

THE *SUNDAY TIMES* TOP TEN BESTSELLER

Fern Britton

A Good Catch

On the surface
they had it all ...



Fern Britton
**A Good Catch: The perfect
Cornish escape full of secrets**

Аннотация

You will love this warm and witty novel from Sunday Times bestselling author Fern Britton. The perfect Cornish Escape! A lifetime of friendship. A lifetime of secrets. Greer Clovelly seems to have it all: beautiful, chic and slender, she's used to getting her own way. Greer has been in love with Jesse Behenna since her first day at school and she's determined that one day, they'll be married. After all, a marriage between them would join together two dynasties of Cornish fishing families to make one prosperous one. For her friend, Loveday Carter – plump, freckled and unpretentious – living in the shadow of her friend has become a way of life. She loves Jesse too, but knows that what Greer wants, she usually gets. Jesse, caught in the middle, faces an agonising choice. Should he follow his heart or bow to his father's wishes? And what about his best friend Mickey, who worships the ground that Loveday walks on? Jesse's decision will touch them all in ways that they could never foresee, and as the dark clouds start to gather the four friends find themselves weathering a storm – one that has the power to sink them all... Pendruggan: A Cornish village with secrets at its heart

Содержание

Copyright	7
Dedication	9
PROLOGUE	12
1	22
2	27
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	41

Fern
Britton

A
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Dedication

To my darling Goose.

Thank you for making me laugh so much.

Love you, Mum.

Table of Contents

Cover

Title Page

Copyright

Dedication

Prologue

Part One

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

Chapter 7

Chapter 8

Chapter 9

Chapter 10

Chapter 11

Chapter 12

Chapter 13

[Chapter 14](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

[Chapter 16](#)

[Chapter 17](#)

[Chapter 18](#)

[Chapter 19](#)

[Chapter 20](#)

[Chapter 21](#)

[Chapter 22](#)

[Chapter 23](#)

[Chapter 24](#)

[Part Two](#)

[Chapter 25](#)

[Chapter 26](#)

[Chapter 27](#)

[Chapter 28](#)

[Chapter 29](#)

[Chapter 30](#)

[Chapter 31](#)

[Chapter 32](#)

[Chapter 33](#)

[Chapter 34](#)

[Chapter 35](#)

[Chapter 36](#)

[Chapter 37](#)

[Chapter 38](#)

[Chapter 39](#)

[Afterword](#)

[Keep Reading](#)

[About the Author](#)

[By the Same Author](#)

[About the Publisher](#)

PROLOGUE

Greer Behenna had never felt so drained. Relieved to be alone at last, she closed her front door and leant her head on its cool, solid wood.

The inquest had been conducted with meticulous precision. The courtroom, even with its lights on, couldn't pierce the gloom of the winter's day hanging outside its windows. The warmth from the old-fashioned radiators filled the air, right up to the high and corniced ceiling, with a density of heat that had left Greer drowsy and with the beginnings of a headache. She had listened to all that the witnesses had said and heard none of it. When called to the stand she gave her own evidence, but remembered little of it now.

So separated were her mind and body she almost floated up the stairs and into her room, where she pulled off her black Armani dress and carefully hung it up in the wardrobe. She found her jeans and a warm jumper and put them on. In the kitchen she filled the kettle. Tom was outside, sitting on the windowsill and mewling crossly. As soon as he saw her he jumped down and clattered in through the cat flap. She fed him. The kettle boiled and she wondered what she'd put it on for. She couldn't face another cup of tea that day. She went to the fridge but there was no wine. She'd drunk the last of it the previous night. She drifted through into the drawing room and then the dining room, where

they'd had so many family celebrations. Back in the drawing room, she reached for the remote control. The television came to life with a rather camp man talking about antiques; she switched the TV off again. Restlessly she got her coat and warm boots from the boot room, picked up her keys from the console table in the hall and left Tide House for the only place that felt right: the cove.

Greer had found herself seeking the solace of the cove more and more of late. The tide was out and she walked down to the water's edge. She found a patch of smooth rock to sit on that was otherwise covered in mussels. She closed her eyes and breathed in the scent of ocean and seaweed. She saw him in her mind's eye. He was standing in the surf, casting his line to catch the sea bass that were lurking beneath the waves. His back was to her but she knew that he'd be frowning slightly, concentrating on the fish, his fingers feeling for a bite on the line. She watched him turn round and, when she saw his face, it wasn't the man that she saw, but the boy. His blond hair, almost white from the heat of summer, plastered around his face, his eyes the colour of the sea, looking at her coolly with that familiar mix of curiosity and indifference. Remembering his face as it was then, Greer was suddenly taken back to the long hot summer of 1975, when she was almost five, and she first saw Jesse Behenna ...

*

He was sitting on Treway quay, loading a crab line with a mackerel head. His tousled blond head was bent closely to the

task and, when he was happy that the bait was secure on the hook, he swung the line to and fro before dropping it into the deep, oily water.

He drummed his dangling feet over the slimy sea wall in concentration. For a few seconds he watched the line sink to the bottom. Satisfied that it had, he shifted his face to the horizon and screwed up his eyes, as if hoping to bring into focus something that he couldn't see. He rubbed the back of his hand across his nostrils and then turned his attention to a bucket by his side.

“Ere you go, lads,” he said, putting a hand into the bag of chips by his side before dropping one into the bucket. Greer saw the quick scuttle of pincers through the opaque of the plastic.

‘Move up, Greer.’ Her mother, Elizabeth, sat down next to her on the sun-warmed, sea-roughened wooden bench, checking for seagull mess. ‘Your dad’s just bringing the ice creams. Don’t get any on your dress.’

‘Can I do some crabbing?’

Greer’s mother looked almost offended. ‘Whatever for?’

‘It looks fun.’

Her father sauntered up, carrying three dripping 99s. “Ere you go, my beauties.”

‘Can I have a go at crabbing, Daddy?’

He looked at her sideways. ‘What does your mother say?’

‘I say she’s in her best dress and I have quite enough laundry to do,’ said her mother.

‘She can take it off,’ replied her father, Bryn, winking at Greer.

‘Lovely day like today.’ He ignored his wife’s horrified stare. ‘Eat up your ice cream and we’ll nip to the shop and get you a crab line.’

‘And a fish head.’

‘Yeah, and a fish head.’

‘And a bucket.’

‘Of course, can’t go crabbing without a bucket.’

The sun was warm on her bare shoulders as she sat, in just her vest and pants, on the gritty, granite sea wall, just a few feet from the boy. She dangled her legs, thrillingly and dangerously, over the sea wall, just as the boy was doing.

She had seen him pull in several crabs and drop them in his bucket and was desperate for the same success.

‘Right. There you go. Mind that hook, it’s sharp.’ Her father passed her the baited line.

She looked at the lump of fish stabbed through with the large hook and nodded solemnly. ‘I will, Daddy.’

‘Do you want me to show you how to feed the line out?’

‘I can do it.’

‘Well, keep it close to the wall. The crabs like it in the dark. The tides comin’ in so they’ll be washed in with it. ’Tis no good crabbing on an outgoing tide.’

Greer was getting impatient. All the crabs would be in that boy’s bucket if she didn’t hurry up.

‘Let me do it, Daddy.’

She took the square plastic reel from her father and slowly let

the line out. She leant her head as far forward over the edge of the wall as she dared.

‘It’s landed, Daddy.’

‘Good girl. Now sit on the reel and it won’t fall in. If you lose it, I ain’t buying you another.’

She lifted her thigh, already growing pink from the sun, and wedged the sharp plastic of the reel firmly under her buttock.

‘Can I pull it up now?’

‘Give it a couple of minutes.’

She looked over at the boy who was again wrinkling his eyes and staring at the horizon. Her father surprised her by talking to him. ‘Ello. You’re young Jesse Behenna, aren’t you?’

The boy reluctantly turned his gaze to the man talking to him. ‘Yeah.’

‘Watching for your dad’s boat, are you?’

‘Yeah. ’E’s been out three days.’

‘Has he? That’ll be a good catch he’s bringing in then.’

‘Yeah. As long as the bastard at the market gives them a good price.’

Greer’s father laughed. ‘Is that right?’

‘Yeah.’

‘I’ve got one!’ Greer was pulling up her line and, as it broke water, her father and the boy could see that she had three fat, black, glittering crabs clinging greedily to the bait.

‘Bring ’em in slow, Greer.’

‘Get the bucket, Daddy!’ she called excitedly.

‘That’s it. Nice and slow. Now drop ’em in.’

Greer watched as the three crabs plopped into her bucket.

‘Mummy! I got three in one go!’

‘Did you?’ responded her mother from the safety of the bench; she was still not looking up from her magazine. ‘Well done, darling.’

‘Do you want to feed them a chip?’ The boy passed over the bag.

She picked up the fattest chip she could see and dropped it into her bucket.

‘Thank you.’

The crabs, which had been scrapping with each other, now started scrapping with the chip.

‘Want one yerself?’ asked Jesse.

Greer darted a glance at her mother, who shook her head. ‘You’ve already had an ice cream, Greer. You don’t want to get fat.’

Greer looked back at Jesse. ‘No, thank you.’

‘Suit yourself,’ he said, shovelling a handful into his mouth.

‘What bait you using?’ he mumbled, standing up and wiping his hands on his cotton shorts. He ambled over, with his hands in his pockets, to look at her catch.

‘Fish,’ said Greer.

‘What sort of fish?’

Greer’s father replied, ‘Mackerel, boy. But I reckon ’tis bacon that’s the best. When I were a nipper, I always used bacon.’

The boy looked at him, nodding his head slowly, weighing up the pros and cons of mackerel versus bacon. 'I prefer mackerel. It's what Dad says is best and he's the best fisherman in Trevay.'

'Then he must be right,' smiled Greer's father.

The emptying of the crabs back into the water was a serious business. One by one they were counted and Greer had a pleasing sixty-four to Jesse's eighty-one.

'Not bad. For a beginner,' he told her.

'Bryn,' called Greer's mother, impatient to get home to a cooling shower. 'It's time to get Greer back.'

'Stop your nagging, woman. We'm 'aving a good time.'

'I've got to get tea on and it's getting late.'

'I told you to stop nagging,' he said, and silenced her with a look.

The children said their goodbyes and Greer's father said, 'Send my regards to your dad.'

'What's your name?' asked Jesse.

'I'm the bastard at the market who never gives him a good price.'

*

Greer snapped her eyes open, remembering Jesse's straight talking as being so typical of him, even as a young boy. He always seemed so sure of himself; he didn't ever seem to care what anyone thought. But had she ever really known him? Had any of them? She continued staring out into the churning, dark sea and pulled her coat closer around her, though she knew that it wasn't

the winter chill that was making her shiver.

The sea in front of her was devoid of boats, reflecting the emptiness she felt inside.

*

Loveday Chandler knocked and waited for several minutes. She pulled her mobile phone from the pocket of her fleece and dialled Greer's number. She heard it ring out behind the closed front door. Snapping her phone shut and putting it back into her pocket, she turned away from the house and headed towards the only other place where her friend could be.

'Greer,' Loveday called as she jogged breathlessly down the beach. 'Greer!'

Greer hung her head and blew out a stream of warm breath into the cold wind. Why would no one leave her alone?

Loveday reached her, panting. 'Greer, darlin', you OK?'

Greer dragged her eyes from the horizon and focused on her oldest friend. 'I'm fine,' she said flatly.

'Only we was worried. You left so quickly.'

'I wanted to be home.'

Loveday sat down on a bunch of mussels next to Greer. 'Twas a tough day.'

Greer nodded, grim faced.

'Brings it all back again,' said Loveday, picking up a small pebble and throwing it into the lapping water.

Greer turned her gaze back to the horizon and again nodded. 'I can't believe he isn't coming back,' she said quietly.

Loveday put an arm around her friend's shoulder. 'I know.'

Greer turned her white and stricken face towards her friend. 'And I can't believe that you'll soon be gone too. My oldest friends are leaving me.'

Loveday felt the tightening belt of guilt around her chest. 'You've got lots of friends ... And as soon as we're settled, I want you to come out to New Zealand and spend long holidays with us.'

'I haven't got lots of friends. I have clients, I have acquaintances, but there's no one who knows me like you do.'

Greer found an old tissue in the pocket of her coat, blew her nose and took a deep breath, trying to calm herself. 'I'm sorry. It's just self-pity.' It took a supreme effort for her to plaster a tight smile on to her face. 'I'm happy for you. I really am. And, anyway, I can't leave. Not yet. I must be here ... in case ...'

Loveday pushed a strand of her corkscrew hair behind her ear. Once such a brilliant copper red, it was now faded to a rust colour and flecked with white. She thought how lucky she was to have this opportunity of a fresh start. Looking at Greer she felt lucky that she had made the right decision all those years ago.

Awkwardly, she fumbled for Greer's hand and gripped it hard. Greer said softly, 'Do you think he ever really loved me?'

Loveday pulled Greer towards her and hugged her tightly, but couldn't answer.

The dice had been thrown a long time ago.

Part One

1

Autumn 1975

Greer's mother had planned on sending her daughter to a small private school in Truro but her husband had soon squashed another of her dreams. 'Trevay Infants' was good enough for you an' me, and it'll be good enough for Greer.' Which is how Greer was to meet Jesse again.

It was early September. Trevay had said goodbye to all the holiday-makers and could get on with being the small Cornish fishing port that it was.

Greer was in her uniform of grey pleated skirt and navy-blue blazer, with dazzling long white socks and shiny buckled shoes. She walked between her parents as they covered the five-minute stretch from home to school. She was nervous. She had never been left anywhere on her own before. As they got closer to the school, more and more children filled the narrow pavements around her. Some of them she recognised but barely knew. Her mother had few friends herself, having always put them off with an extreme shyness which was often interpreted as an unwarranted air of superiority.

In the playground, Bryn bent to kiss Greer. She might not be the son he had wanted, but she was everything to him. His sun and his moon. He would – and did – give her everything. 'You

be a good girl, mind.'

'I will, Daddy.' She put her arms round his neck and hugged him tight. 'Will you come and get me when I'm finished?'

'Aye.'

Her mother kissed her too. 'Have a good day, darling. See you later.'

Greer watched as her parents walked out of the playground. Her father striding out and nodding at acquaintances, her mother trotting to keep up with him and turning to give one last wave to her only child.

Greer's legs started to move towards the school gate and her parents and away from the school building. She was picking up her pace and tears were pricking her eyes. I don't want to be at school. I want Mummy, she was saying to herself.

She was getting closer to the gate. She took a breath, ready to call out to her mother. She could see her father chatting to man in a fishing smock. Her mother was surreptitiously wiping her eyes while her father was laughing at something the man was telling him.

Greer's lungs were now full and ready to shout to them. She opened her mouth but, before she could get any sound out, a small but firm hand caught her round the waist.

'Where you going?'

The air in her lungs escaped soundlessly at the surprise pressure on her diaphragm. She struggled but was held even more tightly.

‘Hey. You’re going to get into trouble if you go through the school gates.’

Something in the voice made her stop and turn to see who her captor was. It was the crab fishing boy from the quay.

A woman carrying a handbell was walking through the playground. She began ringing it loudly.

‘Come on,’ Jesse said.

He took Greer’s hand and ran with her into the school.

*

A male teacher was standing inside the building, at the door to the school hall, identifying the new children. ‘New boys and girls, walk to the front of the hall, don’t run, and sit on the floor, cross-legged, facing the stage, please.’

Greer was feeling anxious but grateful to have Jesse’s hand in hers. Once they got to the front he let go of her and sat on the floor.

‘Are you a new boy too?’ she asked him, settling down next to him.

‘Yeah, but I know everybody ’ere. My brother comes ’ere too.’ He was looking over her head and smiling at someone. Greer followed his gaze and saw a fat, plain girl with her flame-red hair in pigtails, also sitting cross-legged, showing her knickers and waving at him.

‘Who’s that?’ Greer asked, feeling sorry for this unattractive-looking girl.

‘That’s Loveday.’

The fat girl bum-shuffled her way towards them.

‘All right, Jesse?’ she smiled.

‘Yeah.’

‘What’s your name?’ the girl asked Greer.

‘Greer. I am named after a famous film star who was very beautiful.’ Greer couldn’t help herself.

‘Oh,’ said Loveday, her smile pushing her fat freckled cheeks up towards her eyes. ‘That’s nice. I’m called Loveday after my dad’s granny.’

Jesse’s eyes were darting around the gathering faces. ‘Seen Mickey?’ he asked Loveday.

‘He’s there.’ Loveday pointed at an open-faced, tall and very skinny boy standing on the other side of the hall.

‘Mickey,’ Jesse called. ‘Mickey, come ’ere, you beggar.’

‘Who’s he?’ Greer asked Loveday.

‘Jesse’s best friend. Do you want to be my best friend?’

Greer had never had a friend and thought that she might as well start with this poor fat girl. ‘Yes.’

‘Can I tell you a secret then?’

‘Yes.’

‘I’m goin’ to marry Jesse.’

Greer frowned. ‘Has he asked you?’

‘No. But I am going to marry him.’ Loveday smiled, then had a thought. ‘You can marry Mickey! That way we’ll all be best friends for ever.’ Greer looked at Mickey, who winked at her. She frowned back. Loveday was tugging at her sleeve and saying

something. ‘Do you like Abba?’

It was a long day. The new children were introduced to their teacher, Mrs Bond, who took them to their classroom. Loveday grabbed two desks next to each other for her and Greer. Jesse and Mickey were a row in front. Mrs Bond called the register, explained a few school rules – spitting and swearing were not to be tolerated, hard work was to be rewarded – and lessons began.

Greer already knew her numbers and most of her letters. She wrote her name quite clearly on her new exercise book.

Loveday was impressed. ‘What you written there?’

‘My name.’

‘Really?’ She leant forward and poked Jesse in the back.

‘Ow.’ He turned round. ‘What did you do that for?’

‘Greer can write. Look.’ She showed him Greer’s book.

He looked at Greer, ‘Did you write that?’

‘Yes.’

‘Clever.’

With that one word, Jesse’s fate was sealed. Greer decided it was she who was going to marry Jesse. Not Loveday.

2

Spring 1987

‘You’d do a lot worse than to marry that girl,’ Edward Behenna told his son.

‘Shuttup, Dad.’ Jesse Behenna ducked out of reach of his father’s hand as he tried to ruffle his son’s hair.

‘It would be a dream come true for your granddad,’ continued Edward as he pulled out an ancient wooden chair, scraping its legs across the worn red tiles before seating himself at the kitchen table opposite his younger son.

‘If he were still alive,’ murmured Jesse.

Jesse’s mother, Jan, slid the tray of pasties she’d been making into the top oven of the Aga; she banged the door shut and swung round. ‘Edward, don’t start all this again,’ she warned him, irritated.

But Edward hardly seemed to hear her. ‘I promised my dad, as he promised ’is father afore ’im, that I’d do all I could to build the business and make Behenna’s Boats the biggest fleet in Trevay.’

‘And you have, Dad,’ Jesse assured him. ‘Behenna’s is the biggest fishing fleet on the north coast of Cornwall.’

Edward nodded, but a frown marred his lined face. The pressures of running the business were very different from those of his father’s day. This year, the European Union had really

become involved and laws were being passed governing fishing quotas for member states. Cornwall and Devon MPs had tabled questions in the Commons about their impact on their fishing industry. How could they all hope to keep going in this climate, when the government was impounding vessels and fining their owners? This interference, along with upstarts like Bryn Clovelly screwing them for every penny down at the fish market, were driving some fishermen to the wall.

The old ways were dying. Small fleets were struggling to remain at sea and Edward knew that it was the likes of Clovelly who represented the future. Edward's father had fished these waters for fifty years, man and boy. Sometimes his fish would be bought by a fishmonger from somewhere as exotic as Plymouth, but Clovelly saw the swollen wallets of the flash London City boys as rich pickings; he was buying monkfish for restaurants in Chelsea and exporting scallops to New York.

'Aye, it is. I've been working the boats since I was fourteen and left school. I didn't have your education.'

Edward knew he was a good fisherman, one of the best, but being an entrepreneur, like Bryn Clovelly, was beyond him. Behenna's Boats had provided a good living for many families up to now, but carrying on as a lone operation was looking like an increasingly risky option. Clovelly would love nothing more than to add a big share in the Behenna fleet to his portfolio and Edward was finding his offer harder and harder to resist. He knew there were men with fewer scruples than he who would bite

Clovelly's hand off for a deal such as the one he was offering.

'I'm only staying on to do O levels,' Jesse reminded Edward. 'Then I'm full time working at sea on the fleet. But when I'm a bit older and I've saved up a bit, I'm off travelling.'

His father looked at him as if he'd just said he was off to buy a Ferrari. 'Go travelling? Travelling? There's more to find in your own home town than you'd ever find travelling.'

'Oh, that's right. I'd forgotten. There're the Hanging Gardens of Bodmin, The Pyramids of Porthleven, The Colossus of St Columb ... Cleopatra's Needle up Wadebridge. Silly me.'

Edward scowled at his son. 'That's enough of yorn lip, boy. You're the next generation. Greer Clovelly is a lovely girl and the only child Bryn and his lah-di-dah wife ever managed. Poor sod, never 'ad a son. Poor me, I got two and neither of them any bleddy good.'

'Leave off mithering the poor lad. He's only sixteen. He's got ideas of his own,' Jan said.

'I knew by his age that you were the one for me,' Edward told her, and Jan groaned inwardly as Edward played his familiar riff. 'As soon as I saw you, twelve and lookin' like an angel, I said to my mate, "There's the girl I'm gonna marry".'

'Yeah and, more fool me, I did marry you.'

Edward caught Jan's hand as she walked from the Aga to the sink. 'No regrets though, maid? No regrets?'

Jan felt the warmth of her husband's rough and calloused hand on hers and wondered. She'd had plans to travel to the Greek

Islands and sleep on the beach under the stars, like the character she'd read about in a book once. The last book she'd read. Must be more than twenty years ago. But Edward had wooed her into submission and she never did send off the passport application form that had sat on her mother's dresser for two years after she'd married. For their honeymoon, Edward had taken her to Exeter and they'd seen a rep production of *The Mousetrap*. Edward had promised her that the next show they'd see would be in Paris. Almost twenty years on and they still hadn't made that trip.

She stooped and dropped a kiss on her husband's weatherbeaten forehead, feeling the spikes of his overgrown eyebrows tickling her chin. Edward Behenna would now be more likely to see the surface of the moon than the insides of the Folies Bergère. She smiled. 'No regrets my 'andsome.' She straightened up. 'But that don't mean to say you can dictate what Jesse's future is going to be.'

Edward let go of her hand and turned his attention back to Jesse. 'Greer is a lovely girl. Clever, beautiful, and comes from a good family.'

Jesse gave his father a glare. 'I'm not marrying someone so that you can do a business deal.'

'What are you talking about? Business deal? Who said anything about business? I'm just saying she's a lovely girl.' Edward looked at his son with a patient, innocent smile. Bryn Clovelly was a sharp operator. For all of his talk about a merger, Edward knew that selling a share of the business to him was

a risk. However, Bryn had no boys of his own. Like Edward himself, and most vain men, Bryn was desperate for his business not to die with him. If Jesse and Greer were married, it would ensure that Behenna's Boats was safe and Bryn would have himself a son-in-law from one of Trevay's oldest fishing families. They were building a dynasty. But Jesse seemed to have other ideas. Edward got a hot itch on the back of his thinning scalp when he thought about selling his son's future off to the highest bidder.

'She may be, but I'm not marrying her. If you want to do business with old man Clovelly, do it yourself, but leave me out of it.'

'An' what's the matter with lookin' to the future?' Edward spread his hands, fingers splayed, on the old table, his extraordinary eyebrows raised in innocence.

'Plenty.' Jesse dropped his head and stared at his lap.

'Oh, now,' cajoled his father. 'You're not bleating about that other girl, whatshername ...'

Jesse's mother took her hands out of the sink and wiped the suds on her apron.

'Edward, leave him alone. Loveday Carter is a really nice girl. Jesse would be happy with her. Let the boy fall in love with whoever he wants.'

'Her mother hasn't got a pot to piss in, and anyway, what's love got to do with it? He doesn't know what love is.' Edward was exasperated.

‘But you did, or so you say,’ Jan threw back. ‘And stopped me from having a bit of life in the bargain.’

‘Oh, you and your life.’ Jesse recognised the brewing of a row and his father didn’t disappoint him. ‘You didn’t have a life till I took you on. You’ve wanted for nothing since we married. I’m a good man. I’m not a drinker or a womaniser.’

‘And I’m supposed to be grateful for the fact that life now starts and ends at Treway harbour sheds, am I?’

Edward stood up. ‘There’s no talking to you when you get in one of your moods like this. You sound like your mother, and she was a miserable old cow. I’m going back to work.’

‘But the pasties’ll be ready in a minute.’

‘I’m not hungry.’

In the simmering silence that remained after Edward had stomped out of the door and into the spring sunshine of Fish Lane, Jan stood for a moment in powerless frustration. Edward had set his mind on securing the future of the fishing fleet, and if that meant arranging a marriage between Jesse and Greer Clovelly, heiress to the Clovelly Fisheries Company, then that would be it, no matter what Jesse wanted.

She ran her thin hands through her short hair and bent to get the pasties out of the oven.

‘They’re hot,’ she said needlessly, serving one to Jesse.

‘Thanks, Mum.’

She put one onto a plate for herself and, wiping her hands on the tea towel that was perpetually tucked into her apron, sat

opposite her son.

‘Eat,’ she told him. Jesse did so. After a couple of mouthfuls, she asked. ‘So ... is it Loveday?’

Jesse shuffled a bit in his seat. With a full mouth he said, ‘I dunno.’

‘But it’s not Greer?’

‘How do I know? I’m sixteen. I want to see the world before I decide on anything. I’ve got my own mind and my own life.’

Jan nodded in understanding. It was one thing encouraging Jesse in a particular direction, but quite another thing to put all this pressure on the poor lad.

‘I’ll ask your dad to back off.’

*

‘Bloody ungrateful kids.’ Edward was on his boat, *The Lobster Pot*, checking the trawl nets with his old friend and ship’s mechanic, Spencer. ‘He doesn’t know his arse from his elbow. Does he think I wanted to take on the fleet from my dad? No I bloody didn’t. But it was the best thing that ever happened to me.’ He looked up from his work and surveyed the harbour around him. ‘Look at this place.’ He swept an arm dramatically across the view. ‘Trevay is the most beautiful place on earth. What’s he think he’s going to find anywhere else? Answer me that.’

Spencer moved his stained and smouldering hand-rolled cigarette from one corner of his gnarled mouth to another and made a noise that sounded as if he was in agreement. Edward continued: ‘Fifteen boats we’ve got in the fleet now. Fifteen! If

my dad hadn't been so canny after the war and bought them first few cheap from those poor fishing widows whose husbands had never come home from the Navy, we'd still have the arses hanging out of our trousers.'

Spencer gave another grunt.

'You and me, Spencer, you and me, we know how the world works. Hard work brings good things. Not nancying around doing yer O levels and packing yer spotted handkerchief to go travelling. What's that about?'

As inscrutable as ever, Spencer peeled the damp cigarette from his lips and revealed a handful of tobacco-stained teeth. 'Want a brew, Skip?'

Edward stopped what he was doing and looked at his old friend as if for the first time.

'See. You've seen it all, haven't you, Spence? I'll have a cup of tea with you and then, when we've finished here, I'll take you for a pint. How does that sound?'

Spencer went below decks to the galley and Edward could hear the comforting sounds of the pop as the gas was lit and the rattle of the old kettle as Spencer banged it on the hob. Edward took another look at the fishing village that had been his home from birth. The gulls were cackling above him and the May sunshine made mirrors of the water on the mudflats. 'Bloody kids,' he muttered to himself. 'Bloody women.' He rubbed the thick gold wedding band on his finger. 'Bloody Jan.'

He took a deep breath of the salty Cornish air and thought

about his boys. Grant a bloody liability, and Jesse a dreamer. What had he done to deserve them? He loved them. Of course he did, but why didn't they do what he told them? When his dad had told him to jump, he'd asked how high. When his dad got ill and Edward had had to take on the fleet aged only eighteen, he'd had no choice. Sink or swim. He'd chosen to swim. He'd shut the door on the dreams he'd had to go to America. He'd taken on his responsibilities. He'd swallowed his resentment and done the right thing. Why the hell wouldn't Jesse?

*

Jesse knew he should be in his room revising for the imminent O levels, but he couldn't see the point. He'd be leaving school in June and joining his dad at sea. He knew how lucky he was to have a job, and he loved the sea but ... oh, there were so many buts. He took his Levi denim jacket off one of the pegs by the back door and kissed his mum, who was now setting up the ironing board.

'You going out, son?'

'Yeah.'

'Where are you going?'

'Up the sheds.'

'Shouldn't you be doing some school work?'

'What's the point, Mum?' He bent and kissed her cheek to stop her from asking any more. 'See ya.'

He was out of the back door leaving his mother to watch him, shrugging on his beloved denim jacket, slipping his Sony

Walkman headphones on his ears and retreating down the short front garden path. She heard the little gate click shut for the nth time in her life; on her own, again. She worried about her boys and their future. Grant was in the Royal Marines now, stationed in Plymouth. Last time he called he said he was going for Commando Training at Lymington. Ever since he was 16, fuelled by the nightly bulletins reporting the Falklands War, he'd wanted to wear the Green Beret of a commando. Now, at 21, this was his chance to earn it. Grant had been a handful from the off. His unpredictable mood swings had always marked him out. It could be like treading on eggshells living under the same roof as him, and school had been one long round of visits to successive heads. He'd left school with only one exam pass to his name, in metalwork. He was lucky that the army recruiting officer had seen something in him beyond the defensive, edgy character that he conveyed.

'We'll smooth the rough edges off him, Mrs Behenna,' he told her.

She was proud of him, of course, but fearful about the dangers he would face in any war, and of those dark moods which had got him into trouble with the police already. He was such a contrast to Jesse, who was calm and steady, but still waters ran deep with Jesse – Jan knew that there was much more to him than his father gave him credit for. At least Jesse would be safe at home, working with his dad and groomed to take over the business. But what if Edward's plans to marry him off to Greer Clovelly came about?

Jesse would be stuck in a loveless marriage, burdened with the responsibility of a very big business and no chance to see the world and enjoy his freedom. Just like she'd been.

'Stop it, Jan,' she said into the silence. 'Just stop it.' She plugged in the old iron, turning on the radio for her daily infusion of *The Archers* as she waited for it to warm up.

Jesse was still just a boy. Let him have his dreams; there was time enough to be a man.

*

Jesse left the cool of the narrow lane of terraced fisherman's cottages, and was walking up the hill away from Treway and towards St Peter's, the fishermen's church. The graveyard slumbered in the warm sun and delicate white cow parsley heads shuddered in the light breeze, making shadow patterns over the cushions of forget-me-nots growing beneath them. He always glanced at his grandfather's grave as he passed. Today its granite headstone glittered like a smile. Jesse touched his brow and saluted his grandfather before carrying on up the hill towards the sheds.

The sheds were a series of around thirty to forty home-built wooden structures, owned by the people of the town who had no garages attached to their houses, which, since most of the houses were built long before the motor car was invented, was the majority. The sheds had started as makeshift stables and boat-houses but now contained all the detritus of modern living. It was a kind of shanty town sited on a two-acre plot of flattened

mud and sand. Opposite the sheds, some of which were now two storeys, stood a long line of boats of all kinds. Dinghies, clinker boats, fishing boats, rotting hulks, along with trailers of varying sizes on which the boats could be towed down the hill, through the town and down the harbour slipway into the water. At the entrance to the sheds was the second of only two public phone boxes in Treway. The other box was down on the quay. Every resident knew the number of these boxes and regular calls were made between the two to give a shout to the lifeboat crew or call a man home for his tea.

Jesse walked past the phone box, kicking up a little sandy dust as he did so. He looked over to his father's shed, which had expanded over the years and was now a run of four sheds linked together. On the upper floor were the words Behenna Boat Yard est. 1936, painted in fading blue and white letters.

He saw Mickey before Mickey saw him. His best friend since nursery school, Mickey Chandler was the person Jesse shared everything with. Mickey was standing outside his own family's smaller shed, unlocked now with its doors wide open to the sun, and was polishing the chrome of his pride and joy: a two-year-old Honda moped, a present from his family and friends for his recent sixteenth birthday.

Jesse lengthened his stride, taking the headphones from his ears and calling, 'Hey.' Mickey stood up and shielded his eyes with the hand holding the stockinet duster; Jesse could smell the metal cleaner on it.

‘Hey,’ he replied.

Jesse was now close enough to give his best mate a punch on the arm, which was returned with equal force and affection.

‘I thought you were revising,’ Mickey said, returning to his polishing.

‘I thought you were too.’

‘Waste of fuckin’ time, isn’t it?’

‘Yeah. Want a snout?’

‘Please.’

Jesse pulled a crumpled packet of Player’s No. 6 out of his pocket and offered one to Mickey.

‘Ta.’

‘You got a light?’

‘No. Have you?’

‘No.’

‘Shit.’

Both boys pondered on the dilemma of having cigarettes but no means of smoking them. Mickey laughed first. ‘You’re bloody useless, Behenna.’

Jesse grabbed his friend in a headlock and they scuffled contentedly for several minutes.

Eventually they stopped

‘Bike’s looking good,’ Jesse told him.

‘Got my test next week.’

‘Gonna pass?’

‘Of course.’

‘Can I come out with you?’

‘Sure. I’m gonna ask Loveday out when I’ve got me licence.’

Jesse’s heart flipped at the sound of Loveday’s name. Mickey was in love with Loveday and had never made any secret of it. Jesse had never admitted to Mickey that the mention of her name, let alone the sight of her, was enough to shoot a flame of desire and longing coursing through his body.

‘Her arse is too big for the seat,’ he observed.

Mickey smiled. ‘Yeah. And what an arse. Imagine having her arms around you, holding tight, pressing those big boobs against your shoulder blades.’

Jesse could imagine all too clearly, but said only, ‘Fill your boots, boy.’

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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