

# DISBELIEVED

Skin & Bone CSIs

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*For the disbelieved,  
with love*

## The Cyclist

The bike skidded and jerked in the air. For a split second both machine and cyclist seemed frozen upside down, out of time. The boy's legs slipped, his body dangled and he plummeted into the quarry below, still clutching the handlebars as if they could save him.

Anelise ran smack into the wire fence, screaming. 'Are you all right?' she yelled.

'Right... right...?' the echo replied.

She shook the wire.

A couple of stones clattered over the edge.

'Hey!'

'Hey... Hey...!'

A blackbird flew up, scolding.

Heart pounding, Anelise tried to climb over. Her fingers hurt and her feet slipped. It was useless.

Fifteen metres below was a wild tangle of elder and brambles. Nothing moved. Not a glint of twisted bike or scarlet cycling gear.

With shaking hands, she jabbed 999 into her mobile.

No signal. Zilch! Not even SOS.

Throat tight and lungs bursting, she sprinted the rough trackway to the top of the hill, and down the other side to the car park at the bottom. It was mid-afternoon, there was bound to be someone pulling on walking boots and yelling at a dog.

Someone would drive for help.

She was out of luck. There were plenty of cars, but no one about.

To her right, the road zig-zagged down a steep hill towards the village. Nothing for it – she'd have to run. She'd wave down a car. Every second counted. Her feet pounded the tarmac. Her chest ached.

She checked her phone. A flickering signal! Sobbing with relief, she tried again.

'Ambulance, quickly!' she told the woman.

'Location?'

'Carantoc Quarry, just up from the car park you'll see a tumulus.'

'A what?'

'A huge mound of earth – an old burial mound thingy. They'll need ropes and climbing gear.'

Twenty minutes later, a thudding helicopter hovered over the quarry edge, flattening the grass with the down-draught.

Anelise put her hands over her ears and crouched.

It was starting to rain. The grey clouds reflected back flashing blue lights from the ambulance and police car. Paramedics and police peered into the quarry. Far below, men on ropes hacked back the sloes and brambles.

There was no sign of the cyclist – or his bike.

Pain drilled through Anelise's skull.

A Police Community Support Officer in a day-glow vest

came and squatted next to her. 'Where exactly did you see the young man go over?' she yelled. 'Think clearly now!'

'There, just there!' Anelise waved her hand at the wire fence for the umpteenth time. 'I'm certain. He was as clear as you are. I don't know why you can't find him, but he was there!'

The woman scowled at Anelise's black eye make-up and spiked purple hair. 'Do you take anything recreational?'

Anelise glared back. 'If you mean do I take drugs? No I don't.'

Just then, the helicopter lifted and roared away across the hills.

Anelise pulled her fleece over her ears to block out the rain and noise.

Two men in green jackets with silver stripes called the PCSO aside. They shook their heads.

She returned to Anelise. 'There's no one here, love.'

'Maybe he's dead?'

'No. They've swept the area with a heat-seeker. There's nothing bigger than a fox down there.' She put a sympathetic hand on Anelise's arm. 'Are you worried about something at home – or at school? Are you being bullied? Got problems with exams, or your boyfriend or something? Do you need someone to talk to?'

Anelise shook her off. 'I'm not a screwed-up attention-seeker! I was just out for a walk and I saw him. I know I did.' Her head thumped and she wanted to puke.

'We're sure you meant well dear, but we've searched and

searched. There's no cyclist and no bike. Look, not even one of those stunt cyclists you see on telly could get over a fence this high. That's what it's there for you see...'

Anelise screwed up her eyes. *Don't patronise me!* she screamed silently. *Go away!*

The PCSO tried again. 'Well, it's just that these crews could have been needed elsewhere...'

'To save someone who was really in trouble,' Anelise finished for her. 'Yeah, I know. And it costs thousands of pounds to call you guys out; I know that too. And I didn't do it for fun, right? I saw him go over. A teenager in bright red cycling gear and a black helmet. His bike was metallic blue. I'm sure I saw him.'

'Alright, alright.' The woman smiled. 'We're putting this down as a false call with good intent, but well, be more careful next time, eh?' She patted Anelise's shoulder and jumped into a police Land Rover. Mud splattered as the tyres gripped. The blue lights died and the vehicle whined away.

Anelise flopped into the prickly heather and hugged her knees. She stared at the fence in disbelief. Someone had put in clips where they'd cut the wire. The PCSO was right; no one could have got through – or over – that fence.

How could she have been so stupid?

But...

She was certain...

And something wasn't right about it.

What? She buried her head in her arms and tried to think.

Her mind went blank.

After all that noise, the near-silence overwhelmed her. The wind blew. Rain pattered at her jacket. Behind her, a whirring mountain bike bounced downhill towards the mound. She was about to yell a warning, but the cyclist veered away, avoiding the downward path and the log that blocked it.

Anelise got to her feet. 'I'm losing the plot,' she told herself. 'A cyclist couldn't... wouldn't come this way. I need to get home. I'm all achy. Perhaps I'm getting flu or something.' She dragged herself back to the car park.

This time there were plenty of people piling wet dogs into cars. Some were gawping up at the disappearing helicopter. There was no one she knew to beg a lift from, and she didn't have the energy to walk down to the main road and catch the bus as she'd planned.

Pulling out her mobile, she stumbled on until the one-bar signal lit up; then she clicked on 'home'.

'Hi Joe, I know you're busy, but I'm feeling crap, can you come and get me?'

Ten minutes later, a clapped-out VW rattled up the hill and stopped. Joe kicked the passenger door open. Anelise jumped to her feet and got in. 'Thanks everso. Good old Minty!'

'Listen, my beloved Polo may be white and full of holes, but her name is Araminta, not Minty! She's a priceless antique. Kindly treat her with respect.'

Anelise patted the dashboard and strapped herself in. 'Call

her what you like, but today she's a beautiful white charger and you, my dearest cousin, are my knight in shining armour.'

'Glad to be of service.' Joe grinned through his freckles. Then he frowned. 'You look really grim, Cuz. You're shaking. Wassamatter? Seen a ghost?'

Anelise shivered. 'I'll tell you when I'm clutching a bucket of tea!'

'As you wish, M'lady.' Joe revved Minty's engine and sent her hurtling down the hill, whining against worn out gears as she headed for home.

## Jalapeños

Curled in a saggy armchair in her aunt's kitchen, Anelise clutched her second mug of tea. She and Joe had been over the story at least three times. But it still didn't add up.

'I can't get past the feeling that something's badly wrong, and it's not just because I saw an accident that wasn't.'

Joe perched on the chair's arm and opened a packet of biscuits. 'What sort of thing?'

'I wish I knew!' she muttered through a mouthful of crumbs. 'The stupid PCSO had the cheek to ask if I was on drugs or being bullied. She thought I needed counselling – like I'm a loony!' She grabbed another biscuit.

'It can't be easy living with us and not having your own home?'

Anelise stretched out like a cat. 'You and Auntie G have been brill since Mum died. I don't want to be anywhere else.'

'But you must miss your dad. When's he coming back?'

She shrugged. 'About a month, I think.'

'Still in the Congo?'

'Nope. Cameroon. He's happily chasing some sort of giant snail.'

Joe snorted. 'You don't have to run very fast to chase a snail.'

Anelise wiggled her fingers. 'These are super-snails, like Terry Pratchett's "Luggage". They've got loads of little legs with running shoes.'

Joe laughed. 'What's with the molluscs? Your dad's a creepy-crawly man.'

'It's one of his famous side-lines. I think it's to do with the life-cycle of some obscure beetle or food chains or something. Apparently these snails are huge – they'd supply a French restaurant for a month!' Her face clouded. 'Anyway, what're you getting at? That I'm pining after Dad, so me "seeing stuff" is attention seeking, or making my head go weird?'

'Dunno. Just wondered...'

Anelise scowled, then said, 'Perhaps I had a premonition?'

'Knowing things before they happen? Don't be daft! That's impossible.'

'I always have the kettle on ready when you or Auntie G come in.'

Joe snorted. 'That's 'cos you're always brewing up.'

Anelise swirled the dregs of her tea. 'Sometimes I do know stuff, like yesterday I said that girl in year ten was going to call you – and she did. Seconds later.'

'And who gave her my number? That's what I'd like to know!'

'T'weren't me. Dunno why she fancies you.' She tugged his red ponytail. 'You're more horse than human!'

He shook loose. 'She fancies me 'cos I'm awesome. But if you're getting premonitions, tell me my physics exam questions.'

'You'll walk them all without me spooking answers for you. No sweat.' she got up to put the kettle on again. 'However, I

will consult my crystal ball if you make one of your veggie lasagnes this week.'

'It's a deal.' Joe narrowed his eyes. 'Now let's try a scientific experiment: if you're getting premonitions, what colour are you going to dye your hair next?'

'How should I know? Half the fun is reaching for the dye bottles with my eyes closed!' She poured water on the tea. 'But I didn't imagine what I saw today. Honest!'

'I believe you... But I'm just trying to work out why you might have seen something that wasn't – well – there. And it can't have been a premonition because the accident didn't actually happen.'

'True, and it'd be impossible with that wire fence there. Anyone whizzing down that hill would've smashed into it and bounced back.'

Joe rescued the teabags. 'Absolutely. Anyway, changing the subject, I had a text from Mum. She's working late finalising the prosecution forensics for that big Birmingham trial. We can take money from the pot for pizza and the cinema. Do you want to see "Night of the Zombies" again?'

'I'll go for the pizza, but no cinema, ta.' Anelise smothered a chunk of bread with peanut butter and solemnly coated it with hundreds and thousands. 'I'd like to write up what happened earlier. It'll clear my head.'

Joe winced at the sight. 'And you're not going to rest until you find out? I'd be the same.'

'That's right. You go to the flicks if you want. I'll be OK.'

‘Nah. I should be doing my chemistry anyway. The trouble with predicted grade 8s is the teachers expect you to get the bloody things. I haven’t been to a party for a month.’

‘Does that mean you’ll be up till midnight making chemical stinks, with your music on max?’

‘I expect so.’ Joe rubbed his hands with glee and grinned. ‘Mum’s not here, her lab’s all mine. Might as well make the most of playtime! It’s almost six, I ought to get started.’

‘Have you got permission this time? Your mum almost killed you last week.’

‘She won’t mind. That was a bad day and it was my fault, I touched something I shouldn’t have. Tonight I shall learn to compare soil samples.’

‘I thought you said you were doing homework?’

Joe gave his most charming smile. ‘And mineral analysis is on the A level curriculum.’ He stuck out his tongue. ‘Admit it, you adore me for my brilliant mind.’

Anelise stuck her tongue out even further. ‘I’ll be on Dad’s computer in the basement,’ she replied. ‘I’m hungry. Can you get my pizza with loads of jalapeño peppers – extra hot everything?’

Joe grinned wickedly. ‘You just like working down there so you can munch a pickled scorpion or two when no one’s looking. I swear the jalapeños are just a cover.’

‘Of course. All washed down with a swig of formaldehyde.’ She laughed, grabbed her tea and disappeared downstairs.

Joe opened the door to what had once been an elegant Victorian sitting room – now his mother’s forensics lab. His kingdom, his joy. It was worth having the TV and armchairs squashed into the kitchen in exchange for all this lovely, lovely equipment at his disposal. ‘God bless Professor Genevieve Skinner! What a mother!’

Sighing blissfully, Joe spread out his chemistry textbooks and picked up the phone.

In the basement study, Anelise swivelled in the office chair and sighed contentedly. She was home and safe. Joe was here, and all was well. Plonking her DMs on the desk, she slurped her tea and licked the sugary bits off her sandwich.

She closed her eyes.

And the cyclist still fell.

‘Go away! You aren’t real.’

He fell and fell.

Shivering and feeling sick all over again, Anelise sat bolt upright. Something awful was happening. Something even Joe couldn’t fix.

Reaching for her mobile, she began to text:

Hey Lubna, I made a 999 call. I thought I saw an accident on the hills – helicopter came. No accident. Dreamt it. Weird eh?

Anelise re-read, then deleted, shoving the phone back in her pocket. ‘No, I’m gonna forget it. It’ll blow over.’

She twirled the chair again, watching her father’s study walls swim around her: cabinets of neatly labelled drawers

housing dried insects and shelves laden with ‘things’ in jars of formaldehyde – the ‘side-lines’ that distracted him so easily. She breathed in the slightly stale air. She wasn’t as fascinated by her dad’s insects as Joe was with his mum’s forensics, but down here she could at least pretend he’d just gone to work – and he’d be back soon.

Slowly the chair came to a halt facing an old-fashioned mahogany desk and a shiny silver computer. Wiping peanut butter from her fingers, Anelise started it up. The machine sang a low note and the screen lit. Opening her emails she found three from [bernard.skinner@torlake.ac.uk](mailto:bernard.skinner@torlake.ac.uk). She clicked one open and stared at photos of her father holding bugs and crawlies, and a land snail almost as long as the arm of the pygmy man holding it. For the next half an hour she was engrossed reading and sending back chatty replies with no hint of what had happened.

When she’d finished, she tried to text Lubna once more, but the right words kept dancing out of reach. She sighed. ‘I’ll tell her tomorrow. It’ll be easier face-to face. It might even be funny then.’

Upstairs, the doorbell rang, then two minutes later, Joe’s boots thudded down the cellar steps. The waft of freshly baked pizza soothed Anelise’s frazzled brain. Sighing contentedly, she hacked at the huge crispy disc and munched. Whatever else was wrong with life, her dad was blissfully happy in a leech infested rainforest.

*Still miss the bastard, she thought. Hope he comes home soon.*

She opened a fresh document, called it 'The Accident' and began to write an account of everything from the moment her walk took her past the ancient burial mound and down to the log where the lower path had been blocked off.

I looked to my right, she wrote. I saw the cyclist whizzing down the hill past the mound, then he jerked, fell sideways and fell through the fence.

She stopped, considered what she'd written and shook her head. 'Well, *I* wouldn't believe me if I read that. Oh shit, perhaps I am going loopy! But I'm not worried about Dad, and the accident's still "real" in my head; that proves it wasn't attention-seeking stress.'

Anelise chose a vicious-looking green pepper and sucked it. It jolted all her senses with a bolt of taste-electricity.

Senses! That was IT!

Ignoring the pizza, she attacked the keyboard once more, adding in everything she'd heard, how the earth smelled and the air had tasted. Something, somewhere had to give her a clue...

She stared at the cursor winking at the bottom of the page.

'JOE!' she screamed. 'JOE!' She bounced up the cellar steps two at a time, almost crashing into her cousin as he thundered down.

He grabbed her arms. 'You're shaking! What's the matter?'

'Joe, I know what was wrong about today... I can still see the cyclist going over the edge in minute detail, but I can't hear anything. No screaming, no crash landing, nothing. It's like a

DVD with the sound off... Everything I saw happened in silence!

Joe hugged her. 'Calm down. We'll go back there – together.'

'But it's dark and your mum'll be back soon. She'll hit the roof if she catches us going walkabout on a school night!'

'Don't be daft, I mean the weekend. We'll take a picnic and look around. Spend the whole day up there if you like.'

'What for?'

'To look for clues, dope!'

'Clues for what? Nothing happened.'

Joe sighed. 'Whatever's going on. This is seriously bugging you, and you're going to be a bloody nightmare to live with until it's sorted.'

Anelise backed away. 'I-I've changed my mind. I don't want to understand any more. I just want to forget.'

'C'mon Cuz, I'm just trying to help.' He tried to hug her.

She shrugged him off. 'I'm missing Dad or maybe it's a bad period coming.'

'But what if there's more to it?'

'Like what? An over-active imagination?'

Joe's grin broadened. 'I've just been on line checking out the psychology of "seeing things" and this could be interesting.'

'You're saying I'm nuts? What about your chemistry?'

'Stuff the chemistry, and I don't think you're nuts. I just like mysteries.' He hesitated. 'I reckon something near the quarry sparked you off and put the thought of an accident in your

head – but what?’

‘Forget it. You’re just making things worse.’ She stomped back down to the basement.

Joe bounced down after her. ‘Stop feeling sorry for yourself Annie! There’s got to be a rational explanation and it’s going to bug both of us ‘til we’ve got an answer. Look, I really am interested; it’s still forensics, but it’s mind stuff rather than fingerprints. And yes, you are being impossible, but you’re my best and only Cuz and believe it or not, I care when you’re in shit.’

Anelise flopped into the swivel chair and span around. ‘Haven’t you got to go and blow something up in the lab?’

Joe stopped the chair with his foot. ‘No. I want to help you. Why won’t you let me?’

She thumped her feet on the desk and tried not to cry. ‘Because you’re getting at me.’

‘Bloody hell, what makes you think...?’

‘Because you won’t shut up!’ She rolled her eyes. ‘I had a blip. End of. You said yourself that whatcha-callits – premonitions aren’t real – not that this was one, ‘cos there was no accident. Everyone gets weird ideas from time to time.’ She hesitated. ‘This was a bit stronger than before, s’all.’

Joe crouched next to her. ‘So – you really have had this before? It’s not just always having the kettle on?’

She nodded glumly.

‘Then it’s even more important to face this square on. It’ll plague you forever unless we go back and find what it was that

triggered the scene in your head. You've got to Cuz – or life'll be hell.'

She stared at the wall.

'C'mon Annie...'

She switched off the computer. The screen lit her face, then died. They sat silently together in the semi-dark.

After a few moments, Anelise sniffed and rubbed her nose.

Joe handed her a tissue. 'Do you remember when you were little and you were scared of thunder?'

'I thought it was giants playing football under the hills.'

'Then I explained about positive and negatively charged clouds.'

'I was only seven, I thought you were talking scribble.'

'But you felt better because I explained it?'

She nodded.

'This is the same. What you thought you saw by the quarry felt weird, but if you understand what happened and why, then you'll feel in control and no one can accuse you of being loopy. Not even you.'

There was another long silence.

'OK. You're right,' she sighed. 'I do need to go back, and it'd be great if you'd come. Ta. Today was a bit much. It scared me and the police were so patronising, just 'cos I've got purple hair. Talking of which,' she scratched at her spikes, 'it's Monday tomorrow, I'd better go and dye it brown so I don't get expelled.'

At school she said nothing to Lubna – or Henry – or any of her mates. Joe was the only person who needed to know. At the weekend, they'd go back to the quarry and lay the whole mess to rest – rationally.

There was no point telling anyone. What could she say? Who'd believe her?

The following Saturday, Joe knocked on Anelise's bedroom door. 'Get up, lazy bones. It's almost ten. Let's go to the quarry.'

'Aren't you going to be making stinks in the lab?' she called hopefully from the depths of her duvet.

'Nah, Mum's working on the Birmingham case all day. It's now or never.'

Anelise pulled her pillow over her head. 'Changed my mind. Staying in bed. Thanks though.'

'You'll regret it.'

Curling up as small as she could, Anelise pulled her pillow over her eyes. Inside her head the boy on the bike still span through the air and dangled upside down. Again and again.

He never fell. He just... hung there.

She couldn't go back to the quarry, it'd make her feel scared and stupid all over again.

'Suit yourself. Don't know when I'll have time again.' Joe's footsteps thumped downstairs.

Anelise groaned. Joe was right. If she didn't go, she'd never get rid of the nagging memory, and the dread of going loopy. 'Hang on!' she called back. 'I just need to shower.'

An hour later, Minty was whining and struggling back up the Carantoc hills to the car park at the top. Armed with walking boots, waterproofs and rucksacks, the cousins marched towards the mound that hovered darkly above the collapsed quarry lip.

Anelise sat on the log and pulled out a sticky mess of peanut butter sandwiches laced with hundreds and thousands. 'Want one?'

'I'd rather starve! Now, where were you standing when you saw the boy?'

Anelise shrugged as she bit into her elevenses. 'Here, more or less.'

'And where were you looking?'

'Nowhere. I was just walking, then this kid on a bike come careering down the path. He walloped into the wire and went straight through it.'

'Don't you mean over it?'

She shook her head. 'No. It was as if the wire wasn't there at all...

Just then, something whirred and rattled to their right.

Anelise looked round and dropped her sarnie.

A cyclist was bouncing towards them.

She leaped to her feet and gripped Joe's arm. 'Ohmygod, that's *him!*'

## Action Replay

A figure in bright red cycling gear and black helmet hurtled down the top part of the track, bounced right over the blocking log and sped alongside the wire.

There was a sharp crack, the bike juddered, jerked into the air... and plummeted.

Anelise bounded to the fence. 'NO!' she bellowed.

The chain links were ripped apart, exposing the deadly drop.

She gripped a post and leaned out. Half way down the cliff, the twisted frame of a blue mountain bike was caught on a tree root. The lower wheel was spinning wildly.

Below it, the boy lay spread-eagled over a jagged outcrop. He wasn't moving. Dark blood trickled down the rock beside him.

Vomit rose in Anelise's throat. She struggled to breathe.

Joe ran up behind her. 'I'll see what I can do. Ring for help. Hurry!' He swung himself over the edge.

'Give me your phone, they'll see my number come up and won't believe me.' Fear pounded at her ribs.

Joe was already out of reach. 'Annie, it's real this time! You heard everything, didn't you? So did I.'

Pulling out her phone, she swallowed her sobs. 'I've g-got to g-get to the road for a s-signal!' As she turned, something moved at the top of the tumulus. Was it a head? Anelise stopped and stared, but it was gone. She was being stupid. A

boy's life was at stake and she was gawping at a fox.

Somewhere beyond the mound, a scrambler bike revved. Anelise headed for the sound hoping the rider would have a better phone. By the time she reached the other side, there was only a dwindling figure in the distance.

'Oh pustules!' Anelise gasped, then ran. The car park was still empty, but she had the faintest of signals. She tapped 999 once more. Her mouth was dry. What would the operator say? Would they believe her? She had to...

'Emergency, where are you?' The voice sounded familiar. Please let it not be the same woman.

Anelise gulped. 'Above Carantoc Quarry. I need an ambulance please.' Her tongue struggled to move. 'And... and they'll need ropes and climbing gear.'

The operator hesitated. 'You called the other day.'

'Yes.'

'Just a minute, I need to speak to my supervisor.'

'But this is urgent, it's real this time! Honestly, you've got to believe me! I saw the boy, he's bleeding badly!'

But she'd been put on hold.

Joe clung to the loose rocks with shaking fingers and looked down. Five or six metres below, the boy was splayed like a stringless puppet. His scarlet shirt was torn and blood was pooling in dark puddles.

'Hold on!' Joe yelled, 'I'm coming!'

The bike shifted as he brushed past it. The root that held the

front wheel was breaking. If the machine fell, it'd hit them both.

Sliding carefully to his left, Joe worked his way down, searching for toe and hand-holds. His walking boots were too chunky; he couldn't wiggle his feet into tiny places. The sandstone was muddy, the climb greasy and treacherous.

Manoeuvring carefully, Joe found just enough room to perch. He loosened the boy's helmet, his face was scratched and muddy, but Joe knew him from college – Wild Rob, a cycling legend and super-blogger.

Joe touched his back. He was breathing. 'Hey! It's me, Joe Bonne, how do you feel mate?'

'Like shit!' Rob groaned.

Leaning his backside against the cliff face, Joe slipped off his waterproof and spread it over Rob's shoulders to keep him warm. He cursed his rucksack – full of forensic gear, not even a tiny first aid kit. Why did he have to be such a geek? Dark blood oozed thickly from cuts on Rob's right leg and shoulder. He had to do something!

At least he had scissors! Joe pulled off his tee shirt, cut the hem and ripped it in half. He cut and ripped again, bound the boy's leg tightly, then folded the rest into a pad to press over Rob's arm.

A chilly wind made Joe shiver. Loose rocks shifted treacherously under his boots. Where was Annie? Why was she taking so long? He'd feel better if he could hear her voice.

No one else knew they were down there.

What if the emergency services didn't believe her this time?

Thank goodness it was still morning. Someone had to come that way – sooner or later.

Just then: ‘You alright mate?’ an Aussie voice called down from above.

Joe looked up. ‘Just about holding on. You don’t have any rope, do you? Or a first aid kit?’

‘Sorry, bloody useless, me,’ the man called out. ‘I’ve called for an ambulance though.’ He waved his mobile.

Joe relaxed a little. He squeezed Rob’s hand. ‘Help’s coming. You’ll be OK,’ he said.

The boy’s eyes flickered open. ‘What happened? Something punched me in the shoulder and I went arse over tit!’

Before Joe could answer, a helicopter came thudding overhead, flattening everything around. A paramedic swung down from a winch, knocked crampons into the rock face and tied himself on. ‘Up you go,’ he said, passing a sling around Joe’s shoulders. ‘I’ll see to this fella.’

Joe’s stomach lurched as he dangled in mid air. The winch-rope tugged, then lowered him on the path next to Anelise. She tossed him her fleece. It was too small, but he tied the arms round his neck and tried to stop shivering.

The Aussie, a middle-aged man with a beer belly, handed him tea from a flask. ‘You’re a bonza guy alright; I couldn’t have done all that! Didn’t that boy just go? Trying to get himself killed, stupid kid. How’re you feeling?’ Before Joe could answer, the man went on, ‘By the way, someone over there wants to speak to you.’

Joe glanced up and a flash went off in his face. As giddy lights swam in his eyes, a petite woman in motorcycle gear smiled and exchanged her camera for a notepad. 'You're amazing! What's your name? I'm Jessica Dawson, from the Gazette. How did you know the boy was down there?'

Joe shook his head and pretended he couldn't hear over the roar of the rotor blades. The last thing he wanted was to talk to the press. He stared up at Rob's stretcher turning slow circles in mid air as the winch hauled him to safety.

Anelise tapped Joe's shoulder. 'Get me out of here,' she shouted about the din. 'I don't like these people. I feel sick, I want to go home.'

Dawson grabbed her camera and snapped repeatedly as Rob was eased into the belly of the machine. The helicopter changed its roar, lifted, and disappeared above the tree line.

The downdraught died and silence swallowed the hillside.

'Ta,' Joe handed the cup back to the Aussie. 'We're off now.'

The man nodded, but he was deep in conversation with the journalist. The woman sprang around. 'You can't go yet; I haven't interviewed you.'

Joe waved a hand dismissively as he and Anelise marched towards Minty. 'No comment.'

'Hey! Stop!' the woman yelled, running after them. 'Don't you want to be local heroes?'

'No thanks!' Annie shouted back.

At the gate to the car park, their way was blocked by a policeman in a day-glow jacket. 'Are you the two who saw the

boy fall?’

They exchanged glances.

‘I’d like a quick word, if you please. In private.’ He glared at the journalist who backed off immediately. The copper flipped open his notebook. ‘Can you tell me what happened?’ He paused, narrowed his eyes and pointed his pen at Anelise. ‘I know you! You’re the girl who...’

There was no way out of this. She took a deep breath. ‘Yes, I reported the same accident last week, and yes, it was an exact action replay, only this time there’s a real boy being flown to hospital and there’s real blood everywhere.’

‘I’ve got to get something warm on,’ Joe stammered between chattering teeth. He gestured toward Minty. ‘There’s an old fleece in my boot.’

The officer let them through the gate, but kept talking as he followed them. ‘What are your names?’

‘I’m Joseph Bonne, and this is my cousin, Anelise Skinner.’

The officer wrote them down. ‘Did you see the boy cycling before he fell? What made him slip? Did he go over a stone or something?’

Joe unlocked Minty’s boot. ‘Now I come to think of it, I heard a loud crack, and Rob said he felt like he’d been punched in the shoulder.’ He turned to the policeman. ‘Perhaps he was shot? You do get idiots up here taking pot shots at deer and rabbits.’

Anelise’s eyes widened. ‘I saw what might have been someone’s head behind the tumulus, and I heard a scambler

bike driving off. Did you hear it Joe? That could've been someone getting away!

Joe shook his head as he rummaged amongst the junk in his boot. 'No. I was half way down that rock face at the time. Sorry!'

The officer was already on his radio. 'Sergeant Bob Levisson here. Ask the paramedics to verify signs of a shoulder bullet wound in the cycling accident, would you? Over.' The radio sizzled in response.

Joe triumphantly retrieved an oily tee shirt and a spare fleece. He pulled them on and gave Anelise hers back.

Just then a voice that sounded like frying came through the police radio. 'Negative to the question of bullet wound. Plenty of bruising, contusions and some broken bones.'

'Roger that.' The officer smiled. 'I'm sure you two mean well but, you've both got quite active imaginations, especially the young lady here. We'd like a longer chat with you Miss, about the telephone call you made the other day.'

Joe swung around. 'You can't blame her for that. The police agreed it was a false call with good intent, she didn't knowingly waste police time – or anybody else's either.'

The officer spread his hands. 'It's OK; she's not in trouble. We're just intrigued, how did she *know*?'

'She'd nothing to do with what happened today, if that's what you're implying.' Joe slammed Minty's tailgate, making the policeman jump.

'Steady on; of course not,' he replied. 'May I ask how old

you both are?’

‘Annie is fifteen, and I’m seventeen. I drive legally. Do you want to see my license?’

‘No, it’s just that as you’re under eighteen you’ll both need an appropriate adult when we interview you. When will your parents be home?’

‘Mum’s at home now,’ Joe replied, ‘but she’s working this weekend, she’s really busy.’

The officer took out his notebook again. ‘So, she’s Mrs Bonne?’

‘No. She’s Professor Genevieve Skinner.’

‘And your dad?’

Joe shrugged. ‘Dunno. Haven’t seen him for years.’

Anelise smiled coyly. ‘You can talk to my dad if you like, but you’ll have to pop over to Africa. Mum’s dead. Joe and I live with Auntie G in the same house.’

The policeman looked a little disconcerted. ‘Then maybe it’d be easier if we come to your school Miss? It’s you we’d like to talk to most.’

‘S’pose,’ she shrugged. ‘I’m at Danesburrow College. You could ask for Mrs Johnson the maths teacher, she’s always sitting in with the pupils when the police come round. But that’s usually because they’ve broken ASBOs!’

The officer wrote the name of the school. ‘And you confirm you made the 999 call requesting an ambulance to attend the same spot last Sunday?’

‘That’s right,’ she answered.

'And your address?'

'The Old Rectory, Highham Lane, Cawton. Same as I told the lady last week. I haven't moved.'

'Phone number?'

Joe told him, then took Annie's arm. 'No more questions.'

'But...'

'Not without an appropriate adult, officer. I am Joseph Bonne, also of the Old Rectory – and that's where we're going – right now.'