Praise for

THE DROWNING DAY

'An exciting story of survival, courage and loyalty.'
LINDA NEWBERY



'In *The Drowning Day*, Anne Cassidy brings all her skills as a writer to this exciting and thought provoking dystopian novel. With its themes of climate change catastrophe and pandemic panic, it could not be more relevant. A must read for young readers today if we are to avoid the future she so convincingly describes.'
CELIA REES



'I loved this thrilling ecological dystopia. Horribly convincing!'
JOY COURT



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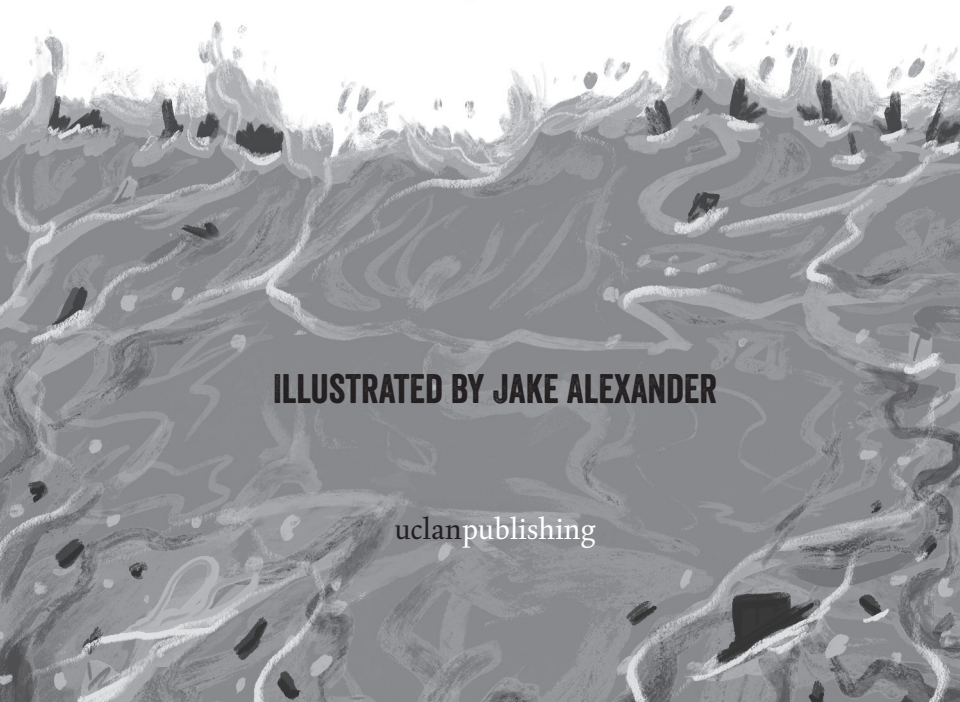
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ANNE CASSIDY

THE DROWNING DAY



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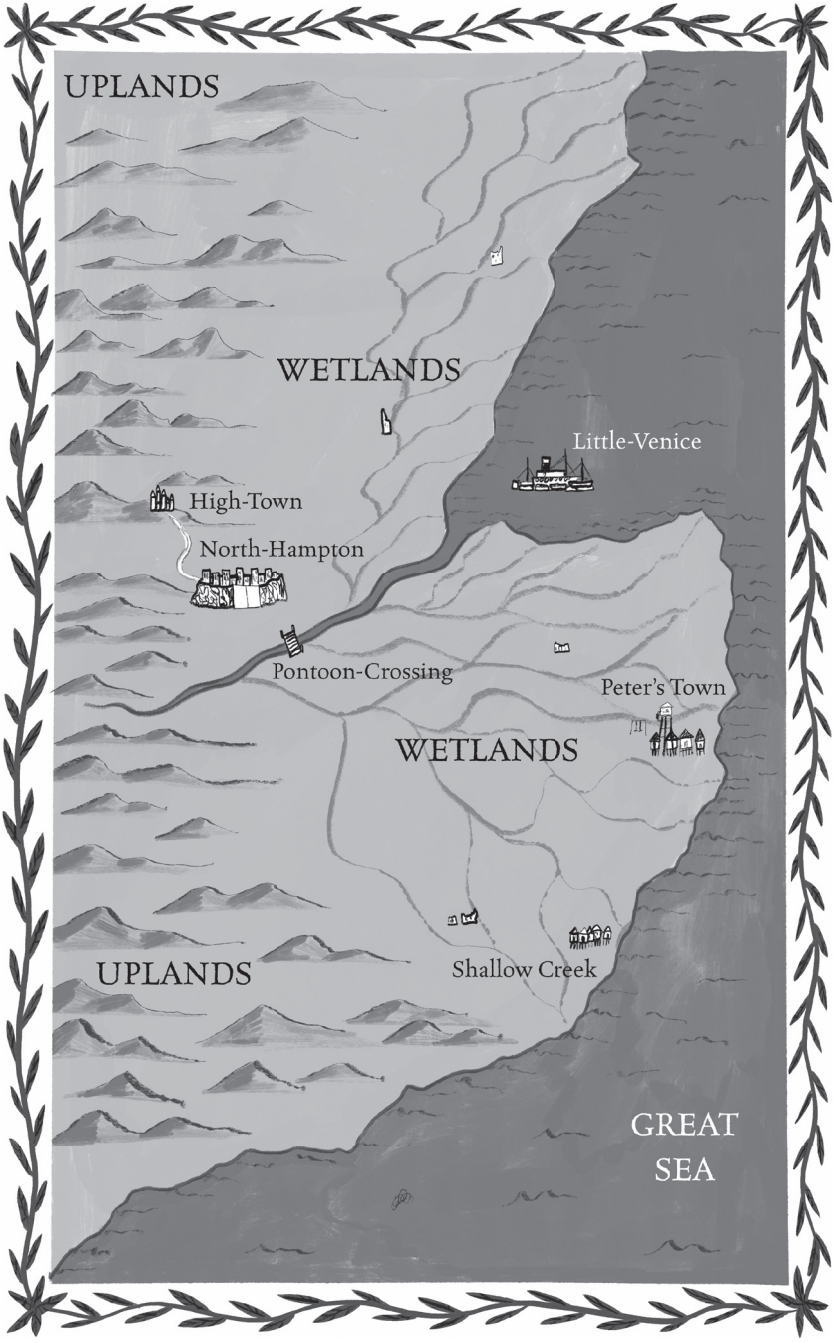
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Set in 11/17pt Kingfisher by Becky Chilcott.

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For Connor,
who thought this was a good idea.


UPLANDS
WETLANDS
Little-Venice
High-Town
North-Hampton
Pontoon-Crossing
Peter's Town
WETLANDS
UPLANDS
Shallow Creek
GREAT
SEA


THE WETLANDS



ONE

THE WATER WAS COMING.

Jade stood on the jetty and looked far out to the sea. The surface was calm and the sky was dull. She couldn't see any signs of life. In the bay there were scores of boats, rafts and diving platforms, all tied to buoys. They clung together in groups, completely still. Like a past-world photograph. Further out were shoals of plastix bobbing on top of the water. They lay on the surface like a skin.

A breeze ruffled at her neck and she shivered a little. She took her timer out of her pocket and looked at it. Through the cracked glass she could see that it was thirteen hours. Time was moving too fast.

After weeks of rainfall, it was dry. The air was still and in the distance, through a grey haze, she could just make out a dull orange sun. She looked around the village, her eyes searching for any movement. Only the wild dogs walked through the mud, weaving in and out of the buildings. Many homes stood back from the sea, shored up by wooden struts forced deep into the ground. Above them all was the water tower, its steel legs dusted with rust. The village was here but the people had gone. The homers had taken everything that they could pack. She'd watched them depart yesterday and some that morning. Those who could pay went on the last bus, and then some families left in the backs of trucks and some on engine-bikes. The ponies dragged carts and the rest left on foot this morning, just as she would. The road out of the village had been saturated to start with, now it was cut up.

The siren sounded. It rang out across the Wetlands even though there was hardly anyone left to hear it. Jade headed back along the jetty and into the square. The sign for the evacuation was flapping on the news-board:

WARNING!
FLOODING IMMINENT!
ALL HOMERS SHOULD HEAD
FOR NORTH-HAMPTON!

Underneath was printed:

BY ORDER OF THE HIGH-WARDENS,
JUNE 2052.

She headed towards home. Some of the dogs followed, wagging their tails, one or two barking and growling at each other. There was no food to spare so she had to ignore them.

Inside the porch was her back-sack, almost full. Her dollar-belt was already fastened around her waist. Her water-bag just needed topping up. She was ready to go anytime, but there was an ache in her chest.

She went further into the cabin, towards the main bedroom door. Pushing it gently, she saw the old man asleep in the bed. He looked pale. His arm was outside the covers, his hand thin and frail. He'd been like that for days now.

It would be a push to get to North-Hampton before they closed the gates, but she couldn't leave Peter's Town just yet.

She had to wait for her granddaddy to die.



TWO

DURING THE EVENING, WHEN HER GRANDDADDY WAS ASLEEP, Jade packed up bread and meat and some apples and walked to Bates's caravan. There was no sign of any of the dogs. Maybe they had given up and moved off somewhere else. This dismayed her. Without dogs, the rats would come.

Bates lived on the edge of the village. She found him sitting out in front of his caravan beside a small fire that he'd lit.

'How's Frank?' he said.

'Sleeping.'

'Is he in pain?'

'I don't think so. He's just tired all the time, exhausted.'

She held out a bag. It was a tarpaulin back-sack, one of a few that her granddaddy had made years before. Living in the Wetlands, it was important to keep belongings dry.

'Here, use this to take your stuff to North-Hampton. There's some food in there as well.'

'Thanks.'

Bates was twelve, the same age as her, but smaller and thinner, as if he hadn't always been able to get a good meal to eat. He looked scruffier than usual: his shirt was ripped at one sleeve and his jeans were threadbare at the knees. He had his peaked cap on so she couldn't quite see his eyes.

'And you'll go in the morning,' she said.

'Sure.'

The next day, Wednesday, was the last day of the sirens. The dykes at North-Hampton would close at sixteen hours on Thursday. Bates should have gone with the rest of the homers but he had wanted to wait for Jade. Up to now she'd been happy to let him, but time was moving on and the water was coming closer at every tide.

'You all packed up?' he said.

She nodded. She glanced over at the caravan he lived in. It had been damaged at one end, as if it had been in a collision. It was like lots of things in the village: old, from past-world, not fit for purpose anymore. Jade had often wondered if Bates had to build up the bottom end of his bed to stop himself sliding down in the night.

'Yes. What about you?'

'Won't take me five minutes.'

Bates didn't have much to pack. He had turned up one day, three months or so ago, in just the clothes he stood in. Some people from the village had helped him and found him somewhere to live.

'You could come and stay with us tonight. It's very dark and lonely here.'

'I'm used to it. Anyway, I think you and Frank should spend time together, seeing as . . .'

'I know.'

'What did Rosa say?' he said.

'Oh, you know. That it won't be long.'

Rosa, the village medic, had come round that lunchtime, just before the last trucks left. She had pulled Jade into the other room and spoken in a whisper.

Your granddaddy is going to die soon, Jade. I don't know how he's held on for so long. You'll want to avoid any discomfort for him so you should give him these pills. They'll help him on his way. It's a merciful thing to do.

She'd given Jade a small bag with pills in it.

Poppy-pills, she'd said. *Give him four to start off with. He'll be comfortable. He might go in his sleep. If not, give him the rest.*

Jade had clasped the bag and put it in her pocket.

'So, you need to go first thing,' Jade said to Bates, 'As soon as it's light. You promise me you'll go?'

'Sure,' Bates said, pulling the peak of his cap.
'It gives me less to worry about if I know you're gone.'
'I will. I promise.'
'Take care,' she said, 'and I'll see you in North-Hampton.'