
SANDY FIN
Operation Splash Landing
MARTIN STEWART


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Also by MARTIN STEWART

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SANDY FIN

Operation Splash Landing



MARTIN STEWART

Illustrated by Santy Gutiérrez

ZEPHYR

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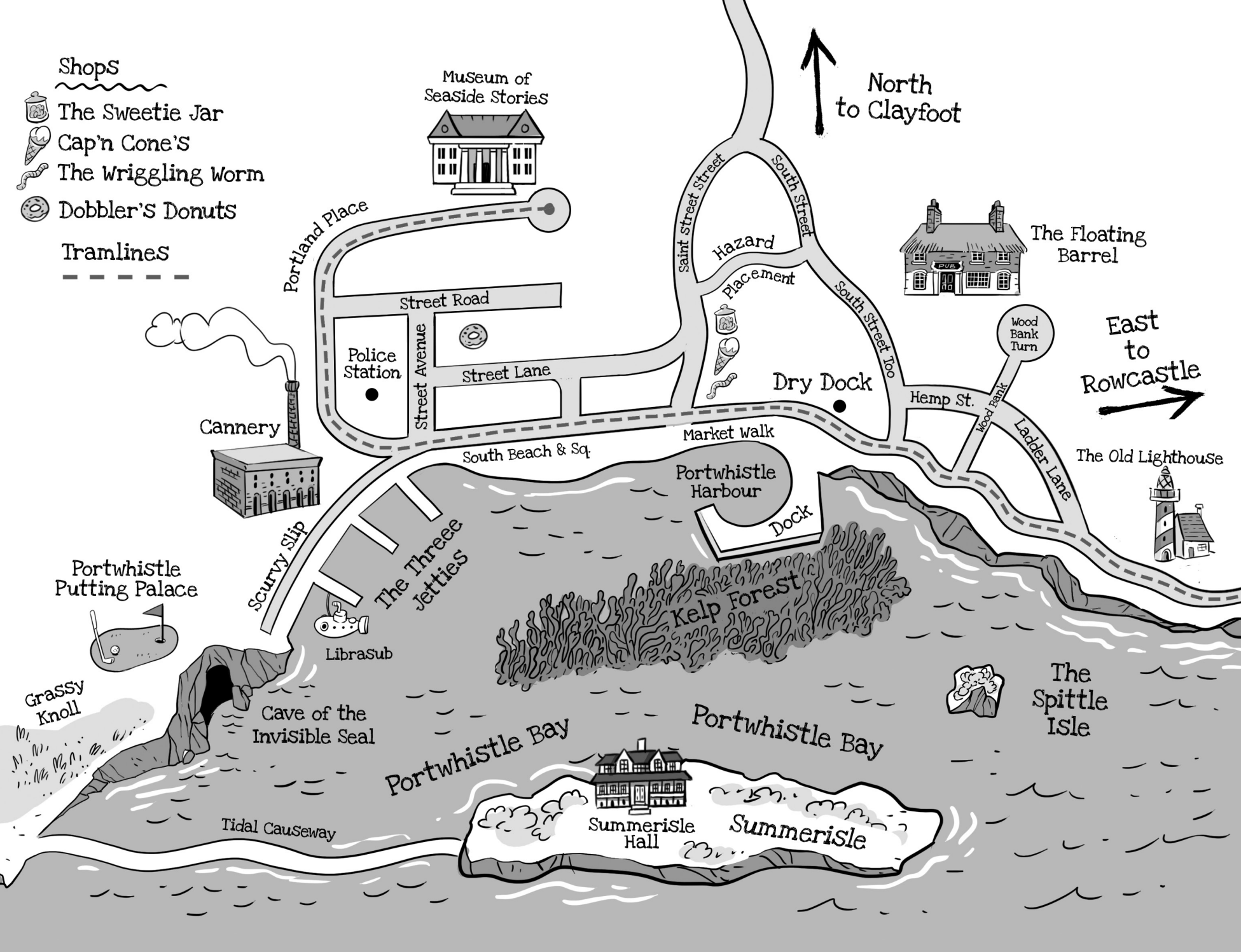
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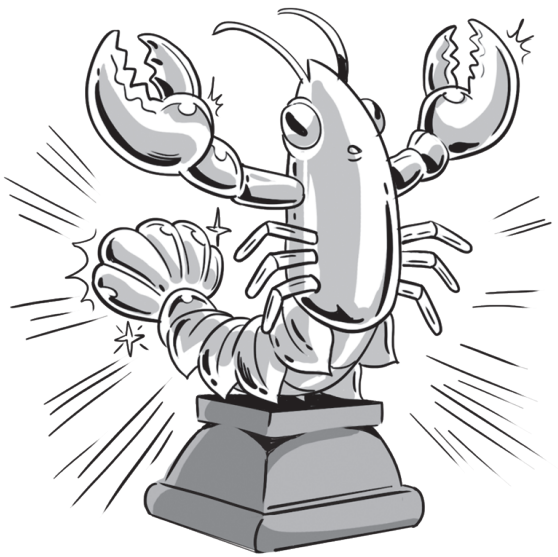
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To all my niblings,

MS




Shops
The Sweetie Jar
Cap'n Cone's
The Wriggling Worm
Dobbler's Donuts
Tramlines
Museum of Seaside Stories
North to Clayfoot
Portland Place
Saint Street Street
South Street
Hazard
Placement
South Street Too
The Floating Barrel
Street Road
Police Station
Street Avenue
Street Lane
Dry Dock
Wood Bank Turn
East to Rowcastle
Hemp St.
Wood Bank
Ladder Lane
Cannery
Market Walk
South Beach & Sq.
The Old Lighthouse
Portwhistle Harbour
Dock
Scurvy Slip
The Threee Jetties
Portwhistle Putting Palace
Kelp Forest
LibraSub
Grassy Knoll
Cave of the Invisible Seal
Portwhistle Bay
Portwhistle Bay
The Spittle Isle
Tidal Causeway
Summerisle Hall
Summerisle



The Golden Lobster of Portwhistle was last seen during the Great Storm of 1912, when a tidal wave swamped the village and washed its most precious antiquities out to sea. Bit by bit, piece by piece, the villagers recovered their treasures and jewels.

Only the Golden Lobster remains lost to the waves.

Legend says the Lobster waits in Portwhistle Bay. Legend says the Lobster's return will restore the village's vanished glory. Legend says the Lobster can only be found by an adventurer of great courage and noble heart.

Legend says lots of things.

All of them are true.

Professor Emile Archambeau Du Pont

My Story: Underwater Amazements A-Go-Go-Go

1

It had rained that afternoon. Pearls of water dotted the moss that sprang, furry and green, between the rockpools. The sea around the tiny island was black and flat as glass.

Lily Spencer ducked out of the moonlight, and checked her watch.

'Come on, Sandy,' she muttered, tugging her hair as the seconds ticked away. 'You've been under for nearly *seventeen* minutes!'

Her little boat *clonked* against the rocks, and she glanced over her shoulder, to where the distant village of Portwhistle glistened as a string of seafront bulbs.



Bubbles popped on the water.

Lily scrambled forward, flashing the ghostly beam of her torch into the sea.

A shape – rising.

She grinned.

Sandy Fin broke the surface with a gasp.

‘Hi, Lil!’ he spluttered. ‘What a swim that was – water’s lovely!’

Lily helped him ashore.

‘I think I’ll stick with the rowboat, thanks,’ she said. ‘You were under for *ages* – seventeen minutes and twenty-eight seconds. A new record!’

The clouds parted, bathing them in moonlight.

Lily sneezed.

‘It wasn’t about that, Lil,’ said Sandy, shaking himself dry. ‘This was a seaside creature safety patrol.’ He raised an eyebrow. ‘Although a record dive *is* a nice bonus – all the way to the Spittle Isle!’

He moved towards the hill at the island’s heart on certain feet, scales shining on his elbows and knees.

Lily watched as he patted them dry.

‘Does that hurt?’ she asked, dashing after him while the moon was hidden by a wisp of cloud.

Sandy shook his head.

‘It’s more like… you know when you bump your funny bone?’

‘Of course!’

‘It’s like that. Kind of tickly, but… not.’ He shrugged. ‘It’s not a big deal – my scales have always flared up when I’m scared or tense or whatever.’

‘And what are you now?’ asked Lily.

Sandy grinned.

‘Excited.’

He crawled forward, knees sinking into the sand, face pressed to a barnacled slot in the hillside.

‘Can you see her?’ hissed Lily, holding her nose as the moon reappeared.

She peered over Sandy’s shoulder – and into a shimmering cave. White light sparkled on its foaming pool, speckling the roof with bright coins.

‘By “her”,’ said Sandy, ‘do you mean Miss Floss the Very Cross Albatross, Portwhistle’s largest seabird, who was last seen three weeks ago struggling with an injured wing, and who we, the village’s Coastal Rescue Team, have so far failed to rescue?’

‘That’s exactly who I mean,’ said Lily patiently. ‘Where *is* she?’

Sandy grinned.

‘There,’ he said, pointing.

Lily focussed past his finger.

Moonlight.

Shadows.

And, beyond that glitter and gloom, a deeper shade.

Which moved.

‘You did it!’ Lily whispered, grabbing Sandy’s hand as a wave hissed over the rocks.

Sandy smiled.

‘She was spotted by Skip Breakfast on his morning watchman walk,’ he said. ‘Then I found a feather

spinning in the landward current – which meant it *had* to have come from here.'

Lily clapped her hands.

'That's brilliant!'

Sandy shrugged.

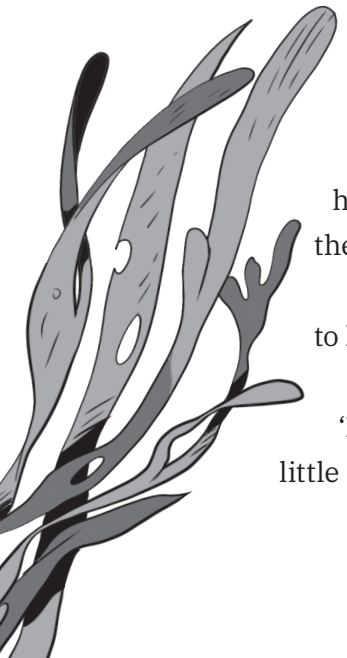
'It's Emile's training: studying maps, scrambling up cliffs, reading patterns in the sand... And we've already rescued *loads* of animals—'

Lily sneezed again. 'Remember the Ranting Cormorant?' she sniffed.

'So much ranting!'

'Pinchy the Polkadot Crab?'

'Got me right on the ear!' said Sandy, pointing to a vivid scar. 'But Miss Floss hurt her wing weeks ago, and we've still not managed to help her – just a *glimpse* and she flaps away.'



'Lopsidedly,' added Lily, sighing with the relief of a lifelong lunaphylactic as clouds covered the moon.

The shade moved again, and a heavy wave swirled seaweed around their legs.

Lily screamed – then clamped a hand to her mouth.

Sandy looked down.

'It's just an eel,' he said, lifting the little serpent away from her ankle.

The eel wound through his fingers as he released it into a rockpool. 'See ya, pal!'

Lily shuddered, then checked her watch.

'It's half past *eleven*!' she said. 'You *know* Emile locks the museum doors at midnight! If you get stuck outside—'

'I won't!'

Lily chewed her lip.

'If our parents find out we're gone—'

'They won't!' said Sandy. 'I packed my hammock with pillows, so even if my mum climbs the ladder—'

'My bed isn't swinging in the attic of the Museum of Seaside Stories,' Lily reminded him. 'All my mum has to do is open my bedroom door.'

'If I was your mum,' said Sandy, 'I'd be more worried about your dad's snoring.' He rummaged in his backpack, pushing aside tools, trowels and tent poles until he came to a thick, waxed sheet. 'I'm going to wrap Miss Floss in this. Now, if she *does* slip past me—'

'Grab her?'

'—run away very fast,' finished Sandy. 'Miss Floss is a *Wandering* Albatross – her beak's as big as a wellington boot!'

Lily bit her lip.

'Why did I let you talk me into doing this?' she said. 'I could have been at home, snug as you like.' A big wave

hit the rocks, showering them with spray. 'And *dry*.'

'Where would be the fun in that?' chuckled Sandy, slipping off his shoes.

Lily looked at her friend. Sandy's patches of scaly skin shone in the pale light, and every part of him – ankles, elbows, head, shoulders, knees and toes – was scraped and bashed and bruised. He turned to her, thick eyebrows dripping with seawater.

'Come on,' he said, eyes flashing. 'Coastal Rescue Team promise!'

They linked pinkies.

'For sea and sky,' said Sandy.

'For wind and wave,' replied Lily.

'And all the creatures we can save,' they finished, together.

They grabbed each other in a soggy hug.

'I'm scared!' whispered Lily.

'Don't worry!' said Sandy. 'This'll be *easy*!'

Holding the tarpaulin like a matador's cape, he wriggled through the slot.

And landed in a puddle of goop.



'Yuck,' he muttered, wiping the oily blue slime on his shorts.

A scratching noise came from the depths of the cave.

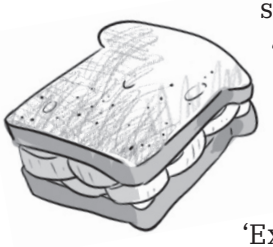
Sandy looked back at Lily through the narrow gap.

'I'm not sure about this,' she said. 'I've got a horrible feeling in my tummy.'

'Me too!' said Sandy. He reached into his backpack and took out a banana sandwich. 'Maybe I'm hungry...'

Lily, like a hypnotist waking a volunteer, snapped her fingers in front of Sandy's face.

'Sandy!' she said. 'This is *dangerous* – you can't snack! *Or* get distracted by—'



'Something shiny!' said Sandy, splashing through the frothy pool.

Lily covered her face with her hands.

'Exactly,' she sighed.

Sandy reached into the water.

'Salt and sauce!' he gasped.

'What is it?' asked Lily, standing on tiptoe.

'It's a *wishing* whelk!'

Lily's ears snapped back.

'Sandy,' she said carefully. 'Put the whelk down.'



The whelk's snail-like body vanished into its shell like a crumpled tissue.

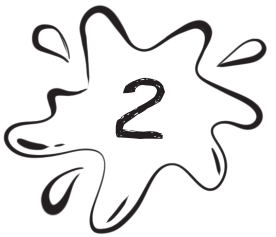
Sandy turned the shell over in his hands. It was the size of a dinner plate, and the weight of a watermelon.

'I've never seen one this big,' he said.

Lily stamped her foot.

'Alexander Dorsal Fin!' she said, cheeks colouring as she used his full name. 'If you don't put down that magical gastropod right *now*, I'm going straight to—'

'There's something I haven't told you,' said Sandy. 'It's about the museum.'



Lily rested her head on the rock.

'I already know,' she said. 'My mum told me. The museum's closing down.'

Sandy nodded.

'It *can't* close, Lil. I've lived there my whole life!'

Lily swallowed.

'It's not just the museum,' she said, 'it's the whole village! Half the shops on St Street Street have closed, and my dad's shop is quieter than ever.'

'I know,' said Sandy. The wishing whelk *hummed* against his skin. 'I just thought, maybe if I wished for things to be—'

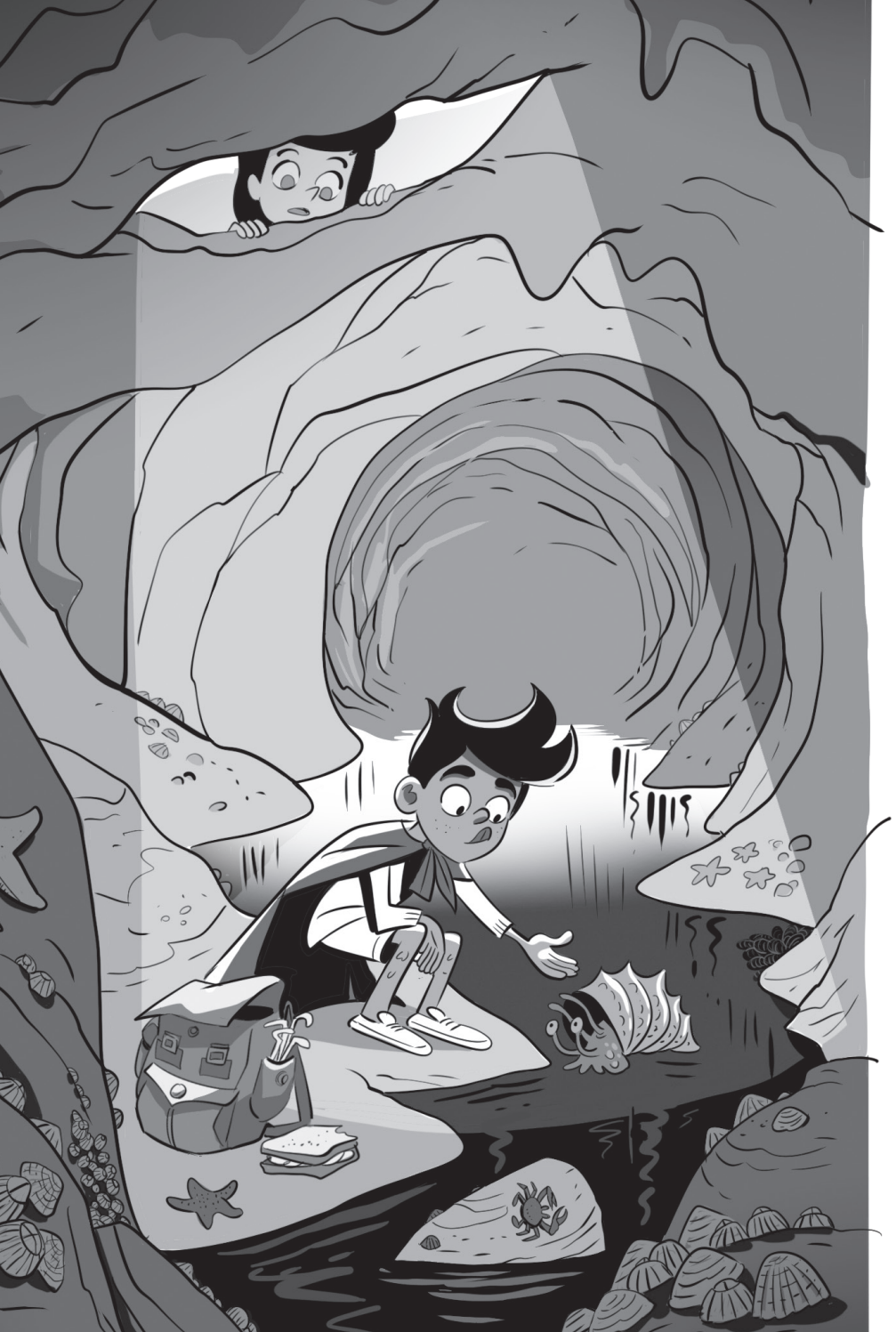
'Sandy, you *know* wishing on a wishing whelk *always* goes wrong! Remember the time I wished for a cure to my moonlight allergy?'

Sandy smiled.

'You were allergic to *sun*light for three weeks.'

'And what about the time you wished you could fly?'

'I *did* grow wings…' said Sandy, raising his eyebrows.



‘On the side of your nose.’

Sandy put his eyebrows down.

‘I know,’ he said. ‘Look, I’m putting it back.’

He lowered the wishing whelk into the rockpool, and let it slip from his palms.

After a moment, the creature *blurped* out, then slid under an urchin-spiked rock. A soft, pulsing iridescence drifted from its shell as it dug into the sand.

Beautiful, thought Sandy. Then, aloud: ‘Let’s rescue Miss Floss!’

He pulled the tarpaulin over his head. Sounds of surf on stone bounced around his ears.

It was as though he had climbed inside a shell.

I’m a hermit crab, he thought, scuttling forward as a wave sloshed over his head. *Protecting my fragile body.*

Miss Floss’s shade shifted.

She’s heard me! Sandy thought, taking a final, slow step.

When something crunched.

‘Uh-oh,’ he said.

‘Uh-oh *what*?’ whispered Lily.

Sandy reached down and brushed a tangle of skeletons with his fingers.

The fine spines of sea trout were wrapped around crab claws and cuttlebones. Everything was sticky.

‘It’s a *graveyard*,’ he said, stepping to the side. ‘I don’t think—’

Click!

'What was that?' cried Lily.

Sandy reached into the rockpool, clicking on his torch.

'It's a tripwire!' he said, running his fingers along the length of sharp twine. 'Somebody's set a trap!' He looked up. 'And – oh, no!'

Lily jumped up and down, trying to see.

'What?' she hissed. 'What's happening?'

Sandy prodded the tangle of wet bones. His torchlight caught in the empty eye sockets, throwing shadows over the walls and drawing a low sound from the end of the cave.

Sandy's hands closed into fists.

'They got *Miss Floss*!'

'What?' gasped Lily. 'Are you sure?'

Sandy held up the bird's big, sharp skull. Three of her neck bones had been broken.

'*Very*,' he said, feeling a hot coal of anger settle in his stomach. 'Somebody did this, Lil! Somebody set this trap, and murdered an innocent albatross!'



Lily nodded – then froze.

'Sandy,' she said. 'If Miss Floss has been killed, then *what's in there with you*?'

A growl echoed round the cave.

Sandy ducked back under the tarpaulin.

'That's not Miss Floss!' he said, scrambling back towards the slot in the rock.

The shade rose – then kept rising, filling the cave with darkness.

'Lily,' said Sandy, clicking off his torch. '*Run!*'