



Sea Glow – Vol. 1
The Secret of the Deep
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Today

I stand on the cliff's edge and look out across the troubled sea. The sky is pale grey, the wind whips at my hair. A storm is coming. The first proper storm since June... since the day Aris almost died and my world turned upside down.

I cradle the striped golden shell in my hand, tracing the smooth mother-of-pearl and rough ridges with my fingers. In my head, I repeat Aris' message, his promise: '*We will see each other again.*'

Chapter 1

If there's one thing you can rely on in Cornwall, it's the weather. Ever woken up on a sunny Berlin morning and felt a hankering for ice-cold winds and heavy rain? No problem! Just catch the next flight to Gatwick, hop on a train, then another train, then a bus, and... ta-daa: you'll be cold and wet in no time. But you'll also be met by a stunning view over the slate-grey Atlantic, its angry, white-crested waves crashing against the beach and cliffs.

I pulled my 50p plastic rain poncho closer around me and my backpack, trying to walk up Greycove's long, uneven main street as quickly as possible. Through rain-splattered windows, shop owners threw me sympathetic glances. I recognised some of them and waved cheerfully. Little Ella Keane from Germany was back! That was at least one sign that summer was on its way.

A gust of wind caught me off guard, pressing me up against one of the picturesque grey fishermen's cottages that gave Greycove its name. There wasn't much in the way of fishing going on here these days. And in any case, this little village had always been home to smugglers and scroungers rather than honest fishermen or miners.

At least, that's what Granny used to say, with a mischievous twinkle in her eye.

At the thought of Granny, my cheerful mood evaporated.

She had grown up here and was just as much a part of this place as the sea air and the sound of the gulls. I had visited her almost every summer with my mother. But two years ago, she had died – and instead of her infectious laughter and wonderful raisin scones, all that awaited us here now was her little cottage with its overgrown garden. I sighed, wiping the raindrops out of my face and shoving a few stray blonde hairs back under my hood.

Not for the first time, I congratulated myself on my practical haircut. *Hey, where there's no style, there's nothing to ruin!*

I pushed myself off from the rough wall of the house and walked on. A few minutes later, I arrived at the low cottage with its white door. The paint was flaking off – one of my jobs for this summer, evidently.

[...]

I was just rummaging for the keys in the pocket of my wet jeans when my phone rang. Unknown number. I answered anyway, but before I could say anything, my mother's voice bombarded me with words.

[...]

That was so typical of my mother! Saving the world with one hand and causing chaos with the other. She's been that way as long as I can remember. My father must have been a very laid-back man. I don't remember him, sadly – he died when I was still very little. Cancer, of course. Does anyone die of anything else? Okay, my mother would certainly have something to say on that subject. For years now, she has taken a few weeks off each year from her job as a surgeon at the Westend Hospital in Berlin to volunteer all over the world for *Doctors without Borders*. That was how Sophie Herrmann, born and bred in Berlin, came to meet the Brit Scott Keane. Pretty soon after that, little Ella Keane arrived on the scene. I have always lived in Berlin, where I'll be taking my school leaving exams next year (fingers crossed for the German result!) but I spent summer after summer growing up in Cornwall. And this was supposed to be a nice, extended mother-daughter holiday before all the exam stress. Honestly, I wasn't that surprised to hear Mama would be arriving late.

I was a little more taken aback by the reason for her delay, which appeared to have something to do with a man whose name I had never heard before.

Calm down, my inner voice told me, it's probably just a work colleague. And even if it isn't, the woman has dedicated herself exclusively to you and her work ever since Dad died. She has the right to a bit of fun, doesn't she?

At that moment, a fury grey monstrosity raced around the corner and threw itself at me, knocking me to the ground and straight into a muddy puddle.

'Snowflake! Come here! Oh, Ella! It's you...'

From behind the monster, whose dirty paws were pressing into my stomach with feverish joy, I recognised the face of the neighbour, Mrs Kemp. She had been good friends with Granny. Since Granny died, Mrs Kemp had been looking after the cottage when Mama and I weren't there. She also looked after Snowflake – a giant, skinny Irish Wolfhound with shaggy grey fur, he had belonged to Granny, but was actually something of a village mascot. A dog with a heart of gold, even if some people thought he looked intimidating. He had always had a soft spot for me.

[...]

Sandwiched between my backpack and the slobbering hound, I waved for help. Mrs Kemp, however, had already decided that everything was fine. Little Ella was here, which meant that the dog and the cottage weren't her responsibility for the next few weeks. And it really was awfully wet and windy out here, wasn't it? She waved back at me affectionately, shouted something about dog food and casserole and hurried back into her warm, dry house.

[...]

I fought my way out from under Snowflake, found my feet and gave the front door a determined kick. Even more paint flaked off, but the door sprang open.

That's more like it.

An hour later, and all was right with the world. At least by my own relatively chaotic standards.

I had showered, unearthed some dry clothes from my backpack and reheated Mrs Kemp's casserole in the oven.

Snowflake had scoffed half a sack of dry food and was lying at my feet, giving off the unmistakeable aroma of wet dog. Outside, the sky tore open and a beam of sunlight fell through the kitchen window. A seagull mewed. Snowflake lifted his head and looked at me expectantly through dark eyes.

I winked at him. 'Let's go.'

He knew exactly what I meant, of course. He leapt up, barking happily, and sprinted towards the back door. I grabbed my phone and my good anorak – which I had packed right at the bottom of my backpack, in the mistaken assumption that I wouldn't need it right away. That was why I had to buy myself that tasteful 50p poncho at the bus station. It was time for my Greycove ritual: a nice long walk along the cliffs to my favourite beach, together with my big, stupid, favourite dog.

Behind the cottage, a new world awaited me. The wind had driven away the rain and was now chasing a few shreds of cloud playfully across a glorious blue sky. The sun shone across the storm-ravaged grassy landscape that stretched out in front of me and all the way to the edge of the cliffs. But the air still felt cool on my skin – unusual for Cornwall in June. I stomped happily along the trail, which was probably only used by rabbits when I wasn't there. Snowflake ran wide circles around me, trying in vain to catch seagulls. They saw him coming long before he could reach them, of course, and launched themselves casually into the air, sailing effortlessly away on the next gust of wind.

I took a deep breath in. Even though we had lived in my mother's home town of Berlin for years, and I had spent the majority of my school days there – this was the only place I truly felt at home. I reached a poorly tarmacked track that ran along the top of the cliffs, in one spot veering dangerously close to the edge. In fact, over the past few years, there had been a lot of talk in Greycove about moving the path due to the risk of falling. But as it was really only ever used by the village youth when they wanted to go surfing or have barbecues in the bay, nothing had ever come of it. Locals knew the spots where they had to take care.

So much the better, I thought contentedly. This way, I won't come across any more visitors than absolutely necessary.

[...]

In the distance, I saw a little rough-hewn shack nestled into the cliff: Stewart's Boathouse. It looked undamaged – so last night's storm tide hadn't made it this far. Even so, the waves were still crashing forcefully against the shore.

The waves hit the jagged rocks and eruptions of sea spray were picked up by the wind and carried through the air. On a calm day, the water would have been almost turquoise. Today, it was a dark, impenetrable grey. Lost in thought, my eyes followed a seagull that Snowflake had disturbed. It hovered close above the waves, as if in search of somewhere to land on the churning water.

And then I saw him.

It was a surfer who'd had the moronic idea of going out on his surfboard on a day like this, in search of the right wave. Instead, he had found more than enough of the wrong ones. I jumped onto a rock on the beach in order to get a better look. Was he in difficulty?

Damn, it certainly seemed that way. The board was being pulled erratically in all directions and the prone figure on top of it was barely moving.

'Hey!' I roared against the wind. 'Are you okay out there?'

Snowflake bounded over, barking, and jumped up onto my rock. I ignored him. Had the person on the board reacted? I couldn't tell. Panic drilled into my stomach and my thoughts were all over the place.

I knew the currents in this bay could be life threatening even on calm days. The board disappeared beneath a gigantic wave... and came up empty.

No, upside down. Then, thank God, it righted itself and the surfer was once again above water, but no longer moving. Nothing was okay.

I pulled my phone from my jacket pocket. Damn, the battery was dead. The last message must have done it.

Do something, Ella! my inner voice screamed. *One more wave and he might not come back up!*

I did the stupidest thing I could have done.

I did the only thing I could have done.

I tore off my anorak and shoes and ran into the water.

Chapter 2

The first wave almost swept me off my feet, leaving my clothes saturated with ice-cold water. I gasped for air, rammed my feet into the sandy seabed and braced myself against the force of the water. I could still stand up. That was good. One step at a time, I fought my way through the water. Spuming sea spray blocked my view, but as another wave surged and broke at around my height, I saw my target again: the surfer had been swept closer to shore and was clinging desperately to his board. Or was he attached to it in some way?

'Hey! Over here!' I roared over to him, regretting it immediately as my mouth filled with seawater. Coughing and spluttering, I tried to get closer, but the water was starting to get deeper. I could feel the undercurrent pulling at my legs.

You're not going to make it, my inner voice warned me. You have to turn back – right now – otherwise they'll be fishing two corpses out of the sea!

One last try! I shouted back at her.

I pushed myself off from the seabed. I swam, one stroke, two, three. The sea spray almost blinded me. Four, five. Suddenly, there was a grey wall in front of me. An enormous wave, towering higher and higher above me. And with it came the surfer, carried up towards me, closer and closer... until the wave broke with monstrous force directly above me.

I had just enough time to snatch a breath before I was forced below the waves and tossed about. I paddled like mad with my arms – and caught hold of something: the leash of the surfboard. That was probably what saved me, because the board was incredibly buoyant. A moment later, we broke the surface of the water and I gasped for breath. One glance at the surfer was enough – no, he really wasn't moving. Panic told hold.

Hurry up, Ella!

I clawed at the rear of the surfboard and kicked my legs as hard as I could. It worked. The shore moved closer and closer, even though each wave dragged us back a little.

It gradually dawned on me that the tide was coming in. Thank God. We wouldn't have stood a chance otherwise. At last, I felt ground beneath my feet; with the board in tow, I staggered towards the beach through the waist-high water.

I was met by a wet grey shadow, charging at my legs and almost knocking me off balance.

'Snowflake, you stupid brute!' I yelled. 'Back to shore, now! You can't help me!'

Unbelievable. He would never normally go anywhere near the water... fortunately he obeyed and tore ahead of me, clearly reassured that I had come back in one piece. I dragged the board and its passenger as far out of the swell as my trembling legs would let me, and then I crumbled. But my beloved dog wouldn't leave me alone, nudging me, yelping and barking in excitement.

'Get off, Snowflake!' I pushed him away as hard as I could and hauled myself up onto my knees.

What about the surfer? Was he still alive?

He lay motionless on his board. Frantic, I tried to pull him off it, before noticing that he was strapped to it. Who goes surfing like that? Never mind. I somehow managed to release the strap and turn him over onto his back.

He was a young man, about my age. Short, black hair framed his face. His masculine features were strikingly beautiful – but he was deathly pale. I shuddered. Was I too late? Panicked, I felt for his pulse, first at his throat and then his wrist, but my fingers were shaking and his skin was so cold that I couldn't be sure. Without giving myself time to think, I tore open his shirt – dark material, certainly not neoprene – and pressed my ear against his chest.

Nice one, Ella, really professional, just great for a doctor's daughter, came the nagging voice in my head.

I closed my eyes. I managed to block out the rushing waves, the whistling wind and Snowflake's panting.

And then I heard it: his heartbeat. Weak, but steady.

I sat up, relieved. And then I noticed something strange: a delicate golden glow on the surfer's wet chest. Perhaps some glowing algae had got caught there?

I wiped my hand over his skin, but the glowing remained.

I reminded myself to focus: was he still breathing? There was no quick way to be sure when it was this windy. Mouth to mouth couldn't be wrong, could it?

Come on, my inner voice encouraged me. You can do it, Mama showed you how.

I held the boy's nose closed, opened his mouth, pressed my lips to his and exhaled deeply. Damn it, was that right? What if I messed it up? Uncertainly, I lifted my head – and a torrent of salt water hit me in the face.

The surfer coughed and spat convulsively.

I rolled him onto his side just in time for him to cough up half the ocean.

He gasped and retched for what felt like an eternity, then took a deep, trembling breath. For a while, I just crouched beside him. I felt completely beaten. The adrenaline was subsiding now and I realised I was freezing cold. Only now did I realise how cold the water had been, how strong the wind was and how little warmth remained in my body. My clothes were drenched. If I was at risk of hypothermia, the surfer's condition had to be life-threatening. We needed help. And fast.

[...]

At last, the path stopped climbing and levelled out before going slightly downhill. And the Bernhardts' house was in sight.

'Miss Bernhardt! Miss Bernhardt!' The two old ladies were calmly pruning roses in their front garden when they were startled by my cry.

'Oh my goodness!' exclaimed Hildy, the younger of the two, straightening up her glasses. 'Isn't that little Ella?'

[...]

'Upstairs, to the guest room! There's no bed down here,' commanded Helen.

We dragged rather than carried the poor lad up the stairs. The guest room was just a few steps along the narrow landing. We laid him on the bed. Hastily, we pulled off the anorak and his long, torn shirt. Then I hesitated. After all, I had never taken off a strange man's trousers before – whether unconscious or otherwise.

'What is it, dear?' The old woman looked at me quizzically over the edge of her nickel glasses. She clicked her tongue disapprovingly when she realised what was the matter.

'That is hardly the top priority at this precise moment, is it?'

Oh God, of course she was right. So we took his trousers off too, as quickly as the wet material would allow. But this was no normal pair of trousers – it was more like a wide piece of cloth, gathered at the hips and ankles. And what he had on underneath was not what I would call underwear. It looked more like a loin cloth. Was this yet another hipster trend that had passed me by?

I was grateful for Helen's calm composure.

Finally, she conjured several blankets out of a narrow cupboard, and we wrapped them around the unconscious surfer.

'Hildy! Where are the hot water bottles? And the thermometer?'

'I'll be there in a minute!' came the resounding cry from below. 'I'm on hold with the emergency services!'

[...]

He was still lying there, just as I had left him. Motionless, buried under a mountain of pastel blankets and quilts, his head on a violet-print pillow. No, something was different: he still looked pale, but his complexion was no longer the half-frozen blue that had scared me so much before. His breath was calm and even. He either had a remarkable constitution – or the Bernhardts had done an incredible job with their hot water bottles. Probably both.

I walked quietly up to his bed and sat down carefully on the edge. My first impression had been correct: he really was about my age. I looked at his expressive face, his straight nose and strong cheekbones. With his short, dark, slightly wavy hair, he reminded of the busts of Roman Emperors I had seen at an exhibition in Berlin last year. Maybe this stranger was from Italy? His lips were narrow, but beautifully curved.

I bet he's a good kisser, shot through my head.

Whoa, Ella, pull yourself together! My inner voice gave me a kick in the backside. *Girl, you really do need a new boyfriend if that's what you're thinking about at a time like this...*

The main thing, after all, was that he seemed to be doing better. Nothing else mattered, right? My gaze fell on his right hand, which was protruding from under the blankets.

On his index finger was a big golden ring. Could it be real? Instead of a precious stone, the ring was adorned with an oval golden disk with a fine pattern engraved on it. Just as I was trying to get a closer look, the surfer breathed a quiet sigh. I jerked backwards. His eyelids fluttered, opened – and then I was looking right into his eyes. They were green. Not grass green, more grey green, but a really unbelievable, vibrant colour. Like the Atlantic in the sunshine.

Nobody would ever need to rescue me from a sea like that, I thought, dreamily.

At first, he gazed aimlessly into the distance, but then he noticed me – and recoiled, as if he had just been given an electric shock.

‘Hey, it’s okay.’ I tried to keep my tone reassuring, and placed my hand gently on the blankets above his chest. ‘Everything’s okay. You were in the water a bit too long, but it turned out all right. The doctor will be here soon.’

‘No!’ he murmured. He looked around in agitation, pushed my hand away and tried to get up. ‘Not... doctor! Nobody!’ His voice sounded hoarse and he spoke with an accent that I couldn’t place.

‘Listen, you have to lie down and stay calm!’ I pleaded. ‘Don’t you understand, this could have been really serious...’ But he continued to struggle. I was amazed at his strength, even though his battle with the waves must have weakened him. ‘Calm down! Everything is okay!’ Just as I thought he was really going to lift himself up, his strength left him. His breathing became laboured and he sank back against the pillow. ‘Everything is okay. Just don’t panic,’ I murmured. ‘We’ll get a doctor. They’ll know what to do.’

‘No...’ His voice was just a whisper. His eyelids trembled, as though he could pass out again at any moment. But he fought against it – and suddenly, he grabbed my hand. He clutched it in an almost iron grip. He pulled me very close to him, so that I could see his unbelievable sea-green eyes better than I would have liked.

‘Bring... nobody!’ I had never heard such an urgent and desperately serious tone before. ‘Nobody. Nobody. They... find me. They kill me. And... you too...’

Then his head fell to one side and he lost consciousness again.

But his grip on my hand didn’t loosen. I struggled to prise it free. Oh God. What had I got myself into?