

A healing adventure around the British Isles. Long-estranged feuding twin sisters learn to love and forgive themselves and each other, as they hunt for their own personal horcruxes and set them to rest - finding treasures along the way!

I Can See The Sea: "The Great Horcrux Treasure Hunt"

By K Sweet

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I CAN
SEE
THE SEA

The Great Horcrux Treasure Hunt



K SWEET

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THE TALE ...

Isobel

Rain, rain, rain. It hasn't stopped all week, not since the very moment when I first heard my brother had died. If it's here to wash away my grief, it's not working, but it's doing a fair job of hiding my silent tears, as I splosh along the sodden pavements. It can rain forever as far as I'm concerned. It suits my mood.

He's gone, really gone, so they say. But I can't, *won't*, believe it. He doesn't *feel* gone, because I'd know, wouldn't I? Surely I'd know? I'd have known the very second he packed up his mortal bags and departed this earth, because he's a part of me, of who I am, and always will be? But I didn't have a clue. Not until that crisp, cream envelope arrived through my letterbox, so innocuous-looking, but a life-shattering bomb in disguise. I'd opened it with curiosity, never suspecting for a single moment what its content would be. And it told me that my beautiful, adored big brother was no more. I'd immediately snatched up my phone to dial the number on the letterhead,

and wailed down it at the person on the other end, because it had to be a mistake, or some kind of sick joke, but it wasn't.

The letter also informed me that today I was requested to attend "a reading of the last will and testament of Matthew James Parkhouse Esq" at an office in London. I wasn't going to go; I didn't want to make it real – but this morning my feet have simply walked that way, as if on automatic pilot. At least doing that, it seems to be taking me back a little closer to him, because perhaps his wishes on a page will make him alive again.

I am bereft that I never got to see him, to say goodbye. I am even more bereft that I wasn't there for him, taking care of him, nursing him, loving him, through his final moments. He'd been ill, you see. But I didn't know any of that because I thought he was away travelling around Australia. That's what he said. But he wasn't travelling, he was dying, and I didn't know because, as was his wonderful way, he protected me from it. "Isobel," he used to say, "I will never give you a moment's suffering because I adore the bones of you!", as he hugged me and made me feel safe, like only a big brother can. But this suffering, even for him, turned out to be unavoidable.

Splish splosh. My sodden trainers march through streets swimming with the deluge, and rivers of ice seep beneath the collar of my jacket and down my neck. It's the last day of August, but I don't mind the unseasonable weather at all. It feels perfect for a moment like this. I could have got a taxi, or caught the tube, or even carried an umbrella, but I feel so numb from his loss that I want to feel *anything*, even if it's just cold and wet. At least the chilling daggers of raindrops upon the bare skin of my face reminds me that, somehow, I still have blood pulsing through my veins. The mechanics of my body continue to function like a remotely-controlled beast, for they, at least, are not crippled by grief – but that almost feels like a betrayal.

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The solicitor's office block looms into sight. It's as nondescript as any other in this part of the city, but today it stands out like it's illuminated in garish neon lights. I've walked along here a million times and never once noticed it, but today it exists because he doesn't. My freezing fingers reach for the door, even though I know I'm horribly early. He wanted me here today, so here I am, early or not. I would never be late for him. I know I'll have to see *her*, which I've avoided doing now for several years, but for him I'd do anything. Gulping a deep breath of heavy air, I enter the building. I am about to hear my dear brother's last wish.

Imogen

"Tiffany, if you are not in that bloody car in the next 3 minutes, I'm going without you! You can walk to college in the sodding rain! And turn that music down!"

"Chill, Cruella. I've got a free period this morning. You'd better go, or you'll be late to meet your beloved sister."

As the sound of sarcastic sniggering filters through the closed bedroom door, I snatch up my car keys, squeeze my feet into stingingly uncomfortable but ridiculously fine heels, and charge for the door. I'm seething with anger. I have better things to do this morning than this, but if I don't turn up, I'll never know what he said, and *she's* going to gloat that *she* does for the rest of forever. Ha! I bet he's having a great laugh, up there on his sodding holy cloud, heaving his sides at the hilarious concept of us two sisters finally in the same room, sharing the same air again. Oh, sure Matty, you just go and conveniently die, leaving me with *that* as my only blood family, why don't you! And expect me to plan you a fitting memorial with *her*! Some choice. Abandoning my brat of a teenage

stepchild to unlimited wi-fi and her own devices, I slam the door behind me with a satisfying, foundation-shaking crunch.

Dashing outside in a futile attempt to avoid the stair-rods of water cascading from a suffocating sky, I fold myself hurriedly into my highly impractical but stunning sports-car. Stabbing the ignition brutally, as if it were a mortal enemy, I roar away up the rain-messed street. I have precisely twenty minutes to get through the sullen London traffic and into the solicitor's office, which, of course, is utterly impossible. But if I'm going, I'm definitely going in this slick little baby. She's not seeing me get out of a black cab like some average moron. That's the sort of thing she would do, and what she does, I do not. Watching the storm smash down on the windscreen, I'll bet she's walked though. She likes to play the martyr, the silly cow.

Predictably, the traffic is as sludgy as ever, as if it knows my time predicament and is sticking two fingers up at me in glee. Embracing my foul mood, I rapidly return its gesture with two fingers of my own. Once I reach the end of our residential street and join the main road, it's stop/start all the way. My nerves jangle inside me, sending a buzz of drumming palpitations through my caffeine-fuelled body, but I distract myself by taking the opportunity to touch up my already fabulous make-up as if my life depends on it. Looking fantastic is both my armour and my shield, and a whole host of highly useful weapons that I do not hesitate to use. I know I look good, about a million times better than her – but that's not difficult. She goes for the *natural* look, and clothes that are "purely functional". It'd be hilarious if it wasn't so sad, she's such a weirdo. No wonder she lives alone like a crazy cat lady.

Finally, over 45 minutes later and at about 2mph, the offices creep into view. I nudge my wheels into a miniscule almost-parking space and throw some coins into the meter.

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Gathering my poise and not insubstantial composure, I'm as ready as I'll ever be. Let's get this over with.

Isobel

She's late, of course, as I knew she would be. As I sit in the tired office waiting room, steaming dry in the stuffy atmosphere, my heart pounds at the words I might hear. What will he say? How did he go? I want to know all the details; where he was, who he was with, what his last words were. Did he ask for me? Was he scared? I don't know anything, other than the fact he's gone.

A cold thought strikes me: What if *she* does? What if he told her and not me? Maybe he thought I was weak, too weak to know – but she's not like me at all. What if *she* was there? He didn't trust me because I wasn't strong enough, but she's tough and he knew it. Feeling suddenly possessed with a chilly wave of jealousy, I physically shudder. The young receptionist looks at me with concern and offers me a hot coffee yet again, but I decline. I don't want to warm up. I don't want to ever feel comfortable again. I don't want to admit that I'm *weak*.

I watch weary-looking fish swim half-heartedly around a green-tinged tank, as I hear the receptionist speak into her phone. "No, Mr Jones, Ms Imogen Parkhouse is not here yet." "Yes, Mr Jones, Ms Isobel Parkhouse is still waiting." Typical. Immy never cares about other people's time. She thinks the world revolves around her.

Some while later a pleasant but slightly harassed-looking gentleman pops his head around the waiting room door. He has short, dark hair, tinged with grey and neatly groomed, and his eyes reflect a natural warmth, as if he's used to smiling a lot,

and when he looks in my direction he does smile. I instantly like him. He looks kind.

“Ms Parkhouse?” he enquires politely. I swallow awkwardly and nod. “Do you know if your sister will be joining us?”

I shake my head. I really don’t know. I would expect her to – with it being a reading of a will, she’ll want to see if there’s anything in it for her, but she does like to play by her own set of rules.

The man moves towards me, with a hand outstretched in greeting. “Raymond Jones, your brother’s solicitor.” I shake hands solemnly, feeling that I ought to apologize for Immy’s lateness, but not really knowing what to say.

“Your sister may not be coming,” he offers gently. “The letter clearly states 10am, and it’s almost 11. Shall we make a start?”

I’m just agreeing and following Mr Jones nervously towards his office when the front doors crash open, to the timely soundtrack of a boom of cymbal-clashing thunder. Like a powerhouse of attitude, and looking as full of herself as ever, Immy strides in. Ignoring me completely, she announces herself to the room.

“Imogen Parkhouse, to see Raymond Jones.”

The receptionist looks flustered, but Mr Jones takes it in his stride. He calmly turns to offer her his hand to shake and smiles the same greeting.

“Ah, Ms Parkhouse, so pleased you could join us. Do come this way.”

For the first time in years I’m in the same room as my sister – and I don’t like it one bit.

Imogen

Pulling myself up to my full height, and switching on my never-failing sexual prowess, I turn in the direction of the attractive but bland Raymond Jones. A brief glance in the direction of Issy tells me immediately that nothing has changed; not her smug superiority, nor her holier-than-thou attitude, or even her tragic hair-style – though maybe she’s a few pounds heavier, the whale. I give Mr Jones my full attention, as if he is the only one in the room and I have been waiting for ages. I know I’m late, but I don’t apologize. I never apologize.

“Shall we proceed?” I snap.

“Of course. This way.”

I march ahead into the room he indicates, which holds a ragged office chair, an overflowing desk, and a sprawling, shabby sofa.

“Please sit down.” He gestures towards the saggy sofa and I arrange myself demurely upon it. Issy, like the non-entity she is, freezes awkwardly in the doorway. Her obvious discomfort gives me a lift of triumph, but I carefully appear not to notice – but so far it’s Immy 1, Issy 0.

“Coffee? Tea?” offers Mr Jones. He notices Issy’s ridiculous hovering. “Ms Parkhouse, please.” He gestures once more towards the aged sofa. Issy, looking brilliantly unsettled, darts towards the opposite end and sits stiffly as far away from me as possible. Immy 2, Issy 0.

“Coffee, black, decaff, no sugar,” I smile graciously. Issy just gives a curt shake of her head. Ha! Cat got your tongue, Is? Quite fitting for a crazy cat lady. Immy 3, Issy 0.

Mr Jones pours coffee from a bubbling percolator behind his desk and passes it over to me.

“Thank you so much,” I purr beatifically. He smiles, and I hold his gaze for just a second too long. He looks momentarily

uncomfortable, but not as much as Issy does, so I deem a little understated flirting to be entirely worthwhile.

“Ah, to business, yes?” He clears his throat and gathers paperwork to him, a touch too quickly. “First of all, may I offer to you both my deepest condolences at this sad time. I knew your brother well, and a better man you could not hope to have as a friend.”

“He was your friend?” Issy pipes up suddenly.

For an instant, Mr Jones loses a little of his professional composure. “I, er, as I said, knew him well. It is often the case with, um, long term clients.” He smiles apologetically as if he’s made some kind of error, but I don’t see what the fuss is about.

“Mr Jones, the will?” My voice is crisp and cutting.

“Ah, yes of course, Ms Parkhouse. Matthew asked you here today so that I could speak to you both together about his final wishes. He has made some slightly unusual requests,” he pauses and smiles, “but I can assure you that he has been quite precise and particular about these.”

“So? What did he leave us?” My patience is visibly wearing thin. I need to get this over with fast. I purposely have a lunch date, a solid reason to be gone from here – because I don’t want to *think* about this. I don’t want to *feel*. Matty is gone, end of story. Emotion is for the faint-hearted. I am not faint-hearted, so I don’t do it. I don’t need to feel this. I just need to get it done. But Issy is the opposite. She is already blubbing into a clutch of sorry-looking paper handkerchiefs. Mr Jones reaches over and offers her a fresh one. She blows her nose noisily, probably just to annoy me. It sets my teeth on edge. Immy 3, Issy 1.

“Mr Jones!” I snap, bringing his attention back to me.

“Er, do you wish to pause to comfort your sister, Ms Parkhouse?” My returning look speaks volumes enough.

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He clears his throat again, now thoroughly flustered, and dives headlong into the lifeline of ‘business’.

“I’ll cut to the chase then, if Ms Parkhouse feels up to it?”
Issy snuffles and harrumphs an affirmative. The drama queen.
Mr Jones dips his hands into a file and pulls out a crisp paper.

“This is what your brother left for you.”

Raymond

Well, this is all a bit awkward. Matty, you git, you could have warned me! But you’re a mate, so I’ll do this for you, just like you asked.

With the two women staring intently at me simply because they don’t dare look to each other, I pick up Matty’s letter and prepare to read it. I’ve got to admit, it’s a good one. That bloke always did have a great way with words. As I start, I have a sense of beginning more than just a reading.

“Greetings from beyond the grave!

“Hi Immy and Issy, the terrible twins back together again, if only for a moment! It might have taken a death to achieve it, but I’ve got my greatest wish at last! I doubt you’ve spoken to each other, and certainly not kindly, but from this point on, that may have to change!

“I’m sorry I didn’t tell you about my impending death. In the scheme of things, it didn’t really seem that important. After all, why worry about what’s going to be for all of us eventually. Far better to live when we’re living, rather than wait to die. I didn’t want you worrying about me, or fussing around me, or making some ridiculous timetable whereby you could both visit me but never at the same time. Issy, you would have devoted your life to caring for me and given up yours, determined to

not let Immy have a look in, and Immy, you would have fitted me into your busy schedule just to wind Issy up, but done your utmost to keep clear of any irksome emotion cluttering up your life. Quite simply, I didn't want to be a pawn in your game.

“Now girls, you have played this game long enough! IT IS TIME TO STOP! You once were friends, you once shared everything, so now you're going to become friends again in order to share once more. To achieve this aim, I have taken a rather splendid idea from the Harry Potter stories, being, as you know, a huge fan! You won't have to go to Hogwarts, but you will need to learn what real magic is – *love* – and you will have to partake in it fully. Remember how Voldemort made horcruxes by splitting his soul into pieces, and how he had to kill each time he did so? He thought it would make him immortal, but all it really did was stop him from having a full and wonderful life. That's what your hate of each other does – it creates horcruxes and stops you both from having a full and wonderful life. That can't go on. Life *is* a gift, so stop abusing the gift of your lives and *live* them. Find your horcruxes, destroy your horcruxes, and learn again to *love* each other with your *whole* heart and soul.

“But I know that for this to work in the initial stages, I need to give to you some incentive. You will not do this unless I do so! Immy, you prize material possessions, and Issy, you don't, but the thing is this: My life has been a great gift, in so many ways. Unknown to the both of you, I amassed a great fortune, no more fortunate man was there than I! I leave this great fortune to the both of you, split equally – yet of course there is a 'but'! You've got to find and destroy those horcruxes along the way! Remember how Harry did it? He had to hunt them down. Together with Ron and Hermione – *the strength of friendship* - he tested himself beyond all reasonable limits to face his fears, but every time he did, he rose a little higher. He got braver, he got kinder, he became true to all that was right and

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real. This you must do too, so I am sending you both on a treasure hunt!

“If neither of you do this, the fortune is lost. If only one of you does this, then only one of you benefits, and the other has nothing. If you want the reward, you have to do this task together. This will work no other way.

“Issy, you don’t think you need the prize, but Immy does. If you don’t partake, Immy gets the lot, and do you think she deserves to take my entire fortune? Immy, you want this, but you don’t want to do the work, but can you bear the thought of Issy having it all instead of you? *Together*. That is your route to success. I would even say that is your *only* route to success.

“This treasure hunt starts tomorrow morning. In true Harry Potter style, meet my good friend Mr Jones at Platform 9¾, Kings Cross Station, at 11am. In the absence of a reliable owl, Mr Jones will act as my messenger! Be there (*on time Immy!*) or miss our version of The Hogwarts Express!

“See you there, good sisters!

“Your ever-loving brother, Wizard Matty. Xxx

“PS. Pack your trunks and spare robes (but no broomsticks are required!). Knowing you two, this could take some time ...”

I look up from reading to see two identical but also utterly different faces, both with their eyes boring into me. Imogen is striking and brimming with fury. Isobel is fragile and overflowing with tears. They’re like two sides of the same coin. How am I ever going to bring them together? It seems like an impossible task – but Matty was never one to give up easily, and neither will I.

Isobel

Tears course down my face. Matty has left us a *letter!* Of all the things I wanted to hear, it is *him*, his voice that I crave the most. I don't want riches, I just want *him*. This letter is the closest I am likely to get. Even though it's Mr Jones' voice that speaks the words, I can hear Matty through him, and my heart breaks as he reaches me from the page. Oh Matty, my dear, dear brother! Whatever am I going to do without you?

But the content of the letter is so *Matty* that it even forces a fleeting smile onto my grief-stricken face. I don't like the content, and I would even go so far as to say that I hate the prospect of the task he so shrewdly suggests, but it doesn't surprise me in the slightest. Really, I wouldn't expect anything less. Matty is everything – the joker, the peacemaker, the genius, and the most caring man I have ever known. It's almost like he wants us to be friends again so much that he's died precisely to achieve it.

Immy hates it far more than I do, and her composure slips further with every spoken paragraph. I know it's truly awful of me, but I find watching her unravel darkly satisfying. I don't want Mr Jones to like her. I want him to know what she's really like. If I just sit here and do nothing, I won't need to explain a word, because he'll see it for himself. Silently, I welcome in her imminent eruption, as I allow my grief to morph into anger towards her.

“Give me that!” She snatches the letter and starts to rant and rave. “I am never, *never* ...” she splutters, for once stuck for words. “Never!” And she storms out – which is no surprise either. The thing with Matty is that he is, *was*, always surprising, so you kind of expect it, but the thing with Immy is that she's never surprising because she's always consistently true to her selfish form.

An untidy tower of lop-sided files thumps off the desk and onto the floor as Immy slams the door behind her. Mr Jones grimaces, looking a little shell-shocked, as I give an apologetic half-smile.

“Sorry,” I offer. “She’s always like that.” I reach down to gather the fallen files with Mr Jones. He proffers a box of Kleenex in return, and I gratefully take a tissue. “Thanks. Sorry, I’m a bit of a crier.”

“No problem, Ms Parkhouse, no need to apologize.” Genuine kindness crinkles up his smiling eyes. “It rather comes with the job! Will you be attending in the morning?”

“Of course.”

“Will your sister, do you think?”

I shrug indifferently, sniffing my tears away in a moment of hardness. I don’t care what Immy does. I just care about Matty. “I’ve no idea. But I’ll be there.”

“Well, then I’ll at least see you tomorrow.” He shakes my hand again and bids me goodbye, as I step, with my mind spinning, towards the door. “Oh, Ms Parkhouse!” he calls me back. “Take this.” He holds out a curly-handled black umbrella. “I don’t think Matty would be pleased if I let you get soaked again.”

He’s right, of course. Matty wouldn’t approve at all. And, knowing that, and knowing that Mr Jones knows it too, makes me cry all over again. My dear, sweet, clever, gorgeous, *dead* brother.

Imogen

I drive home in a crunch of missed gears and squealing brakes. How dare he! How *dare* he! He knows – *knew* - how much I hate her, how I detest the very sight of her, of how a moment

in her presence is always a moment too long. And he also knows – *knew* - how strapped for cash I am. I have a crumbling marriage to a cheating scumbag of a so-called husband, a spoilt brat of a step-daughter whose prime education demands more than a pretty penny, an image to maintain that, let's face it, I've worked hard to achieve - and debts up to my eyeballs. I want to leave Stephen, but I've nowhere to go, and no capital to start again with. Until I raise some serious cash, I'm utterly trapped. Matty knew that, and he failed to mention that he was sitting upon a small fortune. He could have helped me. Instead, he's using it against me. I bet he would have helped *her* though. 'Family' never ceases to disappoint me.

I'm in agony over what to do. I can't bear the thought of towing the line, of doing what I'm told according to somebody else's set of rules, but I know this crazy scheme of his is for real. There won't be a handy get-out clause, or an 'only joking' footnote if I fail to comply. This has the Matty that I know stamped all over it. If I don't go, I don't get, it's as simple as that. But I really don't want to go. I really want to stay as far away from her as I've ever been. But I also really need the money.

My life is an utter fiasco. I'm almost forty, on my third husband, and I have no career to speak of. I suppose you'd say I'm "a lady that lunches" – that's what Matty always called it. But I'm bloody good at it. I know how to do it. I have a pile of acquaintances that you'd never call friends, and I'm always busy. I look good on Stephen's arm, even if I don't feel it. So I refuse to feel. Feeling is for losers. I'm not a loser – even if I currently appear to be in a losing situation. I've never left a husband before and had nowhere to go. There's always been someone else. I know how to use my God-given gifts, and my God-given gifts are undoubtedly my looks – but suddenly, now I'm pushing forty, no-one else seems to want them. My mind flicks uninvited to visions of Stephen, who is currently away on

business. Of course, I know what that's code for. He's shagging his blond bimbo of a PA, Chelsea, employed not for her intelligence in the office but her skills in the bedroom, I'm quite sure of that. She's certainly stupid enough to fall for her balding boss anyway. I hate him. I hate them. I hate *everyone*.

I'll have to go and get whatever this is over with as quickly as I possibly can. After all, dopey-mopey Issy is no match for me. It'll be a breeze. I'll do the task, get the cash, and move far away to sunnier climes, leaving the whole sorry lot of them to it.

I will think only of the fortune, of my just reward. And then it will be no more Issy, no more Stephen, no more slutty Chelsea or bratty Tiffany. Me, myself and I, and the means to start again, just the way I like it. But no more Matty either. If I wasn't so bloody furious with him, or so disciplined with my thoughts, that might seem a little bit empty – but fortunately I do have the intelligence to fill it.

“Right Matty,” I say through gritted teeth, “have it your way. For now.” But not for long, because the Imogen Parkhouse Super-Show is only just beginning. Give her a little time and she will re-invent herself yet again. She always does.

Isobel

Despite the desperately sad circumstances, and the fact that the last thing I want to do is to take a trip with Immy, I find myself quietly excited as I set off for Kings Cross the next morning. This is a true Matty-style adventure, as only he can imagine, and it stirs such warm memories within me. When we were kids, he was always the adventurer. He found jungles and deserts, battlefields and oceans, all within our garden walls. We would play for hours on end in these wondrous imaginary

worlds that were so *real* to us. We sailed to Africa, swung through towering trees like Tarzan, befriended magical beasts, and went on endless hunts for treasure! All those precious times when everything in the world was right, and everyone in it. It seems so remote now in one way, yet still I can conjure the memories so sharply. When I do, he doesn't feel dead at all. He's as alive as I am. It's bittersweet, but when my eyes leak tears, I'm smiling too. The fun we had. Before it all went so horribly wrong.

I wish I didn't hate Immy. I feel like such a terrible person, hating my own sister, but I can't help it. She's so awful. I loathe her, but I wish I didn't. Matty doesn't want me to, and I don't want to let him down, but I can't see how that can ever change – whatever this journey might bring.

Not knowing where we're going, or what we'll be doing, makes me feel nervous. I don't like to be out of my comfort zone, certainly when I've not been able to prepare in advance, and the thought of failing at some difficult challenge in front of Immy makes me shudder. I'm certain now that she will turn up – she'll be dazzled by potential pound signs – so I know I'm going to have to face whatever this is. But in my heart I know that Matty will be kind; strict enough to insist that I do whatever needs to be done, but not asking anything of me that I can't actually do. I'll probably think I can't, but whatever he says, I will try and honour him. He was right when he said I would think Immy doesn't deserve his fortune, and that I'd need to be here today. I'm positive she doesn't – and I will protect it. I'd walk to the ends of the Earth for my big brother – but I can't love Immy again, however much he wishes it. I just can't.

I take a black cab to Kings Cross. My rucksack is a little heavy for too much walking. I didn't know what to pack, so I've tried to cover all eventualities, and at least at this I'm far more adept than Immy. She'll probably only bring cigarettes,

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alcohol and her phone, and then simply steal everything else she wants from me. But not this time! This time I won't let her.

At 10.45am the taxi drops me outside Kings Cross Station. I *adore* Kings Cross Station, with its stunning, sweeping ceiling and the frantic activity. I love the fact that I could get on a train and go *anywhere*. That's Adventurer Matty's influence. As teenagers, we used to hang out here sometimes and watch the world go by, making up stories about the people we saw, the places they were going, and the things they would do. Anything seemed possible – and when Harry Potter was created, with Platform 9 ³/₄ and the Hogwarts Express leaving from this very place, we knew we'd always been right! It's full of magic, and today I love it like an old friend. I almost feel like Matty is here, just on the other side of the barrier, already on the train.

It suddenly occurs to me that it's the first day of September. How very appropriate! It's the day that the story-train always leaves for Hogwarts school, and I'm not surprised to see a gaggle of chattering fans bustling around the tourist area, and posing for photographs beside the trolley in the pretend barrier wall. I feel like I should have a house scarf. Matty always said I'd be a Gryffindor, but I'm not so sure. There's nothing remarkable about me, and I'm certainly not brave – but I am positive that Immy would be a Slytherin.

I wish Matty was here. He would love this. Although, with my memories alive and glowing within me like a protective talisman, I suppose, in a way, he is.

Raymond

I'm early to the Harry Potter barrier at Kings Cross. I have a feeling that Isobel is the kind of person who makes 'on time'

seem like 'late', and I want to avoid any possible upset by her being left alone waiting. Sure enough, it's barely after 10.45 when I see her weaving her way through the milling crowd towards me. She looks utterly practical, in her sensible trainers, with a sturdy rucksack on her back, but there's something quietly charming about her. She could do with a full shot of confidence, plus, dare I say it, a little more self-worth and fire, but she inspires in me the need to care for her, in Matty's absence. In contrast, her sister seems thoroughly self-sufficient and almost intimidating. It's hard to believe they're twins.

I greet Isobel and take the rucksack from her shoulders. She smiles sadly, shyly, uncomfortably, and I can see she's stuck for what to say.

"Are you a fan?" I offer, nodding towards the fake barrier, "Or is that just your brother?" She brightens immediately.

"Oh yes! I *love* Harry Potter! The conversations Matty and I used to have about the stories, they would last all night! Are you?"

"I am," I stage whisper my reply dramatically. "But don't tell anyone, I'm supposed to be a sensible legal man!"

"Oh, you're a Ravenclaw then!" laughs Isobel. "The Ravenclaws are very intelligent!"

"I quite fancy myself as a Ravenclaw – they have the best scarves!"

Isobel laughs politely, as I inwardly search for a way to broach what is to her likely an unbroachable subject.

"Have you, er, heard from your sister? Do you know if she'll be joining us today?"

Isobel shakes her head. "No, I've not heard anything. I'm the last person she'd call. But I am sure now that she'll be here, although she will be very late."

"Oh! How do you know?"

"I just do. It's how she is."

“Shall we treat ourselves to a late breakfast while we wait for her?” I gesture towards a nearby cafe. “If we sit in there by the window, we’ll be able to see when she gets here.”

“Um,” Isobel hesitates. “I’ve not really eaten since ... Matty. I don’t know if I could.”

“Ms Parkhouse, if you haven’t eaten, then you must! Come on!” I shoulder her rucksack (it weighs about a tonne!) and lead the way in a zigzag through the crowd. If we’re in for a long delay, I need the prop of food to fill all the awkward silences and to create distractions in which to think up safe topics of conversation. I mentally send thoughts to Matty. “Help me out here, mate!”

It seems like he hears me. When we enter the café, the queue for food looks a good ten minutes long. I send Isobel to grab a table, and take my time selecting drinks and pastries from the counter, glad of the temporary distance between us. It’s not that I don’t like her. It’s just that I know she’ll have lots of questions about Matty’s task (I call it ‘Matty’s Quest’), but I can’t answer any of them until her sister turns up, and telling her that is something I’d rather avoid.

Soon I’m stirring sugar into my hazelnut latte, and Isobel is politely nibbling at a croissant, as she throws me furtive anxious glances, clearly working herself up to say something.

“So, what do you think of Matty’s choice of owl?” I jump in, wishing to lead the conversation, and feeling that’s sure to be a neutral topic. “If I was an owl, what kind do you think I’d be?”

Isobel gives a soft chuckle, her troubled expression lightening. “Oh, an eagle owl, for sure! After all, you’re the ‘legal eagle’! And an eagle is on the Ravenclaw crest!”

“Oh yes, I rather like that!” I puff my chest out importantly, laughing at myself. “I wouldn’t fancy the hours though, or having to catch my own supper, especially as most of it would have whiskers and tails!”

Again, Isobel gives a small chuckle, and then her face falls.

“Mr Jones, please tell me how my brother died. I need to know. Please tell me he didn’t suffer.”

Her pain is tangible and unbearable to witness. I inwardly curse. Matty, I did not sign up for *this*. Fortunately, at that moment I see a smartly dressed woman marching towards us in a thundercloud of fury. People step back to let her through, like she’s parting an ocean. She’s quite an impressive sight. In fact, she’s striking.

“11 o’clock, you said! Yet where are you both? Cosying up together in here! Un-bloody-believable!”

Imogen has arrived.

Imogen

When I get to Kings Cross, *almost* on time I might add, Issy and Raymond Jones are nowhere to be seen. I can’t bloody believe it. I don’t do waiting. At all. But there’s no dreadful sister, or dreary solicitor, anywhere near the Harry Potter wall. There’s only a load of saddo fan types, some dressed in wizarding robes and giggling about “all the muggles around here”. They obviously mean me. I’m about to give them a thorough ticking off when an even weirder weirdo, dressed head to toe as Albus Dumbledore, stares me out over his half-moon spectacles. He has piercing blue eyes not unlike Matty’s, and the sudden jolt of almost-recognition stops me in my tracks. I know this weirdo guy is probably just wearing coloured contacts, but maybe I miss Matty more than I realized. But I don’t want to think of that now – or ever. I’m here for business reasons and not sentimental ones.

Then I see them, sitting in the window seats of a nearby restaurant, having a jolly old time of it by the looks of things.

She's smarming up to him like a desperado, but I didn't really expect anything else. I'll soon put the kybosh on that. On hurricane heels, I storm over, ready to set a rocket under her ample arse.

They both get to their feet quickly. Issy hurriedly pushes a half-eaten croissant away, looking slightly guilty that I've caught her in the act of eating when she's supposed to be crippled with grief. Ha! One to Immy already. Issy's drama-queen palaver won't wash with me.

Raymond Jones regains his composure immediately.

"Ms Parkhouse, you made it! Great to see you! Can I get you a coffee and something to eat?"

"I'm not here on a jolly. Can we get on?" But I don't ask it as a question. I state it as an obvious essential, and make sure he knows full well there's only one acceptable answer.

"Of course. If you'd both like to follow me, please." He goes to pick up Isobel's ridiculously huge haversack for her, but she snatches it up quickly. She won't let him help her in front of me in case I think she's pathetic I suppose. But it's a bit late for that. I've thought she's pathetic for years.

Without a word to each other, or even a glance of acknowledgement, we follow him. I take the lead, matching Raymond Jones' steps, with Issy trailing along behind. When he stops abruptly at the Harry Potter wall, I almost walk straight into him, but pull myself up just in the nick of time.

"Why have we stopped?" I snap.

Mr Jones looks uncomfortably apologetic. "This is the first photo opportunity," he smiles tentatively. "Matty wanted all this documented, so that you can both look back on this journey later. His request is that you are photographed together pretending to push the trolley through the barrier." He sees that I'm about to explode. "Sorry, it's in Matty's rules, I'm afraid – it has to be done. It's my job to oversee it."

Bloody jobsworth. The frolicking fans are still wizarding around, making muggle jokes and “Expelliamus-ing” towards each other’s fake wands, while the Dumbledore in the background calmly strokes his polyester beard. The last thing I want to do is be a part of this freak show, but even I can see that the easiest option is just to get it done as quickly as possible. I elbow my way through the tangle of robes and put a hand on the ‘stuck-in-the-wall’ trolley, as Mr Jones fumbles hurriedly for his camera, clearly taken aback to have my unexpected compliance and wanting to get it done before I kick off and change my mind – and before the weirdo fans pound our heads in for jumping the queue. I send my best silencing glare in the direction of the outraged mutterings.

“Isobel,” Mr Jones says smartly, nodding her towards the trolley also. First name terms already, I note. Meekly, she places a finger on the trolley handle too. The camera flashes once and I’m away.

“Right, let’s go.” I grab the lead. “Which way?” My blazing eyes tell Raymond Jones not to dare to request another.

He points towards the exit.

Issy finds a tiny voice. “What, we’re not catching a train? I thought we were catching a train?”

“Not this time,” he smiles. “You’re taking an alternative form of transport.” His expression says “Don’t ask.” I’m not that bothered anyway. I just want to get it over with. We trek along with him through the station exit and pound a few pavements. The heels of my shoes are starting to dig in, but at least I look fabulous. Unlike some. Issy puffs along behind us like a growth-stunted tortoise with her house on her back. It probably is the actual entire contents of her house that she’s carrying, complete with the tragic china cats off the mantelpiece. She never was one to travel lightly. Thank God one of us knows how to, at least.

Mr Jones suddenly stops and makes a “Ta da!” gesture with his hands. There in front of us is parked an ancient orange vehicle. Bertha. Mum and Dad’s old VW camper van.

“We’re not going in that!” I cry, shocked. I’m strangely choked to see such an unexpected sight. And that can’t happen at all.

Isobel

“Bertha!” I squeal delightedly. “Where did you get her? Oh, it’s wonderful to see her!” I reach out to stroke her, like you would a cherished pet. I can’t help it! I adore this little van. She is absolutely overflowing with happy memories. Every summer holiday we’d all pile in and off we’d go! There’s barely an inch of the British Isles she’s not seen. And she’s always been *her*, never *it*. She’s part of the family. Suddenly I don’t feel quite so lost.

“Urgh,” shudders Immy scathingly. “When did that thing rise up from the dead?”

I gasp. Her words are carefully chosen to hurt me, I’m sure. She can’t stand anyone else being happy about anything – and in these days of death, Bertha reminds me of life. I glance daggers at her. To my surprise, I see the sparkle of – could it be? – a tear in her eye, but then her expression quickly becomes steel again.

“Your brother found her and restored her,” Mr Jones explains, stepping in to smooth over Immy’s comment. “He has done a really fantastic job, I must say. It’s quite a spectacular restoration. Here, have a look inside.” He pulls keys from his pocket, still with the same ancient leather fob, its grain worn smooth with the years, unlocks and slides back the

door. "Go on!" He gestures for me to get in. Immy hangs back, but I can't wait.

"Oh, she's beautiful," I sigh, running my hands along polished counters and wonderfully upholstered seats. Little curtains of lemon gingham hang daintily at her windows, and the decades-old travel stickers from all corners of the country still adorn her back windscreen. As I touch them, emotions flash through me with a jolt of longing. "I love her!"

"Let me show you this!" Mr Jones steps inside, as I squash myself back to the door to make room. "The roof pops up beautifully now, giving you two quite generous sleeping areas for a van this size. Matty has certainly made sure you'll be comfortable!"

It's brilliant. Dear tired Bertha has been restored to her former glory, yet even better. In my heart I feel Matty working away tirelessly on her, making her so full up of love. Even if his task were just for this moment, what a legacy it is.

"I'm not going anywhere in *that*," spits Immy. "It's old and decrepit, it leaks in the rain, there's no power steering, and it's too bloody small if I'm going to be travelling with *her*."

Mr Jones stares at her briefly, as if he can't believe how anyone could be so cold and ungrateful.

"Matty slaved over this project for you both equally," he says evenly. He sighs. "I think maybe it's time for the next letter. Get in both of you and sit down. It's quite a long one."

Immy looks mutinous for a moment, then marches around to the driver's seat and climbs in, slamming the door behind her. I sit in the back, and Mr Jones parks himself tactfully between us. Reaching into his briefcase, he pulls out a cream envelope.

"Okay girls, listen up."

Raymond

I wonder if I've bitten off more than I can chew with these two, but it's too late to turn back now. I gave Matty my word. Taking his next set of instructions, I unfold the page and settle in for a read. I tell myself sternly that what they choose to think about this is not my concern. I'm just the messenger. And, even if they shoot at me, my legal training means that I'm pretty good at dodging verbal bullets. At least, that's what I hope. With a slightly nervous swallow, I commence.

“My beautiful sisters!

“How wonderful to see you *both* here on this magnificent morning! I hope you enjoyed the photo opportunity! By now you will be reacquainted with our beloved Bertha, and I trust that you are as pleased with her new beauty as I am! Don't see the potential discomfort and the leaking roof, Immy (which, incidentally, barely leaks at all now!). See the wonder, and remember all those times when you sat in the back and shouted “I can see the sea!” whenever the coast came into view. Remember that. Remember the fun we had.

“At this point I have a story to tell. I read it in a book and thought how appropriate it was for you two. It is called, quite perfectly in the circumstances, ‘A Tale of Two Sisters’. Settle down and listen whilst my good man Jones recites it!

A Tale of Two Sisters

I wish to tell you a tale of two sisters. It is a tale full of heartbreak, love lost, anguish and frustration, yet it is also a tale of upliftment, amazement and wonder. After all, sometimes nothing is real to us until it is lost. Sometimes we have to lose it to *really* find it. Let me begin.

There once were two sisters. They were devoted to each other and did everything together; where you found one,

you found the other. It was as if they were joined, for in many respects they were. They *are*. But they didn't really *know* it, until one day circumstances ripped them apart at the seams, sending them spinning in separate directions, and changing their worlds for all time to come. Each was so lost and bereft without the other that they could not see how they would ever feel right again.

For many years the sisters battled to return to each other, and to regain the stability their togetherness brought. They each knew the other was still out there and craved their touch, but it held itself away from them, just out of reach, again and again. As time began to take its toll, and memories to fade, a veil descended between them to a point whereby they could no longer recall being anything *but* separate. But knowing deep within compelled them to continue their search. This 'unconscious' knowing was an everlasting remnant of their togetherness, and it nagged at them, like an unfathomable emptiness that *had* to be filled. And so year after year, decade after decade, and life after life, these two quested to be reunited – even if they had long forgotten quite what that really meant.

Upon the journey to rediscovering their united truth, they tried all the events, distractions and feelings that life can offer, and every kind of challenge and emotion was experienced. Violence, food, relationships, accidents, illness, and even denial were employed to try to fill the feeling of void - but nothing helped in anything more than a transient way. Always they came back to their centre and found it to still be a little hollow. Something was *missing*. And so they continued to search into the expanses of eternity laid out before them.

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You might wonder why I tell such a tale of doom and gloom on these opening pages, yet listen further for it is not. Really it is a tale of great endeavours, an inspiring fable that will touch the very core of you, should you take it to your heart. You will see how through their trials each sister became stronger. They learnt so much, of many things they would not have known had the rift never occurred, and each found in themselves great courage. To be thrust out of their comfort zones brought a myriad of experiences with immeasurable rewards. Eventually they even found to their great surprise that the one thing they thought was impossible was actually perfectly possible. They *could* exist without the other, and return to their peace *exactly as they were*, in each and every lifetime.

Of course, they were alone and apart in a physical way, but they were not always lonely. And if they were, that did not make them unique, for it was an extremely human trait, and part of the glory of who and where they were, and how they were exploring their paths. It was a marker that they knew love. They began to use this to understand themselves and others, to reach out to fill areas of need. As they did, they taught by example and brought others peace also. Many were united through their actions, and so their spirit began to *grow*.

As they grew, they caught fleeting glimpses of each other that seemed immune to the expanses of miles and years. These moments whispered of a greater loving truth, as if the veil momentarily lifted away and offered a tantalising instant of clearest heart-full view, only to fall once more - but every glimpse, however brief, spurred them on. They danced around each other unseen, reaching out hands and hearts into the unknown in willingness to seek the warm

embrace. Yet they could never quite touch, nor take the opportunities that were presented to reunite, and so, by the slightest of hesitations, they missed each other again and again. Oh, the too-ing and the fro-ing! It was enormously frustrating, yet also poetry in motion because it was led by love.

Now they are so close they are only a breath apart. That is all; a single breath. Their heartbeat could inspire the breath that blows the veil right away, and they would find themselves together once more; hand to hand, shoulder to shoulder, heart to heart, and with their eternal connection ever strengthened by their separate experiences. But will they take it? You might think it natural to do so, but in its moment such a thing is not always as easy as it sounds. It is simple yes, but not easy! If they do this, much will change. Many things they have come to know and lean upon on their long journey will instantly be different. What will they do without the journey? Will there even be one left to take if this is completed and their tale of a love lost becomes one of a love found? They stand amid the push and pull of love and fear. Shall this tale have a happy ending, with a sunset and a rainbow, blue skies and turtle doves, or shall it not?

In the tradition of all great tales, love will see them through. The trials they have overcome and the things they have learnt mean their tale is already a triumph. A million moments have passed in great productivity, whether 'good' or 'bad', and these will lead to a million more of their choosing. They will choose well, because now they know what it is to love fully, and who they really are, to themselves and each other, and what matters, and what does not. With a little courage and faith, which they both abundantly possess, they can remember the together that

was. In so doing it will not be a 'was' any more, but a new *is*, which offers a new adventure upon the firmest of foundations – *a love realized*.

Their moment is almost upon them. The Earth holds its breath – that single one breath! – and waits. It waits for the sisters to decide to open their eyes fully and accept what they *see*. And when they do *see*, these two sisters will know again that it is still true. Although they have learnt to be apart, they are so much better as two - and two together can make a brand-new *one* quite beautifully!

“By now, Issy, you probably look baffled, and Immy, likely furious. You both think I've lost the plot. But let's just say that I'm entitled to a different perspective now, and I can see you both in this tale. I'm going to get Ray to leave it with you. Please read it again and see what it is trying to tell you.

“Now, onwards! As promised, an adventure lies ahead, should you agree to take it together, which I truly desire that you will. We are going to quest for those horcruxes and bring them to our own special kind of justice. To do this, you will be tasked with a number of challenges. Some will be easy, and others not insubstantial, but all will be achievable. The first one is simple, but I don't think you will regard it as easy at all! It is this:

“Before we can deal with the horcruxes, we have to forego the hallows. Remember, the hallows are *deathly* hallows. They do you little real good! Harry could have chosen to seek the hallows instead, which would have made him the most powerful wizard in the land. But he was wiser than that. He understood that if he wanted those hallows only for the power they could bring, it would destroy him. So he let them go and went after the horcruxes instead – and when all the horcruxes were dealt with, the hallows weren't deathly any more.

“Issy, of course you know what the hallows are! You have read the stories a thousand times by now. But Immy, just in case you’ve forgotten, I’m going to remind you. They are the elder wand (the most powerful wand ever made), the resurrection stone (to bring back *a shadow of* the dead), and the invisibility cloak (which made its wearer completely undetectable). You will likely dispute this next statement, but I stand by it as true for you *both*. You are choosing the hallows! Immy, you use your beauty like the elder wand. It’s a weapon, and a destructive power you would do well to use more wisely. Both of you use the resurrection stone, being stuck as you are in the feelings that came from a very, very old upset, which should have been put to rest long ago. You keep all the bad feelings alive by your own decisions to do so, and exist like shadows instead of really living your lives. Issy, you abuse that invisibility cloak. You go through your every day trying not to be noticed, being barely here at all, and that is a waste.

“Girls, it is time to choose. Horcruxes or hallows. Be wise like Harry. Choose to go after those horcruxes and leave those hallows be. They are nothing but empty temptation in disguise. When the horcruxes are all dealt with, the hallows will still be offered to you, but then they will be deathly no more because you will *live*. Quite simply, you will have no further need of them.

“The first task is designed to help you put those hallows down. You have become far too used to being with them, and you will benefit from feeling things from an alternative perspective. As I said, it is a very simple task, but you will likely not find it easy! All you have to do is swap outfits, right here, right now, and wear them for the rest of today. Feel what it is like to be the other, just a little bit. And, before you start, don’t tell me that isn’t possible. You know as well as I do that, whatever you might say otherwise, you are an identical size! Issy, try a day in Immy’s ridiculous shoes and see how you like

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it! And Immy, luxuriate in the comfort of a new experience, *trainers*, and get those feet back on the ground!

“Thank you for doing this, my darling sisters. It means more to me than you can yet know. Let’s tell this tale and find you in it.

“Your ever-loving brother,
“Matty”

The second I stop reading, both girls say vehemently and in unison, “I’m not wearing *that!*”

Imogen

I can’t believe this. Matty, my dear brother, you might be dead, but you are still a shit. If you weren’t already dead, you’d be dying of laughter right now, at my expense. You expect me to wear *this!* At this moment, I don’t think you could have suggested anything worse. I’d have more style with a hessian sack tied with twine around my waist.

After much heated debate and equal opposition, we’re doing it, swapping clothes, crushed in the back of a geriatric camper, with those tiny squares of fabric that count as curtains pulled over the windows for a modicum of laughable ‘privacy’. Privacy would be never having to leave the house in this terrible outfit, but as if that’s going to happen.

Soon I am wearing supermarket jeans (Really Issy? *Supermarket* jeans?), a navy polo shirt, a zip-up sports hoody, and beige trainers. I say ‘wearing’, but I don’t think you really wear clothes like this. You just get smothered by them. I feel about a thousand years old and not like me at all. Apparently, that is the whole point. I no longer have my ‘hallows support system’.

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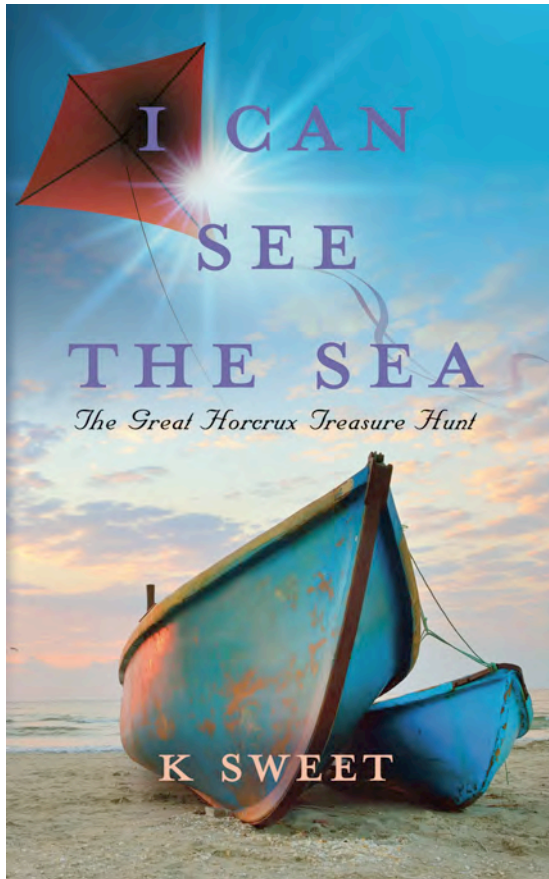
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