

ACROSS  
THE DIVIDE

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Girl With a White Dog  
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# ACROSS THE DIVIDE



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To Peace-makers and Peace-keepers  
throughout the world

CATNIP BOOKS

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*'Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act.'*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

*'We have far more in common with each other than things  
that divide us.'*

Jo Cox, MP



## Chapter One

The only thing I was absolutely sure about at the beginning of the holiday was that I didn't want to go to Lindisfarne. I wasn't sure what to do about all the arguments at school – and especially about what was happening with Aidan – but I did know that I didn't want to spend summer half-term with Dad, miles away on an island.

Before everything went wrong, I'd had lots of things planned for the holiday. Not that those plans would have worked out exactly, after all that had happened in the weeks leading up to half-term, but that wasn't the point.

The point was that even when I did have an opinion, it didn't count. So what was the point in saying what I thought about anything? Nobody would listen to me anyway. For example, I didn't think it was a good idea for Mum to go on the

demonstration in the first place – I even asked her not to – and what happened? She went and got arrested, that’s what. On the first day of my holiday.

If Gran and Grandad had been at home there wouldn’t have been a problem. And I didn’t understand why they had suddenly decided to go on holiday at half-term. Without me. They had only just agreed to let me come back and live with them at the vicarage. They knew I couldn’t stay at home alone, and that if they weren’t there I would have to go back to Mum’s. They had never mentioned wanting to go on a cruise before, only that this was a last-minute bargain, which Gran said was too good to miss.

Still, it would have been all right if Mum had been responsible. I could just about have coped with staying with her for half-term week. It might even have been nice. Maybe a miracle would have happened and we could have talked about what was going on at school. Like we used to. Maybe Mum would have actually listened to me for once and we could have sorted things out between us. I could have gone and met my friends in town and had a quiet time at home with Mum, like a normal family. We could have watched films when she came back from work, we could have relaxed. Like before.

Before she got all involved with her pacifist friends and started arguing with everyone.

It was Mum who messed everything up. Mum and Johnny knew I didn’t want Mum to go on a protest on Saturday, my first day back with her, because I told them so. Not that I should have had to do that. It was pretty obvious that if your daughter moves back with you on the Friday evening, and if you have been missing her, you shouldn’t rush off first thing Saturday morning.

I thought Johnny would support me, but he didn’t. All he cared about was being a good boyfriend to Mum – which, as far as I could see, basically meant agreeing with everything she did. He said the protest was a good thing to do and if he wasn’t busy sorting some things out for a family thing that weekend, he would have gone. He said I shouldn’t give my mum a hard time.

‘Have a lie-in, Olivia. Chill out a bit. It’s just for the morning,’ he said. Typical Johnny.

When Mum was leaving she said she was only going to watch and to support the other protesters, but someone got ill at the last minute so Mum took his place and took part herself. So she got arrested. I wasn’t impressed. Nobody else had a mum who

got arrested for cutting holes in a military fence and weaving flowers through it.

So I had to go to stay with Dad. But that wasn't simple either. Dad lived miles away, in Durham, but he was having building work done on his house, which was why he was renting a place on the island of Lindisfarne for a few months while he wrote a book. Apparently it was the perfect place for his research. So that was that. Lindisfarne it was, whether I liked it or not.

She did apologize.

'I'm so sorry, Olivia,' Mum said on the phone Johnny had handed me. He had come to ours from his flat downstairs, as soon as Mum rang him. 'It's taken me by surprise. They say I have to stay in police custody until I go before the court on Monday morning.'

'You're staying in a police cell all weekend?' I couldn't believe it. We hadn't even had our first lunch together and Mum was locked up.

Mum's voice shook a little, which made me feel a bit funny. 'Yes. And . . . I'm sure this isn't going to happen, so don't get cross, but there's a slight – a slight – possibility we will be transferred to prison and have to stay there for the weeks before the trial . . .' 'Weeks!' I said.

'It probably won't happen. I'm sure I will be back on Monday. Don't freak out, Olivia. I'm sorry, but you need to pack quickly. Johnny's been amazing. He's arranging everything. He phoned your dad to let him know that I was arrested and won't be able to come home for a few days. Johnny will buy the train ticket and take you to the station on his way to his mum's. He will put you on the train to Berwick. Your father will meet you there and you can go to Lindisfarne with him.'

'But Mum,' I said. 'I don't want to go to Lindisfarne. Northumberland is miles away. Can't I just stay here with someone else until Gran and Grandad come home?'

'Look, Olivia,' said Mum. 'I'm sorry. Hopefully I should be given bail on Monday and then I will be released. I just need you to go to your dad's this weekend because I know from something Sister Mary has said that I can't absolutely guarantee that. Johnny won't be here, your gran and grandad aren't around and I can't ask some other family to put you up if I don't know when I will be out – I don't even know how long it will be for. It's better if you go to your dad's. Just for the weekend. It will be fun. Lindisfarne is beautiful. You'll love it.'

‘Well, thanks a lot, Mum,’ I said sarcastically.

I did feel a bit sorry for her, because her voice was a bit wobbly, but I was mainly cross. Gran had gone on and on about how much she was sure Mum was missing me and wanted me to come back to live with her in the flat, but Gran was obviously wrong. Mum had had the chance to spend half-term with me, her own daughter, and she had blown it. All Mum cared about was her peace work. I wasn’t impressed. What good was going on marches and signing petitions and putting flowers in fences and singing songs about peace, anyway? How did that stop wars?

Mum messed up. I think that’s what I want to say. I knew Gran was worried about what had happened only a few weeks before, at the start of May, and that Mum was hurt when I walked out and moved back to the vicarage. Maybe she was. But I had to do it. It wasn’t just because of the row we had about me wanting to join the cadets, either. Gran had no idea how annoying it was, living with Mum in that flat. Like when our already tiny front room was taken over by people making banners and stuff for the next peace demonstration. I’d had enough of piles of envelopes on the table, waiting to be stuffed

with leaflets, and someone I didn’t know sitting on our sofa and using our laptop to check facts or post things on the campaign’s Facebook page or whatever else they did. I was fed up of unwashed coffee mugs everywhere, and the kitchen being so full of people arguing about the government I couldn’t get to the kettle to make myself a cup of tea – and how if I did, Johnny would say, ‘Oh, great idea! Put the kettle on, Olivia. Now, who’s for tea and who’s for coffee?’

I knew Grandad would be angry about her getting arrested. He understood what I meant. You could talk to him about things. He said she was really irresponsible, protesting all the time. I told him that if Mum wanted to do things that are against the law that was her decision. It wasn’t mine. I was fourteen. I was old enough to know what I wanted to do, who I wanted to live with.

And how I wanted to spend my holiday. If I had a choice.



Dad and I could see the castle from miles away. I was still really fed up, but I had to admit to myself that it looked dramatic up on the hill, silhouetted



against the skyline. We turned off at a place called Beal, waited at the level crossing before driving past a farm and a birds of prey centre, and then we were on the causeway, past the sign saying: *Danger! Holy Island causeway. Look at the tide tables.* The tide tables themselves were there too, and a warning to only cross when the tide is out. It wasn't exactly encouraging, all these warning signs. And why had the place got two names, anyway – Lindisfarne and Holy Island?

It was odd how the wet sand between us and the island, normally underwater, was at the same level as the road, so it felt like crossing through the sea. A bit like that Bible story about Moses which Grandad used to tell me. There was sand on either side of us, but the sea was not far away, waiting to cross the divide and reclaim the land between as soon as the time was right.

'So what would happen if we crossed at the wrong time? When the tide was coming in?' I asked, without really thinking it through.

Dad turned his head and raised an eyebrow sarcastically.

'In answer to your question,' he said, 'if we tried to break the rules, and crossed outside the safe times,

then we could get stranded. That's why there are those towers every so often along the causeway – they're for people who thought they could beat the sea. You can't cross over at the wrong time. If you misjudge it, or ignore the warnings, you can take refuge in the towers until the tide goes out or a person in a boat comes to rescue you. But if you have to leave your car on the road and the tide comes in, then your car will be wrecked. And you will only have yourself to blame. I can't believe how many people ignore the warnings and don't learn from other people's mistakes. Crossing from one side to the other is dangerous. You can't take risks. It's so irresponsible. You have to be careful.'

Even the way he changed gear was irritated. He wasn't normally like this. I didn't like it.

'OK, I'm not an idiot,' I muttered under my breath. 'I didn't need a lecture or have my head bitten off.'

Dad gave a short, impatient sigh. 'Sorry, Olivia. I'm just cross with your mum. Look, neither of us really want you to be here, but we're just going to have to put up with each other.'

That hurt. But I was determined not to show him it did.

‘Don’t worry, I’ll keep well out of your way. You won’t even know I’m here,’ I snapped.

There was a pause.

‘I’m sorry,’ said Dad. ‘It’s just . . . It’s just all a bit sudden and I have a deadline to meet. I booked this house so I could have some peace and quiet to get on with my work, and get the extension finished at home, and . . . this . . . you . . . just wasn’t – weren’t – in my plan. OK?’

‘It wasn’t exactly in my plan, either,’ I said, staring out of the window. I could see some birds in the distance picking their way across it. Sandpipers, or curlews perhaps. I sighed and my breath misted up the window. Aidan would know. But he was hardly someone I could talk to any more. Not now. Whether I was in Lindisfarne or not.

‘Olivia . . . Look, I’m sorry.’

I felt tears prick behind my eyes, which really annoyed me. ‘I’m not just pieces you have to pick up. I’m your daughter,’ I said.

‘I know. And I’m sorry. It’s fine, honestly. I’m just feeling a bit stressed. Forgive me? I truly am sorry. It’s good we can spend some time together. I do want to. Of course I do. This is important to me. *You’re* important to me. Forgive me?’

I heard the thumping of a tail in the back. Stan had woken up and decided to join the conversation. The red setter’s head pushed its way between us and he gave my nose an enthusiastic lick.

‘Go back and lie down, Stan,’ said Dad. Stan obediently retreated, but you could still hear him panting with excitement, and the happy sound of his tail hitting the back seat. He gave an enthusiastic woof, and Dad and I looked at each other and laughed. It was hard to stay cross when Stan was about. He loved everyone so much, all the time.

‘OK,’ I said, as sand dunes appeared and we drove off the causeway and on to the island.

‘Great,’ said Dad. ‘It’ll all be OK – honestly, Olivia.’

Stan had lifted my mood. I’d be home on Monday, and this wasn’t a bad place to visit for the weekend. It was beautiful, and it would be fun to be with Stan anyway. I looked up to see the castle looking down on us, and had the strangest feeling that it was glad I had come.