

*Dodos, Brigantines and Lords*

I jumped onto my bed, down next to the lilo where Salim had slept the night before, and banged my fist against the wall, then jumped up on the bed again and down again, wall again, and I went, 'Hrumm, hummm,' bed again, floor again... This was the routine I'd had when I was small, before Mum and Dad bought me the trampoline. Then the trampoline came and I jumped on that instead. Then the trampoline broke, but I didn't go back to the old routine because Mum said it would damage the walls and furniture now that I was bigger.

So I hadn't done the routine in years. I'd forgotten how good it felt.

When I was tired of jumping, I got out some volumes of my encyclopaedia and curled up on my bed against the wall and looked at some interesting entries.

There was a knock on the door. Kat came in. 'Ted,' she said. She closed the door behind her and

leaned against it. 'You've still got your jacket on. Why do you always forget to take it off?'

I shrugged and drew it closer around me.

'Ted, I need you now,' Kat said. She did something odd, which was she sat on the bed next to me. 'You're all I've got. Mum isn't talking to me. Auntie Glo thinks I'm Satan in disguise. Dad's home from work now, but he just shakes his head every time I open my mouth.'

I looked up. 'The dodo disappeared, Kat,' I said.

'What?'

'The dodo. It dropped off the evolutionary path.'

'Right. The dodo. So?'

'It disappeared. Darwin would say it wasn't adaptable enough to survive, so it didn't.'

'I don't think Salim's dropped off the evolutionary path, Ted.'

'No, I know. But I've been thinking about disappearances,' I said. 'And looking some of them up in my encyclopaedia.'

'Oh, yeah?'

'There was this lord called Lord Lucan. People

think he murdered the nanny who was looking after his children and then threw himself off a cliff in remorse. Perhaps he did. But his body never showed up, Kat. Perhaps he made it look that way, but really went off somewhere in disguise, under another name. One theory is that he went off to India and became a long-haired hippy.'

'I don't see what that's got to do with—'

'Then again, perhaps he was murdered himself. Perhaps he's buried under someone's patio.'

There was a long silence. 'That's not very helpful, Ted.'

'There was the *Mary Celeste* too. The *Mary Celeste* was a hundred-foot brigantine ship from New York. It turned up in the Bay of Gibraltar with nobody on board. It was as if they'd been beamed into outer space by aliens.'

'Ted, I don't think this is a time for joking. I slammed the book shut.'

'OK,' Kat said. 'You weren't joking. I should know by now. You never joke. So what do you mean?'

I didn't really know what I meant. The only thing

that linked the dodo, Lord Lucan, the people on board the *Mary Celeste* and Salim was that they'd all disappeared. I sat looking at Kat's hunched-up shoulders. The room was silent apart from her breathing and mine. Somehow – it was a real effort but I managed it – I put out my hand and placed it where her shoulder hunched. It was bony and soft.

'Kat,' I said, 'you and I are together in this. People disappear. And things. Most of them reappear.'

Kat rested her hand on top of mine and I saw some tears fall down her cheeks. Her head went off to one side – she was the one who looked like a duck that's forgotten how to quack – and I felt a teardrop fall onto the hand on her shoulder. For a moment I didn't know if it was her hand or mine. I hate touching people. The wetness of the tear and the confusion of hands felt as if neither of us knew where Kat started and I ended.

'Ted,' she said, shaking her head, 'the *Mary Celeste* people never reappeared. Nor the dodo. Nor Lord Lucan. Whatever.' She stopped and blinked back another

tear. 'That policeman was right,' she went on. 'People don't just evaporate. Salim must be somewhere. If it's my fault he went missing, I have to find him. But I need your help. I need your brains, Ted. Nobody's better at thinking than you are.'

That was the first time Kat had ever paid me a compliment. I plunged both my hands into my jacket pockets and stared down at my trainers and went, 'Hrumm.' Then I realized that in one of the pockets was an object that shouldn't have been there. I drew it out and Kat and I stared at it. 'Salim's camera!' whispered Kat.