

THE LITTLE COUNTRY

# THE LITTLE COUNTRY



Charles de Lint

## Praise for *The Little Country* by Charles de Lint

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“A milestone in contemporary fantasy. This book sings. You grip the pages till your hands lock in place, or turn them so fast you accidentally tear them out. . . . De Lint’s career can no longer be described as promising; he has fulfilled his promise; he has arrived.”

—Orson Scott Card

“The author of *Moonheart*. . . asserts his unique ability to weave together a seamless pattern of magic and realism as this story-within-a-story unfolds with unique grace. Highly recommended.”

—*Library Journal*

“His ability to fuse the mundane with the strange is certainly very much of a gift. This reminded me of that long-ago book, *Mistress Masham’s Repose*, by T. H. White. I was certainly swept into another and very fascinating world page by page and was aware of an unusual and very forceful gift.”

—Andre Norton

“Really original: one of the most fascinating books of this decade. No hackneyed werewolves or vampires, but a real sense of wonder.”

—Marion Zimmer Bradley

“Excellent. . . Magical, mysterious, mystical. Frighteningly weird.”

—*Chicago Sun-Times*

DREAMS UNDERFOOT  
THE FAIR AT EMAIN MACHA  
FORESTS OF THE HEART  
GREENMANTLE  
INTO THE GREEN  
THE IVORY AND THE HORN  
JACK OF KINROWAN  
THE LITTLE COUNTRY  
MEMORY AND DREAM  
MOONHEART  
MOONLIGHT AND VINES  
SOMEPLACE TO BE FLYING  
SPIRITWALK  
SVAHA  
TRADER  
YARROW

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The Little Country

Charles de Lint

A Tom Doherty Associates Book  
New York

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for  
Don Flamanck and Colin Wilson  
two wise Cornishmen

and for all those traditional musicians  
who, wittingly or unwittingly,  
but with great good skill,  
still seek to recapture that first music

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## Acknowledgments

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The novel that follows is a work of fiction. All characters and events in this book are fictitious and any resemblance to actual persons living or dead is purely coincidental.

The tune titles heading each chapter are all traditional, except for “Leppadumdowledum,” which was composed by Donal Lunny; “So There I Was,” composed by John Kirkpatrick; and “Absurd Good News.” Musicians interested in tracking down the tunes should look for them in the usual sources—tunebooks, old and new, but especially in the repertoire of musicians, whether recorded or in live performance and sessions; those tunes credited to Janey Little have been transcribed and can be found in the appendix at the end of the novel for the hopeful enjoyment of interested players.

A work such as this doesn't grow out of a vacuum. *The Little Country* had its origin in sources too exhaustive to list with any real thoroughness, but I can still pinpoint its original spark: many an evening in the early seventies spent listening to my friend Don Flamanck telling stories of Cornwall that he remembered it. When my wife, Mary Ann, and I finally went to Cornwall in October of 1988 to research this book's settings, we found it to be everything Don had promised it would be, and more.

Thanks are due to Don, first and foremost, for that inspiration, and also to Phil and Audrey Wall of Mousehole for more wonderful stories and their hospitality; to Bernard Evans of Newlyn for filling me in on the local music scene; to Ben Batten, Christopher Bice, Des Hannigan, John Hocking, Robert Hunt, John and Nettie Pender, Derek Tangye, Douglas Tregenza, Ken Ward, G. Pawley White, and a multitude of others too numerous to list here for background material; to Colin Wilson for his logical explorations of those things that defy logic; to those many, many traditional musicians, again too numerous to mention, who keep the music alive and give it new life with each note they play; to those musicians who attend the local music sessions here in Ottawa (“All of a Monday Night”) and by their enthusiasm keep my own playing in right good fettle; and last, though not least, to my wife, Mary Ann, a mean mandolin player in her own right, for her support, both musical and literary, and for her love that I could not do without.

—Charles de Li



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myself, a brat who .  
couldn't figure numbers worth a damn  
was always a chance  
and given three lines to add I'd put the middle row  
down as the answer  
but I could read all day if I could get away with  
and all night too with a flashlight under the cover  
of that Green Man . . . or of Merlin of the borders. . .

—ROBIN WILLIAMSON  
from "Five Denials on Merlin's Grave"

He wanted the sort of book that didn't seem to need a beginning and end, that could be opened at any  
page without suffering for it—slow, candlelight reading.

—JAMES P. BLAYLOCK  
from *Land of Dreams*

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**PART ONE — The Hidden People**

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Man has closed himself up, till he sees all  
things through the narrow chinks of his cavern.

—WILLIAM BLAKE

Underneath the reality in which we live and  
have our being, another and altogether  
different reality lies concealed.

—FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

Like burrs old names get stuck to each other and to anyone who walks among them.

—PAUL HAZEL, from *Undersea*

**There were** two things Janey Little loved best in the world: music and books, and not necessarily that order.

Her favorite musician was the late Billy Pigg, the Northumbrian piper from the northeast of England whose playing had inspired her to take up the small pipes herself as her principal instrument.

Her favorite author was William Dunthorn, and not just because he and her grandfather had been mates, though she did treasure the old sepia-toned photograph of the pair of them that she kept sealed in a plastic folder in her fiddle case. It had been taken just before the Second World War in the native Mousehole—confusingly pronounced “Mouzel” by the locals—two gangly Cornish lads standing in front of The Ship Inn, cloth caps in hand, shy grins on their faces.

Dunthorn had written three book-length works of fiction, but until that day in the Gaffer’s attic when Janey was having a dusty time of it, ferreting through the contents of old boxes and chests, she knew of only two. The third was a secret book, published in an edition of just one copy.

*The Hidden People* was his best-known work, remembered by most readers with the same fondness that they recalled for *Winnie the Pooh*, *The Wind in the Willows*, and other classics of their childhood. It told of a hidden race of mouse-sized people known as the Smalls, reduced to their diminutive stature in the Middle Ages by a cranky old witch who died before her curse could be removed. Supposedly the Smalls prospered through the ages, living a hidden life alongside that more normal-sized people right up to the present day. The book was still in print, in numerous illustrated editions, but Janey’s favorite was still the one that contained Ernest Shepard’s delightful pen and ink drawings.

The other novel was *The Lost Music*, published two years after the first. While it didn’t have nearly the success of *The Hidden People*—due no doubt to its being less whimsical and the fact that it dealt with more adult themes—its theories of music being a key to hidden realms and secret states of mind had still made it a classic in the fantasy field. It too remained in print, though there were few children who would find a copy of it under their Christmas tree, illustrated by whichever artist was currently the nadir of children’s book illustrating.

Which was really a pity, Janey often thought, because in the long run, *The Lost Music* was the better book. It was the reason that she had taken up with old things. Because of it, she went back to its sources, poring over folktales and myths, discovering traditional music and finding that the references between old lore and old tunes and songs went back and forth between each other. It was a delightful exploration, one that eventually led to her present occupation.

For while she had no interest in writing books, she had discovered, hidden away inside herself, a real flair for the old music. She took to playing the fiddle and went wandering through tunebook after tunebook tracked down in secondhand bookshops, the tunes sticking to her like brambles on a walk across a cliff-side field. Old tunes, old names, old stories. So Dunthorn was partially responsible for who she was today—a comment that made the Gaffer laugh when she mentioned it to him once.

“Wouldn’t Billy smile to hear you say that now, my robin,” her grandfather had said. “That her writings should turn a good Cornish girl to playing Paddy music for a living—not to mention traveling around by her ownsel’ with nothing but a fiddle and a set of Scotch small pipes to keep her company.

“You like my music.”

The Gaffer nodded. “And I don’t doubt Bill would have liked it too—just as he liked his own writing. He’d sit up and scribble by the lantern till all hours of the night sometimes—took it all very seriously, didn’t he just?—and he’d have admired your getting by with the doing of something you love.”

“He always wanted to live by his writing—writing what he pleased, I mean—but all the bookmen wanted was more fairy tales. Bill . . . he had more serious stories to tell by then, so he worked the boats by day to earn his living and did his writing by night—for himself, like. He wouldn’t give me another book like the one about the Smalls. Didn’t want to be writing the same thing over and over again, was what he said.”

“*The Lost Musichas* fairy-tale bits in it.”

“And doesn’t it just, my beauty? But to hear him talk, they weren’t made-up bits—just the way that history gets mixed up as the years go by. *The Lost Music* was his way of talking about the way he believed that old wives’ tales and dance tunes and folktales were just the tangled echoes of something that’s not quite of this world . . . something we all knew once, but have forgotten since. That’s how he explained it to me, and very serious he was about it too. But then Bill had a way of making anything sound important—that was his gift, I think. For all I know he was serious about the Smalls too.”

“You think he really believed in things like that?”

The Gaffer shrugged. “I’m not saying yes or no. He was a sensible lad, was Bill, and a good mate, but he was a bit fey too. Solid as the ground is firm, but ever so once in a while he’d get a funny look about him, like he’d just seen a piskie sticking its little brown head around the doorpost, and he wouldn’t talk then for a while—at least he wouldn’t say much that made sense. But I never heard a man not make sense so eloquently as Bill Dunthorn could when he was of a mind to do so, and there was more than once he had me half believing in what he was saying.”

Dunthorn had also written essays, short stories, travelogues, and poetry, though none of those writings survived in current editions except for two of the short stories, which were constantly being reprinted in storybook collections for children: “The Smalls,” which was the original version of *The Hidden People*, and “The Man Who Lived in a Book,” a delightful romp about a world that existed inside a book that could be reached by placing a photograph of oneself between its pages. Janey could still remember all the times she’d put pictures of herself between the pages of her favorite books, the very best parts, and gone to sleep, hoping to wake up in one of those magical realms.

“I could use that trick now,” she murmured to herself as she brushed the dust and cobwebs from the chest that was thrust far back under the eaves of the attic.

She still couldn’t believe that Alan had left her in the lurch, right on the eve of a new tour of New England and California.

Things had not been going well between them this past summer, which just went to show you that one should pay more attention to the old adages because they were all based on a kernel of good solid common sense.

Never mix business and pleasure.

Well, of course. Except having a relationship with one’s sideman seemed too perfect to not take advantage of it. Instead of leaving your lover behind, he went on tour with you. What could be better? No more lonely nights while your sideman went out with some guitar groupie and you were left alone in the hotel room because you just wanted to be away from the crowds for a change. Away from strangers. Away from having to put on a smiling face when you just wanted to be silly with a friend, slouch in a corner and simply do nothing at all, without having to worry about what kind of an impression you made or left behind when you traveled on.

But relationships tended to erode if they weren’t worked on, and Alan’s and hers had been no exception. They’d become grouchy with each other on their last tour of the Continent. Complaining

not with each other, but about each other. Mostly it was just little things, dissatisfactions and petty differences, but it began to affect the music until it got to the point where they couldn't work up a new arrangement of any sort without a row.

Argumentative was how Alan described her.

Perhaps she was. But she wouldn't see the music compromised. Improvising was fine, but not simply because he couldn't bother to remember an arrangement. And banging his guitar strings like they were horseshoes and his pick the hammer, that was right out. It was still her name on the tour posters. People came to see her play the music, and she meant to give them their money's worth. They hadn't come to see her sideman get soused and have evenings where he made the Pogues sound like brilliant musicians.

And that was the real heart of Alan's problem. They hadn't come to see Alan MacDonald; they'd come to see her.

"Oh, sod him," she said as she dragged the dusty chest out from under the eaves.

Her voice rang hollowly in the attic. She wondered what the Gaffer would think to hear her sitting up here, talking to herself, but she had the house to herself. He was up in Paul, at the King's Arms having a few pints with his mates. Perhaps she should have gone. Chalkie Fisher would be there and he'd brought along his box, they could have had a bit of a session. And after a few tunes, Jim Raffer would take out his wee whistle and ask quietly, "Do you know this one, then?" just before he launched into the version of "Johnny Cope" that was his party piece.

But for once Janey knew she'd find no solace in the music. Not with the tour still looming ahead of her without a sideman. She had an advert in a couple of the papers, but she'd have to go back to Jenny's flat in London for the auditions. If anyone even bothered to call. Knowing her luck, she'd end up being stuck with some three-chord wonder that she'd have to teach to play his bloody instrument before they could even start to work on their sets. Because everybody who was decent wasn't available. Unless she wanted to go begging Alan to at least finish this one tour with her.

No thanks.

She creaked open the wooden chest and sneezed at the musty odor that rose from its contents. It appeared to be stacked, from top to bottom, with old journals. She took one out and flipped through the pages, pausing when she came to a familiar byline. "Tom Bawcock's Eve in Mousehole" by William Dunthorn. The article was a brief description of the traditional festivities in Mousehole on December 23rd, when the fishermen gathered to eat "Stargazy Pie"—a pie made with whole fish, their heads sticking out through the crust.

She looked through more of the journals and found brief articles by Dunthorn in each one. Most she'd already seen—the Gaffer had kept all of his mate's writing that he could lay his hands on—but there were one or two she'd never read before, and many of them were in manuscript form as well as published.

Well, this was a find, wasn't it just? Wouldn't it be perfect if down by the bottom there were manuscript pages of some uncompleted novel? Or, better yet, a completed novel, just aching to be read. . . .

Her breath caught in her chest as her scrabbling hands came up with a leather-bound book right at the bottom of the chest.

Be still my heart, she thought.

There was some mildew on the cover, but it came off when she rubbed it with the sleeve of her shirt, leaving only a faint smudge. What made her breath catch, however, was the title of the book.

*The Little Country.* A novel by William Dunthorn.

Fingers trembling, she opened the book. A folded slip of paper fell out onto her lap, but she ignored it as she flipped quickly through the thick parchment pages.

My God. It was a novel. A complete, published Dunthorn novel that she'd never heard of before.

~~She turned to the copyright page, not quite taking in the phrase "published in an edition of one copy" until she'd read it a number of times.~~

One copy.

This was the only copy.

What was it *doing* here?

Slowly she put the book down on a stack of journals and manuscripts and picked up the slip of paper that had fallen to her lap.

"My dear friend Tom," the letter began.

Her gaze traveled down to the signature. It was a letter from Dunthorn to her grandfather. Blinking once, she went back to the top of the page and read the letter through.

*Here is the book you promised to keep for me. Read it if you will, but remember your promise—must not leave your possession. It must not be published. Not ever!! Its existence must remain secret—not simply the tale told in its pages, but the book itself.*

*I know you think me mad sometimes, and God knows I've given you reason enough (a good solid bloke, am I?—I smile whenever I hear you describe me so), but you have my eternal gratitude if you will humour me this one last time.*

*I have a sense of foreboding for this coming year—yes, that famous Mad Bill Dunthorn Gypsy prescience strikes again!—so it is with great relief that I turn over the possession of this book to you and know that it will remain safe with you.*

*Godspeed, my friend. I wish there was more time.*

Janey reread the letter, then her gaze settled on the date under Dunthorn's signature. He'd written the letter just two months before his death.

Gypsy prescience?

A secret book?

Thoughtfully she folded the letter and stuck it back into the book between the front cover and the endpaper. Then, sitting there in the Gaffer's dusty attic, she turned to the first page and began to read. Within the first few paragraphs, all her troubles had melted away and she was caught in the spell of Dunthorn's secret story.

Sometimes I feel like I've got my nose pressed up against the window of a bakery, only I'm the bread.

—CARRIE FISHER, from *Postcards from the Edge*

**If our** lives are all books," Jodi told Denzil Gossip, "then someone's torn a few pages from mine."

"Tee-ta-taw," the old man replied in a mildly mocking tone. "Listen to her talk."

He was perched on a tall stool at his worktable under the eaves, tinkering with a scaled-dove model of his newest flying machine. Squinting through his glasses, he adjusted the last tiny nut and bolt for the third time since Jodi had arrived at his loft that rainy afternoon. Jodi waited patiently as he broke a morsel of Burke cheese from the piece he kept in the pocket of his tweed vest for the purpose of enticing the pair of mice who would be powering the odd little craft—at least they would be if they could be got from their cage and into the two revolving mechanisms that looked like exercise wheels attached to either side of the machine.

Denzil was never one to force an issue, especially not on the creatures upon which his experiments depended.

"They've got to want to do it, you," he'd explained to Jodi when she had asked why he didn't just pick them up and put them in. "Those mice and I are partners in solving the mystery, not master and slaves."

The mice, wiser than many would give them credit for, ignored the bribe and stayed in their cage peering through its open door, pink noses quivering. Jodi tried to remember which of the pair had been riding in the miniature hot-air balloon that was navigating the length of the loft when she'd dropped it by one day last week. She thought it was the one with the brown spot on his left hind leg.

"I don't see much point in any of it," she said.

"What?" Denzil looked up at her. He pushed his wire rimmed glasses up to the bridge of his nose. "Well, I go to sea! It's the secret of flight, we're speaking of here—the last frontier! And you want to just ignore it?"

"Not really, I suppose," Jodi said. "But what use is a flying machine that you have to run like a madman to keep aloft? You'd be quicker taking the train—and better rested to boot."

"Where's your sense of adventure?"

"I think I left it in my other jacket. Shall I go fetch it?"

Denzil hrumphed and went back to coaxing the mice while Jodi settled back in the fat, stuffed armchair that she'd commandeered from its spot near the hearth and dragged over to the workbench so that she could watch him go about his business in comfort.

"Fetch it," the parrot sitting on the back of the chair repeated. Then he walked back and forth along the top of the padded cushion, mimicking Denzil's hrumphing sounds.

Jodi reached back and ruffled his feathers. "Don't you start, Noz," she told him.

Denzil's loft was a curious haphazard mixture of zoo, alchemist's laboratory, and mechanic's workshop.

In cages along one wall were four more mice, two white rats, a fat, black, lop-eared rabbit, a pair of green lizards, and a turtle. There was also a murky aquarium that presently held two sleepy-looking catfish; Noz's perch, currently in use by a black-eyed crow; and an empty cage where Ollie, the pale brown rhesus monkey, was kept when he started to misbehave. At the moment Ollie was asleep on top of a bookshelf, sharing the spot with Rum, an old orange tomcat with one shredded ear.

The workbench was vaguely divided into two sections: one side a bewildering mess of test tubes

beakers, glass pipes, a gas burner, clamps, ring stands, thermometers, jars, a set of scales, microscope with a messy tray of slides, and other such paraphernalia; the other side where Denzil was now working presented an equally bewildering display of mechanical tools, wiring, bits of metal, clockwork mechanisms, and the like.

The remainder of the large loft had a small sofa that doubled as a bed on the other side of the hearth, dormer windows, a twin to the armchair Jodi now occupied still in its spot by the hearth, a small kitchen area centered around a black iron stove, and bookcases wherever there was room for them, stuffed with books, folders, and loose bits of paper. Everywhere one tried to walk there were little piles of Denzil's belongings: a heap of scrap metal by the door; a bag of feed leaning against a bookcase; a box filled with rolled-up maps in the middle of the room; little stacks of books, periodicals, and papers.

The room was like its owner, who invariably presented a disheveled, half-bemused face to the world, while underneath his worn and patched clothes, bird's-nest hair and beard, and thin, pinched features was secreted a brilliant mind that never ceased to question the world around him. Jodi spent more time with him in his loft, or going on long rambles in the countryside looking for some missing ingredient for his latest experiment, than she did anywhere else in the town of Bodbury.

His company was worth the assault on her nose that the loft always presented—a weird mixture of chemical odors, smells from the cages that she usually ended up cleaning, machine oil, and Denzil's pipe. And though he always appeared totally engrossed in whatever task was at hand, he was still capable of carrying on conversations on the most diverse series of subjects. There were pauses and lags in those conversations, times when a sentence broken off one morning was completed the afternoon, but the conversations were always worthwhile.

"What sort of pages are you missing?" he asked now.

He put the cheese down between the mice's cage and the flying machine and gave her another glance. Up went his hand to push back his glasses.

"Oh, I don't know," Jodi replied. "I'm just at loose ends and I can't seem to remember anything anymore. I suppose that happens when you get old."

Denzil chuckled. "And you're so very old, you. Seventeen, is it now?"

"Eighteen. And I feel ancient."

"Ancient, is it? My gar. You don't look nearly old enough to be ancient yet. I'd give it a few more years, you."

He pushed the bit of cheese closer to the mice's cage.

"I really do need *todo* something," Jodi said. "I need a Purpose in life."

"Come 'pon that," Denzil said, "I suppose you're right. You can't spend the whole of your life puttering around up here with me. That's not half natural."

"I don't putter. I'm your assistant. You told me so yourself."

"Now was that before or after we decided that it was an assistant's duty to clean up after the animals?"

Jodi grinned. "Before. And it was you that decided it—not me."

"Hmm."

Denzil picked up the morsel of cheese and popped it into his mouth. Reaching into his other pocket he took out a small wedge of Tamshire cheese and put a bit of it near the mice's cage. Both mice regarded it with interest, but neither moved.

"A purpose, you say?" Denzil went on. "And missing pages?"

Jodi nodded. "Great blocks of time. Like this spring. Can my whole life be all so much the same that nothing stands out anymore? *What* did I do this spring?"

"When you weren't helping me?"



Jodi nodded.

~~“I don’t remember, you. What does Nettie say?”~~

Jodi lived with her Aunt Nettie in a small apartment on the top floor of the bordello that her aunt kept at the edge of town. It was her aunt’s greatest disappointment that Jodi hadn’t followed the family tradition and taken up the “life of leisure” as the other women in their family had.

“There’s those that like ’em scrawny and looking like a boy,” her aunt would tell her, which did little to further Jodi’s interest in the profession.

Besides, she would tell herself, she wasn’t scrawny. Thin, perhaps; lean, even. But never scrawny. Cats were scrawny. Or children.

It didn’t help that she was just barely five feet tall, kept her blond hair trimmed short, and wore about in scruffy trousers and a shirt like some twelve-year-old boy from the Tatters—the poorer area of Bodbury that was little more than a series of ramshackle buildings leaning up against one another for support in a long tottery row that looked out over the Old Quay’s harbour.

“Nettie just says that she doesn’t know what to make of me,” Jodi said. “Of course, Nettie always saying that.”

“Well, if you’re asking me, my advice would be to put it from your mind for now, you.”

“And do what? Go quietly mad?”

“No. You could help me convince these obstinate mice to do their part in testing my machine before we all die of old age.”

“It’s the story of my life,” Jodi said as she hoisted herself out of her chair and walked over to the workbench. “Even bloody mice get more attention.”

“Tension,” Noz repeated from the back of the chair, spreading out his wings and hopping down to the spot Jodi had just vacated.

“Taupin says,” Jodi went on as she made a trail of crumbled cheese from inside the mice’s cage to the flying machine, “that the world is a book that somebody’s writing and we’re all in it. That’s why I was talking about missing pages. I really do think someone’s torn some of mine out.”

“Taupin is nothing more than a hedgerow philosopher who wouldn’t know an original thought if it came up and bit him,” Denzil said. “So what could he know?”

“I suppose. Besides, who’d publish a book as boring as our lives?”

“I don’t find my life boring, you,” Denzil said.

“ ‘Course you don’t. *You’ve* got a Purpose.”

“And I’ve assigned you yours—convince these mice that this experiment is for the betterment of mankind. And mousekind, too, of course.”

The mice had eaten all the cheese that Jodi had put in their cage, but were venturing not a step beyond its confines.

“Oh, bother,” she said.

Picking them up, she put one in either exercise wheel.

“I hope you realize that that’s coercion,” Denzil said.

The mice began to run on their wheels. Cables connected to the wheels spun wooden cogs, which in turn spun others until the propeller at the front of the miniature machine began to turn and the machine lurched forward on the worktable.

“That’s got it!” Denzil cried. “By gar, it’s a proper job now!”

He lifted the machine from the table, holding it aloft until the propeller was turning at such a speed that it was a blur. Giving Jodi a grin, Denzil cocked his arm. The parrot immediately lifted from his perch on the back of the armchair and took sanctuary on the top of a bookcase. When Denzil let go, the little flying machine jerked through the air, staying aloft for half the distance of the long room until it took a nosedive.

Jodi, already running after it, caught it just before it hit the ground. Setting the machine on the floor, she took the mice out and cradled them in her hands, making “there, there” sounds.

“You’ve scared them half to death!” she said.

“All in the name of science.”

“That doesn’t change anything. They could have been hurt.”

“Exactly, you! Which is why I was calling for volunteers—not coerced subjects. I wouldn’t doubt that their sulking helped weigh the machine down.”

“That doesn’t make any sense.”

But Denzil wasn’t paying attention to her.

“Oh, dear,” he said, picking up the machine. “Look at this. The cogs on this gear have snapped right off.”

Jodi sighed. This, she decided, wasn’t where she wanted to be today either. Having already been sent forth from the bordello for her long face, then having wandered up and down Market Street and skimmed pebbles over the waves on the beach for an hour, she didn’t know what she could do to fill up the rest of the hours that remained until supper.

She replaced the mice in the cage by the wall with the others. A glance out the window showed her that though the sky was still grey, the rain had let up. The cobbles of Peter Street were slick and wet.

“I’m going for a walk,” she announced.

“Take Ollie with you, would you? He’s been a nuisance all morning.”

“He seems fine now,” Jodi said, glancing at the monkey.

Denzil shook his head. “I know him, you. He’s just storing up energy to wreak havoc in here this evening. I won’t get a stitch of work done. Go tire him out so that he’ll sleep the night away.”

Jodi put on her jacket and called Ollie down from the bookcase. He perched sleepily on her shoulder, one arm around her neck, tail wrapped around her arm.

“If you find those pages I’ve lost,” she said when she reached the door.

Denzil looked up from the workbench where he was fussing with the flying machine again.

“I’ll send them straight along,” he said.

Jodi grinned as she closed the door and started down the rickety stairs that would let her out on Peter Street. There was a bit of a damp nip in the air, but rather than going back upstairs to fetch the trousers and sweater that the monkey wore in inclement weather—there was something rather too undignified about dressing animals up as people for her taste—she let Ollie nestle inside her jacket before she stepped out on the cobblestones and headed back in the direction of Market Street.

The monkey snuggled against her chest, radiating as much heat as he absorbed, his small head poking out from the jacket, just below her chin. She got the odd curious stare from passersby, but most people in town knew her too well to be surprised by anything she did. Since she was often out and about with both the monkey in tow and Noz perched on her shoulder, his green feathers iridescent against the grey granite houses and cobblestoned streets, they paid little heed to one pale brown head that appeared to be poking out of her chest.

Come one, come all, she thought as she paused to study their reflection in a store window. See the amazing two-headed woman.

Scratching her second head under his chin, she walked on.

## 2.

Just beyond the row of weather-beaten buildings in the Tatters that faced the sea, the Old Quay of Bodbury’s harbour stretched along the shore in a mile and then some length of crumbling stone and

wooden pilings. The pilings were rotting and heavily encrusted with dried salt above the waterline and barnacles below. Abandoned piers thrust seaward at right angles, planks missing, greying wood dotted with the droppings of seabirds. The air was heavy with the smell of salt and dead fish swept up against the quay.

At low tide there could be seen, scattered here and there beyond the quay, the hulls of rotting boats and broken spars—a miniature graveyard for that part of Bodbury's small fishing fleet that had fallen victim to the last great storm to hit the town, twenty years ago.

Bodbury's harbouring business was carried out in New Dock now, situated in that part of the town where Market Street opened onto Market Square, and the Old Quay lay abandoned to all but wharf rats, some few old-timers who strolled the stone walkway in the afternoons, reliving memories of other days, and the children of the Tatters who considered the entire area their own private domain.

When Jodi arrived, Ollie asleep in her jacket, a small gaggle of the latter were busily arguing over a game of Nine Men's Morris that two of their company were playing. They had scratched a board on one of the quay's flagstones and were using pebbles and shells for markers. As Jodi approached, they turned grubby faces in her direction.

"Hey, granny," one red-haired boy said, giving her a lopsided grin. "Have you come to throw that ugly babe into the sea?"

To them, anyone over the age of twelve was too old and fair game for their teasing.

"Lay off the poor old woman," another said. Jodi glanced in his direction and recognized Peter Moyle, the son of one of her aunt's working girls. "Can't you see she's got enough troubles as it is, a bent over and ancient as she is?"

A chorus of good-natured laughter spread among them.

"You see?" Jodi asked her sleeping burden. "I'm the low rung on every ladder. Denzil's assistant. Black sheep of the family. Too much the girl to be a boy, too much a boy to be a girl. Relegated to carrying beasts around in my jacket instead of breasts."

"You're not so ugly," another boy said.

"Not like your babe."

"Best drown him quick."

"Time was," Jodi continued to Ollie, "I'd thrash the lot of them, but I'm much too dignified for that now."

"Too old you mean."

"Ah, don't you listen to them," Kara Faull said.

She was a thin gamine, barely eleven, dressed in an assortment of raggedy clothes—shirt and trousers with patched sweater and a skirt overtop the trousers. Her feet were bare, her thin features only marginally less dirt-smudged than her companions. Getting to her feet, she ambled over to where Jodi stood, and reached out to pet Ollie.

"Can I hold him?"

Jodi passed the now-awakened monkey over to her, whereupon Ollie immediately began to investigate the pockets of Kara's skirts.

"Fancy a game?" Peter asked.

"What're the stakes?"

"Ha'penny a man."

"Don't think so, no. I don't feel lucky today."

"Too old," someone remarked. "No time for games."

"Is that true, granny?" another asked.

Jodi laughed at the lot of them. They stood in a ragged circle around her and Kara, eyes twinkling merrily in their dirty faces, hands shoved deep into their pockets. She was about to return their quiet

when the group suddenly fell silent. They backed to the edge of the quay's low stone wall, studious not looking in the general area behind Jodi, two of them whistling innocently—separate tunes, though they were hopelessly off-key, on their own and with each other. Upset by the sudden shift in mood, Ollie pulled free from Kara's grip and jumped into Jodi's arms.

When Jodi glanced casually around and saw who was approaching, her own days of running with the children of the Tatters returned in a rush. For no accountable reason, she felt guilty, certain she was about to be accused of some dreadful crime that she hadn't committed, but would suffer for all the same.

The Widow Pender tended to foster such fears in the children of the Tatters. They were all convinced she was a witch and more than one Tatters mother had threatened to punish misbehaving boys by "sending you to the Widow, just see if I don't."

Silent as the children, Jodi joined their quiet group as the tall, hawk-faced woman dressed all in black went slowly by, walking stick tapping on the quay's stones, back stiff and straight as a board. Her grey hair pulled behind her head in a severe bun. She gave each of the children a disapproving look, her fierce grey gaze skewering each of them in turn, lingering longest on Jodi.

The Widow frowned as Ollie hissed at her. For one long moment Jodi thought the old woman would take her stick to them both, but then the Widow gave her a withering glance and continued on her slow way.

Not until she was well out of hearing did the children relax, loosing held-in breaths in a group sigh. Then they filled the air with whispers of brave talk to take the chill that the Widow had left behind her out of the air.

"Fair gives me the creeps, she does."

"Oh, she doesn't frighten me."

"Didn't see you playing smart with her."

"Someone should give her a shove in."

"Her friends'd just shove her back out again."

It was said that she had caused the storm, twenty years ago, that had drowned the Old Quay and sunk the fishing boats. Called it up because her husband, a fisherman himself, had been gadding about town with a barmaid from the Pintar. Fifteen men were drowned that day, trying to save the boats. The barmaid had left town, though there were those who whispered that she hadn't so much left as been killed by the Widow and buried in a secret grave up on the moor.

Every child in the Tatters knew that the drowned dead were hers to command.

"Ratty Friggens says she's got a Small in that old house of hers—a little wee man that she keeps in a jar."

Jodi turned to the last speaker. "A Small?"

"It's true. Ratty saw it himself—a little man no bigger than a mouse. A Gypsy brought it 'round her house in a wooden wren cage and handed it over right before Ratty's eyes. Told me so himself. Says she'll be using it to creep into people's houses and steal their valuables—once she has been trained."

"She doesn't need valuables," Peter said. "Her whole cellar is loaded with treasure."

Kara nodded. "My da' said that one night, talking to his mates."

"A Small," Jodi repeated.

She looked down the quay to where she could see the Widow, a stiff figure in black, gazing out to sea. Her heart beat quicker. Sensing her excitement, Ollie made a querulous sound. She stroked his head thoughtfully.

Could it be true? If the Widow *did* have a Small, hidden away in that old house of hers . . .

Wouldn't that be something?

And if it was true, did she herself have the nerve to sneak in for a look at him?

~~Not likely.~~

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She didn't have the nerve.

Nor would there really be a Small.

But what if there was?

The Widow turned then and it seemed that, for all the distance between them, her gaze settled directly on Jodi's. The old woman smiled, as though reading her mind.

I know secrets you can't begin to dream of, that smile said. Secrets that will cost you your soul if you'd have them from me. Are you still so willing to learn them?

Jodi shivered. Visions of drowned corpses coming for her flashed through her mind. Bloating white skin, bestranded with wet seaweed. Reeking of death. Dead things lurching into her room while she slept. . . .

Before the Widow returned to walk by them again, Jodi gave the children a vague wave and hurried off, back to Denzil's loft.

I would that I were where I wish,  
Out on the sea in a wooden dish;  
But if that dish begins to fill—  
I'd wish I were on Mousehole Hill.

—OLD CORNISH RHYME, collected from Don Flamanck

**The oldsmuggler's** haunt of Mousehole in Paul Parish is in the Deanery and West Division of the Hundred of Penwith in southern Cornwall. Its crooked narrow streets and stone-built cottages climb from the western shore of Mount's Bay up the steep slope of Mousehole Hill at a point approximately a quarter of the way from Penzance to Land's End, following the coastline west.

Janey Little's grandfather loved the village, and delighted in regaling his granddaughter's visitors with snippets of its history and folklore that he'd acquired over the years. The source of its name alone could have him rambling on at the drop of a cloth cap.

Some historians, he'd explain, think the village acquired its curious name from the Mousehole, a gaping cavern—now collapsed—that lies south of the village, or that it's a corruption of Portheny, the Port of the Island, meaning St. Clement's Island, which lies close to the village. Others cite reference to an old Cornish manuscript that speaks of "Moeshayle," getting its name from the small river that flows through it—"moes" probably being an abbreviation of "mowes," meaning "young women," and "hayle" meaning "river," for a translation of "Young Women's River."

The most dramatic event in Mousehole's history happened in 1595 when the village was sacked by troops from three Spanish ships; it was a Mousehole man who first spied the Spanish Armada seven years earlier. The only surviving building of that period is the Keigwin Arms, which perches on granite pillars above the courtyard where Squire Keigwin killed six Spaniards defending his home. That event is celebrated annually to this day, every July, with a carnival and festivities that end in a commemorative dinner at the Cairn Dhu Hotel where the names of the various dishes serve to tell the story.

Mousehole's other historical claims to fame are far less dramatic. The same back street that houses the Keigwin Arms was also the birthplace of Dolly Pentreath, the last-known native speaker of Cornish whose tombstone is a part of the stone wall of St. Paul's Church overlooking the village, and whose funeral, it's said, was interrupted for a whiskey break. South of the village, along Raginnis Hill overlooking St. Clement's Island in Mount's Bay, stands the Wild Bird Hospital begun in 1928 by two sisters, Dorothy and Phyllis Yglesias, which manages to survive to this day on private donations. Against a mossy wall is a bell with a sign that reads, "Please ring the bell if you have a bird." Each year the hospital tends to more than a thousand sick wild birds brought in by the public.

Mousehole was once the center of Cornwall's pilchard-fishing industry, but though it still retains the flavour of an old Cornish fishing village and there are still fishing boats to be found in its harbour, its principle industry is now tourism. There are few fishermen left, and the only smugglers who remain are in the memories of the older villagers.

Thomas Little remembered the smugglers, though he wasn't thinking of them as he came down Mousehole Lane from the King's Arms in Paul to the home he shared with his granddaughter on Duc Street. A pint of Hick's bitter sloshed comfortably in his stomach. In a brown paper bag he carried a takeout of two brown ales.

The Gaffer, as everyone referred to him, was thinking of Janey at that moment. He'd wanted

show her off to his mates at the local, but she was in one of her moods and hadn't wanted to come. But tonight. . . well, there was a session up at Charlie Boyd's, at his farm on the road to Lamorna, which was the rambling house of the area where the musicians and storytellers would often gather on Friday night.

Boyd's farm was on a headland near Lamorna with a good view of the bay. The flat clifftop was bright with the cries of stonechats and gulls that rang above the dull pounding of the surf on the rocks below, the air sharp with a salty tang. The constant pounding of the waves had eaten away at the granite cliffs, but the farm would stand at least a century or two longer before the rock on which it stood completely eroded.

Until then it remained home to Charlie and his family—brother, wife, daughter and two boys, all musicians all—and a welcome place to visit on a Friday night for those interested in such entertainments. There weren't that many anymore, not these days—even with the revival of interest in traditional music in other parts of the country—but they usually had a fair crowd, with folk dropping in by from as far away as Lizard's Point, across the bay.

Some fine musicians could be counted on at the session tonight, but, the Gaffer thought with pride, his granddaughter would likely still be the best. Hadn't she made two professional recordings already? Wasn't she always on tour—on the Continent and in America, if not in England?

He continued up the street, a short, round man with a balding head and the ruddy features of a fisherman, dressed in old corduroy trousers and a tweed jacket patched at the elbows, smiling at himself, a jaunty lift in his step, brown ale bottles clinking in the paper bag he carried at his side.

Oh, yes. He was looking forward to showing her off tonight.

When he reached the door to his house—owned outright, thank you, and maintained with his pension and what money Janey sent him while she was on tour—he was whistling one of Chalkie's tunes in anticipation of the evening to come.

"Janey!" he called as he stepped inside. "Do you have a spot of tea ready for an old man?"

For a long moment there was no answer.

## 2.

Janey had heard an author describe his writing process once as seeing a hole in the paper that he could step into and watch the story unfold, and that was just how she felt with this new Dunthorn novel. It was like being at a good session when you forgot who you were, where you were, the instrument under your hand, and just disappeared into the music. When the tune finally ended, you sat up and blinked for a moment, the sense of dislocation only momentary, lasting just so long as it took the last echoes of the old tune to fade and a new one to start up.

She looked up from the book now, only vaguely aware of the dusty attic she was sitting in and the book on her lap, her thoughts still wandering the world she'd found within its pages. Then she slipped Dunthorn's letter in between the pages to keep her place and rose from the floor, the book under her arm.

"I'm up here, Gramps!" she called ahead of her as she started down the narrow stairway that would take her to the second floor of the house.

Her grandfather was waiting for her in the small vestibule, the door to the street still open behind him. He looked up to where she came down the stairs. At twenty-two she hadn't yet lost the enthusiasms and energy of a teenager. Her auburn hair hung free to just past her shoulders, except for the bangs in front, and was redder than its natural colour because she'd recently hennaed it. Above her hazel eyes, her brows maintained a slight arch giving her a constant look of questioning surprise that never quite left. Her skin was a good English peach and cream, nose small and slender, while her

smile came so easily and often that it had left dimples in her cheeks.

~~She was wearing a black leotard under a yellow skirt and a baggy black sweatshirt overtop.~~ Yellow hightop sneakers matched her skirt. Presently the knees of her leotard were dusty and there was a smudge of dirt on her nose. Her cheeks had a healthy ruddy flush of excitement.

“You’ve got dirt on your nose, my flower,” he said as she bounded down the last few steps to join him.

His round Puck’s face broke into a smile as she leaned forward to kiss his cheek. But then his gaze alit on what she was carrying under her arm and the smile faltered as he recognized it for what it was.

“Found it then, did you?” he said after a moment.

Janey had the sudden sense of having overstepped her bounds.

“I didn’t mean to go prying,” she began. She remembered Dunthorn’s letter. *Its existence must remain secret. . . .* “You’re not cross with me, are you?”

The Gaffer shook his head. “Never with you. It’s just. . . ah, well. I meant to give it to you soon or later, so why not now?”

“It’s a marvelous book, isn’t it just?”

“Halfway finished it already, are you then?”

“Hardly!”

“Funny you should find it now, though. There was a woman came knocking on our door not three days ago, asking after it. First time that’s happened in years. There were lots of crows, circling about when Billy first died, but as the years went by, I’d only see one every year or so, and then not for what? Five years now? Until this woman came to the door.”

“How did she know about the book?”

“Well, she wasn’t so much after *it* in particular. She wanted any unpublished writings of Billy’s—writings or artifacts. Were hers by right, she said. She was an American woman—about your age—and as unpleasant as Americans can be. Claimed to be the granddaughter of some cousin of Billy’s that I never heard of before.”

“What did you tell her?”

“Well, nothing, my robin. I had a promise to keep, didn’t I? Besides, she rubbed me wrong, she did, making some crant the way she was. Offered me money straightway—as though money can buy anything. I sent her packing. Still, it bothered me, her asking like that. It was like she knew there was something. Maybe not so much the book itself, but something, and didn’t she just want it?”

“What was her name?”

“She didn’t say. Though she did say she’d be in touch—once she’d spoken to her lawyers.”

“And you never told me?”

“Janey, my beauty, what was I to tell you? Some daft American comes knocking on my door asking about a book I can’t admit to owning. . . . I wasn’t ready to tell you about it yet, but I wasn’t about to lie to you either. There’s no lies between us, am I right?”

Janey nodded.

“Well, there you go.”

“And you haven’t heard from her since?” Janey asked.

The Gaffer shook his head. “What’s to hear? There’s nothing she or her lawyers can do. The book doesn’t exist.”

Janey looked down at the very real book in her hand.

“Yes, well,” the Gaffer said. “In a manner of speaking, it doesn’t.”

“When were you going to tell me about it?” she asked.

“Well, that’s the funny thing, my love. I had the feeling the book would choose its own time—



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