

Introduction

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The Curious Four go to **Black Devil's Reef**



Chapter One

“So.... now I’ve got no monkeys left at all - and I’m still allergic to bananas!” Scott said to Dave, who nodded his head in sympathy.

It was a damp, dreary evening in the rain-soaked, crime-infested streets of Salford. Best friends Scott Carth and Dave Crowe were having a cosy chat in a grimy, back-alley pub called *The Rotting Rat*. Perched on rickety stools at the bar, they ordered two ginger beers, the foamy amber liquid served in chipped mugs.. The pub, with its sticky floors and the faint odour of old cheese, felt oddly comforting in its shabbiness.

The barman was overweight and unkempt, with a face only a mother could love. His grimy string vest, which may have once been white, now clung to his sweaty, bulging torso like a second skin. Grease and grime seemed to ooze from every pore, and, as he reached out with thick, sausage-like fingers to pass Dave and Scott their drinks, the stench of stale sweat and sour ale wafted from his person.

"Anyway - my firm is sending me down to Kirrin Bay this weekend," Scott said. "There's an old crumbling castle on an island near there which is being rebuilt into a supermarket. It'll be my job to oversee health and safety during the construction."

Scott shifted his weight on his stool. He was sitting on something uncomfortable. He put his hand in his pocket and pulled out a pair of scissors.

“Gosh. so that’s where these got to! I’ve been running about all day with these in my pocket!” He said, placing the scissors on the bar.

Scott worked in health and safety. His job was mainly counting fire extinguishers and making notes on a clipboard, but he liked to think of himself as some sort of heroic fireman. In fact, that’s what he told women he

was whenever he creeped up to them on the dance floor. The women who let him get close enough to hear him speak, anyway.

"Kirrin Bay! Oh grand! Oh do let me come too..." Dave said, "A trip to Kirrin Bay! Perhaps we'd get a chance to go bathing! Cor! Our friend Mike lives over there, we could ask Jon to join us too - the four of us together - it would be just like old times! "

"What a jolly idea! That sounds like a lark - yes let's all go together and make a holiday out of it! We can take the train and drink ginger beer on the way!"

"I know you'll be working - but I do hope we will find some time for adventures!"

Scott's expression changed and he looked glum.

"Not much chance of that I'm afraid. The firm is going to be sending a managing director to evaluate my work. She'll be hanging around all weekend, telling me what to do and where to go. I doubt she'll let us have any fun at all."

"I do hope she won't be too strict! It will spoil the weekend if she's down on us all the time. I wonder if she'll like Timmy?"

Timmy was Mike's cocker spaniel and went everywhere Mike went. The whole gang loved that dog!

"Maybe she won't be around *all* the time - we'll still have time to go bathing and go on adventures, I'm sure."

Scott downed his ginger beer.

"I'm so excited for the weekend now I'm going to rush home and have an early night. Time goes by quicker when I'm sleeping. Tomorrow I shall go to sleep straight after work.. and maybe Wednesday and Thursday I shall not go to work at all and sleep ALL day - then the weekend will be here before I know it!"

Scott raced out the door.

"I'll pay for the drinks and book the train tickets shall I?" Dave called out after him.

Dave placed a ten-pound note on the bar. The barman coughed up some flem and swiped it.

The barman gave Dave an evil look. Dave's eyes opened wide with alarm.

"Next time you two feckers use the lavvy - gawd's sake try and piss in the bowl, would ya?" He said picking up a mop and bucket.

Chapter Two

Saturday morning came around quickly, and Scott, Dave and their best, better looking friend Jon all took a taxi to the train station.

Scott was so excited that when the taxi arrived at the station, he jumped straight out and ran onto the platform, leaving Dave to pay the fare and Jon to struggle with everyone's luggage. Jon was by far the strongest, so he would have happily carried the luggage anyway, it would just have been nice to have been asked.

"The trains coming...look!" Scott said, after they all regrouped on the platform "Gosh it's one of those old-fashioned steam trains! What a treat! Dave, did you remember the tickets?"

"Yes.." Dave said, "About those - they cost...."

"Oh, I just know this holiday is going to be the best holiday ever! I'm sure the managing director won't be around ALL the time, and we'll be able to sneak off and have some adventures. Did we bring any sandwiches?"

They all looked at each other! Nobody had thought of bringing some food to eat on the train! And it was a long journey!

"Fancy forgetting sandwiches!" Scott chortled, "Jon - run inside the station shop and get some cucumber sandwiches and ginger beer for the journey! Hurry now, the train is pulling up!"

Jon quickly dashed inside the shop and bought a handful of pre-packaged sandwiches and lashings and lashing of ginger beer. He just managed to pay and jump onto the train before it pulled out of the station. They were off on another fantastic adventure!

Scott gazed out of the train window. Picturesque countryside whizzed by.

"Look at that clear blue sky. Aren't we lucky to get a table seat so the 3 of us can all sit together?" Dave said.

At that moment, the ticket inspector approached them. He was a thin, rat-faced man with a permanent scowl, a figure whose very presence seemed to draw the warmth from the air. His gaunt frame was shrouded in a tattered, ill-fitting uniform that hung from his bony shoulders like the burial shroud of some ancient, forsaken wretch. His face, sharp and angular, bore the pallor of one who had seldom seen the sun, and his narrow, beady eyes gleamed with a malevolent cunning from beneath a furrowed brow. His nose, long and hooked, twitched with a nervous, almost predatory energy, while his thin lips, perpetually twisted into a disdainful sneer, revealed yellowed, uneven teeth. As he approached, the air seemed to grow colder, and an unshakeable sense of dread settled upon those in his path, as if his very being were an omen of some unspeakable doom.

"What are you 3 gawping at?" He snapped, "And you - get your damn feet off the bloody seats. Whatdayathink this is - your effing living room? Yoof of today, I dunno. Bastards!"

Dave quickly took his feet off the seat in front of him and looked glum.

"Well - where are ya damn tickets? I ain't got all bloody day you know?"

"Oh sorry, sir!" Dave apologised, digging into his trouser pocket to find the tickets.

"Well - hurry up then?? Why are you taking so long?" The ticket inspector demanded.

"It's just... I have lots of pockets... I can't quite remember where I..."

"Either you give me the tickets or I'll throw you off this fecking train!!!" The ticket inspector was screaming now, his face red with rage.

Dave found the ticket in his inside jacket pocket, and grabbed them, but as he was handing them over he dropped them onto the floor!

"Are you fecking messing me abawt?????" The inspector said, waving his fist under Dave's chin in fury.

"No sir... I'm sorry - I just got so.. so flustered!"

There were tears in Dave's eyes as he bent down and picked up the tickets. He handed them across and the inspector clipped them and went on his way.

Dave sat down solemnly, his head in his hands. Jon put his arm around his shoulder.

"Why.. why did he have to shout, so??" Dave said, dabbing his eyes with his sleeve.

"Now, now, don't let it spoil our holidays!" Scott said, "Before you know it we'll be in Kirrin cottage, having adventures with Mike and Timmy!"

Chapter Three

Mike lived in Kirrin cottage with his uncle Quentin, Aunt Fanny and his dog Timmy.

In the evenings he and Timmy would take long walks in the countryside, explore the hills and valleys, and even go out to Kirrin Island in a little rowboat. In the daytime he had a job in retail or something or other.

Mike enjoyed living with his Aunt Fanny and Uncle Quentin - who had adopted him at the age of 40 - but he did so wish that they would stop treating him like a little girl. They bought him pretty dresses and decorated his room in pink. God had never blessed them with the daughter they so desperately wanted, so when Mike came into their lives they decided that he would just have to do.

"I'm a grown man!!" Mike would argue, but they would laugh and pinch his cheeks and say "That's our Michelle" - which would make him quite cross and send him into one of his sulks.

Today though it was Saturday which meant he didn't have to go to work - which meant more time for adventures! And this was an extra special Saturday because his 3 best friends, Scott Jon and Dave were coming over on holiday! He was presently waiting for them at Kirrin train station, sitting on a bench with Timmy eating gobstoppers and sipping on a can of ginger beer.

"Look, Timmy! The train! It's coming! And look - Jon is waving out of the window! And Scott - and Dave too!! Oh, this weekend is going to be such fun!!"

The train pulled into Kirrin station and Scott, Dave and Jon all stepped off, luggage in hand. Mike shook everyone's hands and beamed. Timmy jumped up and lavished everyone with lots of sloppy kisses. Dave was so happy he

had quite forgotten his argument with the ticket inspector. As the train pulled away the ticket inspector put his arm out of the window and aimed a very rude gesture at Dave, upsetting him again.

"Oh, it is good to see you all again!" Mike said.

"How are your Aunt and Uncle?" Jon asked.

"Oh, Aunt Fanny is *so* looking forward to seeing you all! She's been baking all day! Uncle Quentin is still the same - he stays in his study all day and works - he's no fun at all! What's the plan then, shall we walk back to Kirrin Cottage? It's not far if we take a shortcut over the fields."

"With all this luggage?" Scott said, "No - better we get a taxi. The sooner we get to Kirrin cottage the sooner we can start adventuring!"

They all nodded in agreement and jumped into a taxi waiting outside the station.

The taxi driver was a strange sort of man indeed, possessing a peculiar countenance that seemed almost otherworldly. His face was a pallid mask, etched with deep lines and shadows that spoke of countless sleepless nights and hidden fears. His eyes, set deep within their sockets, gleamed with an unsettling, almost unnatural light, as if they had witnessed horrors beyond mortal comprehension. His skin had an odd, almost waxen quality, lending him an appearance more akin to a figure of morbid statuary than a living being.

His hands, gripping the wheel with a skeletal firmness, were long and spindly, the fingers gnarled and twisted as though shaped by some malign force. His attire, though nondescript, seemed strangely anachronistic, as if he had stepped out of a bygone era, untouched by the passage of time. As he turned to address them, his mouth curled into a thin, enigmatic smile, revealing teeth that were too sharp, too numerous, as if designed for purposes other than mere speech.

"Kirrin Cottage, please - my good man!" Mike said, and the taxi pulled away.

They soon arrived outside the cottage, and Scott was so excited, that he dashed out of the taxi and ran to the front door, quite forgetting the money he

owed for the taxi fare!

Jon began to take the luggage out of the boot as Mike paid the taxi driver, who looked Mike up and down. "Your purretty..." He sneered lustfully, "I'll be happy to give you a ride anytime, my little darling.." He winked.

"I'm a grown man!!" Mike shouted after the taxi as it drove off down the lane.

Aunt Fanny greeted them at the door of the cottage with her usual warmth. She was a rotund, cheerful woman with rosy cheeks and twinkling eyes that seemed to dance with delight at the sight of her visitors. Her low-cut top revealed a heaving bosom that bounced with every hearty laugh, adding to her jolly, motherly appearance. Her ample figure was draped in a floral apron, dusted with flour from her recent baking. With her welcoming smile and enveloping hug, she made everyone feel instantly at home, as though they'd just been wrapped in a cosy, comforting blanket.

"It's so good to see the four of you back together again!" Aunt Fanny said, wobbling her heaving bosom at them. Scott's eyes were drawn to the deep cleft of her cleavage.

Timmy barked.

"Five, Aunt Fanny - you've forgotten about Timmy!" Mike reminded her.

Everyone laughed and laughed and all went into the parlour to feast on cake, peanut butter sandwiches and walnut whips - not to mention lashings and lashings of ginger beer.

Chapter Four

"How did you all manage to get the time off work to come down here?" Aunt Fanny asked.

"It's Saturday, Aunt Fanny! Nobody goes to work on a Saturday!!" Scott replied, perplexed at Aunt Fanny's silliness.

"But I thought Jon was a bar manager. Wouldn't Saturdays be one of the busiest days of the week in a bar?"

"Cripes!" Jon said, dropping his third walnut whip, "I quite forgot! I'm supposed to be due at work!!"

At that moment Uncle Quentin walked into the kitchen with a face like thunder.

"Hello Uncle Quen.."

"What in the devil's name is all this damn noise?!" Uncle Quentin screamed, "I'm trying to work on a most important project and all I can hear is tomfoolery!!"

Uncle Quentin was a tall, imposing man in his sixties, with a stern countenance that rarely softened into a smile. His silver-grey hair was meticulously combed, but now tousled in his agitation, and his wire-rimmed spectacles perched firmly on the bridge of his nose.

His preferred attire was a tweed jacket over a crisp white shirt and a neatly knotted tie, reflecting his academic background as a distinguished professor. His study, where he spent countless hours immersed in his scientific endeavours, was meticulously organised with books and scientific instruments meticulously arranged on sturdy oak shelves.

His voice, deep and resonant, carried the weight of authority that commanded instant attention. His intolerance for noise, especially when engrossed in his "most important projects," was legendary among his family and colleagues alike. Despite his gruff exterior and propensity for irritation, there was an underlying sense of dedication and brilliance that earned him respect from those who knew him best.

Aunt Fanny looked at the ground, her chin resting on her heaving bosom. Her hands were shaking. She didn't like it when Uncle Quentin got cross.. it usually didn't end very well for her.

"We'll try and be quiet." She said, almost under her breath.

Uncle Quentin pulled up a chair and sat next to Dave. He put his hand on Dave's knee and gave it a little rub.

"Hello, David. Nice to see you again." He said, winking.

Dave quickly and silently recounted the lord's prayer under his breath.

Mike suddenly stood up and stomped his foot. "I want an ice cream!" He demanded.

"But we haven't got any ice cream, princess!" Aunt Fanny said patiently.

"Then we shall all go to the corner shop and buy some! And don't call me princess, I'm a fully grown man!"

So with Mike leading the way, the four friends (and Timmy) left the house and took the winding country road towards the corner shop.

Chapter Five

"Shop!" Mike screamed, banging his fist on the counter.

A peculiar old woman emerged from the shadows behind a tattered bead curtain, her unnerving appearance contrasting sharply with the ordinary surroundings.

Her skin, pale and waxy, clung unnaturally to her bones, giving her the appearance of something not entirely human. Her eyes, deep-set and glassy, shimmered with an unsettling, almost amphibian quality. Her thin, grey hair hung in limp strands around her face, framing a mouth that seemed to curl into a perpetual, knowing smirk, revealing teeth that, just like the dentures of the taxi driver, were just a bit too pointed, a bit too sharp.

The air around her was thick with a damp, briny scent, as if she had been dredged from the depths of some forgotten sea. She spoke in a low, rasping voice, each word dripping with an eerie, archaic intonation that sent shivers down the spine of any who dared to listen.

"Miss Dobson! How good to see you, and what can I do for you today?"

"It's MR Dobson! And myself and my friends would like an ice cream each, please. And you can dispense with the pleasantries. I've heard the stories about you and the postmaster and I take a dim view of it."

The old lady's greenish skin reddened (making her turn a sort of brownish colour) and set about serving the young men an ice cream cone each.

"Who's paying for this?" Scott asked, "It's just I seem to have left my wallet at home!"

"I don't mind paying!" Jon said.

"Jolly good show!" Scott said, "Old woman - I'll take 2 ice creams please, extra large - and a packet of your finest monster munch."

As Jon was counting out some coins on the counter, a woman, thin and unnaturally gaunt, slipped into the dimly lit confines like a spectre materialising from the shadows. Her angular frame was draped in a drab, threadbare coat that hung loosely over her bony shoulders, the fabric seeming to absorb rather than reflect the feeble light. She was thin and gangly, wore rectangle glasses and had thin waxy hair which sat upon her head in a bun.

"What a suspicious character..." Dave whispered to Jon, "I don't like the look of her one bit."

"Scott Carth!!!" The woman barked.

Scott jumped and nearly dropped his ice cream.

"What the hell are you doing here? You should be on Kirrin Island at the construction site carrying out your inspection!! We don't pay you to mooch about with your friends and eat ice cream!"

It was the dreaded Ms Slattery - Scott's managing director - sent by "the firm" to keep an eye on Scott!

"Well... don't just stand there gawping!! Get to the site! There's a fella down at the cove called Alf. Speak to him and he'll fix you up with a rowboat and some oars! Now hop to it!!"

"Yes Ms Slattery, sir!!" Scott said hurriedly, giving her a little nod and running outside.

Ms Slattery glared fiercely at Mike, Jon, Timmy, Dave and the old lady behind the counter.

"Well? Just what do you think you bastards are staring at??"

Everyone apologised and ran out of the shop, leaving Ms Slattery alone with nobody to serve her.

As Scott and the gang assembled outside the shop, they proceeded down a winding, cobbled lane that meandered towards the desolate beach. Along

their path, they passed an ancient, dilapidated church whose weather-beaten stones bore the weight of centuries' worth of decay and neglect. The structure loomed ominously against the bleak sky, its spires jagged and leaning as if bowing to forces unseen and malign.

The facade, once adorned with intricate carvings of saints and angels, now bore only the scars of time—crumbling masonry and ivy tendrils creeping like gnarled fingers across its surface. A weathered sign, barely discernible amidst the encroaching vines, proclaimed in faded letters: "**THE ESOTERIC ORDER OF DAGON.**" This inscription whispered of arcane rites and forbidden knowledge, hinting at secrets buried deep within the shadows of the decaying walls.

"Gosh," Dave said, "this village sure does smell a lot like rotting fish. Has anyone else noticed?"

"Sssshh!" Jon said, admonishing Dave for his insensitivity, "You'll upset the locals! Maybe they like it smelling like that?"

The winding lane ended at a small beachy cove. In the distance, they could see Kirrin Island, where all the construction work was taking place. A mist rose up from the sea.

"Mr Slattery said there's a man called Alf who will lend us a rowboat..." Scott said, "Does anyone here know how to row?"

"Know how to row?!" Mike scoffed, "You're asking ME - Mike Dobson - if I know how to row?"

Mike chuckled to himself.

"Well, do you?" Scott asked

"Erm.. no.. not really." Mike admitted, "But it can't be that hard. I grew up watching Portland Bill."

They looked along the cove. An old drunk was lying face down in the sand. His hand clutched an empty bottle of rum.

"I wonder if that's Alf.." Dave pondered.

"Yes, that's him." Mike said, "I've met him once or twice. Makes me feel a bit uncomfortable, it's like he just wants to get in my knickers."

The gang all looked at him.

"... underpants." Mike corrected himself.

"Ahoy there!" Scott shouted in Alf's direction. "I say! You there! Are you Alf?"

Alf didn't move.

"Leave this to me - I did a first aid course at work," Jon said, striding up to the body and giving it a bloody good kick in the ribs.

Alf groaned and turned over. His once-vibrant beard, now streaked with patches of grey and tangled like seaweed, framed a weather-beaten face marked by deep lines etched by the relentless sun. His skin, leathered and creased from countless days beneath its scorching rays, bore the pallor of neglect and privation, a testament to a life lived on the margins of society. His breath stank of rum.

"Who's there? What do you want? Clear off, I tells you!" Alf muttered, his hand shielding his eyes from the blazing sun.

"Now just you listen to me! My name is Scott and my boss says you have a boat for us to get to Kirrin island. We need to get over there pretty gosh-darn sharpish - so please, look alive and give us some assistance, or I'll get my friend Jon to give you another good boot to the ribs - and another one for luck!"

Alf looked at everyone staring down at him.

"Michelle? Is that you Michelle?" He stammered.

"It's Mike - as I've told you before!!" Mike snarled, with indignation.

Alf carefully rose to his unsteady feet and fished in his pockets for a small silver key which he handed to Scott.

"The boat is over there on the sand..". Alf said, "The oars are in my lockup behind us.." he pointed to a small wooden shack set in some undergrowth.

"What is going on with this village?" Dave asked, "What's with the fishy stink? And just what the heck is the church of Dagon?"

Alf stared at Dave right in the eye.

"We don't like to ask no questions in these parts, my good sir. It don't do well to ask questions, no sir-ree. Best to keep a low profile in these parts. If you need information though, Old'Alf can tell you a thing or two if you give him a drink. He likes his drink does ol'Alf."

"Right then! Let's get going, if we're going!" Dave said nervously, backing away and following Scott and the others to the lockup.

Chapter Six

Scott, Mike, Dave, Jon and Timmy were all sat in the little row boat, with Mike on the oars. He was a bit inexperienced, but after half an hour he had the boat sailing east.

Someone tapped him on the shoulder and told him they were rowing away from the island, so after a bit of adjustment he had the boat rowing north.

Someone else tapped him on the shoulder and said they were rowing back towards Kirrin Bay and the Island was South. At this point, Mike got cross, told everyone he was a grown man, and handed the oars to Jon - who got them to Kirrin Island in no time.

"I can't believe it... our very own island!!" Scott said, running onto the shore. "Imagine the adventures we shall have!! But...first things first!"

"...you'll need to sign in at work I suppose?" Jon asked.

"No no no, not at all! Well, eventually - yes - but it's a lovely day. What say we all find a spot to have a jolly nice picnic?"

Dave clapped his hands in delight. "A picnic - yes! What a jolly idea!"

Everyone nodded their heads and agreed that it was a very jolly idea indeed. Even Timmy barked his approval.

"Now..." Scott said, "With that decided we shall need a blanket and some food."

"I've got some sandwiches in my pocket left over from lunchtime. We don't have a blanket...but I'm sure if we tied together all of Dave's clothes that would make a jolly decent blanket!" Jon suggested.

"My clothes?" Dave said, "But they're from Zara!"

“Hooray for Dave!” Mike said, slapping him on the back.

So Dave got undressed and everyone had great fun making a wonderful picnic blanket from Dave's clothes - all the while giggling at Dave and how much he shivered in the strong island breeze.

"Haha look at Dave! He's turning blue!" Scott joked, playfully pinching Dave's left nipple.

"Bark!" Timmy said suddenly. He had seen a rabbit and darted into the undergrowth.

"Timmy! You come back here now! Timmy!" Mike demanded, chasing after him.

Timmy let out a howl and was suddenly silent. Everyone leapt to their feet, worried about what had happened. Mike clawed at the bushes and uncovered a large hole! Timmy had fallen down it and was now yelping at the bottom of a ten-foot drop!

"Oh, my poor Timmy!" Mike said, "He's fallen down a long abandoned well! Hold on, Timmy we'll get you out of there - you just see if we don't!"

"I'll go and get some rope!" Scott said, "They are bound to have some at the construction site we can borrow!"

Chapter Seven

The building site was on the other side of Kirrin island - so about 200 yards away. It was teeming with workers. Two men were digging holes, one worker was moving bricks in a wheelbarrow, but most were sitting around drinking tea and dunking biscuits.

What shocked everyone was the striking realisation that the labourers bore scant resemblance to humanity as it is known. Their forms, though possessing the rudiments of head, arms, and limbs, were marred by an unnatural pallor of flaky, sickly green skin. Upon closer inspection, the gang noted with growing dread the presence of gills upon their necks, pulsating faintly as if in a constant, unsettling rhythm. They slobbered and slimed and made strange gurgling noises as they went about their work/break time.

"Everyone HALT and listen to me!!" Scott shouted.

Everyone ceased sipping tea and dunking biscuits and turned their heads to Scott.

"My name is Scott and I'm your new health and safety manager. And I demand you give me a rope - right away!"

An especially green and slimy man-reptile slobbered up to Scott and nodded his reptilian head as if to say "Hello there". He had a badge which said "Foreman".

"Only got... sllllllrrrrrp..... one rope on this slurrrrrrrrrp..... site....slurrrrrp.... And it's attached to old Sid's safety harness....slurp."

"Well bring it to me right now! This is an emergency. Old Sid will just have to do without one for the time being!"

"You're the boss..... slurrrrrp." The foreman said, slinking off and coming back a few moments later carrying a rope.

"Thank you my good...er...man!"

There was a sudden scream and the sound of falling scaffolding which was cut short by a horrible thumping, splattering noise.

"What the devil was that?" Scott asked.

"I shall go and investigate slurrrrrp master, it sounded slurrrp like Old Si having an accident!"

"An accident, was it? That will be going in my report. It seems like I didn't arrive here a moment too soon!"

With that said, Scott and the gang turned on their heels and quickly returned to the picnic spot - all their thoughts occupied with the problem of Timmy - and how to get him out of that hole!

Chapter Eight

"You're the slimmest, most athletic and most tanned out of all of us, Jon - so you go down and rescue Timmy." Mike said, fastening the rope around Jon's waist.

"You can count on me," Jon said, lifting up his chiselled chin - a look in his eye like polished steel.

Scott, Mike and Dave (who had since been allowed to put his clothes back on) lowered Jon down into the hole.

"Bit lower!" Jon called, "I'm nearly ... yes! I've got Timmy! Timmy is in my hands!"

"Hooray!" Everyone else said.

"We seem to be at the bottom of some sort of dried-up well, which opens out into a giant underground cave! Hang on, what the devil...? There's something here. It's a giant marble statue of something... my word, it's horrible! It's like a giant octopus with a human body with wings and claws and.... there's a little wooden box at the statue's base! I'll grab it!"

They pulled Jon back up with Timmy in his arms and the peculiar wooden box he had found stuffed into his pockets. After a quick check to see if Timmy was ok (he was), they all sat around on the grass (Dave, despite everyone's complaints, wouldn't give the makeshift blanket back) inspecting the box. It was small and rectangular, made of wood but encrusted with small jewels and it didn't seem to have an opening mechanism.

"There is a hinge... but it doesn't seem to have a lock. What an odd box! I'm trying to prise it open with my fingers... but...(grunt) ...no luck!"

A dark cloud hovered over them, making the day very dark all of a sudden. The sky growled and the heavens opened, drenching them from head to foot.

"Let's go back to the boat!" Scott cried as the four friends and Timmy ran back to where they had left the little rowboat. They all bundled in, and Jon started rowing back to the mainland, each pull of the oars flexing his magnificent biceps.

Chapter Nine

Back at the cottage, Aunt Fanny was very angry indeed. Her enormous bosom shook as she spoke.

"Look at the state of yous!" She said, slapping each one of the unruly group one by one, "Come in lookin' like a cat's dragged ya! And mudding me nice clean floor with ya muddy boots! Up to bed the lot of ya, and I don't want to hear a peep outta ya till mornin'!"

Heads bowed, the four of them (and Timmy don't forget) sludged their way upstairs. Dave and Jon were to share the spare room and Mike and Scott were in Mike's room. But everyone was much too excited about the day's events to sleep!! What was in the mysterious box? What was the mystery behind the statue? What did it all mean?

They decided to all meet up in Mike's room and, huddled under a blanket, they spoke by torchlight.

"So.. we've just got to get that box open? It's bound to contain such wonderful secrets!"

"But how... if Jon can't get the lid open, who can?"

"Maybe we can break it open?"

"How can we do that?"

"Throw it on the ground."

"I can't throw..."

"Neither can I."

"Ok, we can drop it out a window! Anyone can simply drop something. It's easy - I drop things all the time."

"What a jolly good idea! We can drop it out the window in the attic! That should be enough height!"

"Right, that's settled. First thing in the morning!!"

And as the boys divided into their separate rooms and beds, their heads full of imaginings and their hearts full of adventure, they drifted off into a restless slumber haunted by harrowing visions.

In the realm of their dreams, darkness unfurled its inky tendrils, enveloping them in a suffocating embrace of existential dread. Shadows danced with malicious intent, their forms morphing into grotesque shapes that defied the laws of nature and reason. Echoes of anguished cries reverberated through the ethereal corridors of their subconscious, mingling with the haunting lamentations of forgotten spirits trapped in the liminal spaces between existence and oblivion.

Chapter Ten

Straight after breakfast, their faces flushed with excitement and the disturbing dreams of the night before quite forgotten, Scott, Mike, Jon, Dave and Timmy ran up the stairs to the attic. It was a dusky old room with cobwebs, sealed boxes and a heavy trunk pushed against one wall. A small skylight was fixed into the roof. Being the strongest, Jon pushed the heavy trunk underneath the window and, using the trunk as a step, managed to open the skylight a crack.

"It only opens 7 inches or so.." Jon said.

"That should be wide enough. Here's the box - see if you can drop it onto the paving below."

Jon took the box and flung it out of the skylight. They heard a dull thud and then a tremendous crash.

"That ought to have done it!" Scott said as they all raced downstairs.

As they headed outside onto the patio, Uncle Quentin was walking into the cottage. He had a bump on the head and was stumbling around with a confused look on his face.

"Where am I? Where is this place?" He muttered.

But the lads had no time to stop and chat! Adventures were afoot!

Outside they found the box shattered on the ground, and alongside the pieces, something was glimmering. Dave stopped to pick it up. It was a necklace with a strange talisman attached. It was made of green stone and depicted a strange and rather grotesque creature with a frog-like face, tentacles, and sexual organs similar to that of a human female.

"It's gruesome!" Dave shuddered, tossing it to Scott, "Take it away! It makes me feel quite uneasy!"

Scott turned it over in his palm.

"I quite like it!" He said, "It might be worth something - let's take it to Uncle Quentin - maybe he can make me an offer!"

The others glared at Scott.

"Maybe he can make 'us' an offer. Is what I meant to say, of course."

They took the talisman to Uncle Quentin's study. They knocked on the door but there was no reply.

"Maybe he's having a nap? Push the door open and take a peek!"

They crept inside, and sure enough - Uncle Quentin was napping, face down on the floor.

"What a funny way to take a nap." Mike said, "Is that blood coming from his temple?"

Scott looked at Mike and rolled his eyes. "Mike, you're letting your imagination run away with you!! Why on earth would it be blood? Anyway, we have more important things to attend to - we need to get this talisman's price evaluated so I can get paid. There must be a book around here somewhere which can help us."

Being extra careful to not wake Uncle Quentin, the gang perused the bookcase. On one of the shelves, amongst the hundreds of dusty old books, was a strange golden crown on a display stand. Etched on it were strange reptilian creatures. The patterns hinted at remote secrets and unimaginable abysses in time and space. The monotonously aquatic nature of the engravings seemed somehow sinister.

"That crown looks very valuable!" Jon said, peering at it.

"I jolly well saw it first!" Scott said, pushing Jon out of the way and lifting the crown from its display stand.

As he did so, the bookcase moved inwards on a hinge, displaying a secret passage!

"I say!" Dave said.

They peered inside but could see nothing but gloom. There was no way to tell how far the passage went back.

"I've got a torch on my vanity table in my bedroom!" Mike said, "I'll go and get it! Gosh, this is exciting!"

Mike rushed to his bedroom and grabbed his torch. The gang, with Timmy in tow, then ventured forth into the strange, eerie tunnel.

Chapter Eleven

The walls of the tunnel were solid rock and damp to the touch. There was a horrible lingering smell, like rotten fish. Dave was quite appalled and complained constantly - shaking his head and repeatedly insisting that 'this just won't do!'.

“We must be walking the full length of Kirrin Bay!” Mike said.

Soon, the tunnel ended at a small, weathered wooden door, its surface pitted and scarred by the passage of time. From the other side, an eerie cacophony of strange noises reached their ears, like a hundred voices chanting in unison, their tones weaving a dissonant symphony of ancient and arcane incantations. With trepidation, they slowly pushed the door open.

The door creaked on its rusted hinges, opening out into an old church, its interior shrouded in a dim, flickering light cast by guttering candles set in iron sconces along the walls. The air was thick with the scent of age and decay, mingling with the acrid tang of incense that hung heavy in the gloom. The church's architecture was a testament to forgotten times, its vaulted ceiling rising high above, supported by columns adorned with cryptic carvings and sinister motifs that seemed to writhe in the uncertain light.

In the centre of the nave, a group of robed figures stood in solemn assembly, their brown garments flowing like shadows as they swayed in rhythm with their chants. The hoods of their robes were drawn low, obscuring their faces, save for the occasional glint of eyes gleaming with fervent intensity. They formed a circle around a stone altar, its surface cold and unyielding, etched with runes that pulsed faintly with a malevolent energy.

Upon the altar, a live goat, its eyes wide with terror, bleated piteously. The creature's bleating intermingled with the droning chants, creating a macabre harmony that resonated through the hallowed space. The stone beneath the

goat was stained with the dark remnants of previous sacrifices, hinting at the ritual's gruesome history.

The chanting reached a crescendo, the voices rising and falling in a hypnotic cadence that seemed to draw upon the very essence of the church itself.

So far unnoticed, the gang ducked behind a pew and watched intently as the dark scene unfolded.

"Goodness me!" Scott exclaimed.

One of the hooded figures came forth and stood by the goat's side, the hand holding a silver dagger. The figure dropped their hood and Scott gasped.... It was his managing director!

"It's Ms Slattery! I knew there was something fishy about her!!" Scott said, "I mean - 'Ms', indeed!"

"Oohhh paaaa lummmm paaaa diddddd gereeeee dooooo..." the chanting persisted, swelling to a frenzied crescendo that reverberated through the ancient stone walls.

As the cacophony peaked, Ms Slattery, eyes alight with a maniacal gleam, raised the gleaming dagger high above her head. In a single, swift motion, she plunged the blade into the chest of the bleating goat. The creature's agonised howl echoed through the nave.

Blood erupted from the wound, an arterial spray that painted the walls and ceiling with grotesque splatters of crimson. The viscous fluid drenched the robes of the assembled, transforming the scene into a tableau of ritualistic horror. The air was thick with the metallic scent of fresh blood, mingling with the musty decay and acrid incense, creating an atmosphere of suffocating dread.

The managing director, her face a mask of ecstatic delirium, scooped up handfuls of the warm, sticky gore. With a deranged fervour, she smeared it across her face and mouth, her features contorted in wild exultation. The blood dripped down her cheeks and pooled at her feet, mingling with the dark stains of previous sacrifices.

Her eyes, wide and unblinking, shone with a madness that seemed to transcend the bounds of mortal sanity. She stood, bathed in the gore of the

sacrificial rite, her breath coming in ragged, euphoric gasps.

"I don't like this adventure at all!" Dave sobbed.

"Shush!" Jon whispered, "They'll hear us!"

"To blazes with this - I'm jolly well going straight home! And you can't stop me!" Dave replied, standing up and running off back down the tunnel, sobbing as he ran.

Dave's sobs and hurried footsteps had alerted some of the hooded mob, who stopped their chanting and started to approach the pew.

"Is there someone there? Who dares trespass our sacred ritual?" Ms Slattery shrieked.

"Oh no! What do we do?" Mike asked, terrified.

"We jolly well run!" Jon said, and they all scarpered back into the tunnel, Timmy at Mike's heels. They didn't look back once, darting into Uncle Quentin's study and slamming shut the bookcase. They then ran upstairs into one of the bedrooms and hid under the bed.

"I wonder what happened to Dave?" Panted Mike.

Dave had wanted to put as much distance between himself and Kirrin Bay as possible, so he had run straight out of the cottage and across the Moors. He was now completely lost, wandering around aimlessly, screaming intermittently and cursing at the moon.

"Do you think we'll be safe here, Scott?" Mike said, turning to Scott - who was lying down next to him under the bed.

Scott suddenly grabbed Mike by the throat and started to squeeze. His eyes were crossed and had a mad look about them. He was dribbling down his chin and making strange, wet, slurping sounds.

"Scott! Leave him alone right now!" Jon shouted, desperately prying at Scott's iron grip on Mike's throat. But Scott's hands wouldn't budge—they were locked tight, unyielding. Mike's face was turning a deep shade of purple

as his breaths faded. Nearby, Timmy cowered, covering his face with his paws, a soft whimper escaping him.

"I say, Scott, you'd jolly well better let Mike go - or..."

It was then Jon noticed the talisman necklace. Scott had hung it around his neck and it was glowing in the darkness.

"The talisman... but of course!" Jon said, snatching the necklace and breaking it off Scott's neck.

Scott began to regain his senses.

"I say old chap..." Mike stammered, regaining some of his senses and rubbing his neck, "That's just not cricket!"

"I don't quite know what came over me! What I wouldn't give for a ginger beer right now!" Scott said, wiping the sweat from his brow.

They all came out from underneath the bed and turned on the lights. Jon opened the window and flung the necklace as far as he could into the garden below.

"Look! Out there!" Jon said, pointing out the window into the surrounding countryside.

Jon, Mike, and Scott peered out of the cottage window, their eyes widening in abject terror at the nightmarish tableau unfolding before them. Through the dense, cloying mist that clung to the open countryside, they discerned the shambling forms of countless fish-like men, their grotesque bodies moving with a purposeful, inexorable gait toward the fragile sanctuary of the cottage. The dim light of the moon cast a ghastly pallor over their scaled, glistening skin.

Behind this horrific horde, the vast, dark expanse of the sea loomed ominously, its waves crashing with a sinister rhythm that seemed to echo the relentless march of the amphibious monstrosities. Each of these abominations bore a weapon of unspeakable malice—rusted fish hooks, barbed tridents, and menacing spear guns—tools of brutality designed to rend flesh and spill blood with merciless efficiency.

As the monstrous figures drew closer, their grotesque features became more horrifyingly distinct—bulging, lidless eyes that stared with cold, predatory intent; gills that pulsed rhythmically with each laboured breath; and webbed, clawed hands that gripped their hideous implements of death with unwavering resolve. The realisation of their impending doom settled upon Jon, Mike, and Scott like a leaden shroud, a creeping paralysis of fear that threatened to overwhelm their very sanity.

"Oh crumbs!" Mike said.

And then the banging began, a dreadfully insistent hammering on the bedroom door that reverberated through the fragile walls of the cottage. The sound was heavy and deliberate, each thud echoing with a sinister purpose that set their hearts racing with primal terror. From beneath the door, a greenish seawater began to seep, its brackish stench mingling with the oppressive air, carrying with it the unmistakable odour of decay and the abyssal depths.

Timmy barked furiously, his frantic yelps a desperate attempt to ward off the encroaching horror. Yet his barks seemed to dissolve into the oppressive atmosphere, swallowed by the relentless pounding. The dog's agitation only served to heighten the sense of impending doom.

"Well.." Jon said, turning to Mike and then Scott and shaking both of their hands. "We've had a good innings... and we certainly had a lot of adventures in our short lives - nobody can say otherwise."

Mike and Scott dropped their heads and looked very solemn. Timmy's tail went between his legs and he sighed.

"I just want to say - you're the best group of friends a wo-, a man could have," Mike said, tears rolling down his cheeks.

The banging on the door continued, more aggressively. The hordes of fish people approaching the cottage from outside were getting closer...and closer.

"I say - I've got a jolly idea - why give them the satisfaction of killing us? Let's end things our way. I vote we all kill ourselves!"

Mike looked at Scott and Scott looked at Timmy and Timmy looked at Jon. They all nodded their silent approval. Jon went over to the bedside table. Sat on top was a lamp - nothing special, the kind of lamp one could even buy at a supermarket should one be desperate for a lamp. He ripped the cord out and bent down towards the plug socket. He slowly and deliberately licked his index finger.

"I'll go first..." he said sadly. But before he could stuff his wet finger into the socket, the night was filled with the sound of sirens. Police sirens! The banging on the door ceased as abruptly as it had started.

"Listen..." Scott said, "Is that....?"

"...the police???" Mike said.

They ran to the window. Sure enough, an army of police cars had the fishermen surrounded, and men with batons were rounding them up and pushing them into marked vans.

"We're saved!!!!" Scott wept, hugging Timmy who gave his cheek a cheeky lick.

Epilogue

They went outside. All of the fish men had been rounded up and placed into police vans and the chief inspector came over to shake their hands.

"How did you know we were in trouble?" Mike asked.

"Well, Michelle - it was all thanks to this little guy!"

The chief inspector stepped to one side to reveal Dave stood behind him, beaming a toothy grin.

"Dave!!! Our hero!! What happened?"

"Well gosh - I don't know about being a hero. All I know is I was wandering around lost on the moors until I came across an old telephone box. I called the local bobbies, explained what we had seen and that I thought something quite unpleasant and possibly illegal was occurring - and here we are."

The chief inspector patted Dave on the head.

"You'd all make fine policemen!" He said.

"But what about the ringleader?" Scott asked - "Ms Slattery... did you catch her?"

As if in answer the managing director screamed at them. She was standing over by the cliffs and had been unseen.

"To hell with the lot of you! You'll never take me alive, coppers!" she shouted defiantly. With that, she leaped off the cliff, plummeting down towards the jagged rocks below. The wind howled in her ears, and for a brief, exhilarating moment, she felt free. But then came the sickening crunch as her body met the unforgiving rocks. There she lay, twisted and broken, limbs splayed at unnatural angles. Her once fierce eyes stared blankly at the

sky, her spirit extinguished, leaving only a mangled form amidst the rugged shoreline.

"Well, I guess that just about wraps things up!" The police inspector laughed, walking over to his car, jumping in and driving away.

"I don't know about you guys... but I'm jolly well famished! Let's see if Aunt Fanny will rustle us up something before bedtime!" Dave said, as the friends all made their way back inside the cottage.

Inside the kitchen they found Aunt Fanny bent over a chopping board rolling some dough. Her ample bosom bouncing with each roll of the pin.

"Ah, Aunt Fanny - there you are. I'd like some ginger beer! And some sandwiches please.. chicken mayo to start - with perhaps some monster munch on the side..." Scott began, but his words were cut off.

Aunt Fanny turned slowly. Her eyes were crossed and she looked quite, quite mad. Around her neck was the amulet, glowing a sinister green. She tenderly caressed it and she stared at them.

"Look what I found outside on the lawn, children...It speaks to me... can you hear it?" she asked menacingly. From somewhere under her apron she produced an axe, lifted it above her head and slowly advanced towards the gang.

"I say!!" Dave, Scott, Jon and Mike all said.

"Woof!" Said Timmy.

The End

Coming Soon

Well, if you got this far - well done! Did you enjoy that? I don't expect you did very much - but if you're a glutton for punishment keep an eye out for my next offering - **Hobbiton Recall!**

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