



seven

Zoe felt at a dead end. She wanted to escape, but she didn't want to escape with Dooby. She knew that the second she stopped fitting into his plans her life would be at risk. She didn't know where Lyca was. She didn't even know where she was. Her only hope was to work on Munchkin. If she could just find out where her boat was being kept, then she had a chance.

In the meantime, she decided to at least try and find out where the island was. Then her compass could be of some use when she came to get away. There was only one person Zoe felt like talking to: William. And Dooby had said William knew everything there was to know, so she went looking for him. He had also said William was mad, but Zoe had few choices.

As she went, she saw Munchkin creep out from Dooby's room. She hoped he hadn't said anything to Dooby. That she'd asked about her boat. She'd been stupid to say anything, at all. Munchkin could have told him everything by now.

The island was small anyway, she'd find her boat soon enough by herself, given the chance to look for it. And when she did, she wasn't going to hang around.

She found William, sitting alone as usual, in one of the side chapels. The multi-coloured light from a stained glass window fell across his face. He looked like something from a stained glass window himself. Fortunately for Zoe, he was in one of his more normal moods. He was reading a battered old book. Its cover was torn, but the rest of it seemed all right.

"Hello again, Zoe," he said. He patted the stone bench. She sat down next to him, but he kept on reading. Zoe tried to think of something to say to get him talking.

"What are you reading?" she said.

"This is my favourite book," William said.

Zoe was getting nowhere.

"Why?" she asked.

"Oh, well, the man who wrote these poems has the same name as me, see? Funny isn't it?"

He went on reading for a moment, then suddenly shut the book. Zoe jumped.

"So. What can I do for you?" William asked.

Zoe sighed with relief.

"How do you know I want something?"

"People generally do, when they come to talk to you. No time for small talk, is there?"

"No," said Zoe, "I suppose not."

"Well?"

"Well, it's just that, I don't know where I am and I don't know where my parents are or if they're even . . . and I don't know what to do about Dooby, and I don't know where my boat is . . ."

"Right," said William, "I see."

"I mean, I'm just fed up. Why does everything have to be so difficult? So scary?"

"Hmm," said William.

"I mean, why is this even happening?"

"What?"

"The sea rising."

"Well, I thought I told you about that the other night."

Zoe paused. Not wanting to offend him, she said, "Oh, I know, but I mean, when did it start? Will things always be like this?"

"Ah," said William. "Well, Zoe. It started a long time ago. I was about your age, I suppose, when it began. Back then, you could walk from here in any direction for fifty miles and not meet the sea."

"Have you lived here all your life then?"

"Of course," said William, as if it was obvious, but Zoe knew that a lot of people must have come and gone; been made to come and go on the island, in that time.

"Do you mean there was no sea between here and Norwich?"

"Norwich? That's where you're from, isn't it? That's right. You could drive there, in a car, I mean, in an hour or so."

Zoe's parents had told her about cars. Their remains littered every street in Norwich.

"Didn't anyone tell you this before?" asked William.

"Yes and no," said Zoe, "My parents told me about a lot of things, but mostly stuff I needed to know about."

"How old would your parents be?"

"I don't know, really. About forty, I suppose. Why?"

"They'd just about remember things properly then. Before the sea came, I mean. Even then it was a while before it got

really bad. But it just kept on coming. I don't think anyone took it seriously enough. By the time they did, it was too late. The world couldn't cope any more, by then. Your parents probably told you this, though."

"They told me there didn't used to be the sea all around, but that was it really. We were too busy just getting on with things apart from that. Surviving. I know there's the main part of the country still out there, to the west."

"West, yes. There's a feeling I get when I look to the west."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh nothing, I don't know. Just some words from the past. West is where the sun sets, isn't it?"

"So then what happened?" asked Zoe, anxious that William was about to change the subject.

"Well, it was just small floods. The panic they caused! The weather went up the spout, and lots of rivers burst their banks. But it was nothing to what happened when the sea started to come. Bits of the coast, they went first. They fell into the sea. And the sea rose some more, and the lowlands went under. That's when it really got bad. When things started to . . . We heard reports from all around the world on the news. Everywhere the sea was covering the land. Then we didn't get any more news."

Zoe didn't understand a lot of what he was saying, but she didn't interrupt.

"Then things got worse round here too. Holland went, then we got cut off. You wouldn't believe the floods. The water would only be rising slowly, I suppose, but it would hold itself back and then come with a charge when the land couldn't take it any more. The people! People from all over coming and going. We just weren't ready and the country

couldn't take it. The world couldn't take it, I suppose, but by then we had no idea what was going on elsewhere. We were on our own . . ."

He stopped, and was silent for a long time. It clearly hurt to remember.

Zoe tried to imagine what the world was like when William was a boy, before the sea started coming. It was a world of which she only knew the shadows. The boxes of things she didn't understand, with happy faces smiling on the side of them. The ruins of cars rusting in the streets, all useless now. The derelict buildings made unsafe by the water swelling up into the ground beneath them like into a sponge . . .

"Were you happy, then?" asked Zoe.

"Well," said William, slowly, "about as happy as I am now."

He looked Zoe straight in the eyes, and smiled.

She looked away.

"William, where is this place? I need to know so I know where to head when I go."

"I would say you're about halfway between Norwich and the mainland. The sea's slowed down recently, have you noticed that?"

Zoe shook her head.

"Well, anyway. This island became a real crossroads. People heading west, people heading north. It was a mess. Then that young Dooby came along."

"You don't like him too, do you?" asked Zoe, surprised.

"He's nothing to do with me. I was here before he came, and I'll be here when he goes."

Zoe started to speak, but William saw what she was thinking.

"Oh, he'll go, all right. Leave this lot to it."

"How do you know?"

William didn't answer.

Instead, he said, "So what about your parents, then? You're on your own?"

Zoe told him the story of that horrible night.

"They left you? That's terrible."

"No!" said Zoe angrily. "They didn't leave me. It was an accident. There was no choice."

"I see," said William. "Well, I suppose it wouldn't be the only time it's happened. Same stories over and over again. Over and over."

"You never saw them here did you? Maybe a year ago? Something like that?"

William shook his head.

"How would I know?" he said, though not unkindly. "No one uses proper names any more, do they? What's your last name, anyway?"

For a second, Zoe was stunned. She thought she had forgotten it. Her own name. With a struggle, she fished in her memory.

"Black," she said, eventually.

"Really? Black? That's nearly the same as mine . . . Blake, see?"

He showed Zoe the name on his book again.

But Zoe wasn't listening. How could she nearly forget her own name?

"Well, anyway," William went on, "if you head west, you'll find dry land again sooner or later."

"Is that the best you can do?" snapped Zoe. "I can't just row off into the middle of nowhere again. I can't!"

William turned and looked at Zoe, then away. He got up.

"William," she said quickly, "I'm sorry. Look, I've got a boat. You know that, don't you? It's how I got here, and it's how I'm going to get away."

"Yes. You get away," said William. "In a boat. Good idea."

"Come with me!" said Zoe. "I'll go west, where there's higher ground."

"West. That's right. Your salvation lies to the west of Udan-Adan . . ."

"I'm going to go and look for Lyca tonight, when everyone's sleeping."

"Lyca, you say?"

"It's just the name of my boat, that's all . . ."

Zoe could see the change in William happen before her eyes. He was starting to lose it again, slipping off into his other world.

"You think it's just the name of your boat? Lyca, Zoe, is the little girl lost.

Do father, mother weep,  
where can Lyca sleep?  
Lost in desert wild,  
is your little child . . ."

"William! You're not listening . . . Come with me. I'll get you out of here!"

He looked at her sharply.

"Why would you want to do that?"

Zoe was puzzled by his question, but it was a good one. She had made it a rule not to trust anyone, and it had seen her through all right. William obviously felt the same way.

"Why?" William said again. "Why me? There's plenty of

people you could take. Younger, stronger, more use to you than I would be. Why put your trust in me?"

"I don't know," said Zoe. "I just want to."

Suddenly, shouts and the sounds of scuffling came from the porch of the cathedral. Zoe rushed to the door of the chapel where she and William had been sitting. At the door she froze. She could see well enough from there what was happening.

"A spy!"

"It's a Cat!"

"Dooby! Fetch Dooby! We've found a spy."

A young man was being pulled into the building by four Eels. He looked terrified. Zoe wouldn't have known he wasn't another Eel, if he wasn't being dragged along by his arms. Dooby, hearing the fuss, came out of his room to meet them. It was no surprise to Zoe to see Spat was among the four who'd found the spy.

Spat took hold of the spy's collar and threw him on to the cold stone floor.

"Dooby!" he said. "We found this Cat. Sneaking around outside!"

"Did he have a boat?" asked Dooby quickly. A little too quickly, Zoe thought.

"I've sent Tolly and Soup to search the whole shore; but there's no sign of one. They must have dropped him and then scarpered."

Dooby turned on the spy, who lay quivering on the flagstones.

"Is that true?" he snapped.

Bravely, or stupidly, the Cat said nothing. Dooby swung his boot into him. Zoe looked away.

"Take him into my room. Let's find out what he's up to."

They took him away. Spat and Dooby followed.

It was late. Zoe went to the pew she was using as a bunk, but she couldn't sleep. Screams and chokes from Dooby's room floated out into the cathedral. Horrified, Zoe decided to try to have another look for her boat. But at the gate she was stopped.

"You know the rules," said the gatekeeper, "No one allowed out after curfew."

She hadn't heard the horn somehow. She must have been too deep in her conversation with William.

Zoe crept miserably back to her bunk, and tried not to listen to the noises of the Cat. He had looked so pitiful. She stared at the ceiling high above her, feeling guilty for doing nothing, and terrified at what would happen to her if Dooby didn't have plans for her and her boat. Her mind began to drift to her parents, and to her old life on Norwich. At least it was something she could focus on, to try and block out the sickening noises. Suddenly, as she gazed up at the ceiling, she saw something move. The ceiling was made of painted panels. Lots of people in various scenes. Zoe guessed they told bits of a story, but she didn't know what it was. But she was sure that part of one of the pictures had just moved. Then she saw it again. It was a light, somewhere above the ceiling. A light moving round and shining through a tiny hole in one of the panels.

Her mind made a connection to something that had happened earlier that day. Somehow she knew what, or rather who it was.