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Preface

In Germany this year they have had more snow than usual, in Britain we have had a much colder winter. In Tenerife the weather has become less predictable, and is there evidence that the gulf stream is weakening? What happens when you're in a bath and the hot water starts running cold? Systems remain stable because of negative feedback. If Arctic ice melts it cools the sea water, if this switches off the gulf stream, our climate gets colder. Global warming causes more evaporation, more clouds, clouds over cold areas drop snow. Ice and snow reflect solar radiation cooling the earth, clouds block the sun. Water trapped in an ice age Europe lowers sea levels. This is a possible scenario.

Think of a clock pendulum, put a little bit of energy in regularly and it oscillates nicely, not too far either side of the centre. Put some extra energy in, making it swing violently one way and it will swing violently back the other, oscillating. Eventually it will settle down to a stable rhythm, which in geological time-scales can be thousands of years. We are technically still in an Ice Age experiencing an Interglacial period, the last glacial retreat was about 10,000 years ago. So if you push the climate hard to hot, then for a stable system, it must swing hard back to cold – negative feedback keeps systems stable. Why do you think that the earth has recovered from the extreme cold of ice ages in the past? Oh and check out history, when you wonder what the effects are of a massive movement of people.

Move or your dead

You weren't expecting things to get so bad so fast, but nature did not wait for the politicians. When the gulf stream turned off it was like the domino effect, remember how long it takes to put the dominoes back up on end! It would take a long time for the ice to melt, meanwhile Europe was on the move, our story starts in what land remains habitable in Britain. The population is confined broadly to the area south of the Thames, north of that is ice, snow and permafrost. Some stayed on hoping for better weather, afraid of marching on an exodus into the unknown. Decimated by the severe winter, their food source gone they had to leave. The infirm had no choice but to stay, intended their lives would be short, others organised in groups left for Kent.

A few of us decided to take the third option which was to avoid the columns and the brigands. We kept our heads down moving like scared rabbits. Dawn and dusk moving at night was too dangerous as there was always the chance of bumping into the brigands. For they too avoided the towns and villages for fear that another band would take them by surprise. Many of them were not just scavenging, some had started to join together to defeat mutual enemies, usually larger groups. Their size although still small was many tens of men, and this made them formidable opponents. They had no qualms about killing rival bands as this gave them more territory to raid.

Marching like small armies, sweeping down upon columns, even armed columns such was their desperation. In doing this they had become heavily armed by seizing weapons. Moving slowly we would try and live off the land if we could. Our aim was to get to the coast and acquire some sort of boat. Unfortunately it's all we could think of doing, the coast was not far, it was however further south than in your day, on account of the dropping sea levels. Vast amounts of water were now locked up in the ice sheets, the opposite of what people assumed with global warming. Sea levels did rise initially, but not for long, the increased evaporation as the earth heated caused cloud cover to dramatically increase, and the gulf stream finally stopped because of all the Arctic ice collapsing into the sea. It was this that signalled great change, as the cloud cover blocked the sun cooling the earth and Europe no longer received its warm water from the south, intense snowfall turned valleys into glaciers, the snow reflecting the sunlight and keeping the areas cold.

I tell you this from the future, I doubt anyone will take this text seriously. I doubt if it will even be published, you are probably more worried about other things, your invisible friend and who is more moral? Why should you worry, your standard of living is better by each generation. Buy your cheap goods from China where men die in thousands digging the coal to power the factories and criticize a search engine company for being complicit. See the sea brought to the boil as you boil your water in a kettle that travelled halfway around the world on a giant oil powered freighter. Have that fruit to keep you healthy, while you breath the polluted air from the plane that flew it in. Whoever you are reading this you will understand when you read on, I shall continue.

Let me tell you about those whom I'm with, it was winter, much worse even than the previous year. This is why those who had remained finally gave up and were heading south. We are now into the period known as spring, think of the hardest winter you have ever experienced. In the daytime you would be lucky if it got to six degrees, but when freezing rain or an ice cold wind blew in from the north you would give anything to sit in a fridge. What few remnants of trees remained had split and shattered in fragments, most had been cut in desperation for fuel to heat fires long ago. These old giants had survived the puny axes, and no one had fuel for chain saws, but these giants were not adapted to such conditions. Even pine trees which would tolerate more extreme weather perished in this last winter.

Humans had died that winter in their thousands, sheltering in groups within buildings had given them some degree of protection. Many were killed when buildings collapsed either under the weight of snow or where stone walls shattered by ice exploded under the weight above them. On the outside a layer of snow and ice buttressed them, but on the inside only the soft bodies of the humans huddled together. An unfamiliar sound would precede the event, stones cracking, mortar shifting, a loud bang and these people were buried alive. No rescue parties came, others would listen helplessly as faint screams and cries slowly faded. Digging through snow, ice and rubble in sub zero temperatures with no tools, hail and snow battering you, it was impossible. You see I tried, we occupied two buildings in a village, our group was awoken by the loud bang as the sound rumbled to our shelter. A few of the men tried to get to our friends, it was a desperate struggle.

We were hampered by the bitter weather, our layers of precious clothing made movement difficult, and we dare not break a sweat, as it would freeze us. We dug for less than an hour, the more we dug the more the snow and hail came filling the hole as quick as we could dig it. The scraps of wood we used would break, imagine digging your garden with a matchstick! It was futile, cold and exhausted we dug our way back into our building. The entrance, even in its sheltered position by the earth mounds we had made last summer, would become blocked. We could not hibernate, had we let the snow fill up our doorway it would eventually have turned to a great block of ice, which even in the summer may never

have thawed.

We had food stored in the main building, but during the winter would venture out and get provisions from the next building, an old house that we used as a store. We used these supplies first because there was always the fear it might be raided, that way we always had a reserve with us.

Where was I? You must excuse me but the cold does funny things to the mind. I was telling you about the trees or should I say lack of them. We could not use forests for cover, they had been decimated, as had our only source of food the last winter. Even the hardiest sheep had succumbed and with this the last hope of remaining on this island.

Travelling you would look for a hole somewhere, if it had a piece of scrub near it so much the better as this added shelter, although I soon learnt to avoid such places. Yes, it seemed like the place to be, but as a huntsman knows the sign of a foxes lair, these became the sign that the brigands looked for. Oh the pickings were much richer in the columns, but for small bands travelling in search of more columns they would take anything they could get.

It was one evening, the weather was turning worse and I needed shelter fast. Walking over the brow of a hill, you might think I was an old man the way I hunched down to reduce the chance of being spotted. There was a small bush and what looked like a dip in the side of the hill. I clambered down the slippery slope, mud, ice and snow made staying upright difficult. As I rounded below the bush, two white lumps stuck out from the snow, as I brushed them off, it was most recognisable. These feet, led to a body which lay half out of the hollow behind the bush, brushing the snow further the figure of a thin woman was revealed.

Had I not seen so much hardship I may well have been sick. I surmised that there was a dwelling not far down in the valley, most likely the band had raided the habitation and she had snuck away. It may even have been another band that got her, here on these hills. I could see they had killed her from the way the skull was caved in, like a man with a rock in his hand had smashed the bone while others held her down. Other than that she was unmarked, oh you may wonder why she had no marks on

her elsewhere. Imagine you wrapped a blanket ten times around your arm, now grip it, does it leave a mark! Did they violate her? No, in such freezing temperatures you would be mad to try.

Going to the loo was not so simple, in your time if you were walking across a field and wanted to go to the loo it can be difficult to find somewhere secluded. In our time, with no hedges, you would be very vulnerable both to the weather and those who might take you by surprise. You would squat with virtually all your cloths on, hidden as best you could and be quick. In this barren open land, survival was extremely difficult, intelligence was your best weapon. The north of England had evacuated many years earlier. In the south there were no emergency shelters, and you are probably wondering why there was no UN response.

The countries that usually provide the majority of the donations were European or North American, when these economies struggled to survive the climate, world trade declined. Help did not flow the other way, the world was in economic turmoil, many countries nearer the equator feared migration, some of these autocratic states went back and in some cases, that is if they ever left it, to the mentality of the dark ages.

Let me tell you about the people I'm with, the friends as I call them. Yet I have known none of them before. How did we meet? I shall tell you that also, during the trek south. Now I must hide, a band of brigands have just appeared on the horizon, I am to their left as they march up the slope. My only hope is to hide as best I can behind what remains of a drystone wall. I prayed they would not stop, had they I would not be telling you this now. Some had turned to cannibalism, a discarded femur some way back on the trail, too large to be from a sheep, too fresh to be from cattle that no longer roamed the fields.

It was at this point that I met my first friend Alice. In an area south of the Thames, a river that had long since ceased to flow, it was in an almost permanently frozen state. Below this line lived the people of England, a very sparse population by your standards. The biggest towns straddling the coast, like beads on a necklace they hung on, like the water on the end of a stalactite, not for long, each slowly dripping away, onto the stalagmite of Spain. The largest town was maybe ten thousand in

number and that only swelled by those migrating south.

Brave seamen, scratched a living taking boats over to Normandy, relying on wind and stars to get them there. Many did not come back for another load, thankful that they had reached France. Thus the number of available boats had declined as had those who knew how to sail them. The skill of sailing a boat could save a man's life, even in land, tales of men attacked by bandits being spared because they knew the sea. This was a precious knowledge.

Sailors were also in demand to ply the straits of Gibraltar, at least in the early days. Even Spain was cold in winter and many moved on, at first greeted with warmth and friendship in the cities of North Africa. Traders welcomed the gold and silver they brought with them, as the mines of Europe and America were no longer providing such materials, and trade from other lands had reduced. However as the numbers began to swell and the percentage of the population that were newcomers increased so did the tensions. The massacres began, news of this filtered back to Spain, where new arrivals far from being dissuaded wanted to avenge the deaths of their countrymen.

Imagine an hourglass, Gibraltar is its waist, and the sands of the European Peoples evacuating their dying countries, poured down in increasing numbers. At this point it is as much as I know, through rumours that spread back to England. There was what became known as the march of the skeletons, the natives took settlers and forced them to march into the Sahara Desert, if they tried to turn back they were shot. Some got lost, most followed the bodies that lay in front of them, scavenging like vultures as they clung to life only to become the next body at the end of the line. Real vultures cleaned up the bones, their numbers swelling, never had these birds had such a glut of carrion.

In the early days of Europe getting frostbite, there was a well organised EU led evacuation of the Northern European countries, and many Russians came too. Peoples of Asian origin fearing they may become victims of racial violence migrated east though Turkey, this falsely fuelled a feeling amongst the people of the Middle East that there was about to be a Crusade, that their lands would be taken as the Europeans followed their fleeing brothers and sisters. Thinking back to the time when

cartoons stirred hatred, they were nothing as to this.

A vast army was raised, it formed around Mecca, calls from a charismatic holy man drew people like ants to honey. This army marched north, he had to move them just to keep them fed. Like a column of Army ants they left desolation in their wake. The embattled Israelis, who no longer had US and European backing, both being rather preoccupied with their own survival, were overwhelmed. These were the only people who seemed to want to go to Europe, they had no choice. Other than Spain; Greece and southern Italy were the only practical refuges and both were bursting, as soon as Israeli boats landed and sometimes even before the boats unloaded, people would surge forward from the beaches. Many were crushed on the shore, others died not far out to sea on the overloaded boats they had commandeered, these boats soon sunk.

For many months the Mediterranean was awash with bodies floating onto the beaches, there were too many even for the sharks, who's numbers skewed by the glut of food were now threatening the whole ecosystem. Why is this of concern? Sharks when they have no more human bodies, were preying on the fish stocks, decimating them. In turn crabs and lobsters were overwhelming the seabed as they fed on the vast quantities of meat falling from the carnage above.

Men around the Mediterranean shores no longer had boats, but they still used lines from shore, yet, there were no fish to be had, the excess of crabs and lobsters at first compensated. Then they to faced lean times, the sharks followed their decline.

Alice

You must remember that unlike those who set out on polar expeditions with supplies of food and equipment we have none of that. Our rations are meagre, below the Russian dolls of our clothing, are thin malnourished people. We have little or no body fat to keep us warm, so we must keep what little energy we do have. The heaps of cloths, make us seem like the old hay stacks, the ones that looked like straw wigwams in fields of old. Feet poke out from below and we shuffle along, stealth not speed is our only defence.

When the brigands had gone I stayed put, watching them through a small gap in the wall, my dull drab clothing blending into the landscape. The band moved away following the ridge across the hilltop, they then moved down as the weather worsened. I hunkered down, hoping to survive this spring snow storm. Some time later as the sun was setting, the snow eased and finally stopped. If you have ever made a big snowman, then that is what I must have looked like. All I could do was sit and shiver, sleep was a luxury, I remember my friends many years ago coming to visit. How they complained that the futons I used for beds were hard. I wondered if any were still alive, how they would love to spend a night in a warm room sleeping on a futon.

You would doze off a bit, then as your head jerked down it would automatically pull back up. Sitting crouched semi-conscious, tired and hungry, oh I had some provisions, but not much and so conserved what I had. In the past a dinner lady had mentioned to my Grandmother that her grandson did not eat much, yet I was never that thin. Needing to eat less was now a useful survival trait. In the morning I looked around, scanning for movement. Nothing, I decided to go on, moving south, all the while looking for my next hiding place. Some days I would travel less than a kilometre, one day I went no more than a few hundred metres, that day I found another hiding place nearby. It was a good choice because ahead there was a long open stretch, it would have been too dangerous to do the whole distance in one go.

I came across the half eaten bodies of a couple, the teeth marks were human, probably the victims of brigands who passed yesterday. The man's and woman's faces suggested they were in their fifties, although these days it was difficult to tell. I had to laugh, inappropriate it may have been. Remembering how we were all going to live to be a hundred and the pensions debacle! What pension would that be? This couple had been travelling unfortunately not in the right direction. When the sky was covered in dense cloud it could be difficult to navigate, even at night if you could not read the stars it was easy to get lost. It makes you think how valuable a compass is, for there was no GPS, the satellites were no doubt sending signals. What good are they, when you have no power in your batteries and no source of re-supply.

Further on I found some rocks, thinking this might be worth a look, I

ventured closer. You had to be on your guard all the time. One time from a distance I saw a person lying in a gully, they were approached by a small group of people. Perhaps brigands, perhaps villagers on their exodus, as they surrounded the body a group who were definitely brigands fell upon them, the body rose as if from the dead. The body was the most ferocious, perhaps the leader. It was a fearful sight and a chill ran down my spine when I peered around one rock, it was at the top, one of many strewn down the hillside. I noticed a tell tale sign, not quite concealed were remnants of cloth, caught on a sharp outcrop.

Moving cautiously I checked the whole area for possible hiding bands, yet I could see none. Perhaps, these were just shards of cloth left by the Brigands travelling through in a hurry to get way. I slipped almost onto my bum, sliding sideways on an icy patch. When I finished this slide which would have been fun in earlier years, I sat trying to recover myself. The last thing you wanted was injury, long since gone were hospitals, even if they did unwillingly provide a home for MRSA, the super bug. One time from a vantage point I waited for a column to pass on a main road. I remained concealed, you never knew if they would be attacked, so only crossed when there were no other humans around. This straggly line, guarded by a few men with shot guns, halted when one of their number collapsed at the head of the column.

The head was the worst place to be, I remember cycling, and if you were always at the front of a group as a ride leader invariably was, you took the brunt of the cold wind. If the column went through a valley you can bet the brigands if they were sufficient in number would attack front and rear. The poor soul I saw drop, was pulled to one side, a few words were exchanged, the person gave up their supplies, gesturing to the others to go on. When I later went to this person, it was an elderly man, perhaps a grandfather, possibly one or more farming families.

Now recovered from my slide, I looked around, over away from the cloth decorated rock was a slab of rock. In the snow cover it looked like a big iced cake, between it and another rock, huddled in the gap was a body. I approached, a faint female voice permeated this eerie silent spot. In this snowbound land, with no trees and little cover even the birds had given up, the wind was still so we did not have its music.

Her family had escaped from a column when the bandits attacked. They scrabbled up the side of an embankment, they kept running as fast as they could, slipping up constantly. Leaving a trail that without further snowfall would betray them. At one point resting to recover their breath, they watched as the brigands smashed the skulls open on a concrete pillar that once supported a now collapsed bridge and ate the raw contents.

Then the brigands had come after them, they had to keep moving, hiding with a trail of footprints to your location was no good. The brigands freshly fed came closer and closer, her mother and father were tiring. Snow had begun falling, this was a mixed blessing, the brigands had a harder time following and the trail was being covered, but these animals were now so close that unless a blizzard brewed up, they were easily seen.

As the parents struggled up a gully, she helped her father, who was older than her mother by some years. He was growing weak, her brother had taken the lead, mother following close behind him. It was getting steep, every step was a battle to stay upright and move forward. Feet would twist as they sunk in the snow to meet a rock below. The brigands were closing in within a few metres of father and daughter. A small column of them snaking up behind, like a viper stalking a mouse.

Her brother had come to the remains of a dry stone wall, turning to look back and checking his parents and sister's progress he noticed a brute too close for comfort. Lifting a stone from the wall he hurled it over the heads of his family. It thudded into the brute, but this bastard was too quick and moved to one side, the man behind fell to the ground as it hit him in the shin, crying with agony. Her brother threw again, it had slowed the leader of the brigands down, this time it missed him again the others now stepping over their comrades fallen body were alert. His parents and sister had now passed over the wall, which was at the head of the gully, above was a plateau where they would stand no chance. This time he picked up the biggest stone he could find, barely lifting it, he hurled himself and the stone down the gully, crashing into the big leader sending him sprawling, the others behind stunned by such an attack fell back like a line of dominoes. The last words she heard her brother say was run. That they did, across the flat snowy landscape her and her

mother helping father move.

As the snow fell they struggled, father was loosing energy fast. For a moment they sat sheltered on the line of an old track. The air was pierced by a ghastly scream, her mother hugged her father, now they only had their daughter. She tried to get both of them going again, urging that her brother's life not be lost in vain. Out of the mist of the snow came the hoard, their feet crunching in the snow, adrenaline flowing. Her father got to his feet, "Go," he said, "Go." Her mother would not leave. She loved her husband, "Go." he said "Help our daughter", both of the women ran, the mother did not get far.

The scum gorged themselves on the parents, but the weather was getting worse, they had fed well and went back down to wait for the next victims that would travel their road. This left Alice hiding huddled between these rocks. At first she was terrified that I would hurt her. I reached deep beneath my layers of clothing, from a bag pulled a bar, a bar you could no longer buy. I had been saving it as they kept well, now I gave it to her. She looked at the wrapper, looked at me, tears welled in her eyes, she grabbed me hugging me her body shaking, perhaps from cold but I think she was releasing her fear, there is a certain relief when you are in a strange place and meet a friendly figure. Perhaps you will understand if you have been lost abroad and speak not the language, coming across an English speaker who will help you is a great joy. I think it was so for this woman, releasing her grasp on me she tucked into the food, thanking me, which made me smile.

She asked where I was going, I explained my plan to head for the coast, expressing my opinion that to stay without livestock was suicide, and the columns were to easy a target, that she agreed and so we joined together as friends.

The Brigand Man

This morning we made a move as the sun started to light the sky. There was no snow, so I went behind, from time to time covering the tracks after making false tracks and re-stepping backwards, this might seem like a waste of time, it was not. No sooner had we found a hiding place than the same band of brigands who had attacked Alice's family appeared on the horizon. It was a clear day, you could see for miles,

perhaps they had come up here to survey the area for targets, or perhaps they were coming back to get Alice!

As we watched them we saw them pick up our trail, I did drag a piece of cloth behind which made the trail look older than it was, then they followed it down to a rocky outcrop after which it being false led nowhere. If the leader was clever he may workout what we had done, this is one time when I wished men were dumber than most of them already are. They stood on the rocks, scanning the horizon, we remained motionless, hidden behind a few boulders, I peered through a snowy gap. The leader then pointed back at the tracks, one of the men followed it back to where the track turned. Now this man searched the snow, he must have found something because he shouted back to the leader pointing to the boulders where we hid.

I signalled to Alice to be ready to move, she knew it meant trouble. I could see in her eyes, which is all I could see. In these conditions, you covered all your face, how we have funny thoughts at the most inconvenient moments, my mind wandering from the trouble we faced to the controversy that had once erupted over Islamic women wearing the Burka and its possible use by terrorists. Now every woman had to cover her face, or have her nose fall off with frostbite. My attention was grabbed by the movement of the leader's hand, he moved his forearm vertically in a circular motion. The men started to fan out, he and two others moving over towards our boulders.

This man might be detestable but I had to admire his leadership. He was smart, if we had concealed our track then he guessed we'd be watching. He also knew that we would react to his actions, by coming for us but sending men around us we were being caught in a trap. If we moved they would chase, if we stayed we would be found, but whichever he had men to see where we went. There were too many to fight, but which way to go, we had to go to one side, that way he and half his men would be furthest from us.

Alice prodded me, I nodded and signed that we should crawl down the slope on her side rather than run. This worked, it gave us vital extra metres before one of the band spotted us, we had now rather taken on a toboggan run, laying on our stomachs we had been crawling down a

steeper and steeper slope, side by side we started sliding using our feet to brake and steer. We finally slowed rolling a few times and coming to a stop, looking back we saw some of the men running down to catch us.

The chase was on, we clambered over several humps and bumps, a few banks covered in snow. On the side of one we slipped precariously, it was not soft snow, the bank had concealed a drop and below it was an iced up river bed, not large, but big enough. On the other bank something jutted up through the snow. Alice sat, her back to the bank, I slid over and climbed out of the river, grabbing at the protrusion. I brushed some snow off, it was a piece of old corrugated iron, I pulled it but it would not budge. Alice now came over and pointed out that they were halfway down the slope. "Help me." I said.

We pulled hard, falling over when the sheet broke free. I pulled it onto the iced up river and sat at the back, telling Alice to sit at the front and pushed away, it began sliding, not fast, but we were moving faster than a man could run on open snow covered ground. The river was about three or four metres wide, shallow with a gentle slope, on occasion we hit a small boulder protruding through the ice which sent us spinning and nearly had us off. Most of the men gave up the chase except one. He followed the river bank, at times we thought he had given up, we would slow down as we crashed into the bends in the river, I might say at this point the corrugated iron sheets are not the most navigable craft, they have an affinity with those trolleys you used to get at supermarkets. We were lucky that in this lowland valley the banks were made of mostly soil, although the stones that flew off at you could hurt even through the layers of clothing.

We were now doing what is not recommended in unknown potentially hostile territory, travelling by daylight. Our ice raft, was eventually halted where the river cut through rocks, had Alice not been so observant we may had descended into a deep hole. We moved to the bank with the elegance of two drunks on an oil slick. Hauling ourselves onto the snowy bank with the ease of two tired turtles crawling up a beach to lay their eggs. We both sat too exhausted to stand.

"Do you think he's still following?" asked Alice, pointing back upstream. "Yes I." said pointing to a head that bobbed up over a ridge in the distance. "Question is why? We must be getting to the edge of their

territory, they were only a small band.”

She looked at me, then again upstream at the now obvious figure of a man. “Perhaps he’s their scout?”

“He’ll be disappointed then.”

“Why?” said Alice somewhat puzzled.

“I don’t have any orienteering badges on me right now.”

She did not laugh, clearly bemused, I explained to her how in the Scouts which were related to the Cubs, one was given badges of achievement for skills acquired. Having been a Cub, I was able to bore her with the detail for all of five minutes, until I got the message that we should leave. The leach as we lovingly called him was still closing in on us, we could see no sign of the others.

As we walked on in the open, I became more nervous, my brain racing.

“No he’s the sheep dog, the others are the pen.”

Alice looked at me, eyes questioning my words.

“He keeps following behind us along this river the others know a shorter route and get ahead of us. The river bends, at some point we could round a bend and face the lot of them, or we can turn and chase him, we might be wrong but that leaders smart and he knows we are running like scared sheep.”

We turned and headed back towards the man chasing us. He stopped in his tracks, then started walking slowly in our direction. As we closed on him we braced for an attack Alice got behind me, I suggested that if he attacks, let him attack me, if she could beat his head with a rock to do so, if not to run like hell. He was armed with an axe, it hung in his belt, the handle down by his side. As we got within a few metres he shouted, “I mean you no harm.”

Alice shouted back, “You bastard.”

“I did not kill your brother and had no hand in the death of your parents.”

“You attacked the column, I saw you.” she said, her body clung to mine, I felt her trembling with mixed emotions she spoke with rage yet seemed filled with fear.

“Why are you following us, if you mean us no harm, what does your leader want with us?” I asked, needing to get to the bottom of this quickly. It may still be a trap, the leader was cunning.

"My brother and his friends joined that bastard's group, we were originally headed for the tunnel. We were attacked like the others, we fought back, killed the brigands who attacked us, all bar a few. It was those few who defended the leader when any of us objected. He grew to like them and we had to follow orders or end up like my brother, Zack was stronger willed than I, he did not want to attack others when we were short of food. At first we attacked the brigands who controlled the road where we attacked you. Then we lived easy, the leader liked that, so when Zack said no and tried to leave, he killed him. My mates restrained me, told the leader I hated my brother, he believed it. Chasing you was my chance to escape, I could not eat the brains, they said I was soft, it would not have been long before it came my turn."

"So you want to join us?"

"Please, look I'm sorry about what happened."

"No." said Alice, "It's a trap, we can't trust a bastard like him."

I looked at him, and looked at Alice, then at the trail of footprints that went up and down the river bank, then my eyes scanned the horizon, pulling my telescope out, I spotted men moving along the ridge of the hill above the river. They started descending, I handed Alice the telescope "Look." I said pointing up across the snowy slope.

She knew we had to move, I suggested we argue it later. The man who stood with us asked to look, now my telescope was not something I gave to others easily. I trusted Alice, but this man?

He sensed my unease, holding the head of the axe he pulled it from his belt, offering me the handle. "You take this, I know it is hard to trust a brigand." I took the handle, holding the axe, I gave him my telescope on the reassurance that I would get it back. He looked at the figures moving towards us, confirming it was them and handed back the telescope.

We moved up the other side of the valley, moving away from them. The axe was beginning to weigh heavy, I was not so well nourished as him. Alice asked if I was ok and I told her my problem, the man, his name Jack was ahead of us up the trail. She took the tool from me and carried it for a while, unwilling to let me give it to him to carry.

The leader was tenacious, still following at a distance. We sat that evening at the top of a hill in what had once been a small iron age hill

fort. "Will he stop following us?" I asked.

"I doubt it." said Jack. "He is very single minded, determined. The number of travellers along that road had dwindled in recent weeks so I guess there is no reason for him to stay there."

Alice was angry, she was of the opinion that without Jack we would not be followed, Jack tried to reassure her that even without him we would probably be followed.

"We should take turns to keep watch." said Jack.

"Watch?" I asked.

"He might attack at night." said Jack.

"How will he see?" I reasoned a night attack difficult. Oh in your day with torches, but now we only have the moonlight and that of the stars. It was a new moon, so we were in almost complete darkness.

"I don't know but I've seen him do it."

"If they attack what good will it do us to know?" said Alice, "By the time we see them it will be too late."

"Maybe, we would hear them?" he said, "Any chance is better than no chance."

Morning arose, all was quiet, I took a cautious look around, following the tops of the hill fort's banks. Coming up one side was our friend and his dinning friends, I slid off the bank back into the enclosure, and ran over to Alice and Jack, he's coming up the side, I said.

"How many?" asked Jack.

"Looks like a dozen at least."

"Great."

"Why?"

"It would be less if he split his forces, so which way do we go?"

"You know the brigands, what would they expect?"

"I have no idea." said Jack, who was more happy being led than leading.

"Come on." I said moving off down the end of the hill fort. We needed to keep out of sight of the group but head as near as we could in the direction they came from, reasoning it would be the most unlikely route for us to take. Going down a snow covered hillside, might seem like fun when you are surrounded by friendly people at Christmas, but sliding about trying to avoid snow covered lumps and bumps which may be hiding all manner of nasties was no fun. Moving down below we found an old sunken road, not ideal it was the sort of place you would expect an

ambush, but on this reasoning who would be stupid enough to travel on it, so who would bother setting a trap!

It concealed our movements, leading us up over another ridge, where we found shelter as another storm blew in. Looking hard around in all directions, yet the brigands were nowhere to be seen. The storm grew worse so we all huddled up behind what used to be a field hedge, its earthen bank acting as a windbreak.

The Family

The storm blew all day and on into the night, it must have been early morning when the snow and wind eased. We now had the hazard of snow drifts, taking it in turns to make some deposits. I squashed fresh snow into my canteen, it would melt inside under my layers of cloths, then I could drink water. Alice had a small plastic bottle and our friend I noticed used an old hip flask. It was vital to stay hydrated, but with no wood for fires and precious little else we had to get fresh clean water by some means.

Another useful item were goggles or glasses, preferably sunglasses to keep the sun from your eyes, and the snow out in the blizzards. We had to move, where we were was too exposed. Wading through the snow we could see an isolated farm house halfway up the side of the ridge. More snow began falling, which only slowed our progress as it got deeper. This was a dangerous move, for all we knew the house may be full of brigands or frightened trigger happy residents. As we got closer what we assumed was the back of the house was deep in snow, it faced up the slope. We approached the front with caution, Jack went first, Alice conceding to my preference that he have the axe. The house seemed empty, and there were no tracks from the doors or windows. Jack cautiously tried the back door, which opened easily allowing the snow that had built up to fall into the kitchen into which it led. He beckoned us to follow, as we entered Alice remarked upon the marks on the kitchen walls where fitted units had been. Utensils and cutlery lay along the edge of one wall, all that remained was a cooker, washing machine and fridge, oh and of course an stainless steel sink, no chairs, no table, holes in the fitted linoleum indicated where some other things had stood, perhaps a welsh dresser. Plates some cracked were piled in the rectangle where it may have stood.

We walked through the doorway into a hall, Jack leading the way, this doorway had no door. Off the hallway we looked through an open doorway, into what had been the lounge, on the other side was the dinning room part of which wrapped around the kitchen so that it had a corner with a south east aspect. The only clue that it was used for eating were the old brass candlestick holders, which seemed more at home on a dinning table than a lounge. The concrete floor was bare in both rooms, Jack proceeded up the stairs which creaked, and did not look too safe, having no hand rails and missing the cupboard, which from the screw holes in the floor had been below it.

A man appeared, at the top of the stairs, "Don't come any further you bastards." He had a shotgun, and was looking decidedly shaky. Alice shouted up, "It's ok we're not brigands." The man looked down at her, then at Jack his hand hovering near the axe, Jack moved his arms slowly in the air. The old man looked down at me, "Who are you?" "We are travelling to the coast, the lady is Alice, her family were butchered by brigands, and this man, he's Jack they killed his brother and he managed to escape from them, joined us."

"Us?" said the man, "How many more of you a?"

"When I say us I refer to Alice and myself."

"Oh!" said the old man, he was still shaking, it was not from cold. He was well wrapped up, and this old house had some mighty thick walls.

"You have Parkinsons?" I asked.

"Ows you know that? You a doctor? need my medicine, can't get it no more, gettin worse see." he said.

"Better come up, it's safe up 'ear." he said gesturing to us. "Best one at a time mind on them stairs, bit dodgy since I took the banisters off."

He had done a thorough job of stripping all the wood from the lower part of the house. He invited us into a small bedroom, it had a fireplace, usual in an old building like this one. This is were the wood had gone, a small pile remained, "Like burning gold." he said, pointing to a piece of hand rail.

We learnt that his wife went with their two sons, one of whom had a wife with him the other accompanied by his boyfriend, a point which still puzzled the old farmer. All had set off just a day ago, they had not heard

about the tunnel, and had decided to head for the coast. Only a few days ago they had repelled a small band of brigands. Each member of the family had a shotgun, with six of them shooting the attackers soon retreated. The old man boasted about his families prowess at shooting. All except his younger son and that funny friend of his, had won competitions, the old man pointed to one corner of the room. In the pile that was his life, were cups and trophies of which he was proud.

We sat for hours talking, as outside the storm grew worse. Well I say we, mostly we listened to the old man's tales of when he was a lad growing up on the farm. How he had been happy when as a child the end of rationing came. He told us how his great grandfather had purchased the farm from a nob as he put it, who was a little to fond of the cards and needed some extra spending money. He explained how his grandfather had used steam engines and threshing machines, and the land girls who had spoilt him as a baby, so he was told by mother. His father had expanded the farm during the war, buying several other farms. He still had his dads first tractor, a lovely machine, not that it was much use now, but he cherished it. Four generations had worked this farm, a tear came to his eye when he said he'd hoped it would be four more.

First his hopes were dashed when the younger of his two bachelor sons had gone all odd, the old man shook his head. Then his hopes were raised when finally his elder son brought home a lovely woman. Oh did he heap praise on his son's choice, she soon became his wife, a farmers daughter who loved the life. The couple had been trying for a son, but his fathers opinion was that he had left it a bit late, silly lad. The wife she was fit enough he commented, but that son needed a few extra swimmers. The old farmer was not so sure it was not for the best, the world being as it is, all topsy turvy.

We stayed in for several days, eking out the rations, the old man was glad of the company, and of Alice's cooking, a treat as she used the fire to do a stew. Please don't ask what was in it, I have no idea but it was the most tasty meal we had all eaten in weeks. With the weather improving I went out into the garden, the snow had thawed a bit over the last couple of days. There was always the hope that there might be some potato tubers, or carrots left in the ground from previous years where they had been grown under glass. I dug deep, and was in luck thanking

the farmers wife where ever she may be, assuming it was her efforts that had given us this food. My favourite in the wild were dandelion leaves, if you could find them, or their roots, like small chewy carrots, not that nice but edible.

We ate a final hearty meal, knowing we must leave the relative comfort. The old man gave me a letter, which if you saw the writing looked more like a trace of seismic activity, apparently his wife would be able to read it. It was quite sad having to leave this likeable old fellow, he had become another friend on our journey, alas he was too infirm to move. In years past, and with the help of medication he could have easily made the journey, but not now. I think back and wonder what happened to him, sitting in a corner of that small bedroom, staring out of the window, one eye on the stairs not knowing who would come next. Alice took a look back up at the old farmer, he waved she waved and turned putting her arm around me. We looked at each other, both sad because we knew he had little chance. Jack walked ahead of us, he seemed like he need some space, when we left he had been unusually quiet.

We followed the trail the old man suggested, it was the route his family was taking and it was a good one, avoiding habitation and keeping to little used tracks. He knew the surrounding farms and knew where you could take refuge. As a boy he had helped his father with contract work on other farms, mostly sheep sheering. This knowledge helped us to find a well hidden wartime gun emplacement. If you have walked on the downs you will know the mostly brick built structures, with their concrete roofs. Some had suffered from subsidence, but most were still accessible, if you knew where they were, and ideal for his armed family.

At dusk we set out for the next one along this trail, now heading south west we were getting much nearer to the old coast. I should explain that the shore line had at first moved inland in some places but only for a few years, then receded rapidly. I wondered if all this ice at the top of the world would affect the axis on which the earth spun. The extra mass would change the gravitational characteristics and so may exert a stronger pull on the gravitational fields of the moon and sun. What affect would this have?

Our journey was surprisingly uneventful, Jack suggested that with most

people gone the brigands would have no choice but to follow the migrants or head for the coast. He suspected most of them had gotten used to their ways that it was unlikely they were going to break with the habits of an easy life. Even if they came to the coast he suspected they would not stay long, he doubted there was any chance of passage until the summer and the brigands he knew grew impatient very quickly.

I asked him why he had been so quiet back at the farm, was it because he was a former brigand? No, he had been touched by the old man's love of his sons, two brothers, and that had upset him inside, both for the loss of his own brother and his wayward father who had left them and their mother to fend for themselves in the worsening conditions.

We came to a fork in the track, checking around for signs of life we cautiously climbed over a high bank, you could see south, and what looked far in the distance, like the blue shimmer of sun on water. The ocean was close, and down this slope was our second gun emplacement. We approached keeping low, I saw something move, signalling to Alice and Jack to drop, we hit the ground, laying down. Through my telescope I could see the barrel of a shotgun. Fumbling for a piece of white cloth I put my arm in the air waving it, hoping that it was the farmers younger son or his boyfriend that saw it. Having a medal winner on the end of the gun did not appeal, "I shouted I have a letter from Stanley White for Mrs Emily White." Of course at this point I realised it may not be them but a band of brigands.

A figure of another man appeared at the entrance, "What did Stanley call his wife?" said the man.

"Sweetpea." I shouted back, still waving the white flag.
"Who are you?" he shouted, I explained and told him of Alice and Jack. He beckoned us over. We all huddled inside behind the concrete wall that backed onto the doorway. Sweetpea was a lovely rosy cheeked lady, the old farmer had been right when he said he needed no fire when he had her to warm his heart, thinking of this I shed a tear as we sat in silence while she read the letter. "Why are you crying?" asked the other woman, Jane the wife of William, was a sensitive loving lady. "Oh I was thinking of what Stanley said about Mrs White." Who at the mention of her name insisted we call her Sweetpea, and she too cried when I told her what her husband told us. Robin was the younger son and his friend

Jason held hands as Sweetpea having deciphered the message insisted she read it to us.

Alice looked happier than I had ever seen her, I guess now we had our own private army she felt a lot safer, that and Jack's theory about the brigands bolstered our morale. Jack still insisted that we take turns through the night at keeping watch. I wondered if the brigands had done this to guard against surprise attacks by other groups. It was hard not to wake everyone when we swapped over guard duty. The women were excused on account of there now being five men. William had a working watch, digital watches were ok but you could no longer get the batteries! The watch had been his fathers, a watch on a chain, in fact it had been his grandfathers before that. A piece of wind up precision engineering. I, a master of gadgets, offered the use of a wind-up torch so we could see it in the dark, but William pointed out that it had luminous hands.

Thankfully the night passed peacefully, well there was a bit of snoring, something that I find difficult to sleep with and I have a mind that it may have been dear Sweetpea, as I knew neither Alice or Jack snored and the snoring continued on every watch. It could have been Jane but with William armed with a shotgun it was not the sort of "nasturtions" one casts.

At sunrise the old pillbox was hard to leave, somehow it felt safe in there. I recalled walking the north downs in better years. There are many such along its length, and I took many photos of them. Now sadly all these treasured memories are just hidden in a box, written to a CD and placed under the concrete path that led to the back door of my home. In the rather irrational futile hope that this ice age will be over in a week or two. Unfortunately I expect it will be some archaeologist, who finds it thousands of years from now. Assuming man survives that long, and gets back to some form of high intellect achieved in our time by philosophers and men of science, those who seek justice and truth, those who seek to conquer knowledge and intelligence rather than control land and minds.

We followed a track that zigzagged down the side of a hill, it was slippery, although the weather was starting to get more like summer it was still bitterly cold, the snow and ice made it hazardous to move at all

but a slow shuffle. Eventually we reached the floor of the valley, following a gentle slope down we reached the end of the valley, it was most abrupt. On either side great walls of rock, looked like the sides of a badly iced coffee cake, the bare rock exposed to the sun, had smatterings of white snow adorning it. We were now on what used to be the shingle beach. In fact it was still shingle below our feet, but the sea was far off.

The Coast

Upon reaching this close to the coast we looked on, there were still icebergs in the channel and no boats. All were gone, we had been so foolish to expect otherwise. The coast was still best part of a mile away across a barren wasteland, strewn with sheets of rock, gravel and sand, like a giant Japanese garden that had not been tended. No rake had levelled the stones, no artist created the rock statues that thrust from the former sea bed. The sound that whipped across this land was no gentle chime, the ice cold wind that blew in made a sound to scare all but the most rational man.

We holed up via a precarious trail into a small cave in a cliff that had once been submerged at sea. Looking out from our hiding place we had a good view of this desolate area. It would be no good trying to even make a raft, as it was not yet summer and to venture into the sea filled with icebergs and stirred into turmoil by the electric storms was no place to be.

The cave retained a constant, if by your standards chilly temperature, it was above freezing. I volunteered to take a look further down into its depths, avoiding using a precious candle that we had retrieved on route, instead using my wind-up torch. Spotting useful things that others had dropped was a vital life saving skill. William had found some rope and kept a hold on one end, the other tied around my waist, just in case. This was no show cave, well lit with a concrete floor and hand rails. This was a natural cave, probably formed sometime at the end of a previous ice age when rivers flowed through underground caverns, how many thousands of years had this taken to form, how had the sea changed its features.

My foot crunched. “Are you ok?” asked William.

“Yes just an old crab, must have come in on the last tide to come up this

high." The cave was quite wide, and dry, further in it twisted slightly through a narrower passage, running slightly down, where I expected it would have gone upward, assuming a river spouted out at the cave mouth, yet much erosion occurred along the coast so it could have been the opposite. Further along water trickled down one side of the rock, filling a tiny pool, like a washbasin, keeping with tradition I decided to name it. As we had ladies present this was to become the Powder Room. A steady trickle left the bowl and disappeared down a crack below. Further on it was again quite dry, opening out into a large cavern, the ceiling showed evidence of stalactites, the floor looked like it was covered with sand and mud, presumably deposited by stormy seas. I took care crossing this area not knowing if it concealed crevasses below. Edging my way round to find two openings, one ahead and one hidden behind a what looked like a stone buttress, naturally formed by the action of water and possibly boulders swished around as water once gushed through.

In places I noted discolouration of the limestone where mineral deposits had leached through, red ochres mostly, a little green from copper. Which way should I go through the Sculptures passage, as I now named it or up the other ascending passage. I decide what goes up must come down, so went up first, the passage got narrower and narrower, winding a long way into the cliff, I was prevented from going further by a lack of rope. I gave the torch a good winding and shone its little white LED (light emitting diode) light into the void beyond. Such a light is strangely eerie, it has a different nature in a cave to the warm glow of an incandescent bulb. I descended back down into the sandpit or Playroom as I decide it should be called, hoping that the others would not mind me being rather greedy with the naming process.

The other passage led down and was quite large, I reasoned perhaps the water had come in from the Long Gallery, from where I came down into the Playroom, perhaps water also came down from our part of the cave. Perhaps the Playroom was more like a liquidiser or blender, perhaps I should call it the Coffee Grinder! Well descending down the Sculptures passage or was it the coffee spout? It was a bit damp and slippery in places, but easy going, ahead lay a massive cavern, the likes of which I had only seen before in a showcave. Ahead was like a beach, beyond that was a large pool of water, beyond that I was not sure if I could see

another exit. I decided to return back to the others, back past the Powder room, which Alice advised me should be the Ladies room, but Robin, complained that this was discriminatory, so the Powder room remained. Sweetpea, and Jane were delighted at the sudden extension to their new home, although not keen to explore it, Jack, Robin and Jason it all seemed were non to keen on going into the bowels of the earth, they preferred keeping watch.

Robin and Jason came into their own when we went foraging, William would keep watch from the cave also guarding the ladies. Jack liked to sit out on a rock half way to the shore, he would scan the beach for anyone approaching our position. I think Jack was a bit of a lonely soul without his brother. William had Jane, Sweetpea took Alice to her heart upon hearing how her family were slaughtered. Alice kept quiet about Jacks involvement, but I know deep down she did not want to be social with him. I had Alice with love that I can't explain, just that it moved me greatly, in many ways one of which did not need a certain V that you may have once been able to get. Then there was Robin and Jason, two likeable characters, they bounced joy off each other, a mutual appreciation society, they were the both meanings of old word for happiness. When they foraged it was almost like play to them, competitive and productive. You could look at a beach and think it empty of anything useful, but I guarantee that any day they went foraging they would bring back a useful treasure.

If we could have got the driftwood they collected back to old Stanley he would have had no worry keeping his fire going. They collected more rope which was much to my delight, and once they new my reason and my passion to explore further they intensified their search. They collected food as well, we had mostly a diet of Mussels and Seaweed slowly cooked in an old saucepan, filled with water from the Powder Room, and boiled over a driftwood fire. At times I did question our sanity at wanting to get ultimately to Spain, yet I knew come winter, when storms lashed the shoreline it would not be so idyllic.

Now we had more rope William again assisted me on a further exploration of the Long Gallery. I ventured further up into it, our entrance was about half a metre below the old sea level in your time, above our cliff was the old cliff face which leaned inland where it had been battered

by the weather. I reasoned that this passage must be going up into the level of the old cliff. There are some humans, and I'm one of them who are not content just to accept what we are told about the world by others, we have to question and explore, we have to know. I always liked Socrates he said "The only good is knowledge and the only evil is ignorance." A wise man, I wonder if he will be remembered.

My thoughts drifted back to the crawl through this passage, I did not want to chance getting stuck, yet it did not seem to get to a cavern and having shed most of my bulky clothing, I could still get a little further without risk of getting jammed in, a slight narrowing that lay ahead, beyond it seemed to open out again. Reason prevailed over passion and I returned having ventured a further twenty metres up the Long Gallery.

You should understand that we could do nothing until the weather and sea conditions improved, we had no wood that was suitable for building a boat. Sitting in our cave we took turns to keep watch. In years past I collected a small number of brass telescopic telescopes, at the time I made my second purchase I had just had a solar water heating system fitted to my house. It was winter then and I remember the news saying it would be a very cold that year. Compared to now it seemed like summer. My radiometer would spin frantically in the south facing window. The purchase of this new toy all the way from Germany did seem frivolous as the panels on the roof had rather overstretched the finances. It extended four tubes that telescopied out to form a functional telescope, the brass finish giving it an authentic look.

It's funny however hard we try to avoid collecting things they seem to accumulate. Then we don't like to throw any of them out because it would be like breaking up a family. So when I had decided to go it alone in the spring and leave the village I took with me my by now old, Bresser Stoertebeker a fine fernrohre. I also kept a small monocular that had been given to me by my mother one time at the Wildfowl Trust's Arundel centre. The rest I distributed to my village friends who had decided to find a column moving south.

What little government remained had organised a rather uncoordinated march to the channel tunnel. It was no longer operating as a rail route but had been found passable on foot. They all thought I was mad, and now

as I look out over this barren expanse between us and the sea I have a mind that they were right. Sure some may not have made it either succumbing to the weather or raiding brigands, but I felt many must be sitting in Spain, drinking wine in some farmhouse, taken in by a kindly family, while here we sat freezing with little hope of even getting to France, and no chance of crossing the Pyrennes into what was left of European civilization before winter.

Boating in Summer

We had scouted the shoreline several days ago with no sign of any driftwood, let alone a boat, we did get some shellfish from rocks as the tide receded. This at least would help sustain us. Now we decided to venture along the land above the line of the cliffs, William, Jack and myself leaving Robin and Jason to guard the women. The reason, William was a crack shot, Jack knew how to spot signs of trouble, brigands being his speciality, and both wanted me to lead, apparently I was good at it?

Our aim, rather our need was to find wood to make a raft, the driftwood was either too small or came in the form of a giant tree, that had obviously fallen into a river when the ground thawed. The rivers being more violent with the summer melting of ice, a tree that came to visit our beach was complete with a full set of roots, its branches had not fared so well. It sat like a giants toilet brush on the shore. Some days later the giant must have picked it up as it had gone.

William carried his twelve bore, Jack his trusty Axe, I had my Telescope, Compass, and Sweetpeas .22 rifle. Jane offered Jack her shotgun but for some reason he declined. I must admit I used to hate guns, wondering why anyone would want one, but in these circumstances it was a great comfort.

As we moved up over the next hill along the chain that followed the cliff we spotted a number of houses. We now lay down on the grass, keeping as low as possible. I took a look, there was no sign of movement, each window was checked and double checked before I told my two companions. Jack had the jitters, "We should go back."

"Why?" asked William.

Jack asked to look through my telescope, he was scanning the grass, not

the houses. The snow had receded and for the short summer the grass was one of the few plants fighting to hold on to the land.

"Look." he said, handing the instrument back to me. He pointed to a spot just below the houses, there was some long grass yet in one area it did not stand. A line the length of a body lay across the line of the slope. I handed the telescope to William to see. We were unable to make out what it was, but Jacks hunch was heeded by us both. Retracing our steps we made a hasty retreat, following close to the edge of the cliff, Jack stopped and hit the deck, we needed no indication from him. William and I crawled to him, What's the matter asked William. Quiet, listen, whispered Jack. At first all we could hear was the wind through the grass, but then I caught it, the sound of feet walking on pebbles, lots of feet. I moved over edging my way towards the cliff face. Not being one for heights I was glad to be laying down, I was also careful to remain concealed, and not dislodge any rocks or pebbles that might give away our presence.

Some way distant along the shore was a band of brigands, bigger than Jacks old group, they were a long way off, but their number and the direction of the wind belied their position. Moving swiftly back I told the others, we had to get over the next ridge and back down onto our beach fast, they would soon round the headland and we would be in view.

Keeping low until we got over the other side, when we ran full tilt down the hill, scurrying across the shingle and scrabbling up our precarious path to the cave entrance. If you have ever seen wild rabbits run for their burrows that was us. We pulled right back into the cave, we knew they might see the entrance, we knew if they saw us they would definitely come up.

We quickly convened a meeting, I expressed that we should at least move our valuables and food back past the Coffee Grinder. There was no natural light past the powder room, if this lot had no lights we could at least hide down on the beach in the Swimming Pool. All agreed this but, not to going down there ourselves, this may have been the sentiments of the more claustrophobic members, or Jacks thought that the bastards might block us in.

Jack, Robin and Jason agreed to take it in turns to keep watch near the

cave mouth, more listening for feet on the pebbles than looking. Jane and Sweetpea agreed reluctantly to move to the powder room and keep quiet, we were all on silent running. William was moving the stuff into the Coffee Grinder the candle providing his light. He had probed the soft mud and sand in many places and was convinced it was all solid rock below. I did mention to him whether if push came to shove and we had to retreat inside that we might not use some of this silt to temporarily block the small entrance between the Coffee Grinder and Powder room, Jack agreed to this, as did all bar Sweetpea, perhaps the most claustrophobic of us, she was used to the wide open spaces of a farm, this was somewhat cramped and the ladies had because of the precarious route into the cave been cooped up much more than us lads.

Alice ventured up into the Long Gallery, she was smaller than I and had agreed to be the temporary ferret, with me as anchor. We all were concerned that if those Brigands hung around too long we may need an escape route, so there was now an urgency in finding where the Long Gallery went. Alice soon reached the narrow gap, she tugged at the rope twice to let me know. I then felt the rope play out through my hands as she moved through the gap using my wind-up torch for light. Once through she again tugged twice on the rope, and continued her crawl. Then the rope stopped moving, my heart began to pound, I wondered if the brigands could hear it echo in these chambers. Relief came when she gave three tugs. This meant a cavern had been found, I was pleased when a light followed by her face appeared crawling back down the Long Gallery.

She whispered to me that, about fifteen metres past the narrowed part, was a cavern of similar size to the Coffee Grinder, this to be known as Alice's Wonderland. Unlike the other caves it had escaped the ravages of the sea, and had a full compliment of cave decorations as provided by mother nature. There was another tunnel beyond, but it was bigger than the Long Gallery, so assuming I could get through the gap, which without so much clothing I did, was my next task to explore. I had made my way into Alice's Wonderland and gone a few metres into the other tunnel when the rope went taught, followed by four frantic tugs.

This was the danger signal, I scurried back down to the Coffee Grinder, Sweetpea, Jane, Robin, Jason and William were sitting down on the

beach, I could see with the light our stuff moved down to one side of William, Jack crouched in the powder room. Alice took my rope, and she too went down with the others.

Jack sensed my presence, we could hear a lot of feet on the pebbles outside, lots of voices, one sent shivers down both our spines. We listened as two voices dominated, one we knew and one unfamiliar but strong, challenging. This is what I remember hearing, it may not be exact but you will understand why we hung on every word.

"We should take a look up there." said the Pretender, his voice younger, less commanding, more cocky, he had something to prove.

"It's a hole in the rocks, what you gona do nest in it?" said the King, the one we knew, gave him a firm put down.

"It might be a cave full of treasure." said the Pretender, boasting.

"Yea and you might break your neck climbing up to lay and egg!" said the confident King.

"Suppose birds nest there! Eggs are good food, oh leader." said our new enemy, his voice mocking.

"Birds, you twat, how many birds you seen?" said the King, and he was right even the birds had flown south, given time some more adapted to such climates may colonise but for now the skies were no paradise for a stranded twitcher. "Go on then." goaded the King, you could tell he wanted rid of this Pretender. What had happened? Had two bands joined forces and why? Who was the Pretender?

We heard one set of feet on the pebbles, then the sounds of someone scrabbling up the rock face, I instinctively moved back, Jack following, we were silent. Lights out we sat on the beach, waiting for more sounds. "Anything?", came the shout from the King, curious.

"Nothing just and empty hole." Little did we know that the fading light outside as the sun began to set saved us. The pretender had not found our route up and without a light he had not even seen into the Powder room which was through the first passage round a slight corner. To him it was just an empty hole, we heard him scrabbling back down.

Jack was the first to venture back into the Powder Room, he returned with bad news. Drawing on the sand he told us that they had made camp almost below our cave. My mind raced, I gestured to William that someone snored, he nodded, knowing full well who. Just imagine, and I don't mean this in a detrimental way, but a pig in and echo chamber, with

a pack of wolves sitting outside. In the faint light from my torch, I made the sign of head on hands together for sleep then the did piggy like faces, pointing to my ears then to the Sculptured entrance. Sweetpea, touched my arm and pointed to her nose, she understood, with them so close any noise could be fatal. We had guns, but we did not know what they had, and that leader, the King of the Brigands was cunning and ruthless, not to mention his questionable dietary habits. That night we all catnapped, getting very little sleep all to afraid that in our slumber we might be the one that makes a noise.

Only William's pocket watch gave us a clue that it was morning, and I can tell you through the night he looked at it repeatedly. Time ground along so slowly, Jack was the first to move, he was the best at it, stealthily he ventured into the Coffee Grinder and listened, had they moved on or were they all late risers? He came back, shrugged his shoulders and shook his head. We all guessed he could not tell if our visitors were still resident, damn tourists I thought. My mind flew back to when I moved down near the coast all those years ago. Work, which was my one man business gave me little time for holidays, a week away was the most I could manage if I was lucky. It might be a budget diy trip to the Czech Republic, with the odd excursion into Germany to practice the other lingo I enjoyed as a hobby. So you can imagine my frustration when during the summer, "My County" was invaded by all those tourists. Clogging the roads, taking over "MY BEACHES", without even a by your leave. They did not ask, just hurtled down, many with caravans and just swanned around like they owned the place. Oh for those tourists, oh for a bit of dogs mess, how pleasant to the scum that washed up yesterday.

An hour passed Jack thought he heard a sound, he came back, made a signal, two fingers walking on our little beach, indicating that he thought those on the beach outside might be stirring. This time I ventured with him into the Powder Room, we could hear a lot of movement on the shingle, it sounded as though they were moving further east. Why were they hugging the coastline? Were they searching for a boat? We sat listening for some time as the footsteps faded into the distance. Moving forward still cautious as we knew this was two groups combined, and one might still be present, we listened from the entrance cave, the opening was small so we could sit comfortable that we were hidden.

It was a long while before I took the reckless decision to crawl to the entrance. Nothing but the wind blowing along the cliffs and the sound of the distant sea breaking over the rocky shoreline. If there were humans present they were Trapist Monks. With great care I poked my head above the lip of the cave entrance, through my telescope to the east I could just see the large group disappearing around the next headland. I pulled back, keen to wait till they had gone before looking again, hoping none had turned to look back.

Another day passed before we all returned to a more normal routine. Jack advised more caution, he thought that they may come back. We would venture for food, early in the morning and at dusk, and we waited a week before any talk of further searches for raft materials. Jack worried, "Suppose we get the raft built, we are almost ready to sail and that lot come back?"

"We should store the materials first, build it when we have all we need." reasoned William, a most practical man, as are most farmers, having also to be engineers, carpenters and such like. Plenty of room in the Coffee grinder.

"Will we get long planks through the Powder Room passages?" asked Jack.

"We can try?"

"And if not?" said Jack, "We can hardly leave planks of wood lying around on the beach."

"It would look like driftwood." said Robin.

"No, it would look like a bill board advertising that boat builders had taken residence. Your driftwood looks nothing like seasoned timbers." said Jack.

"You're the one with the axe." said Jason, defending his friend.

"Smart if it don't fit, chop it up, it's not ideal but better than being found." I said.

It was a fine day when we got up courage to venture again to that collection of houses. Jack was nervous as hell, he was on full alert and hesitant that we should go further. "Suppose it's their base, suppose that patrol along the beach was part of a circuit of their territory." he said, worry etched into his expression.

"Look Jack if we don't we will freeze here next winter, this good weather won't last forever." said William. I had to agree so we decided to chance it, Jack brought up the rear, watching our backs, fronts and everything else, constantly searching for any sign of the brigands.

The first house was a hollow shell, no wood, the second had just the roof timbers, the third also just had roof timbers, all were most inaccessible. The mark in the grass we had seen the last time was as Jack had suspected a corpse. Perhaps an old man like William's father, forced to stay and killed by the brigands. William insisted on burying him, Jack went wild, he said it was like sending up a distress flare except we would become the unsaved.

I was concerned about the time it wasted, we had a problem, how to get those timbers, now William was taking the role of undertaker. How the hell would we get up there?

William had solved the problem while on burial duty. He suggested tackling the smaller house first, no sense in leaving accessible timbers for others. Nearby there was an old van, you know the sort, white van, ladder up the back to get to the roof rack where the workman stored materials too large to fit inside.

The van had long since been stripped, of parts, but it still had four wheels, who needed wheels when there was no fuel. So we pushed the brute against the wall of the smaller house, William climbed up and using Jacks axe, took the roof apart, throwing the tiles down like confetti at a wedding, he would strip part then take out the planks, I stood on the van roof holding a safety rope. Planks were piling up like matchsticks on both sides of the house, once done William insisted we move the van back, and made it look as it had been , so as not to give the game away as to our method. Each of us carried as many planks as we could initially dumping them on the beach near the cave entrance. We went back nine times before we had all the timbers it was getting dark. Robin and Jason had used a rope and with the help of the women hauled up most of the timbers, which with a bit of bending and cajoling had gotten though the passages into the Coffee Grinder. We worked in the dark to get the last load into the cave. Our nerves would not have stood leaving such an obvious sign on the beach below. Jack took care to try and clean the rock face, abseiling with the torch over the point where we had pulled the

boards up. He took on a fanatical zeal, like a woman who insists a clean sink was dirty.

In the morning all except William were exhausted, he wanted us to continue collecting wood from the other house. We needed a rest, had we known that the tunnel had become blocked by bodies the situation may have spurred us on. At first people tripped over the railway sleepers, many were trampled. In what light they had, many made it through, but as more and more bodies fell and with the lack of ventilation, there was no power for the giant pumps. Carbon dioxide from the decaying bodies, and those gasping for air built up to a dangerous level, many more fell, soon all the tunnels were impassable. Those who had moved late or come from the furthest west, had gone through hell. Now they could not use the tunnel, their despair turned to rage and anger. Thousands, angry at their fate, angry at the attacks by the brigands were heading back from Kent, aware that it would be the most severe place in winter. Many chose to follow the coast in the hope of discovering a boat.

We did not know it but two vast armies were heading towards us, neither taking any prisoners. It was the brigands turn to run scared, all except Jacks former brigands had followed their prey to Kent. These brigands were outnumbered and running scared, trying both to outrun the migrants, and combine forces. This was no easy matter with such headstrong leaders all vying to lead the super brigands. Each wanting to halt the rout and slaughter their pursuers, none having the strength of numbers to achieve this.

For us they had got a whole day closer because we delayed on the second house, but we did work hard. To clear the second larger roof in one day we needed more bodies, Robin and Jason joined, we threw caution to the wind. The women stood guard over the growing timber pile, alone they could not haul it in, Alice tried with Jane's help to haul up the smaller timbers but the larger ones had to wait for our final return. It was a big gamble, we were unarmed to save weight and speed our journey, to save carrying so far, Robin and Jason devised a system to slide the wood down each slope, I just hauled the timbers to the top of the ridge sliding them down the other side of the hill to our beach, Jack and William did most of the roof clearing. Jason hauled the wood back to the cave mouth, with this relay system we got it done quickly and had

time get the wood off the beach.

That night I lay aching, unable to sleep I wondered about nails? Oh and the possible need of tools, if our summer boating was to happen!

The Town

It was dawn the following day, Jack and I set out alone to scout in the other direction, we knew there had been a town. I was sure it had a builders merchant, if that had not been totally looted perhaps we might get what we needed. William was against the idea, he determined that the nails and screws in the timbers would suffice, and stones would work as hammers. When I pointed out we might need a sail, his opposition waned but he did not see the need to go, he thought it better to work on a raft design. He wanted Jack to leave the axe, not that he would use it immediately more he was afraid of loosing it. Jack told him that stones would work just as well. I detected that Jack disliked William's disapproval of our mission.

Jack and I worked our way over the hills, we were becoming more cautious, Jack wondered if our friends might be at home. At first from a vantage point near an old village the town looked much as it did when thriving on tourists years ago. When we took a closer look you could see almost all the buildings were derelict. A supermarket looked intact, its steel structure withstanding the elements, but later we saw it close up, sitting like the shell of a long dead tortoise. The glass frontage smashed in, bits of shelving strewn across the floor, isles blocked by display units pushed over, we imagined some mad rush, as desperate people looted, or perhaps the closing down sale.

Jack was living on his nerves, with just one rifle between us we did not want to meet any serious opposition. Cars most with seats missing littered the streets, in one house we saw where some had gone. Furniture was a pile of fabric covered wood, last winter it was the only fuel left. Car seats were fabric covered metal, and a most comfortable substitute, setting a new fashion as inhabitants had copied the Joneses. Had it happened in better circumstances critics would have pointed to it as further proof that we lived in a autodominated society.

We eased our way into the high street, feet crunching over broken glass,

one of the few things not worth taking. Window frames had been taken, and looking through the orifice we saw just empty shells, no roofs, floors, doors, if it was combustible they had taken it. Each building once a thriving shop, was a gutted bare shell. Jack did retrieve a considerable amount of electrical cable, there was no danger of electrocution. I joked with him that we must insist William rewires our cave. This made him grin, I looked up, the smashed sign of a hardware shop, there were a few bits, mostly metal shelving, that was all we ever seemed to find. One wall unit looking rather precarious as it leaned out, health and safety would have had a field day! Behind it I spotted a silver end, stretching my arm into the void I got myself and old screwdriver, the red paint flaking off its wooden handle.

I saw a shop fitter, working away, his boss chivvying him to get the job done quick. In his distraction, he cursed the man, as he lost grip of his favourite tool. Clunk, and a bounce of the blade as it hit the concrete floor, lost for years gathering dust. Jack found a pack of hacksaw blades, similarly lodged down behind a unit. We left with our pickings, the shell of a newsagents next door stripped bare, a few doors along we found a car spares dealer. The centre isle that run the length of the shop had been decimated, but the wall units had been fitted too last and capable of supporting some heavy items. We tried looking behind them, but they would not budge, Jacks axe made a terrible din as it hit the metal fixings. Like the man on the Rank films, I feared a gang of not so friendly film goers filing in to take a look at our next feature, we being the popcorn. I stopped Jack explaining my reason, the building without its floors and ceiling was like an echo chamber, this was the dinner gong.

We moved into the back of the shop, an area occupied by the spares department. Racks from floor to ceiling, once filled with plastic trays. There were lots of nuts and bolts strewn across the floor. Jack found an old tobacco tin that no doubt had once lived in an old man's boiler suit pocket. A man to whom you could have said "You know the widgety bit that goes on the whotsit." and he would have handed you a part, and said, "You mean one of these." You would have said, "Yes that's it, beaming with satisfaction."

With the small bits in the tin and the larger bits in an old carrier bag we moved on. The estate agents proved fruitless and there were plenty of

them. Such offices mostly had desks, which apart from some square steel tubing had been gutted. I picked up a few of the larger T pieces, assuming they may have some use perhaps as fixings and some L brackets for similar reasons.

Jack wondered where all the things had gone, "Can they have taken it all, where is it? Is some fellow wandering around decked out in power drills?" It did seem incredible, houses once full of things, shops exploding with goods. There were small shops where you could hardly move around for items, they even had plastic goods on the pavements, now all gone. At what had been the builders merchant we did find some bigger power tools, and picked up masses of screws and nails strewn across the floor, and some odd tins of paint.

On the way back we found some old bags, and a rucksack stuffed under a pile of rubbish in what had once been one of those cheap shops that sell everything. "What about going back through the gardens?" asked Jack.

"I doubt they are to the same standards as the council kept them!" I replied tongue in cheek.

"No peoples gardens, down the ends where the sheds used to be." This was a smart idea, as conditions worsened people acquired more tools for diy. When the wooden sheds collapsed or were taken for firewood most tools were left like a vapour trail on the lawns. Hidden in the grass was a treasure trove, some rusting, but the better quality tools were in fine condition. We also found jam jars full of screws, one fellow had been most meticulous, each size in a different jar, and these were not old saved screws, but brand new. Loaded with as much as we could manage we took our haul back to the cave.

I had found a large plastic storage box, one of those square stacking type. With some rope and a pieces of wood with a wheel on it made quite a serviceable way of lifting stuff from the beach, we could use it for food as well as tools and findings. When William saw the things we brought, he smiled, then looked at Jack and myself, praised us and apologised for being off hand in the morning. Jane had taken Jacks role as rock watchman, Sweepea had taken guard of the cave entrance, Robin and Jason went of on their dusk raid out to the shoreline to forage for food, and anything else, now they had us to compete with.

The following day, William sat in the entrance making and pre assembling parts of the vessel he had in mind. He needed no paper, he had the blueprints engraved in his brain. While waiting for Jack I watched William, he could look at two pieces of wood, make some cuts and fit them together perfectly. As I sat observing this craftsman, he spoke of things he needed, since our acquisitions his horizons had expanded. William explained that the better the boat he could make the better our chances, Jack appearing from the Powder Room and expressed his agreement.

We clambered past William, like a boy playing with mechano. We scrambled down to the beach, looking out I could see Jane and further away the lads now doing their dawn scavenge, heads bobbing up and down as they looked then reached to acquire. We walked over the pebbles, it was our early warning system, walking quietly on them is near impossible. This time we were looking for buoyancy and sail materials.

Avoiding the town centre we worked systematically through an area furthest from our base, each day planning to do the next nearest because we knew the more days that went by the more likely brigands would appear. A large area of bungalows bore fruit, we did not need to do many of them, it seemed we had chanced upon some hoarders. My granddad was one such man, if it might be of some use later he kept it, giving my mother a nightmare when she came to clear the sheds, my dad's sheds had not been much better. Of course there were no sheds, just the bits and pieces. Jack strung a mass of plastic bottles on knotted ropes, when we marched back I held one end he the other, between us hung a vast array of assorted sizes, the cache, at times dragging on the ground.

Jack stopped, jumped over a low and crumbling brick wall. He pulled up the remains of an old round washing line. Wrapping the bottles around the frame we carried this, each with one end on a shoulder. Like two men carrying a pig on a spit, off to roast it. As Jack and I re-entered the cave mid afternoon, William's eyes popped with delight. "You hit a rich seam lads." he said. The bottles were his main prize, tomorrow we would hunt again.

As the sun came up we were lucky another clear blue sky, cold but good for our purposes. Jack and I were to scurry around, still together for safety, William suggested we split up to cover more ground. Jack had winced at the thought. Out there he knew you had to have someone watching your back. We did a street by street sweep, sometimes we would pick up something of use, a tool in good condition, a few unopened bags of screws, small stuff. It was looking hopeless, at midday having covered the best part of town, Jack stopped me mid sentence, I was suggesting maybe the town being a point of departure was a bad place to look. He said "Caravan park."

I looked at him, "They have not been used in years, probably not much left what with the weight of snow and copious amounts of wood in them." "Abandoned forgotten, no use for cover stripped of wood maybe, but would they have tarpaulin?" he said, he had a good point.

There was one I knew of, over in the next valley beyond the town. It was a long way and far from base. To lighten our load we left our gatherings hidden inside a bungalow, then marched off east, the way the brigands went. Now we moved more cautiously, at the top of the ridge before descending into the valley beyond we looked around.

"Shit", said Jack, starting to shake.

I pulled my telescope from its home in the summer coat pocket, extending it I took a closer look, "Fuck" Now please excuse our use of expletives, when you look down upon probably several hundred brigands, resting in the valley bottom it does rather call for strong language. Not only did they have knives, axes, and assorted cudgels but many carried assault weapons, automatic rifles, machine guns. Whether they had ammunition or were just used as clubs we had no inclination to go and ask. Jack and I pulled back from our vantage point, we had seen enough and seen who was leading.

With a surge of adrenaline we went hell for leather back to camp, Jack almost did not stop to collect our stash. I was in two minds, but with those guys about it may be a long time before we got another chance to forage.

"What's wrong?" said Sweetpea, sitting at the entrance on watch. We

both looked like we had seen a ghost, Jack was still shaking, his nerve gone I had to haul his bundle into the cave, he scurried off inside. I went back down to the beach checking to see that there was no trail of materials leading the way. Luckily not, all clear I clambered back up and pulled Sweetpea back from the entrance.

"William you have to back that contraption out of here. Jane sweep up these wood shavings, Robin, Jason, get the hoist ready." I scrabbled back onto the beach, checking for signs, nothing, grabbing some of the bigger stones I put them one at a time into the box. The lads heaved each in until we had quite a pile, too nervous of continuing longer I rejoined them.

Jack had already explained we now had a small army on our doorstep. Leading them was the King of the brigands, our ruthless friend. We left a few rocks in the entrance cavern and used the rest to simulate a rock fall in the narrow passage between it and the powder room, leaving room for air and sound to enter at the top. William wanted to block the entrance, Jack and I thought this might prompt them to investigate such a change. We knew the brigands leader had knowledge of the cave, we also knew that he might assume it was an empty hole just as the Pretender had told him. If anyone else came looking it's what they would also find.

Land of the Brigands

As we sat in the cave, like frightened mice listening for the cat outside, we took stock of the situation. The powder room was only to be used at night, or by Jack or I listening for daytime activities. The Coffee Grinder, now full of Williams boat kit and our main stash of materials and tools was unusable, we hoped the wood would dampen any echo. Ledges within the Swimming Pool room were used to store a growing collection of foods, much pickled in jars we had retrieved, intended for the voyage but, enough to sustain us for several weeks. With only a small amount of candle power and my wind-up torch we were confined mostly to sleeping, this did help to conserve rations, fresh water we had by the bucket load.

Several days went by, Alice becoming a little restless suggested she help me explore beyond Alice's Wonderland, we both crawled up into that cavern. Beyond was the Royal Gallery, we named it so because it seemed bigger and grander than the Long Gallery. Alice stood at its

entrance holding the rope, I edged my way forward, my eyes adjusted to the dim light from the little torch. No doubt a real caver would have had kittens seeing us explore with such equipment.

The tunnel wound like a river skirting tough terrain and so it had below when meeting a more solid opponent, the water that made this tunnel had taken its route through the softer stone. In places water dripped through cracks, widened by years of erosion by the weak carbonic acid. In places it almost opened into a cavern, but then narrowed again. There was a layer of silt and mud below my feet, fairly solid, but you always wondered if a foot fall would cause some stone below to give, the mud would follow and you with it into a vertical shaft. There were such, I remember one in Derbyshire, the roof was many metres above, and below a water filled chasm, where mining rubble was dumped, so deep it ate thousands of tons and was still not full. What had the ice sheets done to that tourist trap?

I pressed on, eventually probably after at least half a kilometre coming to a halt at a blockage. A rock fall, that may have happened hundreds maybe even thousands of years ago. It was frustrating, but with so little light and no tools I decided to go back. Alice was eager for news, she looked disappointed when given it. We went back to the others, who showed little interest. Jack was still listening for movement outside, when I checked, he signalled all was quiet.

The following morning Jack came and got me, the others read the sign. We had company, you could not miss the sounds of several hundred brigands on the beach. We listened to our enemy rallying the troops.

“Here is where we will stand, they may be many but if they come along the beach they are funnelled between the sea and cliffs, they can't use their numbers to surround us. This is the only way onto the beach for miles, so if they come at us we can hold them.” his voice was loud booming, confident. “We have water from a stream in that gully and soon we'll eat brains for breakfast.” There was a loud roar, another voice boomed, “We have come to join you.” More feet now crashed across the pebbles. Jack and I looked at each other, I left him on watch and went back to tell the others.

Taking some of the tools, I gestured to Alice, we would clear the rubble in the other tunnel perhaps using it to shore up the Powder Room. Using the plastic box we filled it with the smaller rocks and carted it back down to the Coffee Grinder. It was a long slow job, hard on the knees. The others wanted to help, but that only risked making more noise. Jack slowly added our rocks behind the stones blocking the Powder Room passage to the Entrance cave. He was careful not to dislodge the stones, if one fell it would make a terrible clatter.

After two days I had a hole big enough to wiggle through, the fall was not so bad as it appeared, the stone above was solid. The rubble had fallen from a fissure that ran to one side, opening up a giant slot, we called this the Giants Fruit Machine. The tunnel was still wide beyond this point, but further up the roof got decidedly lower. Crawling on my belly, a good use for a skateboard came to mind. Further still the tunnel continued, opening into a squarer passage. This puzzled me for a moment, then I recalled going down caves that had been mines, looking at the side walls you could see the tell tale signs of tools. The tunnel still continued at a slight upward incline. Finally I emerged into a large cavern, now on my guard, aware of what it was and where.

I headed back down the tunnel, like a rat in a pipe. There was little slack left in the rope, Alice had followed as far as the low roofed passage. She gave me a kiss when my head poked back through. "What's there?" she whispered eagerly.

"I believe it is an old quarry cave, used to provide stone to masons repairing cathedrals and alike." I said.

"You know it?"

"Some years ago I went in, a Welsh chap was the guide, not a miner though he did know his stuff, explained how the owner took him down a tunnel in the cave, but upon reaching a rock fall he was not keen to go further. I think this is the other end of that tunnel." I said with a fair degree of certainty. "The entrance was years ago hidden down a dip, trees abounded, and there was an iron fence preventing unauthorised entry. I would like to check how secure our back passage is but ran out of rope, those caves are big, with my puny torch it could take hours to find the tunnel entrance."

We went back to the others, they were interested to know if we could use

it to escape. Jack was more concerned that we had a weakness, as was I. Many of the others would have trouble getting through the tunnels, Jane and especially Sweetpea were big boned women, William was also of a solid build. In a team we stripped Jacks accumulation of electrical flex and turned it into an electricians nightmare. Brown wires joined to blue, blue to green/yellow, brown to that, but it made a good long line, sufficient to act as a guide, a more than adequate substitute for a ball of string.

We need not have worried the following day I found my way to the iron fence. The owners upon closing the attraction had made a reasonable attempt at hiding it. Most of the fence was covered with corrugated iron, soil and rubble heaped against it. At a push with a hacksaw and plenty of time, we could use it as a way out. I was also aware that there may be another tunnel leading into the garden of a house, that I would look for another day.

Back in the Swimming Pool, everyone was looking nervous, the leader of the ever increasing band of brigands was stashing valuables in our cave entrance. Jack did give us some good news, he had forbid anyone to go up to the cave and posted guards below.

The following day we all listened, imagine being sat in the auditory canal, our stones and their stash, like having wax in you ear. But with so many of them outside on the beach, cheering and roaring, such a commotion we could not escape the din. Gunfire ensued, those automatic weapons did have ammunition. Like naughty children sent to bed, listening to the western our parents watched on the television. You heard the action, but could not see who was winning. At first we assumed rival brigands were fighting a war of attrition, with no migrants to feed off they were feeding off each other.

Jack and I went into the Powder Room, we heard voices closer, now two voices spoke.

“We should have joined forces like I said.” boomed the King.

“I know but those others would not listen and now we are being picked off one band at a time.” said the Pretender, he had obviously joined up again. “Do we have enough men to hold them?”

“Maybe, there must be over a thousand of them, and they're armed.”

said the King.

"Sir, another thousand moving around the hills to the north."

"Shit, there's got to be another what, eight hundred sat up the end of the valley leading off the beach." said the King. "We're are being surrounded."

"We must pull back along the coast, move west." said the Pretender.

"Or wait for the others to go down on the beach, we then attack the centre." said the King.

"But the groups on the beach will take us in the rear, the lot coming from the west are just out of range of our guns. If we move then they will attack us." said the Pretender.

Imagine an upside down T, like the T junction of a road. The police put a road block across two of the roads all except the other to which they are driving to around the ring road, it's not yet blocked. You have your eyes on both barricades, if those brigands move along the road to attack either they will have the other in their rear, reinforced by the third still moving into position.

"We leave a rear guard and attack their centre." shouted the King.

"Split our forces, we have at most seven hundred men."

"Leave a hundred on the beach to look like we are still holding, then I'll attack their centre, if they come from the east then we will support your hundred from above on the cliffs."

We heard a cheer, and a mass of men moving across the pebbles. There was a distant exchange of gunfire, then we heard an awesome sound, a vast number of feet trampling along the beach, guns blazing.

The thousand men coming from the east stood their ground, they were waiting for the other group to come from the west. The man commanding this operation put more men on the beach because he considered it a larger expanse and did not want to be out flanked. Besides he doubted that faced with such a large number they would split and attack his centre. This old military man was working on the principle that with such odds the enemy would either retreat while it could or surrender. The old general had a brigand retreat covered. The Pretender was surprised when the hundred he commanded, were not charged. Meanwhile the

inexperienced eight hundred or so who stood at the head of the valley, were taken aback. Against the ruthless, battle hardened brigands their extra numbers were insufficient, many fell on both sides, the brigands at first seemed to be loosing as they climbed over lines of fallen comrades, however the King had sent a small group round behind, and when these opened fire the remainder of the eight hundred panicked, most were cut down trying to flee.

Now the King wheeled his depleted men around, lined them up along the cliff top marched them forwards, they opened fire on the thousand standing on the east of the beach. The old general charged the line of one hundred brigands, the Pretender held. The thousand shot in vain, most short of ammunition, many began to flee east. The band that had attacked the eight hundred in the rear had now reformed behind rocks in the path of those in full retreat. In panic those who still stood ran towards the sea, like the eight hundred in the valley few escaped. To the west the remaining thousand men had reached their position, from where they saw the slaughter.

The King now had no more than four hundred, this was good odds, the thousand who stood in his way had lots of vengeance and passion to avenge these butchers but little else. This group's commander knew when it was better to withdraw. That evening we endured hours of revelry as the King and Pretender celebrated their victory. The King grew in stature, his plan had worked, he now doubted that what remained of the migrants would mount another attack. Come winter he would have them for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

The smell of barbecued meat wafted through the air. We knew not what they used for fuel but the stench was foul.

Setting Sail

William was getting more and more frustrated as the days went on, weeks went by, the barbecues continued. Then we heard a change in the weather, this prompted the King to move his forces in search of shelter. There was a moment of tension when we heard them retrieving the treasures. Orders were given to collect the remaining dead, then we heard the brigands move off.

William threw caution to the wind, and began like a proverbial bull in the china shop dismantling our stone barricade. I had to tactfully suggest that he take a bit more care, he was throwing rock and stone rather haphazardly, narrowly missing demolishing the basin. He stared at me, "Why do we need the basin?, we build the boat and sail for France." "The weather may delay that." I replied, to which there were sounds of agreement especially from the women who rather cherished the Powder Room.

William looked out towards the setting sun, it seemed to late to start assembling his boat, but he was determined, pulling parts into the entrance cave. Jack reminded him that he lacked a sail. William pointed to the glut of cloths, even the four hundred brigands could not use all the cloths from eighteen hundred bodies.

At dusk, William ordered Robin and Jason to collect suitable sail material, strong fabrics such as nylon rain coats. When I pointed out that food stocks were almost depleted he snapped my head off, "Go get some food then."

"We need someone on watch," I said, "The women would be busy sail making."

Jack, came with me, he asked if I thought going by boat now was sensible, at the end of the summer.

"Even if we made it to France we will still have to endure the winter, at least here we have shelter and food, even if we do have to live on dried seaweed." he said, and these were wise words. I saw no way of going over the mountains into Spain this late. To travel across France, where for all we know there are brigands too and sit at the base of the Pyrennes for maybe months. Sailing direct to Spain on a rickety raft, with little steerage and our only navigational aid my old compass, was not an option. Especially now the weather was turning colder again.

I left Jack sitting on the lookout rock, he doubted the brigands would come back for food, they had enough for months. He watched as garments discarded from barbecued bodies floated about the beach on the breeze, some like ghosts would float around then disappear. I busied myself collecting mussels and seaweed, there were a few shrimps but the little buggers were so fast you could not catch them.

Back at the cave entrance Jason was arguing with William, he disliked the idea of building the boat so close to the cave. Not only did it signal our position, but we would have to haul this monster raft over great sheets of rock. William argued it was easier to assemble, safer from high tides and we could defend it if others took a liking to it. Jason was not convinced, and left Robin to help his brother, while he came down to help gather food.

William was furious, he was the one doing all the real work he was the one building the boat that would take us to safety. Jane tried as best she could to comfort his tender pride. Robin was now helping him get all the parts laid out on the pebbles, the ladies using the few sewing materials we had scavenged in the town put together two magnificent sails. One was a spare, to be at sea without a sail would not do, if one ripped or the mast broke he wanted backup. The raft was like a giant pallet, except it was longer in one dimension, the bottles were sandwiched between the planks to aid buoyancy.

In the centre was a strong enclosure, it buttressed the mast, made from the upright of the round washing line, the jib made from another parts bolted together. In the box, went jars of food and bottles of water, along with some essential tools. At the rear were fixings for two rudders, although one was needed he lashed a spare to the deck along with the spare mast, and spare sail. Some of the lighter metal brackets, retrieved from the shop fittings were used around the edge, along with rope to form a safety barrier.

William only realised the sense of Jacks words when he got us together to move the beast. Even with all eight of us, it hardly moved off the ground. Jack came up with an idea, "What if we meaning him and me, go into town and get you some wheels." There were certainly plenty, but I pointed out that our brigands may be in residence.

William, insisted that we go, "Look it's now or never, if there are brigands surely you and Jack will smell their barbecues."

Jack and I ambled off the beach, Jason none to happy came running after us. "Can I come?" he said, gun in hand.

"If we have to dismantle a vehicle I guess and extra pair of eyes on

watch would be handy.” I said looking at Jack.

“Sure.” said Jack, and we started the climb up the side of the valley.

Jack turned to me, “You know William is a bloody good craftsman and I dare say a good farmer, but he’s a bloody shit leader. Why the fuck did we not put our foot down and get him to wait.”

“Because he’s built like a brick shit house.” said Jason, “Ask Robin, you don’t argue with William once he’s set his mind on something.”

“Do you think we will all fit on that boat?” which may have seemed like a silly question but it did not seem big enough for eight, unless you wanted the sharks to cut your toenails.

“Nop,” said Jack, “And I don’t care, you’d have to be an idiot to go at this end of the summer.”

Jason watched both of us as we continued our debate, an exchange that stopped when we reached the ridge overlooking the town. The three of us stayed low, I did my detailed scan, Jason asking several times, and Jack telling him to be patient, or he’ll be the next barbecue.

“I think they must have gone west.” I said, looking at the other two for a consensus. Jack reminded me that the migrant army may not have, and they weren’t to know we were friendly. I looked again this time scanning the surrounding country for signs of movement.

Eventually I took the lead, it was mad, we did not even agree with the plan yet we were assisting, I questioned Jack on this. He shrugged and Jason gave an equally blank look. The first car we found with a compete set of wheels was an old Volvo, Jack suggested we take the body, transmission and engine off and wheel the subframe over the hills. Jason shook his head, not a Volvo it’s too heavy, he looked across the street, we followed him, walking further and further dismissing car after car, now Jack was getting tense.

“What’s up with all those other cars?” he said to Jason pulling him up.

“Trust me, we don’t want to be here all day, we need a car that will be easy to dismantle, right and these mass produced, made by robots aren’t trust me.” he said, had we known is background we may have been more inclined. Robin and Jason had bought an old Gilburn and were doing it up, this was a car with a fibreglass body, he knew all about assembling this type of vehicle.

In the end we settled for the chassis of old Rover. Our method of disassembly was a bit of brute force and ignorance with a pinch of reason and liberal use of adjustable spanners and hammer. We followed the line of the road as far as possible, pushing the subframe up the hill, Jason had suggested taking it along the beach, Jack mentioned rocks, I seconded that, so we went up over the top, once we got it in the right direction we used a bit of rope to fix the steering in position. Getting it up the top was hell, even without its innards. The plateaux along the top was relatively easy going, save for some field hedge remains, which we circumnavigated. We also had to move a few bodies left over from the battle. We took it rather a long way around to the head of the valley, Jack wanted to just let it go down our usual slope, which may well have buckled the chassis making it useless. The sun was sinking on the horizon when we let the car roll down to the beach. It bounced around a bit, overshot the land and ended up ploughing a furrow in the pebbles, this caused William to come running over. It took us a good deal longer, as we swaggered back, he stood and stared at us.

"Land Rover, that's what I said, it has a higher clearance." Being a farmer he new about these things. Unfortunately our explanation that there was a shortage of such vehicles cut no ice. "Come on then lets get this chassis over to the boat."

We all shook our heads and wandered back to the cave, the light was almost gone and we were done in. The women sensed the tension, they put it down to the voyage into the unknown we were apparently all about to make. William stood for a moment then came running after us, "I want to leave first thing in the morning so you lot shift your arses and lets move this thing, there'll be plenty of time for rest on the boat."

We ignored him, he came in after us, "Look William, we have just bust our guts getting that thing here we are tired and need to rest, sorry but you will have to wait." I said, trying to be reasonable. He grabbed me by the collar. "William." One sharp word from a lady whom I had never seen angry before. At this interjection by Sweetpea I was saved from his wroth.

Alice huddled up to me, the ladies had elected to take the watch, Sweetpea expressed her concern that we were all overtired and that was why we were obstreperous.

In the morning William got another surprise, as a farmer he was used to being his own boss, cattle went where he herded them. When first Jack then I announced we were not going, he was taken aback. "So who else is not going?"

Jason, announce he wasn't leaving either, Alice looked at me, then at William and shook her head.

"So it looks like it's Mother, Jane, and Robin then." he said, making a rash assumption.

Robin looked sad, he stood silent for a moment, then said, "If Jason's staying so am I."

William, had that 'I might have known.' look on his face, he turned and looked at his mother and wife. Jane spoke first saying she trusted his boat and his judgement, his mother said "Here here." Her powers of persuasion could not sway Robin or Jason to change their minds.

We all left the safety of the cave, Alice being the lightest build of all, was posted to the lookout rock. The rest of us walked over to the Rover chassis, William engaged his brain and with some rope and raw muscle power we had it shifted, wheeling it along to the flat rock slabs nearest the boat.

Using the rope and bits of drift wood we were able to drag the raft across the pebbles. William relented after we found we still could not lift it, taking off the oars, sails, masts and provisions lightened it sufficiently that with Jane also assisting the six of us managed to get it on to the chassis. Sweetpea had guided us, now William lost no time in reattaching all we had removed.

Sweetpea had a final try at changing Robin's mind, but with the sea conditions relatively calm, William did not let this continue long. We all pulled the great bulk down towards the sea, a few times we had to back up and try again upon hitting an awkward ridge or inconvenient rock.

We were near to launch, the wheels were already in water and the tide was on the change. "William," I said, handing him my compass, "And remember what I said about tacking into the wind, you will need to keep zigzagging, and be no more than forty-five degrees into the wind."

"Thanks." he replied, getting the sail ready. Jane had a paddle in hand

as they would have to work hard to get off the beach, the onshore wind was quite strong.

"Keep well off shore or you may get caught in the tides or hit rocks." I continued.

Sweetpea, handed me her rifle, "You have this dear, all those brigands around."

I pushed it back, "You'll need it there may be brigands or worse in France."

"I have Stanley's revolver, please," she said "Take it." She handed it to me again, a cloth bag tied to it full of ammunition.

"Go on mate, take it." said William, I was not sure if he was saying thanks for the compass or just eager to leave.

I grabbed the rifle slung it over my shoulders and joined the others in pushing William's beast into the sea. It floated well, being flat bottomed had disadvantages in a storm, but leaving this beach it was a godsend. Jane and Sweetpea paddled hard just to keep it from floating back, William raised the sail and she started moving to the east, Sweetpea moved from the side to take the rudder, or should I say tiler. Jane kept paddling on the other side.

As they set sail the onshore wind blew them back, William had to get used to tacking into the wind, I shouted instructions. The craft, moved slowly away to the east, William changed tack and came back our way easing the boat out to deeper water. By his determination and strength I had a feeling with a fair weather he may make it across the channel. With three on board the raft handled well, but I could not imagine it would have done so well with all of us.

When we were sure they were easing in the right direction, we made for shore, the water was getting deep and we were in danger of getting swept under by the current. I urged us all to hold hands, Jack looked at me, then realised why when he almost fell. We met Alice back at the lookout rock, Jason and Robin wanted to forage, I pointed out that with the boat in the water it might attract attention from elsewhere along the coast, we would stick out like a sore thumb.

We all sat in the Entrance cave each taking it in turns to watch the speck on the horizon getting smaller. When I had the telescope I made a sweep of each headland, just to check for unwanted visitors. Lucky I did, looking

out on the headland to the west was another man, brigand or migrant we knew not, but he had seen the slow progress of the boat.

"There's someone watching from the headland to the west?"

"Who?" asked Jack.

"No idea too faraway can't tell, but I think we had better put the stone in the hole tonight."

"We should have collected more food." said Jason.

"And been spotted." said Jack, looking at me.

Robin turned to his friend gave him a hug and kiss and said "He's right." The two of them went back into the Swimming Pool room, the store in the Coffee Grinder was much depleted, a few bits of scrap wood, some driftwood, we did have a glut of nuts, bolts, screws and nails. There was also a fine collection of tools so food and wood were the only items we could have used more of.

Life at Sea

While we hunkered down that night, the little boat drifted further into the channel. The sea remained calm and with the compass, William steered a good course. He had no idea of, tides, currents, sea states, or any ocean charts showing hazards. This was seat of your pants sailing, not to be recommended. If they got into trouble, they had no flares, even if they had there was no air sea rescue or lifeboats. They did not have to worry about the large number of ships that once plied this waterway and the channel was many miles narrower because of the drop in sea level. Whales were a potential danger, Orca would sink that raft in seconds. The sea life that used to inhabit the Arctic had now moved further south, the habitat being suited to its needs.

William was not one to admit fear or defeat, but he had those feelings now. All the sounds became amplified, as he tired through the night, he became more afraid. Jane who had found sleeping impossible offered to take over the rudder. He accepted the chance of a rest. In the morning the sea was still calm, Sweetpea was not, she wondered why they had not reached France yet.

Jane explained this was not Sea France and that William was doing his best.

William had no idea where they were all he could say is they were

heading south south east, he could not account for drift but hoped to reach the coast somewhere near Cherbourg. A pod of dolphins had found them on the third day. They were all becoming anxious, to Williams relief he sighted land, so far they had only minor incidents. A couple of buoyancy bottles had floated off on their own adventure. An Arctic Tern flew over head, which they took as a good omen.

Closing in on the shoreline, they were stunned at all the small boats that littered the beach, these were the reminders of those who had fled earlier. Yet the beach was otherwise devoid of human presence. With a strong inshore wind William had the craft going at a fair rate, unfortunately he did not have his eyes on the surface, they were going too fast, the raft pushed low at the front by the wind in its sail, snagged a lone rock. This sent it in a slow spin, the strong wind now grabbed the sail still pushing the damaged craft towards the shore but no longer in a controlled manner.

The rudder hit something below the surface, William almost went with it as it swung round with some force, breaking off, leaving a trail of broken wood. They then got caught side on by a wave breaking on the beach, it almost pushed the craft over, only William's quick change of position kept the craft upright. Another wave pushed it hard, shoving it onto the sand, William jumped out and pulled on a rope trying to haul it, Jane got off and helped. Sweetpea clung on for dear life, the surf breaking over her, the swell pulling back on her and the raft. As the wave receded, William rushed to pull his mother off and onto the beach. As he did so the now lighter raft nearly sliced his legs as the next wave lifted it, Jane was struggling as the raft slipped back down with the receding water line. William rushed to her, they had to get it in, they needed the supplies. When Sweetpea had composed herself she came the their assistance.

The three of them got the raft up far enough for long enough so that William could retrieve the guns, food, and tools. Then as the tide rose, the raft was seized by Neptune, playing with it as you might play with a toy boat in the bath. In time this flotsam, or at least most of it would through wind and currents drift back towards home.

The three of them looked around the barren landscape, guns at the ready they marched several miles before reaching the old shoreline. The

first landfall was damp boggy marsh, they had to move back to the rocks some way before feeling safe underfoot. Sitting in the rocks they decided to change into dry cloths, the weather was getting much colder, a storm was brewing and without the many layers of protection they would not survive.

Back in our cave we were still holed up, the raft had attracted the attention of the brigands' lookouts who were now encamped in the next big town along the coast. William was meanwhile taking the ladies south, trying to find more solid ground, and shelter. He seemed to be lucky, ahead the remains of a concrete bunker left from the second world war. It was vacant, so they took possession, stashing their supplies in a dry corner, tired and exhausted they all slept well that night. Jack would have insisted on posting a watch, but they did not care.

In the morning William was sitting on the bunker roof, Jane found the ladder and joined him.

"We wouldn't have made it would we?"

"With the others on board?" said William.

She nodded.

"I doubt it, the raft should have been much bigger."

"But we did not have the time or the materials, did we?"

"No." said William shaking his head.

"Do you think they will be ok?"

"I hope so." he said, "We could wait here till summer. I have some tools, we could fix up one of those old boats." he said, pointing to the large collection that was pulled up just above high water. We can live of the sea, this place is pretty isolated, and easy to defend, it would be better to travel next summer, we would not get across the mountains now.

Jane gave him a hug, she too was thinking of us.

Neither of them had really weighed up the practicalities, like how to get one of those real boats into the water, how to navigate back to us.

Winter

As the weather got harsher, the brigands pushed further south into the southernmost tip of England, partly in the hope of better weather and partly because their quarry had pushed on into Cornwall.

We did not know this and for some time remained starving in hiding. It was lack of food that finally forced our hand. Jack and I were the first to venture out on reconnaissance, the ground was again snow covered, the ice slopes treacherous in places. We saw no signs of life, reporting back, Robin and Jason braved the icy rocks and brought us as much as they could carry. They did this for several days running, making the most of the breaks in the weather. Alice put lots in storage, cooking meagre rations.

We took to blocking the entrance with stones, this time to prevent the icy wind whistling through. Inside dry and relatively warm we sat mostly in the Swimming Pool, sleeping as much as we could. Each day Jack would look out and check the weather, on good days, Robin and Jason did their bit, for which we were very grateful. At times I would go up to Alice's Wonderland with Alice just to admire it, well more to admire each other. Jack often sat in the Powder Room listening on watch, for what we did not understand as only an idiot would move in these conditions. Robin and Jason would have their moment.

It was on one such occasion when I looked into Alice's eyes, the cavern was a bit warmer than the inside of your fridge, considering the temperature outside could do deep freeze ten star we were quite comfortable. She gave me more than just a hug, it was more like tugging a bell and shouting all on board. Each of us peeled away the layers, for a moment we sat in our birthday suits looking at each other, I have no idea what she was thinking, but I remembered my parents telling me I must respect women and not get them into trouble. This did not mean not complaining about a rude waitress; no deciphering their code it meant be careful, use a condom. Now where I thought do I get one of those, I looked at her beautiful body, had we had more food I was in no doubt her figure would have been very shapely. How women of the past could end up buying the wrong bra size I shall never know, they only had to ask a man. I used my genetically engineered statistical analysis system to determine her stats, reckoning that with a good food supply she would have nicely filled a 34G. Yes my friends, my brain may be cold but my one track mind was functioning at full power.

Shrinkage, in the cold, well lets just say you'd get used to this environment, Eskimos did! While my middle wicket rose to the occasion,

I did wonder about the Eskimos, surely of any humans, they must be thriving. Could you imagine the Eskimos becoming a world super power? Do raised testosterone levels make men dafter than they already are?

Oh, that felt good, I shunted my train into her engine shed, blew my whistle and checked the locomotion, the feel of her soft breasts added extra stimulation, I thought I might pass out due to lack of blood in the brain. Then I began to wonder if sex starved the brain of oxygen, thus depleting those brain cells, and this was the reason women became smarter than men? Perhaps the inverse square law applies to the amount of sex had in relation to the intelligence level measured.

Another evening when we were all huddled together in the Swimming Pool room, Alice looked at me as I shone the light of my torch across the pool of water, playing with reflections, we strained to see the far side, was there another tunnel, more caves? I explained to her and the others, my nightmare scenario, that we are all sitting feeling safe and secure, when the brigands find another entrance, come through the other end of this cave and step into inch deep water. Jack also asked that from time to time we check the gate in the quarry caves, I doubted anyone who did not have a torch would even consider coming down such a long and torturous route, but we had little else to do, so checking it made sense.

I then turned to another project, I asked Alice to hold the torch, which she did winding it every so often. I had picked up a piece of coke, an old wireless earpiece, and paper clip on our visits to town, with one of the bits of scrap wood and a few screws, this assembled into a crystal set, we had a radio. Crystal sets need no additional power, they are basic but functional. It was night time, the best time to listen for signals as the layers of the upper atmosphere, devoid of solar radiation change their characteristics and channel the signals which bounce like a ball between two walls, technically it's Ionospheric propagation. I wanted to hear something anything, so did the others, nothing. I moved the end of the paper clip around on the lump of coal. Then attempting a crude form of tuning with a few metal plates each on a nail, with plastic between as insulation, static. Jack asked if it might work better in the entrance, "If the weather is not blowing our way then it's worth a try." I replied eager to experiment.

As we sat in the cold entrance, while Jack became more animated with anticipation, and Alice marvelled at the ingenuity, Robin and Jason got colder and more sceptical. Jack turned angrily to them and shushed them. He had seen my other hand rise, and the lights go on in my eyes. In the tradition of ladies first I passed the earpiece to Alice, "Madrid" she screamed, Jack was champing at the bit. She passed it to him, he listened, "It's in Spanish." he said, with a beaming grin.

"What's it say said Alice." looking eagerly, at him, even Robin and Jason were showing an interest.

"Don't know, never did Spanish, anyone else." Robin and Jason took their turns.

Jack asked if I spoke Spanish, I told him only a little from a self study course, Jack taped Jason, "Let the Professor see if he can understand what they're saying."

I can not explain the feelings we were having, but emotion wells up inside you. We were surrounded by hostility, and here was a beacon of hope, civilization, friendly people. I listened intently, if only I had a book, but it was no use searching for them, libraries, bookshops, newsagents and such like were just sources of paper to light fires as people struggled to stay alive.

"Something about the European forces in Spain helping the Spanish military to repulse an attack, bla bla bla, north Africa, don't know maybe they're fighting there, maybe, ah repelled and invasion." The signal faded in and out.

Alice was the first to speak, "So perhaps with the sea levels down, the Straights of Gibraltar are easier to cross?"

"And the North Africans unaffected by our harsh climate are now flexing their muscle." said Jason, "I remember they chose Spain for their holidays once before, there was that film."

Offered Robin, he to remembering the epic legend, "El Cid"

"Could be." I replied, with the weather getting worse and the signal gone we moved back inside, Jack did a fine job of putting the stone in the hole. When we were all back in the Swimming Pool room Jack asked, "So how come they have power?"

"Spain embraced wind power, the critics said it was to intermittent. The Spanish proved them wrong, they put so many generators up that there was always somewhere blowing a generator around. They put solar

water heating in almost every home, so now they are the only ones with the lights on.”

“Don't the North Africans have power,” asked Robin, “They had plenty of oil.”

“Yes but killing all the foreigners that maintained the systems was not a smart move.”

“Ah!”

“How do you know all that?” said Alice.

“Used to listen to short wave radio, mostly in German.”

“Could we talk to Spain, could you make a transmitter?” asked Jack, who's enthusiasm was to coin a phrase, electric.

“I doubt if we could find the parts or my mind recall a suitable circuit.” As I spoke his face dropped. “Perhaps we could find a radio ham in that town, might find the site of a ham's shed, possibly find a radio. Not sure what we would do for power, besides we could do with some extra lights.”

His enthusiasm soared again. “If there is a break in this weather.” said Jack, he was so eager, like a child waiting for Christmas.

“If we can see the grass then it's worth a look.” I responded, though I doubted we'd get enough of a hot spell in what was once autumn to achieve our aim, but each day it did not stop Jack, like one of the statues on the old fashioned clocks coming out of the little doorway to tell if fair weather or foul.

Jack tugged at my sleeves, it was early morning there was no reason to get up. Jack thought otherwise, he could see the grass. “We must go.” he pleaded, Alice tugged at me, soon the three of us were on our mission. Alice was a concern to me, but she had never been on one of our missions, we were armed, and it was unlikely that the brigands would be up to much at this time of year.

There was still a lot of ice around, the ground was frozen solid, one good thing we would leave no tracks. When we reached the town we avoided the roads and pavements, now I know you the reader are not going to believe this but the council failed to grit them. Staff shortage no doubt, trekking across the gardens higher up seemed like our best bet, the sort of house a radio ham would favour. When we passed the remains of the Rover we had dismantled we recovered the alternator and most of the

associated electrics.

A hand drill, now there was a rare commodity, a retired person most likely had it in their stash. Drill bits and a few old baking tins, the same chap also had some tin snips, very handy. Jack found a piece of bicycle frame, asked if it was useful, I should say so. Alice seemed to have eagle eyes, for she would find the most minute items, a metal scribe, and dividers, a tiny finger drill. When we moved on several doors down we hit jackpot. Jack held up a small box with some wires hanging from it. Jack bundled it and anything else he could find nearby into one of our old rucksacks.

We still had no extra lighting, it was most probably foolish to think that people would not have taken such things with them. I had visions of the EU flash light mountain at the French end of the Tunnel. I suggested rather than looking for torches, that Alice with her keen sight look for light bulbs of any kind, rechargeable batteries, and LEDs explaining that they were like the small red lights some used on bicycles, also any electronic components. I thought of us as a post modern pre-layered archaeologists.

We made the most of this window of opportunity, searching only a few sites but doing it thoroughly. At the end of the day leaving site with two bulging rucksacks, and a quantity of larger tools and pieces of metal and plastic. On seeing the collection in the Coffee Grinder, Robin remarked that I was to technology what his brother was to wood. Jason's comment had us splitting our sides, "Well it may not float like the boat, but it's much prettier."

For the rest of the week the weather got slowly worse, Jason and Robin made some courageous attempts at foraging for food. They battled against ferocious winds and icy rocks, we have no idea how they stayed upright. In these final sorties our collection of drift wood increased, allowing Alice to do all sorts of permutations of mussels, winkles, and seaweed. Across in France it was a degree or so warmer, but the old gun emplacement was not so snug as a cave, Sweetpea was struggling, William and Jane had put her down in the old ammunition stores this was below ground and draft free, it was difficult because they had no lighting, William had gathered lots of reeds from the marshes and was using that

to try and keep some kind of fire.

Over here we huddled around Alice's small cooking fire. It amazed me how we got these going. My house in the village had an open fire and even with a cheap lighter, I got through a whole box of fire-lighters and still ended up flameless.

Probing and Playing

When Alice and I went exploring the caves we literally left the others in the dark. In the Coffee Grinder workshop Alice held my little wind-up torch over the patient, as from a hotch potch of parts I made a Frankenstein's monster of a generator. Mounting the alternator on the bicycle frame, I drilled a plate attached to the end and fixed some blades artistically cut from the baking tins. This contraption was secured just behind the cave entrance so it was not visible but subject to the full force of the onshore winds, two wires brought the power back to the rectifier and regulator, keeping them out of the freezing conditions, this then charged the car battery also from our favourite Rover. Most of the wires were either crimped or twisted together and taped as we had no solder or soldering iron.

Lots of wire, a resistor and a mixed bag of LEDs found by Alice and it was like Christmas. We wonder if the person who had bought the mixed bag had intended them for such a purpose, we hoped he would be pleased, or maybe it was a she? Alice and I put off checking the pool, word association, water, second word cold, reaction, negative. We went down our tunnel to the Quarry caves, checked the entrance, the small gap left near the top, possibly I wondered for bats? Was now frozen over, snow had piled up against the bars and frozen solid.

Moving back down through the different eras of working we searched for this passage to the surface. Having no luck I took us back to the part that had been used as a Catholic church during times of persecution. The former owner of the house had used this facility so we guessed it must be nearby. No luck it was fruitless, still we had a free look around, it was just as it had been on my last visit as a tourist.

On arrival back in our caves, Jack now sitting in illumination showed off his boat. Carved from a lump of scrap it was a fine piece of

workmanship. "Do you think we will all fit in?" I asked, raising a laugh. Jack explained, the curtain hook eye at the back was for string. In the middle was a mast, a wire rod that went straight through. The rod was adjustable, he decided it was easier to show us.

We all watched as the little boat sailed out across the pool, he pulled it back pushed the rod down pushed it out, pulled it back, pushed the rod down, pushed it out. We got the idea, he was trying to use it to check the depth of water. The principle was good, like a sea captain of old dropping the line to check the draught below his ship. The boat really needed a motor and a way of dropping a line, neither were immediately available.

I went into the Coffee Grinder, picked the one bar left from the round washing line, attached a piece of the chord that had been used to hang the cloths on, so as not to loose it. I lay near the pool edge poking around for the bottom, the water level never rose or fell so we assumed it was not connected to the sea, lucky for us, or we might have lost some stores and had wet dreams! Around the accessible edge there was a gentle slope, at arms length it appeared to be approximately half a metre deep, still sloping downward. We could have used one of those inflatable boats, the sort that normally float out to sea with the navigationally challenged on board.

This challenge would wait another day, Jack was keen for me to get the ham radio set going. Alas I was tired, so that to had to wait till the following day.

"Will nurse Alice helped me resuscitate Mr R Transmitter in the Coffee Grinder." Jack unknown to us had reinvented the wheel and was giving Robin, and Jason a giggle. It was when we heard Jason say, "Ah look bless him, his gone fishing." that we had to take a look. Jack sat like a pond side gnome. He had used a long piece of wood onto which he had lashed the rod from the washing line. With the line on the end and a big old bolt weighing it down he let the line out until it went slack. He had a mark on the line indicating the surface level, measured the distance from the mark to its new position down the rod, this told him exactly how deep our pond was. The lad was charting the pool bed, as mariners had charted the sea bed.

"Magnificent", I said, "That so simple but so effective, well done." "Three cheers for the Professors student", said Jason, we all did the hip hip hara routine. Jack was using the metal scribe to write the depths by scratching the surface of a non-stick baking tray. Alice looked at the tin, "Don't worry I doubt we'll need it for cakes." I said, she grinned and we went back to our operation. This little beauty ran on twelve volts, in the destruction of its home, the radio had suffered minor damage, it's solid metal construction protecting it from the worst. A few loose wires in the external connections to the microphone and power were soon sorted. The LEDs running on our 12 volt supply took little current, the trickle charge from the windmill was quite sufficient. The radio transmitter would be somewhat more hungry to feed. Taking wires to the battery Alice accidentally turned the lights out, which caused some frivolous remarks.

She soon had the lights back up and the two power leads to the radio. Alice returned sitting by me for the big moment, I flicked the on switch, the dial lit up, there was a crackle and hiss from the speaker, I turned it off. The others unaware that this was being done in stages came to see if we were operational. Next part is to fix an aerial and ground lead. Our plan was to put the aerial on the cliff, but we would need to hide it well, and that called for good weather. For a test we hung the wire down from the entrance, which in the current weather conditions it was soon hidden under a layer of snow.

For the real test we waited until evening, all stood silent behind me, I flicked the switch, tuning the dial to listen for other hams. Scanning the primary bands, nothing, even that transmission from Spain would be good, nothing. To conserve the battery I suggested we try later.

William

The tall, strong man was beginning to suffer, Jane would keep watch when he left the bunker but he was the one doing most of the work, he was the one collecting wood from a broken boat, dragging his kindling nearly a kilometre across the ice, just for firewood. He also spent much time and precious energy scouting the shore for anything edible. He had to keep going, he told himself, for mothers sake.

Sweetpea was in her early seventies and not cut-out for these Arctic conditions. With lack of food and only her thick layers of clothing for

warmth she was in danger of hypothermia. When they had enough wood for a fire, Jane would use the tiny saucepan they had to brew up a small broth. William knew they needed to move south, but he knew there would be little cover, this bunker was the best property on the market. His reconnaissance venture inland via an old raised track that led back through the marshes to firmer ground told him so.

He had seen the remains of houses, they were even worse than the ones in England. Across the water once the people got moving they left buildings with hard to reach roofs and the odd window frame. Here it had been different, as momentum built and order broke down, the hoards of migrating people from northern and central Europe had become a vast unstoppable mass, only the passes of the Pyrenees had slowed their progress. These fortified by the Spanish acted like a pressure regulator, the migrants that Spain had already accepted, the deluge of people landing by boat had now been settled. All realised that Spain could do no more, the peoples at the gates were given food and passage though Spain to North Africa. While people waited in France, like a jam on the motorway they got frustrated, angry, hungry and with emotions running high the south of France had been decimated.

William looked around what had been a small town, thousands of bodies many picked clean, lay strewn across the streets. In England when the tunnel became blocked, the old General had kept order and most of the migrants followed him to battle against the brigands. Here with much larger numbers and a mix of races and religions old rivalries broke out, who can blame them, they were trying to survive, resources were limited. In this once picturesque French village William saw even the houses flattened, their walls pushed over by men desperate for bricks to throw at their competitors. In the distance he could see a big block, all that had survived, the massive structure of a nuclear power station. He did not fancy sheltering in that untended monster.

William returned with nothing but depression, Jane was trying her best to keep their spirits up, when William told her of the destruction. She thought of something I had said, and mentioned it to him. A light went on inside William's head, perhaps they could move south after all, for now he rested, gathering his strength.

The following morning he went with Axe and Saw, this master of wood, this man who could measure by eye determined to build, this time with snow. He tried all morning with limited success, walls and arches fell, these mistakes taught him. He kept trying because he knew others could do it, so he could too. Once he got the angle right on the cut of the ice blocks and the size of the structure right by evening he had a snow covered structure to be proud of. He dragged Jane over to see, she was impressed, no man had ever built her a new house, they crawled inside, it was surprisingly cosie. Jane's excitement was infectious, Sweetpea who had given up hope now rallied.

William with his new found skill did not stop, he had to get them south, he could now build a shelter but how to move his mother and a store of provisions. He took his tools and trekked around the boats, he stopped and looked out to sea. In his thoughts he realised his original plan to wait and take a boat to get the rest of them, but mother came first. His eyes scanned the shore looking for a boat that had plywood sides, preferably one with strips of wood along the outside. Many boats had fibreglass hulls, a few of steel, he passed a yacht, canted over, the keel stretched out at an angle across the mud, like the fin of a stranded whale beached on its side.

The Bobbin, a little red fishing boat, once the pride of its owner. "Sorry mate." he said, cutting through its sides. He pulled out a strip of ply compete with runners about six foot long. With some tools he had and some screws brought from England he set to work on a sledge, the curve of the boats hull inward towards its bow, gave the sledge an upturn at the front. It was not very wide, but no matter, his mother would be able to sit on it. William wrenched a plastic bucket seat from the cabin and screwed that onto the back. As he worked he wondered why these boats had not been stripped of their wood.

He could not know, that when the people arrived in good weather they continued on their way south. Nor that others from the continent who travelled past, were not interested in going north through a marsh to the sea, they just ravaged the villages and towns. William looked at his work, tried pushing it across the ice, it worked well. He had strengthened the top for the long journey ahead, using planks and battens stripped from the flat rear deck of the vessel. The Bobbin, red with snow icing now

looked like one of those decorative cakes to good to eat, but slice you must, the slices in its sides and deck would hasten its decay.

Jane was thrilled, her husband was so clever, she felt safe with this man even if he could be a bit stubborn at times. The following day the weather was cold but free of storms. William loaded the box he had fitted behind the bucket seat. In the front he tied on a bag of spare clothing, mother sat in the seat, Jane pulled on a rope in the front and he pushed on a bar, its metal work, two elegant curved Vs, had once sat on the front of the yacht. William determined that they should keep moving along the flat shoreline, it did undulate but the layers of snow and ice made travelling easy. Although longer than going inland, there was no chance of getting lost, and going around in circles. Not that he would, he still had my compass.

When the millions of people had migrated south before the last winter, so had most animals, the majority slaughtered for food, if it moved you can bet somebody would have a go at killing it. Rats, mice, rabbits, birds, bigger animals, dogs, cats, animals that once lived in Zoos. There were a few hardy lions that escaped, most of the Siberian tigers now in the wild were escapees roaming southern France. European Bison from Poland had managed by luck to escape the worst of the human feeding frenzy, now they and some deer had only to cope with the cold and a few tenacious wolves.

The vast bulk of humans migrating had kept to the relative safety of the motorway system which even on foot, provided a level path that you knew went somewhere. Most of the massive concrete bridges still stood, in a few locations where the weight of ice and snow had over whelmed them, trails down the valley sides and up the other had been worn. All would be swept away by the encroaching walls of ice. People exhausted by the long journey, being unused to walking such distance succumbed to cold and hunger. They dropped to the ground, relatives did not stop to bury them. Behind them were an inexorable column, so all marched on crushing the fallen, bodies that resurfaced the road with blood and bone, black tarmac became white and red, the blood freezing where the road was free of people it looked like the road had the pox.

At first ambassadors from all countries in Spain, made firm

representations to allow their fellow countrymen in. When waves of immigrants arrived the communities struggled with food and provisions. Marshal law was declared, even with such powers politicians struggled, the fortifications along the boarder passes became like an apple press. The massive walls had bodies crushed against them. People marching up the passes could not see ahead, they just knew the column kept moving and so did they, all the time shuffling along, slower and slower until they too were crushed. Only a few intrepid explorers who went over the mountains got through, many of these perished, falling through crevasses, slipping and breaking their limbs. Storms at sea and the desperate weather conditions in the Pyrennes made the final decisions. Overcrowded and at breaking point, many warmed to the idea of going further south. This brought relief to some but misery to the people of those lands, and continued the migrants struggle.

William and his family had covered a vast distance, racing though his mind was the idea that they may be able to use the icy conditions to go around the side of the Pyrennes, this spurred him on. Now he was sure that those who stayed in the cave had missed an opportunity. The sun was low in the sky when Jane finally persuaded him to stop, he was like a man possessed. Jane had picked a good spot, behind, a headland stood between them and the cold winds that blew from the north.

William set to work, cutting his blocks of ice, he was racing against the sunset. When he got both his wife and mother inside, the light had almost gone. He lined up the sledge in the doorway, pulled it in backwards so that the upturned prow helped to block the doorway. The narrowness of the sledge, had proved a befit, it was vital for their journey and with no idea who or what was out there he wanted it close. Mother was able to sit in her seat, he and Jane sat on the bundle of spare cloths, they all huddled together and dozed peacefully.

William closest to the door was woken, by scratching and snarling. A lean mean feral dog had tracked their scent, he was clawing at the sledge trying to get past. His head poked over the top of the prow, snarling, his lips curled back, teeth on show, this was one hungry mutt. He had seen humans kill other dogs from his pack, he was the last surviving on his wits he had outsmarted them. Now he was desperate for food, and if humans can eat his kind they he determined to eat their kind.

William like most English had a soft spot for dogs, being a farmer his dog, poor old Floss had been no pet. She had worked hard rounding up the sheep, but he loved her and was sad when the cold had taken her. He did not want to kill this dog, yet instinctively he grabbed his gun. "Perhaps if we feed it?" said Jane, she knew how her husband was feeling. "We can hardly feed ourselves, besides this is a wild creature, not like old Floss." as he said it, a tear welled in his eye, he thought of Floss when he first held the tiny puppy. A friend and neighbour had just had a litter of pups. Old Burt had let him have first pick, Sandy, William's previous dog was getting on a bit. Sandy would teach Floss the tricks of her trade, little Floss how she had looked up at him, those sad eyes, that look. The dog barked and snarled, snapping William back to the current predicament.

He held the shotgun to his shoulder, finger on the trigger, sighted his target between the eyes. The dog went quiet, this mangy creature was within inches of the barrel, its lips still curled back. William this big strong fellow, who could kill most animals without a second thought, could not do it, he put the gun down on the sledge, "Pass me a jar of mussels." Sweetpea, reached behind into the box and passed one to Jane. William took it opened the lid, placed some along the line of the two barrels and offered the end of the gun up to the dogs mouth. The dogs nose twitched, his lips dropped, no longer was he snarling, or growling, delicately he took the food from the end of the gun. He barked and backed out of the entrance tunnel, they listened as he ran off. Jane put the lid back on the jar and passed it back to her mother-in-law.

The following day they pushed on, crossing a frozen river near the mouth of an estuary they had come quite a way inland, it took them a while to find a sufficiently frozen section to cross, the ground was uneven and the sledge slowed their progress, Jane helped William lift it over boulders. The salt water in the tidal part of estuary mouth had made the ice too thin to cross. Now they made the arduous trek back down the other side to once again pick up the old beach.

They had not gone far, when William spotted a suitable place to forage. He traipsed over the slippery ice and snow covered rocks, nearer the shore they were cold and wet, washed by the sea spray. He pulled out a

solid old knife, and set to work easing the shellfish from their grip on the rocks. It was time well spent, the incoming tide prevented him collecting more, he retreated the moment it turned. Unfamiliar with this coast he had no idea how fast the sea would move, but he knew that over these flat, lightly shelving beaches it could come in faster than a man can run. The rocks were solid but there were areas of mud, he had no desire to get trapped in it.

That night they slept in another of Williams constructions, well fed and relatively warm. The progress had bolstered Sweetpea, who was looking a bit perkier. In the morning they were woken by barking, their mutt was back for breakfast. With jars full of food and some to spare, William gave him a bit extra, the dog wagged his tail and ran off. In the morning they had not gone far when a snow storm started, William at first wanted to carry on, insisting it would blow over, Jane was concerned for mother-in-law insisting that they go back to the igloo. The idea of turning back did not appeal to this stern fellow, he worked hard and built another where they had stopped. As he put the icy bricks in place Jane smoothed snow into the joints, helped by the now heavy downfall. By the time they had finished it was coming down so hard that you could barely see a few metres. They pulled the sledge in and snuggled up.

Jane said to William, "You know this was the best decision, we may have got lost going back." He hugged her, holding her tight in his strong arms. The storm was the start of the winter onslaught. Even this far south the weather was harsh. All they could do was wait it out. William's enthusiastic dream of using the winter conditions to their benefit seemed to him less likely. He had no idea how far they would need to travel, but he guessed it was hundreds of miles, with the number of days suitable for travelling reduced by bad weather and averaging maybe ten or fifteen miles a day he estimated it would take them months. As they sat dozing, Sweetpea was woken by a whimpering, she woke her son and daughter-in-law. It was the mutt, its paws raw where it had been unable to dig a burrow in the frozen ground. The poor dog was in a bad way, William asked Jane and Sweetpea to get off the sledge. "Do you think that's wise?" asked Jane well aware of his intentions. He nodded, and lifted the sledge slightly up and to one side, the dog crawled through the gap.

William put the sledge back down level, his wife and mother took their seats, none to sure about their new arrival. William, gestured for some food, this time he took it and fed the dog by hand, it was cowering back against the wall. "This dogs had a bad experience with humans, it's hurt and scared." said Jane, William nodded in agreement. "I know," he said, "god knows what he's seen poor fellow." It would be nearly a week before they could move again, the only activity was William's keeping the entrance open as snow drifted across the old beaches.

Contact

In our cave we too sat out the weather, Robin and Jason waiting for a gap in the storms, eager to forage. We had no luck on the radio, not even a squeak from the crystal set, although Jack kept trying. I decided to take the plunge. His mapping of the pool showed that it was more like a bath and no more than two thirds of a metre deep. I waded across sending ripples across the pool, which sent mini waves crashing onto the little beach. Alice sat on shore paying out a line. There was a hole at the other end, at first it went up, then back down again. Our pool at the bottom was like the water in the bottom of the U bend in the pipe under your kitchen sink, our entrance from the Coffee Grinder was like the plug hole, hence the sculptured entrance, where just as when you pull the plug the water spins clockwise, this would have picked up stones and grit, grinding the stone, then sculpting out the pool as it speed in from one side, sloshing up the exit pipe where it found some softer rock creating the passage through which I crawled. Following the downward sloping passage the roof got lower as I encountered an increasing layer of mud and silt on the floor. It got to a point were without excavation, further progress risked getting stuck. I backed up and reversed over the lip into the pool.

The others eagerly awaited news. To my surprise all but Alice were please that it was blocked, she like me wanted to know where it went. The others thought we were just after smugglers gold.

There was a gap in the weather, the sun shone, but it was bitterly cold, we hung a knotted rope down to allow a safer passage from our precarious cliff face. Jason and Robin, keen to forage headed across the frozen wastes. No one volunteered to sit on the lookout rock, if you did not keep moving you'd freeze and we doubted even the brigands would

be keeping a lookout in this biting wind. Of course we need not have worried about them, but we were not to know, these ruffians had no electronic tags.

Jack took on the almost suicidal mission of sorting an aerial for the radio. The one we dangled out of the entrance he reasoned was to low. He climbed up off the beach to the cliffs above us, now in your time this would have been pleasant and unless you went too near the edge presented little danger. Jack took a huge hammer, some metal stakes made from the scrap we collected by hacksawing off suitable lengths of angle iron. He hammered two of these deep into the solid frozen ground up on the cliff top, attached some rope, held one end of a reel of wire, and threw the reel down, it unspooled nicely near our entrance, I used an old wire coat hanger unravelled to pull it in and Alice connected it to the radio. Above he risked life and limb dangling on his ropes over the edge, I was glad not to be looking, Robin told us later that Jason viewing these antics had got rather in worried. Jack had another smaller hammer, through the handle of which he had drilled a hole, in this he had some chord. It now dangling from his belt, like a pendulum down by his hands, for he was hanging head first over the edge hammered in another stake and attached the wire to it. He had done this to help conceal it, aware that it betrayed our activity if not our position. The thin round grey cable was almost invisible against the cliff face, in times of danger we could pull our end and in theory the small stake should follow. He had put it in at a slight downward incline so as to effect such an operation.

In France the weather was also favourable, the family had set off again, their adopted dog lolloping along beside the sledge. His poor feet were raw and he was falling behind, William not one to stop, halted the sledge, walked around to the side furthest from the dog and put a bit of food on top of the bag of spare cloths. The dog, struggled even to walk to the sledge. It was a real effort of will power as the dog heaved himself up, with little strength left he made it onto the bag. He was finding it difficult to eat the food before it froze, so run down as he was. William took one of the blankets that were piled over the box behind the seat. Folded it dog-size and covered their bedraggled friend, the dog turned its head. Scared as it was of humans, it had no fight left, if this was the end so be it.

The dog was surprised, and his spirit rose, the man had given him food, and now he was warmer, snuggled up on the bag with the blanket all but covering him. Jane looked around she could see the nose just poking out, and one eye, one sad eye looking back at her. Dropping her rope, she crunched through the snow and gave William a big hug. They set off again, Jane pulling, William pushing and Sweetpea riding shotgun, her eyes peeled, none of them knew what lay ahead.

In our cave that evening, with Jacks new aerial and full stomachs, all huddled in the Coffee Grinder. The switch made a good solid clunk as I switched on, carefully scanning through each of the wavebands, although I could not dawdle. True we had all night, but our battery was old, subjected to the harsh weather and our charge limited.

There was a cheer, the speaker emitted not static but a voice, it was a Spanish voice, I noted the frequency on an unused non-stick tray. It was the same station as before, we were ecstatic, everyone even Alice patted Jack on the back. "That's a damn fine aerial Jack." I said with a smile that would engulf a whale.

We listened for news, but not knowing Spanish only a few words made sense, I turned off and thought about the next step, transmission. Asking the others for a call sign, we had to have some identification, so we knew if another ham was trying to contact us. In the days when governments regulated such there were rules about such things. Now each of us came up with a name and we voted on it, unfortunately I had to be the damp squib that said no to using Jason's suggestion, Smugglers seemed a bit of a giveaway should an unfriendly type be listening. Alice suggested Britannia, but then Robin taking my reasoning suggested that she ruled the waves, which may give a clue our coastal location. Robin suggested Eccentrics, but Jason thought people may think us mad, although it did convey a certain aspect of Britishness. My suggestion of Darwin was no better, Alice pointing out there was a town in Australia by that name. We were having the same problem many readers have had when asked to choose a password for bank or some other security purposes.

I began to scratch my beard. "I'll cut it tomorrow." said Alice. My scratching was this time done in thought, but it could get a bit itchy, we all welcomed a trim from time to time. When Alice came to town with us

she had acquired a selection of scissors. She did a good job keeping all us lads looking reasonably respectable. There were occasions when one dreamed of the luxury of an electric shaver, the trappings of civilization. As the saying goes you don't miss it till it's gone, those gas guzzling SUV drivers had a lot to answer for.

"I know," said Alice, "Sweetpeas, in honour of Mrs White." This was approved unanimously in our mini democracy. Jack urged me to try transmitting, first I suggested we listen to see if we can pick up another radio ham.

"Suppose that's what we are all doing." said Alice, the others agreeing. "And what frequency shall we choose to transmit on?" I asked, with a hint of sarcasm.

"The most popular one." said Jason.

"Which would be?"

"Perhaps you'd better listen first to see." said Jack with a broad grin.

Mostly we just heard the hiss from the speaker, at one point our hopes were raised, there was a very faint voice, the signal faded in and out making it impossible to listen. I did wonder as they did use Q codes, but how to send and was it QRZ? I think this would say we could not get the call sign. Besides our signal was using telephony where I might be wrong but it is only used during language difficulties. Scanning further along the dial, we were ecstatic, we picked up a call sign, we could here some chap calling. Noting the frequency, I tried replying, waited, tried again, for all we knew the transmitter was broken, there was no way of testing it without another radio.

"Hallo Sveetpies, this is Gunter, Over." the man spoke with a distinct accent, he was slow and clear.

"Hello Gunter where are you?, Over." I asked.

"Northern coast of Spain, worked here for Siemens, You? Over." he said.

"England, Over." We waited in silence for some while.

"England? You have Power?" he went silent forgetting to say Over.

"We have car alternator, use wind, in shelter, weather very bad, Over."

"You have not much Power? Over."

"No very little car battery. Over."

"I listen for you on this frequency each night, Not many Hams, For you it is difficulties? Over."

“Yes, Danke. Over.”

“Bitte, are many of you? Over.”

“Six, but many brigands, Over.”

“Brigands? Over.”

“Armed Gangs, kill you, eat you, we hide, Over.”

“Bad, I w... ...oo O...r.”

“Loosing power, Over.”

“O..or..w ..er.”

The LEDs had dimmed and the back light on the radio faded. We agreed to avoid touching the dial. Now all minds were thinking on a more reliable source of power.

The following day our friends had good weather for the morning, by afternoon William was frantically building another house. Jane too now assisted her husband, she had learnt some of the skills, joking with him, “What other husband had built so many houses for his wife.” “All with sea views.” he replied. Once inside William picked up the dog so his wife and he could sit, he gave the poor mutt a hug and rubbed his belly, wrapped him back up in the blanket and there the four of them slept the rest of the afternoon.

In an unusual turn of events for us we spent the morning rather unproductively arguing. Robin had suggested we should stick the alternator with its blades outside in the entrance, we had the means, we could mount the bicycle frame on the winch supports. Jason understandably backed his friend, now with enthusiasm running at a all time high we had the need to speak to Gunter, this was a vital link with Civilization, someone friendly. Jack opposed the idea, he was worried the Brigands might come back, pointing out that twice they had camped below us, he said we already had a big risk with the aerial and that was difficult to see. Alice wavered, but she pointed out that we had to survive here, if the Brigands came speaking to Gunter would be of little use.

They all looked at me, both had merits, it did boost our morale, but if we were worried about being found, sleeping would suffer. “If the snow gets in the alternator and it ices up we would be completely stuffed.” I said knowing this to be highly likely.

“Could we turn it by hand?” said Robin, conceding my point.

"To slow, you'd not generate enough that way, what we want is a water wheel and an underground river, preferable not in these caves but nearby. Silly idea." I said.

It was enough for Jack, he wanted to make a water wheel so if we did find a source at least we were ready. Jack was a man of action, a doer, it could take him a while to come up with a solution, but so far he was doing well.

Alice thought this to be a waste of time and energy, Jason said "It is a pretty pile but maybe Jacks water wheel will be even prettier." Robin gave him a nudge, which evoked a "What" and an odd look.

Alice was right of course, we had searched all the caves, and apart from the continuous but insignificant flow into the Powder Room basin there was no hydraulic power.

"Couldn't we dig the silt out of that tunnel off the pool?" asked Jack. The lad just did not stop thinking, perhaps the passage led to an underground river lower down, previous Ice Age glacial periods had changed the courses of many. I put it to them that to do that we'd have to drain the pool and move possibly tons of spoil. The water would need to be kept away from the cliff face below us, or it could penetrate and split the rocks apart, making our descents even more hazardous. Alice pointed out that perhaps we could pour it down the crack beside the basin where the water goes in the Powder Room. We could do that slowly with our bottles, but the spoil some could go in the pool, but that was about the only place we had, if it went outside it had to be carried to the sea, or we would be putting up another sign of our presence.

Robin and Jason, took it upon themselves to empty the pool. Jack sorted out a set of digging implements, then about to start on the wheel I asked him if it would fit?

"Fit what?"

"Where it's going to go?"

"Where's that?"

"Exactly." I replied, with that he got a bottle and helped the lads drain the pool. For some reason, Alice just went up to her Wonderland and sat. While the others busied themselves , I looked in on her.

"You ok?"

She just shrugged her shoulders. I gave her a hug and a kiss, this did nothing, it was as though she had given up, but why? we had contact?

Futile

Fumbling in a pocket pulling out a piece of wood, she handed me it. It was a piece of driftwood the lads had brought in the previous day.

“So, it’s driftwood.” I said not seeing any relevance.

“Look at the other side.”

I turned over the broken piece of planking, “It’s just scratches”

She took my torch and shone it over one edge, there were words carved into it. I removed my glasses, it read, “Built William White Septe” most of the “m” was broken along the line the wood had split off from the rest of the plank.

“Shit”

“We won’t make it either.” she said bursting into tears, her head leaning on my shoulder. I tried to comfort her.

“Look we don’t know they did not make it and besides that’s why we didn’t go because we thought it was the wrong time to sail. So if anything it means our judgement was correct, ok we won’t do everything right, digging out the silt is probably a waste of time, but we have little else to do.”

She looked at me, thinking about what I had said, then she asked me to do something, she said, “Make love to me.”

Well I can tell you one person who’s pecker was up.

Alice and I slowly stripped off, our bodies sat on our discarded garments, we embraced I tingled as her delicate hands wandered over my skin, her breasts pressing against my ribs. We were kissing and cuddling for some time before my little fellow went exploring. Jack rudely interrupted at this point, “We’ve drained the pool, you two going to come down here and clear the muck?”

I shouted back, “Give us five minutes, just doing a bit of pot holing at the moment.”

“You’ve found another tunnel?” he shouted with excitement, his voice louder, we were not sure if this was due to an increase in volume or a decrease in distance. Alice giggled.

“No done this one before?”

“Ok.” he said going back to the others. Jason looked at him, “Those two are at it again.” he said in his slightly camp voice.

"At what?" said Jack.

"Like what we do." said Robin pointing at them as an item.

"Well not quite like what we do, a." said Jason with a smirk on his face.

Jack laughed, he laughed so loud we heard him in our boudoir.

Digging was slow work, I used an old garden trowel once some keen gardeners beloved tool. How could you tell? besides the obvious wear, the wooden handle was worn. The extracted mud went into a nylon bag that had a draw string, which when full was tied to a rope. Alice pulled this up and over the ridge, Jack caught the bag on the other side of the downward chute into the pool. After some bickering, we had agreed to Robin and Jason's request that we fill up the blue plastic bin, so that it could be lowered down outside on their next foraging mission when they would empty it at the sea. You might think this puzzling, what was wrong with filling up the pool hole? These two were quite fastidious, they did not want us traipsing mud around the sleeping quarters. Alice had an idea they wanted the water back in the pool, quite what for we had no idea. When Jason said "No more please, bin full." I was relieved to stop. The cramped condition, downward slope and poor light made it damned uncomfortable.

That evening we sat chatting after Alice had filled our bellies. Jack said some interesting things, he was puzzled as to why there would be a river running with this cold weather. I explained that there were springs that used to flow all year round, at a fairly constant rate. "But wouldn't they freeze up in this weather?"

"Yes, but underground, water that has seeped down through permeable rock, collects over impermeable layers, then you get your water table, some of which finds its way to springs, some may travel in underground rivers, if it exits into the sea the top layer might freeze but where the salt water and freshwater mix if conditions are right then I guess in all but the harshest conditions it may still flow."

I snuggled up to Alice, put the precious wind-up torch into the ledge where we all knew how to find it and we got some shut eye.

In the morning Jason and Robin braved the inclement weather, it was snowing, but visibility was good. Jack and I lowered down the heavy plastic box, we then lowered down a small wooden sled, this Jack had knocked up, he thought it would be easier than carrying the box and save

wear on the base, were they to slide it.

"How do they stay upright going across that rock?" said Jack, looking on. "Beats me?" I said, amazed that those two could find anything other than snow. But they did, out there where the sea lapped the shore, they searched under rocks, in cracks this time they took the rod that Jack had used to check the pool depth and with some line and mussel for bait, set it up while they continued to forage. We could see them signalling to each other. Jason had located a good area, he indicated to Robin who had a knack of getting some stubborn creatures off the rock. Jason would then continue searching, from time to time he would look out to sea, checking the tide. They were quite methodical, picking an area, scouring it then choosing another when it was exhausted.

They were also our garbage men, any left over shells or inedible bits that Alice left in a pile they would remove and dump in one location on the beach. They chose well, on each tide the shells would be flushed away. The beach was also cleaner, an observant brigand, thankfully these seemed to be in short supply, would have noticed a lack of flotsam and jetsam. As Jason moved about looking for food areas for Robin to gather, we would see him move vast distances, bend down, put an object in a small bag he carried on his belt, then guided by an invisible thread, arrive back at exactly the point within the area they had determined to collect food from. Alice likened it to some weird ballet on ice.

Jason was looking around, then he suddenly veered over to the fishing rod. He pulled the shaft from where he'd wedged it, tugging on the rod. The line came up in the air, I took my telescope, "He's got a fish." This brought Alice to the entrance, "Where, where?"

I handed it to her, "Wow." Robin, was very animated, going over to look, they both looked like a couple of string puppets, yet we could not see the puppet master.

Jack started laughing, I began chuckling, and Alice giggled her head off when they started waving at us, Jason pointing frantically at the tiny fish, we just went into hysterics. We were I guess all a bit odd, none of us had swum with the crowd and now this little eccentric band of people were the only ones keeping some semblance of decency and civilization. Even in our perilous conditions, clinging to life and hope, we remained tolerant

and happy.

Down in Cornwall it was a different story, pursued by the brigands the thousand or so remaining migrants had dwindled in number considerably. Stragglers were left to take their chances, it was everyone for themselves. Frostbit and hypothermia had taken their toll, there was no one over the age of thirty, in either group. Even the brigands were suffering, trying to find shelter for four hundred mad ravenous monsters was impossible, some small groups had split off, picking over the fallen migrants. These smaller groups running out of food would either starve or try to rejoin. They would be accepted back, the brigands looked after their own, they ate them! The King and Pretender held the rest together relentless in hunting the main quarry.

The migrant leader was looking for a place to stand and fight, he knew they were both bait and quarry, he knew the brigands leader was smart and cunning. The migrants were still larger in number, they had learned to forage along the coast, but they lacked the benefit of a dry and relatively warm cave. With declining numbers the arms race was evening up, as migrants fell due to the weather, their comrades would collect the weapons. Many soon had more than one gun, the brigands failed to do this, why? Maybe they wanted to keep the weight down, maybe they had more ammunition for the weapons they had?

Closing in on the Migrants, the brigands were forced to seek shelter from a blizzard in a small village. Splitting into smaller groups and holing up inside the houses. In one, a brigand was loosing the plot, his companions had noticed strange behaviour over the past month or so, he talked a load of crap or so they thought. He started babbling on about some nonsense, the big men laughed at him.

“Look at the silly bastard, off his fucking head.”

“Booze man, I need booze.” said one of the others.

They all started laughing, all went silent apart from the sound of a clip being emptied. Brick and plaster fragments, shattered off the wall, blood splattered across the wallpaper as the layers of cloths were ripped open by the high velocity weapon. Then he sat down and carried on babbling. The King sent a couple of chaps to look, battling through the blizzard they checked several houses, all were quiet except one.

“What the fucks happened?” said one to the babbler.

He stared laughed and opened fire, one of the men fell instantly, the other not yet through the doorway stepped to the side behind the wall. He was bleeding, a bullet had skimmed though his left side, the pain in his ribs was excruciating. He held his gun out arms extended, the barrel pointing into the room from the window next to the door. Firing he sprayed bullets everywhere, most missed but one hit the babbler, took his jaw clean off, blood gushed from where his mouth had been, his top teeth, now red.

In the commotion others had come, one hearing the babbler stop babbling assumed it was dinner time, he stepped through the doorway. The babbler still lived, he had lots of guns, now he sprayed the intruder with two weapons. The force of the bullets ripping through the man sent him backwards, sliding over snow covered road, leaving skid and blood marks.

"The mother fuckers nuts." said the Kings man, blood running down from his ribs.

Now the King came, he saw his man outside, back to the wall and a pool of blood at his left foot. The King assessed the situation, grabbed his man pushing him into the doorway. The babbler, let loose another storm of bullets, while he fired at the man ripping the body to bits, the King fired from the window, the babblers chest exploded. They feasted, the real men ate the babblers brain, the brain of their victim, only wimps would not eat brain. The rest ate the scraps, breaking the bones against the walls, drinking the marrow like a man might drink a yard of ale.

The Pretender, was impressed, the King was the most ruthless brute he had ever encountered. The wounded man would have died anyway, they all knew that. In the migrants camp, things were not much better. They had chosen a fishing village, its solid old houses, with their small windows afforded reasonable shelter. The further west you went, the more intact buildings were, fewer people had passed through. The bigger the glacier the more rock that is gouged from the hills and mountains, so it was with the migrants and the buildings they passed.

The migrants leader was having a hard time, others criticised his decisions, this weakened his authority, yet none would offer any better suggestions. It was a thankless task, they had to stand soon or they

would be driven off Lands End. His mind raced 'Where?', he sent those who were loyal to him to ask the others if they knew a good place in this county. Those who had been native like many had never explored their own territory, others had come as tourists, few even had a clue as to what would make a good defensive site. The weather conditions altered what might normally be considered. The bleak condition made iron age hill forts useless, even ruined castles were hopeless suggestions, they provided neither food or shelter.

Many were beginning to consider the whole exercise futile. The migrant leader down to less than half his original numbers was loosing hope. The brigands had sent small groups to harry his withdrawal, or so he thought. In fact it was larger breakaway groups, seeing so many migrants left to die, smelled weakness, they wanted to steal a march on the King and take the prize for themselves. The migrant leader a student of history had managed to repel them, gaining their weapons and weakening the overall strength of the pursuing brigand King. The migrants never took food off dead brigands, they had no desire to eat their own.

After posting lookouts, Simon the migrants leader sat, scratching his beard, the Fal Estuary, it could not be far away. The snow had eased, he had to keep ahead of the brigands, he raised his followers. Rousing their spirits, for the first time he could give them some positive news, his oratory skills, honed to perfection in university were well received. He began, "We are going to Pendennis Castle, it's near the coast so we may be able to get sea food and I know it had underground tunnels and magazines so we will have some good shelter, it's also a good defensive position. It's not far from here, there is another castle St Mawes we must pass that first, come on." With a cheer and high spirits the men and women of his band followed him. They liked the sound of this castle, and while the brigands slept, the migrants marched.

Behind them the falling snow covered their trail, and it was a big trail. They were halted that evening still a days march from their objective. This time a village further inland provided shelter. The following day the sky was clear, they moved off quickly over the frozen wastes from their night camp at what was left of Trewithian.

Palaeontology

While the remainder of the British migrants struggled to find safety, we had continued our digging process. At first like a demented mole I had just brought up mounds and mounds of mud and silt, which Robin and Jason had removed without complaint. The top sediment had probably been deposited in comparatively recent times, still measured in millennia.

When a “Wow” echoed into the now drained Swimming Pool, I understood what it was like to be in an ear trumpet. They all shouted back, “What, what have you found?”

I whispered “Not so loud.”

“Sorry.” came the reply, wiggling back up to where Alice sat, I said, “We'll keep these.” She looked at the bones in my hands, then at me, the light from the little torch haunting her face. “Bone stew, with those!”

“No these are ancient animal bones, I want to keep them.”

Six eyes stared in, “You'll clutter us up”, said Robin.

“Clutter, clutter, clutter dear.” said Jason, his voice started off Jacks loud and often uncontrollable laughter.

“Come on lads, there are no books to read, let me read the bones.”

“Ooo fortune teller.” said Jason, setting Alice off with a fit of giggling, so much so that she fell of her perch and slid down into my arms.

“Ah true love.” said Robin.

“So sweet.” said Jason.

We were all laughing, you could not help it, the poor old cave system must have thought it had a bad case of tinnitus.

“Must be love bones. Bless.” said Jason.

We laughed ourselves silly, it was infectious, when one tried to stop the others just laughed more, our chests hurt so much. The digging stopped, there was no way any more work would be done that evening.

Jack found a corner of the Coffee Grinder for the bones, christened the New Natural History Museum. As number of bones continued to mount, Robin and Jason teased, was I the Professor or dog?, so keen was I to find and keep my bones. As we made steady progress the path of the passage began to level off, then I hit an abrupt wall of stone. It was only when I looked up that I realised the ceiling was compacted mud, removing it could be dangerous, above it may be rocks or even a pool of water. Backing up along the passage was arduous, without contending hazards.

Talking to Jack that evening we came up with an idea, if there was water then by pushing a probe up through the mud then withdrawing it we could see if any trickled through the small hole. Alice also suggested taking an empty fizzy water bottle, if it did flood then I would have a crude air supply.

The following day I went down again, Alice came part way down to the point just before the passage levelled out, she would relay messages back to Jack who was sitting in the mouth of the passage, holding our two safety lines, we were like little dogs down a rabbit hole while the owner sat on a park bench. Making sure the roof over my head was solid rock I pushed the metal rod up into the mud, it was hard going, I twisted it like a drill, loosened, chunks fell down on the passage below. I pushed hard but made little progress, just a steady mound of dried mud. The pile got so big that I decided to clear it, filling the bag and asking Alice to pull it out, she did, then relayed to Jack, Robin and Jason filled the plastic bin, then Jack put the bag back on the rope and I pulled it back. The rope we had was more than twice the length of the passage, so I could retain one end and Jack the other, when he had the bag he also had the middle of the rope and visa versa, when I had the bag.

I decided to risk continuing, the probing created a dome of compacted mud, the hole was longer than it was wide, this I could tell by establishing the extent of the rock around the edges. More and more probing revealed rock above, this was just a dog leg in the tunnel, so it was back to the trowel. For many more days I continued to dig, while we travelled metres in our small realm. William, Jane, Sweetpea and the mutt had travelled kilometres.

Had the Spanish seen the now considerable string of igloos at regular intervals along the French Atlantic coast they may well have reported an advancing Eskimo invasion force. It was a good day as William and Jane raced the sled along a very flat stretch. The mutt now answered to the name of Sunny, riding on the sledge under the warm blanket with regular food had improved his health, paws were now healed. Sweetpea was also doing better, in the igloos, she would often cuddle him on her lap, he loved this, his tail wagging. But he was still Williams dog, more recently when they stopped and William went to gather food from the sea shore, Sunny would go to, keeping a watchful eye out.

It was several more days when finally I broke through, the passage sloped up, once I had cleared the shallow triangle of mud, I began the ascent. Not much further and a huge cavern deep inside the cliff was revealed, with only the meagre light from the torch it was impossible to see but a fraction of it. When Alice saw my head she knew I had turned around and that meant a cavern.

"We need more lighting, much more lighting, this torch is not enough."

Jack looked at me, "We don't have enough wire left."

"Have you found a river?" asked Robin.

"Can you hear water?" asked Jason.

"Not sure, there was a sound but it was too distant to tell."

Calling it a day on the exploration, we decided to try calling Gunter. The wind had been strong the last couple of days and we reckoned there would be enough charge in the battery. We were in luck, enough power and Gunter, our trusty friend, waiting as promised for our call. The last time we told him that it would not be possible to call for another couple of days, so no need to listen, but he insisted.

"If you have medical problem, I know doctor, we could tell what to do.

Over"

For this we were thankful, he had made a useful point. He may not have been able to help us physically in an emergency, but knowledge can be just as valuable, and having a reliable friend is a great treasure.

He was interested in our progress through the cave system. From the details he asked, Jack wondered if he was making a map. Of that we would not have been surprised.

Dual

Getting to Penndenis Castle had taken longer than expected, slowed by snowdrifts and other obstacles the brigands were again on the migrants tail. The brigand leader had it easy, he just followed their trail. The King knew he had to catch them before they got into Henry VIII's old fort.

Simon was dismayed the castle had already been secured, his group struggled to find a way in, the portcullis was down. He had his people inside the Elizabethan wall, a man ran through the crowds, they're less than a kilometre away. Simon shouted again, a man leaned over the

gateway battlements. "What do you want?"

"Please let us in?"

"Sod off, bloody brigands", shouted the grumpy man, high above on the parapets.

"We're not brigands, but they are." shouted Simon pointing landward. In the distance a large group of men in red were closing fast. This was not Wellington's army, these wore red from the human blood stains that splattered their cloths. Blood red that struck terror into their victims. The old man beckoned to someone, a woman appeared, she spoke, "How can we be sure you aren't brigands?"

"Est quelque chose certain?" replied Simon.

"Changez est certain" replied the woman.

"The Channel Tunnel is blocked we tried to battle the brigands, we need a secure location to counter them, deprive them of their food, he paused, "Us!"

The woman stared at him, his people were beginning to panic, the brigands were getting too close for comfort. The woman left the battlements, the portcullis opened and the migrants ran in, Simon, shouting at them to slow down, reminding them of the tunnel.

As the last of the migrants crossed the bridge, the brigands were already inside the Elizabethan wall, their guns blazing they cut down the stragglers. The woman dropped the portcullis, several men were killed as the heavy wooden structure bore down on them, even without spikes it was a formidable barrier. Simon's men opened fire from the cover of the castle walls. Men filed up to the gateway battlements, firing down, the brigands were suffering, men spun blood spurting, skin and bones ripping as the bullets tore through their cloths.

With these further losses the brigand King ordered the retreat. He now had little more than a couple of hundred men. This put the odds at roughly two to one against him, this was worsened by the strong position now held by the migrants. He tried to find shelter in the buildings around the old town. Falmouth had been a thriving port, from it had sailed all the seaworthy boats, and some less seaworthy vessels now visible when the tide was out. As a departure point it had been stripped of all its wood, houses were roofless, the timber used to patch boats and fuel fires. More storms approached, the leader's plan to whittle down the defenders when they sent foraging parties out was scuppered.

Simon watched as the ragged band, moved back around the coast heading for St Mawes another Tudor fort, built by the King in 1540 to protect against invasion from the French and Spanish. Simon knew he had chosen well, the larger Pendennis Castle perched on top of the hill had held out under siege for six months against the parliamentarian forces. It held a good strategic position, improved by the extra Elizabethan defences. The castle had not been designed for so many, making conditions difficult.

Simon had to enforce strict discipline, the punishments for disorderly conduct were harsh, taking watch for hours on the battlements in Arctic conditions was better than facing brigands but only marginally. Inevitably some would perish, but he had little choice. The woman and her father had worked for English Heritage, having little money and an infirm father they decided to live in the castle, initially taking the role of caretakers with several other families, also guides at the site. As the situation worsened these others joined the migration south.

Jennifer had with the aid of her father beat off attempts by small groups of brigands who tried to gain access. She was glad that she took the chance on Simon, he was a kind, knowledgeable man, a good man. When some tried to attack her for dropping the portcullis on their friends, Simon stood in her defence, "Would you rather have let the brigands in?"

Whenever there was a gap in the weather he would send out foragers, always posting lookouts. By the time the brigands made a move he had recalled his people to safety. The other castle was too far away for the brigand King to reach his quarry, they having a shorter distance to travel than he. Now for Simon and the King it was like a duel, who would fire the first shot? The two castles faced each other across the estuary, within the protection of Pendennis the migrants recovered their strength. Across in St Mawes, the brigands grew hungry and restless.

Occasionally gunfire would echo across to Pendennis as trouble was quelled in St Mawes. By such methods the King kept his men fed, but in doing so weakened further his chance of seizing the only food source left. He puzzled over his quarry, safe across the water, as a fox cub puzzles with a rolled up hedgehog. You know there is meat in there but how to get it, how to get past those prickly spines.

Several weeks went by, storms and extremely low temperatures had kept everyone in. Tempers were frayed, the brigands were bored, "Better to die killing, migrants than sit here starving said the Pretender, the weather was warming up, clear skies and sunshine fired up unrest, the King still did not know what to do. "They will cut us to pieces, we need ladders and a diversion."

His mind was formulating an attack, if he could draw fire on one side of the castle he might get a few men with ladders in from the rear. Where would he find ladders? How would he get the men with ladders in position undetected. That day he sent parties out to check surrounding villages for ladders. A few came back lucky, in all three extending aluminium ladders, found in houses where people had raided them for wood.

Simon and Jennifer stood above the gateway, they could see the line of brigands moving forwards, it was dawn, a lookout had alerted them. They knew an attack was coming, the commotion along the east facing defences had alerted them, their sentries strained to see in the moonless night. The attackers stood to the eastern flank of the castle, they were in weapons range, but the defenders one weakness was a shortage of ammunition. They had fired a lot of rounds the day they entered the castle, Simon now wanted to make sure these brigands were close to ensure the bullets hit their targets.

While the Pretender and most of the force, readied to draw the migrants fire, the King and a few well chosen men crawled round below the hill to come up behind from the south west. In the night his men had placed the ladders laying flat on the ground against the walls. In the castle the migrants all eager to get at their vile enemy were facing north east. Simon was puzzled why did they not attack the gate house? He discussed this with Jennifer, was there something he was unaware of?

The King and his men with all the cloth around their feet for warmth made no sound, when the Pretender started to get his men roaring, the defenders did not hear the ladders go against the walls. In the gate house tower, Simon viewed the main force, expecting an attack, it never came, from behind guns blazing, came the few men and their King,

slaughtering the defenders on this level, now the Pretenders force slowly melted away, like snow in the thaw, two rivers flowed around either side to get to the ladders. There was little cover on the top level gun platform, the King and his men now used the old Canon for shelter. Simon and those in the gatehouse had them pinned down. But they only fired at the sign of movement, the King deduced their ammunition was limited.

As the Pretenders men rushed up the ladders drawing fire from the defenders, the King and his men moved around, dodging bullets from one of the defenders who had them in his sights. From the top of the keep and within it the remainder of the migrants fired on the brigands who were trying to get to the small wooden door that led from the curtain wall into the gatehouse. This was where the pretender was heading, the King now around the wrong side, had realised his mistake. With nowhere to go and under fire, he and the few men left with him jumped over the battlements of the curtain wall. Shards of granite, split of the battlements as a hail of bullets chased them over the wall.

The Pretender, using dead bodies for cover backed off, narrowly escaping a bullet as he slid down the sides of the ladder, less than twenty brigands left the battle. In their flight they managed to drag a few of their wounded comrades away from the location of the Pretenders feigned attack. The Pretender holed up in the remains of the Barrack block, the King struggled through the night to reach St Mawes. His men carrying wounded, slumped into the fortifications. Exhausted they fell asleep, dumping the wounded nearby, these would feed them later.

As the Pretender and his men struggled with the cold, they had to stay alert. Simon still held the castle with over two hundred men and women. Posting men on watch the historian, sent others to raise the ladders. With the castle secure they set about collecting the weapons. As the snow fell that night only bodies lay undisturbed, they would not cause disease nor rot in the freezing conditions outside, they would act as bait for the hungry brigands.

In St Mawes before sun up, one of the brigand wounded had recovered some strength. He resented the failure of the Kings attack and he knew he was to be their next meal. With the King snoring and his retinue asleep, the wounded man crawled across the floor to where a gun had

been dropped. Bullets had torn through ligaments in his thighs, so he could not stand, the pain was excruciating every time he moved. The agony was unbearable, screams waited to escape the prison of his mouth, air slowly hissing between his broken teeth. Human dentistry was not evolved to eat the bones his had just to get the marrow. The man's wide jaw grimaced, his arm reached out to the gun, another pull another few centimetres.

His hand clasped the freezing metal, his gloves had been taken from him, what use did a wounded man have for gloves. The cold steel of the trigger stuck to his skin, he aimed the gun into the corner where the King slept. Click, the pin struck air, the ammunition was spent, in the corner eyelids heavy with sleep fluttered. The wounded man now battled his pain to get to the next weapon, his arm exploded, a clasped hand held the weapon, an arm waved around, he let out a scream that shattered icicles hanging from the stone outside, his chest exploded, the room was silent but for the fading echo of the gun shots. Breakfast was served, the other wounded had died in the night, so the four men would feast for several days yet.

Men sat around the Pretender their knives tearing through his clothes, as they hacked through his skin, steam rose from his still warm blood. For days the men picked at his bones. In the castle the migrants waited, the Pretenders butchers had slipped away during the night.

As these men wandered through the streets of Falmouth looking for refuge, one spotted the remains of a pub. One of them started to pull away some brick rubble, with no wooden floor the basement was open to the elements, but this eagle eyed devil had spotted something metal. The others joined him, wiping more snow away, throwing bricks off which crashed down and split open sending fragments clattering through the layers below. It was a beer barrel, the cask was still intact, if a little dented, taking an old axe the man who had found it broke the sealed bung and poured the golden liquid down his throat. Another grabbed it from him, then another from him, scuffles broke out, the man who had found it, opened fire with his gun, as the barrel fell, bouncing on the brick rubble, two men fell back, blood gushed out of them as beer gushed out of the barrel.

The remaining men waited their turn as the finder regained his prize. With food and drink, these too dinned well that night. The next morning, all overslept in the old house on the slope of a hill, protecting them from the worst of the weather. Snow came down heavy, filling the streets with a deep layer of flakes.

Simon watched as five men approached, only one carried a weapon. These men did not have red cloths, they were clean and quite tidy. One man limped a little, another had his arm crudely held in a rough piece of cloth, its ends tied around the back of his neck.

"Hello", shouted the big man who supported the limping man. "We fought with the general, hid on the beach till those brigands left. Then followed, saw the fighting. A small band attacked us on our way here. These two are wounded."

Simon shouted back, "We'll open up let you in."

"Are you sure?" said Jennifer, she looked worried, "Why did the brigands in the barracks not attack them?"

"Perhaps they've gone, perhaps it was them who attacked these men?" he said with sound reasoning.

"You let us in!" came a request from the expectant arrivals.

"You spoke French." her eyes radiated her concern.

"So?" responded Simon, slightly puzzled.

"So you are intellectual, intellectuals generally don't go round eating people!" she tugged against his arm.

One of their followers asked if he should raise the portcullis. The man seeing them talking high on the battlements, asked again, pleading that his friends were hurt and needed help. Simon, had never known a brigand show any concern for the sick and wounded, true when they were fleeing for their lives they had abandoned people, but that was out of desperation.

"Throw down your weapon then we'll let you in." he said. The man did as he was told, why did they need to bring a weapon in there were now plenty within the walls.

Raising the portcullis was a slow affair due to its weight. As it inched up Jennifer watched the reactions of the men, she observed the expressions on their faces. The one with the limp had a sly grin. The man with the arm tied up fidgeted, the other two stood awkward.

"Somethings not right." she said quietly to the one of the men, tell them

to lower it back down, Simon was out of earshot. The man raced down below and told the men raising it to lower it, one of them said "But Simon said." "Just do it." said a woman watching through the slots where the drawbridge ropes had once been. She too had her doubts, all the migrants she knew were thin and undernourished, even under the layers of cloths she could see these men were well fed.

"Why?, they're not brigands."

"Aren't they? Look at their faces, plump as puddings."

The man who had questioned the order, looked through one of the slots, "Shit."

"Come on open up we're freezing our bollocks off out here." shouted the big man. Then he noticed the portcullis dropping back down, it hit the ground with a thud. "Bastards." he shouted. From within the castle it was clear this had been a ruse, the mens' faces were very angry. Their arms dropped, in a moment they had pulled more guns from under their rags, and sprayed the gateway with bullets. The migrants stepped back from the battlements as the bullets ricochet off the stone crenelations. The woman in the winch room stuck a gun through one of the slots over the gateway and let rip. Other men on watch from the curtain wall now in position also opened fire, the big man fell like a log, as he hit the ground a fog of snow flew up around him. The others were cut down running, sliding head first like toboggan men without the toboggan, sliding forward, two rolling like mad ice skaters losing the plot.

There was a loud cheer, Simon, apologised for being so stupid, after speaking with both women he realised his error. They turned to him with affection, they knew in their hearts that without this man they would have not survived. He had kept them one step ahead of the brigands, found ways of feeding them, kept their spirits up and the breath in their bodies.

Across in the sister castle, the King now down to only three men, one had given them indigestion, heard the firing and cheering. He swore revenge, he had no idea that they were the only ones left. Leading the two loyal men, he began a quest to regroup, determined to counter attack. In the days that followed he found he only had ghosts for company.

Nature

William and family were still making good progress, when they reached St Malo, a port he recognised from boyhood. He remembered when his father had taken them across from Weymouth on the ferry, it had been the family's first trip abroad. They had stayed the night in a small B&B, a very pleasant family run guest house made them welcome. Neither parents spoke any French, he laughed remembering some of the comic misunderstandings. The sea crossing had taken just over five hours, on what now seemed like a floating city.

They moved on past the town and built yet another igloo. That evening they discussed a change of plan, although they did not know it was in the order of fourteen hundred kilometres around the coast to Spain, they did know the shape of France. William keen to make as much progress as possible was eager to cut a corner and head south across country to La Baule on the Atlantic coast. Sweetpea was worried about getting lost, William reassured her with the compass. Jane was more concerned with the hills and what else they might encounter. You could guarantee one thing, William was stubborn and so far had seemed to make good decisions. Jane's loyalty and Sweetpea's devotion sealed the plan. The following morning they had a taste of things to come, Jane heaved and William pushed hard as they got the sledge up the slope onto the mainland, at first it was easy going, they followed a relatively flat valley. The main roads were desolate places, abandoned vehicles covered in snow, metal tombstones of a linear grave yard, marking the death of industrial man.

Buildings, sucked dry like the bones of a whale, water, ice and wind penetrating, splitting and pushing like invisible demolition men. They howled, like alien sirens, crash, the sound of a wall falling across the road behind them. Jane and William turned in unison, looking back at how close they had come to being squashed by its solid mass. Now it lay shattered across their trail. Pushing onwards, through the gently undulating landscape, struggling up the slopes, nearly loosing control on the descents.

The short cut became an endless drain, with no headlands to aim for, no food to forage they were beginning to despair. They were covering less distance each day, this was a concern that grew more acute. Journeying on they never knew how far they had left until they reached the coast.

Endless snow, after storms the drifts made things worse, obstacles and hazards were hidden. William in his rush to make up ground, was pushing a cracking pace one day when they hit a long stretch of level ground. Jane could tell because her load lightened, she knew he was steaming.

Crunch, a loud bang, a cracking sound and the sledge tilted to one side throwing mother and Sunny off into the snow. The blankets covering their precious jars of food flew on the ground, there was the clattering of glass against glass as the the jars rolled around. An old tree stump hidden under the snow on the bend of a road had caught the sledges runner, tearing it apart. They had to stop, so William after scouting a good vantage point built another igloo, those they built inland were concealed to hide their shape. Snow was piled up to look like a drift over a natural feature. Mother sat inside, Jane kept watch, William with shot gun, tools and Sunny marched onwards to a small town that lay ahead.

As William walked cautiously through the streets looking for replacement runners, he was stopped dead in his tracks, Sunny remained silent. In the middle of this picturesque rural French town was a mother bear and her cub, a polar bear, in France! William was both frightened and amazed. All he could think was, "Polar bears, In France!" his mind so conditioned to thinking of people sitting sipping coffee, watching men play boule, he expected bakeries full of delicious smells, fresh bread, croutons, garlic and wine, not Polar Bears!

The deer and European bison roamed with little fear of attack. The predators had followed the trail of bodies, their numbers swelled as they consumed the carcasses. Polar bears, supremely adapted to survive the conditions were thriving as never before. At the base of the Pyrennes there was a feeding frenzy. Many of Europe's Zoos had shed their animals, not deliberately, people wanted food any food. Keepers were held at gunpoint as intruders tried to shoot animals, opening cage doors without reason, many animals died, so did many of the staff, but a lot escaped. Lions, tigers, and other big predators with sufficient fur to survive the climate, gorged themselves on the human dead. Some of the bears were from Zoos others had migrated south with the march of the ice.

The Polar bear and its cub were clawing away the snow to get at the bodies beneath. William and Sunny backed up, the Polar bear mother briefly looked up at them, then continued to pull at the corpse. This mother was used to humans looking at her, as were most this far south. William empty handed went back for the night, tomorrow he would try the other village, one they had passed through earlier that day.

Going back to William was a very negative experience, but he did, in his mind the town was off limits. Both his and Sunny's senses were heightened, both watching for danger, so much so that William almost missed an old roof rack. An old Citron lay on its side blocking the entrance to a courtyard in an outlying farm. The occupants had long since vacated, he wondered if the Citron had been used in place of the gates which were probably wood and used for fuel. The sound of his hammering echoed about the vicinity, he hoped it was not the dinner gong. Grabbing the rack he tried shaking it loose, no luck he continued with the hammer, finally breaking it free of the car. The rack, probably used to carry long items had some useful parts and being metal these would be a good deal stronger than the original wooden runners.

They traipsed back across the snow, it was hard going, as you will know if you have walked any distance in deep snow, this far south the weather seemed a little milder. With insufficient light inside the igloo William braved the cold and set about fixing the new runners. These sat much higher, so he left the remains of old runners to help strengthen the structure, besides it was too cold to do more than you had to. Luckily he had thought to bring a hand drill, the car roof rack was not designed to be screwed to the roof, so holes were needed to put the fixing screws through. With his usual built to last, built with pride workmanship it was a solid job. He tested it pushing it up and down till he was satisfied that it would hold and pleased with performance. The sledge was then pulled inside the igloo for the night.

With a whole day lost and rations nearly finished, the family pushed on, circumnavigating the town to avoid any chance of becoming the next picnic. Unbeknown to Jane or William, Sweetpea's fall had hurt her, she did not complain, she already felt a burden, slowing them down as she rode on the sledge.

Power

In the days that had passed we had with Jacks help rigged a temporary propeller to sit outside the cave fixed onto the outer gear ring of the bicycle frame, in place of where the pedal would normally go. The inner most gear ring was removed and bolted onto the shaft of the alternator by the disk that usually held the fan belt. We could then shield our valuable generator leaving the blades exposed to the weather. Rather like a child putting one of those plastic windmills on a stick out of a car window. Leaving it out at night when it was least likely to be detected, pulling it back into the entrance cave during the day where it would still spin a little. Holding it down was no problem, we had plenty of large lumps of rock.

With our new national grid we grew more ambitious. Although we doubted the chances of ever finding an underground river for our hydroelectric scheme, Alice and I did want to see the newly discovered cavern. Imagine you had no television, no radio save for our half hour chat to Gunter every third day, no books, no games, no puzzles except the ones survival presents, no pubs, no nightclubs, no cinemas, no theatres, no magazines, no festivals and you could not go outside for days on end because of the weather. Apart from making love if you were fortunate to have a partner, which I fancy is one reason Jack turned to problem solving, what would you do? Ever seen a big cat caged in a Zoo where its cell is too small? It paces, it rocks, the confinement drives it nuts. That's why Robin and Jason were so keen to freeze their butts off foraging, while we sat in the relative shelter of the entrance, and that's why Alice and I wanted to explore the caves.

Ironically we were now having to use our minds to survive because you in the past did not. You kept using oil like it grew on vines, roasting yourselves at home on gas mark insane, where your grandparents would have put on a woolly jumper and got on their bike. Still what's done is done we can't change the past, so I shall continue to explain how the power went to our head.

Alice on her first and only foraging trip had picked up things that looked useful but she had no idea what they did, these she dumped in her bag. Now you can bet your life, if you don't have what you want there's a

woman somewhere who has one in her handbag. Alice's bag was a tad bigger, and she had collected several battery drills, Jack had done a good job of collecting items from our friendly Rover. With some ingenuity he had rigged up each drill battery to power a light off the car. These were mounted on strips of wood, unfortunately one was 6v the other 7.3v our charger was for 12v. Lucky for us when put in series it was near enough, the nominal voltages and actual gave us enough wiggle room for the thing to work. The lights were a bit dim, because our bulbs were the wrong rating, but that gave us a longer duration.

Now with two good lights we were able to crawl back down the long tunnel, and into the large cavern. We both had ropes so if the lights went we would be able to follow our way back to the tunnel. The lads had the LEDs lights so we also took my wind-up torch, using that to get us along the passage saving the main lights for the cavern.

Wow when we put our dim lights on, even though we could not see its full glory, it was spectacular. The mud and silt had prevented the sea from damaging it, wow. If you have never been a cave, you really should there are plenty or rather were plenty of show caves in Britain, this was the best I had ever seen. Stalagmites like a hundred lighthouses standing in a sea of rock, some stormy some calm. Curtains pulled back upon this cold theatre. Pillars more intricate than any from Rome. Frozen waterfalls as if a witch had cast a spell, cascaded down across the rock, looking as though made of twisted sugar crystals, twinkled in our lights. From the ceiling high above a thousands stalactites hung, daggers of rock. The walls like raspberry ripple ice cream, iron oxide streaks running through in vivid reds. Giant flowstone marshmallows thousands of years in the making frozen in time. As we wandered though the cavern we found another couple of tunnels. These were for another day, limited by our crude torches and with our enthusiasm bubbling we went back before the batteries failed. Excitedly telling the others, yet we could not convince them to brave the crawl through the narrow passage. Knowledge is hard to acquire, few pursue it, but it truly is power, with knowledge dreams can become reality, obstacles become challenges.

Thaw

A starving bedraggled man, thin and pale crawled over the thawing

snow, so hungry he scratched away to get at the grass below. His teeth chattered with cold trying to bite like a sheep, the cold frozen grass stuck to his lips. His body collapsed in a heap, his red cloths, too large for the spindly body splay out to the sides. Like the snow he melted away, the last of the brigands, the King a few metres from the beach. Metres from an abundance of food of which he never knew.

William thought he was a fool for not killing the bear, its meat could have restocked their supplies. His wife pointed out that the smell of blood would have drawn others in search of carrion. They hardly needed more dangerous predators prowling across the snowy landscape through which they struggled. By the following day their supplies were all but exhausted, each had a small morsel, the situation was becoming desperate.

William did not want to stop, but after getting the sledge over a ridge, Jane almost collapsed, her breathing laboured, she was a strong woman but he had pushed too hard. Sunny jumped from his place on the bag of cloths, as William ran to her, holding her in his strong arms, settling her on the bag. Sweetpea moved by her side, hugging her, William went off to the top of a hill. Withdrawing his watch he checked the time, noted the position of the sun, then looked at the compass. It was midday, either his watch was wrong, or the compass. By the sun they were travelling due south, yet the compass said they were travelling, south west, towards the coast? He looked puzzled, straining to see any sign of the sea.

He trudged back down through the snow to where the women waited. His mind thinking all the time, his watch was still ticking and seemed to be within a few minutes the same each day at sunset and sunrise. Could the compass be wrong, suppose instead of cutting down through France, that they were going across Brittany rather than south though the Loire, this would explain why they had not yet reached the coast. His brain was tired, short of food, he decided to follow the compass it had been right so far, it must be the cold affecting the watch mechanism, he knew metal contracted, perhaps it was that.

Jane had to rest for well over an hour after which they only travelled a short distance following the compass south. It felt a bit colder again, this was good as it kept the snow and ice needed to build their shelters.

In the morning, Sunny was gone, William called him, now it was Jane eager to move on, Sweetpea too urged that they continue. William walked through the streets, looking in the shells of homes and shops, their dog was nowhere to be seen. Dejected, he finally said goodbye, and the three humans continued their slow march. Jane always at the front, had her eyes scanning the horizon for signs of danger, this time she saw a sign for Angers. Because they had delayed leaving, the sun had had time to warm an old road sign, the ice and snow had melted from the top portion. It was by luck that they had found the A11-E60 and beyond the N23, the small road they now followed guided them to the Loire. William realised that the coast was west along the path of the Loire river. With a bridge in front of them he called a halt, pulling the compass from his pocket, looked at the sun, magnetic north had moved, it had to have moved to north west.

Picking their way around the abandoned vehicles, they got across to the southern bank. They were being watched, keeping track of the trail alongside the river, two eyes followed them. The humans pace slowing, the two eyes looked though a haze of steam, the mist which comes from breathing hard in the cold air, what followed them was closing in fast. Blood ran from the animals mouth, its fur standing on end to maintain warmth. Trudging through the snow, the slow people heard only the sound of their boots crunching, compressing layers of flakes, a crisp sound, but not that of the animal now metres behind them. William whirled around at the last moment, Jane felt the extra weight as she pulled from the front. He was in the most vulnerable position, they had six eyes watching ahead and only ears to listen for a rear attack.

The animal jumped up, Williams shotgun went flying as he fell on his back, arms outstretched above his head. The loaded gun slid and spun dangerously across the icy ground. Jane stopped her heart pounding, she knew something was very wrong. Sweetpea, burst out laughing Sunny had dropped his load and was licking Williams beard and nose, his tail spinning. The dog was smart, he knew they had no food left, he knew that they had cared for him, now he brought them a rough looking rabbit, more fur than meat. William was crying, he sat up and hugged his wet nosed chum. Jane did not know whether to laugh or cry. That evening, in a small château each ate a minuscule portion. Sweetpea

asked them what they thought Jules Verne would have thought about the whole situation.

After leaving Nantes it took them three more days to reach the coast, Sunny finding something to eat on most of these. Summer was on its way, in several more weeks of travelling down the coast the climate became milder, with the ice all but gone the trusty sledge was no longer of use. William sad to leave it tried pulling it over the bare rocks, sand and gravel that covered the barren shore. Without the deep snow and ice to level the passage it became hard going, slowing them down. William stopping to rest, took out his pocket watch, deep in thought he stared at it. He had made a mental note of sunrise and sunset, his brain calculating the time of year. It was mid spring, still a good chance of bad weather still the possibility of snow. The weather could be bitterly cold, Jane was concerned, she had been helping Sweetpea along and found that the old woman had a pain in her side, the further they went the worse it got. She was eager for them to make good progress and becoming impatient with her husbands tenacious obsession with the sledge. They no longer had the comfort and luxury that the igloos afforded, now they had to seek shelter each night.

That day William conceded, Jane and Sweetpea sat on some rocks, the sun was dipping in the evening sky, he worked frantically to remove all the screws and bolts, Sunny watched with interest, his neck forward as he looked down from a rock, opposite his master and friend. With slithers of red and pink floating on the horizon, they left the Atlantic shimmering like candlelight as the warm sun sunk into the sea. Ahead of them a small fishing village, its cobbled streets slippery, the slopes uneven. Sweetpea cursing, as she time and time again lost her balance, Jane and William struggled to help her. Ahead of them an old stone church, solid thick walls, now an ancient ruin.

The doorway empty, the pews all gone, tiles lay strewn on the cold slabs of the stone floor. Stained glass windows, distorted, like old jigsaws with bits missing. Panels ripped from the walls left rough stone exposed, tombs of great warriors like the walls of a castle bombarded by the trebuchet of the roof, their detail smashed by falling masonry. Men of valour, heroes who would lie forgotten fading as like a dying candle, man's presence like that of many other creatures was fading from the

ever changing earth.

The following morning they set off back to the shore, the sea now far in the distance lower by many metres. William carried a heavy load, tools, and supplies weighed down the bag on his back. Jane carried blankets tied with string over her shoulder, a smaller bag on her back with the remainder of the food. Sweatpea clung to her other arm. Sunny ran alongside them, every so often stopping to sniff down a hole, or catch scent in the air.

Rescue

With the onset of spring Gunter had been planning a rescue mission, he was sat with some of his Spanish friends in his small villa. It was a nice position halfway up the side of a hill, you could see the village twining its way down the old coastline, the old harbour, its roots now exposed, on this withering vine. The village is situated on the north coast near Santander, facing the bay of Biscay and the wild Atlantic. He was a kind man always willing to listen and did his best to help with any technical problems that arose, he was well respected. You could not miss Gunter, a short tubby man, with the most amazing handlebar moustache. Every third day he would tell of the brave English who battled the elements and hid from the brigands.

That evening, one which followed our transmission, they sat all huddled around listening. “One asked how would they get to the safety of Spain, if they had no boat?” This was the queue he had been waiting for, he replied, “Perhaps we should help?” For many months these good people had listened to our story as you might a soap, they had grown to know us, each having their favourite, each asking for news. Most wanted to meet us, so this suggestion got a positive response.

Discussions of who's boat, when they would go, what about the danger of the brigands, how could they pick us up off the beach as all the ports were now much further from the sea. Questions flowed all night, it was a long night, but then this was a long way to travel by sea, made more hazardous by the unpredictable weather, hidden rocks and the orca that now roamed the colder waters. With a power boat it would have been easier, but the tiny reserve of fuel was limited to military use. There would be no rescue services if they hit trouble.

His old friend Aluino a man in his eighties donated a fine catamaran, well he had not seen it for some time. It lay stranded on a rock shelf nearly half a kilometre from the sea, stuck on its two hulls like a broken neglected beach deckchair. The Romona named after Aluino's wife had seen some long distances in her time, having sailed to Cowes on the Isle of Wight for the races. There was a chance she could be patched up, but poor old Aluino was not up to the journey.

Gunter made the slippery passage across the rock shelf with his band of helpers. Most people were busy just keeping alive, so this was beyond the call of duty. As they approached it was apparent that she had suffered considerable storm damage, it was that that had dragged her and the buoy to which she was still attached out to sea in a shallow storm surge. Most sail boats were now used for fishing, something that had kept Spain from starving. With the demise of the other European fishing fleets, stocks had begun their slow recovery, it was this relative bounty that had enabled them to withstand the massive migration, feeding both the quota of settlers and those less fortunate who were moved on to North Africa.

Gunter's helpers were four in number, Alberto similar in structure to Gunter, in fact you might have thought them brothers, apart from his balding dark hair. Alberto was in his late fifties, with grey encroaching. These men still worked around the village, but because of their ages they were not pushed so hard. He was a decorator by trade so after inspecting the intact twin hulls, scratched and tatty, he by some magic had found paint and lost no time in giving the boat a protective covering.

None of them had worked out how to get the boat into the sea, that was Berto's problem to solve. He had a good look around and for several hours, looking like an undertaker measuring up for a coffin. Scribbling as he went in a tatty old notebook, in a script only he could decipher. Confident with his assessment, the others bid him good luck as he made the slippery journey across the barren rock. As he tottered along the tall man in his dark jacket looked like a drunk priest wandering home after a surreptitious night out.

Ciro, had worked with Gunter in the same office, he was the bright spark,

and could fix pretty much anything. Thin and wiry in a scruffy old jumper that had more holes than a string vest he crawled around checking the internal structure, his friend Delmar was the only sailor amongst them, although not a particularly practical man he knew boats inside out, he knew what was right and what was wrong, he was the only man in the village who had been willing to undertake the journey.

We must not be hard on the rest of the villagers, they had been extremely generous offering tools, supplies and provisions, and all but a few reneged on their promises. With the onset of spring, people were busy in the fields and gardens, it was tough work with only horses to pull the plough. The men would work the soil and the women helped with planting seed. Other men were working on a scheme to divert a small stream to assist with irrigation, building a viaduct, which at its end had a small water wheel, they caught this energy before the water ran down into the irrigation ditches.

Birds would look down at the seeds scattered, but they were deprived of a feast, the local children were with their parents in the planting, screaming and running around they were better than any scarecrow. One little fellow, took a tumble, grazing a knee on a stone in the rough soil, his tears flooded a small valley of soil. A tiny beetle scurried to avoid this salty rain, its little legs scrabbling on the loose particles of earth. A robin, watched from a post, as the men turned the earth he watched for juicy worms. The mother turned to see her son's distress, it would be a scratch, she continued alongside the other women on this vital task, as a dark shadow moved over the light brown earth, dark clouds were marching north. It was vital to complete their work before the deluges started.

Down in the boat, Ciro was tugging at a loose strut within the right hull, Delmar knew it was a critical part that needed strengthening. Gunter passed tools and wood down to his old colleague, these two had been a good team at work, now they worked as one. One would work the other holding structures, passing tools, screws, and fixings. Delmar satisfied with his identification of the internal list of jobs, joined Alberto, both looked up at the sky, hoping these big black buggers would go elsewhere.

The urgency was forced by the migrating whales which would once have travelled much further north but now in summer treated the channel as once they had the Arctic. They had sunk many tiny sail boats now used in place of the giant diesel powered trawlers which sat rotting in the silt of the old harbours. Delmar grabbed a piece of emery cloth and at Alberto's direction first wiped with rag then sanded the surface, Alberto followed with a beautiful coat of paint. He took great care not to spill any on the rocks, not because he was concerned about the environmental impact, he only had a limited supply of marine grade paint, every drop was precious.

Alberto was a proud workman, a perfectionist and he knew how much Aluino loved the boat, allowing these men to have and work on her was second only to allowing another man to entertain your wife. They all knew how Romona's death many years before had devastated his life. She was in her thirties when cancer struck, the treatment had left them unable to have children, the boat had become their child. They spent so many beautiful days travelling the coast, cradled in their love by its sleek hulls, the sun glistening on the sea. The old man still remembered the first time he went to sea without her, intent on sailing into the sunset, his heart crushed by her loss. The relapse sapped her strength, ripping through her beautiful body as a vandal tramples the beauty of flowers at the height of their bloom. He cried when the dolphins came alongside, it was as though they knew, as though they sensed his sorrow. Calmly hugging the hull on which he sat, like a group of friends protecting a grieving friend. For his part, they saved him, he could not leave them, many times they had come alongside in the past, his wife had thrown them fish and watched them in playful mood.

Now Alberto stood back and viewed his work, they had done well, the old boat was itself in relapse. As he watched Delmar rubbing down the stern, he wondered if the Ramona would be taken down to the depths in the cruel sea. He did not envy Delmar and Gunter, the only two brave or perhaps foolish enough to undertake this crazy trip to save the English. He wondered what the ghosts of the Armada, hundreds of years ago smashed on the rocks would make of the endeavour. Would their brave spirits watch over his friends? Gunter interrupted his thoughts, emerging with Ciro from the small cabin, they asked Delmar to inspect their work, so Alberto was left to his thoughts, as his careful hands gently stroked

this fine ladies skin, by the time he finished it would gleam white and blue so smooth it would slip through the waves with the grace of a skater on ice.

That first night back in the only Taverna, they ate and drunk as they had in their youth. All of them were fascinated by what Berto had designed to take the boat off the rock shelf. During his rather erratic and wobbly walk back, for which he received much ribbing, he had scouted a suitable route to the small river that led down to the sea. The river itself would be too shallow and narrow to float the boat down stream, but it was the easiest course to take. He had walked down the bank nearest the rock shelf, waded across at low tide and come back on the other nearest the village harbour.

His contraption consisted of some long poles which after padding with cloth would be placed under both hulls. Using some scaffolding a tube would be placed perpendicular along the ends of the line of pole ends on each side. This would clamp them in place, then the frame would be lifted and the wheel arrangement placed under. They looked at this part in detail, it seemed impossible that it would work without mishap, but they all had great admiration for Berto, he had not yet let them down. In the morning they fell behind schedule due to the effects of too much vino, generously donated by the landlord, it was his best, how could they refuse his generous hospitality. This tall imposing chap with his massive beard was built like a bear, and hugged like one. To him these old men were a group of heroes, and deserved only the best.

Had you seen these men each day walking out towards the sea and each evening coming back empty handed you may have been puzzled, only close up could you see the improvements. She was like a crocus pushing up through soil but she would soon bloom, then you would see after many weeks a group of proud men. Followed by a trail of villagers, each helping to carry a stash of scaffold that Berto had unearthed. A woman slipped on the wet rock, her husband dropping his end, coming to her aid, worried by her fall he insisted she go back he would manage, but she would have none of it insisting that she carry on. At midday with the poles safely under the hulls, all held in place they retired back to the harbour, the tavern owner had put on a fine meal for them, fresh fish, wine, bread, cheese and olives, the giant Isidoro was much like Berto at

solving problems, but his were of a gastronomic flavour.

Later that afternoon, again an army of villagers, marched like little ants intent on crossing a stream they worked as one, with no seeming leader yet each took to the work instinctively. They took the undercarriage, with them, Berto had with some friends and a bit of arc welding, electricity supply permitting, rigged four bogies, much like those under each end of a railway carriage, except he had used car wheels. Two at either side near the stern, and two steerable at each side near the prow.

The only problem was how to get the frame lifted and these clamped to it. The combined weight of the scaffold and boat was too much for the villagers, and Berto knew this. But they could lift one side at a time but not high enough, even with Isidoro's help. Where do people hide bouncy castles? Berto found one from somewhere. They dragged it into the centre, spreading it, then a rather dodgy trail of electrical mains leads was traileed back to a power point that some poor villager had donated. Their bill would no doubt be hefty for that quarter as the pump was switched on. The electricity surging along wires, over the make shift props to keep it out of the river.

Now villagers steadied each side as the bouncy castle struggled to lift, the mass, Berto had sealed it as best he could. It did not bear thinking about what if the patches blew and the damage it might cause and danger to the villagers of frames and boat slewing across the rocks. If you had been there you would realise that they were brave people, we did not realise nor I think fully appreciate what Gunter and his friends were attempting to achieve. Nor were we aware of how William and family were facing worse as they headed south at the end of spring.

Defeat

The family had done well reaching La Rochelle, but at the rate they were travelling William worried that they may not make it to Spain before winter set in again. The trees and plants were more numerous, most young as the older trees had been taken for fires by the migrants. The herbivorous were struggling to survive against the large number of predators, this was good news for the vegetation that struggled against their hungry mouths and the changing climate.

It was just past this city when the trouble really started, ahead of them in the distance was a large pack of wolves facing a stand-off with a pride of lions over a recent kill. The predators had now run short of human carcasses that they could eat. That's not to say there weren't many lining the roads, but even scavengers have their limits, the rot had set in, their bodies cells broken down by the ice crystals, broken skeletons with sacks of putrid rotting organs made the air stench most foul.

Sunny and later his human friends, caught this aroma, as the vapours rose helped by the sun and blown by the wind across the desolate region. With the sight ahead and the smell they all felt sick and scared. Backing off William got them to walk backwards, his eyes on the ravenous creatures that blocked their path. Sunny kept quiet, he knew barking at that many would only alert them. Terror struck as one of the wolves waiting to get in on the lions kill, turned his head. This Alpha male had smelt a new quarry, his sensitive nose distinguishing between foul and food smells. Once humans had hunted his kind to near extinction, now he would return the favour.

Signalling to the pack they set off slowly at first, forming up their attack pattern. The Lions looked on, there were a lot of Wolves to many for the lionesses liking. The wolves would trot ahead then stop and see what this new prey did, before closing. The alpha male had attacked humans before, he had seen effects of the sticks they point. The noise emitted from these sticks caused the flesh to explode, he knew not how but his caution held the pack back.

The family was now walking as fast as they could, William and Jane struggling to keep Sweetpea moving, William would take nervous glances over his shoulder at the pack behind. Sunny was leading them, he would stop and look back, he did not fancy taking on those hungry relatives of his. William could see nowhere to go, no safety, ahead he saw the glint of water, it was the river they had passed some way back, taking a still intact road bridge they had not come this far down to its mouth.

Fear ran down his spine, to his left the sea, ahead the river, one that they could not cross for it was fast flowing, the melting snow had turned this once gentle flow into a raging torrent. If they had to go it was probably

better than being torn apart by the wolves that stalked them from behind. The wolves were smart, the alpha male taking some of his pack ahead further along the shoreline boxing in the fleeing humans. William had his eye on a concrete pier that once jutted out into the sea. Scrambling up the shingle that was pushed against its side he pulled Sweetpea up, Jane struggling as she slipped back. Sunny had run ahead along the concrete.

The alpha male sensed it was a good time to attack, the humans were confined by sea and river, he spotted the female slip. They came bounding across the beach, William had got Sweetpea up with him, sat on the concrete. Jane hearing the howls froze, stuck on the sliding shingle bank. William swift as his bulky cloths would allow, took his shotgun and let off a round at the leader, but this wolf was moving too fast. The shot ricocheted off a big stone sending splinters flying, hitting one of the wolves following behind, it screamed as the shaft of flint sliced into its leg, sticking in the bone.

The other wolves saw this, blood spurting from the open wound, the wolf now laying down writhing with pain trying to lick its wound. The alpha male and a few of his loyal followers still kept coming, it was up to him to show the rest. It worked giving them courage, William wanted to pull his wife to safety, but he knew he had to keep shooting. Firing and reloading, with another wolf down he fumbled to load his last cartridge. The alpha male was within metres, panic set in, William his heart racing, mind spinning as in a nightmare but this was real. Sunny ran with all his might, jumping down below Jane, his lips pulled back growling with all his strength. The Alpha male was stunned at this challenge, why was one of his relatives protecting this human. He barked at Sunny, asking why protect those who hunted us. Sunny could not understand or explain, but Jane was William's mate and he was William's friend. The brave dog stood his ground, now faced with three wolves, one dared to bite him, and almost succeeded, saved by a shot from Sweetpea's revolver. The kick pushing back her frail body.

The alpha male changed tactics just in time, pulling back as William let off a shot. The wolves pulled back, and lay like a sheepdog lays low when rounding sheep. These wolves weren't going to get shot, but they weren't going loose the chance of another meal. William helped Jane up, Sunny leaping up onto the concrete pier. Jane hugged him with great

emotion, tears streaming, her body still shaking.

Sweetpea had been in more pain than she let on, they tried to get her to her feet. She could not speak the effort of getting onto the pier and the firing of the gun had been the final straw. She had a shrewd idea of what might have happened many days ago, appendicitis, causing peritonitis, when the appendix burst bacteria inflamed the peritoneum. William sent Jane to scout the pier, they could only go one way, towards the sea.

Jane came back fast, she looked relieved. "What is it?" asked William. The pier had once formed a small marina, in a pool that linked across to the river was a small dingy. As William dragged Sweetpea along the concrete, his strong arms like a fork lift under her armpits, the Alpha male moved closer the Wolves were more confident. Jane and William had no choice but to throw her into the pool below, her body hit the water with a dull slosh, sending waves rippling across the surface rocking the small boat. William, Jane and Sunny followed. The alpha male sensed they were escaping he ran to the end of the pier, skidding to a halt, should he follow?

Below Sunny was sitting in the boat, William and Jane trying to get Sweetpea's head above water, Jane held her and the boat treading water while her husband got in and then tried pulling his mother aboard. The small boat rocked around, taking on water, of which it already had a plenty. Above the hungry eyes looked down, Jane attempted to struggle aboard from the other side, William was still tenaciously clinging to his mother. Jane cut the tether, and pushed off with a small oar, the little boat made no progress with the mother-in-law acting as an anchor. The wolves jumped into the cold water, paddling hard the short distance to the boat. Sweetpea, shouted at him to let her go, "Save yourselves." she said, wanting her son and daughter-in-law to live.

William became like a little boy again, he was afraid, scared, and did not want to leave mummy. Jane knew that his mothers shot had saved Sunny and her, she did not want to make him let go, but with the mouths almost upon them and no weapon they had no choice. She put the oar down, and unclasped his hands, he sat crying, as the inflatable moved towards the river, his wife paddling hard. The wolves tore into the mothers body, pulling it towards the shingle bank that surrounded the

pool. As they neared the river the lions appeared over the top of the pier, but the thought of getting wet and challenging the wolves did not appeal. It looked like one of those concrete edifices people have, lions on the end of their gate walls.

Jane was shouting at William to help, "For gods sake help William." she screamed as he sat in the boat weeping. She had fished the other oar out of the water below the bar seat that ran across the centre. There was a foreboding sound growing louder, the sound of water churning. They were crossing from calm to choppy water and she was struggling to hold the boat. If at any time his power was needed it was now, but he just sat slumped at the front of the boat crying, shaking with a sad stare, his head canted to one side.

There was a violent surge as the boat reared up it was now caught in the main flow of the river. Jane sat back countering Williams weight in the front, using the oars to try and point the boat forward. This wild water was cutting a new channel, the lower sea level had lots of effects on the landscape, one was to alter the course of rivers. This one was now cutting its way through the bare rock that barred its way. Grit, gravel, stones and rocks all moved by this unstoppable force.

The little boat flew over a rock face propelled by the river, its solid base crashing down onto an obstinate slab of rock that stood valiant against the onslaught. The boat slid across this and crashed back into the turmoil. Williams knuckles were white, as he instinctively grabbed the boat, still he sat frozen. Jane struggled again as the boat was thrown from side to side, the spray soaking them. As a whirlpool spun them she narrowly saved one of the oars from certain crushing between a smooth wall of rock and the boats side which was thrown against it with such force she almost went into the centre of the swirling liquid, pulling herself back from the edge.

The boat battered and full of water then came into calmer water. This was short lived, ahead she fought to get the boat past the breakers that crashed upon the shore and deluged the boat. They were both freezing, Sunny shivered too, as he kept his position below her seat. He did not mind water but he was not keen on this much excitement. Though he was pleased to have saved Jane because from what he had seen

William was in a poor state, it took the dog a while but Sunny figured out that the older woman had been his mother. Sunny remembered how he had cried and barked when humans parted him from his mother, brothers and sisters, now why did they do that he thought?

The little dingy took them out to sea pulled by the tide, Jane paddling in vein to reach the shore but it got smaller and smaller. The current of the river had assisted in pushing them further away. Waves swelled and almost sucked the boat down, it would bob up, then again fall hidden. They drifted, Jane exhausted pulled the oars to safety, lashing them down with a piece of rope she moved to sit at the rear helping to balance the boat. All of them were shivering with cold.

Ramona

It had been a great struggle getting the bogies under the frame, the rock surface was not even and the last one was on higher ground. This had been an advantage when lifting one side as it gave them purchase, but now pushing the last set of wheels took a great effort. The whole rig had lurched over terrifying those holding the other forward steerable bogie in place. The poor old bouncy castle was leaking like a sieve, air hissed from fractures in its deteriorating fabrics.

They then had a long haul across the rough surface. Berto had taken care to rope the hulls down onto the scaffold, making Alberto cringe thinking about the gleaming paintwork. It proved prudent, the slope down off rock shelf could have undone all the work. The villagers keen to keep the hulk moving, were pulling towards this slope when Berto halted them just in time. He had a plan, if they tried to steer at the front and also hold it from slipping down uncontrolled, he could see villagers slipping, and the boat massacring the rest. He and Isidoro found some cracks in the rock and hammered home some massive steel stakes. The sound of the hammer hitting the metal sent shock waves echoing around the bare landscape, it was quite deafening.

He then set up two hoist assemblies one for each side, allowing a few men to keep a control of the decent. The rest inched the assembly forward, women risked crushing as they pulled loose rocks from under the path of the wheels. These were used to fill holes smoothing the route down to the river bed. They had tried to get the steering to face the

ocean, but the angle of decent and rocks on the other bank, forced the unsteerable stern to face seaward.

It was late evening with the sun going down and the small river no danger nor the sea the villagers exhausted traipsed off to their beds. They would be glad to get back to work on the fields, but the following day they all had to go back and help pull the boat down to the sea, weather and sea conditions permitting. The provisions and supplies would be loaded at launch.

In our cave that night we got a message from Gunter that made our hearts stop he was coming to our rescue, we did not know whether to laugh or cry. Delmar spoke with us to find out the lie of the coast. Poor Jason could not contain himself, he spewed out details, so fast poor old Delmar with his broken English had no hope. Robin tried to calm him, Jason knew the coast better than any of us.

In the morning the weather was fine, clear skies, a still sea smooth as glass, the village poured down onto the beach. It was an arduous task, the wheels got stuck and the whole lot had to be backed up many times as the steering now at the rear made it worse than manoeuvring an overloaded supermarket trolley, across a sandy beach.

Each side of the river had a strange trail, as though a giant mad crab had scurried along some invisible trail of scraps. As they got closer to the sea the going got worse, how could people pull it into the oncoming waves. Berto had some poles welded with short bars which stuck out on each side, the main poles pushed into the bogies. Then with people one each side of these hand grips they pushed with fury.

With the boat almost afloat, Gunter and Delmar climbed aboard, women handed them provisions and supplies, sails, and all that which had been removed to lighten the load. Waves of the incoming tide lapped at the sides of the hulls, with an offshore wind increasing as the sun warmed the land the breeze grew stronger. The villagers backed off to a safe distance, many had picnics on the rocks. It would take several hours for the tide to come in far enough. Delmar and Gunter waited with knives ready to cut the ropes, if they went too early the boat could have been washed off the platform and onto the shallows.

Late afternoon, the villagers were waving frantically, the two brave men had slipped the undercarriage, the boat bobbed up as the boat loosed the weight below. Delmar had raised the sail, and Gunter readied to drop the rudders when they were clear of the tubes underneath. Berto had put a flag on a wooden pole at the rear of the structure so they knew, where it was.

With a breeze in the sails, the Ramona pulled out to sea, gaining speed as Delmar an expert sailor made the most of the available wind. The people became specks on the beach, Gunter watched as villagers drifted back to their homes, and Delmar studied some old charts. He had drawn in the new coastline based on the change in sea level, this helped him keep a safe distance from shore. Once he was happy with the course Gunter took the tiller while Delmar went below to sleep. They planed to take turns and so keeping the journey as short as possible.

Ship ahoy

Simon was summoned to the top of the keep by the man on watch. Bobbing around in the sea just off the peninsula was a boat, a small brown and red inflatable. He called to Jennifer, they had been in the room below. She ran up the stairs, "What is it?"

"Look a boat, a tiny dingy."

"It's another brigand trick", she said, wandering back to the stairs.

"No look." said simon grabbing her arm, "There under the seat it's a dog. I haven't seen a dog for years." he said, staring hard at her.

"Or a boat." said the man on watch.

Jennifer still sceptical stayed back in the Castle. Simon and four other volunteers, made their way down to the shoreline, scrabbling down the rocky slopes. The dingy was drifting towards the shore, the tide was in but would soon turn. Simon shed some cloths to brave the freezing water, put the rope around his waist, and waded in. Two stood on shore, the others waded part way behind him, keeping the rope out of the water to reduce the drag as he got to a depth where he needed to swim.

"It's alright fellow." said Simon catching his breath as he clung to the side, Sunny barking at him. The dogs bark was weak, the humans looked in a bad way, he tied the rope to a hook at the front and swam back to

shore keen to beat the tide. While Simon dried and changed into fresh cloths, the other four men pulled hard on the rope, the sea was strong pulling against them. Simon joined but was struggling, he wondered if the might of the sea may not be too much for them and the old rope.

Jennifer had watched from the keep as her man swam to the boat. Now she saw the five men struggling, the tides and currents around the peninsula were strong. Picking more volunteers she made with another rescue party. The tension on the rope seemed to slacken, was the sea giving ground. Simon's ears still full of water had not heard the others come from behind, picking up the heavy rope and pulling. Now the boat came to the shore buffeted in the waves and surf.

The migrants pulled the boat from the water, out of reach of the waves that came close trying to grab it back. Jennifer and two other women pulled Jane out and carried her back up to the castle, some of the men took William. Simon picked the bedraggled dog from under the seat, Sunny weak from days at sea offered no resistance. The remainder of the men took the rope and the boat, this was a valuable craft.

The kind people who now survived in Pendennis, cared and tended for these new visitors. William and Jane had arrived unconscious so it came as a surprise when William awoke to find the people of Spain wearing similar cloths to the migrants, but then he figured these were migrants who had made it. The woman who tended him did so in silence, perhaps because she spoke no English. William tried to speak a few words of Spanish looking at her hazy face through his half open eyes.

The woman shouted, to the others, This one's Spanish.

A crowed gathered, she spoke back to him in Spanish, his brain had not picked up that she had called those who now looked on, in English. This started a flurry of speculation, they wondered if some disaster had happened to Spain, had these escaped some catastrophe.

William again spoke, "Donde estamos?" He could remember little from school classes.

The woman spoke "Usted está adentro Castillo Pendennis , Inglaterra" His eyes, opened wider, "Do you speak English?"

"We are English" said Simon, holding Jennifer's hand, the arrivals had brought some hope.

There was a stunned look on Williams face, “So you made it to Spain too. Were you the one's who battled the brigands in Devon?”

“This is England, and yes how do you know we battled them?”, there was concern in the woman's voice, she was the one who had smelled a rat with those brigands now she wondered who would know this other than brigands. Jennifer was also more tense, Simon felt her hand grip his tighter.

“We hid from them in a cave? Did you say we're in England?” William was having trouble coming to terms with reality.

“Yes, have you come from Spain?”

“No, no we built a raft, got to France, trekked as far as La Rochelle, lost mother, Wolves terrible, Lions, bears, humans all dead. Escaped in the dingy.” William was feeling gutted. Jane had woken, she looked at all the people, at first frightened that they had been captured by brigands, she turned to her husband. “Where are we who are all these people?”

William shook his head, Sunny found his way through the crowd his tail wagging, licked Williams face. William hugged him, the big man was close to tears. Jennifer answered her question, she sensed they were telling the truth and realised by the reaction from the woman, that they had gone through hell to end up almost where they left. Jane sat with her arm around William, she burst into tears, they were both shaking, he could hold back no longer, he let out a scream an burst into floods of tears. The two sat with Sunny, rocking , legs outstretched, backs to the cold granite wall.

The others left these devastated souls to their sorrow. Simon still had the problem of getting his people to safety before the coming winter. For all of them the situation seemed hopeless.

Anticipation

We knew that conditions being good if we did not get our regular call from Gunter he had left on the Ramona. That call never came so now we were all on edge, not knowing what to do apart from squabble over who took the watch. It was funny how each person wanted to be the first to see the famous catamaran. We were all quite relaxed, the usual routine was followed, Robin and Jason doing their regular stint, with one of us watching from the lookout rock, we were unaware the threat of brigands had passed.

Can you imagine, how we felt when Jack screamed at the top of his voice "Sail", as the days had passed we had become more anxious. More concerned that the Ramona had gone the way of the raft. Only Alice and I knew of the fragment from Williams hand, so we were the worst pessimists while the other three became happier we became more depressed. This scream from Jack, shattered our half empty glasses, our exuberance burst forth, like a thermometer in a cartoon, the mercury rose like a rocket. We all took turns looking through the telescope, it was a magnificent site. While Alice and I hugged, tears flowing, laughing and shaking our heads in disbelief. Jason closely followed by Robin, bounded graceful as a deer across the rocks, how he moved so fast without falling, Robin slipped and slid trying to keep up. Jack scrabbled down after them taking with him a long strip of wood, on the end he nailed a ragged cloth, this was the new national flag of Britain, he stood on the lookout rock waving with the pride and vigour, like a man possessed.

The Ramona had weighed anchor, and Jason was swimming, his cloths tied up in an old plastic bag. Robin followed suit, as did Jack as we had prepared for this moment. We too scrabbled down. As Alice and I swam, to the miracle that was before us, we saw Jason climb aboard, he almost freaked out kissing those who helped him aboard Delmar, and then Gunter. A man with as smile as big as the moon, his moustache a marvel to behold, Robin once on deck hugged them both. Jacks mouth went into overdrive, we are sure you could have heard his thanks down in Spain as his voice echoed off the cliffs. Gunter helped Alice and Delmar myself on deck. They were keen to get the boat turned around while the tide and wind was favourable. We understood, sitting on the netting stretched between the hulls. How could we ever repay these guys, it brought a lump to your throat just thinking about it.

When we were under way Robin was the first to ask if they had seen or heard of his brother, mother and sister-in-law. They both shook their heads, it was a long time ago, we could see Robins joy fade as he thought of the family he now missed. "If only William had waited." he said. Jason gave him a reassuring hug, "I expect they're drinking vino in Madrid, knowing William he'll ask what kept us." This made his friend smile at the thought of his headstrong brother.

Delmar set course, as the sun was going down, Gunter taking the first watch of the evening as was their routine. He offered the other bunks in the second hull to us, for which we were grateful, except Robin who found he was not suited for the choppy conditions as the boat bounced over the waves, the wind hard in its sails, a constant buffeting finally had him pumping his bilges over the side. Some lucky crab would no doubt feast on half eaten mussels, our staple diet.

It was a rough night, in the morning both Gunter and Delmar were battling to guide the boat though a storm that had come in from the Atlantic. As it became rougher Delmar decided we had to head for safe shelter, he looked at his charts, we were way off course, through the squally showers Delmar, now with the help of my telescope spotted the Lizard. He was in familiar territory, hoping that Falmouth was accessible we hugged the coast. With the shallow draft of the Ramona we made it into the estuary and dropped anchor.

The lads were rather upset at this set back but, Gunter having a better command of English explained the reasons why. The strong wind could have broken the mast and without an engine they would have drifted onto the rocks. We insisted on keeping watch for brigands, the water was shallow and we knew their diet. As the wind and rain lashed the deck we huddled in the dry down in the hulls. Jack finally gave up his watch, convinced that if there were any brigands loose in this they'd never make it to the boat.

Simon and his friends had given up watching when the storm started, secure within the walls they to did not expect any attacks. That evening the storm died away and Delmar reckoned we still had enough light and a favourable tide and wind to make it back to sea. Gunter weighed anchor, we stayed out of the way while Delmar performed his magic with the boat, the offshore wind was easing as the sun dropped low on the horizon and we slid past the Peninsula and Pendennis Castle, unaware of the significance of this place.

That night Delmar spent hours looking at his charts, guiding us by the stars.

Struggle

Simon and his migrants were finding it difficult to get enough food, we had had a whole beach to feed six, they had the peninsula to feed nearly two hundred. Some had succumbed to disease in their weakened state, all were worried. Simon spent a lot of time asking William about their experiences, even if the cave would have anything of use to them, he was desperate to find a solution. This intense questioning and Simon's obvious concerns shook William.

Jane watched as he snapped back to his old self the strong dependable man upon whom she could rely. Simon decided with William's experience and practical knowledge here was a man with whom he could work. Perhaps it was Simon's nature, his relaxed personality, the warmth of his voice, his kindness, who knows exactly but William did not react in such a headstrong way. He seemed to want to be the advisor, the expert, but no longer the leader. Jane remarked to Jennifer how pleased she was to see him so positive. Jennifer noted they were Yin and Yang.

To move that many people all knew they needed something big, and the only likely place nearby was Plymouth with its naval docks. At first light Simon, William and a couple of other men, all armed marched off, it was a sad moment, the women worried about what lay out there in the wasteland.

Jennifer commanded those in the Castle, who were all permanently hungry, a constant ration of sea food could get to ones psyche. William had not taken Sunny, he wanted to be sure Jane was safe and there was none he trusted more than his fury friend. The dog understood, he realised William knew he would protect his mate. A man looked down at Sunny sitting by Jane who rested on the floor. This man's stare was intense, Sunny looked up at him, the dogs keen senses could feel the coldness in the man's gaze, he had seen the look in the eyes of the hungry wolves. Many resented giving food to the dog when they had so little, and others with less courage had the man's thoughts.

Jane opened her eyes, she looked at Sunny silent, watching the fellow who had now edged a bit closer. One hand behind his back in the other a piece of food. When she moved he jerked back, he would have moved but some others came through the doorway blocking his path. As he turned to leave in silence, Jane said in a solid voice with all the authority

she could muster. "This dog saved my life." The man was caught off guard, he looked at her. "When I lay like I am now frozen on a shingle bank this dog leaped down to stand between me and three wolves." Now it was her stare that was unnerving him, his eyes dropped, she continued, "When we had lost all our supplies this dog left us, he came back later bringing us a rabbit. He fed us, kept us alive mister, you touch him and I'll kill you and if I fail William surely will."

The others stared at the man, one of them, said "Get Jennifer." It was the woman with the nose for the brigands. No one messed with this woman, she then said, "And if he doesn't kill you I will." The man was now nervous, his hands shaking, the knife he held dropped to the floor, it made a clatter as it bounced. The person who had gone to get Jennifer brought her into the room. The hard woman turned to Jennifer asking that she call all to hear Jane speak.

"We must have someone on watch." said Jennifer.

The woman looked at Sunny, "You'll bark if those nasty brigands come won't you boy."

The dog gave a bark back at her, he was smart enough to realise who was on his team.

With all sat around Jane and Sunny in the middle of the round keep, Jane began to tell them the tales of their adventure through France. This became a regular evening feature, as the full extent of the dogs role became clear, he took on the treasured status of a hero. He got more than just food, he got respect and admiration, he truly was man's best friend, woman's too.

For the expedition it was a long arduous hike, which took them five days to complete over now rough terrain. Even following the main A road route involved climbing hills, so many every day and you complain about the stairs!

On the Ramona, we had a flatter ride the sea was still choppy at times and poor Robin did suffer, you could see a trail of fat crabs in our wake. The poor lad did look green as seaweed. During the day we sat on the nets stretched between the hulls, gulls would swoop near as the boat cracked a pace. Delmar had us shifting about in the nets like a group of trapped fish, Jason and Robin did not move much but the rest of us

including Gunter would lean out over the sides of one or other hull to keep it down, as the wind gusted and with full sail we at times only had one hull in the water. It was fantastic, if you looked down below the sea was almost a blur.

On the day we were in sight of Spain a pod of dolphins came along with us, jumping and twisting in the air. This was an aquatic play that we watched from our balcony seats I shall never forget. The tricks you may see in an aquarium are nothing compared to what our relatives can do in the oceans, magnificent. We wondered how any man could kill such creatures, how could anyone buy goods that cause their deaths, do they have no conscience?

Arrival

Excitement rose as we approached the village, Delmar was taking us to the small natural harbour that since the fall in sea level had become the only safety against the wild winter seas. It was a way up the coast from the village, an area of soft rock sculpted out over millions of years. The sun shone on the blue sea, light shimmered on the rocks, ahead an amazing arch.

On the shore a small lad went running hell for leather, by the time he reached the village no doubt his feet were on fire. He stumbled into his parents house, his mother mending some socks, his father carving a piece of wood. It was Sunday afternoon and the people were resting, exhausted from the weeks work. He could not speak for his breathing was so laboured, but his mother knew, "It's the Ramona?" The lads eyes bright, he nodded his head so frantic it should have fallen from his shoulders. His dad dropped everything, the chisel fell where it lay, the socks on the floor. This lad was picked aloft on his fathers broad shoulders, while his mother went into the street, and running from house to house, all were moving, the Priest rang the church bell, for all his worth to alert those further up the village.

From every house people emerged, even old Aluino put his body into overdrive as his eighty year old frame surged with adrenaline. The priest one of the last to leave caught up with the old man, giving him support. The big Isidoro looked back though the crowd at the two lolloping along.

He ran back, others turned and watched as the giant, turned to the Priest, "Allow me father." Aluino had not had a piggy back since childhood, this brought back fond memories.

With the priest in front, the big Isidoro lumbered on through the crowd at a cracking pace determined to get the man who had made all this possible to the cove when the Ramona arrived, he had to see her come though that arch. The people moved aside, cheering the big man on, the priest was struggling with his robes to stay ahead. A woman, shouted, "Pick up your skirts father." the holy man took this in good part, a grin on his face.

Winding down the trail to the small beach within the cove, all moved aside Aluino had never had such a ride and savoured every moment. Even when Isidoro nearly slipped over on loose gravel, caught by those who had stood to let him pass. At the first sight of the hulls nosing through the arch a roar that would wake the dead ripped through the villagers and made even Jack seem like a quiet fellow. It was not only the locals that were coming, at the sound of the bell others came. This endeavour was rippling through the grape vine to other villages and towns nearby.

At the head of the welcoming party stood Aluino flanked by Isidoro and the Priest, Alberto was there, as was Ciro and Berto all waving frantically. Delmar had dropped the sails and we were using oars to paddle the boat in where once an engine would have done the job. We were over come with elation, in the calm of the cove, surrounded by beauty and a welcome better than anything imaginable. I thought it could not get any better, but as Delmar weighed anchor and small rowing boats were sent to collect us. Alice turned to look deep into my eyes, she hugged and kissed me. Oh but that was not all, she said "I'm pregnant." My emotions went hyper, hugging and kissing her. Poor Jason had lost it too, he went berserk with laughter, Delmar and Gunter both looked at him, like they had just liberated an asylum. Jack strangely remained calm, shaking Delmar and Gunters hands and thanking them with all his might.

The flotilla of rowing boats arrived, we almost floated onto them in a dream like state. Gunter was the first onto shore at which a cheer went up and Delmar cracked a joke, "Look what happens when you forget to put your towel on the beach Gunter!" The crowd roared with laughter.

Gunter hugged his old friend Aluino for some time. Delmar assured Alberto that we had taken care of his fine paintwork. Ciro, Berto, Isidoro and the priest were the first to welcome the rescued English. Ciro turned to Berto, looking at the rags we wore, "See Berto and you thought I had no dress sense!" We all laughed, the villagers crowded around eager to meet those of whom Gunter had spoke so much.

We were taken up the trail to the village, but not before expressing our thanks to those who saved us. Back in Isidoro's taverna we ate like kings, vegetables, food we had dreamed of eating. People wanted us to tell them our stories, and even though many could not understand English their friends whispered translations. It was a long evening, Gunter took us up the hill to stay in his villa. It was a day we shall never forget, to see such immense kindness was a great comfort, it gave us hope for the future. Overtime the voyage of the Ramona would become legend across Spain, it would stir a passion that people could still archive great things against all the odds.

Search

In Plymouth Simon was leading the search for a vessel, but what kind of boat would be left, if any? They headed for the docks, needing something big it seemed the best place to look. Just imagine as Simon did, four coach loads of people, he did when looking down on a couple of rusting hulks, lying in silt and mud. This gave him an idea, he turned to William, "You said you built a raft, if you had more wood could you build something bigger?"

William looked at him, "A raft for two hundred people, there's no way you could steer something like that, our raft was bad enough."

"I had in mind a longship." said Simon, with a vision in his head but little idea of how to make one.

"Like the Vikings had?" said one of the men, "But we'd need loads of wood."

"Where did you get your wood William?" asked the other man.

"Roofs of houses they were the few timbers out of reach, but even if there was any, you'd need ladders."

"We have ladders the brigands left." said Simon, he looked at the others, awaiting further comment.

William spoke, "Even if we built it, it would leak like a proverbial sieve."

"We might find some paint?"

"Or oil from car engine sumps, there must be loads of abandoned vehicles, some must still have oil."

Simon felt his idea coming alive, that evening camped in the remains of an old warehouse, he asked William what things they would need.

Picking the big man's brains as to how his group had collected such things. The following morning the men raced back, they had wasted six days, it would be five more by the time they got back.

Jennifer meanwhile had considered the possibility of failure, if they had to stay this winter they would need wood for fire. The hard woman volunteered to go and scout with a couple of the bigger men. Jo wandered down into the eerie skeleton of Falmouth, this woman was tough as nails, the men followed in her wake. The town's deserted streets were littered with debris from walls that had collapsed. Lacking roofs, the weather had started its slow demolition job. Cars once tended with pride, owners who had spent years of their life polishing the paint, now cracked, battered and rusting.

Further out from the town they did locate a few houses where people had left the roofs for shelter, but the timbers were out of reach. Jo and her team came back empty handed apart from a few bags full of jam jars and bottles which were always useful for storage. That evening Jo gave her findings to the whole group, Jane listened, it was not positive but she knew one thing, if those men had found a boat it would be one that needed repairs and that would need tools and fixings. She put this to the group, Jennifer thought it was a good idea as did Jo, the rest followed suit, at least those not collecting food would have a purpose.

Two groups set out, one to the west headed by Jane and Sunny the other with Jo to the north. Like chickens pecking the ground for seeds, they scoured gardens, car boots, shops, old boat yards, garages, anywhere that humans may have worked with tools. In the two days remaining before Simon's expedition returned they pulled in a seizable haul. Had the old canons had gunpowder, there was now plenty of grape shot.

When Simon arrived several days later in the evening there was a clamour for news. He first told them the bad news, then of his idea, which most thought would be impossible.

“The Vikings had pine forests.” said one cynic.

“We can get roof timbers.” said William, backing Simon up.

“We have ladders.” said Simon, distracted by both Jo and Jennifer, who's expressions were, duh why did we not think of that earlier.

“Ladies?”

“We were going to get some timbers for firewood, but couldn't reach them” said Jennifer.

“But we have got something you might need.” she smiled at Simon, beckoning him with her delicate index finger. They were led to the heap of tools and fixings that almost filled one of the small rooms. It was a vast hoard, had it been gold they would each have been rich beyond measure. William immediately dived in like a kid in a sweetshop, organising piles of saws, hammers, screwdrivers and such, he set Jane to work sorting the screws, nuts, bolts nails. Sunny watched curious at the things humans got up to.

The rest, settled down for the night, it was now early summer and time was short. In the morning, Simon sent out three parties armed with ladders to rip timbers from the roofs, William went along to give them advice and help. What William really wanted was a telegraph pole for the mast. He also needed a good build site, he knew from Simon's history lesson that Vikings had used rivers and even crossed land from one to another to get to Byzantium, but they no doubt had logs to roll the boats over, he had none. William looked for a sheltered spot on the beach below the castle, at each potential site he waded into the water at both high and low tides, testing the surface and gradient, aware that they may have to slide the keel over the terrain on which it was built.

Once Simon knew where William wanted the site, wood, tools and supplies were put in place and some suitable people, good with their hands were assigned to start building. One team of scavengers came back with a pile of aluminium tubes, these were too thin for a mast or the horizontal yard but William suggested these as shafts for oars. Later the same team returned with smiles on their faces, it was an aluminium flag pole.

“Will this do for the thing at the top that holds the sail?” said the man at the front.

William was pleased it would do nicely if only he had a mast.

The women were sent out to gather rope, sail cloth or anything of that nature, except Jo who insisted she could do the bigger heavier stuff. Simon knew her nature, if he sent her to look for the mast, it would arrive. It took weeks for her team to find one, but tucked down where it had fallen hidden by a pile of rails in a railway cutting was a telegraph pole in good condition. This was many kilometres away, so it took them even longer to bring it back.

One of the other men a former car mechanic had taken on the messy role of collecting oil, he was a bit of a loner so it suited him. Laying under cars, spanner, hammer, oil flowing as the drain plug was removed. It surprised him how many cars there were and most had not been touched. Perhaps he thought working under a car in sub zero winter temperatures had not appealed to those in search of fuel.

With a growing pile of materials it was soon clear that more labour could be assigned to construction of the hull. The boats keel was by this time assembled and most of the ribs in place. William was keen to start putting planks on starting from the bottom, these were placed slightly overlapping, to form a clinker built hull. With no chard wood tar, rope was soaked in oil and stuffed on the joints.

Even though this boat was nearly thirty metres long and would have twenty five bench seats across like a massive rowing boat, it became obvious that one boat would not carry two hundred people. There was no time to build another, there was already a touch of autumn in the air. Set with one of those conundrums, like the one where you have to take a chicken fox and bag of grain across a bridge but only one at a time. He needed to get enough people across in one trip to allow a sufficient number to crew the ships return and collect those left at Pendennis.

In the evenings William did not rest, as he had been obsessed with the raft and built it in kit form, he now had people working on parts in the castle. Having shown Jane how to carve wood she set to on a head piece and was left a few small sample paint tins.

It was not until the autumn had fully begun that the real test came, with a mammoth effort of manpower they hauled the ship into the water. A devilishly fearsome dragon sat at the prow, should old Neptune try any

tricks this creature was sure to give him a fright. William hauled himself up a rope that hung over the side, men followed and after checking for leaks they put the sail on the yard. Then people handed up rounded stones, this took some time as they put about five tons of ballast in place, covered with a layer of removable plank sections. Others handed up the oars, with no time to loose Simon had organised the people into three groups. The very weakest who would go first, the strongest with them for they would, he hoped come back for the rest.

With under seventy people remaining it was a sad but hopeful departure. Simon, Jennifer, Jane and Sunny were with those who stood watching the fine vessel row out to sea. William had been across this sea before, with his knowledge of the ship and the feisty Jo aboard as second in command, Simon hoped to see them again. The ship had a dark colour to it, and with the sun shining backed by dark clouds it looked menacing. The planks had all been painted with oil. Some tins of waterproofing paint had been used as extra protection on the vital keel, the ships back bone.

The small number on the shore, made their way back to the keep, where only a few people had remained just in case the brigands appeared. From the keep there was a fine view of the ship, its square sail now rigged and catching a fair wind. The oars had been stowed and the crew two per oar on each side had taken to resting. During the day William used his pocket watch and the sun to guide them south, at night Jo took over using the stars. This little lady had dreamed of becoming a famous astronomer, alas the crisis in Europe had scuppered all chance of that, but now the lives of one hundred and twenty six people depended on her knowledge. This gave her great pride, so many of her friends and even her parents had urged her to study something practical. Her father particularly had considered her stupid and stubborn, this excelled her determination and tenacious appetite to know the heavens.

At night the moon lit the sky, its light caught the white spray on the tips of the waves. There was a ghostly creaking as the ships timbers groaned at the buffeting from the rolling sea. In the morning William caught site of the coast of Brittany, on a course roughly five degrees west of the meridian. The ropes attached to the corners of the sail were stretched tight as piano wire, a strong north wind bloating the cloth above. The unnamed boat raced along at almost fourteen knots. The big man's mind

raced back to his first effort, this was something else, oh she was roughly built out of necessity, much of the inner wood was rough and many complained at getting splinters, but a sturdy boat, like her master builder.

On the afternoon of the second day, a violent storm was on the brew, the wind had now changed and across the wild Atlantic streamed vast black rain clouds, lightning flashed on the horizon, the sea began to swell. The sail was lowered, then they had the dangerous manoeuvre of lifting the heavy mast out of its socket while the ship rolled. Leaving it in seemed to much temptation for old Thor to strike with his hammer. With high waves crashing into the ship, the oars were again placed in the water, at times loosing contact at other times it was like you had Neptune himself pulling at the blades. The cold horizontal rain and sea spray made for gruelling conditions. A good deal of sick was sliding down to join the ballast.

The people aboard fought mighty hard to make any progress, it seemed an impossible task, but William shouted about the raft hitting the rock. There were other perils lying just below the surface should the boat drift too near the French coast. Neptune and Thor continued pounding the little boat like two children trying to sink a toy, each out doing the other. Those Gods continued through the night and into the third day but Jane's dragon head finally put the wind up them both, or so William joked. Sun now replaced rain, a gull flew by checking them out, it landed and sat on the dragons nose, put a white bogey on it and flew off.

The wind again blew this time from the north east, the mast was once more hauled up and heaved into its slot. With wind in her sail, she now ran like a sprinter with the finish in sight. On the morning of the fourth day, some Spanish folk had to rub their eyes and take a second look. The storm had pushed them east, once back on a southerly course they had lined up roughly with Santander to the south. William had spotted the large city and was now hugging the coast a way out to sea.

The same little fellow who had spotted the Ramona all those months before again ran with the same fury, he had seen one of these ships in a school history book. He screamed at his father who was sat outside polishing some wood, gasping for breath. "Los vikings están viniendo" His father got up and stared out to sea, and sure enough there was a Viking ship, how could it be? He ran to the priest who was buying some

bread, he looked and ran to the church. His hands reached instinctively for the bell rope.

With the bell ringing others came to see, from Gunter's villa we looked through the telescope. I scanned the stern of the ship, with disbelief, the man holding the course looked like William. I shouted to Jack to get the others, they were all working in Gunter's garden. They came storming down from the sloping terraces, leaving dust storms whirling behind. "Look at the back of that ship Robin." I said handing him the telescope.

There was excitement in the air, all of us tore down the roads, bursting through the people who stood and watched, taking them by surprise. The ship had not yet passed our harbour, from the rocks around the cove we hoped they would see us. I have never seen a man move so fast as Robin did that day, even Jason who was normally the fastest could not keep up. From the headland above the cove Robin, Jason and Jack started waving and shouting furiously, Alice, I and soon Gunter and Delmar came too but we headed for the Ramona. "Come on." I shouted to our vocal friends. The villagers were now following the mad English, with a degree of curiosity and foreboding, as a ship full was more than even Isidoro's generous hospitality could cope with.

When we had paddled the Ramona into a breezy spot, Delmar raised the sail, our ship sliding along as a dolphin might to meet this large vessel. On board Jo had spotted us, and shouted back to William, who obviously caught a glimpse of Robin, sat in the nets waving his arms off like a demented windmill. Jack was making full use of his foghorn vocals, shouting, "Ahoy." William ordered the sail to be lowered and oars placed in the water to slow the ship. He ran up to the head standing holding the dragons neck waving a beaming smile on his face.

Delmar lowered our sail and as we slowed Robin dived into the water swimming across to greet his brother. Jo lowered a rope ladder over the side and he clambered aboard, after the crushing hug from William his face saddened as he learnt the news of Sweetpea. Others in the ship looked down on our catamaran, it was a joy for them to see civilized people. We took the Ramona back into the safety of the cove, while on board the longship the mast was lowered onto the deck. William with some great skill navigated the big monster through the arch the oars just

inches from the rocks on either side.

The crowds had now gathered, watching as these invaders jumped into the sea and swam ashore. Jo had dropped anchor for and aft, these were just big lumps of scrap iron taken from lorry subframes, but they did the job.

The priest with his usual skill and network of people arranged for other villages and towns to help those who were going to stay and provided fresh provisions for the sixty one who had volunteered to return and collect the rest. Robin wanted to celebrate but William insisted they must go now, "But you've only just arrived." pleaded his brother. There was a sorrowful parting, but it had to be, Robin wanted to go to but Jason suggested it better he stay.

William asked if I knew a suitable female norse name, I suggested Erna which in old Icelandic is brisk or vigorous. I handed him my telescope, "Don't lose it I want it back, but it may help you." He smiled, and stepped aboard a small rowing boat, its Spanish owner taking him to the longship, where Jo and the other sixty volunteers awaited their captain.

We watched them weigh anchor, the oars began to move, powering the boat back out into the ocean. Robin had become very emotional, even Jason could not console his frustrations, all we could do was wait. Those who still believed prayed, those of us who did not, watched the weather, clocks and the horizon clinging to the rock of hope.

Friendship

The Erna had a good start, another wind from the south west carried her north. It was during the night when they were near the Lizard, a headland off Cornwall that Thor and Njord the Norse sea god decided to stir up trouble. With the rocky coast not far from the longship one supposes these mischievous lords thought of smashing the impudent humans who might dare to challenge them in such a feeble wooden craft.

The storm came so fast from the south that they had no chance to lower the mast, it waved around as the boat slew in all directions, spun like a spinning top as Thor an Njord played with it as a boat in their bath. With the moon covered by the thick clouds and no lights on land, using the

oars might make things worse. Without my compass they were like a blind man in minefield. Rain and spray lashed the deck, bottles and jars rolled around on the planks, the Erna cried with pain as the waves pounded her sides, and then fell beneath her, the keel straining. With so little good timber William had used a series of big beams sandwiched together, held solid by massive bolts taken from vehicles, strengthened by metal plates and screws, as a surgeon might fix a broken bone.

Thor blew at the mast, Njord tried to push from beneath that the mast almost touched the sea. The crew holding tight to the oars were thrown around the deck, falling of their bench seats, like drunk budgies of a perch. On the starboard side the rudder oar crashed against the hull, William could not hold it, Njord tore the wooden handle from his grip, the lashings that held it in position, stretched and strained as it was wrenched around. A giant wave pushed the stern up so high that the dragons mouth sipped from the sea. Yet the Erna would not give. Jo was hanging on at the dragons neck, thrown from side to side, she had lashed a rope around her waist so as to stand high, her eyes straining to see any glimpse of moonlit coast.

One man near the stern hit his head against one of Erna's ribs, he lay, blood running down his neck. William, slipping and sliding across the wet boards pulled him off the seat and lay him as best he could on the deck, tying the man with ropes to prevent him further injury. Drawing in the oar, he thought he heard Jo shouting, the howl of the wind played tricks with your ears. He saw her wave at him, the others eyes almost closed as the salt sprayed over the open deck, they hunched over, knuckles white with pressure as they clung like frightened apes to a mothers fur. Erna now had water sloshing around the ballast, the stones rolled around like pebbles in swans gut.

William inched his way towards Jo, his defiance enraged the gods who made the storm even more ferocious. As he neared her a giant wave broke over the deck, in its fury the boat canted, the end of wave gripped him and threw him to its master Njord. But Njord had not seen how close Jo was, she grabbed Williams left hand with every ounce of strength she had, both her small hands crushing into his. Sinews ready to snap, Thor blew and the boat rocked to the larboard, Thor had seen William floating in mid air hanging on, as the ship levelled the man was thrown crashing

to the deck, Jo could not hold his weight any longer, she never prayed as a rule but at that moment she shouted at another god. “Odin, do something about your bloody kids.”

It seemed as though he ignored her, the storm still raged, William slid across the boards, his cloths ripped on the rough strips. Blood ran from cuts, and grazes where nails and screws caught. Then Jo looked up there was a break in the clouds, it was the moon. The rain eased, waves still rough but lower, lapping at the sides, Jo thanked Odin, and then looked around. A glint of moonlight shone on what looked like wet rocks, or was it just waves, no waves move.

She unleashed herself, and went and stirred the others into action. “Turn around on your seats and row like fuck.” She ran to the prow, a rock was metres from Erna, and the ship was closing, “ROW ROW” she shouted running back to an empty seat. They pulled hard against a current, Njord was still under the bows up to his tricks where Odin could not see him, he and Thor must have seen the smaller crew. The sixty of them strained every muscle, Jo shouting “Row” with every stroke. The Erna's prow moved a few centimetres back at each stroke, Njord now tried another trick, pushing with the tide, the boat swung around towards another set of rocks, they can't row sideways! William's head moved, he pushed himself from the deck, Jo “Shouted get the rudder.”

Still dazed the big man stumbled to the stern and grabbed it using his weight to push against the forces below. He shouted at Jo, her back to him, she looked around, the wind still howling in their ears. He jumped down to the nearest man on the starboard side, “Get your side turned around, pass it on.” Then he went to the larboard crew, “Keep rowing we need to turn her.” Like a ripple through the grass one side spun around on their seats, the other kept rowing, the ship began to turn, William back at the rudder.

Now Njord was really mad, not since the Vikings had he seen such defiance. William again went down and spoke to the nearest man on each side he would use left hand or right hand to signal direction, as to each sides rowing direction. They kept a keen eye as the Erna was guided away from the rocks, Njord was beginning to tire without Thor it was not so much fun. The waves were loosing their power and the ship

was gliding away from the dangerous currents at an increasing pace. William single handedly raised the sail to take them back out to sea. The crew was exhausted, William had fallen asleep at the rudder and the rest with oars stowed had slept on the deck awash with brine.

As the sun rose on a calm autumn day the Erna rocked gently, the breeze still tugging her along. One of the men woke to see the ship adrift, using his head he lowered the sail and looked around, there was no land in sight. He got food and took some around to each of the crew, waking them with one word "Eat." Getting a friend the two of them carried William and sat him on a soft bundle of spare sail. They then got Jo and put her beside him. Now the man, told his friend to take the rudder, while he looked at the direction of the sun and pulled out Williams pocket watch from its place, the face now cracked with the fall. Only the hour hand survived, it was enough, the old precision time piece continued ticking.

The man raised the sail, his name Stacy, others stopped eating and helped. With a fair wind, he helped his friend at the heavy rudder, steering a course north west. Not knowing where they were, to go north may have taken them up the Irish channel now a very narrow channel, or worse maybe even past the west coast of Ireland. It was mid afternoon, when a shout from one of the crew standing at the prow spotted land, the cliffs were white, and at one end points jutted into the sea to the west.

William heard the call of "Land ahoy." He went to the prow to look, and realised where it was, the Isle of Wight, they were a long way off course. With a heaving on the rudder the Erna pulled around parallel with the cliffs, the light wind pushing at the sail which was now on an north east axis the wind blowing up from the south. William kept the boat heading south south west, knowing that by night fall they would not make Falmouth, he wanted plenty of sea between them and those rocks.

Ashore that evening Simon and friends were worried, the previous nights storm had kept them all awake. All knew the longship should be on its way back yet they had seen no sight of it. That night on board the Erna they tried to drop anchor but the sea was to deep for the ropes. So with the sail down and out of sight of land they took turns to keep watch while cradled in the hull. It had been a long afternoon, the crew bailed out most

of the storm water, a little still remained trapped down between the ballast.

It was a peaceful night, for those on the boat. In the castle all were restless, Sunny snuggled up by Jane who could not sleep for worrying about her husband. They were like a bundle of chrysalises waiting for a signal to hatch.

In the morning the sea was still calm, there was a light cold wind from the north, so reluctantly the crew dropped Erna's sail and rowed her through the ripples that lapped the bow. Mid-afternoon, a ship was sighted coming up from the south east, as it closed on Pendennis, Simon and friends could see the waves of oars, like a millipede's legs rippling along the sides of the boat. It was a heart stopping sight as this magnificent ship sailed through the channel, William wanted to drop anchor in the calm of the Fal estuary, with her low draft she could take the shallow water in her stride, this lady could manage with not much more than a metre and still move.

Jennifer, looked at Simon, "Why did they go up the estuary, why not land to pick us up and go straight back?"

"They must have had a rough time in that storm." said Simon which is just what his lady had thought. "Lets get the dingy we can ferry them across to the shore."

No more words were needed, as they hurried with the dingy, the Erna was dropping anchor in the Carrick Roads. William stood watching with my telescope, he saw Simon and some other men carrying the little boat down to the shore, that brought back memories.

Jo was leaning over the man who had cracked his head. They had tried to bandage him as best they could but he was in a bad way. Others waved back at those waving from the shore, Simon was now paddling the dingy with Jennifer at his side on the other oar. As the little boat came nearer it was dwarfed by the bulk of Erna's body. William dropped the rope ladder, Stacy caught the rope from the dingy and tied it alongside. Jennifer and then Simon climbed aboard, as they clambered into the hull they saw the poor fellow, it was the man who had gotten all the oil from the cars. Now like an engine short of oil, his body short of blood was in danger of seizing up.

Jennifer and Simon wasted no time and got back into the dingy, the crew lowered him down on ropes. Once safely on board Simon and Jennifer rowed like their lives depended upon it. There was one last chance for this poor fellow, one of the women was a trained nurse. From the shore the others had seen the injured man put on board. As the boat hit the shore, Simon and Jennifer each with a paddle in hand jumped clear, the nurse looked at her patient, "I can't treat him here."

Without a word the boat rose out of the water, the migrants carried it up the peninsula to the castle as fast as they could, if one staggered another stepped in. The man was soon lying on soft clothes, legs raised and the nurse tending to his wounds. Simon got the others to take the boat back down and ferry the crew back to land.

When William stepped ashore, Jane hugged him and Sunny barked and wagged his tail that it might spin off. As they stood and others came ashore, each patted William on the back, they had a great respect for this big farmer. Jane did not want to let go of him, she had worried so, and it was only during the evening that the others realised the extent of the crews' ordeal.

Delay

In Spain days passed slowly, the longer the Erna was not sighted the more people worried, Robin was unable to do much, and we did not expect it. He sat huddled in a corner, next to a window looking out to sea, that's all he could do. Jason had a hard time getting the lad to eat. As time went on, he was convinced that they were all lost, and in the back of our minds so did we. There had been some terrifying storms in the Bay of Biscay, the village had suffered damage in the high winds.

One roof was almost completely ripped off, the house flooded by the deluge, streams from the hills became rivers, unharvested late crops were washed from the soil and lay rotting. The villagers pulled together as they always did, a few days later, people were replacing broken timbers, others sorted the tiles. The old couple that lived in the house looked on with great gratitude as a series of kind people brought things to replace those lost.

In Pendennis they battened down the hatches as the storms blew in, it

did however give the nurse time to tend to the Loner, or the Lone Ranger as the migrants called him. There was not much that could be done for him, they had no hospital, the nurse stopped his bleeding and bandaged his skull. The thought was that his skull was fractured, but she did not want to probe too hard for fear of causing more damage, no doubt there was internal bleeding. At best they could stabilize his condition and hope for a break in the weather, they had hospitals in Spain.

Over a week passed before the weather broke, the little boat was used to ferry people and supplies to the Erna. William had not been idle at any chance he had gone to see her, concerned for her condition. For the first time Jane felt what it must be like to compete with a mistress, and the Erna drew him with a passion.

As the crew boarded they had to bail out the mass of rain water that had collected in her hull. It took a whole morning of relaying tools, provisions and people aboard. With a full crew the row out to the open sea was much easier. This time Odin kept his children in check, the sea was calm and a light wind carried them south.

Jo went wild at the prow when she saw a fountain of water, it was a whale breaking surface, then another, a whole pod of migrating whales. The crew was moved as they watched these graceful creatures. Hearing the sound of the gentle giants exhale evoked much emotion as these creatures went around the Erna. Jo, usually serious and unemotional was now animated with excitement, her eyes glowing, on her face a beautiful smile, she was saying in a sweet voice hello to each whale wishing it a happy life.

The longship continued south through many days and nights, sea giving way as it lapped at the planking. It was a fine morning on the last day of their voyage, gulls came in squadrons flying low to take a look. Then the dolphins appeared, for William it was like seeing friends in unfriendly territory, for most of the others it was a wonderful new experience. And Jo, well you can imagine!

The ship gently rolled, the Lone Ranger's eyes flickered the nurse leaned down as he tried to speak. Her ear to his lips, she heard him say, "I now know why the Vikings wore those helmets, bloody good idea." She

laughed, and whispered in his ear, "Odin's health and safety executive ruling." He cracked a grin, but did not hold it long, tensing the muscles sent pain searing through his nerves.

The strong west wind had pushed them towards the French coast, but ahead lay the coast of Spain. The crew lowered the sail, as the boat turned west, and the oars sprouted from the Erna. She was soon making good speed, following the line of the land on her larboard side. The Erna, has at the stern on the right hand side should you be facing the prow, a large paddle that is the rudder or steering board, the Norsemen had another word, Styri, now starboard. The other side is the larboard, you might call it the port side because if the Erna comes alongside a pier she would avoid damage to the rudder tying up on the larboard.

The arrival of the Erna that first time had rippled through Spain, eclipsing the Ramona's voyage, as the migrants told their story to the locals. Now as the great ship travelled along the Spanish coast, like a hot wax striping hairs it pulled hundreds of people to watch as it passed. The coast roads were packed with crowds all shouting and waving. From the shore you could hear the rhythmic sound of oars smacking the waves.

From the cove the Ramona set out once again with us on board with only a slight breeze we were lucky to intercept her. William stayed at his rudder and shouted down to us that they were taking an injured man to Santander. Delmar understood, we turned back and the Ramona like a town crier brought the news to a waiting crowd. That priest must have been fit, upon hearing the news he was off like a shot. Only later did the reason for his sprint become known to us. For a village priest he worked in mysterious ways, it seemed easier to list who he did not know, he was that well connected.

In Santander the streets were buzzing, a biodiesel Ambulance was already waiting on the quayside. It was as though the whole city was now standing at every vantage point, people waving and cheering, as the Erna approached. Her magnificent hull only lacking a row of round shields. Not since the old ferries ran had people seen such a big ship, the noise as the oars hit the sea in the calm water was awesome, its rhythm and the dragon put the wind up one priest who thought it the work of the devil. Quickly he made the sign of the cross. From the youngsters

came the Spanish equivalent of, wow, cool, and awesome.

As the longship slipped into port, women swooned at the fine figure who stood proud at the stern guiding her in. When they shipped the oars, holding them high, the crowds spontaneously erupted into clapping. At the prow Jo dropped anchor, William then did the same from the stern. A small police launch, its tiny motor chugging, came like a puppy to its mothers side.

You have an injured man, shouted one of the crew.

On the Erna, they wondered 'how could they know that?', as they stood watching the man quickly lowered into the launch. The Lone Ranger was in good hands his nurse went too. He had an admirer, she knew what he went through to come back to them, she would not leave this brave man for the world.

An army of rowing boats came alongside, the migrants were one by one helped ashore, and carried aloft by the exuberant Spaniards.

Party

People watched from the streets as down the road came a stream of ragged wretches, held high above the men's shoulders. The onlookers cheered and clapped as each one was taken to a street party that the Major had assembled in their honour. From our village left another stream of people, it grew as more of the migrants from the maiden voyage of the Erna joined the convoy. Though it was more like an old wagon train, people riding in horse drawn carriages, shire horses pulled big carts. All the crew and team from the Ramona were invited, the priest, old Aluino, Isidoro and Gunter sat in a luxurious affair up front.

We were behind, in an old cart, which was an exiting ride as the bumpy roads and hills had you wishing for seat belts, and your feet bolted to the floor! Ciro and Delmar sat up front, Delmar reigns in hand praising the horse, and telling it not to let those in front beat us to the hay. Robin was overcome with joy at the thought of being reunited with William. Alice was holding me tight, her bulge beginning to show, she wondered if our baby would suffer from headaches, as the cart bumped along. As we descended a hill, there was a scream, as a mad man on a bicycle went tearing past us. It was Berto still mourning the demise of the Tour de

France, in his yellow jersey, going at a pace that frightened us.

Alice could not look as he took a bend on those narrow tyres, how he missed the pot hole we'll never know. The grapevine was working well in Spain, as we neared the venue, crowds cheered "Viva Ramona" which had poor old Aluino in tears, what better way to honour his wife's memory, and their lovely boat.

When we arrived there were rows of tables decked out with a sumptuous feast, the rest of the crew had sat in place but they all stood and clapped as we were helped from the carriage and cart. Berto stood in his lycra, and shouted, "What kept you?" Which sent waves of laughter as people further back asked what the cyclist had said. The horses did not miss out, they were taken down a sides street and given water and a feast of carrots and hay.

On the head table were the guests of honour, the Mayor and a man some of you might recognise though much older and still with Camilla. Charles the third, kings with that given name did not seem to do so well when it came to the Kingdoms they inherited. William was reunited with Robin who stuck to him like a leach, so much so that we had to help Jane break his hold so they could take their seats. Jane sat on one side Robin on the other of the big farmer, master craftsman, and captain of the Erna. Sunny, was treated just as we were, and he loved it. The food, our stomachs must have thought it Christmas, these Spaniards had done us proud.

The wine was copiously administered, as were toasts and speeches. You could see the disbelief on the migrants faces, they could not believe this was happening. Charles gave a stirring speech to the courage and valour of his countrymen and thanked the Spanish people for such marvellous hospitality. Which extended to the not so Lone Ranger and his now fiancée, who sat by his bedside, these two were not forgotten, they had a mini celebration around the bed.

We had bands playing on an improvised stage, singers, flamenco. Even a comic play improvised by the local theatre. We understood very little but it did not matter, we were so grateful and honoured at this magnificent reception.

The Mayor made a speech that roused the people he told of how William had built the ship and brought it safely through storms and the treacherous seas. Jane watched with Sunny as the Mayor gestured to William to come up onto the podium, pride welling within her. The Mayor handed him a key, "My friend, for you the freedom of our city." There was a roar as the crowd cheered, most had heard from the rest of the Erna's crew about his skill, strength and determination. Then he continued, "And we must not forget our little Ramona and her brave crew." Beckoning to Delmar and Gunter to the podium, which received loud applause.

That night all were taken in as guests of various families within the city. Sleeping on beds, a luxury denied us for years, most needed a crowbar to prise them loose in the morning. The hosts were most understanding, it had been bad in Spain, but nowhere near that which these people had endured.

Reality

The jubilation and celebrations were short lived. Spain was struggling to survive, the north was relatively safe since the migrations ended. Delmar's son Gregorio had one of the safer jobs, he was a ranger and patrolled the wildlife barrier up the coast near the Pyrennes. The series of ditches, concrete walls and fences were there to prevent an increasing number of predatory animals from getting in and taking livestock. He was proud of his dad and elated when he had a text from his mother with news from the party.

Sat in a tower he kept watch along his section. Rangers worked in shifts, and took turns to walk the fence checking for any damage. In some sections avalanches of rocks, snow and mud could cause breaches, streams and in one case a river were particularly difficult to keep secure, the stretches that went down to the sea were the worst, thankfully he did not have either in his section. You may wonder why all the trouble, can't people just shoot predators if they attack? Eat them instead? Unfortunately the trouble in the south demanded all the armaments available.

Gregorio opened his lunch box, what had his wife put in for him today? "Hmm pate again, well it was ok he liked pate." Just as he took a bite the

alarm rang, he put the sandwich back in the box and picked up his binoculars. It was sector five of the board showing red, he carefully scanned the scrub. He picked up a book, glanced at it, put the book down and took another look, it was one of his worst problems. One member of a troop of baboons had passed through the laser fence, beyond was an electric fence, but these clever fellows had worked out ways to get passed it. A colleague of his had a whole troop get over and try to scale the main fence. With power strictly limited and the supply sometimes intermittent the battery powered fences could and did fail. Then he had to flip the switch on the wires that hung out over the top of the main fence. Some of the more difficult stretches had rolls of razor wire, but there was not enough to do the whole length, most went south.

This lot were now following the other chap, who was throwing sticks at the wires of the electric fence, similar to those farmers used to use. He new what the cheeky monkey was up to, trying to short it to earth. Gregorio climbed down the metal ladder and ran along to the section being tested, his first action to make as much noise as possible, trying to scare them, he had a siren, but this lot knew that sound, they weren't scared of one human. The big male was even more determined, his troop could see the greener grass over the other side and they were hungry.

Gregorio plugged in a hose and turned on a tap, you could tell the stretches where animals tried to break through, there was a patch of lush vegetation where the water canon sprayed them. This added to the problem as this vegetation had to be kept in check or the fence would be overrun with climbers and shrubs. Every so often rangers had the unenviable job of clearance, with no herbicides or flame throwers, it had to be done by hand, most sections were inaccessible to vehicles and with biodiesel rationed it was rather academic.

These little buggers would not shift, oh nice a cold shower, the big male dipped sticks in the wet puddles, he wondered why the human was helping him short the fence? Gregorio ran to a covered box nearby, flipped open a cover and pushed a red button, a warning light flashed at the top of the posts that were now electrified. The big male moved back, took his troop along to the next sector, and continued. The sod had worked out what the lights meant, now Gregorio had another section to

activate.

The cunning baboons continued waiting for the next human defence to be revealed. Gregorio activated a series of bright strobe lights, this did scare them, accompanying this was the sound of thunder. They had not yet tumbled this trick but they would. Gregorio's other fear was a real lightening strike, this could take out all the defences. Then rangers and nearby villagers would be alerted to the failed section, protecting the breach with whatever came to hand.

A friend of his in the village where he and his wife lived was doing a good trade in supplying bows and arrows to the more paranoid. This was wood permitting, being a ranger in the forests of Spain was one job he was glad to have avoided. Gregorio knew a friend who died from a far greater foe than these hungry baboons, desperate humans, wood poachers who would try and sneak in and liberate a tree or two. Not for fire wood, in Spain the governments environmental efficiency drive had made most homes very comfortable without huge energy inputs. This was for furniture and other wood dependant industries, and you would be surprised how many of those there are that depend on this basic commodity. Without oil for plastics you needed wood for beer barrels, as without beer there would be some angry people, trust me on this one.

The rangers had tried horse patrols but without large numbers and protective measures for the horses, a large troop of baboons, lions or most other predators would have them down for lunch and the rider for seconds. One group of six rangers believing this to be a good size barely escaped an attack from hyenas trying to probe the coastal defences.

In the south of both Spain and Portugal things were even more dire, Berto's son was helping in the desperate rush to defend the coast against the raids from North Africa. His son Pedro had graduated in civil engineering, with skills like that the town of Denia had snapped him up. The very south around the straits of Gibraltar had been the first to receive heavy fortification. The Arab raids had changed tack, using Algeria as a base they had captured the Balearic Islands and were now using them to build up for an invasion of the coast near Valencia. At the moment the attacks were small probing for weakness in this soft target. Salik, son of the Great Kamal sat in a tent on Mallorca, he prepared for

the great man's arrival. Together in the coming summer they would avenge the loss of Spain a sore point from centuries ago still festering in the minds of such holy warriors.

Pedro and all his colleagues faced the same problems, with limited resources they had to prevent ships landing. It may surprise you that they had few migrants to help, most had realised Spain would become a hot bed, and the millions of Europeans that had made it through Morocco were now engaged in a struggle to reach the friendly territories of southern Africa. The African countries in the south had surprised the once hated colonial Europeans, after years of receiving aid and help there were many who reasoned such kindness should be returned. Others just feared the expanding influence to the north and wanted their skills to help stem another tide. The rest of the migrants had perished at the hands of the holy warriors, who determined to stop the unbelievers settling peacefully in North African countries. They saw the westerners corrupting the minds of their people, and believed that it was Gods will that those who defied the holy laws should be punished, for why else had the ice been sent to freeze the evil Europeans.

The news from his father of the Erna and Ramona gave him and the people facing the threat of invasion hope that like William they could succeed against the odds. The hero's from Spain's past were good, but there was no substitute for real live ones. Pedro sat in a small office, he was doing critical calculations when he had a call from Berto. Simon had asked the Mayor of Santander how his people could help the people of Spain. The Mayor was a friend of Berto, who had won many a cycle race in his day and once cycled with the mayor in the days when he was just a team rider.

Berto knew his son did not have enough skilled people, most of the bigger towns along the coast had priority and like a sponge had sucked in men and resources. Pedro was struggling, the locals did what they could, but they still had jobs to do and families to feed. Pedro smiled, the Mayor had told Simon that maybe they could go and help Pedro and now Pedro knew nearly a hundred people were coming to help. Many of the migrants were either not skilled enough or still too weak, that is why only about half accompanied Simon and Jennifer, with the feisty Jo eager to help.

Without oil the giant steel ships, both naval and commercial had become useless hulks clogging up the ports which were needed by the small fishing boats. The metal they contained was a valuable resource, naval ships were stripped of their gun turrets and broken up for scrap. The turrets were distributed complete with guns around the coast, this was a massive undertaking, hundreds of ships short on fuel had chosen the safety of the Spanish harbours. Pedro was working on a place to site one such gun turret which was assigned to Denia. He had to make the best use of it, so he needed a site that would give him most coverage to protect the port.

Erna

When Gregorio and his archery friends had left for Denia with Jack and myself following, William had wanted to go too but for once in his life he was persuaded otherwise, Jane and Robin scored a minor victory. It was not for long, at the beginning of spring the attack started on the south coast of Spain, William heard of the vast fleet of ships bringing the enemy to battle. This was his call and nothing anyone could say would stop him.

As the days wore on William became frustrated, with most able men gone to defend the south and our small force to Denia he could barely find twenty men. He need not have worried, in an old, once deserted village in the hills about Bilbao were a group of Danes. These people had refused to go to the south to fight and they maintained they were preparing to help in their own way. This was misunderstood by the Spanish, but somehow their leader knew and when William stood in the cove where the Erna lay at anchor ready to leave. He had but nineteen men and a few brave women, then a woman came running, "Don't leave." she said

"I have to." he replied

"No, no, you no understand, more men are coming, the Danes they are coming."

William waited, the women, children and old men waited, the tiny group on the beach did not believe her, "Ah they're not coming shouted one old man, who had heard rumours about them."

It was like tempting fate, you see these Danes had been making shields

for the Erna and helmets for the men and battle weapons. A column of nearly one hundred men marched down the trail, behind that a donkey pulled a cart carrying shields and helmets for Williams crew. A horse pulled a cart load of provisions and behind their women marched to see them off.

The old man was taken aback and was the first to cheer. The leader greeted William, "Ve knew you vould need us, ve knew." Williams face was beaming, quickly the men boarded across the small plank pier that had been constructed. Its wood bowing under the weight of so many, the oars were soon in the water and the Erna slipped her mooring.

Once at sea the crew raised the sail and she lived up to her name, taking the choppy sea in her stride. Along the shore, old men tottered to see her pass, alerted by the shouts of children and then their mothers, all rushing to watch her passage. As she reached Gibraltar the battle in the south had begun, many miles ahead there was a sea full of ships ferrying the millions that waited, to battle. From the heavily defended rock a cheer went up, even the monkeys joined in the chorus. A day later the Erna reached the battle, the wind had dropped and the small sail boats used by the enemy were floundering. The Erna dropped her sail. William surveying what lay ahead, the leader of the Danes signalled they were ready with the oars. Delmar and a few others readied with weapons to repel boarders at the prow, William at his post on the rudder.

With a heave the Danes pulled hard, the Spaniards with them, as if the sound of the oars were not enough, or the terrible dragon at her head. Those Danes roared with every stroke, the attackers had expected no resistance at sea, so were taken by surprise. William steered her at every ship he could, like a knife through a rope, she cut through them. The Erna was well built and the sound of cracking wood came from the dhows crushed beneath the dragons head.

On one ship men stood with guns ready to fire but her bow wave got to them first, as they let loose a hail of bullets flew harmlessly into the air. Their little boat rocked by the sea beneath it, the men fell back, the boat was crushed and of those who floated several were hit by the oars. The attackers would repair the rope, but it would never be quite so strong. The Erna had another objective and so moved on leaving the debris floating behind her. On shore faced with overwhelming numbers the

defenders rallied, the disruption it caused to the offensive gave them the edge they needed, morale soared.

Some days later the Erna was sailing north, to the aid of her friends in Denia.

Punishment

Kamal was making little progress, his march through Turkey had been swift, decimating the millions of migrants who took that path, he was hailed by all as defender against the new crusaders. In truth most were poor people from eastern Europe pushing their belongings in old prams, even shopping trolleys. It was a slaughter they could not understand, there was plenty of land and Europeans had taken in refugees and migrants from all around the world. What we know of is only hearsay, but the carnage was grim. We wondered why these people seeing floods of Israelis fleeing in the opposite direction had not taken the hint, but where would they go?

The Greeks bolstered by an influx of people from the Balkans and the Israeli army who provided a rear guard for their people were not so easy. Macedonians remembered their history, why were these invaders any different than the Persians. Here the Great Kamal's passages through the mountains were blocked by stiff resistance, every metre gained only by the fanatical drive and massive losses.

It was spring when Salik received a message from his father, "You will have to be the hero my son, you must take Spain for I fight against the devil himself." Salik's pulse quickened it put him in an unenviable position, he would have neither his fathers experience nor the battle hardened troops. He would though have numbers on his side, the pilgrimage that had gone with his fathers call to battle had started with those who followed Salik the Wise. Many had heard of his victorious capture of the islands and his great skill at probing for weakness in the defences of mainland Spain. As the pilgrims marched to join him, they said Salik was guided by God for he is wiser than any man could be.

Salik had by now launched the attack on the south, mainly to draw the defenders away from the east coast where like a lump of cheese the rind at its base he intended cutting deep into the soft side. Like milk from a

bottle thousands of boats made the sea white with their sails as they poured across the ocean.

On the coast we were first alerted by Berto, this man was a sport nut. Using the hills to launch he flew a paraglider, rising above on the thermals. We watched our necks cricked, as like the eagles he soared circling higher aloft. Far out to sea beyond our horizon he could see a white blob, the sky was clear blue, this was no cloud. We watched from the hill where we were preparing secondary defences. Berto then moved from circling in the thermal, descending way ahead landing down in the town. When he did that we knew it meant trouble. His arrival started a steady flow of people from town, most moved into the hills, many keen to help us. We all had little faith that the towns defences would hold long. The Mayor had an army of old men and women, with a small elite force of conscripts, these were the only ones with decent weapons, the rest made do with slings and various bits of cold steel. Gregorios archers took a point above the harbour where the could shower the attackers with a rain of arrows.

Jack and I had made some crude onagars placed around the hills to guard roads that went through them, we now showed the locals how to load and fire. The children were set to work gathering stones of all sizes. Where we could we set up a row of planks behind these were piled rocks, when we cut the supporting ropes these would tumble down the hills.

It was some time before the sails appeared on the horizon, it was like seeing a massive wall of surf. A lookout lit a beacon up on a hill above the town, causing a chain reaction more beacons were lit, others from the surroundings came to help as best they could. All we could do was keep busy, the lull before the storm was nerve racking.

I asked Pedro, “Do you think we could get these people to bring mirrors from their homes?”

“We are too far to burn ships sails my friend.”

“We could put the sun in their eyes!”

He chatted to some of the women and as if by magic in the hours before the attack mirrors of all sizes appeared, many still attached to the cabinet doors. Several farmers came with carts loaded with bundles of hay,

explaining we could set them alight and hurl it down upon the attackers.

I asked one of the old farmers, "Could your horses pull old cars to the tops of these hills?"

He did not question why I wanted to turn the hills into a massive car park, but news spread fast.

When the invaders hit, they came in hard, the small force in the town put up a robust defence, but it was hundreds against thousands more heavily armed. The gun fired from the hill overlooking the port but as Pedro said it was like shooting peas at the stars. The big shells tore through sails and sunk a few boats, but this gun was designed to hunt bigger quarry.

The mayor braced as the first men landed, the conscripts behind the harbour wall let rip tearing down men as they climbed onto the jetties. With all their rounds gone and suffering heavy losses they withdrew. The mayors barricades, held for minutes, sprayed with automatic weapon fire, many fell. It seemed hopeless, the military were not keen to denude other towns to provide reinforcement, they feared this would just open more holes in the already weak defences. Gregorio's archers did their best, many arrows hit their targets, but he could only produce a light shower. His men too came under intense fire as those on the boats fought back. Many fell to the decks wounded with an arrow, but their friends avenged them with the spinning bullets from AK47s.

Gregorio and his men dragged their wounded up a small track to the surrounding hills. Salik the Wise had his toe in the door. His men moved house to house through the town, but they met no resistance. A small yacht sailed away, once the pride of its European owner, the boat was taking news back to Salik. We watched as thousands upon thousands, disembarked pushing forward. Just the tip of the iceberg, more ships followed with Salik himself.

Keen to push in land one of Saliks Generals pushed at our centre, his men streaming up the hills. We opened fire with the onagars but it was not enough, a few fell but most kept coming. Jack remarked, "I see why you needed the fast getaway cars", these were all facing engine towards the slopes.

We then signalled to release the rocks, coming under heavy fire we crawled with knives to cut the ropes. I heard a scream then the rocks falling, in a massive cascade, then more screams as the attackers were knocked down, guns flying into the air, bodies rolling around like rag dolls. I turned and looked across the ridge, two women were pulling Jack up to the escarpment. Blood streaming from his back, all I could do was shout at the top of my voice "You bastards.", as I ran to his side. The local doctors were kept busy, but soon came to his aid, the bullet had torn into his shoulder blade as he leaned out to cut his ropes.

Pedro in an act of insanity, followed the rocks down the hillside, gathering dropped weapons, others did the same, but not for long. The general had plenty of men willing to die and his next force lined up below, he wanted the road we guarded. Without Jack, I got one of the few men to help me push one of the cars, upon the high point stood a massive wooden contraption, normally used to batter castle walls, it was Jacks pride and joy. It had taken us over a week to construct, but the massive machine was loaded with a small vehicle, we had others bring the smaller cars across to it. Untested we stood well back as the weights of stones pulled the arm up, its net loaded with a tiny fiat. The car smashed down in the middle of the generals men, enraged and not wishing to loose more he pushed back up the hill. This time Pedro's armed contingent of mainly women with a few lads, opened fire with the captured weapons. More men fell, but it seemed hopeless, there were just so many. It was like being a beetle caught in the way of army ants, women held up the mirrors. When the troops were blinded by the light we pushed the cars over the edge, they bounced and tumbled, cutting swaths through the army as a strimmer through weeds.

With the onagars this second wave were finally repelled, but only just. On another hill the Mayor and conscripts were, using similar tactics, against a much less determined force. Gregorio was trying to hold the coast road, pouring an avalanche of whatever he could get his hands on down from above.

It was Simon who first spotted the Erna, "It's William he shouted." One of the defenders asked, "What use is one ship?"

"It's not one ship, it's the Erna." Simon said in a proud voice. The man looked across to the mass of sails heading our way, then at Simon as

though the Englishman was mad. He may not have understood but we did.

Jo in an act of defiance, punched the air, growling an aggressive "Yes". The other migrants with us gave a massive cheer followed by repeated shouts of "Erna, Erna". As the sound echoed around the valleys, more joined the chorus.

Below in the town Salik's Generals looked up at the enemy above them in the surrounding hills. As they did William closed the longship on the weave of ships ahead, he had the wind in his favour, but the Danes insisted on rowing just for good luck, so shouting "Odin" at each stroke they closed on the fleet ahead. Some on the nearest ships opened fire, but with the swell the little boats wobbled wildly, few bullets hit her hull. From her steady deck Delmar returned fire and the crew forged ahead, causing even more destruction than in the straits.

Salik on a bigger boat saw the longship cut his cloth in two, the wreckage and sail cloth like the loose threads. What impudence, he had thousands of boats, one would not stop the invasion. Like a shuttle, through a loom, the Erna turned, lowered her sails, Salik could not believe what he was seeing. The Danes pulling hard got her to quite a pace before she struck again. Salik at first was not worried if he lost a few dozen boats, men were hauled from the water into other boats.

From our vantage points we could see the Erna turn raise her sail and go again. The Generals flow of troops was slowing as less boats got through. On the mayors side a group of British commandos who had been defending further up the coast came to his support, halting the advance on the north flank. To the south the roads were blocked with vast piles of junk, old cars anything Gregorio could put in the way. As the enemy clambered over this scrap yard, Gregorio picked them off.

Now the General attacking us, readied for another attack, all we had were the onagars, a few rounds in the captured guns and the farmers bundles of hay. The third wave came up towards us, guns blazing, Pedro's women returned fire. The onagars let rip, we put whatever we could find into the trebuchet setting it for a closer range and hurled some of the bigger mirrors at them. Lads through stones, the farmers lit the bundles of hay hurling them down on the attackers, many of the farmers

fell cut down by the hail of bullets.

At sea Salik awaiting the Erna to plough through for a fifth time, was turning his attention to sinking this ship that caused him so much trouble, the losses were mounting. The elite force he had with him had rocket launchers and he lined up his bigger boats ready for the Erna. From the deck, William looked through the telescope, he could see the men, weapons on their shoulders. Saliks smaller ships had moved back behind his line. William turned the ship and ran towards shore, catching the tail of small ships heading for the harbour. Salik went in pursuit, but the wind was against him and with William. The Erna turned again cutting a path up through more of the boats, as she did so, Salik let his rockets fly, but at that range and with a shield of boats in the way the Erna again cut deep without damage. Most rockets hit Saliks own ships causing even more losses.

Salik needed these weapons to hold his gains, he was well aware that the Spanish would move in reinforcements to hold their position. The Erna moved north out of range, then cut east, William was bringing her round to take the rear. Salik's supply ships trailing some way behind, these weren't armed, he had not expected any seaborne attacks. On land Salik's General was pushing hard, it seemed there were enough boats landing to keep a steady stream coming up the hill, we were the weak spot.

Soaring high above us, was Berto, the sun was doing a great job with the thermals, then we saw a new if short rain fall. Perhaps Berto had raided the Santander firework party box but from somewhere he had got some bags of gunpowder, which mixed with grape shot was a lethal mix. He was so high up the enemy had not seen him, but he decimated their centre. Unfortunately we were faced with fanatics, they were all worked up and this made them even more determined, when again we tried the mirrors they just let rip, women fell to the ground like cutting a puppets strings.

Pedro was getting ready to pull back, we had nothing else to do but push the onagars down the hill taking a few attackers for a ride. Out at sea the Erna, was devastating the supply ships, some of the Danes jumped aboard them, axes and swords slicing through those crew who did not

have the sense to take their chances with the sharks. Now the Erna flanked by a flotilla of supply ships headed north, all flying the flag of Spain. William had become a pirate!

Salik was going crazy, isolated in a small group of ships, he did not know whether to go to the support of his generals or chase the vital supplies. If his fathers forces had been with him, but they weren't, and with all the ships in use he could not expect reinforcement for some time. Almost all the boats ahead of him had made port, clogging it completely. We were now pulling back from the escarpment, the only thing slowing the advancing forces was nature herself, gravity and the rocks and pebbles that tripped them. On the high point we still manned the trebuchet providing a rear guard action, unfortunately we were hitting the rear of their column.

Salik had decided to make for the port, for some reason he halted the drive up the hill and pulled back to a line around the town. Ships then set sail for the south, we knew he wanted to hold this bridgehead and bring reinforcements before we did. A cheer went up as the attackers withdrew back down the hill.

William had taken the Erna to a port to the north, as the longship dropped her sail and rowed into port, followed by the supplies the people waved frantically. The Mayor of the town greeted them, the Danes appreciated the beer! William asked him to ensure the supplies got to us in Denia. The old Mayor gave him a hug and assured him he would take them himself.

William did not stay long, it was late afternoon, leaving the supply ships, they set sail south. The empty boats returning to North Africa for reinforcements were the Erna's new quarry. While she sailed south, a trail of donkeys brought arms, ammunition and food to the defenders of the hills around Denia, at their head was the Mayor of the other town. The port was empty Salik had sent all the boats, he had lost so many he needed them all.

As the days passed we received a steady flow of men mostly Portuguese who were less pressed. Coming across Spain to help via the electric trains which still ran. We did not have enough people to counter attack, it

was a siege. If Salik got his new supplies we were lost, if he did not we would wait for him to surrender.

Chase

During the night the south wind blew, the small ships numbering some five hundred made slow progress tacking into it. The crew of the Erna, kept a straight course making ground fast, the crew rowing their muscles aching with every stroke. William and Delmar taking turns on the rudder, which in itself was a tough job using the heavy paddle to steer the big ship.

In the morning Saliks fleet was scattered about, and the wind was now from the north west and the sea choppy. Aboard the Erna they raised the sail, most of the crew slept as the longship edged closer to the invaders. William kept a keen watch for sails on the horizon, even scattered five hundred were difficult to miss.

When Ahmoud caught sight of the big square sail on the horizon his heart missed a beat. In his small boat the crew upon hearing the news all ran to the stern to look for themselves, it was true. The fleet was fanned out to either side of Ahmoud's lead ship, the men tried to gain every puff of wind, some sat at the front improvising with extra cloth. The Erna truly was putting the wind up them, but they could not move fast enough, nor could they stop her. The longship closed on the line, boats crumpled under her bow, the line was sliced in two, again and again she harried the boats, men swimming for the other ships but these were too concerned with avoiding the next run. The longship's crew now rested, were using the oars, unhampered by wind direction, she kept slicing the cake into smaller pieces, crumbs of boats floated on the surface, men clinging to the debris.

All day the Erna hunted down the little boats, only when night fell did Ahmoud get relief, but not for long. The sea was getting rough, his remaining boats were buffeted around, as the wind raged, and the waves grew in strength. As the lightning struck, the terrified men aboard the fleet would catch glimpses of the Erna's dragon head.

Odin had Thor send down his rage on those who dared to challenge the Erna, Njord now had his time to play, the little boats were no match for

him. While the Erna, took his turmoil in her stride, the small ships taking on water were decimated. Ahmoud's boat had its mast broken and the crew was frantically paddling with bits of driftwood when the sun rose. The fleets remnants, tried as best they could to continue, the men looking behind for the Erna, but it was no longer there.

Ahmoud transferred onto his brothers boat, stood up and shouted, to all the nearby ships, that God has taken the devils to the bottom of the sea. They all shouted their praises, the coast would soon be in sight. As the ships sailed on they were buoyed with relief, smiles on their faces. A man on watch for landfall, came to Ahmoud stuttering, his hand pointed ahead. Ahmoud, looked at the man, he understood, "Land." The man shook his head frantically, Ahmoud now heard sounds coming from the other ships. He tugged his beard, and went to have a look, his brother followed.

It was coming straight for them, on the horizon, the sun behind it was the unmistakable silhouette of a dragons head and big square sail. Ahmoud caught a strange smell in the air, looking to his left a small man already rescued once had a rather brown patch, he stood fixed in a frozen stare. The Erna in the storm had overrun her prey and finding only land ahead she had turned for home, William assuming the ships lost in the storm. The Danes let out a roar, as William told them to ready the oars.

Delmar took his position on the prow, he turned to William, "They're waving a white flag."

"Could be a trick." he shouted back, "They've lowered their sails"

"What do we do, we can't take that lot prisoner there must still be a couple of hundred boats?"

"Get them into a few boats and sink the rest." offered one of the Danes.

"Would they do that if it were us?" asked the Danes leader. This created a stir amongst the crew, one of the Spaniards who spoke good English explained to his countrymen who all started shaking their heads.

"Doubt it." William replied.

"Why are they attacking Spain, Why? They don't need our lands." said one of the Spaniards in a strong accent.

As the Erna approached Ahmoud shouted up, "Please you, no more." William shouted back showing three fingers, "You take only three ships the rest we sink."

Ahmoud turned and spoke with his brother, who asked, "But what will Salik say, and the Great Kamal, if we do as he says how will we get supplies to Salik?"

"If we don't there will be no boats and no sailors, besides, if we don't get back to tell the others how will they know to come?"

"The infidels will sink us anyway?" said Ahmoud's sceptical brother.

From the Erna, the crew watched as the brothers argument grew fiercer, Ahmouds brother finished by swearing at him and jumped ship. A small group loyal to him and his way of thinking raised sail and started for land, at this the crew of the Erna went in persuit.

Eighteen ships broke away in total, all were crushed, but one did get close to shore. The people of that region watched as the rest of the fleet had used the opportunity to escape. William turned the boat back towards them, now the crew were angry, it was a dirty trick, that they were sure. Ahmoud and sixty six boats made it to shore, on a desolate stretch of desert coast.

As Ahmoud stood his boats hauled up on the beach he finally felt safe. They stood laughing at the big longship, a foolish thing to do. Delmar had scanned the coast, it was deserted, except for the boats and Ahmoud's men. William turned the boat, the dragon facing towards Ahmoud's position. Ahmoud stood, aghast as the crew rowed towards the shore. Delmar's head cranked over one side of the prow and another fellow on the other, checking the clear water below for hazards.

Ahmoud's people asked what they should do, he replied, "Run."

Shipping oars the Danes jumped into the water and waded ashore, their axes tearing Ahmoud's boats to shreds. Delmar, shouted at them, on the horizon a large number of men on camels were heading at quite a lick and they did not look friendly.

The Danes leader signalled his men to leave, it was a close call. They ran back to the boat water flying as they waded through the shallows, climbing back at the prow. With all aboard, the Erna edged out to sea. The tribesmen reached the boats, shots scattered harmlessly in the water around the prow, as she backed out under oar.

It was many days until we saw her again on the horizon, we all roared

“Erna, Erna.” Salik, and his generals heard this cry and went to take a look. Far off from the port, the Longship, it should have been his relief supplies that he saw. Salik returned to his tent, the generals with him, they had no news of success in the south, or his father. With the Erna off shore they had no chance of getting back to the Balerics. If he attacked he had not enough men or supplies to consolidate his position, yet he could not surrender.

Salik decided they should press the centre, try to break out and harry the enemy, head south by land. With men holding the flanks, he march his men up to our position guns blazing. He was not met with stones, cars or mirrors, trained troops from the south had come up after the victorious defence of Nerja. Without cover, men fell like cards, the general mad at him for halting his earlier advance now referred to him as Salik the Mad, and when Salik heard this he was summarily executed. With thousands dead or wounded Salik made a last stand in the port. It was not a pretty sight and gave the Mayors sanitation department a headache.

From the Erna the crew were watching, when they saw the Spanish flag raised over the harbour, the longship came in to a rapturous welcome. Oh and I should mention that after a bit of a tidy up, one of those nice parties that the Mayors of Spain seem particularly good at organising, must be something to do with all the sun and wine.

Timing

It was a nice sunny afternoon, William, Delmar and I were off to Alacante on the narrow gauge railway. This was a real treat and an amazing ride through the mountainous scenery. It had been hard work clearing up Denia, eased when lots of the natives returned from the southern front. We had been there almost a month, yet we still had unfinished business. As the carriage rattled along the rails, William remarked, “Bet this takes you back abit, a Professor.” The trains had been badly disrupted in England, and stopped running regularly only years into the fuel crisis. Did I not explain, the governments new nuclear building program was running behind schedule and during that time the gas supplies were cut as the Russians froze more than their butts off. The ships with middle east gas went to the people with the money, China. The price of diesel went through the roof and in the end you needed a second mortgage to buy a rail ticket.

So sitting on this train was a welcome luxury, our eyes darted around as we viewed the scenery. Delmar tugged my shoulder, then William, we were slowing down, as the train went around a curve, we could see the town ahead. With Delmar navigating, it did not take long for us to track down the local hospital. A kind nurse, that Delmar took a bit of a fancy to, showed us the way through a mass of corridors.

Sitting in the corner of a ward, looking out of the window, just as he had the cave entrance was the reason for our visit. "Jack." I said as we walked up behind him. "Hey Professor!" he shouted, a doctor attending a patient in the next bed, turned, looked at Jack, "If our tannoy break, we hire you." He grinned, William hugged him as only William could. Jack flinched, his back was still sore from the repairs. The observant Delmar, just shook his hand and asked after his health. Jack was chuffed to be leaving with us, even more so when he learned that we were going back on a certain boat. "Wow, I dreamt about that last night, when I knew you were coming." he said looking at William, it was like he had found his brother again. The big man was a rock for us all, even if we did have our differences.

Jack sat awkward on the return journey, as the train rocked along, he kept his back clear of the seat. The constant joggling must have hurt, he took quite a hit, he told about the bit of collar bone that had broken off and how the doctors had shown him the x-rays. Something he had never seen before, which had aroused his natural curiosity. After the battle the little railway had been vital and saved many lives ferrying the wounded. We all enjoyed the ride and would have gone for another, even Jack, had we not had a boat to catch.

Waiting at the station to greet us was Berto and Gregorio who Delmar was pleased to see, they to were having the honour of sailing back with us. Jo was staying, working with the other migrants under Pedro's guidance. It was not the work, valuable as it was, or the migrants that kept her. She had seen way Pedro chased down that hill after the discarded weapons, he had guts, and she swooned after him. If you tried talking to her, every second sentence was Pedro this or Pedro that!

As we walked down to the harbour Berto, looked like a mad camper, the

giant rucksack on his back concealed not the kitchen sink, but his paraglider. When you looked around, the once well kept walls had bits of masonry missing where bullets had shattered brick and stone. The port too seemed unnatural, when you saw a harbour empty of boats and fishermen sitting around dejected then it became apparent why. When they spotted William, the sad faces, turned to smiles, one man stood and saluted, another dobbed his cap. This drew a smile from the big man, ahead the leader of the Danes stood at the prow, as we walked across the jetty he greeted us, "So now ve are d new passenger ferry!" the other Danes roared at the joke, the Spaniards had wry smiles when it was translated.

As we climbed aboard, a small delegation came running down the road. It was the Mayor and his staff, his body wobbling. They stood on the concrete pier to wave us off. "You come again." he shouted, while we pushed off. Standing up at the prow, we passengers watched as the fishermen wandered to stand nearby the Mayor. The oars hit the water, William at the stern and the Erna was off towards the open sea.

This was to be a much easier voyage, the Mayors along the coast had all invited the Erna to stop, each keen to say she had been to their town or city. Had William taken up every offer we would have never gotten back, William let Delmar deal with the diplomatic dilemma, tactfully dealt with by liberal use of nautical terminology and harbour layout. It still took us longer than expected, partly because the hosts weren't keen on us leaving and the Danes propensity to take on beer like a holed boat takes on water. But hey they did a lot of rowing and take it from someone whose tried, it's bloody hard work.

The proudest port of all was our village, the Erna's home port. Tales of the great ship's exploits had spread across Spain like a wild fire. The telephone system and bush telegraph where both operating at full capacity. So the villagers knew we were coming well before our sail appeared on their horizon. As we passed through the rock arch into the cove a unit of the Spanish army standing above, saluted. We learnt later that the King of Spain had ordered a permanent guard be assigned whenever she was in port.

As we came in we all looked at the Ramona, now moored safely, then

across to the beach where the whole village were standing. As the crew shipped oars holding them upright, the crowd cheered. William eased the longship up to the Erna's mooring, a villager through up a rope to William at the stern, then another to Delmar at the prow. Time to walk the plank, we all disembarked, passengers first. Jack remarked at how the passengers used to outnumber the crew on the big ferries, how things change.

While the others got caught up in the arrival celebrations, I was concerned, Gunter rushed over to me. "Where's Alice?" I asked. "Come quick." he said grabbing my arm. The two of us flew up the hill, poor old Gunter stopping to take a breather, catching his breath, "You go on, I come in minute."

My feet hardly touched the ground, dust flew off the road as they spun on its surface. His house was in sight, Jason and Robin stood outside. "Hurry up Professor the main feature is about to start." said Jason, with a grin on his face. I ploughed past both, tearing through to our bedroom. Jane sat holding her hand, the midwife was in attendance, Jane looked at me, "Here this is your job." She got up from the bedside seat and gave me Alice's hand. Alice looked at me, smiled and then grimaced, as she pushed. "Hey, the little one has my genes, probably still looking at your bones!" The laugh reflex did it, a delicate little head caught by the caring hands of the midwife took its first adventure. There was a look in Jane's eyes that I had seen before in William. We all knew they wanted a child, and I could sense a renewed determination. Alice was given the baby to hold, at which point emotions took over that are indescribable, only a mother could explain such happiness. Not that I was not on an emotional high, this was better than anything in the world, more thrilling than any theme park. Jason and Robin had poked their heads through the door, radiating big smiles, looking towards Jane, "Shall we go see the hero now?" asked Robin, eager to meet William.

The three of them wandered off, trotting down the dusty roads to see the big farmer come home. I was content to wait on Alice, her wish was my command. Her last words before taking a well earned nap, "That was good timing." Amazing timing, had the last Mayor had his way I'd have missed the birth of our daughter, who Alice insisted on calling Erna Ramona, puzzled me too? Can't think where she plucked those two names from.

I found poor old Gunter, sat on the veranda, hat over his face. The run up the hill had tired him and now he was having a siesta. Go on you can have your siesta too, this is only fiction or is it? Have you ever made a note for yourself in the future to read, like a message from you in the past. What if someone could do it the other way around? Why do they keep calling me the Professor?

That evening as William lay in bed, Jane at his side, he met his match. Jane insisted they go to Santander and she was not taking any prisoners on this one. While he had been off playing the hero she had been to speak with the Mayor. He had arranged for William to have some tests at the local clinic, Jane was determined that Alice should not be the only new mother.

In Jack, Berto recognised a kindred spirit, Berto loved his son but Pedro was away. Berto was impressed by the enthusiasm Jack showed for solving problems in a practical way. Jack also took a fancy to a certain lady who worked next door at the village bakery. There were times when you would see two mad men flying high above the village, riding the thermals. Jack had a head for heights, and Berto was squadron leader.

Oh and a running joke with the Spaniards was how the Danish saved their bacon! A certain old Spanish gentleman went round singing their praises, not that the hardy crew needed it, but he warned people not to jump to conclusions. He went saying wow betide anyone who made them enemies.

It would be a long time before parts of Europe could be inhabited again, even if the ice melted, the damage caused to the nuclear installations had spread some rather nasty particles about the place. Most buried in the deep ice, with a half life of five thousand years, when the ice melts they will only be half as dangerous, no worries there then!

Epilogue

The sad thing is that we could have had our cake and eat it. We had plenty of green technologies. Think of all the streams and rivers that could have been tapped for energy as had been done in the past. Wind

like windmills and solar. More energy efficiency and things such as geothermal heating. As I sit here chatting to Gunter wondering what you will make of this tale, he thought you may be sceptical. How could countries not help those in need? Why so much aggression as though it were anything new! That the world was warming in your time so it can't possibly freeze up like it did. You wonder why?

The earth certainly did heat up, heat the oceans and more water evaporates to become clouds helping to trap heat. But the ice melting, that caused the biggest change, the increase of cold water into the sea at the poles played havoc with the currents. The gulf stream had brought warm water up to Europe, making our climate warmer. When it stopped our countries became colder, so all the rain that used to fall on England just when you were having your picnic, fell as snow. Snow my friends reflects heat, thus the ground became colder and the atmosphere warmer, which sucked up more water as clouds, falling as more snow. When this cycle made some parts of Europe and the other northern countries uninhabitable, industry and with it jobs collapsed. With less money China's economy declined, thus use of fossil fuels that had helped keep the planet warm were in decline. With the greatly increased cloud cover, the sunlight reaching the earth declined causing further cooling. So that is why my friends the north of Spain where we sit now is more like the north of England in its temperature range. If you went to France today you would no doubt like to visit the Lions in Leon, but beware they don't eat you!

Ende

