



thirteen

“Zoe?”

“Yes?”

“This is crazy.”

“Don’t say that.”

“But we haven’t even got any water.”

Munchkin and Zoe were far out to sea. They had watched the island of Eels shrink before their eyes with every pull of the oars. Finally, even the monstrous cathedral had disappeared from view, a dot on the horizon that bobbed into sight for one last time and then was gone.

“Maybe we have,” said Zoe. “There’s something under the thwart.”

They stopped rowing for a while, and pulled the package out. It was a box, wrapped in an old oilskin.

“There you are,” said Zoe. “We should have known Dooby would see himself all right.”

The lid was stiff, but with cold fingers Munchkin prised it open.

There was a bottle of water, and some dried food in tins.

“What a feast,” said Munchkin, smiling.

There was some paper too, folded up.

Munchkin unrolled it; it flapped dangerously in the wind.

It was a map.

“Careful!” said Zoe, grabbing two of its corners.

“It’s not as good as mine,” said Munchkin.

Zoe glanced at it. Even from the quick look she’d had at Munchkin’s map, she could see he was right.

“We can use it, though, can’t we,” said Munchkin.

“Perhaps . . . If we find some land, then definitely. I just don’t know where we are now really . . .”

Munchkin looked at the map again.

“I *do*,” he said. He pointed.

“That’s where we are. That’s the cathedral, more or less.”

Zoe looked.

“So the mainland must be to the west. William was right.”

They carefully folded the map back up and put it away.

There was something still in the box. A smaller parcel, wrapped in an old plastic bag. Zoe took it out and unwrapped it.

It was a photograph in a frame. There, in the picture, were three people; two adults standing either side of a young boy, about five or six. The boy’s parents had their arms around each other, and around him. All three smiled at the camera. Suddenly, Zoe realized who she was looking at. Despite his age in the photo, the boy was Dooby. The good looks, the dark hair, were unmistakable. It was only the innocent smile that had stopped Zoe from recognizing him sooner.

“Look,” said Zoe, and showed the picture to Munchkin. For some reason she felt like crying.

Munchkin looked at the picture.

“That’s what it’s done,” he said, after a moment. “The sea, I mean. That’s what it’s taken away from all of us. Dooby, too.”

Zoe didn’t say anything. In spite of everything he’d done, Zoe couldn’t hate Dooby completely. Munchkin was right, they had all had to grow up very fast, and something had been taken from them. Looking at Dooby’s photograph, she wondered if, like herself, he was just a child who wanted his mum and dad back.

After they had eaten a little of the dried food, and had some water, they rowed on.

"Where did you learn to row?" she asked him, after a while.

"I don't know. I just watched what you were doing."

"You must learn fast."

"Everyone does, though. I mean, if you want to survive."

"Yes, you're right," said Zoe. She wondered if she could trust him.

"How about a song?"

"What?" said Zoe, between pulls on her oar.

"A song. To keep us going."

"Okay, then. You first," said Zoe, amazed, and trying not to laugh.

Munchkin thought for a moment.

"Okay," he said, "Here's one.

*Little Tee-Wee,
He went to sea,
In an open boat.
And while afloat,
the little boat bended.
And that is why,
my song is ended.
If the boat'd been stronger,
my song would've been longer."*

He finished, pleased with himself.

"Munchkin," said Zoe.

"What?"

"Let's not sing any more. Okay?"

Still they rowed on. The sea had been kind to them so far, but it was beginning to get rougher. Night wasn't far away, and Zoe could feel the fear welling up in her throat again, as it had the last time she'd set off in *Lyca*.

At least, she thought, I'm not alone, this time. Between pulls she peered sideways at Munchkin. If he was going to do her in, he could have shoved her overboard by now.

"What are you thinking?" she asked him.

"I was thinking about Rat," he said.

"Oh dear!" said Zoe, "He'll be stuck in that little cage."

"No. I let him out when the attack started. I always do. Did. In case anything happened. You know . . ."

"Oh," said Zoe. "Well, I'm sure he'll be okay."

"Yes?"

"Yes," said Zoe.

"Shall we swap sides?" said Munchkin. "My arm's aching."

Zoe laughed.

"Good idea," she said.

"What are you laughing at?" said Munchkin.

"Nothing."

"What?"

"It's just," she wondered how to put it, "it's just . . . you. You're like a different person since we left the island. You've said more since we got into *Lyca* than I heard you say during the whole time I was there."

Munchkin frowned at her.

"Let's swap places," he said.

Gingerly they swapped places on the thwart. As she stood to let Munchkin slide past her, she suddenly felt how precarious they were, bobbing around on the ocean.

"Aren't you scared?" she asked Munchkin, suddenly, as she slid back

beside him.

“No,” he said, “William told us where to go. And you know what you’re doing. I know you’ll get us there. So I’m not scared.”

“Oh, right,” said Zoe quietly.

They rowed on, and night came. They took it in turns to try and get some rest while the other one rowed, but the sea was starting to happen. The wind was pushing them hard in the face. Zoe didn’t like to tell Munchkin, but she had no idea where they were going now.

Soon it was no use one of them rowing alone. Anyway, it was too rough to sleep, so they both grimly gripped their oars and tried to put them into the water properly.

“Munchkin!” shouted Zoe above the wind.

“What?”

“I . . . I don’t know where we’re going any more. We’re probably off course!

“We can’t hold it against this.”

For the first time, a wave broke over the side of the boat.

“I’ll row!” shouted Zoe. “You bale us out.”

She shoved Dooby’s box, now empty, into Munchkin’s hands. He looked at her blankly.

“The water! Get it out of the boat!”

Munchkin started to scoop the water back into the sea, but before he had made any difference, another wave swamped them.

“Oh God! Oh God! Oh God!” said Zoe.

Munchkin kept baling, but it seemed hopeless.

“Leave it!” shouted Zoe. “Help me point her into the waves.”

For a little while longer, they struggled to keep *Lyca* on course, with her nose into the oncoming waves.

Then it ended. Munchkin fumbled his stroke into the water so badly that he went flying backwards. The oar slipped from his hands and was

eaten up by the waves.

“No!” yelled Zoe, but she was too late.

Munchkin had leant forward again, grasping for his oar. The boat had turned and a huge wave slammed into their side. Munchkin went flying overboard.

“Munchkin!” she screamed, and without thinking flung herself to his side of the boat. The sea pushed her in after him.

For a second or two she was under the water, then her head broke surface. She gulped for some air. Something pulled at her. Turning, she found Munchkin beside her in the water.

“Zoe!”

He grinned. They grabbed each other for a second, then broke to tread water.

“What now?” he yelled.

“Where’s the boat?”

Munchkin nodded. Zoe turned to see *Lyca* a long way off, overturned. The sea pushed her around like driftwood.

“Come on!” Zoe yelled. They tried to swim for *Lyca*.

The waves broke roughly over them all the time now. And after each one a stinging salty spray whipped their faces, making it hard to see.

Zoe could feel herself tiring. The water was freezing, stopping her arms and legs from working. She went under. She broke surface to see Munchkin a little way ahead of her, still fighting the waves.

She went under again. Longer this time. Strangely, it was much quieter under the water. She no longer felt the cold. She no longer felt anything. Darkness was all around her. She knew she was about to drown. Another second and it would be over. The waves pulled themselves to pieces above her. She tried to look up through the water, and thought she saw a light. She wondered vaguely if dawn was coming. Had they been struggling with the sea for so long? It seemed to be getting brighter every

second.

Then with a shock, Zoe thought she felt the bottom with her feet. She looked up again. The light was a brilliant point in front of her now. And then she felt herself being pulled up out of the water. She was being taken towards the light. Pulled upwards by an unstoppable force.

Her head broke through the water and she gasped for air, choking on sea water, but breathing again.

A strong light shone into Zoe's eyes.

"She'll be okay," said a voice.

"Bit close for comfort."

"Yeah. Any more in there?"

"No, don't think so. Let's get home."

The light flicked over her face once more, and she blacked out.

As she went, she just had time to realize something. The light. The Light was from a torch. An electric torch.