over her ears.

Clive shrugged and began to walk up the road behind the shop. “I expect it’ll take a bit of getting used to,” he said kindly.

“You can say that again,” said Holly. She unstopped her ears. Why should she be embarrassed, if Clive wasn’t? Better to be practical. So she said, not without some effort:

“In answer to your questions: no warning that I noticed, probably not all that much although it seems like quite a lot, no it doesn’t although Mum says it often doesn’t anyway for the first few months but then I might get stomach ache or back ache, and five or six days, I think. Or about forty years, depending how you look at it.”

“I’ve forgotten what the questions were,” said Clive. “Could you just go through that again?”

“No,” said Holly. “Stop a minute. Now go away while I ring Mum. Ted says there’s a signal here.”

There was indeed a signal. Doofus stood guard as Holly rang Mum’s number. Mum answered at once although she was at work and could not talk for long.

“Ah, sweetheart,” she said as soon as Holly told her: only about the period, not about Ted and the intruder. Dad could do that. “Good for you! Big hugs, and congratulations. It means everything’s working as it should. Are you feeling okay?”

“I’m okay,” said Holly. “How’s Nan?”

“Drowsy. The carer’s with her, but she doesn’t really notice. Life is one long nap,” said Mum. When she rang off, Holly felt a little weepy again because Mum never called her sweetheart normally.

However, Mum was right; it was sort of reassuring to know that her body was doing its job, although she’d rather it didn’t start doing it so soon.

She went to catch up with Clive, who had halted at a signpost.

Beyond a stile set in a wall was a thin, deep valley densely crammed with shrubs and trees. The weather-beaten signpost, barely legible, read “Nature reserve. Do not disturb nesting birds.”

Anita was right: the narrow path was choked with brambles up to the height of their heads. However, they would not have to hack their way through, for something had already done it.

Branches were snapped. Leaves were trampled. Brambles were ripped out of the ground: and Holly knew that it took a lot of strength to uproot a bramble.

“Something big’s come through here,” said Clive quietly. “Going in, or out? That’s the question.”

Holly looked carefully.

“Both,” she said. “At least, there are broken twigs pointing both ways. Do you think this was Edo, or the other one?”

Clive frowned into the tangle of thorny stems.

“Neither,” he said, and pointed. “Look at that.” Attached to a bramble was a small tuft of dark brown hair.

“Different parts of their bodies might be different colours,” said Holly doubtfully. “Clive? I’m not going in there. I want to get home.”

“Good idea,” said Clive. He backed off, and began to walk briskly in the direction of Ted’s house. As he walked, he scanned the ground on either side. At the standing stones, he stopped abruptly.

“What is it?” Holly asked.

“Not sure. Maybe nothing. Let me just go and look.”

He went over to the stones, and Holly had to follow, although she was anxious to get home and replace her wodge of toilet paper with something proper. It really wasn’t in the right place at all any more.

Clive stared at the ground around the standing stones. It was very wet and fairly muddy.

“Who do you think comes here?” he said.

“Dog-walkers. Sheep. Cows?” she suggested.

“That doesn’t belong to any of those.” He pointed to the mud.

Holly was confused. The prints were scuffed; but even so she knew that they were not the same as the single bare footprint they had found on top of the cliff. These were broad, with distinct toes, and long marks that might mean claws.

“Is that a person? It’s more like a big dog’s. Very big,” she said doubtfully. She compared a print to her own foot, which was less than half its size, and looked around for Doofus. It was far bigger than his feet as well.

Doofus sniffed at the footprints with some interest, and then, nose to the ground, began to follow a trail. He trotted about twenty metres towards a wall before stopping as if he had discovered enough, and trotting back.

“I don’t know what it is,” Clive murmured. “I don’t recognise it. Can you take a picture with your phone?”

Holly did so. “It might just be funny shoes,” she said, although she did not believe it.

She believed it even less when, turning to leave, she saw the far side of the standing stone.

Four long, white scratches crossed its surface, high up: higher than she could reach. And they were new.

Chapter Fifteen

After lunch, she found a quiet moment to tell Dad about her period.

“Oh lord,” said Dad. “Do you need anything? I can drive you into Bude.”

“I’ve been to the shop,” said Holly, feeling efficient and sensible. “I’ve got what I need.” The pad felt a bit odd, but at least it seemed to be staying put, which was a relief.

“Well done you.” Dad hugged her. “Brave girl.”

Holly thought that she was hardly being brave; it wasn’t as if she had much choice. All the same, it was quite a nice thing for Dad to say. He looked a little shell-shocked, but did not ask any awkward questions. And she didn’t need to tell Ted.

“Are you feeling all right?” Dad inquired. “How do you feel about going out tomorrow?”

“Well...”

“Only I think we ought to take Ted out somewhere nice. Give him a fresh view and a cream tea. He’s had a pretty horrible couple of days.”

Holly could see that Ted needed cheering up, and that it might be good for him to get away from the flooded cellar and the wrecked back door. But on the other hand she wanted to go and look for Edo; though perhaps not for the Other One.

She was torn. “I think it would be all right,” she said after a minute.

Dad hugged her again. “I expect you might like a cream tea as well, eh?” Holly smiled, knowing full well that it was Dad who was the biggest lover of cream teas in the family.

“Yes. It’s just that...” she hesitated, and then said, “I’m not sure how often I might need a bathroom. I mean, I haven’t worked that out yet.”

“Sure,” said Dad. “I thought we might go down towards Penzance. There are plenty of interesting places there, including a bird park for Clive; and cafes everywhere. They’ll all have bathrooms.”

“Okay.” She was on holiday, after all. She tried to make her spirits lift. But they sank again when she learnt that Otto was to go with them.

“It’s Ted’s idea,” Dad told her. “He can see Otto’s a bit bored and lonely. He’s a pleasant enough lad, after all.”

“Is he?” Holly wasn’t so sure. Pleasant lads didn’t go spying and boasting about how many houses their father owned.

But Otto was going. And because that filled the car up, Doofus wasn’t.

Holly was outraged. “We can’t leave him behind again! You can’t shut him in the house,” she protested. “Not on his own!”

“We won’t shut him in,” explained Dad. “He can come and go as he likes. The back door will be open – well, we can’t close it properly until the joiner comes to fix it. That should be tomorrow afternoon. Paul has promised to keep an eye on the house and talk to the joiner when he turns up. He’ll keep an eye on Doofus too.”

Holly bit her lip, remembering the shopkeeper’s dark hints about Paul. But she didn’t know how to say that to Dad.

Instead she argued, “Doofus might get lost,” although she knew that he wouldn’t. “He might try to follow the car.”

“I think that’s unlikely,” said Dad. “He’s a very intelligent dog, isn’t he?”

Holly looked at Dad’s guileless face, wondering how much he actually knew or guessed about her black dog. She had never told Dad about the small deaths that, early on, had accompanied Doofus’s every howl. He was unaware of the full story.

To Dad, Doofus was just a big, calm dog. She thought that Dad only saw what he could easily understand. He put the rest inside a mental box labelled “Too Hard”, and forgot about it.

She thought that Ted, however, guessed more about Doofus than Dad did.

“I never thought about room for him when I asked Otto,” said Ted. He glanced remorsefully at the dog who was sprawled against the broken back door, managing to look both relaxed and alert. “Poor old Rex. I mean Doofus. Will he be all right on his own?”

“I think he likes being on his own,” said Holly. She felt sorry for Ted, who looked sad and shaken. For the first time she saw a resemblance to Nan in his tired face. She chatted to him to try to cheer him up, but after a while his eyes and his head drooped, and he slept. Like Nan, again.

It rained steadily all afternoon. Holly was glad of the excuse to stay in, though when she tried to curl up with a book her mind kept circling round the same few daunting subjects: Edo, periods, and a recurring pattern of four deep scratches. At last she abandoned the book and, to save Ted the trouble, offered to make tea.

Clive looked up with relief from the computer where he had been struggling with Ted’s internet.

“I’ll help you. If Ted’s got any spices, I can make a curry,” he said, closing down the computer and following her into the kitchen.

“Did your dad teach you how?” She didn’t often get a lead-in to talk about Clive’s father.

“No, Mum did. Maybe my dad taught *her*. Mum curries anything. Baked beans. Sweet corn. She curries hot dogs,” said Clive, hunting in Ted’s cupboards.

“I know,” said Holly. “I’ve eaten them.” After that particular meal, she had silently vowed never to go to Clive’s house for tea again if she could help it.

“Ted’s got biryani paste,” said Clive in some surprise. “And rice. I didn’t think old people ate curry.”

“I bet your grandparents do,” Holly said, still probing.

“Did,” said Clive. “The Bangladeshi ones are dead.” He took off his glasses to polish them on his T-shirt.

“Sorry.”

“It’s all right, I never met them so I don’t miss them. I think my dad might, though.”

“Have you spoken to your dad lately?” she asked tentatively.

“I emailed him just now, to let him know I’m staying here. Mum probably won’t have told him. He likes to hear from me.”

“That’s good,” said Holly, wondering why, in that case, Clive’s father didn’t visit him in person more often.

“He’s living in Preston now,” said Clive, as if reading her thoughts, “and he works weekends in the electrical shop, so he doesn’t have much spare time. Also I think he’s a bit afraid of my mum.”

“Mm,” said Holly. Most people were a bit afraid of Clive’s mum.

“She always manages to fight with him,” said Clive, inspecting tins. “I think she watches too much *EastEnders*. It was arguing over my name that made them split up.”

“Your name?”

“My dad didn’t want me to be called Clive. Mum said he made such a ridiculous fuss that she couldn’t stand it. But if it hadn’t been that, I expect it would have been something else. Lily’s dad didn’t last long either. We can curry these.”

These were a tin of lamb hotpot and a tin of mixed vegetables.

Holly raised an eyebrow. “Lamb?”

“It’s mostly potato,” said Clive, busy with the tin-opener. With a couple of onions, the contents of the tins made quite a tasty curry. Ted enjoyed it, or said he did. However, Holly was glad Otto was not there to share it. She felt sure that he would sneer.

Next day, in the car, she could feel Otto sneering next to her. Ted had to sit in the front seat because he was not bendy enough to get into the back; so Holly sat in the back wedged between Clive with his plastic bag at the ready and Otto in a designer jacket.

To Holly’s embarrassment, Dad started talking about dialects again. It turned out that Ted knew a few words of the Cornish language even though he was originally from London.

“Myttin da,” he said. “That’s good morning.”

“It sounds like matins,” said Otto. “That’s Latin for morning, or something. I think.” Don’t you *know*? thought Holly.

“Ah, all those old languages are related,” said Ted easily. He was better at making conversation than Dad. “Even Celtic and Latin, if you go back far enough. It’s a funny thing, the further back you go, the more complicated language is. Ever heard of Sanskrit? From India. Incredibly difficult. Hundreds of ways of making verbs.”

“How old is that?” asked Holly.

“About four thousand years,” said Ted.

Clive stirred, his bag rustling. “So is that the oldest language in the world?”

“I doubt it,” said Ted. “It would have been different again further back. They’ve tried to work out what a language from twelve thousand years ago would be.”

“Have they? How?”

“By looking at all the old languages and working backwards. *Tah* might have meant fire. *Garv* might have meant hand.”

“*Garv*,” repeated Holly. She wondered if Edo would recognise it. But if Clive was right, Edo was from way, way before then. Twelve thousand years was nothing. Yet Edo had some sort of language, or half-language.

“There’s a village not too far from Penzance that’s two thousand years old,” Ted was saying. “It’s only ruins, of course, but rather wonderful as I remember. Haven’t been there for years.”

He sounded wistful. So of course Dad immediately announced that they would go.

It took them a while to find it, even with the satnav. It was in the middle of a soggy field. Holly wandered between the round stone houses, their broken walls half-covered with turf, trying to imagine living there, and wondering where Edo used to live back in her own time.

“They mostly lived in caves back then,” said Clive, who was obviously thinking about the same thing. “That’s what Ted’s books say, anyway. But they had stone axes, so they could have cut down trees and built wooden houses. It’s just that they’d have rotted away so we’d never know.”

“Were they clever enough to do that?” Holly asked.

“I don’t see why not.”

“Who are you talking about?” asked Otto, who was lurking nearby, although Holly hadn’t thought he was close enough to hear.

“Nobody,” she said shortly.

“Stone age people,” said Clive. “Before this place was built.”

“Your dad would have fun here,” said Holly, “wouldn’t he? Developing.”

Otto glanced at her, looking surprised and anxious.

“It was a good offer he made Ted,” he said. “It was a very fair offer. Dad thought Ted might like to move somewhere easier, with less stairs, seeing as he’s getting old.”

“What are you on about?” said Holly.

“The letter from my dad,” said Otto. “Aren’t you?”

“What letter?” Holly shook her head in bewilderment and walked away.

“We might see choughs round here,” she heard Clive say behind her. “I should have brought my binoculars.”

“They’re like ravens, aren’t they?” Otto asked.

“More like crows,” said Clive. “Ravens are huge. They can have wingspans of a metre and a half. A crow’s is only about a metre.”

Holly felt that this was an entirely inappropriate thing to say to Otto, who would not care about wingspans. She felt a sudden yearning to see Natasha. Or Mum. Or even Clive’s mum... She was surrounded by males who simply weren’t on the same wavelength. They didn’t have to walk around with a pad in their underwear, she thought glumly, and worry about whether it was leaking. They didn’t have to constantly check where the nearest toilet was. Any old wall would do.

She went over to Dad. “When will the café be?” she whispered.

He looked slightly alarmed. “We’ll find one soon. Are you okay, love?”

“I’m okay,” said Holly, and drifted away. She was lucky, she supposed, that she could tell Dad about her periods, and could buy pads without trouble, and find proper toilets. In some places, girls could do none of those things. She could not imagine how they coped. And how did Edo manage; was it was the same for her?

Dad rounded them up and drove to a café for a cream tea. He was being very protective of Holly although she thought it was Ted who really needed attention; he was already looking tired.

While they were in the café it began to rain again, drumming on the roof like hundreds of impatient fingers.

“I hope that cellar is all right,” said Dad.

“I hope Doofus is all right,” said Holly.

“I can ring my dad and check,” offered Otto.

“No, it’s all right.”

But Otto already had his phone out. Holly decided he wanted to show it off; it was an expensive one. He had a rather brief and stilted conversation with his father. It sounded as if Paul cut the call abruptly.

“Dad says he saw Doofus half an hour ago,” reported Otto, “but he’s off roaming somewhere now. The joiner’s been and looked at the door and gone away again to get the right bits.”

“Hope your dad doesn’t mind having to deal with him,” said Ted.

“No, it’s just – well, he’s a bit... when he’s working,” said Otto, subdued. “He doesn’t like being disturbed, that’s all.”

“All right,” said Ted. “Thank you.” Then he began to talk about shipwrecks, addressing himself chiefly to Otto and Clive. Maybe he thought that Holly, being a girl, would not be interested in shipwrecks. She forgave him, because of his age and tiredness and his resemblance to Nan.

But after the café, when Dad had driven them to see some standing stones that Ted was interested in, Ted fell back behind the others to talk to Holly. They wandered through the wet grass together.

“I’m not ignoring you,” he said. “I just think those two lads need to be encouraged. They both get a bit wrapped up in things, don’t they? Your Clive certainly does. Clever lad, though.”

“*He* doesn’t think so,” said Holly. “He’s not good at reading and spelling. But he is good at thinking.”

“It’s a shame,” said Ted, and stopped there. Holly remembered that Ted was divorced and had a son who lived half way round the world in New Zealand. Even though the son must be middle-aged, Ted might be missing him. So Holly smiled and said,

“Clive’s having a really nice time here. So am I. I like these stones. Are they as old as the ones near your house?”

“Bronze Age. Might have once been a tomb. People call that round one in the middle the Crick stone. If you climb through it it’s meant to cure a cricked back.”

Holly studied the round stone, which was flanked by upright ones. It was shaped like a giant doughnut; the hole in the middle would easily be big enough to crawl through, as long as your back was not too cricked.

But she did not feel inclined to try. It reminded her too much of the stone eye, which had been at the back of her mind and now came hurtling to the front again. This was like an enormous stone eye, through which anything might come. Holly felt a lurch of fear, similar to that she had felt in Tintagel.

“This is the sort of place where they say you find spriggans,” added Ted.

“The bad piskeys?” said Holly, trying to ignore the strange surge of fear. Maybe it was hormones. To distract herself, she asked, “Are spriggans as small as piskeys are?”

“Bigger, I believe,” said Ted. “More like trolls in Norway, maybe. Secretive, thieving little people who laugh at us humans.”

“Does everyone have fairies, or elves, or trolls? I mean do all countries have them in their stories?”

“That I don’t know,” said Ted, although he sounded interested.

“I wonder,” said Holly slowly, “I wonder if it’s people sort of remembering Neanderthals. I know they died out thirty thousand years ago but they

overlapped with modern humans, didn't they? And maybe our ancestors passed down stories about these other people who sort of hide away and look sort of different. And live in the wild. And maybe steal things."

"That'd be some story, passed down for thirty thousand years," said Ted. "But who knows? Folk memory. It might be possible." They both fell silent. Holly was wondering whether she could tell Ted about Edo, and what she could say – when Clive shouted "Chough!" and the moment was gone.

Clive and Otto were celebrating. Holly saw no reason for Otto to celebrate seeing a bird he had no interest in. He was being smarmy.

And she herself was feeling jumpy and grumpy. The fear was still gnawing at her, and she had had enough of stones and rain. She did not say anything; but after Dad had looked hard at her, and then at Ted, he announced that they should head off home. In any case there was not enough time left to visit the bird park properly.

"That's all right," said Clive somewhat sadly in the car. "I've seen a chough."

"There were long queues there anyway when I went last year," said Otto across Holly in the back seat. "I've got lots of pictures of the birds." *Well, you would have*, thought Holly, before Otto added, "I can give them to you on a flash drive if you like."

Otto and Clive seemed to be getting on quite well, to her surprise. If Clive found Otto annoying, he did not show it. Even when he began an argument with Otto about the old hotel and sea-levels, they argued in an almost friendly way, without getting heated.

"You can't flood-proof against the sea," said Clive. "It's not like a river. You can't dam it or change its course. And we're going to get more storms as well. That hotel'll be swept away."

"Not for a hundred years," objected Otto. "Things don't change that fast."

"You'd be surprised how fast things can change," said Ted unexpectedly. "You young ones think everything will just stay the way it is now."

"No we don't," said Holly and Clive together.

"We know how badly things will change," Clive added. "It'll be us who has to deal with it, and it's an impossible task. We can't do it all."

"Surely it's not impossible," said Otto.

"No, indeed," said Dad.

"We can't do everything, but we can do something," Holly said to Clive.

He gave her a look. "You sound like a fridge magnet." She fell silent.

Ted scratched his head. "People can change the world for the better if they really want to. Like the NHS. That was a big thing. Made a huge improvement."

"It's not the same," said Clive.

“It’s not so different,” said Ted.

Holly sat still, another tide of irrational fear washing over her. She wanted to ask Otto to ring his father again and check that Doofus was all right, but Otto would think she was being stupid. She *was* being stupid. The fear had no cause.

Nevertheless, she sat clenched in the back seat for the last few miles until they drew up outside Ted’s house. As soon as the car stopped, she jumped out and dashed round the back. The unmended door was open; evidently the joiner had not yet returned to fix it. She went inside.

The first thing she saw was Doofus, lying calmly in the kitchen across the doorway to the cellar. Holly knelt down, feeling foolish and shaky with relief, and put her arms around him.

“Doofus,” she said. “Of course you’re all right. I am such an idiot.”

The hand that patted him felt wet. And then she saw the drops of blood beside him, on the floor.

Chapter Sixteen

“Doofus! You’re hurt! Where?”

Holly ran her hands frantically over the dog’s coat, trying to find the injury. Although his back was damp with blood, there were no visible wounds. She could feel his heartbeat, as steady and strong as always.

She tugged at Doofus to make him stand up so that she could check his legs and belly. He resisted, staying lying down against the cellar door. He was too heavy for her to shift.

And then she noticed the smudge of blood on the door above his head – a smeary fingerprint.

Ted came slowly into the kitchen, hobbling somewhat because his knees had seized up again in the car. He began to fill the kettle.

“Hope that cellar’s been all right with this rain,” he said. “Could you check it for me, Holly? My old legs aren’t keen on going down there.”

Holly looked round for Clive; but she could hear him in the hall inviting Otto upstairs to see his rock collection.

She put a hand on the cellar doorknob. At once Doofus stood up, stretching with a sigh. While Ted was busy finding mugs, Holly ran her hands swiftly along the dog’s belly: no blood.

It was not Doofus who was wounded, then.

She looked at the fingerprint, and picked up the torch. It was a big old-fashioned one, heavy enough to act as a weapon.

“All right, Doofus?” she asked him quietly.

In answer Doofus stepped out of the way so that she could pull open the cellar door. Two or three steps down, she switched the torch on – and then she heard the door close behind her and the heavy thump of the dog’s body as he lay down against it on the other side.

She swallowed. Doofus had shut her in the cellar. But it would be for a reason.

None the less she felt shaky as she tiptoed down the cellar steps. It was dark and silent and smelt of wet cardboard.

Holly shone the light into the darkness. She saw nothing except Ted’s boxes on the floor and on Dad’s slightly wonky shelves. There was no-one here after all. She began to relax as she turned round and shone the light into the last dark space, behind the cellar steps.

Low down, two eyes shone back for a second before they closed, flinching in the torchlight. They belonged to Edo.

The girl was sitting hunched as if to make herself as small as possible. She was wearing the sludge-green jumper; but as Holly squatted carefully down beside her, she realised that the jumper was ripped across one shoulder. She put a hand out and it came away bloodied.

“Edo,” said Holly. The girl did not reply. She sat taut and coiled, her muscles clenched as hard as wood.

“You’re hurt. What happened? Who did this?” She shone the torch onto Edo’s back and shoulder, and through the ripped wool saw gashes on the skin. Two long, deep cuts; and beneath them, two more heavy scratches that had made red weals but had not drawn blood.

“Who was it?” whispered Holly. Such wounds could not be made accidentally even if you fell into a bramble bush. And they had not been caused by Doofus, any more than the marks on the back door had been.

Whoever had tried to get into the house had attacked Edo, Holly thought. More than once. But there was no way of getting Edo to tell her who it was. Meanwhile she needed a bandage. Holly made a move to stand up.

“Tiss, ssh,” whispered Edo, and laid her long fingers upon Holly’s arm. She did not want her to go.

“I’ll come back,” said Holly, “in just a minute. I’ll leave you the torch.”

She put the torch into the girl’s hand. Edo let go of her arm to inspect it.

Holly ran up the cellar steps and rapped lightly on the door until she heard Doofus’s bulk shift. He allowed her to open the door and squeeze out before settling down again.

“Good boy,” said Holly with feeling. She realised now that Doofus was guarding the cellar, not to keep Edo in, but to keep everyone else out.

“All right down there?” asked Ted, stirring the tea. Dad was in the lounge: she could hear cricket on the radio again.

“Oh, yes, it’s fine,” she said. “Mostly. Um – just a little bit of mould. I’ll take a cloth down, and some clean water.”

“That’d be good of you,” said Ted.

Holly snatched up a bottle of water they had taken out with them in the car. Under cover of getting a cleaning cloth and a towel, she snaffled a box of flapjack which they had also taken out in case of an insufficiency of cream teas. She added the antiseptic wipes, and as an afterthought, an empty yogurt pot from beside the sink. Doofus moved aside for her to re-enter the cellar.

She tried to dab at Edo’s wounds with the wipes and to bandage it with the cleaning cloth, which was a new one. But Edo had little patience with her attempts. She was more interested in the flapjack, which made her eyes widen. Holly guessed that she seldom got the chance to eat anything so sweet. Maybe honey, she thought, and fruit – blackberries. Edo was unfamiliar with bottles, too: but once Holly had poured some water into the yoghurt pot, she drank it.

Before Holly departed she showed Edo how to switch the torch on and off, so that she would not be left in the dark. The girl seemed to get the hang of this quite quickly. The cellar flickered as she experimented, and Holly wondered how long the batteries would last.

“I’ll come back,” she promised, as she stood up.

Edo looked at her. “Oh wow,” she said, and then concentrated on the torch again.

So there Holly left her. She was let out of the cellar by Doofus, as before.

“Could you take some tea up to the boys?” asked Ted. “Take them some of that flapjack too.” He frowned at the table. “Now where did it go?”

“I expect they’ve got it already,” said Holly. She carried mugs of tea up the narrow stairs to Clive’s attic room. Although neither she nor Clive were keen on tea, they were learning to drink it for Ted’s sake. And Otto would just have to put up with it.

Clive and Otto were sitting on Clive’s floor surrounded by rocks but talking about guitars, although so far as Holly knew, Clive had never even picked up a guitar. But presumably Otto had. He probably owned several, she thought. And skis. And the latest laptop.

She stared hard at Clive and winked at him meaningfully, but he just looked faintly surprised and kept on nodding at what Otto was saying. So Holly ran downstairs and out through the broken back door into the rain, to see what she could see.

Edo must have entered the house this way. Maybe Doofus had found her hurt and had guided her here to safety. She could imagine him pulling the girl by the sleeve of Dad's old jumper, just as he had pulled Holly out of the combe – and had pulled Ted out of the front door.

And maybe he'd steered them all away from the same thing. Holly thought of the cave where they had found Ted, and the grim face she had seen in the lightning strike. Clive had said the Neanderthal man couldn't have hammered at the back door and then have reached the cave before Ted; but was that true? Ted moved slowly. He might not have noticed someone slipping past him in the rain.

Holly remembered the club: the notched bone that Doofus had found on the beach. Maybe it could hold spikes in those notches. Four long, sharpened stones. Always four.

At the end of the garden, the broken fence looked no more broken than last night. She stepped through it and studied the ground, which was flattened with feet – her own and Clive's, and probably hikers' boots as well. After a moment's hesitation she decided to walk a little way towards the sea, telling herself that she would keep the house in sight.

No hikers were out today. It was too wet. As she approached the cliffs, there was nobody on the coastal path as far as she could see. All the same she felt a prickle of apprehension. She stared at the empty sea for a moment, before turning round without knowing why.

Somebody was there.

He was about twenty metres away, standing tall beside the bushes that must have hidden him till now. He was staring at her.

The deep brows frowned beneath the long, wet, shaggy hair. Then the teeth were bared. It didn't look like a smile. He stepped out into the open and took a pace towards her.

That was enough for Holly. She fled. Glancing back, she saw that he had begun to run after her, moving clumsily, but fast; and she sped up, flying across the wet grass. He had not gained on her by the time she neared the house, and once she had leapt the broken fence, she saw that he had stopped as if wary of going any further.

Holly slipped in through the back door and closed it as much as she could, which was not as much as she would like. Her mind was whirling.

The man had held no club, no bone. But round his neck was something strung on a tattered length of blue plastic rope. It dangled heavily on his chest.

The stone eye.

Chapter Seventeen

Holly willed Otto to leave. She stared out of the window, ignoring his polite conversation, and watching for the man outside who must have run away. But Holly was afraid he would come back.

The joiner returned and attached a new lock to the back door. That was one load off her mind. Dad invited Otto to stay for tea, and Holly was afraid he would accept, until he learned that tea was veggie-burgers. At that he looked faintly alarmed, said No thank you and went back next door.

“What did you keep him here so long for?” hissed Holly to Clive while they set the table.

“To talk to,” said Clive, slightly defensively. “He’s not that bad.”

“He’s stuck-up. He’s a show-off. He’s full of himself.”

“He can’t help the disadvantages of his education,” said Clive. “I ought to practise making friends before High School. Otto will be good to practise on, because if it doesn’t work out I’ll never see him again anyway.”

Holly could understand the logic of that. She also saw what had not been clear to her before, that Clive was anxious about fitting in at High School: probably with good reason. She thought quite a few people quite liked Clive, but not because he made an effort to be likeable. He was interesting, especially if you were keen on beetles and so on yourself, but he could be off-puttingly abrupt.

“The other one was here,” she muttered.

“What other one?”

“*The* other one. The man. He was outside the fence. He’s gone now. But Edo’s *here*.”

“What?”

“Edo!” she mouthed at him, and pointed at the floor. Clive didn’t get it.

“In the cellar,” hissed Holly, as Dad came over with full plates. Clive’s eyes widened; he looked at the cellar door where Doofus still lay unmoving and unmoveable.

“How?” he mouthed back.

“Ah!” said Ted, waking up with a start. “Tea already? That was quick!”

Holly had to try to act normally through tea, though she was on tenterhooks in case Edo got impatient in the cellar and started thumping or yelling down below them. Once they were washing up together, she told Clive how she had found Edo, hurt – and the other one, hiding in the bushes.

“He was lurking,” she said. “I think he’s after Edo.”

“What for?”

Holly looked at him, wondering how he could be so dense. “Because he is. Something’s hurt her and scared her, and I bet it was *him*.”

“But—”

“I think that’s the reason Doofus made me throw the stone into the sea; it was so that Edo could come through and escape from danger. Only the danger was *him*, and it came here too.”

“I don’t see—” began Clive, but Holly barged on in desperation.

“What do I do now, Clive? I’ll take her down some food, but then what? We can’t keep her in the cellar. And the other one’s out there waiting for her.”

“We don’t know that.”

“Then let’s just assume it,” Holly said. “Why else would he be hanging around? And, oh, Clive – he’s got the stone eye round his neck on a string.”

There was a silence.

“Okay,” said Clive. “Well. We could smuggle her out at night, I guess.”

“First thing in the morning would be better,” said Holly, “when it’s just starting to get light, rather than creeping round in the dark. I can think of an excuse to tell Dad for getting up early. But where can we take her to? Where is she going to be safe?”

“The cave?”

“The other one was there,” objected Holly.

“The combe.”

“The other one was there too.”

“There’s nowhere else,” said Clive. “Unless... I could ask Otto if there’s anywhere that he knows of.”

“No you couldn’t,” said Holly firmly. “We can’t tell him about Edo. You haven’t, have you, Clive?”

“No,” said Clive. “I didn’t make friends with him *that* fast.” He scratched his head. “Maybe we leave it up to Edo.”

Holly considered this. “Or maybe we leave it up to Doofus,” she suggested.

Clive nodded. They both looked at Doofus, lying on guard in front of the cellar door, and he looked back at them with his dark, solemn gaze.

Later that evening, while Dad was busy on the phone and Clive was distracting Ted with geology, she smuggled some bread-and-jam and two stale tea-cakes down into the cellar, along with another bottle of water. This time Doofus followed her down the steps and stood guard at the bottom.

Holly had taken her own small torch. Edo’s was unlit; it seemed that she had been asleep under the towel, although she scrambled to her feet at Holly’s approach. She was wary of Doofus, though not exactly afraid.

“It’s all right,” said Holly, “it’s only me,” but there was barely time for her to thrust the food at the girl before Doofus pushed her away towards the steps. Edo did not try to follow.

Holly ran back up into the kitchen, closing the door just in time before Dad appeared from the hall.

“Holly, love? Mum wants to talk to you,” he said. She went to the phone.

Mum wanted to know how Holly was feeling, how she was coping, and Holly had to reassure her with a volley of *fines* and *excellents*.

“We’ve been to a ruined village,” she said, “and two cafes, and some standing stones, called Men-An-Tol, I think.”

She tried to describe them. But she felt an unhappy longing because she could not tell Mum what she really wanted to. She could not tell her about how she didn’t like this period business, which was a messy distracting nuisance, and about her terrible responsibility for the girl in the cellar.

So she chattered about standing stones and teashops instead; and then she asked about Nan.

There was a pause. “Well,” said Mum, and Holly’s heart seemed to stop.

“What is it, Mum?”

“She’s just so very tired,” said Mum quietly. “The doctor came today, just to check on her, you know. He says she’s winding down.”

Holly’s head seemed to be full of buzzing. Winding down, like an old worn-out clock that might stop ticking at any moment and leave only silence.

“Do we need to come home?” she asked after a moment.

“I don’t think so,” said Mum. “Not yet. Just put Dad back on, will you?”

Holly fetched Dad and then sat half way up the stairs, out of sight.

Dad didn’t say much. He listened. But one thing he did say was, “How long?”

After the call Dad came and sat down on the step next to Holly and put an arm around her shoulders. It was a comforting squash on the narrow staircase.

Holly leaned her head against him. “I don’t want Nan to,” she began, and stopped. She began again: “Not without seeing me. Should we go home?”

Dad shook his head. “The doc thinks there’s no rush. And honestly, love, Nan’s just sleeping most of the time, and when she’s awake, your Mum says she doesn’t really know who’s there.”

Sailing away, thought Holly, and her eyes filled with tears.

“The other thing is,” said Dad, “if Nan goes. When she goes. You know who it will hit hardest? Apart from Mum and us, I mean. Mum and Matt have got each other. But...”

“Uncle Ted,” said Holly.

Dad nodded. “Nan’s his big sister. And if we’ve all gone home and left him...”

“We could take him with us.”

Dad was quiet for a moment. “We could,” he said. “But not just yet. We’ll just see how things go, one day at a time, okay? Ted’s really enjoying your visit here. It helps take his mind off Nan too, you know.”

“Okay,” said Holly. Now she would have to act doubly cheerful in front of Ted, when she was full of all these different cares and could not tell anyone about them.

Apart from Clive. He knew them. Clive was a true friend, although he was an exasperating one at times. But he listened and thought and cared. Clive would help.

So take things one at a time. She couldn’t do anything about Nan, although the knowledge was like an ache in her throat.

However, she could do something about Edo. She could keep Edo safe; and Doofus would know where was safe better than she did. Doofus was a true friend too.

And Dad; as she leaned against him, his arm around her was very heartening, even though she could feel herself beginning to sail away from him into independence just as Nan was sailing away from all of them across an unknown sea.

She knew her father would always do his best to look after her. She was luckier than Clive in that respect.

So she sat up and said, “Right. So, Dad – Clive and me might get up early tomorrow and go down to the beach before breakfast. Clive wants to look for, um, birds, and I don’t want him to miss out if we have to leave soon. Pipits and godwits,” she added, the words rising out of some discarded memory.

Dad looked uncertain. “Well, okay. But wrap up warm. The weather forecast says it’s going to get wild again later tomorrow. And take your phone, and Doofus. I’m always happier when you’ve got the dog with you.”

“So am I,” said Holly. Of course, it all depended on Doofus allowing them to free Edo from the cellar.

But next morning, when Holly’s phone buzzed in her ear and she crept out of bed without disturbing Dad’s snores, she found Doofus downstairs in the grey dawn – no longer lying in front of the cellar but standing ready by the back door.

Clive staggered into the kitchen yawning, with his hair all on end.

“Cornflakes,” he mumbled, and while he was eating them Holly descended into the cellar.

The torch came on below her. It was dim; the battery was fading. Edo was also awake and, it seemed, waiting. She had eaten the bread and flapjack but not the tea-cakes, and she had drunk all the water.

“Come on,” said Holly, realising that she really had no choice; it was time to move Edo out of the cellar. The smell of pee was unmistakable. If Ted noticed, she would have to blame Doofus.

Getting Edo out of the house was easy. The girl seemed keen to leave, although she insisted on bringing the stale tea-cakes with her. But once in the garden, she became more cautious, turning her head to listen and looking around suspiciously. She bent to inspect the ground, and tested the air.

“She’s afraid of something,” Holly said. “What do you think, Doofus? Where should we go?”

“She’s not afraid of Doofus,” said Clive thoughtfully. “I wonder why not? They didn’t have dogs back then, but they had wolves. Surely she’d be frightened of a wolf?”

“I think Doofus must have rescued her yesterday,” said Holly, “and led her to safety in the cellar, so she trusts him.”

“Maybe. But rescued her from what?”

“The other one.”

“Well, I’m not sure,” said Clive. But Holly was.

Doofus began to pad across the grass, and Edo pulled away from Holly to go after him. When Doofus paused and raised his black head, sniffing, she stood patiently waiting.

After a moment Doofus set off again, heading inland along the track that led to Hulverton and the shop. Edo followed him, looking around continually, while Holly and Clive walked behind.

Although it was not raining for a change, everything was wet. The path squelched; alongside it, the bushes were strung with glittering, beaded spiders’ webs. In the heavy half-light no birds sang. Holly hoped Clive knew something about pipits and godwits that he could recount to Dad.

As they passed the standing stones, Edo overtook Doofus and struck out on her own. He did not try to stop her. She walked rapidly towards the village before breaking into a loping run. Holly jogged after her, afraid that she would try to break into the shop or the sleeping houses.

But Edo veered away from the village and made for the entrance to the combe. At that moment someone emerged from the shadow of the silent houses and began to follow them.

It was the Other One. The stone eye still dangled round his neck; and in his hand he gripped the long, yellowish, notched bone. Although it was not studded with any spikes, it looked quite threatening enough as it was.

Holly did not doubt that he meant Edo harm. Anger uncoiled inside her and she let it take over. She wouldn’t let him hurt the girl. She knew she could outrun him: so she began to race.

“Hey!” said Clive, but Holly was flying over the grass, getting between the man and the fleeing Edo, who was now almost at the combe.

Holly halted near the stile, spun round and faced the man with her arms out in warning. She was furious with him; and annoyed with Clive and Doofus, who had not raced to her assistance but who both hung back, watching.

The man stopped too, becoming instantly as still as one of the standing stones.

Holly stared at him, panting. She had to win time for Edo to get away.

“You leave her alone!” It was meant to be a shout, but it came out as a gasp. “Doofus! *Here!*” she called, more strongly.

But Doofus still hung back. He stood poised with one foot up, yet he did not move. Clive hesitated next to him.

Edo, too, had halted, half-way over the broken stile.

“Hoo! Ssss,” she cried.

“Go! Go!” said Holly, wildly waving her away. Edo climbed the stile awkwardly – she was still carrying a tea-cake in each hand – and disappeared down the tangled path.

The Other One looked at Holly with his forbidding glare, and then eyed Clive and Doofus. At last, with a faint grunt, he backed off, and began to lope away.

But he did not go far. He followed the wall that lined the tree-filled valley until, fifty metres further on, he leapt over it. He was entering the combe from the side.

Holly began to climb the stile. “I’m going after Edo,” she said as Clive came running up. “I’m not letting him hurt her again.”

“We don’t know that he did!” said Clive. “Holly, wait, stop, listen. Four slashes. On her arm, on the door, on that tree. *He* doesn’t have a weapon that would do that. And remember that footprint that we found? With four claws?”

Holly was impatient. “Well, what was it, if it wasn’t him?”

“I don’t know. I tried to look it up, but Ted’s internet... and four claws is all wrong anyway. It should be five. But I know it’s something *big*. Don’t go in there,” pleaded Clive.

Holly paused for a moment.

“I have to,” she said. Then she scrambled over the stile, and plunged into the darkness of the combe.

Chapter Eighteen

Edo had already disappeared down the winding, overgrown trail. As Holly set out after her, she was immediately ambushed by brambles that tore at her clothes, and nettles that whipped her legs. This path had not been cleared for a long time.

Not officially cleared, at least. But it was cleared in places. Whatever had broken the stile had seemingly barged at random through the undergrowth here, ignoring thorns and thickets alike.

A young tree had been snapped in half and its top branches stripped of leaves. The sight of it gave Holly pause for a second; but only for a second. She had to get to Edo before the Other One did.

She could hear someone pushing and tearing their way in behind her, but she couldn't see if it was Clive or the Other One. She pressed on, trying to ignore the scratches on her legs and hands. A stream came hurtling through the bushes on her right, and ran busily alongside the path for a moment before disappearing back into the undergrowth. The trail turned into a marsh, spongy and clogged with reeds.

Holly strode on doggedly. She pushed through a lattice of stems and came out into a small clearing, a space made by a gnarled tree that had fallen and lay rotting on the mossy ground, tied down with ivy.

In the middle of the clearing was Edo, plucking at Dad's now-tattered jumper which had caught on one of the many broken branches.

"Edo," said Holly in relief and warning. The girl did not reply. There was the low buzzing of bees not far away – and then a rustle from behind Holly. She spun round.

There stood the Other One. The unfriendly eyes beneath the thunderous brows stared at her and narrowed. Gripping his bone club, he took one step towards her.

"Right," said Holly, stooping to snatch a branch up from the ground. Before she could straighten up again, she was bowled over. A strong hand had taken her shoulder and shoved her aside so firmly that she fell.

But it was not the Other's One hand that shoved her. It was Edo's.

As Holly started to scramble to her feet, Edo gave her a second half-shove. Then the girl went up to the Other One and slapped him on the side of the head.

It was scarcely a slap, though; more like a hard pat. He reached out his free hand and gave Edo a similar slap back.

Edo turned to Holly.

"A bss! Coh, coh. Bsss. Coh." It sounded as if she was scolding.

“I think he’s hers,” said Clive, emerging slowly from the bushes. His trousers were ripped. “I think she’s saying you can’t have him.”

“I don’t want him!” said Holly, shuffling away from the pair before getting warily to her feet.

“Tsss. Coh.” Edo held out her long hand again to the Other One, putting it to the side of his head and then pulling his ear. After a few seconds he did the same to her, with a faint hiss. Seeing him close up, Holly realised that despite his size he was younger than she’d thought – perhaps not much older than Edo herself. His heavy features were misleading.

Edo handed him one of the tea-cakes. “Grohf. *Grohf*,” she said, with almost an animal grunt.

The Other One put the tea-cake to his nose and then his tongue, testing, but did not eat it. He held it in one hand, and then turned to face the inner depth of the combe, from whence came the buzzing of the bees. Standing alongside Edo, he began to make a series of extraordinary noises.

These were not grunts or hisses. He first growled like some kind of wild dog, and then made a long throaty roar; once, twice.

“Oh my,” murmured Clive.

“*Grohf*,” said Edo encouragingly.

The Other One roared a third time, with that terrible, inhuman sound.

Across the clearing, the bushes began to tremble and shake. With a noise of splitting wood, something was pushing through the undergrowth, growling an answer to the man’s roar. But even before it emerged, Holly realised that this was no prehistoric person. It was too big.

It came out of the shadows like a giant, moving, deeper shadow. Its fur was almost black in the gloom of dawn; its eyes gleamed small and dark; its smell was strong and earthy. A few bees circled round its head. Its mouth was glistening. It was a bear.

But it was enormous. It reared up on its hind legs, and Holly stumbled backwards, crashing into Clive.

Edo and the other one did not move back. They stood their ground. The Other One held out his tea-cake in one hand like an offering, and waved his club slowly from side to side as if he aimed to hypnotise the bear. Then he tossed the tea-cake towards its broad, clawed feet.

With a loud *Grohf* of its own the bear fell on to all fours again. Holly noticed that where the front left foot had five long claws, the right had only four. One claw had been broken off. The bear bent its head and snapped up the tea-cake in its wide jaws, the muscles of its shoulders bunching massively.

“Sorry, Clive,” said Holly, though so quietly that she thought he probably could not hear.

But Clive spoke in an equally quiet, even voice.

“It’s all right. Don’t move fast. We can back away slowly. Keep watching him. Don’t shout unless he comes close and looks like attacking us. Then we should hit him in the face.”

“What with?”

“*They’re* not scared,” said Clive. “I think he knows them. I think they—”

He didn’t finish. For Edo stretched out her arm and held out her tea-cake to the bear. Rearing up, it lunged forward and swiped a huge four-clawed limb at her hand.

The claw barely missed Edo as she leapt backwards, throwing the tea-cake to the ground. When the bear bent down to it, Edo darted forward to grab at the broad shoulder, coming away with a sparse handful of dark hairs.

It was as if she was playing a deadly game of tag. The bear did not like being grabbed at. With a roar it swiped at her again, and this time a claw snagged on the jumper and ripped it open.

“Wow,” said Clive. “Back away now. Don’t run.”

Holly began to back away and found herself in a bramble bush. The Other One was backing away too; but Edo crouched on her haunches, watching the bear, which was intent on the tea-cake.

Then she began to sing to it. At least, although there was no real tune, that was what it sounded like.

“*Atsee, atsee, grohf-dah, grohf-dah,*” up and down her voice chanted, gentle and persuasive. Holly could not see that it had any effect on the bear.

Edo reached out again, slowly, and touched its leg. This time, the bear did take notice. With a grunting roar, it lunged at her again, rearing up and dropping heavily on all fours just where she had been.

But Edo had rolled away and jumped to her feet. And now she retreated too. The bear had had enough; it lurched towards them with a shambling, rolling gait. Holly was sure she could feel the ground shake.

“Back *away,*” said Clive again, more urgently. Holly tore free of the bramble bush and hurried behind him up the muddy path the way they had come in, squirming through bushes and ignoring the biting twigs and thorns.

Edo and the Other One had taken a different route. Holly could not see them. And she did not want to stop to check which way the bear went; she could hear it crashing around behind them.

After a few minutes, however, as they hurried on, the crashing slowed and eventually stopped. Clive halted, out of breath, his eyes shining. They were almost at the stile.

“I think we’re okay now,” he said, “but let’s get out of here in any case.”

“That was...”

“That was a cave bear,” said Clive. “Prehistoric.”

“It was *huge!*”

“Bears are. That was about the size of a modern Kodiak bear, I should think. They’re big. More than three metres tall when they stand up.” Clive’s voice was trembling slightly, not with fear, Holly knew, but with suppressed excitement.

“But they were feeding it! What did they think they were doing?” asked Holly, climbing over the stile.

“I think they were... I don’t know the right word. Not exactly worshipping it. But I think the bear is a sort of totem to them, something magical. I read about it in one of Ted’s books. They found a load of cave bear bones buried along with a Neanderthal skeleton.”

Holly shook her head in bewilderment. “It could have killed them!”

“Only if it got really annoyed,” said Clive.

“It looked pretty annoyed to me. I wouldn’t want to see it any more annoyed.”

“Anyway, it’s gone now.” Clive sounded regretful.

“It’s not gone! It’s still in there!”

“Yes. It’s not a very big territory,” said Clive, “but I guess it’s a good habitat for bears. Plenty of cover and food. Berries and roots. And it looked like it had found honey.”

“But what are we going to do with it?”

He shrugged. “I’m not sure we can do anything with it. It’ll do what it wants. You mean who do we tell?”

“No, I don’t.” Holly put her hands to her head. She realised she was shaking. “Oh, Clive. The stone eye must have brought them all here, and now I don’t know what to do!” She raised her head to look around. “And where’s Doofus? We’ve lost Doofus! Did he follow us in? Is he still in there with the—”

She was interrupted by a snarl and a tearing crash from the combe. The bear was coming out.

Chapter Nineteen

It was not leaving by the stile. The noise came from fifty metres further down the wall that lined the valley.

First Edo and the Other One came leaping over the wall. Then the bear came through it.

Stones thudded to the ground: a sapling was splintered. The bear was annoyed.

Once through the wall it reared up and stood tall, staring around. Then, dropping to all fours, it began to lollap heavily after Edo and the Other One, who were running towards the houses.

“Keep still,” said Clive, clutching Holly’s arm. “I don’t think it’s noticed us.”

Holly did not see how the bear could fail to notice them. But maybe it could only concentrate on one thing at a time; for as Edo and the Other One sprinted away ahead of it, the bear slowed, sniffed, and then changed course. It began to pad towards the shop.

“It’s probably smelt food,” Clive muttered.

They followed the bear at a wary distance. It did not look back at them. It reached the shop and pawed at the window. Next it padded round to the door and pawed at that too before rearing up and, it seemed, casually leaning against it. With a crash, the door gave way and the bear strolled over it into the shop.

“We’ve got to warn people!” Holly gasped.

“We’ve got to stay out of its way,” said Clive.

“But what if Anita lives above the shop? What if she comes down?”

“She won’t if she’s got any sense.”

“I’m going closer,” Holly said. While the bear was in the shop, she could not see it; therefore it could not see her. She jumped up and ran swiftly to the shop window, crouching down beneath it with a thumping heart. Very cautiously she peeped in.

All she could see was a vast brown backside. The floor of the shop was strewn with tins and packets. Then a dark head turned towards her, with a fish hanging out of its mouth.

Holly ducked down out of sight. She crept round the side of the building and looked at the other houses; nobody was stirring, not even a curtain twitching. But the wind was rising now, creating quite a noise in the nearby trees, so perhaps the crash of the door had gone unnoticed.

However, people would soon be getting up. What if Anita or one of her customers walked in to find a prehistoric cave bear in their shop? Somebody was bound to get hurt. It was unlikely to be the bear.

She glimpsed Edo hovering in the street, and hoped the girl was not going to have another attempt at grabbing at the bear. Maybe she wanted a handful of fur as a trophy. Maybe it was a way of proving courage, or even of trying to tame the animal, Holly thought distractedly. Whatever it was, it wouldn’t help. She shook her head at Edo, who of course did not understand. Edo began to move towards the shop.

And then, at last, Holly saw Doofus. He had been standing in the shadow of one of the sleeping houses, quite invisible. Now he emerged and walked across to Edo, blocking her path.

Edo looked down at his broad back, hesitated, and tried to go round him. Doofus moved and blocked her way again.

Edo put out a hand, very carefully, to touch him. She pushed. Doofus did not budge. Edo paused, with her hand out.

Meanwhile things were happening inside the shop. There was a muffled smash; a few seconds later the doorbell pinged as the bear came blundering out across the shattered door. Holly flattened herself against the wall until she heard the bear shuffle away.

Stepping silently to the corner of the building, she looked round it. The bear had brought out a loaf of bread which was spilling from a plastic wrapper. The plastic tangled round its claws as it tried to get at the contents.

Behind the preoccupied bear, Holly slipped into the shop without being seen. It looked as if a compact but efficient tornado had been through the place. Shelves were upended; jars rolled on the floor, and half-eaten fish lay scattered round the crate of ice. The counter bore deep claw-marks – four long gouges engraved in the wood.

However, the bear had not discovered the chiller cabinet. Opening it, Holly grabbed an armful of pies and pasties. Hurriedly she tore off wrappings and stuffed pies into all of her coat pockets.

Then she crept out of the shop again and back round the corner while the bear was still grubbing at the bread. Her idea was to lure the bear away from the village – and from Edo.

So she took a few deep breaths before she plunged out into the open a little distance from the bear, and hurled a pork pie in its direction.

The pie landed in the grass about four metres from the bear, which took no notice of it. It did not appear to see Holly even when she walked unsteadily over to the pie she had just thrown. She picked it up again.

“Hey! Bear!” she said. Her voice had gone high. Something inside her was telling her that this was a ludicrously stupid and dangerous thing to do. But she also told herself that she could run at any time; and if she was faster than the Other One, surely she was faster than a heavy, lumbering bear.

As the bear looked up with glittering eyes she said, “Pie! lovely pie!” and tossed it closer. In the background she was aware of Edo staring at her, still held back by Doofus. It occurred to her that this bear might be used to being offered food. Certainly, as it ambled towards her, it showed no timidity but headed straight for the pork pie and wolfed it down in one voracious gulp.

Holly had retreated. "There's more," she said, as she walked backwards, away from the village. When the bear began to follow, she threw it a cheese and onion pasty.

The bear stopped to investigate; Holly managed to retreat another twenty or thirty metres before it looked up at her again.

"Yummy meat pie!" she called, and threw it, gaining confidence. But this time the bear did not shamble slowly but sped up a little, lolloping heavily towards the pie.

Holly backed away faster. "Cornish pasty in a minute," she said.

The bear did not want to wait a minute. It had swallowed the meat pie and was already heading her way again by the time she threw the Cornish pasty. A gust of wind tossed the pasty sideways; but the bear did not miss it. It devoured it in two noisy gulps and looked up hungrily for more.

Holly was drawing it away from the houses; but she was also running out of pies. She only had three left, and now the bear was walking purposefully towards her on all fours, with its strangely rolling gait, front feet turned in. It would have made quite a cute cuddly toy, had it been about a thousand times smaller.

But it was not a cuddly toy. Behind that fur was half a ton of muscle. And it was definitely used to being fed. Holly threw another pie, and the bear hardly paused in its heavy progress to crunch it up before raising its head again, a long tongue licking round its jaws.

Holly panicked. Before the bear could get too close, she flung the last two pies at it, and ran.

She did not hear it following her immediately. Presumably the pies stopped it for a moment. But then, looking over her shoulder, she saw it throw its head back to swallow, before giving chase as if it expected her to be made of pies.

And as it gathered speed Holly very quickly realised that there was no way she could outrun a bear.

She was a long way from the houses now; a long way from any wall that she could leap over. She had a wild idea that if she could hide, the bear might somehow forget about her and stop chasing – but there was nothing to hide behind. She was out in the open, with no cover except low bushes. The nearest things of any size were the standing stones, and they were still some distance away.

Holly flew over the grass, running faster than she had ever run before in her life. Yet she could hear the thudding footsteps of the bear behind her, scarily rapid, gaining on her.

And then something passed her in a black ripple of movement; and she realised that although *she* could not outrun a bear, Doofus could.

He overtook Holly, circled her – scarcely slowing down – and doubled back towards the bear. Holly, risking another glance over her shoulder, could see that the bear was confused. It had slowed up and was watching Doofus. She could also see Edo, running towards them from quite a long way behind, and far beyond Edo were the Other One and Clive, coming more slowly from different directions.

The bear was not interested in any of them – nor in Holly now. All its focus was on Doofus.

Like a sheepdog harrying a huge and awkward sheep, Doofus wove to and fro across its path. The baffled bear tossed its head irritably; and then it charged.

It seemed that until now it had hardly been trying. Now it charged in earnest. It hurtled towards Doofus at a speed Holly could scarcely believe. She felt the ground vibrate. Doofus set off in the direction of the standing stones with the bear in thunderous pursuit.

She stood still, gasping for breath. Her lungs were burning. Behind her, Edo had stopped running to investigate the remains of a pie. The Other One halted alongside her; but Clive stumbled past them, grabbed hold of Holly and dragged her away towards the nearest hedge.

“Keep down,” he instructed her. “It’s not looking our way.” Holly flopped down onto her hands and knees, panting. Crouched almost double, Clive began to creep along behind the hedge towards the standing stones. Holly crawled after him. When they ran out of hedge, they paused and poked their heads up.

Doofus was darting in and out between the standing stones in looping figures of eight which the bear could not easily follow. It charged round one stone, blundered into another, backed up against the third and stopped there, shaking its head and glaring around in a bewildered way. Doofus stood concealed from it behind the largest stone, his flanks barely heaving despite his effort.

A sudden gust of wind swirled wildly, sending a flurry of twigs and leaves across the grass, and pulling the bear’s attention with it. A few large raindrops spattered on the stones.

The bear dropped its head and shook itself. After a moment it began to root in the long grass around the standing stones. Then, the pursuit seemingly forgotten, it shambled away towards the edge of the field, not far from where Holly and Clive were hiding.

They ducked down as it passed. When Holly looked up again, it was to see the bear lurching towards a far wall, a continuation of the one around the combe. Beyond it, she realised, the valley must snake on its long tangled way to the sea.

The bear did not crash through this wall. It merely leant against it until the top two courses gave way. With a lot of grunting, it clambered over. They heard the cracking of undergrowth; and then it was gone.

Holly and Clive sat up and looked at each other.

“That was incredibly brave,” said Clive severely, “and incredibly stupid.”

“Well, if it only eats roots and berries – and pies – it wasn’t going to eat *me*,” argued Holly somewhat weakly.

“No. Just trample you down and tear you to bits. You got lucky.”

“Doofus saved me,” she said, gazing over at the black dog.

Doofus wasn’t looking her way. As soon as the bear was out of sight, he began to gallop back towards Edo who was kneeling to eat the remains of a pasty. She licked her fingers with obvious relish and stood up, turning back towards the shop.

Before she could move, Doofus was in front of her. He blocked her way just as he had before. When Edo tried to get round him, he pushed her back towards the stones.

The Other One, looking warily at Doofus, prodded him with the bone club. The dog’s only response was a snarling curl of his lip, just enough to reveal his sharp white teeth.

Edo turned on the Other One. “*How! How!*” It sounded like a warning.

The Other One lowered his club and attempted to pull her away. Edo slapped at his shoulder quite hard and stayed where she was, next to Doofus. She put her hand on Doofus’s back, gently, with respect.

“That’s interesting,” said Clive. “It’s like Doofus is some sort of totem now. I suppose that’s not unreasonable.”

“We need to get them out of sight,” said Holly urgently. “People will be waking up at any minute!”

“Get them out of sight? Where, though? There’s only the combe, or the cave. The combe’s full of bear; and the tide’ll be coming in now, so we won’t be able to get to the cave.”

“The old hotel?”

“Not secret enough.”

“We can’t put them back in the cellar,” said Holly. “The trouble is, we don’t know anywhere else. We don’t know anywhere safe and secret.”

Clive thought for a moment. “There is somewhere we could hide them,” he said slowly. “Somewhere that would give us some breathing space, at least, while we decide what to do next.”

“Even that would help!”

“Yes. But there’s a downside,” he added, with a grimace. “We’ll have to tell Otto.”

Chapter Twenty

“No!” protested Holly. “We can’t, Clive. We don’t know if we can trust him!”

“What’s the alternative? Do you want to tell Dad or Uncle Ted that there are Neanderthals running around the neighbourhood?”

She was silent. Both Dad and Uncle Ted were kind and well-meaning, but their first act on seeing Edo and the Other One would be to ring the police or the social services, or somebody else who would just take them away. They’d be subjected to all sorts of tests and scans, and poked and prodded at and studied.

For that to happen would be disastrous. The pair did not belong in this modern world, but at least they were – she felt – sort of in the right place if not in the right time.

She tried to explain this to Clive, who nodded.

“Yes, I know. That’s why we need breathing space to think about it,” he said. “Otto can give us that.”

“How?”

“He can give us the keys to it,” said Clive. “The empty house next door.” He began to walk back towards Karrek Row.

At once Doofus moved too, shoving Edo ahead of him. Edo did not seem to mind being shoved. She accepted it. Putting out a long, strong hand, she held it above the dog’s head without touching his fur; and in this way walked steadily alongside him. The Other One brought up the rear, looking glum and holding his bone club ready. When he spotted Holly watching him he gave her a fierce look.

However, he came along silently; and to Holly’s relief they saw no other people on the walk back home. Once there, Doofus corralled Edo and the Other One out of sight around the end of the row.

Holly looked through the windows of Otto’s house, but could see no sign that anyone was up. So Clive threw increasingly large stones at the upper window that he said was Otto’s, until at last, after a chunky pebble that Holly feared would crack the glass, the window opened. Otto’s questioning face appeared.

Clive made a series of shushing and beckoning gestures. Otto looked confused. He disappeared from the window and a couple of minutes later opened the door, pulling on a jumper. His red hair stuck up untidily; Holly thought he looked better that way than with it all slicked down.

“What?” he said.

“We need the key to the empty house,” said Clive. “The one next to Ted’s, with the boarded up windows.”

“What for?”

“It’s an emergency,” said Clive. “Quickly! And don’t wake your dad!”

Otto lifted a key from a hook by the door, but paused in the act of handing it over.

“I need to know what for,” he said.

“We just need somewhere to hide something for a bit. Nothing illegal,” added Holly, “but it is secret.”

“What sort of secret?”

“We can’t tell you now, sorry, but maybe later on,” said Clive. He reached over and took the key from Otto’s hand. “Don’t come after us,” he said, and pulled the door closed.

They collected Edo and the Other One to take them round to the empty house. Doofus made this easy; as soon as he moved, Edo followed him, and the Other One followed Edo.

While Clive was unlocking the door, Holly looked down Karrek Row, expecting to see Otto’s head sticking out of a window, spying on them. He did not appear.

All the same, she warned Clive, “I don’t think Otto will keep away for long.”

“Maybe not. But then I don’t think we can keep the two of them here for long either.” Clive stepped inside the empty house and looked around the interior with some dismay.

It was a mess. The front door led straight into the living-room, where there was hardly any furniture, just a sofa and a dresser covered in dustsheets. The wallpaper had been partly peeled off the walls and lay in soggy clumps on the floorboards. Holes gaped in the skirting board where electric sockets should have been. When Holly flipped a light switch, nothing happened.

“Probably just as well,” said Clive. “They wouldn’t understand electricity.” Indeed, Edo was already squatting down to poke a curious finger into one of the socket holes, while the Other One carefully fingered the dust-sheet on the sofa and held it up to his nose.

Clive locked the door behind them, although Doofus had already lain down in front of it. The room was dusky, illuminated only by pale cracks of light around the edges of the boarded windows.

“What are the windows in the kitchen like?” Clive asked in the gloom.

Holly went into the kitchen at the back. Here the windows were not boarded up, but she checked that they were closed and managed to pull down the remains of a broken blind, which would obscure the view of anyone looking in.

There was no cooker and the wall cupboards had all been removed. However, a bottle of lemonade stood on the counter, along with a multi-pack of cheesy snacks and a toolbox. And the taps worked.

She took one of the packets of cheesy snacks back into the front room, while Clive ran briefly upstairs.

“There are a couple of beds up there,” he reported back, “but no mattresses.”

“I don’t suppose they’ll mind that,” said Holly, opening the packet and offering Edo a cheesy snack. Edo ate it with relish and smacked her lips. The Other One held out a hand, so Holly gave him one too. He munched it thoughtfully and held out his hand again.

“Dill gon,” he said.

“Fini coh,” said Edo.

“Dill gon,” repeated the Other One. He was persistent. He grabbed the packet and retreated under the dust-sheet with it.

“How how *tiss!*” said Edo, displeased; and then she froze. Someone had rapped on the front door.

“It’s only me,” said Otto’s plaintive voice. “I really need to know what you’re doing there. It’s my Dad’s house. Clive? Please?”

Edo dived under the dust-sheet on the sofa to join the Other One. Doofus stood up, stretched, and moved away unhurriedly from the door.

Clive looked at him and at the sofa, and then shrugged at Holly.

“Okay,” he said, unlocking the door. Holly whisked the corner of the sheet over a hairy foot just in time before Otto entered.

Otto stared at the dust-sheet huddled on the sofa. It kept still for a moment; then there was the rustle of a cheesy snack packet, and a faint grunt.

“Who’s under there?” said Otto sharply. “Who are you?”

“They don’t speak our language, Otto,” said Holly quickly. “Please leave them be, they’re very nervous, we found them stranded on the beach, please don’t disturb—”

“They’re refugees,” said Otto, “aren’t they? Where are they from?”

Holly and Clive looked at each other.

“We don’t know,” said Clive. “But quite far away.”

“Syria, I expect,” said Otto, staring at the dust-sheet which was now almost immobile apart from a faint rise and fall of someone breathing. “Or Somalia. They’re probably off some boat that’s capsized. I *thought* I saw somebody the other day when I...” He broke off, looking embarrassed.

When you were spying, thought Holly, but she only said, “Yes, I expect you’re right. But they really are very shy. They just need to be left quiet for a bit while we decide what to do.”

“They’re probably traumatized,” said Otto. “Poor things. I need to tell my Dad.”

“No!” The two spoke in unison.

“Look,” said Otto, “I sympathize, but there are people who deal with this sort of thing. They’ll look after them.”

“You mean put them in a camp,” said Holly, “or prison.”

“I don’t think...” But Otto shifted uncomfortably. After a minute he said, “Look, I don’t need to tell my dad right now, because he won’t be here today anyway. We’re going to Exeter in half an hour; it’s some business about that old hotel he’s bought. But when we come back this evening I’ll have to tell him, unless you report them first.”

“Okay,” said Clive, before Holly could start pleading. “That’s only reasonable. Thanks.” He more or less pushed Otto out of the door.

“Phew,” he said, once Otto’s footsteps had walked away. “So we’ve got until this evening. We need to make a plan.”

The dust sheet flew off Edo’s head. She began to wrestle for the pack of cheesy snacks, hissing and slapping at the Other One. When she got the packet off him she ran into the kitchen. The Other One stayed on the sofa, with the dust sheet round his shoulders, searching for cheesy snacks that had fallen in its folds.

“What plan?” said Holly. She couldn’t think of a single idea.

“Food first,” said Clive. “One thing at a time.”

“They’ve already had pie and cheesy—”

“For us,” said Clive. “As well as them.”

While Edo and the Other One were occupied, they slipped out, leaving Doofus guarding the door, and crept back to Ted’s house. Nobody was downstairs yet although they could hear someone in the bathroom having a shower. Holly ransacked Ted’s cupboards and took half a box of breakfast cereal, two bananas and a lemon cake; she could replace them when she went to the shop. She also took the yoghurt pot that Edo had used as a drinking cup in the cellar.

When she went back next door with the food she could not see either of them. She ran upstairs and found Edo poking in an empty wardrobe; the Other One was underneath a bed, examining its springs.

Holly led Edo into the bathroom and showed her how to use the taps in the basin.

“On, off,” she said. “Off is very important.” She got Edo to do it a few times; it seemed to fascinate her. Holly attempted to mime the purpose of the toilet, although she was not at all sure that the girl understood. But at least she would have water.

Next she led Edo down to the living room and showed her the food on the dresser. Then, while Edo was busy investigating the cereal, she hurried back to Ted's house, and was in the middle of her own second breakfast when Dad came downstairs.

Chapter Twenty-one

"Morning, all," said Dad cheerfully. "How was the bird life? Did you see those pipits and, what was it?"

Clive shook his head and swallowed. "Oyster catchers," he said, "and kittiwakes, and I think I saw a turnstone."

"Not too windy yet? The forecast's pretty terrible."

"Not yet," said Clive.

"Good. We should make the most of it before Prunella comes in."

"Prunella?"

"This storm that's sweeping in from the Atlantic," explained Dad. "Why they give them such friendly names I don't know. They should call them Titan or Doomsday or something."

"That would frighten people too much," Holly said.

"Good," said Clive vehemently. "People need frightening. About global heating, I mean."

Dad looked slightly taken aback. "Ah... well... up to a point, I suppose."

"Before Prunella hits us," said Clive, "could we go out somewhere for the day? I'd really like to see Hartland Quay. Ted says it's got amazing geology. And he mentioned somewhere called Clovelly."

"Sure, we could go there," said Dad. "I already had it on the list."

"As long as it's not too far," added Holly. She immediately understood Clive's thinking: being out would be good, in case Dad or Ted heard strange noises through the wall.

However, being out for too long would not be good, because she and Clive still had to decide what to do with the pair next door, and might need time to move them somewhere else... if anywhere else could be found.

"That's all right, Holly," said Dad reassuringly, "Both places are quite close. We can come back whenever you like." He thought she was worried about her period. It had its uses after all.

So that was arranged; although when Ted came down to join them, he said rather disparagingly that Clovelly was just a little fishing village with a huge car park attached. However he supposed that the kids might like it. He seemed less cheerful than usual; it occurred to Holly that he was worried about Nan, just as she was.

But she had plenty to distract her. While they were getting ready to go, Holly kept thinking she heard odd sounds from next door, and did some prolonged clattering in the kitchen to cover it up. At least Otto couldn't go with them this time, for Paul's car had already driven off.

On the way to their own car, she looked apprehensively at the boarded-up house next door. There was no sign of life, thank goodness. Dad noticed her looking.

"Be nice there once Paul does it up," he said.

"Hmph," said Ted.

"Better than it lying empty," insisted Dad.

"But you don't know who you'll end up with in there," grunted Ted.

Holly glanced at Clive. "That's very true."

"Tourists," muttered Ted.

"*We're* tourists," said Dad comfortably.

"You don't count."

Ted was grumpy. When they reached Clovelly, Holly understood why he hadn't been keen. Not only was it jam-packed full of tourists, it had been designed without any consideration for old men with bad knees. The village perched on a cliff and teetered all the way down it to the sea. Cobbled streets hurtled downhill past white-washed houses to the harbour far below.

The streets were too steep for cars and almost too steep for Ted; Dad held on to his arm as they slithered on wet cobbles. Even Doofus had to tread carefully. It wasn't raining here, but it had been, and mini-streamlets still cascaded down the street. Although there were no cars, there were sledges, pulled by donkeys.

"Oh, look, Clive, donkeys!" said Holly before she could stop herself.

"Very nice," said Clive politely.

"I think I'll stop here," said Uncle Ted. "This looks like a decent café. I'll have a bit of a rest while you keep going down. Otherwise I'll never make it back up to the car."

Dad sat him down and ordered him a hot chocolate and a large slice of cake; so they left him looking a little happier. Then the remaining three of them, with Doofus, ambled on down past the huddled white houses with their bedraggled pots of flowers until they ended up at the harbour right at the bottom. Doofus sniffed around the ropes tied up to the quay.

“Can you please keep hold of him?” muttered Clive to Holly. “I have a bit of a thing about harbour walls.” It was a vertical drop down the dank wall into the sea.

“He’s fine,” said Holly. “He won’t fall in. He knows what he’s doing.”

“Maybe. I just don’t like edges. Like on the cliff; they make me go sort of wobbly.” Edges did not bother Holly, but she kept safely back so as not to bother Clive. Doofus gazed out to sea as if he could penetrate the mist that cloaked the grey horizon. Masts clanked in the harbour.

“It’s pretty here,” said Holly, to please Dad, and immediately decided that *pretty* was not right. *Pretty* was just a fluffy word for useless things. “What I mean is,” she amended, “it’s interesting. It’s sort of complicated and fun and useful all at the same time.”

“Certainly is,” said Dad. “Shame about Ted’s knees.”

“He’s got his cake. Can we have ice-cream?”

“Why not?” said Dad. “We are on holiday, after all.”

“You are a wonderful father,” Holly told him, and Dad laughed, while Clive looked wistful.

Sitting on a bench and fending off seagulls while she licked her ice-cream, Holly wondered if now would be a good time to tell Dad about Edo. He was in his most cheerful mood, with ice-cream dripping from his chin, and it was private on the bench apart from one small boy nearby; and she had pretty much decided that they would have to tell Dad sooner or later. Sooner, in fact – before Otto told Paul.

Holly looked at Clive. He was offering a lick of ice-cream to Doofus, who disdained it. Now was the time. She opened her mouth to speak.

“NOOO!”

The wail of despair came from the small boy, whose ice-cream cone had just been snatched from his hand by a large seagull. Ice-cream lay spattered like a star-fish on the ground. Holly felt a deep shudder of sympathy.

“Oh, no! Can we buy him another one?” she said.

Dad jumped up to ask his mother and then headed for the shop. Meanwhile Clive told the little boy that he had been robbed by a herring gull, and that to put gulls off his ice-cream, he should stare hard at them because they didn’t like that, and shout *Weasel!* because weasels hunted baby gulls. And then he should eat fast.

The moment for Holly’s confession was lost. On the long trudge back up the hill from the harbour, as the cries of *Weasel!* diminished behind them, she let Dad walk on ahead so that she could whisper to Clive.

“We need to tell my dad about – you know who.”

“No, we don’t,” said Clive. “Not yet, anyway. Only if all else fails. I’ve been thinking.”

“What about?”

“About the stone eye and Doofus,” said Clive. “You say the stone eye brought the Neanderthal people here. Why?”

“At first I thought it was just an accident. But then I wondered if it brought Edo here to keep her safe,” said Holly.

“Safe from what?”

“I thought the Other One, but I suppose it must have been the bear.”

“But the bear’s come here too,” argued Clive.

“Maybe Edo was trying to feed it when they got pulled through time, so the bear came with them.”

“Maybe.” Clive sounded unconvinced. “But why them? What’s so special about those people? Why did Doofus make you bring the stone here and throw it into the sea?”

“I assumed that was to hide it,” said Holly. “But it wasn’t deep enough. So perhaps the people arrived by accident after all. I’m getting terribly confused.”

“It would never have been deep enough. You think Doofus would get that wrong? When has Doofus ever got anything wrong?”

Holly looked ahead at the black dog, walking between them and Dad. His ears twitched; his head turned slightly, taking everything in. He looked normal enough – apart from his size; only she and Clive knew what a very peculiar dog he was. She could not remember when he ever did anything without a purpose.

“Doofus sees through time,” said Clive. “I don’t know how that works in physics, but all the evidence points that way.”

“Like a sixth sense? So that’s how he knows when things are going to die.”

“Well, obviously. Okay. Let’s think about this. The stone eye lets things leap forward in time,” said Clive. “From the past to now. Or from now to the future.”

“Yes.” She remembered the flash; the sudden light in the air above a stream; the sense of a void appearing and disappearing.

“One direction only. Things can’t go back in time, but Doofus can *see* back in time. So can we, after all, if we look far back enough in space. The stone eye can’t send the two people backwards; it can only send them forwards. So maybe that is what it’s meant to do.”

“What?”

“Send them on to somewhere in the future.”

“Somewhere they’ll be safer?” Holly asked.

“Maybe. But it’s not random – because only certain things come through. When Doofus lets them, maybe.”

Doofus’s ears twitched again at the sound of his name. He stood still until the children caught up with him, looking past them down the hill.

Holly wondered if it was true: if her dog could see beyond the harbour and the houses and all the modern bustling humans to whatever had been here thousands of years ago. Hundreds of thousands. How far could Doofus see?

While she was wondering this, he yawned hugely. Then he walked over and placed his back under Holly's hand, as if to reassure her.

Holly tried to be reassured. They had almost reached Ted's café now, but she still had a question.

"All right," she said. "But the stone eye is hanging around the Other One's neck! So if it's meant to send them somewhere else, why hasn't it already done it?"

"I don't know." Clive sighed, looking deflated. "I need cake. Come on."

After tea and cake – Ted had another slice, and Clive had two – they helped Ted trudge back up the hill and folded him into the car. Then Dad drove off to Hartland Quay and Geology.

This was clearly more to Ted's taste. He led them down to the sea to view the tormented rock faces, which were even wilder in their zig-zagging than the cliffs near Karrek Row. Clive was stunned in admiration. Looking at his rapt expression, Holly felt that Mr Finney's death was finally forgiven. But it seemed a shame that it was only rock that brought this joy to Clive, and no living creature.

Rock would not let him down, she thought. It would not age and die. He would never have to grieve for rock. She shivered.

Then she shivered again. It was growing colder, and breezier. The wind began to buffet them severely; it sent sea-water splashing over their feet and spray into their faces.

"Hey, the tide's not meant to be in yet," Clive protested.

"Storm on the way," said Ted, squinting out to sea. A slate-grey mass of cloud had gathered on the horizon and was building itself up into the sky.

"That's Prunella coming in," said Dad. "I think we'd better cut this short. Let's go home and batten down the hatches."

"Suits me," said Ted. As they headed for the car, the first large drops of rain began to fall.

On the short drive back, with Doofus pressing against her legs, Holly thought about what Clive had said. She bent her head to murmur in the dog's ear.

"What is the stone eye for, Doofus? Why did it bring them?"

Doofus shook her away. Then he gave her hand a swift lick. That was all the answer she was going to get.

Maybe we'll arrive home, she thought, and find Edo and the Other One have disappeared again; the stone eye will have done its work, and sent them on, and the house next door will be empty.

The idea filled her with a mixture of relief and sorrow. If they had indeed vanished, it would make things so easy. Though maybe not easy for Edo and the Other One.

But, anyway, it wouldn't happen, she decided...

Until half an hour after arriving home, when she got the chance to slip next door; and discovered that it had.

Chapter Twenty-two

Holly thought so for several long minutes, at least, while she ran upstairs looking for Edo and the Other One. The front door had been locked, yet the house was empty. The bathroom tap was running. She switched it off and ran back down. Empty cheesy snack packets were arranged in a circle in a corner of the living-room; the cereal packet was neatly flattened out, its contents gone, and the dust-sheet was nowhere to be seen.

In the kitchen, the tool box lay open with various tools scattered around. The lemonade bottle was also open but undrunk. There were marks on the walls that Holly did not think had been there before; but no Edo.

Then she noticed that the window over the sink, behind the tattered blind, was not fully closed. She climbed into the sink, lifted the blind, threw the window open and looked out. The wind and rain blew in at her, forcing the window shut again; but not before she'd seen the trail of prints across the wet grass, leading to the coast.

Holly ran back next door to fetch Clive, furtively beckoning him out of the kitchen where he was mashing potatoes for Dad.

"They've gone," she said, leading him through the empty house. "They climbed out through the kitchen window."

"I thought it was locked?" He looked at her reproachfully, before his eye was caught by the marks on the kitchen wall.

"It didn't have a lock," said Holly. "I didn't think they'd work out how to open it."

"Why not?" But Clive was staring at the wall. "Hey," he said, "just look at these."

Somebody had used a pencil – probably from the toolbox – to draw around their hands, and to make clumps of short lines and criss-crosses.

“Neanderthal art,” murmured Clive. “This is amazing. Can I borrow your phone to take a photo?”

“What? A *photo*? They might be in the village, Clive – they might be anywhere! We’ve got to go after them!”

“Not before tea,” said Clive. “And maybe not after tea. Maybe we should just leave them to do what they choose.”

“To roam around and break into houses until somebody else catches them? And what about the bear?”

Clive shook his head. “I don’t know what to do about the bear,” he admitted.

“I don’t know what to do about any of this!” wailed Holly.

“Then don’t do anything yet. Right now we’d better go back before your dad comes hunting for us.”

Holly saw the wisdom of this. She also realised that there was no way Dad would let her go out again when tea was about to go on the table; especially while the rain was pounding down so heavily.

But throughout the meal she sat listening to the blustering of the wind and the slashing of the rain against the windows, and wondered where Edo and the Other One had taken shelter. If they were in the cave, were they safe from the storm? If they were in the combe, were they safe from the bear?

Was Ted’s house safe from the bear? That was another worry. It was all too much. With her stomach full, she felt suddenly overcome with weariness. It had been such a long day. She’d woken up before six; now she just wanted to lie down, but her worries would not let her.

Doofus had wolfed down his bowl of dog food and had lain across the doorway, as usual, to rest. But now he raised his head. He jumped alertly to his feet and began to prowl up and down the room.

“What is it, Doof?” Holly asked him.

“He’s still hungry,” said Dad, offering him half a carrot.

But Doofus was not hungry. He was restless. He put his feet up on the windowsill and stared out with such intensity that Holly went over to check what he was looking at.

She saw wildly waving bushes and treetops beneath a rapidly darkening sky: the storm was coming in. Next minute a gust seemed to shake the whole house. Leaves and twigs flew past the window.

“That was a big one,” commented Dad.

“This storm might see a few trees come down,” said Ted. “And we’ll get some mighty waves. It’ll be a high tide tonight: well worth avoiding.”

Doofus left the window, ran across to the door, and then back to the window. He looked not just restless but on edge, thought Holly; and Doofus never got agitated. Nothing seemed to upset him. But now something was.

The window rattled sharply. Doofus started as if some terrible unseen phantom had just leapt through it at him. He jumped backwards onto the floor and darted behind the table. There he stood rigid, put up his head and howled.

The howl filled the room. A more desolate and despairing sound Holly had never heard. She was aghast. He had not howled for months. What did this mean?

Edo and Other One flashed across her mind. Yet what bothered her most was that Doofus was in trouble. She had never seen her dog so anguished, and her heart turned over.

“Doofus,” she said, stumbling across to comfort him. As she tried to give him a hug Doofus wrenched himself away, bolted to the front door and scabbled to get out. This too was most unlike him. Doofus was a dignified dog; he did not panic and scabble.

“What’s wrong with him?” said Dad.

“I don’t know!” said Holly. “He wants to go out, but I don’t know why. I suppose I’d better take him.”

“In this weather?”

Doofus scratched futilely at the door and put back his head again.

“I’m coming, Doofus!” said Holly, hastily pulling on her coat before he could howl a second time.

“I’ll come with you,” said Clive.

“Don’t go far! Don’t get close to those cliffs,” warned Ted. “The wind could blow you off.”

“And stay away from the sea,” Dad added. “Remember a big wave can sweep you away.”

“We’ll remember,” Holly said. She opened the door; Doofus shot out, and the wind and rain came hurtling in, scattering Ted’s newspaper and table mats.

Holly ran after Doofus, calling him back, but the wind batted her cries away. In any case he was soon far ahead of her and racing straight towards the cliffs. Holly had to fight against gusts which felt as heavy and careless as a giant creature’s paws, trying to buffet her aside. Fat raindrops found their way down her collar. The ground felt squishy underfoot, slowing her down almost as much as the wind.

She could not distinguish the roar of the gale from the roar of the waves, which sounded much louder than they ever had before. Behind her, Clive was holding his glasses onto his nose and trying to say something that she could not hear. She shrugged at him before struggling on towards the cliff. The wind was blowing off the sea, pushing her inland; despite that, she had no intention of going near the edge.

But somebody was perched right on the cliff-edge up ahead, overlooking the Inaccessible Cove. As she drew closer, she could see two figures crouched on hands and knees, braced against the buffeting wind. They were staring down at the beach. They were not hikers braving the storm, but Edo and the Other One.

Edo still wore the ripped and bloody jumper, while the Other One had the dust sheet wrapped around him like a lumpy shawl, flapping in the wind. They were far too close to the edge for Holly's liking. Afraid of alarming them, she slowed right down.

So did Doofus. He had veered away from the pair and now stopped some distance from them, closer to the road. Standing on the cliff edge, he looked as tense and taut as a bowstring. He too gazed down towards the beach below.

Holly needed to see what they were looking at. With the wind pushing her, she lay down on her stomach on the wet grass and crawled forward until she could see over the precipice.

Below, the iron-grey sea was leaping up at the beach with furious, clattering, hissing roars that submerged rocks and threw huge fans of spray into the air. Now and then the iron waves flashed and glittered with an eerie golden light beneath the mass of strangely yellow clouds. Although the rain hung back for a moment, more waiting squalls were striped across the sky.

Down at the bottom of the cliff, the cave bear prowled. It trod with heavy, awkward gait around the old hotel. Waves were lapping at the hotel's broken walls.

"That tide's way too high," Clive shouted against the wind. "Must be a storm surge."

He too was on his stomach, peering over the cliff with an expression of pain at forcing himself so close to the edge. Holly pointed to the bear that roamed the beach below.

"What's it doing down there?"

"It's eating fish that have got thrown up by the waves." She saw the bear scoop up a writhing fish, and begin to tear at it with its teeth.

Meanwhile Doofus was studying the bear intently. With a sudden movement, he pulled back from the cliff and headed for the road that led down to the shore.

"Doofus! Come back," yelled Holly.

Her cry was blown away. The dog disappeared into the cleft in the cliffs, and reappeared a moment later much further down, bounding across the rocks towards the bear.

The bear looked up unwillingly from its fish as Doofus approached and circled it. Big though he was, beside the bear he looked small.

The bear did not try to drive him off. Instead it trundled slowly away from him, a fish still hanging out of its mouth, and ambled along the beach.

“What’s he doing?” asked Holly, although she could not hear her own voice. The sea yelled like a football crowd roaring in a confusion of fury.

Clive did not answer. He stared down with his mouth open, one finger holding his glasses in place. Away to her left, further along the cliff-top, Edo and the Other One appeared to be equally mesmerised by the scene below.

The bear trudged away from the ruined hotel and onto the tarmac of the old road. As it shuffled out of her sight, Holly pulled back from the edge and crept a little way along the cliff trail, battling the wind.

Then she retreated in a hurry, for the bear was climbing up the road towards her with Doofus snapping at its heels. When the bear looked over its shoulder as if in protest, Doofus darted at it until it moved ponderously on.

The cave bear could easily, Holly thought, have turned on Doofus – and could have mauled him terribly – but moving on was less trouble for it than fighting. So she could understand the bear; but she could not understand her dog. What was he trying to do?

“Saving the bear from freak waves,” shouted Clive.

Holly shook her head. If the bear was in danger, why had Doofus not herded it towards the combe? That would be been safer for it – safer for everyone, she thought, as she grabbed at Clive and pulled him down into the low bushes that lined the path.

The bear came thudding over the rise towards them, a small hill of muscle and wet fur. She lay still, her head on one side so that she could see through the bottom of the bush. Next to her Clive was as motionless as a log.

The bear’s broad, shaggy head rose out of the grass, swaying as it neared them. She prayed for Doofus to herd it safely in another direction. Surely her dog must know that they were here?

But he did not try to change the cave bear’s course. Instead he jumped and snapped at it every time it looked like swerving to the side. The bear finally got exasperated. Turning and rearing up on its hind legs, it slashed out with its claws – in vain, for Doofus had spun out of reach. The bear dropped back on to all fours and began shambling along the cliff path again, straight towards Holly and Clive.

She held her breath, praying that it would neither see nor smell them. The huge head swung from side to side; the bear paused for a moment, as a sudden gust of wind howled past – and then it plodded on and left Holly and Clive behind.

Doofus ran after it, zigzagging to keep it on the track. When Holly knelt up to look, he ignored her. He was concentrating on the bear.

But now the bear had spotted Edo and the Other One, perched on the cliff-top above the Inaccessible Cove. Their closeness to that steep drop to the pounding sea made Holly's stomach churn; yet they did not seem perturbed by it at all.

And to Holly's horror, they were making no attempt to hide from the approaching bear. On the contrary. Edo jumped up and waved her arms, the remains of the ragged sweater flapping in the wind.

Then the Other One jumped up too, flourishing the bone club. The sea roared and surged beneath them.

With Edo and the Other One in front of it, and Doofus harrying it from the rear, the cave bear grew bad-tempered. It began to swing its head more violently from side to side. Holly's fear grew – both for Edo and for Doofus. Which of them would the bear attack first?

She went closer, and despite the bear she shouted, “Doofus! *Heel!* Edo! *Run!*”

The wind whirled her warnings away. Although Edo must have seen her, she paid her no heed. The prehistoric girl was shouting her own words into the wind, cries aimed at the bear, fierce and urgent and imploring.

Meanwhile the Other One began to stamp on the turf. He hurled the bone club, which bounced off the bear and was blown away over the cliff. The Other One reached into the folds of the dust-sheet slung round his shoulders and pulled out a spanner.

He did not get a chance to throw it. The bear was angry. Lowering its head, it began to charge up the cliff path.

“Oh, no,” said Clive, right behind Holly. “Move back! *Move back!*”

At first Holly thought he meant move back from the bear, and wondered why, since it was charging away from her and Clive. But then she saw a shower of red earth spray up beneath its heavy tread. The Other One looked down, startled, and staggered: a piece of turf caved in beneath him. The bushes at the cliff's edge began to tremble.

Then several things happened all at once. The ground beneath Holly seemed to shudder and sag in a strange, alarming way. Edo yelled out; and so did Clive, who had got hold of Holly's coat and was pulling her forcefully backwards, making her stagger away from the path; and Holly felt herself shouting without knowing what she was saying or who to.

In the same instant she saw Edo and the Other One lurch sideways. There was another spurt of soil as a bush tumbled over. The pair tried to regain their footing while the bear rushed upon them; but there was no footing, no solid ground. The cliff edge was falling away.

“Doofus!” Holly screamed out. “Save them!”

The dog was already on the move. Although the bear was still charging, Doofus was faster. A swift black battering ram, he leapt past the bear, and threw himself at the Other One, who teetered on the cliff's collapsing brink. The dog's jaws snapped at the man's chest – and the stone eye hurtled through the air, shedding its broken blue string.

As the Other One began to fall, Edo reached out and grabbed him. But she had no solid ground beneath her feet either. They began to fall together – and then the bear was falling too as a whole section of the cliff face slid away beneath it, taking stones and earth and grass and bushes in a massive landslide.

Holly was frozen with shock. Doofus – her beloved Doofus, her companion, saviour, friend, was sailing through the air with the impetus of his mighty leap. The stone eye arced over him, rotating.

There was a blinding flash, as if the stone had turned momentarily into a small, white-hot sun. Holly was dazzled. But in the heart of the dazzle the tumbling shapes of Edo and the Other One disappeared. They blinked out of existence, as if the sky had eaten them.

The cave bear was lost in a cloud of thick brown dust. Holly could not tell if it had vanished too. Huge clods of earth began a long, slow fall over the crumbling edge of the cliff.

But in that blinding flash, Doofus had not vanished. He was stretched out in mid-air, seemingly flying; and then falling. His great leap, although it carried him beyond the landslide, had turned into a plunge down, down, towards the waiting, hungry sea.

Chapter Twenty-three

Clive yanked at her coat again, and Holly found herself being flung backwards, almost strangled by her own collar. She landed on top of Clive and he dragged her some more, taking them both further from the edge.

“Okay,” he panted at last. Holly got to her knees and stared back at the cliff trail where she had been standing. It was no longer two or three metres from the edge, but had become the edge. The bushes had gone, leaving a great open wound of wet brown earth.

“Doofus!” gasped Holly. She was shaking. What had happened to him? A terrible thought struck her. What if Doofus’s last, dreadful howl had been foretelling his own death?

Clive was groping in the wet grass. “I’ve lost my glasses,” he said.

“Don’t move, then! Stay there. Wait for me.” Crawling as close as she dared to the new, raw cliff edge, Holly gazed down at the Inaccessible Cove. It was almost invisible now: clouds of swirling dust obscured the beach below. Where was Doofus?

Then, for an instant, the dust was whirled aside. She saw the dog beneath her in the bay, which was now entirely under water.

Doofus was no more than a black nose amidst a surge of sea. He was trying to swim, but ferocious waves were thundering over him and carrying him inexorably towards the jagged teeth of the point. From up here, he looked as small and vulnerable as the puppy she had picked out in the dog’s home.

“Oh,” said Holly, in horror, and she ran through the teeth of the wind to the road and raced down to the beach. The tide was much higher than it had any right to be. The sea was invading the hotel, surging through its rooms.

She waded through the swirling water past the hotel, and as far as she could along the point. It seemed to take forever; the wind kept trying to throw her backwards like a wrestler, while the waves slapped and tugged impatiently at her legs. The further out along the point she went, the colder and stronger was the pull of the sea.

Although she could see across the point by now, she was struggling to get any closer to Doofus. His black nose rose and sank in the heaving waves. Holly staggered and almost fell in under the dragging weight of the current that was trying to force her off her feet.

She could not go any further without being swept right off the point into the sea. The waves were carrying the dog towards her, but they were also trying to dash him on the ragged teeth of the rocks. His head bobbed up and then went under. She could not reach him.

The next wave threw something long up on to the rock next to her. Holly snatched it up: it was the Other One's bone club. Gripping one end, she held it out to Doofus. It came close to the dog's bobbing head, yet still not close enough. He disappeared beneath the waves for a heart-stopping few seconds before emerging again.

Even Doofus could not survive this, she thought, and had a mad idea of flinging herself into the water. What else could she do?

Then suddenly someone grasped her left hand, and a voice shouted:

"I'll hold onto you. Try again."

She looked round. It was Otto, his red hair wet and flattened, and wading up after him was a strange man, no, not strange; it was Clive's dad, with Clive behind him.

There was no time to wonder how or why. Clive's dad held onto Otto's coat and Clive, dripping in the rear, grasped his father's belt. With this human chain attached to her Holly ventured further out along the point. She could feel the sea trying to maul her and throw her down; but Otto had a firm hold of her coat, and she stayed on her feet.

Doofus went under again. Leaning out, Holly stretched the bone towards him as far as she could reach. The black nose reappeared next to it – and this time Doofus managed to seize it in his jaws. Holly pulled on the bone with both arms; Otto pulled on her.

Slowly she dragged Doofus closer, until her fingers met his collar. She hooked them round it, and held on grimly despite her numb hands. She would not let the sea tug him away now.

Inch by inch, she moved backwards, pulling Doofus with her, until Clive's dad moved in and got hold of the dog's wet coat beneath the water. Between them they dragged Doofus up onto the rocks of the point.

There he lay, slapped and splashed by waves that did not want to let him go. His legs twitched but otherwise he did not stir. Clive's father tried to lift him, without success.

"You've got to move, Doofus," urged Holly. "The tide'll keep coming in. We can't carry you. Just a little further, please!"

A wave washed over Doofus and he gave a long shudder. His muscles convulsed as if he wanted to move, but was unable.

"Oh, Doofus! We can't stay here." Holly tried to lift him, in vain.

"We could take one leg each," said Otto.

"He's not a *table*," she said sharply.

"If we lie him on a coat," said Clive's dad, "then we can carry him between us." He was already pulling off his raincoat as he spoke. He laid it down next to Doofus and together they managed to roll the dog on to it. Then each of them took a corner of the coat, and heaved.

It was not easy. But it was possible to lift him this way. They staggered slowly back along the point with their burden and carried him past the hotel which now seethed with water.

At the bottom of the road they put him down, and stopped to rest. They were all soaked through. Holly rubbed her hands over the dog's shivering body, trying to warm him up, to comfort him.

"We'll never get him all the way up the hill," she groaned.

Doofus, as if he heard and understood, made a huge effort and scrambled to his feet. He stood for a moment, trembling, before his legs collapsed beneath him. Otto put his arms around the dog's body and tried unsuccessfully to pull him to his feet again.

"Leave him alone!" said Holly. She was in despair.

But Clive's dad said, "Let's put the coat beneath his stomach, like a sling, to take his weight and leave his legs free."

This they did, holding the coat on either side. Doofus struggled to his feet again, and was supported while he walked. In this manner they inched up the hill and round the corner, where the sound of the waves became a little quieter while the noise of the wind grew.

At the top of the road Doofus sank down to rest again. Holly, kneeling to caress him, followed the dog's gaze along the cliff with its new scarred edge.

Edo, she thought. In her concern for Doofus she had almost forgotten that flash. Now she relived it. A momentary, miniature sun exploding amidst the storm: in her mind's eye she saw Edo and the Other One abruptly vanishing in mid-air.

"They got away into the future, didn't they?" she murmured, and the dog heaved a long, tired sigh.

So that was why Doofus lured the bear here, Holly thought – so that they could all escape via the stone eye. Maybe the stone needed to be in mid-air, and above water, before it worked: that was what had happened last time too. She did not understand it, but Doofus did.

Had the bear escaped into the future? It had been impossible to see. It might have plummeted to the cliff's foot under tons of earth: a swift but terrible fate. Holly shuddered, and then hugged the dog, immensely grateful to have him here, with her, and not buried beneath a cliff-face. Doofus tolerated the hug for a minute before getting laboriously to his feet again.

Once away from the cliff, he shook himself free of the coat and started walking on his own, as if he did not want to be seen struggling. When Karrek Row came into view, there were bright lights in the window; and Dad came hurrying out to meet them.

"You found them, then?" Dad shouted into the wind, and Clive's father nodded. But it was difficult for any of them to speak, out in the storm.

Dad hustled them through the door and shut it, creating a sudden peace and stillness. Holly dripped. Doofus walked stiffly over to Uncle Ted and laid his head on the old man's lap.

Before Holly could say anything, Clive announced, "We didn't go near the cliff edge, but Doofus did and it gave way underneath him and he went right over down into the sea."

"Good grief! You're lucky he's alive," exclaimed Dad. "Let alone with no bones broken."

"He almost drowned," whispered Holly.

"Oh, poor old Rex," said Uncle Ted. "I mean Doofus." His gnarled hand stroked Doofus's wet head.

"And I lost my glasses," said Clive, "and that's why I couldn't see *you* coming until you walked up and found them for me." As he looked at his own father, there was a question in his eyes.

Clive's dad cleared his throat. "Well. I just wanted to come and see you. It took me all day to drive down. I tried to ring to let you know, but there was no answer."

"We were out," said Ted.

"And then on that last narrow lane I got stuck behind a fallen tree. I couldn't get past until this young man" – he gestured at Otto – "and his father came up behind me in their car, and we managed to move the tree together. Then once we got here, the young man kindly offered to show me to the beach, in case you'd taken the dog there."

"It's not really a beach," said Clive. "It's got wave-cut platforms."

"Yes, I noticed," said his dad. Clive smiled.

"Let me get some towels," said Dad, "and put the kettle on."

Ted looked at Clive's dad. "And we'll find some supper for you. Of course you'll be staying, won't you, um...?"

"Mitra," said Clive's dad. "Don't worry, I had a sandwich at the service station. And I can always find a bed and breakfast to stay at." He seemed a little shy.

"I'd rather you stayed here," said Clive.

"Or we've got a spare room at our place," suggested Otto.

Holly thought of the empty house next door with its pile of cheesy snack packets and the drawings on the kitchen wall. She felt a terrible pang, like grief, and knelt down next to Doofus to bury her face in his black coat which smelt of seaweed. None of them but Clive knew about Edo, and she couldn't tell them. She wished she had something of Edo's. Something to remember her by; to prove she had been here. Dad handed her a towel and she blew her nose on it before beginning to rub Doofus down.

“You can’t go out again in this,” said Ted firmly to Clive’s dad. “We’ve got plenty of food. And a sofa.”

In the end, though, it was Holly who slept on the sofa so that she could be near Doofus, on his blanket. Dad squeezed into the attic, while Clive and Mitra shared the little twin room. It was all change.

Holly lay in the dark and listened to the wind rattling the windows, though not quite so hard nor so constantly now. In the gaps between gusts she could hear Doofus’s slow breathing. He did sleep, then; sometimes she had wondered.

Despite her tiredness after the long day’s events, it was hard for her to find sleep. The judder and shudder of the crumbling edge were still too present. She had decided that Clive might well have saved her life up on the cliff, although she had not said this aloud because she did not want to let Dad know how close they had come to catastrophe.

But now she relived the cliff’s collapse: the figures tumbling and then vanishing. She felt blinded all over again. The memory hurt.

Other memories came flooding in. Edo crouching in the cellar; Edo next door, trying out the taps; delicately opening the pack of cereal. Maybe Edo could have got used to living in a house. But not in this house, or in this time. She needed to move on, with the Other One. For the first time, Holly wished that she had learnt the Other One’s name. Now she never would.

She had to trust that Doofus had done the right thing in sending them both away through the stone. What she didn’t understand was *why*.

She turned over again, with a twang and a creak. The sofa was not the most comfortable of beds.

Next week I’ll ask if I can have the attic room, she thought. It must be my turn now...

However, it was not to be.

Chapter Twenty-four

Holly slept in late. When she woke up, Doofus was still asleep. The room was warm and quiet and empty of people until the front door was flung open and Dad came bouncing in. He had been down to the village, and along with armfuls of food had brought back excited news about trees that had blown down and a burglary at the shop.

“Stuff was thrown around everywhere, Anita said! Food scattered all over the place. Sheer vandalism. The door was torn off its hinges, just like Ted’s – it was probably the same idiots. You didn’t see any strange people lurking around yesterday morning, did you?”

Holly shook her head. A headshake, she reasoned, was not an actual lie; and neither Dad nor Anita would ever have believed the truth. This time, she thought, the villagers would not be able to blame it all on spriggans.

“Some people,” said Dad. “They’ll do anything for drugs.”

Or fish, or pies, mused Holly. She eased herself stiffly off the sofa and gazed out of the window. A breeze ruffled the bushes, but the high winds had passed, leaving behind a litter of leaves and branches.

“There were record tides last night, apparently,” Dad told her. “We should go down to the beach later and see if anything interesting has been washed up.”

Like the body of a prehistoric cave bear? thought Holly apprehensively. But nobody was in a hurry to do anything that morning except eat and talk. Everyone made a fuss of Doofus, who put up with it phlegmatically. Otto came round, and they ate and talked some more. Mitra looked at Clive’s rock collection and told them about the electrical shop in Preston and his new flat there.

“It’s got a room for you to come and stay,” he said, looking hopefully at Clive.

“Okay,” said Clive. He looked slightly embarrassed but also pleased, with a faint glow of happiness which he seldom showed at home.

“You could see how you like Preston. You’d have Lancashire on your doorstep, and the Lake District not too far away.”

“Sounds all right,” said Clive. “Are you allowed pets in your new flat?”

Mitra shook his head. “Not really. Maybe a small one, that would live in a tank.”

“Salamander,” said Clive thoughtfully.

Holly hoped that Clive’s new glow was justified, and that Mitra would prove a good enough father to deserve him. She could hear that Mitra was

hoping to tempt Clive away, and that made her heart ache again with a new worry, although naturally she wanted Clive to be happy.

It seemed that everything was about to change again. Life, like the sea, kept throwing up new things and shifting old ones out of sight. And sometimes it took the ground away from beneath your very feet...

In the afternoon, once the tide was on its way out, they all went down to the beach – even Doofus. Holly was not sure if Doofus was fit enough, but he insisted, by lifting his lead from the back of the chair and standing by the door with it. The lead was symbolic. Holly did not need to actually fix it to his collar.

They walked slowly, because of Ted and Doofus, who both seemed equally happy just to stroll. Clive pointed out – from a safe distance – the spot where Doofus had gone over the cliff edge.

“Keep well back,” warned Dad. “We’ll have to tell the council about that. They’ll need to get signs up and re-route the coastal path.”

Holly could not see down into the Inaccessible Cove to check for any remains of a bear. They continued walking to the beach, where they clambered around on the wet rocks looking for flotsam. The shore had gained a whole new set of plastic bottles and bits of rope.

“We’ll have to do another rubbish pick later on,” said Clive.

“Tomorrow,” she said. “Clive... I haven’t thanked you yet.”

“What for?”

“You know.”

“No, I don’t.”

Holly muttered, “You saved my life, you twonk.”

“Oh, that!” said Clive. “You’re welcome. Any time.” He was happy.

Doofus had wandered over to the point. So while the others were beach-combing, Holly joined him, hoping to see into the Inaccessible Cove. The waves were docile now, and she was able to scramble after Doofus without getting her feet soaked. Not that it would have mattered, since her trainers were still wet anyway despite a night propped on the radiator. Holly stopped, and looked into the cove.

Mounds of dark red earth lay at the cliff’s foot. The cave had been obliterated. Above the piles of earth, the cliff face was newly dark and ragged. There was no sign of the bear.

Doofus nudged her.

“What is it?” Holly asked. He nudged her again. He wanted her to keep walking round into the cove.

So, on the third nudge, she waved and shouted at Dad, to let him know where she was going: and then she scrambled round the point.

Doofus did not follow. It seemed that he preferred to rest. Holly stepped over brimming rock pools, and stood staring from a safe distance at the fresh heaps of earth and rubble. Maybe the next storm surge would clear them and reveal what lay beneath – but that might not happen for another fifty years.

Or if Clive was right about sea levels, it might happen much sooner.

There was no trace left of Edo and the Other One, not even a footprint to show where they had trodden. She would find no relic here to remember Edo by. Holly gazed out at the shifting sea, trying to fix it in her memory: always changing, yet always the same. Memory was all that she would have.

She sighed, wondering why Doofus had sent her round the point. She turned back to retrace her steps; and saw it.

Looking up at her from a shallow rock pool. The stone eye.

Holly looked back at it for a moment, with a kind of dread, before she bent to pick it up. Then she weighed it in her hand, considering. Did she really want it back? Perhaps she should just leave it here; or bury it in the sand.

And then someone else might find it. No. This was the reason Doofus had nudged her on into the cove. Maybe he would show her a better, safer place to hide the stone. She slid it back into her pocket where it nestled damply.

Then she hurried round the point and headed towards Dad, who was up at the hotel. Doofus nosed briefly at her pocket and seemed satisfied. Holly found herself wondering: *When I saw Doofus in the dog's home, did I really choose him? Or did he choose me?*

Doofus turned his head to look at her enquiringly.

“All right, I’m coming,” Holly told him. “I don’t suppose you had much choice there, in the dogs’ home, did you? We just both got lucky.” Doofus gave a sort of shrug and trotted on ahead.

At the hotel, Dad and Otto were poking around amongst the ruins. The building seemed to have lost another portion of its wall.

“To be honest,” Dad was saying to Otto, “your father really might need to rethink his plans for this place. These storms are going to happen more and more.”

“I know,” said Otto, sounding glum. “That’s what Clive said too.”

“Did it cost your dad a lot of money?” Holly asked him.

“I don’t think so. I think he got it quite cheap. But it’s his pet project. He’s been spending loads of time on it.” Otto still sounded desolate, and Holly felt suddenly sorry for him.

Clive had tried to make friends with Otto. She hadn’t. She’d just been cold and snarky, though Otto hadn’t really done anything wrong apart from looking at them from the cliff top, and cheating at Monopoly, and trying to show off a bit.

And that, she thought, had just been through awkwardness, because he didn't know how to talk to her. If he had always been to a boys-only school and knew no girls, she would be an alien species to him. Like a Neanderthal. He needed a bit of help.

So she said, "Thank you for coming to my rescue last night and helping to save Doofus. I'm sorry I snapped at you. I was just worried about him."

Otto looked surprised, as if he hadn't realised that she could be nice. "That's okay," he said. "I'm glad Doofus is all right."

"Did you see him fall from the cliff?" she asked, because she wondered how much he and Mitra had actually observed.

Otto shook his head. "No. We were about half way from the house when we saw that lightning flash. Is that what startled him and made him go too close to the edge?"

"I guess so."

"It was brave of you to go in the water after him."

"Well, I had to," said Holly, taken aback. "I couldn't do anything else."

"Yes you could," said Otto.

Holly thought about this. She didn't see it. "I couldn't have rescued him anyway if you and the others hadn't turned up. So if I was brave, so were you."

"Well," said Otto, scratching his head so that his hair stood up on end. It definitely looked better that way. He seemed not to know what to say next.

Then he looked around to check Dad was not too close. "Those refugees," he whispered. "They aren't in the empty house any more. I checked. What happened to them?"

"They ran off yesterday while we were out. They climbed through the kitchen window."

"Where do you think they went?"

"I've no idea." She hesitated. "I think – maybe – they had a friend nearby who helped them get to somewhere else. Somewhere safer."

"Probably just as well they're gone," said Otto. "I hope they're all right."

"Me too. I'm afraid they left the house in a bit of a mess."

"It wasn't too bad. It was already a mess. I don't suppose Dad'll even notice. He's got more than that to worry about right now." He sighed.

"You mean this place?"

Otto nodded. "It's going to fall into the sea," he said gloomily. "All that time and money wasted." He walked away to inspect the far side of the hotel.

But Holly stepped inside the building through the new gap in the wall, and made her way along the airy corridor to the room where she had first discovered Edo. She remembered the calling wind that day; the scattered shells and the girl crouching amongst them. When she went into the room,

she almost expected to see Edo squatting there, looking up without fear; offering her a shellfish.

The shells had all been blown or washed into one corner, along with a new heap of sand and seaweed. Holly sifted through the pile, thinking that she might take a shell home as a souvenir.

Her fingers met something heavy buried in the sand. A stone; but smaller and more jagged than the smooth stone eye.

She pulled it out. It was a flint, with three distinct flakes chipped out of its side. Holly ran a finger along the edge.

“Ow!” She put her finger to her mouth. The stone was as sharp as a knife.

It *was* a knife. It fitted well in her hand. It was a thing of skill. She wrapped it in her handkerchief and put in her other pocket.

Then, feeling somewhat weighted down with stones, but lighter of heart, she climbed back out of the hotel. Clive and his father were looking at the zig-zag cliffs and listening to Ted talk about fault lines. Holly wandered down to the sea, where Doofus was investigating rock pools.

For once he was behaving like an ordinary dog. When a crab suddenly came to life and waved a pincer, he jumped back, looking faintly affronted. Holly laughed and he came trotting over to her.

She squatted down to give him a hug; but this time it was she who pushed him away.

“You’re all wet! Have you been swimming?” She threw a soggy stick into the water. Doofus leapt into the waves, seized it and swam back to her.

“Well,” said Holly. Doofus had never been an enthusiastic stick-fetcher. It seemed that his long immersion yesterday had not made him frightened of the sea at all; if anything, the opposite. She was glad of it. “I might have known,” she said. “You’re not afraid of anything, are you, Doofus?”

Doofus picked up the stick again and dropped it at her feet expectantly.

“Tomorrow,” Holly promised. “You can do more swimming tomorrow when you’ve had a proper chance to rest.” Tomorrow she would clear the beach of rubbish with Clive, she decided, and pootle around in rock pools with her dog. She no longer had Edo and the Other One to worry about; her first period would soon be over without disaster; Clive was recovering from the loss of Mr. Finney, and now he had his dad, and she herself had Doofus.

He was safe. So was she. Everyone was safe. Maybe she could just start enjoying the rest of her time here.

Holly stretched out her arms and exhaled a long sigh of relief at the realisation that she didn’t need to worry any more. Then she began to hunt alongside Doofus for crabs and interesting shells. This was the life, she thought: a proper seaside holiday, with Ted’s ice cream waiting for them in the freezer back at Karrek Row.

It seemed that everybody felt the same. By the time they walked back up the cliff road, they were all relaxed and laughing, even Otto. As they clattered noisily into Ted's house, discussing the merits of ice cream versus crumpets, the phone rang.

Chapter Twenty-five

Holly sat in the back of the car watching the hedgerows reel past her.

"You all right there, Holly?" said Ted, who was in the front. "You're very quiet."

"Oh, yes, I'm fine," said Holly quickly. "Where will we stop for lunch? Somewhere on the motorway?"

"We'll find a country pub," said Dad. "I know of a good one near Gloucester with a garden, so Doofus can have a run around."

"I'm sure he'll like that." Holly didn't really care where they had lunch, but she felt obliged to talk normally so that Dad and Ted would not think she was upset.

But of course she was upset. How could she not be? As soon as she heard Mum's voice on the phone last night, she *knew*.

"The doctor thinks that you should come back now." Mum had not needed to explain any more than that. Holly thought of Nan, lying small and pale on her bed, slowly fading, while she waited to see Ted and Dad and Holly.

And Doofus. Nan had always liked Doofus. Holly hoped he would not howl when – when the time came. When Nan died. She reached over and put an arm across the dog's back; he was lying on his blanket on the seat next to her. He turned his head and gave her hand a fleeting lick. Holly took a long breath before she spoke again.

"A country pub will be nice for Clive's dad as well," she said. "He probably had enough of motorway sandwiches yesterday."

"Shame he couldn't stay down here longer," said Ted, "but at least he'll get to see plenty of Clive back in Derbyshire. Interesting lad, that Clive. I reckon he'll go far."

"He should," said Holly, "but he's no good at exams."

"He'll find a way," said Ted. "He seems resourceful."

Holly twisted her head round to see if the other car was still behind them. It was. Mitra, who was driving, waved briefly at her. Clive and Otto didn't see her; they were busy talking on the back seat.

"Where will Otto sleep?" she asked.

"He can have the camp bed in Matt's room," said Dad. "There won't be space for him at Clive's, with Clive's dad there." Holly wondered if Clive's mum would make his dad sleep in the shed. It wasn't impossible.

It had been agreed that Otto would spend a week of his holiday staying with them. Then they would drive him to Stoke and put him on the train to Exeter.

"Be good for Otto," said Ted. "Don't think he's ever been north of Watford. And his father's going to be all tied up this week trying to sort out what's happening with that old hotel. He's getting engineers in. Though it's a lost cause if you ask me."

"Uncle Ted? Will you sell your house to him?"

Ted was silent for a moment. "I expect so, eventually," he said. "When the knees give up for good. I'm getting a bit old to be living so far from anywhere."

"You could come and live up in Derbyshire," suggested Holly, and then bit her lip, because she knew Ted loved the sea, which was far from any part of Derbyshire; and because he might think that she was just trying to fill the gap that Nan would leave.

Maybe she was. She had grown very fond of Uncle Ted these last few days.

"Well," said Ted. "We'll see."

"I think Matt and Otto should get on quite well," said Dad.

That left another sentence unspoken and hanging in the air. She had probably made it pretty obvious, thought Holly, that she didn't care for Otto.

But she didn't actually dislike him any more. She had decided he was just lonely and uncertain. Maybe he needed to practise making friends as much as Clive did.

Clive's efforts had been quite successful. He'd probably survive okay at High School. As Ted said, he was resourceful.

But maybe she herself needed to try harder; to practise making friends. She ought not to jump to conclusions about other people just because she didn't know them. She had been snide to Otto, treating him with exactly the snootiness that she'd despised in him.

Realising that she was being quiet again, she said, "Uncle Ted, we can take you and Otto on the cable car at Matlock. I think you'll like it there. I know you'll want to be with Nan, but not all the time. Or we can go down the caves at Castleton."

"Not sure if my knees will cope with caves," said Ted.

“They’ve got really nice tea-shops as well,” said Holly, “and lots of geology.”

As Dad began to list all the places they could visit, she once again fell silent. She already missed the song of the waves and the towering zig-zag cliffs. She missed Ted’s narrow, comfortable house. She missed Edo.

She missed Nan, even though Nan had not yet sailed away. She missed the safety of primary school, and her own old, carefree body. Everything was changing, shifting beneath her feet, as fickle and uncertain as the sea. Her body, acquiring mysterious powers; Nan, drifting into sleep. Storms carving out the coast, constantly reshaping it into something new.

The climate. That was the big one, she supposed, although it felt no bigger than the rest.

Even those zigzag rocks that seemed so permanent: they weren’t. Unstoppable slow forces had folded them together like sheets of cardboard. Would climate change be as unstoppable as that? If nobody stopped it, how would anyone survive?

Next to her, Doofus turned round, snorted, and settled down again.

Edo. What sort of future had she and the Other One escaped to? A world where global heating had made modern life impossible?

Edo was a Neanderthal. She was tough and used to hardship. She was also used to warmer weather. Maybe she and the Other One would make a new future possible where modern humans failed.

Maybe that had been Doofus’s intention; not to save the pair from something in the past, but for *them* to save the future. So there they had gone, along with Dad’s sludgy sweater, the tools the Other One had stolen from the toolbox; and possibly a bear.

There was no way of knowing. That couldn’t be the full answer to the problem anyway; not with just two people, although they might be part of an answer. In any case, Edo’s fate was out of Holly’s hands.

But some things were still in her hands. There would be plenty of climate change activists in High School – not just Clive. They would have ideas. There must be things that she could do.

She could not solve it on her own, but she could do something. If everyone did something, maybe it would turn into everything.

Doofus raised his head and licked her hand. Holly stroked him, feeling the long scar in his side, and grateful just to have him here, unhurt. She needed his comfort. More than anyone, she was missing Mum right now. Maybe Mum was missing Holly too. She was going to need Holly in the days ahead.

I must try to be a comfort to Mum, she thought, a strong support, just as Doofus is to me.

She wrapped her arms around Doofus's broad neck, resting her head on his, and watched the hedgerows turn to fields, and the road turn into motorway.

"We'll get you up Mam Tor, Ted," Dad was saying. "You'd like it there. It's an old hill fort. There's only one small steep bit. Well, smallish. Well, not *too* enormous."

"And once you're at the top you've got the view," said Holly.

"I like a good long view," said Uncle Ted.

"Though it is windy on the top," admitted Dad.

"Yes," said Holly, "there always is the wind. But once you're up, you can see the whole world laid before you. We'll help you get there, Uncle Ted. We'll all go up together."

The End

Have you read the first book about Doofus?
Doofus, Dog of Doom is free to download at Emma Laybourn's website,
Megamousebooks.com.

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