Run Wild



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I was the first one to see the wolf.

Well, Connor saw it before me, but he only saw the back of its head.

Anyway, he doesn't count because he's my younger brother.

So I, Izzy Jones, was the first one to see the wolf.

I was the first one to look it in the eye.

But what was a wolf doing in an old empty power station in the middle of London?

It just shouldn't have been there.

But then again, neither should we.



Chapter 1

We wouldn't have thought of going to the old gasworks if it weren't for the Skull brothers, Luke and Scott. Luke's in Year Ten and Scott's in Year Seven, same as me.

I've known them forever.

At primary school, Luke was always in trouble, but Scott was OK back then. He always did eco-duty with me and helped refill the bird feeders. We spent break time drawing animals all over the playground with pavement chalks.

But Scott doesn't talk to me any more.

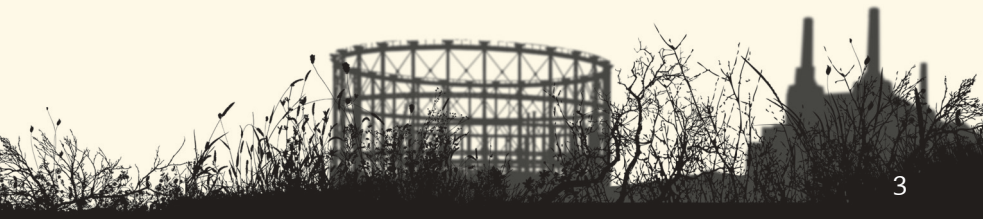


Scott doesn't talk to anyone any more.

He doesn't come in to school much, and when he does he sticks with Luke.

Everyone says they're trouble. I heard one teacher say they live with their nan because their mum can't cope with them. Luke and Scott reckon they own everything round here. They say the skateboard park belongs to them. They've spray-painted graffiti skulls on the concrete. It's not much of a skate park – just a double ramp next to the small kids' play park – but it's all we've got. We're not allowed to skate or play ball games around our estate. It's like fun is forbidden.

Luke said no one could use the skateboard park unless they could do a flat-ground ollie. That's when you make your board do a jump from the ground into the air with you still on it.



Asha said we needed somewhere to learn our tricks. But Luke said girls couldn't skate anyway.

Asha was really mad at that. She said there was no way those Skull brothers were going to tell us what to do. And that's when we went to the old gasworks. We wanted to find somewhere to practise our skateboard moves. We wanted to show Luke and Scott that girls could skate better than them.

That's why our story really begins *before* we found the wolf. It begins with us standing outside the fence around the broken-down gasworks as we looked for a way to get in.

*

It's a hot July day.

The roads are busy with rush-hour traffic. The air is full of dust and car fumes. Drivers



hoot and toot at each other, all keen to get home. No one seems to notice us standing outside the old gasworks. I can feel sweat trickle down my back as I tug at the wire fence.

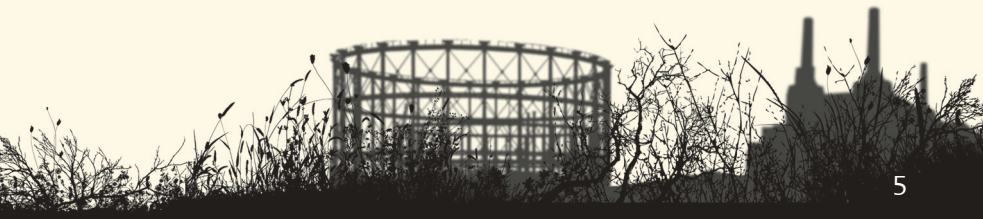
Connor pulls me back and points at a sign that says *Danger – Do Not Enter*.

"We can't go in there, Izzy," Connor says. "Mum will kill us if she finds out."

"Well, she's not going to know and you're not going to tell her," I say. "She won't be back from work until six, which is why we're stuck with you."

"I'm not going in there," he says. He folds his arms and glares at me to show me he means it.

"Well, I can always take you home," I say.



Connor looks like he might cry when I say that, and I feel bad. That was a mean thing to say. I know he doesn't want to be stuck at home with Dad. Dad lost his job six months ago, and since then he has hardly gone out. He sits at home and snaps at everything Connor and I do. He used to take us to the cinema and the park, but he doesn't any more.

Asha digs into her bag. "You can have my crisps," she says to Connor, and she holds the crisp packet up where he can't get it. She's known him all his life, and sometimes I think she knows him better than I do.

Connor frowns. "Can I have all of it?" he asks.

Asha holds it high up. "Once we're in," she says.



He kicks at the bottom of the fence and tugs at some weeds that are growing up the wire. "Through here," he says. "We can fit through this gap."

Asha and I squeeze through after him. We get stung by nettles as we shove our bags and skateboards under the wire.

"Not a word about this, Connor," I say. "Not a word to anyone."

*

The gasworks has been empty for years. Granddad told us he can remember the ships coming up the Thames to London with the coal that they burned at the gasworks to make gas for the city. The huge steel frames are part of the skyline.

For now it's a wasteland. TV companies come to film gritty crime dramas there. And I



heard someone say that the land is about to be bought up and made into shops and offices, but nothing's happened yet.

We walk around the back of one of the huge metal gas tanks. Weeds, railway tracks and rusted railway trucks stretch out before us. It's like one of those end-of-the-world movies where everyone dies and the plants have taken over.

"I didn't realise it was this big," says Asha.

"It goes on and on," I say.

Asha nudges me. "Over there. There's some flat ground by the river. We'll practise there."

Asha gives Connor her crisps, and we set our boards down on the stretch of concrete. It's uneven and weeds sprout from the smallest cracks, but no one can see us and we're free to practise.

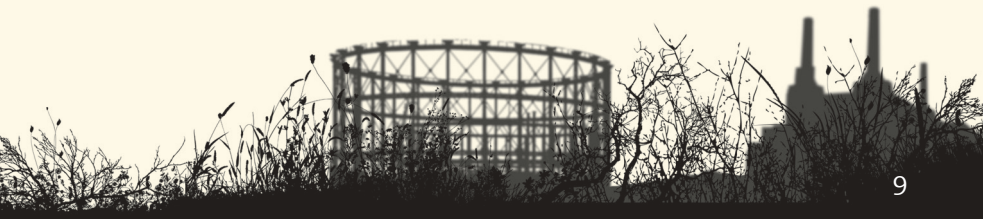


I watch Connor walk away from us down a ramp to the river, munching on his crisps. He stands at the water's edge and pushes his toe into the line of plastic and cans that marks where the river lay at high tide.

"Stay away from the water, Con," I yell.

Asha gives me a shove. "Come on," she says, "let's show the Skull brothers what we're made of."

I put my board down behind Asha and try to follow her. It's a good thing we have our helmets and elbow- and knee-pads, because we hit the ground more times than we can count. I get better at my turns, but however hard I try I just can't get the board off the ground. "I still can't do an ollie," I shout to Asha.



Asha tries again and falls flat on her back. She sits up and looks across at me. "We'll learn," she says. "We have to."

I know she's not going to give up.

I glance at my watch and realise we've been out for ages. I'll have to get Connor home soon before Mum gets back from work.

I turn to look for him at the river's edge, but I can't see him anywhere. All I can see are ripples in the river and an empty crisp packet floating on the water. A few bubbles rise from the dark water and break the surface.

"*Connor!*" I yell. "*Connor?*"

No answer.

I begin to run down to the water. My heart is thumping. "*Connor!*" I scream. "*CONNOR!*" I



was so stupid to leave him on his own. He's not a strong swimmer.

Asha is right behind me, yelling into the water too. "CONNOR!"

I begin to panic.

"CONNNNOOOR!"

"Shhhh!" Connor's head pops out from some bushes beside me. "Shhh," he says again. "You'll scare my dinosaur."

I grab his arm. "That's not even funny."

Connor yanks himself free. "There *is* a dinosaur. An archaeopteryx. It's sitting in that bush."

"Shut up about dinosaurs," I snap. "I thought you'd drowned."



Connor's been obsessed with dinosaurs for years. He has notebooks full of his drawings of them. He knows all their names and when they lived. He even told the museum they were wrong when they put a T-rex with a stegosaurus. Connor said they could never have been seen together as they existed eighty million years apart. I know what an archaeopteryx is. It has always been Connor's favourite. It's a weird dinosaur, like a bird, with feathers and claws.

Connor looks back at me. He folds his arms and blinks back tears. "There *is* one in that bush," he says.

Asha doesn't believe him. "Come on then, dino-boy. Show us," she says.

Connor leads the way as we scramble through the branches until we come face to face with a big black bird that glares back at



us. It does look a bit like a dinosaur. It has a head like a lizard and scaly skin around its beak. Bird poo covers the ground like white paint.

"It stinks!" I say.

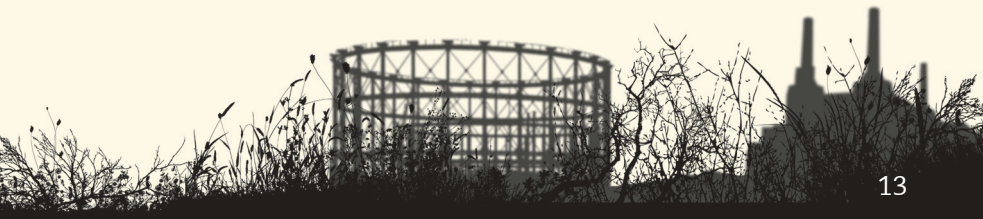
"It's a cormorant," says Asha. "You see loads further down the river. They stand on posts to stretch their wings out to dry."

The cormorant opens its beak wide and makes a gargling hissing sound at us.

I back away. "Come on. Let's leave it alone. We have to get home before Mum does her nut."

"Cormorant," repeats Connor. He doesn't want to go home yet.

We grab our bags and boards and head back the way we've come.



"It'll be quicker if we go this way," I say, and I lead us along an overgrown rail track, past a red-brick building. We stop to look inside. It's huge, with red-brick arches that rise high into the roof. It's cooler in there too. Afternoon sunlight falls through the broken glass windows in the ceiling. Connor runs ahead of us along the old train track and pretends to be a train.

Asha pulls me around and points. "Look," she says. "That's exactly what we need."

On the far side of the building, a long brick ramp comes down from the wall next to the river. The ramp is about twice as long and twice as high as the ramps in the skate park. I can see myself flying down it, twisting and bending around the fallen bricks.

"It's perfect," I say. I check the time. "We'll come back tomorrow."



Asha grins. “We’ll show the Skull brothers that we can skate.”

“Hey, Connor,” I shout. “Time to go.”

He’s still pretending to be a train. I watch him go round the rusted tracks across the floor of the building, moving his arms like pistons. “Toot toot!” he shouts. “Toot toot!” Suddenly, he stops dead. Then he turns and starts to sprint towards us.

“*Wolf!*” he screams. When he reaches me, he grabs my arm and spins around to see if something is chasing him.

“First a dinosaur, now a wolf,” I say with a sigh. “You don’t think we believe you, do you?”

But Connor’s hand grips my arm so tightly that I feel his fingernails dig deep into my skin.

“Wolf,” he says again.



"What exactly did you see?" asks Asha.

Connor's eyes are open wide. "A wolf," he says. "I only saw the back of its head. But it's a wolf. A big grey wolf."

"Probably a dog if there's anything there at all," I say.

Asha frowns. "Let's go. I don't like dogs."

"It might be hurt," I say. I look across the building. I've always wanted to find a stray dog, take it home and ask Mum to let us keep it. "I'm going to look."

Connor holds on to me. "It's a wolf, Izzy."

"Yeah right," I say. "Let's go and see."

I walk ahead of them. Asha hangs back, holding Connor's hand. I try to look brave even if I don't feel it. What if it is a dog? It might be



dangerous. I creep along slowly and listen out for any noise.

Then I see it, about ten feet away on a pile of old sacks. It's licking its front paw. It stops and lifts its head to look at me. It's huge, bigger than any dog I've ever seen. It has rough grey fur and golden eyes. And it stares back at me. This isn't anybody's pet. It has the wild inside.

All I can do is stare while it stares back.

Connor's right.

It is a wolf.

A wolf in London.

Right here.

Right now.

