

Images of the dead bodies floated inside the flames of my warm Kent fireplace, I shivered. It would be years before the horror of that sight faded from my mind. The smell of rotting flesh and the fates of the last week. My stomach turned until I thought I would vomit up my dinner. I sat and relived the events, I will never forget the fear and it will continue to haunt me.

It was a cool night, billowing clouds floating overhead. The stars shining like points of light, moonlight streaming through the trees. We were sitting around the campfire on the night before the worst day of our lives. None of us knew what was ahead of us. Gillian sat warming her hands on her mug of tea with her coat tightly wrapped around her. The smoke from Henry's cigarette created a haze in the cool evening air. Rupert sat whistling cooking sausages, the smell made my stomach groan. I sat in my warm fleece jumper with my hood up, trying to ignore my stomach, thinking about our time away together. We had been best friends since school and we had joined a caving club together, so this year Rupert had insisted that we go exploring caves in Scotland.

We had so far visited the 'Bone caves' at Inchnadamph, a mass of stone rocks and bones of animals. 'Smoo Cave' which was very impressive and 'Traligill cave' which though interesting was a very hard demanding descent. However, these are all known caves, Rupert had read of caves in Scotland that had not been explored, caves that no other man had tread. He was convinced that he had seen something on the internet about them, however he could not find the evidence today. Gillian had already moaned that these did not exist, and we were wasting our time. She hadn't been as interested in exploring Scottish caves as the rest of us. I sat trying to be optimistic, even if there were not undiscovered caves in Scotland, we were at least exploring, and I was enjoying myself despite needing extra clothes and my hair being plastered to my face on regular occasions.

It was a few days later that our adventure really started. We were now on the Isle of Skye which is beautiful, hilly, some green and masses of fragrant purple heather a paradise for some with rolling countryside. We had visited the Spar cave the previous day, near Elgol, which was amazing situated by the sea. Our feet slipped on the greasy seaweed covered rocks as we entered, Gillian is the most cautious member of the group so she followed behind. Rupert charged on in front, he has always been the leader. Henry kept stopping and gazing at the rocks in awe. I tried to enjoy the caves but also help Gillian, who is as close to me as a sister. We are like a family, we look after each other and have done for as long as I can remember. The smells and chill in the air were inspiring. We wandered in silence, glad that we had travelled to see this spectacular sight. Planning to see other caves on Skye, we left, we didn't know what was going to happen to us in the hours that followed.

We were just finishing our breakfast, Gillian and Henry were convinced that they had heard a helicopter landing overnight. Rupert and I were sceptical, of course

other people do visit Skye, but we considered unlikely at night by helicopter. It was then that Rupert noticed a flock of birds circling in the sky. Why were they circling? Rupert and I walked towards the circling birds leaving Gillian and Henry to tidy up. It was when we reached them that we came across a disturbing sight, there lay bones, scattered and what looked and smelled like rotting flesh. The birds we now realised were Ravens.

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Gillian looked pale, as if she was going to be sick, Henry sat and swore. We stood there, shocked, in silence now, looking at each other, time seemed to stand still. I frantically searched for my phone and checked it, it confirmed no signal. Rupert ran off, a few minutes later he returned.

“Flares, Rupert has flares,” said Henry, a smile spread across his face.

“Well we’re in the middle of nowhere, I brought them just in case.”

“So, plan of action then, we’ll set off the distress flares, then I want to have a look around I’m curious to find out what’s happened.”

“Rupert you’re an historian not a detective.”

“I might not be a detective Liz, but I still want to know what’s going on.”

Rupert’s nose was always into everything.

“I want to look around,” said Rupert. “Come on guys, aren’t you curious, we might find some clues.”

“Ok Sherlock Holmes,” said Henry. “We’ll set of one flare and I’ll carry the other, we might need it.”

“I hope not,” said Gillian shaking. “Is it not safer we stay here? Those people might have been murdered, we might get murdered.”

I put my arm around her, “Gillian, we’re here, all together.”

Picking up our torches, I took Gillian’s hand. Hesitantly we then walked back to the dead bodies and Henry set of the first flare. It was a few minutes later that she let go and started walking towards the hedge nearby, I think she was planning to sit down. We all tried to avoid looking at the bodies, it was a gruesome sight, with the ravens gathered around enjoying their meal. Trying to block out the terrible smell, we explored the area nearby. Suddenly there was a loud scream, Gillian had vanished from view.

“Over here,” Rupert called.

As we got there we could hear crying and soon realised that the hedge, was not just a hedge, but it had a large hole underneath it. We would not have found it had Gillian not fallen against it.

“Come on Lizzie, you have the ropes,” said Rupert.

“Rupert, I think one of us needs to stay here above ground, we need to ensure the emergency services find us.”

“I’ll stay, I’ll let off the second flare soon, if there is no response from the mainland.”

“Thanks Henry” I was relieved because I was as curious as Rupert to find out what had happened.

We were soon descending safely into a large cave. We all looked around, breathing in the musty air. Gillian sat with tears streaming down her face, her arm at a strange angle. I looked at it and could see that it was broken. A qualified nurse I took of my jumper and tried to make a sling for her, but she continued to sob. I gave her my arm and helped her to stand,

“We need to find another way out of here, I can’t climb up there.”

“Ok, let’s keep walking,” I shone my torch over the walls and the tunnels beyond. “There must be another way out.”

The torch light shone eerily on the walls, shadows forming in the darkness. We could see what looked like hieroglyphics, we held our noses as the stench was unbearable and there were small bones scattered around. We walked from the large cave into a smaller cave, which then lead to a tunnel to a larger cave, we could then see other tunnels from there. It was then that we found the lap top computer with an empty lunchbox beside it. There was also several battery packs and another lunchbox which suggested the bones were the remains of two bodies.

“I’m going to have a look at it,” Rupert said beaming. “I wonder what is on it, maybe it belongs to the people outside.”

“No don’t, leave it,” I said. “Let the police look at it, we should be getting out of here.”

The smell appeared to be getting worse, we left the computer, curiosity increasing. Rupert started to venture further into the caves. My brain wanted to run but instead my feet wanted to follow, Gillian started to moan. It was then that the smell really hit us and there lay two more men. They were decomposing, the smell of rotting flesh in a closed space made me start to vomit violently. Things then took a turn for the worse, a large man appeared behind Rupert and before I could warn him he had been whacked with a large chunk of wood and now lay unconscious. I stood shivering, it was me next?

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It felt like hours later that I woke up, my head throbbing, surrounded by the cold stone walls. My cell smelt stagnant and rotten. For a moment I was not sure where

I was, then I heard voices. I continued to lie as still as I could, I did not recognise them.

“Ship is nearly empty Fred.”

“We need to get the remaining loot outta here.”

“I can’t get hold of Jake, he’s not answering his phone.”

“Well keep trying, we have no other divers and I can’t go down.”

“What you done with the prisoners?”

“They’re in the caves, not a problem, they’re all out cold.”

Well at least we’re all alive, I thought. I wondered what the ship was they were talking about, and what loot? What had we stumbled on?

“Come on Mart, let’s get moving, need to get ready for flying out tonight, how is it selling?”

“Well Rita says she’s managing to flog it well in her shop.”

“Well not sure when the ship sank, but the treasure has done us well.”

“Mart, what are we doing with the prisoners? Do we put a bullet through their skulls like the others?”

“Haven’t decided yet, am wondering how much they know about us or whether they just happened by this place.”

“Well maybe we should play it safe and shoot them, better that than get caught.”

My brain was racing, what now, we were sitting ducks. Unless Rupert had some bright idea, but I was clueless. I lay cold but clammy, thinking of home. Why had I followed him? I could only hope that the police had arrived, and Henry had led them to the bodies and where we were. I was hoping that I would hear the police coming in and we would all be alright. I lay there shaking now, praying for a miracle. It was then that I heard shooting, I felt like my heart had stopped, were we now being killed? I felt a huge overwhelming feeling of relief when I heard a kind Scottish voice crouched next to me.

“Hello, I’m Jim, are you ok?” he was dressed in black with police emblazoned on his front.

“Yes.”

“And what is your name?”

“Lizzie.”

“Ok Lizzie, well it’s time to get you out of here.”

I struggled to walk as I let him guide me down the tunnel's and out into the fresh Skye air. The feeling of relief washed over me, I was alive. I knelt, and kissed the grass, then looked around me. I could not see Gillian, but Rupert was being led out behind me. Where was Gillian? The tears now started streaming down my face, and my hair was now plastered to my head in the harsh Skye weather. I could feel my heart pounding, it was then that Henry appeared,

"Lizzie, Lizzie, you're ok," We hugged each other. "Where's Gillian?"

My face was wet, and I could still smell the caves, I didn't know who had been shot, was Gillian dead? I could feel myself panicking. Rupert then walked over,

"Lizzie, Henry, where's Gillian?"

"Right," I said, "I'm asking that policeman," I walked over to him, "Excuse me, Excuse me."

"Yes Miss."

"Err have you seen my friend down there, she has a broken arm?"

"We've not found her yet miss."

"And err, who was shot?"

"I'm not sure, the police are still inside."

"John, John, we have the young woman." A man called as they appeared from the cave. She had been put on a stretcher and the policeman ran over to help, I followed him.

A nurse then spoke to me, "She's in a lot of pain and has been given pain killers and a sedative".

Gillian lay there now still and silent. I walked over and squeezed her hand, she squeezed mine back and was using my jumper as a comforter. Ambulance, coastguards, policemen and forensics were all on the scene. The police had descended into the caves and forensics were studying the bodies. The whole area buzzed with activity, Gillian, Rupert and I were then shown to a helicopter to be checked over. Rupert insisted that he was fine, he just had a sore head. I stayed with Gillian and we were flown to the hospital on the mainland. It was there, once checked, that we met with a police officer and answered questions about what we remembered. I told her what I had overheard, bad memories and fear flooding through me, and she scribbled on her note pad.

Henry and Rupert packed away the campsite, it was the end of our holiday and Henry was soon driving the Volvo back to find us at the hospital. They had left the commotion of activity, but before they left they took details of the lead police officer. Rupert wanted to be involved and the police realised that as an historian he would be an asset.

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It was days later that we were back together, enjoying the warmth of my coal fire. Rupert proudly telling us what he had found out. Gillian with her arm in her sling was hanging on to every word he said,

“Have they let you look at the lap top?”

“Not exactly, but I do know what was on it now,” we sat patiently waiting, “There was a hand drawn map of the caves and then notes of gold and smugglers. The entrance to the caves from the shore was hidden by some vicious looking rocks and it was located a little way up, so was not at risk of flooding. The hieroglyphics told of an Egyptian ship, wrecked on the rocks alongside the cave. Several people had been killed and it contained gold and jewellery as well as untold history. There was a cave nearer the shore that contained Gold and Jewellery from the ship. Fred and Martin had hired divers who had emptied most of it and stored the loot in the caves before selling it in a shop on the mainland. It appeared that they were experienced sailors and they had found it one day sailing around the island.”

“Wow,” I said, “Is that logical? An Egyptian ship, in Scotland?”

“Well in 1937 two Egyptian ships dating to around 1400BC were discovered in an estuary in Yorkshire. Also, the ancient Scottish Chronicles suggest that the Scottish lineage derives from the Pharaohs and a princess named Scota”

It was Henry’s turn to be impressed. “That is incredible, I wonder when it did actually sink.”

“Well we are still trying to work it out. The ship is being pulled out of the sea now and will be put in the Isle of Skye museum in Portree. The now late cavers did a lot of our work for us, lucky that Fred and Martin had not found it. I think their only real interest was protecting their treasure, I don’t think they saw the laptop otherwise they would have smashed it. After all, if the police hadn’t shown up when they did they were going to kill us.”

I shuddered remembering and Gillian looked pale again. “What about Jake the diver and Rita and her shop?”

“I’m not sure Lizzie, I’m sure the police have that in hand, I would guess that Martin will have told them as he admitted easily to killing the four cavers”

“Hmm” ok said Henry “Who’s up for caving next year?”

We all looked at him, none of us wanted to go caving for a while, especially not Gillian, Henry started to laugh, “Your faces are a picture, I vote we all go and sit by a swimming pool in Spain.”

I sat watching the fire dance and wondered, what could possibly go wrong in Spain? Caving should not have ended with gun fire. Airports, flights, swimming pools, alcohol, surely things would not go so wrong again, or could they?