

Praise for *White Dolphin*:

'A passionate and lyrical story about the power of the sea and its creatures.'

Guardian

*'A beautifully told, nail-biting tale, that will inspire
and empower anyone who reads it.'*

Kate Humble

'A lyrical, emotive, engrossing adventure.'

Sunday Times

'Packs a powerful emotional message into an exciting plot.'

Daily Mail

*'A wonderful story. Utterly Captivating. The interplay
with the natural world is magical.'*

Nicholas Crane, presenter of BBC's Coast

'An addictive page-turner.'

Bliss

*'An uplifting and beautifully told tale . . . with much to appeal to fans
of Lauren St John and Michael Morpurgo.'*

Bookseller

*'Gracefully written and intense—you can almost feel
the salty air brushing your face.'*

Telegraph

Praise for Gill Lewis' first novel, *Sky Hawk*:

*'Opens your eyes, touches your heart, and is so engaging
it almost turns the pages for you.'*

Michael Morpurgo

*'Rich in atmosphere and full of heart, Sky Hawk is an intense and
touching story . . . A book to treasure.'*

Lovereading4kids.com

'A heart-soaring read.'

The Big Issue

*'An edge-of-your-seat wildlife adventure that tells a very human story
of friendship, discovery and an incredible journey. I loved it!'*

Kate Humble

'A truly moving and inspiring tale of wildlife, friendship and growing up.'

TBK Magazine

*'This beautifully written, captivating book should be on everyone's
bookcase. Breathtaking. Poignant. Unforgettable.'*

Virginia McKenna, Founder of the Born Free Foundation

*'The reader is held spellbound by the intensity of the writing and the
optimism in the message. This is a book for everyone from 8 to 80+!'*

The School Librarian

White Dolphin

Gill Lewis

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

'A book to be kept for life.'

NAZIA, AGE 11

'This is one of the best books I have ever read . . . I give it 10 out of 10.'

ZAK, AGE 11

'A heart-touching story.'

LYDIA, AGE 11

'It was as if the characters were alive and walking around you.'

HARRY, AGE 11

'Extremely inspiring.'

EMMA, AGE 10

'Gill Lewis is a great writer . . . Five stars!'

ASHWIN, AGE 11

'A brilliant, outstanding book.'

MICHELLE, AGE 10



PROLOGUE

Each night it is the same. I stand here on the shoreline, curling my toes into cool wet sand. Above, the moon is bright, bright white. It spills light, like a trail of milk upon the water. The dolphin is here again, her pearl-white body curving through the midnight sea. She twists and turns beyond the breaking waves, willing me to follow. But the ocean is vast and black, and I don't know what lies beyond this shore. So I just stand and watch her swim away.

Each night I have this dream. Each night the white dolphin waits for me. But where she goes, I am too afraid to follow.



CHAPTER 1

I rip another page from the book.
I tear it out, right out.

The paper is tissue thin and edged with gold. It flutters in my hand like a tiny bird, desperate to escape. I let it go and watch it fly up into the clear blue sky.

I rip out another, and another. The pages soar and tumble across cow-scattered fields into the haze above the silver-blue sea.

‘Oi, Kara!’

I look down. Jake’s pink face is squinting up at me against the glare of sun. Ethan’s standing next to him trying to find finger-holds in the granite blocks of the wall. He jumps to pull me off, but I pull my legs up out of reach.

The wall’s too high.

CHAPTER 1

I'm safe up here.

'Kara-two-planks,' yells Jake. 'Teacher's looking for you.'

I run my finger along the rough leather binding of the book. It's heavy in my lap. The hard edges dig into my skin. I rip out another page and set it free, soaring upwards, skywards.

'You're in big trouble, Kara-two-planks,' shouts Jake. 'That Bible is school property. You'll be sent to hell for that.'

'She won't get there, though,' calls Ethan. 'She won't be able to read the signs.'

Jake laughs. 'Learnt to spell your name yet, Kara? K-a-r-a W-o-o-d. Kara-thick-as-two-planks-of-wood.'

I've heard all this before, a thousand times. I turn my back on them and look down to the footpath on the far side of the wall. It runs one way to the coast path along the cliffs, and the other, down steps tangled with nettles and bindweed to the harbour in the town below.

'What I want to know,' says Ethan, 'is Kara Wood as thick as her dad?'

'My mum says,' confides Jake, 'that Kara's dad lost his last job because he couldn't write his own name.'

Ethan sniggers.

I spin round and glare at them. 'Shut-up about my dad.'

But Jake's not finished. 'I heard your mum had to write his name for him. Isn't that right, Kara?'

White Dolphin

My eyes burn hot with tears.

‘Who writes his name for him now, Kara?’

I blink hard and turn back to the sea. The waves out there are tipped with white. I feel the hot sun on my face. I mustn’t cry. I won’t let them see me cry. If I ignore them they’ll go away like they always do. The sea breeze is damp and salty. It catches the white cotton of my shirt and billows it out like a spinnaker sail. I close my eyes and imagine I am sailing across an endless sea, a wide blue ocean, with nothing else around me but the sun and wind and sky.

‘Oi, Kara!’

Jake’s still there.

‘It’s a shame about the Merry Mermaid,’ he shouts.

If Jake knows about the Merry Mermaid, then everyone does.

I turn round to look at him.

A few other children from class are watching us from a distance. Chloe and Ella are both looking this way from under the deep shade of the horse-chestnut tree. Adam has stopped his game, his football clutched against his chest.

‘Still,’ Jake says, ‘it never was much of a pub. It’ll make a great holiday home for someone, a rich Londoner probably. I heard the food was terrible.’

Jake knows my dad works in the kitchens of the Merry

CHAPTER 1

Mermaid. He knows he'll have no job and no money to live on when it closes at the end of the summer. Jake would love it if we had to move from Cornwall.

'Maybe your dad can come back and work for mine on our trawlers?' says Jake. 'Tell him we'll be fishing for shellfish when the dredging ban is lifted in ten days' time. My dad's even bought new gear to rake every corner of the seabed out there. He can't wait.'

I just glare at him.

Jake laughs. 'I'll ask him if you can come too.'

I tighten my grip on the Bible's hard leather binding.

Beyond, I see Mrs Carter striding towards us. I could try and hide the book, but Jake and Ethan would tell her anyway.

'Have you seen the advert at the boatyard, Kara?' says Jake. He's looking at me now and grinning. Ethan's grinning too. They know something I don't. It's in Jake's voice and he's bursting to tell me.

Mrs Carter's halfway across the playground. Her face is set and grim.

'The *Moand's* up for sale,' Jake shouts out. He's jubilant now.

I scramble to my feet. 'Liar!'

It can't be true. I'm sure it can't.

White Dolphin

But Jake is smug. He pulls his trump card. 'My dad's going to buy her and chop her up for firewood,' he shouts. 'Cos he says that's all she's good for.'

I hurl the book at him. The Bible's hard edge slams into Jake's nose and he drops like a stone, both hands clutched across his face.

Mrs Carter is running now. 'Kara!'

I glance down at Jake, moaning in the dirt below me.

'Kara, come down, now!' Mrs Carter yells.

But I turn away from them all and jump, leaving Jake Evans bleeding through his fat fingers, turning the dust-dry ground blood red.



CHAPTER 2

I run and run, down the nettled footpath, along cobbled lanes and back alleyways to the sea front. I have to find Dad.

I have to.

The town is busy, clogged with traffic and the sound of drills and diggers working on the new road into the harbour. Beyond the orange cones and construction fences sits the Merry Mermaid, her roof green with weathered thatch. The air is thick with the smell of beer and chips. The tables sprawled across the pavement are packed with people eating lunch in summer sunshine. The Merry Mermaid scowls down at them from her faded painted sign above the door. I slip through into the darkness and let my eyes adjust from the glare outside.

White Dolphin

'You OK, Kara?' Ted is polishing a glass in his hand, turning its rim round and round with a cloth.

'I'm fine,' I say. 'Where's Dad?'

'He took the day off,' he says. He holds the glass up to the light, inspecting it for smudges. 'Is everything all right, Kara? He didn't seem himself today.'

I look around, as if I expect Dad still to be here.

Ted puts the glass down and leans on the bar towards me. 'You sure you're OK?'

'Yes,' I say, 'I'm fine.'

I back out of the pub. The sun is bright. It glares off the whitewashed houses. I start running away from the harbour and up the hill to the new estate on the other side of town. A stitch stabs into my side, but I keep running past front gardens and driveways, past scraps of green with paddling pools and tricycles and on to the end house, where a caravan sits on bricks upon the grass.

I slow down and push open the front gate. Aunt Bev is hanging overalls and oilskins on a washing line strung between the garage and the caravan. Uncle Tom must be back from sea.

Aunt Bev pulls back the legs of the overalls to look at me and rests her hand on her swollen belly. She holds two wooden clothes-pegs in her teeth. They stick out like warhog tusks.

CHAPTER 2

I try the handle of the caravan door. Flakes of red rust crumble from the door frame, but the door is locked. 'Where's Dad?' I say.

Aunt Bev takes the pegs out of her mouth. 'You should be at school,' she says.

I hammer on the caravan door.

'Your dad went out,' she says.

I try the door again.

'I said he went *out*.' Aunt Bev pegs a pair of trousers to the line. She doesn't take her eyes off me.

I duck under the line and try to dash past into the kitchen, but she puts her hand across the door.

'You in trouble, Kara?' she says.

'Forgotten something, Auntie Bev,' I say. 'That's all.'

'Well, be quick, Uncle Tom's asleep. Don't wake him.' She lifts a hand from the doorway, and lets me pass.

I feel her watching me climb the stairs and slip into the room I share with Daisy. Daisy's sitting on her bed among her dolls, reading *Teddy-cat* one of her fairy books. She stuffs something behind her back as I come in. I hear it rustle in her hand. A tell-tale marshmallow lies upon her princess-pink duvet.

'You're off school,' I say. 'You're meant to be ill.'

White Dolphin

Daisy's mouth is full. She looks at the open door and then at me.

I smile. 'Don't worry. I won't tell.'

A blob of sticky dribble slides down her chin. 'I feel sick now,' she says.

'I'm not surprised,' I say. I wipe the sugar dust from the bed and sit down beside her. 'Daisy, have you seen my dad?'

Daisy nods. 'Uncle Jim's gone fishing,' she says. 'He took his sea rods, them long ones.' Her hair bounces as she nods. It's light and frizzy, a sign the good weather's set to stay. I've seen it go tight and curly before the storms blow in.

'How long ago?'

'Not long,' she says. 'Just after Mum had her coffee.'

'Thanks, Daisy.' I reach under my camp bed for my swimming bag, mask and flippers. Daisy's toys are scattered on my bed. A pink marshmallow is pressed into my pillow. I can't complain, really. It's her room after all. And they'll need my space when the baby comes.

'Are you going with him?' Daisy says.

I nod. 'Please don't tell.'

Daisy draws her fingers across her heart and presses them against her lips.

I change into T-shirt and shorts, and it's not until I hear a car door slam and voices on the drive outside that I realize

CHAPTER 2

a car has pulled up outside the house. Jake's dad's big black pickup is parked across the drive. I back away from the window. I don't want Jake's dad to see me here.

I hear him talking to Aunt Bev in the kitchen.

'Jim's not up there, Dougie.' Aunt Bev's voice is high and tight. 'I'll get him to call when he gets back.'

'It's his girl I want to see.'

'Kara?' Aunt Bev says. I hear her hesitate and stumble on the words. 'She's at school.'

Through the crack in the bedroom door, I see Aunt Bev below me in the hallway. She's blocking the doorway to the kitchen. The back of her neck is bright scarlet and she twists a tea towel round and round her hands.

Dougie Evans leans his hand on the door frame. 'I know she's up there, Bev.'

Aunt Bev takes a step back. Her voice is quiet, almost a whisper. 'What d'you want with her?'

'Just a word, that's all.'

'What's she done?'

Dougie Evans is in the hallway now, at the foot of the stairs, his sea boots on Aunt Bev's clean carpet. 'She broke Jake's nose, that's what she's done.'

I close the door and press myself against it.

Feet sound on the stairs, loud and heavy.

White Dolphin

Daisy stares wide-eyed at me, the duvet pulled up around her chin. 'He's coming up,' she whispers.

I push the camp bed up against the door and cross the room to the window. The garage roof below is flat, but it's still a long way down.

'Kara!' It's Aunt Bev calling now. Her voice is sing-song, almost casual, but I can hear the tremor in it. 'Dougie Evans wants to see you.'

I throw my bag down to the garden and swing my legs out of the window.

Knuckles rap against the door. It flies open and jams against the camp bed.

'Go,' mouths Daisy.

I drop onto the roof, twisting as I land. From there I jump down to soft grass. I turn and see Dougie Evans red-faced and leaning from the window. But he can't stop me now.

No one can.

I grab my bag and run.



CHAPTER 3

‘Wait,’ I yell. ‘Wait.’

I see *Moana* before I see Dad. She looks small compared to other boats in the harbour. With her terracotta sails and open wooden deck, she stands out from the moulded whiteness of the modern yachts. I scramble down steps and run along the pontoon, my feet thudding on the boards. *Moana* is drifting slowly out towards the narrow gap between the high harbour walls. I see Dad sitting at the tiller.

‘Dad,’ I shout. ‘Wait for me.’

Dad pushes the tiller across and *Moana’s* sails flap loose as she turns back into the wind. She drifts towards me, her painted hull throwing rippled patterns of pale blue upon the water. She could have sailed out from one of the old

White Dolphin

photos of this harbour a hundred years ago.

I steady myself as she bumps against the pontoon, grab the mooring rope and pull her in. 'Take me with you,' I say.

Dad shades his eyes against the sun to look at me. 'Why aren't you at school?'

'I can't stay at school,' I say. 'Not today, of all days, Dad.'

Dad just sits there, one hand on the tiller, watching me. I wonder if he remembers today, if it means something to him too. *Moana's* sails flap and ruffle above our heads. She's impatient to be off.

'Let me come, Dad,' I say. I want to ask him if it's true about *Moana*, if he's really going to sell her. But something stops me, because I want to sail her one last time, not knowing if it's true. It's safe not knowing. It leaves a small space inside for hope.

Dad rubs the stubble on his chin. 'All right,' he sighs. 'Get in.'

I climb on board, pull my life jacket on and push *Moana* away. The water here behind the long arms of the harbour walls is deep and green and still. Rainbow ripples of oil spread out across its surface. Dad sets the mainsail and I pull in the jib. I watch the triangle of sail above me pull taut, and catch the wind, and we slide under the shadow of the harbour and out to sea.

CHAPTER 3

The sea is alive out in the bay. A steady offshore breeze is blowing, kicking up small waves, flecked with tips of white. Salt spray flies over *Moana's* bow as she dips and rises out towards the headland. I sit and watch the harbour town and the pale strip of golden sand slip far into the distance. The school and Aunt Bev's house are soon lost among the sprawl of roads and houses that rise above the harbour. The yachts and trawlers and the long white roof of the fish market seem far away now too, another world away, almost.

And it is just us, again.

Moana, Dad, and me.

I sit beside Dad, but he doesn't look at me. His eyes are focused on the distant horizon, looking beyond there somehow, to another place that I can't see. He could almost be sailing in a different boat, on some different sea. I close my eyes and try to think back to how it used to be.

Beyond the headland, the wind is strong and cold. It blows in from the west, gusting dark ruffles on the water. I wish now that I'd thought to grab a jumper and put on jeans instead. I wrap my arms around my knees and watch goosepimples rise on my arms and legs.

'You OK, Kara?'

I look up and see Dad watching me now. I nod, but my teeth still chatter.

White Dolphin

'Get your blanket if you're cold,' he says.

I slide forwards on the seats and open the small locker under the foredeck. Three blankets are neatly folded where they always are, strapped to the low shelf above the tool kit and the flares. I pull my blanket out and wrap it round me. It's deep turquoise, like the summer sea, woven through with strips of silver ribbon.

I curl up against *Moana's* curves and bury my head in the thick folds of blanket, breathing in the salty mustiness of it. The ocean rushes beneath us, a constant stream of white noise. Waves slap against *Moana's* hull, like a heartbeat. I touch the painted wood to feel it pulse against my hand. Somewhere under the thick layers of paint are the pencil drawings of leaping dolphins that Mum drew for me. I try to trace the outline of them with my fingers now. I can almost smell the sawdust and steamed wood of the boatshed where Mum and Dad rebuilt *Moana*. If I close my eyes, I can still see Dad curving steamed planks of wood to make *Moana's* hull, Mum laying white caulk between the boards to make her water-tight, and me sitting in the dirt, floating paper boats across wide puddle seas.

Mum, Dad, and me.

Those pencil dolphins are still there beneath the paint, etched into *Moana's* hull. I try to picture them in my mind.

CHAPTER 3

I never thought I would forget, but somehow, now, it seems however hard I try, I just can't see them any more.

And it must be like this that I fall asleep, cradled in *Moana's* hull. Because when I wake the wind has dropped and *Moana* is still. Her sails are down and she is rocking gently, anchored in the shelter of the cove where we keep our lobster pots. Threads of hot sweet coffee steam drift my way from Dad's red tin cup. The sun is warm on my back, and the sea is turquoise blue, rippled with silver light. Somewhere above a seagull cries. But otherwise, all is quiet and still.

Dad is leaning over the side, pulling on rope. It coils in the boat, dripping weed and seawater. He hoists a lobster pot in and places it on the floor. I can see a tangle of legs and antennae of a lobster inside. It's a big one and will fetch a good price at market. I know we need the money.

Dad opens the trap and runs his hand along the armoured shell of the lobster's back. He draws it out and its claws slash through the air. Its red antennae flick backwards and forwards. Dad turns it over, and in the soft protected curve of its belly lie hundreds of tiny eggs bunched together, glistening black in the sunlight.

White Dolphin

'She's berried,' I say. 'We can't sell her. Look at all those eggs.'

Dad looks up. He's just noticed I'm awake. 'We'll take her and release her in the marine reserve,' he says.

'Not much point,' I say. I scowl at him. 'Jake says his dad is going to pull his dredging chains across every last corner of the reserve when the dredging ban is lifted.'

Dad places the lobster in a large black bucket and covers it with a towel. His face is tight in a frown, running deep creases across his face. He knows there's nothing we can do to stop Dougie Evans from destroying the reef.

'Keep out of Jake's way,' he says. 'He's got a nose for trouble like his dad.'

I stifle a laugh. I picture Jake lying in the dirt, blood pouring down his face. 'Not any more he hasn't.'

Dad looks up. I try to hide my smile, but I can tell Dad's seen already.

'You in trouble, Kara?' says Dad.

I lift the towel and peer in at the lobster. She glares at me with her small black eyes. 'She needs seawater in there,' I say.

'What else has Jake been saying?' says Dad.

I cover the bucket with the towel and sit back so I can look Dad in the eye. I ask the question that has filled my mind all this way. 'Is *Moana* up for sale?'

CHAPTER 3

But Dad turns away. I watch as he ties a chunk of mackerel flesh bait for the lobster pot, and throws it back into the water. The coil of rope unwinds and disappears into the wavering shafts of light.

‘It’s true, isn’t it?’ I say. ‘You’re selling her. You’re selling *Moana*.’

I want him to tell me that it’s not true, because Dad never lies to me.

But he doesn’t say that.

He turns to look at me. ‘Yes,’ he says. ‘It’s true.’

And that’s all he says. But it’s like the breath has been punched right out of me.

‘But you can’t,’ I say. It comes out in barely a whisper.

‘We’ve got no choice, Kara,’ he says. ‘I owe more money than I’ll ever earn. We can’t even afford her mooring fee.’

I twist the end of my blanket round and round in my hand. ‘What about Mum?’ I mumble the words.

Dad flicks the last drops of his coffee out to sea and screws on the thermos cap tight. ‘There’s no other way.’

‘What about Mum?’ I say it louder this time, to make sure that he can hear me.

‘Mum’s gone,’ he says. He looks right at me. ‘She’s been gone a year today. D’you think I don’t know that? She’s gone, Kara. It’s just us now.’

White Dolphin

I stare at him. Dad hasn't talked about Mum for months. 'Mum would never sell *Moana*,' I say. 'She belongs to all of us. We built her together. How will you tell Mum you sold our boat when she comes back? She'll come back, I know she will.'

Dad watches me, like he's trying to decide just what to say.

'She'll send a sign,' I say. My eyes are blurred with tears. I blink and push them back. I think of the dove feather I found the day Mum disappeared. I think of the cowrie shell, pure white; the one I found by candlelight, the night we floated candles for her out to sea. 'Like she did before, she'll send a sign.'

Dad holds me by my shoulders, but his hands are trembling. 'Let it go, Kara,' he says. 'There are no signs. There never were.'

I push Dad's hands away.

The silence is thick between us.

The wind is still. The water flat, like glass.

'Kara,' Dad says. He kneels down in front of me. 'Look at me.'

I close my eyes tight.

'Kara . . .'

I cover my ears because I don't want to listen.

CHAPTER 3

I fold my head into my lap to block him out.

I don't want to hear what he's going to say.

I don't want to hear it.

But it's no use.

I hear him say it, anyway.

'Mum is *never* coming back.'