

To Amber, Cal, Holly, Jimmy and Matt

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CONSPIRACY 365



BOOK SEVEN: JULY

GABRIELLE LORD

SCHOLASTIC

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JULY

1 JULY

184 days to go . . .

12:00 am

Tonnes of water swirled all around me as I thrashed and floundered, trying to claw my way out of the enclosing fishing net. I knew I couldn't hold my breath much longer. My lungs were desperate for air, and already I could feel my mouth wanting to open, even though that would be a fatal move. The net tightened, crushing me against the trapped fish. Fins and prickly scales scored my face and hands like tiny razors.

I struggled, panicked and frantic, feeling like my lungs were going to explode. *Pull it up!* I begged the fishing boat silently. *Please pull the net up! Don't let me drown down here!*

The pressure was unbearable. A ringing in my ears built into a crushing surge. My panic escalated. *This is it!*

The pressure shifted as a sudden lurching, swinging motion moved us through the water. The net was lifting! If I could just hold on a few

seconds longer! But my lungs suddenly convulsed out of my control, and I gulped . . . air! Wonderful, life-saving air!

The net had broken through the surface of the dark sea, and a huge inhalation of oxygen rushed down my throat. I could breathe—just! Higher and higher the bulging net swung above the water, compressing my body even more with the weight of the huge catch surrounding me. Fish seethed, scraped and hopelessly flailed, pressed against my skin.

12:04 am

The bottom of the net abruptly opened, giving way like the wet explosion of a burst water balloon. I was sent free-falling from about three metres, and dumped on the deck of the boat. The catch skidded out everywhere and I landed with a thud, flat on my back. I was stunned and still struggling for air as fish flapped desperately around me. My breath came in great sobbing gulps. I couldn't do anything except suck in oxygen. I had survived, and that was all I knew or cared about just then.

I pulled a small bream from my face, shook off strings of slimy seaweed from my hair, and spat sea water from my salty lips. The dim glow of the boat's spotlights showed that my hands

were bleeding from the tiny incisions made by hundreds of fins and spikes.

'Hey! We've caught ourselves a mermaid!' said a voice nearby. 'Hey skipper! Look what we picked up!'

Wet, black rubber boots stepped up close to my face. I strained my eyes, blinking under the torchlight that was suddenly on me. A young guy was bending over me, his sunburnt face peering out through thick, curly hair. He kicked me gently, like he was checking I was alive.

'Jeez, she's not the prettiest one I've ever seen!' he said to another guy coming up behind him. 'You're pretty badly cut, kid,' he said to me. 'How did you get yourself into this mess?'

A booming voice from a megaphone broke through my consciousness, the words loud and clear. 'Callum Ormond! Stop! Police!'

I struggled to get up. The silhouette of the second deckhand was turned away from me, watching the approaching police boat, *Stingray*.

I looked around for a way out—a way of sneaking off the boat unnoticed. I checked for my backpack. It was still on my shoulders. I still had the Ormond Jewel, but had everything survived being underwater? There was no time to check. A brilliant light was sweeping the surface of the sea nearby, every second getting closer to

the deck of the boat that I had landed on. I had to get away or hide! *Think, Cal, think*, shouted the voice in my mind.

'Hey kid, you in trouble?' asked the curly-haired deckhand, squatting down beside me.

'Chuck him over the side!' said the second deckhand, as he backed away from the approaching searchers. He stopped, hands on his hips, shaking his head. 'We don't want any trouble. We don't want cops nosing around here.'

I sure didn't want the cops nosing around either! I scrambled to my feet, almost stacking it as I skidded in squid ink.

'None of us can afford that,' the second deckhand continued. 'Everyone we've got on board is on the run from something or someone!'

His voice seemed familiar, but before I could think any more about it, the skipper—an old guy with a beard and a black beanie pulled down around his face—appeared. He looked around, confused by all the unexpected commotion surrounding his boat.

'What's going on here?' he demanded, in a thick Greek accent. 'What's with the police? What's with the kid?' he asked, pointing at me, before being interrupted by the megaphone threats from the police boat, which was coming closer every second. The searchlight pierced through

the darkness, revealing the choppy surface of the surrounding sea, and the upturned jet ski, bobbing just a few metres away. The threats stopped for a moment, and the skipper stared down at me once more.

'Where the in the world did *you* come from, boy?'

My teeth chattered as I spat more water from my mouth. 'I fell off my jet ski and got tangled up in your fishing net,' I gasped to the skipper towering over me. 'I'm being chased by the police, but I can't let them catch me! I haven't done anything wrong, I swear!'

The police boat was pulling up alongside us now—the voices of the cops shouted above the noise of the engine. They were going to get me. What was I going to do to protect all my stuff? The drawings, the Riddle, the Jewel?

The skipper swung round, yelling at his deckhands. 'OK you two! What am I paying you for? Don't just stand there! Start sorting the catch!'

I finally hauled myself up, grabbing onto the sides of the fishing boat, thinking I'd have to jump overboard and take my chances in the darkness of the sea.

'So, you're on the run,' barked the skipper.

I was afraid to speak again. I guessed what was going to happen next—he'd call out to the

police, and I'd be handed in. Would I make it to my sixteenth birthday in prison?

I could hear the police alongside us, preparing to board. The slapping sound of the water against the boat grew stronger, blending with the gaping gills and flapping fish that still encircled me.

What was I going to do? I was so distracted, I barely heard the skipper when he spoke again.

'So, you're on the run,' he repeated. 'Big deal. All of my deckhands are on the run. They're all crooks!'

'Callum Ormond!' roared the loudhailer. 'Reveal your location! Hand yourself in!'

'You'd better get out of sight, fast!' hissed the Greek skipper, before dragging me to the cabin entrance and shoving me down it.

12:14 am

I tumbled into darkness, and crouched quietly, straining to listen to what was happening on deck.

'Seen a kid around here?' demanded the officer's voice from the police boat. 'Fifteen to sixteen years of age? He must have come past around the point—he was on a jet ski. There it is, drifting over there, so he has to be around somewhere.'

Please, I begged the skipper. Don't change your mind and hand me over!

'Haven't seen anyone like that,' the skipper's distinct voice called back. 'Didn't see anyone on a jet ski. Maybe he went that way.'

He covered for me! In the cramped cabin below, my limbs went weak with relief.

But my relief didn't last long.

'We're coming aboard,' the officer continued, dismissively. 'We need to take a look around.'

'You've got no right to board my boat.'

'Hiding something, are you?'

12:19 am

While the argument continued above me, I tried to spot a place to hide. But in a few moments, I'd felt out all there was: four narrow bunk beds, strewn with clothes; two small cupboards; a toilet and shower, and, through a doorway, a tiny kitchen. Other than that, there was a humming fridge that reeked of blood and scales, and a couple of long freezers.

The place was so small, there was nowhere to hide. I couldn't even fit under the bunks. I listened intently through the hatch-opening again.

'OK,' I heard the skipper say. 'I guess I can't stop you from boarding my boat. But I'm not happy about it, officer. We're just trying to do a night's work here. We don't have time to waste.'

Someone thudded down the cabin steps without warning. It was the first deckhand, with the black boots and curly hair. He grabbed me and I thought for a moment he'd been ordered to throw me overboard. I resisted as hard as I could until I realised that he was dragging me towards another hatch, half the size of a normal door, cut low into the wall behind one of the freezers. He jerked the door open and pushed me through the hole. Heat and the stench of diesel fuel slammed me in the face.

'The boss says you gotta get in there!'

I could just make out two large diesel engines in the cramped, gloomy area, but couldn't see anywhere to hide.

'There's some space underneath the diesels—where the mechanic works,' he added, with a shove. 'Get in!'

I crawled deeper into the stinking, black hole. There was just enough room for me and my backpack to squeeze under the engines. Cold and wet, I flattened myself into the space.

The hatch door slammed shut, and the freezer was dragged back into position.

The cops started boarding. I heard their muffled voices, followed by their thudding steps down into the cabin. There were things being lifted and thrown about, doors opening and

closing. The footsteps came closer and closer . . . I cowered, hoping they wouldn't find the hatch I was in.

'Where are the engines?' a voice asked, dashing that hope instantly.

I held my breath as the freezer was shifted once more, revealing the hatch door and my hiding place. The door opened and a beam of light shone in. I pressed myself against the floor, as the light played over the machinery that I hoped would obscure me.

A sudden gush of heat rushed out.

'Nothing here,' someone said, before coughing and swearing. 'Bloody fumes.'

The door slammed shut.

I barely breathed again until I heard the police disembark, and *Stingray* sped away to continue the search for me elsewhere.

1:06 am

Cramped and sweating, I kicked a leg out at the hatch door—I'd waited long enough for the cops to move on—I needed to get out. But it wouldn't budge. I kicked again, this time harder. Still nothing. They'd locked me in.

4:47 am

Loud thumping woke me up. Despite everything,

I must have slept, or passed out from the fumes.

'You can come out of there now,' said the skipper, opening the door. Soft light fell on my face, and I sucked up the fresh air.

Awkwardly, I squeezed my stiff and stinging body out from under the engines and emerged. The skipper wasn't smiling anymore. There were no jokes about his crew all being on the run. His face was stern and hard.

'You must have done something real bad, boy,' he said as I lifted myself up and leaned against the edge of the freezer. 'You owe me.'

'You saved me,' I said. 'But I haven't done anything wrong,' I added. 'I'm innocent.'

'Aren't we all?' he scoffed, sarcastically. 'You work for me now.'

'Work for you? For how long?' I asked.

He shrugged. 'Until you've paid me back. Otherwise I give you to the police. Understand?'

I nodded. I knew I had no option. I'd escaped the net but was still trapped.

'I'll send one of the boys down to get you started. Stay here until then.'

He turned and vanished up the narrow steps.

5:03 am

The curly-haired deckhand jumped down the steps into the cabin, his narrowed eyes watching me

with curiosity. He didn't seem hostile, but I was very wary of what he was going to tell me to do.

'The Little Mer-boy,' he joked. 'I'm George,' he said, his face grimacing with dislike at his name, 'but everyone calls me Squid.' He pulled a duffel bag down from a luggage rack. 'We've just pulled in to the fish market wharf.'

'OK,' I said, expectantly.

'So, Merboy, what's your story?'

'The name's *Tom*, actually,' I said, even though the police boat had been hollering out my real name, just hours ago.

He considered this for a moment, before saying, 'Nah, I like Merboy better. What's in the bag?' he asked, nodding towards my backpack.

'Nothing much. What's *your* story?'

'Pretty much the same as the other guys. Most of us take this kind of work because there are no questions asked.'

'But you've just asked me two of them,' I pointed out.

He laughed, dumping the duffel bag on one of the narrow bunks. 'So I did, you're right. And you just avoided answering both. Sounds like you'll fit right in with our crew!' He sat down beside his bag before continuing. 'If you've done this type of work before you'll know that casual deckhands on fishing boats are often on the run

from something. Maybe it's the law, maybe it's the missus, and maybe they just want to get lost for a while. Whatever the case, there are a lot of crooks.'

'And you're not one of them?' I asked, smiling.

'Not really. Never done anything really bad.'

'Same,' I said. 'I just need to lie low for a while.' I shrugged. 'Family stuff.'

'Mate, I understand. But all the same, you'll need to stay on your toes. The cops do a lot of lightning raids; they swoop down on the wharf, looking for people who might be trying to avoid them. We're trying to catch fish, and the cops are trying to catch us!'

He stood back up and stuck out his hand with a grin. It was grimy and scaly, but I shook it.

'Welcome aboard, Merboy. Stick with me, keep your eyes peeled and you should be OK. I can show you the ropes.' He frowned for a second, peering closely at me. 'You sure you haven't worked the boats before?'

'Never,' I said, before he backed away, wrinkling his nose in disgust.

'No-one smells good round here, but you smell like the bottom of the bait tin! How 'bout you wash up a bit and I get you some dry gear?' He rummaged through his bag and threw me a black shirt and a pair of work overalls. 'Here.

You can have these.' He pulled a worn towel out of the cupboard and threw that at me as well.

I followed Squid up to the deck and onto the wharf. The skipper and the other deckhand were busy sorting and stacking big plastic tubs of fish.

The skipper looked up briefly as we passed. 'Show him where to go,' he ordered Squid. 'When I've got time, I'll show him how to clean and scale. Meantime, he can be a wheeler with you.'

Squid nodded.

'Wheeler?' I asked, hurrying after him along the wharf.

'After the fish are auctioned,' he explained, 'the wheelers stack and load the boxes onto trolleys and wheel them over to the loading areas where the pick-ups are waiting.'

We'd reached a tiled shower area, and Squid nodded towards one of the open cubicle doors. I stepped into one and locked the door behind me, then quickly rummaged through my backpack to check how everything had held up. I peeled the tape off the package at the bottom of my bag, and tipped the Ormond Jewel out.

I could hardly believe it. Somehow it had survived, just like me. I stared at it again, amazed at the emerald and precious stones. I turned it over and looked at the images on the back—a red rose and rosebud. Water had dampened the

edges of the Riddle and the drawings, but they were OK. I re-wrapped everything tightly and stuck the tape down again, as best I could. My phone wasn't so lucky—it had not survived the drenching. Water streaked across the dead screen.

It was rough standing under the spray of hot water—every little cut on my body stung like crazy. It was so painful, but knowing everything I'd collected was safe got me through. Without realising it, the gruff skipper had given me some serious cover.

'I need to dry my gear out,' I said to Squid as I came out of the shower cubicle.

'Take it back to the Star. *Star of Mykonos*, that's the name of our boat. Find somewhere to hang it. Hurry up!'

'And I need to make a phone call first. Urgently,' I added, showing him the dead screen on my phone.

'It'll cost ya,' he said, reaching into his back pocket.

'How much?'

'Five bucks.'

'Five bucks for one, quick call?'

'It's a good deal for an urgent call!'

I was in no position to argue. I dug into a pocket in my backpack, scrounged up five bucks

in coins and handed it over. In exchange, Squid passed me his mobile.

I stood there, waiting.

'Oh, I get it' he said. 'Girlfriend, eh? You only got one minute, OK? It'll be my head on the block if you're caught slacking off.'

I ducked back into the cubicle and closed the door.

Boges picked up the phone so fast, like he was there waiting for it to ring.

'You're not going to believe this!' I blurted out.

'Whose phone are you calling from? The state is in lockdown!' he yelled over me. 'There's a man-hunt going on around the beaches. Where are you?'

'I'm at the fish markets.'

'What?'

'I'll explain later, I don't have much time to talk. We've gotta meet. We have everything now. The Riddle, the Jewel.'

'That's great, but I'm serious, you have to keep out of sight! Hide, blend in, do whatever it takes, and then we can meet up when everything's cooled down again. I'm stuck here at the moment anyway, trying to get my application together for an internship.'

Squid banged on the door. 'Hurry up! The boss wants to know why we're not working!'

'Gotta go?' Boges asked.

'I'll call you,' I said before hanging up.

'Be back here in five!' Squid shouted at me as I ran past him, head down, on my way back to where the fishing boat was moored.

It didn't look like anyone was on board, so I jumped on and draped my damp gear over some crates on the deck. The wind and sun would dry them out soon, I hoped.

I'd been very lucky. I'd escaped the police—again. But Boges was right, and I already knew the whole state would be looking for me. I hoped Oriana de la Force and Vulkan Sligo didn't have any information on where I was.

What Squid said about the police raids on the wharves had me rattled. This was a good enough place to hide out for a while, but I couldn't stay here too long . . . I wanted to meet up with Boges and see what we could make of cracking the double-key code, now that we had both halves—the Ormond Riddle and the Ormond Jewel. I also wanted to know if he'd had any luck tracking down Great-uncle Bartholomew's sister, Millicent.

I could hear Squid yelling out, so I slung my backpack on and jumped off the boat to join him.

Squid and I hurried over to a spot where hundreds of boxes of fish were piled high. The fish auctions were in full swing and the voices of the

auctioneers boomed through the area. Buyers and sellers milled around on the wet and slippery floor.

We worked hard, loading the heavy boxes onto our trolleys as they were purchased, and wheeling them through the crowds to the loading dock. Once there, we'd unload them and help the buyers stack them on the backs of their trucks, or in their vans.

As we were lifting a really heavy box of red fish on top of a couple of boxes of flathead, Squid groaned and wiped sweat from his forehead. 'Gary's supposed to be helping us,' he said.

'You mean the other guy?' I asked. 'The other deckhand?' I'd barely seen him—only heard his voice and I hadn't liked what he'd said.

'That's Gary. He's only been working here a few weeks. He just disappears when there's hard work around. I don't like the guy,' Squid continued. 'I don't trust him. I mean, I know you can hardly trust anyone around here, but I *really* don't trust him. The skipper only keeps him on because it's hard to find deckhands.'

8:20 am

Three hours later, the auction was almost finished and the last of the buyers were leaving with their purchases. Behind us, other workers

were hosing down the tiled and cement surfaces, clumping around in bulky gumboots.

'I'm so glad this is almost over,' said Squid, sprawling on the ground near a brick wall. 'I need a break.' He took his phone out of his pocket again and started texting someone.

'I'm going to duck back to the boat, to get my gear,' I told him. 'Back in a minute.'

Star of Mykonos

8:32 am

I snatched up my clothes—they were salty and almost stiff—then jammed them into my backpack. I jumped back onto the wharf, hurrying to rejoin Squid.

The place had almost emptied and Squid had disappeared. I lugged the last two containers of sand shark and leatherjacket into the back of a van and looked around again for him. I couldn't see him anywhere.

Just then, a short guy in overalls—the owner of one of the vans we'd loaded—approached me. 'Will you help me with this load, son?' he asked, pulling off his woollen beanie and wiping his forehead with it. 'If you ride with me to my shop and give me a hand at the other end, I'll give you thirty bucks. Another young bloke was supposed

to help me, but he's useless. Didn't even show up.'

There was still no sign of Squid, and thirty bucks sounded good to me.

'Sure,' I said, shaking his hand. I felt bad for taking off without saying anything to Squid, but thought I had to take up the opportunity to get away—I had no idea what the skipper would expect me to do next.

'My shop's just a few blocks away,' the guy explained as we drove away from the markets. 'I injured my wrist, and Gary was supposed to help me with the load at the other end, but he obviously made other plans.'

Gary? The guy Squid didn't trust?

8:48 am

A few minutes later, we pulled up in front of Mike's Seafood.

'That's me. I'm Mike,' he said, pointing a bandaged hand in the direction of the shop.

'Tom,' I said, before jumping out and walking to the back of the van. I peered around me, keeping a watch on the street in case of police patrols. Mike opened the doors and I began unloading and stacking his trolley.

I wheeled the first lot of containers through his shop and out to the back where there was a big freezer room. Mike awkwardly unbolted the

door and it swung open, releasing an icy cloud. It was so cold and frosty in there—it was like stepping inside an igloo in the middle of Antarctica—so I unloaded as fast as I could, my breath steaming out in front of me.

9:25 am

Finally, I stacked the last load onto the trolley.

‘Wheel that load into the freezer room too, and then can you wait for me here in the shop? I need to get some cash out to pay you.’ He pointed to an ATM down the street. ‘Can’t spare any from the till, I’m afraid.’

‘Sure.’

Just as I was dragging the last heavy box of fish off the trolley, shivering inside the chilly freezer room, a figure appeared in the doorway, his face half-hidden in a dark hoodie.

‘I can help you with that,’ he said, with an evil chuckle. It was the second deckhand from the *Star of Mykonos*—Gary. As he grabbed hold of the freezer door, I realised too late why his voice had seemed familiar to me back on the boat. On the hand that held the door were *three* fingers! Before I could say or do anything, Three-O shoved me hard up against the trolley, sending me flying backwards into the depths of the freezer!

‘I know exactly who you are, Cal Ormond. Did

you think we were all dumb or something?’ he said, spitting at my feet. ‘Everyone knows who you are! The cops were calling your name!’ I jumped up and braced myself, remembering too well how he’d beaten me up at the carpark. ‘There’s a massive price on your head, Ormond, and you owe me big time! I could have got a thousand bucks for spotting that car. It’s time I cashed in!’

He held up a camera phone, and snapped a picture of me.

I lunged at him, but before I reached him, he stepped back and slammed the freezer door shut. My fists slammed into nothing but metal.

I grabbed the door handle and wrenched it, but it wouldn’t open.

‘Let me out! Let me out, damn it!’ I shouted.

I wrenched the door handle again, but nothing happened. I couldn’t get out. I banged and bashed, yelling loudly, realising that Three-O must have recognised me back on the boat, followed me here, and now he was off to tell the police and show them my picture.

And I was locked up in the freezer, just waiting for the cops to come and get me.

‘Mike!’ I shouted, banging uselessly on the door, thinking surely he’d be back any second. He had to let me out before the police turned up. ‘I’m locked in the freezer!’

Already my teeth were chattering. Again, I kicked and bashed and pushed the door, but despite its rusty hinges, it wasn't budging. I swung around to see if there was any other way out, but of course there wasn't.

I grabbed my phone out of desperation, but it was still as dead as the bins of fish that surrounded me. I flung it back into my bag, looking around again for a way out.

Who was going to find me first, Mike or the cops? And how long were they going to take? A thermometer on the wall indicated minus twenty-five degrees Celsius. I didn't know how long I could last.

'Let me out!' I shouted and thrashed my body uselessly against the door. I was going to be a dead fish too if I didn't get out fast. A few minutes had passed already, and panic was starting to fester in the pit of my stomach. I'd have to get out of here or I'd die. Being arrested was better than freezing to death.

My fingers and toes were aching with cold and my nose had gone numb. I backed away from the door and huddled, hugging my knees, trying to warm myself up. The cold was travelling through my body fast, making my arms and legs ache. My ears were throbbing too and the bones in my face were hurting.

I got back up and jumped around, clapping my arms, trying to keep moving. It was impossible to warm up and I was starting to really freak out, like I had that night in Treachery Bay when the sharks were circling, ready to attack. It had been Dad's words in my mind that got me through that ordeal. *Think, Cal. Think.* I was trying to think, trying to work out a plan of action, but it was like my brain was starting to freeze, making it impossible. How do you get through a locked door? Without being a ghost?

The sight of my fingers made me feel dizzy—they were dead white, and when I pressed them together, they felt like pieces of wood, as if they didn't belong to me. Was this the first stage of frostbite?

I was still racking my brain for a way to open the door . . . but came up with nothing. Where was Repro when I needed him? I pictured him in his tiny living quarters behind the filing cabinets, surrounded by his piles of lost property and scavenged bits and pieces. And that reminded me of something . . .

The track detonators!

With my clumsy, frozen fingers, I dragged the backpack off my shoulders and dug around for the tin containing the blast caps Repro had given me.

I figured if I could wedge them into the cracks

between the door and its hinges, then slam something against the door to trigger them, there might be a chance for me to blow the whole thing open. And get out.

Aside from the fact that I had no idea whether the tin had stayed airtight, protecting the caps when I'd fallen underwater, I had another problem: it was very tightly sealed and my fingers were numb, barely able to move. Feverishly, I battled with the lid, fumbling like a baby as I attempted to get it open.

The intense cold tried to take me down as I battled to prise the lid up. My feet were starting to feel frozen to the floor, like blocks of dead weight, when at last the lid lifted. I threw it aside, and ripped out the mouldy roll that was still in there. Underneath, four blast caps lay flat in the tin. They were dry. They were intact.

It took me ages to fumble the first two caps into position—one above and one beneath the top hinge. But when I went to do the same with the bottom hinge, I realised it wasn't possible. The door didn't hang straight and there was almost no gap between the lower jamb and the metal of the door. Two caps weren't going to be enough.

'Mike!' I shouted again. What in the world had happened to him? 'Help me out of the freezer! Mike, I'm trapped!'

The police were going to show up any minute, and Three-O would get his reward for my capture. I didn't know what to do.

I'd never felt anything like this kind of extreme cold before. My eyelids seemed to be drying out. I blinked desperately, trying to see as I wedged the other two blast caps under the door, in a last-ditch effort. Worried I might explode them early, I flinched as I shoved and kicked them into position.

Now that they were in place, how was I going to detonate them? And how could I be sure that the pressure of the blast would blow the door outward, off its hinges, and not towards me?

I had to try *something*. I *had* to set off the detonators.

All I had was the trolley I'd wheeled in. I grabbed it with fingers that couldn't feel anything anymore, and with what was left of my strength I backed it up and then ran and rammed it as powerfully as I could against the door.

All four detonators exploded simultaneously!

The impact of the collision ripped through my body, and the sound and pressure of the explosion in the confined space blasted me back against the freezer wall. Icy splinters speared into my face.

A rush of adrenaline gave me the energy to

get to my feet and check the door. The top hinges had buckled and the bottom hinges were twisted, but the door was still stuck. Instantly I forced my half-frozen body right back into action, and got behind the trolley again. I ran full pelt at the door once more, bashing it with the weight of my body. I felt it shift and buckle. Yelling like a crazy man, I had my third go at it and this time I crash-tackled the door down, completely off its hinges, sprawling sideways as it collapsed to the floor outside.

10:04 am

There was no sign of anyone—Mike, Three-O or the cops. I hesitated, my body madly re-adjusting to the change in temperature, but I couldn't worry about the mess I was leaving behind. All I knew was that I had to get out of there fast. I grabbed my backpack and ran.

I stumbled out the door of the shop, lopsided and off-balance like Frankenstein's monster. I was starting to thaw, my skin first, then my muscles, and for a few freaky moments it was like I could feel my moving skeleton, each frosty bone of my body within the tissue that was starting to warm up and soften. A quick glance down the road, in the direction of the ATM, showed Mike shouting at Gary as they stormed up the

street together, both of them with their mobile phones out. I shivered, increasing my pace, and turned down another street and out of sight.

The sound of sirens started swarming, and in seconds I could hear cop cars skidding to a halt outside Mike's shop. I didn't waste time looking back, I just ran as fast as I could in the opposite direction, forcing my cold, numb legs to stride out and carry me away. Far away from the cops, and far away from the rotten smell of fish.