

OGMORE: 1974

We are going to the beach. I'm lying in the boot of our car, top to tail with my brother Raf. I have my head on my little sister Carla's lap. She is scraping the wax out of my ear with her fingernail. She holds up the hard yellow bits between her fingers and shows them to me. She likes doing this. There are eight of us squished in the car. My Dad is driving.

I like it in the boot. It's warm and steamy. When I lie on my back, I can look out of the back window and see fat grey raindrops sliding down. Sometimes telegraph wires rush by like someone has drawn black lines in the sky. Radio 1 is on. When my sister pokes in my ear, it makes the music disappear and go all muffled. It's like she's doing it in time to the wires going over my head.

I scramble over the back seat, fighting to be first on the beach. It is cold and rainy. The wind smells salty. The sea is brown; it looks murky and churned up and the waves have foamy white tops. The sky is grey. There are no other families on the beach.

Raf is eight. He is a really good climber. We take off our shoes and socks and run down to the sea where the big rocks are. We paddle in the shallow bits. The water is so cold it makes us squeal. We play dares. We dare each other to go further and further into the water. We scream and run away from the waves.

He makes up a game. We have to climb around the edge of the rocks without getting our feet wet or touching the sand. We cling on like limpets, trying to go around them before the waves break and knock us off. This is a great game. We love it when

one or other of us gets soaked with spray. We roar at the sea as loud as we can and collapse on the sand in fits of giggles.

Raf and me find a place where the rocks are smooth and flat. They are filled with rock pools. We lie on our bellies looking into the underwater worlds. I watch two hermit crabs fighting over their houses. Then stick my finger into the anemones to make them curl up and tickle me with their alien fingers.

I like balancing on the big boulders above the rock pools. You can make shapes in the water below. Raf and I cling to each other, sticking our arms and legs out to make strange two-headed creatures. I climb onto his shoulders to see if we can make a human totem pole.

We sit down on the rocks for a rest. Our clothes are soggy. It is getting a bit dark. The only daylight left is a thin streak of silver above the sea. We climb down and start to walk back along the shore. We have come a really long way. I'm worried we will get told off for going so far. I race back up the beach. The wet sand makes it hard to run and my legs ache. My brother gets a stitch and stops to catch his breath. He is lagging far behind me. I scream at him to hurry up. I'm scared we are going to get in trouble. Dad will be waiting for us in the car. He will be getting really cross. The beach is totally empty. We are the last ones. We are definitely going to get done.

I can't remember where we left our shoes. We spend ages looking for them. I'm getting crosser and crosser with Raf. He is so slow and stupid. Then he spots the shoes perched on a rock. We stuff our sandy damp feet into them. It feels horrible and gritty. I

help him tie his laces. Chanting, *Hurry up. Hurry up. Hurry up.* I grab his hand and drag him off the beach.

The sand is rubbing between our toes as we climb the small rocky path up to the car park. It is steep. By the time we get to the top we are puffed out. My clothes feel damp and cold and I'm tired. I think we will see the headlights of our car in the car park, but I can't see them. In fact, I can't see any cars, or any lights. The car park is completely empty. There is not a single car to be seen, not one.

I get a funny, fluttery sick feeling in my tummy. I can hear my heart in my ears as if I have covered them with a seashell. My brother starts to sniffle. I put my arm round him,

"Don't cry," I say trying to comfort him. "They're probably playing a joke on us and will be back in a minute." My voice wobbles a bit. "Maybe they forgot about us, but they'll come back really soon. Honest Raf. They will. Please don't cry."

We walk around the car park a few times. Then we sit on a rock. He's still crying like a big baby. I sing *Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting* out loud to cheer him up. I show him the moves. I start to feel a bit better and Raf stops crying. We play karate, chopping each other and doing kung fu kicks round the car parks.

It is dark now. The beach looks really scary. The rocks make shapes like crouching creatures. The sea moans and groans. A seagull flies past and screeches like a baby screaming. My Dad hasn't come back. I have a lump in my throat from trying really hard not to cry.

My brother wipes the snot off his face with the back of his hand. He nudges me, pointing to a little light further down the road. I suddenly remember there is a café, where we sometimes go to get crisps and pop and ice cream wafers. I hug him hard, shouting out loud with relief. We run hand-in-hand towards the light. The thought of ice cream makes me feel starving hungry.

Inside the café it is warm and bright. There is one of those green strip lights that dazzles your eyes. A kind looking lady is standing behind the counter with brown curly hair and glasses. She has a checked, orange overall on like a dinner lady. I go up to the shiny red, plastic counter and say to the lady,

“Excuse me, do you know where I can find a policeman please?” In Mrs O’Reilly’s class at school she told us what to do if you get lost. She said you shouldn’t talk to strangers but you should try and find a policeman and ask the policeman for directions.

The lady is not a policeman but she not looks kind. She is. She is super kind. She makes us sit at a table and calls us poor lambs. She gets a tea towel to dry our hair and tells us to take off our wet shoes. Then she brings us steamy hot cocoa in plastic beakers with rich tea biscuits while she phones for a policeman.

We wait for ages and ages, sipping our cocoa off our teaspoons and dunking our biscuits. We pick out the bits of milk skin and flick them at each other. We wonder if they are missing us at home.

“I bet they are really worried,” I say, “I bet they’ve got a search party out looking for us.” A picture pops into my head, like an old black and white film. Mum is wearing a black veil over her face. She is in church all on her own. She walks up the aisle and

kneels in front of the altar. She looks up at Jesus on the cross. Then she starts praying to him. She weeps and wails begging him to return her poor lost children.

“I think they’ve been kidnapped by aliens,” says my brother. “They zoomed down and thwack, disappeared the car in one blast of their super ray gun. We’ll have to go and live in an orphanage now and we’ll get beaten every day and have to live on gruel. I’ve seen it on telly.”

“You’re an idiot. Stop being so stupid.” My tummy starts to feel a bit funny again. “What does a stupid idiot like you know anyway.”

The lady comes back and she has a policeman with her. He is big and quite fat and his face looks stern. He has huge, hairy eyebrows that look like two squashed beetles. When he starts to talk, he has a deep Welsh voice that makes him seem friendlier. He takes off his hat and asks us if we know our address and phone number. We both know the address, but neither of us can remember the phone number. The policeman takes out a notebook and writes down the address. My brother and I find this very funny. We try really hard not to giggle, but the minute we catch each other’s eyes, laughter comes bubbling up. My brother stuffs the tea towel in his mouth to stop himself. I laugh even more. It comes out in a snort like a pig. The policeman doesn’t tell us off; instead he smiles and says,

“Ok you two, when the joke is over I’ll take you home, shall I? Give you a ride in my police car.”

It is dark and stuffy inside the police car. It smells of air freshener and tobacco and grown up things. We sit in the back peeking through the grille to see if we can see

handcuffs or truncheons or any sign of robbers in the back. The policeman doesn't put the sirens on but he does drive very fast. The seat is smooth and slidey and we bump into each other shrieking, as we go round corners.

The policeman pulls up on our street. We point to our house. He bundles us out of the car and we wait behind him, hiding behind his legs, as he knocks at the door. We have never come home with a policeman before. I wonder if we will be in really big trouble. Mum answers the door. She is smiling and happy.

She doesn't look cross or worried, or as if she has been weeping and wailing. She is really surprised to see the policeman.

"Evening," he says, "Do you happen to have lost two small children?" Mum looks confused. The policeman drags us out from behind him. "Do these two belong to you by any chance?" Mum nods and gives a little yelping sound. Then she goes bright pink from her neck all the way up to her forehead. Mum bends down and gives us both a big giant hug. She squeezes us so tight it hurts. Then she ends us inside. She stays on the doorstep whispering to the policeman.

It is warm and busy and safe inside our house. It smells of Sunday dinner. My Dad and my other brothers and sisters crowd round us, trying see what is going on and asking where we have been. Dad looks a bit shifty when we tell him and mutters something under his breath that sounds like the f word.

It is nice to be home. Mum sends us upstairs to dry off. We come back down in our pyjamas for Sunday leftovers and piles of hot buttered toast. As we are eating, our brothers and sisters and Mum and Dad sit round the table and make us tell them the

story of what happened. My brother and I start to tell them, but we keep arguing over who did what. Every time we tell it we remember more and more things. Then we make up some new bits to make it more exciting. We tell it over and over again until it is time for bed.

I snuggle up under the blankets on my top bunk, feeling cosy. I lie in bed thinking about everything that has happened. I start to remember the feeling of the dark empty beach and the horrible sound of the screaming gulls. I shiver. I feel really sick and my heart thumps in my ears again. I slip out of my bed and tiptoe into my brothers' room. He is still awake. I sneak into his bed and hug him really hard. We make a little burrow out of the bedclothes for the two of us and snuggle up tight. I sing *Kung Fu Fighting* in his ear over and over until we both fall asleep.