

**SWANFALL**

*Books by Sophie Kirtley*

The Wild Way Home

The Way to Impossible Island

The Haunting of Fortune Farm

Swanfall

BLOOMSBURY CHILDREN'S BOOKS  
Bloomsbury Publishing Plc  
50 Bedford Square, London WC1B 3DP, UK  
Bloomsbury Publishing Ireland Limited  
29 Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin 2, D02 AY28, Ireland

BLOOMSBURY, BLOOMSBURY CHILDREN'S BOOKS and  
the Diana logo are trademarks of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

First published in Great Britain in 2025 by Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

Text copyright © Sophie Kirtley, 2025

Sophie Kirtley has asserted her right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents  
Act, 1988, to be identified as Author of this work

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be: i) reproduced or  
transmitted in any form, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying,  
recording or by means of any information storage or retrieval system without  
prior permission in writing from the publishers; or ii) used or reproduced in any  
way for the training, development or operation of artificial intelligence (AI)  
technologies, including generative AI technologies. The rights holders expressly  
reserve this publication from the text and data mining exception as per Article  
4(3) of the Digital Single Market Directive (EU) 2019/790

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: PB: 978-1-5266-4282-0; eBook: 978-1-5266-4280-6;  
ePDF: 978-1-5266-4281-3

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

Typeset by RefineCatch Limited, Bungay, Suffolk

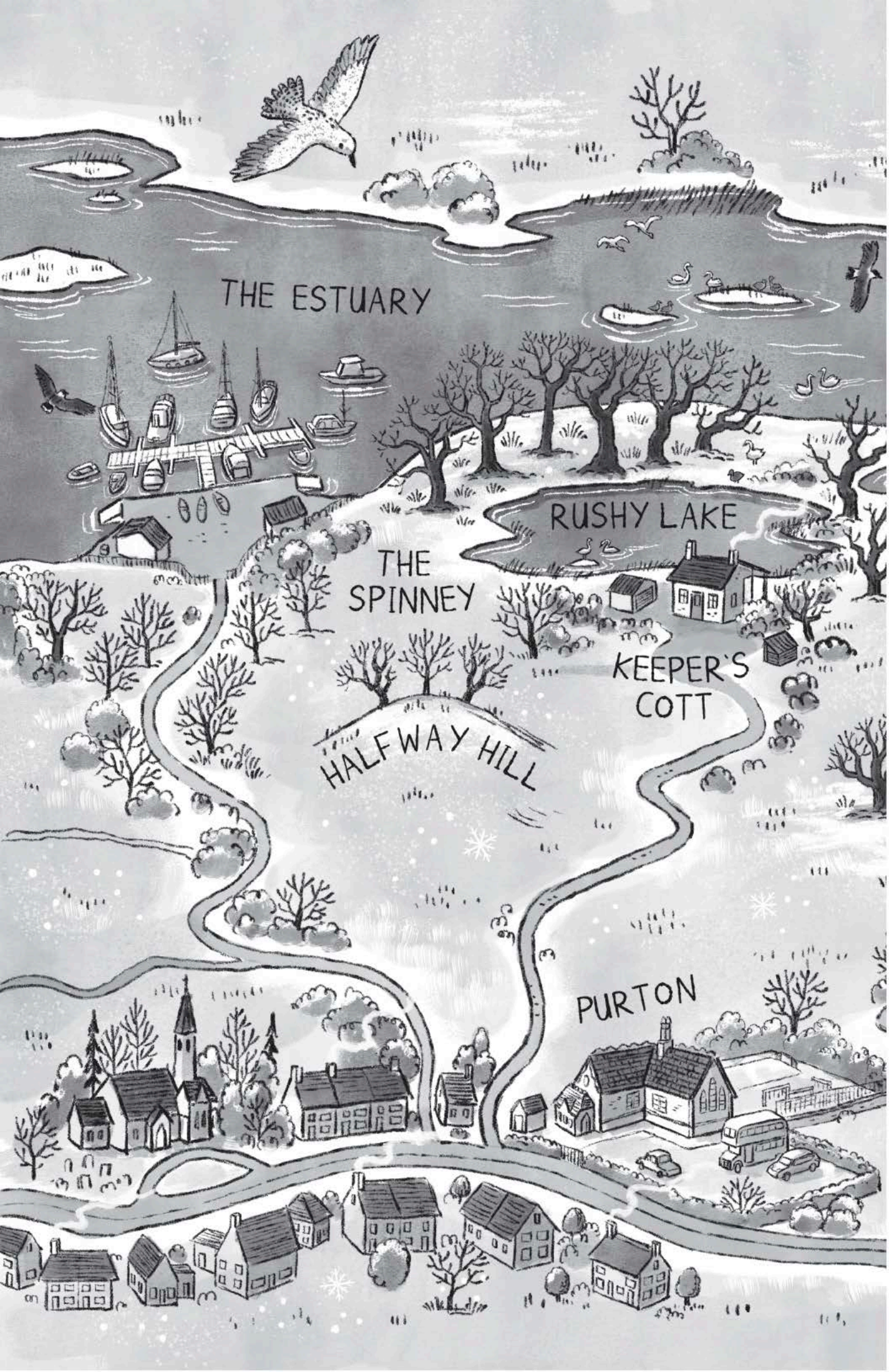
Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.



To find out more about our authors and books visit [www.bloomsbury.com](http://www.bloomsbury.com)  
and sign up for our newsletters

For product safety related questions contact [productsafety@bloomsbury.com](mailto:productsafety@bloomsbury.com)

*For Amy, Alice and Niall,  
My sisters and my brother,  
My flock*



THE ESTUARY

THE SPINNEY

RUSHY LAKE

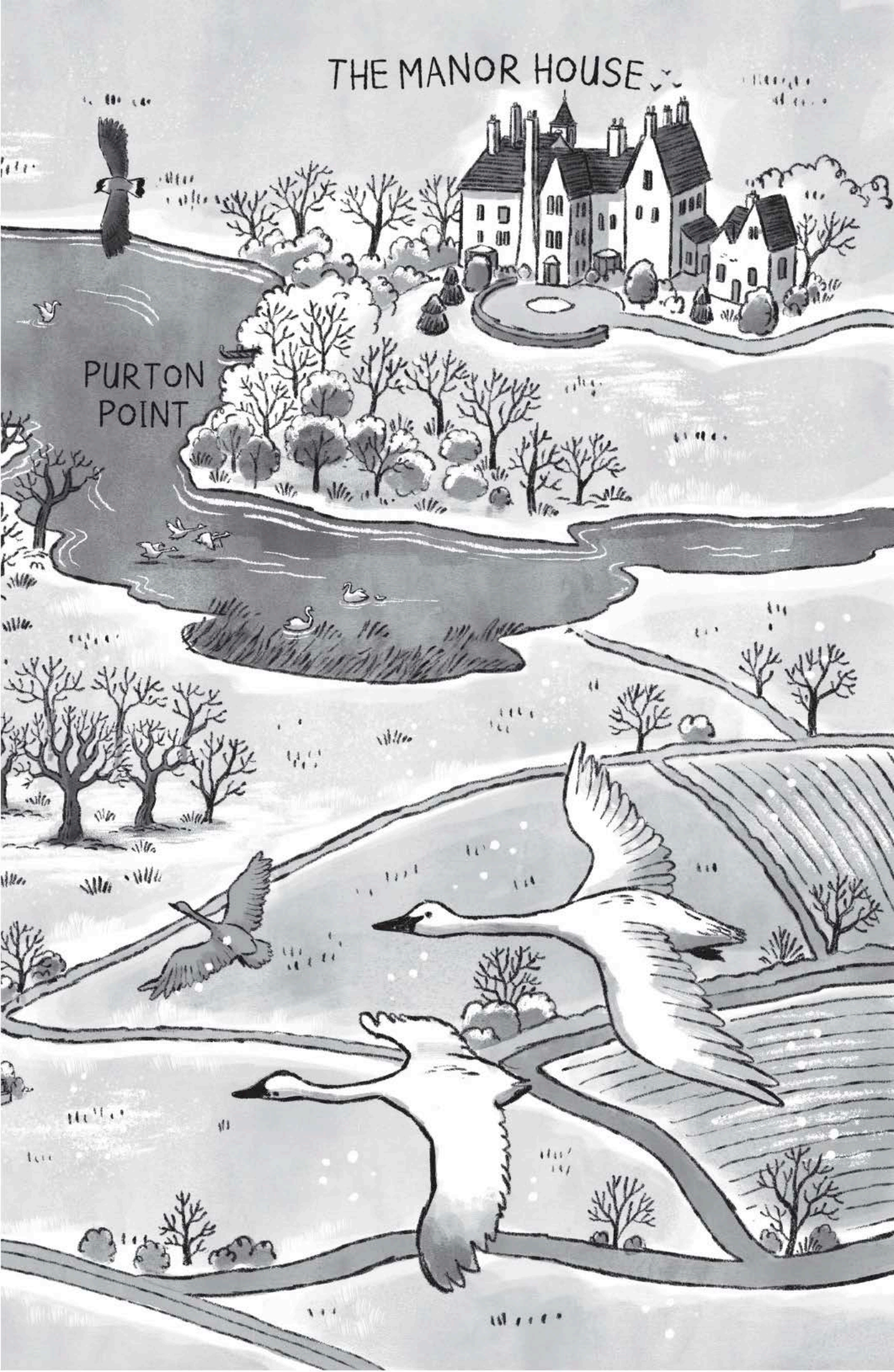
KEEPER'S COTT

HALFWAY HILL

PURTON

# THE MANOR HOUSE

PURTON  
POINT



*While the world is asleep  
we fly by the stars  
it is safer this way  
under cover of dark*

*We fly over snow  
and frozen seas  
dreaming of how  
things used to be ...*

*... when once  
we were loved*

*... when once  
we were free ...*

# PROMISES IN THE SKY



Pip waited by his open bedroom window, wide-eyed and breathless. The winter air smelled of snow and the sky was heavy, full of promise – as if at any second it would open, releasing something white and marvellous on to the world. But it wasn't snow that Pip was waiting for. He was waiting for his swans to come home.

The Arctic swans returned to Rushy Lake every winter, regular and expected as short days and frost and Christmas. *Swanfall*. That's what they called it when the swans came back, having flown all the way from Siberia – more than three thousand kilometres – so many wingbeats from this small lake by the edge of the river estuary. Pip was eleven, and even though he'd lived on the wetlands for years, every winter the swanfall still cast a spell over him. To Pip the swanfall had a kind of magic he could never quite explain – it made him feel

like everything was right in the world, as if, just like the Arctic swans, he too had somehow *landed*, settled and safe for the winter.

Pip peered again through his binoculars all the way to Purton Point and the river beyond. The low sky was still pink with sunrise and although the usual geese and ducks paced the frozen foreshore of the lake, there was no sign yet of the swanfall. It was easy to tell the difference between the migrating swans and the swans who lived here all year long: the Arctic swans were smaller, their necks shorter, their bills yellow with black markings. Their calls were different too, softer, like music almost. Pip blinked in surprise. For a tiny second, he thought he could hear that soft call in the still morning air. His heartbeat quickened. He listened harder.

But no. Not yet. Must've just been his imagination, just the wind whistling in the reeds.

'Pip!' Mum's voice from downstairs snapped him out of his daydream. 'Get a move on, love! School starts in fifteen minutes!'

Pip's heart felt suddenly heavy, like it was made of lead. *School.*

School was one hundred per cent impossible – it was all about sitting still and trying to make his mind focus on one thing at a time instead of the seven billion things at a time that usually danced through Pip's fast-whirling

helter-skelter of a brain. School made Pip feel like a wild thing in a small cage.

‘Pip! Hurry up!’ Mum called again.

‘Coming!’ With a heavy sigh, Pip slung his schoolbag on to his shoulder and trudged downstairs into the kitchen.

As he gobbled his breakfast, he gazed at the three small pictures on the wall by the table. His sister, Edie, had painted them years ago and they were the perfect likeness of his favourite Arctic swans – Midnight, Silver and Moonshadow.

Pip smiled. He knew he wasn’t supposed to have favourites but it was hard not to when it came to those three. There was just something special about them; maybe it was because they reminded him of his very first swanfall. Pip blinked slowly, remembering when he, Mum and Edie came to live in Keeper’s Cott, back when Pip was only seven; Midnight, Silver and Moonshadow had been the first Arctic swans to arrive at Rushy Lake that winter. They were young, only cygnets really, their feathers still mottled-grey, not white like full-grown swans. Mum had marvelled at how they’d managed to fly here alone, all the way from the Arctic tundra – usually cygnets arrived with their parents for their first few winters at least.

Pip, Edie and Mum had given them their names – Edie named Midnight because his bill was almost all

black; Mum named Silver because his was white at the tip; and Pip named Moonshadow because on her yellow bill she had a black marking in the shape of a crescent moon. Each year since then those same three swans had come back to Rushy Lake, and always together too.

‘Pip! For goodness’ sake! Get a move on!’

He tugged on his shoes, called bye to Mum and opened the back door. A gust of wind whooshed in, teasing him with its wild freshness. Pip eyed the pale sky – Moonshadow, Midnight and Silver would be on their way here right now! His heart lifted.

Pip cycled down the frost-sparkled lane to the village. On each side stretched the wetlands, wide and flat, bright with ice – riding fast through the dazzle of it, Pip’s tyres hissed and the frozen air stung his cheeks. There was a magic to the wetlands in winter, when the low hedgerows were feathered with frost and the air tasted so clear and cold it tingled. He paused at the bend to watch a flock of lapwings flicker across the huge apricot sky in their appearing-and-vanishing-and-appearing-and-vanishing kind of way. And again Pip thought he heard it – the call of the Arctic swans – barely there, soft, so soft, like a whisper, like a wish. He held his breath.

From the Manor House across the estuary a distant bell chimed. With a gasp Pip realised the time; he

pedalled frantically to the gates, skidding to a stop at the bike rack where Tommo was parking his bike too.

Tommo was the one good thing about school. In some ways they were total opposites – Tommo was tall and broad, while Pip was small and slight; Tommo's hair was fair and straight while Pip's was curly and dark; Tommo was loud and excitable while Pip was quiet and day-dreamy. None of that mattered though; they'd been best friends for almost as long as Pip could remember.

'Late again,' said Tommo, with his lopsided grin.

'You're one to talk,' laughed Pip. And they hurried in, late together, just like most mornings.

As the school door closed behind him, Pip gazed back at the endless skies and the wetlands, so vast and glimmering. There was a strange new tingle in the sparkling air today and it gave him a fluttery excited nervous feeling. The kind of feeling you get before your birthday or Christmas; the feeling that something extraordinary is out there, on the horizon, just waiting to happen ...