

one

Zoe ran. Harder than she had ever run in her life. Her feet pounded through the deserted streets of derelict buildings. Somewhere, not far behind, she could hear the gang coming after her. It felt as if her heart would burst, but she didn't slow down. She'd been planning to leave the island for a long time, but had been putting it off. It was a big decision to set out to sea in a tiny rowing boat. Now she had no choice.

Before, no one had bothered her. Zoe was a loner. Most of the people left on Norwich hung around together in groups, but she preferred to be on her own. It was safer that way, because you never knew whom you could trust.

Somehow, someone had found out about the boat she'd been hiding. A boat was an escape route, a way to get away from Norwich, which got smaller every year, as the sea kept on rising. It didn't matter that there could only be room for two people at most in her boat. Others had joined in the chase, and now a mob of about fifteen people was hot on her heels. There was only one way out; to get to her boat before

they got to her. So she ran on, while her body screamed for her to stop.

"Get back here!" someone yelled angrily at her, though they couldn't see her.

It wasn't far to the little shed where she'd hidden Lyca, her boat. A couple more streets of derelict shops to where what was left of the city fell away into the sea. If the sea hadn't come she might have been shopping here herself, with her parents perhaps. From much practice she squashed the thought of her parents as soon as it started, and kept on running.

Just before she rounded a corner, she heard more shouts from behind. They had seen her.

"There!"

"Come on!" shouted another voice. "Get her!"

Scared, she made the corner, but her feet slipped from under her on the wet ground. She went sprawling, and slid clumsily in the mud. She started to panic badly, and made a mess of getting up again. She had dropped her pack as she fell, but there was no time to pick it up.

The sound of running feet came closer. Another two seconds and they would be round the corner. She got up and practically threw herself over a wall. She landed awkwardly, but she'd won a little more time. She was in a graveyard. It led away down a hill to where a small brick shed stood near the water's edge. Once it had contained all the equipment for looking after the graveyard, but now it contained Zoe's boat. The previous night she had rowed around from the warehouse where she had found the boat and fixed it. The old building had been unsafe when she'd discovered it, and had been getting worse. She had decided to find a new place to keep her boat, and the shed seemed ideal.

In the dark she had dragged the boat the short distance from the water to the shed. It had been very hard work. At night she hadn't noticed the deep ruts the boat's keel had made in the sodden grass. In daylight, even in her mad rush, they were obvious. She would be lucky if no one had already found it.

"Lyca," Zoe panted as she opened the shed door, "please be here, Lyca."

It was all right. The boat was still there waiting for her.

Pulling it across the grass, and then into the water, she dared to look behind her for the first time. Her stomach twisted with fear. The gang were storming down the hill, weaving in and out of the crumbling gravestones. Zoe moved faster. She clambered aboard and put the oars out, then started to pull. They were at the water now, and though one or two stopped, the rest came splashing madly after her.

"Take me with you!"

"Come back! We won't hurt you. Just take us with you!"

Zoe could see their eyes, clearly. She saw fear. But she couldn't trust them. Since she'd lost her parents, she'd made it a rule not to trust anyone. Zoe had heard people say they'd lost someone, when really they meant they had died. In Zoe's case, 'lost' meant exactly that. It was still unbelievable, and so stupid.

She looked at the crowd in the water again. If she went back, there'd be a fight over her boat, and she wouldn't get a look in. She rowed on, pulling harder, even though she was safely away.

Slowly, she watched as the people dragged themselves out of the water and waded back to the shore. Natasha was there too. That hurt most of all. Natasha was the closest thing she



had to a friend. Zoe used to see her when the supply ships came, before they stopped coming. After that she saw her sometimes at the allotments, when she went to put some work in to earn food. They would only have a little chat, but it was enough to keep Zoe from cracking up. But now the allotments had sunk into chaos, too.

Zoe suddenly remembered their conversation the last time they'd met. She had been about to tell Natasha about her boat, and her plans to escape, but had decided not to. Maybe Natasha had guessed? From something Zoe had let slip? It didn't matter now. The crowd stood quietly, watching her as she rowed away.

Zoe didn't feel scared of them any more.

"Sorry," she said to herself, quietly. She began to cry, but she didn't stop rowing. Her uncut hair fell across her eyes, but she didn't stop to push it away. Still she rowed on, her thin hunched frame working the oars until finally she had to pause for breath.

Feeling around in her pocket she fished out her compass. It was the last thing she owned that had belonged to her parents. For that reason she'd kept it in a pocket. If she hadn't she'd have lost it when she dropped her pack. It was a little dented from her leap over the cemetery wall, but it was still working.

She pointed herself south-west, and rowed. She couldn't remember the name of the place the supply ship used to come from, but she knew the big bit of Britain was somewhere in that direction.

She was rowing away from all she had ever known. It was a strange thing. Before the previous night, she had only ever pretended to row. Her dad had taught her, in the same methodical way he did everything.

"You'll need to know how to do this one day," he told her.

He'd taught her how to use the compass, as well as a lot of stuff about survival. Just in case the time came when she was on her own.

And so every now and then, when they weren't busy just trying to get by, they'd sit in an old bathtub and pretend to row.

Even though it had seemed like a game to Zoe at the time, he'd made sure she was doing it right anyway. And she knew just how to do it, the only thing that surprised her was how hard it was to pull the oars through the water.

"Why don't you look where you're going?" she'd asked her dad.

"When you're rowing, you mean?" he said.

"Yes. Why do you sit looking backwards?"

"It's just the way it's done," he said. "You couldn't row half as well facing forwards."

It had always seemed strange to her, but now it was even worse. There before her was Norwich getting smaller and smaller with each stroke. She was heading into the unknown, without even looking where she was going.

She rowed and rowed, until her small supply of food had gone. She had put the compass on the floor of the boat in front of her, and every few seconds she checked her direction against it. There was no sign of land now, and a creeping fear began to seep into her. She looked at the compass almost every stroke; it was her only chance now. Like magic, its tiny hand kept pointing in the same direction. It knew where she was going, even if she didn't. She lost all sense of time. The sun was somewhere way overhead, and beat on the back of

her neck, making her feel dizzy. She pushed her hair out of her eyes, but the sea wind blew it back across her face. She felt faint. She was in trouble. She had just enough awareness to pull in her oars. Then she slumped over them.

In her stupor she replayed the nightmare where she had lost her parents.



two

After the water came, Zoe and her parents had tried for years to stick it out on Norwich, along with another hundred or so. After a while, they realized they were fighting a losing battle, and that the sea was not going to stop rising. Zoe's mum was ill, too. She seemed to have a sickness that came and went, and had lasted for weeks. They'd had enough.

Back then, there were still fairly regular supply trips from the mainland. A big ship used to bring as much food as could be spared, and anchor half a mile offshore. After rowing in with the supplies and sharing them out, the captain would ask if anyone wanted to leave. Usually there would be one or two more people ready to go to the mainland.

But just when Zoe's parents had decided to get off the island, the boat stopped coming. Instead of the usual four or six weeks, three months went by before it reappeared. Finally it slipped into view late one night, as if the captain knew there would be trouble. By now a lot more people than usual wanted to get off the island. There was confusion; it was dark, and a terrible fight broke out to get aboard the two tiny



rowing boats. Zoe helped her dad to get her mum on board one of the boats, just as it was pulling away from the shore. It was already dangerously overloaded. Two men were trying to push each other out of the boat, even as the oarsman took his first strokes. One of them succeeded in shoving the other out. There was only enough time and room for Zoe, or her dad, to jump in.

She saw her dad hesitate. She had never seen that before; he always seemed to know what to do. She could see him torn between getting in the boat with his sick wife, or putting his daughter in with her.

Zoe looked at the other boat; there was still a little room to be had. She decided to help her dad; to make the decision for him.

"You go with Mum; she needs you," she yelled.

"No!" said her dad.

"I'll get in the other one." She pointed. "I'll see you on board the ship."

"No," he said, "You get in the boat . . ."

Then the oarsman noticed them.

"Only one of you!" he shouted. "And make it quick! The ship's already full! We're leaving."

He started to pull hard now.

"Dad! It's only as far as the ship. I'll see you there . . ."

Still he hesitated. Zoe forced her decision. She backed away from the boat.

"I'm going for the other one. Get on board, Dad! Quick!"

She saw the relief in her dad's face as he climbed aboard from waist-deep water.

"Zoe . . . well, go then!" he shouted. "Get in the other boat! Hurry, Zoe!"

Zoe turned and saw with horror that the other boat was already leaving. More people were arriving from the town,

too, sensing this could be the last chance to get away. They headed for the boat Zoe was making for. She ran across the slimy muddy shore, and tried to climb in over the stern of the boat, then someone hit her on the chin. She fell back dazed in the mud, and watched as the boats moved away towards the lights of the ship.

Suddenly she realized that she was being left behind. Her dad thought she was on the second rowing boat, that he would see her on the ship. She knew the captain wouldn't come back for her. With all these people there would only be another fight. She had to let her dad know now, before the rowing boats reached the ship. She tried to shout, but her voice was weak with exhaustion.

Then she thought she heard her dad call to her.

"Zoe? Are you there?" came his voice through the dark.

"Dad! I'm here! Come back! Get them to come back! Please!"

She thought she was yelling, but in reality she could only manage a whisper. There and then a numbness came to her. Her brain closed in on itself, blocking out the full impact of what had happened. She blacked out, the sea lapping at her legs.

That was a long time ago, though she had no idea whether it was six months, or even a year. It was impossible to tell. She hadn't thought to mark the days, and the weather was so weird you couldn't even be sure what season it was. After waiting a long time for her parents to come looking for her, she began to lose hope. There was no way off and the supply ship never came again. She guessed life was getting harder even on the mainland. She had been sure her parents would come and find her, but maybe they couldn't get a boat, or maybe they'd never even . . . She pushed that idea from her



mind, as always, but it didn't change the fact that she was stuck.

Then she had found the boat.

She rowed and rowed, getting weaker all the time, until finally she collapsed over the oars, exhausted.

The boat drifted.

When she woke, it was dawn.

"Damn!" she yelled, for the whole wide sea to hear. Once again she fought to stop the panic rising inside.

"I could be anywhere."

She checked the compass, against the direction she was drifting in.

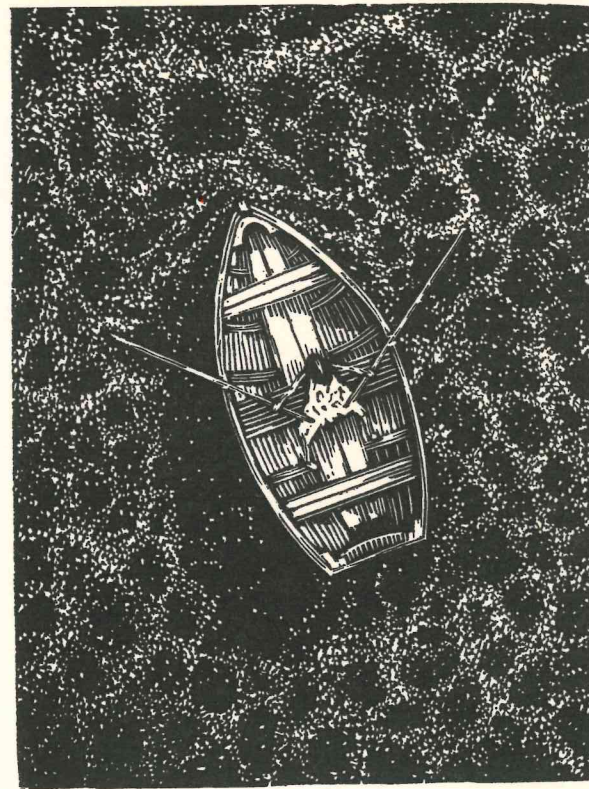
"South-west. Could be worse."

Even so, there was no sign of any land, in any direction. But then, turning on the thwart, she saw it for the first time. She opened her mouth in surprise, but said nothing. Far away on the horizon was a massive, ancient, stone building. It had two tall towers that stuck into the sky, one at the end and another shorter one in the middle. She couldn't see that there was any land underneath it, and it looked as if it was floating on the sea.

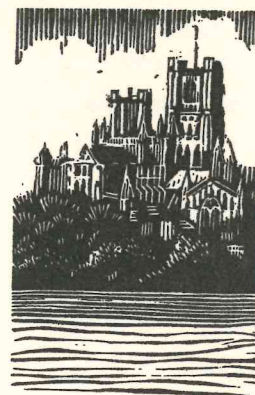
Turning back in her seat, she put her head down, and started to row towards the floating cathedral.

It would be somewhere to stop for a while, at least. She needed to sleep, and to find some food and water. Maybe she could find out where she was, so she would know which way to go on. Perhaps the ship that took her parents away had stopped here too. Someone might have seen them. But then, it looked to be only a little island. Zoe thought there probably wouldn't be anyone left on it.

She was wrong.



then



one

"What are you?" said one of them. "Cats?"

Zoe sat in the wet mud where the three had thrown her. She'd only been out of her boat for a little while before they'd jumped her. Her head rang from a fierce blow, and she felt confused. She was exhausted from rowing for so long.

"Nah, she's not Cats," said another. He was tiny, much shorter than Zoe. "Cats are afraid of water, right? Reckon she's Pigs. She looks good in the mud, anyhow!"

The third of them laughed.

"What are you? Pigs?" said the first one again. He was obviously in charge. He was good looking, short, though not as small as the little mouselike one.

Zoe looked at them dumbly. They weren't making any sense.

"Let's just scrag her anyway," said the third.

Their leader ignored this. He turned to Zoe again.

"Look, we're Eels, see? Eels. This is our place. So what are you?"



Zoe's head sang with pain, but dimly she understood what they were getting at.

"I'm . . . not from here. I'm from Norwich. Or what's left of it . . ."

They eyed her silently.

"She's lying," said the third. He looked stupid and mean. "Let's scrag her. She's Cats. I'm telling you. Or Pigs. Either way, let's just do her."

"Shut it, Spat," shouted the leader.

"Sorry, Dooby." Spat looked suddenly timid.

Dooby turned to Zoe.

"You're from over the water?" He said it slowly, suspiciously.

At last, Zoe fully understood something they were saying.

"Yes. I'm from Norwich. But it's terrible there. There's hardly anyone left. They all went years ago. Some of us stayed and tried to make it work. But it's all over now."

Dooby seemed to ignore most of this. But he said, "You've got a boat then?"

"Yes, it's down . . . yes. I have." Something stopped Zoe from telling them where she'd hidden it. Not for the first time she wondered if leaving Norwich was the right thing to do. But then, she'd had no choice in the end.

"A boat!" said the mouselike one.

"Yeah. I heard, Munchkin," said Dooby. He turned back to Zoe. "Show us your boat, then."

Zoe hesitated.

"Or we'll scrag you properly," said Spat.

Zoe looked at Dooby. He seemed to be the boss.

"Spat's right," he said.

\*

They stood looking at Zoe's tiny rowing boat.

She'd been lucky. She'd headed straight towards the island, and had found a good place to land. She wouldn't have been able to go any further, anyway. Then she'd dragged the boat up as far as she could, tucking it out of sight beneath a huge old tree that had its feet in the water. It was dying, but it had enough leaves left on it to hide her boat a little. It was as good as she could do. She'd decided to walk along the shore and find an easy way up to the cathedral.

And then coming around the corner of a ruined building her luck ran out. She walked slap into Dooby, Spat and Munchkin.

"You came from Norwich in that?" said Dooby, looking at the boat and shaking his head.

"Uh-huh," Zoe mumbled.

"What does it say on the side?"

"Lyca," said Zoe. "It's her name."

"Norwich is east, right? The big old city?"

"Yes, so?" asked Zoe, wanting some answers. She wanted to know where she was, and she was very hungry.

"You don't understand, do you? What's your name?"

"Zoe. Where am I? I just headed for that . . ."

"This is the Island of Eels. And we're the Eels, see? This is our island, and we're in charge. Now, Zoe, what we're wondering, is whether you're telling the truth. Whether you've really come across Udan-Adan. In that." He pointed at Zoe's little boat. "Norwich, you say? I didn't think there was anything left to the east. On the other hand you might be Cats, or Pigs. Or some other tribe. In which case you've come to try something on. Steal some food maybe, knock a few of us off, too, maybe? So which is it? Cats, Pigs? Horses? Or is this story of yours for real?"



Zoe wondered how she could convince them, and what would happen if she failed.

"Look, I've never heard of Pigs or Eels or anything. Norwich is lost now. I found this old boat and did it up. I just started to row. I ran out of food. Don't know when. Then I saw that thing sticking out of the water."

Zoe pointed over their heads, where behind them the huge old cathedral towered into the watery sky. Even though she stood on the land where it did, it still looked as if it was floating on the water that was all around them.

"I just kept rowing. It never seemed to get any closer. But I got here."

"So you're not Cats, then?" said Munchkin.

"We don't know that," said Spat.

"No," said Dooby, "but I believe her. So you don't belong to any of the tribes?"

"No," said Zoe.

"Well you do now," said Dooby. "As of now, you're an Eel. We could do with someone as smart as you."

"Smart?" said Spat.

"Yes, Spat. Smart. Smarter than you, anyway. Get all this way in that thing. She's got brains. Which are in short supply round here."

"So what?" said Spat. He stared straight at Zoe. "No one else has joined us before, have they? You always said it was dangerous. Why don't we just do like we did with everyone else who's come snooping. You said . . ."

"Don't tell me what I said, Spat."

Zoe saw Munchkin take a couple of steps away from the other two, automatically.

"Yeah, but Dooby, we always do 'em. Don't we? You said so . . ."

"I said, Shut It!" Dooby snapped at Spat. There was an uneasy silence for a while. Spat seemed to realize he'd pushed it a bit, and shrugged his shoulders. Zoe saw the anger slip off Dooby's face.

"Thank you, Spat. Anyway. You're not afraid of a girl, are you?"

Munchkin sniggered. Obviously pleased with himself, Dooby turned back to Zoe.

"So you're an Eel now, Zoe."

"But I don't . . ."

"I said, you're an Eel. No arguments. Unless you'd like to give the water a try without your boat."

Zoe shook her head, slowly. She was too tired and hungry to argue, anyway. She didn't even have the energy to wonder what sort of weird set-up she had walked into.

"Let's go back to base, then, lads."

They walked up the soggy hill to where the ruins of old stone walls appeared from the sea and led to the cathedral gates. Rising out of the water beside one of these old walls was a row of white posts.

They made their way in and around bits of fallen masonry, and then not long after, the main door to the cathedral was in front of them. It looked out across a large patch of muddy grass, in one corner of which stood an ancient cannon.

Two boys stood guarding the gateway. Past them was a long porch which led to the doors themselves. These had been reinforced with bands of metal and beams of wood. The two gatekeepers nodded at Dooby, meekly, though they were much bigger than him.

"All right, Dooby," said one. The other nodded. Neither smiled.

One of them shoved hard, and the door to the cathedral swung open.

"Well, Zoe," said Dooby, "welcome to hell."

Zoe had seen some unpleasant sights before, but nothing in Norwich was like this. Once more she began to wonder if she'd done the right thing in leaving at all. Huddled in small groups round smoking fires were the scraps of people. Their clothes were hardly more than rags, and were obviously the result of some fairly primitive sewing skills. Dooby and his two thugs were dressed like kings compared with the others in the cathedral. Zoe looked at her own clothes. She'd mended and patched them countless times, but they seemed almost new, now.

Once inside, Dooby turned to Spat and Munchkin.

"You've got things to do," he said, and they both went off into the gloom.

Zoe and Dooby walked up the aisle in the centre of the cathedral. Zoe couldn't help staring. She stared at the building that had once been magnificent. The floor was thick with dirt and heaps of rubbish. There were broken windows and broken furniture. It was a mess. Then Zoe stared at the people who were living in it. They were in just as bad a state as the building. So far she had only seen children, many of them younger than herself.

"Aren't there any grown-ups here?" Zoe asked. She felt it was the right thing to ask, though she didn't know why, it had been a long time since she'd had any adult help.

Dooby didn't answer.

Some of the people eyed Zoe suspiciously as Dooby walked her up the aisle, but most just ignored her. They looked underfed and wild. The smoke from all their fires drifted way up above in the vaults of the ceiling. Dooby was right. There

was something infernal about the place. And it stank. The worst thing about it was the smell of rotten fish.

"Where do you grow your food?" Zoe asked, turning to Dooby.

Dooby laughed.

"Grow? We don't grow food."

"But what do you eat? On Norwich we had a few animals to breed from, and there were the allotments . . ."

"There's nowhere to grow food. And there's no food to feed animals, even if we had any. This island is only a mile long and half as wide. There's no space. It's all buildings and ruins of buildings. There's no room for animals, and anyway, you need two of things to breed, right? Two of every sort of thing. Well, we never have two of anything here. There's not enough to go round as it is, without looking after animals, too."

Then, as if he'd been saying things he shouldn't, Dooby added loudly: "But this is the best and biggest bit of land left in Udan-Adan, and we're going to keep it!"

He nodded at one or two people who might have heard him.

"What's Udan . . . ?" began Zoe.

"Udan-Adan. The sea. I thought you were supposed to be clever. If you're not then I don't . . ."

"Oh no," said Zoe quickly, "it's just we called it something different in Norwich. I meant, why do you call it that?"

Dooby stopped, as if puzzled. Then he pointed to a dim corner of the nave. Sitting on his own in the dark was a thin, wrinkled figure. He was talking to himself.

"See that man? He's called William. He's older than anyone else here. He says the sea is called Udan-Adan, see?"

William was the first adult Zoe had seen.



"Is he in charge?"

Dooby swore loudly.

"William?" he laughed. "William . . . in charge?"

Then he stopped laughing and grabbed Zoe's arm roughly.

"Listen to me, Zoe. I'm in charge here. Got it?"

He stared at Zoe, peering at her dark hair and eyes, her long oval face. He was obviously trying to scare her, and Zoe was scared.

But she said, "You're hurting my arm." She glared back at him, trying not to show her fear, but she felt her mouth quiver.

Dooby waited a moment longer, then let her go.

Zoe rubbed her arm.

"Aren't there any grown-ups here at all? Apart from William?"

"None that can tie their own shoelaces without worrying about it first," Dooby said chuckling. "Weak in the head, see? But even if there were some with a bit more brains, I'd still be in charge."

Zoe didn't doubt this. There was something about Dooby that made you do what he said. Something more than just his use of violence.

Zoe nodded at William, the old man in the corner.

"Does he know why this is happening?"

"Why what is happening?"

"Why the sea keeps on rising year after year. Where it comes from. If it will stop before there's nothing left."

"No one knows that," said Dooby. "William will tell you he does. But don't believe everything he says. He's mad."

Dooby laughed.

They walked on through the cathedral, until they reached the choir stalls. They were alone now.

"In Norwich, some of them said it wasn't the sea rising, but the land sinking."

"Doesn't make much difference, does it? All I know is that for longer than I can remember there's been the sea, coming to get us, and it's left us like this. Like rats on a sinking ship. But I'm not going to let it happen to me. Get some rest. Munchkin's getting some food for you. Find yourself somewhere to sleep later on. Because I want your help."