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They used John's dental records to identify the body, and afterwards they cremated it. Trevor went to Novosibirsk on his own and came back with an urn full of ashes, a folder of official papers and a few belongings, parcelled up in a suitcase.

On a windy day in September, the three of them drove to the South Downs together. Trevor, Chris, and Hayley—John's father, his mother, and his sister. Standing on top of Firle Beacon, they took turns to dip their hands into the urn, opening them slowly and watching the ashes blow away.

A week later, Hayley saw him for the first time.

He was sitting under the railway arches, in the rain. She didn't recognize him to begin with, as she walked by on the other side of the car park. He was hunched over, with his head on his knees and his coat collar turned up. She heard him cough and saw him shiver, leaning back against the dirty wall for support.

It was only after she was past that she looked round suddenly and saw his face, with all the colour gone out of it and the eyes sunken and staring.

She turned back and ran, calling his name out loud and splashing through muddy puddles, to try and get to him. But when she reached the arch there was no one there. Only the wind, blowing through empty space.

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They burnt all his things. Emptied his bedroom and tipped out the suitcase that had come back from Russia.

Send them to Oxfam, people said. Do something useful with them. But Chris gathered everything into a great heap at the bottom of the garden. Books and clothes. The CDs and the CD player. School reports and photographs and newspaper cuttings. His rock-climbing magazines and the black, hardbacked notebooks that he'd used for work. Everything went straight on to the bonfire.

They set fire to it on a Thursday evening, when the sun was going down. Standing shoulder to shoulder, the three of them watched the flames eat everything. In front of them, John's face fizzled and twisted a hundred times over. Baby and toddler. Schoolboy and student. In his best clothes at a party and in a hard hat on a building site. Certificates glowed and blazed up, newsprint charred and disintegrated. *BRITON DIES IN SIBERIA . . . EXPLOSION DISASTER . . .* Blackened flakes fluttered and broke free, floating up into the dark sky.

They watched until the last red spark turned grey. Until their faces blurred and their shadows disappeared, so that they stood like three great stones in the darkness. Tall and solid and powerless.

'That's it, then,' Trevor said. And Chris turned and walked away from him, and away from Hayley. She went up the garden and into the house, shutting the door behind her.

'She'll be all right now,' Trevor said, looking at the closed door.

They both knew he was wrong. Hayley fetched the rake and began to rake out the embers, spreading them so that they cooled down. Tatters of paper, bits of twisted metal, unrecognizable dust.

Trevor stared, following her movements. When she stopped, he leaned forward and stirred the ashes with his

shoe. Something had hitched itself on to one of the rake's teeth. Hayley peered at it.

'What's that, then?'

Trevor shrugged. 'Looks like a ring.'

Hayley hooked the object out of the debris. It was small and plain. The heat had distorted it without melting it completely, and it was black with soot.

'It's nothing,' Trevor said. 'Just something he picked up and put in his pocket. You know what he was like for hoarding.'

Hayley closed her eyes. That brought John back, sharp and fresh. The way he would bend over suddenly on a site full of rubbish to pick out a medieval nail or a hand-painted tile. *Look, Halo . . .*

Trevor remembered too. 'No point in hanging around,' he said abruptly. 'Put that rake away and come on in.'

Hayley waited until he was halfway to the house before she tipped the ring on to the grass. She pushed it backwards and forwards with the rake, cooling it down and rubbing off the soot. When she picked it up, one edge gleamed gold—or brass. John would have known the difference, but she couldn't tell. She looked at it for a moment and then dropped it into the pocket of her coat.

When she went inside, Trevor was playing back messages on the answerphone. Hayley stood in the sitting room doorway and heard Annie's voice, quick and insistent.

Why have you always got the answerphone on? I'm sick of leaving messages. You never call me back and I need to talk to you. Do you want me to come down and see you—?

Trevor put his finger down hard on the ERASE button. 'Not that,' he said heavily. He looked over his shoulder at Hayley. 'You'd better ring her.'

'Me?'

‘Tell her she can’t come. Mum’s not ready for that sort of thing yet.’

He went past Hayley, into the kitchen, and she heard him fill the kettle and plug it in. Overhead, her mother was moving about in John’s room, making strange noises that Hayley couldn’t identify. Bumping. Dragging. Tearing.

Trevor came out of the kitchen carrying two mugs of tea. MUM and DAD they said. He caught Hayley’s eye and nodded at the phone. Then he went on upstairs with the tea. A moment later, Hayley heard him tapping on John’s door, with his foot. When the door opened, there was a silence and then a low mumble of voices.

Hayley looked at the phone. Then she picked it up and dialled.

It hardly had time to ring before Annie answered. She kept her phone in a little pocket on the arm of her chair.

‘Annie Glasgow.’

‘It’s me,’ Hayley said. ‘Hayley.’

‘Life at last!’ Annie said. Hayley imagined her leaning forward, her thin shoulders poking, her small, sharp face keen and attentive. ‘What’s going on down there? Why hasn’t anyone called me?’

‘We’ve been—’ Hayley couldn’t think how to explain what they’d been. She left the words hanging.

‘Oh come on!’ Annie said. ‘It’s been like talking into a fog. I’ve phoned half a dozen times. Left messages. Written letters. Why hasn’t anyone answered? I want to know how you are, all of you. I need to talk to you.’

Hayley shuffled her feet. ‘Mum’s not very—she needs to forget all that stuff for a bit.’

‘Stuff?’ Annie’s voice sharpened slightly. ‘What do you mean *stuff*?’

‘I mean—’ Hayley swallowed.

‘You mean John? She’s saying she wants to forget *him*?’

‘She won’t even say his name.’

There was a long pause. When Annie spoke again, she sounded different. Cautious and questioning. ‘And what about you?’

‘Me? I—’ Words vibrated in Hayley’s brain. *I saw him under the railway arches. It was him, I know it was, because I saw his face. But when I went to him, he wasn’t there. Of course.* ‘I’m OK,’ she said out loud.

‘You don’t sound OK. You sound like hell. Oh come on, Hayley, don’t buy this forgetting nonsense. You *need* to talk about him. He’s your brother.’

‘Was,’ Hayley said. And then wished she hadn’t, because the sound of her voice gave her away.

‘You *see?*’ Annie said. ‘You’ve *got* to talk. I’m going to come down and see you tomorrow.’

‘You can’t! You mustn’t! Dad said—’

‘OK, OK, don’t go bananas. I’m not going to come to the house. We can meet somewhere in the town. How about lunch?’

‘We’re not supposed to go out of school at lunchtime.’

‘Don’t be such a wimp.’ Annie sounded firm now. ‘Just walk out of the place. No one’s going to notice. And if they do, just tell them where you’re going.’

‘I don’t think—’

‘If you don’t come, I *will* turn up at the house. And I’ll ask Trevor and Chris what they think they’re doing to you.’

‘No!’ Hayley said. She heard the door open overhead. Feet on the landing. ‘Look, I’ll meet you at—’ Her mind went blank.

‘We can go to McDonald’s,’ Annie said. ‘They’re usually all right for me to get into. I’ll park in that car park across the road and wait for you. Half past twelve?’

‘Just after. Look, I’ve got to go now—’

‘OK,’ Annie said. ‘But you’d better be there.’

Hayley was shaking as she put the phone down. Her parents came into the room and she jumped up.

‘I’d better do some homework.’

It was an excuse to get away, but she needn’t have bothered. They hardly looked at her. Chris’s face was blank and Trevor was holding on to her elbow, carrying the two mugs of tea in his other hand as he steered her across the room.

‘We’ll have our tea in here. Come on, Chris. Sit in the chair.’

Hayley escaped upstairs. She meant to immerse herself in homework straight away, but as she passed John’s room the light caught her eye, through the half-open door. She stopped and looked in.

The room was stripped. The window gaped black and cold, with no curtains. The naked light bulb glared down on to bare boards. The walls were a mess of tattered paper and bald plaster.

All the furniture had been piled into the centre of the room, with the carpet and curtains on top and the lampshade thrown into the heap. The wallpaper was mostly there too, ripped off and screwed into ragged balls. On the far wall, a long strip of paper hung down, showing where the destruction had been interrupted.

Hayley looked at it and felt sick and afraid. Closing her eyes, she pushed the door shut and went on into her bedroom.