
CONNOR


GRACE


SIDORIO


CATE


LORCAN


MOLUCCO


CHENG LI


VAMPIRATE CAPTAIN


DARCY

Also by Justin Somper

VAMPIRATES: Tide of Terror
VAMPIRATES: Blood Captain
VAMPIRATES: Black Heart
VAMPIRATES: Empire of Night
VAMPIRATES: Immortal War

ALLIES & ASSASSINS
ALLIES & ASSASSINS: A Conspiracy of Princes

JUSTIN SOMPER

VAMPIRATES

DEMONS OF THE OCEAN



uclanpublishing

XXX is a uclanpublishing book

First published in Great Britain in 2020 by
uclanpublishing
University of Central Lancashire
Preston, PR1 2HE, UK

Text copyright © Justin Somper, 2020
Illustrations copyright © Crush Creative / agencyrush.com, 2020

978-1-9129790-0-4

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

The right of Justin Somper to be identified as the author 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 10/16pt Kingfisher by Amy Cooper

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 my dad, John Dennis Somper,
with love and thanks for sheltering me from the storm.

Crescent Moon Bay,
east coast of Australia.
The year 2505.

THE STORM, THE SHANTY AND THE SHIP



As the first crack of thunder broke over Crescent Moon Bay, Grace Tempest opened her eyes. A flash of sheet lightning broke behind the curtains. Shivering, she threw back the bedclothes and walked over to the bedroom window. It had broken free and was wide open, beating in the gale like a glass wing.

Grace reached out to pull it back. It required some effort and the rain drenched her in the process, but she managed it. She fastened the window but left it slightly ajar – not wanting to entirely shut out the storm. It had a strange, rough music with too many drumrolls and clashing cymbals. It made her heart race from excitement as well as fear. The rainwater was icy cold on her face, neck and arms. It made her skin tingle.

Across the room, Connor was still asleep – his mouth wide open, one arm flopping over the edge of his bunk. How could he sleep through such a racket? Perhaps her twin brother had clean exhausted himself playing soccer all afternoon.

Beyond the lighthouse window, the bay was empty of ships. This was no night to be out sailing. The lighthouse beam swept

across the surface of the ocean, illuminating the troubled waves. Grace smiled, thinking of her dad up above in the lamp room, watching over the harbour, keeping everyone safe.

Another sheet of lightning cracked and splintered outside the window. Stumbling back, Grace careered into Connor's bed. Her brother's face suddenly crinkled and then his eyes opened. He looked up with a combination of confusion and annoyance. She stared down at his bright green eyes. They were the exact same shade as hers – as if an emerald had been cut in two. Their dad's eyes were brown, so Grace always thought that they must have taken after their mother. Sometimes, in her dreams, a woman appeared at the lighthouse door, smiling and looking down on Grace with the same piercing green eyes.

"Hey, you're all wet!"

Grace realised that she was dripping rainwater onto Connor.

"There's a storm. Come and look!"

She grabbed his arm and pulled him out from under the bedclothes, dragging him towards the window. He stood there, rubbing the sleep out of his eyes, as another vein of lightning danced in front of them.

"Isn't it amazing?" Grace said.

Connor nodded but was silent. Although he had lived all his days in the lighthouse at the edge of the shore, he had never got used to the raw power of the ocean – its ability to change from a calm millpond one moment to a raging furnace the next.

"Let's go and see what dad's up to," he said.

"Good idea." Grace grabbed her dressing gown from the bedroom door and wrapped herself up. Connor pulled on a hooded sweater over his T-shirt. Together they raced out of the

bedroom and climbed the spiral staircase up to the lamp room.

As they made their way up, the noise of the storm grew louder. Connor didn't like it one bit, but he wasn't about to share that with Grace. His sister was quite fearless. It was strange. Grace was as thin and bony as a rake, but as tough as an old boot. Connor was physically strong; but Grace had a steely mental strength that he had yet to gain. Perhaps he never would.

"Well, hello there!" said their dad, as they emerged into the lamp room. "Storm woke you up, did it?"

"No, *Grace* woke me up," Connor said. "I was in the middle of a really good dream! I was about to score a hat trick."

"I don't understand how anyone can sleep through a storm like this," Grace said, "It's too noisy and too beautiful."

"You're weird," Connor said.

Grace frowned and jutted out her lip. Sometimes, though they were twins, she felt they were polar opposites.

Their dad took a sip of his hot gum tea and beckoned to them.

"Grace, why don't you come over here and get a ringside seat for the show. Connor, come and sit by me."

The twins did as he said, squatting down on the floor on either side of him. Instantly, Grace was fascinated, enjoying the chance to watch the raging bay from the highest vantage point. Connor had a flash of vertigo but then he felt his father's reassuring hand on his shoulder, sending waves of calm through his body.

Their dad took another sip of his tea. "Who'd like to hear a shanty?" he asked.

"Me!" Connor and Grace answered in unison. They both knew exactly the shanty he would sing. He'd sung it to them for as long as they could remember, from the time when they'd been babies – in

matching cots, side by side – and couldn't even understand the words.

"This," he announced grandly – as if he hadn't done so a thousand times before – "this is a shanty sung by people long before the new flood came and made the world so wet. This is a shanty about a ship that sails through the

night, through all eternity. A ship that carries a crew of damned souls – the demons of the ocean. A ship that has been sailing since time began and will voyage on until the very end of the world . . ."

Connor trembled with delicious anticipation. Grace smiled from ear to ear. Their dad, the lighthouse keeper, began to sing.

"I'll tell you a tale of Vampirates,
A tale as old as true.
Yea, I'll sing you a song of an ancient ship,
And its mighty fearsome crew.
Yea, I'll sing you a song of an ancient ship,
That sails the oceans blue . . .
That haunts the oceans blue."

As her dad sang, Grace looked out through the window at the bay below. The storm was still raging but she felt perfectly safe, looking down from such a height.

"The Vampirate ship has tattered sails,
That flap like wings in flight.
They say that the captain, he wears a veil
So as to curtail your fright
At his death-pale skin And his lifeless eyes
And his teeth as sharp as night.

Oh, they say that the captain, he wears a veil
And his eyes never see the light."

Connor watched as his dad used his hand to mime a veil. He shivered at the thought of the captain's horrible face.

"You'd better be good, child – good as gold,
As good as good can be.
Else I'll turn you in to the Vampirates
And wave you out to sea.
Yes, you'd better be good, child – good as gold,
Because – look! Can you see?
There's a dark ship in the harbour tonight
And there's room in the hold for thee!
(Plenty of room for thee!)"

Both twins looked out to the harbour, half-expecting to see a dark ship waiting for them there. Waiting to take them away from their dad and their home. But the bay was empty.

"*Well, if pirates are bad,*
And vampires are worse,
Then I pray that as long as I be
That though I sing of Vampirates
I never one shall see.
Yea, if pirates are danger
And vampires are death,
I'll extend my prayer for thee –
That thine eyes never see a Vampirate . . ."

The lighthouse keeper reached out his hands to touch both children lightly on the shoulder.

". . . and they never lay a hand on thee."

Connor and Grace had known what was coming but still they jumped, before bursting into giggles. Their dad enfolded them in a hug.

"Who's ready for bed now?" he asked. "I am," Connor said.

Grace could have watched the storm all night, but she couldn't prevent a long yawn from escaping.

"I'll come down and tuck you in," their dad said. "Shouldn't you stay here and watch the bay?" Grace asked.

Her dad smiled. "It won't take a moment. The lamp is on. Besides, Gracie, the bay is as empty as the grave tonight. There isn't one single ship out there. Not even the Vampirate ship."

He winked at the twins, set down his mug of tea and followed them downstairs. He tucked them both back into their beds and kissed first Grace, then Connor goodnight.

After he turned out the bedroom light, Grace lay there, tired but too exhilarated to sleep. She looked over at Connor, who once again was sprawled right across his bed, perhaps already back in the throes of his earlier dream.

Grace couldn't resist one last glance at the bay. She pushed back the covers and padded across the floor to the window. The storm had softened just a little and, as the lighthouse beam swept across the waters, she saw the waves had lost some of their turbulence.

And then she saw the ship.

It hadn't been there before, but there was no mistaking it now.

One solitary ship, out in the middle of the bay. It hovered there, as if quite unaffected by the storm around it. As if it was sailing on the calmest of waters. Grace's eyes traced the outline of the silhouette. It made her think of the ancient ship in her dad's shanty. The ship of demons. She trembled at the very thought, imagining the veiled captain staring back at her through the dark night. But truly, the way this ship just floated there – as if suspended from the moon by an invisible string – made it appear to be watching, waiting. For something . . . or someone.

Up above, in the lamp room, the lighthouse keeper saw the same ship out in the unsettled waters. As he recognised its familiar shape, he couldn't help but smile. He took another sip of his tea. Then he lifted his hand and waved.

SEVEN YEARS LATER

CHAPTER ONE

THE FUNERAL



The whole of Crescent Moon Bay turned out for the lighthouse keeper's funeral. That day, not a single black garment was left to buy at the Crescent Moon Clothing Emporium. Not one flower remained at the Happy Stem Florist. Each and every bloom had been fashioned into wreaths and floral tributes. The largest of these was a tower of white and red gardenias in the shape of a lighthouse, surrounded by a swirling sea of eucalyptus.

Dexter Tempest had been a good man. As lighthouse keeper, he had played an important part in the safekeeping of the bay. Many of those now standing around his grave, their bowed necks burning in the late afternoon sun, owed their life to Dexter's keen eyes and even sharper sense of duty. Others had Dexter to thank for the safe passage of one or more family members or close friends, rescued from the dangerous waters beyond the harbour – waters teeming with sharks and pirates . . . and worse.

Crescent Moon Bay was the smallest of towns and each of its inhabitants seemed bound to the others as tightly as stitches in a piece of knitting. Such a tight weave didn't necessarily make for comfortable living. Gossip flowed faster through the bay than the rapids up at Crescent Moon Creek. Right now, for example,

there was just one topic – what was to become of the Tempest twins? There they stood, heads bowed in front of their father's grave. Fourteen years old. Not quite kids, not yet adults – the boy already blessed with the body of an athlete, the girl gifted with a rare intelligence. But truly, they had few blessings to count, not now they were orphans and – but for each other – all alone in the world.

No one in the bay had ever glimpsed the twins' mother – Dexter's wife. Some doubted that a marriage had even taken place. All they knew was that one day, Dexter Tempest left Crescent Moon Bay with an impulsive notion to see something of the world. And, one day – a year or so later – he returned with a heavy heart and two swaddled parcels containing his twin children, Grace and Connor.

Polly Pagett, matron at the Crescent Moon Bay Orphanage, squinted in the bright light to better observe the boy and girl. She appeared to be measuring them, much like an artist making a sketch. Polly was preoccupied by the dilemma of which bunks to allocate to her new arrivals. True, no arrangements had yet been discussed, but surely there was no option other than the orphanage for these two children? The boy looked exceedingly strong. He could be set to work in the harbour. And the girl was as sharp as a tack. No doubt she'd excel at helping to stretch the orphanage's ever-dwindling budget. In spite of herself, a smile crept across Polly Pagett's tight, papery lips.

Lachlan Busby, the bank manager, turned his head from the fine floral tribute commissioned by his wife (and surely unsurpassed in the churchyard) to better observe Grace and Connor. How poorly their father had provided for them. If only he had glanced across his bank accounts once in a while instead of devoting so much

attention to the ships in the harbour. There was such a thing as giving *too* much. This was not a mistake Lachlan Busby ever intended to make.

Busby had his own plans for the twins. Tomorrow, he would break the news to Grace and Connor – calmly and gently, of course – that they had nothing left in this world. That Dexter's possessions – his boat, even the lighthouse itself – no longer belonged to them. Their father had left them nothing.

He glanced for a moment at his wife, who stood by his side. Dear sweet Loretta! He could see she found it impossible to take her eyes off the twins. It had been a cruel blow to them that they had never been able to have children. But now it seemed that things might have a way of working out. He squeezed her hand.

Grace and Connor knew they were being looked at. It was nothing new. All their lives, they'd been the subject of gossip. They had never escaped the drama of their arrival in Crescent Moon Bay. And, as they'd grown, the emerald- eyed twins had continued to be the subject of rumour and speculation. There is envy in a small town like Crescent Moon Bay and people were envious of the curious twins who seemed talented in ways other kids were not.

People found it hard to figure out why the lighthouse keeper's son was so much better at sports than the rest. Whether it was soccer, basketball or cricket, he seemed to run faster and strike harder, even when he neglected to show at team practice for weeks at a time. And the girl provoked equal suspicion – amongst her teachers as well as her classmates – with her unusually wide-ranging knowledge and strange notions about things far beyond her age and station in life.

Dexter Tempest, so the rumours went, had been a strange father to the pair, filling their heads with curious tales. Others went further still, suggesting that he had returned home to Crescent Moon Bay with a broken mind, as well as a broken heart.

Grace and Connor stood a little apart from the good folks of Crescent Moon Bay. And now, as the congregation at large sang a stirring hymn about the lighthouse keeper's final journey to "a harbour fresh and new", you might have noticed the smallest note of discord in the hot, stagnant air. While Grace and Connor seemed to sing along with the others, the song they sang was a different one, something rather more like a sea shanty than a hymn . . .

"I'll tell you a tale of Vampirates,
A tale as old as true.
Yea, I'll sing you a song of an ancient ship,
And its mighty fearsome crew."

CHAPTER TWO

THE UNINVITED GUEST



It was the day after the funeral and the twins had climbed to the lamp room at the top of the lighthouse. Beneath them, the bay glittered in the noonday sun. Small, sailing crafts shuffled in and out of the harbour. From this height, they seemed like white feathers skimming the blue waters.

Connor and Grace had always liked this room, as had their father. It was a place to come and think; to gain perspective on Crescent Moon Bay and see it for what it was – a tiny patch of land, crammed with too many houses, teetering on the clifftop. In the days since their father's death, the lamp room had taken on extra meaning for the twins. Dexter Tempest had spent so much time in the room that it was impossible for either of the twins to enter it without feeling close to him.

Even now, Grace could see her father sitting in front of the window, his eyes fixed on the harbour below, humming an old sea shanty. She found herself singing it too.

There would be a flask of hot gum tea at his side and, almost certainly, one of his dusty old books of poetry. As she'd come in, he'd turn and smile at her.

"I say, I say, anyone at home?"

The distinctive accent of Lachlan Busby signalled an unwelcome trespasser in the room. Connor and Grace turned from the window as the red-faced bank manager appeared at the top of the stairway.

"Well, I declare, I'm obviously not as fit as I'd like to believe! Did your father really climb up and down these stairs every day?"

Connor was silent. He had no wish to get into conversation with Lachlan Busby. Grace simply nodded politely and waited for the bank manager to catch his breath.

"Would you care for some water, Mr Busby?" she asked a last. She poured a glass and passed it into the bank manager's clammy hands.

"Thank you, most welcome, most welcome," he said. "Did I hear you singing something just now? A strange tune. I didn't quite catch the words. I'd love to hear it if you felt like singing it again."

Connor shook his head and Grace decided it was best to proceed with caution. Clearly, Lachlan Busby was not a man who would climb three hundred and twelve steps purely for a social visit.

"It's an old sea shanty our father used to sing to us," she explained, politely.

"A shanty, eh?"

"He used to sing us to sleep with it when we were small." "A lullaby, then, a pretty song of calming things?"

Grace laughed lightly. "Not exactly. In fact, it's about pain and death and horrible things."

The bank manager appeared alarmed.

"The point of it is, Mr Busby, to remind you that however bad your life appears, things could be far, far worse."

"Ahh, I think I understand, Miss Tempest. And well, may I say how impressed I am at your . . . stoicism, in the current situation."

Grace attempted a smile, though it came out as more of a grimace. Connor looked at Lachlan Busby with undisguised hatred. He was also trying to remember what stoicism meant.

"You two have experienced a loss that no child, no person of your age, should have to deal with," Lachlan Busby continued. "And now you find yourselves with no parent, no income and no home!"

"We have a home," Connor said, breaking his silence. "You are standing in it."

"My dear boy," Lachlan Busby said, reaching out a fatherly hand to squeeze Connor's shoulder, then thinking better of it, "if only this *were* still your home. But, without wishing to pile misfortune upon misfortune, it's my sorrowful duty to tell you that your father died with many debts. This lighthouse is now the property of the Crescent Moon Bay Cooperative Bank."

Grace frowned. She had suspected as much, but somehow hearing the words made her fear more tangible.

"Then we'll live on our boat," Connor said.

"Also now the property of the bank, I'm afraid," said Lachlan Busby, his eyes sadly downcast.

"*Your* bank," said Grace. "Indeed," Lachlan Busby nodded.

"What more have you to tell us, Mr Busby?" Grace decided it was best to hear the worst and be done with it. Lachlan Busby smiled, his perfect white teeth glinting in the sunlight. "I'm not here to tell you anything, my dears, just to make you an offer. It is true that, as of this moment, you have nothing and no one in the world. But *I* have many things. I have a beautiful home, a thriving

business and the most super wife a man could wish for. And yet, the tragedy of our lives is that we have never been blessed

with—"

"Children," interrupted Grace. Everything suddenly became horribly clear. "You have no children and we – we have no parents."

"If you came to live with us you would enjoy every advantage that being a Busby in this town can afford."

"I'd rather die," Connor said, his eyes blazing.

Lachlan Busby turned to Grace. "You seem more rational than your brother, my dear," he said. "Tell me what *you* think of my little proposal."

Grace made herself smile, even though she felt sick inside. "It is very, very kind of you, Mr Busby." The bile rose up in her throat and she struggled to swallow it back down. "But my brother and I do not need new parents. It's very generous of you to offer us your home, it really is, but we'll do just fine on our own."

Lachlan Busby stopped smiling.

"You will *not* do just fine. You are merely children. You cannot live here by yourselves. In fact, you cannot live here at all. At the end of the week the new lighthouse keeper will arrive and you will have to pack your bags and leave."

Lachlan Busby stood up to go. He turned to Grace one final time before departing.

"You are a clever girl," he said. "Don't be too quick to dismiss this offer. Others would give their eye-teeth for it." As their unwanted guest disappeared down the stairs,

Grace put her arm around her brother's neck and buried her face in the dip of his shoulder.

"What are we going to do?" she said. "You'll think of something.

You always do." "I'm running out of ideas."

"Doesn't matter *what* we do," Connor said, "just as long as we're together."

Grace nodded. She started to sing softly . . .

"You'd better be good, child – good as gold,
As good as good can be.
Else I'll turn you in to the Vampirates
And wave you out to sea."

Connor remembered his father with his arms around them, gazing out to sea. Though the words were threatening, sending shivers down his spine, there had been something appealing about the idea of sailing off into the night. Now more than ever.

He cuddled up close to Grace and they set their eyes on the sparkling waters of Crescent Moon Bay. As bad as everything seemed, they would be OK. Things couldn't get worse than this.

CHAPTER THREE

THINGS GET WORSE



Crescent Moon Bay was a poor town, but if you could sell a whisper, it would have been the financial centre of the world. And that day, in the harbour market, the whispers had just one theme – the offer Lachlan Busby had made to the twins and how Connor and Grace had sent him away empty-handed.

This latest event only confirmed the popular belief in the twins' terrible pride and aloofness. No one in the bay could offer the twins a better second chance than the Busbys.

Strange as it may seem, there was not a jot of sympathy for the odd pair, who had always been misfits but now seemed to have withdrawn utterly into the lighthouse that would soon cease to be their home.

There was just one person, besides the Busbys, who still entertained the thought of offering shelter to the Tempest twins. Even now, she was turning dirty sheets inside out to

make up two bunks for them and emptying out a warped little cupboard to house their possessions. As she added a drop of oil to the squeaking hinge, Polly Pagett smiled. In twenty-four hours, the twins would step through the tall green gates and enter her domain. They had left themselves with no other option.

Up in the lamp room, Grace and Connor looked down on the ant-like swarm of people below.

"Time's running out," Grace said. Connor said nothing.

"What are we going to do? Tomorrow night, the bank forecloses on Dad's loan and takes the lighthouse."

Connor wasn't sure what "forecloses" meant but he understood the gist. In twenty-four hours or so, he and Grace would be out on the streets, or bedding down at the Crescent Moon Bay Orphanage. Neither was an enticing prospect.

"Maybe we should reconsider," Grace said at last. Connor turned his face to hers and broke his silence. "Can you imagine what our lives would be like with the

Busbys? They don't want children, they want *pets*!"

Grace nodded. She shivered. She and Connor had always been free to do what they wanted, go where they wanted, think what they wanted. Their father had given them those gifts. It was a rich and rare legacy and one they could not betray. To go and live in the luxurious and suffocating realm of the Busbys would have been a complete betrayal of everything their father had stood for, everything he had believed in.

"Why can't we just stay here and work the lamp, like Dad did?" Connor said, unable to see beyond his frustration.

"You heard Mr Busby. He said he'd already taken on a new lighthouse keeper." Grace sensed that their options were diminishing. "Besides, he'd probably say it was an unsuitable job for two kids."

"Kids!" Connor spat the word out.

"I know," said Grace, "I know. He makes out he's so caring, but you either fall in with his plans, or forget it."

The next day, Grace was making breakfast when she heard a plump white envelope slip through the letter box. Setting the coffee pot to one side, she picked up the envelope, which was addressed in scratchy ink.

Miss Grace Tempest and Master Connor Tempest, Esq.

Grace opened the envelope and unfolded the thick single sheet of notepaper. Seeing the name at the end, she frowned, then began scanning the words.

My dear Grace and Connor,
Today marks the last day of your old life. At midnight tonight, the new lighthouse keeper will be given the keys to the lighthouse and take on the burden of lighting the lamp and watching the harbour below. There is, as my old father used to say, a kernel of goodness in the nut of misfortune – you just have to bite down hard enough to find it. For you, my dear children, it will not be so hard to see what good is coming your way. Tomorrow marks the FIRST day of your new lives. You will be free from the burden your father shouldered all these years. Come down from the lighthouse. Come and accept a new carefree life such as children of your age should enjoy. Some say I am a proud man, but I am not too proud to offer you a place in my family ONE LAST TIME.
What do you say? When you think about it, what other options do you have? My wife and I will give you everything you could want from this life. Just ask and it shall be yours. Meet me at the lighthouse door at midnight. Pack only a bag of memories – for we will soon be making new memories, better memories, as a proper FAMILY!
With open arms,
Lachlan Busby, aka "Dad"!

Grace dropped the letter to the floor in horror and stood there, feeling the tide of fear at last rise up over her.

"What's that?" Connor asked, striding into the room, bouncing a basketball. Seeing his sister's expression, he let the ball drop, each bounce a sad echo of the last, until it rolled to a stop in the corner of the room.

He picked up the letter and read it, taking in each sugar- coated threat. Finally, he took the sheet of paper and tore it up, scattering rough pieces over the floor like confetti.

"That's a fine gesture, Con, but it doesn't change anything," Grace said. "We've run out of options and now we've run out of time."

Connor looked his sister squarely in the eye and rested his hands on her shoulders. He smiled and shook his head. "On the contrary, Gracie. *You* may have run out of ideas. But *I've* worked everything out. Now, let's have some toast and peanut butter and I'll tell you exactly what we're going to do!"

CHAPTER FOUR

HELL OR HIGH WATER



Barely an hour later, the twins stood at the gates of the Crescent Moon Bay Orphanage. Each had packed only a single bag of belongings.

Polly Pagett caught sight of them from the office window. She gave a small wave through the cracked glass and beckoned them through the gates.

The twins waved back, but they did not step forward and a moment later they were gone. Confused, the wiry, bird-like woman pushed open the warped door and stumbled out into the bright sunshine.

As she reached the gates, squinting in the bright light, she saw Connor and Grace heading off towards the harbour road and the sea beyond.

"Come back, come back!" she cried. "This is your home!"

"As if!" Connor threw back over his shoulder.

"Good call," Grace said, squeezing her brother's hand.

In the morning sun, the Busby residence glittered like a fairytale castle.

"That will be my wing," Connor said, pointing into the distance.

"And that will be mine," Grace said.

"I'll persuade Mr Busby to let me drive all his sports cars."

"And I'll fill the swimming pool with roses, just because I can."

They both laughed and, for a moment they didn't see Loretta Busby, waltzing through her Tudor knot garden, secateurs in hand.

But *she* had spotted *them*.

"You came!" she cried. "You came early!" Dropping her secateurs on the lawn, she ran towards them, with the focus and determination of an athlete, albeit one clad – perhaps unhelpfully – in billowing layers of pink chiffon.

"Time to get out of here!" said Connor. And, grabbing his sister's hand, he ran.

The twins only stopped running when they reached the harbour. It was buzzing with activity, as always on a fine morning like this. The fishermen had already returned with their catches. On the wharf, the sorting process had begun. They threw fish into the air like jugglers, this way a tuna, that way a snapper, over here a cod. Beyond the sorting deck, the wharf was crowded with lobster pots, fresh from the ocean. Inside the cages, the purple creatures still moved about, as if looking for a way to escape.

"OK," Connor said. "We've said our goodbyes. There's not much time."

Grace took one last look around, then nodded.

Beyond the fishermen's wharf, the harbour gave way to the moorings of private boats. In the distance, the palatial cruiser belonging to Lachlan Busby gleamed in the sun. It dwarfed its neighbours and blacked out their light.

Dexter Tempest's boat was moored amongst the smaller crafts.

It was a simple yacht, fashioned in the old style, aboard which the twins had spent many happy hours with their dad. Grace and Connor hurried along the wooden jetty that led towards it.

"Here she is," Connor said. He reached out a hand and touched the side of the boat, his fingers running across its name – *Louisiana Lady*.

"Do we dare?" he asked.

"Yes, we dare," Grace answered.

At that moment, the sun was blocked by a passing cloud. A surprisingly chill breeze snaked around Grace's body and she shivered at the sudden drop in temperature. The twins' presence on the jetty had begun to provoke comment. People were stopping to stare and whisper. What were Grace and Connor doing here? Shouldn't they be packing up their possessions and preparing to vacate the lighthouse? The boat no longer belonged to them, as was clear from a hastily erected wooden sign on-board: *"Property of the Crescent Moon Bay Cooperative Bank".*

"We've come to say goodbye to our dad's boat," Grace called.

The crowd made sympathetic noises.

"Can we have a moment to ourselves?" Connor asked, bowing his head.

The people moved away, their whispers now indecipherable hisses. They were soon distracted by the arrival at the harbourside of two intriguing women. Bird-like Polly was clawing at the air, as if she could somehow draw the twins magically back towards her and then tear them apart. Meanwhile, Loretta's skirt had ripped away to reveal surprisingly muscled legs. She looked glowing and pumped with energy as if she was ready to embark on the next stage of her self-inflicted triathlon.

In one swift, smooth movement, Grace jumped onto the boat while Connor uncoiled the ropes that tied the craft to the dock.

"Stop them!" rasped Polly Pagett. "Grab them!" cried Loretta Busby.

As Connor leaped on-board, Grace looked up at the low clouds scudding overhead and felt the breeze run through her hair. "It's a following wind, force two, maybe three," she said as Connor brushed past her.

"Mainsail up," he said. The sail billowed out, filling with the wind that would propel them away.

"Cast off forward," called Grace, neatly winding the loose rope.

"Cast off aft," called Connor, "and we're away!" Released from all its moorings, the boat slipped smoothly maway from the jetty. As Connor gradually let out the boom, the mainsail swelled gratefully with the extra air and the boat quickly picked up speed.

"Goodbye Crescent Moon Bay," Connor cried.

Looking back towards the lighthouse, he could have sworn he saw his father up in the lamp room, waving them goodbye. He closed his eyes, opened them again and the image was gone. He sighed.

"Goodbye Crescent Moon Bay," Grace echoed. "Oh, Connor, what have we done? We need food! We need money. Where are we going?"

"I told you, Gracie, we've got time to work that out. All that matters is that we get away from here just as quickly as we can. And that we're together."

They set the boat's course to the darker waters beyond the bay. Both twins looked hopefully towards their future.

As the yacht picked up still more speed, Connor noticed the wooden sign that still rested on the prow.