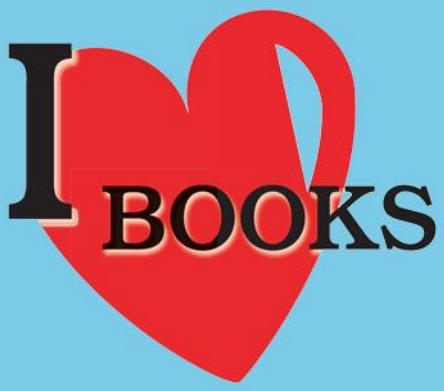


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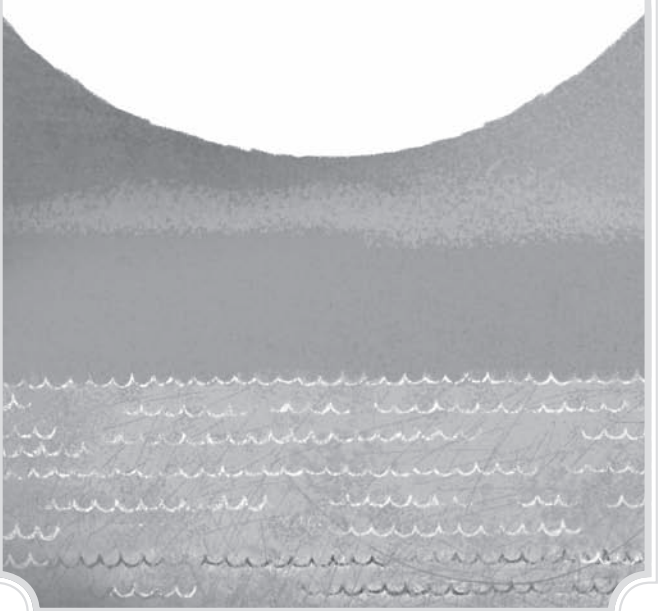
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I

Journey to Adventure




REM

Polly looked around the flat, heartbreakingly bare and empty. How could all their life have been packed up into one small van? She had loved living in London so much but now it felt as if London was forgetting them too easily. They were slipping out of the city, and no one had noticed.

It would have been different if Dad was still with them, Polly thought. She peered out of the window at her mum, who was talking to the removal man, pointing at something on her phone. Probably the map, Polly guessed.

The removal people had been a bit doubtful about how to reach Penhallow Hall. The roads all around it were tiny and twisted, Mum said, with tall hedges that leaned in, so nobody ever drove fast. It was one of the things she'd kept mentioning, when she was trying to convince Polly the move to Cornwall was a good idea. How quiet and peaceful it would be – hardly any cars, just a tractor every so often and even quite a few people riding horses.

Polly reckoned Mum was exaggerating a bit but she understood why. If they'd been living there last year, Dad would still be alive, wouldn't he? Lorries couldn't fit down those narrow little lanes, so he wouldn't have been knocked off his bike.

She shook her head briskly and the ends of her dark ponytail smacked her cheek. It made her eyes water – or that was going to be her

excuse if Mum saw her, anyway.

She couldn't keep thinking about Dad. They were having a new start. From now on it would just be Polly and Mum and no one would know any different. No one would put on that fake sorry face to talk to her. No one would whisper when she walked down the corridor at school: "Did you know her dad died? He got run over on his bike."

They weren't being horrible, or they weren't *meaning* to be. But ever since January, what had happened to Dad had become the most interesting thing about Polly. The story had followed her all the way through the school year. Everyone seemed to know. School felt weird and fake, because people were so nice and careful not to upset her. Nobody was allowed to argue with her any more. Her friends seemed to be tiptoeing around her. Polly's best friend

Becca paused every time she spoke to her, as though she was checking that she wasn't going to accidentally say something awful. It made it very hard to talk about anything, let alone the important stuff. Even the teachers were being eerily kind. It seemed ridiculous to complain that everyone was too nice but that was how it felt to Polly.

Still, it was the summer holidays now. And the school down in Penhallow village went back later than London schools. She had seven whole weeks where she didn't have to explain to anyone that she only had a mum. When she started the new school, she could just say she didn't have a dad and no one would ask any questions. It would be fine. Everything was going to be fine. That was what she and Mum had been telling each other.

Polly grabbed her jacket off the windowsill and banged the door behind her without looking back.



"You didn't tell me it would be like this!" Polly gawped at the front of the house. Pale honey stone stretched on and on under the deep blue sky and what seemed like a thousand windows sparkled back at her.

"I said it was big. And I showed you pictures!"

It was true. When Mum had found out she'd got the job of House Manager, she'd shown Polly photos and brochures and even a video on Penhallow Hall's website. She'd told Polly about the building being over four hundred years old and how the Penhallows had lived there even before that. They had been one of

the richest families in Cornwall and had rooms full of gorgeous treasures… But somehow none of this had prepared Polly for quite how huge and grand the house would be. They were actually going to live here?

Well… In a very, very tiny bit of here, anyway.

"If you look sideways and behind that chimney," Mum said, squinting at the roof, "I think that might be your bedroom window. Up there, look? The round one."



Polly could just about see it, tucked far away in the roof, near the top of a little turret. Somewhere deep down inside her, a spark of excitement flared. It felt strange – she had been so sad, for so long. Maybe Mum was right – they did both need something new. Polly had gone along with Mum's plan but she hadn't ever imagined it *working*. She'd been sure that the cold, dark ball of sadness in her chest was there forever. How could it not be, when Dad was gone? But somehow this ancient house was telling her, *This is going to be an adventure…*





"It's great to see you again, Anna. And really nice to meet you, Polly." Stephen handed Polly's mum a huge mug of tea and pulled out a biscuit tin. "You'll be in here a lot, I expect," he said. "Everyone meets up in the staff room when they've got a break, so there's always tea on the go, and there'll be biscuits if you look hard enough."

Polly took a custard cream, smiling. She liked Stephen – he looked scruffy in his "Penhallow Staff" fleece, with his boots caked in mud and his wild curly hair, but his bright blue eyes were friendly.

There were about twenty volunteers who ran tours round the house – part of Mum's job was to manage them all. But Stephen and Polly and her mum would be the only people

living at Penhallow all the time. Stephen had told them how he had a cottage in the grounds, converted from part of the stables. As Head Gardener he had lots of people working for him, too. But everyone went home at six o'clock.

"Want some tea, Polly? Or squash?" Stephen peered hopefully into a cupboard. "Ummm, sorry… We might need to get some in. Not sure there's been anyone under thirty living at Penhallow for about a hundred years!"

"Really?" Polly swung round from the window. She couldn't stop staring. The gardens were beautiful, lush and green in the sunlight but, even more excitingly, she could just catch a glimpse of the glittering sea through the trees. "No children? Didn't the family who lived here have any then?"



"Well, the Penhallows sold the house in the 1920s. Since then it's had quite a few owners and none of them had children. Of course it belongs to the charity now. The Penhallow

History Trust – they employ me and your mum. Perhaps you as well, when you're a bit older. There are always lots of holiday jobs, working in the café or the gift shop, that sort of thing." He grinned at her.

Polly nodded. She hadn't thought of that. It was really nice, the way Stephen seemed to see that she and her mum came as a pair. She'd been a bit worried that the other staff at the house wouldn't want her hanging about.

Stephen took a big gulp of tea. "The odd thing is, the house hasn't changed much, even though so many different people have lived here. The Penhallow family lost their son, fighting in the First World War, and they left the house. They sold most of the contents to the new owners, all the furniture and paintings and things. Since then everyone's kept it the same – because it all looks so

right, I suppose. No one wanted to move things from the places they'd stood in for hundreds of years. There's even trunks and boxes of old papers and photos up in the attic still."

"It is odd that they left so much behind," Polly's mum agreed, leaning forwards eagerly. "Wonderful, though. There are some fascinating things here, it would have been heartbreaking if they'd all been taken away and sold. I can't wait to get a look at those attics. I'm sure we'll be able to find so much material up there – family photos and documents… We can set up displays! I was thinking that it would be a great way to bring the past alive for the visitors – showing how one family was caught up in world events throughout history."

Polly smiled to herself and went back to

gazing out of the window at the thin, sparkling blue line of the sea. It was nice to hear her mum sounding so enthusiastic. *We're not forgetting about you,* she promised her dad silently. *It's just … it's like the ice is melting a bit.*



"Do you like it?" Polly's mum asked. "I know it's a bit of a funny shape for a bedroom but it's because it's up in the turret."

"I don't like it, I love it," Polly told her firmly. "Look, I can see the sea from the windows on this side, and all the way down the front drive on the other. And the weird shape is fun. What's so good about a bedroom that's square?"

Her mum laughed. "I suppose so. Oh, Polly, you are all right with this move, aren't you? We're not doing the wrong thing?"