

CHAPTER SAMPLER



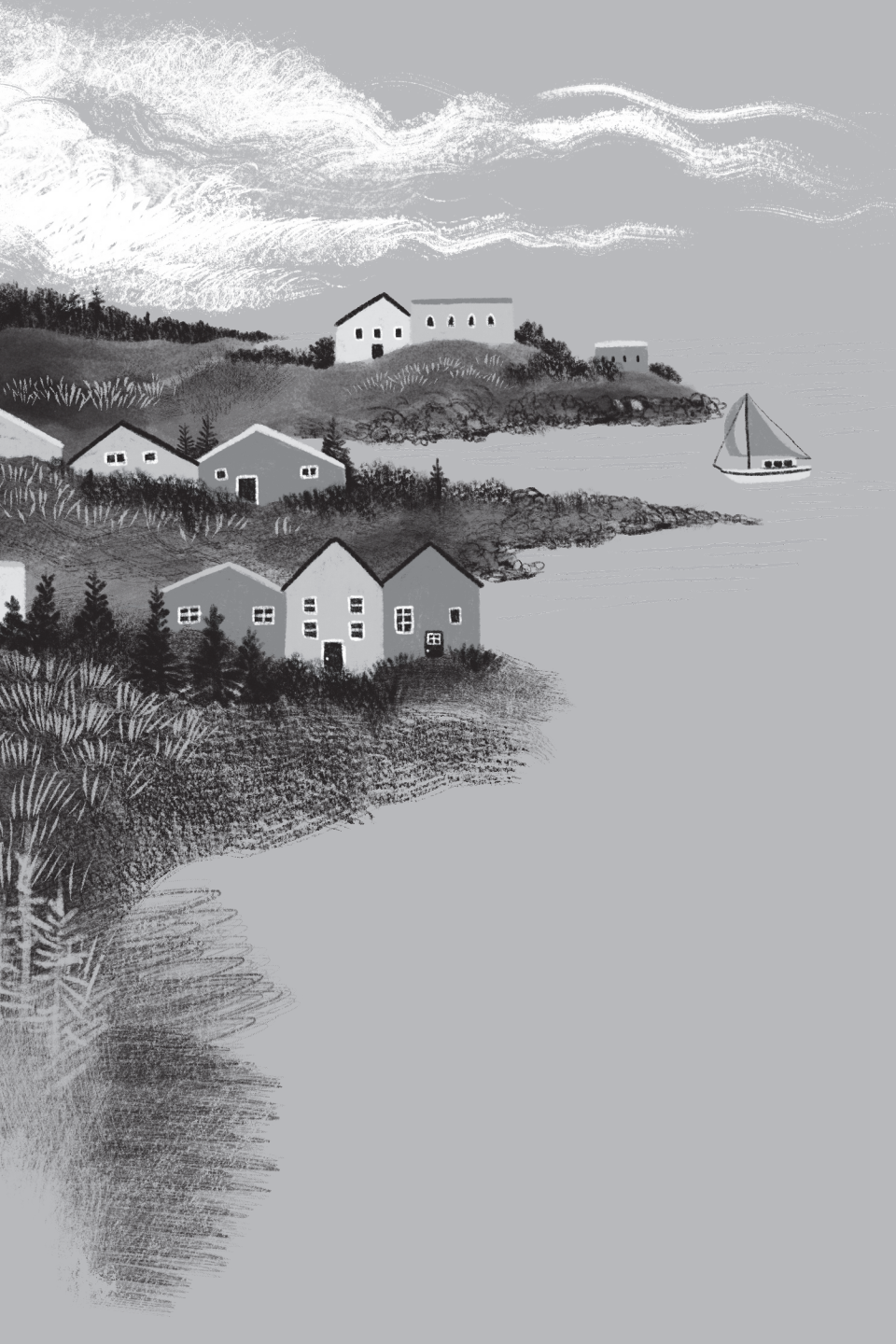
The Boy, the Cloud and the Very Tall Tale

Heather Smith



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Ewan sets off on a quest to find his father.

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“Tell me again, Grumple,” said Flora. “Tell me how Daddy flew away on a cloud.”

Grumple looked up from his sewing, his glasses resting on the tip of his nose. Flora, who had just spilled the contents of Grumple’s button jar across the kitchen table, waited patiently for him to begin. It didn’t take him long. No one could resist Flora’s charms. She was as bright and creative as the button rainbow that was taking shape in front of her. Grumple cleared his throat and began.

“It was a cold and clear December day,” he said. “Not a cloud in the sky, then *poof!* There it was, hovering outside the window like a giant bed of freshly shorn sheep’s wool.”

It was a familiar story. One that Grumple had been telling the children since their father’s disappearance two

years before. Ewan could have mouthed along if he wasn't biting his tongue.

"Your father greeted the cloud as if it were a long-lost friend," continued Grumple. "He even tried to give it a friendly pat, but his hand went right through it!"

Flora swiped her hand through an imaginary cloud. "Silly Daddy!"

At age seven, Flora was happy to accept Father's disappearance as a fairy tale. But Ewan was four years older and remembered clearly the sadness that had driven their father away.

"Imagine," said Grumple. "A cloud. Right outside that very window. The sight of it made your father go teary-eyed."

Flora followed Grumple's bony old finger to the scene of the magical disappearing act. Ewan, on the other hand, kept his eyes fixed on his orange tabby playing catch-and-release with an ant that had strayed through the open kitchen door.

"Your father didn't hesitate to climb aboard that cloud," continued Grumple. "I mean, who would?"

Ewan could hold his tongue no longer. "Me, for starters."

"What do you mean?" asked Flora.

The wobble in her voice caused a wobble in his heart. He hadn't meant to spoil the story.

"Uh, I'd rather fly on a lightning bolt," he said. "Much faster."

Flora giggled. Normally her laugh was contagious. It could cause watery eyes and shortness of breath. But these days Ewan couldn't catch as much as a chuckle.

Ewan stood up and made his way to the door.

All eyes turned to the cat. It was looking to the ceiling innocently, as if there wasn't an ant trapped beneath his paw. Ewan scooped him up.

"Kipper! You bad boy."

Kipper purred loudly.



Ewan sat among the blueberry bushes on the hill overlooking the cove. He fumed at the ridiculousness of Grumple's story. *His hand went right through it.* If that was the case, how did Father manage to ride the darn thing? Wouldn't he have fallen through as soon as he climbed aboard? Ewan shook his head. Grumple's story had more holes in it than a wedge of Swiss cheese. The biggest hole was that Father had been happy to leave. "It was a magical moment," Grumple had said. "Peaceful, almost." Grumple had hoped Ewan would take great comfort in the thought that Father, after years of sadness, was finally at peace. And perhaps Ewan would have, had he believed it. After all, the sorrow that had surrounded Father was as thick as a bank of fog. If only such misery could be turned off with the flick of a switch. Ewan still marveled at how instantly he could darken a room now that Union Electric had expanded its service to Bucket Cove. It was so much easier than making the rounds of the oil lamps to extinguish each of their flames. Still, if misery could be turned off with the flick of a switch, it could be turned back on just as easily.

Ewan frowned as he watched Kipper chase a bumblebee nearby. His cat's delight in toying with creatures smaller than him was wicked. "It will serve you right if that bee stings you right on the nose," Ewan scolded.

Kipper had been given to Ewan the day after Mother's death. He'd been presented to Ewan in a basket lined in blue gingham cloth, with a matching bow tied around his neck. Ewan had been instantly annoyed. Did Father actually think that a scrappy orange kitten could fill the emptiness inside him?

When it came to naming his new pet, Ewan had been so indifferent that he'd said the first word that came to mind: *kipper*. He'd taken inspiration from the lunch his father had just laid before him.

"You're naming your cat after a fish?" asked Father.

Ewan stabbed a piece of the smoked herring with his fork. "It could be worse," he'd said. "I could have called him Bread."

That night Kipper had chewed a hole through the tablecloth and knocked a vase off a shelf, watching with indifference as it crashed to the floor. Four years later, he remained more of a hindrance than a help. He was a mischievous cat, a troublemaker who was more of a chore than a companion. There was one time, though, when Ewan had felt truly grateful for Kipper's company.

It was two weeks after his mother's burial. While Ewan had been happy that her funeral had been well attended, he'd also longed to spend some time alone with his mother.

Standing at the cemetery gates with a bouquet of forget-me-nots in his hands, he'd felt nervous. His mother's headstone, which was covered in floral tributes from friends and neighbors, stood out from the others like a beacon. Ewan had tried to walk toward it, but for some reason his feet wouldn't move. He'd struggled to understand why.

"Maybe," he'd said out loud, "it's because I don't know what to say." That was when Kipper had nipped at his ankles. Ewan was amazed. How had the tiny kitten made its way through the high grass of the path between Ewan's house and the cemetery? Ewan picked him up. "Would you like to meet my mother?" A moment later Ewan was sitting at his mother's grave giving her a play-by-play of Kipper's activities. "He just tried to eat a carpenter ant. Now he's batting a dandelion with his paw. Oh, he just sneezed." His mother would have welcomed a cat. Maybe Ewan would have too had his arrival been under different circumstances.



A breeze wafted from the beach. Although it was July, Ewan shivered with the chill. He longed for hot sunny days, like the ones he'd seen in the *Bucket Cove Bugle* the week before. As part of a weekly series called Exotic Destinations, the paper had printed a photograph of a popular beach in the United States. Unlike the rocky beaches that dotted the coast of Bucket Cove, this one was sandy and dotted with palm trees.

Ewan had been fascinated to learn that back in 1878, a ship carrying twenty thousand coconuts had run aground in Lake Worth, a barrier island off the coast of South Florida. Residents were quick to collect and plant the exotic fruits. Soon the island had a new name: Palm Beach. Ewan imagined a shipwreck full of coconuts washing up on the shores of Newfoundland. Just imagine! Palm trees in Bucket Cove!

According to the article, the weather in Florida was fairly predictable and warm. Sunny days were always on the horizon. But here, because it was so much farther north, he supposed, the weather was often cold, even in summer. Still, the harshness of winter and the dampness of spring were behind him, and Ewan was thankful to have been able to swap out his tweed trousers for knee-length knickers, and his wool overcoat for a button-down shirt and sweater vest, the latter of which could easily be pulled off on the occasional hot day.

Ewan reached across to a scraggly low bush and picked an unripe blueberry. A couple of months from now, he'd happily pop it in his mouth. But today he squished it between his fingers.

Don't pick the red ones, they're green. That's what Father used to say. Flora never understood. How could a berry be red *and* green? Ewan would explain. "Green means unripe. Get it?" Flora would crinkle her freckly nose. "Never mind," Father would say. "She'll get it when she's older."

Ewan sighed. *When she's older.* When she was older she'd get more than a joke about berries. She'd see the holes in

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Grumple's story. Then she'd realize. A cloud didn't take their father away. He walked away on his own two feet.



Ewan stood up and whistled.

Nothing.

He whistled again.

"Kipper! It's time to go back to Grumple's!"

He sighed and looked out over the cove.

"Stupid cat."

A dory puttered away from the wharf. Ewan wondered where it was puttering to. If it were him, he'd putter across the Atlantic. To Scotland maybe. Where he could live in a castle all by himself. Then, if his father ever came back, Grumple would say, *Sorry, the boy's gone. Did you expect him to wait forever?*

But deep down Ewan knew he wouldn't have the guts to putter anywhere. He was a scaredy-cat. Always had been, always would be. Sadly, the bravery that existed in his imagination was nowhere to be found in real life. Sometimes he even jumped at the sight of his own shadow.

"Ouch!"

Ewan rubbed his ankle. While most cats nuzzled for attention, Kipper nibbled. Ewan scooped him up, wishing he'd been given a dog.



Ewan walked back through his fishing village, pausing in front of the little yellow house his mother had built many years before with her own two hands. It had a sky-blue door and five matching windowsills, three on the top, two on the bottom. By this time, early July, Father would have filled the window boxes with forget-me-nots, a tribute to their mother. Now all that filled them was rotting leaves and seagull poop. Two whole years' worth.

Ewan left the vacant house, his old home, for Grumple's white saltbox house with the bright red trim. It was equally attractive, mostly because of its peaceful location on the outskirts of town. It was set back in a meadow, and although Ewan missed his family home and all that had once been in it, living at Grumple's was a comfort.

Dottie O'Reilly called from her porch as Ewan passed. "How's Alfie today?"

Like most locals, Dottie was happy to entertain out-of-the-ordinary phenomena—after all, fairies, sea creatures and witches had been spun into the island's tales for centuries. But a mysterious cloud that took people away? That apparently was a step too far. It saddened Ewan to think the townsfolk thought Grumple was losing his marbles. He wasn't *losing* his mind. He was *using* it. He'd created a fantastical story that was not only imaginative but also kind. And although the tall tale annoyed Ewan, he knew deep down that what Grumple was offering was a gift—an alternate ending to one of the saddest chapters of their lives.

Ewan smiled at Dottie and gave her his usual refrain. “Alfie is grand, Mrs. O’Reilly,” he said. “Top-notch. Best kind. Couldn’t be better.”

And with that he hurried up the lane before she could inquire further.

Moments later he was petting the head of the cast-iron bulldog that stood guard at Grumple’s front door. It wasn’t the most attractive of figurines. In fact, it was quite ugly. It had droopy jowls, and its beady eyes were painted red. Most people who came knocking commented on its hideousness. Ewan always took offense on its behalf. “Don’t worry, mutt,” he’d say. “You’re handsome in your own way.”

Just as Ewan reached for the doorknob, Grumple came flying over the threshold. “To the Hurricle!” he yelled.

The Hurricle was Grumple’s two-wheeled open carriage. Most people called them chariots, but Grumple was not most people. He’d once seen a photograph of an English painting called *A Gentleman with His Pair of Bays Harnessed to a Curricie*. A bay is a horse that has a brown body with bits of black on its mane, ear tips, tail and lower legs. But it wasn’t the bays Grumple was taken with. It was the carriage. It was a grander version of his own, and he was tickled to learn that in England they were called curricles. “Such a fun word!” Grumple had said. He’d quickly adopted the term, changing the *C* to an *H* to make it sound faster, but truth be told, it was nothing more than a glorified wheelbarrow. It

would only ever be as fast as William and Wilder, the two old Newfoundland ponies that pulled it.

Ewan followed his grandfather across the dirt yard. It was an open space used mostly by Flora, who much preferred stomping around in the dust and gravel on the side of the house to the soft wildness of the garden behind it. Even though his granddaughter spent most days covered in a thin layer of gray dust, Grumple also preferred Flora's choice of play space. From his sewing spot at the kitchen table, he had full view of the side yard and could keep a watchful eye on her. His precious flowers stayed safe too.

"Where are we going anyway?" asked Ewan as they made their way toward the barn.

"To Mr. So-and-So's," said Grumple.

"Mr. who-and-who?"

"Mr. So-and-So," Grumple repeated. "The man who owns the Notion Shop."

"The what shop?" asked Ewan.

Grumple didn't answer. His eyes were on the gaping hole in the barn's roof. High winds from the night before had blown some of the wooden slats clear off. Grumple sighed. "Look at the state of it. If only your mother were here." The mention of his mother, no matter how positive, always gave Ewan a start. It wasn't that he didn't like to think of her. He just preferred to do so in moments of his own choosing. That way he was prepared for heartache. When someone else mentioned her, it felt like an invasion, an attack. Still, it was

nice to know that Grumple had admired her carpentry skills. It made Ewan feel proud.

Just as Ewan was following Grumple into the barn, he heard his sister's voice. "Hey, wait for me!"

He turned to see her balanced on one of the porch railings that flanked the side door.

"Flora!" he said. "Be careful up there!"

Flora launched herself into a front flip and struck a perfect landing in the dusty yard.

"Ta-da!"

It was then that Ewan noticed his sister's patchwork dungarees. His heart sank to see the various pieces of striped cotton sewn together as if they were mere scraps of extra material added to the overalls and not the work shirts his father used to wear to the Mercantile.

Flora noticed him noticing. "Grumple made them," she said. "What do you think?"

Grumple's tailored creation struck Ewan as both loving and thoughtless. Loving because he knew that what Flora wanted, more than anything, was to wear boys' clothes, and thoughtless because repurposing their father's clothes suggested he'd never be coming back.

"Well?" said Flora.

Ewan reached out and gave the bib a tug. "Sturdy."

That was no surprise. Father's shirts were made of ticking. The strong cotton was the perfect material for a seven-year-old's playclothes.

“Do you like the pockets?” asked Flora.

Ewan brought his hand to his neck. “Yes,” he said. “Very much.”

The stark white trim on the pockets had the unmistakable crispness of Father’s granddad-style shirt collars. Ewan felt a pain in his memory. The first time he’d described what he was feeling that way was when his father had asked him why he’d gone so quiet on one of their woodland walks. When he’d pointed at the wild forget-me-nots, his father had nodded. Ewan wondered if his father ever felt a pain in his memory when he thought of Ewan and Flora. He hoped he did. It would be nice to be missed.

Flora took Father’s old flatcap out of her back pocket. “Help me tuck up my hair?”

Ewan gathered Flora’s thick, strawberry-blond mane and twisted it onto the top of her head. Flora pulled the cap down over it. Father would have told her she looked as sweet as pie, so Ewan said it instead.

“What kind?” asked Flora.

“Rhubarb,” said Ewan. “My favorite.”

Flora beamed.

“Now,” he said, “I’d better help Grumple hitch up the Hurricle.”

In the barn, Grumple was in a battle of wills with the ponies. William and Wilder were as old as Grumple in horse years and just as stubborn. Today they were even more contrary than usual, and Grumple struggled to control them.

“Couldn’t we borrow Mrs. Shipley-Seward’s new Thomas Flyer instead?” called Ewan.

“Absolutely not,” said Grumple. “You know how I feel about automobiles.”

Ewan knew all too well. Grumple hated the thought of motorcars taking over the roads. He called them obnoxious, noisy and unnecessary. A news clipping from the *Evening Telegram* that Aunt Clara had brought in from St. John’s had served as great ammunition for Grumple’s point of view. The article was called “Reckless Autoists,” and Grumple had memorized a particularly lively excerpt by heart:

“The life of the average pedestrian in the City these days is one of perpetual peril. Let him attempt to cross a street, in broad daylight, and he is lucky if some auto doesn’t come around the corner, at a rate of 15 miles an hour, and just miss him by a scant foot, while the chauffeur glowers at him as much to say ‘Get off the earth, you lobster. What right have you to be on the street?’”

Ewan had tried to say that the news article was irrelevant because they didn’t live in the city. Grumple said it didn’t matter, that motorcars would make their way to the country soon enough, and when they did, they’d wreak havoc. “Just think how they’ll spook William and Wilder!” he’d said.

Ewan smiled. It was the ponies who were wreaking havoc now as Grumple attempted to coax them to the carriage.

Ewan helped by tugging the ropes around their necks and calling to Kipper, who was watching from a hay bale. “Fetch

me one of those carrots,” he said, nodding to the basket of vegetables Flora had collected earlier.

“He’s not a dog, you know,” said Grumple.

Kipper yawned and licked his paw.

“Don’t I know it,” said Ewan.

Grumple fetched the carrot, and together they managed to coax William and Wilder to the cart. A few moments later they were on their way to Mr. Who-and-Who’s What Shop.



Ewan, Grumple and Flora sat in a row on the single bench of the Hurricle.

“When will we be there?” asked Flora five minutes into the journey.

Ewan gripped the side of the cart. “Be *where?*” He still hadn’t a clue where they were going.

“The Notion Shop,” said Grumple.

“Notions are sewing supplies,” said Flora to her brother knowingly. “I already asked.”

“Would you believe I’m fresh out of grommets?” said Grumple. “After all these years my sewing supplies are finally diminishing!”

“It’s because everyone came home again,” said Flora.

“Thanks to Mrs. Shipley-Seward,” added Grumple. “Which reminds me, I must pick up some Czech glass buttons too. The old bat has commissioned me to make her a fur-collared coat!”

Mrs. Shipley-Seward was the richest resident of Bucket Cove. She'd turned heads on her arrival three years earlier by wearing a black, beaded flapper dress and a string of long pearls. She had pulled up to the Mercantile in her Thomas Flyer, exited the car with an air of royalty and stood on the shop's front veranda where Old Man Peterson sat chewing tobacco.

"Do you think you can gather the townsfolk?" she had asked archly. "I have an announcement."

But on hearing an automobile enter the village, the townsfolk had already begun to gather. Grumple, who had been shopping at the general store, was among them. "What in tarnation was that ungodly noise?" he had asked. When he saw the Thomas Flyer, he almost launched into his "Reckless Autoists" recitation, but Mrs. Shipley-Seward had cut him off with a rather grand announcement.

"I, Mrs. Virginia Shipley-Seward, will be opening the island's first pulp and paper mill, right here in Bucket Cove. Not only have I secured clients such as the *London Daily Telegraph*, the *Boston Globe* and the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, but I will also be launching the *Bucket Cove Bugle*. No longer will you need to rely on the local paper from St. John's. We will also export paper, not only across North America, but all over the world. I will be employing thousands. So to all you lovely Bucketeers, tell your people to come home. I repeat, tell your people to"—it was here that she clutched at her heart dramatically—"come home."

A few years before this, the price of cod had taken a nose-dive, and folks couldn't sell their fish at a price high enough to support their families. Many people left the island altogether to find work elsewhere. Soon news of the pulp and paper mill began spreading like wildfire, and people began returning home in droves. Ever since, Grumple had been sewing up a storm. The men who had gone to build skyscrapers in America said that not even in New York City could they find as fine a tailor as Grumple. Hence, months later, his stock needed replenishing.

The Hurricle bumped slowly over the rocky terrain. It was giving Ewan a headache.

"Can't you just get your notions at the Mercantile?" he asked.

Father had stocked lots of sewing supplies when he'd worked there.

"No disrespect to our fine local establishment," said Grumple, "but my tailoring requires the most exquisite supplies. Mrs. Shipley-Seward's request for a fur coat is a perfect example. Only Mr. So-and-So would have Czech glass buttons."

Ewan took the reins, hoping he could speed things up. "Why are these creatures so slow? Giddyup!" he shouted. The ponies slowed to a stop.

"Now you've done it," said Grumple.

William turned his head and gave Ewan the side-eye. Then he looked at Wilder, and the pair broke out into a series of whinnies, brays and snorts.

“I think they’re laughing at you,” said Flora.

Grumple took back the reins. “Apologize to the ponies, Ewan.”

Ewan groaned. “Why should I? It’s their job to pull the cart.”

“They’ll sit here all day,” Grumple warned.

Ewan cleared his throat. “Sorry,” he mumbled.

William pricked his ear.

“Louder,” said Grumple.

Ewan spoke up. “Sorry!”

William gave Wilder a nod, and they were off.

Though it was July, the air was still nippy. Ewan unfolded the heavy plaid lap blanket that sat near his feet and covered the threesome’s knees. The Hurricle carried them through a variety of landscapes—wooded trails, boggy barrens and coastal paths. Ewan disliked the coastal paths. They were too high on the cliffs, open meadows to the right of them, a sheer drop to the Atlantic Ocean on the left. Whenever he was on them, he felt sick to his stomach as his mind filled with visions of the Hurricle tumbling over the edge. They were on one of these paths when suddenly Grumple announced, “We’re here.”

Ewan looked around. There wasn’t a shop in sight. Grumple pointed. Ewan and Flora followed his finger down, down, down to a little inlet far below them. There, built precariously on an outcropping of rocks jutting into the ocean, was a little wooden building with red, peeling paint.

“That’s not a shop!” said Ewan. “That’s a fishing stage.”

Grumple gazed at the building longingly. “It’s been such a long time.”

Flora pointed excitedly at a narrow trail that wound its way down the cliffside. “Are we going down there?” she asked

Grumple climbed out of the Hurricle. “Indeed we are.”

“What about William and Wilder?” asked Ewan, looking for a place to tie them up.

Wilder let out a big yawn. Grumple laughed. “They’re not going anywhere.”

Flora bounded down the path ahead of them. Ewan held Grumple by his elbow. The earth beneath them was mostly dirt and grass, but sometimes it changed to big slabs of rock that were covered in a layer of mist. “Careful!” Ewan called to Flora, but she was already at the base of the outcrop.

A few minutes later Grumple and Ewan joined her. Together they navigated the rocks, dodging the waves lapping up on either side of them until they reached the wooden platform that the small red building sat upon. On closer inspection, Ewan could see that the timber poles supporting the structure were not affixed to the rock by bolts but were simply wedged into the boulders’ watery crevices. He felt himself go weak at the knees.

Grumple rapped on the door.

“If this is a shop, why are we knocking?” said Flora, letting herself in.

Ewan had been in many a fishing stage. Normally they were spaces used for salting and drying fresh cod. They were

usually dark inside, with wooden interiors and ceiling beams that dripped with fishing nets. A large table or two would fill most of the space, and the walls would be covered with various tools used in the processing of fish. But *this*—this was most definitely *not* a fishing stage. For one thing, fishing stages stank to high heaven. This place, though, smelled like a mixture of pipe tobacco and orange peels. It was bright too. The far wall was filled mostly with a large picture window, and except for the mahogany-colored cabinets that lined the perimeter, everything was painted white. Ewan looked in amazement at the hundreds of pullout drawers in the cabinets. No wonder Grumple preferred this place over the Mercantile. Mr. So-and-So must have thousands of notions!

Farther in and along the back wall there was a long counter behind which they'd expected to see Mr. So-and-So.

"Well," said Ewan. "Where is he?"

Suddenly there was a loud *THUD* against the window.

"Jesus Murphy!" cried Grumple.

There, plastered head to toe against the pane, was a man Ewan could only assume was Mr. So-and-So.

Looking a bit like a dazed bird with his face squished against the glass, Mr. So-and-So managed a small wave before pointing to the window latch. Flora ran to open it. A second later the shop owner tumbled rather ungracefully into the room.

"Help him!" cried Grumple. But there really was no need. Mr. So-and-So broke his own fall with an expertly executed side roll. While he sprang to his feet with the nimbleness of an

Olympic gymnast, in appearance he couldn't be further from one. Wearing a cream-colored fisherman sweater and a navy wool sailor beanie, he looked like he'd be more comfortable captaining a fishing vessel than balancing on a high beam.

Mr. So-and-So dusted himself off and grinned at Grumple. "Well I'll be! If it isn'tnnnnnnnnnn't.."

He stalled like this for a good few seconds before breaking off with "Nope. I got nothing."

Grumple graciously filled in the blanks. "Alfie Pettigrew."

"Alfalfa Gettiprew," said Mr. So-and-So. "Of course."

Grumple seemed amused by the flippant mispronunciation of his name, but it annoyed Ewan greatly. Flora, on the other hand, was neither amused nor annoyed. The look on her face was one of pure wonder.

"Are you a fisherman?" she asked.

Mr. So-and-So caressed the arm of his sweater. "Nah. I just wear what feels comfortable. You know what I mean?"

Flora caressed the trim on her overall pockets. "Yes," she said. "I know what you mean."

Mr. So-and-So put his hand out for a handshake, but when Flora took it, he kept both their hands still. "Shaking is terribly undignified," he said.

"It is?" said Flora.

"Oh yes," said Mr. So-and-So. "I'm against it in any form. I keep my salt and pepper in bowls, and when I am scared, I prefer to tremble—it's far more dramatic."

"When I'm scared, I bite my fingernails," said Flora.

Mr. So-and-So examined the little fingers that wrapped around his hand. “Repulsive habit,” he said. “Not to mention short-sighted. How are you supposed to pick wax out of your ear with short nails?”

“Now,” he said, ignoring the disgusted look on Flora’s face, “how about we introduce ourselves? My name is Mr. So-and-So. I am the proprietor of this fine establishment. And you are...?”

“Flora,” said Flora. “And this is Ewan. We keep our salt and pepper in shakers.”

Mr. So-and-So’s eyebrows shot upward. “You mean you’ve never used tiny spoons to sprinkle your pepper and pepper your salt? You poor things.”

Mr. So-and-So proceeded to mime his salt and pepper technique. He reminded Ewan of a mustache-less Charlie Chaplin. Earlier that year Grumple had taken Ewan to see *The Kid* at the Star Theatre in St. John’s. It was a silent film, and Ewan had been quite taken with Chaplin, who’d played a character called the Tramp. Chaplin’s face was comical yet kind, and his brown curls peeked out from his bowler hat much the way Mr. So-and-So’s did from his knit beanie. They shared the same expressive eyebrows too.

Ewan watched as Mr. So-and-So pretended to sneeze after an overly enthusiastic sprinkle from an imaginary spoon. He achooed so loudly the walls shook. Although he and the Tramp shared many characteristics, Ewan wished they shared one more—silence.

“Tell me,” said Grumple, once Mr. So-and-So had finished his amateur dramatics, “how’s your grandmother?”

“Oh, you know,” said Mr. So-and-So, swatting a dismissive hand in the air. “The same as always—dead!”

He threw his head back and laughed.

“I’m ever so sorry,” said Grumple. “I had no idea.”

“Well, it *has* been ten years since your last visit.”

“She was a good woman, your grandmother,” said Grumple.

“Easy for you to say,” said Mr. So-and-So. “She didn’t make you eat your peas.”

“Ew!” said Flora. “Peas are disgusting!”

“Agreed,” said Mr. So-and-So. “The only thing peas are good for arrrrrrre—”

Flora cut him off at the five-second mark. “Sticking up your nose?”

“Absolutely not!” he said. “The only thing you should ever stick up your nose is your finger!”

Flora’s laughter coincided with a crack of thunder.

“What was that?” said Ewan.

Grumple looked out the window. “Looks like a storm’s brewing.”

A kaleidoscope of butterflies filled Ewan’s stomach. He hated storms. Always had. And with Father gone now, they were practically unbearable.

“Oooh,” said Flora. “I hope there’s lightning.”

“Can we just get the Czech buttons and go?” asked Ewan.

Suddenly Mr. So-and-So began spinning in circles.

“What on earth is he doing?” asked Flora.

Mr. So-and-So was now spinning as fast as a whirligig. When he stopped he was holding a small paper envelope. “Czech buttons? Check!”

The trio looked at his hands in amazement.

“Where did *they* come from?” asked Flora.

Mr. So-and-So pointed to a cabinet on the far wall. “The Czech-button drawer, of course.”

Flora crinkled her brow. “But how—”

“No *buts*,” said Mr. So-and-So. “Only *ands*.”

“What does that mean?” asked Ewan.

“*Buts* are exclusionary,” said Mr. So-and-So. “*Ands* include.”

Ewan’s head hurt. “Can we go now, Grumple?”

Grumple shook his head. “I haven’t even had a chance to look around yet!”

Ewan let out a groan. “But—”

“No *buts*,” said Flora. “Only *ands*.”

Mr. So-and-So waved the children closer. “Who wants to see the new wing?”

“I do!” said Flora.

Mr. So-and-So motioned them to a section of cabinetry near the counter. As with the rest of the room, little drawers filled the walls, floor to ceiling. Mr. So-and-So ran his fingers along the little brass knobs as if searching for a particular one. “Ah,” he said. “Here it is.”

He turned to Flora. “Would you like to do the honors?”

Flora reached for the knob.

“Oh no,” said Mr. So-and-So. “You don’t pull it. You lick it.”

“Lick it?”

Mr. So-and-So nodded.

“Should I?” she asked Ewan.

Ewan frowned. “Probably not.”

She looked to Mr. So-and-So.

“It’s your choice,” he said.

Flora smiled. “I like choices.”

She stuck out her tongue tentatively and then licked the brass hardware. A moment later a large section of the cabinetry swung open like a door. Mr. So-and-So walked through the opening.

“Well?” he said, turning. “Are you coming?”

Ewan looked to Grumple, who waved them off. “You three go ahead. I have plenty to look at out here.”

And with that Flora grabbed Ewan’s hand and pulled him over the threshold.

Suddenly they were in total darkness.



“I’m scared,” Ewan blurted. He felt Flora squeeze his hand.

After a moment Mr. So-and-So turned on the lights. Ewan’s cheeks felt as if they’d been showered in thumbtacks.

“No need to be embarrassed,” said Mr. So-and-So. “We all have fears.”

Flora let go of Ewan's hand and ventured farther into the room, which was almost identical to the one they'd just left. "Even you?" she asked.

"Oh yes," said Mr. So-and-So. "I have lots."

"Like what?" asked Flora.

Mr. So-and-So thought for a moment. "You know when you see an elderly person walking with a cane and you get the uncontrollable urge to kick it out from under them?"

Flora and Ewan looked at each other, then shook their heads.

"Really?" said Mr. So-and-So. "Strange. Anyway, my big fear is that someday I'll actually do it."

Flora laughed.

"That's not funny," said Ewan.

"Indeed it's not," said Mr. So-and-So. "Sadly, I can't help the thoughts that pop into my head. I may look as simple and innocent as a cuttlefish, but on the inside I have the tortured soul of a guppy. Anyhoo, who are you two anyway? Gettiprew's child servants?"

"We're his grandchildren," said Flora.

"And where, might I ask, are your parents?"

Ewan and Flora fell silent.

Mr. So-and-So pointed to his mouth and addressed his foot. "Well? What are you waiting for, you stinky, moisture-ridden hoof? Get in here!"

The children stared at him blankly.

"I put my foot in my mouth," he said. "Get it?"

Ewan didn't think that was funny either.

"Mother died," said Flora. "And Father flew away on a cloud."

Mr. So-and-So produced a pipe out of thin air and put it in the corner of his mouth. "Ah. Yes. The ol' 'flying-away-on-a-cloud' scenario. Common story. Happens all the time."

Ewan was getting increasingly annoyed by Mr. So-and-So's attempts at humor. He was also feeling increasingly anxious. Unlike the old wing, the new wing had no windows, and the fact that Ewan couldn't see the storm brewing outside made him uneasy. How could he escape danger if he couldn't see it?

"Come on, Flora," he said. "We'd better get back to Grumple."

"Don't you want to see what's in the drawers?" asked Mr. So-and-So.

"Not really," said Ewan.

"I do," said Flora.

"Go right ahead," said Mr. So-and So. "You won't be disappointed."

Flora chose a drawer at her eye level, about eight rows up from the bottom. She moved her face closer to the handle and stuck out her tongue. Mr. So-and-So shot across the room. "What on earth are you doing?" he cried.

Flora looked to Ewan and then to Mr. So-and So. "Don't I have to lick it for it to open?"

Mr. So-and-So's face distorted with disgust. "*Lick* it?"

"Yes, I thought—"

Mr. So-and So turned to Ewan. "Did she say *lick* it?"

Ewan nodded.

Mr. So-and-So rubbed his chin and began muttering to himself. “Lick it? My word. The girl must be mad. Lick it? *Lick* a handle to open a drawer? How utterly revolting. Poor little mite. Maybe she’s iron deficient. Too bad the handles are brass.”

Flora cleared her throat. “So should I just...er...pull it?”

Mr. So-and-So straightened up and smiled. “What a novel idea.”

Flora gave the handle a little tug.

“Now please reach in,” said Mr. So-and-So. “With your fingers,” he added, presumably for fear she might try to scoop it out with her tongue.

Flora pulled out a small strip of paper and read it aloud.

“Dogs would be much more enjoyable if they drank through straws.”

Ewan smiled at his little sister’s advanced reading skills but frowned at the nonsensical message. “I thought this was a notion shop,” he said.

“It is,” said Mr. So-and-So. “And what young Flora just read, my friend, is a notion. An odd one. But a notion nevertheless.”

“So a notion can be a button or a grommet but also an opinion?” asked Flora.

Once again Ewan found himself smiling at his younger sibling. Even Mr. So-and-So looked suitably impressed by the insightfulness of her remark.

“Indeed,” he said. “An opinion, a thought, an impression, an idea. It can even be a whim or a desire.”

“And this room is full of that kind of notion?” asked Flora.

“Yes!” said Mr. So-and-So. “Pick another one!”

“Hang on a second,” said Ewan. “I have to disagree with the dog notion. Dogs are great. No matter how loudly they drink.”

Mr. So-and-So gave Ewan a patient smile. “Let’s test that theory, shall we?”

He reached behind the counter and pulled out a bowl of water.

“Wait,” said Flora. “Where did you—”

Mr. So-and-So shoved his face into the bowl and proceeded to slurp, snuffle, slobber and snort.

Flora watched with delight. Ewan, with disgust.

When Mr. So-and-So was done, he wiped his face with his left sleeve and then pulled a straw out of his right.

“Excuse me,” he said, “while I daintily—and quietly—drink from this water bowl.”

He took a long, silent sip and then let out a soft “aaaah.”

He turned to Ewan and raised an eyebrow.

Ewan shrugged. “I agree that dainty sipping is better than loud slurping,” he said. “But dogs will never be able to drink from straws, so what’s the point?”

“Never say never, Ewan,” said Mr. So-and-So. “I once taught a beaver to use a hacksaw. He’s a carpenter now. Builds lodges and dams all over the island. As a matter of fact, he just won

Beaver of the Year. You should have seen the photo they printed in the *Rodent Review*, though. Poor fella's got teeth down to his toes! Oh well. That's the price of success, I guess."

"Maybe he could use a nail file," suggested Flora. "To make his teeth short again."

"Or maybe," said Ewan dryly, "he could throw the hacksaw away and keep his teeth short by using them as they were intended."

"My dear Ewan," said Mr. So-and-So, "if we all used our body parts as they were intended, the palmaris longus muscle in our wrists would be strong enough for us to climb trees. But since we can get our apples from the local mercantile, that particular muscle has become useless. Hmmm. I wonder. Now that beavers can use hacksaws, will their teeth become obsolete too? Probably not. They'd have to use them for eating, of course. Unless they drink everything through straws. Like dogs."

Ewan was trying to make sense of the half-fact, half-nonsense argument he'd just been bombarded with when Mr. So-and-So said, "Ewan? Would *you* like to pick a drawer?"

The question jarred him. Him? Pick a notion? The idea certainly intrigued him. But they really ought to have been going, what with that storm brewing outside. In the end, what Ewan lacked in bravery he made up for in curiosity. A moment later, with his hands clasped behind his back, he walked around the room, wondering if he'd feel the pull of a particular drawer.

“Maybe this one,” he said, reaching for a drawer in the bottommost corner of the back wall.

Mr. So-and-So winced. “Ooooooh. I don’t know about that one. It’s a bit untoward, if you know what I mean. A bit unsavory.”

Ewan hesitated. Flora grinned. “Do it,” she said.

The notion was handwritten in loopy writing.

“You can pick your nose, you can pick your friends, but you can’t pick your friend’s nose,” Ewan read.

Mr. So-and-So smiled fondly. “Ah,” he said. “That ol’ chestnut. A true classic. Been around since 1344, you know.”

Ewan wanted to try another drawer but was too shy to ask.

“Go ahead,” said Mr. So-and-So. “Pick another one and then we’ll be on our way.”

Ewan walked to the other side of the room and picked a drawer as high up as he could reach. He unrolled the strip of paper and read, *“A ship in harbor is safe, but that is not what ships are built for.”*

Ewan looked up at Mr. So-and-So. “Tell that to the crew of the *Titanic*.”

Ewan had read a book of Grumple’s called *Titanic*, written by a man named Filson Young just thirty-seven days after the passenger liner sank in 1912. His description of the catastrophe was based on survivor accounts, and it had made Ewan think a lot about the passengers who had died. Surely they had thought their ship was safe in the harbor *and* on the sea. Otherwise, why would they have climbed aboard? Ewan

certainly wouldn't have. That was the thing about taking risks. It was too risky.

Flora skipped to where Mr. So-and-So was standing and tugged at his sweater. "Can I have another turn?" she asked.

Mr. So-and-So shook his head. "We'd better check on your grandfather. The old coot is probably shoplifting."

Flora batted her eyelashes. "Please?"

Mr. So-and-So patted her head. "Next time you'll get two in a row. Promise."

Flora rubbed the heavy wool of Mr. So-and-So's sweater between her fingers. "Mr. So-and-So? Why are you wearing such heavy clothes? It's July."

Mr. So-and-So shrugged. "Like I said, I wear what's comfortable."

Ewan couldn't see how overdressing for the weather was comfortable, but then again, he wasn't Mr. So-and-So. Nothing that man did made much sense, as was clearly demonstrated by his answer to Flora's next question.

"Mr. So-and-So? What were you doing before you smashed into the window?"

Mr. So-and-So smiled. "I was flying."

"You can fly?" said Flora.

Mr. So-and-So nodded. "In my head I'm as graceful as a New Zealand kiwi bird."

"Kiwis don't fly," said Ewan.

Mr. So-and-So rubbed his chin. "And therein lies the problem."

As they moved from the new wing to the old, Ewan was struck by a memory: his father, sitting on their front steps, shining his work boots over layers of newspaper. Ewan could picture the Kiwi Shoe Polish tin clearly. It was black and red with a bit of yellow. A cute little kiwi bird stood above the word *KIWI*, which was written in white capital letters. It was a memory so strong Ewan could smell it. It was the gas-like scent of the shoe polish, the inky print of the newspaper and the floral notes of Mother's forget-me-nots. It was an aroma that captured a moment in time. An olfactory snapshot. And just like that it was gone.

Back in the old wing, Ewan could see that the storm was brewing harder. The sky was dark, and the clouds were heavy with rain. Distant thunder gave him goose bumps.

"Grumple," he said, "we'd better get going." Ewan was relieved when Grumple agreed. But purchasing the items proved to be a lengthy process, as Mr. So-and-So insisted on providing commentary for each item he checked in. "English Superfine Twilled Tape? 'Twill be a superfine addition to your sewing basket! Show Boat brand bias tape? I may be biased, but it's the best on the island." And so it continued. By the time they left, the wind had picked up terribly. It almost took the door off the hinges when they opened it.

"Enjoy the journey!" said Mr. So-and-So, as if they were venturing out into a gloriously sunny day. They had just reached the base of the cliff when they felt the first few drops of rain. As on the descent, Ewan held Grumple's elbow. Flora

bounded ahead. “You just have to run between the drops!” she called.

Going up the trail was much harder than going down. Despite the rain, they stopped at the top to catch their breath. Ewan looked back at the Notion Shop.

“Look, Flora,” he whispered. “You can’t see the new wing from the outside.”

Flora gasped. “Maybe it’s magic,” she said.

“Yes,” said Ewan. “Maybe it is.”