

## Journey's End

The storm seemed to come out of nowhere. It came at Grace and Connor just when they were at their most vulnerable, out beyond the harbour in the open ocean. It didn't give them a chance.

The sky changed colour so fast, it was as if someone had ripped away a sheet of blue wallpaper to reveal a gaping black hole. The heat from the sun vanished in an instant and the rain came down in hard pellets of water that burned and froze them in the same instant.

The water roiled beneath them, like a bucking bronco trying to throw its rider. The boat clung onto the waves, and Grace and Connor clung onto the boat, their harnesses offering little reassurance. What good was it being tied to a boat when at any moment the sea might slice their vessel in two or crush it in its rough, salty fist?

"We shouldn't have done this," Connor cried. "It was a stupid idea."

"No," shouted Grace, above of the roar of the water.

"What choice did we have?"

"We're going to die!"

"We're not dead yet!"

Were those tears rolling down Connor's cheek, or was it the saltwater stinging his eyes? Grace found it impossible to tell. She thought of their father. What would he have done?

"I'll tell you a tale of Vampirates," she sang, bravely, "A tale as old as true."

Connor grasped this crumb of comfort and joined in.

The two of them were still singing as the boat spun over and the guard rail snapped in two.

The twins were thrown apart and down, down into the freezing, churning water.

Filled with a strange calm, Connor watched pieces of the boat sink past him down into the darker water below. A strange catalogue of cups and cutlery and books twirled past him. He reached a hand out towards them and watched them dance away. He smiled. Beneath the surface of the water it was calm, a safe haven from the storm that raged above. It was tempting to stay here, and drift with the other broken pieces of his world. This might be a good way to die.

No, he had to find Grace! He tore himself from his trance and with every fibre of his body, pushed upwards through the water. It was hard and it was painful, and it was all he could do not to let go, open himself to the water and sink back down into the darkness.

But Connor was strong and now he used all his strength to fight the shower of shrapnel hurtling towards him as he

neared the wreckage of the boat. He burst through the surface, waves lashing him at every turn. Swallowing salty water and retching, he looked desperately around, searching for something buoyant to grab onto. And for his sister.

Connor's saviour turned out to be a piece of seating. He gripped its jagged edges tightly, pulling himself up onto the plank of wood as if it was a surfboard. It was an enormous effort and his hands were bleeding. The churning saltwater added to his pain. But Connor took a gulp of air and realised he had done it. He was alive. But where was Grace?

The storm was still raging, but quieter now. Connor scanned the bubbling water, looking for his sister's face amid the debris. She wasn't there. Gaining control of the makeshift surfboard, he moved through the water, looking for any sign of her. There was none.

The sea grew calmer but it was becoming harder and harder to see more than a metre or so ahead of him. Connor realised that a mist was settling. It grew thicker, enclosing him in his own personal cloud. No! Now he would never find her. He flapped his hands around him, trying to push the mist away, but all this did was to unbalance him. He brought his hands back down to the float and, defeated, let his head fall onto its surface. What was the point? If Grace was gone, there was nothing for him. He might as well slip from the float and dive back down into the water. At least they'd be together then. Connor lost track of how long he drifted for. It seemed an eternity, but it might have been only a few seconds, stretched out of all recognition through despair and fatigue. Now, the mist was thinning. Through it, he could see the shadow of a ship. It was faint, but he could not miss the outline. It was like an old galleon. He'd only seen such things in books and as a model at the Maritime Museum. He must be imagining it – hallucinating, as death approached.

But no, it was a ship. As the mist began to lift, he could see it quite clearly – turning in the water. Why was it changing direction in the middle of the ocean? Unless it was stopping for some reason. Perhaps it had come to rescue him?

Buoyed by the thought, he used his remaining strength to wave his arms in the air and cry out hoarsely.

"Over here! Over here!"

The ship continued to turn. But it *wasn't* coming for him. He could see no one on board. No one had seen him. The mist had lifted to the level of the deck. As the ship completed its turn, a soft golden light fell upon the ship's figurehead – a young woman. If only she were a real woman instead of a painted sculpture. Her piercing eyes seemed to watch him but, of course, they were nothing

more than daubs of paint on wood.

Connor was at a loss what to do as the ship began to move off into the distance. As it sailed away, he made out sails quite unlike any he had ever seen. They were like wings, glimmering with thin veins of light.

"Hey!" Connor called again. "Help!"

But his voice was weak and the ship was already much too far away. All he could make out was the dark silhouette of its strange, tattered sails. They seemed to flap gently as the ship made its way. It seemed as if, rather than sailing through the rough ocean, the ship was merely skimming the surface, unaffected by the strong currents. His mind must be playing tricks.

It just didn't make sense. His body felt dull and heavy and now it seemed that his mind was losing the fight too.

Grace was gone. The ship that might have rescued him had sailed away. The only option open to him now was to give up and join his sister in her watery grave.

His reverie was broken by a voice at his side.

"Here, grab my arm. You're safe now."