

Bethan Winter

Christmas

“Dinner’s ready!”

The sound of twenty-one pairs of feet wandering around the enormous house.

“Watch out, the plates hot!”

“Could you carry the potatoes through please?”

“Bethyyy sit next to me!”

“Can I have the gold cracker?”

“John, stop messing with the fire!”

The massive room at the back of the house, filled with the smells of the Christmas roast and the fire burning at the side of the room. The bright Christmas decorations everywhere covering the massive tables, the old piano, even the painting hung above the fire place had gold tinsel surrounding the frame.

The room soon filled up as everyone came in, carrying food or drinks or just talking to each other. The whole family, all my cousins, my sister, my parents, my aunts and uncles, Mormor and Morfa. Twenty-one people in one room all talking and eating and drinking and smiling and laughing and shouting and playing all at once.

After the food came the concert. Every year we did the same thing. We ate the meal prepared by Mormor and then the ten cousins took it in turn to play a piece of music or two on our many instruments. The untuned piano and the scratchy violins; the modern saxophone music that Morfa didn’t recognise even though Eli told him everyone knew the pop song that Ruth was playing; the brass instruments played with vivacity although often out of tune. The loud clapping of the adults was enthusiastic and they congratulated everyone on their brilliant playing and how much they’d improved since last year.

Scratching at the big, oak door.

“It’s the dogs!” exclaimed Helen

“Don’t open the door!” ordered Auntie Mary. Kate opened the door and the three, young, bouncing dogs came jumping in.

“Pippi!” shouted Tom

“Storm!” shouted Becky

“Joe!” shouted George

“Some-one catch them before they eat the food!” shouted my always sensible Mother.

We caught the dogs and took them outside into the snow where we played in the white, blanketed garden with them, testing the ice on the pond to see if it would break. We stayed outside making snowmen and snow angels until the end of the day. The end of Christmas. The best day of the year.

The Rip-Tide

Days spent on the beach with my cousins, sandcastles and swimming and learning to kayak when the waves were smaller. The dangers of the sea weren’t known and so we’d swim out of our depth and past the end of the cliffs until a worried mother told us to come back. Throughout the years we learnt to kayak and surf and went out in storms and sailed to other beaches for the day.

One day we went out and the sea was relatively calm. I was kayaking and two of my cousins were swimming. We took it in turns to catch waves into the shore. I paddled out until I was level with my cousins; they were messing around and dunking each other under the water. One of them shouted over to me. “I can’t move”. I didn’t believe him

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and just laughed. Then I saw my younger cousin, who was 8 at the time. He was being dragged out to sea even though he was swimming towards the shore. "I can't move!" I believed him this time and paddled towards my cousin who was being dragged out and under the water. I reached him and he grabbed hold of the back of the kayak but the extra weight meant that I also couldn't move and was being dragged out with him. We were past the end of the rocks, deep, murky water; don't know how deep it is.

The kayak only held one person so I jumped out into the water and held the boat as he managed to scramble in. We were even further out, the shore was a blur. I watched as he paddled towards the shore and looked up at the cliff which we call the point to see my mum and half the village watching us. I was still being dragged out to sea. I started to swim towards the blurry shore as fast as I could, but I was hardly moving anywhere. I managed to catch up with my cousin who was also still struggling to swim. My aunt came towards us in the kayak and told us to hold onto the back. Each time a wave came we moved closer to the shore but the swell between the waves made us move further away than we'd come. There was no point in it and we were just getting further away.

So we carried on swimming, not stopping for fear of being dragged under the water. By this time the whole Point was covered in people watching us. My mum was shouting down to us to keep swimming, we were nearly there. It had taken us nearly twenty minutes to swim a few metres. We carried on swimming as much as we could until we could touch the sand with our toes. The warm, soft sand. When the waves came in we swam and when they went out we dug our toes under the sand as the water went over our heads and our mouths got filled with the salty water.

After a long time, we'd managed to reach the shore. My mum was sitting there with my younger sister and Mr Oliver from the village. "It's a good job you were wearing those buoyancy aids," he said in his strong, Pembrokeshire accent, "Those rip-tides are nasty things; could've ended up a lot worse."

We walked back to the cottage, soaking wet and shivering. Our Mormor had made lunch, sandwiches and cakes. We walked through the door and were told to go back outside and take off our wet clothes; we didn't want to ruin the floor, did we?

After lunch we walked back down to the beach, the tide was on the way out. "What shall we do this afternoon then?" said John, "How about Setlands?"

So that afternoon we went back out in the kayaks and paddled to a nearby beach where we went swimming again and had a camp fire when it started to get dark. For once, we didn't complain when we were told to wear the buoyancy aids before we left.