

It was a wild and lightning-struck night. The kind of night that changes everything.

Jagged forks of light ripped across the sky and thunder rolled in tidal waves over the rooftops and spires of London. With the rain lashing down and the clouds crashing above, it felt like the whole city was under the sea.

But Cordelia Hatmaker was not afraid. In her candle-lit room at the very top of Hatmaker House, she was pretending to be aboard the *Jolly Bonnet*. The ship was being tossed by massive waves as she staggered across the deck (really her hearthrug), fighting a howling wind.

BOOM.

'Batten down those hatches, Fortescue!' she yelled. 'I've got to lash myself to the wheel!'

A tin soldier stared blankly from the mantel.

'Aye, aye, Cap'n!' Cordelia squeaked, out of the corner of her mouth.

BOOM.

'Enemy fire!' Cordelia cried, seizing the back of her wooden chair and heaving. Under her hands it became a great ship's wheel.

BOOM.

A violent gust of wind blew the window open. The candle sputtered out and Cordelia was plunged into darkness.

BOOM, BOOM, BOOM.

Echoing up the five storeys of Hatmaker House came the sound of somebody pounding on the front door.



Cordelia scrambled down the ladder from her bedroom and galloped along the top corridor. Aunt Ariadne emerged from her chamber, wrapped in a plum-coloured velvet dressing gown. Uncle Tiberius appeared, grizzle-headed from sleep.

'Father!' Cordelia cried, skidding past them. 'My father's home!'

BOOM, BOOM, BOOM.

Cordelia raced down the spiral staircase that twisted through the middle of Hatmaker House. She hurtled past Great-aunt Petronella, snoozing in front of the flickering lilac fire in her Alchemy Parlour. She rushed past the tall

doors of the Hatmaking Workshop and, deciding that sliding down the corkscrew bannister would be quickest, in three heartbeats she reached the bottom floor.

Her bare feet slapped the cold tiles of the hallway. She shook her head to chase away the dizziness and ran (in not quite a straight line because she was still a little giddy) across the wide hall to the door.

White light flared across the sky as she turned the hefty key in the lock. A tall figure loomed through the pebbly window.

Thunder clapped overhead as she pulled open the heavy oak door.

A crack of lightning split the sky in two.

A man stood on the front step of Hatmaker House. He was drenched, ragged and gasping in the wind.

It was not her father.



Cordelia stumbled backwards as the man lurched through the door, bringing the rain and the unruly wind into the house with him. His rich brocade cloak smelled of sea spray and salt.

'Lord Witloof!' It was Aunt Ariadne, carrying a lantern down the stairs. 'What on *earth* has happened?'

Lord Witloof was dripping a puddle of rainwater on to the hall floor.

'Alas, not *earth*, Madam Hatmaker, but sea!' Lord Witloof wheezed. 'Something has happened at *sea*!'

Cordelia felt as though a Siberian Ice Spider was crawling down her neck.

'Please, my Lord, tell us what has occurred,' said Uncle Tiberius.

'Has something happened to the *Jolly Bonnet*?' Cook appeared in the kitchen doorway, her hair in rag-rolls and a wooden spoon in her hand.

'Where is my father? Captain Hatmaker?' Cordelia's voice was thin and quivery with fear.

Lord Witloof took the black tricorn hat off his head and tipped out a large volume of water from its brim.

'The *Jolly Bonnet*,' he pronounced, 'has been sunk. She crashed on to those ghastly rocks that guard the entrance to Rivermouth.'

The wind howled through the house.

'But my father? Where is he?' Cordelia asked.

The Ice Spider was spinning a freezing web around her insides.

Lord Witloof looked down at his boots.

'I was there. Waiting at the top of the lighthouse to see that the ship was guided safely through the strait,' he muttered, gripping his hat, knuckles white. 'The palace has been most anxious for Captain Hatmaker to return with the final ingredient for the king's new hat. But tonight . . .'

Lord Witloof stopped, eyes filled with horror.

'The sails came into view through the storm,' he went on, face grey. 'I was close enough to hear the crew's cries on the wind, saw Captain Hatmaker himself at the wheel . . . but before the ship could pass the rocks to reach the safe haven of

Rivermouth, a terrible wave crested from the black ocean and cast the *Jolly Bonnet* upon them. The ship was matchsticks in a matter of moments.'

Cordelia was shaking her head. Then she realized her whole self was shaking.

'All went down with the ship,' Lord Witloof whispered. 'None survived.'

'But . . . no,' Cordelia said. 'My father is the best swimmer I know. He can swim through storms and whirlpools. He can't have sunk!'

Lord Witloof looked seasick and sad.

'Captain Hatmaker is lost at sea,' he said. 'I am sorry.'



Cordelia's grief and fury, stronger than her shaking legs, carried her back up the stairs. Aunt Ariadne's voice was a ragged flag fluttering behind her. A treacherous tide of tears swelled in her eyes as she felt her way along the top corridor. She wrenched open the door at the end and the achingly familiar smell of her father broke over her.

It was the smell of spices he brought back from his adventures, and cedar and woodsmoke and sea air. Cordelia launched herself on to his empty bed and buried herself in the scratchy wool blankets.

She lay with her face pressed into the pillow, feeling as

though the saddest song she had ever heard was trying to burst out of her. It howled through her stomach and into her chest and wound round her heart and up into her throat, where she could feel it juddering with despair.

'Cordelia?' whispered Aunt Ariadne, tiptoeing into the room.

The thunder rumbled overhead. It sounded like ships crashing on rocks.

'My poor Cordelia.'

Cordelia lay with her whole body tense, determined not to let the sad song out of her mouth. A warm hand rested on her back. Eventually her aunt said, 'This will help you sleep, my love.'

She stroked Cordelia's hair aside and Cordelia felt the velvet of a Moonbloom Nightcap being pulled gently on to her head.

The nightcap worked a dark-purple kind of magic and she was asleep in the space of a single sigh. Tentacles beckoned her from the deep and she called to her father, but her voice was lost among the shapes of waves. All night long the words *lost at sea, lost at sea, lost at sea* whispered to her in storm-tossed dreams, and an albatross keened and curled in a strange sky.

In the morning, she woke with an idea.

What is lost can be found.



Cordelia pulled on her father's jacket. Its gold buttons glinted in just the same way hope does. She pushed up the sleeves and padded out of the room.

Hatmaker House was quiet. Through the window, the sky was a clean blue and the raindrops that speckled the windows glowed in the rays of pale-yellow sunlight.

The Library smelled of beeswax and polished wood and Turkish carpet. Thousands of books stood shoulder to shoulder on the shelves. Ancient grimoires, guides to new sciences, and tomes full of eldritch secrets all jostled for space. Some were taller than Cordelia's knees, with ridged leather spines; others were smaller than the palm of her hand and bound in jewel-coloured silk. They were all the kind of book whose pages whispered when she turned them.

It was so early that the Quest Pigeons still dozed in

their aviary beside the window, heads tucked under their wings.

'*Coo*, *coo*,' Cordelia hooted in a low voice. Several bright black eyes blinked at her, as she filled their tray with new seeds and poured fresh water into their dish.

She looked at one bird in particular.

'Agatha,' she said. 'My father is lost at sea and you're the only one who can find him.'

Agatha flurried her wings importantly and cooed.

Cordelia's father, Captain Prospero Hatmaker, had hatched Agatha himself, keeping her (as an egg) warm in his armpit. One day she pecked her way out of her shell to find herself cupped in his gentle hand, and decided he was the perfect mother.

When a Quest Pigeon is hatched this way, they will always fly to their mother, wherever they are in the world, to bring a message home. So Cordelia took a tiny scroll of paper from the top drawer of the desk and wrote:

Father, they say you are lost at sea. If you are lost you can be found. Please find yourself at sea as soon as you can

There was hardly any room left on the scroll so she crammed in:

and please come home. Love Dilly

She kissed the paper – carefully so she would not smudge the ink – and waved it in the air to dry. Then she rolled the scroll up tight and sealed it in a minuscule glass bottle with a cork and red wax.

She lifted Agatha gently out of the aviary and tied the bottle to the bird's leg. She could feel Agatha's little heart pattering triple time.

'To Prospero, to Prospero!' Cordelia whispered, like a spell.

She threw the window wide and Agatha took flight. Cordelia leaned out, watching until the bird was a pale speck above the new-washed houses of London.

'Cordilly?'

Uncle Tiberius was standing in the doorway, rubbing his sleep-creased face. He looked like a bear who had been woken from hibernation too early.

'Are you all right, little one?' he asked, his rumbly voice gentle.

'Yes, Uncle,' Cordelia answered. 'I've just sent a message to Father.'

Uncle Tiberius's shoulders sagged.

'Oh, Cordelia, my sweet girl,' he said.

'You see,' Cordelia explained, 'if he's *lost* at sea, that means he can be *found*. So I've sent Agatha to find him.'

'Little Hatmaker,' Uncle Tiberius said heavily, 'when a Quest Pigeon's mother is . . . gone . . . the poor confused pigeon just flies away . . . and is never seen again.'

Uncle Tiberius's eyes suddenly glistened and he blew his nose on a green silk hanky.

'Don't cry, Uncle!' Cordelia said, climbing on to a chair to pat his shaking shoulder. 'Agatha will find Father. He isn't *gone* – he's just *lost*, which is very different.'

Uncle Tiberius wiped his eyes.

'Now, let's look lively!' Cordelia grinned. 'We have to finish making the Concentration Hat for the king. They'll be expecting us at the palace!'



Usually on a palace delivery day, Hatmaker House was humming with a mixture of jollity and chaos. But the Hatmakers, except for Cordelia, were red-eyed, black-clad and slow that morning. Cook put extra honey on Cordelia's porridge and a heavy kiss on the top of her head.

Jones, the Hatmakers' coachman, leaned in through the kitchen window, clutching a cup of tea. He wore his smart blue uniform, an ink-black tricorn and a sombre expression.

Pale-faced at the head of the breakfast table, Aunt Ariadne bit a dry corner of toast. She adjusted a sprig of rue on her black Mourning Hat and said, 'I am sorry we must go to the palace today, Cordelia, my brave girl. Being Hatmakers to the Crown has its burdens, and duty beckons.'

'And we can't be outdone by the blasted Bootmakers. Or

those finicky Glovemakers, for that matter,' Uncle Tiberius growled, stirring his porridge moodily.

'Nor the Watchmakers or the Cloakmakers!' Cordelia added.

'Twitchers and posers,' Uncle Tiberius muttered.

'And anyway,' Cordelia finished, 'Father would want us to go.'

Aunt Ariadne's mouth went a little wonky. 'We must finish the hat as best we can, even though it will be without the special ingredient Prospero was bringing home.'

'What was the ingredient?' Cordelia asked.

'An ear feather from the Athenian Owl of the Platonic Forests,' replied Uncle Tiberius. 'Wisest bird in the world: it goes to great lengths to avoid human company. It would have kept the king closely focused on his work and keen to remain undisturbed.'

'Run along and help Great-aunt Petronella with her fire, my Cordelia,' Aunt Ariadne said, in a peculiar wobbling voice.



'Give it some vim, child!' Great-aunt Petronella croaked.

Cordelia pumped the wheezy bellows so hard that the lilac fire leaped into life, licking violet tongues of flame up the sooty chimney. The Alchemy Parlour danced with purplish shadows as the fire threw flickering light over the brass

instruments. Great-aunt Petronella placed her cool hands on Cordelia's cheeks.

'You are a strong girl,' the ancient lady said with a kind of fierce caw.

Cordelia thought the grown-ups were being rather silly, all dressed in layers of black and telling her she was brave and strong.

'I know you think Father has drowned. I did too, last night,' she said to her great-aunt. 'But actually, when I woke up, I realized he's just *lost*. It's very different, you know. And he once survived twelve days on a leaky raft floating on the ocean. He can survive anything.'

Prospero Hatmaker had, indeed, survived twelve days drifting at sea on a shard of broken hull. And so had Cordelia. It was her favourite story.

'You were born on the ocean, littlest Hatmaker,' Cordelia's father would tell her. 'Your mother and I went on many ingredient-seeking adventures together. One day, we realized we had a third Hatmaker on our journey with us: you! You arrived in the world one very starry night, a little way off the coast of Morocco. The whole crew threw a party and your mother and I were overjoyed. We didn't have a crib on the ship, so we made a hatbox into a cradle and you slept very happily. It was the hatbox that saved you . . .

'Many weeks later, a terrible storm broke over us out of a blue sky. The mast was struck by lightning and our ship

caught fire. I was at the wheel, trying to steer us out of the storm, when I saw your mother run down into the belly of the ship. She emerged through fire and smoke with the hatbox in her arms.

'Just then, with a calamitous screech, the ship ripped in two; fire had torn it right down to the keel. The world seemed to split in half and your mother hurled the hatbox across the chasm, across the churning water. I dived for you. The hatbox landed on the crest of a wave as I threw myself into the ocean. When I surfaced, half of the ship was gone. I dragged myself on to the wrecked remains. By a miracle, you were alive, though very wet and wriggling in your hatbox.

'All night, I searched for survivors. But I saw by the light of the rising sun that your mother was gone. The crew were gone. You and I were the only ones left, stranded on a half-sunk ship and surrounded by miles and miles of empty ocean.

'After twelve days, we were picked up by a passing Portuguese caravel and eventually I arrived back in London with you – the greatest treasure I've ever brought home.'

Her father always wore a seashell hanging from a chain round his neck. A tiny painting was inside, no bigger than Cordelia's eye. It was a portrait of her mother. Cordelia could stare at the painting for hours, at her smooth skin, her halo of dark hair, and her kind, smiling eyes. It held her spellbound.

'You look just like her, littlest Hatmaker,' her father always

said, his eyes full of love. 'Her beauty and cleverness were her gifts to you.'

Cordelia would smile at her father when he said this, and reply, 'What are *your* gifts to me, Father?'

He would grin back and say, 'The gifts of a Hatmaker. Wildness in your wits and magic in your fingertips!'

'You are a brave girl, as well as strong.' The croaky voice of Great-aunt Petronella broke into Cordelia's thoughts.

Cordelia blinked. Her great-aunt was gazing at her with pride and sadness.

'He's not dead,' Cordelia told her firmly. 'He'll come back. I've sent Agatha.'

Her great-aunt gave her a kiss on the forehead and a Sunsugar toffee from her tin.

'Cordelia! I need you in the workshop!' Aunt Ariadne called up the stairs.