

My best moment with Perijee happened when we were lying out in the cove. There weren't any clouds that night, not one. If you opened your eyes wide enough you could see all the stars together, looking down on us like a city in the sky. It was just me and Perijee and the waves coming in and nothing else for miles and miles. The sky had never looked so big to me before.

I tried to find one of the stars that Dad had told me about, so I could show it to Perijee. He was still about my size then. This was before he tried to take over the world etc.

'Perijee,' I said, pointing up. 'Look.'

Perijee looked at my finger.

'No,' I said, pointing harder. 'Look *there*. At that star.'

Perijee grew a finger on his hand and tried

to show it to me. I groaned.

'No, Perijee.' I pulled his head down to my arm. 'That star, at the end of my finger, is called *Sirius*. It's the closest one to Earth – that's why it's so bright. See?'

Perijee nodded.

'Maybe that's where you came from,' I said.

Perijee glowed, like a candle in a jar. He grew more fingers, tens of them, wrapping round my hands and wriggling.

'Home,' he said.

I smiled. 'That's right, Perijee! *Home!*'

(I felt a bit bad, actually, because right then I realised *Sirius* was way off in the other direction and I'd been pointing at the wrong star the whole time. It might have even been a plane. I don't think Perijee noticed, so it's no big deal.)

We stayed like that for hours, him with his head on my shoulder and the waves hissing at the stones by our feet and his whole body glowing and fading like a nightlight, while I made up the names of the stars.

'That's the Jam Tart. And that's the Angry Horse. And that's the, er . . . Flying Fish.'

Perijee listened until he fell asleep, and when it


was properly late I carried him back across the beach in my arms and laid him in the hut by the jetty and tucked him under the nets.

It was my most special moment out of all the times we spent together, easy. Because as I stood there in the middle of the cold, dark hut and watched him sleep, I realised for the first time how *small* he was. Even though he was my size.

He didn't look like an alien at all. He looked like a baby.

And right then I knew that no matter what happened to Perijee and me, no matter how much we changed, it was my job to make sure that he was always safe and always loved and always happy.

Otherwise, what's the point of being a sister?



It all started just like any other morning, except I was holding a pineapple and the cove was covered in ten thousand dead jellyfish.

The cove wasn't normally covered in dead jellyfish. Normally it was covered in shingle, which is like rubbish painful sand. It was pretty much the only thing there was on Middle Island – that's why no one else lived there, apart from me and Mum and Dad.

By the end of that day, lots of other things would be different – in fact, everything would be. But I didn't know that then. All I knew was that I had a pineapple.

Frank's boat finally appeared, creaking through the cove in a cloud of smoke.

'You're late!' I shouted.

Frank was always late. He made me miss the

school register so often the others in class had started calling me 'Late-lin' instead of Caitlin, which is my name. When I asked if they could call me something else, they changed it to 'the weirdo who just moved here and who can't read or write properly', which is what they stuck with for the rest of the year.

Frank used to be a local fisherman, but he wasn't very good at it so Mum and Dad hired him to drive me to school every day instead. He has long hair like a lady and a big bushy beard, and doesn't do any normal grown-up things like own a car or wear shoes.

He stopped the boat beside the jetty and stared out.

'Jesus,' he said.

'It's a pineapple,' I explained. 'We all have to bring in food.'

Frank pointed behind me.

'I was talking about the jellyfish, Caitlin.'

'Oh yeah,' I said. 'Them.'

I climbed into the boat while Frank shook his head some more.

'Never seen anything like it ... Dead fish everywhere, boats wrecked, flooding all over the mainland ...' He turned to me with a grin. 'Some storm, eh?'

‘What storm?’ I said.

Frank was surprised. ‘The one last night, sprat. With all the thunder and lightning.’

I shook my head. Frank frowned.

‘... And the gale-force winds? The twenty-foot waves? The massive meteor shower that people saw all over the world?’

‘That sounds exciting,’ I said.

Frank glared at me. ‘Yes, Caitlin! It was the biggest storm in years! People thought it was the end of the world! How did you miss it?’ He pointed across the cove. ‘Look – on the other side of the island there are prawns washed up on the beach that are bigger than ...’

‘Wow!’ I gasped. ‘You can see *that* far away, even with your ...’

I suddenly realised what I was saying and stopped. The other thing I should mention about Frank is that he has a glass eye. Sometimes I really want to ask him about it – like if his old one’s in someone else’s head, so he can swivel it round and look at their brains – but that would be impolite so I never mention it.

‘You’d better not be going on about my bloody eye again,’ Frank muttered.

The engine belched and we set off for the mainland.

‘So,’ said Frank after a while. ‘Nice pineapple.’

‘Thanks!’ I said. ‘I thought I’d bring in an exciting fruit, seeing as it’s the last day of term.’

Frank whistled. ‘Summer holidays! Ooh, you jammy git. I’d love six weeks off work.’

‘You don’t have a job,’ I pointed out.

Frank scowled at me. ‘What about you? Anything exciting planned for your time off?’

Of course I had. I’d been planning it for *weeks*.

‘I’m going to have a party on the island!’ I said. ‘I’m inviting the whole class today!’

Frank looked amazed. ‘Wow! Your parents don’t mind having that many people over?’

‘I’m sure they won’t,’ I said.

Frank’s smile disappeared.

‘... You have asked them, haven’t you?’

‘Of course!’ I said. ‘I mean, *I will*, eventually. But let’s face it – they’ll both be too busy to care what I do over the holidays anyway. Dad’s not back from his book tour for months, and Mum’s got a big deadline so she’ll be on the computer every day. Even more than usual.’

Frank shifted nervously beside me.

‘Look, sprat – I’m not sure having a party is such a good idea. Why not just invite a couple of mates over?’

I groaned. ‘I’ve *tried* that! I invite people from my class all the time, but they’re always busy – every single weekend! I mean, how am I supposed to make any friends up here if no one ever comes over?’ I laughed. ‘It’s almost like they’re making up excuses not to come, because they think I’m a complete dork. Or something.’

We made a big turn in the water and the mainland appeared up ahead. You could already make out the school – it was the biggest building for miles. It had taken a real battering in the storm. There was a dead octopus hanging from the flagpole, and a whale was stuck on the street and blocking traffic.

‘But if I invite the whole class at the same time,’ I said, ‘then someone’s *bound* to be free, right? For one day in six whole weeks?’ I sighed. ‘I mean, if they’re not ... I’ll be on my own all summer. And that would be *awful*.’

Frank said nothing. We pulled into the harbour and I leapt out.

‘Well, see you at hometime!’ I said. ‘I might be a bit later than normal, because I’ll be taking suggestions for cake flavours and ...’

‘Caitlin.’

I turned round. ‘Yes, Frank?’

Frank thought about saying something, then changed his mind. He smiled instead.

‘Nothing,’ he said. ‘I hope your plan works out. Good luck, sprat.’

I gave him a big grin and ran to school, clutching the pineapple to my chest. I was so excited – I was finally going to make some friends, for the first time ever! It was nice for Frank to say it, but I didn’t need any *luck*.

Why would anyone say no to a party?

I left before everyone else when the bell rang for the end of the day and walked quickly down to the harbour. I only stopped to throw my pineapple at a wall and stamp it into chunks.

I was much faster than normal, so Frank was still smoking by the time I got to the boat. He started coughing when he saw me and threw his cigarette into the water.

‘Christ!’ he said. ‘You’re in a hurry!’

I got straight in.

‘Er . . . everything all right?’ said Frank.

I sat and waited. Frank bit his lip, then quickly turned on the engine. We drove off in silence. The waves smacked against the front of the boat and the mainland slipped out of sight behind us. Frank glanced over at me.

‘So . . . went well, did it?’

My lip started trembling.

'Oh no,' said Frank. 'Please don't start crying.'

I did. I sprayed tears all over the place. Tears and worse. Frank looked like he was trying to sail through a hurricane.

'Argh ... oh god ... there's bound to be some tissues somewhere ... take the wheel, will you?'

I steered and sobbed while Frank looked for tissues. Eventually he came back with an old tea towel he found under a gutbox.

'Want to talk about it?' he said gently.

I shook my head. 'You wouldn't understand. Schools were completely different when you were my age. They hadn't even discovered electricity.'

Frank frowned. 'I'm forty-two, Caitlin.'

'You'd have had candles instead of computers, and horses instead of ...'

'Just tell me what happened.'

My eyes filled up again.

'They all laughed at me,' I said quietly. 'The whole class. No one wants to come over.' My voice started trembling. 'I've got to spend the whole summer ... *by myself!*'

Right on cue Middle Island appeared up ahead, gloomy and grey with clouds. It looked even more

empty than usual. I burst into tears, again. Frank pulled up by the jetty and turned the engine off. We sat and floated in silence, clouds of jellyfish lapping against the sides like bubblebath.

‘I’m sorry they laughed at you, sprat,’ he said. ‘They shouldn’t have done that. I know what it’s like to be lonely around here. Some days you’re the only person I talk to, apart from the fish.’

I looked at him suspiciously. ‘... You talk to the fish?’

‘That’s not what I meant,’ Frank muttered. ‘I mean that I never married or had kids. It’s a tough life, being a bachelor at my age.’

I wiped my eyes. ‘But you’ve got friends – you talk about those guys down the pub all the time! And there’s *loads* of people where you live on the mainland! On Middle Island it’s just me and Mum – and Dad, when he’s back from tour ...’

‘Doesn’t mean you can’t get lonely,’ said Frank. He patted me on the back. ‘It’s going to be tough for me these next six weeks, not seeing your face every morning. I’ll miss you.’

I glanced up. ‘... You will?’

‘Course I will!’ said Frank. ‘You’re my friend, aren’t you?’

I felt like I was glowing.

‘... We’re friends?’

‘You bet,’ said Frank. ‘And I’ll be counting down the days until I can see you again.’ He stretched out across the bench. ‘I’ll have to find some other ways to pass all my free time. A few long lie-ins, maybe ... a little fishing ... a lazy stroll to the pub around lunchtime ...’

I leapt onto the bench.

‘Then that settles it!’ I cried. ‘We’ll start Monday morning!’

Frank looked blank. ‘Start what?’

‘Spending the summer together!’

Frank sat up.

‘You what?’

‘It’s the perfect solution,’ I explained. ‘You’re lonely, I’m lonely ... We can hang out together instead! Every single day! That’s what friends do, right?’

Frank was so delighted he’d gone pale.

‘But – but—’

‘At least that way I won’t be so crushingly sad and lonely,’ I added.

Frank didn’t speak for a long time. When he did, he was gritting his teeth.

'Fine,' he said. 'I'll come over. For one day a week – all right?'

I gasped. 'Really?'

'Yes! Really!' Frank snapped. 'But the *second* you start going on about me taking out my eye ...'

I didn't even let him finish. I gave him the biggest hug you've ever seen.

'Frank,' I said. 'I don't care what everyone else says about you – I think you're the absolute best.'

Frank smiled. I couldn't see it, but I could feel it.