

Naomi Foyle

Or Daughter from *Astra*, a novel-in-progress

1.4

If Astra looked up from her Tablette maths exercises she had a perfect view of the IMBOD mobile medical unit parked in the school yard. Is-Land Ministry Of Border Design. The crisp black letters were stamped on the side of the white trailer beside the IMBOD Shield: a sea-green downward-pointing triangle, halved by a crimson red line and surrounded by a radiant golden circle. The shield was as old as Astra; it had been designed in the year of GeneIsis to celebrate the completion of the Shell. This morning in Assembly the whole school had chanted the *O Shield* hymn to welcome the two IMBOD medical officers.

O Shield.

*Your beautiful Triangle
summons the spirit of Gaia:
and sings also of Is-Land,
the green earth that springs
from between two rivers.*

*Your bright red pillar
reminds us to respect
Gaia's fiery core
and the martyrs' blood
that runs in all Is-Lander veins.
Your golden circle is the Sun
and the Shell and the Sacred Grains.*

*O IMBOD Shield
You protect us,
And we vow to defend
all that you contain.*

Between her sums, which were easy, Astra watched batches of Year Ones enter the unit, and then fifteen minutes later, depart, some proudly examining their Tablettes, showing each other their new certificate uploads, some punching the air, others tenderly fingering their shoulders. Kamut Whetstone cried and held the Second Officer's hand as she escorted them back to their classrooms. The First Officer stayed inside the unit. She must be injecting the Serum.

The Second Officer was small, round and blonde. The First Officer was tall and muscular and her skin was a shade of nearly night-black. She had spoken at Assembly, in a loud clear voice, telling them that today IMBOD was proudly initiating a major evolution in national defence. By injecting all the children with Security Serum, IMBOD was creating a new generation of strong, happy Is-Landers, superbly equipped to maintain the Shell their parents had sacrificed so much to build. Thanks to the hard work of the scientists who had developed the Serum, the country's former cycles of violence and insecurity were over. Instead, this was the start of decades of security, healing the wounds and traumas of the past. Is-Land would soon take its rightful place among the world's nations as a prime exporter of ShellTech and Code Innovation. Soon Is-Land, like Garmaland and the Himalaya, would become a Holy Land, safe for all to visit.

The First Officer's soaring voice and bright smile were electrifying. The children all yelled 'Is-Land, Is-Land,' at the end of her speech and the teachers stood up and clapped loudly. Miss Raintree even cried – Astra saw her wipe her eyes. After the tumult subsided, the First Officer sat down next to the Second Officer and cast her a bashful, sidelong glance, as if to say, 'How did I do?' Both Officers were young – they were still doing their national service, Miss Raintree had said when the children returned to class and discussed the momentous Assembly. Imagine having such an important responsibility when you were still only nineteen or twenty! They must have done very well on all their tests. Probably they were going to study medicine when they went to Code College. And yes, Tedis, administering Security Shots definitely involved maths: graphs, pie charts, schedules and dosages. The Officers had undoubtedly done exceptionally well on their maths tests.

Astra sneaked another look out the window. Meem was in the group of students now being led across the yard. She was skipping and laughing and kicking a pebble, until the Second Officer told her not to. Astra's tummy tensed. Her skin felt hot. Couldn't Meem also not have the shot? she'd asked Hokma. But Hokma had said that giving a pair of children a secret was like putting an egg in a washing machine. Besides, Meem's Code parents wanted her to have it, and even if they didn't, Hokma's plan would only work for one child.

Meem disappeared into the van. Astra glanced again at the class clock: 9:45. She had drunk the orange juice at 8:00, all in one go, just like Hokma had told her to. The six-year-olds would take another hour to get their shots, then the seven-year-olds would start at 11:00, first Mr Chang's class; then Miss Raintree's. The schedule was all written down on the letter the school had sent to Hokma's Tablette.

The orange juice had tasted disgusting, but Astra had managed not to pull a face as she drank it on the bus. *All in one go*. Her tummy hadn't felt right since – sort of gassy – and now it swelled and contracted again. Her skin was burning and her mouth felt dry. Hot bubbles of sweat were bursting out on her forehead. She couldn't breathe. She gasped for air, and her stomach cranked a blazing bolt of pain up toward her heart. She wrapped her arms around her middle and started to cry.

'Please, Miss Raintree,' Tedis piped up excitedly beside her, 'Astra's going to be sick.'

'Euw!' Silvie Fischer squealed. The harsh metallic noise of chairs being dragged over the tiled floor scraped the inside of Astra's skull. Vaguely, she sensed Miss Raintree's cool palm on her brow, but nothing could soothe the fire racing over her, the acid flaming in her throat. She was gagging now, in great guppy hiccoughs, until her ribs ached and her whole body was shaking.

'Astra, what's wrong?' Miss Raintree sounded very far away.

She raised her head, and like an Old World sea-monster hurtling out of an underwater cave, a spume of vomit shot from her mouth across the room. Splodgy droplets of half-digested waffle splattered over Miss Raintree's dress, Silvie's curly hair, Tedis' maths book, her classmates' desks, the Fractions Family vidboard and the floor. Astra's face drained of blood and she slumped back down in her seat, her forehead on her desk, her arms still hugging her stomach.

'Wow.' Tedis exhaled as Sylvie started to shriek. Cries of *eugh* and *yuck* and *No way!* zinged around the room like ping-balls in a *Tablette* game.

'Oh, Astra,' Miss Raintree sighed. 'Tedis, can you please go and find the janitor? Tell him he'll need to bring the mop and some wet cloths. The rest of you, stay here and get on with your sums.'

After Miss Raintree had taken Astra to the nurse's office, and helped the nurse clean her up, she phoned Hokma's *Tablette*, because Hokma was in charge of all the Or Children's schooling. Luckily, Hokma happened to be in New Bangor doing some shopping, and she came right away, in a solar-taxi. By the time her Shelter mother arrived, Astra had had diarrhoea twice and was lying scrunched up on the nurse's trolley, sniffing. So Hokma – whose dark purple eye-patch made her look almost as commanding as the First Officer – held her hand and told Miss Raintree and the nurse and the school principal, Mr Waterson, that the Security Shot would have to wait because Astra needed to come home with her right now and recover. Miss Raintree, who had a big wet mark on her dress where she'd had to wash off Astra's sick, wasn't sure about that, because the IMBOD unit was at the school for only one day, and next week it would be in the next town, fifty miles away; but Hokma said not to worry: her Birth-Code brother, Dr Samrod Blessor, was a high-ranking IMBOD Medical Officer – in fact, he had helped develop the

Security Serum in its early stages – and she would take Astra to see him tomorrow. And Mr Waterson said, Oh my goodness, Dr Blesser, I didn't know you were related – perhaps he might come here and give a talk to the students, do you think? And Miss Raintree said quietly, 'Please thank your brother for me,' because one of his Code treatments for post-traumatic stress syndrome had cured her own father after the War of Wars. Then Mr Waterson had asked Hokma to ask her brother to email Astra's Security Shot Certificate to the school, and said Astra should take as much time as she needed to recover. She was ahead of her age group in all her lessons, so a few days off wouldn't hurt. In fact, perhaps they should talk about letting this bright little girl skip a year? Hokma said, Yes, that might be productive, and then she shook all their hands goodbye, bundled Astra up in her coat and carried her like a baby out to the solar taxi-rank.

'Good girl,' she crooned as she tucked her into the back seat. 'Now let's take you home to Nimma, and in the afternoon we'll go up to see the Owleons. Here, I bought you a yogurt drink to calm your tummy down.' And Astra groaned, because her throat still hurt too much to talk. But she knew that she had followed orders and would be a great scientist one day like Hokma and Dr Samrod Blesser. She sipped her peach yoghurt drink slowly as the taxi sailed smoothly over the flyover toll road out of New Bangor, fresh air flowing in through the windows, and when they came down off the ramp onto the old dusty rutted B-road, Hokma made the driver go extra slowly all the rest of the way home to Or.

1.5

'What in Gaia's holy name happened?' Nimma came rushing out of Craft House to meet Hokma and Astra, her yellow silk skirts fluttering around her. Hokma had called her from East Gate.

'She was sick.' Hokma hugged Astra to her side. 'She must have eaten some wild berries in the woods yesterday.'

'*Astra.*' It didn't match her pearly-pink lipstick and feather earrings, but Nimma put her spiky voice on. 'How many times do we have to tell you? You must never eat anything from the woods unless we pick it with you.'

'I didn't eat any berries.' Her voice rising, Astra pushed Hokma away, harder than she'd meant to. This was the acting part, but with both her Shelter mothers accusing her of something she hadn't done, for a moment it felt as if she *bad*.

'No one else was sick, were they?' Hokma said, reasonably.

‘If you did, let this be a lesson to you.’ Nimma wagged her finger at Astra, the one with the big emerald ring. ‘You didn’t sleep properly, you’ve been sick at school and you’ve missed your Security Shot. Have you checked her temperature, Hokma?’

‘The nurse said she was fine,’ Hokma said as Nimma rested the back of her hand on Astra’s forehead.

‘I didn’t do anything *wrong*. I just got sick, that’s all.’ Astra folded her arms and glared up at Nimma.

‘Shush, Astra.’ Hokma rubbed her shoulders. ‘It’s okay, we believe you. Nimma, don’t worry, get back to work. I’ll take Astra to her room.’

Nimma frowned. ‘But what about her shot, Hokma? She has to have it – what did you arrange with the school?’

‘Samrod will give it to her tomorrow. Mr Waterson’s fine with that.’

‘Samrod? I thought you hadn’t talked to him since—’ Nimma glanced down at Astra and tightened her lips.

‘I’ve just been so busy lately. I’ll call him today – it will be a good chance to catch up. I can take her tomorrow, in the morning.’

Nimma raised her hands, palms in the air. ‘Well, as long as the school approves.’ She looked back at Craft House. ‘I would take her to the Earthship, but we have to restock the linens before the anniversary ceremony.’

‘I know, Nimma. I’ll settle her in. She’ll be fine on her own. Won’t you, Astra?’

Clinging to Hokma’s fingers, Astra nodded. She’d had a yoghurt drink in the taxi to comfort her tummy and was already feeling much better. And as soon as Hokma unloaded her supplies and had some lunch, they were going up to see the Owleons.

‘All right. But you must go to bed and stay there – no playing in the woods today. I’ll be checking on you later when I give Elpis her tea, and if you’re not in the Earthship, you’ll have supper in your room tonight.’

She had to stay in bed or miss the Fire Pit tonight? ‘But Hokma said—’ Astra beseeched.

Hokma shushed her again. ‘Nimma’s right,’ she said. ‘You need to rest. You can go to the woods again on Sunday.’

Astra scowled. Typical Shared Shelter parents: always breaking promises and siding with each other.

‘Thank you so much, Hokma,’ Nimma was saying. ‘I’ll tell Klor how helpful you’re being.’

‘Nimma, it’s nothing.’ Hokma put her hand on the older woman’s sleeve. ‘We’ve always said I would get more involved in Astra’s life when she started school. And besides, Or’s supposed to be about cooperation, isn’t it?’

‘It’s nice that you still feel that way, Hokma. I know Klor and I do too.’ Nimma put her own hand, with its shiny skin and faint brown speckles, on Hokma’s, and patted it. Her face relaxed and suddenly she smiled, like she used to do before Elpis had her stroke. She looked pretty again, instead of pinched and worn.

But then she inspected Astra again and sighed. ‘You’re positively green around the gills, young lady. Better give her a bucket, Hokma.’

‘C’mon, Astra.’ Hokma gently pulled her back. ‘Let’s get you to bed.’

It wasn’t fair that she didn’t get to see the Owleons today after drinking that horrible juice and throwing up on Miss Raintree and agreeing to lie to Klor and Nimma and everyone for ever. But Astra had to admit she felt – if not exactly tired, a bit weak. Hokma tucked her in, fetched her a glass of water and a bucket and closed the greenhouse corridor blinds so the room was shady like the forest.

‘Now you get some sleep and Nimma will come up later with some soup.’ Astra flounced beneath the sheets. ‘I don’t *want* Nimma to come up. Why is she so *mean* to me sometimes?’

Hokma stroked her cheek with the back of her finger. ‘Nimma’s not mean, Astra. She loves you very much. She just doesn’t want you to get hurt or lost running around in the woods.’

‘But...’ But Astra was yawning now and her complaint got lost in her pillow.

Hokma laughed. ‘No buts, Butter Bean. It’s time to get some sleep. I’ll see you this evening, and tomorrow we’ll leave early to meet Dr Blesser. We haven’t completed our mission yet, remember.’

Hokma kissed Astra’s forehead and left her to sleep. Astra burrowed deeper into bed. Tonight was Storytelling at the Fire Pit, and tomorrow she was going to meet the famous Dr Samrod Blesser. But right now she was a brave Is-Land warrior recovering from a dangerous mission and basking in the glow of her rewards: a day off school and the promise of the Owleons. She stretched between the cottony-clean sheets, and as she did, a quiet tingle stole over her, the feeling that came sometimes after she’d run a race, or swum all the way across Green Lake: the flame that flickered between her legs and made her feel bigger and warmer, as though something important was going to happen.

Ummm. It was nice when the feeling happened. She’d asked Nimma once what it was, and Nimma had said it was Gaia Power, and it felt so nice because it was Gaia’s special gift to

women and men. Gaia Power, Nimma said, is the life force that flows through everything on the planet: trees, flowers, animals, water, even stones and metals. In human beings Gaia Power is especially strong in the sexual organs – which are officially called the clitoris, the vagina, the breasts and the penis – because these are the parts of the body that create and nourish new life. Mostly people just use enough Gaia Power to do everyday work and hardly notice their sexual organs, but sometimes Gaia Power wakes up and reminds us just what a miracle our bodies are. Then we feel excited and happy to be alive. Gaia Power, Nimma said, will always help Astra feel good about herself and the world. When she gets older, the feeling will be stronger, and she might want to share it with other people, but for now she should just enjoy it quietly.

Of course Astra had asked why she had to be quiet about her Gaia Power, and Nimma told her it was because Gaia Power was stronger in private. Like seeds, it needed darkness to sprout. That's why women like to call their vaginas Gaia Beds or Gaia Gardens, and men call their penises Gaia Ploughs or Gaia Stems. But Nimma and Hokma would always answer questions about it, and if anyone ever tried to touch Astra's Gaia Garden, she was to come and tell Nimma at once.

If Astra was with other people, her Gaia Power was usually fleeting – an Or-Child would say something stupid or an Adult would give a command – and the spell would be broken. But if her Gaia Power lit up when she was by herself, in the forest, or in bed with the lights out, she sometimes rubbed herself to make the feeling stay longer. She reached down now and put her hand between her legs. Often it was nice just to feel the pressure of her wrist there. Was that what a Gaia Plough felt like? she wondered. As she gripped her wrist bone with her thighs, images of the girl in the tree floated through her mind. Did the Non-Lander girl think Astra had been looking up her dress? Had she been wearing panties? Had she been feeling her Gaia Power too, so high up there in the tree?

Astra yawned. One day she was going to capture the Non-Lander girl and then something *very* important would happen. Snuggling under the sheets, she slipped her fingers into her panties and left them there, planted in her damp Gaia Garden as she drifted like a leaf into sleep.

When she woke up, Nimma was setting a tray of soup and bread and tofu-carob pudding down on the bed. As she ate, Nimma pulled up a chair and talked. She said the other children were back from school now, all about excited about their Security Serum certificates. But Astra shouldn't worry; Hokma had spoken to Dr Blesser, who had some extra shots at his clinic, and he was definitely going to see her tomorrow.

Naomi Foyle, Or Daughter

Studies in the Maternal, 4(1), 2012, www.mamsie.bbk.ac.uk

‘Hokma will take you,’ Nimma said as Astra licked her pudding spoon clean. ‘She’s going to be looking after you more from now on.’

Astra put the spoon back on the tray. ‘I know. She said I could stay at Wise House with her sometimes.’

Nimma nodded. ‘And how do you feel about that?’

‘Good!’

Nimma was smiling, but her face looked like it did when she gazed at Elpis sometimes: faraway, but not still, as though an eddy of sad thoughts were trapped beneath her features.

‘I mean, as long as I can still stay here too,’ Astra hurriedly added.

Nimma gave herself a little shake. ‘Of course you can,’ she said, in her nicest, warmest tone. ‘Klor and I will always be your Shelter parents, and this will always be your room, and Meem’s.’

Nimma picked up the tray. Astra thought she was going to get up and take it downstairs, but she set it on the bedside table and remained in her chair.

‘You’re our angel, Astra,’ she said. ‘Gaia gave you to us, and we promised Her we’d always look after you. I’m sorry I’ve been a little cross with you lately. I’ve had a lot of extra responsibilities this year. But things will be a lot easier now that Hokma can share taking care of you. I promise I’ll try to be nicer; how’s that?’

Astra squirmed a little beneath the sheets. Had Hokma told Nimma she’d said Nimma was mean? ‘You’re not cross,’ she mumbled. ‘Only when I’m naughty.’

‘You wouldn’t be Astra if you weren’t naughty sometimes.’ Nimma smiled properly now, her eyes crinkling at the edges. But she still didn’t get up to go.

‘What are your responsibilities?’ Astra asked, enjoying the way the big word bubbled out of her mouth.

‘Well, Elpis needs a lot of care now. And there’s the Craft House Exhibition to prepare. I haven’t been sleeping very well lately. But I’m sure that will pass.’

Astra played with her sheet, rolling the edge up like a veggie wiener. It had never occurred to her that Nimma found her jobs hard. ‘Can I help with Elpis?’ she asked.

‘That’s very kind of you, Astra. It helps Elpis when you play in the living room. It’s good for her to have company.’ Nimma rested her wrist on Astra’s forehead again. ‘Your temperature’s gone down. Do you want to sit downstairs with her now and do some Tablette drawing on the sofa?’

Astra did want to get up, but at the same time it was so nice to have Nimma all to herself. They hadn't talked like this, just the two of them, in a long time. 'Can I hear a story first?' she asked.

'A story? There'll be lots of stories tonight.'

'Yes, but I want to hear *my* story – the story of my Birth-Code mother.'

'Ah.' Nimma stroked Astra's hand. 'Yes, that's a good story, isn't it?' Her eyes creased and twinkled. 'And I did just promise to be nicer to you, didn't I?'

Astra nodded happily and settled down into the pillows.

'This story has a sad part, remember?' Nimma cautioned.

'That's okay. I like the sad part now.'

'All right then. Well,' Nimma began, 'as we all know, all Or Children have Code parents, Birth parents and Shelter parents. Sometimes these are the same person, but mostly they're different, and so every Or-Kid has a different set of Parent Stories. This is the story of Astra Ordott's Birth-Code mother. Her name was Eya.

'Eya was young and strong and very pretty, and after she finished her national service she moved to Atourne to attend Craft College. In the Year of GeneIsis, when the whole country was excited and everyday felt like spring, she fell in love with Astra's Code father, who was a very handsome young man who worked at a restaurant near the college. But her lover's family were all uneducated Ag-Labs and Eya knew that her Birth-Code-Shelter father wouldn't approve of him. So she kept her love for him secret. And when she found out she was pregnant, she was very scared. She didn't want her father to find out, but she didn't want to dissolve the embryo either. She wanted it to grow into a foetus and then a baby and be born. She told her best friend, Cora, and Cora said, "Eya, don't worry. My Code-aunt Hokma lives in a place called Or – in Or there are lots of kids with lots of different kinds of parents. Why don't you go there, and tell Aunt Hokma I sent you? You can tell your papa you're working in the gardens and after the baby is born Hokma can give it to some Or parents and you can come back to Atourne."

'So that's what Eya did. At first she didn't say she was expecting a baby. She just asked if she could work here. She had some Craft skills, of course, but Craft House was full, so we registered her as a seasonal Ag-Lab and she helped Klor with the fruit trees – and if any of my team members fell ill, she helped me, selling hand-made cloths to visitors. She wore loose clothes and a headdress, and for a while no one knew she had a baby in her tummy. But one day she asked to meet Hokma and she told her about the baby. She said it was going to be born in two months, and she asked Hokma to help her. She was very frightened of her papa still, and she

wouldn't tell Hokma the name of the baby's Code father. She cried and cried, until Hokma said she'd ask the other Or adults what to do.

So Hokma called an emergency Or meeting. She said she would be one of the child's Shelter mothers, but she wouldn't be able to look after a baby and do all her work with the Owleons. So we all went away and thought about it, and that night Gaia came to Klor and me in our dreams. She said the baby was her gift to Or to celebrate GeneIsis, and She told us to be the baby's Shelter parents. Then Eya was very happy because she knew her baby would safe and well-loved in this world. She did some beautiful crocheting with me then, little green hats and booties for when the baby was born. And when it was Eya's time, Hokma and I helped to bring her little girl baby into the world.

'Eya said you were to be called Astra, which means "star" – she said that was the name your Code father had chosen. And she stayed for a month, breast-feeding you, but then she had to go back to Atourne. Oh, how she cried – but she said she would come and visit every holiday, and she did come back, once, when you were six months old, and she brought you a silver bracelet that Klor and I keep in a special drawer, for you to look at and play with on special days.'

Nimma's voice was lower now. Her face was turned towards the greenhouse corridor, not as if she was counting the parallel light lines falling over Meem's bed but as though she were looking through them to a place no one else could see.

'Then what happened?' Astra asked, even though she knew. This was the sad bit; she'd cried a lot the first time she'd heard it. But now she knew the ending, in a funny way she liked to hear it.

Nimma shifted in her chair and looked at Astra again. 'Well, we didn't hear from Eya for a while. And then Cora visited and said that Eya's papa had arranged a marriage for her, to a wealthy nuclear engineer who lived in a hill stronghold. She'd gone to live with him there and she wasn't able to visit Or anymore. She couldn't even text or email either, because her new husband would be very angry if he found out she'd had a baby before she married him. But Eya had told Cora that she loved Astra very much and would never, ever forget her. Cora knew where Eya was and later, when Astra was older and went to college in Atourne, Eya would come and meet her on her shopping days, she promised. But for now, Hokma and Nimma and Klor were to be Astra's Shelter parents, and they were the best Shelter parents she could have. Isn't that so?'

Astra lunged forward and hugged her Shelter mother. As she did, her elbow caught the tray, and her bowl and plate and spoons went clattering to the floor. But Nimma didn't shout at her; Nimma hugged her back. Her arms went right round Astra, her cheek rested on Astra's head

and her billowy dress smelled of wild roses, the musky-sweet scent Klor gave her every birthday. ‘I love you, Nimma,’ Astra blurted into its soft folds. ‘When I meet Eya, I’m going to tell her you’re the best Shared Shelter mother ever in the whole wide world.’

Then Astra came downstairs with Nimma and sat on the sofa beside Elpis in her wheelchair. Elpis nodded and opened her mouth, which was her way of smiling. Nimma wrapped Astra up in a fleecy blanket with Tabby and asked her to make a picture of Craft House, showing her team at their looms and the racks of hemp clothing and shelves of wool blankets and linen house cloths. So when Nimma left, Astra drew a cutaway of Craft House, with Nimma’s team in red and gold robes and Nimma in a silvery blue shawl, and then she scrolled to the edges and drew the gardens outside Craft House too, adding Is-Land soldiers, up in the fruit trees and lying in the grass, to protect them all. One was Durga, because Durga started her national service this year, and another was Gregor, because even though Gregor was bossy he was good at archery, and one – of course – was Astra, with Tabby in her pocket and an Owleon flying above her. Then she zoomed out, and above them all she painted the Shell, a golden shining dome, and above *that* missiles veering away from the Shell’s magnetic force field and boomeranging back onto to the Non-Landers in their strongholds in the dunes and mountains bordering Is-Land. Then the picture turned into a huge movie storyboard, with lots of dead Non-Landers covered in blood, and more grieving Non-Landers killing themselves with sharp sticks, and the leaders of Panarabia being put in jail by the Guardians of the Servers. She showed it all to Elpis and explained each part of the story, and when Elpis drooled a little on her dress front, Astra wiped her mouth with a hanky like she’d seen Nimma do.

When Nimma came back to see if Astra was well enough for dinner and storytelling, she said how wonderful the picture was and she asked if she could put it on the Craft House vidloop for the Or Anniversary celebrations. Of course Astra said yes she could, and then Nimma took her temperature and said she could come to Core House for dinner and to the Fire Pit afterwards, as long as she went straight to bed as soon as Nimma told her. She had a big day tomorrow, travelling with Hokma to meet Dr Blesser, and she needed to be all better to make sure she wasn’t sick again before her shot.

Yes, Astra agreed, she didn’t want to throw up in Dr Blesser’s office. He was a genius, like she was going to be one day, and she was going to talk to him about Code-working and Owleon design and maybe, if Hokma went to the bathroom for a minute, what Hokma was like when she was little. But right now she was starving for her dinner.

© Naomi Foyle 2012. This extract is reproduced here with the kind permission of the author and Jo Fletcher Books.