

A GARVIE SMITH MYSTERY

# HEY, SHERLOCK!

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# TEN FACTS ABOUT GARVIE SMITH



1. Lazy, rude, golden-hearted, aggravating, economical with the truth, kind (to those who deserve it).
2. Highest IQ ever recorded at Marsh Academy.
3. Lowest grades.
4. Best mates with Felix (cat burglar), Smudge (stupidest boy at school and proud of it), Alex (who's been selling something he shouldn't).
5. Wouldn't dream of telling his mother he loves her. Besides, she wants to move back to Barbados, and what's the point of that?
6. Smokes, mainly tobacco.
7. Liked by girls.
8. Hated by the police, teachers, other boring adults.
9. Exceptionally good at maths.
10. Scared of dogs.

# 8

Garvie went back up to his stretch of fencing. Smudge's brother shouted something to him, and Garvie waved a hand, nodding politely, stepped over his fallen panel and continued onto the path beyond. Lighting up, he stood there a moment, breathing out smoke, admiring the country scene, the sunlit green pasture to his left, the placid green trees on his right.

It had been very different for Amy last night. He thought about that.

Dark, unstable, ferociously wet. The pasture would have been a rough screen of racing shadows, the flattening marsh grasses obscured by the driving rain, the trees a heaving mass of blackness. She'd had the dog with her too, complicating things, slipping and sliding about.

What had she been up to? What was she scared of? Something bad. Bad enough to make her take the dog for protection.

He went down the path. Thirty metres on, poking at the edge of the path with the toe of his boot, he noted some streaks of kicked-up earth, still damp in the shadow of the woods. Further on, a skid mark.

He proceeded, smoking.

Another thirty metres and he stopped again. Here, where the path curved to the left, there was a break in the thorny undergrowth at the side, almost invisible. A narrow animal track disappearing into the trees. And on some brambles just inside the tree line, another scrap of black fabric.

He frowned. Again he imagined the chaos of the woods last night, rain lashing down, branches clashing, drenched blackness shaking the packed trees.

Why had she left the path?

He threw away his cigarette butt and pushed his way into the undergrowth. It was hot among the trees, steamy, still wet underfoot from the rain. He slithered as he went, bending and twisting, parting low thorny stems, stepping over trailing creepers. Birds called around him. After a while the track became more distinct. He went along it warily, glancing about him, checking the ground. There were scratch-marks here and there that could have been made by a large dog's paws scabbling for purchase, deep prints in the mud churned up by running feet.

Why had she been running?

He went on through the tangled vegetation. The track forked; he hesitated, found more footprints, and went on again, following them, off the path now, deeper into undergrowth.

Gradually he began to feel afraid.

She'd run through the trees, then she'd run off the path into the thicket. Why?

He pushed his way through it carefully. Everything was quiet. All he could hear was the noise of his own shallow breathing. These signs – scraps of fabric, footprints that may have been hers, branches she may have broken – were all that Amy had left behind. But he began to have the feeling that he was not alone. As if something was there with him, now, in the woods. As if his fear was slowly leading him to it.

He stopped and looked around him, and listened, and went on again.

The first sign was a faint noise at the edge of the silence, unreal. Gradually it became real. A low hum, a buzzing.

There was a screen of alder ahead of him. Cautiously he went towards it. The buzzing grew louder. Through the shadows he saw movement. Innumerable flies seething in a cloud, settling in clumps on a darker shape humped in the undergrowth. Fat shiny bluebottles in a swarm. Garvie put his hand over his mouth and went closer, slowly, moving among the flies that rose around him, stepping through the thicket towards the spot, and found at last, lying there on the ground, legs splayed out, head twisted back, the body of the Dobermann.

He found a clearing nearby, a grass patch surrounded by birch trees narrowing at one end into a broad mud track for vehicles, and walked round it until he found a convenient stump, and sat on it, thinking.

It was bright there after the damp darkness of the trees and he lifted his face to the sun and breathed the warm air.

The dead dog was called Rex: its name was on a medallion attached to its collar. It was big animal, heavy-looking; its body had already begun to swell in the heat. Its head was twisted at an angle from its shoulders as if wrenched round violently, and its lips were curled back from its powerful jaws in a fixed snarl.

For a while Garvie thought about the dog. It was a monster, like Smudge had said. Then he thought about the sort of a person who might kill such a dog.

At last he got up and began to make his way through the wood to the path.

Singh was walking briskly along the path from Sophie's house towards 'Four Winds'. The wood stood tall around him, beech trees in full leaf, blocking out the sun. As he went, he called the station and arranged for a member of the tech team to pick up Sophie's phone. He also put through a call to a local volunteer group to organize a sweep of the woods. He looked at his watch again. He had to return to the Police Centre as soon as possible to deliver his preliminary report.

He was anxious. He knew now that, for reasons still unknown, Amy had set off in the storm for Sophie's house. She hadn't got there. Increasingly he feared she had been in some sort of danger. He

peered into the crowded trees at the side of the path, and his heart sank, thinking of them heaving in the rain and wind.

He walked on. The path bent down over a shallow stream and rose again. Dusty shafts of sunlight filtered through the leaf canopy and dissolved in the shadows. He looked at his watch and increased his pace as the path rose up the hill. At the top of the crest it flattened and broadened, the trees shrank back, and he emerged into sunlight with the pasture on one side of him. Ahead of him he saw the gables of 'Four Winds', and he accelerated again. He walked on for another hundred metres or so, and then a boy stepped out of the bushes just ahead of him and stood in the lane wiping his hands.

Singh came to a stop. 'Garvie! What are you doing here?'

The boy turned and frowned. 'Just taking a break.'

'Isn't this a long way from the house?'

'Compared to what?'

The boy stared expressionlessly at Singh with those unblinking blue eyes, and Singh felt again his strangeness.

Garvie said, 'Been talking to one of her friends?'

'Yes, Sophie Brighthouse. How do you know?'

'Where else would she be headed at midnight in the middle of a storm?'

'OK, but—'

'But she didn't get there.'

Singh paused. 'No, she didn't. How do you—'

Garvie parted the branches at the side of the path. 'Something in here you need to see.' He glanced back at him.

'What?' Singh said.

Garvie said, 'Hope you're not bothered by flies.'

'Flies?'

But Garvie had turned away, and Singh followed him into the trees.