



## Before You Read

Word Focus - **port** (to carry)

This journey depends on carrying something safely.

What could make carrying something safely across water more difficult?

## Track the Journey

Follow the movement carefully as you read.

- Where does the journey begin?
- Where must the egg be transported to?

Be prepared to explain the full route.

## Morph Key

The root **port** means to **carry**

### **portable**

able to be carried easily

### **transport**

to carry across from one place to another

### **support**

to carry from beneath to keep something steady

## Key Words to help you read

**shallows** - not deep water near the shore

**horizon** - the line in the distance where land and sky appear to meet



The coastline was almost beautiful. Grey stone curved around the bay, and the sea lay still, as if nothing had ever disturbed it. But I had seen the wreckage. Broken boats were scattered along the shore, their wood dragged apart. Many had tried to leave this island. They had failed. The sea never stays the same for long. It can turn without warning, and when it does, it is cruel and unforgiving.

Perhaps I should introduce myself. You might think I came here to take something rare. Most people do. But I do not collect creatures for my own pride or profit. I carry them away from places that would destroy them. Some cannot survive where they are found, and this one would not survive if it hatched here. I would explain more, but the shadows are growing bolder. They have been watching us, and they know the egg is here.

The rounded shell rested in my hands, warm and faintly trembling. It was small enough to be **portable**, but that did not make it safe. Not with my ship, the *Odyssey*, anchored so far from shore, just beyond the *shallows*. Not with that sound in the air, almost musical at first, until you listen properly. It seemed to weave through the beat of wings just out of sight. I had heard it before. I had no wish to hear it again.

A smaller boat lay at the water's edge. Maro was already inside, one hand resting on the oars, his eyes fixed on the *horizon* rather than on me.

"You heard it?" I asked.

He didn't answer. He just nodded. We both knew what it meant. Whatever was *circling* above us was getting



**faltered** – began to lose strength or control

**tempted** - made to want something, even if it's a bad idea

**swell** – a rising movement of the sea

**circling** – moving around something repeatedly



closer. I had no wish to meet them. Not ever. It was time to leave.

I stepped in, steadying myself as the boat shifted beneath my weight. There was no room for mistakes now. We would have to **transport** the egg in two stages: first across the shallows to the Odyssey, then beyond the Crossing to the far side of the island. As we left the shore, the sea barely moved, but I did not trust it. Maro rowed in silence, each stroke steady and controlled. I adjusted my grip as the boat rose and dipped, keeping the egg secure between my palms. I had carried creatures before. I knew how to **transport** them safely. But I also knew how quickly things could go wrong.

The wind rose without warning, tightening the surface of the water before breaking it apart. The boat rocked harder now, lifting and dropping as waves struck against its sides. Spray stung my face, sharp as grit. The sound came again, closer this time, not the wind, not the sea. Something else. Maro's rhythm *faltered* for just a moment. I felt it too.

There was something new in the sound now, not just noise, but a pull, as if it were trying to draw us away from our path. It did not force you. It *tempted* you. I kept my focus on the egg, forcing myself to ignore it. I had learned a great deal while travelling and protecting, but those creatures... they do not behave as other things do. They do not need to chase you if they can make you turn towards them instead.

I shifted my hold, trying to **support** the egg as the boat tipped sharply. Too much pressure might damage it; too little, and it could slip from my hands. I could not hold it like this for long, not in rising water.

Ahead, the ship rose and fell with the swell. Behind us, the shore was already slipping away. Above us, the shadows moved slowly, circling, edging closer. Watching. Waiting. I had to decide: turn back and lose what little time we had, or press on and risk losing everything.

The sound rose again, clearer now. And this time, Maro's head lifted in response.