

# Chapter One

The four walls of his cell had become Lucky's closest companions. Four grey walls, cold hard stone. A small window with bars – iron – and a view of the sea below. One door. Heavy. Only opened for food and his daily sojourn outside. He hated most things about the prison, but the walls were constant, at least.

They never yelled or hit or accused.

His fingers traced the marks scratched on the wall. Thin vertical lines to denote the days of incarceration, given up after one year and seventeen days. On the wall by the window, he'd scratched his name, over and over, three years into his sentence, afraid if he didn't, it would disappear. The rest of the cell was covered in images of birds, shells, fish, anything he could remember, etched into the stone with the blunt knife they gave him to eat.

One time it hadn't been as blunt as they thought, and he wrote his name on his arm. His name was important, though he couldn't say why, only that he couldn't allow himself to forget it.

Under the bed was the sketch he kept hidden. The face of a boy, long hair, a scar above one temple. Lucky didn't know who he was, but his heart ached for him. When the thunderstorm shook the castle and the waves crashed against the prison walls, Lucky would climb under his bed and wonder who the boy was, if he would ever see him again.

Footsteps down the hall. Outside time.

Lucky sat on his bed.

‘On your feet.’ The guard’s words were resigned, tired. They both knew what was coming. At least this was the one who was merely fed up with him, rather than the one who would take any opportunity to kick and punch.

Lucky stayed seated.

‘Come on, don’t be like this. We both know how it’s going to end.’

Once he’d tried to remember the guards’ names, match the shifting faces with those patterns of sounds, but after a while, it stopped mattering. They were all the guard, whether it was the bearded one, the kind one, the one who shouted. Guard. Walls. Inside. Outside. The details were irrelevant.

The guard sighed and unlocked the door. The lock went clunk. The door went creak. The footsteps went thud, thud, thud, exactly as they always did.

Lucky stayed seated.

The guard sighed again, and put a hand under Lucky’s arm, hauling him to his feet. Lucky tried to stay seated, but it didn’t matter, just as the guard said. They both knew how it was going to end. Still, the ritual felt important.

Ritual was about all he had left.

And he truly didn’t want to go outside. As the guard pushed him up the steps to the walled courtyard, he pulled back, his nails digging into the wall.

‘Nearly there,’ the guard said with a grunt. ‘I don’t know why you put up such a fight. If I had to spend all my time in a stone box, I’d treasure every moment of sunlight.’

Lucky couldn’t explain. Couldn’t express how much the sky terrified him, so far away. The four walls were safe, familiar. The sky changed. It sucked at him, hungry. The guard gave him a shove and he fell to his knees on the flagstones, clinging to a small plant that had pushed through the gap. He kept his eyes on the ground, his fingers tight around that

speck of green. The sky pulled. One day it would pull him right out of here.

Away from the guard. From the walls. From everything that made sense.

Lucky didn't want change.

The guard was on his arm again, pulling him to his feet. 'Walk.' He dragged Lucky a couple of steps. 'It's good for you. Do you want your muscles to waste away completely?'

Lucky kept his eyes firmly on the ground, on the line between the wall and the flagstone. He took one uncertain step, and then another. The air smelled of salt and the salt reminded him of blood and the wind was as cold as her smile.

Lucky shuddered at the thought of her. The girl with white hair who had destroyed his life. Ten years in solitary had made his memories crumple like wet paper, but he remembered her. Remembered that day. His mother bending down to examine something in the rock pool. The girl with white hair creeping closer. She'd smiled, a cold smile like a crescent moon, and she'd brought the rock down on his mother's skull. Lucky couldn't move, couldn't speak. Couldn't scream, even as she handed him the rock still dripping with his mother's blood.

They'd found him there like that, shaking and sobbing. There was no sign of the girl, and no one would believe him. At his trial they called him moon-touched and locked him away to be forgotten.

'Good, keep going,' the guard said, oblivious to Lucky's whirling thoughts. He blew on his hands and then wrapped his arms around himself. His tabard with the lattice threads of the church ruckled over his chainmail. 'Got a bite in the air today, huh.'

Lucky ignored him and walked. One step after another. Three times around the courtyard. That's all he had to do, and then they'd let him go back to the cell. It was safe in the cell.

He started the second circuit. There were forty-eight steps from each corner to the next. A hundred and ninety-two steps per circuit. Five hundred and seventy-six steps in total.

And then he'd be safe again.

'Sea's loud today,' the guard said. 'Bet there's a storm brewing. That's going to be fun tomorrow.'

Lucky said nothing. He carried on counting the steps. Two hundred and sixteen. Two hundred and seventeen.

The ground shook. Lucky stumbled, his shoulder slamming into the wall. He moaned, gripping with his fingernails to the damp wall, clinging on with all his strength. The wide sky beat down on him.

'What was that?' The guard rushed past him, leaning over the wall. Lucky stopped. The door to the cells was open, unprotected. He could go back.

He stopped, frozen, waiting for the guard to notice he wasn't walking. The man's attention was focused on something over the wall, out to sea. Lucky took a step towards the door. And then other. And another.

The ground shook again, throwing Lucky to the floor. He landed badly, slamming his hands against the flagstones.

'Threads of fate, protect us,' the guard murmured, his voice laced with horror. 'Leviathan!'

As he bellowed the last word, a bell rang out. Lucky clapped his hands over his ears. He lay flat on the ground, waiting for either the ringing to stop or the sky to suck him up, but neither happened.

Slowly, he lowered his hands – they were doing nothing to drown out the noise – and looked around. The guard remained staring out over the wall at the sea. Lucky pushed himself to his feet and sprinted for the stairs. There was no shout from the guard, no attempt to stop him.

By the time he reached the bottom, his lungs burned and his legs ached. Above him, the guard yelled, then screamed, and Lucky couldn't stop himself from turning around.

Something immense, scaly, and drooping towered over the wall. It had a huge maw, far bigger than any of the doors in the prison, surrounded by swaying fronds like seaweed. Seawater washed off the gleaming green-gold scales, pouring on to the prison yard. The guard backed away on his hands and knees, scuttling like a beetle. The thing swayed; an eye the size of the full moon stared down at him.

Lucky fled.

He sloshed down the passage, the cold water lapping at his ankles, slowing him down. The cold, lidless eye persisted in his mind, staring into his soul.

It was only when he reached the comforting solid wood of his cell door that he remembered the water wasn't normal.

It flowed through the barred window of his cell, splashing down into a pool on the floor that reached halfway up the legs of the bed.

Lucky backed away.

His head throbbed as he stared at the cell, trying to process what he saw with the safe, constant cell he knew. Sometimes in the winter the rain came in and made puddles. Sometimes a bad storm whipped the waves up and they did the same. But not like this. Never like this.

Lucky sat on the bed.

He pressed his fists into his stomach. It hurt, worse than he could remember. He moaned, hoping it would bring the guards. He didn't like the guards but they were normal, and normal was safe, or at least familiar, which was a form of safe.

But the guard was outside, under the watch of that eye.

Lucky wrapped his arms around himself, rocking slowly. He didn't know what to do. His life was the cell, the routine of

the guards, meals, outside walk. No one else came, except the doctor twice a year, occasionally more when he was ill. Other people had once, but not for many years.

The water was up to the edge of the bed now and he knew if he stayed here, he'd die. Would that be so bad? He'd get to see his mother again.

He closed his eyes.

An unearthly wail filled the air. It raced down Lucky's spine, making the hair on his arms stand on end. The eye filled his mind again and he shivered uncontrollably, his hands slapping against his thighs.

Leviathan.

It reminded him of her, of the girl with the cold smile. Lucky shook his head. If he lay down and died now, he'd never learn who she was. The leviathan had given him a chance he may never get again. He stumbled to his feet, the water sloshing around his knees. The leviathan wailed again and Lucky wailed with it.

He staggered to the door, and pressed himself against the wall, listening for the guard. A slap, slap, slap sound made him tense, but when he peered around, the corridor was empty, just the rising water lapping against the walls, licking at the stone. Devouring them slowly. He turned towards the courtyard, out of habit, but there was nothing for him that way. No exits, no freedom.

Not that way.

The other way had more cells. All empty now, though he remembered that wasn't always the case. Sometimes there had been others. He'd heard them shouting or crying. But they never stayed, unlike him, and he'd hear their absence in the silence.

He pushed on. The water dragged against him, trying to pull him back. Lucky squared his shoulders and kept walking.

At the end of the corridor was a brick wall, with a window looking down on the sea. The water, much higher than it

normally was, lapped at the window. Lucky avoided staring at it, afraid the leviathan would stare back. On his right was a room with a table and chair, an inkwell, and an open ledger. To his left, another set of stairs rose up to the unknown.

Lucky paused, uncertain. Stairs that went up would go to the sky and the leviathan. But there was nowhere else to go. He started up the steps.

The wall exploded inwards, showering him with shards of brick. The impact knocked him off his feet, slamming him into the steps and knocking the breath out of his body. He lay, gasping, covered in dust, as water rushed into the hole.

The water rose higher, coursing up his body as he fought to get air back in his lungs. It sucked at him, dragging him from the steps. Lucky scabbled at the stone, trying to get a grip, but they were smooth and slippery and his nails cracked and broken.

A wave washed over his head and Lucky lost his grip, disappearing under the cold, murky water. He broke the surface with a gasp, coughing out the salty seawater, and another wave pushed him under again. The stone step smacked into the side of his face, slamming his teeth together.

He was too dazed to fight back as the water dragged him towards the sucking gap in the wall. Lucky closed his eyes as the water rushed over his head again. The current forced him through the remains of the window, out into the sea beyond.

Out into the wide world.

Under the sky, Lucky panicked. The water pulled him down, gripping his ankles with cold tendrils, smashing him into the rocks. Then the sky would yank him the other way and he'd break the surface, gasping and choking. The two grabbed at him, pulling him this way and that, each one refusing to give up their prize.

Lucky didn't want the leviathan to take him. He didn't want the sea or the sky to, either. He wasn't ready to meet his mother yet. Not before he'd found her killer.

He thrashed his arms, struggling to keep in the boundary of sea and sky. Deep in the back of his mind, a memory awoke, a memory of going into the sea voluntarily, of splashing around with others. Of movements to keep you in that space between the air and the waves.

He kicked, spraying water with wild abandon, but it helped keep the sea from dragging him down. A strange sensation, light and tickly, moved through his chest. Out across the sea, something floated, bobbing up and down on the waves. His first thought was leviathan, and he almost went under when his limbs froze in horror, but as he blinked through the spray, he realised it was a tall ship.

More shapes moved in the water, slipping quickly between the waves as they came towards him. Lucky tensed, but what could he do? He couldn't go back to the cell, could barely keep his head above water. If these were guards, at least they'd be able to tell him what to do. Give him back routine.

He was so focused on the approaching figures that he didn't spot the wave building until it struck him, smacking him into a rough, barnacle-encrusted rock. Bright colours went off behind his vision, and pain blossomed down his right side.

Lucky sank beneath the waves.