

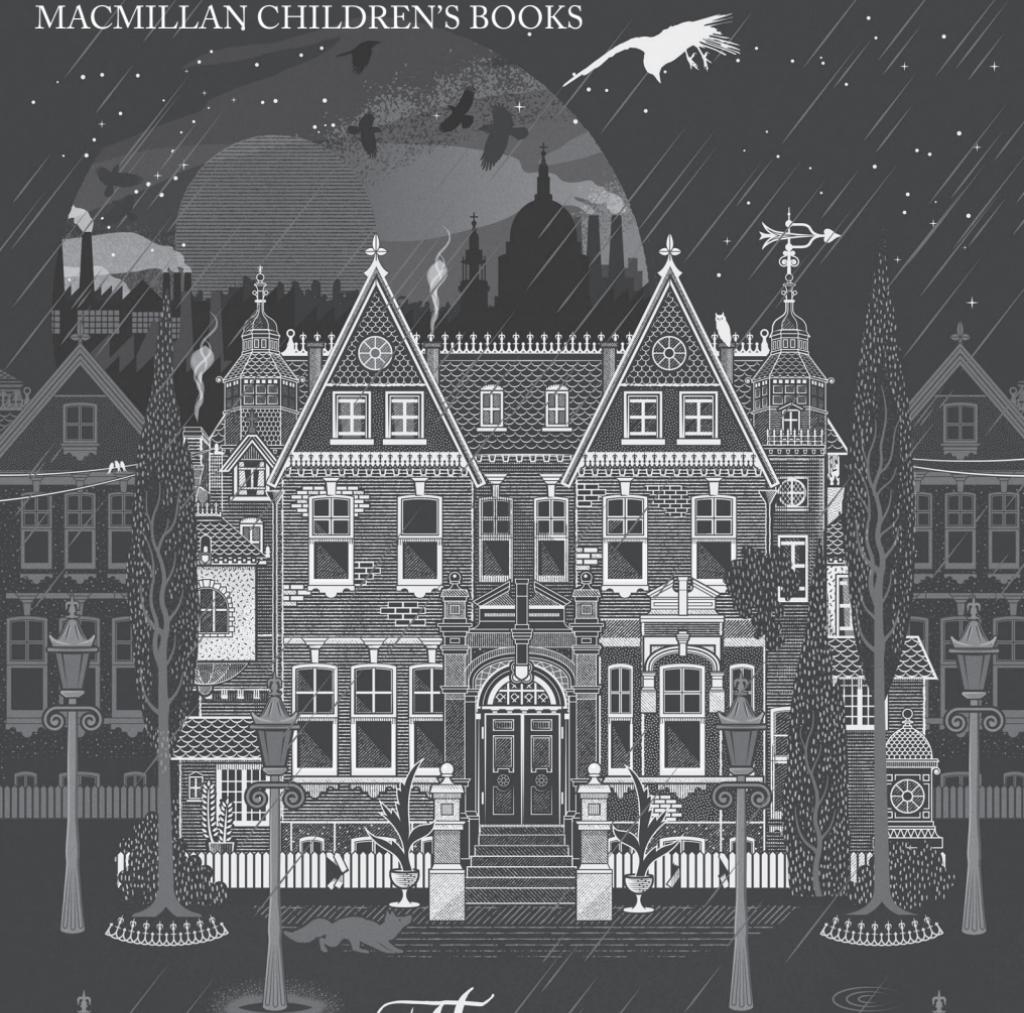
The Shadows of Rookhaven



*Other books by Pádraig Kenny,
published by Macmillan Children's Books*

The Monsters of Rookhaven

MACMILLAN CHILDREN'S BOOKS



The *Shadows* of *Rookhaven*

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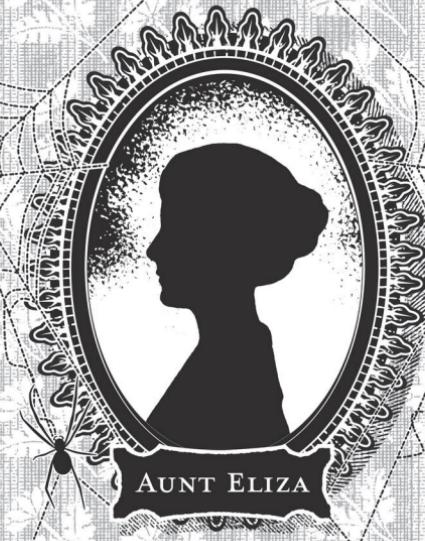
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*This one is for Mona, who taught me everything I know about
whispering in the corner at parties. We miss you, Momo.*





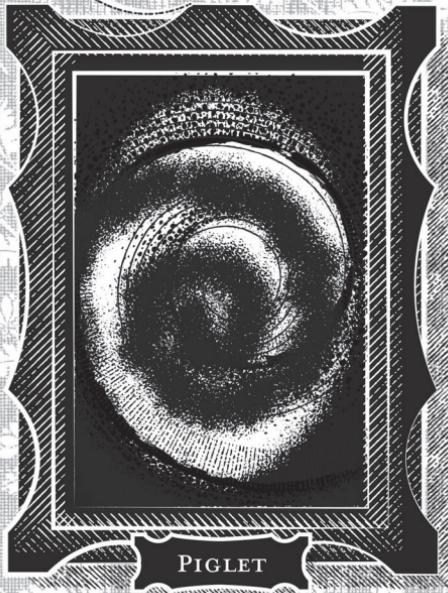
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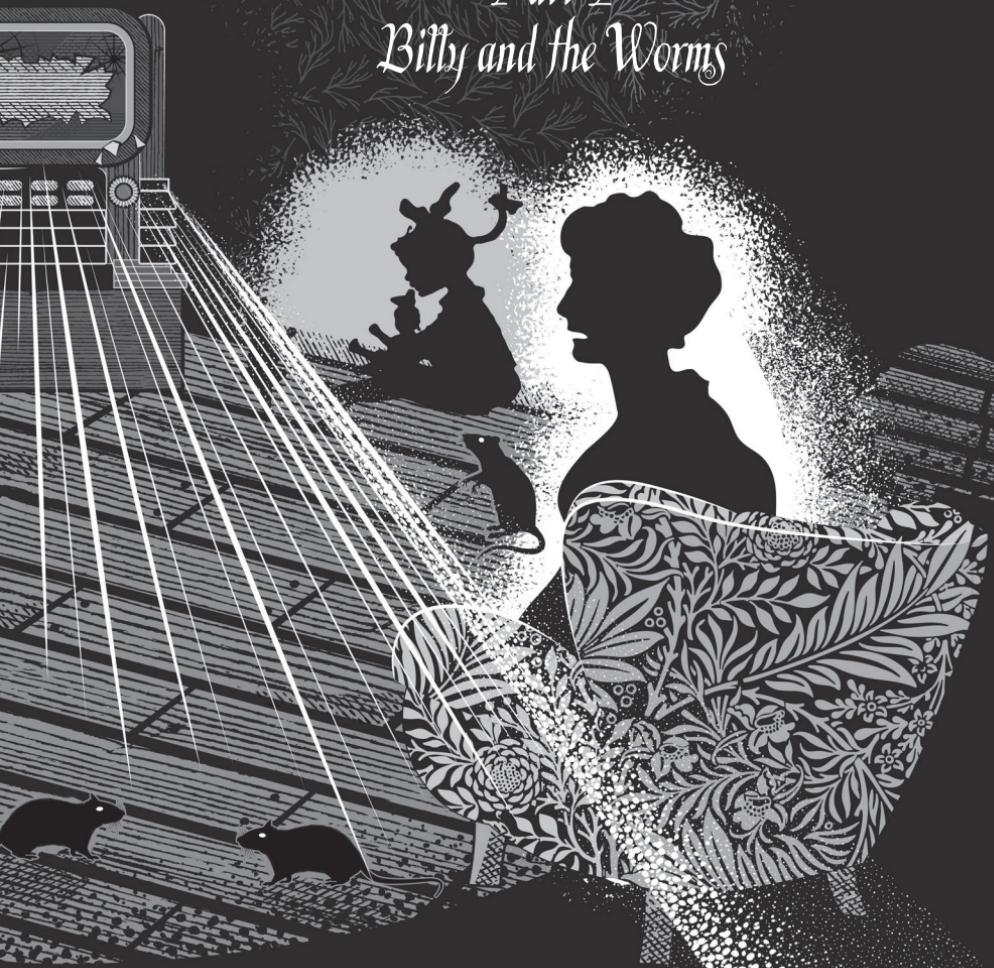
PIGLET







Part 1
Billy and the Worms





Billy

‘We loves you, Billy Catchpole. Your mum and dad loves you – you know that, don’t you?’

Billy sat cross-legged in the gloomiest corner of the cellar. *Mum*, as she liked to be called, was sitting in one of the old, mouldering armchairs he’d rescued from a bombed-out house. Its once-bright floral pattern was faded to a pale yellow and grey.

‘We loves him, don’t we, Dad?’ she said, turning her eyes to the man sitting in the matching chair across from her. The man’s head was tilted upwards. He was clearly distracted, as if not completely present in the room. Billy could see the sharp edge of his Adam’s apple in his scrawny neck. It bobbed up and down as he tried to form words.

‘That’s right, Mum,’ the man said in a hoarse whisper, his white, sightless eyes staring up at the ceiling. ‘We loves him very much. And we loves his little sister too.’

Billy looked over to the corner where Meg was playing with a filthy rag doll. She looked no more than six years old, but appearances were deceptive for their kind. She had likely looked that age for a very long time – certainly from before he’d found her, anyway. Her hair stuck up in dry, jagged clumps and her soft, round face was grimy with dirt, but her eyes shone, and it made Billy’s heart melt to see them.

Mum licked her lips, and the corner of her mouth twitched into a grimace as she tried to form a smile. Billy knew exactly what was coming next, and the thought of it made his stomach flip.

‘You know what I’d like, Dad?’ Mum said.

‘No, what’s that?’ Dad replied.

Billy’s shoulders and neck tightened, as if tensing for a blow.

‘Something nice to eat. A snack, maybe.’

Dad frowned, then his face started to twitch and become more animated. He swung his head round on his stalk-like neck and looked towards Mum.

‘A snack,’ he whimpered, his hands clenching the armrests of his chair.

‘Just . . . just something small,’ said Mum, licking her lips again. She started to drum her bony fingers against the arms of her chair.

‘That’d be nice,’ said Dad, turning hopefully, desperately, in the direction of Billy.

Billy stood up, his eyes going to the book he was holding. It had been nice reading it. It was a book about pirates and treasure on a mysterious island, and it made him feel as if he were there on that island, and not here in the damp and gloom of the cellar with the Catchpoles. The book was written by someone called Robert Louis Stevenson. It was wrapped in a ragged and torn red dust-jacket. There was a pirate on the cover. He held a bloodstained sword and was looking at a smoking ship on the horizon.

‘What would you like?’ Billy sighed, barely able to look at them.

‘Something small,’ wheedled Mum.

‘A snack,’ said Dad.

‘Just a little one.’

‘But warm.’

‘And juicy.’

‘And *alive*.’

Dad rubbed a hand across his chin in an effort to wipe away a long string of drool that had been slowly dripping down from the corner of his mouth.

Mum leaned her head in Billy’s direction. Her whole spindly body was quivering.

‘What about a nice suckling pig?’ she said, clapping her hands together with glee.

Dad responded with some vigorous nodding.

‘I’ll try,’ said Billy, feeling the great weight of their expectation.

Mum smiled, revealing a mouthful of yellow, sharpened teeth.

Dad looked suddenly crestfallen. ‘But not a dog. I hates dogs. Awful stringy things. Sour-tasting, they are. I hates them,’ he shouted, banging a hand down hard on the arm of his chair.

‘No dogs,’ said Billy.

Dad’s eyes widened. ‘You promises?’

‘I promises,’ said Billy.

Mum clasped her hands under her chin and squealed,

her feet tapping the floor with delight. Meg looked up sharply from her doll and frowned at her.

‘We’ll stay in and watch the telly while you go about your business,’ Mum said.

Billy looked at the old television set, which he’d positioned at a point between them. Its screen was caved in, and its casing was scarred and burnt. It too had been salvaged from the ruins of another house in the London streets above.

‘Telly, yes. We’ll watch us some telly before tea,’ Dad murmured, his tongue licking his long incisors, his gaze returning to the ceiling.

Both of them settled back in their chairs, their breath rasping in the gloom as they returned to a state of what looked like semi-hibernation. Billy watched them for a moment. Secretly, he called them the Worms. Years of hiding underground from the sunlight that was fatal to their kind had bleached them both to a deathly pallor. They reminded him of white twisting maggot-like things, blind and panicked, oblivious to the world around them, caring about nothing else but their next meal. Nevertheless, he felt some measure of pity for them. It was hard not to after knowing no other company for so long.

They didn’t speak of their past, but sometimes Billy would catch Dad rambling deliriously in his sleep about being banished by their family for the sin of hunting humans. About having broken something called the Covenant. They’d taken the name Catchpole years ago.

Slowly but surely, they'd started to imitate the ways of the people who lived in the world above. The telly had been one way of doing this, the furniture another. Soon he was calling them Mum and Dad. It was easier that way. Easier to pretend that how they lived was normal. He could have left them a long time ago, but he had no one else. He was alone. Even in his first couple of years with the Catchpoles he'd still felt alone, but at least he could imagine he was part of something bigger. A pretend family wasn't a real family, but pretending was better than nothing.

Meg was the only person in Billy's dark little world he truly had something in common with. He'd found her hiding in a rubbish tip. One look at her was enough to tell him that she wasn't human. She, too, had obviously been abandoned. No doubt for the same reasons he had. He'd offered her food, but she clearly had no interest in it, and being in sunlight didn't seem to affect her either, just as it didn't affect him, unlike the Catchpoles. He'd taken her home that very night and their 'family' had been complete.

Billy went over to Meg and knelt before her. He cupped her face in his hands.

'You behave now, Meggie. Stay here and look after Mum and Dad. Billy's going to see if he can get some food for them. I'll read to you when I get back.'

Meg rubbed her nose vigorously with her hand. Billy smiled at her.

He made his way up the stairs. Every step away from the Catchpoles seemed to make him feel lighter, and yet every

step away from Meg almost caused him pain. They were all he had, and the world above wasn't safe for him. It wasn't safe for any of them, which is why they'd spent so many years underground.

The Catchpoles had found him years before, in the abandoned ruin of a house destroyed during the Blitz. Like him, they were discovering it was harder to find places to hide, what with all the people seeking shelter from the bombs. Almost anything below ground that could be converted to a shelter had been, which had left their kind scrabbling above in the dark and, in the worst cases, exposed to sunlight.

Some of their kind. Because he really wasn't exactly one of them, was he? He was what Mum called 'something else', just as Meg was. He was different. He could walk around in daylight for one thing, and pass himself off as human.

At least to the untrained eye.

He opened the cellar door just a crack and peered into the scorched shell of the house that sat above them.

Nothing moved, but Billy knew you couldn't be too careful. He hoisted himself up and over the lip of the opening, and then gently closed the door behind him. He made his way to the back of the house and crept out into the ragged garden.

It was dusk, and the light in the evening sky was a pallid pinkish grey. Billy sniffed the air. It was cold and a little smoky. To his right he heard the human family

three doors down chattering among themselves.

Billy made a run for the bin at the end of the garden. He leapt on to the lid, and bounced straight up and over the wall, landing deftly on his feet in the narrow weed-tangled laneway on the other side. He crouched there for a moment, sniffing the air again and listening hard. He could hear the chatter again. A child laughing, a man speaking, someone saying something about it being teatime.

Billy moved swiftly down the laneway to the right, keeping his eyes and ears open. He was walking past the house he'd heard the noise coming from when he felt that familiar tug at his heart. He stopped, and looked at the wooden door that led into their back garden. He heard a child squealing with glee.

Just a minute, he thought. I'll take just a minute to see. Just a quick look.

Billy put his eye to the knothole in the door. He could see the well-tended garden and in through the window of the sitting room.

The father was standing by an armchair and smiling. He'd obviously just come in from work. He was still wearing his work clothes, a grease-splattered set of brown overalls. The young boy ran into the room like a little blond whirlwind, and his father ruffled his hair. He was followed by an older girl. She looked to be about seven, and seemed a lot quieter than her brother. Their mum was already sitting on the couch, and the children went to sit either side of her.

Billy knew every rhythm of this tradition.

The man leaned down towards the rectangular wooden cabinet with the grey screen inset in its front. This was the fabled family television set. Billy smiled as he remembered the excited shrieks of the two children as their father had lugged it in through their hallway a mere two months ago. It was made of scuffed and battered mahogany and the family seemed to love it.

There was the familiar clunk as a black knob was turned, and a tiny square of light appeared and then expanded to fill the full screen. The screen glowed with a low luminosity, and Billy saw the grey-black figures of two men onstage talking to each other. There was the laughter of what sounded like dozens of people, and the family, all of them sitting together on the couch, laughed along too.

Billy watched for a few moments, noticing their bright, shining eyes, their easy smiles and laughter. His own smile faded as he remembered the cellar and his 'family' below and what he had to do. He reluctantly stepped away from the door. He heard the laughter fading behind him as he walked, and felt that familiar sick longing in the pit of his stomach.

He rounded a corner that brought him to the front of the street. A few of the houses were empty shells, but some of them, like the one he'd just been spying on, had people living in them. Billy could see the warm glow of lamps through net curtains, and the telltale flicker of television screens.

He walked with his head down, making sure to avoid

any passers-by. The street was almost deserted, but he still didn't want to catch the eye of anyone. He passed by the Regal cinema. A young man dressed in the buttoned blue tunic, bow tie and pillbox hat of a cinema usher was sweeping the marble steps. He had a cigarette clamped in his mouth and he frowned as he spotted Billy. Billy averted his eyes and quickened his pace.

Billy had been in the Regal several times before, but had never once paid the admission fee. He remembered a Saturday night not long ago when he'd sneaked in and the place had been so packed it had felt fit to burst. A film about a hapless store assistant had been showing. The man in the film wore his cap backwards and was always getting into scrapes and falling over. The laughter was deafening. Tears were streaming down people's faces. There was a young couple sitting next to him and they were doubled over with laughter. Billy sat back and smiled at the screen, and just for a few moments he pretended the three of them were there together, and that they were a family.

A cold gust of wind rounded the corner and slapped a scrap of newspaper against his shin. Billy brushed it off and kept walking, leaving the Regal behind.

He stopped short as he heard whimpering on the air. Billy closed his eyes and listened hard. There was the rapid, panicked thrumming of a heart nearby. Billy nodded to himself and followed the sounds. The wind shifted slightly and he caught a scent. He quickened his pace.

The sound was coming from a dank alleyway nearby.

Billy crept into it, and something flashed in the gloom. He spotted a pair of eyes.

A dog's eyes.

I hates dogs.

Billy sighed.

It was a skinny-looking terrier, and it was pulling at a bone lying underneath a pile of mulch and soggy paper.

'All right, boy?' said Billy.

The dog's head whipped round. It looked terrified. Billy bent down and held his hand out. 'All right?' he said.

The dog eyed him warily, but started to approach him. It looked at him suspiciously for a second, then licked the palm of his hand. Billy smiled.

'Good boy.'

He could hear Mrs Catchpole's voice now.

Break its neck, Billy. Snap it like a twig. It won't feel nothing. It'll do as a snack. I ain't picky.

Billy's smile disappeared. He felt a shiver of disgust. He stood up.

'Go on, boy, go. There's a good boy. Run.'

Billy made to step aside, but the dog was trembling now, and it bared its teeth as it started to growl. It was staring at the mouth of the alleyway.

Billy cursed himself for not having paid attention. He should have noticed the alleyway getting darker. Should have smelled the scents.

A net descended on him, and one of the two men who now rushed into the alleyway tried to cinch it tight.

Billy could see him grinning. He stopped grinning when Billy punched him. The man fell backwards, choking and clutching his throat. The dog snapped at the man for good measure before it dashed away. Billy had just wrestled the net off himself when the other man swung at him with something heavy and black. Billy ducked, and in the same swift movement reached up and grabbed the man's hand. For an instant their eyes locked.

Billy squeezed.

Hard.

There was the splinter and crack of finger bones.

The man's eyes widened and he shrieked in agony. His weapon clattered to the ground. He fell back against the alley wall and slid down it, clutching his mangled hand to his chest.

Billy ran.

He could still hear the choking sounds and the other man howling behind him. He allowed himself a brief smile.

He stopped smiling as soon as he saw two more men burst from cover behind a parked van, and hurtle across the street towards him.

He pivoted on his heel, reached out and grabbed a drainpipe. He swung himself up and scampered skyward, feeling a curious mixture of dread and elation. He reached the eaves of the roof of a tenement building and flipped himself up and on to it, as if he weighed nothing. He heard someone shout, 'Get it! Get the feral!' and he was already leaping the space between the building and another one

across the alleyway. He felt the rush of wind in his hair.

Something snagged his ankles, and now he found himself tumbling over and over, while the ground rushed up to meet him.

He tried to right himself in order to cushion his fall, but his ankles were tied together with rope, and he could see the wooden balls of a bolas wrapped round his legs.

The ground was wet and hard, and he hit it with a smack. For a moment, the edges of the world burned a vivid white. He couldn't breathe.

At last, he took in a huge lungful of air. It felt as if a knife had been plunged into his chest.

Then the rage came.

He felt the blood fizz in his veins. His breathing became guttural and the fingers of his hands became elongated and clawed.

Billy sat up and snarled. He worked at the bolas rope, took it off and swung it at one of his attackers, just as the man was about to pounce on him. A ball hit the thug in the side of the head with a loud *thok* and he flailed backwards into the deserted road.

The other man grabbed Billy's arms and tried to pin them behind his back. Billy snapped his head back and heard a satisfying crunch as the man's nose broke. The man groaned and fell on to the path with a slap.

Billy leapt to his feet.

'Stay still now, boy.'

Billy turned. A tall man wearing an ankle-length leather

coat was approaching. He had long, lank black hair, and his eyes glittered with a mixture of faint amusement and contempt. His hands were covered in tattoos.

The hair on Billy's neck prickled. He could feel his teeth elongating, the bones of his jaw almost cracking as they broadened. The muscles on his arms pulsed and hardened. His snarls became deeper and more animalistic. He clenched his fists, jutting his chin out, daring the man to approach him.

The man shook his head. 'Look at you. There you are now,' he said in a tone that sounded like something close to admiration. 'You ever felt hungry?'

The question stopped Billy in his tracks. The man smirked.

'No, don't suppose you have. No interest in meat, bone or gristle for you. Not for your kind, anyway.'

Billy was confused. How did the man know what he was? Billy tensed, and the man took half a step back.

'I wouldn't if I were you, boy.'

Billy leapt through the air.

The man held his palm up to his mouth and blew a fine spray of yellow dust in Billy's direction. The dust caught Billy in the face mid-flight. He felt as if he'd been whacked by a sledgehammer, and for the second time that day he hit the ground. He tried to raise himself up, but this time his arms and legs wouldn't respond. They felt dead and leaden.

The last thing he saw was the man looking down at him as darkness descended.

Billy woke with a start.

His head had been lolling on his shoulder, and he snapped to attention to take in his surroundings.

He was sitting on a chair in what looked like a large dilapidated warehouse. It had whitewashed walls and narrow windows boarded up with mouldering planks of wood. There was an enormous brass machine in front of him: a thing of shining cogs and gears and levers, with what looked like a large porthole of thick yellow glass at its centre. A panel of glass tubes in rows ran along the front. There was a lever in the centre of this panel. The long-haired man stood a few feet to the right of the machine, looking at Billy.

‘It’s awake,’ he said.

Two men in lab coats were inspecting the machine’s dials. One was a fresh-faced young man. The other was older, with dark hair going to grey. He wore half-moon glasses, and his eyes were a sharp, callous blue.

‘Is that right, Mr Thorne?’ said the older man, scribbling something on the clipboard he was holding.

‘That’s right, Mr Aspinall.’

Aspinall looked sharply at Thorne.

‘*Professor* Aspinall.’

Thorne gave a dismissive sniff and sneered at the professor.

Billy tried to stand, but a sudden wave of nausea overcame him, and the world blurred to a sickly grey before

his eyes. He collapsed back on the chair, gasping for air. His vision started to clear, and that was when he noticed the two golden clasps covered in runes clamped to his forearms.

‘Wouldn’t try moving so long as you’re wearing them,’ said Thorne, pointing to the clasps. ‘That’s some of my best work there. You won’t be able to get too far too quickly so long as you’ve got them on.’

Billy went to grab one of the clasps to try to rip it off, but as he soon as he closed his fingers around its edge he was hit by another bout of nausea.

Thorne laughed. ‘Wouldn’t try taking them off, either. Unless you want to risk feeling like your head’s come clean off.’

A door to the left opened and two more men stepped inside, flanking a middle-aged man in a dark coat and grey suit, who was walking with the aid of a mahogany cane.

The man with the cane had a boyish look about him. His cheeks were almost cherubic,



his nose slightly upturned. One of the men grabbed a chair for him and the man sat down on it, a few feet in front of Billy. He rested his palms on his cane and smiled at him.

‘How very nice it is to meet you, Billy,’ he said, his voice soft and gentle.

‘Say hello to Mr Courtney, boy,’ said Thorne, kicking the leg of Billy’s chair.

Courtney raised a hand and looked pleadingly at Thorne. ‘Please, Mr Thorne, that won’t be necessary.’

Thorne stepped back, glowering.

Courtney was still smiling. ‘Let me introduce myself, Billy. I am Robert Courtney. You may have heard of me.’ Courtney raised an eyebrow. Billy shook his head. Courtney nodded and looked amused. ‘Well, perhaps not.’ He prodded a knot in the wooden floor with the end of his cane. ‘My father was renowned industrialist Joshua Courtney. He passed his company on to me. And now with my family fortune I’m helping to rebuild London after the horrors of the war.’

Billy clenched his jaw. He wanted to be out of this place, but there was something about this man that seemed to demand his attention.

‘I myself suffered during the war.’ He tapped his leg. ‘A shrapnel wound, hence the cane.’ He nodded to himself and smiled ruefully. ‘But here I am.’ He gestured at Billy. ‘And here you are.’

Billy was aware that all eyes in the room were on him. Professor Aspinall was tapping a pencil on his clipboard.

'Why have you brought me here?' asked Billy.

Courtney leaned forward. 'Because you're special, Billy. You have certain talents and skills. And because I need your help.'

Billy clenched his jaw and narrowed his eyes. 'Why should I help you?' he hissed.

Courtney cocked his head at the two men who'd come through the door with him. 'Gentlemen, if you would be so kind.'

The two men walked back out through the door.

Courtney smiled apologetically at Billy. 'Billy Catchpole. How whimsical and charming that all of you should see fit to give yourselves a family name.'

Billy felt a cold sensation that flared to a hot, sweaty panic when he saw the Catchpoles being ushered into the room by Courtney's two men. Both of them had their wrists bound with rope. Courtney's men urged them forward with cattle prods, and the Catchpoles' eyes rolled agitatedly as they tried to get their bearings.

'Where is we, Mum? Where is we?' Dad wailed.

Mum gave a sudden sob. 'Billy's here. Our Billy's here!'

Dad sniffed the air. 'Oh, praise be. That he is. That he is.' Dad changed direction and started to shuffle towards Billy. 'Maybe he's gone and brought us a nice suckling pi—'

The force of the cattle prod into his back threw him off his feet. He yowled in agony on the ground, twisting and turning like an eel. Billy was surprised when he almost leapt from his chair. He was even more surprised by the

tears that pricked the corners of his eyes.

Dad was dragged to his feet, and he and Mum were pushed towards the machine. Thorne had opened a hatch in the side of it by means of a valve wheel. The Catchpoles were ushered in, clutching each other fearfully, looking around in a blind panic, mouths working silently behind the glass. Thorne tightened the wheel behind them, and there was a clunk as the door locked.

‘What are you doing to them?’ Billy asked, panic rising.

Courtney nodded to Professor Aspinall, who pressed some buttons then pulled the lever. The machine hummed into life, and Billy felt the floor beneath his feet vibrate. Courtney was looking almost hungrily at the scene as it unfolded. A light sheen of sweat had formed on his forehead, and Billy could hear the man’s heart starting to pound faster and faster.

The humming of the machine rose to a loud, pulsing *vworp vworp* sound that reverberated through Billy’s skull. The air around the Catchpoles started to shimmer with purple and mauve light. They held each other. Billy could taste lead on his tongue.

The *vworping* sound came in waves now, and the light around the Catchpoles became more vivid. Billy saw them blinking sightlessly.

And then he watched, horrified, as they crumbled to fine, swirling dust right before his eyes.

Courtney clenched and unclenched his hand on the pommel of his cane, his eyes still on the viewing window.

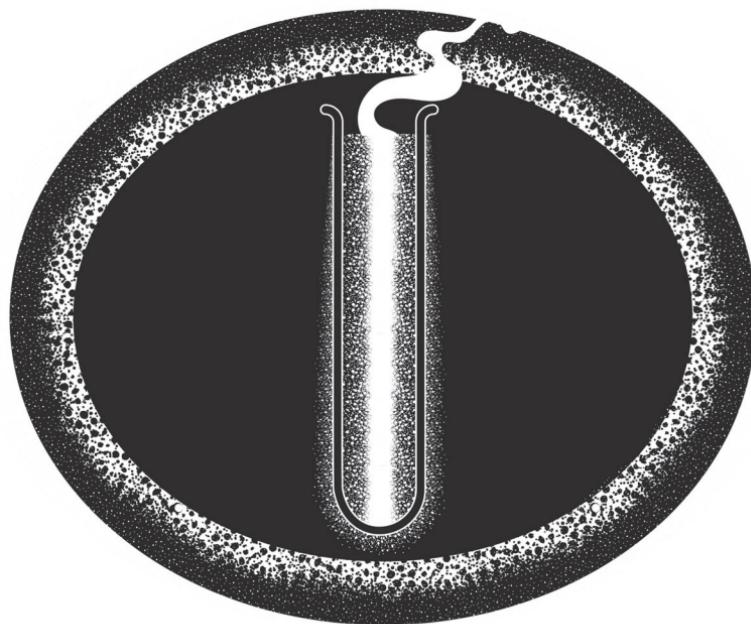
'Incredible,' he almost sobbed. 'Incredible.'

Billy felt a terrible hollowness in his gut as he took in the scene. He slumped forward.

Aspinall pushed the lever up. Pressed the buttons. The sound stopped; the colours faded. There was silence in the room except for the soft hissing of a luminous green vapour that now seeped into one of the glass tubes inset into the machine's control panel.

Professor Aspinall twisted the tube and detached it from the machine. He brought it over to Courtney, who took it in trembling hands, gazing upon it with a mixture of terror and hope.

'I wouldn't be too confident, Mr Courtney. The subjects were rather weak and old. The degradation in active essence will be quite acute.'



Courtney didn't seem to hear him. He smiled for a moment, but that smile started to fade as the green vapour within the glass tube began to blacken.

Aspinall nodded. 'I told you, sir. Very often degradation can—'

Courtney screamed and hurled the tube on to the floor where it shattered into a thousand pieces, black vapour seeping into the air. Courtney's hair flopped down in front of his eyes, and he brushed it back in agitation.

Billy was panting now, looking at the black vapour as it disappeared into nothingness. *All that remained of Mum and Dad, gone.*

Courtney smiled at Billy again, but it was the tight trembling smile of a man on the edge.

'Like I said, I need your help, Billy.'

Billy's nostrils flared as he tried to contain his anger and grief. *Was that grief?* He thought so, and it surprised him. Even though they weren't strictly 'family', Billy felt something for the odious Catchpoles. How could he not after all these years in their company?

'I'm not helping you with anything,' he said hoarsely.

'Oh, but you are, Billy. You very much are,' said Courtney. 'I have so much money I don't know what to do with it. I can have anything I want. You, on the other hand, grew up with nothing. No home. Not even a proper family. I can give you a home, a home of your own. Somewhere you'll both be safe.'

Both? Billy felt another wave of panic at that word.

‘Otherwise *she’ll* go in the machine,’ said Aspinall.

Courtney rapped his cane on the floor. One of the men who’d escorted the Catchpoles left the room and returned seconds later, guiding Meg in with a hand on her shoulder. Billy felt as if he’d had a bucket of ice water thrown over him. He tried to stand, but another wave of nausea gripped him, and it felt as if the inside of his head were filled with jagged glass splinters. He tried to call on his feral nature, but he felt weak, as if that part of him had been suffocated by the magic of his bonds. Meg went to run to him, but the man with her wrapped his arm round her. She started to cry. The nausea passed and now Billy roared at the ceiling until he was hoarse. He finally gave in and slumped in his chair, panting, tears streaming down his face.

‘Let her go,’ he croaked.

Courtney shook his head. ‘Not until I get you to promise me something, Billy. Otherwise she goes in the machine.’

‘I think that would be a rather interesting experiment,’ said Aspinall, eyes hard and ruthless as he looked at Billy.

Billy lowered his head and looked at the floor, tears of frustration blurring his vision.

‘What do you want me to do?’ he sobbed.

Courtney smiled sympathetically. ‘It’s very simple. I just want you to use your talent for stealth and cunning to steal something for me.’ He turned towards Thorne. ‘Mr Thorne, if you would be so kind as to release our guest.’

Thorne came towards Billy and pressed down roughly on each clasp with both hands until there was a clicking

sound. As soon as he removed the cuffs, Billy's head felt clearer. Meg was still sobbing. Billy looked at her. Their eyes locked and he nodded. She understood his unspoken message for her to hush. She bit her lip.

'Do you have the device, Mr Thorne?' asked Courtney.

Thorne reached into his coat and took out a silver-plated orb, no bigger than a fist. He handed it to Courtney, who held it in front of Billy.

'This will aid you in your task,' he said.

Billy said nothing.

Aspinall sniffed. 'It's this or the machine, boy. You choose. Choose right and you and the other urchin get your freedom and a life to live as you please. But if you double cross us, Mr Thorne here will find you, and then it's the machine for both of you. I can't say I wouldn't be curious as to what it would do to you.'

You are, after all, both part beast and part human.' Aspinall smiled. 'It would be quite an interesting experiment, I should think.'

Courtney glared at him.

'Professor, please.' Aspinall pursed his lips



and gave a little deferential nod, but Billy could see the anger in his eyes.

Billy stood up slowly. It was an effort to look at his captors. His head felt like lead on his shoulders.

Courtney stood up too, and held the orb out towards him. It was covered in strange runes, similar to the ones on the clasps. Billy took it in his hand. It felt heavier and more dense than an object of its size had any right to be.

Courtney placed a hand on his shoulder.

‘I want you to use this to find something very precious.’

‘Where do you want me to go?’ asked Billy.

Courtney smiled at him.

‘I want you to go to a place called Rookhaven.’