



four

"Where's my boat?"

"Safe," said Dooby, calmly. "In a safe place."

"Where?" Zoe said again. "It's my boat, you had no right . . ."

"Yours is it? Pay for it, did you? Or maybe someone just gave it to you? No! You found it and took it, and now I've done the same."

"All right, I found it. But it didn't belong to anyone. It had been forgotten, and it took a lot of work to do it up. I spent weeks sneaking around the city finding the things I needed to mend it. I found the oars on the wall of a pub. No one else would have thought of that! So if it's anyone's it's mine!"

"Look, Zoe. I'm not taking it from you. Like I said, I want your help. And I want that boat, to get us, you and me, out of here."

"What?" asked Zoe. She was brought up short again. She wondered why she hadn't realized. It was obvious what he was after.

"I wouldn't tell that lot," he said, nodding through the door of the side chapel where they were sitting, "but this place is finished. I keep telling them we'll be all right, but time's nearly up for this place."

"You're right there," said Zoe. "How long have you been here?"

"Me? A few months now, I suppose. Why?"

Zoe shrugged.

"I just wondered . . ."

"How come I'm in charge? Because when I got here I found a bunch of animals, arguing and fighting. But they were all weak. I sorted them out. If they didn't like it, they went for a swim."

He paused. Zoe said nothing.

"You're the first good thing to come this way in a long time," Dooby said after a while, pushing his dark hair back into place.

Zoe didn't answer. For some stupid reason, she liked what Dooby had just said. It was the first time anyone had said anything nice to her in a very long time. But she told herself to be careful.

"You've got brains. Anyone with half a mind can see this place is living on borrowed time. This bunch of idiots have their uses, though. You wouldn't believe how many other people there are, other tribes who want this land."

"Pigs, Dogs?"

"That's right. Though the Dogs are no longer a problem . . . But there's others, too. Clinging to little blips in the sea like limpets. So they want my island. And at least this lot can fight. I'll say that for them."

"Didn't you try and make it work? On Norwich, it went well for a long time. We had food growing, rainwater

collection. It was all organized for a bit. It really only started going to pieces a little while ago . . ."

"There's nothing here, Zoe. This place, it's no place to live. It's like being on a boat. A big boat, I suppose, but there's nowhere to go but the sea. No one can get off. And I don't let anyone on. Except you."

Zoe's heart started to race. She knew how precarious her life was here.

"Well, if you're going to survive on a ship, you need to have the means of survival. Food. We were talking about this yesterday, weren't we?"

"Yes," said Zoe. She knew Dooby was horrid, had done terrible things, but she couldn't help feeling relief at having someone to talk to.

"If you want to eat chickens, you need two chickens to make more with, see? Two pigs to make more pigs, and so on. At least two of everything, and probably more like seven in case some of them die, or you have to eat them sooner, see?"

"And you haven't got anything here, have you?"

"Not any more," said Dooby. "We've got some stores of food, but there's not much left. I've been rationing things out as best as I can, but that lot don't understand. They think I can keep on giving them food for ever. We had some animals, but they're all gone now. We used to find seagulls' eggs, but even the birds have abandoned us now. I get some of them to fish from the shore, but . . . well, they don't catch much. Not enough anyway. So yes, I've been looking for a way out for some time."

He paused, stroking his hair again.

"I have an engine. An engine for a boat such as yours."

"An outboard motor? So why didn't you . . . you didn't have a boat, did you?"

"Exactly. And now you come along . . . well, it's fate, isn't it?"

Zoe didn't like the way this was going, but she played along.

"So where's my boat?"

"So, Zoe, I couldn't have everyone seeing it, could I? They might start to get ideas. So I had Spat and Munchkin move it to a safe little harbour. They're fixing the motor on to it, right now."

"But it's not big enough!"

"What for?"

"I mean, there wouldn't be enough room for you three, and me. Unless . . ."

"No, that's right. Like I said, the boat is just for the two of us, see? I don't need Spat and Munchkin, not now they've moved the boat for me. But I do need you, because you know how to work the thing. How to steer, how to find land again."

"And now I need you, because you won't tell me where it is."

"I knew you were smart," said Dooby grinning unpleasantly. "Oh and by the way, you won't say anything to anyone about this." He stopped smiling, and Zoe felt cold. He didn't need to say what would happen if she did.

She suddenly hated herself. She had caught herself liking the thought of escaping in a boat with him. She had caught herself liking him. But he had reminded her just in time of his real nature.

"Well," she said, risking a little edge in her voice, "what about everyone else? You're their leader, you can't just leave them . . ."

"Like you just left Norwich, you mean?"

"That was different."

"Was it?"

Zoe was silent.



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Later that day, Zoe tried to find where Lyca had been moved to. After her conversation with Dooby, a new determination to escape had grown in her. She walked brazenly out of the gate this time. She felt that she didn't really care what happened to her now, she was just angry at the way Dooby was controlling her.

She searched as much of the shoreline as she could, but it was slow work. There were places where buildings stood at the water's edge, and she had to find a safe way through or round them. She knew from experience how dangerous these ruined buildings could be. Once the water had got under them they could become even more lethal to hang around.

The light was going, and as she got cold, her anger and determination began to slip away from her too.

Finally, she was barely able to see a few paces in front of her. Then she noticed a light flickering behind her. She turned to see Spat, with his usual mocking smile.

"Having fun?" he asked. "Curfew's in five minutes. Time for bed."