



CHAPTER 2

TAKING FLIGHT

I watch, with my bike ready to go, as Grace stands and discusses something with her dad. I kick the pedals impatiently, whizzing them round and round.

I can see them through the window of Beck Croft. I am keeping my distance. He has a shaved head, muscles and tattoos. He is never still. He has a sort of restless energy, pacing up and down, clenching and unclenching his fists.

OK, so you shouldn't go on appearances. I am a scrawny, scruffy so-and-so in a jumper with holes in it, so what would he make of me?

He points a lot. With a harsh, jabbing motion. Sometimes he looks through the window at me.

Then I see him lift the window, point at me and beckon.

My heart thudding, I lean the bike up against the fence and make my way to the door of Beck Croft. He's there waiting for me, leaning against the door frame. Big and powerful.

“Joel Shipton.” I offer my hand. I see Grace hiding behind him, gnawing at her fingernails.

“Live round here, do you?”

“Over there.” I point across the fields. “In the old farmhouse. Me and my sister.”

I know that I have perhaps said something he does not approve of, or cannot quite understand. “Just you and your sister?”

“Yes. Our parents died. She's my guardian.”