

The background of the top half of the cover is a detailed illustration. A young boy with dark, curly hair, wearing a black jacket over an orange shirt and green pants, is lying on his stomach on a large, white, fluffy cloud. He is looking out over a coastal town with colorful houses (yellow, orange, red) built on a hillside. A blue body of water with a small sailboat is visible. The sky is a mix of teal and white with stylized clouds.

The Boy, the Cloud and the Very Tall Tale

Heather Smith



Strength isn't found, it's awakened.

TWO YEARS AFTER THE DEATH OF HIS MOTHER, Ewan's father disappeared. As far as his little sister, Flora, and his grandfather, Grumple, are concerned, his father was swept away by a magical cloud. But Ewan knows it's a cover, though what it is covering up, he can't be sure—he is certain his father wouldn't leave willingly.

When he meets Mr. So-and-So, the owner of the mysterious Notion Shop, he is inspired to take destiny into his own hands. With his grandfather's most reliable horse, the normally timid Ewan sets off from his home in Bucket Cove on a journey that will test his belief in himself while unraveling the secrets of his father's disappearance. When he is joined by Flora and Mr. So-and-So, he comes to understand that even grown-ups sometimes struggle to process their feelings, and that by showing compassion to others, we can begin to show compassion to ourselves.



Heather Smith is the author of several picture books, including the award-winning *The Phone Booth in Mr. Hirota's Garden*. Her middle-grade novel *Ebb and Flow* was shortlisted for the Governor General's Literary Award, and her YA novel *The Agony of Bun O'Keefe* won the Ruth and Sylvia Schwartz Children's Book Award and the OLA Forest of Reading White Pine Award and was shortlisted for the Amy Mathers Teen Book Award and the Geoffrey Bilson Award for Historical Fiction for Young People. Originally from Newfoundland, Heather now lives in Waterloo, Ontario, with her family.

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The Boy, the Cloud and the Very Tall Tale

AUTHOR: Heather Smith

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In this magical middle-grade novel about family, Ewan sets off on a quest to find his father.

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KEY SELLING POINTS

- A beautiful story, with magic woven in, about a grieving family and the quirky individuals who are determined to help them come through.
- Features the timeless themes of perseverance, confidence and family coming together.
- Set in 1924 and with a feel of folklore, the story and adventure pull the reader in.
- Heather Smith is an award-winning, acclaimed author of books for readers of all ages.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

PHOTO CREDIT: HILARY GAULD



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Heather Smith

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“Tell me again, Grumple,” said Flora. “Tell me how Daddy flew away on a cloud.”

Grumple looked up from his sewing, his glasses resting on the tip of his nose. Flora, who had just spilled the contents of Grumple’s button jar across the kitchen table, waited patiently for him to begin. It didn’t take him long. No one could resist Flora’s charms. She was as bright and creative as the button rainbow that was taking shape in front of her. Grumple cleared his throat and began.

“It was a cold and clear December day,” he said. “Not a cloud in the sky, then *poof!* There it was, hovering outside the window like a giant bed of freshly shorn sheep’s wool.”

It was a familiar story. One that Grumple had been telling the children since their father’s disappearance two

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years before. Ewan could have mouthed along if he wasn't biting his tongue.

"Your father greeted the cloud as if it were a long-lost friend," continued Grumple. "He even tried to give it a friendly pat, but his hand went right through it!"

Flora swiped her hand through an imaginary cloud. "Silly Daddy!"

At age seven, Flora was happy to accept Father's disappearance as a fairy tale. But Ewan was four years older and remembered clearly the sadness that had driven their father away.

"Imagine," said Grumple. "A cloud. Right outside that very window. The sight of it made your father go teary-eyed."

Flora followed Grumple's bony old finger to the scene of the magical disappearing act. Ewan, on the other hand, kept his eyes fixed on his orange tabby playing catch-and-release with an ant that had strayed through the open kitchen door.

"Your father didn't hesitate to climb aboard that cloud," continued Grumple. "I mean, who would?"

Ewan could hold his tongue no longer. "Me, for starters."

"What do you mean?" asked Flora.

The wobble in her voice caused a wobble in his heart. He hadn't meant to spoil the story.

"Uh, I'd rather fly on a lightning bolt," he said. "Much faster."

Flora giggled. Normally her laugh was contagious. It could cause watery eyes and shortness of breath. But these days Ewan couldn't catch as much as a chuckle.

Ewan stood up and made his way to the door.

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All eyes turned to the cat. It was looking to the ceiling innocently, as if there wasn't an ant trapped beneath his paw. Ewan scooped him up.

"Kipper! You bad boy."

Kipper purred loudly.



Ewan sat among the blueberry bushes on the hill overlooking the cove. He fumed at the ridiculousness of Grumple's story. *His hand went right through it.* If that was the case, how did Father manage to ride the darn thing? Wouldn't he have fallen through as soon as he climbed aboard? Ewan shook his head. Grumple's story had more holes in it than a wedge of Swiss cheese. The biggest hole was that Father had been happy to leave. "It was a magical moment," Grumple had said. "Peaceful, almost." Grumple had hoped Ewan would take great comfort in the thought that Father, after years of sadness, was finally at peace. And perhaps Ewan would have, had he believed it. After all, the sorrow that had surrounded Father was as thick as a bank of fog. If only such misery could be turned off with the flick of a switch. Ewan still marveled at how instantly he could darken a room now that Union Electric had expanded its service to Bucket Cove. It was so much easier than making the rounds of the oil lamps to extinguish each of their flames. Still, if misery could be turned off with the flick of a switch, it could be turned back on just as easily.

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Ewan frowned as he watched Kipper chase a bumblebee nearby. His cat's delight in toying with creatures smaller than him was wicked. "It will serve you right if that bee stings you right on the nose," Ewan scolded.

Kipper had been given to Ewan the day after Mother's death. He'd been presented to Ewan in a basket lined in blue gingham cloth, with a matching bow tied around his neck. Ewan had been instantly annoyed. Did Father actually think that a scrappy orange kitten could fill the emptiness inside him?

When it came to naming his new pet, Ewan had been so indifferent that he'd said the first word that came to mind: *kipper*. He'd taken inspiration from the lunch his father had just laid before him.

"You're naming your cat after a fish?" asked Father.

Ewan stabbed a piece of the smoked herring with his fork. "It could be worse," he'd said. "I could have called him Bread."

That night Kipper had chewed a hole through the tablecloth and knocked a vase off a shelf, watching with indifference as it crashed to the floor. Four years later, he remained more of a hindrance than a help. He was a mischievous cat, a troublemaker who was more of a chore than a companion. There was one time, though, when Ewan had felt truly grateful for Kipper's company.

It was two weeks after his mother's burial. While Ewan had been happy that her funeral had been well attended, he'd also longed to spend some time alone with his mother. Standing at the cemetery gates with a bouquet of forget-me-nots in his

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hands, he'd felt nervous. His mother's headstone, which was covered in floral tributes from friends and neighbors, stood out from the others like a beacon. Ewan had tried to walk toward it, but for some reason his feet wouldn't move. He'd struggled to understand why.

"Maybe," he'd said out loud, "it's because I don't know what to say." That was when Kipper had nipped at his ankles. Ewan was amazed. How had the tiny kitten made its way through the high grass of the path between Ewan's house and the cemetery? Ewan picked him up. "Would you like to meet my mother?" A moment later Ewan was sitting at his mother's grave giving her a play-by-play of Kipper's activities. "He just tried to eat a carpenter ant. Now he's batting a dandelion with his paw. Oh, he just sneezed." His mother would have welcomed a cat. Maybe Ewan would have too had his arrival been under different circumstances.



A breeze wafted from the beach. Although it was July, Ewan shivered with the chill. He longed for hot sunny days, like the ones he'd seen in the *Bucket Cove Bugle* the week before. As part of a weekly series called Exotic Destinations, the paper had printed a photograph of a popular beach in the United States. Unlike the rocky beaches that dotted the coast of Bucket Cove, this one was sandy and dotted with palm trees. Ewan had been fascinated to learn that back in 1878, a

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ship carrying twenty thousand coconuts had run aground in Lake Worth, a barrier island off the coast of South Florida. Residents were quick to collect and plant the exotic fruits. Soon the island had a new name: Palm Beach. Ewan imagined a shipwreck full of coconuts washing up on the shores of Newfoundland. Just imagine! Palm trees in Bucket Cove!

According to the article, the weather in Florida was fairly predictable and warm. Sunny days were always on the horizon. But here, because it was so much farther north, he supposed, the weather was often cold, even in summer. Still, the harshness of winter and the dampness of spring were behind him, and Ewan was thankful to have been able to swap out his tweed trousers for knee-length knickers, and his wool overcoat for a button-down shirt and sweater vest, the latter of which could easily be pulled off on the occasional hot day.

Ewan reached across to a scraggly low bush and picked an unripe blueberry. A couple of months from now, he'd happily pop it in his mouth. But today he squished it between his fingers.

Don't pick the red ones, they're green. That's what Father used to say. Flora never understood. How could a berry be red *and* green? Ewan would explain. "Green means unripe. Get it?" Flora would crinkle her freckly nose. "Never mind," Father would say. "She'll get it when she's older."

Ewan sighed. *When she's older.* When she was older she'd get more than a joke about berries. She'd see the holes in

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Grumple's story. Then she'd realize. A cloud didn't take their father away. He walked away on his own two feet.



Ewan stood up and whistled.

Nothing.

He whistled again.

"Kipper! It's time to go back to Grumple's!"

He sighed and looked out over the cove.

"Stupid cat."

A dory pattered away from the wharf. Ewan wondered where it was puttering to. If it were him, he'd putter across the Atlantic. To Scotland maybe. Where he could live in a castle all by himself. Then, if his father ever came back, Grumple would say, *Sorry, the boy's gone. Did you expect him to wait forever?*

But deep down Ewan knew he wouldn't have the guts to putter anywhere. He was a scaredy-cat. Always had been, always would be. Sadly, the bravery that existed in his imagination was nowhere to be found in real life. Sometimes he even jumped at the sight of his own shadow.

"Ouch!"

Ewan rubbed his ankle. While most cats nuzzled for attention, Kipper nibbled. Ewan scooped him up, wishing he'd been given a dog.



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Ewan walked back through his fishing village, pausing in front of the little yellow house his mother had built many years before with her own two hands. It had a sky-blue door and five matching windowsills, three on the top, two on the bottom. By this time, early July, Father would have filled the window boxes with forget-me-nots, a tribute to their mother. Now all that filled them was rotting leaves and seagull poop. Two whole years' worth.

Ewan left the vacant house, his old home, for Grumple's white saltbox house with the bright red trim. It was equally attractive, mostly because of its peaceful location on the outskirts of town. It was set back in a meadow, and although Ewan missed his family home and all that had once been in it, living at Grumple's was a comfort.

Dottie O'Reilly called from her porch as Ewan passed. "How's Alfie today?"

Like most locals, Dottie was happy to entertain out-of-the-ordinary phenomena—after all, fairies, sea creatures and witches had been spun into the island's tales for centuries. But a mysterious cloud that took people away? That apparently was a step too far. It saddened Ewan to think the townsfolk thought Grumple was losing his marbles. He wasn't *losing* his mind. He was *using* it. He'd created a fantastical story that was not only imaginative but also kind. And although the tall tale annoyed Ewan, he knew deep down that what Grumple was offering was a gift—an alternate ending to one of the saddest chapters of their lives.

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Ewan smiled at Dottie and gave her his usual refrain. "Alfie is grand, Mrs. O'Reilly," he said. "Top-notch. Best kind. Couldn't be better."

And with that he hurried up the lane before she could inquire further.

Moments later he was petting the head of the cast-iron bulldog that stood guard at Grumple's front door. It wasn't the most attractive of figurines. In fact, it was quite ugly. It had droopy jowls, and its beady eyes were painted red. Most people who came knocking commented on its hideousness. Ewan always took offense on its behalf. "Don't worry, mutt," he'd say. "You're handsome in your own way."

Just as Ewan reached for the doorknob, Grumple came flying over the threshold. "To the Hurricle!" he yelled.

The Hurricle was Grumple's two-wheeled open carriage. Most people called them chariots, but Grumple was not most people. He'd once seen a photograph of an English painting called *A Gentleman with His Pair of Bays Harnessed to a Curricl*. A bay is a horse that has a brown body with bits of black on its mane, ear tips, tail and lower legs. But it wasn't the bays Grumple was taken with. It was the carriage. It was a grander version of his own, and he was tickled to learn that in England they were called curricles. "Such a fun word!" Grumple had said. He'd quickly adopted the term, changing the *C* to an *H* to make it sound faster, but truth be told, it was nothing more than a glorified wheelbarrow. It

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would only ever be as fast as William and Wilder, the two old Newfoundland ponies that pulled it.

Ewan followed his grandfather across the dirt yard. It was an open space used mostly by Flora, who much preferred stomping around in the dust and gravel on the side of the house to the soft wildness of the garden behind it. Even though his granddaughter spent most days covered in a thin layer of gray dust, Grumple also preferred Flora's choice of play space. From his sewing spot at the kitchen table, he had full view of the side yard and could keep a watchful eye on her. His precious flowers stayed safe too.

"Where are we going anyway?" asked Ewan as they made their way toward the barn.

"To Mr. So-and-So's," said Grumple.

"Mr. who-and-who?"

"Mr. So-and-So," Grumple repeated. "The man who owns the Notion Shop."

"The what shop?" asked Ewan.

Grumple didn't answer. His eyes were on the gaping hole in the barn's roof. High winds from the night before had blown some of the wooden slats clear off. Grumple sighed. "Look at the state of it. If only your mother were here." The mention of his mother, no matter how positive, always gave Ewan a start. It wasn't that he didn't like to think of her. He just preferred to do so in moments of his own choosing. That way he was prepared for heartache. When someone else mentioned her, it felt like an invasion, an attack. Still, it

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was nice to know that Grumple had admired her carpentry skills. It made Ewan feel proud.

Just as Ewan was following Grumple into the barn, he heard his sister's voice. "Hey, wait for me!"

He turned to see her balanced on one of the porch railings that flanked the side door.

"Flora!" he said. "Be careful up there!"

Flora launched herself into a front flip and struck a perfect landing in the dusty yard.

"Ta-da!"

It was then that Ewan noticed his sister's patchwork dungarees. His heart sank to see the various pieces of striped cotton sewn together as if they were mere scraps of extra material added to the overalls and not the work shirts his father used to wear to the Mercantile.

Flora noticed him noticing. "Grumple made them," she said. "What do you think?"

Grumple's tailored creation struck Ewan as both loving and thoughtless. Loving because he knew that what Flora wanted, more than anything, was to wear boys' clothes, and thoughtless because repurposing their father's clothes suggested he'd never be coming back.

"Well?" said Flora.

Ewan reached out and gave the bib a tug. "Sturdy."

That was no surprise. Father's shirts were made of ticking. The strong cotton was the perfect material for a seven-year-old's playclothes.

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“Do you like the pockets?” asked Flora.

Ewan brought his hand to his neck. “Yes,” he said. “Very much.”

The stark white trim on the pockets had the unmistakable crispness of Father’s granddad-style shirt collars. Ewan felt a pain in his memory. The first time he’d described what he was feeling that way was when his father had asked him why he’d gone so quiet on one of their woodland walks. When he’d pointed at the wild forget-me-nots, his father had nodded. Ewan wondered if his father ever felt a pain in his memory when he thought of Ewan and Flora. He hoped he did. It would be nice to be missed.

Flora took Father’s old flatcap out of her back pocket. “Help me tuck up my hair?”

Ewan gathered Flora’s thick, strawberry-blond mane and twisted it onto the top of her head. Flora pulled the cap down over it. Father would have told her she looked as sweet as pie, so Ewan said it instead.

“What kind?” asked Flora.

“Rhubarb,” said Ewan. “My favorite.”

Flora beamed.

“Now,” he said, “I’d better help Grumple hitch up the Hurricle.”

In the barn, Grumple was in a battle of wills with the ponies. William and Wilder were as old as Grumple in horse years and just as stubborn. Today they were even more contrary than usual, and Grumple struggled to control them.

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“Couldn’t we borrow Mrs. Shipley-Seward’s new Thomas Flyer instead?” called Ewan.

“Absolutely not,” said Grumple. “You know how I feel about automobiles.”

Ewan knew all too well. Grumple hated the thought of motorcars taking over the roads. He called them obnoxious, noisy and unnecessary. A news clipping from the *Evening Telegram* that Aunt Clara had brought in from St. John’s had served as great ammunition for Grumple’s point of view. The article was called “Reckless Autoists,” and Grumple had memorized a particularly lively excerpt by heart:

“The life of the average pedestrian in the City these days is one of perpetual peril. Let him attempt to cross a street, in broad daylight, and he is lucky if some auto doesn’t come around the corner, at a rate of 15 miles an hour, and just miss him by a scant foot, while the chauffeur glowers at him as much to say ‘Get off the earth, you lobster. What right have you to be on the street?’”

Ewan had tried to say that the news article was irrelevant because they didn’t live in the city. Grumple said it didn’t matter, that motorcars would make their way to the country soon enough, and when they did, they’d wreak havoc. “Just think how they’ll spook William and Wilder!” he’d said.

Ewan smiled. It was the ponies who were wreaking havoc now as Grumple attempted to coax them to the carriage.

Ewan helped by tugging the ropes around their necks and calling to Kipper, who was watching from a hay bale. “Fetch

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me one of those carrots," he said, nodding to the basket of vegetables Flora had collected earlier.

"He's not a dog, you know," said Grumple.

Kipper yawned and licked his paw.

"Don't I know it," said Ewan.

Grumple fetched the carrot, and together they managed to coax William and Wilder to the cart. A few moments later they were on their way to Mr. Who-and-Who's What Shop.



Ewan, Grumple and Flora sat in a row on the single bench of the Hurricle.

"When will we be there?" asked Flora five minutes into the journey.

Ewan gripped the side of the cart. "Be *where?*" He still hadn't a clue where they were going.

"The Notion Shop," said Grumple.

"Notions are sewing supplies," said Flora to her brother knowingly. "I already asked."

"Would you believe I'm fresh out of grommets?" said Grumple. "After all these years my sewing supplies are finally diminishing!"

"It's because everyone came home again," said Flora.

"Thanks to Mrs. Shipley-Seward," added Grumple. "Which reminds me, I must pick up some Czech glass buttons too. The old bat has commissioned me to make her a fur-collared coat!"

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Mrs. Shipley-Seward was the richest resident of Bucket Cove. She'd turned heads on her arrival three years earlier by wearing a black, beaded flapper dress and a string of long pearls. She had pulled up to the Mercantile in her Thomas Flyer, exited the car with an air of royalty and stood on the shop's front veranda where Old Man Peterson sat chewing tobacco.

"Do you think you can gather the townsfolk?" she had asked archly. "I have an announcement."

But on hearing an automobile enter the village, the townsfolk had already begun to gather. Grumple, who had been shopping at the general store, was among them. "What in tarnation was that ungodly noise?" he had asked. When he saw the Thomas Flyer, he almost launched into his "Reckless Autoists" recitation, but Mrs. Shipley-Seward had cut him off with a rather grand announcement.

"I, Mrs. Virginia Shipley-Seward, will be opening the island's first pulp and paper mill, right here in Bucket Cove. Not only have I secured clients such as the *London Daily Telegraph*, the *Boston Globe* and the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, but I will also be launching the *Bucket Cove Bugle*. No longer will you need to rely on the local paper from St. John's. We will also export paper, not only across North America, but all over the world. I will be employing thousands. So to all you lovely Bucketeers, tell your people to come home. I repeat, tell your people to"—it was here that she clutched at her heart dramatically—"come home."

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A few years before this, the price of cod had taken a nose-dive, and folks couldn't sell their fish at a price high enough to support their families. Many people left the island altogether to find work elsewhere. Soon news of the pulp and paper mill began spreading like wildfire, and people began returning home in droves. Ever since, Grumple had been sewing up a storm. The men who had gone to build skyscrapers in America said that not even in New York City could they find as fine a tailor as Grumple. Hence, months later, his stock needed replenishing.

The Hurricle bumped slowly over the rocky terrain. It was giving Ewan a headache.

"Can't you just get your notions at the Mercantile?" he asked.

Father had stocked lots of sewing supplies when he'd worked there.

"No disrespect to our fine local establishment," said Grumple, "but my tailoring requires the most exquisite supplies. Mrs. Shipley-Seward's request for a fur coat is a perfect example. Only Mr. So-and-So would have Czech glass buttons."

Ewan took the reins, hoping he could speed things up. "Why are these creatures so slow? Giddyup!" he shouted. The ponies slowed to a stop.

"Now you've done it," said Grumple.

William turned his head and gave Ewan the side-eye. Then he looked at Wilder, and the pair broke out into a series of whinnies, brays and snorts.

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"I think they're laughing at you," said Flora.

Grumple took back the reins. "Apologize to the ponies, Ewan."

Ewan groaned. "Why should I? It's their job to pull the cart."

"They'll sit here all day," Grumple warned.

Ewan cleared his throat. "Sorry," he mumbled.

William pricked his ear.

"Louder," said Grumple.

Ewan spoke up. "Sorry!"

William gave Wilder a nod, and they were off.

Though it was July, the air was still nippy. Ewan unfolded the heavy plaid lap blanket that sat near his feet and covered the threesome's knees. The Hurriclue carried them through a variety of landscapes—wooded trails, boggy barrens and coastal paths. Ewan disliked the coastal paths. They were too high on the cliffs, open meadows to the right of them, a sheer drop to the Atlantic Ocean on the left. Whenever he was on them, he felt sick to his stomach as his mind filled with visions of the Hurriclue tumbling over the edge. They were on one of these paths when suddenly Grumple announced, "We're here."

Ewan looked around. There wasn't a shop in sight. Grumple pointed. Ewan and Flora followed his finger down, down, down to a little inlet far below them. There, built precariously on an outcropping of rocks jutting into the ocean, was a little wooden building with red, peeling paint.

"That's not a shop!" said Ewan. "That's a fishing stage."

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Grumple gazed at the building longingly. “It’s been such a long time.”

Flora pointed excitedly at a narrow trail that wound its way down the cliffside. “Are we going down there?” she asked

Grumple climbed out of the Hurricle. “Indeed we are.”

“What about William and Wilder?” asked Ewan, looking for a place to tie them up.

Wilder let out a big yawn. Grumple laughed. “They’re not going anywhere.”

Flora bounded down the path ahead of them. Ewan held Grumple by his elbow. The earth beneath them was mostly dirt and grass, but sometimes it changed to big slabs of rock that were covered in a layer of mist. “Careful!” Ewan called to Flora, but she was already at the base of the outcrop.

A few minutes later Grumple and Ewan joined her. Together they navigated the rocks, dodging the waves lapping up on either side of them until they reached the wooden platform that the small red building sat upon. On closer inspection, Ewan could see that the timber poles supporting the structure were not affixed to the rock by bolts but were simply wedged into the boulders’ watery crevices. He felt himself go weak at the knees.

Grumple rapped on the door.

“If this is a shop, why are we knocking?” said Flora, letting herself in.

Ewan had been in many a fishing stage. Normally they were spaces used for salting and drying fresh cod. They were

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usually dark inside, with wooden interiors and ceiling beams that dripped with fishing nets. A large table or two would fill most of the space, and the walls would be covered with various tools used in the processing of fish. But *this*—this was most definitely *not* a fishing stage. For one thing, fishing stages stank to high heaven. This place, though, smelled like a mixture of pipe tobacco and orange peels. It was bright too. The far wall was filled mostly with a large picture window, and except for the mahogany-colored cabinets that lined the perimeter, everything was painted white. Ewan looked in amazement at the hundreds of pullout drawers in the cabinets. No wonder Grumple preferred this place over the Mercantile. Mr. So-and-So must have thousands of notions!

Farther in and along the back wall there was a long counter behind which they'd expected to see Mr. So-and-So.

"Well," said Ewan. "Where is he?"

Suddenly there was a loud *THUD* against the window.

"Jesus Murphy!" cried Grumple.

There, plastered head to toe against the pane, was a man Ewan could only assume was Mr. So-and-So.

Looking a bit like a dazed bird with his face squished against the glass, Mr. So-and-So managed a small wave before pointing to the window latch. Flora ran to open it. A second later the shop owner tumbled rather ungracefully into the room.

"Help him!" cried Grumple. But there was no need. Mr. So-and-So broke his own fall with an expertly executed side roll. While he sprang to his feet with the nimbleness of an

Heather Smith

Olympic gymnast, in appearance he couldn't be further from one. Wearing a cream-colored fisherman sweater and a navy wool sailor beanie, he looked like he'd be more comfortable captaining a fishing vessel than balancing on a high beam.

Mr. So-and-So dusted himself off and grinned at Grumple. "Well I'll be! If it isn'tnnnnnnnnnn't.."

He stalled like this for a good few seconds before breaking off with "Nope. I got nothing."

Grumple graciously filled in the blanks. "Alfie Pettigrew." "Alfalfa Gettiprew," said Mr. So-and-So. "Of course."

Grumple seemed amused by the flippant mispronunciation of his name, but it annoyed Ewan greatly. Flora, on the other hand, was neither amused nor annoyed. The look on her face was one of pure wonder.

"Are you a fisherman?" she asked.

Mr. So-and-So caressed the arm of his sweater. "Nah. I just wear what feels comfortable. You know what I mean?"

Flora caressed the trim on her overall pockets. "Yes," she said. "I know what you mean."

Mr. So-and-So put his hand out for a handshake, but when Flora took it, he kept both their hands still. "Shaking is terribly undignified," he said.

"It is?" said Flora.

"Oh yes," said Mr. So-and-So. "I'm against it in any form. I keep my salt and pepper in bowls, and when I am scared, I prefer to tremble—it's far more dramatic."

"When I'm scared, I bite my fingernails," said Flora.

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Mr. So-and-So examined the little fingers that wrapped around his hand. “Repulsive habit,” he said. “Not to mention short-sighted. How are you supposed to pick wax out of your ear with short nails?”

“Now,” he said, ignoring the disgusted look on Flora’s face, “how about we introduce ourselves? My name is Mr. So-and-So. I am the proprietor of this fine establishment. And you are...?”

“Flora,” said Flora. “And this is Ewan. We keep our salt and pepper in shakers.”

Mr. So-and-So’s eyebrows shot upward. “You mean you’ve never used tiny spoons to sprinkle your pepper and pepper your salt? You poor things.”

Mr. So-and-So proceeded to mime his salt and pepper technique. He reminded Ewan of a mustache-less Charlie Chaplin. Earlier that year Grumple had taken Ewan to see *The Kid* at the Star Theatre in St. John’s. It was a silent film, and Ewan had been quite taken with Chaplin, who’d played a character called the Tramp. Chaplin’s face was comical yet kind, and his brown curls peeked out from his bowler hat much the way Mr. So-and-So’s did from his knit beanie. They shared the same expressive eyebrows too.

Ewan watched as Mr. So-and-So pretended to sneeze after an overly enthusiastic sprinkle from an imaginary spoon. He achooed so loudly the walls shook. Although he and the Tramp shared many characteristics, Ewan wished they shared one more—silence.

Heather Smith

"Tell me," said Grumple, once Mr. So-and-So had finished his amateur dramatics, "how's your grandmother?"

"Oh, you know," said Mr. So-and-So, swatting a dismissive hand in the air. "The same as always—dead!"

He threw his head back and laughed.

"I'm ever so sorry," said Grumple. "I had no idea."

"Well, it *has* been ten years since your last visit."

"She was a good woman, your grandmother," said Grumple.

"Easy for you to say," said Mr. So-and-So. "She didn't make you eat your peas."

"Ew!" said Flora. "Peas are disgusting!"

"Agreed," said Mr. So-and-So. "The only thing peas are good for arrrrrrre—"

Flora cut him off at the five-second mark. "Sticking up your nose?"

"Absolutely not!" he said. "The only thing you should ever stick up your nose is your finger!"

Flora's laughter coincided with a crack of thunder.

"What was that?" said Ewan.

Grumple looked out the window. "Looks like a storm's brewing."

Butterflies filled Ewan's stomach. He hated storms. Always had. And with Father gone now, they were practically unbearable.

"Oooh," said Flora. "I hope there's lightning."

"Can we just get the Czech buttons and go?" asked Ewan.

Suddenly Mr. So-and-So began spinning in circles.

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“What on earth is he doing?” asked Flora.

Mr. So-and-So was now spinning as fast as a whirligig. When he stopped he was holding a small paper envelope. “Czech buttons? Check!”

The trio looked at his hands in amazement.

“Where did *they* come from?” asked Flora.

Mr. So-and-So pointed to a cabinet on the far wall. “The Czech-button drawer, of course.”

Flora crinkled her brow. “But how—”

“No *buts*,” said Mr. So-and-So. “Only *ands*.”

“What does that mean?” asked Ewan.

“*Buts* are exclusionary,” said Mr. So-and-So. “*Ands* include.”

Ewan’s head hurt. “Can we go now, Grumple?”

Grumple shook his head. “I haven’t even had a chance to look around yet!”

Ewan let out a groan. “But—”

“No *buts*,” said Flora. “Only *ands*.”

Mr. So-and-So waved the children closer. “Who wants to see the new wing?”

“I do!” said Flora.

Mr. So-and-So motioned them to a section of cabinetry near the counter. As with the rest of the room, little drawers filled the walls, floor to ceiling. Mr. So-and-So ran his fingers along the little brass knobs as if searching for a particular one. “Ah,” he said. “Here it is.”

He turned to Flora. “Would you like to do the honors?”

Flora reached for the knob.

Heather Smith

“Oh no,” said Mr. So-and-So. “You don’t pull it. You lick it.”

“Lick it?”

Mr. So-and-So nodded.

“Should I?” she asked Ewan.

Ewan frowned. “Probably not.”

She looked to Mr. So-and-So.

“It’s your choice,” he said.

Flora smiled. “I like choices.”

She stuck out her tongue tentatively and then licked the brass hardware. A moment later a large section of the cabinetry swung open like a door. Mr. So-and-So walked through the opening.

“Well?” he said, turning. “Are you coming?”

Ewan looked to Grumple, who waved them off. “You three go ahead. I have plenty to look at out here.”

And with that Flora grabbed Ewan’s hand and pulled him over the threshold.

Suddenly they were in total darkness.



“I’m scared,” Ewan blurted. He felt Flora squeeze his hand.

After a moment Mr. So-and-So turned on the lights. Ewan’s cheeks felt as if they’d been showered in thumbtacks.

“No need to be embarrassed,” said Mr. So-and-So. “We all have fears.”

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Flora let go of Ewan's hand and ventured farther into the room, which was almost identical to the one they'd just left. "Even you?" she asked.

"Oh yes," said Mr. So-and-So. "I have lots."

"Like what?" asked Flora.

Mr. So-and-So thought for a moment. "You know when you see an elderly person walking with a cane and you get the uncontrollable urge to kick it out from under them?"

Flora and Ewan looked at each other, then shook their heads.

"Really?" said Mr. So-and-So. "Strange. Anyway, my big fear is that someday I'll actually do it."

Flora laughed.

"That's not funny," said Ewan.

"Indeed it's not," said Mr. So-and-So. "Sadly, I can't help the thoughts that pop into my head. I may look as simple and innocent as a cuttlefish, but on the inside I have the tortured soul of a guppy. Anyhoo, who are you two anyway? Gettiprew's child servants?"

"We're his grandchildren," said Flora.

"And where, might I ask, are your parents?"

Ewan and Flora fell silent.

Mr. So-and-So pointed to his mouth and addressed his foot. "Well? What are you waiting for, you stinky, moisture-ridden hoof? Get in here!"

The children stared at him blankly.

"I put my foot in my mouth," he said. "Get it?"

Heather Smith

Ewan didn't think that was funny either.

"Mother died," said Flora. "And Father flew away on a cloud."

Mr. So-and-So produced a pipe out of thin air and put it in the corner of his mouth. "Ah. Yes. The ol' 'flying-away-on-a-cloud' scenario. Common story. Happens all the time."

Ewan was getting increasingly annoyed by Mr. So-and-So's attempts at humor. He was also feeling increasingly anxious. Unlike the old wing, the new wing had no windows, and the fact that Ewan couldn't see the storm brewing outside made him uneasy. How could he escape danger if he couldn't see it?

"Come on, Flora," he said. "We'd better get back to Grumple."

"Don't you want to see what's in the drawers?" asked Mr. So-and-So.

"Not really," said Ewan.

"I do," said Flora.

"Go right ahead," said Mr. So-and So. "You won't be disappointed."

Flora chose a drawer at her eye level, about eight rows up from the bottom. She moved her face closer to the handle and stuck out her tongue. Mr. So-and-So shot across the room. "What on earth are you doing?" he cried.

Flora looked to Ewan and then to Mr. So-and So. "Don't I have to lick it for it to open?"

Mr. So-and-So's face distorted with disgust. "*Lick* it?"

"Yes, I thought—"

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Mr. So-and So turned to Ewan. "Did she say *lick* it?"

Ewan nodded.

Mr. So-and-So rubbed his chin and began muttering to himself. "Lick it? My word. The girl must be mad. Lick it? *Lick* a handle to open a drawer? How utterly revolting. Poor little mite. Maybe she's iron deficient. Too bad the handles are brass."

Flora cleared her throat. "So should I just...er...pull it?"

Mr. So-and-So straightened up and smiled. "What a novel idea."

Flora gave the handle a little tug.

"Now please reach in," said Mr. So-and-So. "With your fingers," he added, presumably for fear she might try to scoop it out with her tongue.

Flora pulled out a small strip of paper and read it aloud.

"Dogs would be much more enjoyable if they drank through straws."

Ewan smiled at his little sister's advanced reading skills but frowned at the nonsensical message. "I thought this was a notion shop," he said.

"It is," said Mr. So-and-So. "And what young Flora just read, my friend, is a notion. An odd one. But a notion nevertheless."

"So a notion can be a button or a grommet but also an opinion?" asked Flora.

Once again Ewan found himself smiling at his younger sibling. Even Mr. So-and-So looked suitably impressed by the insightfulness of her remark.

Heather Smith

“Indeed,” he said. “An opinion, a thought, an impression, an idea. It can even be a whim or a desire.”

“And this room is full of that kind of notion?” asked Flora.

“Yes!” said Mr. So-and-So. “Pick another one!”

“Hang on a second,” said Ewan. “I have to disagree with the dog notion. Dogs are great. No matter how loudly they drink.”

Mr. So-and-So gave Ewan a patient smile. “Let’s test that theory, shall we?”

He reached behind the counter and pulled out a bowl of water.

“Wait,” said Flora. “Where did you—”

Mr. So-and-So shoved his face into the bowl and proceeded to slurp, snuffle, slobber and snort.

Flora watched with delight. Ewan, with disgust.

When Mr. So-and-So was done, he wiped his face with his left sleeve and then pulled a straw out of his right.

“Excuse me,” he said, “while I daintily—and quietly—drink from this water bowl.”

He took a long, silent sip and then let out a soft “aaaah.”

He turned to Ewan and raised an eyebrow.

Ewan shrugged. “I agree that dainty sipping is better than loud slurping,” he said. “But dogs will never be able to drink from straws, so what’s the point?”

“Never say never, Ewan,” said Mr. So-and-So. “I once taught a beaver to use a hacksaw. He’s a carpenter now. Builds lodges and dams all over the island. As a matter of fact, he just won

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Beaver of the Year. You should have seen the photo they printed in the *Rodent Review*, though. Poor fella's got teeth down to his toes! Oh well. That's the price of success, I guess."

"Maybe he could use a nail file," suggested Flora. "To make his teeth short again."

"Or maybe," said Ewan dryly, "he could throw the hacksaw away and keep his teeth short by using them as they were intended."

"My dear Ewan," said Mr. So-and-So, "if we all used our body parts as they were intended, the palmaris longus muscle in our wrists would be strong enough for us to climb trees. But since we can get our apples from the local mercantile, that particular muscle has become useless. Hmmm. I wonder. Now that beavers can use hacksaws, will their teeth become obsolete too? Probably not. They'd have to use them for eating, of course. Unless they drink everything through straws. Like dogs."

Ewan was trying to make sense of the half-fact, half-nonsense argument he'd just been bombarded with when Mr. So-and-So said, "Ewan? Would *you* like to pick a drawer?"

The question jarred him. Him? Pick a notion? The idea certainly intrigued him. But they really ought to have been going, what with that storm brewing outside. In the end, what Ewan lacked in bravery he made up for in curiosity. A moment later, with his hands clasped behind his back, he walked around the room, wondering if he'd feel the pull of a particular drawer.

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"Maybe this one," he said, reaching for a drawer in the bottommost corner of the back wall.

Mr. So-and-So winced. "Ooooooh. I don't know about that one. It's a bit untoward, if you know what I mean. A bit unsavory."

Ewan hesitated. Flora grinned. "Do it," she said.

The notion was handwritten in loopy writing.

"You can pick your nose, you can pick your friends, but you can't pick your friend's nose," Ewan read.

Mr. So-and-So smiled fondly. "Ah," he said. "That ol' chestnut. A true classic. Been around since 1344, you know."

Ewan wanted to try another drawer but was too shy to ask.

"Go ahead," said Mr. So-and-So. "Pick another one and then we'll be on our way."

Ewan walked to the other side of the room and picked a drawer as high up as he could reach. He unrolled the strip of paper and read, *"A ship in harbor is safe, but that is not what ships are built for."*

Ewan looked up at Mr. So-and-So. "Tell that to the crew of the *Titanic*."

Ewan had read a book of Grumple's called *Titanic*, written by a man named Filson Young just thirty-seven days after the passenger liner sank in 1912. His description of the catastrophe was based on survivor accounts, and it had made Ewan think a lot about the passengers who had died. Surely they had thought their ship was safe in the harbor *and* on the sea. Otherwise, why would they have climbed aboard? Ewan

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certainly wouldn't have. That was the thing about taking risks. It was too risky.

Flora skipped to where Mr. So-and-So was standing and tugged at his sweater. "Can I have another turn?" she asked.

Mr. So-and-So shook his head. "We'd better check on your grandfather. The old coot is probably shoplifting."

Flora batted her eyelashes. "Please?"

Mr. So-and-So patted her head. "Next time you'll get two in a row. Promise."

Flora rubbed the heavy wool of Mr. So-and-So's sweater between her fingers. "Mr. So-and-So? Why are you wearing such heavy clothes? It's July."

Mr. So-and-So shrugged. "Like I said, I wear what's comfortable."

Ewan couldn't see how overdressing for the weather was comfortable, but then again, he wasn't Mr. So-and-So. Nothing that man did made much sense, as was clearly demonstrated by his answer to Flora's next question.

"Mr. So-and-So? What were you doing before you smashed into the window?"

Mr. So-and-So smiled. "I was flying."

"You can fly?" said Flora.

Mr. So-and-So nodded. "In my head I'm as graceful as a New Zealand kiwi bird."

"Kiwis don't fly," said Ewan.

Mr. So-and-So rubbed his chin. "And therein lies the problem."

Heather Smith

As they moved from the new wing to the old, Ewan was struck by a memory: his father, sitting on their front steps, shining his work boots over layers of newspaper. Ewan could picture the Kiwi Shoe Polish tin clearly. It was black and red with a bit of yellow. A cute little kiwi bird stood above the word *KIWI*, which was written in white capital letters. It was a memory so strong Ewan could smell it. It was the gas-like scent of the shoe polish, the inky print of the newspaper and the floral notes of Mother's forget-me-nots. It was an aroma that captured a moment in time. An olfactory snapshot. And just like that it was gone.

Back in the old wing, Ewan could see that the storm was brewing harder. The sky was dark, and the clouds were heavy with rain. Distant thunder gave him goose bumps.

"Grumple," he said, "we'd better get going." Ewan was relieved when Grumple agreed. But purchasing the items proved to be a lengthy process, as Mr. So-and-So insisted on providing commentary for each item he checked in. "English Superfine Twilled Tape? 'Twill be a superfine addition to your sewing basket! Show Boat brand bias tape? I may be biased, but it's the best on the island." And so it continued. By the time they left, the wind had picked up terribly. It almost took the door off the hinges when they opened it.

"Enjoy the journey!" said Mr. So-and-So, as if they were venturing out into a gloriously sunny day. They had just reached the base of the cliff when they felt the first few drops of rain. As on the descent, Ewan held Grumple's elbow. Flora

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bounded ahead. "You just have to run between the drops!" she called.

Going up the trail was much harder than going down. Despite the rain, they stopped at the top to catch their breath. Ewan looked back at the Notion Shop.

"Look, Flora," he whispered. "You can't see the new wing from the outside."

Flora gasped. "Maybe it's magic," she said.

"Yes," said Ewan. "Maybe it is."



Two

William and Wilder, scared by the thunder and lightning, pulled the Hurricle with surprising speed. Ewan's knuckles were white as he gripped the carriage, fearing that at any moment it would careen out of control and go flying over a cliff. Flora, on the other hand, enjoyed the tumultuous journey home. She seemed to enjoy the rain on her face and shrieked with delight as if she were riding the Coney Island Thunderbolt and not Grumple's rickety chariot. A few months earlier, a photo of the Thunderbolt had been printed in the *Bucket Cove Bugle*, and as soon as Flora had clapped eyes on it, she announced she was moving to New York. The fact that she was seven years old had little effect on her determination. "I can travel by myself," she'd said. "All you need is a little know-how and a whole lot of nerve."

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Those had been the children's father's words of wisdom. They applied to many things, from learning to ride a bike to diving into the waters off Parson's Peak. Not that Ewan did either. Two skinned knees had put an end to his bike-riding days, and while he'd marveled at Father's form as he swan-dived into the Atlantic, Ewan had never had the courage to follow suit.

As the Hurricule entered the village, Ewan could hear his father's voice faintly in his head. *A little know-how and a whole lot of nerve.* He wondered just how much nerve his father had needed to walk out on them. He also wondered if there'd come a day when his father's voice would grow so faint in his head, he wouldn't be able to hear it at all.



Ewan had a feeling the Old Hag would visit that night. The closer it came to bedtime, the stronger the feeling got. By the time he'd brushed his teeth and gotten into bed, he was certain. Eventually, too exhausted to fight it, Ewan slipped into a deep sleep.

It was Father who had told him about the Old Hag. He said she'd been visiting him since he was a boy. Ewan had asked what she looked like, but Father said he didn't know. He said that a visit from the Old Hag was more about sensing than seeing, that he would be woken by a presence, the feeling of something—or someone—looming over him, scaring him into a state of paralysis, freezing him with fright.

Heather Smith

Ewan had had his first encounter with the Old Hag on the night his mother died. It had been a day filled with heart-break. His mother's illness had taken its toll, and she was now slipping in and out of consciousness. Doctor Anderson had advised the family to stay close to her bedside. It would soon be time for goodbyes. So stay close they did—Father by the head of the bed, holding his wife's hand and stroking her hair, and Ewan at the foot of the bed, cross-legged on the mattress, telling stories aloud from a fairy-tale book he was not yet able to read. Although the illustrations depicted the white knight as a muscular and handsome man, Ewan replaced each *he* with *she* in honor of his mother, who up until her illness had been as capable and strong as any male folk hero. Maybe even more so. Flora, who was just three, played on the floor with Ewan's toy horse and cart, gloriously oblivious to the pain and sadness in the room. After Mother passed, Father hugged his children tightly, then sent them to bed. Ewan drifted off to the sound of his father's sobbing, only to wake a few hours later to a shadowy figure looming over him. Ewan tried to scream but was unable to use his voice. He tried to flee but was unable to move his muscles. *Please*, he said in his head. *Please*. The Old Hag had lingered a few minutes longer, then disappeared.

And so it was this night as well—that feeling of being pushed down, paralyzed, helpless. Ewan pleaded in his head once again, and eventually the Old Hag went on her way. Ewan had always assumed the Old Hag was a figment of his

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imagination, but on this particular night, with his experience of the Notion Shop fresh in his mind, Ewan wondered. If an old fishing stage could contain secret wings invisible from the outside, could the Old Hag be more than a bad dream? Could she be...real? And if she was real, what about clouds that took people away? Could they be real too?



Ewan woke to the sound of Flora whispering in his ear.

“Check your pockets! See if you got one too!”

Ewan rubbed his eyes. “One what?”

Flora sat on his bed. “One of these.”

He looked at the small piece of paper in her hand. “A notion?”

Flora grinned. “A notion.”

“Go on then,” said Ewan. “Read it.”

Flora cleared her throat. “*Children should be seen and not burred.*”

Ewan frowned. “What does that mean?”

Flora shrugged. “I was hoping you’d know.”

Ewan sat up and flattened his hair, which had a mind of its own. “Well, the real saying is *children should be seen and not heard*. Old Mr. Stack said it to you once, remember? That time you sang ‘Drunken Sailor’ during Reverend Simmons’s sermon?”

Flora began to sing.

Heather Smith

“What shall we do with a drunken sailor
What shall we do with a drunken sailor
What shall we do with a drunken sailor
Ear-ly in the morning?”

Ewan didn’t interrupt. He knew her favorite verse was next.

“Shave his belly with a rusty razor
Shave his belly with a rusty razor
Shave his belly with a rusty razor
Ear-ly in the morning!”

He laughed. “Not the smartest song to sing in church,” he said.

“No,” said Flora. “But probably the funniest.”

She read the notion in her hand out loud again “*Children should be seen and not burred*. I like this one better, even if it doesn’t make any sense.”

Ewan smiled. “Agreed.”

Too tired to get out of bed, Ewan asked Flora to pass him his trousers. He was extremely disappointed to find the pockets held only the two notions he had already read. He took them out and put them on his bedside table.

Flora squeezed his arm. “Maybe we can go back to the Notion Shop today and you can get another one.”

Ewan ran his fingers along the colorful crocheted squares of the blanket his mother had made for him. There were 225 of

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them, a rose motif in the center of each one. Ewan wished his mother was there with him now. She'd say, "Oh well, Ewan. You win some, you lose some." Then together they'd work around the house doing minor repairs or set about sprucing the place up with a lick of paint. His mother always had a way of refocusing him. Who would help him through life's ups and downs now?

Ewan threw back his covers. "I'm not bothered, Flora. It's all a load of nonsense anyway."

He moved to the basin and splashed water on his face, hoping to hide the redness in his cheeks. Flora passed him a towel. How foolish he was, getting his hopes up about receiving a random scribble on a scrap of paper. He patted his face dry. "I'll meet you outside, Flora. Grumple is expecting us to till the vegetable garden today."

As Ewan changed out of his striped cotton pajamas, he thought about his middle-of-the-night musings. Of course the Old Hag wasn't real. And Mr. So-and-So's invisible-from-the-outside new wing? It was obviously some kind of optical illusion. Ewan gave his head a shake. He'd let his guard down. Somehow his experience at the Notion Shop had allowed him to entertain the idea that maybe Father *hadn't* left of his own accord, that maybe he *had* been taken away in a trancelike state. But the thing about hope is that it's so easily dashed—one minute you think your mother will get better, and the next she is slipping away.

Ewan tucked his sweater vest into his knee-length knickers and pulled on a pair of argyle socks, pausing in front of the

Heather Smith

mirror just long enough to adjust his suspenders and straighten his flatcap. His clothes weren't made with the most expensive materials, but Grumple's fine tailoring made them look like a million bucks. Not that he had much time to admire them. There was much work to be done. Grumple had a garden that needed tilling, and there were other chores that needed completing as well. That's what life was about now. Chores, responsibilities and getting by. He had no time to get wrapped up in silly ideas on pieces of paper. He had work to do.

Ewan went outside and walked up to the vegetable garden. His sister was nowhere to be seen.

"Flora?" he called. "Flora? Where are you?"

With a feeling of unease, he checked the barn. His heart sank. William was gone.



Ewan rushed back inside to find Grumple sitting at the kitchen table. He tried to remain calm.

"Grumple? I know the vegetable garden needs to be tilled, but the upper field is a bit of a mess too. How about Flora and I spend the morning pulling weeds and getting rid of any large rocks in the soil?"

Grumple looked up from his newspaper, tears streaming down his face. "Fine, fine. Whatever you think."

Ewan reached into the sideboard. About a year after moving to Bucket Cove, Mrs. Shipley-Seward had released

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a newspaper called the *Wednesday Weepies*, and ever since then Ewan had made sure there was always a fresh handkerchief for Grumple on hand. He much preferred Mrs. Shipley-Seward's previous paper, the *Monday Merries*, which had made Grumple cry with laughter, but Mrs. Shipley-Seward said that what the public craved was sob stories. For the life of him, Ewan couldn't see why.

Ewan passed Grumple the handkerchief and swapped out the *Weepies* for the *Bucket Cove Bugle*. "Why don't you read the local news instead?" he asked.

He pointed to the headline. "Look, Grumple. Fanny O'Connor's ewe wandered down to the harbor and boarded Bert Green's dory. Looks like she floated out to sea."

Grumple lifted the paper. "But surely Bert's dory had been tied to the dock."

Ewan shrugged. "Maybe the ewe chewed the rope. I'm sure all the details are in the article."

When Grumple stuck his nose in the paper, Ewan said, "Flora and I are going to ride William and Wilder to the upper field now. We'll be a while."

Grumple barely looked up. "Mind how you go."

As soon as he was out of the house, Ewan bolted to the barn. He'd hated lying to Grumple, but he didn't want to alarm him about Flora. Not that her disappearance was a mystery—Ewan knew exactly where Flora was headed.

Ewan mounted Wilder. Trust Flora to take William, the most reliable of the two ponies. Wilder was notoriously

Heather Smith

unpredictable, stopping and starting whenever he felt like it, venturing off in directions of his own choosing.

Ewan squeezed Wilder's belly with his legs. "Giddyup!"

Wilder sauntered out of the barn and down the gravel driveway. Ewan pictured Flora, miles ahead now, navigating the narrow coastal trail to the Notion Shop. "Please, Wilder," he said. "Flora is all alone."

As if by magic, Wilder broke into a gallop.



Ewan kept hoping to catch up to Flora, but he never did, despite the fact that Wilder kept a surprisingly steady pace. William was the faster of the two, always had been, which was why Flora had chosen him in the first place.

Ewan's heart was racing. He'd never taken the coastal trail alone. What if he and Wilder fell over the edge of the cliff? Who would hear their screams? Who would save them? Or worse, what if Flora and William had fallen over an edge up ahead? How would Ewan save them? Could he find the strength? Would he have the courage?

Wilder whinnied as the Notion Shop, and William, came into view. When William echoed Wilder's greeting, Wilder galloped to William's side. As the two ponies nuzzled each other, Ewan looked down the path to the Notion Shop. It somehow looked steeper and more narrow than it had last time.

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Ewan dismounted Wilder and started down the path. He went slowly so as not to lose his footing. Hungry seabirds circled above him while mighty waves crashed below. Ewan paused to take it all in. Although the rugged cliffs and thunderous ocean frightened him, he could still appreciate their beauty. Father had often taken him to picnic on Parson's Peak. With misty faces they'd watch the puffins dive for fish and then return, triumphant, to their cliffside nests, their beaks brimming with herring. But the mist on Ewan's face now was more annoying than refreshing, and as he made his way to the rocky outcropping on which the Notion Shop sat, he couldn't help but feel angry with Flora. What was she thinking, coming all the way out here alone?

Ewan opened the door to the shop and found it empty. He wasn't surprised. It wasn't *sewing* notions Flora was after. It was the other kind, the kind found in the secret wing. Ewan looked at the drawer pull that opened the new wing. He wondered who had licked it, Flora or Mr. So-and-So. The thought of putting his tongue on something freshly licked by someone else disgusted him, even if that someone else was his own sister.

Instead of licking the handle, Ewan pulled it. He'd hoped to trigger the opening of the secret door, but all he did was open the little drawer itself. Inside were dozens of pink two-hole buttons. They looked like pigs' noses. Ewan took one out. It was delicate and pretty and felt like a seashell. He placed it back in the drawer and checked his pocket for loose

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change. If he had enough money, he'd buy one and make a sock puppet for Flora. Her favorite animals were pigs, mostly because of the noises they made, which Flora liked to imitate often. She'd have great fun with a pig puppet, and even though he knew it could turn out to be a rather noisy present, Ewan resolved to make her one. Her happiness was more important to him than anything.

Before licking the handle, Ewan pressed his ear to the wall of drawers near Mr. So-and-So's counter. Knowing that this particular section of cabinetry was the entrance to the secret wing, Ewan gave the area a couple of knocks. When no one answered, he sighed. There was only one thing to do. With a great deal of reluctance, Ewan bent down and licked the handle. A moment later the large section of cabinetry swung open like a door, and there, on the other side of the threshold, were Flora and Mr. So-and-So. They were standing on their heads.

"Top of the morning," said Mr. So-and-So. "Or do I mean bottom of the morning? Is it even morning? We've been standing on our heads so long I've lost track of time!"

Flora let her feet drop to the floor and sprang to standing. "Look, Ewan," she said. "I've got you three!" She pulled the familiar strips of paper out of her pocket and held them in the air triumphantly.

And just like that, the anger and frustration Ewan had felt faded. After all, Flora had traveled all this way for *him*. How could he be mad at such a gesture?

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“Want me to read them?” she asked.

Ewan smiled. “Go ahead.”

Flora stood tall.

“A buttercup is a beautiful thing, until you fill it with tea.”

“That’s odd,” said Ewan.

Flora straightened out the second piece of paper.

“Scaring is caring.”

Ewan frowned. “That’s even odder.”

“And finally,” said Flora. *“A derriere that is super-iere is a number one bum.”*

“That’s just silly,” said Ewan. “What makes one backside superior to another?”

Mr. So-and-So, who was still standing on his head, snorted. “Can *you* carry a five-pound bag of potatoes using only your firmly clenched buttocks?”

“Why would I?” said Ewan. “When I have two perfectly fine hands?”

Mr. So-and-So scoffed. “And what if those hands were covered in chocolate? Then what?”

“Why would my hands be covered in chocolate?”

“My dear boy, have you never eaten a football-sized Easter egg on a hot summer’s day while walking home from your local mercantile? Sheesh!”

“Why would I be eating an Easter egg in summer?”

Mr. So-and-So sprang to his feet in exasperation. “Listen here, young man, backsides come in all shapes and sizes and abilities. Now I’m sorry if your derriere is infere-iere—a

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bottom bottom, so to speak—but I'll not have you pick apart my very tall tale as if it is somehow untrue!"

Mr. So-and-So's curly mop of hair was standing straight up, as if he was still upside down. Flora bit her lips at the comical sight.

"What's so funny?" asked Mr. So-and-So.

Flora reached up toward his head. "May I?"

Mr. So-and-So scooched down. Flora laid her hands on top of his loose curls and pressed down. When she released them, they popped up again. She shrugged. "Oh well," she said. "I tried."

"Silly girl," said Mr. So-and-So. "You forgot the magic word."

He bent forward. "Try again."

Flora placed her hands on his head again. Ewan could tell by her face that she was thinking about what could possibly be the magic word. Ewan hoped she wouldn't say *please*. That was far too obvious for a man like Mr. So-and-So. With her eyes closed, Flora made a guess.

"Cabbage?"

Mr. So-and-So's hair responded by settling down into its slightly flatter but no less messy style.

Ewan was astonished. He'd expected something unusual, but *cabbage*? How on earth could his sister have guessed such a random word?

Mr. So-and-So smiled. "Well done, my little tadpole. You used your imagination, and it worked."

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Mr. So-and-So glanced at Ewan and gave him a wink, confirming Ewan's suspicions that Mr. So-and-So had somehow let Flora win.

"Now," said Mr. So-and-So, placing his cuffed beanie high on his head, "how's about you two vacate the premises? Your presence is growing tiresome."

Flora tried to pass the three notions to Ewan.

"That's okay, Flora. You can keep them."

Mr. So-and-So raised an eyebrow. "Not good enough for you, eh? Too silly? Too juvenile?"

Ewan shrugged. "A bit."

Mr. So-and-So sighed. "Go ahead. Pick your own. But make it quick, okay? I don't have all day. Time flies like an arrow, fruit flies like a banana."

Ewan felt a stirring in his belly as he surveyed all the drawers. Having the ability to choose something—and not knowing what that something might be—gave Ewan an odd sense of hope, as if somehow there might be one notion in here that held all the answers. It was unlikely, judging by the previous examples, but Ewan felt hopeful nevertheless.

"How do you reach the topmost drawers?" asked Ewan. "I want to try that one," he said, pointing to a drawer high up in the corner.

Mr. So-and-So sighed. "You use the ladder, of course." He looked at Flora and rolled his eyes. "Of all the ridiculous questions."

Ewan looked around. "But there is no ladder."

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“Ha! Then what do you call this?” said Mr. So-and-So, holding out a long, metal, tongue-shaped object.

“That’s a shoe horn,” said Ewan.

“Is it?” said Mr. So-and-So. “I always wondered what it was called.”

Flora giggled. “Silly Mr. So-and-So.”

“So where’s the ladder?” asked Ewan.

Mr. So-and-So looked at Flora. “Flora, dear, be a love and scamper up and retrieve that notion for your brother, would you?”

“Okay,” said Flora, skipping to the corner of the room.

“Wait,” said Ewan. “She can’t just—I mean, there’s nothing—”

Flora sat on the floor and took off her shoes and socks.

“That’s a good tadpole,” said Mr. So-and-So. “Trust your instincts.”

Before Ewan could protest again, Flora had placed the toes of her right foot on one of the bottom pulls, and with her hands on the little brass pulls above her she scampered up the wall of drawers like an expert rock climber. At the top she opened Ewan’s desired drawer, grabbed the paper and scampered back down.

“That was fun!” she said. “I should try that on the cliffs!”

“Don’t you dare!” said Ewan.

Flora passed Ewan the notion, which he read to himself.

“Well?” said Flora. “Aren’t you going to read it aloud?”

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Ewan folded it in half and placed it in his pocket. "I'd rather keep this one to myself," he said.

"That's not fair!" said Flora. "I read you mine this morning!"

Mr. So-and-So put his hand on Flora's shoulder. "Now, now, nosy parker. Leave your brother be."

Mr. So-and-So smiled kindly at Ewan. Ewan looked away.

"Put your shoes and socks back on now, Flora," said Mr. So-and-So. "The smell from your rancid hooves is going right up my nose."

Out in the old wing they said their goodbyes. Flora was sad to go, but Ewan was anxious to get back home. Mr. So-and-So watched as the two children made their way up the path.

"Oink, oink!" he shouted.

Flora laughed. "He's mad, isn't he, Ewan?"

"Stark raving," said Ewan.

At the top of the trail, the children caught their breath and took a moment to look at the sun reflecting off the ocean's surface. Ewan put his hands in his pockets. In his left he could feel the notion that had left him uneasy. In his right there was something that hadn't been there before—something shell-like and round with two tiny holes. It made him smile. Unlike the content of his left pocket, the content of his right wasn't unsettling at all. In fact, it felt like something close to comfort.



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Ewan and Flora rode home side by side. Ewan gently admonished his sister for going to the Notion Shop alone and asked that she never do such a thing again. Flora promised but reluctantly. Riding the coast alone, she said, had been the best adventure of her entire life.

When the pair arrived home, they found Grumple napping on the sofa. Ewan was thankful. The longer Grumple had been sleeping, the less likely he was to have gone to the upper field to check on them.

Ewan woke Grumple with a gentle shake. "Grumple, we're back."

Grumple opened his eyes. "So you are."

"We didn't get much work done in the upper field today," said Ewan. "We'll go back tomorrow, though. Promise."

Grumple pulled himself up to sitting. "Never mind. That field is not going anywhere."

Ewan's stomach grumbled.

Grumple smiled. "Lunch?"

Ewan nodded. "I'll make it."

In the kitchen Ewan sliced some of Dottie O'Reilly's freshly baked bread and opened a jar of her homemade mustard pickles. Ever since their mother died, Mrs. O'Reilly had made it her business to make sure the Pettigrew family was well fed. She was a good neighbor to Grumple, and Ewan was grateful.

Ewan put the bread, butter and pickles on the old wooden table his mother had made for Grumple from old barn boards.

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Seeing it always reminded Ewan of his mother's resourcefulness and creativity.

Ewan saved the opening of the bully beef for last. It had been one of his favorite mealtime jobs since he was little. The first step was to remove the small metal key that was glued to the side of the oblong can. The key had an open slot at its end that looked much like the eye of a needle. Ewan would fit this slot over the metal tab located about an inch from the top of the can. Then, slowly and carefully, he'd roll the key in a clockwise motion around the perimeter of the tin, pulling with it a thin strip of the metal. With each turn the thin strip of metal would wind around and around the key, exposing the bully beef beneath. Ewan would continue in this manner until the entire metal strip had been peeled away and the top of the can could be lifted off. This job that Mother and Father had always left for him was a small thing, but he cherished it. Providing lunch for the family had made him feel useful. Especially when Mother was sick. Father said he didn't know what he'd have done without him.

Ewan had just detached the key from the can when he caught a glimpse of Flora outside the kitchen window. She was sitting in the dirt by the barn door, crying. Ewan went outside.

"Flora? What's wrong?"

"I was just thinking," she sniffled.

Ewan crouched down in front of her. "About what?"

Flora wiped her nose with her sleeve. "Your face."

Ewan wrinkled his nose. "My face?"

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Flora nodded. "When you read that notion, it went funny. I don't want you to be sad."

Ewan thought of the notion that still sat folded in his pocket. "Oh, Flora. I wasn't sad. I was just...I don't know...confused, I guess."

Flora looked up. "Confused?"

"I just have some stuff to figure out, that's all."

"What kind of stuff?"

It was too hard to explain, and he wasn't ready to share, but Ewan had a feeling that his role in the family was about to change.

He held up the key from the bully-beef tin. "Flora? I have a job for you."

Inside, Ewan watched his sister carefully open the tin, her tongue stuck out in concentration. "Can this be *my* job now?" she asked.

Ewan traced the outline of the notion in his left pocket. "Consider it yours."



Three

"Flora! Hold on! I'm coming!"

Ewan scrambled down the cliff quickly and confidently. On the gravelly bits, he dug his heels into the dirt and slid downward. On the rockier bits, he faced inward and hugged the rock face as he made his descent. Any danger he felt he pushed to the back of his mind.

Anything for his little sister.

At the bottom he found Flora draped across William, who lay crumpled beneath her.

Except for a cut across her forehead, Flora was miraculously unhurt. Ewan hugged her tight.

"Time to get you home."

Flora looked up at the cliff face. "I'm too tired."

Ewan wrapped his arm around her waist and hoisted her to standing.

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"Don't worry, Flora. We'll do it together."

Ewan woke, confused. It wasn't like him to nap in the middle of the day. He looked down at the notion he'd been reading before he fell asleep.

Strength is not found—it's awakened.

When he'd first read it at the Notion Shop, he'd been startled. After all, he had just been questioning his strength moments before, on the coastal path. How had the notion been able to speak to him so directly?

But now, much like the crocheted blanket that had kept him warm during his nap, the notion was a comfort. He just needed to get used to the idea. The thought that there was an inner strength deep down inside him, ready to appear when he needed it, made Ewan feel brave.

Ewan read the notion over and over to himself until it became a call to action. No longer could Ewan sit by and ponder his father's disappearance. It was time to do something about it. It was time to go find him.



Ewan spent the next half hour sewing the delicate pink button he'd magically acquired from the Notion Shop onto the toe of one of Mother's thick, knee-high socks. Mother had knitted the socks herself using a soft pink yarn and had worn them under her house dress in the winter months. Ewan hoped a

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pig puppet made from something belonging to their mother would be meaningful to Flora. It certainly was to him.

With two black buttons for eyes and two corners cut from one of Ewan's old plaid flannel shirts for ears, the puppet was complete. Ewan looked at the tartan ears and smiled. A Scottish pig. Flora would like that. Father's old boss, Duncan Abernathy, was Scottish. Flora had loved visiting Father at work just so she could hear Mr. Abernathy roll his *r*'s.

Ewan placed the puppet on his sister's bed and then quietly packed his mother's old carpetbag. He'd decided to travel light—he didn't intend to be gone for long, and he didn't own much anyway. When the bag was packed, he sat on his bed and wrote a letter.

Dear Grumple and Flora,

*I'm off to find Father. He's out there somewhere,
hiding. He shouldn't be hiding. It's not
fair. I will tell him so when I see him.*

*I have taken William and the Hurricle.
Sorry, but it had to be done.*

*Yours truly,
Ewan*

Ewan opened his bedroom window and dropped his bag, taking care not to crush any of the lupines that filled the garden.

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Before leaving his room, he added the two notions from his bedside table to the third in his pocket. They felt like fuel for what he was about to do. Well, the one about picking friends' noses was pretty useless, but the other two certainly spurred him on. Even the "*ship in safe harbor*" notion made sense now. There was no doubt about it. As far as Ewan was concerned, it was time to cast off and sail into the unknown—it was time to look for answers.

After taking a final look around his room, Ewan went downstairs. Grumple was in his usual spot at the kitchen table, happily lost in his sewing. Ewan took a deep breath and stepped into the room.

"Grumple? I'm just going out for fresh air."

Grumple barely looked up. His eyes were on the Czech glass button he was carefully sewing onto the emerald-green coat he had made for Mrs. Shipley-Seward. Ewan picked up one of the ones yet to be sewed on. It was a swirl of purple and green with a golden dragonfly embossed across its surface.

"These are beautiful," said Ewan.

"Only the best for Mrs. Shipley-Seward," said Grumple.

Ewan regarded Grumple's steady hand. He really was the best tailor around. Ewan felt proud. He put a hand on Grumple's shoulder.

"See you later, okay?"

Grumple looked up. "Everything all right, Ewan?"

Ewan forced a smile. "Best kind."

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On his way out Ewan grabbed the heel of Dottie O'Reilly's homemade bread and an apple. From the kitchen window he could see Flora in the dirt yard, making tracks in the earth with the toe of her shoe—a series of roads for his toy horse and cart, no doubt. Dottie O'Reilly had once been so concerned about Flora's obsession with “boys' toys” that she'd collected the baby dolls her own daughter had outgrown and brought them to the house. “I couldn't help but notice that Flora has no dolls to play with,” she'd said. “Please pass these on to her.” Little did Mrs. O'Reilly know that Flora had once had plenty of dolls—rag dolls made by Grumple. But one day she had thrown them all into the fire, dramatically declaring, “All these girls do is sit there and stare!”

Ewan quietly retrieved his bag from the back garden and crept across the side yard to the barn. Luckily, Flora was so engrossed in her game that not even a bomb dropping from the sky would have gotten her attention.

In the barn, Ewan harnessed the Hurricle to William. Wilder looked put out. “You reap what you sow, Wilder,” said Ewan unapologetically. “Maybe if you were more reliable, I'd be taking you instead.”

You reap what you sow was something Grumple said often. Ewan remembered one of the first times he'd heard Grumple use the phrase. Grumple's brother, a politician in St. John's, had crashed his treasured Model T into the Parker and Monroe shoe store down on Water Street. According to Grumple, the broken leg his brother had suffered was exactly

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what he deserved for flaunting his wealth in such an ostentatious way. “Automobiles!” he’d grumbled. “They’ll be the death of all of us!”

Wilder nuzzled his head into Ewan’s shoulder and fluttered his eyelashes. He was a charming old beast. Ewan gave him a scratch on the nose. “Next time. Okay?”

Ewan climbed into the Hurricle, pushed aside the lap blanket that lay crumpled at his feet and set his packed bag beside it. For the second time in two days, he was venturing out alone. But this time he didn’t know for how long.

With the reins tight in his hands he took a deep breath and steeled himself.

“William,” he said. “I need you to get me out of here quickly and quietly.”

He gave the reins a quick tug. “Hyah!”

To Ewan’s surprise, William took off as lightly and gracefully as an old Newfoundland pony could, galloping over the gravel driveway and down the lane. Once they passed Dottie O’Reilly’s house, Ewan felt he was home free. The houses were few and far between in Bucket Cove, and he’d likely get out of town unspotted. Once they reached the main road, Ewan steered William into the woods and onto a trail he and his father had often taken when they’d gone bakeapple picking. Bakeapples were not apples but a relatively rare berry, found in bogs. Father loved them, and when the season was right, he’d spend hours knee deep in bog water, searching for the small orange jewels—and even more hours making bakeapple

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jam to put in the cellar to enjoy over winter. Ewan had recently learned that bakeapples also grew in Norway, Sweden and Finland, but the Scandinavians called them cloudbberries. Had he heard this fact before his father's disappearance, he might have found it charming. Now the mere mention of the word *cloud* set his teeth on edge.

The tree-lined trail was narrow, and Ewan had to duck to avoid being poked and prodded by branches and leaves. Luckily, the trail soon widened, and when they reached an open meadow Ewan brought the Hurricle to a stop.

"Now, William," he said, reaching for the carpetbag, "let me just look at the map I packed."

He was surprised to find the bag open. He was sure he'd snapped it shut.

Ewan searched the map for a place he'd heard stories about but never been—Howl's Inlet, a remote community at the base of the Kranky Peninsula. His father had spent his summers there as a boy. Ewan had loved hearing about his father's summer home and the happy times he'd had living in a small log cabin surrounded by nature. It was the isolation that Father seemed to enjoy. "It was peaceful," he'd said. "Quiet. A place where thinking was replaced with being." That had always confused Ewan. How could you "be" without thinking? Ewan thought all the time. In fact, the quieter it was, the more he thought!

Ewan traced his finger on the map from approximately where he was now to Howl's Inlet. He reckoned it would

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take three nights and four days to get there. Tonight he'd sleep on the barrens, the next somewhere along the coast on the way to the Kranky Peninsula, and the third on the peninsula itself.

This wasn't the first time Ewan had speculated that Father had disappeared to Howl's Inlet, but it was the first time he'd felt brave enough to go find him. That's not to say he wasn't worried. What if when he found him, he was unable to forgive him? Ewan dropped the map back into the carpet-bag and sighed. He'd awakened enough strength to start the journey, but would he have the strength to finish it?

"Come on, William," he said, settling back onto the bench again. "Let's go."

It was close to supertime now. It had been silly for Ewan to head off so late in the day, but he knew he'd reach his father's favorite bakeapple spot by nightfall. There, sheltered in the woods not far from the peat bog, was a small cabin that served as a base for any berry pickers and hunters in the region. Ewan and his father had often spent the night there, just the two of them snuggled together on the bottom bunk, listening for the occasional hoot of an owl, which Ewan had always found thrilling. Although the cabin was often empty on their arrival, the things left behind by fellow islanders gave it a community feel. Ewan remembered snuggling under a patchwork quilt left on the bed, its squares decorated with reminders of their surroundings—tuckamore trees, caribou, moose and pine martens. Attached to it had been a

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note from a Mrs. Lorna Dodd, wishing the berry pickers and hunters luck, warmth and a good night's sleep. Adding to the welcoming feel was the communally stocked root cellar built into a grassy knoll behind the cabin. Ewan loved the look of the cellar and always marveled at its crude but ingenious construction. It had been dug eighty years before—a damp, cool room hollowed out from the earth, complete with a mossy roof and a wooden door. Inside the structure was reinforced with wooden beams to protect the multiple shelves of bottled meats, pickled vegetables, jams and preserves. Ewan knew he wouldn't go hungry—no one would begrudge him if he stocked up on some extra items for his journey.

The Hurricle bumped along the grassy dirt trail, and Ewan enjoyed the forest around him. It felt safe, unlike the coast where he'd be heading for the next leg of his journey.

Soon the trail widened once again into a wide-open space called the barrens. Ewan's father loved the vast expanse of moss carpets and sparse vegetation, but Ewan found the land uninviting and cold. He had liked the pitcher plants, though. They had purple flowers that stood out against the rugged landscape and added a touch of softness. But then one day he saw an insect land on one of the plant's pitcher-shaped leaves only to slip down the tubular leaf and drown in the rainwater at the bottom. As it turned out, the carnivorous plant was as unforgiving as the landscape that surrounded it.

Ewan soon came upon the bog and the little cabin in the nearby woods. It felt strange to be there alone, without his father.

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"I'm glad you're here, William," he said as he climbed down from the Hurricle. William whinnied in return.

Ewan grabbed the carpetbag and opened the door to the cabin. He was greeted by a familiar musty smell. He set about opening the windows, just as his father had done on their many arrivals. He remembered the excitement he'd felt on those visits and how safe he'd felt in his father's care. Now the only thing he felt was loneliness.

Ewan opened the cupboards and checked out the supplies. He took out a mason jar of seal meat. From the label he could see it had been left behind by the Lyver family of Tug's Harbor. He grabbed a fork from the cutlery drawer and dug in. The meat was tasty but rich. A few bites in, and his stomach was happy.

Ewan lay down on the bed and looked at the ceiling. The trilling of the birds outside put him on edge, despite the happiness of their songs. He thought about going home. It'd be dark, but at least he'd be doing something that made sense. Going home had a point. Being alone in the middle of nowhere did not. Ewan closed his eyes to trap the tears. Crying never changed anything. It didn't bring his mother back. All it did was make his face wet and his eyes red. So he learned to bottle it in. He was getting so good at it, he wondered if the tears would even come if he let them. And if they did, who would wipe them away?

Ewan was getting sleepy. A short nap before making sure William was settled wouldn't hurt. Just as he was drifting

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off, he felt the weight of an animal at the end of his bed. He froze. What on earth could it be? There were no raccoons in Newfoundland. Or skunks. It could have been a pine marten. Or a muskrat. What if it was a lynx? Too scared to open his eyes, Ewan played dead. Perhaps the critter would give him a sniff and carry on his way. The mattress moved up and down slightly as the animal walked up the length of the bed. It stopped at Ewan's shoulder. On you go, little fella, he thought. Just keep walking.

But the critter did not keep walking. Instead it nipped Ewan's shoulder with its fangs.

"Kipper!" yelled Ewan. "Can't you find another way to say hello?"

Ewan pushed the cat off the bed, wishing he had closed the carpetbag securely before setting out on the journey. The last thing he needed was a stowaway.

Kipper hopped onto the table and sat next to the jar of seal meat. He nudged it with his paw.

"Kipper," said Ewan, sitting up slowly. "Don't you dare."

Nudge.

"I'm warning you..."

Nudge, nudge.

"Kipper!"

Ewan sprang toward the table.

CRASH!

He was too late.

Glass shattered and meat splattered.

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Ewan picked out the glass and then sat on his knees and watched Kipper help himself to the feast.

How he wished for a dog.



Just before dusk Ewan explored the area around the cabin. He loved how the orangey-yellow bakeapples added a touch of color to the peat bog, which was a carpet of dark greens and browns. The ground beneath him was damp and spongy. He remembered a smaller version of himself shouting to his father, “Look at me! I’m walking on the moon!” He’d often wondered what the moon was made of, and although his father said it was likely green cheese, Ewan preferred to think it must be more like the peat bogs of Newfoundland.

Kipper frolicked across the landscape, biting into the bakeapples, piercing their skin and spoiling them for future berry pickers who would have traveled far to find them.

“Kipper!” shouted Ewan.

He made a grab for the cat but missed. Kipper took off across the peat bog.

“Fine,” said Ewan. “Have it your way.”

Ewan headed back to the cabin alone. As the sun went down, the sky turned pink. In the distance a young caribou grazed the tundra alone. Ewan paused to take in the beautiful scene. The caribou looked up. “Where’s your mother?” asked Ewan. The caribou opened its mouth, but no sound

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came out. Ewan kept walking, his eyes on the sky but his mind on Flora, safe at home with her new pink puppet.



Back at the cabin, while William grazed on a bale of hay, Ewan helped himself to some salt cod which had been “lovingly caught off the perilous shores of Hugtight Bay”—the label on the jar had been signed by a Mrs. J. Tobin. With his stomach once again content, Ewan went to the bottom bunk and pulled Mrs. Lorna Dodd’s quilt over his head. He closed his eyes and hoped the window he’d left open for Kipper wouldn’t be seen as an invitation for other, wilder animals. He also wondered if Kipper would even come back at all. Maybe he’d think country life was better than Bucket Cove. As he drifted off to sleep, Ewan heard the hooting of owls. It wasn’t as magical as he remembered.



Ewan woke to a rumbling—not *in* his tummy but *on* it. It was Kipper, sprawled across his torso. A dead sparrow was nestled between his two front paws. He was purring so loudly—and proudly—that the bed practically vibrated.

“So you came back,” said Ewan.

“Back?” said a voice from the top bunk. “I was never here in the first place.”

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Ewan could barely get the words out, but he had to ask. "Who goes there?"

A head peered into the bottom bunk. "Buongiorno!"

Ewan jumped so high he banged his head on the top bunk and sent poor Kipper tumbling to the floor.

Mr. So-and-So climbed down. "Honestly, Ewan. That's no way to treat God's creatures."

Kipper rubbed himself affectionately around Mr. So-and-So's legs.

"My, what a pulchritudinous pussycat. *Pulchritudinous* means beautiful, by the way."

Ewan folded his arms and frowned. "What are you doing here, Mr. So-and-So?"

"Picture this," said Mr. So-and-So, bursting with excitement. "I'm in the Notion Shop teaching a mackerel to sing 'How Come You Do Me Like You Do?' when *VROOM, VROOM, VROOM*, there's a god-awful noise from up on the cliff, and if it isn't old Alfalfa Gettiprew driving like a maniac in a splendid-looking Thomas Flyer. So I race up the trail and say, 'Stop this hubbub at once,' but Alfalfa can't hear me because he's going five hundred miles an hour, and when he sees me he slams on the brakes and says, 'I need your help!' and me, being the philanthropic type, give him a tip of the rather glorious top hat I happen to be wearing and say, 'At your service.'"

Mr. So-and-So, pleased with his retelling, puffed his chest out with pride.

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Ewan was stunned. Taking off in an automobile? Grumple must have been worried sick!

“Why would Grumple want *your* help?” he asked.

Mr. So-and-So deflated. “Contrary to popular belief, I can be a useful sort of chap at times.”

Ewan regretted his careless choice of words. “I’m sorry. It’s just—”

Mr. So-and-So waved a hand though the air. “Apologies are nothing more than oral defenses for bad behavior.”

“But—”

“No *buts*, only *ands*. Now stop talking and go wake your sister.”

Ewan looked around. “Flora’s here?”

Mr. So-and-So nodded toward the door. “I offered her the top bunk, but she wanted to sleep in that quaint little carriage of yours.”

Ewan’s heart quickened. “You left her *outside*? All night?”

Mr. So-and-So looked incredulous. “Now calm down. I covered her in a blanket.”

Ewan bolted outside. There was Flora, curled up on the floor of the Hurricle. Wilder whinnied his hello, but Ewan was too worried about his sister to give the horse his attention. He shook his sister gently. “Flora. Wake up.”

She rolled over, opened her eyes and smiled.

“Who do you have there?” asked Ewan.

Flora animated the pig puppet on her hand. “Trotters is the name. Snuffling’s the game.”

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She reached out and made Trotters nuzzle Ewan's neck. Ewan smiled. Flora brought the puppet to her chest and stroked it gently. "Thank you for the puppet, Ewan. But no thank you for leaving. That was bad."

"I have to go find Father."

"Grumple says he's happy where he is."

"I'm sorry, Flora, but Grumple just says that to make us feel better." He reached out his hands. "Come on. I'll help you out."

The puppet's jaws snapped. "Watch out," Flora said. "Trotters might bite you."

Ewan admired his sister's imagination. "I'll take the chance."

The pair clasped hands. Ewan wanted to say *You shouldn't have followed me* but didn't. He pulled his sister to sitting and said, "I'm glad you're here."



Inside, Mr. So-and-So was making porridge on a camp stove. Kipper was draped around his neck like a mink stole. Ewan scowled at his traitorous cat. *Pulchritudinous, my foot.*

Over breakfast Flora and Mr. So-and-So took turns describing the series of events that had led them to the cabin.

Flora started first.

"When I saw your letter, I took off to the barn, hopped on Wilder and made for the forest. I was very brave."

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Mr. So-and-So went next.

"After your grandfather almost killed me in that dreaded automobile, I immediately set out to save you two toddlers from almost certain death—this place is riddled with rattlesnakes!"

And so they continued with their tag-team storytelling.

"I was in the forest," said Flora, "all by myself, shouting, 'Ewan! William!' But then I saw a whole load of blueberries and I thought, I'm going to pick those blueberries! They were a bit red, but I picked them anyway and I ate lots and then my stomach got sore and I remembered Father saying, 'Don't pick the red ones, they're green' and then I fell asleep."

"So here I was," continued Mr. So-and-So, "barreling through the thickest brush imaginable, on the lookout for two dead children, when what do I see? Only *one* dead child! I was ever so disappointed! My goal was to find two!"

"But it turns out I wasn't dead at all!" said Flora.

"Which I found out pretty quick," said Mr. So-and-So, "when I picked her up by the feet and slung her into my boat!"

Flora rubbed her head. "That landing really hurt."

Mr. So-and-So smiled. "But wasn't it funny looking back?"

Flora laughed. "Yes, I suppose it was! And poor old Wilder trying to keep up with the boat was funny too!"

"Ah yes," said Mr. So-and-So. "Good times. Good times."

Ewan opened his mouth to speak, but Flora took a big breath and began again.

"So after Mr. So-and-So realized I wasn't dead, I—"

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Ewan waved his hands in the air. “Stop. Stop. Stop.”

Mr. So-and-So and Flora looked at each other.

“Is he always this rude?” asked Mr. So-and-So.

“Not usually,” said Flora.

“I’m not being rude,” said Ewan. “I have questions, that’s all.”

They looked to Ewan, who cleared his throat.

“First of all, we are *not* toddlers. And second of all, *riddled with rattlesnakes* is a ridiculous thing to say because there are no rattlesnakes in Newfoundland.”

“My dear little guttersnipe,” said Mr. So-and-So, “those are not questions. They’re comments!”

“Okay. Here’s a question for you. Did I hear correctly? You rode a *boat* through the forest?”

Mr. So-and-So nodded. “It’s parked out back. Go have a look.”

Ewan pushed his surprisingly delicious oatmeal aside and went outside and to the back of the cabin. There, shrouded by a cluster of balsam fir trees, was a yellow dory with wheels—three wheels, in fact. One on the front, two in the back. The word *Destiny* was painted in a curly script on the side.

“Mr. So-and-So says it’s ambivalent,” said Flora.

“I think you misheard,” said Ewan. “The word is *amphibious*.”

“No, no,” said Mr. So-and-So. “She heard correctly.”

“But *ambivalent* means ‘having mixed feelings.’”

“Trust me,” said Mr. So-and-So. “If you didn’t know whether you were a boat or a car, you’d have mixed feelings too.”

Flora nodded enthusiastically in agreement.

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Ewan examined the *Destiny*. Except for the wheels, it was more boat than car. It looked like a typical dory, pointy at both ends with high sides and a flat bottom. There were two bench seats width-wise across the middle, one near the front and one near the back. The only things car-like about it were the steering wheel and foot pedals near the bow, behind which sat a wooden kitchen chair. Where the engine was kept was another mystery, one that Ewan was not interested in inquiring about lest he get an explanation he didn't want to hear—like there wasn't one and the *Destiny* was powered by the same kind of half-baked magic that makes a whole wing of a building invisible from the outside.

"Now," said Mr. So-and-So, "let's go back inside. I need you two peons to clean up this cabin tout de suite! We've no time for jentacular dillydallying. We have a disappearance to solve!"

Ewan was taken aback. "You're not taking us home to Grumple?"

"Well, I suppose I should," said Mr. So-and-So. "But doesn't The Case of the Man Who Flew Away on a Cloud sound a whole lot funner?"

Ewan felt a burning sensation in his veins. He wasn't prone to outbursts of anger, but Mr. So-and-So had somehow managed to make his blood boil. "This isn't a game!" he shouted. "This is serious! I need to find our father, and you ruined everything by telling Grumple you'd come find us. He'll be expecting us now. We might as well pack it in and

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go home. *Bye-bye, Father. I always knew I'd never see you again.* I don't know why I let a silly notion convince me otherwise!"

Flora let her mouth drop open in shock. Mr. So-and-So, on the other hand, clapped his hands slowly and loudly. "What an eloquent soliloquy. Well done, my little terrestrial leech."

Flora closed her mouth and joined in on the clapping. "Yes. Well done, Ewan. Bravo."

"Stop clapping," said Ewan, his blood at a steady simmer. "That wasn't a performance."

"No," said Mr. So-and-So. "It was more than that. It was a theatrical interpretation of the rather emotional stirrings that are occurring deep down in your *Eigengrau* soul. *Eigengrau*, by the way, means 'intrinsic gray,' and I use this word because I could not bear to describe your soul as dark—not when you're only eleven years of age. For as we all know, darkness of the soul doesn't set in until age fourteen. Now, if I may give you one quick note on your wonderful perfor—excuse me, *theatrical* interpretation, top marks for both the execution and elocution, but the sentiment? Well, I never took you for a quitter."

"There's no shame in admitting defeat," said Ewan. "Especially when the odds are stacked against you."

"What do you think, Flora?" asked Mr. So-and-So.

"I think Ewan was brave to leave home to search for Father, and now that he has our help, he can be even braver."

"What do you mean *has our help*?" said Ewan. "Don't we have to turn around and go back home?"

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"For badness' sake," said Mr. So-and-So. "Untwist your knickers and quit your worrying. I told your grandfather that it might be a while before we returned and promised I'd let no harm come to you."

"You did?"

Mr. So-and-So nodded. "I also said—and I quote—'when a boy has a plan, he must follow it to the death!'"

Ewan cringed. "That sounds a bit extreme."

"These are extreme circumstances," said Mr. So-and-So.

"How will Grumple know you've found us?" asked Ewan.

"Oh, he already knows," said Mr. So-and-So.

"How?" asked Ewan.

"Mr. So-and-So's carrier pigeon delivered a note," said Flora.

Mr. So-and-So looked to the sky. "I sent her last night. She should be back any minute."

"There she is!" said Flora.

Ewan looked up to see a pigeon flapping through the sky as if her wings were about to give up.

"What's wrong with her?" asked Ewan.

"Wrong?" said Mr. So-and-So. "Nothing."

"Why is she flying like that?"

"Like what?"

The threesome watched the bird as it alternated between an unbalanced soar and a frantic flap.

"Like it—" Ewan looked at his sister, then cupped a hand around Mr. So-and-So's ear. "Like it drank too much alcohol," he whispered.

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Mr. So-and So stretched out his arm for the pigeon's landing. "My dear boy, Grace might have a nip of whiskey once in a while, but she never overindulges."

"Grace?"

The threesome watched as the bird crash-landed into the side of the *Destiny*.

Mr. So-and-So picked her up. "I'm hoping she grows into her name."



Soon they were setting out convoy-style across the land. Ewan and Kipper led the way in the Hurricle while Flora rode with Mr. So-and-So in his boat-car. Grace, for some reason, decided to perch on Ewan's shoulder like a parrot. But unlike a parrot, Grace didn't talk. In fact, she made no noise at all. Mr. So-and-So said she'd been mute as long as he'd known her. He wasn't sure why. Ewan wasn't used to birds, and having one on his shoulder was most uncomfortable. Still, he pretended he liked it in the hope that it would make Kipper jealous. So far it was having little effect.

They spent the morning traveling through the woods and over the barrens until they reached the coast. They took a rest in a small community called Tibb's Tickle. A tickle is a saltwater strait between two landmasses—in this case, the cove's main beach and Clonker's Island, which Ewan could see in the distance. After they had all stretched their

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legs and had a bite to eat, Flora set about skipping stones while Mr. So-and-So spread himself across the beach rocks, sunbathing under a cloudy sky. Ewan studied his map. Before nightfall they'd have to find a place to camp along the coast. By lunchtime the next day they'd be on the Kranky Peninsula. By midafternoon the day after that, they'd be in Howl's Inlet. Ewan ran his finger along the route that lay ahead of them. The meandering nature of the coastal road filled him with frustration. He walked down to the shore and lobbed a beach rock into the ocean.

"Well," said Mr. So-and-So, "what's the plan?"

Ewan pointed into the distance. "The Kranky Peninsula is just beyond that island. Too bad we couldn't cross the tickle. If there was a ferry running, we would be there in no time. We might even be able to shorten this trip by one whole night."

"Question," said Mr. So-and-So. "Do you have a brain inside your head, or is your skull filled with maggoty porridge? Too bad we couldn't cross the tickle," he mimicked. "Have you not noticed that I have been driving around in a *b-o-a-t*?"

"A boat with *wheels*," said Ewan, doubting that Mr. So-and-So's vehicle was anywhere near seaworthy.

"My dear Ewan, the *Destiny* is ambivalent, remember?" said Mr. So-and-So. "That means it works on land and water. Sheesh. You're such a mush-for-brains."

Flora overheard. "Are we going on a boat ride?"

Mr. So-and-So raced toward the boat. "Across the tickle we go!"

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Ewan scrambled after them. "What about the horses? And the Hurricle? This doesn't make any sense."

"Not to worry, my little louse!" said Mr. So-and-So. "The *Destiny* is expandable!"

Mr. So-and-So stood in the boat and reached under one of the seats. "There's a button here somewhere." His eyes rolled up in his head as his fingers searched the underside of the wooden bench seat.

Ewan's heart sank. Despite his urgency to get to Howl's Inlet, he'd rather walk there than venture out on open water in Mr. So-and-So's ridiculous vessel.

Mr. So-and-So's eyes popped open wide. "Here it is!"

A second later the *Destiny* made a sputtering noise, followed by a loud *bluuuuuuuurp* as the boat-car stretched itself in all directions, becoming twice as wide and four times as long.

Flora was beside herself with excitement. "I can't believe this! Pinch me, Ewan. I must be dreaming."

Mr. So-and-So made his way to the back of the boat. The stern had split in half lengthwise, opening up like a set of double doors. "Okay, my little nitwits, load her up!"

Ewan rushed to the opening, blocking it from Flora, who was trying to board with a very reluctant-looking Wilder.

"No one is getting on this boat," he said firmly. "It doesn't look the least bit seaworthy, and tickles are known for their currents. Look at how choppy it is today."

"You're the one who said it'd be quicker by boat," said Flora.

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“Yes, but not *this* boat,” said Ewan. “I meant a big ferry. Look at this ridiculous contraption! This whole idea is pure madness!”

“Agreed,” said Mr. So-and-So, grinning with delight.

“Why are you smiling?” Ewan growled. “Can’t you see that this is a wildly dangerous idea? Everything is a joke to you. You think you’re funny and clever, but you’re not. In fact, you are quite rude. The rudest man I’ve ever known! Calling me mush-for-brains? That’s just mean. And you know what? Not only are you mean, you’re strange. *Driving around in a b-o-a-t*. Why did you have to spell the word *boat*? It makes no sense. Nothing you do makes sense.”

Flora gasped. “Ewan!”

Ewan stormed away. Out of the corner of his eye he saw not only the shock in his sister’s face but also the sadness in Mr. So-and-So’s—and if he’d had a mirror, he’d have seen that his own face was a perfect mixture of the two.



Ewan sat alone in the woods, surrounded by fallen trees. He’d surprised himself with his outburst, and his mood was now as dark as the sky he could see peeking through the treetops. That is, until Grace arrived. She flew through an opening in the trees, straight as an arrow, then crashed beak-first into Ewan.

“Oof!” said Ewan, clutching his chest.

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Grace lay dazed and confused a few feet away.

Ewan picked her up and cradled her in his hands. "You okay?"

The poor thing looked utterly pathetic.

"That was really good flying," he said.

Grace tilted her head, as if she was listening.

"You just need to practice your landing," said Ewan.

Grace perked up and flew into the air. Ewan watched as she made a U-turn and circled back toward him. He held out a finger as a perch. "You can do it," he said. But judging by the ever-present vacant look in her eyes, he wasn't so sure.

Grace's approach was slower this time, which Ewan thought might be an advantage, but the more she decelerated, the wobblier she became. She was like a spinning top that was coming to the end of its revolutions. At the last minute Ewan abandoned his idea of offering Grace a finger perch and cupped his two hands together into a bowl shape instead. Grace drifted this way and that, falling like a feather in the wind. Ewan caught her softly and said, "You are still rattled from your crash landing. Try again later. Once you're rested, I'm sure you'll do much better."

Grace stared into the distance. Assuming she was embarrassed, Ewan changed the subject.

"Can you believe that Mr. So-and-So?" he said. "It's almost as if he wants to get us all killed!"

Grace scuffed her claws against Ewan's palm like a bull about to charge.

"Ouch!" said Ewan, placing her on the ground.

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Grace began pecking at one of her legs. *Tink-tink-tink. Tink-tink-tink.*

Ewan blew on his hand to cool the sting.

Tink-tink-tink. Tink-tink-tink.

“What on earth are you doing?” he asked.

Then he clued in. Grace was a *carrier* pigeon. He reached down and pulled a strip of paper from a small metal tube attached to her leg. It was a notion.

The sulkiest of sulkers sulk with good reason.

Ewan sighed and tucked the paper into his pocket with his three other notions.

“Come on, Grace. Let’s go.”

Ewan carried Grace in his right hand and stroked her head with his left. As she leaned into him, he thought of Kipper, who allowed Ewan to pet him only when *he* needed attention, not when Ewan did.

Ewan pulled the bird in closer. “Thanks for coming to find me, Grace.”



Four

Mr. So-and-So and Flora sat in the now-loaded boat, looking anxious and forlorn. Flora jumped up when she saw Ewan. “Oh, thank goodness,” she said. “We were worried sick.”

The relief on Mr. So-and-So’s face was easy to see. Still, he wagged a finger at Ewan and tutted. “One minute you’re blathering on about a shortcut across the tickle, and the next you’re running off into the woods, wasting the very time you were trying to save!”

Ewan ignored him and boarded the *Destiny*, closing the stern behind him. He made his way to the bow of the boat, stepping over the first bench seat and squeezing past William and Wilder, who were tethered to a rather rusty-looking bolt screwed into the hull, before coming across Kipper

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sprawled across the deck in a way that made him look ten times larger than he actually was.

“Move,” said Ewan.

Kipper opened one eye and, seeing the pigeon in Ewan’s arms, let out a spine-tingling hiss. Ewan stepped over him and stroked the top of Grace’s head. “You’re a good little bird, aren’t you?”

Ewan sat on the second bench seat, next to Flora, and said, “Sorry to worry you, Flora.” And to Mr. So-and-So, who was sitting in the yellow kitchen chair, he said, “I accept your apology.”

“Mr. So-and-So apologized?” said Flora. “For what?”

Ewan passed Flora the notion.

“How is this an apology?” she asked.

“He acknowledged that I had good reason to storm away,” said Ewan. “Which I can only assume means he’s sorry for insisting that we cross the tickle in this silly—”

“Anchors away!”

Ewan and Flora toppled backward as the boat-car lurched forward and bounced haphazardly over the beach rocks toward the ocean.

“Stop!” yelled Ewan. “I can’t swim!”

The *Destiny* entered the water with a splash.

“It’s a good thing you’re in a boat then, isn’t it?” said Mr. So-and-So.

William and Wilder whinnied as the *Destiny* bobbed up and down on the choppy waters. “I think we should turn

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around,” said Ewan. He was beginning to feel a bit nauseous. “The horses don’t like it.”

“They look pretty happy to me,” said Flora.

Mr. So-and-So felt around under the steering wheel. “Let me just...ah, here we go.”

They heard a mechanical whooshing sound, and then the boat stopped bobbing and began moving forward with a quick and steady movement.

“What was that?” asked Flora.

“I activated the fins. We’ll be moving at a fair clip now.”

Ewan dared to look over the side. Attached to the hubcap of the rear wheel was a pectoral fin, like that of a whale. Artificial, of course. As the wheel spun round, the fin propelled the boat forward. Judging by the speed at which they moved, Ewan assumed there was a matching fin on the other rear wheel as well.

While Flora was happy to sit up front on the bench, Ewan took Grace to the back of the boat and hunkered down in the hull. With the *Destiny* moving forward at a steady pace, it no longer wobbled about on the waves, which did wonders for Ewan’s nausea. It did nothing for his nervousness, however. He said a little prayer that they’d reach dry land once again—and soon.

The breeze off the water was cool. Ewan folded up the bottom of his sweater and placed Grace inside. The snug fit of his sweater made the newly formed pouch sit close to his body. Ewan felt like a mama kangaroo. “That’s a good

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little baby,” he said, stroking Grace’s head. He looked to see if Kipper was watching, but the cat was fast asleep at Mr. So-and-So’s feet, as if he was snoozing by a fire and not on a tumultuous journey across a tickle.

“Ha!” said Mr. So-and-So, taking his eyes off the ocean and looking back at Ewan. “A swammock!”

Ewan peeked over the gunwale and scanned the ocean. “A swammock?” he said. “What’s a swammock?”

“You should know,” said Mr. So-and-So, turning his attention back to the horizon in front of them. “You invented it.”

Ewan looked down at Grace and smiled. A sweater hammock. A swammock. He liked that. But what he liked even more was the soft coo that he heard coming from his new friend.

“Mr. So-and-So,” Ewan called. “Did you hear that? Grace cooed!”

“Well, I’ll be,” said Mr. So-and-So. “There’s a first time for everything!”

The boat had a certain rhythm to it, one that Ewan was starting to enjoy. With his spirits lifted, Ewan relaxed into the hull and watched his little sister play on the bench seat. “Look, Ewan, I’m driving the boat!” Ewan smiled as Flora pretended to turn an invisible wheel. “Ahoy there, matey!” she called to imaginary passersby. Mr. So-and-So turned to look at her. The smile on his face was heartbreakingly familiar. It was the same one Ewan wore when he looked at the window boxes on their yellow saltbox house. It was

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a sad smile, the kind where the corners of the mouth are coaxed upward by fondness, but there's a wish on the lips to feel love without loss. Ewan knew this wistfulness all too well. It seemed that Mr. So-and-So did too.

"Look," said Flora. "We're halfway there!"

The sight of Clonker's Island filled Ewan with anticipation. Tomorrow they'd be in Howl's Inlet. Would his father be in the little log cabin as Ewan had imagined? Would he be happy to see Ewan? What if he wasn't there at all? What then? These were the questions swirling in Ewan's head when Mr. So-and-So cut the engine.

"What are you doing?" asked Ewan as the boat drifted aimlessly.

"Having a snack," said Mr. So-and-So, taking a ham sandwich out of his left trouser pocket. "Want a bite?"

Ewan gritted his teeth. "What I want," he said, "is to get off this boat."

Mr. So-and-So peeled his sandwich apart and threw some ham to Kipper, who, sensing the incoming meat, opened his eyes and mouth just long enough to retrieve it. "That's a good little cat," said Mr. So-and-So.

"Can Trotters have some?" asked Flora, opening her puppet's mouth wide.

Mr. So-and-So reached into his pocket and pulled out another sandwich. "Fetch," he said, tossing it into the air.

Flora jumped to her feet and caught the sandwich in midair. A moment later she was tucking in.

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Ewan was fuming. “Can’t we just get going now?” he asked.

“Might I suggest,” said Mr. So-and-So, tossing a piece of ham in Ewan’s direction, “that you sit back and enjoy the ride?”

Ewan slapped the ham into the ocean. “This is not a ride—it’s a mission.”

Mr. So-and-So put a finger to his mouth, then a hand to his ear. He leaned out over the water. “Did you hear that?”

“Hear what?” asked Flora.

It was faint, but Ewan could hear it.

“How come you do me like you do do do?”

It was getting louder.

“How come you do me like you do?”

Mr. So-and-So’s face was bursting with joy as he sang back a response. *“Why do you try to make me feel so blue? I’ve done nothing to you.”*

A second later he was holding a mackerel like a microphone. It had jumped right out of the sea into his hand. Together the duo sang, *“Do me right or else just let me be. ‘Cause I can beat you doing what you’re doing to me.”*

“A singing fish!” Flora shrieked.

Ewan blinked, as if closing and opening his eyes would make the scene disappear. Mr. So-and-So and the mackerel sang in harmony with such gusto, it quickly became clear that the song would be sung in its entirety. Flora and Kipper were immediately engaged. Flora clapped along, while Kipper swiped at the mackerel. Grace, on the other hand, seemed to be looking through the scene rather than at it.

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She was a strange creature. Although clearly not as strange as a singing mackerel.

As part of their big finish, the duo elongated the final *do* for so long that they had to pause for breath to continue.

“Dooooooooooooo”—gasp—“ooooooooooo...”

Flora joined in.

And Kipper. *“Meeeeooooooooow...”*

The horses too. *“Neeeeeeeeeeigh...”*

Ewan, vibrating with anger, screamed at the top of his lungs. “If you don’t stop singing, I’m going to jump out of this boat and swim to the Kranky Peninsula myself!”

“That’s odd,” said Mr. So-and-So. “I thought you said you couldn’t swim.”

Ewan let out a roar and lunged toward Mr. So-and-So.

“Ewan!” yelled Flora.

Mr. So-and-So grinned. “Someone found their sea legs!”

When Ewan reached him, Mr. So-and-So held the mackerel in front of him like a sword. “Whoa, whoa. Easy, my precious little nutcase.”

Ewan snatched the fish and threw it into the sea.

Mr. So-and-So gasped. “Ewan! I never took you for a murderer!” He hung his head over the side of the boat. “You’ve drowned my very best friend.”

“*Drowned* isn’t a word,” said Ewan. “And your friend is fine. He’s a fish.”

“You mean *she*,” said Mr. So-and-So. “Honestly, Ewan, you’re so presumptive.”

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“And you,” said Ewan, “are infuriating. You have the nerve to give *me* a lecture about wasting time, yet here you are, lollygagging about on the ocean like we have all the time in the world!”

Mr. So-and-So’s face lit up. “That reminds me.” He reached into his left trouser pocket and pulled out three large swirl lollipops. “Who wants one?”

Despite his anger, the sight of the sweet rainbow suckers made Ewan’s mouth water. He was reaching out for one when Flora said, “Ewan, please don’t throw them overboard.”

Ewan sighed and went back to his hunkering-down spot. He unwrapped his lollipop and took a lick.

“I take it you didn’t like my singing,” said Mr. So-and-So.

“It wasn’t the singing,” said Ewan. “It was the song.”

“Perhaps you’d like me to sing you a serenade instead,” said Mr. So-and-So.

“Absolutely not,” said Ewan.

“What’s a serenade?” asked Flora.

“A serenade is the sweetest of songs,” said Mr. So-and-So. “It’s sung to a person you care about.”

“I want a serenade!” Flora whined.

“And I want to go to the Kranky Peninsula,” said Ewan.

“Very well,” said Mr. So-and-So, moving back to the steering wheel. He adjusted his beanie and started the engine. Instead of chugging to life, the engine choked.

“Is something wrong?” said Ewan.

Mr. So-and-So turned the key again. The engine sputtered.

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Mr. So-and-So shrugged and sat back down. "Probably needs a rest, that's all."

"A rest?" said Ewan. "Engines don't need rest. They either work or they don't!"

Mr. So-and-So snapped off a piece of his lollipop with his two front teeth. "In that case," he said, "the engine's broken."

Ewan threw his lollipop over the side. Flora gasped. "I give up," said Ewan.

"I wouldn't worry," said Mr. So-and-So. "The tickle will step in and do its job."

"What do you mean *do its job*?" said Ewan. "Its job is to simply exist."

"If you say so," said Mr. So-and-So.

They sat in the *Destiny* for another half hour or so, Flora and Mr. So-and-So enjoying their sugary confections, Ewan wishing he hadn't tossed his into the sea. They were drifting to the east, away from the peninsula, when the waves of the tickle picked up.

"Here we go," said Mr. So-and-So with a grin.

The boat began swaying from side to side.

"What's happening?" asked Ewan.

"Come on, Trotters," said Flora. "Let's surf!"

Flora stood in the middle of the hull with her legs bent slightly and her arms out straight. "Yippee!" she yelled as the swaying intensified.

"Flora, be careful," said Ewan.

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Soon the boat was no longer swaying but was rocking, so much so that splashes of water began sloshing over the sides.

"Flora!" yelled Ewan. "Sit down!"

"For goodness' sake, Ewan!" she said. "Leave me alone. I'm trying to have fun!"

As the momentum picked up, the splashes of water became bucketfuls, and Ewan's nervousness turned to full-blown terror. The horses snorted in distress, and even Kipper looked slightly alarmed.

"Isn't it marvelous?" said Mr. So-and-So. "The tickle has come to life!"

As suddenly as they had risen up, the waves died down. Ewan moved to the stern and watched the waves ripple away from the boat like a tide receding from the shore.

Flora joined him. "What's happening?" she asked. "Where are they going?"

"I don't know," said Ewan. On the surface, the rough seas appeared to be coming to an end, but Ewan couldn't shake the feeling that they were just getting started. There was something very sinister about the way the waves had crept away from the boat.

The retreating whitecaps stopped about a mile out and created a ring around the *Destiny*. They pulsed in place.

"Ha!" said Mr. So-and-So. "The water is treading water!"

Suddenly the sky above them darkened. The waves began to bubble a little higher and a little faster. Ewan hugged his swammock. "It's okay, Grace," he whispered. He stroked the

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top of her head with his finger. Bringing her comfort brought him comfort too. He'd never felt that with an animal before. Kipper barely gave him the time of day.

The waves rolled back as if they were gearing up for a running start. With Grace secure in her pouch, Ewan grabbed the straps of Flora's dungarees with one hand and the boat's railing with the other. A moment later the boat shook uncontrollably as the waves thundered toward them. The sound was that of a million waterfalls, and there was a stench so strong it was as if the entire ocean had been churned up beneath them.

Mr. So-and-So leaped across the deck and covered the children with his body. "Tidal wave!" he yelled.

Suddenly the thunderous roar stopped.

Ewan, who had closed his eyes in fright, dared to open one.

"Jumping Jehoshaphat," he whispered.

Flora followed his gaze. "Holy moly."

The threesome stood up slowly, looking around in awe at the waves that stood just short of crashing, twenty feet high and completely surrounding the boat. Flora reached out and put her hand through the wall of water. When she pulled her hand back, it was perfectly dry.

"Amazing," said Mr. So-and-So.

Ewan agreed. It *was* amazing. Beautiful too. But he was also very aware that an ocean's worth of water could collapse on them at any moment. "Try the engine again," he said. "If Flora can put her hand through it, perhaps we can drive through it."

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“Goodness gracious, Ewan,” said Mr. So-and-So. “Can’t you relax for five minutes and enjoy what’s happening around you? Be in the moment, for pity’s sake.”

“I don’t want to be in this moment,” said Ewan. “I want to be on the Kranky Peninsula. We should be heading for Howl’s Inlet by now. Not here surrounded by—”

Ewan turned to his sister, who had begun to giggle uncontrollably. “Flora? What on earth are you laughing at?”

His question was answered by the sight of five watery fingers tickling her belly. It was as if there were a real-life hand pushing through the water and wearing the sea like a glove. Its fingers rolled gently and playfully across Flora’s tummy, playing her like a piano. Each giggle was a note, her laughter a song.

Then came a “Ho-ho-ho-ha-ha-ha!” Mr. So-and-So was being tickled, not by five fingers but ten.

Soon the horses were hee-hawing like donkeys, and for once Kipper’s meows sounded pleasant.

Ewan knew he was next. A transparent hand reached for him, its fingers extended.

“Go away,” said Ewan, folding into himself.

The fingertips did not go away. Surprisingly, they were not wet, as Ewan had expected, but smooth and soft as they tickled his belly. Ewan hadn’t laughed in a long time and was annoyed to think these ridiculous fingers might be the thing that would make him feel joy. He resisted until they reached his most ticklish spot of all—the slope of his neck. He bit his

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lip as the fingertips brushed across his skin, dancing lightly from his jawbone to his shoulder. When the fingers reached the hollow above his clavicle, Ewan could no longer hold it in, and as soon as his reluctant laughter joined the others', the boat took off at great speed, fueled by their chortling.

The surroundings were a blur as they whizzed across the tickle, and within a few moments they were deposited on a rocky beach at the start of the Kranky Peninsula. The fingers were gone and the ocean was calm, but Ewan did not feel relief. He felt frustration. It was getting dark. Crossing the tickle was *supposed* to be a shortcut. If only Mr. So-and-So hadn't cut the engine! Perhaps if he'd left it alone, they would have made it to the other side. Now, because of the delay, they'd have to spend two nights on the peninsula rather than one.

Mr. So-and-So turned the key in the ignition. The engine purred. "Well, whaddya know," he said. "It works!"

Soon they were bumping up the beach toward a coastal road while Mr. So-and-So sang, "*How come you do me like you do, do, do...*" Ewan covered his ears.



Mr. So-and-So stopped the vehicle and gave the occupants the choice of keeping the car elongated or reverting to their original convoy. Ewan didn't give Flora a chance to respond.

"I'm riding in the Hurricle," he said. "Alone."

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Now, as he led the pack up the coast, he hoped to get at least an hour's traveling in before nightfall. William and Wilder, still dazed from the boat journey, veered this way and that, making the ride a dizzying affair. Ewan hoped they'd soon get their bearings.

Ewan looked down at his swammock. Grace, who was lying on her back, looked up at him. He reached down and lightly stroked her belly.

"What about you, Grace?" he said. "Are you ticklish?"

Grace closed her eyes. Clearly, she didn't want to talk about it.

At dusk they pulled into a clearing in a nearby wood. As the sun did its disappearing act, the temperature dropped drastically, making it feel like a late-fall evening rather than a summer one.

"I'm cold," said Flora, rubbing the arms of the lightweight sweater she wore under her dungarees. Ewan felt the chill as well.

"Don't worry," said Mr. So-and-So. "I'll have you toasty in no time."

Within minutes he had built a fire. While the children warmed themselves in front of it, Mr. So-and-So began building a lean-to shelter. He started by tying a long, thin fallen tree between two large oaks.

"That looks like a gymnast's bar," said Flora. "Can I have a swing?"

"It's not very high," said Mr. So-and-So.

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"I don't mind," she said.

Mr. So-and-So smiled as Flora ran toward him. As the bar was only about five feet from the ground, Flora was able to grab it easily. Mr. So-and-So watched as she swung back and forth like a monkey, her legs pulled up so they didn't drag across the ground.

"Look," she said. "I'm in the Olympics!"

Before the end of the school year, Flora's teacher, Miss Inkpen, had shown the class photographs from the 1920 Summer Olympics. Flora had been particularly taken with the gymnasts. The fact that they were all men did not go unnoticed. By the next day Flora had formed her own Olympic team, and recesses were spent swinging from tree limbs and improvising other acrobatic feats that Flora felt were in keeping with the sport. Unlike the real Olympics, Flora's events were open to both boys and girls.

"Let's see your dismount," said Mr. So-and-So.

Flora landed firmly on her two feet, sticking the landing like a pro. She threw her arms into the air. "Ta-da!"

Mr. So-and-So applauded. "Well done," he said. "Ten out of ten."

Mr. So-and-So stacked a line of fallen trees against Flora's gymnast bar. He placed them at a forty-five-degree angle to create a sloped wall. Flora bent her head and stepped in.

"I like your little hidey-hole," she said. "It's very cozy."

"It's not a hidey-hole," said Mr. So-and-So. "It's a lean-to. And it's not done yet either. Come on. Out you get."

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Mr. So-and-So covered the floor with soft spruce boughs and topped them with three heavy blankets he'd retrieved from somewhere deep inside the *Destiny*. When he was done, he stood up tall. "Check it out."

Ewan and Flora crawled inside. "I want the middle bed," said Flora, bouncing on the boughs. The pair lay side by side, about a foot apart from each other, wrapped in their warm blankets. The nighttime stars, twinkling through the gaps of the tree-branch roof, and the heat from the fire were welcome.

"Ewan?"

"Yes, Flora?"

"When you see Father, will you hug him?"

The sadness that shrouded his little sister's question hurt Ewan's heart. Poor Flora. How long had she been worrying about seeing Father again? Ewan answered in a way he hoped would ease her fears. The fact that his answer was untrue was beside the point.

"Of course I'll hug him," said Ewan. "Seeing Father means we'll be a family again! I can't wait to have a picnic at the cape. I'm going to ask Father to make Mother's deviled eggs. What are you going to ask for?"

Flora's eyes lit up. "Jam sandwiches and Mrs. O'Reilly's date squares!"

For the next little while the siblings talked about their favorite foods. Ewan was glad the conversation had been steered away from Father. He wasn't in the mood for a game of pretend.

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It wasn't long before Mr. So-and-So was calling them back to the fire. "Suppertime!"

He passed them each a bowl of soup. Ewan wondered how he'd have fared if Mr. So-and-So hadn't tagged along. Likely not very well. Truth was, Ewan had never made a fire in his life. For food, he'd planned on surviving on foraged berries and the "borrowed" supplies from the communal root cellar. For warmth, he'd planned on sleeping close to William. He hadn't even packed a heavy blanket. Despite his foolishness, Mr. So-and-So sure was capable. Not that Ewan would ever tell him. For now he'd keep his gratefulness to himself.

After they ate their soup, Mr. So-and-So went to the *Destiny* and returned with a cast-iron frying pan and a large mackerel. He slung the mackerel into the pan and put both on the fire.

"Wait," said Ewan. "That's not—"

"Of course not," said Mr. So-and-So. "I'd never eat a friend."

He gave the pan a shake and winked at Flora. "A friend's brother perhaps."

Flora and Mr. So-and-So laughed. Ewan, who was tired of being on the outside, tried to laugh too. What came out was a strained croak.

When the fish was ready, they ate in silence, even Mr. So-and-So—which was a testament to the lingering hunger they felt despite their first course of soup. When they were done, they fed the animals. Leftover fish for Kipper, and oats for Grace and the horses. Soon they were

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settled into their beds in the lean-to. Ewan felt content. His stomach was full, and the crackle of the fire relaxed him. It felt like they were on a camping trip, not a missing-person expedition, and Ewan welcomed this escape from reality. For the first time ever, he allowed himself to be in the moment, as Mr. So-and-So had suggested earlier. With the stars sparkling high above him, and Flora breathing lightly beside him, it was a pretty nice place to be.

“Now,” said Mr. So-and-So, “who’s up for a ghost story?”

And just like that, Ewan wanted to be out of the moment. “I don’t think it’s a good idea to scare Flora this close to bedtime,” he said.

“I won’t be scared,” said Flora. “I love ghost stories.”

“Did you hear that, Ewan?” said Mr. So-and-So. “Your sister loves ghost stories.”

“Can’t we just go to sleep?” said Ewan. “We have a big day tomorrow.”

“Don’t worry,” said Mr. So-and-So. “I’ll make it short. And besides, scaring is caring.”

He cleared his throat. “Once upon a time in a land where summer feels like winter, where goose bumps take up permanent residence on the skin and icicles live in nostrils, there lived a little boy named...let’s see...Evan. Evan had a little sister named...Laura.”

Flora giggled. Ewan was far from delighted.

“One night,” continued Mr. So-and-So, “Evan and Laura were all tucked into bed when they heard a scratching at

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their window. 'Mommy! Daddy!' Evan called. But Mommy and Daddy were nowhere to be found. Evan and Laura were all alone. What happened next will make the hairs stand up on the back of your neck."

Ewan was shocked by the cruelty of Mr. So-and-So's words and quickly cut him off before he could continue with his wretched story. "How about *I* tell a story?" he suggested.

"But Mr. So-and-So is telling one," said Flora.

Explaining why Mr. So-and-So's words were cruel seemed equally unkind. Not only would Flora be reminded that she was essentially an orphan, but her rosy impression of Mr. So-and-So would be crushed as well.

"It's okay," said Mr. So-and-So. "I don't mind. Go ahead, Ewan. Make it juicy."

Ewan cleared his throat. "Once upon a time there was a wicked warlock named...hmm, let's see...I know... Mr. See-and-See."

Flora giggled.

"Mr. See-and-See was a mean and foolish man who said very foolish things. One day Mr. See-and-See was standing on the edge of a cliff when a big gust of wind came. He swayed this way and that, desperately trying to keep his balance. 'Mommy! Daddy!' he cried. But he was all alone. It was just him, the cliff and the wind. What happened next will make the hairs stand up on the back of your neck."

The smug smile Ewan was wearing slipped off his face as Mr. So-and-So slowly and quietly left the lean-to and moved

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to the fire. Kipper, who had been curled up on Mr. So-and-So's stomach, followed him out, hissing at Ewan on the way. Out of the corner of his eye, Ewan saw Flora sitting up, hugging Trotters to her chest. "You're the mean one, Ewan," she whispered.

The pang of shame Ewan felt was followed first by embarrassment, then defensiveness. Shouldn't Mr. So-and-So feel a pang of shame too? Having the children in his story call for their absent parents seemed heartless and uncaring. Still, that didn't make what Ewan had done right either. It had upset Flora and hurt Mr. So-and-So's feelings. If Ewan's mother were alive, she'd have been disappointed. While many of the townsfolk believed in "an eye for an eye," Ewan's mother had not. She'd believed retaliation only made things worse, that forgiveness and understanding were more important. But Mr. So-and-So was the most confusing person he'd ever met. How could Ewan forgive someone he didn't understand?

Ewan reached out and stroked Grace, who was sleeping beside him. Maybe he should apologize anyway. For Flora's sake. He'd started to get up when he heard Mr. So-and-So speak from where he was sitting by the fire.

"I'm sorry, Ewan. You are right. I *am* foolish. I didn't even think. It was just a story. I didn't mean anything by it. I think it's because I'm selfish. I never consider other people's feelings. What I said was insensitive, but it wasn't deliberate. I meant no harm, I can promise you that."

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The camp fell quiet except for a few sniffles coming from Flora. A few moments later Mr. So-and-So returned to the lean-to. Before he moved to his bed, he paused in front of Flora, gently cupped her chin and tilted her face upward. “No need to cry, my little wood louse. All is well. Lie back now and go to sleep.”

Flora did as she was told, and the camp was quiet again. The inside of Ewan’s brain, however, was abuzz with noise.

How could one man be utterly annoying and impossibly lovable at the very same time?

He seemed to delight in calamity.

He was careless and reckless and oftentimes rude.

But Ewan had believed him when he’d said he meant no harm.

He knew it was true not just by his words but by the way he had applauded Flora’s dismount.

And the way he had cupped her chin.

He was as gentle as he was reckless.

An impossible man.

But a good one.

Ewan cleared his throat again.

“Once upon a time there was a boy named Ewan. One day his father disappeared. He should have gone to find him, but he didn’t. Because he was afraid. Ewan was a real scaredy-cat. He jumped at the sight of his own shadow. But then Ewan met a man named Mr. So-and-So. Mr. So-and-So had a wonderful shop full of marvelous notions. One of the

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notions helped Ewan be brave. Ewan was glad to have met Mr. So-and-So. In a way, Mr. So-and-So changed his life."

"I like this story," Flora said sleepily.

Mr. So-and-So remained unusually quiet.

"He was a kind man," Ewan continued, hoping to draw him out. "He was somewhat magical too."

"Somewhat?" said Mr. So-and-So.

Ewan smiled. "Rumor had it he could make inanimate objects become real. Legend says he once made a pink pig puppet come to life. It even talked!"

Flora extended her arm so that Trotters was facing her. "Trotters?" she said. "Are you alive? Can you talk? Are you Scottish? Can you roll your *r*'s like Mr. Abernathy at the Mercantile?"

Ewan had taken a risk he hoped would pay off. He watched as Flora began to move Trotters's mouth.

"RRRRROII MY RRRRRRRRRRRRRRRR'S? WHY, OF COURRRRRRRSE I CAN, LASSIE, I'M FROM ABERRRRRRRRRRRDEEN!"

"Ewan!" Flora yelled. "He's talking! All by himself!"

Flora moved her hand inside the puppet's mouth again.

"Now, my little squirrrrrrel," said Trotters. "It's time for you to settle doon and gae to sleep."

Ewan took a sidelong glance at Mr. So-and-So. He could barely see his lips moving.

"Close your wee peepers now, Florrrrrra, and hae a good night's rrrrrest."

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Flora settled into her blanket, hugging the puppet on her arm.

Ewan wondered if Mr. So-and-So had used magic or ventriloquism. Not that it mattered. What mattered was that Flora was happy.

And for now, so was he.



Five

As Ewan drifted off to sleep, he saw his mother filling their window boxes with forget-me-nots. She let Ewan pat the dirt around the roots. She said the flowers could feel his kindness through his fingertips, and as such they would grow like weeds. The pair sat on the ground facing their bright yellow house, surrounded by the salty sea air and seagulls circling the sky. Ewan leaned against his mother, his head resting on her shoulder. His breath got deeper and deeper. He was almost asleep when his mother whispered, "Wake up, Ewan. Here they come." Ewan watched as the plants got taller and taller, playfully chasing each other up and over the front of the house as if they were having a game of tag. They seemed to multiply as they shot up the wall, intertwining and intermingling as they raced. Soon all that could be seen of the house was the

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odd pop of yellow peeking through a sea of greens and blues. Then there was singing. High-pitched and happy. Little faces had appeared on the centers of each flower. *"How come you do me like you do do do? How come you do me like you do?"*

Ewan woke with a start. The stars in the sky no longer twinkled, they flashed. *Warning! Warning!* Ewan couldn't run. He struggled to breathe. The Old Hag's silhouette was slight, but her presence weighed a thousand tons. She put a hand on his chest. Ewan tried to push it away, but it was so warm and so strong that he wrapped his fingers around it.

"It's okay," said Mr. So-and-So.

Ewan struggled to catch the breath the Old Hag had taken.

"In through the nose, out through the mouth."

Ewan did as he was told. When his breathing relaxed, Mr. So-and-So patted his hand and went back to his sleeping bag. Their interaction had happened so fast, Ewan wondered if it too had been a dream. The lingering warmth on his hand proved otherwise. Ewan moved to the fire, hoping Mr. So-and-So would join him. He did.

"It wasn't just a bad dream," he said, his voice low so as not to disturb Flora. "It was more than that."

"I know," said Mr. So-and-So.

"You do?" said Ewan.

"Don't worry," he said. "I sent Edith on her way."

"Edith?"

"You think her mother named her the Old Hag? Anyway, I told her to go find another young whippersnapper to terrify.

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‘This one is mine,’ I said. ‘If anyone’s going to scare the bejesus out of this youngster, it’s going to be me.’”

Ewan felt oddly honored. “Oh. Well, thanks.”

Then it sunk in.

“Wait a minute. You *know* the Old Hag?”

Mr. So-and-So nodded. “We usually see each other at the ODD Ball.”

“The ODD Ball?” said Ewan.

“Well, it’s more of a meeting than a ball, but there’s *always* dancing. Edith does a mean foxtrot.”

“The Old Hag can dance?” asked Ewan.

“Oh yes,” said Mr. So-and-So. “But only after all business has been conducted. As president of the ODD Squad, it’s a rule I strictly enforce.”

“What’s the ODD Squad?” asked Ewan.

“It’s a local business association I started. To be a member you must be otherworldly, devious or delightfully dangerous. *O-D-D*. Get it?”

“I get it,” said Ewan. “But why would the Old Hag be a member? She doesn’t have a business.”

Mr. So-and-So looked at Ewan as if he had just grown horns. “You think she scares the poopsies out of people out of the goodness of her heart? Creeping about at all hours isn’t a hobby, you know!”

“But how does she make money?”

“She doesn’t. She gets paid in stories.”

“What do you mean?”

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“Think about it. Everyone loves to talk about their visits from the Old Hag. For some, it’s the greatest story of their lives! All of these stories become part of the Old Hag’s legacy—and having a legacy is way more valuable than having a bank account.”

“But the Old Hag isn’t real,” said Ewan. “Father said she was just a figment of my imagination.”

“I’m sure your father is a fine man, Ewan,” said Mr. So-and-So. “But one man’s trash is another man’s treasure.”

Ewan sighed. Having a conversation with Mr. So-and-So was like herding cats. His words sent Ewan off in all directions, and no matter how hard he tried, he couldn’t grasp a single one.

“Why is your face like that, Ewan?”

“Like what?”

“Scrunched up like a crushed tin can.”

“It’s my confused face, I guess. I have no idea what trash or treasure has to do with the Old Hag.”

Mr. So-and-So stoked the fire. “What I’m saying is, what might be a figment to one person might be very real to the next.”

“How?” asked Ewan.

“Well, it depends on how open you are to possibility. Most people *want* to believe that the Old Hag is imaginary—it’s easier that way. Other, more brave people are willing to entertain the idea that she’s as real as the Easter Bunny—because she is.”

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Ewan tried to picture Mr. So-and-So and the Old Hag doing the foxtrot at the ODD Ball. It was difficult, because for Ewan the Old Hag was just a shadow. He wondered who else was in Mr. So-and-So's business association.

"Mr. So-and-So," he asked, "is Duncan Abernathy in your squad? He owns the Mercantile in Bucket Cove."

"Well, let's see," said Mr. So-and-So. "Is he otherworldly?"

"No."

"Devious?"

"Definitely not."

"Delightfully dangerous?"

Ewan laughed. "If anything, he's dangerously delightful."

"Ah," said Mr. So-and-So. "One of those overly nice types, eh? So sweet they make your teeth ache? Yuck."

"I'm guessing he's not in your club," said Ewan.

Mr. So-and-So shrugged. "If he's not ODD, he's not in the squad." He took a small brown paper bag out of his left trouser pocket and offered it to Ewan.

"What's this?" asked Ewan.

"Some licorice allsorts to keep your big gob occupied," he said. "I'm about to start a soliloquy."

Ewan popped one of the colorful confections in his mouth, happy to keep quiet for as long as it took to get through the bag.

Mr. So-and-So closed his eyes for a moment, as if in prayer, then opened them slowly and dramatically and began to speak.

"It was 1918, six years ago now, and I was going through a lonely patch. My grandmother, who'd run the Notion Shop

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alongside me, had passed away two years before, and I still missed her dearly. We wrote many of the notions together, you know. It was my idea, of course. I was about your age when I began at the shop. I didn't like it at first. It was as boring as a non-singing mackerel. But one day I had a notion about the word *notion*. I thought, Notions...hmm...notions...hmm...NOTIONS! It made Granny fall off her chair. Don't worry—she just chipped a bone in her ankle. If she'd broken a whole leg, I'd have had to put her down. Anyhoo, I started writing notions—thoughts, ideas, impressions—with the aim to give them to folks who needed them, people who looked troubled, forlorn or just plain bored. Granny and I magicked the secret wing in no time. We were a good team, the old bat and me, and—”

Ewan almost choked on a blue jelly button. “Did you say *magicked?*” he sputtered.

Mr. So-and-So passed Ewan some water. “I taught a mackerel to sing. Are you really so surprised?”

Ewan took a swig and caught his breath. “I suppose not.”

“I get my abilities from my granny. She, in turn, got them from her grandfather. They skip a generation, you see. I suppose the family legacy will die with me. I mean, I certainly won't ever be married. Who'd have me? Now, can I continue my soliloquy, or are you going to choke to death in the middle of it?”

Ewan searched the bag for another jelly button. “I'll try not to.”

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Mr. So-and-So cleared his throat and continued. “We were a good team, the old bat and me, and when a customer came in who looked in need of a pick-me-up, Granny would distract the other customers while I lured the unsuspecting soul into the secret wing. It made me feel like Robin Hood. I wasn’t stealing from the rich and giving to the poor, but I was certainly giving gifts to people when they needed them most. Sometimes it was a laugh or a giggle to lighten their moods. Other times it was more profound, life-changing even. Granny worried that word would get out about the secret wing and we’d either be inundated with visitors or burned at the stake for our magical and witchlike tendencies. Fortunately, our secret-wing visitors always left a bit stunned. As they walked up the cliff, they never failed to look back and shake their heads. They’d think, Did that really happen? The secret wing became their little secret, one they never would share lest their friends and family think them barmy.

“Creating notions was good fun. I liked to make up my own, while Granny preferred inspirational quotes that she came across and thought worth sharing. Her face would light up and she’d scream ‘Eureka!’ as if she’d just found the cure to hiccups. Like I said, we worked well together. After she died I missed her terribly. I felt a yearning. For friendship. For community. For fellow businesspeople who had that extra something. Quirky individuals who wouldn’t think my secret wing odd, who would understand my

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creative, *somewhat magical* side. So I placed a want ad in the paper, looking for like-minded associates. Entrepreneurial, creative types who ticked off some of the boxes in the ODD criteria. Before I knew it, responses were flooding in."

Ewan ate his last licorice allsort, a circular pink one with a black center, and tossed the empty bag into the fire. "Why would you want dishonest people in your association?" he asked.

"Who said anything about dishonesty?"

"Isn't that what *devious* means?"

"My dear boy, why do you always look at things in such a negative way? Deviousness is more than dishonesty. It's about being clever and underhanded and sneaky. Anyone can be dishonest, but deviousness requires a certain level of genius. Can't you ever give credit where credit is due? Sheesh!"

Ewan marveled at Mr. So-and-So's twisted logic. "So where do you fall in the ODD criteria?" he asked. "Are you other-worldly, devious or delightfully dangerous?"

"I'm not one to toot my horn," said Mr. So-and-So, reaching into his pocket and pulling out a tiny bugle on which he produced the tiniest peep, "but I'd like to think I'm all three."

"Who else is in the club?" asked Ewan.

"Have you heard of the Vanishing Woman of Quentin Lake?"

"I've heard of Quentin Lake. My father took me hiking there once. We didn't see a woman, though. Perhaps she had vanished by the time we got there."

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“Lucky you,” said Mr. So-and-So. “Legend has it she likes to appear late at night, dressed in white, on the side of the road. When an automobile passes by, she sticks out her thumb, hoping for a lift. Of course, what passerby would stop for such a scary apparition? *I* wouldn’t stop—would you?”

Ewan shook his head.

“Inevitably, the travelers drive past her, but when they look in their rearview mirror they can no longer see her. Where did she go? Shaken, they direct their attention back to the road. That’s when, out of the corner of their eye, they see her again—sitting right beside them in the passenger seat!”

“Does she get paid in stories, like the Old Hag?” asked Ewan.

“No,” said Mr. So-and-So. “As with all of our members, she gets paid in what feeds her soul.”

“And what’s that?” asked Ewan.

“Recognition,” said Mr. So-and-So. “She was tired of constantly being regarded as fictitious, so she expanded her business in the hope that people would finally see her for what she really was—a real live dead woman! She scares the pants off people all over the island now, not just Quentin Lake. People can no longer dismiss her appearance as an isolated event or tall tale. The woman is a household name now!”

“What about the others?” asked Ewan. “What feeds their souls?”

“Well, some of our more devious members, like the Weatherman and Conniver MacGyver, like to keep the ins and outs of their businesses to themselves. They’re just in it

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for the camaraderie—and the lassie buns Edith brings to our monthly ODD Ball. But others, like the Phantom Drummer, are in it for more artistic reasons. Phanty is not a very good musician, you see, and when he first started out, he couldn't get through a performance without being pelted with rotten fruit. Now he performs his incessant, monotonous drumming anonymously in the middle of the night, and the mysteriousness of it all has made him the talk of the town!"

Ewan was astonished. "You *know* the Phantom Drummer?"

"Oh yes," said Mr. So-and-So. "Between you and me, I was one of the fruit throwers at one of his early performances. I hit him square in the eye with a moldy plum! And then there's the Steward of Sorrow. Unhappiness feeds his soul. Greedy beggar can't get enough of it."

Ewan knew sorrow all too well. The fact that someone could hunger for it sent a shiver down his spine.

"What about you?" he asked, changing the subject. "What feeds your soul?"

Mr. So-and-So looked surprised by the question. "Me? I..." He looked to the sky as if the answer was floating among the stars. "Silly me. Here I am, the president of the ODD Squad, and I don't even know."

Before Ewan could think of something comforting to say, Mr. So-and-So stood up and dusted himself off. "Now," he said, "before you kill Kipper with your unending curiosity, how about we call it a night?"

"Wait," said Ewan. "I have another question."

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“Poor old Kipper,” said Mr. So-and-So. “He must be half-dead by now. Shame. I was rather fond of the old mog.”

Ewan smiled. “Curiosity killed the cat, but satisfaction brought it back.”

“So what are you saying?” said Mr. So-and-So. “Curiosity is a good thing, and I should keep answering your inane questions until the wee hours of the morning?”

“I just have one more,” said Ewan.

Mr. So-and-So sat back down. “Go on then.”

“What does the Old Hag look like?”

“To be honest, she was born with a face only a mother could love. She had a terrible time as a child with her witch-like features. But she grew into her face and used her sharp, elongated features in her favor. An entrepreneurial success story, if you ask me.”

Mr. So-and-So stood up again. As he turned back toward the lean-to, Ewan said, “She really scared me.”

Mr. So-and-So put a hand on Ewan’s shoulder. “She’s gone now, Ewan. All is well. Time for sleep now, okay?”

They settled back in their beds. Mr. So-and-So was almost asleep when Ewan whispered, “Remember when you said you hoped Grace would grow into her name?”

Mr. So-and-So whispered back, “For goodness’ sake, Ewan.”

“I wish I never grew into mine.”

He waited for Mr. So-and-So to respond, but he didn’t. Ewan wondered if he was just pretending to be asleep.

“Do you know what my name means?”

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"No," Mr. So-and-So groaned, "but I'm sure you're going to tell me."

"Mother said it means 'born from the yew tree.' She said a yew tree is strong because it is protected by its own poison. And sometimes I think, Yep, I'm poisonous, all right. But my poison doesn't protect me—somehow it kills everyone around me. First Mother, now Father."

"Your father isn't dead, Ewan."

"He could be."

"If you really thought that, you wouldn't be looking for him, you silly sausage."

"What if he *is* dead, though? Or what if he is alive but doesn't want to be found?"

Ewan waited for Mr. So-and-So to say something comforting, but it appeared that this time he truly was asleep.

Ewan pulled his blanket up to his chin. He lay awake in the dark, hoping the Old Hag wouldn't come back. He was desperate for rest, but sleep wouldn't come. The wind whistled through the trees. A tree branch snapped in the forest and made Ewan jump. Then he heard the sound of swishing along their spruce-bough mattress. Mr. So-and-So was shimmying like a seal on ice, moving out of the lean-to and positioning himself along its entrance.

"Don't worry, she won't come back tonight, Yew Tree," he said to Ewan. "I can promise you that."

It was Mr. So-and-So's second promise that night.

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I meant no harm, I can promise you that.

Ewan believed them both.



In the light of day, Ewan felt embarrassed. *She really scared me.* He'd actually said that. Out loud. *Silly boy.* He should have known by now that everything was better in the morning. He should have just waited it out. Instead he'd let down his guard and showed himself for the frightened little boy that he was. He was a weakling, pure and simple. Always had been, always would be. He felt so foolish, he could barely look Mr. So-and-So in the eye. Fortunately, they had a day of traveling ahead of them, so avoiding Mr. So-and-So would be relatively easy. After all, Ewan would be driving the Hurricle alone.

"Ewan," Mr. So-and-So announced, "today you ride with me. Flora, you can take the Hurricle."

Ewan was quick to protest. "Flora can't ride in the Hurricle alone," he said.

"Of course she can," said Mr. So-and-So. "She navigated to the Notion Shop alone, didn't she?"

"But what if William and Wilder get spooked and take off? We're so close to the cliffs and—"

"Oh for goodness' sake," said Mr. So-and-So, pulling a long rope out of his left trouser pocket.

"What's that?" asked Ewan.

“An umbilical cord,” said Mr. So-and-So. “Apparently, you need to be attached to your sister at all times. We’ll tether the horses to the back of the *Destiny*. Flora can ride in the Hurricle behind them, and I’ll drive at their excruciatingly slow pace so they won’t wear themselves out trying to keep up.”

“In that case, why doesn’t she just ride with us in the *Destiny*?” asked Ewan.

“Did it ever occur to you, Ewan,” said Mr. So-and-So, “that maybe Flora would like some space?”

It was becoming clear that for some unknown reason, Mr. So-and-So was determined to spend time with Ewan alone.

“Did it ever occur to *you*, Mr. So-and-So,” said Ewan, “that she might find it lonely riding alone all morning?”

It was also clear that Ewan was determined *not* to spend time alone with Mr. So-and So.

Flora popped her head out of the lean-to. “I won’t be lonely,” she announced, squashing Ewan’s hope that she’d ride in the *Destiny* and act as a buffer between him and Mr. So-and-So. Flora consulted the pink pig puppet on her hand. “What do you think, Trotters? Want to ride in the Hurricle?”

Flora waited for Trotters to reply in his thick Scottish accent. “Awwww,” she said. “Why can’t magic last forever?”

“Because if it did, it wouldn’t be magic anymore,” said Mr. So-and-So. “It would just be the way things are.”

For the next half hour, while Flora and Mr. So-and-So packed, Ewan fussed over the “umbilical cord,” double-, triple- and quadruple-checking that it was securely fastened

between the *Destiny* and the Hurricicle. Soon they were on the road. Ewan sat in the stern of the boat-car. Mr. So-and-So was at the wheel in the bow. Ewan wished the *Destiny* had been elongated again so that there was more space between them. As it was, they were at a comfortable chatting distance, and he really didn't want to talk about the previous night.

"So," said Mr. So-and-So, "about last night." Then he laughed. "Just jesting. I know you don't want to talk about it. And by *you* I mean *Y-E-W*."

Ewan groaned.

Mr. So-and-So patted the bench seat beside him. "Come. Lend me an ear."

Ewan made his way toward the bow. The road was uneven, and because he felt unsteady, he moved to the port side of the boat and gripped the gunwale as he baby-stepped toward the bow. When he reached his destination, Mr. So-and-So said, "Go away."

"But you just told me to come here," said Ewan.

"Not like a six-hundred-year-old tortoise with cataracts."

"We're in a moving vehicle," said Ewan. "It's bumpy. And I have to be careful with Grace."

Mr. So-and-So shrugged. "So? Go back and do it again."

"No," said Ewan. "I won't. I don't have to do as you say."

Mr. So-and-So waved him away. "If you try again, I'll tell you a secret," he sang.

"I don't care about your secrets," said Ewan.

"Yes you do," said Mr. So-and-So.

He was right, of course. All the clues to what made Mr. So-and-So tick were becoming of great interest to Ewan.

Ewan walked from the stern to the bow again, this time without the aid of the gunwale. He lowered his stance, tensed his abdominal muscles and, with Grace safe in her swammock, put his hands out for balance. Mr. So-and-So, of course, aimed for every bump on the road. Kipper watched with amusement.

Ewan reached the front of the boat and sat on the bench seat, waiting for Mr. So-and-So to reveal his secret.

"I know you're angry at me for going across the tickle," he said. "But I wouldn't have done it if I didn't think you were brave enough."

"Is that your secret?" asked Ewan.

"No," said Mr. So-and-So. "It's just a fact I wanted to share."

"But I'm not brave," said Ewan.

"Sure you are," said Mr. So-and-So. "People who have nothing to lose don't always have a choice."

"You think I have nothing to lose?" said Ewan. "What about Flora? She's everything to me."

"Which is why you'll do anything to get to Howl's Inlet. You want her to have her family again. You want to make things better."

"That might be true," said Ewan, "but wanting to fix something doesn't make me brave."

"No," said Mr. So-and-So, "but acting on it does. You've started this journey. All you need now is a kick in the pants to finish it."

“And taking me across the tickle was my kick in the pants?” said Ewan.

Mr. So-and-So grinned. “All you need is a bit of confidence, lad. When you believe in yourself, the world is your oyster. And speaking of oysters—” Mr. So-and-So reached into his left trouser pocket and pulled out a marble. “Aw, shucks,” he said. “I was expecting a pearl.”

He threw the marble over his shoulder with such force that it narrowly missed Wilder, tethered behind them. Mr. So-and-So fell silent, seemingly focused on navigating the bumpy dirt road and dodging overhanging branches from the fir trees that lined their path.

“Mr. So-and-So?” said Ewan. “I thought you were going to tell me a secret.”

Mr. So-and-So opened his mouth, then closed it again. The bravado that usually filled his face was gone and had been replaced with something honest and real.

Ewan thought that maybe he wasn't quite ready to hear Mr. So-and-So's secret. “Maybe you can tell me another time,” said Ewan. “When you're ready.”



Six

At lunchtime they pulled into a meadow and sat on the grass eating cream crackers slathered in Betty Fitzgerald's blueberry jam. Mr. So-and-So produced a pot of tea and three teacups out of thin air. At one point he plucked a buttercup out of the grass and filled it with tea. It wilted. "See?" he said. "Proof."

"Of what?" asked Ewan.

"That a buttercup is a beautiful thing until you fill it with tea, remember?" said Flora. She hopped up and started tumbling and cartwheeling through the field, saying, "Watch me! Look at me! Don't look away! This one's going to be great!"

Mr. So-and-So rubbed his forehead wearily. "She's delightful, isn't she?" He pointed to a collection of trees at the far end of the meadow. "Why don't you climb those trees over there?"

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Flora scampered to some nearby maples.

"No, not those ones," Mr. So-and-So said. "Those other ones waaaaay over there."

Flora ran to the far end of the meadow.

"She should be closer," said Ewan. "If she falls, I won't be able to catch her."

"The only way you'd be able to catch her is if you were standing underneath her the entire time. And no child needs a human safety net hanging around them constantly."

As Flora began to climb the trees, Ewan provided commentary. "Oooh...ugh...no...oh my...oh dear...oh my word..."

"I have an idea," said Mr. So-and-So. "Why don't you just stop watching?"

"I can't," said Ewan.

Ewan took Grace out of the swammock and placed her on the ground in front of him. Kipper came along and stepped over her, hovering his paw over her head for just a moment.

"Don't you dare," said Ewan.

Kipper looked at Ewan, then continued on, his paw brushing the top of Grace's head.

"What's the deal with you and your cat?" asked Mr. So-and-So.

"What do you mean?"

Mr. So-and-So gave Ewan a look.

Ewan sighed. "I don't really know. I think it's me. No, I *know* it's me. It has to be, right? I mean, pets love their owners.

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Unconditionally. But Kipper doesn't love me. I don't think he does anyway."

Ewan tucked Grace back into the safety of his sweater.

"Let that bird get some exercise for once," said Mr. So-and-So. "You coddle her too much."

Ewan looked down at his swammock. Maybe Mr. So-and-So was right. He lifted Grace out. "Want to fly for a bit?" he asked. Grace took off over the trees.

"Don't worry," said Mr. So-and-So. "She'll come back. She always does."

Ewan watched Flora swing from a tree like a monkey. Her hands gripped the branch tightly as she swung back and forth, back and forth, building up speed and momentum. Even though he was far away, Ewan could tell by Flora's body language that she was eyeing a nearby branch. At any moment she was going to let go, fly through the air and—hopefully—reach her target.

"And you can stop worrying about your sister too," said Mr. So-and-So.

But Ewan didn't relax until Flora had reached the next branch safe and sound.

"You know, animals pick up that kind of thing," said Mr. So-and-So. "Stress and anxiety. Maybe Kipper doesn't like being around your nervous energy."

Ewan shrugged. "Maybe."

Mr. So-and-So reached into his left trouser pocket. "Here. Have a persimmon."

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Ewan accepted the exotic fruit without batting an eyelash. He was used to Mr. So-and-So now, and nothing the man did surprised him.

Ewan took a bite of the persimmon and relaxed against the trunk of a tree. "Once," he said, "when I was little, I saw a drawing in a book. It was a science book that belonged to Grumple, and the picture was of a body, but it was the inside, not the outside. Everything was labeled—the heart, the lungs, the spleen. But what I found most interesting was the long, coiling intestines. I thought, That's it! That's what's been causing those knots in my stomach! From then on, whenever I was feeling anxious, I'd lie on my back and stretch out from the tips of my toes to the tops of my fingers to keep the intestines from getting all gnarled. It didn't help. When I was nervous my stomach still got tangled up tight, and there was nothing I could do about it."

"You poor little thing," said Mr. So-and-So.

"Father got me Kipper after Mother died," said Ewan. "He thought having a cat would help. With the knot. Can you imagine? He actually thought Kipper could make everything better. If only it were that easy."

In the distance Ewan could see that Flora was now playing hide-and-seek with Kipper in a cluster of bushes. A moment later she came bounding toward them, her dungarees covered in burrs. She was making a beeline for Mr. So-and-So. When she reached him, she jumped into his arms. "Did you see me? I think I have the tree-climbing muscle that no one else has!"

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Mr. So-and-So examined her wrist. "Well, will you look at that. A palmaris longus muscle! You really are special, aren't you?"

Flora cozied up into Mr. So-and-So's lap and rested her head against his chest. Ewan bit his lip to keep from smiling at how frozen Mr. So-and-So looked. It was as if what was in his lap was a skunk, not a delightful and charming seven-year-old girl.

Ewan stretched out his leg and gave Mr. So-and-So a nudge with his foot.

"What was that?" asked Mr. So-and-So.

Ewan smiled. "A kick in the pants."

Mr. So-and-So put his arms around Flora, stiffly at first, but then they relaxed.

"I love these bumpy bits," she said, stroking the thick woolen cables that ran down the arms of Mr. So-and-So's sweater.

"My granny made it," said Mr. So-and-So. "The cables represent fishermen's ropes and are meant to bring luck and safety at sea."

"Why do you dress like a fisherman?" Flora asked.

Mr. So-and-So picked a burr off the bib of her dungarees.

"Hush now," he said. "Children should be seen and not burred."



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Grace arrived back just as they were packing up. Ewan tried not to look as relieved as he felt.

“Can I ride in the Hurricle again?” asked Flora. “I like to pretend I’m driving through the streets of New York City in Mrs. Shipley-Seward’s Thomas Flyer. Everyone points at me and says, ‘Look at dat goil driving dat yuge cah.’”

Mr. So-and-So laughed at Flora’s attempt at a New York accent. “Mrs. Shipley-Seward, huh?” he said. “Industrious woman. Always on the lookout for the next big thing. Waltzed into one of our ODD Balls like she owned the place. Decent woman. Bit of a snob, though.”

“But she’s in the newspaper business,” said Ewan. “The newspaper business isn’t otherworldly, devious or delightfully dangerous.”

“No,” said Mr. So-and-So. “But she was looking for those qualities when launching a new newspaper. It all started when one of her *Wednesday Weepies* reporters heard a rumor that the elusive Steward of Sorrow was part of a business association. He was desperate to get an interview and, after some serious snooping, found out where and when we met. When Mrs. Shipley-Seward found out about it, she became interested in more than just a single interview. She wanted to meet *all* the members in the hope they could offer some radical ideas for a new publication. She wanted something fresh and dramatic and out of this world. Who better to ask for ‘out of this world’ than the ODD Squad? So on the first Thursday of the month, at exactly one o’clock in the

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morning, she made a rather grand entrance into Murphy's Funeral Parlor and asked us to pitch her some ideas."

"And did you?" asked Flora.

Mr. So-and-So set about hitching the horses to the *Destiny*. "Well, I suggested the *National Notions*, but she called the idea dangerous. She said, 'We don't want to give people philosophical morsels to gnaw on. They might begin to think for themselves!' The Old Hag suggested the *Saturday Scaries*, but she pooh-poohed that idea too. If I didn't know better I'd have thought she already had an idea and was just looking for the right person to execute it. Eventually she latched onto a couple of our more devious members. I don't know what kind of ideas they were coming up with, but they were having a good old gab in the corner, and Mrs. Shipley-Seward certainly seemed interested."

"Did she dance?" asked Ewan. "At the ODD Ball?"

"Oh yes," said Mr. So-and-So. "She knocked over an empty casket with her rather exuberant cha-cha."

"Why do you have your meetings at a funeral parlor?" asked Ewan.

"It was the Steward of Sorrow's idea. He said the atmosphere puts him in the right frame of mind for both business and pleasure," said Mr. So-and-So.

Ewan had been in a funeral parlor once. His frame of mind at the time didn't bear thinking about.

"I saw Mrs. Shipley-Seward in the Mercantile once," said Flora. "Mr. Abernathy said she looked glamorous, but I

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thought she looked uncomfortable. Her dress was covered in so many beads it must have weighed a ton!"

Mr. So-and-So pulled two apples out of his left trouser pocket and gave one to William and one to Wilder. "Did you know that when she was much younger, Mrs. Shipley-Seward and her husband ran a dinner theater in St. John's?" he asked, rubbing Wilder's soft nose. "From what I understand, she had a marvelous voice, and her husband's piano playing was sublime. But after he died, Mrs. Shipley-Seward packed it all in. She couldn't bear to perform without him. But like I said, she's an industrious woman. Many years later she set her sights on the newspaper business and was soon one of the most successful women in the area."

Ewan marveled at how Mrs. Shipley-Seward had picked herself up and moved on after such a big loss. He wished he had the same strength and resilience.

Soon they were following a long dirt road that wound along the coastline. Sometimes it swerved inland, where it was a bit sheltered, but more often than not the ocean was in full view and they were exposed to the elements. Ewan was still waiting for more July-like weather, and the chill reminded him that summer in Newfoundland was as unpredictable as the items in Mr. So-and-So's left trouser pocket.

Ewan checked on Grace, who was sitting quietly in the swammock. She was awake but staring straight ahead. Ewan often wondered what went on in her mind. Did pigeons even think? If so, what did they think about? He looked at

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Kipper, who was chewing on the lace of one of Mr. So-and-So's brown lace-up work boots. Ewan wondered if Kipper's thoughts were as devious as his behavior.

The day wore on, mostly in silence, and it was late afternoon when Mr. So-and-So said, "I'm ready now."

"Are you sure?" said Ewan.

Mr. So-and-So took his hands off the wheel and stood up. "Trade places with me, will you, Ewan?"

Ewan scrambled into the kitchen chair as the *Destiny* veered to the right. "What on earth are you doing?" he yelled as he straightened the wheel.

Mr. So-and-So settled onto the bench seat. "Honestly, Ewan, I can't possibly drive a car whilst revealing what lies deep in my tortured soul. That kind of thing causes spontaneous human combustion, you know."

"Well, I can't possibly drive either," said Ewan. "I don't know how!"

"Looks to me like you can," said Mr. So-and-So.

Ewan dared to take his eyes off the road and looked down at the pedals near his feet. "I don't even know which is the gas and which is the brakes."

Mr. So-and-So waved a hand through the air. "You'll figure it out."

Ewan frantically tested the pedals and, as Mr. So-and-So had predicted, quickly figured out which pedal was which. Soon he had the *Destiny* cruising at a steady speed. He was surprised at how easy it was to drive. Unlike horses, wheels

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did not have a mind of their own, so there was never any resistance when he turned them. The car just went wherever Ewan wanted it to go. Very obedient.

“So,” said Ewan, after he was more comfortable behind the wheel. “This secret?”

Mr. So-and-So played with a loose thread on the cuff of his fisherman sweater. “Ah, yes. Well, it relates back to the growing-into-your-name business from earlier.”

Ewan was intrigued. “Go on.”

Mr. So-and-So pulled the thread from his cuff and placed it on his upturned palm. “So-and-So is not my real name, you know.”

“It’s not?” Ewan wasn’t really surprised. He had assumed that the name was made up.

Mr. So-and-So blew the thread off his hand with a loud *pah!*

Ewan watched out of the corner of his eye as Mr. So-and-So began tugging at another loose strand of yarn.

“Did you know,” he said, “that a so-and-so is what you call someone you dislike? It’s usually preceded with an adjective—like *nasty* or *mean*.”

“You’re not mean,” said Ewan. He was fibbing, of course. Mr. So-and-So *did* come across as mean sometimes, but mostly he meant well.

“I used to be as sweet as sunshine,” said Mr. So-and-So. “As the youngest of five brothers, I was the most amicable, the most easygoing. But I was also a bit mischievous, you see, because of my magical abilities. I was five years old when I first

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realized I was different. My brothers were teasing me about my hair because it's so, well, big. I felt powerless because I was little and they were big, but then I felt something in my left trouser pocket. I reached in and pulled out a pair of scissors. I don't know where they came from, but it was perfect timing. 'Fine,' I said. 'If you don't like my hair, I'll cut it all off.' The looks on my brothers' faces! 'Stop, stop,' they said. 'We're sorry. We didn't mean it.' But I kept hacking away until I was practically bald. My brothers were beside themselves. 'Dad is going to kill us,' they said. A moment later my hair magically grew back. 'Great,' they groaned. 'He's just like Granny.' I wasn't exactly sure what they meant, but I knew that Granny could pull a loaf of freshly baked bread from under her white straw bucket hat, so as far as I was concerned, being like her could only be a good thing. That is, until it prevented me from doing the thing I wanted to do most in life: be a fisherman and spend my life at sea. 'Crazy ol' Georgie,' my brothers said. 'He can spend his life working in the old Notion Shop with Granny, while the rest of us take to the water, keeping the George family fishing traditions alive.'"

Ewan was confused. "Your name is *Georgie George*?"

"Before my mother got married, she was Ruthie Ruth. She said her name put people in a good mood, made their voices go all singsongy. She wanted my name to have a ring to it too. You don't like it? Oh well. Doesn't matter. It's Mr. So-and-So now. I changed it when I became a legal adult. Because that's what I was. A bitter, twisted so-and-so. But who could blame me?"

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My brothers left school at age fourteen to work on the boat, so logic would dictate that I would too. But noooooooooooooo,” Mr. So-and-So sang, “my job was to sell needles and thread all day. I was too ‘unreliable’ to be out on the water. Too ‘away with the fairies,’ they said. They said I wasn’t cut out for life on the sea. Because my head was always in the clouds. I was too distracted, unfocused. ‘It’s always one crazy idea after another with you,’ they said. ‘You think you can fly, for goodness’ sake. We can’t trust you. You’ll have us all drowned.’ They said I was as useless as a screen door on a submarine.”

Mr. So-and-So reached a hand toward Ewan’s sweater hammock. “May I?” Without waiting for an answer, he grabbed Grace and swiped her across his sweaty brow.

“That’s better,” he said, placing the stunned bird back in the swammock.

“Where are your brothers now?” asked Ewan.

“Still on the island, I presume,” said Mr. So-and-So. “I’ve thought about looking for them, but after what I did, I don’t think they’d be very happy to see me.”

“What do you mean *after what I did?*” asked Ewan. “What did you do?”

Mr. So-and-So sighed. “Something bad. Really bad. It wasn’t right. I know that. But I was young. And so very hurt. Do you know how hard it was to watch my brothers, all three burly and brawny and ruddy-faced, sail out to sea with my father each day while I was stuck at home with Granny, big-eyed and wild-haired like a cartoon character?”

Heather Smith

Ewan glanced over at Mr. So-and-So. He did have a comical face. His eyebrows had a life of their own. But it was also a kind face, even if it did look wistful at times.

"Do you really want to know?" Mr. So-and-So asked.

Ewan nodded.

Mr. So-and-So looked at his feet. "I took an axe to the family boat," he said. "Smashed it to smithereens."

Ewan was shocked. "Really?"

Mr. So-and-So nodded. "Don't worry. I got my come-uppance. I proved their point, you see. 'This is exactly why you're not fit for life on the sea,' they said. 'You're too unstable!' I'd ruined any chance of living my life on the sea. Not only that, I had disappointed my family. The look on my father's face. I'll never forget it. Anyway. It was my own fault. I only had myself to blame."

"I'm sorry, Mr. So-and-So," said Ewan.

"Thank you, Ewan."

As the *Destiny* pattered up a steep incline, Ewan glanced at the horses and Flora behind him. Flora gripped the front of the Hurricle. Her grin was a mile wide. "Look, Ewan! I'm on the Coney Island Thunderbolt!"

"Hold on tight," said Ewan. "We're almost at the top!"

"Such a lovely relationship you two have," said Mr. So-and-So.

They drove silently for a while, Ewan thinking about what he could say to make Mr. So-and-So feel better. He was not very good at that kind of thing, but as the road

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rounded a bend, revealing the ocean in all its glory, he felt inspired enough to say, “Mr. So-and-So? You know what? I believe you *can* fly.” He meant it too. Even though the man had crash-landed into a windowpane on their first meeting, Ewan still believed that Mr. So-and-So had what it took to make the impossible happen.

“It was Granny who suggested I try,” he said. “She said, ‘Go jump off the shed, my boy. See what happens.’ So I did. And you know, just before I broke my right leg in three pieces, I felt it. Flight. That night Granny told me she’d had an inkling I was special like her. She said that while the rest of the world were one hundred percent boring, we were ten percent magic and ninety percent guts.”

Ewan thought about that. “You’re only ten percent magic?”

“Thereabouts. Magic is nothing without guts.”

“Mr. So-and-So?”

“Yes?”

“Do you miss your brothers?”

“Not really. Sometimes I feel like I’m missing *something*, but I don’t know what it is. It’s the strangest feeling. It’s a yearning, and it’s painful, but it’s mixed with a wistfulness that almost feels pleasurable. A Portuguese fisherman once told me that in his language there is a word for this feeling—*saudade*. Strangely, there is no English word for it. Maybe not enough people experience it.”

“I’ve never experienced it,” said Ewan. “I know *exactly* what I’m missing.”

Heather Smith

Mr. So-and-So smiled kindly. "Why don't you tell me about your mother?"

Ewan had never described his mother before. The words came quick and easy.

"She was very handy, could build anything. She even built the house we lived in! She could knit, crochet, fish, paint, draw, sculpt, cook, hunt—she could do anything!"

"Could she fly?" asked Mr. So-and-So.

Ewan smiled. "You know, she probably could!"

Mr. So-and-So smiled back in return.

"What about *your* mother?" asked Ewan. Do you miss her?"

"Oh, my mother died."

"I'm sorry," said Ewan.

"That's okay," said Mr. So-and-So. "I was a baby."

"Still," said Ewan.

"Yes," said Mr. So-and-So. "People who say you can't miss what you've never had have never lost a parent."

Mr. So-and-So's words touched Ewan in a place deep inside him, a place that few had entered. A secret wing perhaps. For the first time in a long time, Ewan felt understood. Overcome with a mixture of relief, sadness and joy, he sent a message to his tears. *You can come out now. It's safe.* But Ewan had spent too many years creating a dam behind his eyes, and layers upon layers of hopeless thoughts, each one stacked on top of another. He'd created a barrier so high and so watertight, not even a single tear could seep through.

"Ewan?" said Mr. So-and-So. "Are you okay?"

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Not wanting to sit with his muddle of feelings, Ewan slammed the door of his secret wing. “So,” he said, changing the subject, “did you like working in the shop with your granny?”

“Oh yes,” said Mr. So-and-So. “We came up with the secret-wing idea together you know. It was definitely a twenty percent magic venture.”

“If you found happiness in the Notion Shop, why didn’t you change your name back to Georgie George?”

Mr. So-and-So smiled. “Because it wasn’t Georgie George who found out who he really was—it was me, Mr. So-and-So. After Granny died, I realized that the *Destiny* was never my destiny. The Notion Shop was. For the first time in my life, I embraced who I was truly meant to be. And what better name for a sewing-shop owner than Mr. So-and-So. Because of the pun. Sew and Sew. Get it?”

Ewan smiled. “I get it.”

Mr. So-and-So yanked at the thread in his sweater again. This time it came free, leaving a hole in his sleeve. He tossed the strand overboard, but it got snagged on a splinter on the handrail.

Ewan stole a quick sideways glance at Mr. So-and-So. “Mr. So-and-So? If you’re okay with all that happened in the past and know that the *Destiny* was never your destiny, why do you dress like a fisherman?”

Mr. So-and-So looked into the distance. “Maybe,” he said, “it’s my way of staying connected to my family.”

Heather Smith

Ewan thought about the colorful crocheted blanket his mother had made for him, and how even though it was boy-sized now, he would use it for the rest of his life. He thought too about how grateful he was for Grumple, who always tightened the loose threads and made repairs when need be.

Flora's happy *vroom-vrooms* floated through the air from her pretend Thomas Flyer.

"She's a wonder, isn't she?" said Mr. So-and-So.

Ewan smiled. "She really is."

"I always wanted children," said Mr. So-and-So. "But I guess it was never meant to be."

Ewan tried to think of something to say, but what could mend a heart that was more than a little bit broken?

Ewan pulled the snagged wool off the handrail. He put it in his pocket. He would ask Grumple to darn Mr. So-and-So's sweater when they got home.



As the day wore on, Ewan found himself truly enjoying the views, even when their convoy had climbed high above the coast and meandered along the cliffs. They hadn't come across any communities thus far so were surprised—and excited—to see a sign that said *Stay the Night at Kelly's Bight!*

"Splendid idea," said Mr. So-and-So.

"But if we keep going, we might reach Howl's Inlet before midnight," said Ewan.

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"It'll be dark soon," said Mr. So-and-So. "Best to stop before nightfall. Especially on these high cliffs."

Ewan knew Mr. So-and-So was right, but he couldn't hide his disappointment.

Mr. So-and-So reached out and patted Ewan's shoulder. "A good night's sleep will help you to face whatever it is that comes your way tomorrow."

It wasn't long before Kelly's Bight appeared, nestled around an inlet below them. They made their way down the steep slope slowly and carefully, and when they reached the bottom they took in their surroundings. A single wharf stood at the edge of a small harbor, and a handful of boats bobbed gently around it. Brightly colored houses dotted the rugged hills that surrounded the cove, and the community seemed quiet and serene. Except for the large bronze statue in its center, of a woman holding a book, it looked much like Bucket Cove.

The threesome hitched the horses on a post near the wharf and stretched their legs on the beach.

"Look," said Flora. "That house looks like a puffin."

Mr. So-and-So and Ewan followed her gaze to a small white dwelling with black trim and an orange door.

Intrigued, they walked up the hill to take a closer look. They were greeted by a sign that read *Welcome to the Puffin Shop*. Underneath, in curly writing, were the words *There's nuffin' like a puffin!*

Flora stood on her tiptoes and looked in the shop window. "I like puffins."

Heather Smith

There was a sadness in her voice. Ewan put his hands on her shoulders. "Me too."

"Crikey," said Mr. So-and-So. "If that's what liking something looks like, I'd hate to see your faces when you hate something."

He opened the door. "Come on, sad sacks. Let's see what this place is all about."

Inside there were shelves of soapstone carvings, oil paintings, quilts and knitwear, all with a puffin motif.

The trio looked around in wonder. Even Grace, who was tucked snugly into the swammock, popped her head out to take a look.

"There's so many," said Flora.

"A veritable plethora!" said a woman bursting through the door of a back room. In her enthusiasm to reach her customers, she stumbled forward. Mr. So-and-So caught her by the hands and steadied her. They locked eyes.

"*Plethora*," said Mr. So-and-So dreamily. "What a wonderful word."

She smiled. "A plethora of puffins...a surplus of seabirds. There are myriad ways to describe my *beaucoup de* birds."

"An abundance of Aves," said Mr. So-and-So.

As if in surprise, a strand of hair fell from the woman's bun. "You are acquainted with the scientific name for the class in which birds are placed in the animal kingdom?"

"Indeed," said Mr. So-and-So. "But perhaps they'd be better described as a *cornucopia* of chordates."

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Her eyes widened. "You know the taxonomic category as well?"

"Phylums are my forte," he said.

The woman's bright orange glasses had slipped down her freckled nose.

Mr. So-and-So straightened up. "The name's So-and-So," he said. "And you are?"

"Kelly," said the woman. "Kitty Kelly."

Mr. So-and-So placed a gentle kiss upon her knuckles. "Enchanté."

Miss Kelly blushed. "You must be of the sea," she said, noting his sweater and cap.

It was Mr. So-and-So's turn to blush. "Fishing is in my blood," he said.

Ewan cringed.

"A noble profession," she cooed.

"Tell me, Kitty Kelly of Kelly's Bight," said Mr. So-and-So, "do you own this town?"

"Oh no," she said, waving a hand through the air. "My ancestors may have founded this town, but Kelly's Bight belongs to everyone who lives here."

Mr. So-and-So grinned. "Beautiful *and* benevolent. What a marvelous mix."

The pair gazed into each other's eyes. Ewan was so embarrassed by the scene playing out in front of him that he forgot about Flora. She'd been unusually quiet. He turned to find her back at the door, staring through its window.

Heather Smith

“Flora?”

“Can we go now?” she asked, her nose pressed against the glass.

She was clearly sad, and Ewan knew why. He quickly tried to cheer her up.

“Look,” he said, picking up a pair of puffin-colored socks. “Would you like a pair? I might have enough money—”

“I’d like to go now.”

Ewan turned back to Mr. So-and-So, who was complimenting Miss Kelly on her simple polka-dot housedress.

“Flora would like to leave.”

Miss Kelly regarded the children as if for the first time. “Are they yours?” she asked, a touch of disappointment in her voice. “I mean, they’re lovely, it’s just...”

Mr. So-and-So blushed. “Mine? Oh no. Certainly not. They *are* lovely, of course, you’re absolutely right, but I have no offspring to speak of.”

Miss Kelly smiled shyly. “Nor have I.”

The ding of the bell broke them out of their reverie. Flora had opened the door and run out.

“Was it something I said?” asked Miss Kelly.

Mr. So-and-So looked into her kind and worried face. “If it was, it only makes you all the more human in my eyes.”

Ewan sighed. “Don’t worry,” he said dryly. “I’ll go after her.”

“You do that, my little ragamuffin,” said Mr. So-and-So, not giving Ewan a second glance.

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Ewan ran back to the harbor and found Flora sitting on William, her top half draped along his neck. He reached up and rubbed her back. "I understand, Flora."

"How could you?" she said. "You're not inside my brain."

Ewan reached up and helped Flora off the horse. "I was there, remember?" he said, his hands on Flora's shoulders. "When Father took us to the cape. It was a hard day, but it was a good one."

Flora buried her face into Ewan's sweater. "Why did he leave us, Ewan? Is it because I am bad? Is it because I play in the mud and don't play with dolls?"

Ewan's heart sank. It had never occurred to him that Flora would think their father's disappearance was her fault. She seemed so carefree all the time, so happy-go-lucky. Ewan had stupidly assumed she was somewhat oblivious to their family's problems, but of course she'd be affected by them. How could she not be? And how could Ewan not have seen it?

He tugged the strap of her dungarees, bringing her closer to him.

"Wasn't Father the one who asked Mother to turn your dollhouse into a barn for your toy animals?"

Flora nodded. "Yes."

"Then how could he think you are bad for not playing with dolls? You're letting your imagination get the better of you, Flora."

Flora took off Father's flatcap so she could nuzzle farther into Ewan's chest.

Heather Smith

“Father didn’t leave because of you,” Ewan whispered, running his fingers over her long thick hair. “And if you don’t believe me, you can ask him yourself. We should reach Howl’s Inlet tomorrow, and I just know he’s going to be there.”

Truth was, Ewan didn’t “just know” anything. All Ewan could do was “just hope.”

And hope had never got him anywhere before.



Father had taken them to the cape at Grumple’s urging. “You need a day out together,” he’d said. “You need to spend time with your children.” So Father left his bedroom and took Ewan and Flora for a ride in Grumple’s Hurricle. The trip was mostly quiet until they came upon the cape. It wasn’t their first time seeing a puffin, but it was their first time seeing a colony. They stood in wonder at the breathtaking view. Not only was the cliff’s grassy bluff dotted with birds, but so too was its craggy rock face. Every nook and cranny from the top of the cliff to where it met the ocean was filled with birds. There must have been hundreds.

“Can we stay a while?” Flora asked. Father sat and patted the ground on either side of him. Ewan and Flora took their spots, and for the first time in months their father wrapped his arms around them. Ewan felt as if he might cry, but not even his father’s touch could reach what was deep down inside him. They watched impressive takeoffs as the birds

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went hunting, and triumphant landings as they returned with food for their families.

Father pointed out the way they lifted off the cliff and soared into the horizon. "There they go!" he said. "Free as a bird."

Ewan laughed. "They *are* birds."

Flora snuggled in closer to her father's arm. "But they always come back, don't they, Father?" she said.

"Yes," said Father. "They always come back."

One morning a week later, Ewan and Flora each woke to find a carved puffin on their bed. They were rough around the edges, crudely painted, and had an overall primitive look about them. Had their mother been alive, Father likely would have asked her to make them. She was a skilled crafts-woman, whereas Father was all thumbs. Ewan wondered how long it had taken his father to make them.

Ewan kept his puffin on his small bedside table. Flora played with hers constantly. She often let it "fly" out her bedroom window, but more often than not, her puffin was a monster that terrorized the toy cars that drove the muddy roads she carved into their driveway.

One day not long after Father disappeared, Flora asked if she could borrow Ewan's puffin. She said she wanted her puffin to have a wife. Ewan agreed, and for the rest of the day Flora played with her puffin couple out in the yard, on the blueberry hill and in the meadow. The next day she asked if she could play with it again. "They're in love," she said. Ewan agreed but asked her to be careful with it. That afternoon,

Heather Smith

while Ewan was helping Grumple mend some loose boards in the barn, Flora came running. "Come quick!" she cried.

Ewan ran after her down to the cove. Flora pointed. Ewan could just make out a paper boat made from the *Wednesday Weepies*, with the silhouettes of two puffins, floating out to sea. "I didn't mean to let go," Flora said, starting to cry. "It was an accident."

"It's okay, Flora," Ewan had said, putting his arm around his sister. "Sometimes the things you love just disappear."



Seven

Miss Kelly invited them to dinner that night. She lived above the shop. Mr. So-and-So instructed Ewan to leave Grace in the Hurricle. “As my granny used to say,” he said, “there is nothing as rude as bringing a pigeon to dinner.”

“She never said that,” said Ewan, but he followed Mr. So-and-So’s instructions nevertheless.

“Be a good girl,” said Ewan, wrapping Grace in Grumple’s plaid lap blanket and laying her on the floor of the Hurricle. Kipper watched from the seat. “If you eat her,” said Ewan sternly to the cat, “I’ll never speak to you again.”

Mr. So-and-So snorted. “You barely speak to him now.”

Miss Kelly’s home consisted of a kitchen, a small sitting area and a bedroom. Ewan sat on the sofa and watched Flora draw puffins on a notepad that Miss Kelly had given her. In

Heather Smith

the kitchen, Mr. So-and-So helped Miss Kelly prepare a meal of salt meat and potatoes. Traditional music played from a radio that sat on a small table next to the sofa. The mixture of fiddle music, cooking smells and the sea air coming in the open window brought Ewan back to his family home, where a similar scene had often played out. It was at times like these that he ached to spend time again with his mother and father and Flora. But, knowing it was an impossibility, he decided to enjoy the warmth he felt in his current surroundings instead.

Soon the table was filled with steaming-hot plates of delicious food.

"I'm sorry I can't offer you a room for the night," said Miss Kelly as she tucked a napkin into the neck of her dress.

"Oh, don't worry," said Mr. So-and-So. "We're more than happy to camp on the beach."

Miss Kelly smiled. "It comes as no surprise that a well-rounded man such as yourself is a competent outdoorsman as well," she said. "But do feel free to use the outhouse."

"That would be wonderful," said Mr. So-and-So. "The nighttime temperatures can be quite nippy on the nether regions. Please accept my thanks—from the bottom of my bottom."

Miss Kelly laughed. "You do have a penchant for parlance."

Mr. So-and-So offered his hand across the table. "A prediction for prose."

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Miss Kelly reached forward, knocking over a lit candle. "An aptitude for argot."

"Or, more simply put," said Ewan, dousing the flames, "a way with words?"

"Kids these days," said Mr. So-and-So, his eyes fixed on Miss Kelly's. "They've no imagination."

"I have imagination," said Flora. "Lots of it."

Miss Kelly sat back and smiled. "You do? Tell us about it, darling."

For the first time all day, a smile spread across Flora's face. Its appearance made Ewan both grateful and sad. While he was happy that Miss Kelly's sweet *darling* had made Flora feel special, he hadn't realized just how hungry his sister had been for attention. Clearly, he hadn't been doing a good-enough job of making her feel loved.

Flora stood up. "Miss Kelly? Would it be okay if I sat next to you?"

"Of course," said Miss Kelly.

Ewan stood up to help Flora move her chair.

"That's all right," said Flora, walking from one side of the table to the other. "I don't need a chair."

Ewan smiled as Flora shimmied her way onto Miss Kelly's chair, almost pushing the poor woman off. Once she was settled, she linked arms with Miss Kelly and said, "While you were setting fire to the table, I was imagining that all the puffins in the Puffin Shop came to life, flew out the window, picked up that lady statue and dropped her into the ocean."

Heather Smith

Miss Kelly laughed. "Oh my. That would be terrible. Poor Mrs. Dennehy has been through enough!"

"The statue's name is Mrs. Dennehy?" asked Flora.

Miss Kelly nodded. "It was built in her honor by members of the community."

"What happened to her?" asked Ewan.

Miss Kelly looked down at her hands, which she had begun wringing together. "Well, it's not easy to say."

Mr. So-and-So's face filled with concern. "My dear, whatever could have you in such a tizzy?"

"It's just that...well...it's most unusual..."

They waited.

"You see, Mrs. Dennehy flew away on a cloud."

The news howled through Ewan's ears. *Did she say 'flew away on a cloud'?*

Mr. So-and-So rushed to Miss Kelly's side. "Oh my dear. How utterly terrible. Was she a friend of yours? I'm so, so sorry."

"Wait a minute," said Ewan, getting his wits about him. "When I told you that Father flew away, you popped a pipe in your mouth and said, 'Ah yes. The ol' flying-away-on-a-cloud scenario. Common story. Happens all the time.'"

"And?" said Mr. So-and-So. "What's wrong with that?"

"You were taking it lightly," said Ewan, "as if you didn't believe us."

"Oh, I believed you," said Mr. So-and-So. "It is a common story—or at least it could be."

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“What do you mean *could* be?” asked Ewan.

“Well, it wouldn’t surprise me to see a flying cloud. Anything’s possible. I slept on a cloud bed once. The Weatherman made it for me.”

“The who?” said Miss Kelly.

“The Weatherman,” he said. “From the ODD Squad.”

Miss Kelly’s face filled with confusion.

“It’s a business association,” Mr. So-and-So explained. “For otherworldly, devious and delightfully dangerous types.” Then he smiled. “I’m the president.”

Miss Kelly looked impressed.

“Anyhoo,” said Mr. So-and-So, now pacing around the table, “here I was at one of our monthly meetings, and the Steward of Sorrow was droning on and on about how unhappiness feeds his creativity. He said he was going to write a book called *SAD: Feasting on Sorrow, One Bite at a Time*. He said that he was sick and tired of the phrase *Turn that frown upside down*. He said it was healthy to feel sad and that misery should be encouraged from time to time. He said he wanted to popularize a new phrase—*Take that grin and give it a spin*. Which, I pointed out, only makes sense if you spin it one-eighty. What if you’re an enthusiastic spinner and spin it three-sixty? Then what? Anyway, he kept yakking about how he was the best ink slinger in town, and I was just getting so tired of it all that at one point I yelled, ‘Nap time!’ To my surprise, the Weatherman turned to me and said, ‘Here ya go, So-and-So,’ and with the point of a finger he produced a cloud bed out of thin air.”

Heather Smith

"That's amazing," said Flora, who had now somehow managed to maneuver herself onto Miss Kelly's lap.

"It was," said Mr. So-and-So. "The Weatherman has a remarkable gift. He works in cahoots with the Vanishing Woman a lot. Creates a bank of fog when she needs one—you know, to add some tension, some atmosphere. He makes the fog so thick, drivers don't see the Vanishing Woman until they're almost upon her. The reduced visibility is delightfully dangerous. It scares the wits right out of them!"

"Oh my," said Miss Kelly. "That story has given me goose pimples!"

Flora ran her fingers along the tiny bumps that had erupted on Miss Kelly's arm.

"I can feel them!" she said.

Spurred on by the audience's excitement, Mr. So-and-So became even more dramatic.

"You should see these fellas," he said, his tone hushed. "The Steward of Sorrow looks nothing like you'd think. He's a jolly-looking fella. Almost like ol' Saint Nick himself. And he's got the belly and the beard to boot! And the Weatherman? Well, he should try working with the sun from time to time. The man's as white as a ghost! He's always got the sniffles too. He smells of menthol and eucalyptus because he eats Fisherman's Friend lozenges like they're going out of style. You can smell him a mile away."

Ewan was beginning to feel impatient. He didn't want to hear about the ODD Squad. He wanted to hear more about

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Mrs. Dennehy and the cloud, but he was unsure how to ask. He didn't want to upset Miss Kelly again.

Mr. So-and-So caught Ewan's eye and cleared his throat. "I wonder, my darling," he said to Miss Kelly, "would you be willing to tell us a little about Mrs. Dennehy?"

Ewan smiled at Mr. So-and-So in gratitude.

Miss Kelly nodded. "Mrs. Dennehy was an important woman in Kelly's Bight. She was selfless and kind and always took care of those in her community. During the war she was a member of the Women's Patriotic Association. The women would spend hours knitting socks to be mailed to the soldiers overseas. They'd tuck a handwritten note in the toe of each one. Mrs. Dennehy always hoped her Bobby would get one of her notes by coincidence, but if he did, she would never know. Her dear husband died in the Battle of Beaumont-Hamel. Mrs. Dennehy became a very different woman after that, and who could blame her? It was now the community's turn to take care of her. She was grateful for all the cakes and cooked dinners, but there was nothing we could do to ease her pain. Her house was the highest on the hill, overlooking the whole town. Every day she'd sit staring out over the houses of her neighbors and gazing at the horizon. There was no use trying to catch her eye to wave at her as we walked by. She only had eyes for the sea."

Flora leaned back and rested her head on Miss Kelly's shoulder, wrapping her small hand around the back of her neck. Her fingers brushed the edges of Miss Kelly's short, neat bob. "That's so sad," she said.

Heather Smith

Ewan agreed. It *was* sad. But he desperately wanted the story to move along, to the part where Mrs. Dennehy flew away on the cloud.

“Miss Kelly?” he said. “Do you think I would be able to speak to the person who witnessed her disappearance?”

Miss Kelly’s voice broke. “You already are.”

Mr. So-and-So rushed to her side. “Oh, my poor dear,” he said, bending down on one knee. “What a bothersome brouhaha.”

Miss Kelly wiped a tear from her eye. “Such a troublesome to-do.”

They gazed at each other lovingly, oblivious to Flora, who was sandwiched between them. Ewan dropped a fork on his plate and gave a little cough. The clang of cutlery caught Mr. So-and-So’s attention. He stood, pulled a chair around the table and then sat down eye to eye with Miss Kelly.

“I wonder, darling,” he said, “could you tell us a little bit more about the day Mrs. Dennehy disappeared?”

Miss Kelly composed herself. “I was making my way to Puffin Rock and—”

“Puffin Rock?” said Flora.

“Home to the island’s largest puffin colony,” said Miss Kelly. “You three really should visit. It’s quite the sight.”

“Oh, I’ve seen puffins before,” said Flora. “Hundreds of them.”

Miss Kelly smiled. “At Puffin Rock you’d see thousands.”

Flora’s eyes lit up. “Really?”

Ewan looked at Mr. So-and-So again and gave him a pleading look. Mr. So-and-So placed a hand on Miss Kelly’s shoulder.

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“So you were making your way to Puffin Rock. What happened next?”

“Sorry,” she said. “I get carried away when it comes to puffins.” She readjusted Flora, who was sinking even deeper into her lap. “I had just left the house,” she continued. “As usual, I looked to Mrs. Dennehy’s window to give her the wave I knew she wouldn’t return, and to my surprise she wasn’t there. Then, as I turned toward the harbor, I saw her. She was standing on the wharf, wiping her face as if she’d been crying. Above her was an unusual cloud. It appeared to be hovering rather than floating, and I blinked several times to make sure my eyes weren’t playing tricks on me. I was suddenly filled with trepidation and dread. The ominousness of that cloud made me hurry toward dear Mrs. Dennehy, but in my haste I tripped—I’m rather clumsy, you see—and when I picked myself up, what I witnessed was utterly unbelievable. That curious cloud was now floating away into the horizon—and Mrs. Dennehy was on it!”

Mr. So-and-So placed a hand on Miss Kelly’s cheek. “My poor little kitty cat.”

Flora had fallen asleep.

Ewan stood up and moved to the window. He stared at the wharf and imagined what Miss Kelly had just described. He could hardly believe it. Grumple had been telling the truth. Father *had* flown away on a cloud.

Poof.



Heather Smith

When Flora woke up, the foursome sat around the table and ate the most delicious dessert. The mixture of pound cake, berries, custard and cream was stunning, and Ewan wished he could enjoy it thoroughly—but his mind was elsewhere.

After they'd finished and taken their dishes to the kitchen, Mr. So-and-So pulled him aside. "What's up, lad?" he asked.

Ewan shrugged. "Nothing."

"Come on, my little tatterdemalion. You didn't just spend twenty minutes trifling over your trifle about nothing."

Ewan sighed. "All this time, I thought Grumple was talking nonsense, but now it seems it could be true. If Father really did fly away on a cloud, who knows where it took him? He's probably not in Howl's Inlet at all."

"He could be," said Mr. So-and-So. "Maybe this cloud rescues people who need to get away from it all and takes them wherever their hearts desire."

Ewan was doubtful. "Maybe."

"I suggest we stick with the plan and head to Howl's Inlet," said Mr. So-and-So. "What do you say?"

"I guess so," said Ewan. "I haven't got any other ideas."



Flora begged Miss Kelly to camp with them on the beach.

"Mr. So-and-So will build us our very own lean-to, and we can whisper stories to each other until we fall asleep."

The Boy, the Cloud and the Very Tall Tale

Miss Kelly giggled. "Oh, I'm not sure..."

"Please?" said Flora. "I never had a friend before."

Miss Kelly was quick to give in to Flora's charms. "All right then, why not?"

Soon they were on the beach, setting up camp. Mr. So-and-So built two lean-tos while Ewan found four big logs to set around the fire. Flora was full of energy and bounded around the beach collecting shells, sea glass and dead starfish, all of which she showed to Miss Kelly with great pride. Ewan had taken Grace out of the Hurricle and put her back in her rightful place in his swammock. He'd missed her. Kipper was nowhere to be seen at first but eventually came out of the woods with a dead mouse in his mouth.

"What a horrible cat," said Ewan.

"He's just doing what cats do naturally," said Mr. So-and-So.

"What?" said Ewan. "Committing murder?"

"No," said Mr. So-and-So. "Surviving."

Miss Kelly built up the fire while Flora filled her in on their journey thus far.

"Goodness gracious," said Miss Kelly. "Your poor grandfather must be terribly worried."

"You're probably right," said Flora. "We should probably send Grace with another message."

"No," said Ewan, louder than he'd intended. "Grumple knows the situation. Mr. So-and-So said it might be a while before we returned. Grace stays here."

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“Are you worried she’ll get lost?” asked Flora. “Because she won’t. She’s a *homing* pigeon. First she’ll fly to Grumple’s home, and then she’ll fly back to this one. That’s how it works!”

Miss Kelly finished her fire duties and joined the others on the logs. “I’m sorry, Flora,” she said gently, “but homing pigeons only know the way to *one* destination—their nest. You can’t just tell them to go between two places as if they were human messengers. That’s not how it works.”

“It is when you’re ten percent magic,” said Mr. So-and-So, his chest puffed out proudly.

“Grace is ten percent magic?” said Miss Kelly.

“No,” said Mr. So-and-So. “I am.”

Miss Kelly raised an eyebrow and smiled. “I love a man with thaumaturgic tendencies.”

The pair instinctively reached across the fire to each other, only to get stung by its heat. After they’d pulled their arms back in alarm, Mr. So-and-So said, “I wonder, my dear little wood nymph, would you like to join me on this ligneous length of lumber?”

Miss Kelly moved around the fire and joined Mr. So-and-So on his log. Flora giggled. “Are you two in love?”

Mr. So-and-So responded by extending his finger like a perch and giving a little whistle. Almost instantly Grace wriggled out of the swammock and flew to him in a haphazard manner, making a spectacularly clumsy landing on Mr. So-and-So’s outstretched arm.

The Boy, the Cloud and the Very Tall Tale

“Let me tell you a little something about Grace,” said Mr. So-and-So.

Flora leaned in Ewan’s direction and whispered, “Did Mr. So-and-So just completely ignore my question?”

Ewan smiled and whispered back, “Yes. Because it was a little bit rude.”

“Oh,” said Flora, her face falling. “I didn’t mean to be rude.”

Miss Kelly caught Flora’s eyes from across the fire. A wink and a smile, and Flora knew all was forgiven.

“As I was saying,” said Mr. So-and-So, “I’m sure Ewan thinks that Grace here might get lost if she goes on a mission, or that she’ll hit a tree or get eaten by a predator. All very valid concerns. However, this old girl is as tough as old boots. A trip to your grandfather’s house and back is child’s play to this magnificent beast. Especially when you compare it to her time in the Great War.”

“Grace was in the Great War?” said Flora.

“Part of the Royal Air Force in England,” said Mr. So-and-So. “She traveled with the troops in aeroplanes to France. When they needed messages sent back to England, they’d pop a note in the message tube and she’d fly back over the English Channel. She did five trips during her service, flying over two hundred miles each time—sometimes through extremely stormy weather! And,” he said, raising her up like a trophy, “it is a well-known fact that many of these birds were shot at as they delivered the messages. I imagine Grace here dodged a lot of bullets in her day.”

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Ewan's heart swelled with pride for his little friend. "Wow," he said. "She deserves a medal."

"Indeed, she does," said Mr. So-and-So, stroking her wing with his finger. "She paid a big price for her service."

"She had to pay to be an army bird?" said Flora.

Mr. So-and-So smiled. "Of course not, my sweet little waif. What I mean is, she paid with her health and well-being. Poor girl has suffered greatly. Sadly, she'll never be the same again."

Ewan extended his pointer finger and whistled. To his surprise, Grace responded and flew to him. "What do you mean, she'll never be the same again? She has no wounds. Not that I can see anyway." He gave Grace a once-over. She looked fine.

"Have you looked into her eyes?" asked Mr. So-and-So.

"Of course," said Ewan.

"Notice anything unusual?"

Ewan held Grace before him. "They're a bit starey," he said. "A bit empty."

Mr. So-and-So nodded. "It's called the thousand-yard stare," he said. "Also known as shell shock."

Flora moved closer to Ewan's side. "Oh, the poor thing," she said.

Ewan recalled seeing many men return home from the war in a terrible state, some in casts, some missing limbs. Others, like Duncan Abernathy's son, Ian, came home as completely different people. Once known as the life of the party, Ian was now described by locals as a "shell of a boy."

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Ewan once spied Ian in the back room of the Mercantile, sitting on the floor in the corner of the room. The look on Ian's face was one of complete blankness. To Ewan he looked no more alive than the sacks of flour that surrounded him. The memory made Ewan feel like crying. But he announced his feelings instead. "I feel really sad."

Kipper, who had been dozing by the fire, moved from Mr. So-and-So's feet to Ewan's and draped himself across the tops of the boy's boots, his tail curled protectively around his ankles.

Ewan was taken aback. He looked to Mr. So-and-So, who smiled approvingly.

Flora stroked the top of Grace's head. "Is Grace sad too?" she asked.

"Sometimes, perhaps," said Mr. So-and-So. "But remember that coo?"

Ewan recalled the sweet sound Grace had made the first time he put her in the swammock. He realized now that it was the safety of it she must have liked. "Yes," he said. "I remember it well."

"That was remarkable, Ewan. Keep up the good work."

"Work?" said Ewan. "What work?"

Mr. So-and-So smiled. "Being a friend."

Ewan tucked Grace back into his sweater. "Thanks, Mr. So-and-So. But being a friend isn't work. Being a friend is easy."

Mr. So-and-So snorted. "Try being friends with the Old Hag!"

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It was in the silence that followed that they noticed Miss Kelly staring into the fire, her shawl pulled up around her face.

"Are you okay, my love?" said Mr. So-and-So.

Miss Kelly waved a hand through the air. "I'm fine," she sniffed. "Just fine."

Mr. So-and-So placed a hand on her back.

"My dear," said Mr. So-and-So. "Have you been crying?"

Tenderly he drew back the shawl, revealing her tear-stained face.

"It's just all this talk," she said, wiping her eyes. "It's so upsetting."

"Oh, you poor fragile woman," said Mr. So-and-So. "War talk can be distressing to the toughest of men. I can't imagine how it must affect a gentle, innocent female such as yourself."

Miss Kelly turned on him, the look on her face anything but fragile. "Excuse me?" she growled.

Mr. So-and-So was taken aback. "I...uh...er—"

"My good man," she said in a measured, even tone, "never confuse a person's sadness for weakness."

Mr. So-and-So scrambled to make things right. "Oh, my dear, I'm ever so sorry. You just looked so upset, and I—"

"I looked upset," she said, "because war is upsetting. I should know. I was there."

Flora looked at Miss Kelly, her eyes wide. "You fought in the Great War?"

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“Yes, I was a nurse. In the Voluntary Aid Detachment,” she said. “But let me tell you, I would have fought alongside the men if it had been allowed. Instead I mended their wounds to the best of my ability. I was a good nurse, but I would have been a better soldier. I spent my early years out in the bush, hunting game with my father. I know how to handle a gun, and I was in peak physical condition.”

Mr. So-and-So shook his head in amazement.

“I know, I know,” said Miss Kelly. “I can come across as a bit clumsy, a bit scattered, but when the going gets tough, believe me, I get going.”

“Oh, I believe you,” said Mr. So-and-So.

“Tell me more about the war,” said Flora.

Miss Kelly smiled and shook her head. “No more talk of war. How about I tell you more about Kelly’s Bight?”

“Okay,” said Flora.

“A long time ago, my great-great-great-grandfather, Gilbert Kelly, moved to this part of the island after coming across the puffin colony while on a hunting trip. He fell in love with Puffin Rock and knew other people would too. He settled here with his family, and soon others joined him. Kelly’s Bight thrived—mostly because of Puffin Rock, which attracted many visitors. Puffin Rock put Kelly’s Bight on the map.”

While Miss Kelly continued to tell Flora stories about growing up in Kelly’s Bight, Mr. So-and-So went to the wharf where the horses were hitched to make sure they were fed

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and watered before they all settled in for the night. Ewan gently picked up Kipper and joined him.

“So,” said Ewan. “Did you use magic back there or what?”

Mr. So-and-So pulled a carrot out of his left trouser pocket and fed it to William. “Magic? What are you talking about?”

“Kipper. He came to me when I needed comforting, which is strange because he only ever comes to me when he needs food. He’s usually concerned with his needs, not mine, so I figured that maybe you had something to do with it.”

Wilder stole the carrot from William’s mouth. Mr. So-and-So tutted and pulled a cucumber out of a nearby tree and fed it to William. “Kipper responding to you today had nothing to do with my magic,” he said, “and everything to do with yours.”

“I’m not magic,” said Ewan.

“Your words were,” said Mr. So-and-So. “You were open and honest and said how you felt. You said you felt sad. Kipper heard you and reacted accordingly. I am guessing you’ve never let your guard down that way before.”

Ewan shook his head. “I guess I always thought, What’s the point? How could a stupid cat fix anything?”

Kipper wriggled out of Ewan’s arms and sauntered away.

“Blimey,” said Mr. So-and-So. “With that attitude, I’d have stayed away from you too.”

Ewan sighed and sat on the wharf. “If I’m being honest, I never really liked Kipper. But today he was there for me.”

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Mr. So-and-So sat beside him. "He always has been, lad. You just never let him in."

Ewan looked out across the bay. "I'm a horrible person."

Mr. So-and-So made a grabbing motion in front of Ewan's mouth and closed his fist tight. "Caught it," he said.

"Caught what?" asked Ewan.

"The nasty little adjective that flew out of your mouth," said Mr. So-and-So, tossing it over his shoulder. "Don't worry. I got rid of it. Now say the sentence again."

Ewan wasn't exactly sure what he was supposed to say, but he gave it a try. "I'm a...person?"

"Exactly," said Mr. So-and-So. "And persons make mistakes. It doesn't make them horrible. It makes them human."

Ewan felt buoyed by Mr. So-and-So's words. "Thanks, Mr. So-and-So," he said. "Maybe you're right. I'm going to make it up to Kipper. He deserves better."

Right on cue, Kipper appeared. He hopped onto the wharf and stepped over Mr. So-and-So's lap to get to Ewan's. Before he settled down, he stuck his nose in the swam-mock and gave Grace a curious but gentle sniff. Then, after giving Ewan's thighs a good knead, he curled up and started to purr.



When Ewan and Mr. So-and-So got back to camp, Flora asked them to sit by the fire next to Miss Kelly. Once they

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were sitting in a row, Flora stood before them and puffed out her chest. "I have an announcement to make," she said.

"Oooh," said Mr. So-and-So. "Let me guess! Are you running away to join the circus?"

Flora laughed. "No, but I am going to do something daring."

Ewan's stomach did a flip. "What do you mean *daring*?" he asked.

"Oh, I know!" said Mr. So-and-So. "She's going to go over Niagara Falls in a barrel!"

"She'd better not!" said Ewan.

Miss Kelly laughed. "Why don't we stop talking and let her tell us?"

Flora stood tall and cleared her throat. "I, Flora Pettigrew, am changing my name."

"Why would you want to change your name?" asked Ewan.

"Flora doesn't suit me," she said. "From now on I want to be called Skippy."

"Skippy?" said Ewan.

"Like Skippy Skinner, from the comics. He lives in New York City!"

"Sorry, Flora," said Ewan. "You can't just change your name because you think another one might suit you better."

"Mr. So-and-So did," she said. "I heard him say so on the way to Kelly's Bight today."

"But Skippy is a terrible name for a girl," said Ewan. "What will people think?"

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“Who cares?” said Mr. So-and-So. “I think it’s positively plucky.”

“I agree,” said Miss Kelly. “It’s splendidly spunky.”

Flora’s eyes widened with delight. “So does that mean you’ll call me Skippy instead of Flora?”

“Why not?” said Mr. So-and-So.

“I’m not sure about this,” mumbled Ewan.

“Let her be,” Mr. So-and-So whispered. “No harm will come from it.”

Flora let out a giant yawn, then made her way to the lean-to that Mr. So-and-So had built on the other side of the fire. She crawled into her folded blanket and patted the one beside her. “Come on, Miss Kelly. It’s time to whisper each other ghost stories.”

Once Ewan and Mr. So-and-So had settled into the other lean-to, all was quiet except for the hushed whispers and the occasional giggle coming from the other side of the fire. Ewan was happy that Flora had a new friend, but deep down he wished it was his mother Flora was cuddled up to—even if Miss Kelly was one of the loveliest people he ever did meet.

Ewan looked at the sky through the cracks in the lean-to roof and picked a single star to focus on. He imagined his father was staring at the very same one.

Anything was possible.



Eight

Although the snores around Ewan were soft, their existence was an annoying reminder that he himself could not find sleep. He tried to focus instead on the soothing sound of the distant waves, hoping they'd lull him into slumber. He was deep in concentration when he heard a voice.

"What's on your mind, Ewan?"

Mr. So-and-So never ceased to amaze him. "How did you—"

"Your breathing," said Mr. So-and-So. "It's full of questions."

"Actually," said Ewan, "there's just one."

"Your father will not be disappointed to see you," Mr. So-and-So answered.

Ewan should have known that Mr. So-and-So's ten percent magic included mind reading.

"But he left us—"

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“And all the reasons why will fall away once he sets eyes on you.”

Ewan felt a sudden fondness for the strange and wonderful man beside him.

“I do hope you like your name now, Mr. So-and-So,” he said. “Because I think you’re a really nice so-and-so.”

“Like I said,” said Mr. So-and-So, “I grew into it.”

“It’s just that...” Ewan thought about their shared sorrow. “I just hope that you’re happy.”

“I am,” said Mr. So-and-So. “Reasonably so anyway.”

“I want you to be more than just reasonably happy,” said Ewan. “I want you to be...” He searched for the right word. “*Ridiculously* happy.”

“Thank you, Ewan, but don’t fret. I have a full life. The Notion Shop keeps me busy. And if ever I get lonely, I can always meet up with the folks at the ODD Squad. I wouldn’t call them friends exactly, but you know what I appreciate about them?”

“What?”

“Their first instinct isn’t to judge. Because they know what it feels like to be constantly looked at as odd or different. And I do enjoy having a cuppa with the Old Hag—she’s fifty-fifty, by the way. Fifty percent magic, fifty percent evil. And my fellow members are most generous. You should hear the adjectives they use to describe me. *Funny, charming, endearing!* They sure know how to make a so-and-so feel good about himself. And, of course, I build them up when they

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need it too. When the Old Hag feels self-conscious about her appearance, I tell her that of all the hags I've ever met, she is the most beautiful. The fact that she's the *only* one I've ever met is beside the point. So don't worry about me, Ewan. I'm content. And after today," he said, glancing across the fire at the other lean-to, "well, the future is full of possibilities."

Ewan relaxed into his sleeping bag. "I'm glad."

"And..." said Mr. So-and-So, his voice trailing off.

"Yes?" said Ewan.

"Well...how could I possibly be unhappy with you and Flora around? Especially after that little boost you gave me the other day."

"What boost?" Ewan asked.

"The other night you said that a certain man changed your life?"

Ewan could hear uncertainty in Mr. So-and-So's voice. He opened his mouth to offer some reassurance, but Mr. So-and-So cut him off.

"Maybe I misinterpreted," he added quickly. "Maybe you meant the man's *notions* changed your life, not the man himself."

Ewan smiled. "I meant the man," he said. "Without the man there'd be no notions. And without the notions, I wouldn't be on this journey."

Mr. So-and-So rolled himself over to face Ewan and said, "Anytime you want more notions, just say the word. I'll have you back in the shop in an instant."

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Ewan felt a tingling of excitement. "Really?" he said. "How?"

Mr. So-and-So shimmied out from under his blanket. "Follow me."

Ewan left Grace nestled in his bed and followed Mr. So-and-So down the beach. About half a mile from camp, Mr. So-and-So stopped. "Is this a good spot?" he asked.

"For what?" asked Ewan.

"For the Notion Shop."

Before Ewan could ask another question, the empty space before them filled with a thousand pinpricks of color, whirling and twirling through the air in a kaleidoscopic dance. It felt as if they were watching the northern lights, the astronomical phenomenon Ewan had read about but never seen.

"Look closely," said Mr. So-and-So. "It's almost here."

Ewan squinted. A blurry red fishing stage appeared through the multicolored fog. As it came into focus, it grew. The bigger it grew, the more real it became. Within seconds the fog dissipated, and there, sitting haphazardly on the rocky beach, was the Notion Shop.

"Well, don't just stand there, you lazy lump of lard," said Mr. So-and-So. "Go in!"

The inside was just as Ewan remembered, with its bright, white interior and wall-to-wall sewing-supply drawers.

"Is this real?" asked Ewan, looking around. "Or am I somehow just imagining it all?"

"Oh, it's real all right." Mr. So-and-So said. "Except for the outside. The outside's not real." He went behind the counter.

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"I'm starving! How about you?" He pulled out a tin of bully beef and began to open it with its metal key.

Ewan went to the big picture window. Looking out, it appeared to Ewan that the Notion Shop was still in its original location, sitting precariously on top of an outcropping of rocks, in an inlet surrounded by cliffs. Or was it? How could it be?

He turned around to see Mr. So-and-So pop a piece of bully beef into his mouth. He smiled at Ewan and threw him the key. "A souvenir of our time together," he said.

Ewan snatched the key out of the air. He smiled, thinking of Flora and how thrilled she had been when he'd passed on the job of opening the tin to her. He stuck the key in his right trouser pocket. "Thanks," he said.

They moved to the wall that housed the secret wing. Just as Ewan was about to lick the handle, Mr. So-and-So screamed at the top of his lungs. "Noooooooooooo!"

Ewan jumped a mile. "What's wrong?" he said, clutching his chest.

Mr. So-and-So wiggled his hips back and forth. "Oh, that's better," he said. "My unmentionables were riding up. Most uncomfortable."

Ewan scowled. "You frightened the life out of me."

Mr. So-and-So grabbed Ewan's wrist. "According to your racing pulse, you're very much alive."

Ewan yanked his hand away. "Can we just go into the secret wing now?"

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“Well, the handle’s right there!” said Mr. So-and-So. “What are you waiting for? Lick it!”

Ewan licked the handle and the secret door swung open. They stepped into the room, and Mr. So-and-So said, “Go ahead. Why don’t you pick four. To tide you over.”

Ewan scanned the room. He decided to choose one high, two low and one in the middle. He walked to the far wall and eyed a drawer near the top. *If Flora could do this, then I can too.* He took off his shoes and wrapped the toes of his right foot around one of the bottom pulls, and then, grasping two higher pulls with each hand, began to pull himself upward. His legs shook like jelly.

Mr. So-and-So tutted. “What are you? A monkey? Use the ladder, for goodness’ sake.”

“But there is no ladder,” said Ewan.

“Then what do you call this?” said Mr. So-and-So. Ewan turned to see Mr. So-and-So standing beside a rolling library ladder. It was hung on a railing that wrapped around the perimeter of the room. When Mr. So-and-So pushed it, it glided with ease to where Ewan was standing. Happy not to have to scamper up the wall, Ewan carefully climbed the ladder and chose his first notion. He was about to climb back down again when Mr. So-and-So grabbed the bottom rungs. “Wheeeee,” he said, whizzing around the room.

Ewan’s knuckles were white. “Please, Mr. So-and-So,” he said. “Stop!”

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“Let yourself go, lad,” Mr. So-and-So called. “Let yourself be a child for once.”

Tears pricked Ewan’s eyes. He was nobody’s child. How could he be expected to act like one?

Mr. So-and-So ran at full speed, only slowing when the ladder reached the curved rails at the corners. That’s when the rhythm appeared. *Whiz* down the straights, *whoooooosh* around the bends. *Whiz-whoooooosh. Whiz-whoooooosh.* It was a lullaby, a hymn. A meditation and an invitation. An escape. *Let yourself be a child for once.* Ewan leaned into the bends and dared to lean out on the straights. *Whiz-whoooooosh. Whiz-whoooooosh. Let yourself be a child for once.* The words swirled through the air, twisting lightly and turning gently. They brushed Ewan’s face, then flitted away, leaving an echo of touch in their wake. *Whiz-whoooooosh. Whiz-whoooooosh. Let yourself be a child for once.* It was a nursery rhyme, a ditty. It was teeter-totters and merry-go-rounds. Scraped knees and chins. It was letting go by holding on, knuckles white with delight. It was a chant, an anthem, a protest song. A mantra that tore down walls. It was nobody’s child overcome by fun. A fragile boy undone.

“Ewan?”

The ladder slowed.

“Ewan? Are you okay?”

Mr. So-and-So looked up.

He saw a welling, a brimming, a flood.

His face crumpled.

“Oh, my boy.”

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He raced up the rungs and took the child in his arms.

Shhh. Shhh. Shhh.

It was a ballad.

A love song.

A sweet serenade.



Ewan and Mr. So-and-So sat cross-legged on the floor, eating bully beef in a comfortable silence. Mr. So-and-So had gone into the old wing and come back with plates, forks, knives and a picnic blanket. It seemed a lot of effort for a single can of bully beef, but Ewan appreciated the gesture nevertheless.

Mr. So-and-So pulled a jar of mustard from his pocket and placed it on the blanket between them. "Eat up. You must be famished after all the wailin' and bawlin'."

Ewan, who normally would have blushed at such a comment, could only agree. He *was* famished. Crying seemed to work up an appetite.

"There was a dam behind my eyes," he said. "And it broke."

"Silly boy," said Mr. So-and-So. "Why did you build a dam behind your eyes?"

"It never used to be there," he said. "It just appeared one day."

Mr. So-and-So tutted. "Must have been one of those elusive eyeball beavers. Never mind. The dam is gone now. You can cry to your heart's content."

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“My teacher, Ms. Gallagher, said that boys don’t cry.”

“Well, I certainly hope Ms. Gallagher isn’t a biology teacher,” said Mr. So-and-So. “Doesn’t she know that all human beings have tear ducts, regardless of sex? Honestly!”

“Do *you* cry, Mr. So-and-So?”

Mr. So-and-So pulled off his cap and gave it to Ewan. “Go ahead. Drop it.”

Confused but curious, Ewan let Mr. So-and-So’s knit beanie fall to the floor.

A waterfall of tears poured down Mr. So-and-So’s face.

“My hat!” he cried. “My precious hat!”

He scrambled across the picnic blanket on his hands and knees. “How could you, Ewan? How could you drop him? And from such a height too!”

He clutched the hat to his chest. “He was my best friend.”

A moment later he looked up, grinning. “I hope that answered your question.”

Ewan grinned back. “So you’re saying that you can cry at the drop of a hat?”

“Oh ho! You’re smarter than you look!”

Ewan smirked at the sight of Mr. So-and-So struggling to pull his hat down over his gigantic hair. “There,” he said, finally satisfied. A moment later it sprang off his head and landed a few feet away. As was his habit, Ewan stifled a giggle. Mr. So-and-So retrieved his hat and then came back and knelt before Ewan, gesturing to the boy’s mouth. “Open up.” Ewan did as he was told. “Hmmm,” said Mr. So-and-So,

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peering down his throat, “it’s just as I thought. You seem to have been visited by the elusive gullet beaver. And it’s built a dam right across your vocal cords.” Mr. So-and-So put his hand on Ewan’s chin and gently closed his mouth. “It’s good to laugh too, Ewan. Obstreperously and often.”

Ewan found himself welling up again. Mr. So-and-So pulled out a handkerchief. “There, there,” he said, bringing it toward Ewan’s eyes. But at the last second he threw it high in the air with a flourish. “Ta-da!”

“Grace!” said Ewan as the bird fluttered erratically out from under the cloth. Ewan reached for her, disrupting her disoriented flight with his warm and welcoming hands. Tears flowed and laughter rang out as he kissed her beak and nuzzled her neck, but underneath it all, his mixture of emotions scared him.

“Mr. So-and-So,” he said, “this is too much. I don’t like it. The broken dam has broken me.”

Mr. So-and-So held Ewan’s face in his hands. “It’s okay to fall apart from time to time. And it’s easy to lose yourself when you come undone. But don’t worry—I’m here to help you pick up the pieces. Even the ones that fall in the mud or get swept under the rug. I’ll find every last piece, okay? Every last wonderful morsel of you.”

Ewan dared to put his hand over Mr. So-and-So’s. “Thank you,” he whispered.

Mr. So-and-So smiled. “Up you get,” he said. “It’s time you collected the rest of your notions.”

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Ewan set about choosing his notions, and with Mr. So-and-So's permission chose a fifth for Flora. He put Flora's notion into the tube on Grace's leg and slipped his own into his pants pocket, adding them to the four folded ones he'd already read.

"Good idea," said Mr. So-and-So.

"What is?" asked Ewan.

"Putting them in your left trouser pocket. It's a magical place."

As soon as they stepped into the cold night air, the Notion Shop dissolved. Ewan stared as its hard sides softened and its red paint melded into the swirl of color it had been on its arrival. It looked like Mr. So-and-So's giant lollipop come to life, the multicolored stripes spiraling in circles, fading with each rotation until it was nothing but a dusting of rainbow sugar sprinkling the sky.

As they walked back to camp, Ewan kept his hand in his pocket. His palm tingled with anticipation at the thought of reading the notions. It was the same feeling he had every birthday when Duncan Abernathy from the Mercantile would say, "Today's your day, Ewan. Pick a sweet of your choice!" Ewan always chose an Oh Henry! bar but he struggled with when and how to eat it. On the one hand, he wanted to gobble it down right there on the shop floor. On the other, he wanted to make his chocolate last—a bite on the way home, a nibble before bed, a chunk first thing the next morning. It was the same with Mr. So-and-So's notions. When they got back to camp, Ewan was tempted to crawl into his sleeping bag and

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devour them, but something told him he'd be better off to wait, that while anytime was the right time to eat chocolate, Mr. So-and-So's notions were best consumed at just the right moment—and discovering when those moments were was part of the experience.



The next morning Ewan climbed out of the lean-to to find himself shrouded in mist. “Look,” said Flora, pointing to where William and Wilder stood in the distance. “Horse ghosts!” The fact that Ewan could barely make out their shapes filled him with dread. He walked to the water's edge. A heavy bank of fog that hung low over the ocean was rolling in over the land.

Mr. So-and-So stoked the fire. “You know what this means, right, Ewan?” he said.

The news that they wouldn't be heading to Howl's Inlet resulted in another flood of tears from Ewan.

Flora, whose hair was being braided by Miss Kelly, was alarmed. “Why is Ewan crying?” she said. “Ewan never cries. What's happening?”

Mr. So-and-So hung a big iron kettle over the fire. “Not to worry,” he said. “Ewan's emotions have been celebrating their long-awaited freedom by streaming down his face in a parade of tears. And really, who could blame them? If I'd been kept prisoner for that long, I'd wreak a little havoc too.”

“I don't like it,” said Flora. “I want him to stop.”

Heather Smith

Ewan, desperate to appease his little sister and get the attention off himself, took Grace out of his sweater and whispered, "Off you go, Grace. Go see Flora."

The bird took flight and landed on Flora's knee. Ewan nodded to the small container on Grace's leg.

Flora opened it up and pulled out the notion. Her eyes lit up. "For me?" She read it aloud. "*A puffin with stuffin' needs a child to luff him.*"

Flora looked to Mr. So-and-So. "Luff him?"

Mr. So-and-So laughed. "Work with me here, Skippy."

He reached into his left trouser pocket and pulled out a small stuffed puffin.

Flora held it tight. "Oh, Mr. So-and-So!" she said. "I had a toy puffin once, but I lost him! I'm so pleased to have another!"

Ewan, who was still crying, busied himself pouring mugs of tea. Miss Kelly caught his eye. "Don't worry, Ewan," she said. "The fog could very well clear up by midday."

Ewan nodded. But little did she know it wasn't disappointment that Ewan was feeling. It was relief.



He'd woken up that morning with cold feet. Literally and figuratively. His feet had escaped the blanket in the middle of the night and felt like blocks of ice. And he was no longer excited about finding his father. Up until the dam broke,

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he had been fairly sure that searching for his father was the right thing to do. But now he was having second thoughts. What if they couldn't find him? What if they did and he hadn't wanted to be found? Ewan was worried his newfound emotions couldn't handle such disappointment. And maybe he and Flora were better off without their father anyway. For a moment Ewan wondered if they could move into the Notion Shop.

The fog did not look as if it was going to lift, so Ewan decided to burn off some energy walking on the beach. He said goodbye to Mr. So-and-So and Flora, who were whittling pieces of wood into toy cars, and waved to Miss Kelly, who was heading off to work at her shop.

"Mind how you go, lad," said Mr. So-and-So. "That fog is as thick as flea poop."

"I think you mean pea soup," said Ewan.

"No," said Mr. So-and-So, "I mean flea poop. I stepped in a puddle of it once, and it was as thick as—"

"Pea soup?" asked Ewan.

"Yes!" said Mr. So-and-So. "Excellent comparison."

Ewan laughed. "Don't worry. I'll be careful."

Because of the "flea poop" fog, Ewan couldn't see far into the distance, but he enjoyed how the beach unrolled bit by bit before him, a maritime carpet of seashells, starfish and kelp. The air, despite its heaviness, lightened Ewan's spirits. Its salty smell tickled his nose, and its chill danced on his cheeks.

Heather Smith

Sitting on a large beach rock facing the ocean, Ewan reached into his pocket. It felt like the right time for a notion. He caressed the four small slips of paper. With his thumb and forefinger, he pulled one from the middle.

He held it a moment before reading it. He had that Oh Henry! bar feeling—should he gobble it up or savor it? It didn't really matter, he supposed, because, unlike a bar of chocolate, a notion could be enjoyed again and again.

Ewan smoothed wrinkles out of the notion by rubbing it across his thigh, the tweed of his knickers making a *scritch-scratch* sound. The notion was face down, and he could see the curlicue shapes of Mr. So-and-So's writing through the thin paper. He couldn't make out the words but could see there were seven. Unable to savor the notion any longer, Ewan flipped it over and read it aloud.

"Labels are for jam jars, not people."

He was disappointed. Of course labels were for jars. Who would stick a label on a person? What would that even look like? And what purpose would it serve?

Ewan folded the notion to indicate he had read it and put it back in his pocket with the others. He was going to pick another but stopped himself. He decided to mull the jam-jar one for a while instead.

He moved farther up the rock so that he was able to stretch out his legs and get more comfortable. He thought about the labels on the canned goods in the root cellar of that cabin in the woods.

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Pickled beets. Ingredients: beets, sugar, vinegar, salt.

Partridgeberry jam. Ingredients: partridgeberries, sugar, orange peel.

He imagined himself wearing a label.

Ewan Pettigrew. Ingredients: blood, bones, guts.

Now *that* would be false advertising.

Blood, bones and *fear* would be more like it.

Maybe the label needed a footnote. *May contain traces of cat.* Because just as Mr. So-and-So declared himself to be ten percent magic, Ewan believed he was ten percent scaredy-cat. Maybe more.

The blood, bones and guts label was more suited to Flora. Girls were said to be made of sugar and spice and all things nice, but those things didn't describe Flora at all. Flora was more than a sugary label. She was fierce.

Ewan hugged his knees to his chest and looked into the horizon. Maybe, he thought, I can be more than my label too.

The possibility brought him to tears. He was beginning to wonder how much one boy could cry but decided he didn't much care. For once, he felt in control. He could cry if he wanted to—it was his choice, nobody else's. He let the tears fall freely down his face. Seemed he could cry at the drop of a hat too. The memory of Mr. So-and-So and his hair made him smile.

Ewan closed his eyes, letting the salt of his tears mix with the salty air on his face. He was glad the dam behind his eyes

Heather Smith

was gone but wished there was one behind his nose, which was now running relentlessly.

A moment later he felt a shift in the air around him. It almost felt as if there was someone, or something, casting a shadow above him. A shiver went through him—a shiver so cold it almost turned the tears on his cheek to ice. You are not your label, he said to himself. You are not your label.

He opened his eyes.

Hovering above him was a cloud. It was soft and wispy, like a giant bed of freshly shorn sheep's wool. Ewan was immediately drawn to it. He stood on his tippy-toes and stretched out his hand. He was just about to give it a friendly pat when something in his gut told him to back away. With every step he took, the cloud moved with him, its presence losing its welcoming feel. Ewan kept walking backward until he felt his legs hit a large boulder. That's when he decided to turn and run. His feet slid this way and that as he navigated the tough terrain. He was desperate to look back to see if the cloud was still chasing him, but he kept his eyes forward, his mind focused on getting safely back to camp. It was only when he could see Mr. So-and-So's lean-tos in the distance that he dared to look around. He could see the cloud retreating out over the ocean. He paused for a moment to catch his breath. He knew now that what he had just seen was the cloud that had taken Father and Mrs. Dennehy away.

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Ewan's head felt muddled, and he desperately needed to talk things through with Mr. So-and-So. But when he got back to camp, Mr. So-and-So was fast asleep.

"Mr. So-and-So, wake up," he said, giving his shoulder a shake. "Something has happened."

"What?"

Ewan looked around. "Where's Flora?" he asked.

"You mean Skippy?" said Mr. So-and-So. He pointed at Flora's bed in the opposite lean-to. "She was right there, building a miniature lean-to for her puffin."

Ewan saw a collection of small twigs and branches on her crumpled sleeping bag. "She's not there now. How long ago was that?"

"Oh, I'm not sure," said Mr. So-and-So, yawning. "I've been asleep."

"You should have been watching her!" Ewan shouted.

"Relax," said Mr. So-and-So. "She has probably gone up to help Miss Kelly at the shop."

Ewan's heart filled with dread. "William and the Hurricle are gone," he said, running toward the wharf where Wilder stood alone.

Mr. So-and-So got to his feet. "Silly girl! Where would she take off to in this fog?"

Ewan wasn't sure, but he had a good idea. He hopped on Wilder's back. Grace appeared and perched on his shoulder.

"Where do you think you're going?" asked Mr. So-and-So.

Ewan grabbed the horse's reins. "Puffin Rock."

Heather Smith

Mr. So-and-So jumped onto Wilder behind Ewan. “Not without me you’re not.”

“You should stay here,” said Ewan. “Tell Miss Kelly what is happening.”

“There’s no time for that now,” said Mr. So-and-So. “Time is of the essence!”

Ewan nudged Wilder with his heels. “Hyah!”

As they hurried along the coastline, Ewan’s heart did peculiar things inside his chest. It would race with anxiousness one minute and drop with dread the next. But as soon as he saw the Hurricle teetering over the edge of Puffin Rock, it stopped altogether.



“Ewan, let’s go.”

Go where? thought Ewan. *I’m dead.*

Mr. So-and-So dragged him off the horse. “We need to find Flora.”

The second Ewan’s feet hit the ground, he heard a familiar voice that brought him back to life.

“Help me! Help!”

Ewan scrambled toward the cliff. “I’m coming, Flora!”

Even though the Hurricle was hanging precariously over the cliff’s edge, Ewan hoped Flora was inside it—better to be at the top of the cliff than at the bottom. It turned out she was halfway between.

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Ewan gasped when he saw his sister hanging from a small outcropping of rock, her little hands clinging to its crumbly surface, her body dangling below it.

“William!” Flora cried. “He fell. He landed in the ocean. I think he drowned!”

Ewan forced the image out of his mind and focused all of his energy on his sister.

“It’s okay, Flora,” he called. “Everything will be okay.”

Grace flew down and sat on Flora’s shoulder. Ewan hoped Flora could feel the comfort he knew the bird was trying to give.

Ewan turned to Mr. So-and-So. “Well?” he said. “Aren’t you going to do something?”

Mr. So-and-So was in a daze. “She’s alive. Thank goodness she’s alive.”

Ewan shook Mr. So-and-So by the arm. “Do something! We need to help her.”

“Yes, yes. Of course,” said Mr. So-and-So, starting to focus. “Let’s see. How about rope? We need some rope. Where do you think we can find some rope?”

“Some rope?” Ewan growled. “What do you mean *some rope*? Aren’t you ten percent magic? Use that to save her, for god’s sake!”

Mr. So-and-So looked stricken. “It doesn’t work like that, Ewan. I can’t just—”

“What do you mean you *can’t just*?” said Ewan. “You can make the Notion Shop appear out of thin air, but you can’t magic Flora to safety?”

Heather Smith

Mr. So-and-So was flustered. “Magic is nothing without guts, and I—”

“You’re useless!” Ewan screamed.

“Please!” Flora cried. “Stop fighting.”

Ewan gave Mr. So-and-So one final glare before scrambling down the cliff. The only magic happening at that moment was the disappearing act of Ewan’s crippling fear of heights. He moved down the cliff as quickly as a mountain goat. Facing the rock, he concentrated on keeping three points of contact at all times. Footholds were few and far between, but Ewan stretched himself so far it was as if he was made of elastic. He never looked down, and with Grace’s coos as a guide, it wasn’t long before he was on his stomach, leaning over the ledge Flora hung from. Grace, her job done, flew back up the cliffside. The dazed and confused Mr. So-and-So needed her more now.

Flora’s little fingers were white from gripping the ledge.

“It’s okay. I’m here now,” said Ewan.

He placed his one hand under his sister’s left armpit and the other around her right leg. With one mighty heave, he hoisted her up and over the ledge, where she collapsed into a sobbing heap. Loose rock fell from above. Perhaps it was the cliff protesting the disruption—or perhaps it was applauding the only way it knew how. In any case, as Flora lay panting on the gravelly rock, Ewan pulled her underneath him, his body forming a protective shell.

“William...” Flora whispered.

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"I need you to listen to me," said Ewan. "Once you catch your breath, we are climbing back up this cliff. Don't worry. There are plenty of crevices and footholds," he lied. "Okay?"

"I'm not sure I can do this, Ewan."

"Yes, you can. I believe in you." He held out his hand. "Ready, Skippy?"

Flora nodded. "Ready."

When Ewan pulled Flora to standing, he noticed blood seeping through the leg of her dungarees. Flora seemed oblivious to it. Ewan looked away so as not to draw attention to it. First he needed to get Flora back to safety.

Ewan ascended first, so that Flora could follow his exact path. He made sure that each lump and bump he grabbed or stepped on was fixed solidly to the rock face and would not give way. It was unnerving to have Flora out of his sight. But when he put his foot on a small outcropping of shale only to feel it crumble away to nothingness, he knew he had been right to lead the way.

They moved up the cliff methodically and at a steady speed, Ewan calling out an encouraging direction at every step. The cliffside's harsh appearance turned into a thing of beauty with its offering of perfectly sized crevices and footholds.

The cliff was a gift.

Sweaty and shaky, Ewan reached the top and pulled himself over the peak. Mr. So-and-So reached for Flora as she made her approach. "Don't touch her!" yelled Ewan.

Heather Smith

Mr. So-and-So took a step back. "I was only trying to help."

"Help?" said Ewan, pulling Flora to her feet. "*You? Help?* Ha! You're as useless as a chocolate teapot!"

"Ewan!" said Flora.

"No wonder your family didn't want you out on the ocean with them—you'd have gotten them all drowned!"

Mr. So-and-So hung his head. But then he noticed the blood. "Her leg," he said, pointing at Flora's dungarees. "It's bleeding."

"Don't worry," said Flora. "It doesn't hurt."

"It will when the adrenaline wears off," said Mr. So-and-So. "Best get her back to the cove," he said. "Get that looked at."

Ewan picked up Flora and put her on Wilder's back. "I don't need you to tell me what's best for my sister."

He climbed on behind her and gave Wilder a nudge. "Hyah!"

Flora looked back. "Are we just going to leave him here?"

"Maybe he will fly back," Ewan said, loud enough for Mr. So-and-So to hear. "He's ten percent magic, after all—when it suits him."

As they rode off, Ewan stole a backward glance. Mr. So-and-So stood slumped as he watched them ride away. Grace sat protectively on his shoulder.



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Miss Kelly welcomed the two children with open arms and a worried face. “Oh, you poor little mites. What a terrible ordeal.”

Flora sobbed into Miss Kelly’s chest as the gravity of the events sank in and the loss of William became all too real. Ewan too shed tears for the horse, who in all likelihood was lost to the sea. He shed some for Wilder as well, who would be lost without his longtime best friend.

Miss Kelly calmed the children with cups of hot tea and a blazing fire. Then she tended to Flora’s battered leg.

“The bones are all intact, but I suspect you’ll be off that leg for the next week or so.”

“A week?” said Ewan.

Miss Kelly nodded. “I’m afraid so.”

Ewan kept his worries about how Flora’s injury might affect the rest of their trip to himself. It’d be selfish to say them out loud.

“You can go find Father without me,” said Flora, reading his mind. “I’ll stay with Miss Kelly—if she’ll have me.”

“Of course,” said Miss Kelly. “I can’t have you gallivanting up the coast in this state, can I?”

Ewan nodded in appreciation.

“Now,” said Miss Kelly, opening a bottle of rubbing alcohol, “this is going to sting a bit.”

Flora winced as Miss Kelly cleaned the cuts and scratches that covered her leg. Ewan winced too. Every dab felt like a stab.

Heather Smith

“All done,” said Miss Kelly, wrapping the wounds in gauze and elevating Flora’s leg with a cushion. She topped up their tea and moved to the window. “I do hope Mr. So-and-So is okay,” she said, gazing into the distance. “It sounds as if you were quite hard on him, Ewan.”

“I was mad.”

“But he’s such a sensitive soul.”

Ewan stifled a snort. Sensitive? She had to be kidding. Most of the time Mr. So-and-So was like a bull in a china shop—charging around with reckless abandon, giving little thought to the precious items that surrounded him.

Still, he had his moments.

My boy.

Ewan joined Miss Kelly at the window.

Together they waited.



Nine

Ewan, Flora and Miss Kelly moved onto the Puffin Shop porch so they'd have a wider area to scan nervously. Ewan thought about going back to look for Mr. So-and-So, but Miss Kelly preferred that he stay put, away from the dangerous cliffs. It's just as well, thought Ewan. *He's probably just sulking on the cliff's edge anyway.* Still, as time moved on, he couldn't help but worry. It was almost two hours before Mr. So-and-So appeared. It was Flora who saw him first.

"There he is!" she yelled. "And he has William with him!"

It was quite a scene to behold—a limping Mr. So-and-So, pulling a limping William, who was in turn pulling the battered Hurricle. It hurt Ewan to see the three so injured and broken. Grace flapped about ahead of them, a clumsy but confident head of the pack.

Heather Smith

Miss Kelly ran to Mr. So-and-So and gave him a gentle hug. His face, which was red from exertion, went an even deeper shade of crimson.

Ewan watched as the poor man lumbered along slowly, one hand in his pocket and one on the reins. He walked with his head hung and his shoulders slumped. Even his normally bouncy curls seemed to droop under an unseen weight. When he reached the porch, he avoided Ewan's eye. Flora, forgetting her injury, jumped to greet him. Mr. So-and-So responded to her yelp of pain by helping her settle back into the wicker chair.

"How's William?" she asked. "How did you save him? Are you okay? You look hot. And you smell bad too."

Miss Kelly ushered Mr. So-and-So to a chair and passed him a hot cup of tea.

"Take your time," she said. "You can tell us what happened when you're ready."

Mr. So-and-So took a sip of tea, his right hand shaking as he brought the cup to his lips. Ewan found it hard to watch. The guilt he'd been keeping deep inside was beginning to come to the surface. He shouldn't have left Mr. So-and-So alone on that cliff, no matter how angry he'd been at him.

Mr. So-and-So took another sip of tea. When his teacup was settled back on its saucer, he began.

"It was a shock to see Skippy dangling from the side of the cliff like a pair of long underwear hung on a line. I thought, One gust of wind and that girl's a goner! How I wished she

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really was a pair of long underwear. If a pair of long underwear falls from a line, it might get a bit dirty—embarrass itself by looking a bit soiled. But if a girl falls from a cliff, well, let's face it, most likely she'll be as dead as a doornail. The thought made me go numb with fear. I was as frozen as my brothers' hearts when they denied me my rightful spot in the family business. Anyhoo, after Ewan's remarkable rescue, I had time to reflect—I was all alone, you see, and it was then that I thought, Chin up, So-and-So! You can't change the past, but you do have control over the future. So right then and there, standing all alone in the middle of nowhere, I made a solemn vow that the next time I saw Skippy dangling from a cliff, I'd be the first to come to her aid."

The words *remarkable rescue* swirled in Ewan's head. He'd felt Mr. So-and-So's gaze as he said them but hadn't dared look up to meet it. He wasn't ready to look Mr. So-and-So in the eye quite yet. Not after all that had happened. It was nice to be praised, though. It seemed to soften his anger a bit.

Mr. So-and-So raised his cup to his lips, his hand shaking a little less. After a loud *slurp* and an even louder *aaaaah*, he continued.

"I was about to make the journey back to Kelly's Bight when Grace, who had flown away during my self-reflection, came flapping and squawking up over the edge of the cliff. Luckily, I speak pigeon. Our conversation went like this:

'Squawk, squawk, squawkity-squawk!'

'Squawk?'

Heather Smith

‘Squawk!’

‘Squawk, squawk, squawk?’

‘Squawk!’

“I couldn’t believe it. William had washed up on the shore below. And he was alive! I immediately jumped into action! Well, not jumped. Climbed. It was a difficult descent, as you well know,” he said, nodding at Ewan, who was looking at his feet. “But don’t worry, I didn’t hurt myself. I was A-OK. Unlike William, who was in a very bad way. But he was better off than I imagined he’d be. The impact when he hit the water must have done a number on his ribs, but he was breathing and in good spirits. After we both had a cup of tea and shared a sardine sandwich, we were good to go.

“I walked him along the coast a bit, until the cliffside became less rugged and more like a hill. We found a well-used path that meandered upward. It weaved this way and that, which made the incline less steep but near tripled its length. We were exhausted when we reached the top. Poor William was drastically drained.”

All heads turned to look at William. “The poor dear,” said Miss Kelly. She left the porch and went to him, quickly administering a healthy dose of tender loving care. She took the horse’s head in her hands and stared into his face. “And by this stunned look in his eyes,” she said, “I would say he’s critically confounded.”

“I’d go so far as to say acutely astounded,” said Mr. So-and-So.

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And so began another round of word tennis between the two grown-ups.

"Dangerously dazed," said Miss Kelly.

"Fantastically fazed," said Mr. So-and-So.

"Badly befuddled."

"Markedly muddled."

William interrupted them with a whinny.

"Will he be okay?" asked Flora.

Miss Kelly nodded. "He'll be on stall rest for several weeks. My neighbor has a barn. I'm sure he'll have room for William."

Mr. So-and-So made eye contact with Ewan for the first time since their exchange at the cliff.

"I guess it's just you and me for the trip to Howl's Inlet, eh?"

The eagerness in Mr. So-and-So's face unlocked something in Ewan. He felt ashamed of the things he'd said. He'd been so afraid. And so angry. He couldn't hold his gaze. Looking down, he noticed the blood.

"Mr. So-and-So," he said. "You're hurt."

Miss Kelly followed Ewan's eyes. Mr. So-and-So's hand was in his pants pocket, and the pocket was seeping blood.

Miss Kelly gently pulled his hand out. Flora and Ewan gasped at the sight of Mr. So-and-So's palm, which was shredded with gashes.

"I lost my footing at one point," he said sheepishly. "I fell down the rock face—I tried to hold on, but I just kept sliding and sliding." He looked at his hand and then at the children. "Don't worry. It's not as bad as it looks."

Heather Smith

Despite the goriness, Miss Kelly remained calm. "Come, my love. Let's go get this sorted. I have plenty of first-aid supplies upstairs."

Mr. So-and-So smiled weakly. "Having you tend to my gruesome injuries is the height of romance."

As Miss Kelly led Mr. So-and-So into the house, Flora said, "Mr. So-and-So? It might sting a bit."

Mr. So-and-So bent down and whispered in her ear. "If I'm half as brave as you are, Skippy, I'll be A-OK."

Such a nice man.

Ewan looked to the ocean in shame.



It was decided that Flora would stay overnight at the Puffin Shop so she could sleep with her leg elevated in a comfortable bed and have a close eye kept on her by the wonderfully attentive Miss Kelly. Ewan and Mr. So-and-So would camp on the beach again before heading off for Howl's Inlet in the morning. Mr. So-and-So's injury was indeed not nearly as bad as it had looked, and Miss Kelly had done a thorough job of bandaging him up.

Except for a few grunts and groans from Mr. So-and-So, settling into camp was mostly a wordless affair. But when Mr. So-and-So attempted to build the fire with his comically large bandaged hand, Ewan broke the silence. "Sit down, Mr. So-and-So. I'll take care of this."

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Mr. So-and-So sighed. "Useless again," he said, settling himself onto his sleeping bag.

Ewan busied himself arranging kindling in the firepit. "About that," he said. "I'm sorry for the things I said. I was out of line, and I didn't mean them. I was very scared, and I took it out on you."

"Don't worry, Ewan," said Mr. So-and-So, trying to get comfortable on his bed of boughs. "I've forgotten it already."

Ewan left his fire duties to help him. "Lift up," he said, nudging Mr. So-and-So's hip with the toe of his boot.

"Lift up what?" said Mr. So-and-So.

Ewan smiled. "Your super-riere derriere."

Mr. So-and-So laughed and obliged. Ewan flattened the greenery underneath.

"That better?" he asked.

Mr. So-and-So relaxed back. "Perfect."

Ewan knelt by his side. "Mr. So-and-So?"

"Yes, Ewan?"

"I've been thinking..."

"Go on."

"You weren't useless. You were scared, just like I was. I can see that now. And I don't suppose ten percent magic makes much difference when you're faced with what we were faced with."

"It's okay, Ewan. Honestly."

"It's not okay. I've been scared my whole life—I know how it feels to be frozen with fear. I don't know why I thought it should be any different for you."

Heather Smith

“Probably because I claimed to be ninety percent guts. It’s what my grandmother said we were, so I just went with it, even though I’ve never really felt gutsy at all.”

“Well, it took guts to save William,” said Ewan. “Thank you for that.”

“It should be me thanking you,” said Mr. So-and-So. “You inspired me, Ewan. I thought, If young Ewan can navigate this precarious precipice, then so can I. Turns out I didn’t need magic. I needed to believe in myself.”

Ewan had never been anyone’s inspiration before.

“Now don’t you start crying,” said Mr. So-and-So with a wink.

Ewan smiled. He wiped away a tear and went back to tending the fire. Before it was even lit, he could hear Mr. So-and-So’s snores. Ewan knew that sleep wouldn’t come as easily for him. There had been numerous thoughts jumbling about in his head ever since his encounter with the cloud—an encounter he still hadn’t had the chance to tell Mr. So-and-So about. The experience had churned up a lot of disjointed ideas in Ewan’s head. Fragments floated about like the ash from the fire—sparks of ideas that fizzled out before they became fully formed.

Ewan climbed into bed and hoped sleep would come, but when he closed his eyes all he could see was Mr. So-and-So’s shredded hand. His own hand moved to his pants pocket, the memory of the blood on Mr. So-and-So’s trousers seeping through his mind. It was then that he felt the notions. With

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all the commotion, he'd forgotten all about them. He quietly moved back to the firepit, where he pulled a notion out of his pocket. Could what was written on this small piece of paper bring clarity to the muddiness in his mind?

He held it in the light of the fire and read:

Pickles are transformative.

Ewan smiled at the silly words and reached for another notion. Maybe this one would be more helpful, he thought.

You don't need a shovel to dig deep.

Nope.

Ewan sighed and put the fire out. In the still of the night, he went back to bed. *You don't need a shovel to dig deep.*

He closed his eyes.

He imagined he was on a beach, a sandy one.

With cupped hands he began to dig.

He thought of his father.

Sand slipped through his fingers.

A million grains of sadness.

Why did he leave?

Scoop.

He didn't have to.

A billion grains of anger.

I'll always be here for you.

A trillion grains of lies.

Scoop.

A rock.

Bloodied knuckles.

Heather Smith

The sand below, filled with moisture.
Drizzle in his face.
The smell of the sea.
Clouds in the sky.
But not *that* cloud.
Scoop.
What did it want?
Scoop.
Who sent it?
Snippets of cloud-talk scooped from the earth.
A bank of cloud when she needs one.
A cloud bed out of thin air.
Two million grains of confusion.
Gouge, shift, dig.
Blood, sweat and tears.
She was wiping her face—as if she'd been crying.
The sight of it made your father go teary-eyed.
Maybe he'd already been crying.
A gazillion scoopfuls of sorrow.
Sorrow.
Where did all the sad people go?
Unhappiness feeds his creativity.
What if..
No.
It doesn't make sense.
Whoosh!
A wave.

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The hole caving in.

Flooded.

Hands like scoops.

No! No!

“Calm down, my little waif.”

Ewan opened his eyes.

“What’s all this about?” asked Mr. So-and-So. “You looked like a dog dreaming about squirrels.”

“I wasn’t asleep.”

“You weren’t?”

“I was just thinking—I think.”

“If you say so. In any case, you’re wound up as tight as a spring.”

Mr. So-and-So patted Ewan’s hands, which Ewan was still holding like scoops. “Relax,” he said. “Why don’t I tell you a story?”

“What kind of a story?” asked Ewan.

“A bedtime one. You know, once upon a time and happily ever after. That sort of thing.”

Ewan closed his eyes again. The breeze cooled, the ocean soothed and Mr. So-and-So’s voice whispered a story about a young fisherboy who single-handedly—and one-handedly (he’d fallen down a cliff and injured the other)—sailed the seven seas. There were whales and sea monsters and a choir of singing mackerels.

It was a quadrillion grains of magic.



Ten

In the morning Ewan and Mr. So-and-So said their good-byes to Flora and Miss Kelly and headed up the coast. They took the *Destiny* so Wilder could stay with William, his company sure to hasten William's healing. Grace and Kipper were left behind as well. The quieter the journey, the better, Ewan thought. Mr. So-and-So would be distraction enough. That said, as they drove up the peninsula, Ewan wondered if there was much point in going to Howl's Inlet at all. While Mr. So-and-So had been packing, Ewan had been mulling over what he'd dug up in his dreams the night before. If his newly forming theory was true, the journey would be pointless.

As they passed Puffin Rock they looked at each other and smiled. Ewan was glad there were no hard feelings between

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him and Mr. So-and-So. Especially because he needed to bounce some ideas off him.

Ewan had taken over the driving so that Mr. So-and-So could rest his sore hand and relax with a bag of licorice allsorts on the bench seat behind him. Ewan had hoped to be face-to-face with Mr. So-and-So so he could see the man's reaction to what Ewan was about to say, but that would mean waiting for a pit stop, and Ewan's ideas were burning a hole in his mind. He couldn't wait.

"Mr. So-and-So?"

"Yes?"

"I think that maybe the Steward of Sorrow kidnapped my father."

A pink jelly button shot out of Mr. So-and-So's mouth and flew across the bow of the *Destiny*.

"Have you gone mad?" said Mr. So-and-So.

"Hear me out," said Ewan, his eyes on the road. "The other day when I went for a walk, I was crying—again—and, well, you mightn't believe this, but a cloud came. *The* cloud, I think. The one that took my father."

"That's quite an extraordinary story, Ewan. But I don't see what it has to do with the Steward of Sorrow."

"You said that unhappiness feeds his creativity."

"And?"

"*And* you said he was a writer."

"So?"

"So I was thinking that maybe he kidnaps sad people to use as inspiration."

Heather Smith

"Oh, I don't know," said Mr. So-and-So. "Ol' Stewie is a misery-guts, but he's no kidnapper."

"He could be," said Ewan. "If only he knew someone who could lure people away with a magical cloud."

Ewan stole a glance back at Mr. So-and-So and saw that his eyebrows had shot up in interest.

"The Weatherman?" he said.

Ewan nodded. "You said he creates a bank of fog for the Vanishing Woman when she needs one. Maybe he creates a floating cloud for his ol' pal Stewie."

"That certainly sounds plausible," said Mr. So-and-So.

"Tell me," said Ewan. "That cloud bed he made for you. Were you drawn to it?"

"Oh yes," said Mr. So-and-So. "I even tried to give it a friendly pat, but my hand went right through it!"

Ewan slammed on the brakes so hard that Mr. So-and-So's allsorts went flying, paper bag and all.

"Thank you, Mr. So-and-So," Ewan said, jumping out of the *Destiny*. "This little chat has made me more certain than ever. Your devious friends are behind Father's disappearance, and I'm going to prove it."

Ewan made his way toward a clearing in a nearby field. Mr. So-and-So raced along behind him. "How are you going to do that?" he asked.

Ewan felt a familiar prickling in the back of his eyes. "By crying."

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They sat on the grass, cross-legged and side by side. A lone cow looked at them with interest from the other side of a weathered old fence.

“Want me to come with you?” asked Mr. So-and-So.

Ewan shook his head. “I think I need to do this alone.”

Mr. So-and-So gave an understanding nod. Placing a hand on Ewan’s shoulder, he said, “I’ll leave you to it” and then walked away.

“Mr. So-and-So?” Ewan called. “Give Flora and Grace a hug from me, will you? And Kipper too?”

Mr. So-and-So turned around. “What about Miss Kelly? I can give her a hug *and* a kiss, if you like.”

Ewan smiled. “Please do.”

As Mr. So-and-So walked away, he said, “Best of luck in your attempt to get kidnapped by an unusual and devious entrepreneur, Ewan! I really mean that. From the bottom of my heart.”

Ewan laughed.

Then, after Mr. So-and-So had disappeared from sight, Ewan began to cry.



It didn’t take long for the cloud to arrive. With Ewan’s thoughts on where he was going and what he was leaving

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behind, the tears fell fast and freely. Just as before, the cloud had a certain magnetism that pulled Ewan close. This time, when he felt himself reach forward to give it a friendly pat, he didn't pull away.

The second his fingers went through the airy vapor, Ewan felt a shift. The wonder about where he was going disappeared, and there existed only the moment he was in. He had expected the cloud to feel cool, but instead it was warm and inviting. The fact that his hand went right through it didn't stop him from climbing aboard—he somehow knew he'd be supported by the feathery softness. As the cloud lifted off, the landscape below grew bigger and bigger. Out of the corner of his eye, Ewan could see a vehicle cruising along a country road in the distance. How strange, he thought. *That car looks like a boat!* He'd never before seen anything like it! The car stopped, and its driver looked to the sky and waved. Ewan smiled and waved back to the friendly stranger.

The cloud moved higher and higher, until it was hundreds of feet in the air, floating gently and at an even speed. The ocean below was endless, and the view was so breathtaking it felt painful to look at, like its beauty was too much to bear. Ewan put his head down and closed his eyes. He rode the cloud for many moments, a day's worth, maybe more. Time seemed immeasurable on the cloud. Counting seconds and minutes was as futile as counting the water droplets the cloud was made from.

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Ewan drifted in and out of sleep, his dreams filled with unfamiliar people like the persistent young girl who seemed to cartwheel, jump and skip through every scene.

At one point Ewan felt another shift. A chill ran through his body, hundreds of goose bumps banding together to say, “Something’s happening! Wake up, wake up!” The moment had the feeling of Christmas morning, an anticipation of good things to come. Ewan sat up to see the cloud heading toward a thick bank of fog. He felt an overwhelming uneasiness. Clutching his heart, he hugged his knees to his chest. Wispy strands of vapor swirled all around him. They looked soft, like kitten tails or the loose threads of a gray woolen sweater. Somehow they brought him comfort.

Adding to Ewan’s swell of emotions was the sound of stringed instruments in the distance. Their repetitive scales and tuning of strings filled Ewan with a great sense of anticipation, as if at any second a concert might begin. A moment later the fog lifted like a curtain, revealing hundreds of smaller clouds twirling and whirling to a classical song that was getting louder by the minute. They danced up, down and all around, but it was their final choreography that took Ewan’s breath away. Multiple lines of clouds zoomed though the air, performing loop-de-loops and barrel rolls at top speed before arranging themselves, one by one, into a long staircase. At the end of that staircase—hundreds of feet below—was a rugged but charming island. From his vantage point on the cloud, Ewan could see the island in its entirety. It was dotted with saltbox houses,

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and a charming lighthouse sat atop a cliff at its most southerly point. The whole scene appeared to him blurred at the edges and in muted tones, like an old family photo of a great-great-grandfather he'd never met but felt a connection to nevertheless.

The staircase clouds sank under Ewan's weight as if they were pans of ice in open water. The sensation made Ewan feel unsteady.

"Almost there! Don't stop! You can do it!"

Ewan looked down at the rocky shoreline below. A figure stood on the beach rocks. He wore rubber boots and an oilskin hat. In his hand was a megaphone. With his encouragement, Ewan made it down what had felt like a never-ending staircase.

At the bottom the man embraced Ewan warmly. He smelled as if he had just swallowed a dose of strong-smelling medicine, presumably for the rattle Ewan could hear in his chest. "Don't worry, young man," he said. "We will help you."

"Help me with what?"

"Your melancholy."

"Ah," said Ewan, recalling the feeling that had come over him in the fog. "That's what it is."

"Yes," said the man as the pair walked up the beach. "Melancholy mixed with despair mixed with hopelessness mixed with heartache. Don't worry. It's perfectly normal."

"But why do I feel this way?" asked Ewan.

"Good question," said the man. "But the answer is beside the point."

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“But how can you help me fix it if we don’t know what caused it?”

The man took out a handkerchief and blew his nose. “Who said anything about fixing?”

The foghorn from the lighthouse let out a deep bleat as Ewan followed the man inland from the coast. It sounded as if it was sighing.

Ewan encountered many passersby, all of whom seemed to be wandering aimlessly and at a snail’s pace.

“It’s wonderful to meet you,” they said. Sympathy dripped from their voices. It made Ewan feel as though he was grieving something. But what?

As the man led Ewan farther into the village, Ewan noticed that the houses were of all different styles and sizes. Some were mansions and some were little more than shacks, but they stood proudly side by side as if they were of equal status. The community atmosphere Ewan had been feeling heightened as they passed the general store, the library and the local schoolhouse. The sepia tone Ewan had seen from the cloud had not disappeared, and although the houses were devoid of color, they still managed to appear homey and inviting.

As they entered the town square, Ewan saw the source of the classical music, which had been playing nonstop since his arrival. It was coming from a loudspeaker strapped to one of two large columns flanking the entrance of a rather grand building.

Heather Smith

“Town hall,” said the man after a trio of surprisingly dainty sneezes. “You’ll be visiting there today. But first let me show you to your house.”

“Are you okay?” asked Ewan. “You don’t look well.”

The man dismissed Ewan’s concern with a wave. “Occupational hazard. As the town’s official greeter, I am constantly exposed to the elements. And as you can tell, rain, drizzle and fog are staples of the island. But there’s nothing like a layer of mist on your face to make you feel alive!”

As they walked away, Ewan glanced at the clock tower that stood in the center of the town hall’s courtyard. After the unnerving timelessness of the cloud, its presence felt grounding.

They walked through the town center and followed a dirt road that wound its way up a slight hill. They passed only one house before coming to a country lane.

“How is it that I can still hear the music?” asked Ewan.

The man’s face lit up, like he’d been waiting for Ewan to ask. “Well, when the air above the ground is warmer than the air near the ground, it causes a temperature inversion, which causes sound waves to rise and bend back toward the earth, causing a fountain of sound, drip-drip-dropping all over the island. Isn’t that fascinating?”

Ewan nodded. “Yes, I suppose it is.”

When they reached the end of the lane, they came upon a saltbox house set back in a meadow. Next to it was an old barn, which was separated from the house by a dirt yard.

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“We’re here,” said the man, but Ewan already knew. The sight of the house had filled his heart with a sad yearning, something he hadn’t felt when passing the other homes along the way.

Ewan ran to the front door. A cast-iron bulldog stood guard. It wasn’t the most attractive of figurines. In fact, it was quite ugly. It had droopy jowls, and beady eyes that were painted red. Ewan stroked its head. *Don’t worry, mutt. You’re handsome in your own way.*

He walked into the house and immediately turned right and entered the kitchen. He looked out the window into the dirt yard. The sight of the barn made him smile, though he did not know why.

“How are you feeling?” asked the man.

Ewan turned around and looked at the old barn-board table in the center of the room. “Have you heard of a thing called *saudade*?” he asked.

The man smiled. “Oh yes.”

Ewan wiped a tear from his cheek. “I am filled with it.”

“Good,” said the man. “Very good.”

The man said his goodbyes and instructed Ewan to visit the town hall by day’s end to register with the deputy mayor.

“Am I to stay here all by myself?” asked Ewan.

The man looked him up and down. “I don’t see why not. You’re almost grown, aren’t you? Don’t worry—the kitchen is fully stocked, and there are no boogeymen on the island. Not that I know of anyway!”

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The man started to laugh as he exited through the front door of the house. Ewan went out through the kitchen. Leaning against the side porch railings, he took in his surroundings. A series of little roads had been carved from the dirt of the yard. Ewan began to sob.



Ewan didn't feel the need to explore the layout of the house—he seemed to know it intuitively. After his breakdown on the porch, he went back to the fully stocked kitchen and made himself a meal of homemade bread and mustard pickles, which he ate at the beautiful barn-board table.

Later he made his way back down the country lane and into town. He waved to passersby, and they waved back. He wondered how it was possible for the townsfolk to look haunted but peaceful at the same time. A moment later he caught his reflection in the window of a bakery shop and saw that he too had the same miserable yet contented look.

Soon Ewan was standing inside the town hall. It was a grand space with shiny tiled floors. If it weren't for the strange spiral staircase in the center of the room, Ewan would have likened it to a ballroom. With no one to greet him on the main floor, Ewan began to climb the tight corkscrew of steps. They led him through an opening in the ceiling and onto the second floor. Ewan looked around. He saw four doors, one per wall. Each one had a word etched

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into the frosted glass of its upper window. Ewan read them aloud. "*Mayor, deputy mayor, closet, water closet.*"

Ewan left the staircase and went to the water closet, not because nature was calling but because indoor plumbing was a novelty. He pulled the chain on the tank and watched the bowl fill up three times before going to register with the deputy mayor as the sickly greeter had instructed.

He knocked on the door three times.

"Come in," said a voice.

The office was large and cheerful, much like the man who sat behind a large writing desk by the window.

"Sit, sit," he said, grinning from ear to ear.

He was a jolly-looking fellow, Ewan thought. Almost like ol' Saint Nick, himself. He even had the belly and the beard to boot.

"I'm Stew," said the man, extending his hand. "And you are?"

Ewan shook Stew's hand. "I'm...actually, I'm not really sure."

"Not a problem, not a problem," said the man jovially. "How about we call you, let's say, Ewan?"

Ewan's eyes filled with tears. "*Ewan* means 'born from the yew tree,'" he said, not knowing exactly how he was accessing this information. "A yew tree is strong because it is protected by its own poison."

"Is that so?" said Stew. "Tell me about yourself. Any family? Brothers or sisters?"

Ewan's mind was a blank. "I—I think I'm alone in this world."

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Stew passed him a handkerchief to catch the tears that now rolled down his cheeks. “Come now, Ewan,” he said. “That’s not quite true. You have me. And all the wonderful villagers of this beautiful island.”

Stew’s kindness made Ewan cry even more. As Ewan wiped his eyes he noticed that the handkerchief was embroidered with the letters SOS, which Ewan felt was very fitting. It seemed everyone in this place was sending out a distress call—and just being here made him feel as if the call was being answered.

“And it might help you to know,” said Stew, “that you are not the only lonely child in this world. I happen to know a boy whose mother died and whose father disappeared shortly thereafter!”

Ewan put his hand to his heart. “That’s so sad.”

Stew took the handkerchief back from Ewan and wrung it out into what looked like a small glass inkpot. Whether anything came out of the handkerchief, Ewan wasn’t sure, but Stew looked pretty satisfied.

Stew laid the handkerchief on the desk, reached into his drawer, pulled out an Oh Henry! bar and handed it to Ewan. “Well, Ewan,” he said. “It’s official. You’re now a registered resident of our lovely island.”

Ewan got to his feet.

“No need to rush off,” said Stew. “Why don’t we keep each other company? Have a stretch out on that couch over there and relax. I’ll just sit here quietly and do my work.”

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“Okay,” said Ewan.

He moved to an exquisite mahogany-framed sofa with beautiful claw feet. It was upholstered in a brocade fabric that felt luxurious to touch.

“Go ahead,” said Stew. “Put your feet up.”

Ewan swung his legs up on the couch and leaned against the elegantly curved arm. He held the Oh Henry! bar in his hand. Somehow he knew exactly how it would taste.

“Here’s a strange question,” said Ewan. “When’s your birthday?”

“October ninth,” said Stew. “When’s yours?”

Ewan took a bite of the nutty chocolate. “No idea.”

Ewan’s taste buds came alive, and although he enjoyed the fudgy goodness melting across his tongue, he was also overcome by a deep sense of loss. After taking his last bite, Ewan shimmied down the couch until his head was resting against one arm and his feet almost touched the other. With his hands folded on his chest, he looked up at the embossed-tin ceiling tiles.

“How are you doing over there?” asked Stew.

“I’m stewing, Stew,” said Ewan.

Tears seeped from the corners of Ewan’s eyes and dripped into his ears. It was then that he noticed Stew take a piece of paper out of his desk drawer and dip his feather pen into the glass inkpot. The more Ewan cried, the faster Stew wrote. He seemed happy that Ewan was sad. Strangely, Ewan did too.

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Stew told Ewan he'd enjoyed his company and that his presence had helped with his productivity. "There's always room on my couch for you, my boy," he said.

My boy. Something about those words seemed familiar to Ewan. "I'll come back tomorrow," he said. He hoped there'd be another Oh Henry!

As he walked down the steps of the town hall, he realized that the song on the loudspeaker was the same one he'd heard on his arrival.

He asked an old man with bloodshot eyes the name of the song.

"It's 'Méditation,' by Massenet," said the man. "Isn't it gorgeously sad?"

"Yes," said Ewan. "Yes, it is."

Ewan made his way back to the saltbox house on the outskirts of town. On his way he came upon a woman staring intently into a shop window. Ewan stopped to join her. Behind the glass was a large abstract painting. Ewan took it in. It looked like the artist had poured molasses from the top of the canvas and let it trickle downward.

"So much hope in its despair," said the woman.

Ewan couldn't describe it, but the thick rivulets of murky liquid oozing down the canvas definitely made him feel something.

"It's...inspiring," he said.

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Ewan continued on. He saw a man standing by a small duck pond. He was looking at a pair of mallard ducks. The drake stood over the other duck. It appeared to be dead.

"Such loss, such love," said the man.

"You can't have one without the other," said Ewan.

Ewan kept walking. He was almost out of the town square when he saw a young girl sitting on a park bench, clutching a stuffed animal. Ewan joined her.

"What a lovely teddy bear," he said.

"The deputy mayor gave her to me," she said, wiping her eyes with a handkerchief. Ewan noticed it had the same SOS letters embroidered on it as the one the deputy mayor had given him.

"I think I dreamt about her once," she continued. "She seems so...familiar. And look, her fur is so worn. I think she may have been owned before."

Ewan reached out and stroked the thick, matted fur between the bear's ears. "The bear has you now. And look, she's smiling."

The girl nodded. "Thank you. Everyone is so kind here." She began to cry again.

Ewan patted her back. "Yes," he said. "This is a special place."

Ewan walked home. He stroked the bulldog and told him he was striking to look at. Inside he went from room to room, yearning for something he couldn't put his finger on, wishing for nothing with all his heart.



Eleven

There were three bedrooms to choose from, but Ewan picked the one at the back that overlooked a garden filled with lupines. A crocheted blanket covered the bed. It was made up of many squares, each with a rose motif in its center.

After a supper of pan-fried cod, which had been brought to him by the deputy mayor himself, Ewan set about making minor repairs to the house. He tightened a doorknob here, oiled a squeaky hinge there. He wasn't exactly sure why, but it seemed the natural thing to do.

He felt nervous going to bed alone in an empty house. Not that he could quite remember it being any other way. But he imagined a bit of company might bring him a feeling of security. In the top drawer of his dresser was a pair of striped cotton pajamas. Ewan put them on and went to bed. Even within the

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four walls of the house, Ewan could still hear the melancholic strains of the classical piece broadcast from the town square. The music was company, and it lulled him to sleep.

Much later Ewan woke to a woman standing above his bed. He realized he was frozen with fright.

"You can move, you know," she said. "All you have to do is decide you can."

Ewan decided to sit up and was surprised when his body obeyed.

The woman sighed and pulled up a chair. "You don't remember me, do you?"

Ewan shook his head.

The woman looked around. "They do a good job, I have to give them that," she said. "Looks just like the original."

She stroked one of the roses on the crocheted blanket. "Right down to the smallest of details."

"I'm sorry," said Ewan. "Who are you exactly?"

The woman stretched out a bony, clawlike hand. "My name is Edith. I'm a friend of Mr. So-and-So's."

"Mr. who?"

She nodded thoughtfully. "He thought this might be the case. After all, brain fog is one of the Weatherman's specialties."

Ewan closed his eyes. When he opened them, the strange woman was still there.

"You're not dreaming," she said, reaching for his tweed knickers that hung on the footboard and tossing them onto

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his lap. "Now do me a favor and check your left trouser pocket."

Ewan reached in and took out eight slips of paper, one straight, seven folded.

"What are these?" he asked.

"Those are Mr. So-and-So's notions," she said. "They should help."

Ewan unfolded one at random. Written in a neat, loopy script were the words *Pickles are transformative*.

He folded it back up again. "I don't see how."

The woman stood up. "I don't either. But alas, I am just a messenger."

At the doorway she paused. "Oh, and he said to tell you, and I quote, 'I miss you the way an American buffalo would miss the red-billed oxpecker if it were to one day stop feeding on the unwelcome ticks that live in its fur. We need each other, my little scarecrow. You are the yin to my yang, the corned beef to my hash and the mustard to my pickles.'" The woman frowned. "I think I got that right—it was a lot to memorize."

Then she was gone.

And then she was back.

"Oh, and he said he hoped you wouldn't be offended by the oxpecker comparison. Because they sometimes eat the earwax and dandruff of other mammals. He wasn't implying that you'd do the same."

And then she was gone.

Ewan waited.

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She didn't return, but he still couldn't fall back asleep.

Ewan reached into the pocket of his trousers again. He read through the other seven folded notions. The unfolded one he saved for last.

Memories are the glue that binds us together.

Ewan folded it and put it with the rest. While he had the sense that these notions were meant to be meaningful, none of them made much sense to him. He wished it was morning so he could visit the deputy mayor again. Unlike the uneasiness he felt now, the sadness he had felt eating that Oh Henry! bar had been a comfortable feeling. It had made him feel connected to something, even if he didn't know what that something was.

Ewan got up and went outside. He sat on the front step next to the bulldog. The sight of the dog made him feel wistful—and that made him feel grounded again.



Ewan went back to bed and slept for a few more hours, until he was awakened by a tapping on his window. Worried the strange woman might have returned, he approached the window cautiously and drew back the curtains slowly. What he saw on the windowsill stirred up something deep inside of him—not a memory exactly, but something similar. As he opened the sash, he thought of the girl on the bench for some reason.

“Hello, little fella,” he said to the pigeon. “Do I know you?”

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He put his finger out as a perch. The pigeon hopped onto it.

"I think I may have dreamt about you once," he said, bringing the pigeon closer.

The pigeon began squawking excitedly.

"What is it?" said Ewan. "Is something wrong?"

The bird flew off. Ewan followed.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

The bird flapped through the house and began pecking at the front door. Ewan opened it. "You want out?"

Ewan expected the bird to fly off, but it hung about as if it was waiting for Ewan to join it.

"Do you want me to come with you?" asked Ewan.

The bird squawked excitedly as if in agreement.

"Okay, okay," said Ewan. "I'll come. But let me change out of my pajamas first."

Within minutes Ewan was outside in the cool, fresh air, following the pigeon through laneways and residential roads he had yet to explore. At one point the pigeon raced ahead and flapped about in front of a little yellow house. When Ewan caught up, he fell to the ground. It was the forget-me-nots that had weakened his knees. There were hundreds of them blooming happily in the wooden window boxes on every side of the house. The bird landed on Ewan's shoulder and nuzzled his neck. Ewan felt grateful for its comfort.

With tears running down his face, Ewan ran to the front door and tried the handle.

"It's locked," he said, his small voice on the verge of breaking.

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The bird pecked at his right trouser pocket. Ewan reached in and pulled out a small metal key.

“But it has no teeth,” he said.

The pigeon pecked the lock. At the bird’s insistence, Ewan slipped the notchless key in the keyhole and turned it. The door opened.

He walked inside, moving from room to room.

Searching.

He walked up the staircase.

Three bedrooms.

Two empty.

In the third, a man, looking out the window. Shoulders slumped.

Ewan cleared his throat. “Hello?”

“Do I know you?” asked the man, turning. He had sad, smiling eyes.

Ewan shrugged. “Maybe?”

The man looked at the key in Ewan’s hand. “What do you have there?”

Ewan held it up. “I’m not sure. But it opened the door.”

The man moved forward. “I think I’ve dreamt about that key.”

He wrapped his hand around Ewan’s. The moment their hands were both touching the key, the room began to transform. Color began spreading across the walls, filling in every nook and cranny and ridding the room of its sepia-toned nostalgia.

Ewan looked at the man’s green eyes and his crisp white-collared shirt. Suddenly he remembered.

Heather Smith

“Father?”

“Ewan?”

They embraced.

“This place is a lie,” said Ewan.

He said it over and over lest he forgot it.

“This place is a lie. This place is a lie.”

His father rocked him slightly, his big hand cradling Ewan’s head.

“You’re so big in my arms now, Ewan. I must have been gone a long time.”

“Two years,” said Ewan.

“Let me see you,” said his father, stepping back.

The second they separated, the colors began to fade and their memories muddled.

Ewan held out the key. “Don’t let go,” he said.

They moved to the bed and sat down.

“You used to open the tin,” said Father, looking at the key they both held now. “It was your favorite job.”

“It’s Flora’s now,” said Ewan.

“Flora,” said Father, his eyes welling up.

The pigeon flew into the room. And with it a flood of recent memories.

“Grace,” said Ewan.

With his free hand he folded up the bottom of his sweater into a pouch. Grace tucked herself into it.

“I have a lot to tell you, Father,” said Ewan. “But first, can we talk about the old days?”

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His father smiled. "I'd love to."

For the rest of the morning, they talked. They shared stories of the fun they had had as a family. The times they'd spent exploring the island and picnicking along the coast. How resourceful Mother had been. How trouble always seemed to find Flora. The more they talked, the more memories came, each one making the bright colors all around them brighter, the rich tones richer and the deep hues deeper.

Ewan loosened his grip on his father's hand. "I'm going to let go now," said Ewan.

He knew the colors wouldn't fade. Their memories were more than just an old-fashioned snapshot of days gone by. They were here and now and in glorious Technicolor. They were the glue that bound them together. Forever and for always.

Ewan took his hand away. The bully-beef key lay in his father's palm.

"A souvenir of our time together," he joked.

His father held it out. "You keep it," he said. "It might come in handy."

Ewan put the key in his right trouser pocket and smiled.

It was all coming back to him now.



Over a lunch of smoked mackerel and bread, Ewan filled his father in. He told him about Mr. So-and-So, the ODD Squad, the Weatherman and his theory about the Steward

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of Sorrow. The more Ewan talked, the more the creases in his father's forehead deepened.

"Ewan, when that cloud came, I—"

Ewan raised his hand. "No need to explain. The cloud came for me too, remember? We didn't have a choice. No one on this island did."

His father nodded, taking it all in. "So you think the Steward of Sorrow is feasting on all of our sadness?"

"I don't *think*," said Ewan. "I know."

"Well, there's certainly enough sorrow on this island to feast on," said Father.

"Yes," said Ewan. "And somehow old Stew made us feel grateful to be sad."

"Makes sense," said Father. "Feeling a sense of loss means you once had something to lose. And when you're without memories, that's something of a comfort."

"He really manipulated us, didn't he?" said Ewan. "He made us feel welcome in his office so we'd spend time with him. He'd churn up memories we didn't know we had so we'd feel loss. And then he'd feed on that loss."

"What exactly does that mean, *feeding on it*?" said Father. "What exactly is the Steward of Sorrow getting out of all this?"

"Mr. So-and-So told me he is writing a book," said Ewan. "I guess our sadness inspires his stories."

"Seems a bit extreme, though, don't you think? Kidnaping people in order to write a book?"

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Ewan shrugged. "Maybe he is hoping for a bestseller."

His father laughed. "Maybe."

Ewan stood up. "In any case, I'm going to get to the bottom of this."

"How?" asked his father.

"I'm going to have a chat with our so-called deputy mayor."

His father stood up. "I'll come with you."

"No," said Ewan quickly.

His father was surprised at his tone.

"I can do this alone," Ewan said, his voice softer. "I *need* to do this alone."

"I understand, son."

Ewan was about to leave when his father said, "Just a thought, but perhaps you should visit the mayor as well."

"Who's the mayor?" asked Ewan.

"No one knows," said his father. "He tends to keep to himself. But he has to be involved in all of this somehow, right? He's the mayor!"

He was right. Ewan had been so taken with solving the mystery of the Steward of Sorrow that he had never given the mayor's role—or identity—a second thought.

"Maybe the mayor is that Weatherman character you mentioned," said Father.

"Maybe," said Ewan, but he doubted it. He now realized that it had been the Weatherman who had greeted him when he first arrived, a job that didn't seem fitting for a mayor.

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Ewan opened the door and bid his father and Grace goodbye.

"Mind how you go, son," said his father.

Ewan smiled. "Don't worry, Father. I will."



As Ewan walked to the town square, he felt bad for the villagers he passed. They could only hear the ache in the music, but Ewan now knew there was tenderness too. It did wonders for his spirits.

At the town hall, Ewan took his father's advice and knocked on the mayor's door. Given the mayor's absence up till now, Ewan doubted he'd actually be in there, but he was hoping to sneak into the office to gather some information. He was just about to knock on the door again when the Weatherman stepped out. A waft of menthol and eucalyptus shot up Ewan's nose.

Ewan tried to look beyond him into the office. "Are you the mayor?"

The Weatherman shut the door. "No, I'm her assistant."

"I just thought I'd introduce myself to...her."

The Weatherman sneezed. "She's not in," he said, wiping his nose with a handkerchief.

"Weren't you just visiting her?"

The man scowled. "If you must know, I was delivering paperwork."

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Ewan smiled. "Sorry. I wasn't being nosy. I'm impressed more than anything. I can't believe I'm standing next to the mayor's assistant!"

The Weatherman's chest seemed to expand. "It is an important position. The mayor relies on me for a lot. I'm her right-hand man." His eyes went dreamy. "And she's my everything."

"What's she like?" asked Ewan, forcing a sense of awe into his voice.

The Weatherman's pale cheeks flushed with pride. "She is an enterprising woman who wears many hats, which is why she's hardly ever here. While she conducts business elsewhere, the deputy mayor and I keep things running smoothly in the village. But she works on the island on Thursdays and Fridays."

"She sounds amazing," said Ewan. "I'd love to meet her."

Ewan held his breath while the Weatherman sneezed two, three, four times. After he composed himself, he said, "I'll have a word, if you like. The mayor and I are *very* close. She'll be back on the island tomorrow night so that she's up and at 'em on Thursday morning for a full day's work. I'll see if I can arrange a little tête-à-tête."

"Do you think she'll agree to see me? I really hope so," said Ewan.

The Weatherman grinned. "The mayor and I are like this," he said, intertwining his index and middle fingers. "The deputy mayor and I will be going to fetch her from St. John's

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tomorrow evening. We'll be back here around nine p.m., if you'd like to meet us on arrival."

Ewan nodded. "I'll be here."

The Weatherman descended the staircase. "Hey, kid," he said, turning around and tossing a small object toward Ewan. "A gift. From me to you."

Ewan caught the object with one hand. "A Fisherman's Friend? Golly gee willikers! Thanks, mayor's assistant!"

When the Weatherman had disappeared from sight, Ewan put the bully-beef key in the lock and turned it. He knew it would work. After all, Mr. So-and-So was ten percent magic.

Ewan entered the office and quietly closed the door behind him. The mayor's office was a mirror image of the deputy mayor's, complete with a handsome writing desk and a mahogany-framed sofa. On the desk he found the paperwork the Weatherman had just delivered. Ignoring the words *Top Secret* stamped in red, Ewan began to read. It was a list of newcomers. At the bottom was a note, presumably from the Weatherman himself.

Here are the names and backstories of our latest arrivals. Their original stories are highly publishable, and their ongoing sadness is sure to inspire many works of fiction. I do hope they find solace here.

Ewan put the papers back where he'd found them. So he was on the right track. The Steward of Sorrow had stolen not

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only their original stories, but their feelings as well, weaving their sadness into fictional tales for profit. But how could Ewan convince the villagers of this while they were separated from their memories? How could he lift their brain fog?

Once he'd gathered as much information as there was to be had, Ewan made his way to the door. Just as he reached for the knob, something glinted at the corner of his eye. It was a glimmer of gold in a swirl of purple and green. Ewan turned his head. It was a dragonfly, one of six, each embossed across a Czech glass button. Ewan reached out, and as he stroked the fur collar on the coat that hung elegantly from a wooden coatrack, everything fell into place.



Although Ewan was anxious to get back to his father, he decided to visit the Steward of Sorrow as he had promised. The last thing he wanted was for ol' Stew to get suspicious when Ewan didn't show up.

A man was just leaving the office as Ewan entered. Although his face was tearstained, there was a spring in his step. As Ewan had, he must've found some comfort within the deputy mayor's office walls.

"Ewan!" said Stew, his droll little mouth drawn up like a bow. "What a pleasure to see you, my boy!"

Ewan did his best "I'm so happy to be sad" routine by immediately going to the couch and forcing tears into his eyes.

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Stew threw him an Oh Henry! bar and readied himself with his feather pen. “How are you feeling today, Ewan?”

Ewan took a bite of his bar. The moment the chocolate hit his tongue, he was standing in Duncan Abernathy’s store, choosing a birthday treat.

The memory inspired him.

“I feel like I’m mourning something,” said Ewan. “Like I’ve been given a present and someone has snatched it away.”

“Good, good,” said Stew.

“It’s like I’m at a party,” Ewan continued. “The balloons have popped, the ice cream has melted and the candles have dripped into the cake. That’s what life feels like to me now. A party gone wrong.”

Stew’s pen scribbled at lightning speed. Ewan grinned. Fictionalizing memories was surprisingly fun.

Ewan stretched himself out on the couch. With his hands folded on his chest, he looked up at the embossed-tin ceiling tiles.

“How are you doing over there?” asked Stew.

“I’m stewing, Stew,” said Ewan.

While Ewan stewed, Stew continued to write. From time to time he looked at Ewan. Little did he know that the tears seeping from the corners of the boy’s eyes and dripping into his ears were not sad tears—they were happy ones. Because, unlike the last time Ewan had lain on this couch, he now knew that sadness wasn’t all he had in this world. Although he had felt loss in his life, he also had a great many things

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to look forward to. Like getting back home to his sister and being a family again. He had a plan.



It was late afternoon when Ewan returned to his father. Grace was waiting on the front porch.

Ewan scooped her up. “Grace, I have a job for you.”

They went into the kitchen, where Ewan wrote a note on a scrap of paper. He opened the tube on Grace’s leg, expecting to find it empty. How silly of him not to have checked when Grace had first arrived.

He pulled out the notion. It was more than a strip of paper this time. It was a scroll.

Ewan unrolled it.

Some see the glass as half-empty.

Some see the glass as half-full.

Others get off their ass

And fill up that glass

Because they’ve no time for such bull.

Ewan laughed. For once he felt one step ahead of Mr. So-and-So and his notions. Instead of sitting around waiting for his life to change, Ewan had taken charge and changed it himself.

Ewan rerolled the scroll and put it in his pocket. He placed his message in Grace’s tube, kissed her on the beak and took

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her outside, where he released her to the sky. He had one full day to hatch his plan, which was good, because Mr. So-and-So would need that time to do the tasks Ewan had outlined in his message.

Back inside, Ewan found his father curled up sideways on the sofa with his eyes closed. Ewan watched him for a moment before speaking.

"I found out some things," he said.

His father opened his eyes. "You did?"

He waited for Ewan to fill him in, but the only thing Ewan wanted to fill was the space on the sofa next to his father.

His father stretched out his arm. "Come."

Ewan climbed into his father's arms, curling himself into a ball and resting the top of his head against his father's chest.

"First I think I'd like to have a little nap," said Ewan. His father smelled like he remembered, a mixture of Lifebuoy soap and mustache wax.

"Me too," said his father.

Ewan wished for a moment that he had his blanket. The one that had warmed him the night before. But he realized that hadn't actually been *his* blanket. It was a duplicate. A fraud. So he relied on his memory instead. He could almost feel the yarn against his skin and smell the Sunlight detergent Grumple used to clean it. As always, he resisted the urge to poke his finger through the loosely woven stitches and caressed the petals of a yellow rose instead. Feeling warm and loved, he fell fast asleep.

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After their evening meal, Ewan told his father everything—what he had learned about the island and how he planned to get them off it.

Father shook his head. “This seems so unreal.”

“You believe, though, don’t you, Father?” said Ewan.

“Of course,” said his father. “And I believe in your plan too.”

Ewan sighed with relief.

“Speaking of which,” said his father. “This Mr. So-and-So... you’re sure he’ll show up?”

Ewan smiled. “I’m one hundred percent positive.”

Ewan stood up and kissed his father goodbye.

Father looked surprised. “Oh,” he said sadly. “I thought you’d be spending the night here. With me.”

“It’s too risky,” said Ewan. “We can’t let on that we know each other.”

“But you’ll be all alone.”

“I’m not all alone now that I’ve found you. I know where to come if I need anything.”

Father walked Ewan to the door. “Come by first thing tomorrow. Okay?”

Ewan hated to disappoint his father again, but he knew that he must.

“Father,” he said, “if we want to get off this island, we have to carry on like normal. Otherwise they might get suspicious.”

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Father relented. "So one more day of moping?"

Ewan laughed. "I'm sure we can squeeze out one final day's worth of tears."

As Ewan walked down the front path he said, "Remember, the town square tomorrow. Eight o'clock. And don't forget—I need you to gather the villagers. Don't worry. Mr. So-and-So will help you."

"I'm not worried," said Father, pretending to bite his fingernails.

Ewan laughed again. This time quite loudly. It seemed Mr. So-and-So's wish for him was coming true. Now that he'd been reunited with his father, Ewan's laughter would come obstreperously and often.



Ewan looked over his shoulder several times as he walked to the house at the end of the country lane. The knowledge of how and why the island operated the way it did was like a ticking time bomb inside him. Would he be found out before he had a chance to expose the island's secrets to its inhabitants? He was grateful when he saw the beady red eyes of the cast-iron bulldog glowing in the dark ahead of him. Ewan ran toward them, gave the dog his usual greeting, then rushed inside, locking the door behind him. He knew he had a sleepless night coming up and wished he could have spent it in his father's arms. Still, he knew that spending the

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night apart was the right decision, one that was sure to pay off. Soon this whole experience would be far behind them.

The next morning Ewan wandered around the village, smiling sadly at his fellow villagers. It came harder now, finding comfort in their shared sadness.

He walked past the dripping-molasses painting he'd admired just two days earlier. It was dreadful. How had he seen it so differently?

The day dragged on. Ewan thought about visiting the Steward of Sorrow in order to keep up appearances, but he and the Weatherman would have left the island by now. Ewan pictured them on the cloud, riding to St. John's to pick up the mayor, then the threesome traveling back together, having a grand chat about the success of their island. Little did they know it would be changed forever—if his plan worked.

Ewan went back to the white saltbox house. He did odd jobs to keep himself occupied until suppertime. After a plate of kippers and bread, he made his way to the coast. It was seven o'clock. Right on schedule.

He fought to keep the spring out of his step as he made his way back to the dock where he'd originally been dropped off. He wouldn't want anyone to think he was happy. To distract himself from his nervous excitement, he decided to run through the plan in his head. The nerves really started to kick in.

When the lighthouse appeared in the distance and the smell of the sea grew stronger, Ewan broke into a light jog.

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When he reached the shore, a huge grin spread across his face. There, under the cover of darkness, was the *Destiny*. Standing right next to it was a ridiculously happy-looking Mr. So-and-So. Grace was perched proudly on his shoulder.

"She led the way brilliantly," said Mr. So-and-So.

"I knew she would," said Ewan.

Ewan looked beyond him to the boat. "Did you bring them?"

Mr. So-and-So nodded. "All in a carefully curated stack."

"And the others," said Ewan. "Are they coming?"

"They'll be here any minute."

"I wasn't sure if there'd be enough time for everyone to get here."

Mr. So-and-So grinned. "The fingers of Tibb's Tickle can extend far across the ocean—if you ask them nicely enough."

Ewan had never been so thankful for Mr. So-and-So's ten percent magic.

"So I'll see you in the town square? Eight p.m. sharp?"

Mr. So-and-So nodded. "I'll be there."

Ewan looked down at Mr. So-and-So's bandaged hand. "How is it?"

"Better," said Mr. So-and-So. He placed his good hand under Ewan's chin and tilted it upward. "Are you ready for this?"

Ewan nodded. "As I'll ever be."

Mr. So-and-So smiled. "It's good to see you, my boy."



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Ewan went back to the town hall and began initiating step one of his plan. Night had fallen, which made things easier. Ewan looked up at the loudspeaker and followed the wire that emerged from its base. From where he was standing, he could see that it ran up the decorative column, over the eaves trough and through a slightly open second-floor window. Knowing that the room at the front of the building was the one marked *closet*, Ewan went inside the empty building to investigate. Using his trusty bully-beef key, he gained access through the front doors.

Ewan had never been in a building after hours before, let alone a dubious town hall on an even more dubious island. It was dim inside, but not pitch black, thanks to the glow of the streetlamps in the town square. Holding the bannister, Ewan headed up the spiral staircase. The landing was windowless, so he used the wall as a guide as he walked slowly toward the closet door. Using the key again, he unlocked it.

As Ewan's eyes adjusted to the dimly lit room, he could see that it was not a closet at all—it was a large ornate room much like the mayor's and deputy mayor's offices, with the same fancy floor and ceiling. What made it different was the lack of furniture. Ewan was surprised to see only a single table in the center of the room. On that table was a gramophone with a record spinning on its turntable. Next to the gramophone was a microphone, its wire running down the table, across the floor and out through the open window. The microphone was tilted toward the gramophone's beautiful

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blue horn, picking up the “Méditation” by Massenet that flowed from deep within it and transmitting it to the loud-speaker outside.

It was time for step two of the plan.

Ewan stepped into the room and was approaching the gramophone when the door shut behind him. Ewan took a breath and turned around. There, on either side of the door, stood the Steward of Sorrow and the Weatherman. Ewan tried to play it cool.

“There you are,” he said, looking at the Weatherman. “I’ve been looking everywhere for you. You said to meet you here and, well, here I am!”

“You’re in a good mood tonight,” said the Steward of Sorrow.

“Of course,” said Ewan, his heart beating out of his chest. “I’m about to meet the mayor!”

“You’re awfully early, aren’t you?” said the Steward of Sorrow. He nodded toward the Weatherman. “From what I understand, the mayor’s assistant here asked you to be here at nine—it’s not even eight o’clock.”

Ewan felt a trickle of sweat run down the small of his back. “Oh, really? I could have sworn he said eight o’clock. Silly me.”

Ewan could hear the murmurs of people gathering outside. Mr. So-and-So and Ewan’s father would be waiting for him to appear at the window soon. Ewan racked his brain for a way out.

“The jig’s up,” said the Steward of Sorrow.

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“The jig? What jig?” said Ewan innocently.

The Steward of Sorrow stepped out of the shadows. “Your carefully timed plan to have us arrive on the island just after we’d been exposed. I bet you couldn’t wait to see the villagers turn on us.”

“What do you mean? Nobody was going to turn on you,” said Ewan. “I wanted you to see their joy, that’s all.” He paused for a moment and then added, “The joy you took away from them.”

The Weatherman spoke for the first time. “We didn’t take their joy away from them. They were already sad when we brought them here.”

The Steward of Sorrow took another step closer to Ewan. “I knew something was up when I saw you sniffing around Pettigrew’s place. That’s when I realized our mistake—*his* mistake,” he said, nodding again toward the Weatherman. “We had never before brought two people to the island who knew each other. But his stupid cloud is as soft as he is—it couldn’t resist rescuing a kid.”

Ewan snorted. “Rescuing? Is that what you call it?”

“The mayor says that crying helps people,” said the Weatherman. “She says that the villagers find peace here.”

“Oh, please,” said Ewan. “You knew their stories were being used to fill the *Wednesday Weepies*. I saw your note on the paperwork you brought to the mayor’s office.”

The Weatherman protested. “Stew said that having your life story immortalized in print is one of the biggest honors you can bestow on someone. He said that being a muse and

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inspiring great works of fiction is something most people only dream of. He said our villagers were lucky. He said they were at peace here.”

Ewan turned toward the Steward of Sorrow. “You really have him fooled, don’t you?”

The Steward of Sorrow laughed. “It wasn’t that hard. He’s as gullible as they come. Two sandwiches short of a picnic, if you know what I mean.”

The Weatherman looked at the Steward of Sorrow with a mixture of hurt and confusion.

“Well, don’t just stand there, you numbskull,” said Stew. “Put a brain fog on this kid before he spills the beans to that crowd outside.”

The Weatherman’s face pinked ever so slightly with anger. “Don’t call me a numbskull.”

The Steward of Sorrow softened. “Come, my friend. Let’s not squabble amongst ourselves. Cast a brain fog on this boy so that we can put an end to this disruption. Once we deposit him on the beach where we found him, we’ll go out for a celebratory dinner, just you and me.”

The Weatherman looked at Ewan, then back at Stew.

“Can we go to that three-star restaurant in Michelin Cove? The one that serves frog legs and bouillabaisse?”

“Of course,” said the Steward of Sorrow. “Whatever you like.”

The Weatherman turned toward Ewan and drew back both arms, his forefingers pointed like guns. “Sorry, kid,” he said. Then, just as he thrust his arms forward, he pivoted, pelting

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the Steward of Sorrow with pellets of ice until he looked more like the Abominable Snowman than Ol' Saint Nick.

Ewan was stunned. "Is he—"

"He'll thaw out eventually," said the Weatherman. He pointed to the window. "Go. Do what you need to do."

Ewan ran to the gramophone and attempted to lift the needle cleanly off the record. An ear-piercing scratch screeched through the loudspeaker, followed by disgruntled muttering from the people Mr. So-and-So had been gathering outside. Ewan winced. At least he had their attention.

With microphone in hand, Ewan made his way to the window. He could hear his own breathing amplified outside. Mr. So-and-So and his father had gathered quite the crowd, but Ewan needed to reach every resident on the island. "Attention, villagers," he said into the mic. "Please make your way to the town square. I repeat, please make your way to the town square." He then opened the window wide and tossed the microphone to Mr. So-and-So before running back downstairs and out of the building.

At the top of the front steps, Mr. So-and-So handed the mic back to Ewan. "Is everything okay?" he asked. "You were a long time in there."

"Everything's fine," said Ewan. "But I'm nervous. What if they don't believe me?"

"They will," said Mr. So-and-So. "Trust yourself."

As more and more people trickled into the square, Ewan scanned the crowd for his father. He found him near the back.

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In a sea of sorrow-filled faces, his father's stood out. He wasn't sad. He was proud. Ewan locked eyes with him and smiled. He was ready. All he needed was a little know-how and a whole lot of nerve.

When the square was filled, Ewan took a deep breath and began. "This place is a lie," he said, surprised by the boom in his voice. "You're being used. For your sadness."

The villagers looked at each other, confused, as Ewan knew they would be. He reached for the stack of papers Mr. So-and-So had placed behind one of the columns. He took one paper off the top.

"Anyone recognize this person?" he asked, pointing to the front-page photograph circled in red.

Heads turned in the direction of a small, elderly woman in the center of the crowd.

"Why, that's me," she said nervously.

Ewan read the headline. "*Local Woman Loses Her Beloved Newfoundland Pony, Fletcher, in Deadly Barn Fire.*"

The woman moved through the crowd. When she reached the front, Ewan passed her the paper. "Look," he said. "There's a photo of you and Fletcher together."

The woman scanned the newsprint. "I dreamt about this story once."

"You didn't dream it," said Ewan. "You lived it."

Ewan addressed the crowd again. "Your memories have been stolen, and all you've been left with is a lingering sadness. Sadness that has been used to sell newspapers."

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Ewan looked out into the sea of blank faces.

"You had full lives before this, I promise you," he said. "Full lives with people who love you. People you've shared sad times with, but happy times too."

He looked at Mr. So-and-So and gave him the go-ahead with a nod. Mr. So-and-So put his thumb and forefinger in his mouth and let out a sharp whistle. The villagers followed his gaze and turned around. Dozens of strangers were flocking to the town center.

Ewan spoke loudly and clearly into the microphone to the newcomers. He held up the photo of the woman and the horse. "Anyone here know Mrs. Jessica Foley?"

An older gentleman broke apart from the crowd and shuffled toward them, waving his hand.

"Jessie?" he called.

The woman looked at him, puzzled, but it wasn't until he embraced her that the fog lifted.

"I left a kerosene lamp unattended in the barn," she cried. "How will I ever forgive myself?"

The man hugged her even tighter. "I've missed you so much."

Ewan grabbed another *Wednesday Weepies* and read from it. Then another and another.

"Lunatic Lou: Life in the Asylum."

"Wallowing War Widow: A Tale of Perpetual Grief."

With each headline, a memory was sparked. With each reunion, it was set alight.

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After some time, Ewan read out the headline of the last paper in the pile. “*Girl, Twelve, Fails to Save Brother from Drowning.*”

A few moments later the girl from the bench was in her mother’s arms. The teddy bear, she now remembered, had belonged to her brother.

Ewan marveled at what was going on around him. For the first time in a long time people were experiencing joy. Everyone could feel it. Even the villagers who had not been reunited with anyone seemed uplifted by the happiness around them.

Ewan instructed the crowd to make its way to the harbor. “We’re taking you home,” he said.

Those who were still in their brain fog were skeptical, but those who had been released from their misery set about convincing the others that it was time to leave the island, that a better life awaited.

“I’ll meet you at the *Destiny*,” Ewan said to Mr. So-and-So. “I have one more thing to do. I won’t be long. Don’t leave without me!”

Mr. So-and-So grinned. “Give the mayor my regards, will you?”

He passed Ewan a notion. Ewan read it, then placed it in his pocket. “Will do.”

As the crowd made its way out of the town square, Ewan turned back to the town hall. The Weatherman had been watching from just inside the open door. When Ewan approached, he stepped into the light.

“Now do you understand?” asked Ewan.

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“They made it sound like this place was a haven,” he said. “Stew said the brain fog eased their pain. And the villagers, they seemed so content.”

“In a way, the brain fog does ease the pain,” said Ewan. “It takes away the memories that are so happy they’re painful to think about. But given the chance, those happy memories can be something of a comfort. It just takes time.”

The Weatherman pointed in the direction of the coast. “Well, the least I can do is keep my promise to you.”

Ewan followed him down the steps. “Where is she anyway?” he asked.

“Stew warned me that there might be a revolt. I couldn’t see why, but I wasn’t taking any chances. So I told her to hunker down in the lighthouse. I wanted her to be safe.”

As they walked out of the square, he said, “She’s a lovely woman deep down.”

Ewan wanted to say, *You really are gullible*, but stayed quiet.

“Why did you work with the Vanishing Woman?” he asked.

“Because she asked me to.”

“But she scares people. And your fog made it all the scarier.”

The Weatherman shrugged. “The folks at the ODD Squad, they’re my only friends.”

It wasn’t much of an explanation, but Ewan tried not to judge what he didn’t understand.

As they approached the lighthouse, Ewan braced himself for the foghorn’s heavy sigh, but all he could hear was the soothing sound of distant waves.

Heather Smith

There were six steps up to the lighthouse door. The Weatherman sat down on one.

"I'll wait here," he said. "Go easy on her, okay?"

His words gave Ewan a jolt. Mrs. Shipley-Seward had taken advantage of hundreds of people and caused a tremendous amount of pain to their loved ones—and the Weatherman expected him to go easy on her? Still, the way he said it...his voice was so small, so broken. It made Ewan feel sorry—not for her, but for him.

Ewan had never been in the inside of a lighthouse before, and he was surprised to see that the main floor looked much like a regular house. There was a living room with a three-piece suite and a kitchen with an icebox and stove. Mrs. Shipley-Seward stood with her back to Ewan, looking out a tall rectangular window facing the sea.

"The *Monday Merries* was a great paper," said Ewan. "My grandfather read it all the time."

"It wasn't a big seller," said Mrs. Shipley-Seward. "I had a business to run, employees to pay."

"You're lying," said Ewan. "Everyone read the *Merries*. And your business was booming. You said so yourself. You had big clients—the *London Daily Telegraph*, the *Boston Globe*, the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. But still you went to the ODD Squad, looking for some 'radical' ideas so you could increase your business."

Mrs. Shipley-Seward turned around. The Czech glass buttons on her coat glimmered. She looked at Ewan from

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beneath the brim of her silk, bell-shaped hat. “How do you know about that?”

“I know a lot of things. I know that your husband died a long time ago. I know that sadness can sometimes feel like your only connection to the person you lost, but that’s just a lie you tell yourself because happiness might mean you’ll forget them. I know I should feel bad for you, but I don’t. You took my father, and that means you are a horrible, wicked woman. That is what I know.”

Ewan turned to go.

“The public craves sad stories,” she said.

“No,” said Ewan. “*You* crave sad stories. You went to the ODD Squad hoping there’d be someone there to help you make the *Wednesday Weepies* a reality. How lucky that you came across the Steward of Sorrow—the best ink slinger around. Imagine the stories he could write for you. You’d get a new newspaper, and he’d get paid to do what he loved best—feeding off sadness. It would be a win-win! But where would ol’ Stew find enough inspiration to produce a weekly paper’s worth of stories? I guess that’s where the Weatherman came in. Surely he could work some magic. Why, you saw him make a cloud bed for Mr. So-and-So with your very own eyes.”

Mrs. Shipley-Seward shrugged. “Congratulations. You have it all figured out.”

“I don’t need your congratulations. Or an apology. I just wanted to say out loud how I felt.”

Heather Smith

“Good for you,” she said. “But guess what? I have no regrets.”

“I didn’t think a person like you would,” said Ewan.

He made his way to the door and paused.

“I almost forgot,” he said. “This is for you. It’s from my friend Mr. So-and-So. He sends his regards.”

Mrs. Shipley-Seward walked across the room, the heels of her dainty gold T-strap shoes clicking on the hardwood floor. She took the small slip of paper from his hand and read it.

“When opportunity knocks, don’t leave it on the threshold like an encyclopedia salesman—invite it in.”

She looked up. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

Just then there was a rapping at the door. The Weatherman poked his head in and looked at Mrs. Shipley-Seward with concern. “Is everything okay, my dear?”

Ewan left them alone and exited the lighthouse. He hoped the Weatherman knew what he was getting himself into. He seemed like a decent man. As for Mrs. Shipley-Seward, Ewan was still angry, but he was willing to let his bitterness fade. He had his father back now. It was time to make up for lost time.



Twelve

The harbor was filled with every type of vessel imaginable—dories, schooners, skiffs, sailboats, trawlers—all filled with families bringing their loved ones home. The brightly lit ship's lanterns made the spectacle feel like a celebratory parade. Happy songs rang out over the water, their musical notes dancing through the air in victory.

The stars in the sky twinkled their applause.

It was one hundred percent magic.



As they sailed upon the ocean, Mr. So-and-So explained how he had managed to find so many of the villagers' loved ones.

Heather Smith

"After Grace brought your message," he said, "Edith and I telephoned as many police stations and collected as many missing-person reports as we could. Once we had a list of names, our ODD Squad friends scoured back issues of the *Wednesday Weepies* for the stories that featured them. Your plan to read them out worked a treat, Ewan. Well done."

"Yes," said Father. "I always knew your cleverness would result in you accomplishing great things."

His voice was filled with pride, but his eyes looked troubled.

"Father? Are you okay?" Ewan asked.

"Flora. She was only five when I left. I'll be a stranger to her now."

Ewan wished he could tell his father he was wrong, but he knew that might be lying. He wrapped his arms around his father's waist instead.

"How about a sing-along?" said Mr. So-and-So, trying to lighten the mood.

Ewan's father smiled weakly. "Thanks. But I'm feeling rather tired."

Ewan made a bed for his father out of their heavy blankets. His father settled down in the hull of the boat and quickly went to sleep.

"Must be exhausting," said Mr. So-and-So, "finding out you've been missing in action for two years."

"Yes," said Ewan. "Poor Father."

Ewan looked at the parade of boats leading the way. "How long will it take to get to Kelly's Bight?" he asked.

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“Two hours by boat, one hour by land. Of course, it took Edith only moments to reach you the first time. She can appear at any given destination like that,” he said, snapping his fingers. “Which is why I sent her to check on you in the first place. I was worried sick.”

“I liked the notion you sent with her,” said Ewan.

“*Memories are the glue that binds us together?*” said Mr. So-and-So. “Yes, that’s a good one, if I do say so myself.”

“All of your notions have been good,” said Ewan. “They’ve really meant a lot to me.”

“I’m glad,” said Mr. So-and-So.

As the *Destiny* bobbed over the rhythmic waves of the Atlantic, Ewan revisited each one.

“Interesting,” he said as he arranged the slips of paper back into the order in which he’d received them.

“What is?” asked Mr. So-and-So.

Ewan left the bench seat and stood at the helm next to Mr. So-and-So. “I just realized...all of these notions apply to you too.”

Mr. So-and-So took his eyes off the ocean and glanced at Ewan. “How so?”

Ewan skipped over the first one and began reading. “*A ship in harbor is safe, but that is not what ships are built for.*”

Mr. So-and-So grinned. “You missed one.”

“Well, the first one applies to everyone,” said Ewan, hoping to avoid reading it out loud.

“Read it anyway,” said Mr. So-and-So.

Heather Smith

Ewan sighed. *"You can pick your nose, you can pick your friends, but you can't pick your friend's nose."*

"Ahhhh," said Mr. So-and-So. "Such an important fact. And so universal too."

"Let's move on, shall we?" said Ewan.

He read his second notion again. *"A ship in harbor is safe, but that is not what ships are built for."*

"Are you saying I don't take risks?" asked Mr. So-and-So.

"Not in matters of the heart," said Ewan.

Mr. So-and-So's left eyebrow shot up in surprise. "Matters of the heart, eh? Tell me more, wise old sage."

Ewan shrugged. "I just noticed how you are with Flora. And me too. You're always calling us guttersnipes and parasites. It's like you're afraid to say how you really feel. Don't get me wrong, your little nicknames are, um...charming? But you don't always have to put on a front. You can just say how you feel sometimes. Okay, my boy?"

Mr. So-and-So's eyes went glossy in an instant. Such power in two words. "Next," he said, his voice choked.

Ewan continued. *"Strength is not found—it's awakened."*

"Is this about my behavior on the cliff?" said Mr. So-and-So.

Ewan laughed. "Yes. It's about your behavior on the cliff."

Mr. So-and-So looked at Ewan fondly. "We both found out what we were capable of that day, didn't we, lad?"

"We sure did," Ewan replied, smiling. "Ready for the next one?"

The Boy, the Cloud and the Very Tall Tale

"Fire away," said Mr. So-and-So.

"The sulkiest of sulkers sulk with good reason."

"Good reason or bad reason, I am not a sulker!" shrieked Mr. So-and-So before lowering his voice so as not to wake Ewan's father. "Why on earth would you think this notion applies to me? I am the least sulky person I know. I don't dwell. I take things on the chin. Honestly, Ewan, this is the biggest insult that's ever been hurled at me. I can't even talk to you right now. Put those notions away. I've had enough." He crossed his arms and turned away from Ewan.

Ewan let Mr. So-and-So sulk for a few minutes and then started reading again.

"Here's a good one," he said. *"Labels are for jam jars, not people."*

"I'm not changing my name again," said Mr. So-and-So, turning to Ewan, his jovial face back on.

"I know," said Ewan. "I just want you to know that you're more than a so-and-so, no matter what adjective is put in front of it. You're a somebody, and a big somebody too."

Mr. So-and-So pulled a handkerchief out of his left trouser pocket. Attached to it was another handkerchief, and another, and another, all in bright, alternating colors. He dabbed his eyes. "I'm not crying. I have conjunctivitis."

Ewan folded his arms and glared at Mr. So-and-So.

Mr. So-and-So sheepishly tucked his handkerchief chain back into his pocket. "I'm putting on a front again, aren't I?"

Ewan raised an eyebrow. "Yup."

Heather Smith

Mr. So-and-So turned and looked Ewan directly in the eye. "Thank you," he said. "What you said, about me being a so-and-so, it means a lot."

Ewan smiled. "You're welcome."

He read the next notion. "*You don't need a shovel to dig deep.*"

Mr. So-and-So rolled his eyes. "I dig deep all the time. But go ahead, enlighten me."

"You're doing a fine job of driving this boat, but I can't picture you doing this for a living."

"What are you getting at?"

"This 'life-long' dream of yours to fish with your family. Is that really what you wanted for yourself? Or is that the story you told yourself because you thought that's what you were supposed to want in life?"

Mr. So-and-So looked at Ewan with interest. "Go on," he said.

"You just seem so well-suited to the Notion Shop. It's like *that* was your destiny, you know? And this grumbling about not being able to fish for a living with your brothers, I don't buy it. I think you're grumbling for another reason. It's like how Mrs. Shipley-Seward hung on to her sadness in order to make her feel connected to her husband. I wonder if maybe you are holding on to bitterness so you can feel connected to your family."

Mr. So-and-So was quiet as he let it all sink in. "So what are you saying? You want me to get rid of my hat?"

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Ewan laughed. "I never said that. I like your nautical look. I was just wondering if you need to dig deeper into the reason you can't let go of this whole fishing thing. Which brings me to our next notion."

"Pickles are transformative?"

Ewan grinned. "I'm skipping that one."

"Memories are the glue that binds us together?"

Ewan nodded. "Tell me a memory about you and your brothers."

"Well, there was that time they made me cut my own hair off."

"No, a good memory. You have to have some."

Mr. So-and-So took a moment to think. "We used to play hide-and-seek. I was always scared of hiding alone. It was that moment of being found. 'Found you!' they'd yell, and I'd almost jump out of my pants. My older brother noticed that I was always reluctant to play. One day he said to the others, 'I am hiding with Georgie.' Not 'Georgie is hiding with me'—'I am hiding with Georgie.' There's a difference there. Do you see it?"

Ewan nodded. "I see it."

Mr. So-and-So smiled. "That was a good memory."

"When was the last time you saw your brothers, Mr. So-and-So?" Ewan asked.

Mr. So-and-So shrugged. "Ten, eleven years ago."

Ewan read out the last notion:

"Some see the glass as half-empty."

Heather Smith

Some see the glass as half-full.

Others get off their ass

And fill up that glass

Because they've no time for such bull."

He looked at Mr. So-and-So. "Well?"

Mr. So-and-So nodded. "Yes," he said. "I think it's time I filled up that glass."

Ewan leaned over and gave Mr. So-and-So a kiss on the cheek. "I love you, Mr. So-and-So. I don't think we men say that to each other often enough."

Mr. So-and-So's mouth dropped open. "Yes, y-yes," he stammered. "You've got a good point there, Ewan. And yes, I must say, without a shadow of a doubt and unreservedly, I, er, I love you too. Very much, in fact."

Ewan smiled. "So," he said, changing the subject, "do you think the fingers of Tibb's Tickle can help us get home faster? Maybe if you asked them nicely enough?"

Mr. So-and-So looked back at Ewan's father, who was sleeping soundly.

"Might I suggest you enjoy the ride?" he said. "Be in the moment for once?"

Ewan gave Mr. So-and-So a hug and went to the back of the boat, where he slipped into his father's arms and fell fast asleep alongside him.



The Boy, the Cloud and the Very Tall Tale

When he next woke the boat was a car, and they were bumping along the coastal road toward Kelly's Bight. Father was in the front, asking Mr. So-and-So a million questions about the ODD Squad, and Mr. So-and-So was regaling him with outrageous and hilarious stories of its members. Ewan was enjoying their conversation and was nestling deeper into the sleeping bags when he noticed that his swammock was empty.

"Where is she?" he asked, bolting upright. "Where's Grace?"

"Don't worry," said Mr. So-and-So. "I sent her ahead to wake up Miss Kelly and Flora."

Ewan moved to the front of the boat and sat next to his father. "It's not even dawn," said Ewan. "Flora hates getting up early."

"I promised her I'd wake her," said Mr. So-and-So. "She can't wait to see you." He looked at Ewan's father and added, "Both of you."

Before long they had passed Puffin Rock and were making their way down the coastal road into Kelly's Bight. The Puffin Shop stood out in the early-morning light, as did the two figures on the porch. As they approached, Ewan could see Flora wrapped in a blanket on Miss Kelly's lap. When Ewan waved, Flora got to her feet and jumped up and down. Her leg must have been feeling better. Ewan was glad. Beside him he could feel his father holding his breath. Ewan reached for his hand and held it until the *Destiny* pulled up to the Puffin Shop door.

Heather Smith

Ewan was barely out of the *Destiny* when Kipper appeared. He'd never come running to greet Ewan before. Ewan picked him up and buried his nose in his fur. Kipper purred loudly.

Flora stood nervously on the porch, rocking back and forth with her eyes on Father, chewing on the silk trim of the blanket she held between her teeth.

"Look, Flora," said Ewan. "It's Father."

When their father stepped forward, Flora turned to Mr. So-and-So and put her arms up in a plea to be picked up, something Ewan hadn't seen her do since she was a toddler. She wiggled her legs and opened and closed her hands quickly, signaling to Mr. So-and-So a sense of urgency. Mr. So-and-So rushed forward and scooped her up. Safely in his embrace, Flora wrapped her arms and legs around him and buried her face in his chest. The look on his father's face made Ewan's heart break a little.

Mr. So-and-So rubbed Flora's back and smiled kindly at Ewan's father. "She'll come around," he said. He said it with such authority, both Ewan and his father relaxed a little. He was right, of course. She just needed time.

Inside, Miss Kelly made them a hot breakfast of eggs, bacon, sausages and toast. Flora hung close to Mr. So-and-So as he ate, leaning against him, climbing onto his lap and then off again, all the while staring at her father. Sometimes when Father smiled at her, she smiled back, then quickly looked away. At one point she went into Miss Kelly's room and retrieved Trotters, who proceeded to snuffle up

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Mr. So-and-So's arm and kiss his nose. Everyone knew that it was Father's nose Trotters really wanted to kiss.

After breakfast they retired to the living room. Flora sat between Father and Miss Kelly on the sofa. While the grown-ups were busy talking about the weather, the history of Kelly's Bight and other matters too boring for children, Flora inched closer and closer to her father, who casually opened an arm for her to curl into. Soon Trotters was dancing up his arms and over his head, tickling his neck and kissing his cheeks. Ewan, who had been sitting quietly with Grace and Kipper in his lap, felt as if he could cry. He didn't though. The few tears that made an appearance were happy to sit on the sidelines. The most magnificent spectacle was playing out before them—who'd want to roll away from that?



They spent the next couple of days traveling back to Bucket Cove. William stayed behind under Miss Kelly's care and would be collected at a later date. Mr. So-and-So and Miss Kelly's goodbye was as long as the words they used to describe their feelings—*I shall miss you considerably...commo- diously...voluminously...va-va-voomously*. They kissed on the lips for six seconds (Flora counted) before Father took Mr. So-and-So's elbow and gently led him away.

Traveling back to Bucket Cove was like playing a game of musical chairs, as the foursome switched vehicles and

Heather Smith

traveling partners at every rest stop. It was a happy coincidence that Ewan was in the Hurricle when they pulled into Grumple's, mirroring his exit five days earlier. It felt like a lifetime ago now.

The children rushed ahead of the adults. Grumple was thrilled to see them, of course, but it was when his son was standing before him that his emotions came to the forefront. Ewan had never heard such gut-wrenching sobs. Flora was alarmed.

"Shouldn't Grumple be happy?" she asked.

"He is," said Mr. So-and-So. "But he's also sad for what he's missed."

Flora looked up at Mr. So-and-So and smiled. "He'll come around."

Mr. So-and-So looked to Ewan. "Isn't she a wonder?"

"Yes," said Ewan. "She really is."

Over a plate of Mrs. O'Reilly's date squares, they filled Grumple in on all that had happened, and Ewan sheepishly admitted that Grumple had been right all along—Father *had* flown away on a cloud. Grumple thanked Mr. So-and-So profusely for taking care of the children. When Mr. So-and-So said, "My pleasure," he really meant it.

Soon it was time for the children and Mr. So-and-So to part ways. They stood in the side yard next to the *Destiny*, looking at the ground and avoiding eye contact as if they'd only just met.

Flora held up Trotters and made his mouth move. He was painfully silent.

The Boy, the Cloud and the Very Tall Tale

"I guess he doesn't know what to say," said Mr. So-and-So. All three looked down at the dirt.

"Well," said Mr. So-and-So after another long silence. "Nice knowing ya."

Flora burst out laughing and jumped into his arms. "You're funny, Mr. So-and-So."

Ewan wrapped his arms around Mr. So-and-So's waist. "I'm going to miss you."

"Come now," said Mr. So-and-So. "I'm not moving to the moon. I'm only up the coast. Come visit me anytime."

Mr. So-and-So was sitting at the wheel of the *Destiny* when Ewan took Grace out of his swammock. "You're forgetting something," Ewan said.

Mr. So-and-So smiled. "She's yours now, Ewan."

"No," said Ewan. "She's yours. Like you said, you're only up the coast. I can visit her anytime."

Grace flew to Mr. So-and-So and perched on his shoulder.

"Besides," said Ewan, nodding toward Kipper, who was nibbling the leg of a small barn mouse, "I have Kipper."

Mr. So-and-So started up the *Destiny* and reversed out of the driveway.

"Wait!" said Ewan.

He ran into the house and grabbed a jar of Dottie O'Reilly's pickles. Back in the yard, he handed them to Mr. So-and-So. "I hear they're transformative."

Mr. So-and-So's eyes lit up. "I'll say! Cucumbers one day—pickles the next!"

Heather Smith

As he drove away, he held a pickle to his mouth like a cigar and said, "Remember, all the best stories have an epilogue!"

He pronounced it eppy-lo-gwey.

It was the perfect ending to the best story.



EPPY-LO-GWEY

The Steward of Sorrow went on to write a bestselling self-help book entitled *Take That Grin and Give It a Spin: How to Be Miserable in Thirty Days or Less, Dissatisfaction Guaranteed*.

After some reflection, Mrs. Shipley-Seward invited opportunity over the threshold and started a new airline called Air Cumulous. She is in love with her chief operating officer.

The Weatherman is now the chief operating officer of a new airline called Air Cumulous. He is in love with his boss.

Edith aka the Old Hag still terrifies the bejesus out of people on a nightly basis. She is now the president of the ODD Squad.

After a nasty sting on the nose from a disgruntled bee, Kipper the cat no longer terrifies animals smaller than him. In fact, he now has his own pet, a three-legged barn mouse named Speedy.

Heather Smith

Grace received a medal of bravery for her work during the Great War. Somehow wearing it makes her fly better.

Trotters continues to speak on occasion, but only in the presence of Mr. So-and-So. He has perfected twelve different accents and has discovered the joys of opera singing.

Grumple's tailoring business boomed when he was invited to design and create flight-attendant uniforms for Air Cumulous. He even went on a test flight once. He tried to give the cloud a friendly pat, but his hand went right through it!

Father continues to work at the Mercantile. In his free time he takes care of the house, doing minor repairs and sprucing the place up with a lick of paint. Magically the five sky-blue window boxes are always filled with forget-me-nots, even in the depths of winter.

After deciding that she, for one, would never grow into her name, Skippy decided to change hers permanently. She continues to be herself, inside and out, and cartwheels through life with tenacity and spunk. She was—and always will be—a wonder.

Kitty Kelly turned her upstairs apartment into the Kelly's Bight Historical Society, which brings many visitors to her beloved town. She now lives happily ever after and pleasantly in perpetuum with her supportive and splendiferous spouse. Together they live in a bright orange house overlooking a red fishing stage.

Mr. So-and-So moved his Notion Shop to an outcropping of rocks near Kelly's Bight. It is often covered in pestilential

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puffin poop. When he is not learning to fly, Mr. So-and-So spins his beloved bride on a library ladder until she falls dizzily into his arms. This, he believes, is the height of romance.

Ewan was surprised but not disappointed that “up the coast” turned out to be “up, up, up the coast.” Although the coastal roads still scare him, he often takes the journey to Kelly’s Bight and makes many memories with Mr. So-and-So. The glue between them is as thick as flea poop.



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fictional character!

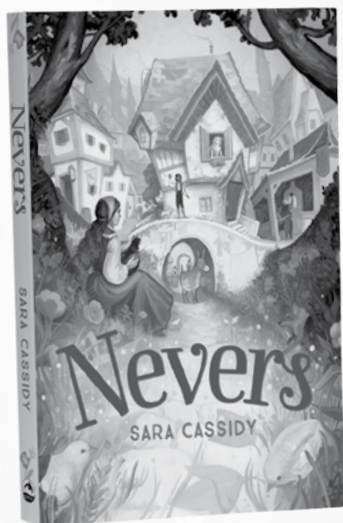
to my girls, Rosie and April, who are splendidly spunky
and positively plucky.

and finally to my husband, Rob, who is a supportive and
splendiferous spouse. The glue between us is as thick as
flea poop.

Discover the MAGIC

“Nevers is a marvelous and magical book with an unforgettable heroine—prepare to be transported!”

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Fitzgerald-Trouts series



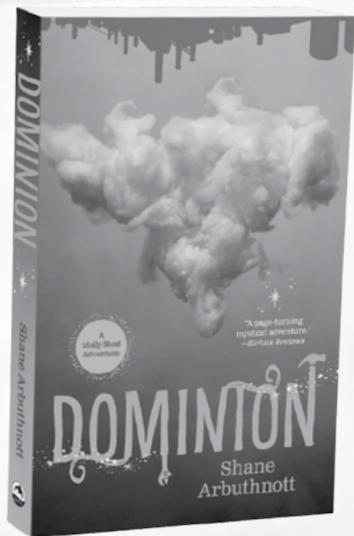
Welcome to the wondrous tale of the smart, resourceful Odette and her mortally clumsy mother, Anneline. This adventure begins in France at the end of the eighteenth century. When fate leads Odette and Anneline to the quaint town of Nevers, where things are not always what they seem...

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“A page-turning mystical adventure.”

—Kirkus

Molly Stout works with her family, collecting dangerous magical spirits on their airship. But when she captures a spirit that can speak and claims to have been friends with her ancestor, her entire life is upended. What if everything she knows about the spirits is a lie?

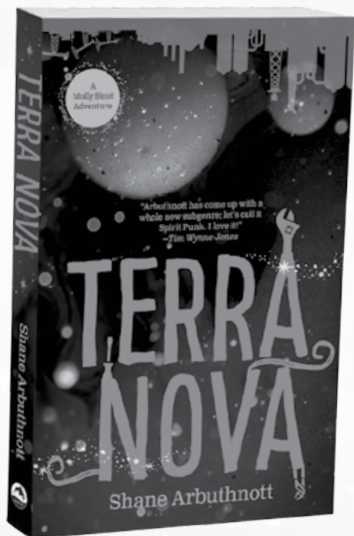


Kobo Emerging Writers Prize
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★ “This spectacular sequel takes steampunk into new territory.”

—Kirkus, starred review

Molly has been fighting to free the spirits, but she fears her rebellion is only putting everyone in danger.



HILARY GAULD



Heather Smith is the author of several picture books, including the award-winning *The Phone Booth in Mr. Hirota's Garden*. Her middle-grade novel *Ebb and Flow* was shortlisted for the Governor General's Literary Award, and her YA novel *The Agony of Bun O'Keefe* won the Ruth and Sylvia Schwartz Children's Book Award and the OLA Forest of Reading White Pine Award, and was shortlisted for the Amy Mathers Teen Book Award and the Geoffrey Bilson Award for Historical Fiction for Young People. Originally from Newfoundland, Heather now lives in Waterloo, Ontario, with her family.