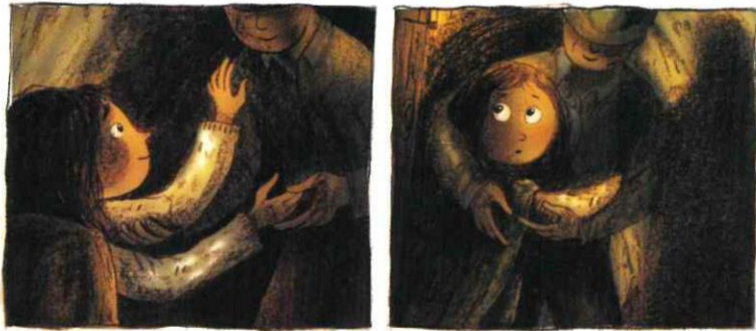


“Come back and see us sometime, if you’ve a mind to,” he said, and then put his face in his hands.

“Goodbye,” said Cherry. “Thank you for the fire and for helping me. I won’t forget you.”

But the old man never replied.

The journey through the mine was long and difficult. She held fast to the young tinner’s waist as they walked silently through the dark tunnels, stopping every now and then to climb a ladder to the lode above until finally they could look up the shaft above them and see the daylight.



“It’s dawn,” said the young man, looking up.

“I’ll be back in time for breakfast,” said Cherry, setting her foot on the ladder.

“You’ll remember me?” the young tinner asked, and Cherry nodded, unable to speak. She felt a strange affinity with him and his father. “And if you should ever need me, come back again. You may need me and I shall be here. I go nowhere else.”

“Thank you,” said Cherry. “I won’t forget. I doubt anyone is going to believe me when I tell them about you. No one believes in ghosts, not up there.”

“I doubt it too. Be happy, little friend,” he said. And he was gone, back into the tunnel. Cherry waited until the light from the candle in his hat had vanished and then turned eagerly to the ladder and began to climb up towards the light.



She found herself in a place she knew well, high on the moor by Zennor Quoit. She stood by the ruined mine workings and looked down at the sleeping village shrouded in mist, and the calm blue sea beyond. The storm had passed and there was scarcely a breath of wind



even on the moor. It was only ten minutes' walk down through the bracken, across the road by the Eagle's Nest and down the farm track to the cottage where her family would be waiting. She began to run, but her clothes were still heavy and wet and she was soon reduced to a fast walk. All the while she was determining where she would begin her story, wondering how much they would believe. At the top of the lane she stopped to consider how best to make her entrance. Should she ring the bell and be found standing there, or should she just walk in and surprise them there at breakfast? She longed to see the joy on their faces, to feel the warmth of their arms around her and to bask once again in their affection.

She saw as she came round the corner by the cottage that there was a long blue Land Rover parked in the lane bristling with aerials. *Coastguard*, she read on the side.



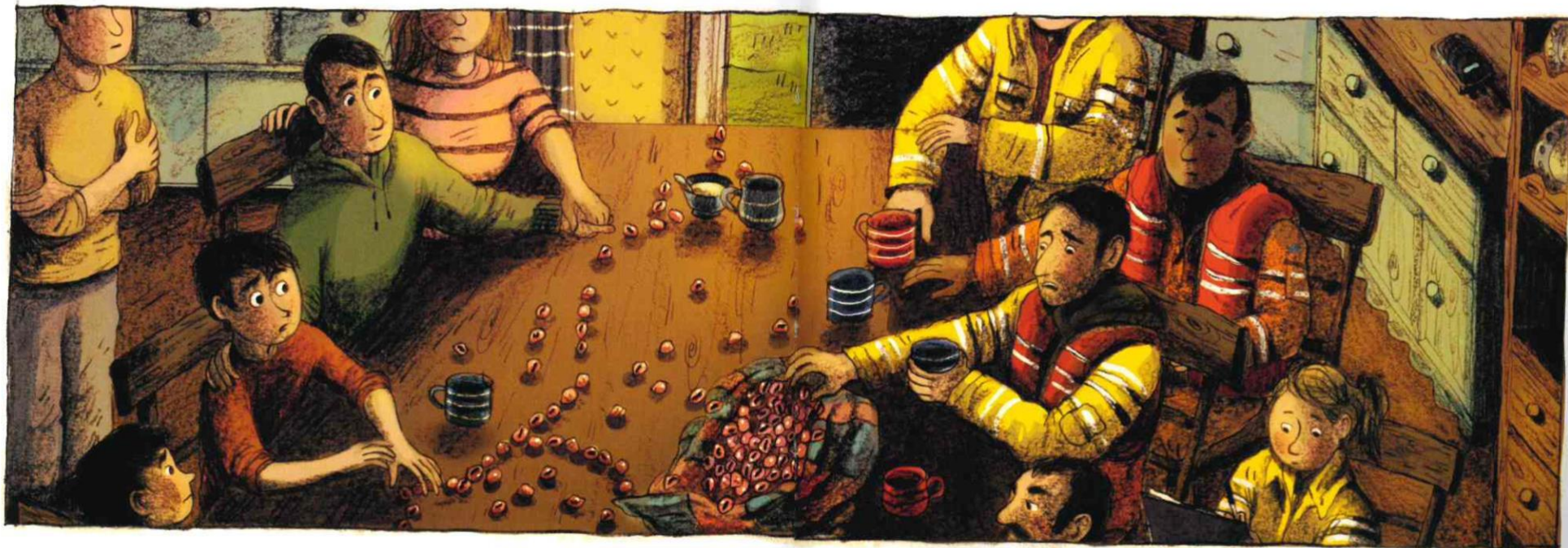
As she came down the steps she noticed that the back door of the cottage was open and she could hear voices inside. She stole in on tiptoe. The kitchen was full of uniformed men drinking tea, and around the table sat her family, dejection and despair etched on every face. They hadn't seen her yet. One of the uniformed men had put down his cup and was speaking. His voice was low and hushed.



“You’re sure the towel is hers, no doubts about it?”

Cherry’s mother shook her head.

“It’s her towel,” she said quietly, “and they are her shells. She must have put them up there, it must have been the last thing she did.”



Cherry saw her shells spread out on the open towel and stifled a shout of joy.

“We have to say,” he went on. “We have to say then, most regrettably, that the chances of finding your daughter alive now are very slim. It seems she must have tried to

climb the cliff to escape the heavy seas and fallen in. We've scoured the cliff top for miles in both directions and covered the entire beach, and there's no sign of her. She must have been washed out to sea. We must conclude that she is missing, and we have to presume that she is drowned."

Cherry could listen no longer but burst into the room, shouting.

"I'm home, I'm home. Look at me, I'm not drowned at all. I'm here! I'm home!"

The tears were running down her face.

But no one in the room even turned to look in her direction. Her brothers cried openly, one of them clutching the giant's necklace.

"But it's me!" she shouted again. "Me, can't you see? It's me and I've come back. I'm all right. Look at me."



But no one did, and no one heard.

The giant's necklace lay spread out on the table.

"So she'll never finish it after all," said her mother softly. "Poor Cherry. Poor dear Cherry."

And in that one moment Cherry knew and understood that she was right, that she would never finish her necklace, that she belonged no longer with the living but had passed on beyond.

