

I obeyed and peered down at a slide of the family, arms linked and grins liberally distributed. "So!" I said in a very flat tone, "what's new?"

"Look there, in the background," Mum pointed, "that's you and someone else. We can't really make out who he is."

She was right, it was certainly me, my back to the camera and arm linked with someone I now remember so very clearly.

"Cor! He looks ever so much like David Cassidy," commented my little sister Tracey. "Tell us who he is Liz, where did he come from?" I couldn't tell them, the moments I recalled were precious and were not meant to be shared, just

treasured. "You don't know how near you are Tracey, it could just be that very person."

"Oh come on Liz," she sniggered, "I suppose you met walking along the beach at Camber Sands!"

Well, she was nearly right. We met by the sea but in a small Cornish village just as summer was being edged away by autumn winds. It was a morning when people were packing up their things, filling their suitcases and catching their trains home. We were meant to be leaving that evening and everyone was glad because it was grey and 'so chilly' as Mum kept repeating. Dad took one last picture but I didn't want to smile at the

camera, I drifted away and watched the gulls swooping for fish. Stealing the silver morsels from the decks of rocking fishing boats and gliding away on a breeze.

I looked around to see what everyone was doing and then I noticed him, standing not a few yards away. He didn't see me, he too was watching the movement around him and stood with his hands in his pockets. It isn't in my nature to talk to complete strangers but I'd dreamed of him a thousand times and imagined how it would be to meet him, just once.

There wasn't much to it really, I just walked up to him and introduced myself. He didn't look surprised, I suppose girls must fall over him wherever he goes. There was no need for words, he simply took my hand and threaded it through his arm. Then we walked. The path led up from the cove to the cliffs and we climbed, stopping only once to rest and look down at the sea. We reached the highest part of the track and then followed it downwards into another cove just as faint beams of sunlight broke through the white, puffy clouds. David helped me scramble across the rocks and we sat close together, dangling out feet in the glistening water. Splashing each other and shouting as the spray dampened our hair and clothes, cold and refreshing.

He told me about his home, his ambitions, the things that made him happy. Together we laughed and talked and found so much in common with each other. We paddled in the surf, our shoes thrown over our shoulders. David told me how he'd been working so hard and had quietly arrived in Cornwall for a few days by himself. He'd picked the quietest spot he knew and now he felt relaxed and happy. Romance hadn't been part of his plans but, as he put it, you can't plan nice surprises.

For lunch we shared a large pasty which we bought from the village shop and gorged ourselves on scones with fresh cream dripping down the sides. I felt so contented but I knew

that emptiness would soon return, not hunger but a longing for someone who I'd soon have to leave.

It was only when David took my hand and kissed my fingertips that I forgot the future and realised that I shouldn't waste the time we had.

All afternoon we collected shells and searched for pebbles with salt crystals inside. We wrote our names in the sand and watched them wash away as the tide covered the beach and filled the rock pools with brine. And as the sky turned pink with the dusk we walked back inland, past the shops and hotels through the fields and along winding, narrow roads. "You must see my cottage before you go home," David had pleaded. "It's unbelievable."

I'd agreed to go back with him, just for half-an-hour but I felt so tired that the journey seemed impossible. David insisted on giving me a piggy back ride for a while but we managed to hitch a lift on a passing tractor for the last part of the journey. That was the time I remember most, sitting on the back of the old trailer it was pulling rattling slowly along.

The cottage as promised, was incredible and I looked around while the kettle boiled for coffee. Collapsing into a chair at last I could feel my eyes gradually closing until an arm on my shoulder began shaking me gently. "Wake up love, come on, please..." It was David of course, his voice soft and very concerned. "I've got to talk to you," he continued, "before you have to go." What he told me was that he knew we'd never meet again but he'd enjoyed the day so much he wanted to give me a small present. In his hand was a necklace, a delicate strand of shells, each one perfect. He told me he'd made it himself, to give to someone special.

An unwelcome voice abruptly broke my nostalgic dreaming. "I know who it is," gurgled Tracey, "it's that boy you met on holiday last year. What was his name? Don't tell me, I remember, it was Dave Castell and he came from Birmingham."

She was right. ★

