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The storm blew thick flurries of snow across the road and everything whirled and swirled all around. The wind was so strong that the minibus was shaking. I was scared we were going to capsize.

*The Big Survival Handbook* was inside my bag, in the luggage compartment. It didn't have anything to say about minibuses capsizing, I was sure of that. But there were all kinds of things about storms and wind and emergency first aid. *The Big Survival Handbook* was too big and too fat, so it was no use while you were actually travelling. You had to read it when you were nice and safe somewhere indoors, and then remember what you'd read for when you were in a tricky situation.

Like the rules of three, for instance, which I'd learned by heart. You usually make a decision within three seconds, and your life can depend on it. And if it all goes wrong, your brain can cope without oxygen for three minutes. Maybe a bit longer, but then something gets damaged and, after that, you're lost at the first rule of three. You can stay alive in an extreme climate without special protection for three hours. You can go without drinking water for three days and without food for three weeks.

I'd only read the beginning of *The Big Survival Handbook* so far. It had more than three hundred pages and all those facts had started to get a bit boring after a while. But Mum had told me to take a book that would last me at least a week.

"Are we okay?" I said to the driver. I didn't know how to say capsize in Icelandic. Or in any other foreign language for that matter.

He laughed. "Yow. We are okay." I decided that "yow" must mean "yes".

We were driving slowly. Now and then I spotted a road marker so I knew the driver must be right. Everything was fine, we were following the road. But between one road

marker and the next there was nothing but swirling snow. Sometimes the wind held its breath and we could drive a bit faster. But then another flurry of snow came along and the driver had to slow down again.

I glanced back at Linda. She looked terrible. She was scared of capsizing, too, even more than I was.

“Which side’s the big drop on?” she said.

“Left,” said Mum.

“Then the sea’s on that side, too,” said Gran. She tapped me on the shoulder. “Have I got that right?”

“How should I know?”

“Ask the driver.”

“Sea?” I asked. “Where is the sea?”

The driver pointed to the left.

“Twan asked the driver,” said Gran. “The sea’s over there.”

“Not far to go now, eh?” said Mum. “The coast road can’t be that long.” She started singing, “*We’re nearly there, we’re nearly there, and we’re going to have some fun!*”

Gran sang along, “*We’re nearly there, we’re nearly there, and we’re going to have some fun!*”

The worst was still to come.

“*Show us your bum!*” Mum and Gran sang in chorus.

Linda and I pretended to be deaf.

It was our second day of travelling. On the first day, we’d flown to Reykjavik, where we’d stayed in a hotel with bunk beds. We ate hotdogs and hamburgers and wandered around the

city. We didn't do anything else, though. Mum and Gran were trying to spend as little money as possible because they weren't sure what was going to happen.

The next morning we boarded a small plane that brought us to the north. Mum sat next to a man who talked about the weather. He said there was going to be a storm.

"I think he knows what he's talking about," Mum said to us.

After we'd landed, Gran said it didn't look as bad as all that. She never paid any attention to men who pretended they knew all about something. Nine times out of ten it was just scaremongering. Or showing off. But, either way, it was hardly ever true. And she told us we'd do well to bear that in mind.

As we walked to the minibus, I looked at the sky. If there was anyone who didn't know anything about the weather, it was Gran. It looked grey and menacing up there.

Within three seconds I'd made a bad decision. I wanted to sit next to the driver. I thought I'd chosen the best seat but, as we drove along, the wind and the snow got worse, and I realised that beside the driver was the worst place to be. Sitting up front, I knew exactly how bad it was and I could see just how little the driver could see. They were better off in the back. Gran, Mum and Linda were leaning against each other and they didn't notice how long it sometimes took us to get from one road marker to the next.

The minibus drove into a narrow tunnel. Every few metres, a passing place had been cut into the rock. Two cars driving alongside each other wouldn't work. Any cars coming in the opposite direction would have to get out of our way. Or we'd have to get out of their way. But there wasn't any oncoming traffic. The tunnel was just as deserted as the road.

"Were you scared?" asked Linda.

"I thought we were going to capsize."

“Capsize?” Linda leaned forward, her mouth close to my ear. “Cars don’t capsize. Cars topple over.”

At the other end of the tunnel was Grandpa Kas's village.

"Is he waiting for us?" asked Mum. "Is he there?"

Gran wiped the window with the sleeve of her jacket. "I don't think so."

The driver got out and slid open the big passenger door to let Gran, Mum and Linda out. I climbed out too and carefully put my feet on the road. The snow on the ground was slushy and wet. It wasn't far to the pavement in front of the petrol station, but I still didn't manage to keep my trainers dry.

Everyone was busy doing something. The driver was unloading the luggage. Linda, Mum and Gran were pacing up and down. Gran picked up our suitcases and bags. Mum paid the driver.

Then an old man came over and stood beside me. He had a woollen scarf around his neck and a hat on his head.

"Are you one of the twins?" he asked.

"Yes," I said.

"Dad!" cried Gran. "You've found Twan." She beckoned Mum and Linda over.

"Grandpa Kas is here!"

Mum gave Grandpa Kas a kiss. "Hello, Grandpa," she said.

Linda put out her hand and Grandpa Kas grabbed hold of it. He was wearing brown gloves. "Then you must be the other twin," he said.

"Gosh, it's been such a long time," said Mum. "Do you two still recognise Grandpa Kas? No, of course you don't. You were only two. Or was it three? No, four. The two of you were four when Grandpa Kas came to stay for a week."

"They were three," said Gran. "They'd just had their birthday."

"Gran's right," said Mum. "So you'll have forgotten all about it, won't you?"

Mum already knew we'd forgotten all about it. We'd told her that at home.

Grandpa Kas pointed at a red car parked nearby. "Svanna's going to drive round with your luggage. They've taken my car keys off me, which is a bit of a bother."

"I know," said Mum. "That's because you're not allowed to drive anymore."

"Who said so?"

"You're just not allowed," said Gran. "It's for your own good."

"I suppose so," said Grandpa Kas, pulling his woolly hat down even further over his ears.

We carried our luggage to the red car. Linda tried to pull her suitcase, but the wheels got stuck in the snow. A plump woman climbed out of the car. She picked up everything and packed it all in. There was no room left for passengers.

The woman shook hands with everyone. "Hello, I'm Svanna." She gave us a friendly smile as she said it.

"Hello," said Mum. She was about to say something else, but Svanna got back into the car, closed the door and slowly drove away, straight on for a bit and then around the corner.

"I told her we'd walk," said Grandpa Kas. "It's not that far."

The petrol station was shielding us a little from the wind. We didn't want to move.

"Come on," said Gran. "We can handle a bit of rough weather."

The wind wasn't blowing as hard in the village as it was on the coast road, but it was still stormy. Wind force six or seven. Maybe even seven and a half.

Grandpa Kas led the way. He was wobbly on his feet. Maybe that didn't mean much, though. Perhaps he was wobbly even at wind force zero.

“Don’t you have a walking stick?” said Gran. She had to talk really loud to make herself heard above the roar of the wind.

Grandpa Kas turned around, step by tiny step. He looked at Gran and took his time to reply. “I can manage fine without a stick.”

“Pull the other one,” said Gran.

“Give me a shove. Go on. Give me a push and you’ll see I won’t fall over without a stick.”

“Do we have to do this now?” asked Mum. “Can’t it wait until later?”

Grandpa Kas turned his back on us and started to move. Gran went to walk beside him and, instead of giving him a push, she gave him her arm.

It was late in the afternoon. It was starting to get dark and the streetlights were coming on. The village was supposed to be close to the sea and close to the mountains, but there was no sign of either. The air was thick and grey and the snow flew straight into our faces. The flakes stuck to my eyelashes, and I had to squeeze my eyes shut. The cold gnawed at my head and my hands and crept into my soggy trainers. *The Big Survival Handbook* says that when you’re freezing you have to put your hands into your own armpits and your feet into someone else’s. Having frozen feet in your armpits sounds horrible. But sometimes you don’t have any choice. Frozen toes have to be amputated if you don’t act quickly.

Linda was walking beside me.

“Have you got cold feet?” I asked.

She didn’t reply.

“You’ve got cold feet,” I said.

Grandpa Kas’s house was small and yellow. It was at the edge of a field, quite a way from the road. Behind the front door was a hallway with a stone floor. Grandpa Kas brushed the snow

off his coat and stamped a few times before going inside. He sat down on a wooden stool and took off his shoes. He wanted to put them on his shoe rack but we were just undoing our laces and we were all getting in each other's way, so it took him a while to get there.

Then we walked around the house in our socks. Between the kitchen and the living room there was a doorway without a door. Our luggage was piled up beside a brown armchair. There was no sign of Svanna anywhere.

Grandpa Kas showed us the bedrooms. We tried to get a good look at everything without pushing or bumping into each other. One person was trying to go in while someone else was trying to come out, and we all got tangled up in the hallway.

There was a guestroom with a double bed and an extra mattress on the floor, which didn't leave enough space to open the door all the way.

In the second bedroom there was a bit more space. Grandpa Kas had a single bed. It had crumpled sheets on it and a blue blanket, which was half on the floor. On the other side of the room was a sofa with brown corduroy cushions and a wardrobe with a mirror on the door.

"Well, that's everything," said Grandpa Kas. "Except for the loft." When we were back in the kitchen, he pointed at a hatch in the ceiling.

"What do you keep up there?" asked Gran.

"A few bits and pieces," said Grandpa Kas. "That's all."

"What kind of bits and pieces?"

"None of your business," Grandpa Kas said to Gran. "But you know how it is. Sometimes you hang on to stuff, even if you're never planning to do anything with it."

Linda wasn't interested in Grandpa Kas's bits and pieces. "Where's the toilet?" she wanted to know.

"At the end of the hallway," said Grandpa Kas.

When Linda came back from the toilet, she had more questions. “Where’s the bathroom?”

Grandpa Kas patted the kitchen counter. There was a flannel hanging over the tap and a dish with a bar of soap in it next to the sink.

“What about the shower?” asked Linda.

“Humph,” said Grandpa Kas. “At the swimming baths. It’s a bit of a walk. I’m not allowed to drive anymore, so I walk there and then I walk back. It takes quite a while, all told.”

“I don’t want to go to the swimming baths!” said Linda.

“We’ll come up with something,” said Mum.

“First let’s work out who’s going to sleep where,” said Gran. “Three of us can sleep in the guestroom and there’s space in Grandpa Kas’s bedroom, too.”

“Then you can go in with Grandpa Kas,” I said to Gran. “Mum and Linda and me can share a room.”

“No, I don’t want to,” said Linda.

I thought for a moment. Did I really want to sleep in the same room as Gran? “Fine,” I said. “Then Mum can sleep with Grandpa Kas and Gran can come in with us.”

“I don’t want to do that either,” said Linda. “I want a girls’ room and a boys’ room.”

“Boys?”

Linda nodded towards Grandpa Kas. He’d sat down on a kitchen chair. Without his hat and scarf, he looked kind of crumpled. He had a big nose and big ears and eyebrows with long hairs growing in all directions. There was stubble on his top lip and tufts of beard on his chin.

“No,” I said.

“We’ll let Linda decide,” Gran said quietly. She half-covered her mouth with her hand. “She’s a big girl now.”

“Gran means Linda got her first period today,” whispered Mum.

“What are you lot talking about?” asked Grandpa Kas.

“Nothing!” said Linda.

“About who’s going to sleep where,” said Gran. “We’re going to have a girls’ room and a boys’ room.”

“Oh, I see,” said Grandpa Kas. “A boys’ room. That’s nice.”

“Twan and I need to have a quick chat,” said Mum, pushing me out of the kitchen. In the hallway, by the coatrack, she said, “Linda’s having her first period and she’s got tummy ache.”

“Wargh. I can’t hear you.”

“When a girl has her period,” Mum went on, “she starts bleeding. You know that.”

“Can’t hear you!”

“It’s a real hassle, especially the first time. That’s why she’d rather sleep in the same room as us. All women together. You understand, don’t you?”

“Can I sleep in the living room?” There were two armchairs in the living room and no sofa, but I was sure Grandpa Kas wouldn’t mind if I moved the sofa from his bedroom and put it somewhere else.

“That’s not going to work,” said Mum. “We need to have somewhere to talk in the evening. We go to bed late and you get tired much earlier.”

“Then I want to sleep in the kitchen.”

“Stop being silly,” said Mum. She took me into Grandpa Kas’s room. “See, it’s pretty cosy in here.”

“How about the loft?” I said. “I could sleep in the loft, couldn’t I?”

“Twan,” said Mum. “Do you know how small this house is? There’s hardly any space up there.” She held out her hand a short way above the floor. “About so high. No more than that. It’s a storage space. For bits and pieces, Grandpa Kas said.”

“What kind of bits and pieces?”

Mum lost her patience. “Oh, don’t you start! It doesn’t matter what kind of bits and pieces.” She patted the arm of the brown sofa. “This is where you’re sleeping. You can try it for one night. Deal?”

I walked out of the room.

Mum came after me. “Twan?”

“One night,” I said. It was going to be more than that, I knew it. And Mum knew it, too.

In the kitchen Gran was making coffee.

“Svanna usually takes care of that,” said Grandpa Kas.

Gran picked up a thermos flask from the counter.

“Well, we’re here now,” said Mum. “And we’ve discussed it all with Svanna. She phoned us.”

Gran shook her head in warning. Best not to mention Svanna’s phone call.

Svanna had found Gran’s number in Grandpa Kas’s address book. That had been a month ago. She’d called Gran and then Gran had told us what Svanna had said. Grandpa Kas wasn’t doing too well.

“He needs help every day,” said Gran. “And Svanna’s just someone from the village. We can’t let her go on looking after an old man who... well, an old man who’s part of our family.”

“How bad is it?” asked Mum.

“He’s done,” said Gran.

“Done?” said Mum. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Nearly done. Apparently that’s what he’s been announcing to everyone. That they should leave him alone now because he’s nearly done.”

“You can’t be serious,” said Mum.

“I’m afraid I am. And Svanna says it can’t go on like that. One way or another, we’re going to have to look after Dad.”

“They have old people’s homes in Iceland,” said Mum. “They must do. There are homes everywhere. Maybe there’s even a home for old sailors. That would be perfect. Iceland’s full of fishermen, so there must be a home for sailors somewhere.”

“I’m sure there is. And Dad would love that. He’s spent all his life fishing and everyone knows that fishermen get along best with other fishermen. But then who’s going to visit him? And what if something happens to him? It’s too far. If we’re going to look after Dad, it has to be here. Here, not there.”

Mum took a deep breath. “Do you know what that means?” she said to Gran.

“Yes,” said Gran.

“What?” I asked.

“We have to go fetch Grandpa Kas,” said Mum.

At first I thought “we” was Gran and Mum, but Mum said a few days later that Linda and I were going, too.

“I really don’t see why Twan and I have to go,” said Linda.

“Because it’ll be better that way,” said Mum. “We hope Grandpa Kas is going to be pleased to see us. His whole family! His daughter, his granddaughter and his great-grandchildren! Grandpa Kas needs to feel welcome, that’s what it’s about.”

“We think he’s going to be difficult,” said Gran. “That’s what it’s really about.”

“So we have to butter him up,” said Linda.

“Absolutely not,” said Mum.

“Absolutely,” said Gran. “But that’s not such a bad thing.”

“You can’t call it buttering up,” said Mum. “This is about family ties.”

“What family ties?” said Linda. “I don’t even know Grandpa Kas!”

“He visited here once. Specially to see you two.”

“That doesn’t count,” I said. “That’s way too long ago. I don’t remember anything about it.”

“Nope. Nothing at all,” said Linda.

“I think it’s important,” said Mum. “We’ll have a better chance if we all go.”

Grandpa Kas’s little kitchen smelled of coffee. Gran filled three mugs.

“Why did Svanna call you?” asked Grandpa Kas.

“It was about the luggage,” lied Gran. “And what time we’d be getting here.”

“How did she get hold of your number?”

“No idea,” said Gran. “From you? Maybe you gave it to her. Just in case.”

Grandpa Kas looked at his feet. He stared at his socks and sighed. After a while he said, “I suppose so.”

Mum made hot chocolate for Linda and me. “And Svanna’s prepared supper for us,” she said. “Something with fish, I think. We just need to heat it up.”

“Plokkfiskur,” said Grandpa Kas.

“Plokkfiskur?” said Mum. Then Gran said it: “Plokkfiskur.” And I shouted, “Plokkfiskur! Plokkfiskur!” because it felt good to be able to make a bit of noise.

Grandpa Kas smiled. “Plokkfiskur,” he said slowly.

“That’s just what we needed, eh?” said Gran. “A bit of a laugh.”

The room fell silent.

Mum put the plokkfiskur in the oven.

Grandpa Kas had only four kitchen chairs. Gran fetched the stool from the hallway. I knew it was for me. Linda had stomach ache, so she was allowed to sit on a chair.

The plokkfiskur was good. Creamy sauce and potatoes and fish without bones, all mixed up together.

Grandpa Kas had closed the curtains. The wind was howling outside. There was a rusty sound coming from the village, something slowly grinding and squeaking its way along the streets.

“An iron monster,” I said.

“It’s the scraper,” said Grandpa Kas, and everyone acted as if that was a good enough answer.

I wanted to ask him what kind of scraper, but Grandpa Kas was too busy eating. He kept smacking his lips. Every so often he’d wipe bits of plokkfiskur from his mouth and then wipe his hand on his jumper. Sometimes he wiped his eyes as well. They were watery and the left eye was leaking a bit.

It was hard to believe Grandpa Kas was nearly done. I didn’t know exactly what “nearly done” meant. I knew what “all done” meant, though. All done meant dead. What if Grandpa Kas was all done later that night while I was sleeping in the same room as him?

After dinner, Svanna brought round some blankets and sheets. There were two duvets as well.

“Duvet or blanket?” asked Mum.

“Blanket,” I said, because I’d never slept under a blanket before.

“Duvet,” said Linda.

Mum made up a bed on the sofa in Grandpa Kas’s room. She gave me a bottom sheet and a top sheet and a yellow blanket.

“Is he going to die soon?” I whispered.

“No, of course not,” said Mum. “Don’t be frightened.”

“I’m not frightened,” I said.

Mum pulled the blanket straight. “Good.”

I cleaned my teeth in the kitchen. Mum told me to wash my face.

Grandpa Kas, Gran and Linda went and sat in the living room, on the other side of the doorway without a door.

And if I wanted to wash the rest, said Mum, she’d hold up a towel. Then no one would be able to see anything. She was looking at my bum, so I knew what she meant.

“I’m fine, thanks,” I said.

After me, it was Linda’s turn in the kitchen. Mum stood in the doorway, holding up the towel.

Linda kept shouting the whole time: “Don’t look, don’t look.”

“I’ll ask if we can shower at Svanna’s tomorrow,” said Mum.

“You be careful,” said Grandpa Kas. “Too much showering isn’t good for a person.”

I took *The Big Survival Handbook* to bed with me and read a few pages. It was about making fires.

Mum came in to give me a kiss. “*The night train’s off to the Land of Sleep,*” she sang.

I pulled the blanket over my head.

“*The engine driver’s a woolly sheep.*”

“Stop it!”

“It’s so easy to wind you up,” said Mum. “*Fall asleep and you can board his train.*” She left the room, still singing. “*To the land of chocolates and lemonade rain.*” Mum didn’t try to wind Linda up. She went straight to the kitchen, without stopping at the girls’ room.

I read a few more lines. I had to stop in time, because it wouldn’t be long before Grandpa Kas came to bed and I didn’t want to see any more of that than I had to. But Grandpa Kas got tired sooner than I thought. He came into the bedroom before I’d finished the chapter.

“Exciting stuff, eh?”

I turned on my side with my face to the wall.

“Something about fire,” I said.

“Read a bit to me,” said Grandpa Kas.

“What?”

“Just a little bit, doesn’t matter what. I’m too old to read myself.”

“It’s not a book for reading aloud.”

“Just tell me if you don’t feel like it,” said Grandpa Kas. “It’s your book. You’re in charge.”

I turned onto my other side. Grandpa Kas had got changed. He was wearing checked pyjama bottoms and a white T-shirt. He climbed into his bed and lay on his back.

“It’s advisable always to carry good fire starters with you,” I read out loud. “Greasy cotton-wool balls are easy to make and they weigh almost nothing.”

“Is it a story?” asked Grandpa Kas.

“Rub plenty of petroleum jelly into the balls of cotton wool and keep them in a tightly sealed bag.”

“So it’s not a story?”

“No,” I said. “It’s not a story. It’s a handbook with pictures. On this page, for instance, there’s a picture of some cotton-wool balls with twigs next to them and you can see a hand making a spark with some kind of spark-maker.”

“That’s nice,” said Grandpa Kas. “You telling me what’s in the pictures, I mean.”

He pulled a cord above his bed without asking if I was still reading. The light went out.

“Is the sofa all right?”

“It’s okay,” I said.

Outside the wind was blowing like mad. Something was rattling close to the window and in the distance the scraper was still scraping away.

“I know why you lot have come here,” said Grandpa Kas.