

me with a knowing, confidential look in her eyes. 'And what about you Michael? You look a bit peaky.'

If I did look peaky, it wasn't because I was hungry.

'Too much Polly,' said Barry.

'Pegleg! Dumbo!' said Polly, and she stuck her tongue out at him, and then ran indoors after Aunty Eleri, still rabbiting on about the Sandman.

'Come on,' said Barry. 'I've got the kite ready and the wind's just right.'

'You go careful,' said Dadci. 'Don't go prancing around on that leg of yours.' And then Polly came running out again.

'What about the Sandman's supper?' she said.

'The Sandman can sing for his supper,' Barry said. 'Mike's flying my kite.'

'Later,' I said to Polly. 'We'll do it later.' It wasn't at all easy keeping everyone happy.

'My sister's a nutter,' said Barry as he walked away, 'a real little nutter.' And then he let me have a go with one of his crutches. 'We'll have a crutch race,' he said, and I discovered he could still run faster than me even with a broken leg.

That afternoon I flew the yellow kite from the back garden and it soared up over the fields around Buzzard Rock. And Barry was right – it was perfect kite-flying weather, the breeze off the sea filling the kite with a life of its own. It was a wheeling buzzard, a rearing cobra, a skimming swallow, whatever it wanted to be. I didn't seem to be able to control it at all. When the kite decided it would dive-bomb the cows and scatter them in all directions, Barry took it off me and flew it himself. And after that, whenever it grounded in the rocks or the gorse, I was sent off to retrieve it and launch it again. I didn't mind a bit. I was with Barry and I could

watch a kite for ever. He obviously didn't believe a word Polly had said because he never mentioned Polly or the Sandman all afternoon, and neither did I. When Auntie Eleri called him inside to lie down for a bit to rest his leg, I went off to help Uncle Rob with the evening milking.

We'd just put the cows out and I was washing down the parlour with the hosepipe when Polly appeared carrying a churn in one hand and a plastic bag in the other. 'What you got there?' said Uncle Rob taking off his milking apron.

'Bread for the Sandman,' she said, 'and Dadci gave me some crusts too for the turtles – he says turtles like their crusts better if they've been soaked in milk.'

'Well, if anyone knows what turtles like,' said Uncle Rob, winking at me, 'then it'll be Dadci.' And he patted her on the head as he passed. 'I'll leave you to finish up then,

Michael. I'm going to have a word with Barry – frightened the cows silly he did, him and that flipping kite of his. All upset and messy, they were.' I kept very quiet. I'm not at all brave when it comes to owning up, I never have been.

Polly waited until he was gone and then handed me the churn. 'You do it,' she said. 'I can't reach, and anyway I'm not allowed. Full to the top, mind. Remember there's three of them and the Sandman.' So I did what I was told, dipped the scoop in the tank and filled the churn right up. 'We got to hurry,' she said. 'Mum wouldn't let me go down to the beach without you. I told her the Sandman would look after me, but she still said I had to wait for you. Come on, he'll be waiting.'

We spotted the Sandman from the cliff path. He was out at sea, sitting astride one of the giant turtles. The other two were swimming





alongside. When he saw us coming he waved and the turtles turned and made for the beach. We ran down to meet him. Polly was holding up the plastic bag. 'We got lots of bread for your sandwiches and we got crusts too, for the turtles,' she said. 'Dadci said they like crusts.'

'And so they do,' said the Sandman. 'Aren't you the clever ones! Let me see now . . .' He sounded just like Dadci about to begin one of

his stories. 'Let me see now . . .' He was looking all around him on the beach – I had no idea what for – but then he found it, a great saucer-shaped rock that lay tipped sideways in the sand right under the cliff. 'This'll maybe do,' he said as he inspected it carefully. Then he took a deep breath, bent his knees, spread his arms out wide and lifted it, just like that.

'What're you doing?' said Polly.

'I suppose you could say I'm sort of laying the table,' the Sandman said, 'for me turtles. In the sea there's not a creature that swims better, but they're just not made for walking on the land. It hurts their flippers, so it does.' No huffing, no puffing, easy as you like, he carried the rock all the way back down the beach and dropped it in the sand near the sea.

Polly poured in the milk and broke up the crusts – she wouldn't let me do it. She sprinkled them on the milk; and then we



mixed them round and round until they were well and truly soaked.

'There we are then,' he said – now he sounded like Aunty Eleri – and he licked his fingers. 'Dinner is served, boys. Bread crusts all nice and soggy, just like you like them. Come and get it.' And the turtles scooped their way out of the shallows, lifted their wizened heads over the lip of the rock and dipped their chins in the milk. Eyes closed in bliss, they lapped and chomped and licked until the rock was quite dry. This all took some time because, of course, turtles do everything in slow motion. Meanwhile the Sandman was busy scoffing his sandwiches. He ate with his mouth open, the bladderwrack popping and crunching as he chewed. When he'd finished he washed it all down with what was left of the milk from the churn. Then he burped, loud and long, and loosened the seaweed belt around his belly.

'Have you ever had bladderwrack sandwiches?' he asked. We shook our heads. 'Sure it's the best brain food in the whole world. It helps you with your thinking processes – well that was what me old mother told me and she was more than usually right.' He shook his head sadly. 'But I've been thinking and thinking, and I've still no notion how I'm going to get meself back home to Ireland. I thought maybe I could ride back on me turtles – take turns maybe – but it's no good, no good at all. We've tried it. They're not as young as they were. They can just about carry me as far as me poor old upside-downed coracle out there, but they'd never get me all the way back to Ireland.'

Polly wasn't listening. She was shielding her eyes with her arm as she looked out towards the lighthouse. I knew what she was thinking because I was thinking just the same thing.