

## *Smugglers' Cove*

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The sea was rough, a legacy from the overnight storm. Bella, their two-year-old spaniel was enjoying herself so much in the waves she refused to come ashore. Linda and George were trying not to worry.

'Look, Linda, doesn't she just love the sea? And she's half dog, half fish, isn't she? I mean really, have you ever seen such a strong swimmer?'

'No, George, she's still a pup and could easily drown in those waves. And anyway, where is she?'

'Over there, in that kelp bed. There she blows! Doesn't she just love diving under the biggest of the waves.'

'No, George, that's not Bella, that's a seal.'

'No, really Linda, it's definitely Bella. When did you see a seal with ears?'

'No, that's seaweed, not ears. It's definitely a seal.'

'Are you sure, Linda? It looks like Bella to me.'

'Look, George, over there. Over there, near those caves. Thank goodness she's out of the water at last. Did you know they're called Caiplie Coves? Smugglers use to use them. They say they dug tunnels which go all the way to Kilrenny, to the graveyard. Come on, let's get closer so she can hear us.'

'Hey, watch out, these rocks are slippery. Ah, God, my knee!'

'George, you really should get it done. You know you need a new knee, don't you? No point putting it off now you're retired.'

'Yeah, I know, I should try to get it done over the winter so I can get back to golf next Spring. But, well, I don't know. ...'

'Anyway, apparently, there's a ghost who wanders around here, always on a neap tide. Seems he was beheaded for treason. They say his ghost carries his head under his arm. The head still speaks. And, if you are lucky enough to catch him unawares, he is obliged to grant your wish.'

'Rubbish! Who told you that nonsense?'

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'I read it on the East Neuk Facebook page, I think. Or maybe it was Marjory, at reception? Or that girl Sandra in the washing up room. She's been coming to Silverdyke Caravan Park for years and years. I think her husband was born here, something like that.'

'Is that Bella over there? Is that another dog she's chasing? Oh no, we'll never catch her now.'

'Maybe it's the ghost's dog. They say he has one that never leaves his side.'

'Now your ghost has a dog? You mean like Greyfriars Bobby?'

'Why not? Are ghosts not allowed dogs?'

'Okay, I'll allow the Smuggler's Ghost to have a Ghost Dog. Well, at least the phantom managed to lure Bella out of the sea. I have to admit, like you I'm not that happy with her swimming in such rough seas. And you're right, she's still a pup. But look, I don't know why we are even here anyway. Really, I told you we should have walked to Elie today rather than to Crail. Didn't I say Bella would dive into the sea. Bound to happen, obvious really. Remember? I said the path to Elie is so much safer on days like this, didn't I? But oh no, you insisted we come this way, didn't you?'

'Don't get on you high horse again, George. Anyway, you don't listen, do you? The crab shack place at Crail Harbour is open today and I really fancy a half lobster and a few scallops.'

'Oh, how can you be sure it's open today?'

'Because I looked it up on Facebook, okay? And look, the sun's breaking through. It's supposed to be the best day of our week, according to the BBC weather app and I want to sit at the harbour and chill in the sun, take a few good shots for my portfolio. The camera club starts again next week. The camera on this new phone is amazing.'

'Not the BBC weather app? It's rubbish. I wouldn't trust that site, Linda. Far, far better to use the Met Office app. All the guys at the golf club swear by it. Look, see, I've got it on my phone now and look, it says, "increasing gales, storm force 8 and rising. Heavy rain and a distinct possibility of hail." '

'Hail? In September? George, exactly what planet are you tuned into? Surely not for Cellardyke in Fife. Sounds more like you've got the forecast for Siberia. And look, trust your eyes, George. Look out there, to the Isle of May. Look, the mist has cleared. It's crystal clear. Can you see any clouds? Can you? And look, the tide is on the turn now. Oh,

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talking of tides, did I say this is actually a neap tide today, a smuggler's tide. Or is it tonight?'

'Oh, and who told you *that*? Another Facebook guru, I suppose? I mean, Linda, some of these folk on Facebook are deranged, aren't they? I mean, they just make it up, don't they?'

'Actually, it was Sandra, at the washing up. Her husband's a sea angler. He's going after big cod on these neaps, because the biggest fish always come in closer on a neap tide, so she said. Apparently, he's been coming here fishing for years. I think she said his grandparents are from here.'

'Ah, well, yes, as you know there's nothing like local knowledge. Did I ever tell you about the guy from Edinburgh who drowned when he went salmon fishing in the Tweed near Peebles? Well, he was a solicitor, a know-all, and he just completely ignored the ghillie and . . .'

'Yes, George, I know, you've told me like maybe a million times. Anyway, where's Bella gone to now? I hope she's not in the water again.'

Still only mildly concerned at this point, they started calling, scanning the shore and the rock pools, checking the tangles of weeds for Bella's brown and white head.

A few minutes later, they were becoming frantic.

'BELLA, TREATS, BELLA. COME ON, THERE'S A GOOD GIRL!'

But Bella did not come. Nor could they see her anywhere. And the waves seemed higher now, more ferocious. Linda was on the edge of tears when a voice shouted from the path near the caves:

'Hello there, is it a wee brown and white dog you've lost?'

'Yes! Where is she?'

The man, clearly an angler from his rods and paraphernalia, turned and pointed back towards the caves and they could not hear what he was saying. They scrambled over the remainder of the rocky beach and crunched up through the scree until they reached him.

'She's our dog, Bella, a spaniel. You saw her? Where?'

'Look, I'm not actually sure if it was your dog. She went past me like a rocket, with something in her mouth. Big it was, like a stick but floppy, maybe a stalk of seaweed? The

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other dog, the one she was chasing, it had a fish in its mouth. Bright orange it was, still wriggling, the ones the locals call rock cod but not really a proper cod, probably a cuckoo wrasse. Anyway, that other dog, the lead dog, it was weird. It was like, shimmering, like it was covered in jellyfish. Anyway, they headed that way past me into the dubs, ye ken, the rock pools. But, hey, wait, maybe they were going the other way, up towards the caves like a said earlier. Look, sorry, I wasn't really paying them any attention. To be honest, I'm half asleep here.'

**'What? Another dog? Whose dog?'**

'How should I know? Look, I'm no' a dog warden ye ken. But, if it's any help, there was an odd-looking guy up by the caves, sort of hiding, behind the rocks. Ducked down when I looked at him. Try him. Look, you'll need to excuse me. I'm shattered. I've been wading oot from that wee sandy bay over there since first light. Only two cod so far, just wee ones, two pounders. Put them back to grow big, eh? But there are big yins about, I'm sure o' it. It's a neap tide again tonight, just after seven o'clock, just as it's getting dark. Perfect for the big boys. Look, I'll leave you to it, okay? I'm knackered. I'm off to get some shut eye. See ya!'

With that, the small round man lumbered off towards Cellardyke, draped in equipment.

'God, George, she can't have drowned, can she?' said Linda with an edge of hysteria in her voice.

'No, honey, calm down,' said George, also worried but trying not to show it. 'Bella's a great wee swimmer. She really is. Anyway, she's probably following that other dog and when its owner realises, they'll see her collar tag with her name and your mobile number. It's a storm in a teacup. Bella'll turn up soon, you'll see. All we need to do is hang around here, 'last known whereabouts' the cops call it, eh? After all, it's not the first time she's run after another dog, is it? Look at me with her the other day when she ran off after that hare. But she came back eventually, she always does, right?'

The first of the big drops of rain fell from a clear sky. George and Linda turned towards the church spire at Kilrenny, dismayed to see a wide bank of black clouds scudding towards them, the forerunner to the storm predicted by the Met Office app.

As the wind rose, the temperature dropped rapidly. They ran towards the caves as the downpour started in earnest. As they ran they kept shouting for Bella, but she did not come. This was so unusual because she was an obedient dog, normally, especially when treats were on offer. By the time they arrived at Caiplie Coves they were soaked through, shivery.

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The towering hillside above the cave complex comprised mainly clean, soft sandstone, riven, eroded by wind waves and rain over thousands of years. Seen in the dry, the stone was mainly red but intermingled with pinks, yellows and darker browns rimmed with black. Now it was soaked with rain, the rock face looked dark, foreboding. Most of the caves were high and shallow and they could easily see that Bella was not there. There were two deeper, darker caves. The larger sloped gradually to meet the rocky floor about five metres from the shingle shore. The smaller cave was hidden behind a jumble of large harder rocks and sentinels of eroded sandstone pillars. This opening snaked away from the entrance, becoming lower, narrower, and darker. They called to Bella and listened for a response. Nothing. Soon they were on their hands and knees. After a few minutes of crawling and shouting, the tunnel became too small for a human then twisted into complete darkness.

'George, do you think she might be in there, trapped?'

George, who was feeling claustrophobic said, 'I suppose it's possible but why would she do it? It doesn't make sense. Unless she was following that smell. God, that stink is rank, isn't it? Is it rotting seaweed?'

'More like rotting fish.'

'Or maybe she followed that strange dog, the one covered in jellyfish. Maybe the smell is from it?'

'Yes, maybe that's what happened. 'George, do you remember that chap we met on Arthur's Seat, the posh guy with the black lab and the deck chair?'

'Oh, yes, years ago. Was it a Jack Russell he was waiting for?'

'Yes. Remember he said it had chased a rabbit into a warren and was stuck. He could hear it yapping so he knew it was okay. Remember he said it had happened before, so he wasn't worried. He knew it would eventually dig its way out. Remember?'

'Didn't he say his wife had gone home and brought him the chair and a picnic basket?'

'Yes, didn't he have a transistor radio too? And the lab to keep him company. He thought he might be out all night, waiting. I wonder what happened?'

They called down the tunnel to Bella then listened for a reply but heard only the sound of the waves crashing on the shore behind them, stirred by the rising wind.

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'Actually, Linda, thinking about it, there could be dozens of interlinked tunnels in there, making the sound bounce around. We need a torch to shine in and show her the way out, don't we?'

'Yes, that's probably what's happened.'

'If she's in here, of course,' said George. 'She could be still out there in the dubs, if she was chasing after that dog, if that's where it went. That fisherman was a bit odd, wasn't he? I mean, totally out of it. Vague. Maybe hypothermia? No wonder, imagine standing deep in the water casting out into the crashing waves trying to catch a fish. Why not just go to M&S and buy what you want?'

'Listen to yourself George. The pot calls kettle black, eh? Think about it. Think about a man who plays as much golf as you. Out in all weather's, even winter golf wearing thermals and big thick gloves. Is that rational behaviour? Well, is it? Perhaps that fisherman might think you are a bit odd? Anyway, I refuse to dwell on the idea she might be out there in that storm. I am convinced Bella *must* be in here. Where else could she be?'

'Maybe she's gone back to Silverdyke Park, to the motorhome? Maybe she's sheltering under it, waiting for us.'

'Yes, I suppose that's possible. Yes, I like that idea.'

'Okay, Linda, here's what we'll do. You stay here and keep calling her just in case. She comes to you better than me, right? So, I'll jog back to the caravan site and get our wet weather gear and bring a flask of coffee and some of those high energy snack bars. Look, come out here, to the mouth of the cave. Look, the phone signal here is not too bad. So, if she turns up or you need anything, try me, okay?'

'But George, it's freezing in here and I'm only in shorts and a thin top. And I'm soaked through.'

Linda could feel a sneeze coming but tried to hold it back. George saw the signs of another summer cold coming on and fished out his emergency handkerchief for her just in time.

'Right then Linda, you take my anorak. I'll get back to you as soon as I can. Come on, let's get you settled nearer the front of this cave and hope you can get a good enough signal on your mobile, in case that other dog owner phones you. That's really the most likely outcome, eh? Thank goodness the wind is blowing offshore so you are not being soaked by rain blowing in. Right then, I'm off, okay?'

'Thanks. Take care with your knee, the path will be slippery.'

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'No worries.'

The storm was still rising and as George set off along the rough path, the rain was lashing down. Miserable and trying to keep warm, he decided to go for it, lengthened his stride and picked up speed. By his estimate he had around two miles to run and should do it in about twenty minutes, he thought.

Thankfully his left knee felt okay. It had been acting up more over the last few months, a legacy of years playing badminton, squash and occasionally tennis. A guy at the golf club had used his occupational health insurance to get a knee operation on the run up to early retirement, a decision made on the promise he would be right as rain within six months. However, after the op he had suffered eighteen months of agony before his knee eventually healed and the pain subsided.

As George approached the steep run of steps which he must scale to reach the caravan park, his left foot skidded and he fell to the ground, sideways. An initial stab of pain was followed by what felt like a surge of electricity running up from his knee to his brain, making him gasp in agony.

'Here, son, grab oan. Ur ye okay? Lit me help ye up, c'moan, grab ma erm, Ah'm no sae decreputt uzz Ah look.'

The older man was accompanied by a very wet collie who nuzzled close to George. Sniffing Bella, the dog whined then yipped.

A strong hand gripped under George's armpit and hauled him upright.

'C'mon, **up** we go. Ah'm Ray, by the way. Noo, kin ye hop? Aye, that's it, nae bother, eh? That's it, son, only eichty-odd mair steps tae the tap o' it and then it's straight oan the levull a' the way back tae yer fancy motturhame. Me and ma missus is just ower frae yees in ma son's Van. Is yer wifey ett yer place wi yer wee dug?'

As they made their way up the steep flight, hopping through the pounding rain, George explained his predicament to his new friend learning in return that Ray had been a policeman before retirement and then a security supervisor at Torness Power Station for ten years.

'Well, son, yer in luck, ma Helen wiz a nurse, still is, working vuluntray for McMillan nurses as a visitur. She'll ken wit tae dae. Aye, Helen's the geenayus in oor faymly. Isn't she, oor Timmy?'

From the top of the steps the elderly, overweight dog yipped a 'yes' then set off at a steady amble towards the caravan park.

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At the motorhome, George repeated his tale of woe to Helen, telling her about Linda, the missing Bella and their encounter with the sea angler who may or may not have seen Bella with the silvery coloured dog.

'That'll be Sandra's man Paul. Ray, away over to Margie and find out what pitch they're on and then go and get him to come here. Tell him it's urgent. Go on, scoot!'

At eighty-two with a new knee and a new hip, a trek to Caiplie Coves and back was well beyond Ray.

It took about fifteen minutes to get hold of the sea angler and get him orientated to Helen's way of thinking. Like Linda, Helen knew from Sandra's soliloquy in the washing up area about neap tides and big cod but Paul insisted on giving them the full story while Helen packed George's rucksack with warm jogging bottoms, wet weather gear, coffee, snacks and three microwaved heat pads wrapped inside Linda's warmest fleece.

'Paul, there's a distinct possibility Linda might be hypothermic. Make her drink this flask. She might not like it, but you must insist she drinks it, *all* of it. It's extra strong, full of caffeine, loaded with sugar and condensed milk heated through. And make her eat at least two bananas and as many of these fruity bars as she can eat. Get her to put these heat pads on her tummy, over her heart and don't start back until she is fully aware of what's going on. This rain is on for the rest of the day.'

'Gotcha. I'm a volunteer fireman and a trained first aider.'

'And Paul, tell her to forget about Bella. The wee dog will make her way home, eventually. When he was still a pup, we lost our Timmy at that same spot and he was missing for three days, weren't you, our Timmy? From what I've heard from you and George, it was more or less at that same spot, near the caves. All the locals will tell you, there is something very odd about those caves, Margie in reception says there is an old smugglers' tunnel that leads up to Kilrenny cemetery. According to local legend, a few hundred years ago, there was a famous smuggler around here, a sort of Robin Hood. In real life he was an artist, a silversmith who worked for the University of St Andrews and all the local dignitaries. But he was also involved in smuggling, wine, brandy, tobacco, special herbs, and, of course, tulip bulbs which were a real money-spinner, back then. Anyway, some people are convinced he still haunts Caiplie Coves and Kilrenny cemetery where he is buried. They say he only appears when there is a neap tide. Oh, and he has a dog, a small silvery hunting dog with him whenever he appears.'

'Helen, Sandra has been doing my head in with this nonsense for years. Is it you who told her?'

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'No, Margie is the fount of local knowledge on the Phantom of Caiplie Coves, not me. Now, Paul, off you go and bring back Linda to us safe and sound.'

'Aye, George, didn't Ah tell yees,' said Ray as they watch Paul stomp off into the downpour on his short fat legs. 'Helen's the girl tae sort yees oot. There's no' much gets past her, so there's no.'

Two miles away, in the smaller, deeper cave, Linda was feeling increasingly shivery. She was sneezing and her nose was running. To warm herself, she began to do her Zumba warm-up routine, being careful to go easy with her right arm and shoulder even though it had been officially passed as 'fully recovered' from the horrific tendon injury which had laid her low for almost two years. Bending forward to touch her toes, she saw a long kelp stalk lying close to the wall near the back of the cave, at the entrance to the small twisting tunnel. Picking it up and moving to the light at the edge of the cave, she saw the teeth marks.

'This must have been what the fisherman saw in Bella's mouth. It proves Bella was definitely here, in this cave.'

At this discovery, Linda kneeled again to peer into the tunnel and call to Bella. Then she remembered the torch app on her phone. Just out of reach at the twist in the tunnel she saw a dog tag glinting in the light from the phone. Using the kelp stalk, Linda clawed it towards her. It was Bella's with the plated silver disc with the Peebles coat of arms: three fishes.

From a recent pub quiz night with the camera club, she had heard the symbolism of these three fish, information new to her as an incomer since relocating to Peebles from Edinburgh, downsizing, cashing in on the property boom in the capital.

*one salmon swimming upstream to spawn in the upper reaches of the Tweed which flowed through the town, and two salmon returning to swim out to sea to repeat the cycle.*

Below this emblem was engraved 'CNI' which she had learned was an abbreviation for *Contra Nando Incrementum*, the motto of the town of Peebles. Strictly this meant 'there is growth by swimming against the tide' referring to the salmon runs for which the Tweed is famous. In shorthand, locals said it meant 'to swim against a rising tide.'

On the reverse of the tag, she saw 'Bella' and her mobile number.

Lifting it, she sniffed. There was a very definite stink of rotting fish, strong and rank.

'So, you wee scamp, you really were here. At least that means you've not drowned. But where are you? Still in there? Could there really be a tunnel all the way to Kilrenny? Is

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this fish smell from the other dog? Was it this smell that attracted you? I must tell George, bring him up to date.'

As she moved back nearer the entrance of the cave to get a signal, her phone rang.

It was George. 'Hi, honey. Bad news. Did you see my texts, get my voicemails? No? Anyway, I've twisted my knee, skidded on the grass just beside that long flight of steps up from the old Cellardyke swimming pool. Reduced to hopping. Hopalong Cassidy, eh? I think I'll have to bite the bullet and get this knee done, eh? But no worries, that fisherman we met, his name's Paul, he's on his way to help you. And Ray and Helen, the couple with the old collie, they've been great. Now listen Linda, Paul has my rucksack. There's warm, dry clothing for you and waterproofs. Paul works with Fire and Rescue as a voluntary officer and is a trained first aider. He'll sort you out. And listen, Helen says not to worry about Bella. It happens all the time. Dogs are always getting lost at that spot. Something to do with a ghost dog leading them astray. All nonsense of course but some of the locals seem to believe it.'

The reception dropped out and George was speaking to himself.

'Sorry, honey, what did you say? Linda, you're breaking up. But don't worry, Paul's on his way. Text me, let me know you're okay. Love you.'

Linda looked out at the downpour and shivered. The tide was on the mend, filling the far away dubs. As the waves rolled towards her, their tops, frothed by the wind, looked as if they were bubbling like a geyser. A seal flopped off a rock and disappeared into the foam.

The incoming tide was mesmeric. Linda closed her eyes and tried to lean against the wall but it was sloping, knobbly and damp. Instead, she hunkered down into a ball, wrapping her arms around herself to conserve her body heat. Her eyes closed and she began to drift, imagining she was a seal, floating under the waves, watching the two dogs swimming high above her . . .

Her nostrils filled with the same rank smell of rotting fish.

She opened her eyes to see a tall figure silhouetted against the opening to the cave. By his side with a fish in its mouth stood a small dog with a diaphanous silvery coat. The dog appeared in profile, completely still, looking up at its master. The man's head, wearing a feathered hat, was tucked under his left arm. He wore a long dress coat, silvery, dripping water. As the drops hit the ground, they hissed and fizzed into pops of steam which rose up, surrounding him in a mist.

From the long, moustached face, the head spoke without moving its lips.

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'Madam, I apologise. I'm afraid Halo here has been up to her old tricks, luring dogs into her tunnel.'

The voice was a deep bass, cultured, with an old-fashioned Edinburgh twang in it.

'I was clearing the neap dubs of debris, checking that my landing stage is serviceable and did not notice what she was about. Then, out of the blue your fisherman friend came along near me so I had to hide. As you will understand, my neap tide visits must be kept secret. Essential, you will understand. The last thing I need is crowds of people watching out for me. That would never do, would it?'

'Excuse me, do you have my Bella?'

'Yes, yes, of course. But not here. I left her safe and sound at the Kilrenny Kirk, tied up to the gates of our family tomb. Look for the tomb of the Lumsdains.'

'Did she crawl all the way to the church through that tunnel back there?'

'Ah, dear lady, secrets are secrets and so must remain secrets. Can I trust you to keep ours?'

'Please, are you sure Bella is safe?'

'Yes, you have the word of Nathaniel Lumsdain. Now, I hear your rescuer approaching, rather noisily. Therefore, I must, as they say, *fly!* Good morrow to you. Come, Halo.'

The apparition shimmered and faded but the smell remained.

The burly fisherman trudged into the cave, dripping wet, creating a pool at the very spot the ghost had stood at.

'Ah, you must be Linda. I'm Paul. Did you get George's messages?'

'No, but I spoke to him, thanks.'

'Now, Linda, put on this fleece and these jogging bottoms ....'

The following evening, the warm sunshine was back. They were sitting out, enjoying a glass of wine. Both weather apps were in agreement, the weather was set fair. An Indian Summer, the radio news was claiming.

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Her long lead fixed to a spike, Bella was rooting along the perimeter hedge, following her nose, indulging her latest obsession, hunting out stones to bring back as trophies.

'How's your knee tonight,' asked Linda.

'Good, thanks. Look, the swelling has gone right down. The ibuprofen tabs from Helen are working. But borrowing this knee brace from Ray was the real answer. I've been online and I've got one arriving at Peebles. Should be there when we get home.'

'Are you sure you'll be able to drive. You know I'm not up for driving the motor home. I've checked with Marjory in reception. She has a cancellation for the pitch that Ray and Helen are on, it would give us another week to let your knee recover. I mean, what better spot in the world is there when the weather is like this?'

'No, Linda, I'll be fine to drive on Saturday. Anyway, I have two golf ties next week and an away match with the team.'

'You're planning to play golf with that knee?'

'Of course. I'll be fine with my new knee brace plus the ibuprofen.'

'George, did anyone ever tell you that you're completely bonkers?'

'And this from the woman who had a conversation with a headless ghost?'

'Shush! Keep your voice down. And tell me this George, was Bella at the Lumsdain tomb or was she not? And did she stink of rotting fish or did she not? Anyway, you agreed, this is our secret, my part of the deal with the rather dishy Nathaniel Lumsdain. So, do not go around spreading my secret to another soul, okay?'

'Okay, a deal is a deal. A little more of this Sauvignon Blanc, my dearest?'

'Yes, please. But George, should you be drinking wine with those ibuprofen tabs in you? How many have you had?'

'Just enough to make you look especially gorgeous, even with a runny nose.'

'Mmmm. You do say the nicest things. Not!'

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