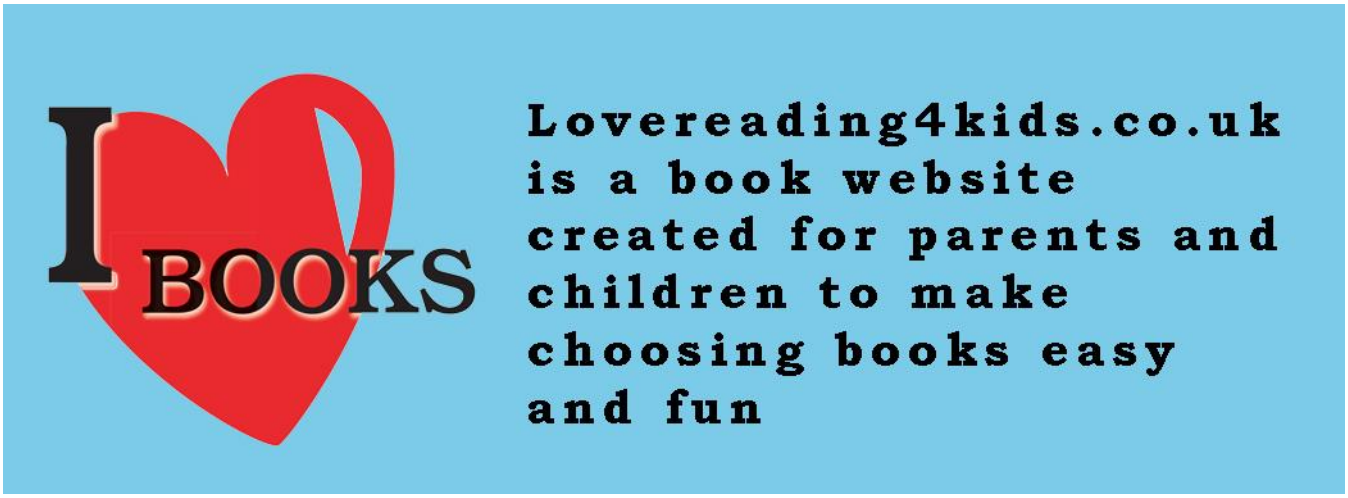


Opening extract from

The Lost Treasure

Written by

Holly Webb

Illustrated by

Jason Cockcroft

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For William
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I

A Summer of Secrets





"We could go to the cove and swim," Polly suggested. Rex only gave one paw a vague wave to show he'd heard. He was lying on his back in the sunshine, half asleep, and he didn't look as though he really wanted to do anything, but Polly was restless. There were only three weeks left of the summer holidays and she was starting to feel the days slipping through her fingers. She wanted to have adventures, to explore, not just laze about in the sun. It was hard to explain that to a dog, though. Especially a ghost dog who was so old

he didn't actually know how old he was.

Polly gave a huge sigh and then peered round the clump of rose bushes to check that none of the visitors exploring the gardens had heard her.

"I suppose the cove will be packed with people having picnics anyway," she added gloomily. "It's almost lunchtime."

"What's the matter?" She hadn't noticed Rex rolling over. Now he was sitting up, and he poked his long grey muzzle over her shoulder and licked her cheek. "You don't sound happy."

Polly absent-mindedly rubbed away the slobbery patch with one hand. "I don't know. I woke up this morning and remembered it's more than halfway through the holidays, that's all."

Rex didn't say anything and Polly peered round at him. "I mean, I'll have to go to school soon."

"You'll go away?" Rex asked slowly, pulling his head back.

Polly turned to look at him properly. He was drooping – it was the only word. His long wolfhound head hung down between his front paws and his shoulder blades were sticking out of his golden-brown coat. He looked skinny, suddenly, and sad.

"Rex! What is it?" Polly flung her arms round his neck, relieved that he was still warm and there and just a little smelly. The more time Rex and Polly spent together, the more real he seemed to become. Had she imagined that he was fading slightly, around the edges, just then?

"You're leaving."

"No!" Polly hugged Rex tighter and then drew back to look him in the eyes, realizing what she'd said. "No, no, you don't understand. I'll only be going to school in the village." She stared at him worriedly. "You thought I meant boarding school, like William, didn't you?"



Rex nodded. He was still gazing at her anxiously but his ears had pricked up a little.

"William was a Penhallow and rich, that's why his parents sent him away to school. It's what families like that did in the 1900s. There's no way Mum could afford a boarding school. And I wouldn't want to go, anyway, honestly I wouldn't. I'd hate it."

William, the ghost who haunted the nursery floors of Penhallow Hall, had been sent away to

school at seven. Polly couldn't imagine leaving home that young. Home, his parents, his beloved dog Magnus. It must have been awful, even though William didn't complain about it.

Polly rubbed Rex's ears and sighed. "But I'll still be gone for most of the day. I probably won't get home until about four."

Rex sat up straighter, his tail thumping slowly on the ground. "But we'll have time after that. And our nights, to explore. And school isn't every day, is it?"

"Not the weekends," Polly agreed. "I'm sorry, Rex. I didn't mean to upset you. I suppose a lot of the children you knew went to boarding school."

"If they went to school at all," Rex said. "So your new school is down in the village?"

"Yes. I've got to go and get all the uniform soon. Mum's going to take me into town."

Polly made a face and Rex blew sympathetically in her ear, making her giggle.

"So. Let's do something. What shall we do, Polly?"

Polly blinked at him – she was feeling so grumpy about school, she'd almost forgotten about being restless. But then a wave of excitement surged through her and she jumped up. "Could we –" she was almost too excited to speak – "could we wake another of the dogs?" She looked hopefully at Rex – there were countless stories and adventures waiting, she was sure.

Rex gazed at her for a moment and then his tail began to swish to and fro. "But who?" he wondered aloud. "There are so many dogs sleeping at Penhallow." He gazed over at the building and looked along the line of windows, his ears twitching thoughtfully. "The portraits

in the library or the drawing room would be a good place to start. Or perhaps the carvings on the Grand Staircase. A fair few dogs there. And there's the mosaics in the folly, of course."

"The what?" Polly frowned at him. "Oh, that funny little stone temple thing?" She shook her head. "I don't think we can go there. There's a children's workshop on making your own mosaics, and Mum said it was so popular it's booked out. She was really pleased because it was one of her ideas for new events. She tried to get me to go but I wanted to be with you instead. There'll be people everywhere. Even though no one can see you, they can still hear me talking *to* you. It's hard enough here, with all the visitors looking at the rose beds."

The rose garden was one of Rex's favourite places, since it was just below the terrace steps where his statue stood guard. It was here that



Polly and Rex had first met, soon after she arrived at Penhallow Hall. Unfortunately it was one of the busiest spots in the gardens, too.

Rex wrinkled his nose thoughtfully. "Perhaps you should go to this … workshop? You should be spending time with your mother."

"Well, my mum won't actually be there, she just organized it. She's busy setting up a new exhibition at the moment."

Rex sniffed. "As long as she isn't working too hard."

Polly smiled at him. Things had been better since she'd told her mum she was too caught up in her work. "She never meant to forget about me, you know. It's just that she loves working here so much, and it was helping her block out all the hurt

about Dad." She sighed. "It's a pity we can't tell Mum about you. She'd love it, once she got over the shock. It'd be a dream come true, being able to ask someone about the house who was actually there, in the past. Even better than all those old Penhallow family documents she gets so excited about."

Rex got to his feet and started to walk towards the house. "I don't know," he said as Polly joined him. He stared up at the house again. "I don't think she'd believe. She wouldn't see us. You're the only one who can, for some reason. I still don't know why or how. But I'm glad you can. I feel more real than I have in years. It's not just me, either. I can feel the others stirring… If you want to wake another dog, someone who's already waking would be



easier, I think. Have you seen any of them?"

Polly chewed her bottom lip. "I don't know for sure – it's like I see something out of the corner of my eye. Especially at night, when I sneak downstairs to meet you. I suppose moonlight's better for seeing…" She stumbled over what to call them. She didn't like to call Rex a ghost, it wasn't the right word for him. He was too real and warm and funny to be a ghost. Ghosts were scary. "Things twitch and shimmer. Sometimes I'm sure the dogs in the portraits wag their tails, just a tiny bit."

"Exactly." Rex looked pleased with himself. "You see, I told you that more of us are waking."

"Yesterday, I thought the china dog in the Red Drawing Room was going to talk to me," Polly said, smiling as she remembered the dog's funny, squashed-up face. The dog was always the first thing she looked at whenever she

came into the room and she'd noticed the same thing with visitors. They would smile at the odd little blue figure and reach out to stroke it – and then of course they would remember that it was a valuable antique that they mustn't touch, and tuck their hands in their pockets.

"Could we go and wake him? Or her. It might be a she, I don't know." Then she shook her head and sighed. "There'll be loads of people in the Red Drawing Room. All the beautiful things that one of the Penhallows brought back from China are kept there. And Mum's in there all the time right now, as well. There are a lot of family portraits in that room, all from about the same time. She's trying to find out which of the Penhallows collected all these things for her exhibition. 'Treasures of China', she wants to call it."

Rex put his head on one side. "We couldn't

just borrow the china dog?"

Polly giggled. "Can you imagine what Mum would say if I just wandered in and asked? *It's OK, I'm just borrowing it for a minute…*"

Rex huffed. "Well, maybe not. I'm still not used to all these visitors in my house." He looked irritably at two elderly ladies who were walking past admiring the roses. One of them turned and blinked at Polly, a confused expression flitting over her face. But then she shook her head and walked on.

