



CHAPTER 1

It was a bright and beautiful February morning, and Clem, Ash and Zara were sitting around the big old oak table in the very middle of the mudlarking museum. They were drinking hot chocolate topped with soft marshmallows and pillowy clouds of vanilla whipped cream, and eating cinnamon doughnuts fresh from Mr Kostas's bakery. Gerald

-1
0
+1





the iguana was taking a lemony bubble bath in a large teapot. Everything was quiet, and everything was perfect.

Well, except for Ash trying to fit four doughnuts in his mouth and Zara telling him off, and except for Gerald pretending to be a dolphin and splashing water all over Clem's marshmallows. But that was all perfectly normal.

What wasn't normal was Oswald, the museum keeper, walking into the room holding a tiny suitcase.

'Well, better go and catch my train then!' he said cheerily.

Ash stopped shoving doughnuts into his mouth. Zara stopped telling him he was going to choke if he wasn't careful. Gerald stopped mid-dolphin dive and belly-flopped

-1
0
+1



into his teapot. His rubber duck went flying and Clem's hot chocolate was now almost entirely lemon-scented bubbles.

'Are you going somewhere?' Clem asked. It was a bit of a stupid question – because why else would someone be carrying a suitcase? – but Oswald never went anywhere. He was always, always in the museum. He looked after all the strange and magical and sometimes dangerous objects that had been found





washed up on the banks of the River Thames. Clem, Ash and Zara were there to help him out. A few months ago, they had saved the city from disaster by visiting a secret underwater London in the Thames and returning a lost crown to a furious and deeply weird porpoise queen called Barbara. Oswald had then made Ash, Clem and Zara Guardians of the Museum. This meant that technically they could look after everything too. They had keys around their necks, which could open any of the mysterious doors and boxes and chests and cabinets that were dotted around the crooked walls of the museum. But they'd never had to open the doors themselves. Oswald was always around. And everything had been calm and quiet and well, normal, since then. Clem was starting to

-1
0
+1





wonder if she'd completely imagined their adventure.

'It's just a week,' said Oswald cheerily, swinging the impossibly small suitcase. Clem didn't understand how he could fit so much as a sock in there, let alone enough clothes for a week. To be fair, Oswald was always doing impossible things. But the one thing he never did was ... leave the museum.

'I haven't seen my sisters in a very long time,' Oswald continued, smoothing the ribbon on a violet bowler hat, deciding against taking it and putting it back on the hat stand. 'A very, very long time. And now is as good a time as any. You're all off school, the museum isn't exploding, and Gerald has finally recovered from that nasty bout of tail rot.'

Gerald looked embarrassed and sunk

-1

0

+1





beneath the bubbles in his teapot. Clem could just see the very top of his lilac shower cap.

‘But what are we supposed to do if something goes wrong?’ asked Clem. She felt a great *whoosh* of something a lot like excitement. And also panic. And also like Gerald had just flicked bubble bath foam at her head.

Zara took a notebook and pencil from her top pocket and looked at Oswald expectantly. Clem could see Zara was dealing with the shock of Oswald leaving by being organised and in charge. By contrast, Ash could barely contain his excitement. He was hopping from foot to foot like he needed a wee. On his seventh joyful hop he accidentally toed the tiny suitcase. Clem was sure

-1
0
+1





she heard a howl from inside it.

‘I’m sure nothing will go wrong, my dears, but if it does, you will simply just have to deal with it. Gerald will be here – you know how terribly travel sick he gets – and you have the rest of the Thames and Tide Club if you need them. And I’ll be back in a week. *Bonne chance!*’

And with that, Oswald picked up his suitcase, put on a lime-green top hat, winked and swept out of the door into the misty morning sunshine.

Zara paused, her pencil hovering over the empty page of her notebook. Clem watched a thousand thoughts flit across her face. Zara would absolutely have to write something down, because Zara always wrote everything down. Zara loved lists, facts and plans. Her

-1
0
+1





pencil moved in mid-air and then finally
Clem saw her write:

1. JUST DEAL WITH IT

It was, Clem supposed, a list and a fact and a
plan.



-1

0

+1

