

## Chapter 12

### Beth

Beth was not scared. She had complete faith in the good intentions of the kelpie. That was why she had been chosen. Unlike the others, Beth had had the imagination to see that the horse might be a saviour, not a threat. Once she glimpsed the kindness in those cool, staring eyes, she had had no doubts as to what she must do.

Beth was not scared, but every other creature was. As they sped across the loch, cormorants and gulls took flight, seals basking on the rocks disappeared at once, and anxious eider ducks tried to shepherd their broods of ducklings away from danger. Even the dolphins, those most inquisitive of sea creatures, kept their distance.

More remarkably still, islands moved. Not the bigger ones. It took more than a kelpie to disturb them. But Beth was sure she saw a couple of small skerries edge away as they passed.

She was amazed at the speed with which they travelled. She supposed that the creature was working hard with its legs deep down in the water. Or perhaps they were flippers?

The speed and energy of their movement created a great wake of waves that spread across the whole loch. Many a rowing boat capsized. Bobby-in-the-Boat lost all the fish he had caught that day.

They approached the farthest islands. Even though these islands had recently rearranged themselves, the kelpie seemed to know its way around. They headed for a large island whose coastline as far as Beth could see consisted of high cliffs. Above the cliffs the land rose to some small hills.

The kelpie entered a narrow channel between this island and the one to the left. Beth supposed this must lead to the open sea. There were cliffs on either side of the channel, but on the righthand side the height of the cliff declined until they reached a point where the monster turned aside, approached the cliff, and reared its long neck so high that its head was level with the top of the cliff and its nose touched it.

Beth knew at once that she was supposed to climb the kelpie's neck onto the island. This was a little scary, but she had the creature's mane to hold onto, and she tried not to look down. In this way she landed on the island.

It was not at all clear to her why she was there or what she should do, though she had no doubt that it was with some definite purpose that the kelpie had brought

her there. When she looked back, she saw that the kelpie was continuing through the channel towards the ocean.

She decided to climb the hill ahead of her, and soon she was looking down onto the seaward side of the island. Here there were no cliffs, but a gentle grassy slope running down to a sandy beach. A boat was anchored off shore, and three tents were pitched on the grass. Next to the tents was a structure that could only be a cage. Beth could not see what was in it. Round a small table there were three figures seated.

Almost at once she realised - was it an intelligent guess or the telepathic powers of the kelpie? - that the cage must contain Grizzlette and the three figures must be her kidnappers.

She focused again on the figures and tried to make out what they were. Humans. Beth had never seen humans, but she had heard about them from Wompy and seen pictures. She was almost sure these were humans. But if Beth's task was to rescue Grizzlette, she could not see how it was to be done.

Then the kelpie appeared in the sea, moving towards the beach near the camp. Evidently Beth was not being left to rescue Grizzlette alone. There was a plan. The appearance of the kelpie would surely scare the humans out of their wits, and while they ran away in terror Beth would be able to run down to the camp and set Grizzlette free.

It was a while before the humans noticed the kelpie. When they did, they rose excitedly from the table, pointing and looking at the creature. The sight of the kelpie was surely enough to terrify any creature. The monster heaved itself above the water, so that not only its head and long neck could be seen, but also something of the massive proportions of its body. The humans were running to their tents.

But they soon emerged again - with cameras. So far from taking flight, they were moving towards the shore, presumably to get a better view. They were taking picture after picture.

Then Beth discovered that the kelpie was not always silent. It let out a thundering snort. It was a sound that must have been heard all over Bearloch, thought Beth. She had never heard so terrifying a sound. It was repeated and again repeated. The humans made no move, but stood stationary watching the monster.

Beth knew there was nothing further it could do to scare them away. Were it to leave the sea for the shore, it could not retain its monstrous form, but would have to appear as a horse. She watched as it did its worst, snorting and rearing up in the sea, and making as though to come ashore. She knew that, when this display had no effect, it could not continue without becoming ridiculous. She knew it would have to leave, and it did.

Had Beth thought about it, she would have been amazed at the way she had learned to read the monster's mind. It was as though they knew each other so well they could plan and act together without needing to speak. But she did not reflect on this at the time. She was too disappointed and too puzzled as to what could now be done.

She did not think there was a plan now. The kelpie's plan had been tried and had failed. The humans were back at their table, talking. One of them ran into a tent and returned with books that they all poured over.

Beth saw no chance of creeping up to the cage unobserved. There was no cover nearby. She could only hope that perhaps, if she waited, the humans might go away for a while. She knew the cage would be locked, but could not think what to do about it.

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The party in Grampa's fishing boat heard the monster's ear-shattering snort.

"What the jiggers is that?" said Grampa.

"It could be a whole army of elephants trumpeting in unison," said Bobby.

"Or a whole armada of boats sounding their foghorns all at once," said Duff.

But these did not seem very likely explanations.

"More likely a gang of jaunty giants from the caverns under the earth," said Wompy. "Probably they are performing their war dance before attacking the kelpie." Wompy didn't always get everything right, but he usually had the best story.

Whatever it was the noise added to their anxiety as they approached the farthest islands.

Duff was scanning the landscape ahead with binoculars. Suddenly he cried out with delight and pointed to the hill where Beth was now waving wildly at them.

Faced with the high cliffs, they would not have known what to do, had Grampa not been there. Although the island had recently moved, Grampa knew its shape well. He knew that if they went around to the seaward side there would be no cliffs. But he also knew a quicker way to reach Beth. By turning to the right and following the coast some distance, he brought the boat to a point where a burn ran down through a gap in the cliffs to the sea. Here it was possible to bring the boat to shore and to scramble up a rough path to the top of the cliffs.

Grampa and the others were expecting simply to get Beth aboard and to return home. But when Beth explained the situation, they saw there was more to be done.

They decided that Grampa and Wompy should stay in the boat, while the others returned with Beth to the top of the hill to see for themselves.