

Archibald Zwick and the Eight Towers



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Dedication

This book is dedicated to my parents, **Harrison Rowe Palmer** and **Margaret Elizabeth Palmer**, whose love and encouragement shaped my life.



Chapter One

A Terrifying Night at Sea

Archie was cold, wet, hungry, and exhausted. But he was alive, and that was reason for hope, especially now that the storm had passed.

He did not know how long he had been clinging to his overturned kayak, or where the storm had taken him. It was now pitch-black, and Archie guessed that it had been hours since sunset, though the sudden darkness brought by the storm made it difficult to know just when the sun had gone down. As the waves gently rocked him, Archie's thoughts drifted to his parents, who were no doubt very worried by now.

The Zwick family was vacationing on a small island in the Bermuda archipelago, and Archie had been so eager to use his new kayak that immediately on arrival he had run directly to the water after they arrived, pausing just long enough to shed a few articles of clothing. Because it was already late in the afternoon, his mother had called after him, using his full name "Archibald," as she always did when she wanted him to know that she really meant what she was saying. She had instructed him to come in out of the water in half an hour. Archie's parents had then gone inside the house, and Archie, determined to enjoy the precious moments in the water, had paddled out farther than he should have. Before he realized the danger, a strong current had pulled him out to sea and then the sudden storm had erupted.

Hours of sheer terror followed, for his kayak soon capsized. It was all Archie could do to hold on to it during the terrible storm. He was a very good swimmer for a boy of sixteen, and he was now thankful that his

parents had insisted that he complete every swimming course available at the local YMCA. But this gave him very little comfort as he struggled in the rough waves. With each swell, Archie had been certain that he would lose his grip and be swept away from the kayak. And with each terrible gust of wind, his face and body had been sprayed with a salty ocean mist that had found its way into his eyes and mouth and nostrils, despite his best efforts to protect his face.

Now, hours later, Archie did not even know which way he should paddle, even if he had not lost the paddle. And although he had been trained in righting a capsized kayak, he now lacked the energy to try such an ambitious project. Instead, he scanned the horizon, hoping to catch a glimpse of lights indicating a shoreline. He wanted desperately to be out of the water, filled with a hot meal, dry and warm, and resting in a cozy bed. There was still just enough of an ocean spray to sting his eyes with saltwater, and so, after a while, Archie grew weary of looking for the shore. He held on to the kayak, struggling to stay awake, for he was afraid that if he fell asleep, he might release his grip, drift away from the kayak, and drown.

Afraid of what might happen if he continued in his current predicament, Archie decided that if he drowned, it would not happen because he failed to act. He began to drain the seawater from the kayak by lifting first the bow and then the stern, holding each end up for as long as he could in his weakened condition. He then stared for some time at the overturned kayak, mentally preparing himself for the daunting task before him. Suddenly, with one mighty shove, Archie managed to right the kayak on his first attempt. Mustering the little remaining strength in his weary body, he began pulling himself up onto the kayak, which rocked with each movement he made. Because he feared that he would not have the strength to right the kayak if it capsized again, Archie took his time, inching gradually up and over the cockpit. Once his body was centered over the kayak, Archie slowly began turning until he lay lengthwise, face down. He raised his torso and allowed his feet to dip into the water. Then he began maneuvering his legs into the cockpit.

When at last he was sitting in the kayak, Archie took a deep breath, sighed, and began sobbing uncontrollably. The flood of tears sprang from a multitude of emotions—from joy, despair, terror, anger, and longing. Joy, because he had righted the kayak and crawled into it. Despair, because he was uncertain whether he would ever find his way back. Terror, because he feared the unknown: the storms, the sharks, and other ocean perils. Anger,

because he felt his parents had failed to protect him. And longing, because he missed those same parents, his home, and school, and every part of the life he now felt was being snatched from him.

The crying released all of the emotions Archie had pent up during the storm, but it also sapped his remaining strength. When he no longer had the energy even to cry, Archie began to think of what might happen even if he could find his way back. He assumed, at a minimum, his parents would ground him for the whole summer vacation. He knew that his father would be especially angry, for he had sternly warned Archie to stay close to the shore. In his mind's ear, he could hear his father say, "The boy thinks he invented the wheel," his father's way of saying that Archie did not know as much as he thought he did.

Archie was now as tired as he had ever been, and he wanted more than anything to sleep. He struggled to remain awake, because he was afraid if he fell asleep, the kayak would capsize again and he would drown. But the physical need was too great, so Archie leaned forward and allowed his heavy eyelids to close. Although he quickly drifted into sleep, fear and discomfort precluded a deep sleep. Caught between the world of dreams and the nightmare of terrifying reality, Archie simply floated in his kayak. After a while, he opened his eyes and sat up, not really refreshed, but unable to continue in this awkward half-sleep. He sat quietly and once again, began searching for lights. For quite some time, success evaded him.

The monotony was finally broken when Archie caught a glimpse of a greenish, glowing light in the distance. His heart racing, he was suddenly energized to begin paddling, but because he had lost his paddle in the storm, Archie was forced to use his hands. He had floated silently for so long that the sound he now made as he splashed his way through the water seemed odd to him—odd and very loud.

So happy was he to see the light that he never took his eyes off of it as he paddled. After studying it for some time, Archie decided it must be a small island, perhaps even the island on which his family was vacationing. Lights from a larger island would surely be spread out. At last, Archie would be out of the ocean and safely on shore. He would be able to make a telephone call to his parents, who would certainly come to get him. It would be very pleasant, indeed, to get out of his wet clothes, eat a meal, and lie down to sleep in a warm, *dry* bed.

As Archie relished these thoughts, he continued to study the glowing green light, which gradually took shape before him. Although Archie

expected the single light eventually to divide into a multitude of distinct lights emanating from various buildings along the shore of the island, it remained curiously united, yet continued to grow in size and actually began to take shape. Archie soon realized that the light he had observed consisted of a structure that was *glowing* in the dark! There were no lamps, floodlights, beacons, traffic lights, neon signs, or other lights—just a glowing edifice! While his brain was still trying to process this strange fact, it received another shock. There was no island at all. Instead, a glowing, green castle seemingly arose directly out of the sea!

Archie rubbed his eyes in disbelief, expecting the glowing, green castle would simply be transformed into more familiar forms as he drew nearer. Instead, vivid details of the medieval castle came sharply into focus the closer he got to it. A wall at least one hundred feet high surrounded the entire fortress, parts of which were visible beyond the towers that punctuated the wall. Everything seemed to be constructed of the mysterious, glowing, green substance, which appeared to be the only source of light. And Archie's first impression had been right: the walls of the castle rose directly out of the ocean itself. It was not sitting on land at all!

Archie's focus on the strange sight was broken by the sound of rowing, and he soon spotted a small boat approaching him. At first he thought the splashing oars and lapping waves were muffling the voices of the men aboard the small craft, for Archie could not understand what they were saying. Soon, however, he realized that they were speaking a strange language. Their appearance frightened him, for as the boat neared, the men stood up in the boat, and Archie could see that they were wearing strange clothing—loosely fitting, knee-length tunics over pantaloons. As he strained to make out more detail, Archie's focus shifted from the clothing to the men's eyes, in which he saw a kindness that quickly eased his fears. He was glad when they lifted him out of the kayak and took him into their craft. He was soon wrapped in a blanket and lying in the boat as the men rowed it toward the floating castle. Archie closed his tired eyes and quickly fell asleep.

