Helping your children choose books they will love

I reading

Lovereading4kids.co.uk is a book website created for parents and children to make choosing books easy and fun

Opening extract from

Really Weird Removals.Com

Written by

Daniela Sacerdoti

Published by

Kelpies an imprint of Floris Books

All Text is Copyright © of the Author and/or Illustrator

Please print off and read at your leisure.

Lovereading4kids.co.uk

Kelpies is an imprint of Floris Books

First published in 2012 by Floris Books
© 2012 Daniela Sacerdoti



This book is also
available as an eBook

Daniela Sacerdoti has asserted her right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 to be identified as the Author of this work

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced without the prior permission of Floris Books, 15 Harrison Gardens, Edinburgh
www.florisbooks.co.uk

This publisher acknowledges subsidy from Creative Scotland towards the publication of this volume

British Library CIP data available
ISBN 978-086315-902-2

Printed in Poland

1. WEIRD THINGS HAPPEN WHEN IT'S WINDY

Alistair Grant's *Scottish Paranormal Database*

Entry Number 411: Vanishing lighthouse keepers
Type: Supernatural wind
Location: Muckle Flugga Lighthouse
Date: December 1910
Details: The three keepers of a lighthouse vanished suddenly, leaving no trace. Their log reported heavy storms in the few days before their disappearance; however, there was no sign of bad weather anywhere else on the coast.

My dad has hundreds of books. The walls of his study are covered in bookshelves, all the way up to the ceiling. He keeps books in unsteady towers all around his computer, under his desk, on the window sills. Big books and small ones, ancient ones and brightly coloured ones, fresh from the Eilean Bookshop down the road. If there's anything you need to know, just have a rummage in my dad's bookshelves, and sooner or later you'll find what you're looking for. I do that all the time. When it's pouring outside, when I'm bored or just because I feel like it. I go into my dad's study while he's writing, quiet as a mouse, and I read. My dad doesn't even notice I'm there.

That happens a lot. I mean, my dad not noticing I'm there.

I found a book in my dad's study once; it said that windy weather makes people go a bit crazy, that it makes strange things happen and, if it's blowing strong, you're better off staying inside.

Well, I live on Eilean, an island off the west coast of Scotland: I'm pretty used to the wind blowing all year long. But today, it's blowing us off our feet. The sun is shining, the sky is cornflower blue, but this gale is whirling and hurling around the windows, howling as if it was trying to get in. The sea looks choppy and frayed, all foamy on top.

I can't follow the book's advice and stay inside. I need to be at shinty practice by half past four, and I'm running late.

"There you are darling, don't forget your hat." My mum hands me my kit – the changing bag and the caman. I can smell a cloud of essential oils all around her. It's a good smell. It's my mum's smell.

Her name is Isabella. She has wavy brown hair all around her face like a halo, and blue-grey eyes with little brown speckles in them. She wears flowing skirts and dangly earrings, and lives in a world of her own, occasionally stepping into ours to look after my sister and me.

Mum and Aunt Shuna have spent the whole morning burning lavender oil and meditating in my mum's room, with my little sister Valentina sitting cross-legged between them. Like my dad, my mum has a room of her own, but it's not called a study, she calls it a "sanctuary".

The yellow sign outside says:



Even though she's in a world of her own, helping people with her massages and healing and all those weird things she does, Mum always knows what we're doing, and what we need. She remembers all the important but small details, our classes and birthday parties and parents' nights, and, if we need her, she always seems to materialise at our shoulder.

My dad was born and grew up on the island, but my mum comes from down south. Here on Eilean, "down south" usually means England. But my mum comes from a lot more *south* than that. She used to speak Italian, but now she speaks English, though a bit differently than the rest of us.

Time to go to shinty. I *love* playing shinty. I wouldn't miss practice for the world, not even on a windy day like this.

I open the door, and it hits me. The salty wind is in my mouth, my hair, it gets inside my clothes. It feels... exciting. As if something is about to happen.

"Adiiiiiiiiiiiil!" I wave to my friend across the road. The wind is so loud, I have to shout. I run to him and we walk down past the brightly coloured houses, a red one, a yellow one, a blue one. My hometown is amazing that way: it's like a rainbow. There are always a lot of tourists taking pictures of the houses and boats and seals.

Adil and I put our heads down and walk on against the wind, squinting, our hands in our pockets. When we finally make it to the sports centre, we run in quickly and stop for a second to catch our breath again.

"Phew!" says Adil. His black hair is standing on end, and he's trying to flatten it.

"What a day. To think the forecast said mild and sunny," says Lorna, from the counter. "I'll be surprised if anyone else turns up for shinty practice today."

I think she might be right. Shinty is played outside, on the grass. We'll be blown away. We are well used to windy, but this is something else.

I'm getting changed into our blue-and-yellow strip, pulling up my stripy socks, my caman leaning against the bench beside me, when Adil says just about the last words I want to hear.

"Gary must be here too. Great." He points to a Nike sports bag under the bench just beside us. "I was hoping he'd stay home, with this wind... But no chance."

For some reason, Gary McAllister has decided to make my life hell. I'm not sure why. He's so good at it, and he's been doing it so long that nobody besides Adil seems to notice. The thing is, Gary and I grew up together, we live in the same town, we go to school together, we play shinty together and we go to Scouts together. There's no way to escape him.

I once tried to talk about it with my dad, and it looked like he was listening, but after a long silence he just said, "Ok then," and resumed his writing. I don't think he heard a word. He was thinking about his book, I expect. My dad's books are read all over the world.

He writes about a little boy who travels in time. His name is Reilly. He's a hero. He's incredibly strong and he's got magical powers.

I'm nothing like him. I'm just Luca, the invisible son.

I don't want to worry my mum, so I try to manage the whole Gary thing on my own. Adil, my best friend, is on my side, but Gary is a lot bigger than him. He's a lot bigger than any of us.

My legs are like lead as I walk towards the door. I'm dreading it.

I open it carefully, expecting another salty blast of wind. But... nothing. The air is still. The little corner of sea I can see in the distance is as smooth as oil. The wind has gone all of a sudden. It must have been an Atlantic storm passing over us and moving on towards the mainland. But there were no grey clouds, none of the other signs that come with storms. It's strange.

Mr MacDonald waves at us from the far end of the pitch. There are only a few boys around him, but probably more will come when they work out the wind has subsided.

Gary has a smirk on his face. He's clearly delighted to see me.

"Pull up your socks, Luca," he says, waiting for me to look down, so he can slap me under the chin.

I ignore him. He'll have to do better than that.

"Right, settle down boys. Not enough of us to play a match, so we'll just practise. Each of you, get a ball. To the hail and back. And... Go!"

The rest of the team turn up after about twenty

minutes, so we play a game, five boys in each mini-team, and one sitting out.

The caman is heavy, which means players have to be careful with it. In spite of all precautions, though, accidents can happen. A lot of accidents seem to happen to *me* when Gary is playing. He's so good at it, so quick, only he and I notice. I often go home bruised, and nobody has been aware of any foul play.

Half an hour later, I've been stamped on, tripped and hacked, and I'm furious. I grit my teeth. I won't give up. I love this game and I won't stop playing because of him.

"Your mum is a nutcase," he whispers, brushing against me.

Last straw.

Before I know it I'm rolling on the ground with him, with Mr MacDonald shouting things I can't hear. It's as if the wind is roaring in my ears again, though all around me the air is still and calm. I can see nothing but Gary's face.

Ten minutes later, we're standing in the changing rooms in front of a very disappointed Mr MacDonald.

"What happened? What brought this on? You two are good friends..."

Yeah, right. Just because we grew up together, everybody assumes we're the best of friends. Nobody seems to detect Gary's cruel streak.

As we stand there I catch a glimpse of our reflections in the mirror on the wall opposite. Gary is tall, sturdy, with brown hair, a freckled face and little piggy eyes. He's about a foot taller than me. I'm slim, with fine

blond hair and blue eyes. I look like a feather could knock me down.

On the other hand, I'm a very fast runner, the fastest in my school. I'm good at shinty because I slip between people and I get to the hail before they can get a hold of me. But when it comes to strength...

"I want to speak to your parents. I'll phone Duncan..." (that's my dad) "...and Alan tonight. We need to put an end to this."

"I don't think that's necessary," says Gary in his oily fake-reasonable voice. "It was just a silly argument. It's all sorted now." He offers me his hand. His eyes glint with malice.

"Is that true, Luca?" asks Mr MacDonald.

"Yes. Yes, of course." I take Gary's hand and shake it. It feels clammy and horrible. As long as my parents don't know I've been fighting. It's too humiliating.

"Sorry, Luca," says Gary. His voice is dripping with dishonesty. He doesn't mean it for a minute. Mr MacDonald is no fool, he's been teaching for many years and I know he's suspicious of Gary, but I don't think he can quite pinpoint why. "By the way, my mum is coming to see your mum today. She says your mum is great at what she does, even if you don't always understand what she says!" He gives me a big smile, and then turns to Mr MacDonald with a wide-eyed innocent look.

"I've never had a problem understanding her," says Mr McDonald coldly. "Now go, Gary, we're finished here,.

As Gary goes to get ready for his shower, Mr MacDonald puts a hand on my shoulder.

"Are you ok?"

"Of course. Yes," I lie.

"Don't mind him. He talks a lot of nonsense." His dark eyes are full of warmth. He probably knows what it's like for my mum, because part of his family is from Jamaica. People who don't know him still ask where he's from when they see his black skin. But Mr MacDonald was born on Eilean and is an islander through and through.

Maybe I should tell him about Gary... Would he understand?

But I hesitate, and the moment passes. He walks away, and I gather my stuff quickly. I don't want to be left alone with Gary. I'm not afraid, it's not that. I just don't want another fight.

Adil is waiting for me at the entrance of the sports centre.

"Hey..."

"Hey."

"You in trouble?"

I shake my head.

"That... halfwit!" Adil is the only boy I know who never, ever uses bad language. This is because if his father hears he's been swearing, he'll skin him alive. Adil's parents are very strict. So he comes out with old people's expressions, like "good heavens" and "holy mackerel". It cracks me up.

"He'll get tired of it." I try to sound unconcerned, but the whole thing is really getting me down.

We walk along the main street, past the coffee shop, past the tiny grocery shop, past the Eilean Bookshop

with my dad's books displayed in the window – *Reilly's Egyptian Adventure*, *Reilly in Transylvania*, *Reilly and the Stone Age Hunters* – with blown up cut-outs of Reilly in his various incarnations. My dad's virtual son. Reilly would know how to tackle Gary, for sure. No, Gary would never have picked on him in the first place.

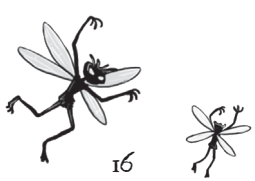
The bookshop door is open and a lanky tall man in a tweed suit is standing at the counter talking to Kim, one of the shop assistants.

"...Duncan Grant?" she's saying. That's my dad's name. I prick up my ears. "Sorry, I can't say. A lot of people come to look for him... you know, fans... He asked me not to tell folk where he lives."

"OF COURSE, OF COURSE," replies the man. He's incredibly loud, though his tone is friendly. "But I'm not a fan, I'm his *brother*," he booms.

Brother? Wait a minute. My dad has no brothers. He has a sister, Aunt Shuna, who lives with us. That's it.

Remember that book I told you about? The one that says weird things happen on windy days – it looks like it could be right.



2. I HAVE AN UNCLE?

Alistair Grant's *Scottish Paranormal Database*

Entry Number 167: A spell of exile
Type: Fairy
Location: Outer and Inner Hebrides
Date: First recorded April 1761
Details: Local fairies can cast a spell over islanders, compelling them to leave the island by any means possible. The first such incident recorded was in April 1761, when a crofter named Alexander Fraser left Harris on a boat and disappeared at sea. The latest recorded incident occurred in December 1995, when an unfortunate woman known only as "Sharon" left Benbecula on a boat and was never seen again. Many more such incidents are recorded in Skye, Barra, Lewis and Seil.

"Duncan's brother? Well, that changes everything. Come and I'll show you the Grants' house."

Kim and the man step out of the shop, and I crouch behind the postcard stand, dragging Adil with me. I peer between the cards. He *does* look like my father. Blond, a reddish beard, blue eyes, the same spaced-out look, like he's short-sighted.

"Goodness, now I see you, you're his *twin*!" Kim echoes my thoughts. She points along the road. "You want the blue house, just five doors down. If nobody answers, go round the back – there's a narrow alleyway beside the house, with a sign that says "Little Moon".

Walk down the alley, you'll see a wee door, that's where Isabella works."

"It's still the old Grant house – where William and Beth Grant lived," the man booms.

"I wouldn't know; I'm a newcomer. I think so, though..."

Kim has hardly finished talking before he has walked on.

I blink once, twice. There's something perched on his shoulder, a bit like a parrot on a pirate's shoulder... Something black and transparent at the same time. Like a little stormy cloud.

I wait a few seconds for him to walk on a bit.

"Wait a minute. If he's Duncan's brother, how come he doesn't know where he lives?" I hear Kim muttering to herself. And then, "Adil? What are you doing behind the postcards?"

"Apologies!" I turn to see Adil standing up, his cheeks on fire. "I was doing my laces up."

The worst liar in the universe.

Luckily Kim shrugs her shoulders and walks back into the shop before she can see me. I don't want to talk about this uncle of mine until I've met him.

I wonder if my mum knows of his existence...

We slip into the alleyway beside my house and hide around the corner as the tall man strides ahead into our courtyard. I can still see the shadow on his shoulder. It must be some weird light effect. Maybe there's something wrong with my sight, or maybe it's a speck of dust. I blink repeatedly, squint, rub my eyes. Nothing changes. It's still there.

He finds the door and the sign on top.

"Isabella!" He calls, with his booming voice. "ISABELLA!"

Well, he's not shy, that's for sure.

Mum comes out. She stops in her tracks.

"Alistair? Is it really you?"

"It is indeed me. Sorry to land on you like this, but my house is infested and I have nowhere else to go."

Infested? Rats, mice, cockroaches? Where on earth does this man live?

I notice my mum's face. She looks flustered and happy to see him and worried, all at the same time.

"Oh Alistair. I don't know..."

"Where's Duncan? Don't tell me. He's in his study. Writing. Luca, come out."

He says it just like that, loudly, all in one breath. Adil and I freeze.

"Luca?" says Mum. "Come out from where?" she asks.

"He's round the corner. Look."

My mum comes and sticks her head out the gate.

"What are you doing? And why are you still in your shinty strip?"

"Well..." I begin, walking into the courtyard.

"Apologies, Mrs Grant," interrupts Adil, and runs away in a panic. It's all too much for him.

"Sorry, Mum. I heard *him* telling Kim he was my uncle."

"He is. This is your Uncle Alistair."

He looks a bit like Doctor Who, tweed suit, bow tie and all, except he's blond. And *very* loud.

"You've got something on your shoulder," I say, and his eyes widen. He looks at me like he can truly see me now. My mum looks at me too, then him, then me again.

"Luca, go get yourself something to eat. We'll come in a minute."

"*What* is he seeing?" I hear her saying as I step inside.

Their voices fade as I walk into my mum's treatment room. It's such a nice place. It makes you feel all relaxed and peaceful, just being in it. Every day there's a different oil burning and a different scent in the air: today, it's vanilla. There's a soft glow from the candles and the oil burners, and a table lamp with an orange cloth on it to give the room a sunshiny sort of light. On the wall opposite the entrance there's a painting of an American Indian woman and a wolf above a waterfall, topped with a little rainbow. For some reason my Aunt Shuna calls it "Morag and her poodle". Shuna teaches art at Eilean High School, so she knows a thing or two about painting.

I breathe in the vanilla for a bit, deeply. Then I open the door into our house and... I trip over something and nearly fall flat on my face. The something says, "Hey!"

My sister Valentina is sitting cross-legged in front of the door, with her rabbit, Petsnake, in her arms. Yes, you read right, Petsnake. You see, she really, *really* wants a pet snake, but my mum and dad keep saying no. She hasn't stopped trying, though. She even asked her teacher to tell my parents that a pet snake would greatly help her emotional development, but for some reason, the teacher refused.

"Ouch! What are you DOING?"

"I was just hanging out with Petsnake and then I heard shouting. What's going on?"

"Our uncle is here."

"We don't have an uncle!"

"We do *now*."

"What do you mean?"

"Shhhhhh!!!!" I can hear voices rising again. "I better go see what's going on. Who's looking after you?"

"I'm looking after *myself*!" she says, indignantly.

I know I should say my sister's annoying and she's a pest and all the things boys usually say about their little sisters, but the truth is, Valentina's a laugh. She's a bit spacey and eccentric. She loves walking barefoot; she has long blonde hair, which she refuses to tie back; and big brown eyes. She's also very, very sharp.

She has a passion for animals. But not ponies and kittens and puppies like most little girls. No, Valentina's into weird and scary creatures. My dad got her a subscription to *Reptiles of the Americas* (I suspect it has three subscribers: Valentina, the editor and the editor's mum), which she reads avidly and cuts up to make scrapbooks. She's into cryptozoology. You probably don't know what it is – I didn't either. It's about animals nobody knows about, like the Loch Ness monster, the Yeti, unicorns and stuff like that. She has a magazine for that too. I flicked through an issue of it once; it was all about strange armadillo-things that live in the lava of a Peruvian volcano...

"Your sister's looking after herself *and* me!" My Aunt Shuna comes into the hallway, her sunny smile bringing out her dimples, her green eyes full of fun. She doesn't

look like my dad at all, though she's his sister – apart from the blonde straight hair, which I've inherited.

"Come and have a snack. You're still in your shinty gear? Go and get changed then..." She stops suddenly. She's heard his voice. My uncle's.

"Alistair?"

He comes through the door. Aunt Shuna looks like she's just seen Medusa – you know, that creature from Greek mythology with snakes on her head – the one who petrifies you if you look into her eyes.

She stands still for a second. And then they hug really tight, for ages.

My mum is smiling, and Valentina is staring at this stranger who looks a lot like her dad.

"You must be Valentina."

"Yes."

"I'm your Uncle Alistair."

"Ok." She looks at him for a wee while, then she tips her head to one side and says, "You've got something on your shoulder."

Uncle Alistair gives her the same look he gave me. Like he's truly *seen* her.

"They can both See..." he says. His eyes are shining.

"What. Do. You. Think. You. Are. DOING!"

A Dad-shaped iceberg has walked down the stairs. His voice has frozen everyone.

"Duncan, I was going to tell you..." Mum begins.

"I want you out."

"He's got nowhere else to go..."

"What? He's got a perfectly good house in London! He knows I don't want him near my children, ever!"

My dad can be scary. He's very tall, unlike me (I take after my mum where height is concerned) and he has a nose like a Roman statue – you know, big and straight. He hardly ever speaks to us, so when he does, we listen: we've either done something really, really amazing or we are in big trouble.

"Not in front of the children!" says Mum. I'm not sure why she says that, because Valentina is a tough cookie and I'm not really a child, I'm twelve.

"No. You're right, Isabella. Let's go up to the study," says Alistair, unfazed. I can see where Valentina inherits her cool. Mum and I get all emotional about things, while Valentina is unflappable. My dad is something else entirely – he normally doesn't notice what's going on or, if he does, he ignores it in case it interferes with his writing.

"We're not going anywhere. I want you on your way back to London as soon as you can find a boat."

"Duncan!" and "Dad!" shout four indignant voices.

"I'm not listening. I want..."

"I don't care what *you* want!" says a voice that is so used to being sweet that when it's not it sounds all funny. Like a bird barking. It's my sunny mellow Aunt Shuna. We all stare at her. "We haven't spoken to our brother for twelve years, Duncan. He hasn't had it easy since... you know what." She looks away.

"How do you know?" asks Dad. His voice is icy. Visions of penguins, igloos, polar bears come into my head.

"What do you mean?"

"How do you know he hasn't had it easy, if you haven't spoken for twelve years?"

Icicles, Eskimos, sleighs. Not the cheery Christmas ones.

"We have spoken, sometimes," says Alistair. He and Shuna look at each other, an incredible warmth in their eyes. The ice in my head melts away.

"I want you to stay in Eilean, Alistair. And if you can't stay here, you and I will find somewhere else in the village to live," says my aunt.

"NO!" Mum, Valentina and I shout in unison.

"I have no choice. Alistair, come on. Children, you can come and see us... whenever... you..." Her voice breaks.

Oh no, tears. I HATE to see people crying.

"If she goes, Duncan, I'll go too!" cries Mum.

"And me! And Luca too!" Valentina adds, holding on to my sleeve just to make sure.

I'm quiet. I don't actually want to leave my dad. He looks a bit taken aback. I don't think he was expecting this total *mutiny*.

"At least listen to Alistair," pleads Mum.

"It seems I have no choice."

He turns, as cold as a loch in winter, and walks solemnly up the stairs. Uncle Alistair follows, and the little shadow follows him. It's not on his shoulder now, it's walking by itself, and it looks a lot like...

Wait. A little girl? Seriously? I try to take a better look, but she blurs, and she's gone. I must have been dreaming. I blink again. Nothing.

I can't go and listen at the door, they'll know. So I can't tell you what they said to each other. But I can tell you what *we* say, my mum, Aunt Shuna, Valentina and I.

"Come to the kitchen, for a snack and a chat. Mum's standard answer to emergencies is to give us food.

Valentina is still looking towards the stairs. She does that sometimes, staring into a corner even though there's nothing there. A bit like cats do.

"Come on, darling," says Mum, and Valentina reluctantly walks into the kitchen with us.

We all sit around the table with the red polka-dot oilcloth on it. Valentina and I have Nutella on toast; Mum and Shuna have a cup of tea.

"When we're finished, can I go and play with the wee girl?" says Valentina all of a sudden.

"Who?"

"The wee girl that came with Uncle Alistair. The one without shoes."

