



# THE WEATHER WEAVER

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*For Leonardo & Isabella*  
*May you always find the silver lining.*  
*Xxx*



One

# SHETLAND

**S**TELLA hung over the wooden rail and watched the inky waves, far below.

*I know you're down there...*

As if in answer, a sudden swell made the ferry tip and her stomach rolled. She'd never liked being out on the open water, but the nightmare had made it worse. She couldn't remember all of it. Deep, dark water. The feeling of drowning. In the daytime, the details always faded, like mist in sunlight.

Mum always blamed it on Gran – all her tales of sea witches

and selkies, blue men and sea monsters. Stella didn't really believe the stories any more, but deep water still made her uneasy. She couldn't shake the feeling there was something down there, watching.

"We're close now," said Dad, his eyes twinkling. "The edge of the world!"

It did feel like it. They'd been travelling for ages. Always north. Until the air was clear as crystal and the only sound was seabirds.

Dad nudged her. "You excited to see Shetland again?"

"Can't wait," she said.

Ever since they'd moved away, Stella had been longing to come back, but now it was really happening, it felt alarmingly real.

"It'd be better if you were staying too."

Dad put an arm round her shoulder. "We've talked about this."

"Just for like, a few days?"

"You know we can't," said Dad. "That's the whole point of you coming here. Mum and I have got to work."

*Work. Always work.*

Other people's families went on holiday together. That was the point of holidays.

"It's important, what we're doing," said Dad.

*More important than me.* Stella narrowed her eyes at Dad, but he just smiled at her.

"I could come with you?" she said. "I could help."

"Don't be daft," said Dad. "You'd be bored out of your mind."

Besides, I don't think they allow children on research vessels."

Stella pulled a face to show what she thought of that.

"Hey, you're the one who's been pestering us to come back here!" said Dad.

It was true, but Stella had always imagined *all* of them coming back, as a family. Not just her, on her own. She *was* excited to see Grandpa again. The bit she wasn't looking forward to was Mum and Dad leaving. Six weeks was a long time.

Dad shook her gently by the shoulder. "Happy thoughts, remember?" he said. "I know you're nervous, but you're going to have a great time."

Stella curled her toes inside her shoes. Maybe she would. Maybe it would be amazing.

"Come on," said Dad. "Name one thing you're looking forward to."

Stella thought about it for a moment. "Hot chocolate," she said.

*In a big mug. With cream instead of milk. And loads of shortbread to go with it.*

"More than I'd be allowed at home," she added, daring Dad to disagree.

"Sounds like a plan," he said. "With cream? Shortbread to dip?"

Stella nodded. He remembered.

"So, hot chocolate. What else?"

"Seeing puffins again," she said. "Real live puffins."

"*Tammie norries*," Dad reminded her. "Get Grandpa to take

you to the lighthouse. They're nesting, this time of year. You'll be able to get right up close."

It was hard to stay cross with Dad, even when he deserved it. Somehow, he always knew what to say.

*Puffins. Right up close!*

"I'm looking forward to staying with Grandpa too," she said.

It would be strange seeing him without Gran. They were always a pair. Salt and pepper. Bread and butter. Gran and Grandpa.

Now it was only Grandpa. But it would still be brilliant to see him. It had been such a long time! Six whole years. The last time she saw him, she was only five.

"Do you think he'll recognise me?" she said.

Dad smiled. "He'll recognise you alright. But I daresay he'll be amazed. His favourite little girl, all grown-up and independent," he said.

Stella's heart glowed with pride. She stood up straighter, turned her face into the wind and let her knees bounce, riding the movement of the boat, like a proper Shetland sailor.

The deck bucked over a wave and she grabbed for the rail again. How did Dad make it look so easy?

"There it is," he said and pointed at the horizon.

Stella squinted at the distant dot and her stomach flipped like a mackerel. Soon she'd have to say goodbye.

The Shetland mainland looked like a little limpet. A small grey hump hunched low in the sea. As the boat drew gradually closer,



the cliffs loomed taller. Seagulls whirled and swooped down the sheer rock face like stunt pilots.

On the skerries, close to the shore, dozens of seals were sunning themselves like fat black sausages. Stella pointed at them in excitement. "Sleeping selkies!"

"I'd forgotten you used to call them that," said Mum, joining them at the rail.

"They've made a welcoming party for you," said Dad. "Remember the selkie story?"

"Of course I do," replied Stella. "I've got the book with me."

"*Shetland Myths and Magic*? No wonder this rucksack's so heavy!" said Mum, hefting it in her hand. "How on earth did you fit it in?"

"I took some stuff out . . ." said Stella.

"What?!" said Mum. "What stuff?"

Stella could practically see the packing lists scrolling through Mum's mind.

"Nothing important," she said. "Just spare socks."

"There wasn't spare anything!" said Mum. "And I already packed a stack of books for you. That one's falling apart!"

Stella felt a sudden twinge of embarrassment. *Shetland Myths and Magic* was very tatty now. And a bit young for her. But it was still her favourite.

"Gran always used to read it to me," she said. "Coming back here, I just felt like . . ."

“It was a good idea,” interrupted Dad, firmly. “Grandpa will be pleased.”

Mum shook her head and looked doubtfully at Stella’s two bags – probably wondering what else she’d taken out.

Dad put a reassuring arm round Mum’s shoulder.

“It’s not a problem,” he murmured into Mum’s hair. “Socks can be washed. She’s going to be just fine.”

Stella gave him a grateful smile.

“Come on, tell us what else you’re looking forward to,” said Dad.

“The northern lights?” she said.

Dad shook his head. “Not this time of year. Right now, it’s the *Simmer Dim* – summer twilight, so it won’t get properly dark.”

*Never dark?* thought Stella. *I’ll be able to stay up all night!*

“That doesn’t mean you get to stay up all night, mind,” said Mum.

Mum did that sometimes – knew exactly what she was thinking. Usually when Stella was trying to get away with something.

“It’s the holidays,” said Dad. “A few late nights won’t hurt.”

“I was thinking more of your father,” said Mum. “I should think he’ll want his sleep, even if Stella doesn’t.”

“You’ll be fine with Grandpa, won’t you?” said Dad.

It wasn’t a real question. It was just to make Mum feel better. She almost told him that, but a glance at Mum’s face changed her mind.

“I’ll be responsible,” she said. “And super helpful. And I’ll go

to bed at bedtime. And I'll wash my own socks if I haven't got enough. You don't have to worry. I'll be completely fine."

*I will, she thought. I'll be fine.* Her stomach was doing little somersaults. *Just think of it as an adventure,* she told herself.

Stella breathed in as they slipped through the narrow opening in the harbour walls, as though she could make the boat thinner by sucking her tummy in. The harbour was packed with fishing boats, their lines clinking and clanking.

There was a great whirr and growl of thrusters as the ferry lined up neatly alongside the wall. Two crewmen leapt ashore and looped ropes around the bollards that sprouted on the dockside like massive mushrooms.

Stella peered over the side. Ropes of dark-brown seaweed tangled beneath the surface. She counted five jellyfish.

*I do NOT want to fall in there.*

A scrap of the nightmare surfaced in her mind: a feeling of being trapped, tangled in seaweed.

Dad picked up her suitcase in one hand and walked down the gangplank, as calmly as if he were taking an afternoon stroll, then headed off along the dock.

Stella glanced back at Mum. Dad had made it look easy, but now it was her turn.

She took a deep breath for courage. Also, in case she fell in.

*Don't think that! It's not going to happen.*

The gangplank bounced as she walked along it. Three short

steps – with her arms out wide, like a tightrope walker – then she jumped off, onto the concrete, and let the breath out again.

It felt good to have solid ground under her feet.