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Cherry lay on her side where the tide had lifted her and coughed until her lungs were clear. She woke as the sea came in once again and frothed around her legs. She rolled over on her back, feeling the salt spray on her face, and saw that it was night. The sky above her was dashed with stars and the moon rode through the clouds.

She scrambled to her feet, one hand still holding her precious shells close to her. Instinctively she backed away from the sea and looked around her. With growing dismay she saw that she had been thrown back on the wrong side of the rocks, that she was not in Boat Cove.

The tide had left only a few feet of sand and rock between her and the cliff face. There was no way back through the sea to safety.

She turned round to face the cliff that she realized would be her last hope, for she remembered that this little beach vanished completely at high tide. If she stayed where she was she would surely be swept away again and this time she might not be so fortunate. But the cold seemed to have calmed her and she reasoned more deliberately now, wondering why she had not tried climbing the cliff before. She had hurried into her first attempt at escape and it had very nearly cost her her life. She would wait this time until the sea forced her up the cliff. Perhaps the tide would not come in that far. Perhaps they would be looking for her by now. It was dark. Surely they would be searching. Surely they must find her soon. After all, they knew where she was. Yes, she thought, best just to wait and hope. She settled down on a ledge of rock that was the

first step up onto the cliff face, drew her knees up to her chin to keep out the chill and waited. She watched as the sea crept ever closer, each wave lashing her with spray and eating away gradually at the beach. She closed her eyes and prayed, hoping against hope that when she opened them the sea would be retreating. But her prayers went unanswered and the sea came in to cover the beach. Once or twice she thought she heard voices above her on the cliff path, but when she called out no one came. She continued to shout for help every few minutes, forgetting it was futile against the continuous roar and hiss of the waves. A pair of raucous white gulls flew down from the cliffs to investigate her and she called to them for help, but they did not seem to understand and wheeled away into the night.

She stayed sitting on her rock until the waves threatened

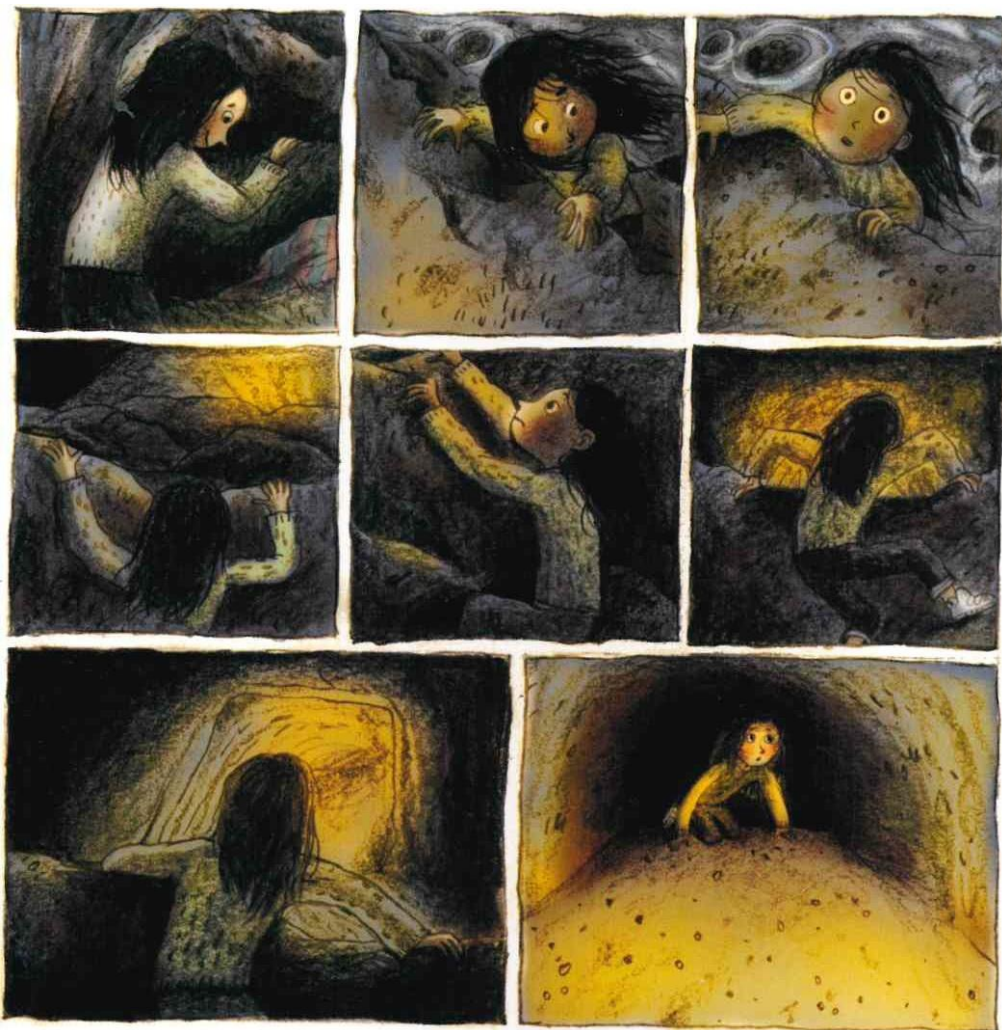


to dislodge her and then reluctantly she began her climb. She would go as far as she needed to and no further. She had scanned the first few feet above for footholds and it did look quite a simple climb to begin with, and so it proved. But her hands were numbed with cold and her legs began to tremble with the strain almost at once. She could see that the ledge she had now reached was the last deep one visible on the cliff face. The shells in her jersey were restricting her freedom of movement, so she decided she would leave them there. Wrapped tight in the towel they would be quite safe. She took the soaking bundle out of her jersey and placed it carefully against the rock face on the ledge beside her, pushing it in as far as it would go. "I'll be back for you," she said, and reached up for the next lip of rock. Just below her the sea crashed against the cliff as if it wanted to suck her from the rock face and claim her



once again. Cherry determined not to look down but to concentrate on the climb.

She imagined at first that the glow of light above her was from a torch, and she shouted and screamed until she was weak from the effort of it. But although no answering call came from the night, the light remained, a pale beckoning light whose source now seemed to her wider perhaps than that of a torch. With renewed hope that had



rekindled her strength and her courage, Cherry inched her way up the cliff towards the light until she found herself at the entrance to a narrow cave that was filled with a flickering yellow light like that of a candle shaken by the wind. She hauled herself up into the mouth of the cave and sat down exhausted, looking back down at the furious sea frothing beneath her. Relief and joy surged within her and she laughed aloud in triumph. She was safe and she had defied the sea and won. Her one regret was that she had had to leave her cowrie shells behind on the ledge. They were high enough she thought to escape the sea. She would fetch them tomorrow after the tide had gone down again.

For the first time now she began to think of her family and how worried they would be, but the thought of walking in through the front door all dripping and dramatic made her almost choke with excitement.

