

## Sample translation

Rotfuchs

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Nina Scheweling

### **The Mystery of Darkmoor Hall**

**- The Hunters of the Vanished Winds (vol. 1)**

Rotfuchs

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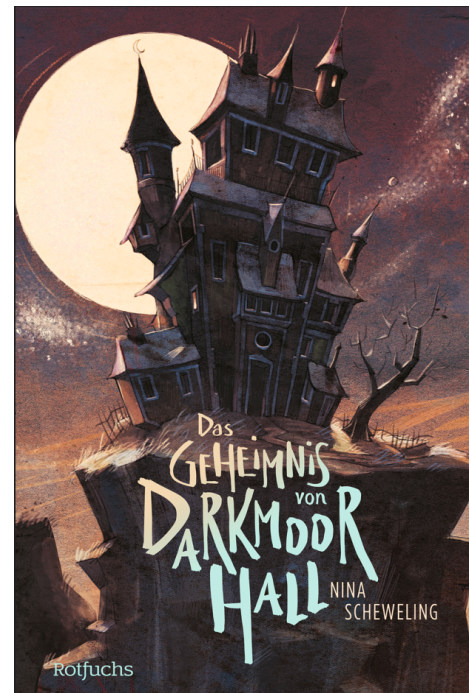
**A treasure thought to be lost, a dark family secret and the obscure past of an entire village: Three friends get into the adventure of their lives, which holds not only tricky riddles but also unexpected dangers.**

#### Topics:

Cornwall, smugglers, dark family secret, treasure hunt, mysterious amulet, tossing sea, Greek mythology, an abandoned mine, old manor house, Enid Blyton-style adventure novel

#### Story:

Kate moves to Darkmoor with her family and is not at all thrilled: There is nothing going on in the small town on the English cliffs, it rains all the time and no tourists stray into the sleepy nest. The boredom is soon over when Kate meets Gus, who after the death of his parents has recently moved in with his mean and arrogant aunt in the ancient Manor Darkmoor House on the cliffs. Together with Billy, a local boy whom Kate rescued from a gang of bullies, they set about solving an old family mystery that Gus inherited from his great-grandfather. A poem and a silver compass lead them faster than expected into the forbidden parts of Darkmoor Hall, to a secret compartment in the fireplace, a cupboard door in the cellar and finally into the dangerous darkness of the disused mine below the cliffs. As they search for the lost treasure, they encounter ever more tricky poems, but soon realise that they are not the only ones on their quest; a mysterious pursuer seems to be hot on their heels. Could it be that the snooty butler Barnaby is pursuing his own goals?



**Nina Scheweling** worked as a literary translator during her studies of English, German and modern history. After graduating, she discovered her love for children's books and since then has been working as a freelance translator, editor and author in Freiburg and Stuttgart.

# **The Hunters of the Vanished Winds**

## **Book 1**

### **The Mystery of Darkmoor Hall**

**By Nina Scheweling**

**Sample translation by Romy Fursland**

#### **1      The Stormy Sea**

The waves crashed against the cliffs with such force that the whole earth seemed to shake. Spray flew up and settled like cold, salty mist on her skin. Kate brushed a damp lock of hair out of her face and moved closer to the rugged cliff edge, looking down at the roiling sea below.

When she'd set off from home half an hour ago, the sky had been draped like a dusty blanket over the landscape, dull and grey and ordinary. But now the wind was picking up, and a flock of dark clouds went scudding past above her head and piled themselves up into black mountains over the sea. She knew the weather could change quickly on the coast. But she still hadn't expected such a dramatic transformation.

She peered down over the edge of the cliff. The water gurgled and foamed among the jagged rocks. A huge wave rolled in and thundered against the cliff face. She jumped back, but it was too late. A fountain of salty spray shot into the air, giving her an ice-cold shower. Water dripped from her hair and ran inside the collar of her jacket, and within seconds her trainers were soaked.

Kate swore under her breath. She'd already been in a bad mood: this was all she needed. But even if she got soaked to the skin there was no way she was going home.

Home. Ha. She didn't think she'd ever call this place home. Two weeks ago they'd moved here – to Darkmoor-on-Sea, a desolate little backwater on the Cornish coast – from the city. The house they'd moved into was in the middle of the village, and was apparently 450 years old. She hated the smell of stale salt that had settled into every nook and cranny of the house. She hated the walls, their rough-hewn stone and crumbling mortar. She hated the bleak landscape outside the windows, which seemed to consist of nothing but heather, moorland and cliffs. And she hated the silence that had moved into the house with them.

The silence was actually the whole reason they'd moved. Her parents had decided to open their own café, which was something they'd dreamed of doing for a long time, and which they'd hoped might save their marriage. But the plan had failed miserably. The silence had followed them here, had made itself at home in the small, dark rooms above the café, and Kate had the feeling it wasn't going anywhere any time soon.

She scanned the moorland above the cliffs, and spotted a narrow path that looked as if it had been carved straight into the cliff face. It led all the way down to the beach. Ahead of her the bay curved around into a steep rocky headland, at the tip of which stood a mansion house. It looked forbidding and gloomy, and Kate wondered what kind of person would want to build a house in such an inhospitable spot. It was the first thing she'd found even remotely interesting in this godforsaken place, so she decided to take a closer look at it.

She slithered down the uneven path to the deserted beach. The sand was wet and heavy, and her shoes left deep footprints that filled up with water immediately. A few birds were scouring the silt-encrusted cliffs for something to eat. But other than that there wasn't a soul to be seen.

A powerful gust of wind hit her full in the face, loosening yet more hair from her ponytail. Kate didn't notice. Her eye had been caught by a white object swirling in the air in front of her. It blew fitfully around the beach for a while, until the wind died down for a moment and dropped it in the sand at her feet.

Kate bent down and picked it up. It was a sheet of paper covered in pencil drawings, of something that looked like a cross between an old watch and a compass. The paper was too clean and dry to have been on the beach for long. Kate looked up at the cliffs in the direction it had appeared from. Just then, another sheet of paper fluttered up into the air and was whirled about by the wind.

She weighed up the possibility of climbing the rugged cliff face. It was covered in barnacles and full of deep cracks, and there were some protruding rocks that would serve as good hand and footholds. On a whim, she began to climb. There were so many handy little ledges and crevices that it was almost as easy as climbing a flight of stairs.

About five metres up, she suddenly came across a little plateau hidden behind some rocks, from which you could see the whole of the beach without being seen yourself. It was the perfect hiding place, and it looked like she wasn't the first to have discovered it. On the rocky ledge lay a folder made of thick pale-blue card, with a few loose sheets of paper poking out of it. Every gust of wind lifted the cover of the folder slightly, until at last another page worked itself free and was whisked into the air. Kate jumped up and grabbed it just in time to stop it fluttering down onto the beach. This sheet of paper had a drawing of the old compass on it too. She bent down to pick up the folder and opened it carefully so as not to lose another page to the wind. The sketches were breathtakingly good. One showed the lighthouse on the little island off the bay, another the mansion house on the cliffs, another a seagull looking almost pensively out to sea as the wind ruffled its feathers. Most of the drawings, though, were of the compass, and they all looked so realistic that Kate almost felt the urge to reach out and pick it up off the page. On the lid of the compass was a man's face, his cheeks puffed out as if he was trying with all his might to blow something away. And there was also a kind of poem written next to the picture. But Kate didn't have time to read it.

The first few heavy raindrops came pattering down onto the rocks around her. Kate looked up at the sky and was startled to see the black clouds massed above her head. An ominous thunderclap rolled in from the sea, heralding a fierce storm. She closed the folder quickly before the rain could

ruin the drawings. Only now did she spot the name on the front of it: *Gustav Grenville*. She'd never heard of him. But why would she have? After all, she'd only lived here a few days.

Kate slipped the folder inside her jacket and was about to climb back down to the beach when she heard a sudden noise.

A boy appeared on the clifftop, sprinting along it as if he was being chased by the Devil himself. He kept casting harried glances behind him. Then he jumped down, landed on a rocky ledge, shinned along the jagged cliff face, and finally ducked inside a little cave-like recess in the rock. A relieved grin spread across his face – but not for long. When he caught sight of Kate, who was looking up at him in astonishment, his eyes widened in fear and he put a finger to his lips with a beseeching expression.

“Oi!” Before Kate could work out what on earth was going on, she heard someone shouting to her from up on the clifftop. She realised, to her surprise, that three more boys had suddenly appeared. Where had they all come from? A moment ago the beach had felt like the most deserted place in the world, and now it was like Piccadilly Circus.

Kate thought the boys looked about thirteen or fourteen, so a couple of years older than her. The one on the left was gawky and pimply with orange hair. The one on the right was as round as a barrel, with a face that reminded Kate of a lump of dough. The one in the middle, however, had no real distinguishing features at all, which might have been why he was wearing a garish red-and-yellow checked raincoat, to make himself stand out. This plain-looking boy now waved to her imperiously and called again: “Oi! You! Have you seen Billy?”

When Kate didn't reply straight away, the gawky one added impatiently: “Weedy kid. Shabby old clothes, stupid grin – which he's about to have wiped off his face.”

All three of them laughed gleefully.

“We lost him on the clifftop,” said the plain boy. “He's chicken. Probably hiding under a gorse bush. Or he might have gone down onto the beach.”

Kate subtly dropped her gaze a little. As luck would have it, the cave where Billy (for it must be him) was hiding happened to be located directly below the boys on the clifftop. Billy gave her a pleading look and shook his head frantically. Kate had no idea what was going on, but she decided on a whim to help him.

“He went that way,” she called, pointing along the beach in the direction she had come from.

“I bet he's headed for the fishermen's huts,” said the gawky one. “Probably thinks he can hide in there.”

The plain one looked at Kate suspiciously. “No one makes a fool of us and gets away with it,” he snarled, and she got the uncomfortable feeling that he wasn't just talking about Billy, but her as well.

“Come on, before he gets away!” called Dough-Face and the gawky boy as they ran off. But the plain one didn't follow them – he went on standing there, looking thoughtfully down at Kate. Only when one of his friends yelled: “Come on, Dan!” did he turn without a word and follow them.

## 2      The House on the Cliffs

Frowning, Kate watched the boys go. They were soon lost from view beyond the cliffs. She hadn't met anyone else in Darkmoor yet, but if they were anything like those three she wasn't sure she wanted to.

In the distance there was another roll of thunder. Kate was startled to realise how dark it had become. Ominous, towering clouds filled the sky above her head, plunging the beach into hazy half-darkness. Then there was another thunderclap, closer this time, and a few seconds later a flash of bright white lightning.

She looked out at the inky black sea, which was being tugged relentlessly this way and that by the wind and the waves. A solid wall of rain was approaching the beach, churning up the surface of the water even more. When the downpour reached her, it would be her second cold shower of the day. No thank you!

Kate turned and began climbing up the rocks towards the little cave where Billy was. At least it would give her shelter from the storm. The cliff face grew steeper and steeper, but just as she reached the point where she'd run out of handholds and footholds, a hand reached out and hauled her up onto the ledge. Just in time. No sooner had she scrambled to safety than the storm hit the beach. The rain came pelting down, and the rocky cave provided just enough cover to keep them halfway dry.

"Hi," said the boy. "I'm Billy."

"Hi. I'm Kate," she replied with a smile as she studied him. The plain-looking boy's description of Billy turned out to have been pretty accurate. He must be about the same age as Kate, but he was much smaller than her, with matchstick-thin arms and legs, and he was dressed in faded clothes that had seen better days. He had slightly sticky-out ears and a freckled face, and he was grinning – although it wasn't a stupid grin, but rather an embarrassed one.

"Thanks for not telling them where I was," he said. "I would have been in for it if they'd caught me."

"You're welcome." Kate sat down beside Billy, hugged her knees to her chest and looked out at the storm raging in the bay. The rain was beating down mercilessly, as if trying to wash away the whole of the coastline. She could barely see a metre in front of her, and behind the misty grey curtain of rain the lightning flared again and again. "What did they want?" she asked, raising her voice above the din of the rain.

Billy shrugged, "The usual. Just trying to annoy me."

Kate looked at him curiously, but he didn't elaborate. Instead he asked: "Are you here on holiday?"

"I wish." Kate sniffed. "At least if I was on holiday I'd be leaving soon. We moved here two weeks ago. My parents have taken over the café on Sea Street."

"Old Molly's café? Cool. I hope she left you the recipe for her lemon muffins. They're the best –"

He was interrupted by a loud rumble of thunder, and they both looked out to sea. The veil of rain had thinned out a little and they could see the churning waves breaking on the beach and crashing against the rocks in the bay. The high winds had become a full-blown storm that seemed to drain all the colour out of the landscape. Outside their little cave the world was a maelstrom of wind and water, accompanied by the deafening sound of thunder, driving rain and crashing waves.

Kate had never seen a storm like it. As if to confirm this, a dazzling forked bolt of lightning split the sky beyond the headland. It outlined the silhouette of the mansion house for a moment, dark and ominous.

She pointed at the house. "Who lives there?"

"At Darkmoor Hall?" said Billy disparagingly. "Ethelda Grenville. Or *Lady* Ethelda Grenville, I should say. If she's even still alive. No-one in the village has seen her for years."

"Someone could go round and check on her."

Billy waved a hand. "By all the pixies! No way."

"Pixies?" Kate asked. "What do you mean?"

"You know what pixies are, don't you?" said Billy. "Those little goblins with pointy hats that play tricks on people and steal things and stuff?"

"Never heard of them," Kate replied with a smirk. "They don't sound very nice."

Billy shrugged. "They can be quite useful. If you give them presents."

Kate's smile grew wider. "Oh, right. And why is the idea of visiting this Lady Grenville so off-putting, exactly?"

"First, because she's a miserable, bossy old bag. And secondly because there's a curse on Darkmoor Hall."

"A curse?" Kate laughed out loud. "You can't be serious. What happens if you go inside the house, then? Do you fall down dead?"

"Don't joke about it! You shouldn't joke about curses."

"First goblins, now curses. Please tell me you don't actually believe all this rubbish?"

"It's not rubbish. Just because you can't explain something doesn't mean it doesn't exist."

"Okay," said Kate, amused, "now I'm curious. What is this curse?"

Billy looked out at the storm and sighed. "Alright. I'll tell you. But only if you promise not to laugh."

"I promise."

"Well, the Grenvilles have always been a bit strange," he began. "They think they're better than everyone else, and mostly keep themselves to themselves. People from the village try to stay out of their way." Billy shuffled about till he'd found a more comfortable sitting position, and hugged his knees. "The curse dates back hundreds of years. One stormy night a stranger turned up at Darkmoor Hall. He was frozen half to death and asked if they could give him a bed for the night. The butler turned him away, saying they weren't some kind of lodging house for beggars and tramps, and slammed the door in his face. But the stranger was too weak to go on – he collapsed on the steps of Darkmoor Hall. A servant girl found him there, took pity on him and let him into the

house so he could warm up and have something to eat. But Lord Grenville walked in on them, and when he saw the stranger he threw him into the dungeon, where the poor man starved to death.”

A thunderclap echoed over the sea as if to underline Billy’s story.

“Darkmoor Hall has a dungeon?” said Kate incredulously.

“People say there’s a whole labyrinth of catacombs down there, with a dungeon and torture chambers and who knows what else,” Billy replied.

“And what does that have to do with this supposed curse?”

“The stranger was never buried. His skeleton is still lying there in one of the dungeon cells. And when the dead aren’t given a proper burial, their souls can’t find peace. They’re trapped in our world forever, as ghosts, haunting the place. And as you can imagine, the stranger’s ghost is not a great fan of the Grenvilles. Things have gone downhill for the family ever since. Lots of them have died in mysterious ways. Some of the old people in the village swear blind that the stranger put a curse on the Grenvilles just before he died.”

Kate shook her head in amusement. “What a load of crap. There’s no such thing as ghosts, or curses.”

“Humph,” huffed Billy. “You have no idea.”

Kate suddenly remembered something. Grenville... she’d heard that name somewhere before. She pulled the folder out from under her jacket and read the name written on the front.

“Gustav Grenville. Is he related to Ethelda Grenville?”

“Must be her nephew,” said Billy. “There aren’t any other Grenvilles left at Darkmoor. Or anywhere else. The family is practically extinct.” Billy gave her a meaningful look.

“Yeah, yeah.” Kate waved her hand dismissively. “The curse, right. What do you know about this Gustav?”

Billy shrugged. “Not much. He’s about our age. His parents died in an accident, and it turned out Lady Grenville was his only living relative. So he moved in with her about six months ago. But he’s a bit of an odd one. He goes to a private school in Barton Cove and he hasn’t said a word to anyone in the village all the time he’s been here. He mostly just hides up in that old house like his aunt. And whenever he does come out, he just stands on the beach and stares out to sea for hours on end.” Billy pointed to the folder. “Where did you find that?”

“It was on a ledge down there. He must have left it behind.” She opened the folder.

Billy marvelled at the sketches. “Wow. They’re really good.” He leafed through the pages and pointed to the poem Kate had come across earlier. “What’s that?”

“I don’t know. I didn’t have time to look at it.” She took the sheet of paper out of Billy’s hand and read the lines aloud:

((Riddle))

The light comes in the morning,  
The chimney smoke at noon,  
The toll of the bell in the evening,

And death with the midnight moon.  
Where they meet each other,  
A ring of words is forged,  
Let the winds blow freely  
Out of Demon's Gorge.  
((End))

"Huh," said Billy. "What does that mean?"  
"No idea. Sounds like a riddle."  
"Demon's Gorge... do you think Gustav came up with that himself?"  
"We could ask him."  
"No thanks. Wild horses couldn't drag me to old Grenville's house."  
"Okay," Kate replied, closing the folder. "Then I'll go on my own."  
Billy shrugged. "Suit yourself."

Not long after that, the rain stopped. The storm passed over and the weather grew calmer, and the sea with it. The water had taken on the same bluish-grey colour as the sky. Kate and Billy ventured out of the cave and scrambled down the wet rocks onto the beach. Once they'd got to the bottom Billy glanced at his watch, whose glass face was so scratched that you could hardly read the time. "Argh, it's so late," he exclaimed. "Now I'm for it. Nice to meet you."

Before Kate could reply, he ran off. "Thanks again for your help," he called back over his shoulder. "And stay away from Darkmoor Hall. You don't want to go messing with ghosts. Or Lady Grenville."

Kate waved goodbye and watched him dart up the narrow path, quick as a fox, and disappear out of sight behind the cliffs. Then she smiled grimly. A cursed mansion house, a strange boy, a mysterious poem – it seemed Darkmoor-on-Sea had more to offer than she'd first thought. She put her hand inside her jacket and patted the folder. Darkmoor Hall was crying out to be explored – and as luck would have it, she had the perfect excuse.

### 3      **Darkmoor Hall**

Kate's mum loaded the dishwasher in silence, trying to stay out of the way of her dad as he tidied the cereal boxes back into the cupboard. Then her dad left the kitchen without a word, and went downstairs to start baking today's batch of cakes. Her mum stood there wiping the work surfaces for a while, staring off into space, before giving Kate and Ben a kiss and following her husband down to the café to set the tables.

Kate watched her go, a shiver running down her back. Arctic: that felt like the only word to describe the situation at home these days. Her parents' silence created such a frosty atmosphere that



Kate would have preferred it if they'd started screaming at each other again. Like before, when they'd argued about anything and everything. But now they didn't even do that – it was as if all the words they might have said to each other had dried up. And Kate wasn't sure they would ever return.

Since the café was open from nine in the morning till six in the evening, Kate and her younger brother Ben were mostly left to their own devices during the holidays. After breakfast Ben would take himself off to his room and build models of planetary systems and space rockets. He was obsessed with all things extra-terrestrial, and sometimes Kate thought he felt more at home in the dark expanse of space than here on earth.

For her part, Kate couldn't stand to stay in the musty flat a moment longer. She grabbed her raincoat and the folder full of drawings, and fled outside. Her parents were used to her wandering around on her own for hours, and luckily they never seemed to mind.

She stepped out onto Sea Street and walked towards the market square, past the grey stone houses and cottages that were so typical of Darkmoor-on-Sea. Unlike many other villages along the coast, which at least attracted a few tourists in the summer, Darkmoor seemed to have been forgotten by the world. There were hardly any B&Bs where tourists might have stayed, and only one pub. Swimming in the sea – on the rare days when the weather was nice enough – was out of the question anyway because of the rocks and the dangerous undercurrents, and the village had nothing else to tempt tourists. It was a wonder the place even featured on the map. And it was a mystery to Kate why her parents would want to run a café here.

The marketplace was dominated by a church which, in Kate's opinion, was ridiculously big for a little village like Darkmoor. The elaborate tower rose high into the air, making it look more like a cathedral than a village church. In some places there was a gap of less than a metre between the walls of the church and the adjoining houses, as if the church had been squeezed into the square after everything else had been built. Kate had heard a rumour that music could be heard from the nave at night: apparently the vicar suffered from insomnia, and would let himself into the church after dark to play gloomy hymns. Kate shook her head. A boring village full of crackpots and weirdos. How on earth had she ended up here? She squeezed through a narrow passageway to the left of the church, and turned onto Tilly Road.

The weather was much calmer than it had been the previous day. The smell of salt and the cries of seagulls were carried on the slight breeze, and it was so chilly that Kate zipped her jacket up right to her neck. And this was meant to be *summer*, she thought peevishly. Another reason to hate Darkmoor.

A few minutes later, Kate had passed the last of the houses. The cliffs stretched away ahead of her, with the blue-grey sea beyond them. Kate followed the road that wound across sparse heathland and big sheep pastures towards the sea before eventually giving way to a narrow track.

After following the road for five minutes she came to the headland. From here it looked like an old witch's finger, all crooked and bony, poking into the sea. Behind a large wrought-iron gate, a driveway led up to the mansion house. A high wall ran along to the cliffs on either side of the gateposts.

Kate looked for a doorbell or some other way to get someone's attention. But she couldn't find anything, not on the gate nor on the wall beside it. Eventually she took hold of the bars of the right-hand gate and shook a little. To her surprise, the gate swung open with a quiet squeak. Kate wasted no time in stepping inside.

A path curved gently along the narrow headland. Secretly she was afraid that at any moment a slavering guard dog would come bounding up, intent on tearing her to pieces. But no – she didn't meet a soul. It was almost as if nobody had walked this path to Darkmoor Hall for a very long time.

At last she reached a gravelled square with a mottled fountain in the middle. There was no water coming out of it. At the centre of the fountain was a sculpture of a bent, bearded man carrying a sack over his shoulder. What a weird statue for a fountain, thought Kate, but the thought vanished as quickly as it had come, because her gaze was drawn as if by magic to the towering building behind the fountain. The house consisted of one main wing and two symmetrical side wings. The dirty grey façade was unadorned, the windows looked like little arrow slits, and on the roof there were lots of pointy chimneys jutting into the air. The closer Kate got to the building, the more details she noticed. Above the eaves and protruding from crumbling ledges there were lots of little stone gargoyles with horrible grimacing faces. The windows in the wing to her left were dusty and shuttered. The house must once have been an imposing sight, radiating power and wealth. Now it just looked cold, forlorn and forbidding.

She went up the wide, worn steps to the massive oak front door. The knocker was a brass ring held in the mouth of a gargoyle. Kate lifted the ring and let it fall onto the wood. The dull thud seemed to echo throughout the furthest corners of the house. She knocked again, twice, and waited.

She heard the quiet sighing of the sea at the foot of the cliffs, and somewhere nearby a raven cawed. Apart from that, it was almost eerily silent. Kate was about to knock again when she heard shuffling footsteps from inside. A bolt was shot back, and a moment later the door opened. A man in black livery appeared in the dark hallway. He had grey, lifeless-looking eyes, thin hair and a wrinkled face that reminded Kate of crumpled-up paper.

"Yes?" he growled, eyeing her coldly.

"Hi," said Kate, pulling the folder out from under her jacket. "I found this folder on the beach. It says Gustav Grenville on it. I heard he lived here, so I thought I'd come and give it back to him."

"Hm," said the man, who she thought must be the butler, and held out his hand for the folder. "Thank you."

Kate hesitated. If she gave it to him, she might lose her only chance of seeing inside the mansion house. And if the inside was anything like as grand as the outside, she was keen to take a peek. "I'd like to give Gustav the drawings myself," she replied.

The butler frowned in disapproval. "We don't receive unannounced guests. I'll pass the folder on to Gustav." He took a step towards her and held his hand out again.

Kate hugged the folder to her chest and lifted her chin defiantly. She wasn't giving up that easily. "Why don't you just go in and announce me. I'll wait."

"That's not how it works, I'm afraid. Give me the folder and be on your way."

"No."

The butler's frown deepened. "I *beg* your pardon?"

"No. I'm not going till you tell Gustav I'm here."

"The young man doesn't want to see anyone."

"How do you know, if you don't ask him?"

"You ought to watch your tone, young lady." The butler stared at her, outraged. Kate stared stubbornly back.

The butler seemed to realise the quickest way to get rid of her would be to let her into the house briefly. So he stepped back reluctantly and made way for her. Kate tried not to smile too triumphantly as she stepped past him into the hallway. The oak door fell shut behind her with a dull thud, plunging everything around her into a dim half-light. The butler muttered something under his breath, then said, "Wait here," and shuffled off.

She'd done it. She was inside Darkmoor Hall. And the house exceeded even her wildest expectations.

#### 4      **A Strange Boy**

She was standing in a huge entrance hall with a worn parquet floor and dark wood-panelled walls. To her right, a wide curved staircase led up to a gallery. The only light in the hall came from a couple of narrow windows above the front door, but the pale grey light petered out somewhere above her head, as if the dust and gloom were too thick for it to penetrate all the way to the floor. The hall was empty apart from an enormous oil painting on the wall to her left. It showed a man, naked from the waist up, his wild hair falling into his face, strangling a monstrous sea snake with his bare hands. In his wide eyes was a look of triumph and madness. Kate shuddered.

A quiet rustle made her look up. In the gallery, in the shadow of a pillar, a boy stood looking down at her. When he realised she'd seen him he moved back a little, but went on watching her.

"Hey," she called up to him. Her voice sounded so loud in this vast space that it made her jump. "Are you Gustav?"

The boy hesitated, then nodded warily.

Kate held up the folder. "Is this yours?"

Gustav stared at the folder. "Where did you get that?" He spoke so quietly that Kate could barely hear him.

"I found it down on the beach yesterday and I came to give it back to you."

Gustav seemed to wrestle with himself for a minute, but eventually he stepped out of the shadow of the pillar and came slowly down the stairs. Kate took the opportunity to study him. He was about the same age as her, with short dark hair and a pale face. As he stood at arm's length from her, his eyes cast down, Kate got the impression that he would have liked to make himself invisible.

"I'm Kate," she said, handing him the folder. "Here you go."

Gustav took it and murmured “Thanks,” without looking at her. Then he shifted hesitantly from one foot to the other without a word. Kate had done what she’d come here to do. But she didn’t want to leave yet. So she pointed to the folder and said: “I had a look. You’re amazing at drawing.”

“Thanks,” Gustav murmured again.

An awkward silence sprang up between them. Kate thought she heard a door bang somewhere, and looked around the hall. Where had the butler gone?

“Do you want to see my room?” asked Gustav suddenly.

Kate looked at him in surprise, and before he could change his mind she replied: “Yes, please. I’d like that.”

Gustav turned and flitted up the stairs like a ghost. Kate followed him. Her hand slid along the smooth, polished banister, and the thick carpet on the stairs swallowed up the sound of her footsteps. The higher they climbed, the stronger the smell of old wood which seemed to fill the house.

The door to Gustav’s room was opposite the staircase. As he shut the door quietly behind them, Kate looked around. The two lattice windows on the opposite wall were bigger than the ones at the front of the house, and let in a lot more light. It fell on faded beige walls, dark furniture and a soot-blackened fireplace.

On a desk, Kate saw drawing paper and pens. But apart from that there were hardly any personal touches: no posters or photos or clothes strewn all over the floor like in Kate’s and her brother’s bedrooms. She glanced up at the high ceiling, which was stained with an ugly water mark. She looked away quickly and tried to think what she could say about the room without offending Gustav too much. “Nice,” she managed at last.

Gustav looked at her with a frown. “Do you think so?”

“Well, no, if I’m completely honest. It’s horrible.”

The corners of Gustav’s mouth twitched as if he was about to smile. But instead he sat down on his bed and stared into space for a moment, lost in thought. “When I was six, we moved to a new house,” he began suddenly. “I always liked being outdoors, so my mum painted trees and fields on the walls and a sky with clouds on the ceiling. The room wasn’t half as big as this one, but it was perfect.”

“Wow,” said Kate. “That sounds brilliant.” She sat down beside Gustav on the bed. “Your mum died, didn’t she?” she asked tentatively.

The smile on Gustav’s face vanished. “Yeah. And my dad.”

“I’m so sorry.” Kate wondered if it would be tactless to ask any more questions. After all, she and Gustav didn’t even know each other. But her curiosity got the better of her. “What happened?”

Gustav turned his face away. “A car accident.”

“Oh, man. That’s awful. And since then you’ve been living here?”

“Yes.” He stared, unseeing, at the wall. “No-one had ever mentioned Darkmoor Hall or Aunt Ethelda before. And then suddenly they told me she was my only living relative.”

“You didn’t even know her?”

“No. And she’s not even my aunt. She’s actually my great-aunt or something. If it’d been up to her she’d never have taken me in at all. But she felt she had to do her ‘familial duty’.” He was silent for a moment, then added almost in a whisper, “I miss them so much.”

Kate didn’t know what to say. She thought how she would feel if her parents and her brother died and she suddenly had to go and live with a complete stranger who didn’t even want her. Her chest constricted at the thought. However soul-destroying the silence between her parents was, and however much Ben got on her nerves sometimes, she couldn’t imagine life without them.

Gustav gave a quiet sniff, and surreptitiously wiped his face with his sleeve. Kate hoped he wasn’t going to start crying. She couldn’t deal with tears. Not her own, and definitely not anyone else’s. Hoping to change the subject she stood up and went over to the desk, which was almost overflowing with pencil drawings. Most of them were views of Darkmoor Hall from different angles, and there were some very detailed drawings of the strange sculpture in the fountain. She was particularly fascinated by a gargoyle with a wide-open mouth and glowing eyes.

Gustav came to stand beside her. “Creepy, huh?”

“Very,” Kate agreed. “Why are there so many of those gargoyle things here?”

He shrugged. “The Grenvilles have all kinds of weird quirks.”

Kate grinned. “I hate to say it, but last time I checked you were a Grenville yourself, Gustav.”

“Only my aunt calls me Gustav. You can call me Gus.”

“Okay.” Kate couldn’t help thinking of her conversation with Billy. Gustav – Gus – actually seemed all right to her. He was quite quiet and reserved, but definitely not ‘an odd one’ like Billy had said.

Gus moved a couple of the drawings aside, searching for something. “There’s this other statue, you have to see it. It must be here somewhere...”

A whole pile of pages slid off the desk and fell to the floor, revealing a round metal object whose chain had got caught on the foot of the desk lamp.

“Hey!” Kate exclaimed. “I’ve seen that before. In the drawings in your folder.” She pulled the snagged chain out from under the lamp.

“Careful,” warned Gus. “That compass is a family heirloom. It used to belong to my great-grandfather.”

More gently now, Kate examined the round pendant. It was about five centimetres across, and was made from a pristine silvery metal. On the lid was a picture, in relief, of a bearded man with puffed-out cheeks.

“Is that your great-grandfather?”

Gus grinned. “No. That’s Aeolus, the god of the winds.”

“Oh, right. And what’s he doing on a compass?”

“In ancient Greek myths there were four winds that blew from the four points of the compass,” Gus replied. “So one wind from the east, one from the south and so on. That’s probably why they put him on there.”

Kate slid her fingernail carefully into the narrow groove at the edge of the pendant, and opened the lid to reveal a delicate compass dial, picked out from the shimmering pearly background in

different shades. Fine, interlacing lines were engraved around the edges, and in the middle of the compass was a wafer-thin needle mounted on a small, glittering black stone. The compass had clearly been crafted with great skill. And although it must have been very old, it looked somehow untouched by time.

“Now turn around in a circle,” said Gus.

Kate turned on the spot, keeping her eye on the needle of the compass. It stayed pointing at Gustav’s bed the whole time, trembling gently.

“So that’s north?” she asked, pointing to the bed.

Gus nodded.

Kate admired the compass again from every angle, then closed the lid and handed it back to Gus. “It’s beautiful. Is it very valuable?”

“I think so. It’s silver, and the stone in the middle is a real black diamond. My great-grandfather decreed that it had to stay in the family. Since then it’s been passed down from generation to generation.”

“Why did it have to stay in the family?”

“No idea. But Augustus made a point of saying so in his will, and so far everyone has respected his wishes.”

“That poem next to one of the drawings,” said Kate, “is that to do with the compass too?”

“Yes. The poem was also in Augustus’s will. But there was no note to explain what it means.”

“How does it go again? Something about morning and noon and stuff. Can you read it to me?”

“I know it off by heart,” Gus replied. “*The light comes in the morning, the chimney smoke at noon, the toll of the bell in the evening, and death with the midnight moon. Where they meet each other, a ring of words is forged, let the winds blow freely, out of Demon’s Gorge.*”

“It sounds like a riddle,” said Kate. “Like in a treasure hunt.”

“Could be, I suppose.”

“In the morning, at noon, in the evening... where they meet...” murmured Kate, chewing thoughtfully on her lower lip. “In the morning it gets light, so perhaps that’s what the bit about light refers to. And maybe the chimney symbolises a factory where people go to work during the day. In the evening the bells ring. And at midnight you die?!” She looked questioningly at Gus, but he just shrugged.

“Or perhaps it’s do to with ageing. Childhood is the morning, noon is youth, and so on.”

“I wouldn’t even try and make sense of it, if I were you,” said Gus. “No-one’s ever been able to work out what it means.”

“But there must have been a reason your great-grandfather wrote it down.”

“Who knows. Augustus was a bit of an eccentric. It might just be a nonsense rhyme.”

Kate tried not to show how disappointed she was. But Gus was right. The poem could mean anything, and if generations of his family hadn’t been able to work it out, she was hardly going to be able to decipher it on the spot.

She went over to the big window and looked out to sea. The house was only a few metres from the cliffs. There must have been an annex below Gustav’s room at one time, extending all the way to

the cliffs. But it looked like there'd been a landslide at some point that had pulled part of the building down with it. Kate wondered, with a shudder, whether the whole house would fall into the sea one day.

Gus's voice interrupted her reverie. "Thank you for coming," he said quietly.

Kate looked at him, surprised. "Why do you say that?"

"It's been a long time since anyone talked to me. Properly talked, I mean."

"Well it's no wonder, if you never see anyone," Kate replied. "A boy from the village told me the other kids find you a bit scary."

Gus stared at the compass in his hand. "Scary, huh? I always thought they just thought I was weird." He sniffed again and then went on: "At first I didn't want anything to do with anyone. And now no-one wants anything to do with me. Sometimes I think people don't even realise I'm still here."

"I'm not surprised," said Kate lightly. "I think you're a bit weird too."

Gus's eyes widened. So as not to hurt his feelings, Kate added quickly with a laugh: "But weird is good! Much better to be weird than boring!"