THE RAGE OF THE SEA WITCH

Roland Chambers lives on a small tumble-down farm on Dartmoor with his family and other livestock – a dog, a cat, some pigs and chickens, and occasionally, wandering hill ponies.

The Adventures of Billy Shaman



The Rage of the Sea Witch

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For Susan, Nelly, Benjy and Sam







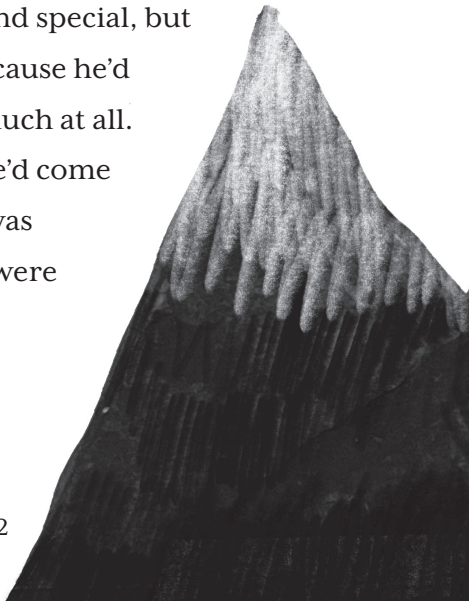
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I want to tell you the story of Billy Shaman, because if I don't tell it, nobody else will. As to why I think it's so important, or who I am, you shall find out shortly. Let's not be in a hurry. Let's just start at the beginning, in a strange house, where Billy's parents (very selfish people) were about to abandon him for the summer holidays, with nothing to do but wander its many rooms and walk in the garden.

'See if you can find the source of that river,' said his mum, pointing to a stream. 'Draw a map.'



‘Look at these orchids, Billy,’ said his dad, reaching into his pocket for a magnifying glass. Billy’s mum was a famous explorer. His dad was interested in flowers and bugs. Each had a nickname for the other. His dad was Rusty, because of his bright red hair. His mum was Spider, because of the ropes she used to scale mountains and to swing down into canyons. It made them sound exciting and special, but Billy was plain Billy, because he’d never done anything much at all. At school, the closest he’d come to having a nickname was ‘Billy S’, because there were three Billys in his class.



‘You can’t seriously be leaving me here for the whole holidays?’ grumbled Billy, knowing perfectly well that was exactly what was going to happen.

His parents ignored him.



‘See this one here?’ said his dad, kneeling in the grass. ‘That’s a little marsh orchid.’

His face was tender.

‘As soon as you’ve gone,’ Billy muttered, ‘I’m going to stamp on it.’

He wasn’t surprised his parents were leaving him alone. Every summer was the same, though the house was always different. Some had dungeons. Others had greenhouses.



Last year he'd stayed in an empty castle owned by a famous mountaineer. This year it was a sort of museum owned by a group of people interested in science, or flowers, or something. He'd already forgotten. He didn't care. His parents weren't even going on holiday with each other. His dad was flying to South America, his mum to Africa. Meanwhile, Billy was staying in the strange house on his own, with only the caretakers to talk to – Mrs Cript and her husband, Mr Cript, who looked like a gargoyle.



'I hate orchids,' he said bitterly.

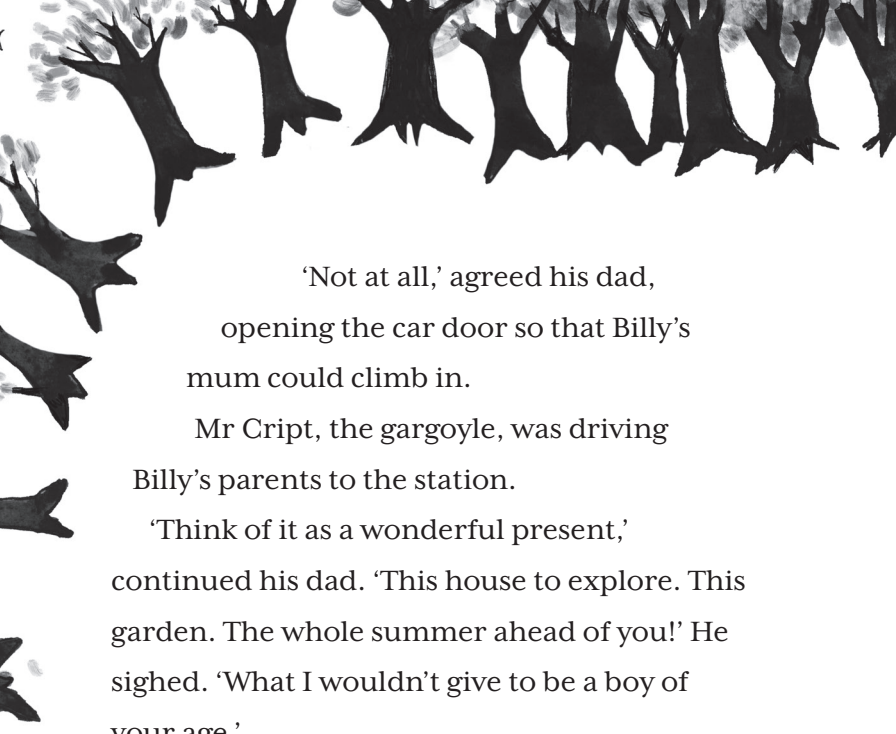
'Nonsense,' said his dad, putting his hand on Billy's shoulder. 'I know you don't mean it.'

'I do,' said Billy. 'I hate orchids and I hate you.'

'Oh, Billy,' said his mum.

'Don't be difficult,' said his dad.

'It's not as if we're deserting you,' said his mum, looking at her watch.



'Not at all,' agreed his dad, opening the car door so that Billy's mum could climb in.

Mr Cript, the gargoyle, was driving Billy's parents to the station.

'Think of it as a wonderful present,' continued his dad. 'This house to explore. This garden. The whole summer ahead of you!' He sighed. 'What I wouldn't give to be a boy of your age.'

'Come on, Rusty,' said Billy's mum.

'All right, Spider.'

Billy watched until the car vanished round a corner of the long drive and even the growl of the engine disappeared. He looked at the orchid at his feet, but he didn't feel like stamping on it any more. He could hear a bird singing, but he didn't know what sort of bird it was.



'Well, come in if you're coming,' said a voice, and when he turned, there was Mrs Cript. She didn't sound very encouraging. She looked as though she didn't care what he did, as long as she was not expected to do it for him.

So he picked up his suitcase and followed her inside.

