

# BLACK TIDE

CAROLINE CLOUGH



Kelpies

*With love to my wonderful husband,  
and my children, Charlotte and Rory.*

*Many thanks to my girls Julie and Sheila, who have supported  
me so well for so long.*

*Thanks to all at Floris for their advice and support.*

*And thanks to all the lovely and enthusiastic pupils and  
teachers that I have met in schools all over the country, who have  
encouraged and inspired me to write Toby's new adventures in this  
sequel to Red Fever.*



This book is also available  
as an eBook

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## 1. Kidnapped

Something was wrong. In the fuggy state between slumber and waking, Toby Tennant could sense something was very wrong with his world. He tried to open his eyes but sleep had a strong grip on him and he couldn't shake it loose.

*Wake up! I must wake up!*

With a huge effort he squinted out of one eye, rubbing the other with a grimy hand. Blackness was all around him and for a moment he couldn't work out where he was. He groped for the torch that was tucked in beside him and, grasping the handle, quickly wound it up. It threw a pale flickering light on the inside of the tiny cabin.

*Ah, I'm in my den.*

For a moment he was reassured. This was his safe place, the place where he could hide from the madness outside that was now his life. But as he lay curled up on the old mattress that took up most of the space, he felt a growing unease. There was something so wrong with the way the boat was pitching and rolling sideways. Toby hated sailing, but the deadly red fever virus had changed everything over the past three years. He'd had to learn the ways of the sea in order to survive.

A terrible sense of dread crept over him and, fighting his terror, he pulled on his damp clothes. There was no sound from the *Lucky Lady's* engine; there was no sound of his Dad or his little sister, Sylvie. There was no sound of anything or anybody, just the whack, whack, whack of the waves hitting the side of the boat as it was tossed and thrown about.

*What's going on? Why aren't we moving? The boat feels like it's drifting. What's Dad doing?*

Toby crawled to the hatch door and flipped it open, shading his eyes to the brightness of the morning light. As he swung round to face the *Lucky Lady's* cabin he saw exactly what was wrong. There, stood on the deck, were two huge men dressed in black, their backs towards him. Toby froze, the cold hand of fear closing over his heart.

"Hey! You two! Come in here and help me tie the prisoners up!" shouted a gruff voice from inside the cabin.

"Yep, Captain!" The huge men stooped and disappeared through the low wooden door of the boat's cabin.

*Prisoners? He must be talking about Dad and Sylvie. We've been boarded by pirates!*

Toby now saw the grey outline of a large inflatable boat moored alongside the *Lucky Lady*. He pulled himself up onto the deck and, grasping the rail, made his way unsteadily towards the cabin as the boat bucked and shifted under his feet.

*What are they doing with Dad and Sylvie? What do they want with them? Surely they just want to steal our food and fuel? Or maybe they aren't ordinary pirates.*

A hot anger rose in Toby's chest as he imagined the dirty rough men pulling Sylvie around. She was only six years old and, though she could be very annoying at times, Toby was always fiercely protective of her. After all, she had no mum to look after her now.

*What am I going to do? There are at least three of them and they are enormous and probably have weapons! How am I going to fight them off?*

He slunk down and crawled nearer to the cabin door. He could hear raised voices from within.

“Take your filthy hands off us!” An angry voice rang out. It was his dad. “Why are you doing this? What do you want with us? Just take our food and fuel!”

Toby heard a loud, coarse laugh and then someone said, “We don't want your meagre offerings! It's YOU we want!”

There was a scream from Sylvie, and sounds of a scuffle came from the open door. Toby's blood started to boil. How dare these evil men board their boat and assault his family? He had to do something and he had to do it now. He glanced round searching for a weapon and spied a large wooden pole with a hook on the end, for pulling the boat up to moorings. He picked it up and, without thinking, flung himself through the cabin door.

What he saw inside made him cry out in fear and dismay. His dad and Sylvie were cowering in terror on one of the bunk beds, their hands tied in front of them. Standing over them were four men, filling the tiny cabin with their bulky frames. All of the men

were wielding guns and they looked like they knew how to use them.

The men turned and stared in shock at the young boy waving a pole at them. Toby didn't hesitate.

"Take that!" he screamed as he lunged at the one nearest him, striking out with the hook and cracking the man violently across the top of his skull. The huge raider crumpled slowly to the floor with a quiet moan. Before Toby could raise his pole to attack the next one, someone cannoned into him and smacked him heavily to the hard floor of the cabin. The last thing Toby heard was the concerned voice of his dad ringing in his ears.

"Toby? Toby? What have you done to him, you yobs?"

It was some time later when Toby started to come to. His head throbbed, and through the misty fog of pain he was aware of one of the raiders standing over him. The man called out: "Is there any point in taking this one? He looks at death's door. Must have hit his head hard. Does the General want damaged goods?"

"Aye! Chuck him into the inflatable along with the others. If he looks a goner we'll throw him overboard," called back another.

Toby was aware of being lifted clumsily, carried out of the cabin into the cold air and then thrown into empty space. He gasped as he flew through the air and hit the wooden planking on the bottom of the inflatable. As he lay, unable to open his eyes, he heard his dad murmuring to Sylvie nearby. He could smell

the metallic tang of blood somewhere. He tried to put his hands to his head, which felt wet and sticky, but they were tied together. A boot nudged him sharply in the ribs.

“Leave my brother alone!” Sylvie squealed.

“Tell your kid to shut up or else she’ll end up like her big brother,” a voice commanded.

“Don’t you touch a hair on her head!” yelled back his dad. This was followed by bursts of laughter from the four men.

“Like you can do anything about it, eh?” said the same man. Toby could hear a tone of authority in this voice and wondered if he was the “Captain” the men referred to. “Now you tell your kids to behave,” the man continued, “and we’ll all get along just fine. It’s not in our interest to knock you about – we want you to arrive in one piece otherwise you’ll not be much use to us.”

“Aye,” another voice cried out, “otherwise it’ll be us that’ll get it in the neck from the General!”

“Shut up, Calvert! Else I’ll have to shut you up, too!” barked the Captain.

Toby lapsed in and out of the darkness of unconsciousness as the inflatable’s outboard motor roared into life and the boat took off, bouncing over the waves. He could feel his dad’s hand grasping roughly onto his arm, and as he peered painfully into the light, he saw his dad and Sylvie crouching in the bottom of the boat next to him.

*Where are they taking us?* Toby gritted his teeth as the boat hurtled along, banging violently against the

waves and sending spasms of pain ripping through his body.

“You’ll like it at Fort George,” bawled the Captain, as if reading Toby’s thoughts. “We’ve collected quite a number of folks just like you – loners struggling for an existence in this mad bad world. You’ll thank us for rescuing you from your pitiful life. At least you’ll have company!”

“What do you want with us?” his dad roared back over the drone of the engine. The men laughed again.

“That’ll be a surprise for you to look forward to!” replied one of the men.

“Aye, not a nice one though!” retorted another.

“Calvert! Thought I told you to keep it shut!” commanded the Captain. “We don’t want to frighten our guests, do we?” There was a murmur of amusement.

*Surprise? What could they mean? It doesn’t sound good. I’ve got to do something quickly. I can’t just let them take us to this place, “Fort George”. What if they want to eat us? Toby had heard stories of people being eaten but at the time he hadn’t believed them. Now... He tried to put all horrible images out of his mind.*

*I’ve got to get off this inflatable and back to the Lucky Lady. That’s the best chance we’ve got. Then I’ll be able to follow them in her and rescue Dad and Sylvie from this Fort George.*

As he lay going over his plan in his head, Toby knew that the chances of him getting away and then rescuing his dad and Sylvie were slim. The future looked very bleak but he had to do something. He couldn’t just lie



here letting these men take them nearer and nearer to what sounded like a death sentence.

He wriggled his toes as the feeling returned to his legs and arms. He peered from under his blood-soaked fringe and saw the men sitting up at the front of the inflatable, scanning the horizon. The boat appeared to be following the craggy cliffs and rocky shores of the Moray coast. Toby knew vaguely where they were. When he had gone down into his den to sleep, his dad had been steering the boat towards Fraserburgh, where they had last seen their friends Jamie and Katie McTavish.

*I told Dad not to let the McTavishes go off on their own! He wouldn't listen! I knew something dreadful would happen if we split up. Why won't he ever listen to me?*

But this was not the time to go over old hurts and grudges. This was the time for action.

*Here goes!*

Toby gathered up all his strength and courage and lifted himself bodily from the bottom of the inflatable in one swift leap. Without pausing to look over the side, he flung himself into the churning white waters as the boat sped on.

“TOBY!” he heard his dad scream, before the shock of the cold North Sea hit the breath from his body.

*Mustn't gasp! Don't open your mouth!* He told himself, as the freezing foaming waves closed over his head. He remembered his dad telling him that most people who went overboard were killed by the cold. The shock of hitting the freezing water made them hyperventilate so that they gasped and swallowed great lungfuls of

salty water. Then they drowned. Toby was not going to let that happen to him.

As he dropped down and down into the blackness of the ocean he could hear the dull throbbing of the inflatable's outboard motor vibrating somewhere above his head. He let himself plummet down, keeping his legs together and his arms still. He knew he had to get far enough away from the boat to make the raiders think he had drowned.

As Toby descended, the sea became quieter and quieter and darker and darker. The clear blueness soon turned to menacing black as he struggled to see in front of him.

*Got to get these ties off my hands – got to start striking for the surface soon. Don't know how much longer I can hold my breath.*

As the dark closed around him, Toby tried not to think of what else might be swimming through the gloom towards him. Something brushed against his legs and then something else darted past his face.

*Don't think – just swim!*

Toby pulled his hands hard apart in an effort to break the ties but they were fastened tight.

*Got to get my hands free. NOW!*

Through the ghostly murk he could just make out a large silver object coming towards him fast.

*What's that?*