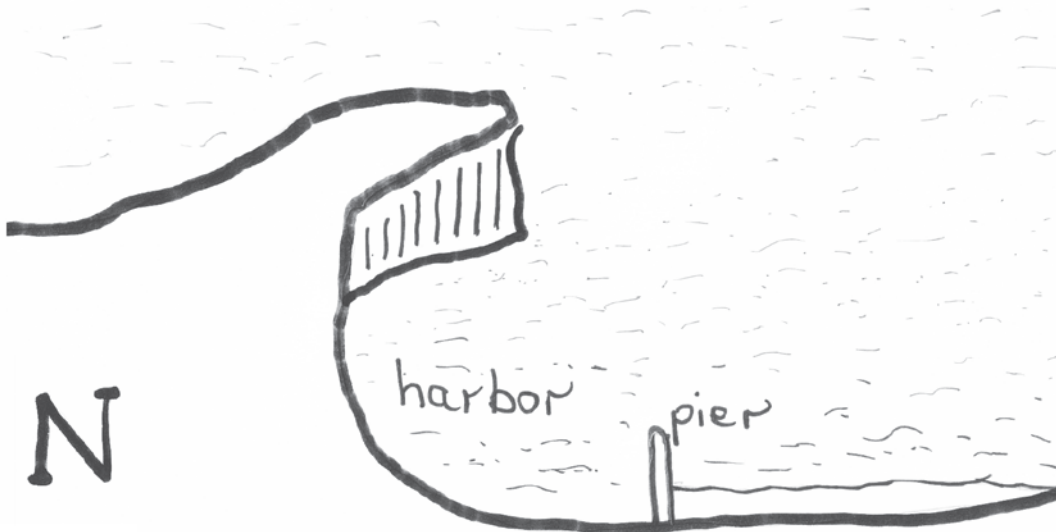


E

ATLANTIC

OCEAN



N

harbor

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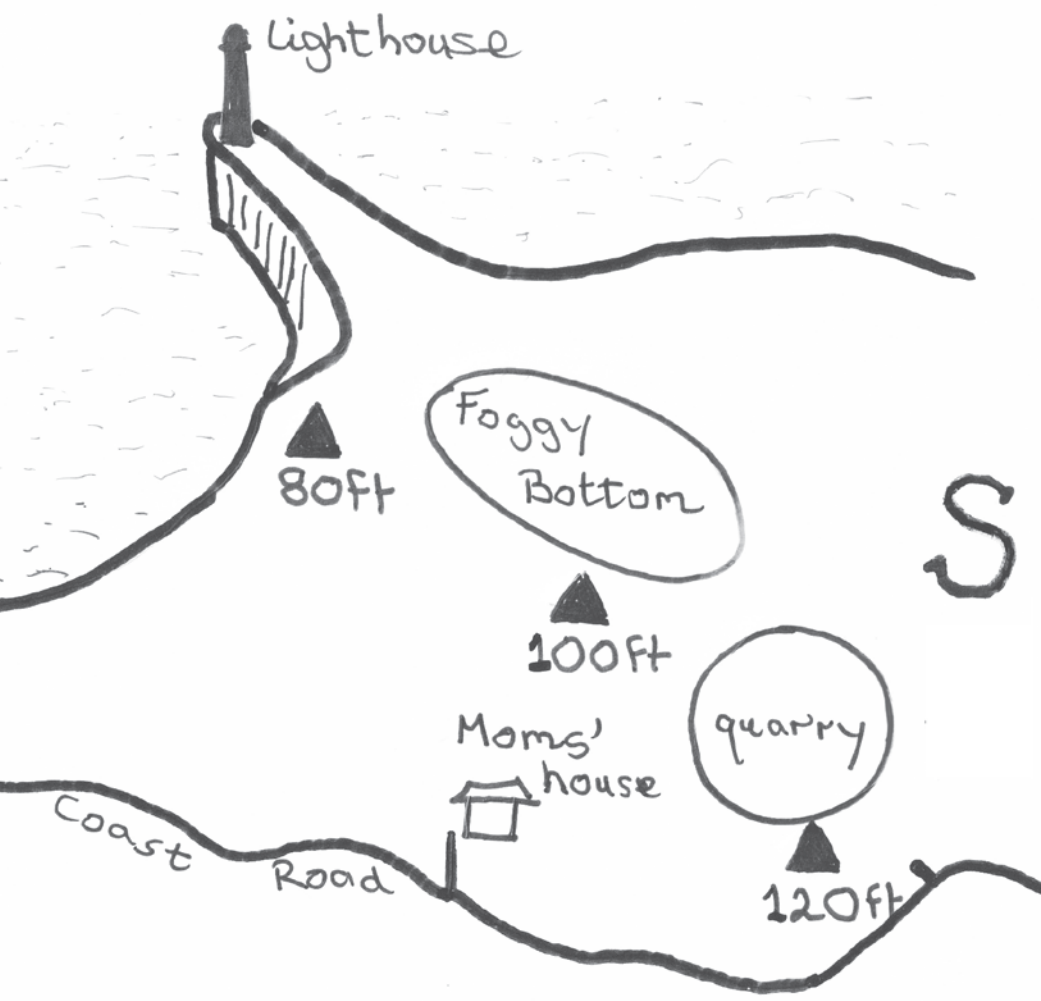


Off

Penzance  
Hotel

Penzance

W



Lighthouse

80ft

Foggy Bottom

100ft

Mom's house

quarry

120ft

Coast

Road

S

## Chapter

### 1

When her mom said, *A week at the beach*, Cally had imagined sun and sand and sea and ice cream and rock pools and splashing in the waves. She had not thought, *Fog*. Certainly not the dripping kind that makes your hair stick to your head and your skin pucker up with cold.

She leaned over the balcony of their motel room and craned her neck. She had hoped to see the sea, but all she could make out was the dirty white and black number plate on the back of their Subaru Forester. Beyond that, its green body dissolved into grey. There seemed to be no junction between sky and land, as if the parking lot itself was suspended in a thick cloud. The only evidence of their being near the shore was the rhythmic sound of crashing waves echoing through the fog.

“I’m going for a walk,” she said, as she opened the sliding door that led back into the motel room. She scanned the room looking for her shoes. Her mother and Aunt

Beth were both stretched out on the matching seashell and sea horse strewn comforters that adorned their queen-sized beds. Seeing them side by side made Cally feel the same pain in her stomach that she'd first felt that terrible summer two years ago, when her mom's cancer was first diagnosed. Their sisterly resemblance was clear, and not just because of the blue jeans and pale t-shirts they both wore. They were dark haired, the same height, with the same long neck. But Janie, Cally's mom, looked skinnier than her sister and still had dark circles under her eyes, two years after her breast cancer treatment. *Stop thinking about it*, she said to herself. She definitely needed a walk.

"Not on your own, you're not." Her mother's predictable response. "Not in this weather."

"Giles, you go with her," Aunt Beth said.

Cally sat down on the floor next to her shoes and glanced over to the corner where her cousin was seated, his head bowed over a screen. He showed no sign of having heard. Giles was on another planet, or so it seemed. During the entire drive to Maine from Vermont the previous day, he had never so much as turned his head to look at her. His long, thin body had remained hunched over his phone, like a magician concocting a spell. Cally knew that if she'd kept her head down like that she'd have been car-sick. So, no, he did not appear

to be the walking, or talking type. No way he'd want to go with her to explore the beach. She wondered why he'd even come on this vacation.

Giles was not Cally's real cousin, more of a step-cousin, because Aunt Beth was not Giles' mom. They were step-cousins because Aunt Beth had married Giles' dad earlier in the summer. Giles' dad was her new Uncle Ernest, a pretty unfortunate name for an uncle. Giles was two years older than Cally, already fourteen, and the only thing that she had in common with her ginger-haired step-cousin was that they both had spindly bodies and long legs.

No, that was wrong, Cally thought. They did have something else in common. Something very sad. Both their real moms had had the same disease. They'd both suffered from breast cancer. With one big difference—her mom HAD got better, and his real mom (she didn't even know her name) had died. How awful must that be? No wonder Giles was quiet.

The room suddenly felt too small for Cally. She needed to get out—the moms couldn't stop her. She slid her feet into her sneakers and concentrated on the laces.

“Go on, Giles. You two go and explore,” Aunt Beth repeated. “It could be fun.”

“Like you'd know,” he said, his voice harsh, sarcastic.

Cally couldn't believe it. Why was he so rude to Aunt

Beth? She watched as he uncurled his coiled frame from the seat, grabbed an orange parka, picked up his brick red cell phone and headed for the door. The door slammed shut behind him.

Cally looked over at her aunt in time to see a flush appear on her cheeks. "I guess I said the wrong thing again," Aunt Beth said, as she swung her legs off the bed.

"Don't take it so hard, Sis," said Cally's mom. "He's just being a teenager."

"Tell me about it," Aunt Beth said with a sigh.

Cally decided to make her exit while she had the chance. And anyway, the moms looked like they needed to have a heart to heart on the subject of Giles. She didn't need to witness that.

"I'm going out too," she said. "I mean, I'll go and see if he wants company."

## Chapter

## 2

Outside, Cally looked around and saw only fog. A thick, all-encompassing cloud. Still, better than being cooped up inside, she thought, even if I walk in circles. She wondered which way Giles had gone. She zipped up her hoodie and walked out into the parking lot.

“You escaped too?” A voice to one side of her. She smiled as Giles’ orange parka appeared out of the mist.

“Too right,” she said. “I need a walk.”

“I think the beach is this way,” he said pointing to their right. “Follow me.”

Cally thought about it. Why not? she decided. At least he hadn’t said, *Go away*.

Cally gradually relaxed as she walked, just happy to be out of the claustrophobic atmosphere of the hotel bedroom. Giles strode out ahead, his orange rain jacket a beacon in the fog. She picked up her pace to keep up. Her

feet echoed as they scrunched on the sandy footpath that ran alongside the road. Ahead she heard the thrum of waves coming ashore and then sucking back over sand. It told her the shore must be close. So strange not to be able to see beyond the veil of grey. Was the tide out or in? How wide was the shoreline? Was it sandy or rocky or covered in sea-weed? It had been dark and rainy the previous evening when they'd arrived, so they'd not yet had a chance to explore. Her mom's description from the tourist website, *Penzance has a quaint harbor*, was all she had to go on.

The road, empty of traffic, ended abruptly in a parking lot. They climbed over the iron railing surrounding the lot. Condensation on the metal bars wetted Cally's hands and the inside-legs of her jeans as she crossed. She realized that her face was damp with sea-fret. They jumped down and their feet crunched onto pebbles.

"Pretty eerie," said Giles.

"Right," she agreed. They stood still for a while, listening. The fog hung round them like the soaked walls of a tent. Cally still could not see the sea, but its sound raked repeatedly in her ears. They followed the noise out to the water's edge where white-flecked waves hammered out of the mist into the shore. With no visible landmarks to aim for, Cally focused on the foghorn's sound. It was like a herd of cows mooing in sync.



“Let’s go this way,” she said, pointing along the beach. She was surprised when Giles set off in the suggested direction, apparently anxious to lead the way. She started after him, counting out-loud the interval between blasts. One, two, three... eighteen, nineteen, MOOOOOOOOO. Giles seemed unmoved by her refrain. He walked on ahead as she timed her step with her counts.

They strode along the shoreline, her moos reverberating back through the fog. Cally noticed how Giles’ footprints ahead of her filled with water as soon as his feet left their mark, the sand was so wet. As they walked, the beach was gradually replaced by yellow-grey rocks and rock pools. They advanced with their heads down, leaping across pools and sliding over seaweed-strewn surfaces. The noise of the sea grew louder and the spray higher as they sprang from rock to rock. Cally changed her moos to Wows as she leapt forward, but her voice was drowned out by the waves.

She almost collided with Giles when he stopped suddenly.

“Whoa!” he said.

She looked up. Ahead, the rocks became huge boulders and the cliff face loomed in front of them out of the fog.

“We’d better go back,” he said.

They both turned to retrace their steps. Cally was

now in the lead. She jumped over one rock pool and balanced on the next outcrop. She looked to left and right to try to see the way she had come. But the rock she was standing on was now separated from the next by a wide gap, a channel that was too big to leap, a gap that was filled with water. Each roll of the tide brought a further torrent of water along the trench.

Cally stared down at the rushing water. "Hey, what happened?"

Giles caught up with her. "Uh, the tide came in?"

"Right. Well I guess we can't go this way. We need to get closer in to the shore."

Cally turned and went forward again. She knew she should move faster but which way? The tide was encroaching on both sides. She felt Giles hand on her arm and looked back into his wet face. He was staring ahead, biting his bottom lip. His look told her everything. He's as scared as I am, she thought.

"It's too late," he said.

Cally followed his gaze. Grey fog rolled over water. Water behind, crashing; water to their right, rocks being submerged in froth; to their left a row of stone pillars surrounded by sea. In front the cliff face. The wet surface on which they were balanced was fast becoming an island. Cally tried to concentrate on not slipping off. How

could the water have come in so quickly? Why hadn't she noticed?

"Now what?" she shouted.

"Guess we'll have to go up." He pointed at the cliff face. "Up there."

Cally stared at the waves crashing against the cliff. The huge, steep cliff. She couldn't even see the top through the fog. It was made up of horizontal layers, black slabs dripping with moisture, interspersed with dark yellow-grey boulders, and out-jutting ledges that protruded at odd angles.

She looked from the cliff to Giles. "That's not even funny."

"We don't really have a choice," he told her.

"Wait... seriously?" She didn't want to seem like a wimp, but climbing a cliff? "Umm, I'm not really a climber."

"Well, you're about to become one. Come on." Cally felt herself being tugged forward. Giles' hands were strong. She wanted to dig her heels in, to protest, to get her breath. Why couldn't she breathe?

His face was suddenly right next to hers—serious, stern, his eyes bright with determination.

"Come ON! You've got to. Do what I do. Follow me."

The feeling of cold on her heels, of the sea soaking

her socks, made up her mind. Giles moved. She followed. They ran and splashed over rocks and pebbles and made it to the cliff face. Giles did not hesitate. Cally took a breath. Giles was right. She didn't have a choice.

He started climbing, calling instructions over his shoulder:

"This bit's slippery."

"Take a hold here."

"Grab this branch."

"Rest a minute."

On and on and on. The noise of the waves was lost, blocked out of her brain by her need to follow his instructions. The world became Giles' voice, Giles' feet, Giles' words, her own breath and the fog, the taste of salt, the smell of wet rock and sweat. *Concentrate*, she thought. She had no feel of time, just lungs bursting, muscles tight, shoulder blades aching, jaw locked...

Until,

"Made it!" A holler from above.

And the world turned from vertical to flat as Cally crawled forward on all fours onto solid, horizontal ground. The grass was soaking wet, but she didn't care.

*Thank you*, she thought. Thank you to Giles, to God if there was one, and to her body for getting her up the cliff.

“Holy crap,” she said, breathing hard. “That was intense.”

She crawled another foot from the edge of the cliff. Her right hand sank into something sticky and soft. She pulled it back, as if she’d touched an open flame, and looked down.

“Eeewww!” It was so gross. Her fingers were covered in black and white feathers, matted together with dark red-brown goo. Was that blood?

“Disgusting!” she cried and sank back down on the wet ground.

## *Chapter*

### 3

“What’s up?” Giles was at her side. “Come away from the edge.” He motioned her forward.

Cally stared at her hand, then at the disgusting mess in front of her. She tried to wipe off her hand on the wet grass but her fingers were still stuck together. The smell of dead animal hit her and she turned her head away.

“I put my hand in something. It’s really gross.”

She got to her feet, staggered forward and held out her horrible hand.

“Sick,” Giles agreed, “but better than dog shit.” He picked a feather off her finger. “Definitely dead bird.” He looked around and started to tear wet fern fronds from the adjacent rocks. “Try wiping it with this.”

She rubbed some of the mess away.

“Oh God. I think it was a seagull,” she said. “Maybe there’s a puddle somewhere I can wash my hands in?” She looked around.

“Don’t worry about it.” Giles seemed to have lost interest and was already moving away into the fog. His ginger hair was now dark and plastered flat to his head, ears sticking out like bat wings as he disappeared between wet black rocks and bramble bushes. Behind her the waves crashed against the cliff face. Cally raced to catch up. She did not want to get left alone in this creepy place.

As they trekked forward and upward, the noise of the waves against the cliffs gradually faded. A hundred yards or so further on they were able to speak without shouting.

“There’s got to be a road up here somewhere,” Giles said. He pulled his phone out of his pocket and wiped the moisture off the screen. “Not much of a signal. Let’s keep walking away from the cliff.”

The mist continued to swirl around, but the sky looked lighter and brighter to the west, away from the sea. Out of that horizon she saw two birds—ducks maybe—silhouetted, low-flying, skimming the bushes above the mist. They quacked in unison, flew straight across her line of vision and descended over the hillside, out of view. Their quacking faded and was replaced by a distinct *splash*.

“There must be water over there,” she said.

Cally ran forward and stopped. Ahead, the land fell away, as if a giant had taken a bite out of a hillside cake.

“Wow,” she said.

Giles joined her.

“Awesome,” he said.

They stood at the rim of a mist-filled crater, with a dark edge that curved away out of view into the fog. It was impossible to see how wide the crater was, or how far down it went, but the way the quacking and splashing echoed and faded over and over again, in and out of her hearing, suggested that it was a big body of water and that it was a long way down the steep-sided cliffs to the water’s edge.

Cally rubbed her eyes and looked again. There was something else. Flashes of white, down and to her right—something weird moving through the mist. Was it a person? An animal?

“What’s that?” She pointed in the direction of the movement.

“What?” Giles turned his head, but whatever had been there was gone.

“There was something moving over there.”

“I didn’t see it. Maybe it was a deer?”

“No. It was white.”

“Could have been a deer’s tail.”



“Maybe.” That did make sense, but... there was something else. The creepiness she had sensed before on the cliff top came back to her. “Do you smell that? Something stinks. It’s like before, from the dead bird.”

Giles didn’t answer; his attention was back on his phone.

“Any luck with the signal?” Cally really wanted to get away from this place.

“It’s getting better. At least I’ve got one bar now. Not enough for Google maps though.”

“Let’s try over there.” Cally pointed toward the place she had seen the deer or whatever it was. “Maybe that deer was on a path.”

“OK. Maybe a better signal higher up,” Giles agreed.

They slipped across grass, weed and pebbles to what did appear to be a deer path. It wound its way uphill away from the rim of the crater. The quacking sound of the ducks faded into the distance behind them. They walked in single file as the mist gradually cleared. Ten minutes further on, the path veered steeply down again. Cally pulled up, out of breath from the climb up to this point, and Giles, in an effort to avoid slamming into her, skidded on the loose soil and gravel, lost his footing and fell on his butt.

“Yow!” he cried. He sat up looking slightly abashed. “Watch it, will you,” he muttered.

“Sorry. I just didn’t see how the path goes down all of a sudden and...”

He got up and dusted himself off. “It’s OK.”

They looked around. The ground fell away below them again but this time there was no fog. This looked like a man-made crater. It reminded Cally of a quarry she’d seen in the Green Mountains in Vermont, a quarry that was only visible from a car on the interstate if you happened to look out at just the right moment. And this view had the same effect on her. It was a shock, the shock of a beautiful landscape of trees and hills suddenly scarred, replaced by stark, man-made walls and jagged rocky outcroppings. She looked down into the quarry and saw at the bottom the evidence of discarded industry, a jumbled mass of dirty-orange rusted metal drums interspersed with slabs of grey-green slime-covered concrete like gravestones in an overgrown graveyard. This scene screamed WASTE DUMP.

“That’s gross,” said Cally.

“Smells bad, too,” agreed Giles.

Cally sniffed. “Yeah. Even worse than before.”

“And different. Something more chemical than dead bird.” Giles lifted his freckled snub nose and mimed sniffing as if he were at a wine tasting. “Hints of gas station, I think,” he said in a faux sophisticated voice. “And perhaps a hint of toxic waste.”

Cally laughed. This was a new side of him. He was being funny. “Ha. Don’t you hate it when adults get all, ‘Look at me, I’m such a wine expert.’”

Giles smiled. “Yeah. Especially when it’s probably some cheap crap they bought at Costco.”

Cally was actually starting to enjoy this. But then the disgusting smell and the sight of the waste dump brought her back. “But seriously, those drums must have got down there somehow,” she said. “There’s got to be a road leading out of here.”

“Good point.” Giles examined his phone again. “OK!” He did a fist pump. “A signal!” He swiped a few times and then showed her the screen. “Here we are, here’s the cliff and the road’s over there.” He pointed around the edge of the waste pit, studied the phone again, scrolling down. “And it winds down back to Penzance. Great! 2.1 miles. We just need to find a way from here to the road.”

They headed along the edge of the quarry, through the branches of yellow ash and scrubby oak trees and tangles of weeds and ferns, looking for a road.

“I think there’s a wall over there,” Giles said, pointing through the trees. “Let’s go.”

Sure enough, after a few more minutes of trampling down weeds, they came to a low stone wall topped with a barbed wire fence. “OK. All we have to do is get over that.” Giles took off his windbreaker, scrambled up the

wall and draped it over the barbed wire. “I can see the road. Come on.”

Cally needed no encouragement. She climbed up beside him, took his hand for balance, lifted one leg and then the other over the rain jacket and jumped down on the other side.

Once over, they saw a tall, diamond-shaped sign attached to the wall and facing out towards the road. It showed a black skull-and-cross-bones on a white background. Just in case the message wasn’t clear, the word **Danger!** appeared in bold and black below the skull. And below that a second warning, **Trespassers will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law.**

“Oh well,” she said, as Giles joined her, “I guess we’re criminals now.”

Giles took in the sign and its warning. “How were we to know it was private?” he said. “They need to put a sign over there by the cliffs.”

“No way was I going to climb back down that cliff even if I’d seen—”

*Beeeee-doop, Beeeee-doop, Beeeee-doop*—a piercing, electronic ring made them jump. Giles pulled out his cell phone.

“It’s Beth,” he said.

“Right,” Cally nodded. It sounded strange to hear him call her aunt by her first name. But she was his step-mom,

not his mom, she reasoned to herself, so of course that's what he would call her.

Giles glanced at Cally. "I'm not going to tell her about any of this." He nodded towards the *No Trespassing* sign.

"Right," she agreed. "My mom would have a seizure if we told her about the cliff, and trespassing... she'd totally freak out." It felt good to be his co-conspirator.

Giles swiped his phone. "Hi," he said. "Yes, I'm good." He looked towards Cally and rolled his eyes upwards so his forehead creased. "Yes, Cally's here. She's OK. We did a long walk. We'll be back in an hour," he said. He nodded at the phone some more, as he kicked a stone onto the road. "Yes. Yes. OK. Right. We will. Bye." Giles turned off his phone.