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‘A stunningly executed portrait of an island community seething with secrets that are ready to burst free... Baker’s writing is by turns amusing and achingly sad, but always beautiful. Batten down the hatches and clear your schedule because this is an absolute gem and it will ravage you’

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what  
we did  
in the  
storm

T I N A B A K E R



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I love the Isles of Scilly, a cluster of unique unspoilt gems off the coast of Cornwall. I met my lovely husband Geoff on the beautiful isle of Tresco (not in the aisle of Tesco as most of my friends assumed), and we had our wedding blessing there. I have only ever experienced kindness from the people who live and work in this magical part of the world.

And this is how I repay them!

# *The North End*

*May, Before the Storm*

*He notices the figure high on the cliff above him, buffeted by the gale, leaning forwards, trudging on, long dark hair whipping wildly in the wind. This part of the island is never welcoming, let alone in savage weather, although a few horny teens might chance it. Take me up the North End, the old joke.*

*Stupid maid. Stupid bleddy tourists! He can't fathom them. If you don't have to work in it, why the hell would you be out battling these elements? A big storm is brewing – soon be bucketing it down, a gale threatening.*

*Ted the boatman likes rough seas. Brings back that time as a kid on the rollercoaster, one of the few bright memories in a grey childhood. Can't think about that. Needs to get cracking. He urges on the*

*boat, forging through outraged waves.*

*End-of-the-world skies today. Clouds glowering green as an old bruise overhead, evil black tumbling in fast from the west – a whole lot of nothing between this tiny island and America; nothing but the vast vicious ocean.*

*Slices of sunlight pierce the gloom to light up the cliff. Two of them up there now. Another maid by the looks of it, a bright pink coat rather than a rubber-duck-yellow waterproof. He turns to cock his head at a new engine noise he does not like one bit.*

*The next time he looks up it seems like the women are dancing up there, daft beggars.*

*He's distracted by one ramshackle seagull heading in low over the water, its flight jerky, straining for land. Unusual for them to get caught out. The rest are already roosted down to wait out the storm. Perhaps this one is brain damaged, or bladdered. He smiles to himself. A pint with his name on it at the Old Ship just as soon as he settles this deal over on St Mary's – a dirty business as his missus would put it, wrinkling her nose at anything he's involved in. Still, needs must. This gig championship weekend is the busiest time on the islands and he has to capitalise on it.*

*His mind drifts, comforted by images of cold beer served by a hot barmaid. When he glances back, there is only one woman up on the cliff.*

I

*The Previous June*



# Hannah and Beatrice

The animal is desperate, eyes insane with fear, spittle flying. Its lips are pulled back, fangs bared as it throws itself against the bars with all its weight. It would rip out her throat if it had half a chance to escape the cage. A killer. As far as she can make out, some sort of chihuahua crossed with a gremlin and possibly a feather duster.

Hannah might also be yapping with terror, but she clenches her jaw shut tight, her hands squeezing into fists beside her.

The noise is extraordinary. An assault.

This is her first time in a helicopter. Someone like her wouldn't usually travel this way, unless she was being airlifted to hospital, her life hanging by a thread. This journey is also 'a matter of life and death' according to Jane, but not really. Of course the girl's wedding day is vitally important to her, and she's the one paying for the flight, or rather her father is.

In the seat across the aisle from Hannah, Beatrice Wallace makes *there-there* noises to soothe her fur-baby.

‘Primrose, darling. Hush now. It’s okay, sweetheart. Mummy’s here.’

Poor thing! How she adores the dog. She always wanted a daughter.

Sitting next to Beatrice is her actual goddaughter, Charlotte. The girl has not looked up from her phone once, checking photos of her own face by the looks of it; as bad as a teenager, although Charlotte is now in her early twenties. She is missing the exceptional views. Blue for days!

Beatrice is very much looking forward to this holiday – the wedding of one of her best friend’s daughters, and a week away from the grind of London. Marvellous!

Hannah, however, is not thrilled to be returning to the island so soon. She has been summoned back from her first proper break in a year, to ‘save the day’ and put a stop to the bride-to-be’s theatrical tears which garbled her words in the frantic phone call the previous evening. She begged Hannah to be a last-minute replacement for her first choice of hairdresser (from a London salon, naturally), who has reportedly been poleaxed with food poisoning and will not be making the long journey over to Tresco.

Hannah told the girl she’d get back to her as she was just disembarking from the ferry at Penzance, but there immediately came a call from the island estate manager Bobby, who pointed out that Hannah’s job is to serve the likes of Jane and her family, whatever the request. The plans of worker bees like Hannah are never in the same league as those of the valued guests.

Hannah needs to keep in Bobby’s good books, and this, as

much as the assurance of the fee and a paid flight back to the Isles of Scilly from the mainland, persuaded her to return.

By morning, it was as if the churning waves which had assaulted the evening ferry crossing from Tresco to Penzance had never happened and all was calm and bright. It likes to play tricks on you, the weather here – three seasons in an hour is not uncommon. Hannah caught the first flight back.

Today there are nine passengers on the Penzance to Tresco helicopter (aviation fans will know it's a Sikorsky S-76) and while Charlotte seems a tad jaded by the transport (not a patch on the helicopter from Nice over to Monaco), most are excited by this leg of the journey and the prospect of their well-deserved holidays.

Passengers have been assured by a briefing video that it is only a fifteen-minute flight. Hannah wonders if her heart will hold out so long. It batters frantically, every instinct fighting against her current incarceration. Humans are not supposed to fly in deafening tin cans. She stares hard at the sea far below, trying to concentrate on something other than her fragile mortality. There is hardly any sense of scale from up here, just an unfathomable expanse – a terrifying watery void peppered by a sprinkling of miniature vessels which could be tiny fishing boats or mighty ocean liners.

A toddler squeals with glee, Primrose yelps in terror, Charlotte yawns theatrically, and Hannah squeezes her eyes shut and screams internally.

An eternity later – finally – a glimpse of land ahead!

Seeing the island from above as they approach is like the beginning of a film. Hannah almost forgets her sense of imminent death as they approach the intense turquoise blues of the

shallow waters surrounding the small land masses. It is like the Caribbean – or at least what she’s seen of those tropical shores on television. There are even palm trees, despite this being, technically, England.

Return visitors know this view from the postcards sold at Tresco’s innovatively named Island Shop, purveyor of goods including caviar and baked beans, although not in the same tin. The photos on those cards do not do the scene justice.

The helicopter swoops over the crazy castle where The Family live – the island’s ultimate bosses, although they are off holidaying on some other paradise island at the moment – and comes to hover over the giant penis of the heliport.

‘Oh! Really!’ Beatrice nudges her companion and points. ‘Look!’

‘Wow!’ replies Charlotte, hastily chronicling the *artwork* for her Insta feed.

This is a new attraction. Someone has recently drawn said appendage on the grass, using weedkiller or bleach. Hannah has walked past this *installation*, but she hasn’t experienced the full glorious effect of the prank from the air. It amuses her to see the startled reactions of the elderly couple in the seats in front of her, and she can afford to smile now they are finally descending to hover over solid land.

As they touch down, she offers a sincere prayer of thanks.

Beatrice waits for a moment after Charlotte has alighted, so she can descend the steps alone like Joan Collins, although the hair is always an issue thanks to the downdraft. *How on earth did Joanie’s wigs survive*, she wonders?

Hannah’s legs are wobbly as she exits the helicopter, the last one to disembark because she allows the holidaymakers to go

ahead, although they'll get their bags at the same time as she does.

When she nears the waiting room she perks up and gives a wave, wink and a wiggle for the benefit of the heliport workers – Vlad and the two new lads, all of them in the pub every night living their best lives. She gets an appreciative whistle in return.

The travellers congregate in the bijou waiting room, gabbling and checking their phones. Beatrice scoops Primrose into her arms and the small dog, delighted to be released from her travelling cage prison, wiggles delightedly, licking her mother's neck. Charlotte pulls a face at this display.

Bobby arrives ready to execute his estate manager meet-and-greet, giving Hannah a thumbs up, acknowledging her swift return to rescue the bridal party. Beatrice notices the interaction and smiles at Hannah, now recognising her from the Old Ship where the girl works primarily as a barmaid.

Meanwhile, arrival bags are offloaded while another batch is transported across to be stored in the hold. Passengers who are departing then walk across the green to board, bracing themselves for the return trip to the mainland. By the time everyone in arrivals has their bearings, the helicopter has already taken off again and a small group of seagulls has settled on the ball area of the graffiti cock, watching the proceedings with reptilian eyes.

There are no cars on the island, part of its USP, so heliport passengers are transported to the Old Ship Inn and their various timeshare cottages via the *Wacky Races* style tractor-bus. Workers and visitors generally use pushbikes or walk, and there are golf buggies to help those less mobile get around.

There is a short wait as a beefy heliport worker brings round

a wheelchair for one of the larger passengers. Beatrice turns to Charlotte and whispers, 'If she lies on the beach, do you think marine biologists will throw water over her?'

Charlotte giggles then snaps a selfie of her arrival. She will need to take precautions here – sea air is brutal on the complexion.

# Beatrice

As soon as they arrive at Falcon, the family's spacious timeshare property with one of the best views over to the neighbouring island of Bryher, Beatrice settles Primrose on her blanky at the foot of the bed. She knows she's lucky to be able to bring her – visitors' dogs aren't usually allowed to stay on the island in June, only in winter, but special dispensation has been given due to the wedding.

She unzips her bag to air out the wedding outfit – the silk crepe palazzo pants and flowing blouse in soft blues with a faint shimmer of gold, one of her favourites ever since Charlotte helped pick them out on their latest girls' shopping expedition. She lays out her toiletries and checks herself in the dressing-table mirror. All shipshape.

The grocery supplies have already been delivered, so she pops downstairs to make herself a restorative Bloody Mary before tackling the rest of the unpacking. She is very much looking

forward to trying the complimentary bottle of Westward Farm Gin later.

Beatrice Wallace owns six weeks here at Falcon, one of the larger holiday homes on the island, sleeping twelve at a push. She might have booked a smaller cottage for these extra nine days as it's only herself, Charlotte and her son Kit staying this time, but it's nicer to be somewhere that feels like home.

All of the guests are relieved they weren't fogged in on the mainland, but Beatrice especially so, as she didn't want to cut it fine for the wedding ceremony this lunchtime.

She told her infuriating husband that they should have booked a flight for yesterday in case of bad weather, but he was adamant that he was far too busy to think of taking another day off work. And after all the extra stress that caused, Henry still had to stay behind – a 'crisis in the markets'.

'There's always a bloody crisis in the markets!' snapped Beatrice, before disconnecting the call. She seethed on the train all the way from St Pancras to Cornwall, which took some seething.

'Hellooooo!' comes a call from outside.

'Kit! Darling!' shouts Beatrice in reply, hurrying to open the door. Charlotte dashes down from her own bedroom to greet the rather gorgeous young man in running shorts stretching his calves on the doorstep, but Primrose beats her to it. Hugs, kisses and delighted woofs commence.

'Char! Looking good!' beams Kit, who decided to come to the island a day early.

'Oh, please don't!' blushes Charlotte. 'I'm a state!'

'You are not! What are you going to do while the *mothership* and I are at the wedding of the year?' he enquires.



‘I’ll go for a walk, look in on the pub, the usual,’ she smiles. ‘But perhaps we can meet up later if you like? Have a few drinks?’

Kit seems oblivious to the note of hope (some would say yearning) in the young woman’s voice.

Beatrice addresses Charlotte. ‘I’m sorry you weren’t invited to the wedding, darling, but you hardly know Janey, and it is only a small do. Oh, damn!’

‘What is it, Mum?’ asks Kit.

‘Please don’t call me *Mum*, darling, I hate it! There seems to be no celery for my Bloody Mary,’ she informs him. ‘I shall have to be very brave.’

Kit is about to sit in the kitchen chair, but Beatrice says, ‘Oh no. Chop-chop! Time to get ready, darling!’

‘You make a start. I’ve only got to shower and put on my suit,’ he replies. He turns to Charlotte and says, ‘I hate weddings. Sooo boring.’

Beatrice is aware that Charlotte not only loves weddings, but that she would have loved to attend one with Kit.

‘I wish I’d come over yesterday with you, darling,’ sighs Beatrice. ‘I do not like to be rushed.’

She hurries upstairs and commences preparations, worrying about her son as she applies a well-practised subtle smoky eye.

Kit has seemed rather down in the dumps lately. He has recently moved back home after splitting up with his latest girlfriend, and Beatrice thinks he now seems a little . . . lost. He has no job lined up, and he spends most of his time skulking round his bedroom all day, gallivanting to parties all night – so nothing much has changed since he was home from uni in the holidays.

Many of Beatrice’s friends wail about their empty nests, but she

tells them, 'Darling, I yearn for the day!' although she is joking.

Kit's father accuses his son of lacking a work ethic, but Beatrice defends him, saying that *it's just that poor Kit's had a few false starts; he's not yet found his true path; he's a sensitive soul.*

He gave up on the business course, as well as the foray into public relations. He was never keen on the idea suggested by his cousin to join him with the landscape gardening enterprise, and he only worked on one TV production as a runner. Sticking at things does not seem to be Kit's forte.

Yet despite his mother's unwavering support, he frequently mocks her.

'Why do you need a PA?' he challenged Beatrice only the other week. 'You don't even have a job!'

'I do so, as you well know!' she responded.

'And what might that be exactly?'

'I plan things for your father. Events. Charity functions.'

'You don't even clean your own shoes!'

Exasperated, Beatrice snapped, 'Darling, you're almost twenty-seven and you're jobless and living with your parents, so I rather think you should sort yourself out before you start offering me career advice, don't you?'

But then he looked so hurt, she felt awful.

Beatrice takes another sip of her drink, wishing she knew what would make her son happy, or at least happier.

She rolls out her shoulders and looks around the tastefully decorated bedroom. The whole place is spotless, but there are splatters of seagull shit on the window. She doesn't know why they can't cull the bloody things. If they gave her a gun she'd do it herself.

It is easier to stoke her anger about that than admit her disappointment that, yet again, her husband has let her down.

### 3

# Hannah

Due to the wedding emergency, Hannah is one of the first passengers to be dropped off at Hawk, the largest holiday property on the island. She knocks, walks in, and is met by one of the bridesmaids, a girl with sparkly braces on her teeth who she's never seen before, and she's swiftly ushered upstairs. The master bedroom is already a hive of activity awash with decreasingly fizzy champagne and escalating fizzy anxiety.

'Hurrah! The cavalry!' squeals Jane, the blushing bride, rising from her chair where *dewy* make-up is being professionally applied, rushing towards Hannah in a haze of perfume. The girl's fluffy dressing gown is gaping, and Hannah's own impressive chest is squished against an ample, corseted bosom.

'Yesss!' shouts one of the younger bridesmaids, already in acres of tulle, running around in non-specific giddiness.

'What a lifesaver!' adds Jane's mother, one of several Right Honourable Tresco regulars, lightly holding Hannah's

shoulders and air kissing her cheeks, careful not to make contact and smudge her own recently applied lipstick. Hannah has served this woman's family in the bar for five seasons, and this is the first time the mother of the bride has ever acknowledged, let alone touched her.

'Can I just get a coffee before I make a start?' asks Hannah.

'Of course, of course,' says Jane.

While she's in the kitchen making her drink, Hannah calls Alison, her boss at the pub, and is put back on shift to work early doors tonight. No point not earning now that her holiday's been cancelled. Just as she's adding milk to her coffee, she hears a scream upstairs and rushes back up.

'What happened? Are you okay?'

'A bird just crashed into the window,' says Jane. 'It nearly gave me a heart attack!'

'Is it alright?' asks Hannah. A small ghostly impression of the poor creature remains on the pane.

'I don't know. Will you have a look?' says Jane.

Hannah goes back down to collect her coffee and checks outside. There's no sign of the bird on the grass beneath the bedroom window, so it might have simply stunned itself and flown away, thank God. She applies a smile as she returns to the bride's boudoir. There's no need for her to share her thoughts on the omen with the wedding party.

Hannah's hairdressing kit has already been brought up to this impressive holiday home from the much smaller worker's cottage she shares with two other girls. She assumes Bobby did the honours, but anyone might have collected the bag because no one bothers locking their doors here.

'It's like Britain used to be in the fifties,' enthused Bobby

when he first introduced Hannah to the accommodation which has been her home for the last six years. ‘Honesty boxes for flowers and farm produce, and you can leave your bike anywhere and no one will vandalise it like they would on the mainland. No crime here. No pollution. It’s a proper paradise!’

At that time, Hannah hadn’t been on a bike since she was a small child, back when they visited her *babcia* in Poland. (Hannah’s actual name is Zuzannah, but nobody here has ever bothered with that, so she dropped it.) When she first met Bobby and his bright, rainbow-painted bicycle she had no idea that it was the principal mode of transport on the island and wondered why he might wax so lyrical about his place of work.

Now she understands people’s enthusiasm. The island is heart-achingly gorgeous. Wildflowers festoon gardens and fields, red squirrels cavort in trees, the air is pure. Walkers embrace the immaculate views and wave and smile at each other – the people who come here generally drop no litter to spoil the pristine beaches and the water is crystal clear, although bloody freezing.

Isolated from the mainland, Tresco engenders the sense of a true getaway. It is remote, as in it once took Hannah twenty-three hours to return to Croydon to see her mother – the journey entailing tractor, boat, ferry, train, tube, taxi, plus the obligatory delays. It is also exclusive, as in shockingly expensive.

And life here is from a time gone by – a time of fresh air and strolls along perfect sandy coves, of cheery bunting and fine paintings of vast horizons and cheeky sailors. A time of board games and sing-alongs and cream teas and old-school racism and servants and masters, where even today girls like Hannah work like dogs, while a few of the privileged guests treat them like shit on their deck shoes.

‘You are so lucky to live here!’ people exclaim.

Hannah knows she’s lucky.

But sometimes she can’t bear the everyone-knowing-every-one-else’s-business-in-and-out-of-each-other’s-houses-*tight-knittedness* of this community and she marches up to the cliffs to get away, where to the accompaniment of screeching sea-birds and crashing waves, she can scream out loud.

## 4

# Bobby and Hannah

‘Oh, she do look pretty, don’t she!’

‘I’m no expert on the fairer sex, as you well know, Miss Elisabeth,’ says Bobby.

‘Ooh, she do! A very pretty maid. Well, the dress and the hair. Shame about the face!’ cackles Miss Elisabeth – former teacher, former councillor, part-time postmistress, tour guide, community centre assistant, playgroup assistant and church volunteer. The oldest worker on the island. The woman is nothing if not adaptable. Everyone calls her Old Betty, but never to her face.

‘Do not let them hear you!’ warns Bobby.

‘And a lovely service. Proper lovely,’ she witters on.

Bobby nods. The church side of things has gone down well. Plenty of photo opportunities, which will hopefully flood social media and drum up business. Standing outside the church for the official poses, the bride indeed looks . . . bride-like. The hair is a triumph, adorned with tiny pearls to complement

the gown, a beautifully draped off-the-shoulder number with shades of Vera Wang if he's not mistaken. Bobby loves a little *Vogue* glamour on the island – a welcome change from Barbours and wellies. Everyone here smells like wet dog. Even those who don't have dogs.

'They done her up a treat,' says Betty. 'The bride with the beautiful blue eyes.'

The bride's eyes are obviously brown.

Bobby is confused. 'Blue eyes?'

'Oh yes,' nods Betty. 'One blew east, the other blew west.'

'Will you behave,' he hisses.

Bobby makes his way across the path to praise Hannah. A good manager should give positive feedback whenever it is warranted. So many bosses only admonish, which saps morale.

'An excellent job with the hair there, Hannah. Well done. I love the little pearls. A very nice touch.'

'Thank you.'

'Good tip?'

'Fair enough.' She looks away as she says it, so he guesses it wasn't impressive.

'It stands you in good stead going the extra mile like this – cancelling your own break, rushing to the rescue. The guests appreciate it. The Family will appreciate it.'

The bride's people are friends with the island's ultimate bosses, *The Family*. Bobby reports directly to The Family, who report to the royal owners, or rather the minions in their employ, and the royals, of course, report only to God. Many of the regular visitors, like Jane's family, have been coming here to holiday for decades. Most tourists only manage a day trip over to see the Abbey Garden – it's all normal folk can afford – but



those who stay, those who come back year after year at peak season, like Jane's clan, timeshare owners who visit several times each year, they are usually dripping with assets.

The bride has appreciated Hannah's effort to the tune of an extra fifty pounds on top of her fee – and while Hannah is grateful for the cash, it is more a Blue Peter badge level of thanks rather than a full commendation. Jane's family spend more than fifty quid on a round of drinks in the Old Ship most lunchtimes. And Hannah hasn't gone the extra mile for them – as the crow flies from Land's End, she's gone twenty-eight extra miles.

Still, her effort has pleased Bobby, which means word will get back to her immediate boss, the redoubtable Alison, who governs the pub with an iron will and a slick of Estée Lauder lippy. A good word from Bobby might help grease the wheel the next time Hannah wants to swap her shifts.

The wedding party no longer notices Hannah. As soon as she'd fulfilled her purpose she was dismissed and subsequently ignored. Jane, her relatives, and Glorious Greg the groom – thus named due to his habit of declaring everything on the island 'glorious!', from the shooting and fishing to the *evocative* Malbecs he downs like water – are back with their own kind now. Even Primrose is on her best behaviour and part of the inner circle, sporting a pink cape affair with a giant bow attached to her collar.

The guest holding the dog catches Hannah's eye and makes a funny face, followed by a wry smile, as if to say, 'It's ridiculous, isn't it?' He mimes shooting himself, which makes her laugh. She recognises this good-looking young man from a past visit, but she's forgotten his name.

Hannah was invited to the church as an afterthought. It's an open invitation, although regular visitors know that most islanders will be far too busy working to come to mid-week midday nuptials. A few, like Miss Elisabeth, have stopped by for a few minutes to see the couple outside St Nicholas's Church – built in 1878 by the rather innovatively named Thomas Algernon Smith-Dorrien-Smith, although presumably not single-handedly, aptly dedicated to the patron saint of sailors. None of the workers have been invited to the reception.

Hannah needs a lie down. She's tired after yesterday's bad crossing, a disturbed night's sleep in the B&B, and today's early start. Her body clock is more used to late nights behind the bar than early mornings, although when she'd first come over as a chambermaid she'd worked totally different hours. Now, along with her bar work, she's added 'unofficial hairdresser' to her skill set, not that there's an official hairdresser on the island. She's been doing cuts and colours for friends, workers, and a few guests for the last couple of years. She also gives house-keeping a hand when they need, and she recently started helping the interior design team.

'You'll soon be managing this place at the rate you're going,' said Bobby, teasing her. But everyone has to pitch in here.

Hannah watches Bobby walk over to shake Glorious Greg's hand, beaming at the bride and doing his best professional fawning. Bobby has a low centre of gravity and a suggestion of bowlegs, possibly from spending so much time tootling around on his bike, overseeing the smooth running of the island business. A peal of laughter trills out at something he says. Hannah is about to head back to her room and get some rest when Old Betty grabs her arm.

She comes up close, the old girl's teeth always a shocker, and says, 'Lovely job on that hair! Silk purse out a cow's ear!'

Old Betty has an unusual turn of phrase.

'Miss Elisabeth!'

'Pity she didn't get the genes, hey? That bleddy dog had more luck than her!'

'You did a lovely job with the church flowers,' says Hannah.

Betty ignores the compliment, as women tend to, and says, 'He has an eye for you, that youth. Proper 'ansome, him. Proper tall.'

The tall young man holding the dog's lead seems to divine they're talking about him and gives them a small apologetic wave and another grin. His mouth is beautiful.

'He is a bit lush,' smiles Hannah, who has a vague recollection of kissing him under a bunch of mistletoe at the pub last Christmas. But then, who didn't she kiss under that mistletoe.

Betty leans in and whispers, 'You take care! Hear me? You take care!'

'Why?' asks Hannah.

'He'll be gone soon enough. One of you'll end up broken-hearted. Or worse.'

'Are you the island soothsayer now,' laughs Hannah, shrugging Betty's fingers off and trying to make her escape.

The old woman sweeps her into a farewell embrace. Hugging Old Betty is like hugging a sack of sticks.

Just then the wedding golf buggy, decorated with pink and white ribbons to match the flowers in the opulent bridal bouquet, sets off to a cheer, the newly hyphenated Bamford-Lloyds waving regally from the back. All the workers wave in reply – if they didn't it would be noted by Bobby – and Hannah sets off in the opposite direction.

She wonders how anyone could bear to marry someone like Glorious Greg. The man's a buffoon. But Hannah will be thirty-two next year, and her mother has been nagging her that it's time to settle down, time to start thinking about giving her a grandchild. It's not that Hannah's against the idea, but it's not so easy when tourists are only here for a couple of weeks at a time, plus there are very few eligible workers on the islands, and most of them usually only stay for a season or two before disappearing. Anyway, she tells herself, she's having a fun time as she is.

And she's been stung in the past. Before she came to the island she was engaged to be married for an entire five weeks – well, her boyfriend at the time asked her, but never supplied a ring, and never mentioned it again. They broke up the following month when he suddenly left the country, claiming it was for a new job, although it turned out to be a new woman. Hannah blames herself for not seeing how flaky he was. She doesn't have the best track record in her love life.

She sighs and walks on.

Buttercups and daisies, honeysuckle and wildflowers in pinks and blues that she can't name, adorn the path as she makes her way down to New Grimsby. She'll have time for a nap before getting changed for her shift at the pub. She meets Angie from the shop walking Sadie Dog the other way up the path and greets them both, to the dog's delight. She waves to Isak from the cottage gardening team who looks to be in mortal combat with a giant dead *Echium* over in Tern's front yard. She texts her mother again – *Sorry! I'll try to get over to see you soon.*

A soft silence suddenly engulfs her, and she's hit by a wave of nausea like she's still at sea. She's overtaken by a strange

sensation where the world seems to tilt and darken. She has to steady herself on a garden wall.

Exhaustion, probably.

This strange episode is observed by one plump baby gull which sits on the nearest cottage roof, bleating heart-rending cries in the perpetual hope of food. A single magpie remains on the chimney opposite watching her impassively. It calls out three sharp, scornful cries, and swoops away.

Hannah salutes it and hurries on.

# *The Graveyard*

*May, After the Storm*

*The screeching is insane, the fight bloody. High above the church roof, attacks and retreats, feathers and fury. The larger gull dive bombs its rival aiming to impale it with an evil beak, intent on murder. The flock shrieks encouragement. Brutal.*

*The gulls are too intent on violence to notice the silent ones below.*

*Beneath the lush green grasses and whispering leaves of the watchful trees a favoured few are buried here. There will be no new grave. Miss Elisabeth feels it in her bones – there will be no body to bury. They will never find the missing girl.*

*She lays her posy next to Florence's headstone – her friend and former teacher; one of the few select islanders allowed to sleep beneath this hallowed earth. The graveyard is full. People who live and work on this tiny island now have to be buried elsewhere.*

*Elisabeth herself has a nice plot already sorted in Helston, where*

*her people were from. Her mother and father and baby brother already lie side by side over there. She can't remember her brother as she was only little when he was taken by the angels. She wonders if she'll recognise him. She hopes they all get on when they're reunited in the great hereafter. Elisabeth is looking forward to seeing her mum and dad again. She'll be able to say 'I told you so' now they realise it was not her who left the gate open, allowing the horse to escape, even though she got a smacked bottom for it.*

*Funny, she remembers that time as if it were yesterday, but she can't quite place what she had for breakfast.*

*How Elisabeth loves this church. But her faith is of the little England 'All Things Bright and Beautiful' variety, not the snake-wrangling hysteria and speaking in tongues favoured by Americans like John What's-His-Face, the expert up at the Abbey Gardens. Seemingly ecstatic in the pews, booming out hymns, dispensing hearty handshakes afterwards. So embarrassing. He was from the Bible Belt. Elisabeth is sure she wouldn't like it there. A real Holy Joe. Didn't do him much good though – a terrible business, that.*

*Miss Elisabeth is at her happiest arranging flowers for the altar, cocooned by the profound peacefulness of the church. The moment she steps outside, she is untroubled by thoughts of sin. She does not approve of Catholics with their guilt and handwringing and over-the-top ceremonies. She does not trust any form of passion in religious practice.*

*As she walks away from Florence's grave she says a silent prayer for the poor lost girl. They've just started searching for her – police from the mainland, volunteers – but the waves have already taken her, Elisabeth feels sure of that. Still, she will join them this afternoon – it is only right, a community effort.*

*Eventually, though, the search will be abandoned.*

*There might be a plaque of some sort at some point in the future – a few words on a bench near the church. Nothing that might really commemorate a woman's life.*

*Men get the statues.*