

Knotty family tale goes without hitch

UNUSUALLY for a novel, this one starts with a glossary of knots – granny and reef, of course, but also more esoteric ones such as Jack Ketch's Collar, Monkey's Fist and Carrick Bend.

That done, we're into the story. Returning to Cornwall after 30 years' self-imposed exile in Crete because his father has suffered a stroke, Andrew goes back to The Siding, an old railway carriage that was his family's seaside retreat.

He recalls traumatic events from his childhood, remembering knot-learning sessions with his grandfather, a rope maker,

THE DEVIL'S MUSIC

by Jane Rusbridge, Bloomsbury, £16.99

Review by Joan Stephens

who taught him that in ancient times the art of tying was esteemed because knots kept treasures safe.

Told partly through his own memories, partly through those of his mother, the book enables the reader to unravel the family history, much of which makes harrowing reading.

In *The Siding*, Andrew returns to knot making, helped by finding his grandfather's copy of

The Ashley Book of Knots, meets Sarah, a tango dancer and sculptor.

She teases him into telling his story and, ultimately, facing the reality of what happened on the day on the beach when he was left in charge of his baby sister and his mother disappeared, apparently for ever.

After his father's death, can she be found? Will she return? Is a happy family possible?

Just like a complicated knot, the strands of the tale are woven together into a haunting and powerful story of love, betrayal and family secrets in this excellent first novel.