

## Footprints

It started like any normal day. I went for a walk on the beach with my dog, Meg. The sky was grey and overcast and rain was threatening to come at any time. I walked quickly with my hands in my pockets to keep them warm against the biting wind. Meg scampered along behind, trying to keep up while also having one eye on the gulls circling above. I hurried along until I reached our favourite place, a hidden cave at the very end of the beach. It was sheltered and the rocks had been worn smooth by waves over the decades. All around there were small caves, some big enough to crawl into. No one came here except for Meg and I – or at least that was what we thought. But today was different. I could tell the minute we arrived that something was not right, and then we saw the footprints.

They were large, a man's size ten or eleven. And leading towards the largest (and scariest) cave. Legends had surrounded this place for centuries. Several school children had died there in a freak accident in the 1850s and it was said that their ghosts would brutally murder anyone who came upon their final resting place. I didn't believe any of this mumbo-jumbo of course, but most people on the island did, and that's how I know that no one else should have been there. I was curious, so I followed them into the cave. I had to crouch to fit into the entrance but found that I could stand tall once inside. As my eyes adjusted to the darkness, I noticed Meg had crept in front of me. Suddenly, she barked loudly, again and again with the cave echoing the noise until an orchestra of dogs could be heard.

I saw it/him/her move in my peripheral vision. Their long, spindly fingers making shadows on the wall, like I did in primary school. But mine didn't fill fourteen-year old schoolgirls with horror. Mine didn't become the stuff of nightmares. They seemed to be reaching out to me, grasping at the tendrils of hair that had escaped my ponytail. A twig snapped, I whirled around, expecting to see someone. All I saw was darkness. Pitch black surrounded me. Emerging from the shadows, Meg was whimpering. Her back leg was bent backwards, causing her to limp. As I bent down to help her, the creature emitted a low growl that came from deep within its throat. It emerged from the shadows and my first thought was about how big it was. It was at least ten feet tall so in comparison the footprints were tiny. It had the form of a human but the presence it was radiating suggested something else entirely. Something worse.

I didn't get much time to ponder my many questions before I was screaming. The howls of my torment echoed off the cave walls in a futile attempt to cry for help. I saw something shine in the darkness, a hint of silver that caught

my eye. A knife? No, a claw that had mutated from his hand. He reached towards me and slashed through the air. I stumbled backwards, breathing heavily. With each breath I took it advanced on me, mauling the air. I tripped. Falling to the side it caught me with its huge talons. A giant gash appeared in my pale upper arm, the fabric of my jacket frayed and stained with a crimson liquid.

Blood.

I gasped and Meg howled, launching herself at the creature. Noticing the small black terrier it lashed out. Spotting the ribbons of flesh on the damp cave floor I heard Meg's body *flump* to the floor. "NO!!!" I called out, begging for Meg to hear me and come bounding back. But she didn't. All the adrenaline I had drained out of me. I curled up into the foetal position and waited. Waited for death, waited for help. I don't know but whatever I was waiting for didn't arrive. I looked around, baffled. It seemed as though everything was back to normal, everything apart from Meg.

I crawled towards her body. Pain shot up my arm every time I moved it, like a bullet ripping through a fresh wound over and over. Suddenly, it went black again. Scanning the void of darkness I was wary. I knew what to look for now. At least I thought I did. It moved. Faster this time, as though it was feeding on the fear radiating from my body. It crept towards me, stalking me as I staggered away from it. Reaching out again, mauling me in its mind. It was bigger, it had grown to at least twice the size it was.

I saw its claws, now with serrated edges. "New and improved monster!" A deep voice echoed in my head. It was advertising the best features of the majestic predator. As it advanced on me I thought of my family and friends. My Mum, my Dad and my baby sister, Leanna. I would never see them again. I was petrified, wondering what they would do with my body, if they ever found it. I tried screaming again but this time it only aggravated the monster. It got closer. Closer. Closer. The last thing I ever saw was its "face". It had holes for eyes, like a skull, but I knew it could see me. Slits for nostrils and no real mouth. Teeth jutting down and outwards, growing straight out of the skin. Its breath stunk. Assaulting my nostrils, I inhaled the toxic vapour as it ripped through my flesh, making streamers out of my skin.

Darkness.

This time I knew it wasn't the cave. It felt different. Safe. Slowly, light crept upon me. I was in a field, the field next to my house. I could see my house and in the distance I could see a large black blob bounding towards me. Meg! She leapt up at me and licked my face. I laughed at the feel of her rough tongue on my cheek. I walked towards my house. In it I could see my family, back in East Yorkshire, laughing and joking not quite aware of my disappearance. From here I could watch my family go on with their lives. They could carry on and I would watch over them, their guardian angel.

Not much had changed, but one thing was certain, I believed those stories now.