

‘Maybe some small stuff. Remember what I said, though – you need to be quiet and keep still, otherwise you’ll scare them away.’

‘Okay.’ Daniel lifted the bright-red net to his face and pushed his glasses up his nose, frowning. ‘Hope I catch more than just tadpoles this time.’

‘Wrong time of year, mate. Don’t worry. You’ll get something, I’m sure.’

His son’s enthusiasm took him back to his time growing up in Tovil, fishing with his own father at this very spot and trying to land something bigger than a minnow.

Not a pike, though.

Something special.

Then he’d gotten older, and for years the river hadn’t factored into his life at all. It wasn’t until he and Michelle had Daniel that

he'd remembered what it was like to be that age – and what he missed about it. He might work all hours in his role as a mobile mechanic, but he spent time with Daniel whenever he could, knowing Michelle relished the few hours of peace and quiet their Saturday outings afforded her.

Michael's attention was taken by a sudden rumble to his right, moments before a three-car passenger train roared past, its wheels swooshing along the line towards Paddock Wood. As it disappeared between the trees, a calmness returned to the riverbank.

A soft *plop* reached him, and he paused, crouching next to his son.

'Keep still. See that log poking out from the bank?'

'Yeah.'

‘The water’s rippling, see?’

‘Why? What is it?’

‘Either a water vole, or an otter. Quiet now.’

Holding his breath, Michael pointed at movement on the water’s surface as a sleek brown streak of fur burst from the water and scampered up the opposite bank.

‘Otter! We saw an otter!’ Daniel spun around and grinned at him. ‘That was so cool.’

‘Did you like that?’

‘Yeah – wait until I tell them at school next week.’ He slipped his hand into Michael’s and tugged. ‘Let’s fish, Dad.’

‘Okay. There’s a good spot along here, over by that tree. Your granddad used to bring me here when I was your age. Let’s go.’

Moments later, Michael cast off his line and dug his boots into the soft undergrowth, his

shoulders relaxing.

Daniel crouched at the water's edge, his brow furrowed as he swept his net back and forth in the shallows, and Michael smiled at the boy's expression of sheer concentration. A light breeze ruffled his strawberry-blond hair that was darkening every year, another reminder that his childhood was passing too fast for his father's liking.

Michael craned his neck to see further up the riverbank, but saw no-one else. They had the place to themselves. Not that he was overly surprised – with the summer drawing to its inevitable end, most people were making the most of the weather and spending Friday nights having barbecues or sitting outside in pub gardens until darkness set in. It was only because it was his turn to be designated driver

last night that he was here, and Michelle was having a lie-in.

‘What do you think, shall we buy some cakes on the way home? Do you think your mum would like that?’

‘Yes!’ Daniel grinned up at him, then went back to inspecting his net. ‘Haven’t caught anything yet, Dad.’

‘Patience, kiddo. Waiting is half the fun.’

Michael’s gaze turned back to the river, and he blinked as he caught sight of some *thing* further upstream.

For a moment, he couldn’t understand what he was seeing. The spread-eagled form floated along on the gentle current, brushing against the reeds that clumped against the bank only a few metres away, then spun around on an eddy and drew closer.