

Thursday 29th April

LO: Comprehension

one came and where the water was still enough for us to sail our boats. There was only one place left that we could go – Rushy Bay.

Rushy Bay was forbidden territory to us, along with most of the west coast of Bryher. The pool under Gweal Hill and the beach on Popplestones beyond was as far as any of us children were allowed to go in that direction. We never asked why, for we did not have to. We all knew well enough that the west coast of the island was dangerous, far too dangerous for children, whatever the weather. Mother and Father reminded me repeatedly about it, and they were right to do so. At Shipman's Head and Hell Bay there were black cliffs hundreds of feet high that rose sheer from the churning sea below. Here even on the calmest of days the waves could sweep you off the rocks and take you out to sea. I had been there often enough, but always with Father. We used to go there for firewood, collecting the driftwood off the rocky beaches and dragging it above the high-water mark to claim it for our own; or we would go for the seaweed, piling the cart high with it before going back home to dress the flower pieces or the potato fields. But I never went alone over to that side of the island, none of us ever did.

strange, unearthly monotone. Maybe it was not to himself that he talked but to the kittiwake that sat always on his shoulder or to the black jack donkey that pulled his cart wherever he went, or maybe it was to the great woolly dog with the greying muzzle that loped along beside him. The Birdman went everywhere barefoot, even in winter, a stooped black figure that lurched as he walked, one step always shorter than the other. And wherever he went he would be surrounded by a flock of screaming seagulls that circled and floated above him, tirelessly vigilant, almost as if they were protecting him. He rarely spoke to anyone, indeed he scarcely even looked at anyone.

Until now it had never even occurred to either Daniel or me to go alone into the forbidden parts of the island, nor to venture anywhere near the Birdman's cottage. After all, the island was over a mile long and half a mile across at its widest. We could roam free over more than half of it and that had always been enough. But Daniel and I had to have somewhere to sail our boats. It was all we lived for, and Rushy Bay was the only place we could do it. Even so I did not want to go there. For me it was far too close to the Birdman's cottage on Heathy Hill. It was Daniel who persuaded me

There was another more compelling reason though why we children were warned away from Rushy Bay and Droppy Nose Point and the west coast of the island, for this was the side of the island most frequented by the Birdman of Bryher. He was the only one who lived on that side of the island. He lived in the only house facing out over the west coast, a long, low thatched cottage on Heathy Hill overlooking Rushy Bay itself. No one ever went near him and no one ever spoke to him. Like all the other children on the island, Daniel and I had learnt from the cradle that the Birdman was to be avoided. Some said the Birdman was mad. Some said he was the devil himself, that he fed on dogs and cats, and that he would put spells and curses on you if you came too close.

The little I saw of the Birdman was enough to convince me that all the stories we heard about him must be true. He was more like an owl, a flitting creature of the dark, the dawn and the dusk. He would be seen outside only rarely in the daylight, perhaps out in his rowing boat around the island or sitting high on his cart; and even in the hottest summers he would always wear a black cape over his shoulders and a pointed black sou'wester on his head. From a distance you could hear him talking loudly to himself in a

– Daniel had a way with words, he always had.

Retrieval

1. What two things did Gracie and her father collect from the beach and what did they do with them.
2. Which animal is the birdman compared to ?

Words in context

3. Find and copy a word that shows the cliffs were very steep.
4. What does the author mean when he says *Daniel had a way with words, he always had.*

Inference

5. Why do you think people thought the Birdman was mad ? Use the text to explain your answers as fully as possible.

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