



ELISABETH HEWER GRIFFITHS

Elisabeth was born in Bristol and raised on stories (and cake). She grew up loving writing in all its forms, and jumped at the chance to study on Bath Spa's MA in Writing for Young People as soon as she finished her journalism undergraduate degree at Cardiff University. Fictional worlds have always fascinated her more than the real one. She writes poetry as well as prose, and her debut poetry collection, *Wishing For Birds*, was published by Platypus Press in 2015. *Cliff Edge* received an Honourable Mention in the 2017 United Agents/Bath Spa Prize.

About Cliff Edge

The island of Eddisfarne in the North Sea is not the sort of place bad things happen. Its seventeen thousand inhabitants live their lives knowing the worst thing likely to happen at night is a tree falling across the road.

But then a young girl is brutally murdered and everything changes.

Cecelia Morton, seventeen-year-old daughter of the chief of police, finds herself caught in the middle of the investigation when she befriends the victim's withdrawn older brother, Adam.

Can she defeat her own demons long enough to help Adam with his?

elisabethhewer@gmail.com

@elisabethhewer

CLIFF EDGE

Chapter One

It's the dream again. I mean, obviously. It's a winter Monday. Of course it's the dream.

Here's me in the dream, salt-lipped, feet planted, my hair whipping into my face. I'm seventeen, not twelve like I was when it really happened. My body's the body I have now, long-legged and honed to a sharp point. Back then I was small and scrawny, nothing growing together the way it ought to.

There's panic twisting inside my gut and my arms are outstretched but I'm not moving. Not moving. Not moving as my mother, right in front of me, staggers backwards and disappears over the edge of the cliff.

A lot of people wake up at that point in dreams. Not me. I don't wake up until after, when I've scrambled to the edge of the cliff and looked down at the waves crashing on to the rocks. There's a ragged foam circle where my mother hit the water and a spill of red hair under the skin of the waves.

My heart thuds in triple-time, and the red rises and breaks through. I realise too late that I'm staring down at the wicked, long face of a water horse. Its eyes are glowing in the low light and its mouth is opening, wider and wider and wider, and it's screaming with my mother's voice —

And then I'm awake, heart hammering, feeling sick to my stomach. Same as always.

A glance at the clock tells me it's 5.08am. When I look outside to find it still pitch black, my eyes catch my reflection in the window. My face seems horribly pale against the dark of my hair and bedsheets. I shudder and press my hand against my forehead. I'm cold and clammy, covered in sweat.

I need to get moving.

Getting dressed takes no time at all. My running kit is where it always is: strewn over the chair in the corner. The neon pink stripes on the leggings are the only splash of colour in my plain and neutral bedroom.

I slip downstairs, past Sasha's bare room, and glance at Dad's door as I go past. It's open, his bed empty, the duvet thrown back and his sheets rumpled. The surprise is enough to make me pause, but I shake it off. He never asks where I go at night, so why should I bother?

Once I'm outside, I take off at a sprint straight away, up the stairs from our house on to the pavement and then down the harbour wall. It juts out into the North Sea, stern and unyielding. Down the stone in the dark I go, past sleepy seagulls and iron railings, so fast my breath starts to hurt my throat.

It's about a two-hundred-metre sprint and I hit the stone wall at the end hard enough to knock the little breath I have left out of me. I slump down on to my elbows and let my joints grind into the rough stone. It hurts, but it's a useful sort of hurt. The sort of hurt that helps me pull myself together.

Still puffing, I let my head loll down. It's unbearably grim out here. November sucks, and November on Eddisfarne sucks most of all. All I've got to look at is the dim circle lit up by the lamps around me and then the utter black of the open ocean. The emptiness makes me shiver, and I'm not sure whether it's with fear or longing.

I'm just about to turn to head back down the wall when a flashing light on the cliff road opposite catches my attention. I blink in surprise. Police, out at this time of night?

I put that together with my dad's empty bed and feel a frisson of anticipation. That feeling you get when you know something's happened, or about to happen, that's going to cause a lot of talk. Police on Eddisfarne rarely get called out in the night, and if they do go, they don't go with their lights on – and even then they don't get the chief of police out of bed. Crime's usually someone nicking a sheep, after all, or drunk crofters' kids up Bister way.

A cold wind licks up the back of my neck, goose bumps prickle up my thighs, and in the middle of all that sudden tension my phone goes off.

I jump and fumble in the pocket of my hoody for it. The ringing's shockingly loud and the surprise is making me clumsy. I finally get it to my ear, heart thudding, and I have to jam it tight against the side of my head to hear over the waves.

‘Cecelia?’

My dad’s on the other end. He sounds frantic.

‘Yeah?’ I’m still a little breathless from being startled, but I do my best to hide it.

‘Listen, I’m at the station. There’s been – something’s happened. I need you to bring me some stuff from home, can you do that?’

Normally I’d drag my feet, but I just want to know what’s going on.

‘Yeah, sure. What’s happened?’

‘Great.’ Dad doesn’t acknowledge my question. ‘I need a fresh set of clothes, please, and there’s a file in my office.’ Five years ago, before Mum fell, there would have been a ‘love’ in the middle of that sentence. ‘It’s a big red lever arch one, says “August, Firstow Camp” on the side. Can you get it?’

My nose wrinkles at the thought of ploughing through the mess in Dad’s office, but I keep my voice sugar-sweet and reply, ‘Clothes and file, OK. Can I use the car?’

‘No, I’ve got it. Can you run?’

‘I suppose.’

‘Great. Wear your reflective jacket, OK? It’s too dark.’

‘Yeah, OK,’ I lie, and end the call. It’s pre-emptive. Dad doesn’t like saying goodbye on the phone and I’m sick of him hanging up on me.

With my phone back in my pocket, I take a couple of deep breaths. That sensation of something being about to get itself started is still there. I hug my arms around my stomach and tell myself to calm down. It could be nothing. A burglary, or someone’s grandma getting herself lost around Harquoy or one of the outlying towns. A drama that’ll be over and done with before it’s really started.

I don’t feel like it is, though.

‘Steel yourself,’ I tell a passing seagull, and take off back down the wall.

*

I get to the police station on foot, all Dad’s stuff shoved into a rucksack. The file turned out to be a bit too big for the bag, but I sorted the problem.

‘Jesus, Cecelia,’ says Dad when I trot into the harshly lit reception and offer him the file, ‘What did you do to it?’

So, it's a bit squashed round the edges, but whatever. 'It's here, isn't it?'

I shoot Dad my sulkiest look and begin to rummage around in the rucksack for his clothes. I'm a little puffed from the run, but I took it at a sensible speed instead of my mad dash down the harbour wall earlier. The five K to the station is easy if you pace it right.

The station's busier than I've ever seen it. Through the glass doors behind the reception desk I can see Harquoy's officers bustling about, shouting across each other and frantically tapping at computers or piling up files. All the movement makes the tiny force seem huge. That shiver from earlier makes another pass through me, travelling right from my toes to the top of my head. Whatever's happened, it's something big.

'Where's your jacket?'

I glance up at Dad. He's examining my mostly black running gear with a face like thunder.

'Oh, I left it outside.'

His eyes narrow. He knows I'm lying. But he says absolutely nothing, and it sets my teeth on edge. I can't get him to fight me about anything these days, not even if I run five kilometres along unlit roads in clothes dark enough to make me invisible to oncoming cars. I think sometimes I could stab him and he'd just pat my head and go to work.

'Well, thanks for bringing these. I appreciate it.' He takes the clothes and turns away.

I can't believe it.

'Um, Dad?'

'Yeah?'

'Aren't you going to tell me what's going on?'

He doesn't even turn back to me properly. He just shakes his head, his attention already on an officer coming towards him. It's like I'm barely there. I could be anyone, some random member of the public, rather than his daughter.

'We can't talk about it yet, sorry.'

It doesn't matter how many times he's closed me out over the last five years, it still stings. The feeling of rejection makes me as defensive as ever, so I put on my haughtiest look.

'Whatever,' I say, tipping my chin up. I've always been told this expression

makes me look much more like my mother and, as Dad's got more distant over the years, I've got less ashamed of using that against him like a weapon.

'Will you be all right getting home?' He looks over and his face changes when he sees the way I'm looking at him. But he doesn't say anything. Of course he doesn't say anything. My hurt hardens into anger.

I can't be bothered with this any more. Not this dodgy brown carpet or the unflattering lights or my distant, disinterested father. I spin on my heel and march towards the door.

'See you whenever,' I toss over my shoulder at him, and bash my way through the double doors out into the night. I'd hesitate just outside to see if he calls me back, but there isn't any point. He'll watch me leave and then he'll go back to the police officers that he prefers to me.

'Oi, Cee, that you?'

I know that voice well, and its owner's face appears in the flash of a lighter seconds later. Ryan Samuels. *That* boy. We've got a history, me and Ryan, and it's the kind of history that puts us on edge around each other. He ended things officially back in January this year and I'm not sure I've forgiven him yet for the reason he did it.

Hardly in the mood to bring up old relationship drama, I'm about to wave and run off when I realise that Ryan probably knows exactly what's going on. They hired him as the station receptionist when he left school last year. He'll be easy to get it out of, too. He might have ended things, but I know he isn't over me.

So I stop.

'It might be me,' I tell him, pushing my weight on to one hip and tossing my hair, 'but only if you ask nicely.'

'Easy there, little tiger.'

I step further into the shadows, closer to him. The air around him is acrid with smoke.

'Little's a strong word from someone who's barely an inch taller than me.'

Like this I can see him properly. His smug, self-satisfied smile and the polished gleam of his blond hair are catching the light emanating from the station, and he looks good enough to remind me why I went for him in the first place.

Focus, Cece, I tell myself. I tilt my head and blink slowly at him, reusing the tricks that hooked him before.

‘Come on then,’ I wheedle, ‘What’s going on in there?’

I’m slightly surprised when I don’t get a superior smirk and some teasing comeback about how he knows more than me. That’s the way it used to play out. Instead Ryan frowns and tosses his cigarette to the ground, stubbing it out under the ball of his foot.

‘It’s bad. I don’t think anybody can believe it’s happened.’

I lean in. ‘Tell me.’

‘There’s been a murder.’

I rock backwards, astonished, but that isn’t the end of it. Ryan catches my wrist, his expression more serious than I’ve ever seen.

‘It’s really bad, Cee. It’s this little girl – they found her out in the peat up Fawick way. Face down in the mud with the back of her head caved in. Someone hit her hard. I mean really hard.’

It takes me a second to process that. I stand there, my mind racing, my breathing speeding up, not even caring that he’s still got his hand wrapped around my wrist.

‘A kid,’ I repeat at last. My voice is shakier than I’d like, my bravado temporarily vanished. ‘A girl.’