

THE ISLANDS OF LOST THINGS

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Twelve-year-old Sophie never imagined that a single lost pendant could change everything. When she is swept away to a chain of mysterious islands where all lost things wash ashore — umbrellas, keys, socks, even forgotten memories — she discovers that the world itself is in danger.

With the help of a grumpy rope-weaver, a clever button trader, and Captain Beak, a boastful talking parrot, Sophie must outwit the ruthless pirates known as the Gatherers and recover her mother's pendant. The Islands of Lost Things is a middle-grade fantasy adventure brimming with quirky characters, inventive gadgets made from forgotten treasures, and heartwarming moments of friendship and hope.

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*Paperback Edition
Version 1.0 (Final)*

LOST IN THE STORM

Sophie sat on the shore, cross-legged, hammering a crooked plank. Her homemade boat looked like it had been made out of an old fence — because it had. She had spent weeks gathering old planks from behind the neighbor's shed and sneaking nails from her dad's toolbox. The planks stuck out in all directions. Instead of a sail, a tattered old blanket she had taken from the living room was flapping in the wind. But Sophie didn't care. The most important thing was that it could float. Well, most of the time.

She stepped back to admire her work. "Not bad for a twelve-year-old," she said with a grin.

Her mom had told her about the island just last week, when Sophie had been moping around after her mother lost the pendant. "There's a legend," her mother had whispered, her eyes twinkling with that special sparkle that appeared whenever she told Sophie stories, "of islands where all lost things eventually wash up. Things that matter most to people find their way there." She'd squeezed Sophie's shoulder. "Don't worry too much about the pendant, sweetie. Some things have a way of coming back to us."

She lifted her head and looked out at the sea. The waves lazily lapped at the rocks, and far away a light shimmered. Somewhere out

there, Sophie thought, lay her mother's pendant - the small silver fish pendant her mother had lost a year ago while they were walking on the beach. Sophie and her mother had looked for the pendant until nightfall but never found it. Since that day, she had promised herself that she would bring it back. It wasn't just any pendant - it was the gift her mom had received from Sophie's grandmother.

She pushed back the messy light brown hair that kept falling into her eyes and clipped it with a silver fish-shaped hairpin, one that matched the lost pendant. Her jacket was too big for her and hung off her shoulders. It had belonged to her brother, who had left it behind when he went to the city for his studies. Sophie loved it because of the pockets. They could fit nuts, ropes, and even a couple of shiny pebbles she had picked up that morning.

Sophie shoved the hammer into one of her pockets and began dragging the boat towards the water. Her boots left deep imprints on the wet sand, and her heart pounded with excitement. Today was the day. She could feel it. Today was the day she would find the pendant.

The sea looked calm, but Sophie didn't notice the dark clouds gathering on the horizon. They crept forward slowly, like a giant grey cat. Sophie pushed the boat into the water, holding onto the side. Cold sea spray hit her face, and she laughed and climbed in.

Her first paddle strokes were clumsy, the blanket sail flapping in the wind, but Sophie was stubborn and moved forward. She didn't see how the clouds began to swallow the sun, and she didn't hear the wind beginning to howl like a wounded dog. Sophie just rowed forward, singing a song she made up: "Hey sea, reveal your secrets to me."

Soon enough, her voice was drowned out by the waves, which were growing taller. The boat rocked harder. Sophie frowned but told herself she could handle it. She always could. She rowed forward, not noticing how the sea around her was changing. At first, the waves were lazy, lapping against the sides of the boat. But they grew taller. The wind snatched her song and carried it away, leaving only a whistling in her ears. Sophie frowned, tightening her grip on the paddles and finally looked up at the sky. The clouds

she had ignored now hung overhead, dark and heavy like wet blankets.



"It's nothing," she told herself, even though her voice trembled. "I can handle it." Even though the wind bit at her cheeks, she brushed off the worry. She wasn't one to back down easily.

She always handled things: fixing a bike with a broken wheel, catching the neighbor's runaway chicken, and even pulling her little brother out of the thorn bushes when he got stuck. Last winter, when Dad's car got stuck in a snowdrift, Sophie was the one who figured out how to put old carpet scraps under the tires for traction. But the sea was different. The boat lurched and the blanket sail flapped so loudly that Sophie flinched. Water spilled over the side, icy and salty, soaking her boots.

"Come on, hold on!" she shouted at the boat, as if it could hear her.

A wave slammed into the side, and, with a loud crack, one of the planks broke off. Sophie gasped, watching as her masterpiece of a

fence-turned-boat fell apart. She let go of the paddle and clung to the side of the boat, but the next wave was stronger. The boat tipped. The blanket sail flew into the darkness, and Sophie realized this was the end of her voyage. There was a loud snap as the boat split in two. Sophie screamed as she plunged into the water.

The cold burned like a thousand needles and the waves tossed her around as if they were playing a game. She managed to grab onto a floating plank, a piece of the side with a nail sticking out. The wind howled and the clouds thickened, lightning flashing in the distance. Sophie clung to the plank, her fingers slipping on the wet wood. She had no idea where she was drifting. The shore had long vanished from sight. With her teeth chattering, she kept fighting. The next thing she knew, another wave hit, and everything spun.

Sophie woke up to wet sand in her nose. She opened her eyes and immediately squeezed them shut again. The salty water stung like a swarm of angry wasps. Her cheek rested on something rough and solid, while the water splashed her legs. She lifted her head and realized she was hanging onto a piece of her broken boat, which had been scattered along the shore. She sat up, rubbing her bruised knee, and looked around. The sea was still rumbling somewhere behind her, but the waves no longer seemed so angry. The sky was grey with jagged clouds through which thin rays of sunlight peeked. Sophie blinked, unable to believe her eyes.

The shore was littered with umbrellas. Not just any umbrellas, but all kinds of umbrellas. There were old umbrellas, new umbrellas, battered ones with bent ribs, all kinds. They stuck out of the sand like strange flowers of all colors — red, blue, orange. She even saw one with polka dots. Some were open, but some were closed, and some looked like they'd been tossed away a hundred years ago. Sophie staggered to her feet and took a step forward.

"What is this place?" she muttered, glancing around.

At first, she thought she had ended up in a landfill, but she knew that landfills were not this organized. The umbrellas stood in neat rows, as if someone had planted them there. She bent down and touched the nearest one. A red umbrella with a nice, smooth handle.

The fabric was cold and smelled of the sea. Her jacket, heavy and soaked, hung down to her knees. And then she realized maybe she had reached the Islands of Lost Things. Her mother's words rushed back to her, and Sophie's heart began to race. This had to be it! She looked around eagerly, wondering if her mother's pendant was hidden somewhere in the sand or maybe in between those umbrellas, or perhaps there in the distance by what looked like a small hill of stacked books. Her heart beat faster.

"Where am I?" she said, hoping the sea would answer.

But the sea was silent, except for the whispering of the waves. Sophie turned and saw that the shore stretched far into the distance, and beyond the strip of sand, another small island was visible. Between them hung a wobbly rope bridge, swaying gently, a thread connecting two worlds. She took a step and nearly tripped over a piece of her boat.

She looked sadly at the broken wooden planks and muttered, "Well, thanks for not drowning me."

Her hands trembled. Whether from the cold or the strangeness of it all, she could not tell. She had set out to find her mother's pendant, and instead she had ended up in this bizarre place. The sun broke through the clouds and glittered off the umbrellas, as if they were winking at her. She didn't know where she had landed, but she wasn't about to give up. The pendant was out there, and she intended to find it. Adjusting her jacket, she took a deep breath of the salty air and stepped into the unknown.