

## THE MERMAID'S PURSE

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A mermaid's purse washed up on Porthcressa beach. Speckles of yellow sand stuck to the black skin, coated it in a rough blanket. Then the last breath of a wave washed over it, cleansing the sack before sucking it back into the ocean. The tide went out for the day, leaving the purse nestled among wet seaweed.

A black dog, salt water matting his fur, lolloped towards the tideline. His greying muzzle chucked aside rope gone crispy in the sun, his nose covered in a beard of sand. With his front paws, he dragged the dry seaweed away to find the mermaid's purse. He bit its tail, pulled it from its cocoon.

'Lenny! What are you eating now?' a young girl shouted, running carefully to avoid the shards of broken shells. The dog dropped the purse at her feet. She picked it up. 'Mum, what's this?' she said, poking the middle of the sack. 'It looks like ravioli.'

Her mum came over, her walking boots crunching the seaweed beneath her feet. 'It's an egg sack, Tess. From a dogfish or a shark, I think.'

'Cool!' Tess stroked the leathery surface. 'Do you think it's still alive?'

Her mum shrugged. 'I'm not sure, depends how long it's been out of water. But it's quite sunny today. Not sure anything can survive sunbathing for too long.'

'Oh,' Tess said. 'I'll put it in the sea anyway – just in case.' She began to walk over the sand, sinking her toes into the wet, squashy parts.

'Don't throw it near the dog; you know what he's like,' her

mum instructed, walking over to Lenny, who was terrorising a flock of seagulls.

The girl waded into the sea and the salt made her eczema bite. 'Be free, ravioli,' she said, releasing the purse into the waves.

The ocean carried the sack out until she couldn't see it any more.

Twenty years later, Tess remembered the mermaid's purse when she sat on cold white tiles, the apex of her legs dripping crimson. She hoped the egg had survived.