

They took him away. Spat and Dooby followed.

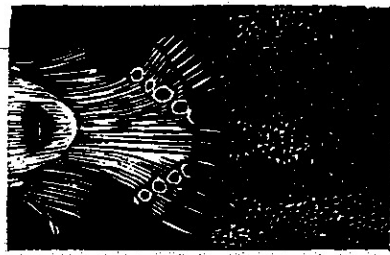
It was late. Zoe went to the pew she was using as a bunk, but she couldn't sleep. Screams and chokes from Dooby's room floated out into the cathedral. Horrified, Zoe decided to try to have another look for her boat. But at the gate she was stopped.

"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.



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Zoe got up from her bunk. Checking to see that no one was watching her, she went back to the corridor where she'd spoken to Munchkin that morning. It was darker than ever now, and she stumbled around for a long time. At last her eyes got used to the darkness and she could pick out the shape of the walls beside her. But still, she couldn't find what she was looking for.

She tried feeling her way all along the walls, but found nothing. She gave up. Sliding down the wall, she sat on the floor, and decided to stay there for a while; the noises from Dooby's room were almost inaudible here. That was something, at least.

She began to doze. Then, as if it was a dream, a line of light appeared in the darkness opposite her. She wondered if she had gone crazy, as the beam of light grew in front of her eyes. It was only a few paces to the left of where she sat. It hung motionless in the air for a moment like a sword of fire. Then it grew out sideways at the top and bottom, and got fatter. Finally she realized what she was looking at.

It was a small door opening in the wall, with a light behind.

She was right. A moment later she saw Munchkin step down from the door halfway up the wall. Zoe was terrified he'd see her, but Munchkin's eyes had been exposed to the flickering light of his candle, and Zoe was still sitting in a dark corner. She watched as Munchkin carefully closed the door behind him. Zoe saw why she hadn't found it. Even staring straight at it, it was hard to see where the door was, now that it was shut.

As soon as Munchkin was convinced he'd shut it properly, he blew his candle out. Zoe was sure this was something only he knew about, something he wanted to keep that way. He was moving extremely quietly and slowly, and from the care he had taken to make sure the door was invisible again, she knew this was one thing no one else knew about, not even Dooby. Even as she sat there in the darkness, an idea came to her, and her heart started thumping so hard, Zoe thought Munchkin would hear it.

He was so close that Zoe could smell the reek of smoke from the extinguished candle. She held her breath, thinking he was still there, but when she heard his feet shuffle at the end of the corridor, she realized that he had quietly walked away.

Zoe thought for a moment. She felt that there might be a chance of a bargain to be had. If she could find out why Munchkin's hideout was such a secret, she might be able to bargain with him, get him to tell her where Lya was being kept. In return, she wouldn't tell Dooby about Munchkin's hidey-hole.

But she couldn't do anything about it now; she didn't have a light. She'd have to come back when it was light; some time when Munchkin was doing something else.

She put her hand out against the wall, and counted her footsteps to the end of the corridor. She had to know how to find the place again.

The following morning, Dooby called everyone into the centre of the cathedral to make an announcement. He climbed into the pulpit.

"We can expect an attack," he said. "The spy was very helpful. He tells us that the Cats are planning an attack in a few days time. We must be ready for it when it comes. I will be discussing preparations for our defences with Spat and Munchkin. When I have decided what we need to do they will inform you of your jobs. That's all for now."

Dooby, Munchkin and Spat went off into Dooby's room. Zoe looked around. She saw Sarah and Molly standing nearby. Sarah was talking loudly about Spat, making sure no one would forget he was her boyfriend. As if that were possible. Everyone seemed quite calm about the news, but Zoe's heart was racing. And then it stopped. Zoe had seen something that filled her with fear. She was watching Sarah showing off to the others. Then she saw her pull something on a cord around her neck from inside her dress.

Attached to the cord was a pendant, a very unusual one. The cord it was strung on was normal enough, but the piece of jewellery itself was unmistakable. It was a big silver disc engraved with a pattern of the points of the compass, not just the four main points, or the four more between them. This compass had sixteen big arrows and then another sixteen minor points marked by fine lines. Zoe knew it in detail without needing to see it more closely. Because it had been her mother's.

Sarah stood pretending to clean it, but really it was just part

of her showing off. Something broke inside Zoe, and she charged at Sarah.

Zoe practically threw herself at her.

"Where did you get that?" she yelled.

Sarah had been taken by surprise, and for a moment was too stunned to say anything.

"It doesn't belong to you!" Zoe shouted. "Give it to me!"

"Get off me!" Sarah yelled back, pushing Zoe away.

Zoe fought to grab the necklace from Sarah's neck, but she was held back by some of Sarah's friends.

"Get lost, you little creep!" yelled Sarah. "Get your hands off me!"

Zoe wrestled with them.

"Let go of me!" she screamed. "Give me that! It's not yours!"

"Stop her!"

"Someone shut her up!"

"Where did you get it?" Zoe shouted. "Tell me!"

Zoe nearly broke free, but Molly came over and hit her across the face twice.

"Shut up! You're crazy . . ." She hit Zoe again, and Zoe had had enough. She sank into the arms holding her. They let her drop to the floor, where she lay crying.

Sarah came up to her.

"Why do you want to know, anyway? What's got into your crazy little head?"

Zoe shook her head. If she told Sarah it was her mother's they'd never leave her alone. Besides, the fact that Sarah was wearing it was all Zoe needed to know.

As if Sarah knew what she was thinking, she said, "Spat got this for me. It was his present to me, see? And the previous owner no longer has any need for it."

She laughed. The others joined in.

"Come on," she said to them, "let's go. Stinking little rat . . ."

They left Zoe huddled on the floor, muttering insults at her as they went.

Zoe felt a hand on her shoulder. She looked up. It was William.

"Zoe, my dear." His voice was kind and calm.

Zoe just shook her head, dumbly.

"What was that all about?" William asked.

Still Zoe only shook her head.

"Don't go looking for trouble, Zoe. Even Dooby won't look after you for ever . . ."

"You don't understand . . ." Zoe said through her tears. "That pendant. It was my mum's . . . it is my mum's. I'm sure of it."

"Oh Zoe . . ." began William.

"No!" said Zoe firmly, "I know it is!"

"But Zoe, I was going to say . . . That's good."

"Good? How can it be good? If Sarah's got it, and Spat gave it to her, then . . ."

"No. That's just the point. Spat didn't give it to her. He wasn't even here when she got it. She just says he did because she thinks he loves her. I know where she got it. Everyone does. She's so stupid that one. So vain . . ."

Zoe couldn't understand what William meant.

"You're not making sense. Tell me!"

"A ship came by. Last one we saw. Sarah got it from a woman on board."

"What? When was this?"

"Last year some time. I don't . . . it's so hard to keep track, you see. Swimming on the open sea . . ."

Zoe wanted to keep William on the subject.

"Did you see the woman who gave it to her?"

"Oh," he said, "oh. She didn't give it to her."

"Then . . . ?"

"She swapped it for some food. That's why Sarah's so stupid . . . what use is jewellery here? She gave food for it. Food, the only thing that's any use."

William started laughing, and despite herself, Zoe did too.

"That could have been my mum, that's just like her . . . but did you see her?"

"No. No, it was her husband who did the deal. There was a little boat, see?"

"But they didn't take anyone with them? Why didn't you go?"

"I think they'd sized us up pretty quickly. They said they were full, that they'd come back for us. Of course, they never did . . ."

That sounded right to Zoe. The captain hadn't even turned back for her. When he saw the bunch of savages on Eels Island he must have wanted to keep well away.

"But why did they stop at all?" asked Zoe.

"What?"

"Why did they stop here at all? Why didn't they just keep clear and head on for the mainland?"

William shrugged.

"They said they needed food. There was none on board and some of them were near to death from it. They didn't even land. A few of them just rowed close by in a boat. Some of us went down to the shore."

"Wait. Was this before or after Dooby came?"

"Oh before. He'd never have let anyone swap food for jewellery . . ."

"But why did she?"

"Vain, see? They shouted across to us. Food! We'll pay you for it! Everyone told them to get lost! Take us with you and we'll bring some food, they said. Then the men in the boat said they were full, that they'd come back, like I told you. They never did, of course . . ."

"So what about Sarah?"

"Ah. Well, Sarah was different. She waded out to the boat with this great armful of food, and then she came back with that necklace thing . . ."

"But didn't anyone try and stop her?"

"No," said William, "like I said, this was before Dooby got here. There was no one with any brains at the beach, see? Those that were, you know . . . ? A bit simple. They just watched her do it. There was a real fight about it later, though. People tried to get it off her, but she kicked and screamed till they left her alone. But she said she made the men in the boat promise to come back for them all, when they weren't full. Never did, but then you know that, eh?"

Zoe's mind was reeling. This was the first news she heard of her parents in a very long time, but it was good news. They'd been all right when they'd passed the island. They hadn't stopped, but gone on to the mainland.

"They must be all right," Zoe said to herself, but then doubt came into her mind again. If they were okay, why hadn't they come back to look for her? Perhaps it wasn't her dad who'd been in the boat and swapped Mum's jewellery for food. Maybe it was someone else, maybe the only reason they had it to swap was because . . .

"No!" said Zoe aloud. "They're okay. I know it."

She told herself that seeing the pendant was a good thing,

she wouldn't believe otherwise. But she had to find her parents, and to do that she had to get off this stinking little island.



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Zoe knew time was running out. She would have to find Lycia fast, or she was going to get caught up in a fight she wanted nothing to do with. Her fate would become a matter of chances then.

With Munchkin occupied for a couple of hours at least with Dooby's meeting, Zoe decided to find his hideout. She was convinced she could do a deal with him, just like her parents had with Sarah. They traded food for a useless bit of jewellery. She would trade information for silence. Her boat for not telling Dooby about Munchkin's lair. But to do that she had to find it first.

She had to do it without being seen by anyone, and that was one of the things about the inhabitants of the cathedral, they were always watching. It was even hard to see everyone who might be watching her, many of them clung to the dark corners, hidden from sight.

Still, the urge in her to explore was too strong to ignore. As far as she could tell, no one was taking any notice of her. As calmly as she could, she took a burning candle from the side