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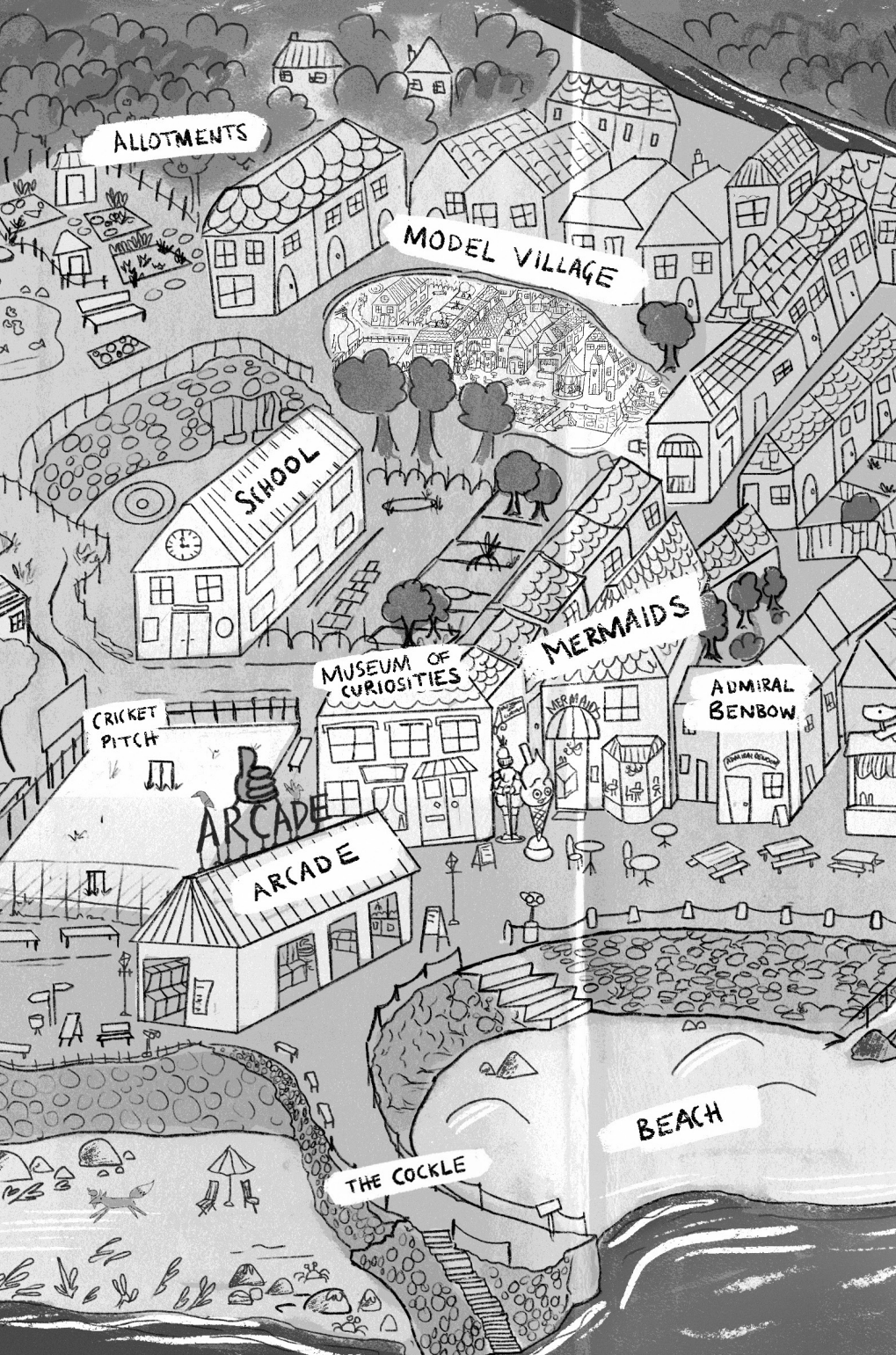
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DEAD GOOD DETECTIVES

JENNY MCLACHLAN

Illustrated by Chloe Dominique

Farshore


ALLOTMENTS
MODEL VILLAGE
SCHOOL
MUSEUM OF CURIOSITIES
MERMAIDS
ADMIRAL BENBOW
CRICKET PITCH
ARCADE
ARCADE
BEACH
THE COCKLE


HALFWAY HOUSE
CHURCH
GRAVEYARD
BLACK CAT CAFÉ
FISH + CHIPS
FISHING HUTS
CLIFFS
SAND DUNES
MERRY-GO-ROUND
SEA
FATHOM
MAPPED OUT BY SID JONES

CHAPTER ONE

I'm sitting in the graveyard with my best friend, Zen, when he spots a ghost.

'It's over there,' he says. 'In that tree!'

It's not a ghost. It's a plastic bag. But I don't say this to Zen. Instead I fix him with a serious look and say, 'Let's get it!'

We jump off the bench and run through the graveyard, laughing as we dodge between the graves. Out at sea, thunder rumbles and dark clouds cover the sky like a blanket. There's a storm coming, but we don't care. We've got a ghost to catch.

While Zen leaps around, his shirt untucked and his shoelaces undone, I find a long stick and start whacking the bag. Eventually it floats to the ground and Zen snatches it up.

'Is it dead?' I ask.



Zen rolls his eyes. 'Sid, it's a ghost. Of course it's dead.'

But it turns out it isn't because suddenly it attacks me and it doesn't stop until I pull the bag off Zen's hand and stuff it in my pocket.

Ghost hunt over, we go back to doing what we always do after school: sitting on the bench, eating crisps and making up stories about the people buried in the graveyard.

'OK,' I say, nibbling on a Wotsit. 'So Iris Tiddy over there was famous for her pilchard pasties and she was going out with Harry Thompson.' I point at a headstone with 'Harry Thompson, Gone Fishing!' engraved on it. 'She loved him because he caught the biggest pilchards in town.'

'It was an unusual relationship,' says Zen, 'because Harry was born one hundred and ten years after Iris died.'

I laugh, but my voice is drowned out by an enormous clap of thunder. It's followed by a flash of lightning.

'Awesome,' I say, as goosebumps prickle my arms. 'Zen, can you smell the lightning?'

'I can't smell anything,' he says. 'I'm too scared.'

And that's when I notice he's huddled down inside his hoodie. Zen's been scared of storms ever since his dad told





him about this man who's been struck by lightning seven times.

'Well, it smells amazing,' I say. 'Like snow and sparklers mixed together.'

'I'll take your word for it,' he says, then we watch as the black clouds roll closer. Soon fat drops of rain are speckling my face and glasses. When another bolt of lightning lights up the sky, Zen decides he's had enough.

'I'm going home,' he says, grabbing his rucksack. 'You coming?'

'No, I'll stay for a bit longer.'

'Suit yourself,' says Zen. Then he runs down through the graveyard pretending to be struck by lightning seven times as he goes. I join in too, and when he finally disappears through the gates I'm lying on the path.

I pick myself up and sit on the bench. And then . . . everything is quiet.

I keep very still, watching and listening. Snails stretch their way across wet headstones, rain falls and birds peck at the gravel. Water drips from the trees and the stream bubbles past me towards the sea.

I watch all this, then get up and wander along twisty



paths, trailing my fingers over lichen and picking my way between headstones that stick out of the ground like teeth. Some have fallen over completely and are lying, half buried, under moss and mud.

But not my mum's grave. That's perfect. The best in the whole graveyard.

I crouch in front of it and clear away some dead leaves. Dad made it himself by carving all Mum's favourite things into a tree stump: there's an owl, a fox, shells, beetles and a lightsaber. There's even a shark's fin rising out of the top. I touch the fin each time I visit and now it's smooth and shiny.

Not only is Mum's headstump (as Dad insists on calling it) the best in the graveyard, it's also got the best view. From up here I can see all of Fathom: the narrow streets and ice-cream-coloured houses; the seafront with its harbour wall that stretches out to sea like a giant snake. I can even see the model village where, right now, I know Dad will be sitting inside the red-roofed kiosk tidying up souvenirs and thinking about our tea.

It's fish-finger sandwiches tonight. My favourite.

I stand up and take one last look around the graveyard. Every bush and tree is swaying wildly with the wind.



Then I see something strange. There is a clump of ivy over by the sea wall that's standing dead still, not moving at all.

I wipe my glasses with a Wotsity finger. I've always known the pillar of leaves is there. I've squeezed behind it when I've played hide and seek with Zen and I've drawn it on my map. But this is the first time I've noticed what a strange shape it is . . . sort of boxy and *grave*-like.



CHAPTER TWO

Even though I should be going home, I decide to investigate the ivy and I walk into the oldest part of the graveyard.

People round here call this *Pirate Corner* because so many of the headstones have a skull and crossbones engraved on them. Zen's mum is a historian, and she says this was just something people did in the olden days, but Zen and I think there are loads of pirates buried up here.

I stand in front of the clump of ivy. Then, with rain trickling down my neck, I push my hands into the leaves. My fingers brush against cobwebs and tangled stems. There must be spiders in here, but I keep going until my fingers touch something cold and hard. I feel a shiver of excitement. There's definitely something in there!

I rip away the furry stems and glossy leaves until I can



see a patch of stone. It has letters engraved on it – a K and an I – and numbers too. It must be a headstone!

The dark clouds are making it hard to see, but I'm not going anywhere until I know who this grave belongs to. I need to put it on my map.

I tear away more leaves until I've uncovered the whole headstone. It's taller than me and tilting so far to one side that it's almost touching the sea wall. I feel a dip of disappointment when I realise it doesn't have a skull and crossbones engraved on it, but it does have a cherub's face and entwined leaves and faded writing.

I put my finger inside the first letter and I trace the words as I read them out loud.



It's nice, I think. Like a poem.

I just need to add Ezekiel's grave to my map, then I can go.

My map is my hobby. Some twelve-year-olds collect stickers or play football. Others, like Zen, build axolotl towns on Minecraft. (Actually, it might just be Zen who does this.) But I like to spend my free time making a giant map of Fathom.

I pull a Crunchie out of my rucksack and shove it on top of the grave, then find my pencil case. Next I take my map out of its plastic holder. It starts flapping in the wind so I press it against Ezekiel's grave and find the place where I'm standing right now.

It's as I thought. Where the grave should be, I've drawn a bush!

Before the rain can smudge anything, I rub out the bush and replace it with a headstone half the size of a baked bean. Then, using my brand-new red gel pen, I add the initials EK.

Just as I'm drawing the curly bit at the bottom of the K, lightning explodes from the sky. It lands so close that the hairs on my head stand on end and I get a massive whiff of sparklers.



Definitely time to go.

I put my map in its holder, shove everything back in my bag then run down through the graveyard.

'Bye, Mum!' I shout as I pass her grave.

'Bye, Sid!' I reply on her behalf, which I know is a pretty weird thing to do, but I do what I like in here. I carry on, hurtling past the mausoleum with its ugly gargoyles and clearing the stream with one jump.

But when I reach the gates I skid to a stop.

I've only gone and left my Crunchie on Ezekiel Kittow's grave!

I'm about to go back and get it when I hear a horrible scraping sound. It's like rocks being dragged over more rocks and it's coming from inside the graveyard. I stare as the wind whips the trees backwards and forwards and sheets of rain sweep over the graves, soaking my face and uniform.

Then I hear it again.

Scraaaaaape!

It's coming from the mausoleum. I stare at the funny little building. It's like something from a fairy tale: brambles cover the roof and stone creatures cling to the walls.



Right now the gargoyles are peering at me through smooth, pupilless eyes. Some have tails. Others snouts. All of them hold on to the crumbling walls with long pointed fingers.

Once the mausoleum had a door and a couple of windows, but these were bricked up years ago and now all I can see are pale squares showing where they used to be. Of course, Zen and I have often wondered what's inside: witches, ghosts, trolls . . .

Really, we haven't got a clue.

Scraaaaaape!

With a jolt I realise that a pinprick of light is gleaming on the front of the building. I wonder if someone's in the graveyard with me, shining a torch, but a look over my shoulder tells me I'm alone. And now the light is getting bigger! My heart thuds as I watch it shining in the darkness, stretching until it shows the outline of a door.

But that can't be right. The mausoleum doesn't have a door. It has bricks, and ivy covering those bricks . . . So why can I clearly see a door . . .

A door that's opening!





I make a sound that's halfway between a scream and a sob. A *scob*, I think, as I stumble backwards, tripping over a pot of fake flowers. Still scobbing, I crouch behind a stone angel. Run! hisses the sensible voice inside my head. No, Sid, stay where you are and watch! hisses another, much stupider voice.

Stupid wins. I squeeze my mouth shut and peer around the angel.

A golden mist has begun to roll out of the half-open door. It twists between the graves, licking the feet of cherubs. I hold tight to my angel as the mist comes creeping towards me.

Then, just when I think things can't get any weirder, a huge figure steps into the doorway, blocking the light. It's a man, and he's so tall he has to stoop to avoid hitting his head on the door. He has a bushy beard and he's wearing a long coat. Clutched in his hand is a cutlass.

Pirate, I think, because that's exactly what the man looks like. He's even got one of those triangle-shaped hats – a tricorn – on his head. My heart hammers as I watch him take a great gasping breath of air then turn to look into the graveyard. His dark eyes slide from left to right, then settle on my stone angel.

