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Opening extract from  
**Mondays are  
Murder**

Written by  
**Tanya Landman**

Published by  
**Walker Children's Books**

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**Steve** Harris – mountaineer, hiker, abseiler and all-round rugged guy – had just finished his training session at the local gym. Peeling off his sweaty garments, he dropped them on the floor and stepped into the shower. The water was hot, but he liked it that way – it reminded him of the steaming South American jungles he'd spent so much time exploring. He turned towards the jet of water, letting it cascade over his face and down his neck.

Suddenly he jerked his head back so hard it cracked against the tiled wall. The water had got hotter. It was boiling. Dangerous. Frantically Steve grabbed the heat dial and twisted it. Nothing happened: the temperature didn't change. He tried to turn the water off. The control came away in his hand. He pushed the door, but it was stuck. With increasing desperation he hammered on it, yelling and screaming for help. He could feel his skin blistering, his entire body being scalded by the savage heat.

A shadowy form appeared on the other side of the glass and for a moment Steve felt a surge of relief. Someone had come to help him!

But as the face drew closer he seemed to stare into the cold, dead eyes of a ghost.

At that moment Steve Harris knew he was doomed.



dangerous sports

**M**y name is Poppy Fields. I know perfectly well that people can't rise from the dead. Zombies? Poltergeists? Phantoms? Spooks? They're all figments of someone's deranged imagination. I don't believe in ghosts.

Not in the daytime, at any rate. Not when I'm at home.

But at night, in the dark, on a remote island that's cut off from the outside world by a raging storm, when people start dropping dead left, right and centre, and you're absolutely one hundred per cent sure that no living soul could possibly be responsible for murdering them? Well, in those circumstances it's hard not to think

that the invisible hand of an avenging spirit is at work. Believe me, I should know.

I was there.

It was almost the end of the summer holidays. My mum, Lili, is a landscape gardener and she runs her own firm, Green Fields and Far Away. The summer's a busy time of year for her and normally I spend the school holidays doing Not Very Much at home. But this year we had a phone call. It was a client of Mum's saying that a friend of hers was handing out free holiday places at an activity centre on the Scottish island of Murrug and would I like to go? Mum didn't ask my opinion. She leapt at the offer like she'd been electrocuted. Ten thousand volts of enthusiasm went into her answer: "Fantastic! How wonderful! Yes, she'll love it." Landscape gardeners don't earn very much, so the fact that it was free was a big plus. She thought she was giving me a treat, you see.

And why was it free? Well, it turned out that the activity centre would be opening to proper, fee-paying school parties in September, but first they needed willing kids to act as guinea pigs. It would be my job to try out everything that was on offer: rock climbing, canoeing, horse riding, hillwalking. It sounded good and, no matter how hard we looked, neither of us

could see a catch. So a few days later, Mum delivered me with my shiny new coat and squeaky new walking boots to the motorway service station where my adventure holiday would begin.

The first shock we had was Bruce Dundee.

He was one of the instructors, and he was going to drive me and the other kids up to Scotland. Mum had spoken to him on the phone to arrange where we were going to meet and she'd said he sounded nice. But you can't tell how someone's going to look over the phone, can you?

Bruce's face was a mess of scars. For a second I thought it was a mask. I was half expecting him to peel it off and shout, "April fool!" Only then I realized it wasn't April.

I honestly don't think I reacted – not visibly anyway. I mean, I was shocked all right, but I didn't gasp or scream or anything. Mum, on the other hand, was a real embarrassment.

First she expelled a sharp breath. Then she tried to cover it up by gabbling at him.

"Well, this is Poppy, and she's got all her stuff. We went and bought her a new coat for the trip, I didn't think her school anorak would be quite up to the Scottish weather. It can be ever so changeable up there, can't it, even at this time of year? I've put in some

good thick jumpers and socks. And new walking boots too, of course, only I do hope they don't rub – blisters can be a real pain, can't they, literally I mean, and you don't want to be caught on some hillside with blisters bursting in your boots and miles to go before you can get back into the warm. And I've put in sensible shoes for the horse riding, but no hard hat because they said they'd provide those, that's right isn't it...?"

Bruce didn't seem bothered. I suppose he was used to people going funny on him. He gave me a friendly wink and then said with a faint Australian accent, "If you're wondering about my face... It was a car accident, a few years ago. I had to have plastic surgery. Wasn't very successful, I'm afraid. Makes me look like The Joker, I know, but I'm a regular guy underneath."

"Oh, I'm sure you are." Mum turned red and attempted to calm herself. "Are you a friend of Mike and Isabella's?" she asked a little bit more normally.

"The guys who run the centre?" he replied, eyeing Mum with interest. "Why? Do you know them?"

"No," answered Mum. "Mike's a friend of a friend."

"Yeah, same here," Bruce said, sounding faintly relieved. "I've never met them before. I'm kind of a late addition, I guess. Standing in for a mate of theirs who couldn't make it. I've heard a lot about them though."

Everyone says they're real nice guys. Poppy will be in safe hands, no worries."

Mum smiled and kissed me on the cheek. Then she drove away in a screech of tyres and I was left to fend for myself.

I climbed into the minibus and said hello to the kids sitting inside. I'm interested in people. Not in a let's-have-a-good-long-chat-and-tell-each-other-all-our-problems sort of way, like Mum. What makes me curious is how they behave: what they're thinking but not saying. Studying human behaviour is a hobby of mine. So I tend not to talk very much, and keep my eyes open. You can pick up a lot that way.

Take the other kids, for example.

First there was Meera. She said a loud, "Hi, how are you?" and flashed a lovely big, confident grin at me but I could tell from the way her eyes widened that she was nervous. She was probably scared stiff about being away from home but was trying hard to cover it up.

Alice, on the other hand, only managed to whisper a faint hi before doing one of those I'm-so-shy-I'm-just-going-to-peep-at-you-from-beneath-my-fringe smiles that some girls think makes them look sweet. She wasn't shy at all: she was just acting the part. I knew right away I was going to find her annoying.

Then there was Jake: hood pulled over his head,

feet up on the seat in front of him, chewing gum, not bothering to look at anyone. He was exuding waves of hostility but I could see right through them. Terrified, I thought. Just like Meera. I bet he sucks his thumb.

We sat there for a bit while Bruce did grown-up things like checking the oil and water, and adjusting the tyre pressure. Meera buried herself in a magazine and chewed her lip nervously; Alice sat flicking her hair over her shoulder so we'd all notice what a nice shade of blonde it was; Jake blew an enormous bubble with his gum that I hoped would pop all over his face but sadly didn't. I wasn't sure what the hold-up was, and nobody looked like they were about to explain anything to me, so I just kept quiet and watched them all.

We were supposed to set off at 9.30 a.m. but by 9.45 we were still parked on the tarmac. Bruce was pacing up and down, tapping a number into his mobile and saying irritably, "Are you on your way? Yeah? Well, how long?"

"What are we waiting for?" I asked at last.

"Some kid. Don't know why we can't just go without him. He should have been here on time," complained Jake.

"They're probably stuck in traffic," said Meera reasonably.



“Who’s that?” Alice pointed at a van that was pulling up alongside us.

We watched the driver climb out. She was smartly dressed in a navy-blue suit, with flat sensible shoes that clacked on the tarmac as she walked around to the passenger’s side and yanked the door open. Then she started whispering fiercely to a shadowy figure in the front seat. Whoever was in there clearly wasn’t keen on moving, but eventually – probably to avoid the embarrassment of having his mum picking him up like a toddler – he gave in and got out.

When he stood up I realized I knew him. Or at least I knew his name. Graham Marshall: the new boy in my class. He’d only started at my school about two weeks before the end of term because his dad had got a new job and they’d had to move house. He’d instantly been renamed Gawky Graham by the boys on account of his being terrible at sport, and Geeky Graham by the girls on account of his being good at computers and stuffed to the gills with mind-blowingly useless information.

“Sorry everyone. So sorry we’re late,” Graham’s mother said, her teeth clenched with impatience. “We couldn’t find his walking boots. You’d think he’d deliberately hidden them!”

I took a sneaky look at Graham. He was staring innocently into space and his face was giving nothing

away but I thought that, if he really *had* concealed his boots, he had a devious streak that was quite surprising. There might be more to Graham beneath that nerdy exterior than met the eye... Perhaps I should watch him more closely. He glanced casually over to the minibus and for a moment his eyes met mine. In that split second I could see not only that he *had* hidden them but also that he knew I'd guessed he'd hidden them. He looked down at the ground, lips slightly pursed, and I couldn't tell if he was cross with me or trying not to laugh.

"They're all waiting for you, Graham," said his mother. "Now come on, hurry up."

*Do I have to?* He didn't say it aloud but the hunch of his shoulders shrieked the message loud and clear to anyone who was paying attention.

His mum wasn't. "Come on, darling," she wheedled. "You know Dad and I have got to work this week. Fresh air is exactly what you need. You've been spending far too much time on that computer of yours. A little exercise will do you the power of good. Put some colour into your cheeks."

*Hate fresh air. Hate exercise. Want to stay at home.* It was like watching cartoon thought bubbles pop out of his head as he stomped up the steps and into the minibus.

I smiled and said hello because it was quite nice to see someone I vaguely knew, even if he was a geek. “Nice try,” I said sympathetically.

His grin came and went so quickly that if I’d blinked I’d have missed it. “It didn’t work,” he replied gloomily.

“You never know,” I told him cheerily. “It might be fun up there.”

“Fun?” he said. “Doing dangerous sports? Risking mortal injury? Outdoors? In Scotland? In August?” He sighed and then added with a sniff, “And clearly you’ve never heard of midges.”

“Midges?” I repeated, sounding like a baffled parrot.

“Vicious biting flies. I hope you’ve packed an effective insect repellent. Although I gather that nothing really deters them.” He lapsed into a miserable silence.

As soon as Graham was sitting down, his mother clacked back around the van and climbed into the driver’s seat. With a wave she was off. At last Bruce started the minibus engine, and we headed north up the motorway to Scotland.

Scotland is a long way away. A very long way away. My bum had gone numb by the time we crossed the border and according to Bruce we still had miles to go before we reached the ferry that would take us across to the

island. Meera had bought a load more magazines at the last service station we'd stopped at, and she and Alice had been ploughing through them one by one. Jake had plugged himself in to his iPod and Graham was reading his copy of *Guinness World Records*. I had a book with me too but I wasn't reading it.

I was watching Bruce.

The scars on his face meant that his expressions were really difficult to read. He didn't move his eyebrows or smile or do any of those usual things, so trying to guess his thoughts and emotions was enough to keep me busy for ages. I had to work out his mood from the way he carried his shoulders. When people are relaxed, they're all droopy, but when they get wound up their shoulders start edging up towards their ears. Then there were the little giveaway gestures – the nervous tugging of his earlobe, the little grinding movements of his teeth. I started off watching him just because I was bored, but the further north we went, the more interesting it got. It seemed to me that, the closer we drove to our destination, the more tense Bruce became. By the time we reached the ferry, his neck was as stiff as a pole and his shoulders had reached jaw level.

But then we got on the boat, and pretty soon I couldn't think about anything except how much I wanted to die.

It started well enough. We had to leave the minibus on the mainland because the ferry was too small to take vehicles. When it left the harbour, it chugged along the coastline without too much trouble. It rolled about fairly gently – enough to make your stomach feel a bit odd but nothing too serious. I suppose we were sheltered from the full force of the wind by the hills. They were purple – covered in heather, I guess – and hunched together like a group of grumpy old ladies complaining about the price of butter.

But when we rounded the headland and hit the open sea I knew I was in trouble. Suddenly it was like being on a rollercoaster. We shot down sheer wave-walls into deep valleys and then got thrown up over the next peak. We tipped to one side, the ship's railings grazing the white crests of the waves, before we were heaved over onto the other side and scraped through the frothing foam.

I had never felt so ill in my entire life. I was going to die. If the boat didn't sink, I'd expire from pure misery. I didn't much care how it happened. I just hoped it would be over quickly.

The captain was really helpful – not. "It's only a wee bit of wind you great jessies! You'll never be sailors! I don't know what they make you kids from nowadays. No stamina! Do you never eat your porridge?"

Ha ha. Very funny.

I was soaked to the skin, doused with rain and drenched with seawater, clinging to the ship's railing, which had become my very best friend in all the world. I'd ejected my breakfast ages ago, followed by last night's tea and yesterday's lunch. In fact, I was pretty sure that everything I'd eaten in the past few years had been forced out of me bit by bit, and I felt as withered and shrunken as a sun-dried tomato.

But then I saw something that sent such a chill through me that for a second I forgot how ill I was feeling.

As we got closer to Murrug, Bruce squeezed past me and went to stand at the prow of the ship. He was facing into the wind, being lashed by the rain, but he didn't seem to care. His hands were gripping the railing so tightly that his knuckles were white, and he was gazing at the shifting horizon. He looked intense – savage – like a whaler scanning the sea in search of prey. At any moment he'd reach for his harpoon.

When he turned and went back to his seat, I felt my stomach lurch with something that wasn't seasickness. His scarred mouth was wrenched into something close to a smile. But I could have sworn that, mingling with the rain and the sea spray, tears were streaming from his eyes.