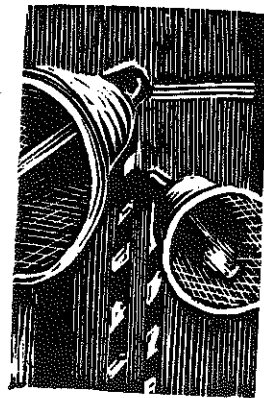


"You see!" Zoe shouted at William. "Now how are your stories going to help you survive?"

"They might not help me, but they might help you," William said calmly.



eleven

The mad clanging of bells was coming from way up in the tower that rose from the middle of the cathedral. Shouts and the sounds of people running reached them.

"Attack! We're under attack. Come on!"

"Hand out the weapons!"

"Cats! Dooby, it's the Cats!"

Zoe ran into the cathedral. She was amazed. The same people that had seemed such a mess to her before were now quickly and efficiently organized into an army. Weapons were being passed out, as Spat and Munchkin shouted instructions. Groups of ten or so were running off to guard various doors and passages.

Dooby stood in the middle of it all, satisfied that they were working as he'd taught them to.

He spotted Zoe. She tried to turn, but he grabbed her arm.

"Come with me, Zoe. It'll be all right."

Zoe felt comforted by his calm voice, and hated herself for it. She was even comforted by the painful grip on her arm. It stopped her having to think what to do. But when

she thought of what he'd done to the poor Cat she felt sick.

Suddenly, William stood ranting at the top of the choir stalls.

"Ely is almost swallowed up!" he yelled, his eyes wild. "Lincoln and Norwich stand trembling on the brink of Udan-Adan!"

His shouts of nonsense added to the urgency.

"The wheels of Albion are turning, vast and invisible!"

Then he saw Zoe.

"Zoe! I've remembered! Doctor Foster went to Gloucester. Doctor Foster! Go west, Zoe! West!"

Zoe stared at William, but then Dooby rushed up to her.

"Take this!" he said, and thrust an awful looking pikestaff into Zoe's hands. It was literally a museum piece.

"Just shove it at anyone who gets too close, right?"

"No, I don't want it!" she protested.

"If you want to live, you'd better! Come with me!" And with that Dooby grabbed an ancient-looking sword, with a huge curving blade, and ran for the stairs to the tower. He pulled Zoe after him.

Zoe had no choice but to follow, gripping the pike grimly.

"Udan-Adan is a lake not of waters but of spaces!" William went on with his mad shouting; though no one was listening. "On its islands are the mills of Satan . . . but to the west lies Golgonooza; the city of salvation!"

"There they are!" Dooby shouted.

They stood at a window about halfway up the tower of the cathedral. From there they had a clear view of a mob, carrying similarly brutal weapons, heading fast towards them.

"What are you going to do?" asked Zoe, her heart thumping. She'd never been in anything like this in Norwich.

"Just watch! This should be simple enough!" Dooby was incredibly calm. Once again Zoe wondered who he was and where he was from. He was only a little older than she was.

"The Cats are desperate. They've only got a little zit of an island left now. It's higher than here, but there's barely enough room to turn round. One big wave this winter and they're dead. They've tried this many times, but they're weak now."

"Why don't you let them stay here?" asked Zoe.

"Not enough room. Tough, but that's how it is. We've got a few too many here ourselves. Still, this fight should help our numbers drop a bit."

Zoe was horrified at the bluntness of what he said.

Below them, the army of the Cats met the Eels on the green in front of the cathedral.

"Aren't we going to help?" asked Zoe.

"No," said Dooby, "we've got this under control."

It didn't look like it to Zoe. But Dooby turned to her.

"Just watch this," he said.

From behind the Cats, from the same direction in which they'd come, another force of Eels spilled on to the green. Then from inside some old ruined buildings on either side came two more bunches of Eels. The Cats were caught on four sides. There was no hope for them.

Guiltily, Zoe was relieved. She didn't know what she'd do if she was forced to use the terrible weapon in her hands.

They watched the fight take shape.

Zoe backed away from Dooby, wondering if she could escape.

"All be over in five minutes," said Dooby, laughing. "Look, there's William!"

Zoe had been about to hurtle down the tower, but came back to the parapet. She saw William run out and start yelling more nonsense at the people fighting.

"William!" yelled Zoe from the tower. "Be careful!"

There was no way he could hear her above the noise of the fight.

He continued to pour out a stream of nonsense. Zoe hated him for his stupidity. And she hated herself for not making him see the truth.

"William!" Zoe screamed again, but the noise was too great.

He walked right into the heat of the battle.

"William! No!"

She lost sight of him for a moment. Then she saw him lying still on the grass. She went cold.

Suddenly the bells in the tower started to ring again fiercely. Shouts rose from the nave of the cathedral.

"Dooby! Where's Dooby?"

Someone was calling for him from below.

Dooby ran back down the stairs. He pushed Zoe in front of him. Dumbly, she put up no resistance. She could think only of William, not herself. She didn't want to believe what she'd seen. They were at the bottom. Dooby dragged Zoe out into the nave.

Molly ran towards them, yelling.

"Horses! There's Horses coming! Horses from Gogmagog! We're done for!"



twelve

Dooby grabbed Molly, and shook her.

"Nonsense! Get a grip on yourself. What do you mean?"

"It's true, Dooby," cried Molly. "There's Horses. There's lots of them!"

"Where are the Horses? Are you sure?"

Zoe looked at Dooby. For the first time, she saw him begin to panic.

"They've landed on rafts to the east of the island," Molly said. She was wild with fear. Sarah ran up behind her.

"They're coming!" she yelled. "We're done for, Dooby. There's hundreds of them!"

"Get as many men as you can find and go and meet them! Now!" yelled Dooby. Molly and Sarah ran off.

Zoe didn't think they were going to find anyone.

"Damn!" Dooby said quietly.

"So you didn't get everything out of the Cat then?" said Zoe.

She felt pleased by this. Dooby was angry.

"We'll have to put our plan into action a bit sooner than I'd hoped. Come on. We're leaving!"

"What?"

"We're finished if we don't! This is completely different; the Horses are strong, and with the Cats as well we don't stand a chance. Do you want to die? Well come on then! To the boat!"

He shoved the point of his sword at her throat. She nodded. She could feel a little blood trickling down her neck.

Then Dooby ran, tugging Zoe along behind him.

They hurtled down the ruins of passages and streets, ducking under and over collapsed buildings. Rounding a corner they met two unarmed men. Without pausing Dooby charged them, swinging his sword in front of him.

"Eels!" he yelled, and the speed of his attack gave the men no chance. They dropped to the ground in a single heap. Dooby ran on. Zoe didn't dare look at the men as she ran round them.

"Horses!" shouted Dooby as he ran. "Who'd have thought they'd team up with Cats? I should have guessed!"

They were at the west side of the island now. Zoe had never made it this far. There, right at the water's edge, was a low wooden shed.

"Right. Here it is," said Dooby.

He fumbled with a chain round his neck. At last he pulled a key out and unlocked the doors.

"Get that engine started!" he shouted, pulling the doors open.

Zoe ran inside the shed, all the time thinking of how to get away from Dooby.

"Lyca!" she said. She looked her boat over quickly. Everything seemed okay. There were the oars she'd pulled from the wall of The Six Swans, ages ago now, it seemed. And there was something new; a small outboard motor fixed to the stern.

They dragged the boat into the water, wading up to their knees. Zoe looked at the engine.

She had never used one, but Dad had told her about them. He had even shown her a broken one once. This one looked okay.

"So how does it work?" she said to Dooby.

"What?" he screamed. "Don't you know?"

"It's your engine!" she yelled back, "I thought you . . ."

"NO!" shouted Dooby. Zoe could see he was beginning to panic.

"I think you pull this cord . . ." Zoe said.

She pulled the starter. Nothing. She pulled again. Nothing.

"It has got petrol in it, hasn't it?" but as Zoe asked the question, she knew the answer. She had never used petrol herself, but Dad had said that it was what made engines work. The blank look on Dooby's face said it all.

"What's petrol?" he asked.

"Oh great," said Zoe. "Well, we'll just have to row for it then."

Zoe fumbled with the crude clamps that were holding the motor to Lyca's stern.

"What are you doing?" Dooby shouted at her.

"It's no use without petrol! It won't go. I'm taking it off. It'll only slow us down."

The useless engine splashed into the water behind the boat.

"Dooby!" A voice yelled at them from the island. "What's going on?"

They turned to see Spat and Munchkin coming after them.

"You were going to go without us! You . . .!" screamed Spat.

"So what?" said Dooby, and turned to meet them with his sword. His usual calm had returned.

Spat and Dooby fought, Munchkin hung back, hesitating. Seeing the fight, Zoe took her chance and put out to sea in the boat. Dooby was having more trouble with Spat than he'd had with the two Horses. Spat was armed with a sword very similar to Dooby's. They splashed wildly in the shallows, thrashing about with their weapons. Munchkin stood nervously at the water's edge, as if trying to decide what to do. Rowing away from the awful fight, Zoe had a perfect view of it all. Suddenly Munchkin jumped into the sea, and started to swim for Zoe's boat.

"Wait," he spluttered. "Take me with you!"

Distracted by this, Spat and Dooby paused in their struggle for a second. Then Dooby snapped out of it. He shoved his sword into Spat. Spat slid into the shallows, which reddened around him.

By now Munchkin was well out to sea, about halfway from the shore to the boat.

"Come back here!" yelled Dooby from the shore. "Come back. You traitor! You're supposed to be taking me!"

Dooby looked stupid, jumping up and down in the water, yelling his head off.

"Munchkin! I order you to come back! Now!"

Munchkin kept on splashing through the water.

Zoe stopped.

"Oh, William," she said. "Should I come back for you, just in case?"

She shipped her oars, and waited for Munchkin to reach her.

After a minute more, of splashing, Munchkin grabbed the gunwale of the boat. Zoe wondered why Dooby hadn't tried to follow. They weren't that far off shore yet.

"Come round to the stern. Give me your hand!" said Zoe, and she helped Munchkin over the back of the boat.

Munchkin fell spluttering into the bottom of the boat.

"Take the other oar," said Zoe. "Let's get out of here, before Dooby comes after us."

Munchkin climbed beside Zoe and started to row.

"He won't do that."

"How can you be sure?" asked Zoe.

"He can't swim," said Munchkin, grinning.

"I think he's going to have to learn."

As they rowed away, they could vaguely hear the sounds of the fighting outside the cathedral coming to an end. Dooby was by now a tiny figure standing motionless on the shore.

"Why did you wait for me?" asked Munchkin.

"I don't know . . . I didn't think you stood much chance if I left you to Dooby. And you didn't tell him about what I said. About where my boat was."

"No," said Munchkin, simply. "But what about him? Who do you think won the battle?"

"Who knows? But I think Dooby will be all right. People like him always are. It's William I'm worried about. I wanted to take him with me. I saw him go down in the fight. But maybe he's okay."

Munchkin shrugged.

"Don't be sad," he said. "He would never have left, anyway."

They rowed in silence for a while. Zoe realized they ought to take stock of their direction before they went too much further. She fished in her pocket for her compass.

"Oh no," she said.

"What?" asked Munchkin.

"My compass. I've lost it. It must have fallen out of my pocket when we ran out to the boat."

"So how do we know where we're going?" asked Munchkin.

"We don't. Not exactly. We'll head for where the sun's going to set. That's west, roughly."

"West?" asked Munchkin. "That's what William used to say. Salvation is to the west of the sea. There's a city called Golgonooza. That's what William said, anyway. He was always saying it. It was in one of his stories."

Something clicked in Zoe's mind. She made the connection, and at last understood what William had been trying to say. She felt her heart lift as she thought of him, and of how his story was helping them.

"I didn't think you took any notice of William."

Munchkin shrugged.

"I liked his stories, that's all. Made everything seem better."

Zoe smiled.

"Well," she said, "that's where we're going then."



thirteen

"Zoe?"

"Yes?"

"This is crazy."

"Don't say that."

"But we haven't even got any water."

Munchkin and Zoe were far out to sea. They had watched the island of Eels shrink before their eyes with every pull of the oars. Finally, even the monstrous cathedral had disappeared from view, a dot on the horizon that bobbed into sight for one last time and then was gone.

"Maybe we have," said Zoe. "There's something under the thwart."

They stopped rowing for a while, and pulled the package out. It was a box, wrapped in an old oilskin.

"There you are," said Zoe. "We should have known Dooby would see himself all right."

The lid was stiff, but with cold fingers Munchkin prised it open.

There was a bottle of water, and some dried food in tins.

"What a feast," said Munchkin, smiling.

There was some paper too, folded up.

Munchkin unrolled it; it flapped dangerously in the wind.

It was a map.

"Careful!" said Zoe, grabbing two of its corners.

"It's not as good as mine," said Munchkin.

Zoe glanced at it. Even from the quick look she'd had at Munchkin's map, she could see he was right.

"We can use it, though, can't we," said Munchkin.

"Perhaps . . . If we find some land, then definitely. I just don't know where we are now really . . ."

Munchkin looked at the map again.

"I do," he said. He pointed.

"That's where we are. That's the cathedral, more or less."

Zoe looked.

"So the mainland must be to the west. William was right."

They carefully folded the map back up and put it away.

There was something still in the box. A smaller parcel, wrapped in an old plastic bag. Zoe took it out and unwrapped it.

It was a photograph in a frame. There, in the picture, were three people; two adults standing either side of a young boy, about five or six. The boy's parents had their arms around each other; and around him. All three smiled at the camera. Suddenly, Zoe realized who she was looking at. Despite his age in the photo, the boy was Dooby. The good looks, the dark hair, were unmistakable. It was only the innocent smile that had stopped Zoe from recognizing him sooner.

"Look," said Zoe, and showed the picture to Munchkin. For some reason she felt like crying.

Munchkin looked at the picture.

"That's what it's done," he said, after a moment. "The

sea, I mean. That's what it's taken away from all of us. Dooby, too."

Zoe didn't say anything. In spite of everything he'd done, Zoe couldn't hate Dooby completely. Munchkin was right, they had all had to grow up very fast, and something had been taken from them. Looking at Dooby's photograph, she wondered if, like herself, he was just a child who wanted his mum and dad back.

After they had eaten a little of the dried food, and had some water, they rowed on.

"Where did you learn to row?" she asked him, after a while.

"I don't know. I just watched what you were doing."

"You must learn fast."

"Everyone does, though. I mean, if you want to survive."

"Yes, you're right," said Zoe. She wondered if she could trust him.

"How about a song?"

"What?" said Zoe, between pulls on her oar.

"A song. To keep us going."

"Okay, then. You first," said Zoe, amazed, and trying not to laugh.

Munchkin thought for a moment.

"Okay," he said, "Here's one.

Little Tee-Wee,
He went to sea,
In an open boat.
And while afloat,
the little boat bended.
And that is why,

my song is ended.
If the boat'd been stronger,
my song would've been longer."

He finished, pleased with himself.

"Munchkin," said Zoe.

"What?"

"Let's not sing any more. Okay?"

Still they rowed on. The sea had been kind to them so far, but it was beginning to get rougher. Night wasn't far away, and Zoe could feel the fear welling up in her throat again, as it had the last time she'd set off in Lyca.

At least, she thought, I'm not alone, this time. Between pulls she peered sideways at Munchkin. If he was going to do her in, he could have shoved her overboard by now.

"What are you thinking?" she asked him.

"I was thinking about Rat," he said.

"Oh dear!" said Zoe, "He'll be stuck in that little cage."

"No. I let him out when the attack started. I always do. Did. In case anything happened. You know . . ."

"Oh," said Zoe. "Well, I'm sure he'll be okay."

"Yes?"

"Yes," said Zoe.

"Shall we swap sides?" said Munchkin. "My arm's aching."

Zoe laughed.

"Good idea," she said.

"What are you laughing at?" said Munchkin.

"Nothing."

"What?"

"It's just," she wondered how to put it, "it's just . . . you."

You're like a different person since we left the island. You've said more since we got into Lyca than I heard you say during the whole time I was there."

Munchkin frowned at her.

"Let's swap places," he said.

Gingerly they swapped places on the thwart. As she stood to let Munchkin slide past her, she suddenly felt how precarious they were, bobbing around on the ocean.

"Aren't you scared?" she asked Munchkin, suddenly, as she slid back beside him.

"No," he said, "William told us where to go. And you know what you're doing. I know you'll get us there. So I'm not scared."

"Oh, right," said Zoe quietly.

They rowed on, and night came. They took it in turns to try and get some rest while the other one rowed, but the sea was starting to happen. The wind was pushing them hard in the face. Zoe didn't like to tell Munchkin, but she had no idea where they were going now.

Soon it was no use one of them rowing alone. Anyway, it was too rough to sleep, so they both grimly gripped their oars and tried to put them into the water properly.

"Munchkin!" shouted Zoe above the wind.

"What?"

"I . . . I don't know where we're going any more. We're probably off course!"

"We can't hold it against this."

For the first time, a wave broke over the side of the boat.

"I'll row!" shouted Zoe. "You bale us out."

She shoved Dooby's box, now empty, into Munchkin's hands. He looked at her blankly.

"The water! Get it out of the boat!"

Munchkin started to scoop the water back into the sea, but before he had made any difference, another wave swamped them.

"Oh God! Oh God! Oh God!" said Zoe.

Munchkin kept baling, but it seemed hopeless.

"Leave it!" shouted Zoe. "Help me point her into the waves."

For a little while longer, they struggled to keep *Lyca* on course, with her nose into the oncoming waves.

Then it ended. Munchkin fumbled his stroke into the water so badly that he went flying backwards. The oar slipped from his hands and was eaten up by the waves.

"No!" yelled Zoe, but she was too late.

Munchkin had leant forward again, grasping for his oar. The boat had turned and a huge wave slammed into their side. Munchkin went flying overboard.

"Munchkin!" she screamed, and without thinking flung herself to his side of the boat. The sea pushed her in after him.

For a second or two she was under the water, then her head broke surface. She gulped for some air. Something pulled at her. Turning, she found Munchkin beside her in the water.

"Zoe!"

He grinned. They grabbed each other for a second, then broke to tread water.

"What now?" he yelled.

"Where's the boat?"

Munchkin nodded. Zoe turned to see *Lyca* a long way off, overturned. The sea pushed her around like driftwood.

"Come on!" Zoe yelled. They tried to swim for *Lyca*.

The waves broke roughly over them all the time now. And

after each one a stinging salty spray whipped their faces, making it hard to see.

Zoe could feel herself tiring. The water was freezing, stopping her arms and legs from working. She went under. She broke surface to see Munchkin a little way ahead of her, still fighting the waves.

She went under again. Longer this time. Strangely, it was much quieter under the water. She no longer felt the cold. She no longer felt anything. Darkness was all around her. She knew she was about to drown. Another second and it would be over. The waves pulled themselves to pieces above her. She tried to look up through the water, and thought she saw a light. She wondered vaguely if dawn was coming. Had they been struggling with the sea for so long? It seemed to be getting brighter every second.

Then with a shock, Zoe thought she felt the bottom with her feet. She looked up again. The light was a brilliant point in front of her now. And then she felt herself being pulled up out of the water. She was being taken towards the light. Pulled upwards by an unstoppable force.

Her head broke through the water and she gasped for air, choking on sea water, but breathing again.

A strong light shone into Zoe's eyes.

"She'll be okay," said a voice.

"Bit close for comfort."

"Yeah. Any more in there?"

"No, don't think so. Let's get home."

The light flicked over her face once more, and she blacked out.

As she went, she just had time to realize something. The light. The light was from a torch. An electric torch.



after



one

“Hello?”

“Give her time, she’ll be all right.”

“Hello. Hello? Can you hear me?”

Zoe opened her eyes.

Two women were standing over her, peering at her.

“There, see!” said one of them. “You’re all right, dear. You’re safe now.”

Zoe noticed she was in a bed. A proper bed. Not exactly clean, but like nothing on Eels Island. She was in a white room, with a single window that let in fierce bright sunlight. She thought she could hear the sea somewhere not far off.

She sat up.

“Where . . .”

“ . . . am I?” The older of the two women laughed gently.

“That’s what they all say,” the other one said. “You’re safe now, dear. I’m Rosie, this is Mary.”

Rosie waited for Zoe to say something. She didn’t.

"What's your name, dear?" Rosie asked.

"Zoe," Zoe said blankly. She was having trouble remembering everything.

"Don't worry, Zoe. You're all right, now."

"But what happened?"

"Some of our fishermen found you. You were half-drowned. Found you in the shallows three nights ago. You've been very lucky."

Zoe was still confused. She tried to think, to remember, but her thoughts came slowly and then only with a lot of effort. But she was somewhere safe, with kind people looking after her. Bits and pieces started to come back into her mind.

"Is this Golgonooza?" she asked.

Rosie and Mary looked at each other. Zoe saw Rosie raise an eyebrow ever so slightly.

"Never heard of it, love," Mary said brightly. "This is Hope. It's a bit west of what used to be Cambridge."

"But William said . . ." she stopped. The thought of William made her think of someone else.

"Munchkin? Did they find . . . is Munchkin all right?"

"Munchkin?" asked Rosie.

"That boy. You know," said Mary to Rosie. Then turning back to Zoe, "Such a funny name. Yes, he's fine, love. He's been asking after you every five minutes. He is your friend, isn't he?"

Zoe thought for a moment.

"Yes," she said. "He's my friend."

Rosie left to tell the doctor that Zoe was awake. When she returned, she brought the doctor, a huge man with a serious face, but she brought someone else, too.

"Munchkin! Look at you."

He shuffled in behind the huge doctor, looking smaller than ever, but dressed in some new clothes. He looked ridiculous, somehow.

"Are you all right?" he asked.

Zoe nodded.

"She's only just all right," interrupted the doctor. "Beats me why she isn't dead. Both of you come to that."

Munchkin shrank back, but sat himself on the end of the bed, quietly.

"Where have you come from?" asked the doctor as he examined Zoe.

"Norwich," said Zoe.

"Norwich!"

He looked amazed.

"You're either very lucky, or very clever. Probably both. We've had no one come in from Norwich since the last rescue ship."

Zoe's heart immediately started at this.

"They must have been on that ship!"

"Who?"

"My parents . . . I'm looking for my parents . . . they came off Norwich on the last ship . . ."

"I think you must be confused, Zoe. That was nearly a year ago."

"No, you don't understand. They were on that boat. They must've been. Black. Rob and Cathy Black. Have you heard of them?"

All three said nothing. The doctor shook his head.

"I'm sorry."

"But you must have!" said Zoe. "My mum was ill. She would have been in here. You must have treated her!"

"Don't upset yourself, dear," said Rosie.

"No listen . . ."

"Zoe," said the doctor, "try to understand. When that last boat came in, things were really bad. We're better organized now. We try and keep a record of everyone passing through. There's lots of people looking for people, you know . . . but it was a bad time. A lot of disease and . . . there was just too much chaos to cope with."

"So they could have been on the boat, then!" said Zoe, her hopes rising again. "Just because you don't remember them doesn't mean they weren't here."

"Yes, but . . . Zoe, you should know. That ship, they had a terrible journey. Lots of them didn't make it. There was a lot of disease. They had to stop at some little island . . . what I'm saying is, don't hope too much."

Zoe ignored him.

"But the people who did make it, where are they? Are they here?"

"No. We were too full here. I'm afraid I don't know where they went."

Zoe had to ask him something.

"Isn't there somewhere called Golgonooza around here? Have you heard of a place called that?"

The doctor gave her the same blank look that Rosie and Mary had. Zoe's heart sank; she had wanted to believe everything William had told her.

"Everyone who came in off that last boat went up to Newhome . . . more houses there, you see," said Rosie, trying to be helpful. "My Billy took them up in his cart. He did ten trips, there and back."

"That's enough for now, Zoe. You need to rest."

"No! I want to go to Newhome . . . I've got to . . ."

"Not now, Zoe."

"Listen to the doctor, dear."

"We'll talk about it tomorrow."

They left, ushering Munchkin out with them.

Zoe stared at the window, too weak to protest any more. She sank back into the soft, soft pillow and went to sleep, dreaming of the sea.

A little while later, Zoe was disturbed by a scratching at her window. It sounded like a rat scrabbling around outside. Then a small hand appeared and pushed the window wide open. It was followed by an arm, and the arm was followed by the rest of Munchkin.

"Munchkin!" laughed Zoe.

"They wouldn't let me in."

He smiled.

"I'm glad you didn't take any notice."

He smiled some more.

"So are we going then?" he asked.

"What? Where?"

"To this Newhome place. To find your parents."

Zoe looked at Munchkin.

"I . . . don't know," she said at last.

"What?"

"The doctor's right. They're probably . . ." she couldn't say it, but Munchkin understood.

"But you don't know that," he said.

"No. But it's like Sarah and Molly said, isn't it?" said Zoe bitterly.

"Don't take any notice of them."

"Well, why else didn't they come and get me?" Zoe yelled at Munchkin.

"Shh! They'll throw me out if . . ."

"It just doesn't make any sense any other way," Zoe said angrily, but she kept her voice down. "They said we were found by fishermen. Fishing means boats, right?"

"Yes, but . . ."

"So if they've got boats here, why didn't they use one to come and find me?"

"Zoe, they've only got two little boats here. I've been asking around. They need them for fishing all the time, or there wouldn't be enough to feed everyone. They don't let anyone use them for anything else."

"They'd have found a way, if they'd been here," she said.

Munchkin didn't say anything for a long time. Finally, when he was sure Zoe was ready to hear what he was saying, he spoke,

"Zoe, how can you ever be happy until you know for sure? One way or the other, you must find out. You've come all this way, you can't give up now."

Zoe was silent. Munchkin could see a tear rolling down her face. Then she looked up.

"But I don't even know where Newhome is."

"I do," Munchkin said, grinning. "I've been asking around. It's further up the coast."

Zoe sighed.

"What would I do without you?" she said, her face brightening.

Munchkin shrugged.

"Let's get going," he said. "They won't let you out for days."

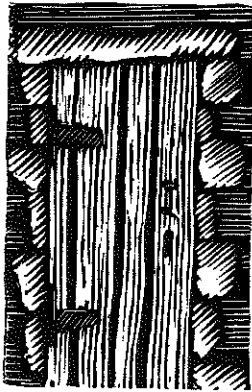
"How do you know?" asked Zoe.

"I've been asking around."

Zoe laughed.

"Listen, Munchkin, you don't have to come," she said.

"I've got nowhere else to go," said Munchkin, "but anyway. I want to."



two

Zoe followed Munchkin out of the window. Once outside Munchkin rummaged underneath a nearby bush. He pulled out a sack. He had clearly been busy.

“Food. Clothes,” he said.

Zoe frowned at him.

“We’ll pay them back when we can,” he said. “Come on, quickly, before they notice you’ve gone.”

He held out some clothes to Zoe. She’d found her old clothes at the foot of her bed, but now she quickly stripped them off and slid into the dress Munchkin had got for her. She looked down at herself.

“Couldn’t you have found something a bit more practical?” she asked.

“I didn’t have much choice,” he said. “Anyway, you look nice.”

He grinned sheepishly.

“Well, it’s a warm day,” said Zoe. “Come on, then.”

Now they were outside, Zoe could see Hope clearly. The

hospital she’d been in wasn’t really a hospital. It was a large old house, its original owner presumably long gone. The rest of Hope was just bits and pieces. A few real houses, but lots of temporary buildings, sheds and shacks.

There, away to their right, was the sea. It was a beautiful sight. The sun was shining and the waters were calm. It looked so perfect, so friendly, Zoe found it hard to believe it had been her enemy for so long. It had nearly killed her.

“This way,” said Munchkin. “That track.”

He pointed. Zoe saw a rough path heading away up the coast.

“So how far is it to Newhome?”

Munchkin looked a little embarrassed.

“I don’t know,” he said. “They were getting suspicious,” he added, defensively.

“Doesn’t really matter, I suppose.”

They began to walk, leaving the small shanty town, Hope, behind them.

As they went, Munchkin told Zoe all he’d found out. Things were better than Munchkin had ever dreamed possible.

“It may not exactly be Golgonooza, but it’s not bad,” he said. “People are trying to make things work, working together. There’s no one exactly in charge, but there’s no fighting. They just do what needs doing.”

“Things must be better here,” agreed Zoe, “just having a hospital. Even if it’s not a proper one.”

“It’s the only one around. If your parents had landed anywhere along the coast for forty miles north or south, your mum would’ve ended up in that hospital, just like you did. There’s nowhere else . . .”

Then Munchkin realized what he was saying and stopped. But Zoe hadn't noticed.

"Forty miles?" she asked. "How much is forty miles? That's so big."

"It's unbelievable," Munchkin agreed, "the island was just a speck of mud. The difference! Look at all this land. It goes on for ever."

Zoe looked inland. Munchkin was right. There was lots of lovely dry land as far as the eye could see.

"But not just that," Munchkin went on, "life's better here. People doing things right, you know?"

"We can't even be that far from Eels Island. We weren't at sea for long enough."

Suddenly Munchkin looked worried.

"What's wrong?" Zoe asked.

"Do you think . . . I mean, if it's not that far . . . supposing Dooby survived, supposing he got here . . ."

Before her eyes, Zoe saw Munchkin start to shrink back, become the frightened mouse she had first met.

"He won't. Even if he made it out of that scrap . . . he'd never find us."

But the thought was enough to make them both quiet for a long time.

For the rest of that day they walked along the rough track that followed the coast, always in earshot of the sea. They saw no one.

For Zoe and Munchkin, it was like a different world. To be able to walk in one direction all day without walking into the sea was a new and strange experience. And with every corner they rounded their amazement grew. There was no end to it; just rolling hills stretching to meet the blue sky at the horizon. Zoe started to love the land.

Still they walked and still they saw no one.

"I suppose most people have moved as far inland as they can get," she said.

"That's what I was thinking," said Munchkin. "Why is Hope there at all? It must be dangerous there, and if the sea keeps on rising . . ."

"I know. I suppose there's the fishing, though."

"It's getting dark," said Munchkin. "We'd better find somewhere to sleep."

"I thought we might get there today . . . it didn't sound that far."

The thought of spending a night in the open made Zoe feel nervous, in spite of all she'd been through. But Munchkin didn't seem bothered.

"We'll find somewhere, a bit of shelter, in case it rains. It's not going to be too cold, anyway . . ."

Dusk was falling fast, and by the time they found an old barn to sleep in, night had come. There was enough light from the stars to find their way in, but once inside they could see nothing. They huddled together just inside the doorway, and slept.

Zoe woke before Munchkin. Bad dreams had gnawed at her all night. She wanted to forget them as quickly as possible, but she sat, still propped up next to Munchkin while he kept on sleeping. Gingerly she shifted a leg that had gone numb. She felt blood begin to bring it back to life.

Zoe's thoughts drifted, but her mind was still as numb as her leg had been. She felt neither fear, nor hope. Neither pain, nor love. She felt empty, that was all. But she felt Munchkin's breathing beside her, and she knew she was alive, at least.

Finally Munchkin stirred. Zoe quickly moved away.

"Don't," said Munchkin.

"How long have you been awake?" Zoe demanded.

Munchkin grinned.

Zoe turned round, and then she screamed.

"Oh! Munchkin! Look!" she yelled, wildly. She turned back to Munchkin, and pointed behind her to the far side of the barn.

"What's . . . oh God! Is it . . . he . . . dead?"

Zoe didn't say anything. The answer was obvious. The old man's body had clearly been shut away in the forgotten barn for a very long time.

"Come on. Let's go."

They left the barn, and stood for a moment, blinking against the sunshine of another beautiful day.

"He must have died in there, sheltering just like we were . . ."

"I wonder who he was?"

"Just someone else, looking for someone, or something . . . come on, let's go. It's too horrible."

Zoe tried not to make the connection, but she couldn't help thinking about William. Was he still lying on the grass in front of the cathedral where he had fallen? She hoped someone had done something for him.

With surprise she found herself wondering about Dooby, too. Where might he be now? Lying in the mud somewhere? He'd been like a king on the island. What he said was what people did. He was the only law. Zoe wondered how he would have managed here – on the mainland. Would he still have been a leader, or would he have been happy just to be alive and safe? But really, it didn't matter to her now. She hoped she never saw him again, and though she knew she

could never forget him entirely, she could try and put him to the back of her mind.

With William it was different. She would remember him as long as she lived, because she wanted to.

By midday they had finished their food.

"Couldn't you have pinched some more?" asked Zoe.

"I thought we'd be there by now," Munchkin said. "I didn't know there could be so much land. Anyway, I didn't think you approved."

"Oh, I don't know. I suppose I spent all my time on Norwich stealing things. Just because their owners had left them behind didn't make them mine. It seemed worse stealing from the hospital, that's all."

"But that's what they're for."

"What?"

"To look after people."

"I don't think that's what they had in mind."

"There's nothing here to even steal from."

Munchkin was right. They were sitting on a slight rise in the coastline that showed them the countryside around for many miles. There wasn't a building in sight, just miles of fields that had once been carefully tended by farmers, but which now lay overgrown and hidden.

"Why aren't there more people here?" Zoe asked.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, if the country got smaller when the sea rose, then there ought to be more people squashed into what's left."

"I don't know," Munchkin said. He shrugged. "Perhaps they wanted to get well away from the sea."

Zoe nodded. She could understand that, but there was lots

of farming land going to waste here. Maybe there were fewer people than she thought.

"At least on Norwich I could have gone scavenging for some tins."

They walked on and the day moved on with them.

They were beginning to get used to the land now, but only slowly. They had both known nothing but islands all their lives, and it would take a little time before the mainland felt normal to them. For much of the time they walked in silence. Zoe watched Munchkin, deep in his own thoughts. She wanted to know what he would do now, but she didn't dare ask him. Anyway, she barely knew herself what she intended to do. Supposing they got to this place and there was no trace of her parents, what then? At least, they should get away from this part of the coast. Just in case Dooby found them, even though Zoe knew that was very unlikely.

They walked and walked until their legs ached and their feet were sore. There was no sign of Newhome.

"I think William was wrong," she said.

Munchkin stopped walking and looked at her.

"What do you mean?"

"This isn't salvation, it's nothing."

"I know it's taking longer than we thought, but we'll find it."

"I don't just mean Newhome, I mean all of it. What is there for us here?"

"You're wrong," Munchkin said, "it's much better here. There's people organizing things. The nurse at the hospital was telling me all about it. She said the country had been in a real mess, but that things were getting done now. She said in a few years things would be back to normal. William was right. Things are getting better."

Zoe didn't speak.

"Just think about that awful island. I'm glad I'm here. Aren't you?"

Zoe nodded.

"I just wish William was here too."

She walked on, and Munchkin followed.

Then, late that afternoon, a town appeared from nowhere. Coming out of a little gully, they walked up over a ridge and there it was in front of them.

There was a piece of board hammered to a stake by the side of the road. On it someone had carefully handpainted a single word. Newhome.

Munchkin turned to Zoe.

"Well?" he said.

"It's even smaller than the last place," said Zoe after a while. It was the same story again. A handful of proper houses in what had once been a tiny hamlet, but with the same mad assortment of shacks and lean-tos thrown up alongside them.

"Quiet, isn't it?" said Munchkin, then, "look. There's someone we can ask."

He pointed across to the largest of the houses, where a woman had just come out of the door. She was carrying a bucket, and started to hobble across to an old well.

"Come on," said Munchkin, but Zoe hung back. "What's wrong?" he asked.

Zoe didn't reply. She couldn't explain.

"Quick! She'll be gone in a minute."

Munchkin grabbed Zoe's wrist and tugged her after him.

"Hello!" he called.

The woman stopped and waited for them to reach her.

"Yes?" she said.

"Is this where the people from Norwich came?" Munchkin asked.

The woman frowned. Zoe hovered uneasily behind Munchkin. She wished he'd shut up, but she didn't want to stop him.

"That's right," she snapped. "What of it? Anyway, I've got things to do."

She started to walk away.

"No, wait! Please," Munchkin pleaded. "This is my friend Zoe. Zoe Black. She's looking for her parents. We think they might have come here."

The woman stopped, and glared at Zoe.

"Black? Black."

Then she turned to leave, but as she was going she stuck a finger out. It pointed to a small cottage that seemed to cling to the big house for support.

"You'd better go in there," the woman grunted as she hobbled off.

Zoe knocked at the cottage door, after much persuasion from Munchkin. He hung back behind her, and watched as Zoe's knuckles struck the feeble wood. Almost as soon as her last knock had died away, the door swung open. Zoe looked up at the man who had opened it.

It was her dad.

They went inside. Then Zoe just stood. She felt numb. She had tried not to think about what might have happened to her parents. It was too painful. But sometimes, when she needed a little hope, she had allowed herself to imagine finding them. In her mind's eye she had seen this meeting several times. She would rush into their arms, they would all

be crying and laughing. But now Zoe just stood, feeling nothing. Munchkin, who had slipped in behind Zoe, tried to hide himself. He hung back in a corner, but it was a small room and even he couldn't disappear in it.

Zoe stared at her parents. Her dad was standing where she had shoved him when he had tried to hug her. Her mum was sitting in a makeshift bed by the side wall of the cottage.

"Why didn't you come?" Zoe said quietly.

"Zoe, darling, we tried . . ." her mum began.

Her dad reached for her, but Zoe backed away.

"Why didn't you come?" she said again, louder this time. Anger rose in her.

"Zoe, Mum wasn't well," said her dad.

"I know, but that was ages ago!" Zoe yelled. "Why didn't you come?"

"Zoe . . ."

"WHY?" Zoe shouted again. She trembled.

"Mum was ill for a long time . . . we couldn't get a boat . . . then . . ."

"Are you still ill now?" Zoe said. She spoke a little more calmly, but she still shook with rage. Her mother didn't look ill. She looked better than Zoe could ever remember.

"Rob, just show her," said her mum anxiously. Her dad looked at her mum with a question in his eyes, and she nodded hard.

"Go on," she said.

Zoe didn't understand what she meant. She watched as her father moved around behind the bed. For the first time Zoe noticed a small cardboard box sitting on a high table. Her father lifted the box down, carefully, so carefully, as though it was made of glass, not cardboard. Zoe stared, struggling to comprehend. Gently, her father put the box down at the foot

of the bed. Zoe looked at her father, who pointed into the box.

There, lying on some of the cleanest, whitest sheets Zoe had ever seen, was a tiny creature. Zoe gazed at its little hands and its tiny fingernails. She stared at its little crop of fluffy black hair, at its minute ears, at its beautiful, calm, sleeping face. She looked up at her parents, but just for a second.

"Oh . . . what . . ." Zoe began, but she couldn't speak. She looked at the baby again.

"He's a him," said her dad, daring a slight smile.

"Your baby brother. Zoe, I'm so sorry, but there was nothing . . ."

"Mum's quite old to have a baby. By the time we knew she was pregnant we couldn't risk coming to get you. She was really ill. Then he came early and we didn't get down to the hospital in Hope. It was touch and go . . ."

But Zoe wasn't listening. Tears were streaming down her face. One of them splashed on to the baby's tiny face, and he moved a hand a fraction, but he kept on sleeping.

"He's so . . ." but she still couldn't find the words. Her mum got out of bed and put her arms around Zoe.

"Do you like him?"

Zoe nodded, biting her lip.

"You don't hate him for stopping us from finding you?"

"Oh no!" she said. "He's lovely!"

"I was so worried about you . . ."

"How did you get here, Zoe?" asked her father.

"I . . . rowed, and I . . . I ended up on an island, and . . ."

Zoe broke off, staring at the baby again. He snuffed slightly, but still kept on sleeping.

"It was terrible," Zoe went on. "You went there. Mum's pendant. That island. I got stuck there and . . ."

"That awful place!" said her dad. "My God! We didn't dare go ashore. The people, they were like animals, we could tell that from the boat."

"Animals . . ." Zoe echoed.

Munchkin shuffled uncomfortably.

"Oh no, I mean," said Zoe, turning to Munchkin. "Not you. The others, they were all like animals, all except you and . . ."

"Well, don't worry, Zoe," her mum said. "Things are better here."

Zoe turned back to her mum to speak, but her dad got there first.

"That's right," he said, "They may have been wild animals on that awful island, but it's different here. At least people have remembered what it means to be human."

Her father's words reminded Zoe of something she had heard someone else say, not very long ago.

"That's what William said," she said.

"William?" asked her mum. "Is that your friend?"

She looked at Munchkin.

"Oh no," Zoe said. "This is Munchkin."

"Munchkin? That's a . . ."

"Yes, Mum," said Zoe, laughing. "He knows it's a funny name."

Munchkin smiled.

"Hello, Munchkin," Zoe's mum said.

He smiled again and mumbled something.

"So who's William?" Zoe's dad asked.

"He helped me. On the island. I wouldn't be here without him. Or Munchkin."

Then suddenly Zoe realized something. She looked at her baby brother.

"What's he called?" she asked.

"Nothing, yet. He's only a week old."

"Mum's still getting better."

"Please," said Zoe, "please, can we call him William?"

Her mum and dad looked at each other, and nodded.

Zoe gazed at Munchkin, at her parents, and at baby William. And as she looked at her family, she realized that it had grown. There were five of them now. Yes, she thought, five.

