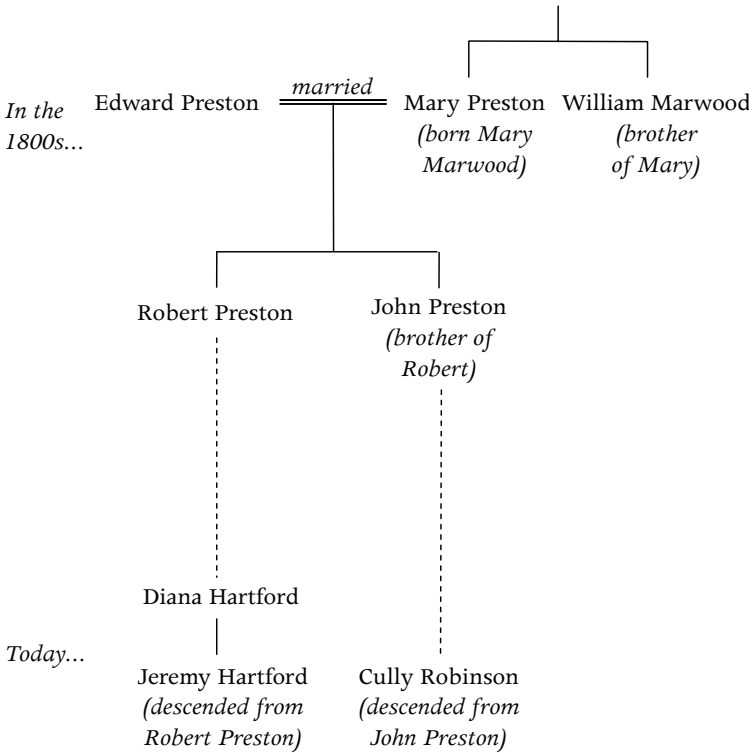


The families in the story



Chapter 1

The village

‘Seacliffe!’ called the bus driver.

The bus turned left into a large empty car park and stopped.

A few seats behind the driver a girl stood up, picked up her heavy backpack and got off the bus. ‘Thanks,’ she said.

The bus drove away.

The girl looked around. She was completely alone.

The car park was at the top of a cliff. Beside her a gate led into a churchyard. There was an old stone church. And gravestones, some of them fallen or broken, were sticking out of the long green grass. In front of her, near the edge of the cliff, there were a few pretty white cottages and a small shop that wasn’t open yet.

The girl looked at her watch. It was twenty past eight.

Light rain began to fall.

She looked up. ‘Thanks,’ she said to the sky. ‘Good weather for reading gravestones.’

She walked over to the gate and into the churchyard. She put her backpack under a tree and took out a piece of folded paper. She unfolded it, looked at it and put it away again.

‘*Preston or Marwood,*’ she said aloud and went to the gravestones to search for the names.

For half an hour she walked up and down the lines of graves. Some of the gravestones were very old and difficult to read. Others made her sad. Through the years a lot of men had drowned near here. Mothers had lost young children. She looked at the names on the gravestones and wondered about the lives the people had lived.

But the names she was looking for were not there.



She heard a noise and looked up. Two big tourist buses were turning into the car park. She was surprised to see that there were quite a few cars there now too. And the sun was shining. There was also someone else among the graves – a woman holding some flowers.

The girl walked slowly towards her.

The woman knelt to put the flowers on a grave.

‘Excuse me,’ said the girl. ‘I don’t want to trouble you but perhaps you could help me?’

The woman looked up. ‘You’re Australian,’ she said.

The girl smiled. ‘Yes, I am.’

‘Are you travelling?’ asked the woman and nodded at the backpack under the tree.

Beyond the tree the girl could see lots of tourists getting off the buses and walking towards the little shop.

‘Yes. I have two months here in England then I hope to go to America.’

‘Well,’ said the woman. She had finished with the flowers. ‘What are you doing in our little churchyard?’

‘My mother wants me to find some of our ancestors. She’s traced our family tree back to the 1700s and she thinks that some of our ancestors may be buried here. But I can’t find them.’

The woman stood up and brushed some dirt off her hands. ‘Old Em,’ she said and began to walk towards the gate.

The girl followed her. ‘Old Em?’

‘Emerson Cleary,’ the woman explained. ‘If your ancestors are buried here or anywhere around here, Old Em will know. He’s traced the family trees of most people in the village. He’d love to talk to you. Come on, get your bag. I’ll show you the way.’

The girl grabbed her backpack and followed the woman through the car park towards the cottages and the shop. The car park was quite full now but she couldn’t see many people.