# INCHTINN

## ISLAND OF SHADOWS

FREE LIMITED EDITION PROOF COPY – NOT FOR RESALE

This is an uncorrected book proof made available in confidence to selected persons for specific review purpose and is not for sale or other distribution. Anyone selling or distributing this proof copy will be responsible for any resultant claims relating to any alleged omissions, errors, libel, breach of copyright, privacy rights or otherwise. Any copying, reprinting, sale or other unauthorised distribution or use of this proof copy without the consent of the publisher will be a direct infringement of the publisher's exclusive rights and those involved liable in law accordingly.

Also available by Danny Weston

*Mr Sparks*

*Scarecrow*

*The Haunting of Jessop Rise*

*The Piper*



Danny Weston

# INCHTINN

## ISLAND OF SHADOWS

Illustrated by MIRANDA HARRIS

uclanpublishing

*Inchtinn: Island of Shadows* is a uclanpublishing book

First published in Great Britain in 2019 by
uclanpublishing
University of Central Lancashire
Preston, PR1 2HE, UK

Text copyright © Danny Weston, 2019
Cover design and branding copyright © Helen Crawford-White, 2019
Interior illustrations copyright © Miranda Harris, 2019

978-0-9955155-9-8

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

The right of Danny Weston and Miranda Harris to be identified as the author and illustrator of this work respectively has been asserted in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publishers.

Set in 10/17pt Kingfisher by Becky Chilcott

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

*For Philip Caveney,*
*without whom I would never have*
*become a writer . . .*

"You cannot swim for new horizons until you have courage to lose sight of the shore."

*William Faulkner*



## Chapter One

# The Boat

NOAH STOOD ON THE WOODEN JETTY IN THE chill light of early morning. He stared apprehensively across the vast stretch of flat grey water to the distant smudge on the horizon that Mr Morrison had just pointed out as their eventual destination. Noah pulled the canvas lifejacket tighter around him and tried not to tremble. He didn't want the old man to know how scared he was, but realised that it was probably all too obvious. It clung to him like a bad smell, like an ill-fitting suit of clothes that he could never remove, no matter how hard he tried.

Mr Morrison sat in the wooden dinghy, smiling encouragingly up at Noah. The boat was already piled high with all the equipment that Millicent had insisted on bringing with them and she was still in the house, selecting a last few items that she couldn't bear to be parted from, even for a couple of weeks. Noah couldn't believe she was planning on bringing out yet more things. Didn't she realise how dangerous it was to overload a boat? Didn't she know how deep the Firth of Forth actually was?

"Not a good sailor then?" observed Mr Morrison, in his slow Scottish lilt. "Despite the name," he added under his breath, and Noah winced, already too familiar with the joke or at least, variations on it. He had heard them so many times back at his last boarding school. "Noah who's afraid of the water," they used to whisper, just loud enough for him to hear. It was one of his main reasons for leaving the place.

"Weather's good, anyway," added Mr Morrison. "Should be a nice calm crossing. That's always a blessing." He leaned over the side of the boat and spat into the water. He was old and grey whiskered, his scrawny body encased in a voluminous khaki duffel coat. A woolly hat was pulled down to just above his piercing blue eyes. He claimed to be an experienced sailor – that's what he'd told Millicent, anyway – but Noah was far from convinced. People in the local village, he thought, would claim just about anything if they thought it was an easy way

of earning a few extra pounds; but whatever Mr Morrison had told Millicent about his abilities on the water, she'd booked him for the trip and paid up front in hard cash. Now here he sat in a boat that looked decrepit enough to fall to pieces at any moment.

He studied the floating speck of phlegm he'd just expelled as though trying to spot a hidden message in it. Then he turned back to study Noah, who thought he detected a hint of malice in the old man's gaze as he said, "Well, you may as well climb aboard now. If you're ready."

And suddenly Noah was back at the school, standing on the high diving board and staring down at the blue water of the swimming pool below him, while Mr Greer, the PT instructor glared up at him, no doubt wondering what was taking so long. Noah's grinning classmates clustered around Mr Greer, enjoying the moment.

"Well, come on, boy, what are you waiting for? It's quite simple. Put your blessed head down and dive!" Greer's voice echoed around the swimming pool and Noah was horribly aware of the other boys sniggering at his discomfort, knowing only too well about his fear of the water.

He couldn't move so much as a muscle. He stood like a statue, rooted in position, absolutely terrified of the prospect of diving from the board. He didn't exactly know what he was afraid of. There was just something about the prospect of

the chill embrace of the water that filled him with a powerful sense of dread – the thought that he would slide into those glistening depths and never ever manage to find his way back to the surface.

"Are ye all right, lad?" Mr Morrison's concerned voice brought Noah back to the present. He was relieved to find that he was standing on the jetty and not the diving board – and yet, even the thought of climbing down that short stretch of ladder into the dinghy was enough to strike an all-consuming fear into him. He opened his mouth to speak but nothing emerged.

"Do ye want me to come up there and help ye down?" asked Mr Morrison gently; and Noah realised that there was no spite in the old man at all, that he really was only trying to help.

Noah shook his head. "I'm . . . fine," he croaked. "Just . . . give me a minute. I don't . . . it's just that I don't like to be rushed."

He managed to take a tentative step forward and place one foot on the top rung of the ladder. Then gathering his courage, he swung himself around, so that he was facing back towards the jetty. He clutched the wooden uprights of the ladder so tightly they hurt his palms.

"So it's all to do with another book, is it?" asked Mr Morrison. "I believe that's what Mrs Palmer told me. Another of her stories for wee children." Noah realised that the old man was just making conversation, trying to take Noah's

mind off the situation. "I'm told that she's quite a big name in publishing."

Noah nearly laughed at that innocent remark. One of the reasons why Millicent had taken to spending so much time in her remote Scottish cottage was for the novelty of not being recognised. Back home in Kent, she could barely go out of the house without being spotted by crowds of avid readers who wanted nothing more than to talk to the creator of *The Adventurers* and countless other best-selling children's series. And now a new Adventurers title was required and Millicent was planning to do something based around the exploration of a mysterious island – but, instead of just making things up like she used to, now she had decided she actually needed to spend time in just such a place. And luckily, there was one only a few miles from the cottage. The visit to "Inchtinn" had been planned for quite a while. Millicent had intended to visit the place alone, but Noah's unexpected arrival from the boarding school in England meant that she was now obliged to take her adopted son along with her for the trip. It was evident she wasn't keen on the idea but she'd dealt with it in her usual brisk style, clearly determined to make the best of things.

"You can be my assistant," she'd told Noah. "You can do the fetching and carrying while I get on with the important job of writing the book."

"But I'll be bored!"

"Nonsense. The fresh air will do you good – and it'll give you a chance to ponder your latest misadventure."

It was all settled; and it had only recently occurred to Noah that there was only one way of visiting an island. You went by boat.

"I can't imagine what made her choose Inchtinn," continued Mr Morrison, watching intently as Noah slowly descended the ladder. "I mean, she said she wanted somewhere remote but that place has such a reputation . . ."

Noah froze in the act of lowering his foot to the next rung of the ladder. He actually managed to turn his head to look down into the boat.

"R . . . reputation?" he echoed. "What does that mean?"

Mr Morrison must have seen the anxiety written large in the boy's eyes and he made a dismissive gesture. "Ah . . . superstitious nonsense," he said. "Nothing for you to worry about. People like their spooky stories, that's all." He gazed up at Noah. "You're doing fine," he said. "That's the way, no hurry. Take it one step at a time."

Noah felt annoyed that his fear was so evident, but was determined not to embarrass himself. "Tell me," he insisted, as he got his left foot into position. "What they . . . say about the island."

Mr Morrison seemed reluctant to go into more detail. "Oh, you know . . . just . . . the usual claptrap," he said. "People with

too much time on their hands will always take the opportunity to gossip. I'm afraid that's the way of things out here." He made another attempt to dismiss the subject. "A couple more rungs now and you're there."

Noah held his breath. He turned his head briefly to get his bearings, then lowered one foot gingerly down the last few inches onto the deck of the boat. Immediately, he felt the wood sway treacherously under his step and he teetered on the verge of panic, but Mr Morrison, sensing his fear, got quickly to his feet and stretched out a hand to support the boy, then helped to lower him onto a seat in the stern. Noah sat there miserably, his hands clamped onto the wooden thwart, aware of the way the bottom boards tipped and lurched beneath the soles of his shoes and knowing only too well that it would be much worse once they were under way.

"Are ye not much of a swimmer then?" asked Mr Morrison; and once again, Noah was back at the school, Mr Greer's harsh words booming in his ears, ordering him to dive – and then the teacher's echoing tones were joined by the rising chant of the other boys, as they clapped their hands in an urgent rhythm and urged him on. "Dive, Noah, dive, dive, DIVE!" And he'd been so desperate not to disgrace himself that he'd actually tried to go through it. He'd snatched in a breath and allowed himself to fall. There'd been a brief horrible tumble through the air, the shocking embrace of the icy water as it struck him

like a clenched fist, his breath exploding out from him with the impact – and then he'd sunk like a stone to the bottom of the pool. Worst of all, was the shock of the moment when he'd instinctively tried to suck in a breath and foul tasting water had gushed into his mouth . . . in that instant, he'd truly believed he was going to drown.

"Are you cold?" asked Mr Morrison. "You're shaking."

"I'm all right," Noah assured the old man, but he wasn't, because in his head he was still back there, thrashing and kicking helplessly in the water, unable to claw his way back to the surface and he was terrified, more scared than he'd ever been in his fourteen years of existence. It was only then that Mr Greer had realised Noah's predicament and had dutifully dived in to pull him out. The other lads had helped to get him up out of the pool and he'd lain on his back, coughing up chlorinated water, while his classmates stood around, gazing down at him, making no attempt to hide their expressions of pure contempt. And Noah had realised at that moment that this was the way the other boys would always see him now, that there was no use trying to fit in with them anymore. He would be forever marked as a coward, and therefore not worthy of their friendship.

He'd left the school the very next day.

A gull shrieked in the air high above him, wrenching him back to the present. He stared into the sky for a moment, then lowered his gaze to look at Mr Morrison, meaning to ask once

again about the island – about what he had meant by the word "reputation" – but the old man was looking back across the expanse of the jetty as somebody came down the steps of the cottage and walked confidently towards the water's edge.

"Here's your mother now," said Mr Morrison.



## Chapter Two

# Millicent

SHE STRODE ALONG THE NARROW STRETCH OF the jetty, carrying a large suitcase with one hand and the handle of her trusty Underwood typewriter in the other. As ever, she was dressed in a tweed jacket and jodhpurs, a slouch hat pulled down low over the grey eyes that always bore that characteristic look of steely determination. She was Millicent Palmer and she was a publishing legend, an author for more than thirty years now.

Of course, some things had changed over those years. Once upon a time, she had been ridiculously successful. Where most

authors thought they were doing well to produce ten books, her titles had numbered in the hundreds and commanded the kind of sales that made the competition envious. Where other writers struggled to complete a few pages of text, she had seemed to exhale them, turning out some of her most successful stories in a matter of days. When she had a book "on the go, " as she liked to call it, she would lock herself in her study and type like someone possessed until she could key the words THE END at the foot of the final page. The books had earned her a fortune and had bought Millicent and her late husband, Archie, a splendid house in Kent, an apartment in London and a country retreat in Scotland, where they would head whenever they had a little time on their hands and needed some solitude.

Millicent and Archie had enjoyed a long and faithful marriage – and they'd been successful at everything they'd attempted with one notable exception. They had somehow failed to produce any children.

Noah had been adopted as a baby. He'd known about it from an early age, it had never been kept a secret from him. Indeed, Millicent (he never called her anything else, she hated "Mum" or "Mummy") had once told him that she and "The Captain" – her pet name for Archie – had always intended to adopt more children, but once they'd got Noah, they'd quickly decided that one was quite enough, thank you. Noah was never

really sure whether to take this as an insult or a compliment but hoped it was the latter.

And then of course, Archie had been killed in the war and that had affected Millicent profoundly. She no longer found it quite such a breeze to write her books – now it was a chore, something she really had to apply herself to. The words that had once come so easily had to be dragged out of her, one at a time. At first she had thought it would be a temporary thing, but Archie had been gone seven years now and still she was struggling to meet her deadlines. Her literary agent, Alicia, had even discussed with her the possibility of employing ghost writers who would produce new books using her name, but Millicent had resisted such a solution, assuring Alicia that she would eventually recapture her old spirit.

At the heart of it, of course, was the fact that Millicent was lonely. She had always told her friends that Archie had been the only man for her and she really wasn't interested in finding a replacement. The problem was, she wasn't particularly good at the motherhood side of things. Noah had always got on much better with Archie, who he remembered as a big affable bearded man with a booming laugh and a joke for every occasion. Of course, there had been that unfortunate business with the sailing trips, but . . . he'd surely meant well enough with that, following some wartime notion of turning his boy into a man, and all in all, he'd been a good father, kind and supportive.

When the destroyer he'd commanded had been sunk by a torpedo in 1944, and lost with all hands, it had left a gaping hole in the family unit that would probably never be filled.

After that, Millicent had tried to fulfil her motherly duties to the best of her abilities. But things had been strained to say the very least and as soon as Noah was old enough, she'd packed him off to the first of what was to be a whole series of boarding schools. The problem was, he couldn't seem to get along at any of them. The last one had been a particularly horrible example of the form, rife with bullying and excessive corporal punishment, so he was glad to have left it behind him. But the prospect of being trapped on an island with Millicent for two weeks wasn't exactly his idea of a good time, either. He'd even suggested to her that he might stay at the cottage by himself, or that Millicent might hire somebody to look in on him every day. But she was having none of that. She wanted Noah where she could keep an eye on him.

She reached the ladder and gazed down into the ramshackle dinghy, as though assessing its suitability for the task at hand. Much to Noah's bewilderment, she seemed perfectly happy with what she was looking at. She set aside her typewriter and handed the suitcase down to Mr Morrison, who stood upright to reach for it. He grunted as he took the weight in his arms.

"Heavy," he observed, unnecessarily. He turned and

placed the suitcase carefully in the boat beside a pile of other equipment.

"Do we really need that?" asked Noah, anxiously. "It'll sink the boat."

"Nonsense," said Millicent. "It's just warm clothes and other necessities. This good weather might not hold. One needs to be prepared for all eventualities." She picked up her precious typewriter, turned around and came effortlessly down the ladder as though it was something she did all the time. She actually jumped the last couple of feet and the impact of her boots on the bottom boards made the dinghy rock alarmingly.

"Be careful, you'll capsize us!" protested Noah. Millicent and Mr Morrison exchanged amused looks.

"As you'll have gathered," said Millicent, "Noah is not a natural sailor."

"Ah, he'll be fine," said Mr Morrison. "He'll soon get his sea legs." He winked at Noah, but when he failed to get a reaction, he took a last look around. "Well, if you're all set, we might as well be on our way."

"Excellent." Millicent settled herself down beside Noah and watched as Mr Morrison moved to the stern of the boat and stooped to pull the cord of the rusty outboard motor. It took him several attempts, but finally the thing sputtered into noisy, noxious life, puffing out a cloud of oily smoke. Mr Morrison cast off the mooring rope and settled himself on the stern thwart

so he could handle the rudder. He opened the throttle and the dinghy moved smoothly forward across the mirror-like surface. Noah felt a corresponding lurch in his stomach and tried to put his mind on something else.

"Noah, you've gone decidedly pale," observed Millicent. "Did you take the tablets I gave you?"

Noah nodded, but didn't reply for the moment. He glanced over his shoulder and was shocked to see that the jetty was already surprisingly distant.

The tablets were supposed to help with travel sickness, but he didn't know if they were having any effect on him.

"Just keep your gaze fixed on the horizon," Millicent advised him. "I always remember Archie saying that helped."

"That would be your late husband, would it?" asked Mr Morrison, spotting an opportunity for conversation. "Somebody told me he was in the service."

Millicent nodded. "A naval officer," she said. "A Scotsman like yourself. Captain Archie McCallum." She smiled proudly. "He gave his life in defence of his country and died a hero at the Battle of the Atlantic."

Mr Morrison bowed his head. "Oh, I'm sorry for your loss," he said. Then a puzzled expression crossed his face. "Forgive me, but . . . I understood your name was Palmer?"

Millicent nodded. "It's really quite simple. I never took my husband's name. I had already established a career with my

maiden name, you understand, so we decided not to er . . .” She smiled. “. . . rock the boat.”

“I see,” said Mr Morrison. “And you’re allowed to do that, are you?”

“It’s not unheard of,” Millicent assured him.

“Well, well. I never knew.”

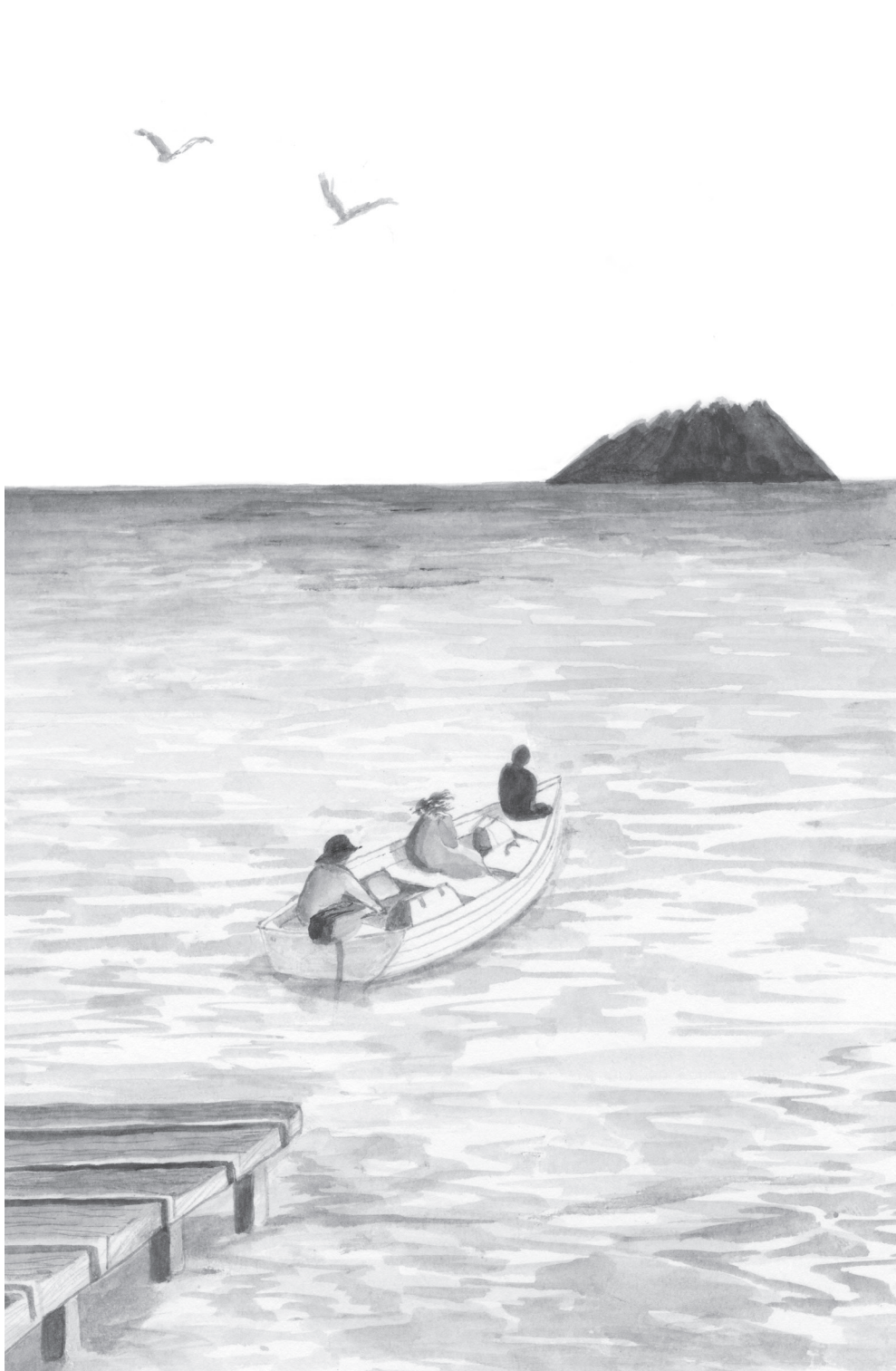
“Ah, anyway, it’s all ancient history now,” said Millicent. “We have to get on with things. But we do miss him terribly, don’t we Noah?” She glanced at her adopted son, but his head was bowed, and he was staring intently at his feet, so she made an effort to shrug off her sad memories, and turned her gaze back to Mr Morrison “So,” she said. “Tell me more about this place we’re visiting.”

Mr Morrison frowned as though this was a tall order. “Inchtinn?” he murmured. “Well, where would I start? It’s always been there on the horizon, just about as long as I can remember. Why, when I was a wee boy, I’d sail over to it with my father, looking for bird’s eggs.”

“You collected them?” asked Millicent.

Mr Morrison snorted. “We ate them,” he said. “Times were hard back then, you were glad of anything you could get your hands on. Strange, lonely old spot, it is. Something quite eerie about it.”

Millicent looked thrilled. “Good. That’s exactly what I’m looking for. And the place we’ll be staying?”



"It's an old wooden cabin," said Mr Morrison. "Don't be expecting too much, now. There's a cast iron stove in it and a couple of old beds and that's about it."

"I'm sure we'll be fine there," said Millicent. "And I seem to remember you said that the island is completely uninhabited?"

"Mmm . . . aye, pretty much."

Millicent looked at the old man suspiciously. "What's that supposed to mean?" he asked him. "Either it is or it isn't."

"Well, there's just the one fellow who spends some of his time out there. Finlay, his name is. The bird-man."

"The what?" Millicent looked amused.

"Oh, you know, he's a . . . what's the word? Orni . . .thol . . .ogist? I think that's what he calls himself. There are rare birds on the island, you see. He works for the Royal Society. You know, the people who look after our feathered friends? They'd take a very dim view of my old egg-stealing ways, I'm sure."

"Quite right too," said Millicent. "That's how a species becomes rare in the first place."

"Anyhow, I doubt he'll bother you at all. Stays on the far side of the island, he does, well away from the cabin you'll be using. He's got a wee shed there would make your place look like the Grand Hotel by comparison."

Millicent nodded. "He sounds interesting," she said. "Maybe I'll look him up for a chat. Might give me some useful background for the book."

"Aye, well, I wouldn't bother if I were you," said Mr Morrison. "He's a bit of a loner to tell you the truth. Well, you'd need to be, living out there most of the year. He comes back over to the mainland from time to time. I think he has a sister in Fife. He had me ferry him over once." Mr Morrison grimaced. "Not much of a conversationalist, that one."

"I suppose he doesn't get much practice," said Millicent. She smiled. "And that's it as far as habitation goes?"

"Aye. There are some abandoned buildings, mind you, up on the cliffs. Part of the old leper hospital . . ."

That made Noah sit up and take notice. "A leper hospital?" he repeated, incredulously. "In Scotland?"

Mr Morrison grinned. "Aye, it does sound odd in this day and age, I'll grant you," he admitted. "But this would have been back in the . . . what, fifteen hundreds? They used to send the lepers and plague victims over from the mainland, to try and prevent the spread of the disease. You know, quarantine." He shook his head. "Grim times," he muttered.

"Oh, that's lovely," said Noah. He shot an accusing look at Millicent. "What kind of a place are you taking us to?" he asked her.

Millicent laughed at his horrified expression. "Don't worry, dear, it was all a very long time ago. I'm sure there's nothing for you to worry about." She turned her attention back to Mr Finlay. "Was Inchtinn fortified during the war?" she asked.

"I believe some of the islands were."

"Aye, some of the bigger ones. Inchcolm still has gun emplacements on it. Inchmickery, too. They were put there in case the Germans ever decided to attack Scotland but it never came to that, thank goodness."

"Why are they all called Inch-something?" muttered Noah. "Is it because they're small?"

"It just means "island", dear," said Millicent. "In Gaelic."

"Well, *Innis* would be more correct," said Mr Morrison. He smiled slyly. "Inch is what's called an Anglicisation. A lot of that sort of thing going on these days, I'm afraid." He must have sensed that she might be offended and added, "Not that I've got any problem with it. There's room for all comers here." He seemed to remember something. "We always used to call the place Shadow Island when we were youngsters."

"Why did you call it that?" asked Millicent, intrigued.

"Oh, it was just something about the way the light was when it shone on the crags. It made these extraordinary long shadows. Sometimes, you'd swear they looked like fantastic creatures . . . fairies, unicorns . . . you name it."

"So is that what Inchtinn actually means?" asked Millicent.

"Ah no. It's actually named after the lepers."

"What do you mean?" asked Noah.

"It means, literally . . . 'Island of the Sick'."

"Oh great," murmured Noah.

But there's nothing like that going on over there these days, surely?" reasoned Millicent.

"Oh, Lord no. That all happened centuries ago. Now it's just a home for sea birds and . . ."

" . . . crackpot children's authors," offered Millicent and the two of them laughed conspiratorially.

"What I don't understand," muttered Noah, looking accusingly at Millicent, "is why you feel you need to *go* there. You used to be able to write anywhere."

Millicent sighed. "I do hope you're not going to complain for the entire two weeks," she said. "It's as I've already explained. The publishers have set a ridiculous deadline for the new Adventurers book and there's just too many distractions, even at the cottage. Alicia seems to phone me every ten minutes about some nonsense or other – readers wanting signed photographs, businesses asking if I'll endorse their products and goodness knows what else. I get deluged with fan mail on a daily basis. I swear people must think my books write themselves!"

The dinghy hit a sudden swell and bucked alarmingly in the water. Noah clung on tightly, wishing this part could be over – but though he could already see the island more clearly, it didn't appear to be very much closer. "How long does it take?" he murmured. "To get there?"

Mr Morrison shrugged. "Thirty minutes . . . maybe forty. Depends on the prevailing winds."

Noah scowled. He was finding the old man's vagueness annoying.

"And how far is it?"

"Just over a mile."

"Well, how long before . . .?" Noah broke off. Mr Morrison was gazing intently down over the side of the dinghy, a big smile on his face. "Looks like we have a visitor," he said.

Noah turned his head and couldn't help giving a gasp of surprise. A dark, whiskery face was staring up at him from the water, two round black eyes watching him with intense curiosity. Noah supposed he shouldn't really be surprised. He'd seen grey seals often enough from the beach, but he'd never been this close to one before. Impulsively, he lifted one hand from the thwart to point at the creature; and the seal, no doubt interpreting this as a hostile action, flipped over and dived into the deep, its speckled carcass briefly visible below the surface like a fleeting ghost.

"You scared her off!" exclaimed Mr Morrison delightedly.

"*Her*?" repeated Millicent. "How can you tell it's a she?"

Mr Morrison waggled his thick eyebrows. "By the shape of her," he said, but he didn't elaborate on that point. "Who knows? Maybe she's a selkie, looking to visit somebody on shore."

Noah frowned, fascinated despite himself. "What's a selkie?" he asked.

The old man chuckled. "Oh, just one of those daft old

Scottish myths," he said. "Have you not heard the tale?"

Noah and Millicent both shook their heads. "Why don't you tell us?" suggested Millicent.

"Oh, I'd hesitate to recite something in front of a professional author," said Mr Morrison. "I'm afraid my storytelling skills are somewhat lacking in polish." But it was clear that he really wanted to tell them – and after a moment's hesitation, he did, leaning forward in his seat as though to confide a secret.

"The story goes that the selkies are only seals as long as they are in the water. But when they go on to the land, something incredible happens. Something mysterious. They shed their skins and turn into beautiful young women. They go further ashore, seeking the handsome young men of the area. They have romances with them. Sometimes they marry, even have children. And things carry on like that for many years. But one day, the call of the sea is too strong for the Selkie. She cannot help herself. She creeps out of her home one starless night and the poor husband, out looking for his wife, finds nothing but her clothes, left carelessly on the shore – and he knows that the Selkie could resist the call of the wild no longer. She has gone back to her home in the deep."

There was a short silence then as Noah and Millicent let the words sink in.

"Mr Morrison," said Millicent, after a few moments. "I do believe we'll make an author of you yet."