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Opening extract from

Ingo: The Deep

Written by

Helen Dunmore

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The Deep

by

Helen Dunmore

HarperCollins *Children's Books*

CHAPTER ONE

It's April, and the sun is warm. I'm sitting on a rock with Faro, way out at the mouth of the cove. The water below the rock is deep enough for Faro to swim, even now when it's low tide. I scrambled out over the jumble of black, slippery rocks to get here.

The sun glitters on the water. Everything's so bright and alive and beautiful. I'm back in Senara, back at our cove, back where I belong. Faro and I have been talking for ages. Not about anything special, just talking. That's one of the best things about Faro. We start a conversation and it flows so easily, as if we're picking up each other's thoughts. Sometimes we are.

Faro's tail is curled over the edge of the rock, and every so often he pushes himself off with his hands, and plunges into the transparent water to refresh himself. The muscles in his arms and shoulders are very powerful, and he can pull himself up again out of the water and on to the rock again without much effort.

Faro can't stay out of the sea for too long. The skin of his tail, which is usually as glistening and supple as sealskin, grows dry and dull. Faro says that if the Mer get too much sun on their skin it cracks, and then they get sun-sores which are hard to heal.

But I'm sure that Faro's able to stay out of the sea longer these days. Maybe it's something to do with Faro growing older, and more resilient...

My thoughts drift away. Luckily, Faro's one of those people you can be silent with, too. He hauls himself up on to our rock again, dripping and glistening.

A new summer is about to begin. For my brother Conor and me, there'll be days and days of swimming and sunbathing and long evening walks with Sadie. Sadie loves swimming, too, and with only her nose above the water she looks more like a seal than a Golden Labrador. In the evenings we'll build driftwood bonfires on the sand, and have barbecues where we cook mackerel which we've just caught off the rocks.

I don't want to think about the past. I want to live *now*. But no matter how hard I try, the memory of the flood in St Pirans keeps coming back. Floods change people, even after the water's gone down. You don't feel safe in the same way, once you've seen fish swimming in and out of the car-park gates, and houses like caves full of salt water.

Conor and I have never talked to anyone about what happened to us the night of the flood, when the Tide Knot broke. Nobody would believe us, anyway.

The Tide Knot is sealed again. The sea can't come raging in over the land.

But I shiver. I know Ingo's power.

We moved back to our cottage here in Senara in January. That was one good thing that came out of the flood: our rented house was an uninhabitable wreck. And Mum didn't want to live in St Pirans any more. She thought we'd be safer back in Senara, high up on the cliff.

If you've never been in a flood, you can't imagine what St Pirans looked like afterwards. The streets were full of mud, sand, rocks and every kind of rubbish. Wheelie bins, smashed cars, street signs, hundreds of plastic bags, soggy sofas, wrecked computers, TVs with shattered screens, filthy clothes and books turned to mush. There were waterlogged oranges everywhere. You wouldn't believe there could be so many oranges in one town. There were lots of dead fish too, stranded when the water fell.

The smell was the worst part. The whole town stank of rotting food, rotting seaweed, dead fish and sewage from broken pipes.

There were muddy tide marks on the houses higher up the hill, but ours was completely underwater during the flood so it was dirty all over. There was even a branch of seaweed sticking out of the chimney. Our front door hung off its hinges. All our possessions had swilled around in the flood water. Some had disappeared, and most of the rest were ruined.

Mum was really upset about losing our photo albums. Conor and I searched through piles of stuff, trying to find them, but in the end we had to give up. We did find just one framed picture of all the family, face-down in the fireplace under a tangle of seaweed. In the photo Mum and Dad were standing close together, with Dad's arm around me, and Mum's arm around Conor. It was taken a few years ago, and it was always Mum's favourite.

But after Dad disappeared, nearly two years ago now, she put the photo into a drawer.

The photo frame was smashed, but the photo wasn't damaged. Conor and I dried it carefully, then we gave it to Mum.

That was the only time Mum cried. But she said she was being stupid, because she had us safe and who cares about photo albums if you've got the real thing?

She hasn't got Dad, though. She still believes Dad drowned nearly two years ago. When she talks about him, it sounds as if that part of her life is closed. I'm scared that her boyfriend Roger is slowly and surely taking Dad's place.

I sit bolt upright at the thought, clenching my fists. Faro gives me a quizzical smile.

"Do you want to fight, little sister?"

"Sorry, Faro, it's not you, it's just something I thought of…"

"Watch me instead. I'm going to do underwater somersaults."

He dives in a pure, fluid line. I'll never, ever be able to dive like that, no matter how much I practise. And those somersaults – his body is a blur, whipping the water into foam. Round and round, faster and faster until he breaks the surface, tosses back his long hair and calls triumphantly, "Did you see that, Sapphire?"

"It was great, Faro."

He climbs out of the water again, and settles to watching sea anemones in a tiny pool on top of our rock. Faro can watch rock pools for hours. So can I usually, but not today – my thoughts keep pulling me back.

So we came back to our cottage in Senara. The Fortunes, who were renting our cottage, moved out when they heard we were homeless. They've rented another cottage nearby. Gloria Fortune came round on the first day we were back, with an apple pie. She knocked politely on our kitchen door as if she'd never lived here at all.

Everybody in Senara brought us furniture and food and clothes and blankets, as if we were refugees. It's true that all our clothes were gone, and we didn't have money to buy new ones, but I didn't want to wear other people's old stuff. Mum got an emergency payment from the insurance, so now at least we've all got new trainers and a set of new clothes each.

The restaurant where Mum worked has closed, like all the other restaurants in St Pirans. Mum's got a

temporary job at the pub here in Senara, four evenings a week.

We're home again. We are really home.

Sometimes I can hardly believe those words. I wake up and expect to find myself in the little bedroom with the porthole window in St Pirans. But here I am, in my own bedroom with the ladder leading up to Conor's attic. I feel something I can hardly describe. It's like when you panic because you're late and it's Monday morning, and then you remember that it's half-term. It's like the sun coming out. *Home.* All the sounds and smells of our cottage are just right. I know where all the scuffs on the furniture have come from. I know why the living-room door doesn't shut properly (because Conor smashed into it when he was learning karate). I know which birds sing in the tree outside the kitchen door. Every object in our cottage is like part of the family.

The Fortunes hadn't changed much inside our cottage, but they did loads of work in the garden, getting it ready for spring planting, just as Dad used to do. I'm planting stuff every day now, all the things Dad used to plant: carrots and lettuces and tomato plants up against a sunny southern wall, and some strawberry runners that Granny Carne gave me. She gave me lots of seeds, too. Granny Carne doesn't ever buy seed in packets, from shops. She saves it all from year to year, she says. She has seed you can't get nowadays.

Dating back to the sixteenth century, I expect, I wanted to say,

but I kept my mouth shut. You have to show respect to Granny Carne. Besides, it makes me dizzy when I try to think of all the time Granny Carne must have seen. All those lives coming and going.

Granny Carne went on carefully sorting seeds and putting them into brown wage envelopes marked in her strange, spiky handwriting. Finally she said, "If you can't feed a family from a plot of land as good as you've got here, there's something wrong with you."

She bent down and crumbled a clod of earth between her fingers. "Respect the earth and give it back what it needs, and it'll always feed you," she said. The birds sang loudly, as if they agreed. Granny Carne touched an apple branch. "He'll be covered with bloom this year," she said. "Look at the buds."

I hadn't noticed how many buds there were, fat and ready to burst into flower. Or were they really there before? I wasn't certain. I stared hard at Granny Carne's brown fingers, which looked as if they could bring life out of a dead branch if they wanted to.

"Yes, this branch will be bending down with fruit come September," murmured Granny Carne, and then she left the apple tree and went over to the rowan that grows near our door.

"Do you know why this tree's here, my girl?"

"No, Granny Carne," I answered meekly.

"Your ancestors had the good sense to plant the rowan close by their threshold, because they knew the

rowan keeps away evil. The rowan's a powerful tree, Sapphire, full of Earth magic. Never hurt the rowan, or cut it down without great cause. Let it live out its natural life in peace, and the rowan will always give you its protection."

I stared at the rowan with new respect. It's not a big tree. No tree grows tall up here because the winter gales blow them sideways and the salt stunts their growth.

"No evil shall pass this threshold," muttered Granny Carne, with one hand on the trunk of the rowan.

Evil? What evil does she mean? I thought, and fear jagged through me.

"Put your hand on the bark, my girl," Granny Carne urged me. I lifted my hand. But it felt as if a wall of solid air lay between me and the rowan. I pushed hard, but I couldn't get through it. My hand dropped to my side.

"I can't touch it, Granny Carne."

Her fierce owl eyes swept over my face. I thought she was going to be angry with me, but then her expression changed.

"Is it that you don't want to, or that you can't?"

"My hand won't. There's a barrier." I looked down at my hand nervously, and then back at Granny Carne.

"Granny Carne, it's not... it's not because *I'm* evil, is it? You said that no evil could get past the rowan tree. Is that why I can't touch it?"

Granny Carne's wrinkled face looked meditative. "No, my girl. Most likely it's the Mer blood in you that won't

touch the strong Earth magic of the rowan. Not that the Mer have much love for any tree."

"Why not?"

"Maybe because trees are rooted in the Earth. You remember this, my girl. It's not evil that separates Earth and Ingo, it's difference. But there are plenty who want to make evil out of difference. Be warned, Sapphire."

Her face was set and harsh. She stared into my eyes as if she was searching for something.

"Be warned, my girl," she repeated, and a shiver like the flood-memory shiver ran down my back. "Go careful, on Earth and in Ingo, when you meet those who seek to make their power out of the differences between us all." Her voice had risen, as the wind rises before a storm. Suddenly it dropped again. "I'll leave you to get on with your planting now," she said, and turned her back on me.

"Granny Carne—"

But she was gone, striding up the lane as if she were as young as Mum, and not as old as... as old as...

The rowan tree?

The hills?

Roger's living in our cottage, too. Well, not completely – he's got a studio flat in St Pirans as well. But he's spending most of his time here. He sits in Dad's chair at our kitchen table, just as I was always afraid he would.

Roger wants us to have a boat. He says it's crazy not to when we've got such a good mooring down at the cove. And Conor and I are both old enough to be sensible. The fact that our dad disappeared when he was out in the *Peggy Gordon* shouldn't be allowed to stop us from ever having a boat.

I know that this is Roger's opinion because I happened to hear him talking to Mum when I was digging in the garden and they were talking in the kitchen. Mum didn't agree.

"Give me time, Roger," she said. "I know you mean well, but I can't bear the idea of them taking a boat out on their own. The weather changes so fast. I can't risk losing them."

Roger said, "You hold on to those kids too hard, Jennie."

"Do you think I don't know that? But Sapphire can be so impulsive. So wild. So like…"

"Like her dad?"

"Yes."

"You can't change that. Sapphire's pretty tough. Look at the way those kids coped during the flood. God knows what they went through that night. They're good kids. You think about it, Jennie. I know where I could get them a boat. A real little beauty."

The trouble with Roger is that you can't hate him for long – even though I want to hate him, for not being Dad...

"You're thinking about that diver again," says Faro. I jump, and nearly fall off the rock. Faro grabs my arm.

"I wish you wouldn't break into my thoughts," I say crossly.

"You let me," he says.

It's true. I can keep Faro out of my mind completely if I want to. I only have to put up a mental portcullis, like the ones that guarded the entrance to castles in the olden days.

"Roger's not just 'that diver', Faro. He's my mum's boyfriend."

"Is he still your enemy?"

"I don't know. I used to hate him. I still *do* hate him sometimes..."

"I could deal with him for you," says Faro, as if it's the most normal thing in the world. "Next time he's in the sea, I can be there also." He flexes his shoulders, and the muscles ripple.

"*No*, Faro." Sometimes it seems that Faro might do anything.

He frowns darkly. "Your enemies are my enemies, Sapphire."

But just at that moment something distracts him. There's a flurry of foam on the calm water about a hundred metres out beyond the mouth of the cove, in deep water. Mackerel maybe. Or perhaps – perhaps even a dolphin…

Faro leans forward, watching the water intently as if

he's reading it. The surface breaks into a shower of glittering drops. I think I catch the shadow of a tail under the clear water.

"It's a dolphin, Faro."

"No. It's one of my people."

My heart thuds. One of the Mer. One of Faro's people.

"It's not my sister," murmurs Faro. "No, it's a signal. I must go."

He turns to me, his eyes glowing with excitement. "Wait here. Don't move."

And in a second he's gone, pushing himself off the rock, slipping beneath the surface in one smooth, strong dive. I watch him swim deep, his tail driving him out towards the mouth of the cove, and then he disappears.

I wait. I know he'll come back. Faro always does everything he says. I look up and see a scud of cloud coming in, covering the sun. It's past low tide now. Soon the water will be rising. I mustn't stay too long or I'll get caught by the tide. Soon it'll be time to climb the steep, familiar path over the rocks, back up the cliff to home.

Conor's in St Pirans, helping our friends Patrick and Rainbow to clean out their cottage, which is right on the beach. The full force of the flood hit it, and they've lost everything, even the windows and doors. Everything inside their cottage was smashed to pieces.

Conor took Sadie with him because Rainbow was desperate to see her again. She loves Sadie. Thinking about Rainbow makes me feel guilty because I haven't

seen much of her since we moved back here. She wants to be friends, and I want to be friends, too, but it's complicated. I keep thinking, would Rainbow still want to be my friend if she knew the truth about me? If she knew that I had Mer blood and half belonged to Ingo? If she could see me sitting on this rock, now, with Faro? I'm afraid Rainbow might blame me for what Ingo did to St Pirans that night.

It's all too complicated. I'm not going to think about it any more. Mum and Roger are buying stuff over in Porthnance. I didn't use to be allowed to come down to the cove without Conor, but I'm older now, and Mum hasn't said anything about it since we've been back. And anyway I'm not on my own. I'm with Faro. No one could keep me safer in the sea than Faro.

At this moment, Faro's head breaks the surface, sleek and shining. He pushes back his hair.

"Sapphire! Come quickly!"

"The water's freezing, Faro. It's only April. I've got human blood as well as Mer blood, remember? I'll get hypothermia."

Faro shakes his head impatiently. "Come *on*, Sapphire. I'm not talking about the swimming that humans do. Come to Ingo with me."

To Ingo. I won't feel the cold there. The water will envelop me, and feel like home. I'll dive beneath the surface, through the skin of the sea, and my lungs will burn just as Faro's burn when he enters the Air. But not

too badly. Like Faro, I don't feel the change so much these days. The sea change. A thrill of excitement runs through me. But I still hesitate. Time in Ingo isn't like our time. I might be in Ingo and think only an hour had passed, while it could be a whole human day. Mum has had enough fear and worry. Conor and I haven't been into Ingo since the night of the flood. We've kept close to home.

"Quickly, Sapphire! My friend is here, waiting. There's an Assembly."

"What's an Assembly? Is it like a Gathering?"

My heart quickens again. When I was in Ingo with Faro last autumn I saw crowds of the Mer in the distance, their beautiful cloaks of shell and net glimmering around them, on their way to a Gathering. It sounded like a wonderful party, but Faro wouldn't let me go. I didn't even get close enough to speak to the Mer. But maybe this time I will. I'll get to know Faro's people. Maybe I'll have a cloak, too—

"No," says Faro, "a Gathering is for pleasure. An Assembly is more... more serious. My friend has been sent to summon you."

"Summon me!"

I stand up on the rock, and draw myself to my full height. "*Summon* me, Faro? Who is he to summon me?"

Faro looks up at me, and I look down. I feel the power in him. Mer power, strong as a magnet. But I feel the power in me, too, rising to meet his. I'm his equal. We

stare at each other, and neither of us looks away.

At last Faro says, "They're asking you to come, Sapphire. They need you there."

"That's not what 'summon' means, Faro."

"Maybe that was the wrong word. Don't be angry." A persuasive smile flickers on Faro's face. "Come, Sapphire. Come."

I look behind me. The white sand of the beach, and then rocks and boulders rising almost to the lip of the cliff. The way home. I look back at Faro's face, and then beyond him to where I think I see a shadow waiting, deep in the water. One of Faro's friends. The Mer want me to go to an Assembly.

Maybe this means that the Mer are letting me deeper into Ingo now. An Assembly... If it's for something serious, as Faro says, maybe Saldowr will be there. Surely they'd need him there, because Faro says Saldowr is the wisest of the Mer. I want to see him again. I hope the wound in his shoulder has healed. He was so badly hurt in the struggle to seal the Tide Knot again that I was afraid he would die.

So far, even though I've been to Ingo many times, I've only met Faro and his sister Elvira and Saldowr, and seen the shadows of other Mer swimming in the distance. There are bound to be a lot of them at the Assembly. Hundreds, maybe. And I'll meet them face to face.

Excitement pulses in me like a rising tide. Senara, Mum, Conor, Sadie are already shrinking in my mind.

They're just as clear, but small and distant, like images at the wrong end of a telescope. Ingo is holding out its arms to me.

"I'll come," I say, and I swing my arms forward, and dive from the rock.