

Polly had grown up a lot. She told me so all the way there, and then opened her mouth and wagged a wobbly tooth at me just to prove it. She fell on her knees in the sand beside the Sandman Rocks and clasped her hands together. 'I know,' she said, beaming up at me. 'Let's pretend we're children. We'll build a real Sandman all of our own and we'll make him fat as fat can be. You make his body, and I'll find some shells to make his buttons and his mouth and his eyes and his nose. Come on.'

There are some people who just expect you to do what you're told, and Polly was one of them. So I didn't argue. Off she went down the beach, bottom in the air, looking for cowries and mussels and cockles and limpets, while I began to think about how to build the Sandman's body. It was going to take a lot of digging and an awful lot of sand. As Dadci said in his story, the Sandman was enormous, a

huge sleeping giant stretching at least four metres from the round rock that was his head to the two sticking-up rocks that made up his feet. One rocky knee was raised up and bent, and one of his arms looked as if it was pointing out to sea, out towards the three Turtle Rocks.

I began with the arms. I always do the easiest things first. I'm like that. I wasn't going to have to do too much fetching and carrying to flesh out the arms. The sand was still wet from the tide, heavy to carry but all the better for sculpting and shaping. Polly would come back from time to time to show me her collection of shells and to tell me just what she thought of my handiwork. 'Fatter,' she kept saying. 'He's got to be a great fat giant like Dadci says.' So all that morning I made him fatter. By the time I'd finished, he had a huge great belly like a sumo wrestler and he had arms and legs to match. Polly added the

finishing touches – cuttle shells for his mouth and his eyebrows, clams for his ears, cockleshells for his teeth and cowries for his fingernails and toenails, limpet shells for his eyes and a huge black oyster shell for his nose; mussels for buttons, sea lettuce for his hair and a great big belt of seaweed around his tummy with a crab shell for a buckle. She stood beside me and looked down at him critically.

‘But don’t you think he should be a little fatter?’ she said, her head on one side.

‘No,’ I said quickly. ‘I think he’s just right as he is. Anyway, there’s no point; the tide’ll soon be in and he’ll be all washed away.’

I shouldn’t have said that.

‘Oh no!’ she cried and ran down to the sea. I followed her. ‘You’re got to stop it, Mikey. You’ve got to stop the sea coming in,’ she said, and I laughed – well, you would, wouldn’t you? ‘It’s not funny,’ she shouted, stamping

her foot. ‘You’ve got to stop it, else he’ll drown.’ And a little wave ran up the beach and over her toes. ‘Quick!’ she cried and she grabbed my arm and tugged on it hard.

‘But there’s nothing we can do,’ I said. ‘It’s the moon.’

‘The moon?’ She was screaming at me now.

‘What’s the daft moon got to do with it?’

‘A lot,’ I said, and I began to explain as patiently as I could all about how it was the pull of the moon that made the tides rise and fall like they did, and that there really wasn’t much I could do about it.

‘Stuff the moon,’ she said, and she fetched her spade and began to dig furiously in the sand between the Sandman’s feet and the rising tide.

‘What are you doing?’ I asked her. Ask a silly question.

‘S’obvious,’ she said. ‘If we dig a big, big



hole, then the sea will all fall in and the Sandman won't get drowned will he?' I tried to tell her you couldn't dig a hole big enough, that there was quite a lot of sea out there and it was all coming our way. But she wouldn't listen.

So side by side we dug together, and every time I looked up the sea was coming in closer. Then it was trickling into our hole and there was a sandy pool at the bottom of it. 'See?' Polly was jumping up and down in triumph. 'I told you, didn't I?' Sometimes with some people it's best not to argue. I stood and I waited and I watched as the tide filled the hole, overflowed, and then spread slowly up the beach. Polly shouted at it to go back, but had no more success than King Canute had had before her. In spite of all her fury it lapped over her feet and rolled on up towards the Sandman.

'You can always make another one,' I said.

There wasn't much else I could say.

'But he's my Sandman, and I don't want him to drown.' And then she began to cry. She was standing by the Sandman's feet now and the tears were running down into her mouth. I put my arm around her.

'We'll make you another one just the same,' I said. 'Tomorrow, I promise.'

'But I don't want one just the same, I want him.' A whispering ripple of sea ran up over the sand and touched the Sandman's ankle. 'Oh wake up, Mr Sandman,' Polly cried. 'Please wake up. Please. We got to wake him up. We got to.' And she crouched down and bellowed in his ear. 'Wake up, Mr Sandman. Wake up!' She turned to me with pleading eyes. 'Oh help me, Mikey, please help me.' And so I found myself shouting with her. I took hold of his rocky knee. I even tried to shake it. He didn't move. The sea came hissing up the



beach and washed around his other foot.

And then quite suddenly I remembered Dadci's story. 'Maybe if you told him you loved him, that you'd look after him, you know like Dadci said. Tell him you'll feed him,' I said. 'We've got the picnic, haven't we?'

She looked at me for just a moment and then she put her arms around his neck, kissed him on his sandy cheek and whispered in his clamshell ear: 'We got crisps, Mr Sandman. We got tomatoes. We got peanut-butter sandwiches and hard-boiled eggs. And I do love you, Mr Sandman and I'll feed you and look after you for always and always, and I'll help you get back to Ireland if you want, honest I will.' And she kissed him again on both cheeks and then wiped the sand off her mouth.

A finger twitched, then a hand and then an arm. It could have been the wind whipping at the sand, but I knew it wasn't. The limpet-shell





eyes opened and blinked and squinted at the sunlight. Polly sprang off him and backed away towards me as the Sandman propped himself up on his elbows. He looked us up and down. I don't think he could believe what he was seeing, and he wasn't the only one. He lifted a sandy arm and rubbed his eyes with the back of his wrist. When he yawned I felt Polly's hand creep into mine, and when he sat up I realised she was biting my knuckles.

Just sitting up the Sandman was as tall as Uncle Rob – and Uncle Rob's tall enough. And then he breathed in deeply and stretched and yawned again and scratched his head. When he'd finished he twiddled his finger in his ear. I kept expecting everything to fall off, the sand or the seaweed or the shells, but not a single thing did, not a grain of sand, nothing. Under his mop of sea-lettuce hair his face was round like a pumpkin, and when he stood up and

smiled down at us his cockleshell teeth gleamed white in the sun. 'Best sleep I've had in a long time,' he said. He spoke in a deep echoing drawl of a voice that sounded as if he was still yawning. 'Was I dreaming or was I not?' he went on. 'Did someone say something about a bite to eat?' And he patted his belly in a meaningful sort of a way. He was so tall it hurt your neck to look up at him. I'm telling you he was a giant, a living, breathing giant.

Polly wasn't going to be able to reply, not with her teeth deep into my knuckles, so I thought I'd better say something myself. 'We've got some sausage rolls,' I said.