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Opening extract from

The Flip Flop Club: Whale Song

Written by

Ellen Richardson

Published by

Oxford University Press

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OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Great Clarendon Street, Oxford OX2 6DP
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First published 2012

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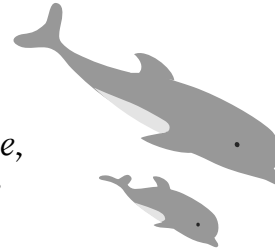
British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Data available

ISBN: 978-0-19-275662-6
1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

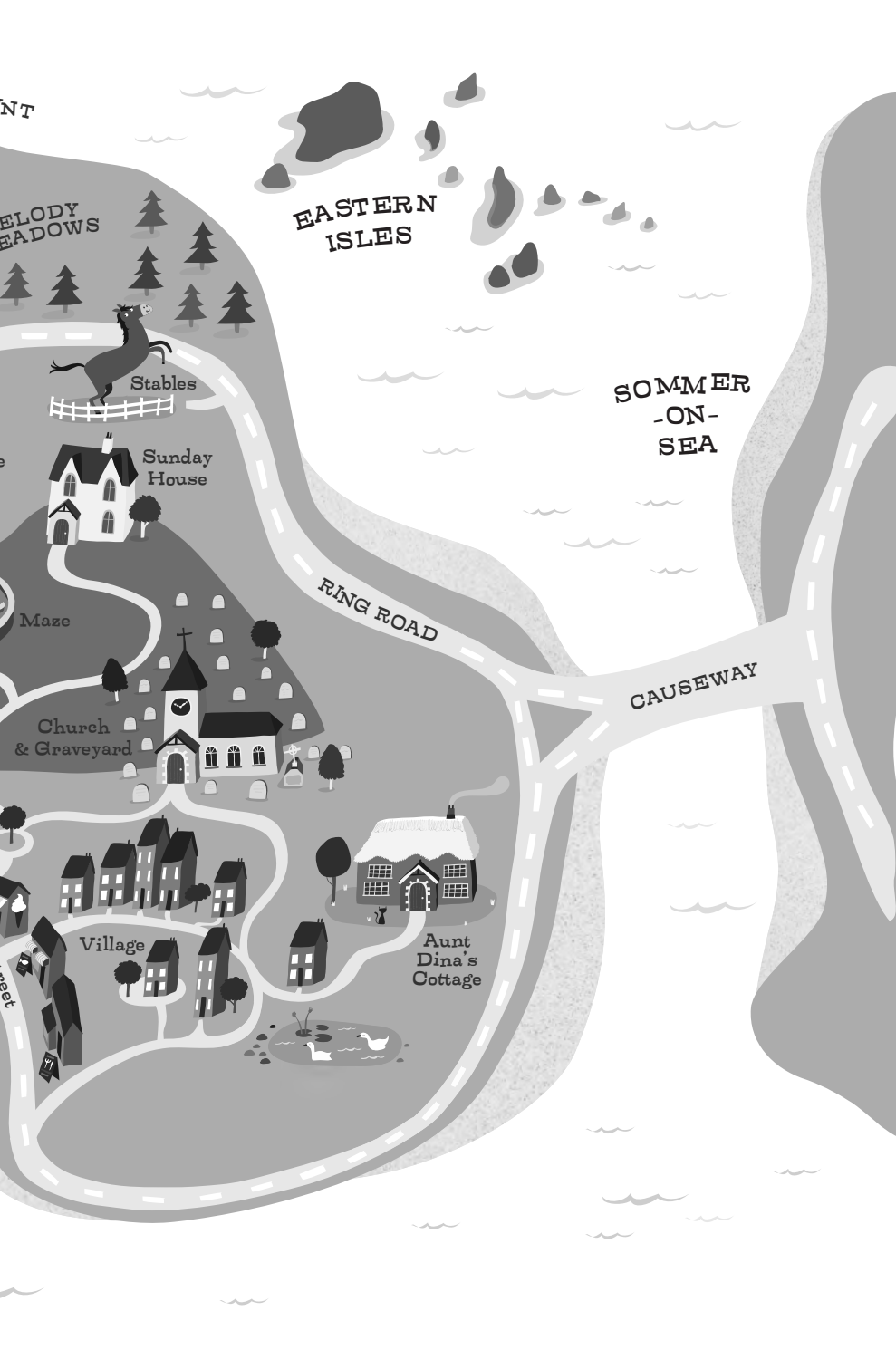
Printed in Great Britain

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For my niece,
Catherine




SUNDAY ISLAND
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W
E
S
DEAD MAN'S POIN
ROCKY CLIFFS
THE HOOK
MIRROR COVE
Treehouse
WESTERN ISLES
DEVIL'S TEETH
MOUNTAIN STREAM
LAKE
Caravan Park
High Street
MAIN BEACH
HARBOUR
Sailing Club


NT
ELODY
EADOWS
EASTERN
ISLES
SOMMER
-ON-
SEA
Stables
Sunday
House
Maze
RING ROAD
CAUSEWAY
Church
& Graveyard
Village
Aunt
Dina's
Cottage

Chapter 1

'It's not worth being famous if I have to get up at five a.m.,' Sierra grumbled, yawning and shivering in the chilly dawn air. 'And I'm not even sure I want my picture in the paper looking like this!' She tugged at her too-short, Tash-sized wetsuit, staring mournfully at her feet which were very un-Sierra-like in neoprene wetshoes instead of sparkly flip-flops.

Elly smiled in sympathy but grabbed her friend's hand and pulled her after Tash. 'Come on! She's leaving us behind!'

'You have to get up early to go whale-

spotting.' Tash strode ahead of them across the beach. 'I hope the rumours are true and that there really are Northern Bottlenose whales headed our way. They're rare this far south.'

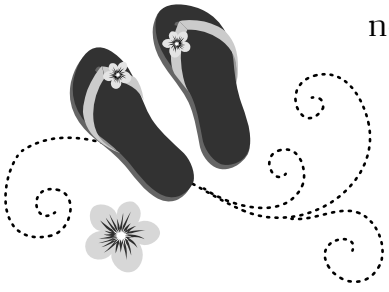
'We just *have* to win *The Sunday Island News* contest and be the first to get a photograph of them,' Elly said.

'I'll do my best!' Tash patted the waterproof camera she wore around her neck.

'It's the photo of *us* I'm worried about!' Sierra muttered.

'Don't worry,' Tash said, whirling round to grin at Sierra. 'The news crew will have a hair stylist and someone to do manicures.'

'Really?' Sierra's face lit up, then fell. 'Oh, I nearly fell for that. OK. We find the whales first, then I stress. Deal?'



'Deal!' Elly was suddenly so excited she felt she might explode. She let go of



Sierra and leapt over a mound of seaweed, whooping in delight. The wetsuit Tash had lent her made her feel like a real sailor. And today they were going to leave the harbour for open sea. Her tummy went all butterflies and squirms at the thought.

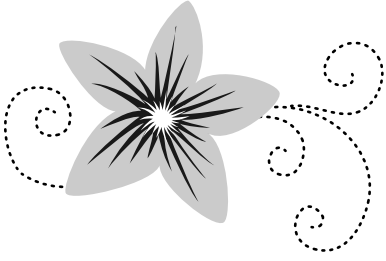
The morning sun hung just above the eastern sea and the beach of Sunday Island's main harbour was washed clean by the tide. Sailing boat rigging clinked in the steady off-shore breeze and seagulls screamed overhead. Other than a small fleet of dinghies dozing on the sand and a flock of wading birds dodging the waves, the girls were alone. Mojo, Tash's border terrier, spotted the birds and gave chase, bounding across the damp sand. With a clattering of wings, the birds took to the air before wheeling off to find a dog-free stretch of sand.

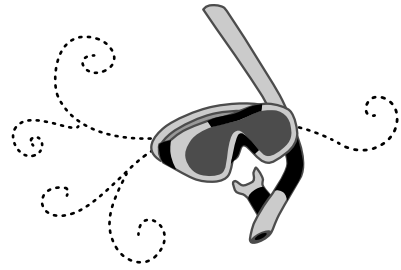
Elly slid to a stop, watching the birds.

Everything smelt of sea and freshness. What a morning for an adventure!

'I've seen Minke whales before, but never a Northern Bottlenose. It would be so great if we spotted one.' Tash's voice was wistful. Elly knew that Tash had photographs of whales and dolphins stuck all over the walls of her bedroom and tree house. Today was obviously pretty special for her.

Tash whistled Mojo to heel as they reached her blue and white Wayfarer dinghy, named the *Mojo* after him. He trotted over to them, panting and wagging his tail. 'Good dog!' Tash gave him a pat, then slid off her backpack and stowed it in the boat. 'OK, give me your stuff too.' She turned around and her eyes widened in disbelief at the sight of Sierra's enormous purple handbag, which her friend was wearing slung over her wetsuit.





'Why on earth did you bring *that*?' Tash began to splutter with laughter.

'I've got lots of really important stuff in here,' Sierra said, hugging her handbag close. 'I need to keep it with me.'

Elly shrugged her backpack off her shoulders. In her rush to make the dawn rendezvous she hadn't bothered to fasten it properly. Now, as she struggled to close the zip, the backpack slipped from her fingers. It hit the ground, dumping all her stuff onto the sand.

'Watch out, you'll get sand in our sandwiches!' Sierra knelt to help Elly repack. She held up a book. 'What's this?'

'A book?' Tash exclaimed. 'The *Mojo* isn't exactly a cruise liner, you know. No deckchairs and skittles.'

'No fancy restaurant with five-course meals either.' Sierra sighed, rubbing her tummy.

'I'm starving!'

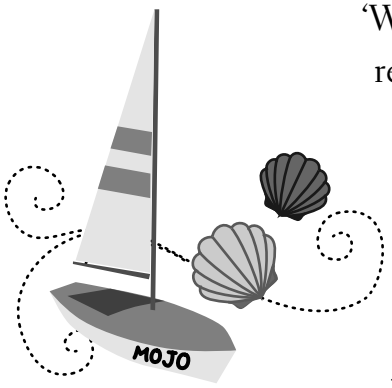
'You should have had breakfast,' Tash said.

'I did! Sea air makes me hungry.'

'Everything makes you hungry.' Elly shook her head in mock despair. 'You're going to have to become a chef.'

'Great idea.' Sierra's eyes sparkled. 'With my own TV show.' She waved to an invisible camera, and then handed the book to Elly.

'I brought the book to show you both,' Elly said. 'Aunt Dina gave it to me last night. It's an Edith Builtmore sailing adventure. My aunt says Edith Builtmore used to live on Sunday Island.'



'Which one is it?' Tash reached for the book. '*The Secret of Harebell Island*. That's one of my favourites. I have every book Edith Builtmore ever wrote. She was into marine ecology long before



it was trendy, and she was a world class sailor.' Tash paused. 'Did you know she was returning to Sunday Island after sailing the Atlantic single-handed when she disappeared? They never found any trace of her or her yacht.'

'That's sad.' Sierra shivered. 'And mysterious. I wonder what happened to her? Maybe she's still stranded on a desert island somewhere.'

'She'd be super-old by now,' Elly said. She tried to imagine being out in the open sea all alone. Edith Builtmore must have been very brave.

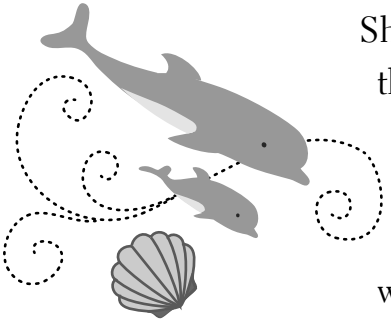
Tash turned the book over and studied the author's photograph. 'Someday I'm going to sail around the world single-handed.'

'Now I know you're crazy.' Sierra made a face. 'Days without anyone to talk to? Or a hot shower? Urgh!' She took the book from

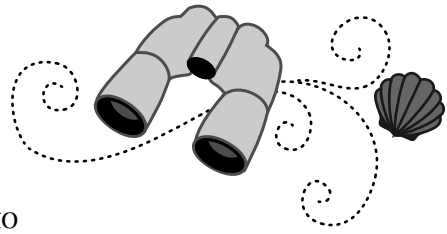
Tash and flipped through it. 'This looks good. Can I read it when you're finished, Elly?'

'Sure,' Elly said. 'It's about three girls. I just wondered…is it too weird or could she have been writing about our mums? They would have been on the island about the same time she was. It would be so cool if they inspired one of Edith Builtmore's books.'

Elly thought about the photograph the three of them had found in Tash's attic, the one of their mothers as girls on Sunday Island. They had been best friends too. She had framed a copy of the photo and hung it on the wall of her bedroom in Aunt Dina's cottage. It was her second most precious possession.



She reached up to touch the chain of the silver charm she always wore around her neck. She'd tucked it inside her wetsuit to keep it safe. Each of them had inherited



a friendship charm from their mothers, and had sworn never to take them off. Tash's charm was pinned to her wetsuit and Sierra's dangled among the clutter of bangles on her wrist.

Sierra's eyes were bright with excitement. 'I bet you're right. Our mums are secretly famous.'

'And if we want to be famous too, we need to get going before someone else beats us to those whales!' Tash interrupted. 'We need to be the first to spot them, remember?'

Elly slid the book into her backpack. She fastened the zip securely before handing the pack to Tash, who stored it in one of the waterproof cargo bags tucked against the side of the boat.

Then Tash tugged out some life jackets and handed them round. 'Essential equipment, guys.'

'But this thing is…*orange*!' Sierra's eyes

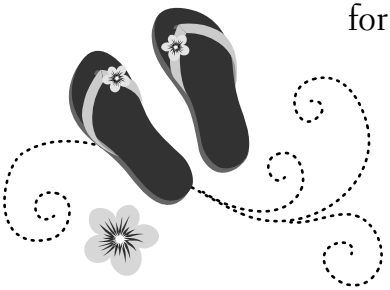
widened in horror. 'Orange makes my skin look green.'

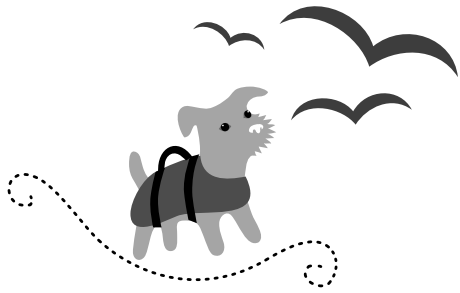
'Sorry, Sierra.' Tash was doing her best not to smile. 'Even Mojo has to wear one.' She knelt to slip a bright orange dog-shaped life jacket onto the border terrier's back, fastening it with chest and belly straps. Mojo whined but stood patiently, obviously used to the routine. 'Safety before fashion.'

'I guess,' Sierra said sadly as she pulled on the life jacket. 'Oh well, at least my armbands are pink.'

'Armbands?' Elly said, before she could stop herself. Tash was staring, open-mouthed.

'Absolutely,' Sierra said firmly. 'Essential for the ocean-going lady of fashion.' She tugged some bits of plastic from a mesh pocket on her wetsuit and proceeded to blow up a pair of neon-pink armbands,





which she slid up her arms. When she had finished, she struck a muscle-pose. 'What d'ya think?'

Elly began to splutter. Tash was already whooping in hysterics.

Sierra grinned at them. 'OK, so I'm a scaredy-cat, but the armbands make me happier about going out to sea in this teensy little boat.'

'Totally you, Sierra.' Elly decided this wasn't the time to mention that neon-pink armbands and a fluorescent orange vest were an eye-watering combination.

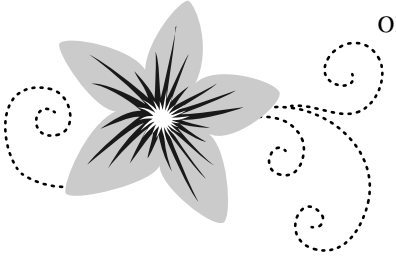
'Come on,' said Tash, when she got her breath back. 'Let's get the *Mojo* launched before the rest of the island wakes up and beats us to the whales.'

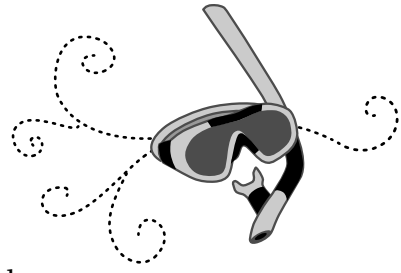
Mojo lifted his ears at the sound of his name and barked.

'All dogs on board!' Tash scooped the border

terrier into the bottom of the boat, where he sat perfectly still, like the trained sailor he was. Tash lifted the front bar of the two-wheeled trailer and began to back her boat towards the sea. As soon as she was knee-deep in the water, Tash unhooked the ties and floated the boat off the trailer. She steadied the dinghy in the bobbing waves as Elly and Sierra towed the trailer back up onto the beach. Then they splashed into the sea and held the boat while Tash hopped in. She stood in the centre of the boat, untying the ropes securing the sail. She took her place at the tiller. 'Come aboard and raise the mainsail, First Officer Elly!'

Sierra kept the dinghy steady as Elly hitched herself over the side of the boat and found the rope used to raise and lower the dinghy's large triangular sail. She pulled it in hand over hand, as Tash had taught





her. The mainsail slowly unfurled and began to flap in the breeze. When it reached the top of the mast, Elly secured the rope and settled back, her heart thudding with excitement as the sail filled and the boat started to slide through the water.

Sierra quickly hauled herself over the side. 'You can't leave without me!'

'Raise the jib, Second Officer Sierra!' Tash called.

Sierra made quick work of raising the tiny jib sail, which was soon ballooning out in front of the mast. The dinghy picked up speed, riding as gently as a rocking horse over the bouncing waves. The *Mojo* steered crisply away from shore.

Elly sat back on the wooden ledge that served as a seat. Sierra sat opposite her, clutching the sides of the boat with both hands. Tash guided them towards choppier water at the

head of the harbour. The boat cut through the waves, bobbing up and down, as the *Mojo* headed out into open sea. The whale-sighting expedition had begun!

