



'Please, Mr Sandman,' she said, 'can you take us over there, over to Coracle Island? No one's been over there, not since Sergei whatshisname turned himself into a seagull and flew off home to Russia – that's what Dadci said. Oh please! We could ride on the turtles.'

The Sandman thought for a moment. 'Indeed we could,' he said, 'indeed we could. It's not that far and I don't suppose they'd mind, not one bit, not after all you've done for us. And when all's said and done, one good turn deserves another, does it not? When do you want to go?'

'Now,' said Polly, smiling through her gappy teeth.

'Well,' said the Sandman to the turtles, 'you heard the little lady. Let's go.'

And so off we went, riding the turtles over the waves towards the lighthouse on Coracle Island, and me clinging on for dear life to the

shell so that I didn't fall off. It was like riding a horse without stirrups – not that I've ever done it, but you know what I mean. You cling on and you hope. The turtle's shell wasn't shell at all, but leathery and slimy, and I kept slipping and sliding. But what worried me most was the thought that at any moment my turtle might decide to dive and swim on underwater. I was grinning with terror, doing my very best not to look frightened. Polly looked across at me laughing and shrieking with delight. 'Gee up!' she cried. 'Gee up!' And the three of us ploughed through the sea, the Sandman's turtle a good deal lower in the water than ours – as you might expect.

It wasn't a race, but I was pleased nonetheless when I found myself out in front, though less pleased when I saw the mountainous waves crashing over the rocks on Coracle Island. I wanted to turn back but

I didn't know how. I clenched my teeth, took a deep breath and gripped the shell even harder, but my fingers were numb with cold now and seemed to have no strength left in them. One wrong wave and I'd be in the sea. I needn't have worried though. The turtle waited for just the perfect wave and we were carried in over the raging surf and washed up safe and sound on a narrow, pebbly beach. I got off, patted his shell and tried to stop my knees shaking. 'Thanks,' I said. And the turtle blinked his black eyes at me as if to say that it was no trouble, no trouble at all.

As soon as the other two joined me on the beach, we began the long climb up to the lighthouse. Every now and again the Sandman would stop and sigh. 'Me poor old coracle, all bashed about and upside-downed. It's not fair, it's not fair at all.' Polly was clambering on ahead like a goat. She arrived at the door of the

lighthouse first and tried to shake it open, but she couldn't budge it. I tried once, but it was locked.

'Do you want to go inside then?' the Sandman asked, and he turned the handle. When it didn't open, he put his foot against the door and pushed it. The lock broke at once. 'There we are,' he said. 'Easily done. I'd go with you, but I don't think I'd ever get myself through the little door would I?' And he was right about that. So Polly and I went alone into the cold dark of the lighthouse.

In front of us was a winding stairway.

'You go first,' Polly whispered.

'Why are you whispering?' I whispered.

'In case he's still here, you know, Sergei Ivanovitch thingamyjig. Maybe he's still here.'

I very much hoped he wasn't.

The steps were steep and narrow and my legs began aching almost at once. Eighty-five steps I counted, until we came at last into a

large round room with a table in the middle of it and a chair. There was nothing on the table except a teapot and a tin. Polly opened the tin. 'His Welsh cake tin and it's empty,' she whispered. I took the lid off the teapot. There were just a few dry tea-leaves inside.

The clock on the chest of drawers had stopped at precisely five o'clock, and beside it was an empty glass and a bottle of something. I could just read the writing on the label. 'It's vodka, isn't it?' said Polly. And it was.

All around the walls were pictures of sailing ships, but when I looked closer I saw that each one was of the same ship; and on every ledge stood an intricate, detailed matchstick model of a ship, all different sizes, but they were all the same ship, the same as the one in the pictures. And above the neatly made-up bed was a faded photo of a bearded sailor and his wife. 'That's him,' I said. 'That's Sergei Ivanovitch Prokofiev.'

Must be.' Then Polly was tugging at my shirt and I looked around. There was a chest against the wall and a blue uniform with gold buttons laid out neatly on top of it. On the floor beside it was a pair of black boots. But Polly was still pulling at me and pointing. She was pointing at the window and the window was open just as Dadci had always said it was, and there below it were a few white feathers on the floor. Seagull's feathers. Polly's cold hand crept into mine. 'Shivery,' she said.

