

Cordelia Hatmaker was following a star.

The North Star hung above the dark jostle of night-time London – just out of reach but never out of sight. Even the smudges of smoke rising from the city's chimneys could not dim Polaris's brightness.

Cordelia felt like she was trying to catch a song in her hand. She had followed the star from her home, Hatmaker House on Wimpole Street, to the wharves near St Katherine's by the Tower. All around her, seagoing galleons creaked and swayed in their sleep, rigging like black lace against the sky.

In the lapping waters of the River Thames, Polaris's reflection gleamed like a coin dropped to the bottom. And on the map in Cordelia's hands, the same star winked at her in silver ink.

Between the three versions of the same star, Cordelia could feel a secret being whispered in a language she didn't speak.

'Where am I meant to go next?' she asked, in plain English.

It was not the first time she had asked that question, and not the first time the North Star had simply twinkled mysteriously down at her in reply.

But it *was* the first time that a guttural voice rasped from the dark, 'Pretty bit of treasure you got there, missy.'

A shadow lurched towards her. Cordelia sprang back, almost toppling off the quay. A hand shot out – she was jerked forward – suddenly a snarling mouth was an inch from her nose.

'Gimme it.'

Cordelia gagged as stale ale-breath wafted into her face. It was a sailor, stinking of drink, his yellow teeth bared in a grin. He was so close that the bristles of his beard scratched her chin.

'Ugh!'

She tried to push past him, but he grabbed her arm.

'Gimme that,' he slurred.

'It's just a bit of paper!' Cordelia gasped, flapping the map. 'It isn't worth anything!'

She was lying. The map was one of the most valuable things she owned. Although she hadn't yet worked out what it was a map of, she knew that maps generally led to treasure.

In this case, she hoped the treasure it led to was her father. Captain Hatmaker had hidden the map inside a telescope as his ship was sinking and given it to a cabin boy, Jack Fortescue – the only known survivor of the shipwreck.

For you. From him, the wreck-shocked Jack had whispered as he'd handed Cordelia the telescope.

The *Jolly Bonnet* had sunk almost two months ago and Cordelia's father had disappeared with it. Most of the Hatmaker family believed he had gone down with his ship, but Cordelia would not – could not – believe it.

It had taken Cordelia several days to find what looked like a blank piece of paper hidden inside the telescope. And it had taken her several more days to discover that it was actually a map, drawn in ink that could only be read by starlight. This discovery had made her even more determined: her father was alive, and he needed her help.

But the map was very puzzling. For a start, normal maps had helpful place names on them. *This* map showed a circus with eight roads leading off it, surrounded by a maze of lanes, but none of them was named. *Thames* was the only place name on the entire map, and it was surrounded by little swirls of silver ink to symbolize the river, with an *X* marked just beside it in the bottom-right corner. In the crook of the opposite lane cutting across the corner, there was a tiny drawing of a face with wide eyes, a curly beard and wisps of wind blowing out of his round mouth: the North Wind.

Beside him, Polaris glimmered at the tip of the Ursa Minor constellation.

At least she knew that the Thames was the right river. But it was miles long, and though Cordelia had been methodical in her search – she had started at Westminster Bridge and worked her way slowly eastwards, keeping the North Star in view at all times – she had found no sign of the circus, nor the crook in a lane where the North Wind blew. Westwards, the Thames stretched all the way to Oxford. Eastwards, it went all the way to the sea. Finding the place she was looking for would take years at this rate.

There was also a riddle, written in curling letters around the edge of the paper:

At the sign of the Rose and Sea
Runs the Fast River secret beneath.
Face the North Wind and follow him south,
There you'll find the hidden mouth.

Then there was a line of writing scrawled on the back, in her father's energetic handwriting:

Look to the stars.

Every starlit night since discovering the map, Cordelia had slipped out of Hatmaker House, quiet as a shadow, and gone

hunting around London, trying to find the place shown on the map.

She had been lucky: she had managed to avoid trouble. She hadn't come up against the pointy end of a knife.

Until tonight.

The sailor's eyes slid over the map. Drinking too much grog had made him somewhat groggy.

'*Paper?*' he muttered. 'Thass not gonna get me any money.'

'Exactly,' Cordelia said, hoping she sounded confident and not as if her legs were made from Tremulous Elver tentacles and might jiggle out from under her at any moment. 'K-kindly release me and be on your way, sir.'

'Woss this, though?' The sailor squinted at the pendant hanging around her neck, and his eyes came alive with greed.

'No!' Cordelia gasped.

The pendant was a delicate shell. Painted on the inside was a portrait of Cordelia's mother – small as a snowdrop blossom but so detailed it was possible to see the individual freckles on her nose. Cordelia had only been a few weeks old when her mother died in a storm at sea. Her father had always told her she looked like her mother, but this portrait was the only proof that it was true.

The necklace, along with the map, was by far the most precious thing Cordelia had ever possessed. Both her parents had been lost at sea, years apart, their ships gathered into the crushing arms of storms and turned to driftwood. She would

not let a drunk sailor rob her of either of the treasures that linked her to her mother and father.

She curled her fingers into claws and swiped at the sailor's face. There was a yowl of rage and a wild struggle, at the end of which Cordelia found herself suspended over the Thames.

'Shuddup or I'll drop ya,' the sailor hissed.

Only his finger, hooked in the chain of her necklace, was keeping Cordelia from plunging into the black slick of the river. She gripped the edge of the quay with her tiptoes.

'Please –' She could barely breathe.

The sailor pulled out a short knife. It glinted wickedly, like it had a hard question to ask. For a moment Cordelia thought it might all be over – then the sailor started sawing at the chain.

It severed in seconds. Cordelia grabbed the pendant with one hand and the sailor's beard with the other. She yanked, glad to find that the beard was strong enough to take the weight of an eleven-year-old.

The sailor bellowed in confusion as his beard dragged him downwards. Cordelia dived sideways, like a woodsman dodging a falling tree.

She threw herself belly-down on to the quay, felt her legs kick the air.

'That was close!'

Two seconds later –

SPLOSH!

Caws of laughter, like the shrieks of strange nightbirds, rang in the rigging above her.

'That's right, miss!'

'He needed a wash!'

Cordelia scrambled to the edge and peered into the river. The reflection of the North Star jumped in the ripples. Then a selection of swear words announced the sailor's arrival back at the surface.

'Best be away – before he gets 'imself out!' a voice from the rigging, gasping with laughter, advised her.

Cordelia opened her fist to check, and the steady eyes of her mother gazed at her from the shell pendant. She let out a shuddery sigh of relief.

She fled from the wharves, faster than a Lunar Hare at full moon, and did not stop running until she reached London Bridge.



The sky in the east was pale by the time Cordelia staggered to a stop. When she was certain that the sailor wasn't following her, she tucked the shell pendant with its broken chain carefully into an inner pocket. Then, making sure there was nobody else around, she unfurled the map again. The lines gleamed like threads of silver as the stars above sprinkled their light.

She studied it carefully.

If only she could solve the riddle – she was certain it would narrow down her search. But, no matter how many times she read it, she could not decipher the meaning.

At the sign of the Rose and Sea
Runs the Fast River secret beneath.
Face the North Wind and follow him south,
There you'll find the hidden mouth.

She assumed that the first part of the riddle was the name of an inn, and yet there did not seem to be a tavern, coffee house or tea parlour anywhere in London called the Rose and Sea. She had investigated an inn called the Rose and Crown, loitered near an establishment full of jaunty, cooing ladies called the Roses and Thorns, and had been shooed away from the window of the Rambling Rose chocolate house. But she had not found a place that went by the name of the Rose and Sea.

'And a *fast river* that's a *secret*?' Cordelia said aloud for the thousandth time, hoping to find new sense in the riddle.

She peered over the stone balustrade of London Bridge. The Thames below gave a slow shrug on its way past.

'You're not a fast river,' she said to the water. 'And you're definitely not a secret. I see you here on the map – the only thing I'm actually sure of.'

And how did you face the North Wind but follow it south? Did it blow you south? How far? Should she wear a billowy cloak that would catch the wind and carry her along?

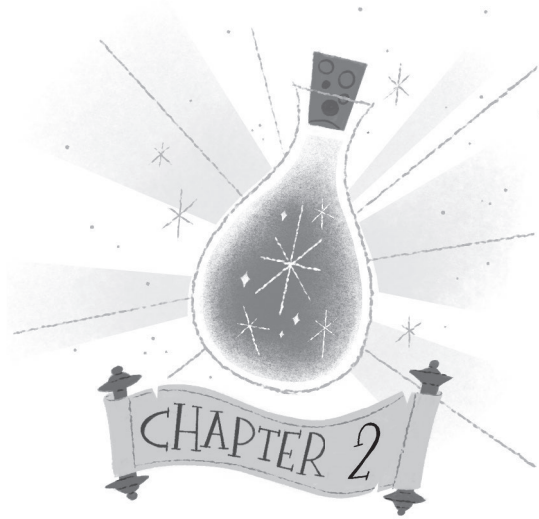
She turned the map over and frowned at the line of writing scrawled on the back:

Look to the stars.

She watched the words fade as the stars above faded too. Another night was gone and the map remained as mysterious as the first time she had unfurled it. Her heart, which had been blazing with hope when she slipped out of Hatmaker House hours earlier, now felt like a spent match.

She padded home in the grey dawn, footsore and heartsore.

The map was a question from her father – and she had to find the answer.



'Where ya bin goin' at night?' a voice, brighter than the sunlight, chimed.

Cordelia woke to find a pair of brown eyes twinkling down at her.

'Aaah!' she cried, jerking upright.

Sam Lightfinger sprang to the end of the bed. She surveyed Cordelia, grinning suspiciously.

'What on earth makes you think I've been going out at night?' Cordelia asked, pulling the blanket up to her chin to hide the fact that she was still wearing yesterday's clothes.

'Fer a start, yer still wearin' yesterday's clothes,' Sam said. 'And I heard ya sneaking in just after dawn – *again*.'

Cordelia had been delighted when Aunt Ariadne had said Sam could live with them, but it was sometimes inconvenient

to have such a keen-eared person sleeping in the bedroom below hers; her comings and goings were always noticed, no matter how softly she trod. Before moving into Hatmaker House, Sam had lived on the streets, having to fend for herself after her brother was sent away on a prison ship. Cordelia and Sam had become firm friends, Cordelia happily sharing everything she had with Sam. But the one thing she *wasn't* ready to share was the truth about her nightly searches along the Thames . . .

'You must have been dr-dreaming,' she declared, but halfway through the word 'dreaming', she was overcome by an enormous yawn, which was slightly undermining.

'I'm serious, Cor,' Sam said. 'Yer not savvy. There's people out there that could do ya harm.'

In a rush, Cordelia remembered: the quay, the sailor, the necklace!

She scrabbled through blankets and clothes to get to her inner pocket. She pulled out the necklace: it was safe. She sobbed a little sigh of relief seeing her mother's face, tiny, in the palm of her hand.

'What 'appened to that?' Sam asked, nodding at the broken chain.

'Nothing.'

But Sam was quick; she swiped the necklace.

'Cut with a blade,' Sam said gravely. 'Next time, the blade could be on yer neck.'

'Don't say that!' Cordelia cried. 'That's horrible!'

'Yes,' Sam said seriously. 'It *is* 'orrible. Ya shouldn't go out by yerself.'

Sam handed back the necklace, eyeballing Cordelia. There was a long moment of scrutiny, during which Cordelia unsuccessfully tried to arrange her face into an innocent expression.

Then Sam grinned. 'Fine, don't tell me. But when yer slow gettin' up in the mornings, I get ta eat all the toast!'

She bounded across Cordelia's bedroom and disappeared down the trapdoor into the house.

'Wait!' Cordelia leaped out of bed. 'Leave a slice for me!'

She tucked the shell necklace safely under her pillow. Pulling off yesterday's clothes and grabbing some fresh ones, Cordelia hurried after Sam.

She was more or less dressed by the time she reached the kitchen.



Cordelia's family were sitting round the big oak table and Sam had already tucked into a stack of toast piled as high as her nose. Aunt Ariadne was finishing her porridge and Great-aunt Petronella, perched by the fire in her large armchair, was singeing a crumpet she had speared on a toasting fork. She ate like a bird – in pecks.

Uncle Tiberius took his last gulp of tea as Cordelia tumbled into the room.

'Have you sewn Schlafen Grass into your nightcap, Dilly?' he teased. 'You're sleeping so late these days!'

Cordelia smiled sheepishly as Cook poured her a big cup of Honeymilk tea.

'Don't forget lessons with your great-aunt this morning, Cordelia,' Aunt Ariadne said. 'And we'll need you in the workshop soon. There's lots to be done before the shop opens.'

Cordelia nodded, helping herself to eggs.

'And remember Sam's lesson,' Aunt Ariadne added. 'You're teaching her the most important magic of all.'

'Reading and writing's magic?' Sam asked through a mouthful of toast.

'Indeed it is! Learning to read is like learning how to make a fire: it will light your way through life.'

Leaving Cordelia and Sam chewing that over, Aunt Ariadne hurried upstairs after Uncle Tiberius, to begin working on the hats they planned to make that day.

Sam swallowed the last bite of toast, but Cordelia didn't really mind. It had been two months since Prospero had gone missing in the shipwreck. Without Sam's merry presence, Hatmaker House would have been full of shadows. But Sam's sunshine chased the shadows away.

Since moving in with the Hatmakers, Sam had cheerfully refused to wear a dress, but she had never said no to a single

meal. It made Cordelia happy to see the new dimple appearing in Sam's cheek when she smiled.

Cordelia had not told her family about the starlight map her father had sent her. She did not want to raise their hopes only to disappoint them if the map led to a dead end. They'd given up hope, believing Prospero Hatmaker had drowned. But Cordelia daydreamed about finding her father and bringing him home, pictured him stepping in through the front door, imagined her aunt's joyful face, her uncle's happy tears . . .

'Jones! To the Alchemy Parlour!' Great-aunt Petronella cried, waving her toasting fork like a sword. 'Time for today's lesson!'

Jones poked his head through the kitchen window. Jones was the Hatmakers' coachman, and also, as Great-aunt Petronella impishly called him, 'Conveyor of the Ancient Maid'. She hadn't left her armchair for as long as Cordelia could remember, and was simply carried from room to room by Jones, often assisted by other members of the household.

Today, Cordelia and Sam each took an arm (of the armchair, not the great-aunt), to help Jones carry her up the spiral stairs.



The Alchemy Parlour was alive with tiny lights, as though someone had scattered a handful of Elysium Seeds across the

room. A collection of crystals hung in the wide window, casting diamonds of sunlight over everything.

'Ah! Excellent!' Great-aunt Petronella cawed as they set her chair down by the flickering lilac fire. 'The Empyrean Crystals are refracting the sunshine nicely!'

Jones slipped away as Cordelia settled Sam at a table with a quill and ink. She wrote out the alphabet on a clean sheet of paper for Sam to copy. Sam began her work, with one eye closed and her tongue sticking out.

'Helps me concentrate,' she explained. 'But my tongue does get a bit cold.'

Great-aunt Petronella picked up a tall jar of grey water that stood on her workbench. She held it up to the light and Cordelia saw pearl-bright ripples in the water.

'Blimey!' Sam said, looking up from writing a rather wobbly *f*. 'What's that shiny stuff?'

'It is joy,' Great-aunt Petronella croaked. 'Today's lesson is on extracting Essence of Joy from this rainwater, which I collected yesterday. All water contains joy. But there is a special kind to be found in rain. It is a gentle joy if the rain is soft, and a fiercer joy when the rain is harder. It also gathers at the edges of clouds to make silver linings. Even just by letting raindrops fall on your face, you can feel the joy they hold.'

She dipped her gnarled fingers into the jar and flicked droplets at Cordelia and Sam. Sam giggled, and Cordelia felt little dashes of happiness where the drops landed. Her

great-aunt dabbed a little rain behind her ears as though it was perfume.

'Come winter, we will work with snowflakes,' she said. 'A single snowflake can contain a large quantity of wonder. But today: rain!'

Following careful instructions from Great-aunt Petronella, who pointed at things from her chair using the toasting fork (to which she seemed rather attached), Cordelia set up the distillation equipment, while Sam carried on with her letters.

Cordelia poured the jar of pearly rain carefully into a large bulbous bottle set on a trivet above a small stack of wood. She fetched a bowl from a high shelf and fixed a twisty glass tube to the mouth of the bottle.

'Distillation is a method of extracting something pure from water,' Great-aunt Petronella explained. 'Put the bowl under the lip of the pipe, ready to catch the joy – good. Now we are ready to light the fire.'

She turned her bird-bright eyes on Sam. 'Come here, little Lightbringer, I think you should do it.'

Sam looked up, forgetting to put her tongue back in her mouth. 'My name's Light*finger*,' she said uncertainly. 'Not Light*bringer*.'

'Is it indeed?' Great-aunt Petronella fixed Sam with a penetrating gaze. 'I remember a time when there were Lightbringers and Flamemakers and all sorts of families

whose arts were in the weaving of light. That was before the ban, of course.'

Cordelia would never get used to her great-aunt 'remembering' things that had happened hundreds of years ago. It was particularly strange because she claimed to have forgotten her own age. If Great-aunt Petronella was to be believed, she had lost count in the middle of the last century.

'The ban?' Sam said.

'You mean when Henry the Eighth banned all Making except by the Maker families?' Cordelia asked.

'Yes, the king's ban,' her great-aunt replied. 'There were once hundreds of Maker families. But, fearing that others would use Maker magic to become more powerful than him, King Henry decreed that all but a handful of Makers should stop Making. Those who defied him were imprisoned. Some were executed. It was a terrible time. Families went into hiding, changing their names to disguise who they really were, frightened that the king's men would come to arrest them.

'We helped as many as we could escape to safety through secret passageways under the city. It went on for years, well into Elizabeth the First's reign. Makers of all kinds disappeared: Weather Brewers, Besomers, Dance Spinners, Songtellers – all gone. Some went into hiding, others got away on ships to the New World.'

Cordelia had never heard this part of the story before. She suddenly felt fiercely proud of her great-aunt, helping

Makers to escape the tyranny of a king. If she couldn't fight loudly, at least she'd fought quietly. *If Making is in somebody's blood, it should never be stopped by another human, even if they wear a crown!* Cordelia thought.

'Of course, there are still some Makers in other countries, whose rulers have not suppressed their crafts,' went on Great-aunt Petronella. 'The king's Wigmakers in France, for example, and the Glassmakers in Venice. The Papermakers of the East create very special magics, and the Carpetmakers in Persia work wonders with their threads. But in England only the Makers of the Royal Garb are left.'

'But there were so many others!' Cordelia frowned. 'I've never heard of some of them, like the Songtellers, and the Weather Brewers! Why weren't they allowed to continue?'

'Because – just as you say, my dear – there were *so many*. King Henry feared their power might grow beyond his control. He was particularly afraid of magical artefacts being made that might be used against him. Every magical creation the King's Men could find was burnt. Buckleberry Hall was emptied of everything, even the carpets! But some things escaped the flames. Even now an antique chair with unusual properties will occasionally turn up, or an old broomstick with an eccentric personality, made by a Besomer.'

Cordelia felt her eyes become round as coins, and her great-aunt continued:

'King Henry felt he could handle only a handful of Maker families. He decided clothes makers would be most useful to him, so we were the only Makers given permission to continue our craft.'

'Those were the Hatmakers, Bootmakers, Watchmakers . . . Glovemakers and Cloakmakers, right?' Sam ventured.

'Exactly!' Cordelia smiled. She did not add the sixth family – the Canemakers – who had been expelled in disgrace from the Makers' Guildhall thirty years ago. The last Canemaker was currently languishing in prison, awaiting trial for trying to start the very war that Cordelia had stopped.

'The king built the Guildhall for us and made us obey very strict rules: for a hundred years or so, the Makers were only allowed to make clothes for the monarch. Then, during the reign of Charles the Second, we were allowed to open shops. That is, I'm afraid to say, when things began to get a little more *competitive* between the families.'

Cordelia grimaced. To say things were 'competitive' between the Maker families was mild. Aside from an enormous argument two months ago, most Makers hadn't spoken a word to each other in several decades.

'Anybody could be a descendant of an ancient family of magical makers,' Great-aunt Petronella said to Sam. 'You'll occasionally find a clue hidden in the surname. Sometimes it's as simple as a few letters changed.'

Sam stared, speechless, at Great-aunt Petronella.

'So, Sam!' the old lady cried. 'Let us see you *bring some light*: choose a fragment of the refracted sunshine scattered over the floor and start the fire with it.'

She held out a pair of bronze tweezers.

Sam hesitated.

'I don't fink yer right about my name.'

'Lightbringer or Lightfinger, you are more than capable of this task,' Great-aunt Petronella said briskly.

A soft breeze nudged the crystals in the window and Sam's gaze drifted to the diamonds of light, shifting across the floor.

'But ain't it – ain't it breaking the law?' Sam said. 'Even if I *was* a . . . a Lightbringer, it's still *banned*. I'd get chucked in prison fer doing any kinda Making.'

'You're suddenly very law-abiding!' Cordelia teased.

Sam blushed and muttered, 'Don't wanna disgrace the Hatmakers.'

'You'd never disgrace us, Sam,' Cordelia assured her. 'You make everything more sunshiny . . . See, you've already brought light to this house!'

She gave Sam an encouraging nudge, and Sam took the tweezers.

Cautiously, as though she was handling a living thing, Sam picked up a shard of sunlight from the floor. It trembled as she carried it carefully across the room. She laid the bright diamond of light on the stack of wood, paused for a moment, then covered it with the smallest twig.

The piece of sunlight flickered.

Cordelia held her breath.

The fire took. In seconds, the little pile of wood was wreathed in crackling flames.

Great-aunt Petronella's eyes sparkled in the firelight.

Cordelia leaped up. 'You did it, Sam!' she yelped, hugging her friend. 'You *did* it!'

Sam broke into a huge smile.

It felt like the start of something.