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Opening extract from

I Never Liked Wednesdays

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Chapter 1
The Call of the Sea

When I was young, I lived in Liverpool and my best friend was a boy called Midge. His real name was Kevin Midgeley, but we called him Midge for short. And he was short, only about three cornflake packets high.

Midge was my best friend and we had lots of things in common. We enjoyed the same things like ... climbing trees, playing footy, going to the pictures and hitting each other really hard. And there were things we didn't enjoy like ... sums, washing behind our ears and eating cabbage.

But there was one big thing that bound Midge and I together, one big thing we had in common. A love of the sea.

The River Mersey is not so busy today. In the old days – but not long, long ago – it was very busy indeed. Those were the days of cargo boats and the big liners that took people across the sea. Large ships sailed out of Liverpool for Canada, America, South Africa, the West Indies, all over the world.

My family had all been to sea. My grandfather and all my uncles, and my great-grandfather too. Six foot six, strong arms rippling in the wind, huge hands grappling with the wheel, soaked in rum and as fierce as a wounded shark – and that was just my granny!

By the time they were 20, most young men in Liverpool had visited parts of the globe I can't even spell.

In my bedroom each night, I used to lie in bed – it's the best place to lie really. I used to lie there, in the winter, and listen to the foghorns sounding all down the river. I could picture ships nosing their way out of the docks into the shipping channel of the River Mersey and out into the Irish Sea. It was exciting. All those far-off places. All those exciting adventures.

Midge and I knew what we wanted to do when we left school – we wanted to become sailors. A captain, an admiral, perhaps one day even a steward. Of course we were only about 10 or 11 at the time, so we thought we'd have a long time to wait.

In fact, the call of the sea came sooner than we'd expected.