

The Legend of Caradoc by David Dunham

*There is a legend about Jack Caradoc. He just doesn't know it yet.*

Chapter One

Cornwall, England, present day

'You must concentrate, Jack. There's no room to lose control. No room at all!'

Jack didn't respond. He'd heard it all before.

'Be clever. Be quick!'

Jack tried to focus, but he couldn't stop his mind drifting to thoughts of taking Calo for a ride. If they galloped, they could reach Prussia Cove by dusk.

'Just one second lost and you're gone – you're dead!'

Jack held back a sigh. 'It's not real sword fighting, Dad.'

'That's not the point. You don't get hit. Ever. Agreed?'

Jack nodded. He didn't have the time to argue.

'Loosen your grip; it's too tight. And your stance is all wrong. I could pierce your heart before you had time to blink.'

Pierce my heart? Jack thought. With a wooden sword?

'Remember to lift your head, and keep your eyes off your sword. They've seen it before. They know what it looks like.'

Jack shuffled along the oak tree that long ago had been felled and balanced on two flat stones. He pushed his weight on to his back foot, straightened his arm and then bent it slightly at the elbow. He lightened his grip and waited; waited for another defeat.

'En garde,' said his dad.

Jack exhaled hard and raised his sword to touch his father's.

'And... fight!'

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Jack lunged first, but his father parried easily. Jack lunged again, taking a higher line.

His father came at him again. Jack blocked it.

Attack...

Block...

Attack...

Block...

Lunge, parry, riposte; the rhythm did not relent as Jack and his father moved back and forth on the tree. Suddenly, Jack's father increased his pace.

Attack...

Block...

Attack...

Block...

Attack...

Block...

Jack was moving backwards and sensed he was about to fall off the tree. Faster, faster, faster, he told himself, suddenly feeling fresher than when the training session had started. His father lunged, aiming for the heart, just as his own father had once instructed. It was quick, much quicker than normal, and should have caught Jack out. He should have felt the thump of the blunt wood on his chest. Only he wasn't defeated by the speed; he was ready for it. He didn't know how, it just happened. His sword parried as if it was held by someone else and he swung his father's sword around. The target was unguarded. For a split second, Jack hesitated and then his sword took over again, striking the chest hard, right where the heart is.

Jack froze. Did I just do that? he thought. Have I won?

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His father touched his chest, as if he might be bleeding. 'You beat me,' he said quietly.

Jack couldn't help smiling. 'I can't believe it... I didn't think I ever would.'

'Well, you did. I knew you would one day.'

'Really?'

'Yes, Jack. Really.'

'You're just saying that now I've won.'

'No, I'm not. I just didn't expect it to happen yet.'

'I'm nearly sixteen.'

'Yes, I know.'

Jack heard concern in his father's voice. 'I just got lucky, that's all,' he said, trying to make his father feel better.

'No Caradoc has ever made a mark on his father before he turns sixteen. That makes you special, Jack. That makes you different.'

Jack jumped off the tree and started to walk towards the stables. 'I don't care about being different, Dad.'

'I wasn't defeated by luck, Jack. And neither will you ever be.'

Jack walked on. His father came after him, pulling him around.

'You should take this seriously, son. Just as the Caradoc boys have done for generations.'

'I do take it seriously,' said Jack.

'Sometimes you make me think otherwise.'

'Look, all I want to do is surf after school, ride Calo and help you on the farm. That's what makes me happy.'

'Your mother wants you to go to university.'

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Jack turned away and resumed walking. 'Unless it's in Cornwall, I'm not going anywhere.'

'You will one day. One day you'll have no choice but leave here.'

Under his breath, Jack said, 'not if I can help it.'

The back door of the house opened. Jack's mother stepped forward. 'You taking Calo out?' she asked.

'Not for long, mum.'

'The storm isn't far off. And stay away from the cliff edge.'

Jack said nothing. Storms and cliffs didn't worry either him or Calo. He collected a bridle and saddle from the stable and headed for the paddock. Calo was on the other side, eating grass. Jack rested the saddle on a gate and whistled once, loud and sharp. Calo looked up. Jack whistled again, this time for longer, and Calo began to trot towards him. Jack reached down into a bucket of apples and held out his hand.

'There you are, mate,' he said.

Calo bent his neck and took the apple in his mouth, leaving saliva on Jack's hand.

'That's my boy,' said Jack. 'Plenty more left for later.'

Calo came closer. Jack stood still and put his arms by his sides as Calo rubbed his nose against his face. He could feel his breath against his cheek. 'You want to go for a ride?' said Jack.

Calo breathed out.

'Towards the sea?'

Calo rubbed his nose against Jack's face.

'Okay, let's go then.'

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Jack positioned the saddlepad on Calo's back, straightened it, and swung the saddle on top. He brought the cinch under Calo's body and tightened it, and then brought the bridle up the nose, taking care to be gentle as he took it over the ears.

'Good boy,' he said, taking hold of the reins. 'Nearly there.' Jack put his left foot in the stirrup, sprung up and swivelled his body on to the saddle. 'You comfortable?' he said.

Calo made a very low rumbling sound in his throat.

'I know, I know. I'm excited too.'

Jack nudged Calo gently. The need to give him a slight kick to start walking had long gone. Jack hoped that one day he could whistle a certain note that would make Calo canter and another to make him gallop. All he needed was more time with him, which he'd have as soon as he left school. One more year to go and he was out for good. No more classrooms or lessons on subjects he cared nothing about. No more pressure about projects and exams, and no more detentions for falling asleep on his desk because he'd been awake since the early hours to help with milking.

He left the paddock, went down the side of the stable and started to cross the cobbles in front of the house. The kitchen window opened.

'Don't be late, love,' said his mother. 'I'm doing toad-in-the-hole for tea.'

'With mash?' said Jack.

'Of course. And gravy.'

Jack smiled and kept going. No one could make gravy like his mum. It was dark brown and laced with Worcestershire Sauce, and though thick, it was never lumpy. Always smooth, it would slide across the crust of the Yorkshire pudding and over the sides to soak into the butter heavy mash.

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‘He’s not wearing a riding hat,’ said his mother, closing the window. ‘I keep telling him too. And he needs a haircut. I don’t know how he can see with his hair blowing everywhere.’

Jack’s father paused in the hall. ‘Were you talking to me?’

‘No, no. Just to myself.’

‘Oh. Okay.’

‘You all right? You look troubled.’

Jack’s father said nothing.

‘What is it? What’s the matter?’

‘It’s Jack.’

‘What about him? It’s the university business again, isn’t it? He needs to at least think about it. I don’t think I’m being unreasonable.’

‘It’s not about university.’

‘Oh. Is it school? I wouldn’t be surprised if it was.’

‘It’s not school.’

‘A girl? He’s got a girl in trouble, hasn’t he?’

‘No, not that. At least, I hope not.’

‘You have talked to him about it, haven’t you?’

‘Yes, we had a chat.’

‘Because I’d rather know, than not know.’

‘I know, love. And he does too.’

‘Good. I’m relieved.’

There was a moment of silence.

‘So, what’s the matter then?’

Jack’s father drew in a breath and said quietly, ‘He beat me... and it wasn’t a fluke.’

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‘He beat you?’

‘Correct.’

‘But he’s not meant to. He’s not sixteen yet.’

‘I’m well aware of that.’

‘And you definitely didn’t let him win?’

Jack’s father raised his eyebrows. ‘*No*, I didn’t.’

‘What did you tell him?’

‘Nothing to give him any ideas. Probably wouldn’t believe me anyway.’

‘Does it mean anything?’

‘I hope not. I hope it remains as it should be; a family tale, a tradition... a legend.’

‘He’s about to find out what that legend is.’

There was another moment of silence.

‘You are going to tell him, aren’t you?’

‘I haven’t decided.’

‘Well, you’d better hurry up and decide because he’s sixteen on Saturday.’

‘I know.’

‘Your father was probably no different, or his father, or his father, and all the others.’

Jack’s father sighed. ‘I should never have told you.’

‘But you did, as did your father afterwards.’

‘Only because you believed I was lying.’

‘You can hardly blame me. The legend is hardly plausible.’

Jack’s father shrugged.

‘It’s more than implausible, in fact, it’s crazy,’ said Jack’s mother.

‘It’s part of my family’s history.’

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‘I know, I know. I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have said that. I wasn’t inferring your family is crazy.’

Jack’s parents sat down on the kitchen bench.

‘So, what are you going to do?’ asked his mother.

‘I’ll decide by Saturday. I just need space to think.’

‘Going to The Crown then?’

‘Just for a pint.’

‘Then make it quick. I don’t want to be worrying about both of you out in a storm.’

‘Don’t worry, love, I’ll be fine. As will Jack.’

The grey clouds were no longer far away. They were creeping closer to land, bringing the guarantee of rain and possibly lightning. Jack wasn’t put off by the thought of getting wet, but he feared a lightning strike would spook Calo, and a spooked horse was always dangerous to ride, even if it was Calo. Still, he hoped the lightning was some way away. There was enough time to satisfy his need to see the waves glide in to the cove, and if the wind was up, feel sea spray on his face.

There was a stone wall ahead, a metre high and covered in lichen. It marked the boundary of the farm.

‘You want to jump it, Calo?’ said Jack. ‘I think you do. Come on!’ Jack nudged Calo and he responded at once, going from a trot to a canter. Jack lifted himself slightly out of the saddle and leaned forward, gripping Calo’s mane. Calo soared over the wall with ease and kept going at a canter.

‘Good boy!’ said Jack, stroking Calo’s neck. ‘You’re the best!’

Jack sat back as adrenalin rushed through him. It was not as powerful as it was the first time he jumped a wall as a boy, but it was still a sensation he craved, and thought about

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whenever he was bored, which at school was most of the time. There were plenty more walls to jump before they reached Prussia Cove. First, they had to pass through what lay before them. On maps the cluster of trees was marked as Bluebell Woods because in the centre was a clearing where bluebells had bloomed every spring for centuries. Locals, including Jack, knew the woods by a different name: Loveday. A hundred years or so ago, a girl by that name had been sent into the woods to pick bluebells. Her mother had wanted to sell them at the market and didn't care for the tale that bad luck would come to those who profited from their beauty. So off Loveday was sent with her basket. Night time came and she had not returned home. Her mother roused her neighbours and with lanterns they scoured the woods, shouting Loveday's name. They searched for hours, but there was no sign of the girl. And then the mother came to the clearing. She lowered her lamp and her heart broke. On the ground was the basket she had given her daughter that morning. A single bluebell was in it, and while all the unpicked bluebells were a deep violet-blue, the head of the picked bluebell was black. Loveday's body was never found, and the basket was burned, though for years afterwards there were sightings of a girl with blonde hair walking in the woods. She was wearing a frock and a bonnet, and was bending down to pick bluebells. In her hand was a basket.

Calo began to slow without Jack telling him to. He raised his head and neck. His ears pricked up sharply. The entrance to the woods was just metres away.

'Come on, boy,' said Jack. 'I'm with you. There's nothing to worry about.'

There were two paths through the woods. The one to the left ran along the edge and had plenty of daylight. The other went through the centre where the trees were most dense and the light was dim. It took half the time to travel along, but it meant passing through the clearing.

Jack looked up. The clouds above him were now grey. He was losing the race to avoid the storm.

‘Shortcut it is then,’ he said. ‘Sorry, mate.’

Jack nudged Calo and they entered the woods. The path, wide at first, began to narrow and the trees crept ever closer to it, blocking the fading daylight.

‘Come on, boy!’ shouted Jack. ‘Come, on!’

Calo wove between the trees, staying tight to the path, all the while on the brink of breaking into a canter. Jack’s heartbeat accelerated. He hadn’t taken the shortcut for years, not since he’d heard the tale about Loveday, but could still remember where the clearing was. Getting closer, he thought; closer... closer... closer... and there it was, a perfect circle and with no branches above: the clearing.

Jack leaned close to Calo’s neck. ‘Keep going! Keep going!’

Calo kicked in to a canter.

‘That’s my boy!’ said Jack. ‘Come on!’

The path began to widen. The open fields were ahead.

‘Nearly there!’

Calo went up into a gallop.

‘Woo-hoo!’ shouted Jack as they emerged from the woods. ‘Good boy!’

Calo kept his speed. Jack thought about pulling him back. The surge of adrenalin was exhilarating, better even than the time he surfed the widowmaker at Newquay. He wished the fields would go on forever so he could ride and ride, and never pull at Calo’s reins. But he knew he had to because he was about to ride off the cliff.

‘Easy, boy, easy,’ he said, bringing Calo down to a canter and then a trot. ‘That’s it, well done.’

The coastal path was exposed to the wind whipping off the sea. Jack reached into his pocket for a hair band. He fumbled with it and it blew away. He didn’t care. He felt happier with his hair blowing wildly behind him, as if it gave him more freedom. His teachers didn’t

like the length, but he did, and his mates, and no one was going to tell him what to do with it. Except his mum, perhaps, but she had the right to.

‘Almost there, Calo, almost there,’ he said, glancing up at the sky. There was no rain, yet, but the clouds, menacingly dark and closing, promised a downpour. Jack looked around for shelter in case of lightning. Other than the old fishermen’s cottages on the hill he could see nowhere for protection. It’s okay, he told himself, you won’t get caught out. Calo won’t get spooked.

The path began to drop down. Prussia Cove came into view. Even with the wind, the waves were calm, and the turquoise water was clear, so clear that the rocks on the seabed could be seen. It was almost high tide. Only a thin strip of the clean, white sand remained. A few more minutes and it would be covered. Jack kicked himself for being late.

Calo’s ears pricked up, just as they had at the entrance to the woods. Jack sensed his neck becoming tense.

‘What’s up, mate? You heard something?’

Jack listened, expecting to hear thunder in the distance. All he could hear was the wind and the sea lapping into the cove. The thunder was not far away, though. He was certain of it.

‘Best we went home I reckon,’ he said.

Jack took one final look at the cove. He squinted. There was a figure on the rocks. It was the figure of a woman, possibly a girl. She had her back to him and was resting on her knees, with her head thrust back and her hands on the soles of her feet.

‘What is she doing?’ said Jack.

Calo’s ears remained pricked. At the top of the path that led down to the cove was a white horse. It was tied by rope to a gate and was trying to break free. Jack glanced again at

the water and realised why the horse was distressed. The girl on the rocks was about to be cut off by the tide.

## Chapter Two

‘Let’s go mate,’ said Jack, not even needing to give Calo a nudge to get moving. The girl stayed in her position. It appeared painful to Jack.

‘Hello!’ he cried out at the top of his voice. ‘Hello!’

The girl didn’t respond. The tide kept coming in.

‘Hello!’

The girl remained motionless, as if she was in a trance. The sea had now come over the back of the rocks. The girl was at the far end on a ledge. Jack glanced at her, then the sea, wondering what to do. Shouting from the path was pointless. He knew he had to get cl.

‘It’ll be all right,’ he said to the girl’s horse as he passed it on the path. ‘I’ll get her... I hope.’

Jack took Calo on to the sand. ‘Hello!’ he shouted. ‘Can you hear me?’

The girl snapped out of her trance and turned. ‘What do you want?’ she said abrasively.

She has no idea, Jack thought. ‘To warn you,’ he said.

‘About what?’

Jack pointed to the water on the rocks. ‘To that.’

The girl looked around her. ‘I’m stuck!’ she said.

‘You should swim.’

‘I can’t!’

‘You’re kidding me,’ Jack said quietly. ‘That’s really helpful.’

‘What do I do?’

Jack looked at the rocks and the now sea covered route the girl would have taken to the ledge. It was the only way to escape, if the girl could swim, that is.

‘You have to rescue me,’ she said.

‘And you have to stay calm.’

‘I am calm! Just hurry up will you!’

Jack drew a long breath and exhaled hard. ‘This is madness.’

‘I’m waiting,’ said the girl.

‘All right, all right,’ said Jack. ‘I’m coming.’ He nudged Calo to move. The water rose up Calo’s legs with each step. ‘It’s just water. Stay calm, mate.’

‘Are you sure you know what you’re doing?’ said the girl.

Not really, Jack thought. But it’s the best option. ‘Try and get closer,’ he shouted.

The girl edged as far as she could on the rocks. Jack glanced down. The water was now halfway up Calo’s legs. ‘You can do it mate,’ said Jack. ‘You can do it.’

Calo snorted and pressed on, fighting the sea. Suddenly, his front leg buckled.

‘Easy, boy, easy,’ said Jack, wobbling in the saddle. He had forgotten there was a sudden drop in the seabed.

Calo froze.

‘It’s okay,’ said Jack, feeling seawater seep into his boots. ‘It’s okay.’

‘Stop dawdling,’ said the girl.

‘I’m not!’ said Jack.

‘Yes, you *are*!’

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Jack sighed. 'You're going to have to jump.'

'I'll drown,' said the girl.

'You can jump or stay there and hope you're not washed away. Which is it?'

The girl looked around her as if there was some other option.

'You've got ten seconds to make up your mind,' said Jack, feeling dampness rise from his feet to his ankles. 'And then I'm gone.'

The girl said nothing. She remained rigid on the edge of the rock.

'Ten... nine... eight...'

The girl bent her knees.

'Seven... six... five...'

The girl closed her eyes.

'Four... three... two...'

The girl bit her lip.

'One!'

The girl opened her eyes and jumped towards Jack, only she misjudged her leap and hit the water on the deeper side of Calo.

'Take my hand,' said Jack, quickly reaching down.

The girl raised her arm. As she did, she stepped backwards, losing her balance, taking in a mouthful of water.

Jack released his feet from the stirrups and pulled off his trainers. 'Hold on!' he cried.

The current took the girl further away from Jack, but instead of using her arms to get closer to him, she was flapping them up and down, getting nowhere.

'I'm coming!' said Jack. 'Keep your head up!'

The sea was winning. The girl's head began to drop under the surface.

'Swim!' yelled Jack.

The girl's head came up. Jack launched into a front crawl. Glancing up between strokes, he caught sight of the girl dropping below the surface again. Her arm came up high. Jack grabbed it and swung it round his neck. The girl brought her other arm out of the water and locked her hands. The pressure forced Jack down. He closed his mouth just in time before he went under the water. He came back up and sucked in air, only his hoodie suddenly felt heavy, as if lined with weights.

'What now?' asked the girl.

Jack kicked harder to keep afloat. His mind flashed back to spring when he'd signed up for lifeguard training and then pulled out at the last minute to go surfing.

'Time to move,' he said. 'Keep your grip.'

Jack's neck ached from the strain of supporting the girl. He brought his arm round her waist and grabbed her t-shirt. It helped, but the discomfort remained. He raised his left arm and brought it down into the water, pulling it back as he kicked hard. The girl held on; her fingers were locked hard against Jack's skin. He raised his arm again, bringing it down and back up.

'Come on!' said the girl.

Jack couldn't tell if he was making progress. He had seconds until fatigue defeated his body and he still had the shelf to overcome. He needed both arms to swim, so let go of the t-shirt and brought his arm up. With everything he had, he swung it backwards through the water, accidentally knocking the girl's arms away. She panicked and grabbed his hoodie, taking them both below the surface. They became separated. Jack thrust his arm out, and then the other, expecting to touch the girl. He felt only water. He raised his head, gasped for breath and went back under the surface. I've lost her, he thought; I've lost her! He came up again and felt back of his hoodie being tugged. He turned, expecting to see the girl. Calo, with water up to his neck and the girl holding on to his bridle, stared back. Jack didn't have

enough air in his lungs to speak. He swam to the girl's side, hoping she understood what to do. She pushed down on his shoulder for leverage and grabbed the top of the saddle. Calo sunk a little more into the seabed. Jack swam on. He took Calo's bridle, pulling him forward over the shelf.

He stood up and gasping for air said, 'It's shallow now.'

The girl waded to shore, collapsing on the sand.

'You okay?' asked Jack, still wheezing.

The girl coughed and nodded at the same time.

'You sure?' said Jack.

'I'm sure.'

'What were you doing?'

'Yoga,' said the girl, sucking in air.

'On the rocks?'

'Good a place as any.'

'Not when the tide cuts you off.'

'I wasn't to know that.'

'Everyone else round here does.'

'Evidently, I didn't.'

'Well, you do now.'

The girl pouted, as if she'd been insulted. She swept her hair away from her face. It was the same light brown as Jack's, only much shorter. Jack put her age at about sixteen. She stood up quickly; too quickly as she wobbled.

'You should see a doctor,' said Jack, steadying her.

'I'm fine.'

'You might be in shock.'

‘I doubt it.’

‘You almost drowned.’

‘Almost is a long way from actually drowning, isn’t it?’

Jack was lost for words. The girl turned her back to him and made for the path.

‘What an ungrateful snob,’ said Jack quietly.

‘I heard that,’ said the girl, still walking towards her horse.

‘Oh, so you can hear, but you can’t say thank you?’

The girl swung round sharply and said, ‘Thank you.’ She turned back and resumed walking.

Jack took Calo’s reins and followed. ‘My name is Jack, by the way,’ he said.

‘That’s nice.’

‘And this is Calo.’

The girl stopped again. She came down the path and kissed Calo on the nose. ‘Thank you, Calo,’ she said warmly. ‘You’re my hero.’

Jack smiled. He wondered which cheek of the girl would kiss. She might even kiss him on the lips, he thought. What a great story that would be to tell Jimmy; he’d be so jealous.

‘Calo’s bridle is too loose,’ said the girl. ‘And his saddle pad needs replacing. It doesn’t align with the contours of his back.’

Jack’s jaw dropped. He couldn’t believe what he was hearing.

‘You should have a pad custom made,’ said the girl. ‘That’s what I’ve always done.’

‘Is it now, miss... whatever your name is.’

‘Yes, it is.’ The girl mounted her horse. ‘And my name is Van.’

‘As in, minivan?’

The girl scowled. It was clear to Jack she'd heard his response before. 'Van, as in short for Vandra,' she said.

'Well, Van, are you going to apologise?'

'For what?'

'For this!' said Jack, pointing to his sodden clothes.

The girl sighed. 'Sorry.'

'You really meant that, didn't you,' said Jack sarcastically.

'Are you accusing me of insincerity?'

Jack considered saying no. He'd had enough though of the girl's attitude. 'Yes... yes, I am.'

'Then I retract my apology.'

'You can't do that.'

'Yes, I can. Goodbye, Calo. I pity you for having such a rude owner.'

Van took off on her horse, leaving Jack stunned. He wanted to shout out something; something that would let the girl know how insulting she had been. Nothing came to him, and even if it did, he knew he'd regret saying it. A shiver went through him. He needed a hot shower more than getting worked up by a girl with a strange name. He led Calo to the top of the path, deliberately not looking the way Van went. There was still enough light to get home where toad-in-the-hole with mash and gravy awaited him. Mmm... yum, he thought. He lifted his weary leg and placed his foot into the stirrup.

'Damn her!' he said, looking at his wet socks. 'She made me lose my trainers!'

Jack squelched into the house and into an onslaught of questions from his parents. They continued over dinner, developing from what had happened to who the girl was.

'You're certain her name was Vandra?' asked his father.

‘That’s what she said. Have you heard of her?’

Jack’s father hesitated a moment and then shook his head.

‘She must be on holiday,’ said Jack’s mum. ‘If she was from round here, she’d have known about the tide.’

‘Perhaps,’ said Jack ‘or maybe she’s just moved here.’

‘She might be at your school on Monday then.’

‘I doubt it, mum,’ said Jack. ‘No one at my school would do yoga on a rock or have a saddle-pad custom made.’

‘Well, if she is there you should still make her feel welcome. Starting a new school isn’t easy.’

Monday arrived and Jack had already forgotten about the girl. His alarm clock came alive at a quarter to five, the same time as always, and just as he did every morning he reached for it and hit the snooze button, silencing the irritating beep. Just five more minutes, he thought; just five more minutes and I’ll get up. Five minutes, however, is never enough. For the previous six weeks Jack hadn’t cared that much about his alarm clock going off as he could return to bed after helping his dad. Today was different though. The summer holiday was over. Once he had milked forty or more cows, Jack would have to put on a pair of trousers, a white shirt, blazer, tie a tie, pack his bag and catch a bus to spend seven hours in his least favourite place: Royal Oak High School. It was a stupid name, Jack had often thought, for there was nothing royal about the school. Some of the pupils wanted A-grades and to progress to sixth form to try and get more A-grades so they could then attend a good university which would lead to a career and money, and a fancy house in a town far away from Cornwall. Others, such as Jack, just wanted to get school over and done with. Only nine

more months, he thought as he pulled back his duvet. In nine months I'll be free. No more school.

His work clothes, consisting of a smelly jumper and an even smellier pair of dungarees, were in a pile on his bedroom floor. He stumbled bleary-eyed into them and crept downstairs, hoping not to wake his mum, remembering to remove his woolly hat from the hook by the back door.

'Wake up, Jack,' he said to himself as he slid his feet into his muddy Wellington boots. 'There's work to do.'

Rain greeted him outside. Summer really was over. Not to worry, he thought; it'll soon be breakfast time and a good breakfast makes everything all right. Two mugs, he decided; it's definitely a two mugs of tea day and most definitely a tablespoon of strawberry jam stirred through porridge day, perhaps even golden syrup with a dollop of apple sauce too. But first, there were cows to milk.

'Morning, dad,' he said, entering the milking shed.

'Morning, son.'

No instructions were needed. Jack had his row of cows to milk, and his dad had his, just as they been doing every morning for the past two years. They went from cow to cow, washing udders, then connecting them to pipes, rarely talking as the radio was on.

'I've got one rule in here,' Jack's dad had told him on his first day. 'I pick the radio station, and if the news is on you don't talk over it.'

Two hours whizzed by. Jack's work for the morning was done.

'Off you go, son,' said his dad. 'I don't want you being late for your new tutor.'

The new form tutor. Jack had forgotten about him. He hadn't even seen him, no one in his class had. All they'd been told at the end of last term was that Mr Humphries wasn't returning and he'd been replaced by a Mr Walters.

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‘Where’s he from, miss?’ Jack’s best friend, Jimmy, had asked the head of year, Miss Dawlish.

‘I believe he’s from Scotland.’

‘Scotland? Why does he want to come all the way down here?’

‘I can’t say, Jimmy. Not that it’s any of my business, or yours for that matter.’

Jimmy was standing at the gate as Jack arrived at school. He was chewing a piece of gum and flicking through the pages of a surfing magazine.

‘Look at this,’ he said, folding back a page. ‘This could be us.’

Jack looked at the picture Jimmy had thrust at him. It was of a monster wave, in the barrel of which was a bronzed surfer.

‘It’s in Hawaii,’ said Jack.

‘So?’ said Jimmy. ‘We could get there. We should start saving.’

‘You don’t have a job.’

‘I do.’

‘A paper round will not buy you an airfare to Hawaii.’

‘Then I’ll get another. Come on, let’s do it. We can go as soon as we leave here.’

Jack pushed the magazine back. ‘Sorry, mate. The best we can hope for is Newquay.’

Jimmy frowned. ‘Spoilsport.’

‘Realist.’

‘Whatever.’

The bell rang. People began to drift towards the school buildings.

‘Have you seen him?’ asked Jack.

‘Who?’

‘Walters.’

‘Nope, but Katie has. She said he’s thin and bony, and bald.’

‘He is not. She’s making that up.’

‘That’s what she said, and my sister doesn’t lie.’

Jack raised his eyebrows.

‘All right, she does sometimes.’

‘The last time I saw her she said she’d been offered a recording deal in London.’

‘She might have been.’

‘So she has?’

Jimmy blew out his cheeks. ‘Probably not, but you can’t blame her for trying.’

‘Trying what?’

‘To impress you.’

‘Stop that right now,’ said Jack.

‘Stop what?’

‘Trying to set me up with your sister.’

‘I’m not!’

‘You are too!’

‘But she’s so sweet.’

‘She’s also in the year below.’

‘I’d go out with a girl in the year below.’

‘That’s because you’d go out with anyone, Jimmy.’

The bell rang again. The playground had nearly emptied.

‘Come on,’ said Jack. ‘Let’s go and see this tall and bony Mr Walters.’

Mr Walters, lanky, thin and with a shaved head, was stood behind his desk with his arms crossed as Jack and Jimmy entered their form room.

‘You’re late,’ he said aggressively. ‘No one is ever late when I’m in charge.’

Jack glanced at the clock. The minute hand struck fifty. 'It's ten to nine,' he said. 'That's when form class starts, which means we're not late. I'm afraid you're wrong, sir.'

Mr Walters uncrossed his arms and stepped towards Jack. In a thick Scottish accent, he said, 'If you were sitting down you'd be on time, but you're not, are you? You're standing up, which in my book makes you late, doesn't it, Mr... ?'

'Caradoc. Jack Caradoc. And you are?'

Mr Walters came even closer. A heavy silence fell upon the room. 'I'm Mr Walters, your new form tutor, and I'm still waiting on your acknowledgement, laddie.'

'For what?'

'That you're wrong, and I'm right.'

Jack didn't break eye contact.

'I'm waiting, laddie. Don't be so stupid as to push my patience.'

Jack swallowed. In his sharpish voice, he said, 'Drog yw genev, mes ewn ov vy ha kamm os ta.'

A girl at the back of the room giggled. Jack didn't need to look to know it had been Kerensa Tonkin. She was the only other pupil in his form, in the entire school, who could speak fluent Cornish.

Mr Walters put his hands on his hips. 'What did you say, Caradoc?'

'Drog yw genev, mes ewn ov vy ha kamm os ta,' said Jack.

'Say it in English, laddie.'

Jack shook his head. He opened his eyes even wider.

'In English, laddie,' barked Mr Walters. 'Not in your gobbledygook.'

Jack swallowed again. 'I gave you my answer. If you can't understand our language, I suggest you either learn it, or leave Cornwall.'

The Legend of Caradoc by David Dunham

Mr Walters screwed his eyes up. ‘Listen here, sunshine; I ain’t going anywhere, and neither are you after school. You’re coming back here for detention. Now sit down or you’ll be in detention tomorrow too. Do I make myself clear?’

Jack bit his tongue and did as he was told. Detention for one day was bad enough, but consecutive days would be excruciating.

‘You idiot,’ said Jimmy quietly. ‘Did you not read today’s surf report?’

Jack wanted to groan. He *had* read the report. The waves that afternoon were going to be the best for weeks at Praa-Sands.

‘I can’t ask my brother to wait for you,’ said Jimmy. ‘Not when it’s going to be so good.’

Jack clenched his jaw, restraining a big sigh. Nine more months of school suddenly felt like a prison sentence. ‘I know you can’t,’ he said reluctantly. ‘Better go without me then.’

The end of the school day came and everyone headed for the gate. Everyone, except for Jack.

‘Six-foot waves,’ said Jimmy, taunting Jack as he headed for freedom. ‘Six-foot waves, Jackster!’

Jack turned away and began to trudge towards his form room.

‘Sit down,’ said Mr Walters, pointing to a desk as Jack entered the room.

Jack said nothing. All he could think of was the surf at Praa-Sands and that instead of heading there with Jimmy and his brother he would spend the next hour staring out of the window.

Something landed on his desk.

‘Open it,’ said Mr Walters.

The Legend of Caradoc by David Dunham

Jack looked at Mr Walters and then down. A pad of lined paper was in front of him. At the top of it was a single sentence.

‘You’re to write that sentence over and over until the clock strikes four-thirty,’ said Mr Walters. ‘Understood?’

Jack delayed his answer. It dawned on him that Kerensa had given him up; told Walters what he had said earlier and now Walters was turning the words round to get his own back.

‘Do you understand?’

Jack nodded.

‘Good. Then begin. And do it in English.’

Jack stared at the sentence.

‘I said, begin, Caradoc.’

Jack picked up his pen and began to write.

*Sorry, I’m wrong and Mr Walters is right*

*Sorry, I’m wrong and Mr Walters is...*

Stuff this, Jack thought.

*Sorry, I’m right and you’re wrong*

*Sorry, I’m right and you’re wrong*

*Drog yw genev, mes ewn ov vy ha kamm os ta*

*Drog yw genev, mes ewn ov vy ha kamm os ta*

There was a knock. Jack glanced up. Miss Dawlish glanced back and approached Mr Walters. She whispered something in his ear.

‘I’m needed in a meeting,’ said Mr Walters, addressing Jack. ‘I’ll be back soon so don’t think for a moment about slacking off. Do I make myself clear?’

Jack didn’t respond, or even look up. He knew he could get away with not doing so; that Walters wouldn’t risk losing his composure in front of a senior colleague.

*Ov ewn, ta dregydna*

*Ov ewn, ta dregydna*

Wait, Jack thought, listening for the door to close. Wait... wait ... it’s coming... and there it is. Walters has left!

Jack put down his pen and leaned back, locking his fingers together behind his head. This is so dumb, he thought, looking around the empty room. I could be on the way to the beach right now, not stuck in this miserable place. He looked at the clock. What he saw depressed him. He had fifty-three minutes to go.

‘Jimmy was right,’ he said quietly. ‘You really are an idiot.’

He leaned forward and laid his head on the table, determined to rest his eyes, but not fall asleep. He could sense his breathing slow and his eyes become more relaxed, and the minor discomfort of his knuckles pressing against his head start to fade. The early start had finally caught up with him.

Just a little nap, he told himself. You deserve it.

Beeeeep!

Just five minutes and you can open your eyes.

Beeeeep!

Jack bolted upright. It can’t be, he thought.

Beeeeep!

Jack pushed the chair back and dashed to the window. At the far gate where the kitchen deliveries came in was a green and white 1967 Volkswagen Kombi with surfboards strapped to the roof. Standing either side of them, waving his arms, was Jimmy.

Jack waved back. Jimmy's older brother, Danny, hit the horn again.

Beeeeeeep!

Jack loved that sound when he was at home because it meant Jimmy and Danny were coming up the farm track and it was time to go surfing.

Beeeeeeep!

Jack looked at the paper on the table and then at his bag, remembering what Mr Walters had said about being back soon.

Beeeeeeep!

Jack continued to stare at the paper, weighing up his choice. Detention vs surfing... detention vs six-foot waves... detention vs defiance... detention vs further punishment... detention vs mates... detention vs...

'I'm out of here!' said Jack, grabbing his bag. He made for the staircase, half expecting to meet Mr Walters or another teacher. He peered over the banister.

Go! he said in his head, conscious that what was coming next was a greater challenge than navigating the stairs. He paused at the glass door on the ground floor. The playground lay ahead of him. School buildings flanked his route to the gate. Room after room with windows. The meeting was being held in one of them, Jack thought. Someone would definitely see him.

Beeeeeeep!

Jack glanced towards the gate. Jimmy remained on the roof of his brother's van and was now beckoning him.

*Detention vs defiance...*

Jack breathed out hard, looked to his sides for a glimpse of a teacher, and began to run, catching sight of Jimmy punching the air.

‘Half way there,’ Jack said to himself. ‘Keep going!’

Danny fired up his van as Jimmy climbed down from the roof. The engine was loud, very loud, loud enough to make anyone in a nearby building look its way.

Too late now, Jack thought, reaching the gate.

‘Good lad!’ said Jimmy. ‘I knew you couldn’t resist it.’

Jack opened the van’s sliding door. ‘Let’s just get out of here.’

‘As you wish,’ said Danny.

‘Caradoc!’ The voice, Scottish and fierce, boomed across the playground.

Jack froze.

‘Stop there!’ roared Mr Walters.

‘Get in,’ said Jimmy.

*Detention vs six-foot waves*

‘Get in,’ said Jimmy. ‘Now!’

Jack smiled at Jimmy. ‘Good idea,’ he said, stepping into the van.

‘Caradoc!’ boomed Mr Walters.

Jack pulled the sliding door across. Mr Walters continued his march towards him.

‘Time to catch some waves,’ said Danny.

Mr Walters stopped abruptly. He raised his arm and pointed menacingly at Jack.

‘You’ve really got him annoyed now,’ said Jimmy.

Jack wound down the window and waved at Mr Walters, mocking him. ‘That’s nothing,’ he said. ‘He hasn’t seen what I wrote in detention yet.’

Chapter Three

That night, over dinner, Jack confessed to what he had done at school. At least, most of it. He looked down at his plate, waiting for his father to respond. He always spoke first on any matter of discipline. It was just how it was.

‘We already knew,’ said his mother.

Jack looked up. ‘What?’

‘We had a phone call.’

‘From Mr Walters?’

‘No, from Miss Dawlish.’

Jack felt a little relieved. He’d often regarded Miss Dawlish as a teacher who was hard, but fair.

‘What did she say?’

‘Pretty much what you told us.’

Pretty much? Jack thought; that means she said something else.

‘She said you wrote lines of Cornish.’

‘Oh, that,’ said Jack. ‘There’s nothing wrong in that.’

Jack’s mum’s face hardened. ‘There is when you’re being rude, whether it be in English or Cornish,’ she said.

‘I wasn’t being serious.’

‘Mr Walters thinks you were. He’s livid, apparently. He wants you punished.’

What a surprise, Jack thought; Walters wants me to repeat detention.

Jack’s father cleared his throat. ‘You did something stupid, son, and from what Miss Dawlish said, Mr Walters won’t be forgetting it in a hurry.’

‘Okay, okay, I get it,’ said Jack. ‘Another detention awaits.’

Jack’s mum drew in a breath. ‘It’s more serious than just one detention.’

## The Legend of Caradoc by David Dunham

Jack frowned. 'What do you mean? It's not like they can expel me.'

'No, not for what you did. However...'

'However, what, mum?'

'Mr Walters found out you're the captain of the surf team.'

'So?'

'He wants you suspended from the team. For one week.'

'From when?' asked Jack nervously, fearing what the answer would be.

'From tomorrow.'

'He can't do that! The inter school championship is on Saturday.'

'Which is why he's pushing for it,' said Jack's father. 'He wants revenge and he's found out the best way to get it.'

Fury started to rise up in Jack. 'That's so unfair!'

'I know, son, but you've allowed this to happen.'

Jack couldn't believe what he'd just heard. 'How on earth is it my fault?'

'Because you let him rattle you, and then you humiliated him, so he's going to humiliate you.'

Jack's lower lip began to quiver. 'But, I... I just...'

'I know, you just couldn't give in.'

'You're no different from your father,' said Jack's mum. 'He would have done the same.'

'You've got to help me, dad,' said Jack. 'I can't miss the championship. We can win this year, I know it! Please, help me!'

Jack's dad sighed. 'There is a way out of this.'

'I'll do it, whatever it is, I'll do it. Detention, picking up litter, prefect duty, anything.'

Jack's dad looked across the table. 'Emily, over to you.'

Jack's mum scowled, as if she had lost a bet over who would speak next. 'Well, I knew how you'd react so I called Miss Dawlish back and asked her what it would take for her to block Mr Walters from having you suspended from the team.'

'And she went for it?' said Jack. 'Please say she did.'

'She did, yes.'

## The Legend of Caradoc by David Dunham

Jack punched the air. ‘Yes! Thank you, mum, thank you!’ Jack stood up and kissed his mum on the cheek. ‘I would have cried if I’d been suspended. We can win, I’m telling you, we can. Our team is on fire right now. You should have seen Jimmy today, he impressed even...’ Jack paused. There was something he’d forgotten to ask. ‘Hold on, what did Miss Dawlish say I have to do to avoid being dropped?’

His parents both looked at each other.

‘Mum? What did she say?’

‘Well, it involves activity and...’

‘Yes?’

‘Young ladies.’

Jack raised his eyebrows. ‘In what way?’

‘In the way of you, err, helping to lift them.’

‘To lift them?’

‘That’s right, lift them.’

Jack suddenly remembered the poster he’d seen that morning in the corridor. Miss Dawlish was beginning a new lunchtime class and was looking for strong boys in the final year to help. For a laugh, Jimmy had written the rugby captain’s name on the signing up form.

‘Helping to lift them how?’ asked Jack.

‘Around their waist.’

‘Why would a girl want me to do that?’

‘Because that’s what happens in...’

Jack’s parents looked at each other again.

‘In ballet, son,’ said his dad.

Jack gripped the back of a chair. ‘No! Please say no. Please say you’re just winding me up.’

His parents both shook their heads.

‘Sorry,’ said his mum. ‘I wish I was winding you up, but I’m not.’

‘I can’t take a ballet class!’ said Jack. ‘I’ll be the laughing stock of school.’

‘Yes, you probably will be,’ said his dad.

## The Legend of Caradoc by David Dunham

‘Duncan! That doesn’t help,’ said his mum.

‘It’s the truth. We know it, and Jack knows it.’

‘Mum, please, please, you have to call Miss Dawlish and tell her I can’t do it,’ said Jack.

‘You have to say I’ll do something else.’

‘She isn’t budging, I’m afraid. If you don’t do it, you’ll miss the competition.’

‘And if I do go through with it I’ll never live it down.’

‘That may be, but at least you’ll get to surf on Saturday. And who will mock you if you win? You’re the captain, you’ll be the school hero. No one will care less about the leggings and poses, and it’s only on Friday lunchtime. It’s not as if the class is on Saturday night.’

Jack knew his mum was right. And ballet might even be enjoyable, particularly if Lucy Peters was in the class. Every boy in his year would want to lift her by the waist.

‘Well?’ said his mum. ‘What do you say? It could be a lot worse.’

Jack scoffed.

‘Hey! Less of that!’

Jack felt his cheeks burn. ‘Sorry, mum.’

‘That’s all right.’

Jack ran his hand through his hair. ‘Okay, I’ll do it.’

‘Good lad.’

Foolish lad, more like, Jack wanted to say. He kept quiet and headed up the staircase. It had been a long day and he needed to sleep. As he reached the landing, he paused.

No, I couldn’t have heard that, he thought. I must have heard it wrong.

He turned quickly and hurried back down to the kitchen.

‘What do you mean, no one will care less about the leggings?’ he asked.

‘Oh, yes, I thought you might wonder about that.’

‘Mum?’

‘Miss Dawlish clearly takes her ballet seriously and so expects you to also.’

‘I am *not* wearing leggings!’ said Jack firmly.

‘She said it’s compulsory. She said she wants people to be impressed when people pass by.’

## The Legend of Caradoc by David Dunham

Jack felt a wave of anxiety hit him. 'When people pass by where?'

'The school gym.'

In his mind, Jack saw the gym. It was all glass on one side and was set between the two main school buildings. Whenever people went from one building to the other, which was at every lesson break and lunchtime, they peered in at whatever activity was taking place: basketball, badminton, five-a-side football, indoor cricket, and from this Friday, ballet.

'Regretting what you did earlier, aren't you, son?' asked Jack's dad.

Jack tensed his jaw.

*Detention vs defiance... detention vs eight-foot waves, the sea, laughing with mates, and sharing a can of lager on the way home as the sun sets.*

'No, no. No regrets,' said Jack, forcing a smile. 'And I've always wondered what leggings feel like. Now I get the chance. Good night.'

Jack, lying in bed, hit the snooze button. Almost the weekend, he thought; just over ten hours to go to the best time of the week: the ringing of the going home bell at three-thirty; the permission to leave school and forget about it for two days, to do as he pleased, to surf, ride Calo, hang with his mates, and go back to bed after his milking duties. And Friday was always the best day at school because he had a double lesson of sport and his teachers were also longing for the bell, and so after lunch they lost interest in being strict.

Except for Mr Walters, that is, Jack predicted as he pulled the duvet over his head; there's no way he'd lose interest in being strict; he'll always be looking for a way to... Jack sprung up. Friday didn't mean an easy ride; it meant it was the day he had to take a... ballet class.

Fake an illness, Jack thought; that's the solution. He began to list his options: stomach ache, dizziness, chest pain, memory loss... allergy to any clothing material associated with ballet.

Forget it, he told himself; no one will believe you; you're just going to have to serve your punishment and hope that no-one notices.

'Dream on,' he said quietly. '*Everyone* is going to notice.'

## The Legend of Caradoc by David Dunham

There were voices in the kitchen. Jack heard his dad and then his mum. That's strange, he thought; mum is never awake at this time, and dad should be either moving the cows into the shed, or be in there already with them. Jack put on his work clothes and headed downstairs. His mum had her coat on and was holding a mug of tea. The dark rings under her eyes revealed a sleepless night.

'What's the matter, mum?' he asked.

'Your grandmother's had a fall. The hospital called earlier.'

Jack's stomach turned. 'Is she okay?'

'They're doing x-rays. They think she's broken her leg. I'm going there now.'

'I'll come with you,' said Jack.

'No, you need to stay here.'

'It's a long way, mum. You shouldn't go alone.'

'It's only Plymouth.'

'But I want to see her.'

'I know you do, love. But your dad needs your help, and I don't want you missing school.'

'And I want to see gran.'

'She's probably groggy from the drugs they've given her. Today's not the best time.'

'Tomorrow, then,' said Jack.

'It's the championship tomorrow.'

'I don't care; gran's more important.'

'That's very sweet of you, love, but I'm not having you missing the championship. Your team needs you.'

'Your mother's right,' said Jack's dad. 'And your gran would say the same.'

'What about Sunday? Can I come then?'

Jack's parents looked at each other.

'I'm probably going to stay at gran's house for a few days,' said Jack's mum. 'It'll be easier for visiting her.'

Jack suddenly realised what his mother's absence meant. He couldn't help looking down.

## The Legend of Caradoc by David Dunham

‘I’m really sorry, love,’ said his mum, coming forward to hug him. ‘We’ll have a birthday tea when I get back, and we’ll go somewhere special, wherever you want.’

Jack hugged his mum harder. ‘It’s okay, mum, I don’t mind. I just want gran to get well.’

‘And she will. I’ll let your dad know when you can visit.’

‘You should get going,’ said Jack’s dad. ‘You’ll hit traffic otherwise.’

Jack followed his parents outside to the car.

‘Blast,’ said his mum. ‘I left my reading glasses upstairs.’

‘I’ll get them,’ said Jack.

‘I think I left them by my bed.’

Jack ran up the stairs. On his mother’s bedside table he could see books and a diary, but no reading glasses. He looked around him, pulling open drawers and lifting clothes on the bed, and could still not find them. Best shout down and ask, he thought. The window was already open. Jack went to call out. He heard his mother ask a question and stopped himself, wondering if he’d heard correctly.

There was a silence. Finally, his father said, ‘No, I haven’t decided.’

‘You need to. Time’s running out.’

‘I realise that.’

‘It’s either tomorrow or never.’

‘It doesn’t seem important now. All you should be thinking of is your mother and helping her.’

‘I can still worry about you, can’t I?’

Jack stepped closer to the window. A floorboard creaked and he froze, waiting for a sign he’d been caught eavesdropping.

‘There’s no need to worry about me, love,’ said Jack’s dad.

Jack breathed out in relief. He’d got away with it.

‘Are you thinking about your promise?’ asked his mum.

‘Yes. It’s hard to ignore.’

‘It was a very long time ago. You were just a boy.’

‘It’s still a promise, and it was to my father.’

## The Legend of Caradoc by David Dunham

‘Would it be such a bad thing if you didn’t say anything?’

There was another silence, longer than before. ‘Perhaps not. Perhaps it’s about time someone put a stop to all of this.’

‘Someone should have done that a long time ago.’

Jack’s dad said nothing.

‘Please tell me you don’t believe it. Please tell me you think it’s just a story.’

Jack’s phone beeped in his pocket with a message. The sound must have carried as his parents both went quiet.

‘I’ve just remembered where my glasses are,’ said his mum. ‘I’ll go and get them. Jack won’t get anywhere looking for them upstairs.’

The text message had been sent by Jimmy. It read: Danny says party@my place tmrw night. Parents going away! P.S. Danny said yes to the tattoo!

Danny’s parties were legendary. The last one involved a DJ, cocktail bar, a fire-eater, and a bonfire in the bottom field. A hundred or more people showed up, including the police, because of the sound system keeping all the neighbours awake. Turn the music down and don’t do it again, they’d said. That was two months ago and according to Danny, he’d kept the peace long enough.

‘It can be a double celebration,’ said Jimmy, heading into school later that morning. ‘Your sixteenth birthday and us winning the surf champs.’

‘Don’t jinx it, mate. We’re not the favourites, remember.’

‘I’m not jinxing anything. We’re going to smash St Joseph’s. I can’t wait to see their faces when you lift the cup.’

‘What about St Piran’s?’

‘They’re useless.’

‘And Truro?’

‘Yep, them as well.’

‘I hope you’re right,’ said Jack. ‘Because this is it, our...’

‘I know, I know, it’s our last chance at winning.’

## The Legend of Caradoc by David Dunham

‘And our last chance at...’

‘Glory.’

‘That’s right.’

‘Better not pull a muscle later then.’

Jack looked at Jimmy quizzically. ‘Pull a muscle doing what?’

Jimmy stepped away. Raising his arms above his head, he went up on his tiptoes and twirled like a ballerina. ‘Doing this,’ he said, smiling.

‘Who told you?’ said Jack firmly. ‘Tell me! I’ll kill them!’

Jimmy edged backwards, laughing. ‘Miss Dawlish told my sister. She’s in the class. You’re going to be her partner!’

‘What?’

‘That’s right! Can’t wait to see it!’

‘You are *not* watching!’

Jimmy began to run away. ‘Oh, yes I am! The whole year is too!’

Jack started to chase after Jimmy. ‘You are *not* watching it!’

‘Try and stop me, ballet boy!’

That night, Jack lay in bed, turning one way then the other, then back again, not given a single thought to the ballet class he’d been in. Changing his position did nothing to make him feel more comfortable. His stomach and head still hurt, and the pain seemed to be increasing.

I can’t believe this is happening to me, he thought. I can’t fall sick, not tonight, any time but now, please!

He began to work through in his mind what could have made him feel unwell.

Did I hit my head in ballet? I don’t remember doing so.

Did any of the girls I lifted look unwell? Umm... they looked okay.

What about lunch? It was just a cheese sandwich; can’t be that.

What about tea? Nah, no-one ever got food poisoning from burger and oven chips. What can it be then? Whatever it is, I wish it would stop.

## The Legend of Caradoc by David Dunham

Jack lay flat on his back and opened his eyes. He picked out one of the glow in the dark stars on his ceiling and stared at it, hoping it would distract him and somehow magically send him back to sleep.

Stay calm, he told himself. Breathe... breathe... breathe.

The staring wasn't working. If anything, it was inflaming the pain in his stomach, as it began to move to his sides and up his chest.

This is bad, he thought, now panicking.

Jack glanced at his alarm clock. It was nearly midnight.

What a crap way to turn sixteen, he thought; lying awake in bed in pain, waiting to throw up.

Jack considered his options: stay still and see it through; sit in the bathroom and make himself sick, or wake his dad and ask for his help. You can't do that, he realised; dad needs his sleep, and you'll never make yourself throw up. You just have to wait here and deal with it, all right?

The pain was on the move again. Jack reached for his shoulder. It hurt, really hurt, and felt warm, though not as warm as his forehead which was producing heat, but no sweat. Jack flung back his duvet and removed his t-shirt.

I need water, I need water, he thought, reaching to switch on his lamp. A bolt of sharp pain shot all the way down his left arm to his hand.

'Argh!' he cried, unable to contain his reaction.

Breathe, he told himself; breathe... breathe

The pain began to fade. Jack swallowed hard and waited, as if whatever was inside of him was preparing to come at him again.

'Jack, you okay?'

Damn, Jack thought; I've woken dad. 'I'm fine,' he said. 'It's nothing.'

Jack's dad remained on the other side of the bedroom door. 'Didn't sound like nothing,' he said. 'Sounded like you'd hurt yourself.'

Jack considered for a moment telling the truth and then said, 'It's just cramp. It's gone now.'

'Cramp, where?'

'In my calf.'

## The Legend of Caradoc by David Dunham

‘Do you want me to stretch your leg?’

‘No, no. Go back to bed, dad.’

‘Okay. Shout if you need me.’

‘I will. Night.’

‘Night, son.’

Jack lay still, wondering if he’d had some form of cramp. It would make sense as it had been intense and brief, and had now passed. He touched his forehead. It felt cooler than before, almost back to normal. Jack pulled the duvet over himself and turned to face his clock, debating whether he should set the alarm for a little later to make up for lost sleep.

Nope, can’t do it, he decided; can’t let dad down, or the cows.

The red numbers on the clock face changed to midnight. It occurred to Jack that it was now his birthday. He’d turned sixteen.

‘Need to sleep,’ he said, closing his eyes. Thoughts of the day ahead, of work, and the competition, and his gran, and Danny’s party, came at him. He tried to block them, to clear his mind and drop off, but each was persistent, as was the irritation of being woken by some stupid pain that was either cramp, or indigestion, or perhaps even part of a dream and wasn’t actually real.

Count down from ten, he told himself; and slowly, that’ll help.

Ten... nine... eight...

Jack paused and scratched his left hand to remove an itch.

Seven... six

The itch returned. Jack scratched it again and for longer.

Five...

Jack scratched his hand again, this time digging his nails into his skin.

Four...

‘Argh!!!’ he groaned. ‘Argh!’ Jack felt as if the palm of his hand was being stabbed, but not on the outside, from the inside. Instinctively, he clenched it.

‘Argh!’

The door flung open and the light came on.

## The Legend of Caradoc by David Dunham

‘What is it?’ asked Jack’s dad.

‘It’s my hand! It’s agony!’

Jack’s dad collapsed on his knees at the bedside. There was terror in his face. ‘Let me look!’

‘It might make it worse.’

‘I need to see!’

Jack bit his lip as his dad grabbed his left wrist. He closed his eyes, as if it helped reduce the pain. Slowly, he unfurled his fingers and heard his father gasp.

‘What is it?’ said Jack, not daring to open his eyes.

There was silence.

‘Dad?’

With a tremor in his voice, his dad said, ‘You need to see this.’