

# The Fearful

Keith Gray

*Random House Children's Publishers UK*

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## About the Book

*The legend says that in 1699 schoolteacher William Milmmullen and his five pupils visited Lake Mou, but only William returned. He claimed that a terrifying creature rose from the lake and devoured the boys. But did it? And if it all happened so long ago, does it really matter to anyone nowadays anyway?*

The legacy of that tragedy lives on in the town of Moutonby: a town divided between those who believe in the legend of the lake monster, and those who don't. Tim Milmmullen wishes he knew the answer. Every day he watches the dark water, looking for a sign. Because if the stories are true, if the creature in the lake is real, then according to the legend he's the only one who can stop it from killing again.

# The Fearful

KEITH GRAY

RHCP DIGITAL

*Biggest thanks must go to the effulgent Charlie Sheppard, who fights very hard for me, and to Carolyn Whitaker. They both deserve medals: For tolerance in the face of extreme adversity.*

*Thank you to Miriam Hodgson for helping shape the idea in the beginning, and to Harriet and Lucy for eleventh-hour inspiration; to the Scottish Arts Council for their support; and to Andy Briggs and Steve - for being Andy Briggs and Steve.*

*But I'd like to dedicate this book,  
with all my love, to Jasmine.*

# Part One

Friday 17th November

## Tim Milmullen's Monster

WHATEVER IT WAS, it could only have been dead for a couple of hours. But in those couple of hours it had obviously been re-run over at least half a dozen times. Animal pancake. Either a fox or a cat, way too big for a squirrel. It took a lot of elbow grease to get it up from the road, the spade's metal blade ringing harshly against the tarmac in the early morning hush. And even then there were sticky bits of fur or something still left there.

Tim grimaced as he dumped it into the sack.

He stood in the lamppost light; even the sun wasn't up yet. It was six-thirty in the morning of what looked like turning out to be a particularly miserable November day. The tail end of last night's storm still whipped its chill wind around the tall elms and horse chestnuts lining either side of Park Avenue. It rattled the branches high above Tim's head and bit right through his cagoule and all four of his jumpers. On his I-hate-this-job scale of 1 to 10, he rated this at a 9, easily. Maybe even a 9½. He refused to give it a 10. Not that he knew a job worthy of a full 10; he just hated the thought that he could be doing *the worst job in the world*.

A car passed by on the road, kicking up leaves. He turned his back on its headlights in case it was someone who might recognize him.

Last night's storm had ripped the last of the leaves from the trees and they covered the avenue like a soggy blanket,



making his task even more difficult. He slushed through the thick drifts in the gutter with his wellies, spotted the stiff, crooked body of a blackbird amongst all that brown, and tossed it quickly into the sack to join the fox or cat or whatever it was. He hated these mornings when he was forced into helping his father with the collecting; he tried not to think about having to do it for the rest of his life.

But he was determined *not* to have to do this for the rest of his life – that was the point. He'd do anything to stop it from happening. Anything. He'd change his name; he'd leave home if he had to. He just had to do it soon, because in only a few days he'd be sixteen and then, for what it was worth, the rest of his life would be over.

His father appeared from out of the darkness of the bushes at the edge of the park and Tim immediately felt guilty, worried his father would be able to tell what he was thinking. But the man didn't show any sign of it if he did. He was carrying a spade and a sack of his own. He stopped to kick around in the leaves by the roots of an old elm, aiming his torch, but didn't see anything interesting so walked over to where Tim was standing shivering in the road.

Bill Milmullen was a couple of centimetres taller than his son, with a black beard and slightly scruffy-looking hair that came down over his ears. He grew it long because he'd always been self-conscious about the hearing aid in his left ear, something he'd had to wear since he was a child. He wasn't a man who usually drew attention to himself, but he looked conspicuous enough today in his yellow waterproofs.

'Any luck?' He took Tim's sack to feel the weight.

'Not much,' Tim said.

Bill shook his head, tugging gently on his beard. 'Not a good day,' he said. 'Not a good day at all, eh?' He turned to Tim, who simply shrugged.

He looked back across the park, tapping the toe of his boot gently with his spade, deciding what to do next. Tim watched him, wanting to force a decision on him; thinking,

*Let's go home. Just say, 'Let's call it a day,' and head for home.*

But his father was no mind reader. And Tim didn't have the courage to voice his thoughts. The wind stirred the leaves at their feet.

'Didn't you manage to find anything?' Tim asked.

'Half a hedgehog,' his father said with a sigh. He took his spade up again. 'Well, the way I see it, we've got a choice. I checked the freezer before we came out, and it's full enough for tomorrow as it is, so we could always head home now. It's next week that worries me - if things are still no better we could end up with only half a feed for your Carving.' He raised his eyebrows at Tim, who was looking at his feet. 'So maybe it'd be best to head for the playing fields and hope we're luckier there. What do you think?' He checked his watch. 'We've got plenty of time before breakfast. It's not even seven yet. What do you reckon? See what we can find at the playing fields? That's going to be the best bet, isn't it?'

Tim didn't say a word as he trudged after his father back towards the van. He knew it wasn't as if he'd really had a choice anyway.

I'm going to leave home, he thought. *I'm going to have to get away.* And the thought shocked him a little. Not because it was a new thought - he'd been thinking it for months. It shocked him because he suddenly realized he could; he really and truly, honestly *could*. He trembled slightly inside his thin cagoule and four jumpers. If push came to shove, he had to get away.

'Mr Milmullen. Hello! Mr Milmullen.'

Both Tim and his father turned at the sound of the voice. Mrs Kirkwooding was standing at the top of the driveway of her large, austere house that overlooked the park. The elderly lady waved again, clutching a purple dressing gown around her skinny frame. Bill hurried over and Tim was

quick to follow. At last, this was a stroke of luck. He realized her appearance could mean he got to go home early, so he put a spring in his step to catch up with his dad.

‘Mrs Kirkwooding; how are you this morning?’

‘Ah, Mr Milmullen, good. I’m so pleased to have caught you.’ The old lady fought with the wind for the hem of her dressing gown. ‘I’m afraid I’ve lost Marshal,’ she said. ‘I was hoping you could help.’ Tim’s father looked dubious. But the old lady was already walking away up her long driveway, expecting the pair of them to follow.

Mrs Kirkwooding was a friend of the Milmullens, a regular on Saturday mornings: one of the Fearful. She lived alone in her grand house, had done ever since Dr Kirkwooding died. She kept the house itself spotless, even had a girl from Tim’s year at school help her with all the dusting and polishing, but she refused to touch the garden. She’d left it to grow and sprawl exactly as it wanted to over the years, saying that it had always been her husband’s passion and she had no right to interfere even now. But she sometimes prowled through the unruly bushes and overhanging trees, searching for small dead things – frogs, or birds, or mice. And of course anything she found was saved for Saturday mornings.

They left their sacks and spades outside when she ushered them through the back door into the kitchen. She shivered and closed the door behind them to keep the weather in its place. Tim’s father nudged him with a discreet elbow to remind him to wipe his feet on the mat. He shuffled them quickly, glancing around the kitchen. It looked almost as old-fashioned as theirs back home, but he got the feeling the pipes under Mrs Kirkwooding’s sink didn’t leak, and he reckoned the toaster probably popped up without the help of a fork jammed in its side.

‘He passed away in his sleep,’ the elderly lady was telling his father. Her dark, permed hair was wind-blown and showing its steely roots. ‘I’m sure it was peaceful enough.’

Tim stepped up behind them. The dead golden retriever was in his basket in front of the washing machine.

Bill knelt down and gently stroked the dog's ear. 'Yes,' he said quietly. 'He certainly looks peaceful enough, doesn't he?' Without turning to look at the old lady he asked, 'Are you sure you want Tim and me to take him?'

Mrs Kirkwooding nodded. 'Oh, yes. It's what I decided a long time ago.'

'Maybe burying him - or cremation maybe? - would seem more respectful.'

'No, I'd like you to take him.'

'It's just a thought, Mrs Kirkwooding, but in the past when anyone's allowed a family pet to be eaten—'

The old lady folded her arms and stood her ground. 'If you are anxious about what my neighbours may think, Mr Milmullen, then thank you for your concern. But my family has lived in Moutonby just as long as yours, and my sisters and I were all brought up to believe in the legend just the same as *you* and *your* brother were. We have always been proud to be Fearful.'

Tim's father rose to his feet, nodding quickly, smiling widely, trying to placate her. 'Yes, I understand that - of course I do. It's just that with times being like they are, certain people may see feeding Marshal to the Mourn as, well, a rather callous thing to do.' He turned to Tim. 'Wouldn't you agree?'

Tim didn't get the chance to answer.

'No, I would not.' The old lady simply refused to back down. 'I would see it as doing my duty. And if "certain people" would also do theirs, then you would not be outside my house at the crack of dawn collecting roadkill, would you?'

Bill slowly shook his head, looking at the dead dog. 'No, Mrs Kirkwooding, I don't think we would.' He tugged on his beard, as was his habit, and sighed heavily. 'I don't think we

would.’ Then to Tim: ‘I’ll bring the van round. We’ll have to carry him between us.’

Tim nodded, not exactly sure what to say. His father left and he stared down at the dead Marshal. Okay, at least this meant they had enough for the Feed and could go home now, so he guessed he was pleased. But Marshal certainly wasn’t their usual kind of collection. And for some reason it made Tim feel peculiar inside.

‘The lake was one of his favourite places to be walked,’ Mrs Kirkwooding was saying.

Tim nodded and murmured a kind of ‘um’ sound. He had often seen the two of them. Maybe that was what was so strange about it.

The old lady smiled at him. ‘Maybe you’d like to include him in the Feed next Saturday? It would certainly be an honour on your special day. I’d like to feel I’d made a contribution to your Carving celebration.’

Tim stayed quiet; he wouldn’t look at her.

‘I’m sure your school friends are all very envious.’ She was standing at his shoulder, beaming down at both him and Marshal. ‘You’re going to be the most important person in Moutonby.’

And with a bit of effort he managed to hold his tongue.

Ten minutes later they had Marshal covered by a blanket in the back of the van and were heading home. Bill had been right: it had taken the two of them to carry him. Tim couldn’t stop himself from turning round every so often and staring at the hump of the dirty, brown blanket. The tip of the dog’s tail poked out at one side.

‘We’ll get complaints about this,’ his father said. ‘Somebody’s bound to say something, just you wait. Somebody’ll complain.’

‘Are you really going to use him as feed?’

‘I don’t suppose I have much of a choice, really. Mrs Kirkwooding can be very specific when she wants to be.’ He

smiled, albeit briefly. 'I'm just not looking forward to having to fend off the phone calls from outraged animal-lovers in the middle of the night. It'd be nice if these people would realize that we're doing it for their own good. I know it's unpleasant, but if it wasn't for our family, well . . .'

He sighed, looking tired; looking like a man with the weight of the whole town on his shoulders. Which is exactly what he believed he was, of course.

Tim didn't say anything in reply, but he managed to turn round and face forward again.

They drove home in silence along the streets of the small northern town. People were just beginning to wake up; you could almost hear the hundreds of alarm clocks ringing. They'd be sitting down to breakfast and beginning to psych themselves up ready for another day at work or school. In the old days, or so Tim had been told, everyone would have waved or shouted greetings to his father as he passed by, just as they had done to his grandfather, and great-grandfather, and great-great-grandfather. And so on. Everybody in those days had been Fearful.

The Milmullen family history had been a proud one in Moutonby. As the Mourner his father would have been one of the most respected men in the town. People would have asked for his opinion and advice. But times had changed - or so Tim had been told - because nowadays his family were the butt of every joke these people told. Not that his father seemed to notice. He still followed the old traditions; he still talked about duty and commitment; he still held dearly to the legend. He spent two mornings a week scraping roadkill out of the gutter to protect these people. These people who no longer waved or shouted greetings, but laughed as soon as his back was turned.

Tim hated these people sometimes. And then other times . . .

He watched his father behind the wheel of the ancient, crappy van. He looked older than he should, with deep lines

across his brow, and more than one bag under each eye. Recently he'd acquired a few silver threads in his beard. Tim had been told a hundred times or more by the other kids at school that his father was crazy. To Tim he just looked tired. And he knew that one day he would be just as tired, just as talked about.

*Just as crazy?*

The Milmullen family tradition says that the son will take over the father's role when he turns sixteen, which was exactly what his father had done before him. And his grandfather, and his great-grandfather. And so on.

Tim was sixteen in only eight days' time - next Saturday, the 25<sup>th</sup>. He'd have his Carving and then his future would quite literally be set in stone.

The road ran around the tip of the lake and the houses fell away. Bill swung the van off the road onto the muddy track that led across the waste ground towards the water's edge. The van bounced and groaned in the ruts. Their house stood alone on the shore and Tim had once asked his father why no one else had a house next to the lake. 'Because the town likes to keep its distance,' had been the simple reply.

Built over the year 1699 to 1700 by Old William Milmullen, it no longer looked like the sentinel or ever-watchful guard it had originally been intended as. But neither did it look like the welcoming guesthouse it was meant to be now.

From the outside it was a tall, spiny, grey, angular building - remarkable for its ugliness. There was a patchy wall of conifers on one side, and a garage on the other - a very twentieth-century addition and pebble-dashed to prove it - but no lawn as such. There was the attempt at a gravel driveway with room enough for several guests' cars. No doorway faced the town, but an arched entrance opened out onto the lake shore (and Tim's mother's 'garden', consisting of two much-fussed-over flowerbeds on either side). Above

the door, carved into the weathered stone of the arch, were the words MOURN HOME.

A side door led from the kitchen onto the driveway. Bill pulled up beside it. 'You go get changed and ready to help with the breakfasts,' he said. 'I'll be okay getting everything to the freezer.'

'Don't you want me to give you a hand with Marshal?'

'No, no; I'll manage.' He smiled at his son, but looked slightly distracted as he did so. 'He's big enough to make two feeds, and I'd rather sort that out myself.'

Tim nodded, but couldn't help sneaking one last glance at the hump of the brown blanket (and the tip of the tail) as he climbed out of the van.

He headed straight upstairs. He could hear his mother and sister starting breakfast in the kitchen but decided he wanted to leave the job of talking about Marshal to his father as well.

His bedroom was at the top of the house, third floor up; it used to be the attic. He dumped his cagoule on the floor in front of his wardrobe and set to work getting rid of the four jumpers he'd stuffed himself inside.

The room was messy, but massive; he didn't have enough posters to cover the walls. The floor was wooden, which looked nice, but was way too cold first thing in the morning at this time of year. A scattering of threadbare rugs made a well-trodden path from his bed to the washbasin in the far corner. He had a bulky, almost-antique bookcase that wasn't as full as he'd like it to be, and an old dressing table that he used as a desk, with last week's homework still unfinished somewhere in among the chaos of papers scattered on top.

There was also a second-hand electric typewriter from when he'd wanted to be a journalist. Leaning against the wall next to his wardrobe was an acoustic guitar because he'd wanted to learn how to play at one time. It was covered in dust and had two broken strings. There was a pile of



photography books that needed to go back to the library because he'd never been able to save up enough to buy himself a camera. Over and over he'd tried to find something he could be that would take him far away.

The most remarkable feature of his room was the three huge windows looking east, south and west. Moutonby and Lake Mou are buried in the heart of Yorkshire, and Yorkshire is renowned for being the largest county in England. Which was why he couldn't see too much of it, even from up here. The imposing lake filled the valley and the view - to walk its circumference would take at least half a day and over nine miles worth of anybody's stamina.

Tim often stood at his windows. To the east he could see the deep, dark waters of Lake Mou. And to the south he could see the dark, deep waters of Lake Mou. While the view out of the west window was, well, pretty much the same really.

No, that's not strictly true. To the west the shore was uneven and ragged, with the pine woods tumbling over the hills and rushing all the way down to the water, and the slow blue of the river Hurry threading its way down between them towards the town and its lake. Pure picture-postcard scenery. South was just water - water for as far as he could see. But stretching out seventy metres or so from the shore was the gangplank feeding pier Great-Grandfather Thomas had built when he'd realized he was scared of boats.

For Tim, looking east had always been the most interesting view, because the WetFun water-sports club sat on the gentle curve of shoreline - just off the main road which would take you to Lancaster, Leeds, York, wherever you wanted to escape to. The club was an endless source of fascination for him. He enjoyed watching the windsurfers and water-skiers doing their stuff. The night-time bar was usually loud and lively.

He often wished he had a fourth window, one to look north with a view of the town. The water could be beautiful,

especially on summer days with the million golden camera-flashes winking in the sun, but he sometimes thought it would be nice to look at something solid for once, something which wasn't constantly rippling and shifting and changing. It could make your eyes go funny if you stared at the lake for too long.

He freed himself from the last jumper and moved over to the south-facing window. The wind chopped and stirred the surface of the water, making waves. He certainly had the best view in town of Lake Mou; there was no denying that. And he'd watched the water every day of his life for as long as he could remember. So if anyone was going to see the creature that supposedly lived there, it'd be him, right?

Yet so far . . .

## Mourn Home

'HAVE THEY BEEN told?'

Bill Milmullen couldn't stop a sneaky draught of cold air from squeezing past him into the kitchen. He hurried the door closed and set to removing his waterproofs and heavy boots.

Like the rest of Mourn Home the kitchen had been built with a stately scale of ambition. But, like the rest of Mourn Home, it hadn't aged well. The stone floor was dangerously worn and uneven, and required concentration when carrying stacked crockery. The slab-like wooden table in the centre could easily seat ten, so to be able to hold a conversation without shouting during meal times the Milmullens all huddled around one end. And while the oven was probably great at roasting wild boar, it could certainly be a little heavy-handed when it came to fish fingers.

Bill glanced over his shoulder at his wife and Tim, but nodded at Tim's twin sister, Jenny, in particular. 'The students,' he said. 'Has anyone told them?'

Jenny was carrying two plates full of Full English. She shrugged. 'I haven't said anything.' She tried to catch Tim's eye but he was determined to keep out of it as long as he could - because he knew what was coming. He concentrated on the washing-up like it meant life or death or something.

Bill turned to their mother. 'Annie?'

'Let them eat first, love.' She was cracking fresh eggs into the frying pan.

It was sometimes difficult to tell with Bill whether he was honestly having trouble with his hearing aid, or simply

wasn't listening. 'They'll be wanting to get out there as soon as they've had their breakfast.'

'I'm not sure if it's the kind of thing your guests want to hear about while they're eating,' Anne said, raising her voice just a little.

Jenny stood in the middle of the kitchen looking from one parent to the other, still holding the two plates. Tim scrubbed harder than was necessary at the cereal bowls, adding yet another generous squirt of Fairy.

'I don't want them going out there without being told,' Bill said.

His wife smiled at him reassuringly. 'I'll catch them before they leave.'

Anne Milmullen was a beautiful woman. Tim knew this. It couldn't be denied when you compared her to other Moutonby mothers. She wasn't drab, or grey, or gloomy. She'd been born here, lived all her life in this small town, yet he and Jenny reckoned their dad was lucky to have met her. And although they were twins, it was Jenny who was growing up to look like her. Whereas Tim worried he was getting more and more like their father every day.

Bill took over from Anne at the stove so she could get her own breakfast. Jenny was still standing there with the students' meals, unsure whether to serve them just yet. 'Mum?' she asked.

Anne nodded. 'Don't let them get too cold.'

But Bill was insistent. 'I think Tim should tell them.'

Even though Tim could have guessed this was going to happen he still flinched at the sound of his name. He buried himself up to his elbows in suds and pretended he hadn't heard. He did not, *not*, want to have to talk to the students about the Mourn. They'd laugh in his face.

Jenny had been halted mid-stride yet again and clicked her tongue with audible annoyance. Nobody spoke. Anne was pouring herself a cup of coffee; Bill was pushing the

spitting, popping eggs around in the pan. So Jenny sighed as loudly as she could.

Anne glanced across at her husband before making up her own mind. 'Come on then, Tim. Their stomachs will be thinking their throats have been cut.'

He was still washing up. 'I'm still washing up.'

'Your father's right. The boys need to be told before they go out on the lake.'

'Can't Jenny tell them?'

'I don't mind telling them,' Jenny said. Tim had known she would. He knew her so well. It was obvious she fancied the one who called himself Gully - any more obvious and she'd have a neon sign flashing on her head. She was wearing a T-shirt usually regarded as far too cool for serving breakfast - make-up too.

The battery in Bill's hearing aid must have been on the blink. He still had his back to everyone when he said, 'It's your responsibility now, Tim.'

'And it'll be your neck as well,' Anne told him, 'if they complain about their breakfasts being cold. Jenny, you can take Mr Spicer his, please.'

Tim had plenty more arguments left in him, but knew now was not the time. Reluctantly he dried his hands, then when he tried to take the plates from Jenny she held on and pulled a face at him. But it wasn't his fault, was it? They silently tussled for a second or two. It wasn't like he wanted to serve her darling Gully.

And he felt resentful towards her. He said, 'These breakfasts are massive. Have you been giving them extra portions on purpose, Jenny?'

She went red - instantly. And leaped away from him, letting go of the plates.

'Tim . . .' his mother warned.

'But look at the size of them!' he said, holding out the plates for all to see.

Jenny spun on her heel to face the sink as if something in there desperately required her attention.

Tim said, 'What happens if they think we're trying to fatten them up for tomorrow's feed?'

Bill turned round sharply. But before he could say anything Tim was pushing backwards through the door into the guest dining room.

'I'm going, I'm going,' he muttered.

Anne took pride in making the dining room as bright and welcoming as she could. There were always fresh flowers on the sideboard and at the tables. She did her best to hide the fact that it was over three centuries old with a contemporary, but still warm, decorating touch.

Three of the eight tables were occupied. Jack Spicer sat looking out at the lake from the table everyone had come to think of as his for the past thirty years, an unread newspaper in front of him. He was their most regular guest, spending maybe two or three months here each year. Tim's father regarded him as an old family friend and he often accompanied Bill around the lake. Tim and Jenny had always thought of him as a little severe, chilly - not at all the grandfatherly type. Even as youngsters they'd found themselves becoming quiet and polite and respectful in his company, which Tim knew had always been an effort for his sister. The old man nodded good morning to him now and he smiled quickly in reply.

The annoyingly friendly American couple, Mike and Sylvie, were in front of the fireplace at the table Anne considered the most pleasant. They were already eating but found time to smile hello as well. They'd only been here a couple of days, weren't planning on staying much longer. The two university students who'd arrived yesterday afternoon were at the smaller table just behind them. Gully sat up straight, rubbing his hands in expectation when he saw the huge pile of bacon and eggs and sausage and tomato and black

pudding that Tim was carrying. Scott, on the other hand, looked half asleep.

‘Brilliant, brilliant, brilliant.’ Gully was generous with the brown sauce the second Tim put the plate down in front of him. He was tall, blond, with a pop-star-perfect face – which was why Jenny liked him so much, Tim guessed.

Scott was darker and a lot broader. Maybe he played rugby or something. His face was pale this morning, however, and he seemed reluctant to move. Tim realized he must be hung over, remembering they’d both spent a late night in the bar at WetFun, coming back loud and drunk after midnight.

He stood at their table, watching Gully shovel the food down while Scott summoned the courage to start. He felt small and young and embarrassed. And he hated it. The familiar resentment towards his father was soaking up into him, feet first, as though he were a sponge for it.

Scott was looking at him and Tim shrugged quickly to hide his awkwardness at hovering there. He said, ‘You look like you could do with an aspirin or something.’ It was just so he had something – anything – to say.

Gully grinned and jabbed his fork at his friend. ‘You look like shit.’

Scott nodded as though it hurt. ‘Yeah. Déjà vu.’

Gully laughed through a mouthful of sausage, louder than Tim thought was necessary, but he tried to join in on the joke by laughing as well because he wanted to be liked by them. He’d heard Gully say ‘Who cares?’ at least half a dozen times when they arrived yesterday afternoon. Tim could easily imagine being one of them himself some day.

The kitchen door swung open and Jenny appeared with Jack Spicer’s breakfast. Gully, Scott and Tim all watched her. And it was obvious she knew she was being watched because colour rose up her neck to her cheeks. She served Mr Spicer quickly but politely, and still without once looking at the students’ table she asked the American couple if

everything was okay for them ('We're fine, honey. Just fine,' Sylvie beamed); only then did she turn and scowl at Tim. All he could do was scowl back as she disappeared into the kitchen again.

He continued to hover, not wanting to say anything more, but knowing he couldn't escape back into the kitchen until he did.

Scott broke the yolk of his egg with his knife and let it ooze across his plate. He looked up at Tim as if he'd forgotten he was there and raised his eyebrow by way of a question.

'Aspirin?' Tim asked. 'Can I get you one?'

Scott shook his head. 'I'll survive.'

But Tim couldn't go anywhere just yet. Gully was also watching him now, so he said, 'You're windsurfing then?'

'That's the plan.'

He nodded. 'Great.' The awkwardness was making him hot. 'So . . . How did you know about this place? It's a bit out of the way.'

'I've been here before,' Scott said. 'Came here when I was in my first year.'

'Yeah? Why?' Maybe he wouldn't have to explain things after all.

'I was doing a Geology degree, before it got too boring. But it's a weird shape or something - weird rock formations along the shore? - and we had to discover why it happened thousands of years ago. Big waste of time, really, if you ask me. But isn't it meant to be deeper than anywhere else around here too?'

'That's right, yeah. It's really deep.'

'So they said. Weird shape, but deep. A bit like Gully.'

His friend grinned at him but didn't stop chewing.

Tim was smiling furiously, wanting desperately to ingratiate himself. 'Yeah, yeah. It used to be called the Hundredwaters, because it was so deep. You know, people



say, "It's as deep as one hundred waters." Nobody's ever seen what's at the bottom.'

Scott shrugged. 'I just remember that it rained all the time, and it was ridiculously cold, freezing, so half of us went to the pub anyway. Geology wasn't for me. But that's how I knew about the water-sports club.'

Gully suddenly joined in. 'Last night the guy who runs the place said we could use a couple of the jet-skis if we wanted. I'm up for that.'

Tim nodded as if it was the most interesting fact he'd ever heard. 'Great.'

'You must have been a few times,' Scott said. 'You any good?'

Tim's smile slipped a little. 'Jet-skiing?' He shook his head. 'No. Never tried.'

Both Gully and Scott looked as surprised as their attitudes would allow.

And Tim took the plunge. 'Well, you know, it's meant to be dangerous.'

He let his words hang there; hoping one of them would jump in and say, 'Yeah, we know all about *that*,' and save him the embarrassment. Unfortunately they simply stared at him.

So with a shrug he said, 'What with the monster and everything . . .'

Gully's chewing slowly came to a halt. 'What?'

Tim felt like he was wading through deep water. 'Hasn't anybody told you?' He tried to look shocked. 'It's the local legend, you see. The Mourn. It's called the Mourn.' He was nodding his head like it was on a quick spring. 'Yeah. It lives in the lake. It eats people . . .'

He coughed, shuffled his feet. 'Sometimes.'

Gully's mouth hung open wide enough for Tim to be able to see the mush of bacon and beans in there. He had a real urge to laugh and shout, 'Nah! Just kidding!' But couldn't. He realized the elderly American couple were listening in,