

Extract from **Foundling**

Her body tense, her palms clammy, Ren felt the probing night slink back and a new menace slide into its place.

It had not withdrawn or permitted her to sleep when a voice whispered, 'Are you awake?' Jerking, her hand protecting her throat, she wanted to cry out: 'Don't kick me! You can have the cave, keep all the stores. I'll go and I won't tell anyone I've seen you. I promise.' But the words would not come.

'Stop moaning,' the voice continued. 'It's only me. Come outside.' He guided, and she found they were together, crouched by a stump of rock.

'Is that other one still here?' the boy asked.

'How did you know she was with me?'

He hissed, impatient, 'Followed her, of course. Only I kept on the top path. She's a massive walker. A sight better than the feeble muscle you usually see, slouching along. Took me all my time to keep up, what with the rougher going. Where's she making for?'

'The depot.'

'I wouldn't be in her shoes if she's caught.'

This sympathy was surprising. 'Doesn't she scare you?'

'Why?'

'Being a street person, she...!' Ren began but there was too much to explain.

'I'm not scared of *her*. She wasn't the only one on the move tonight.'

His words peopled the hills with watching eyes. Above her, the stars dimmed. 'Are there patrolmen?'

'No, not them. Others. As a rule I give this place a wide berth, night times, only I was following that girl. Something to do. Then you brought her into *his* cave. I waited a bit, but it was coming on dark, so I said to myself: Time to go back. It was then I sensed someone else. I thought at first that it was someone attached to her, with a meeting lined up, but it wasn't anybody like that. It wasn't someone just waiting, hanging about. This one was on the hunt.' His voice had become tremulous, barely audible.

'But he didn't catch you,' Ren whispered. Like Brocket, she could not pronounce the name, Yordas.

'He had my scent.' The boy paused. 'But I gave him the slip. I got onto the peat track, on the top, way above here. It was then I found it. Dumped near the path.'

'What? Dumped?'

'Like some do with dogs they don't want. Somebody must have pushed it up the track the other side of the scar--it's a distance--and it was parked under an alder, by the side of one of the potholes. Drop down there, and it'd be minutes before you hit bottom, and when you

did...I couldn't leave it, could I, the push-chair thing? Not with *him* prowling. I had to bring it here.'

'A push-chair? What's the use of that?'

'It's what's inside it.' For a moment his tone held a hint of apology. Ren waited.

'A baby.'

She was too astonished to answer. He pulled at what Ren had thought was stump of rock behind them and there was the creak of a wheel.

'I couldn't just walk away from it, could I? *He'd* have got it. I can't take it back with me, either. *He'll* catch me, lumbered with this. I couldn't just leave it there, could I?' he repeated. 'It'll be safe with you; *he* has no truck with women. And there's always the chance this one's a girl.'

Infected by his dread, she wanted to cling to him, to make him chant with her: Yordas cannot harm us; it is centuries since he stalked over these hills; he is dead. But the shape she reached for had gone, its passage marked by the lift of leaves that rattled then sank again among the grass tufts. Yet her hand was not empty. It had found the buggy.

She shouted, 'I can't take this!' but the shout was merely a whisper. For the boy had not abandoned it. Up there, on those night-soaked fells, among the bottomless holes, he had been haunted by a terror yet he had not run away. Finding the buggy, he had hoisted it over bracken, along gullies, slowed down by its cumbersome weight.

What could she do with it?

Beside her, it trembled; there was a smack of plastic, a brief whimper, then stillness. Clumsily Ren turned the wheels and looked under the hood. A head, cased in a woollen helmet latched at the chin, lolled against the metal frame; a hand, ungloved, lay twitching slightly on the edge of the waterproof apron.

One thing she could not do was leave the child alone in the open. She fumbled with springs, catches, straps, studs, a zipper then rugs and at last the body was freed. It hung for a second from her arm's winch before landing against her chest. Gasping at the weight, she peered into the face. Pallid, sickly under the weak starlight, it had no distinguishing feature. The eyes did not open to acknowledge her; the lips did not smile. For a moment Ren's decision wavered then under the wrappings a leg kicked and came to rest against her thigh. Ren turned and, carrying this surprising burden, she picked her way delicately through the drifts of leaves and entered the lightless cave.

Author's comments

It was some time before I had a clear idea of this book but with it came the setting, mainly parts of Ribblesdale and Wharfedale, in Yorkshire. There is very little of the young people's trek that I have not walked myself. I could not decide where to begin it until I recalled a cave

I had visited and the reason for its name, Yordas. According to legend, he was a Nordic giant who lived there (no doubt because the main chamber is very high) and his favourite meal was small boys. So it was also an excellent place to introduce Brocket!

I have taken a school party to some of the places described in the novel and, protected by hard hats and wellington boots, we began at Yordas cave. We agreed that none of us would have enjoyed a night spent in it, and would never have dared to try, alone.

When this book was published in America, we changed the title to **Found. Changes were also made to the text where it was considered that some words and expressions would not be understood by the American reader.**

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