Song of the River

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For Chris Jones, aka the Kernow Beaver,
and for all farmers who protect our future
by giving space for the wild things





Song of the River

Sometimes I feel like a river.

Sometimes I feel like I'm drowning in its sound.

The river rages deep inside of me

and I can't make it stop.

How can you stop a river?

How can you change its song?





CHAPTER 1

I never wanted to live here.

Before we moved to this valley, we lived in the city. Mum, Dad and me.

We lived in a warm flat at the top of a big building. The street was lined with trees and my bedroom overlooked the park. I walked to school every day and at weekends I played with friends.

Every Friday night, Dad and I got fish and chips from the chippy. We all sat in front of the telly eating them from the paper bags with loads of salt and vinegar.



Life was safe. I thought nothing could harm us. There was no warning that life would change. None at all.

But it did.

Dad was knocked off his bike by a lorry. He was in hospital for a long time, and then he died. And I couldn't do anything to stop it.

Dad dying felt like a hurricane sweeping through our lives, taking everything away. It left me and Mum holding on to each other among the wreckage. We knew nothing could be the same again.

Mum said she couldn't live in the city any more. She wanted to get away. She said she wanted to build us a new life. She said life was short and you had to follow your dreams.



She fell in love with a cottage and its garden. I remember her showing me the advert. "It's beautiful, isn't it, Cari?" Mum said to me.

I looked at the white cottage with its garden by a river. It was tucked into a valley at the edge of a small village, hills rising above it. It seemed a world away from our flat in the city.

"Can you imagine it?" said Mum. "We'll make the cottage our own riverside cafe. We'll have tables with red checked tablecloths, plates of carrot cake and flapjacks. There will be spotted teapots and teacups and scones with small pots of cream and jam."

She smiled as she thought about it. "We'll have customers sitting and chatting under the willow trees that line the riverbank. We can do it together. You and me."



And I remember looking at the advert – at the grassy lawn and the big old trees that dipped their branches into the sparkling river. But I couldn't see us being there somehow, because I knew Dad couldn't be there with us too.

But Mum bought the cottage. She sold our flat in the city and we moved in here three weeks ago, before the end of the summer term. I left all my friends and school behind.

But the cafe is Mum's dream. Not mine.

I didn't want to leave our old flat at all.

Because leaving the city meant leaving Dad behind too.

