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Opening extract from

Brock

Written by

Anthony McGowan

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To Mark Cass, Geoff Gnaggs, and the other friends of my youth in Sherburn in Elmet, in the West Riding of Yorkshire

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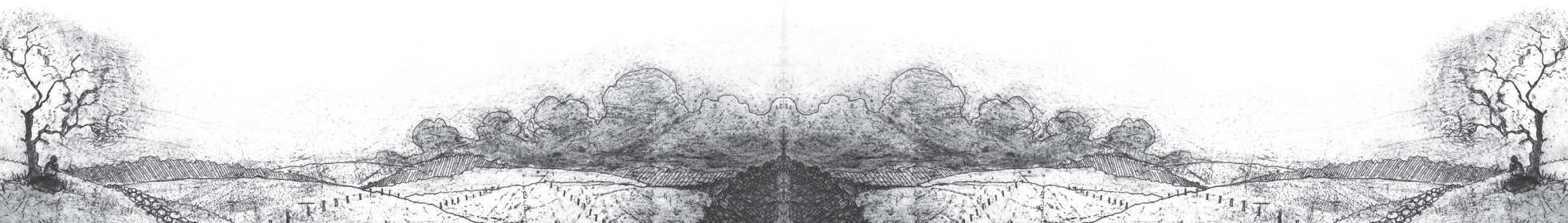
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One

The old male shifted in his sleep. He was fighting again those long-ago battles, back in the days when his teeth were still sharp. Those teeth were worn down to brown stumps now, but once every living creature feared them.

He remembered the big fox he had killed in a clash over earthworms. Then there was the mink, a cruel invader from other lands. It had come down in search of his young. That was a fight that he would not forget – the deep puncture marks in his throat helped him remember.



But before then, back when he was a kit, there was the time when men had come with dogs and they had killed and killed. Only he had got out, carried away in the mouth of his mother. She had put him in a safe place, and gone back for the rest of her litter. But she had never returned, and so he had been left alone in the wide world.

Somehow he had survived, with worms and fallen fruit for food. The first winter was hard, and he had frozen and he had starved. But he had endured.

And now here he was. The old king, asleep in his sett. Strong still, but fading.

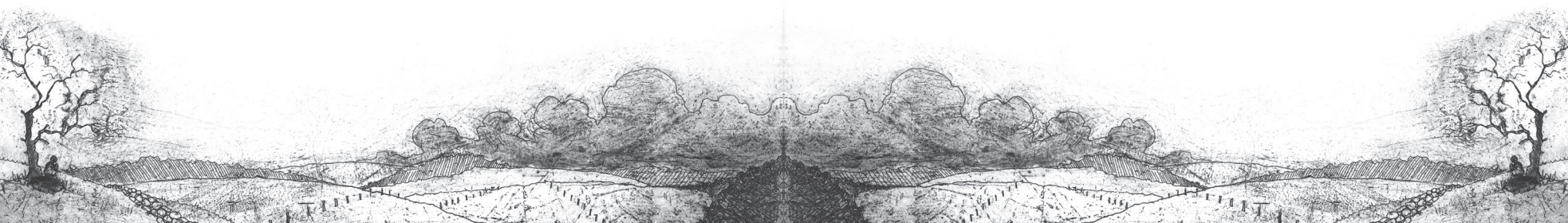
But his memories scurried back to the men and the dogs, and all of a sudden his senses came awake.

The scent was strong. And now so were the sounds. He felt the fear run through the tunnels

and sleeping chambers, and he knew that the time had come.

He stretched himself.

Yes, there was still one last fight in those old bones.



Two

"Wake up, Nicky, wake up!"

I didn't want to wake up. I wanted to stay asleep. And even more than that, I wanted to stay in my bed where it was warm. Ever since the boiler bust the mornings had been hell. In the night your breath would freeze on the inside of the window so you could write your name in it with your fingernail.

"Wake up, Nicky, wake up. You've gotta come."

It was Kenny, of course. Kenny's my brother. People say he's simple, and he is. I know you're not meant to say 'simple-minded' any more, but it seems to me that it's the exact right word for Kenny. He hasn't got all the stuff going on that messes up other people's heads. He isn't always trying to work out the angles, or how to stitch you up. He thinks other people are as kind as he is, and he only has one idea at a time.

His brain was starved of oxygen when he was getting born, so now he has what they call learning difficulties. But, like I say, I think 'simple' is better and kinder and truer than talking about 'difficulties' or 'disabilities'.

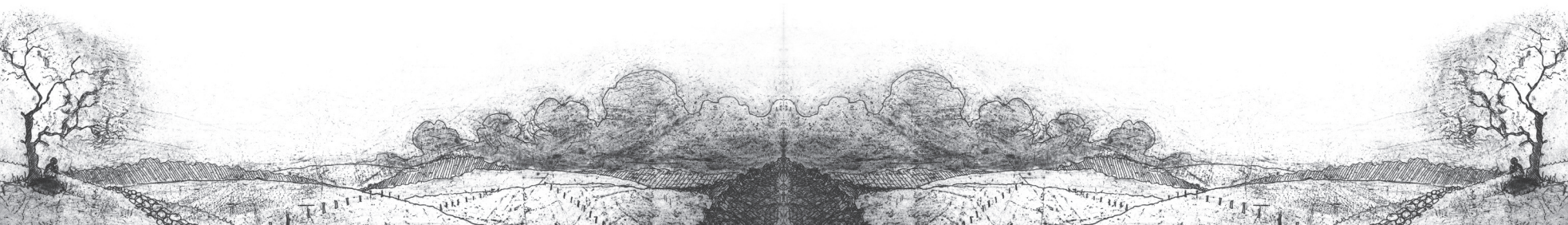
Sometimes I wish I was simple, and happy, like Kenny.

"C'mon, Nicky," Kenny pleaded.

I half opened an eye and checked the window. It was still as black as death outside.

That half-open eye was my first mistake.

"Ha!" said Kenny, and his voice crackled with joy. "I saw you. You're awake. C'mon, we've got to go."



"Get lost, Kenny," I said. "It's too early, and it's flipping freezing."

But it was no good. He yanked me out of bed, and before I knew what was happening I was pulling my kecks on.

"What the heck is this all about, Kenny?" I said. I was trying not to sound angry. You can't sound angry with Kenny or he gets upset.

"Just come on," he said. "It's good."

