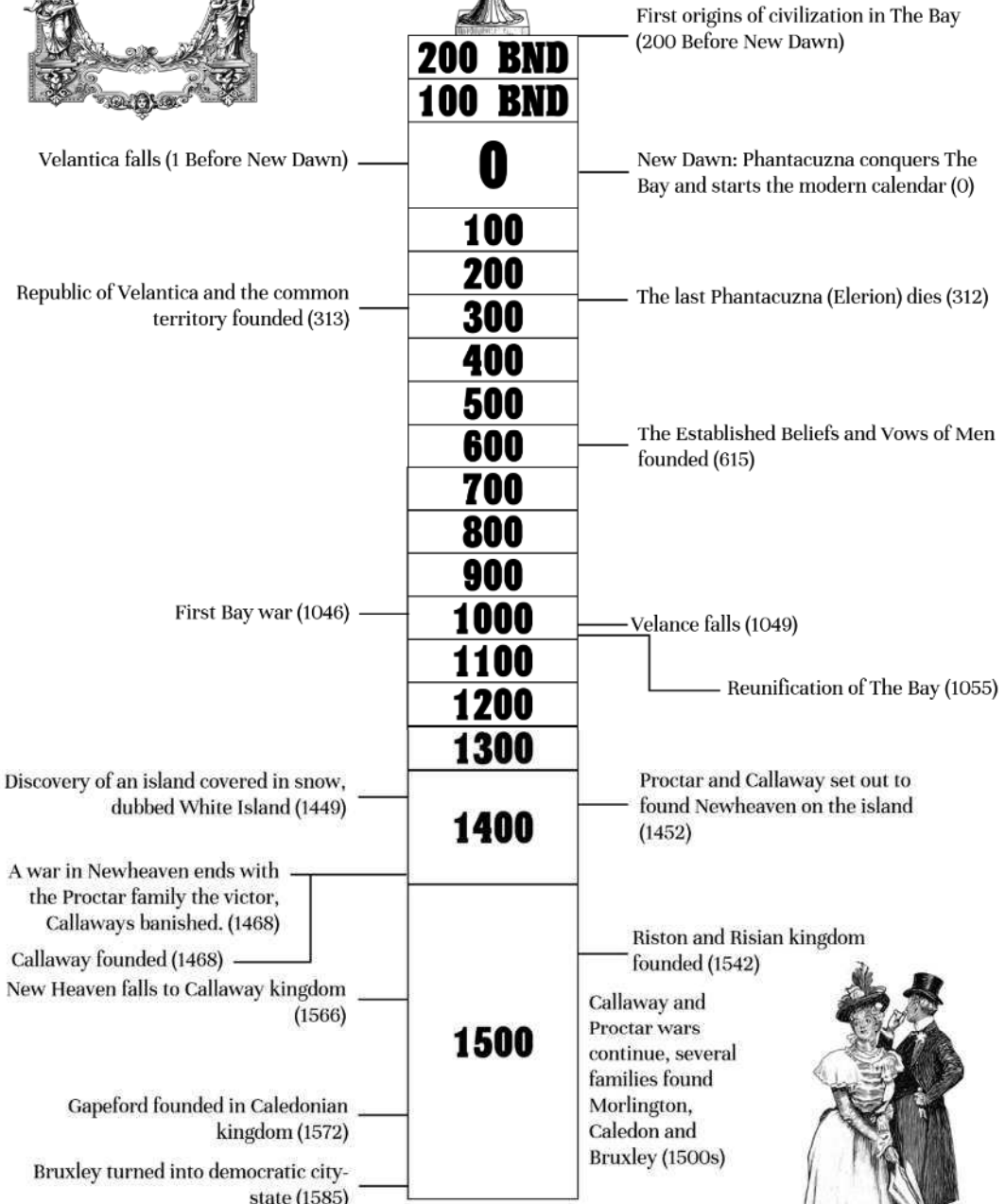


Blackfort's
Crown



Our History





Our History



Dunston founded in Risian kingdom (1602)

Caledonian king founds Jinxton (1602)

1600

Bruxley fire destroys Guild Palace (1652)

Democracy House opens on ruins of Guild Palace (1689)

Pridon Copperstone invents Automated Engine in Dunston (1702)

Quincer Callaway conquers the West of White Island (1706)

Quincer Callaway dies, son Adam Callaway takes over (1720)

Caledon renamed Dykeford (1715)

Adam Callaway conquers East of White Island (1721)

Revolt in Dykeford for equality fails (1753)

Callaway kingdom conquers The Bay (1721)

Adam Callaway dies, succeeded by Charlotte Callaway (1756)

Democratic revolution in Dunston (1760)

Treavor Carston born (1789)

First democratic elections on White Island (1762)

1700

Camilla Carston born (1824)

Jack Carston born (1826)

Claire Johnston born (1834)

Percival Roberts born (1836)

Alexander Blackfort born (1839)

Jacob Blackfort born (1850)

Lord Melbourne takes office (1853)

The Year Of White Bread (1855)

Hyacinth Plexview born (1857)

Revolution begins in Dykeford (August 12, 1857)

Kingdom of Blackfort founded (August 13, 1857)

Gapford starvation (October 1857)

1800

Morlington siege (December 12, 1857)

Alexander beheaded for treason, Percival crowned, name 'Blackfort Kingdom' kept out of respect (January 17, 1858)

Callaway Empire ceases to exist, Percival crowned (February 1858)

Celeste Locknicklas born (1880)

Adam Blackfort born (1883)

Dykeford renamed Perceford (1882)

Lucy Carston born (1883)

1900



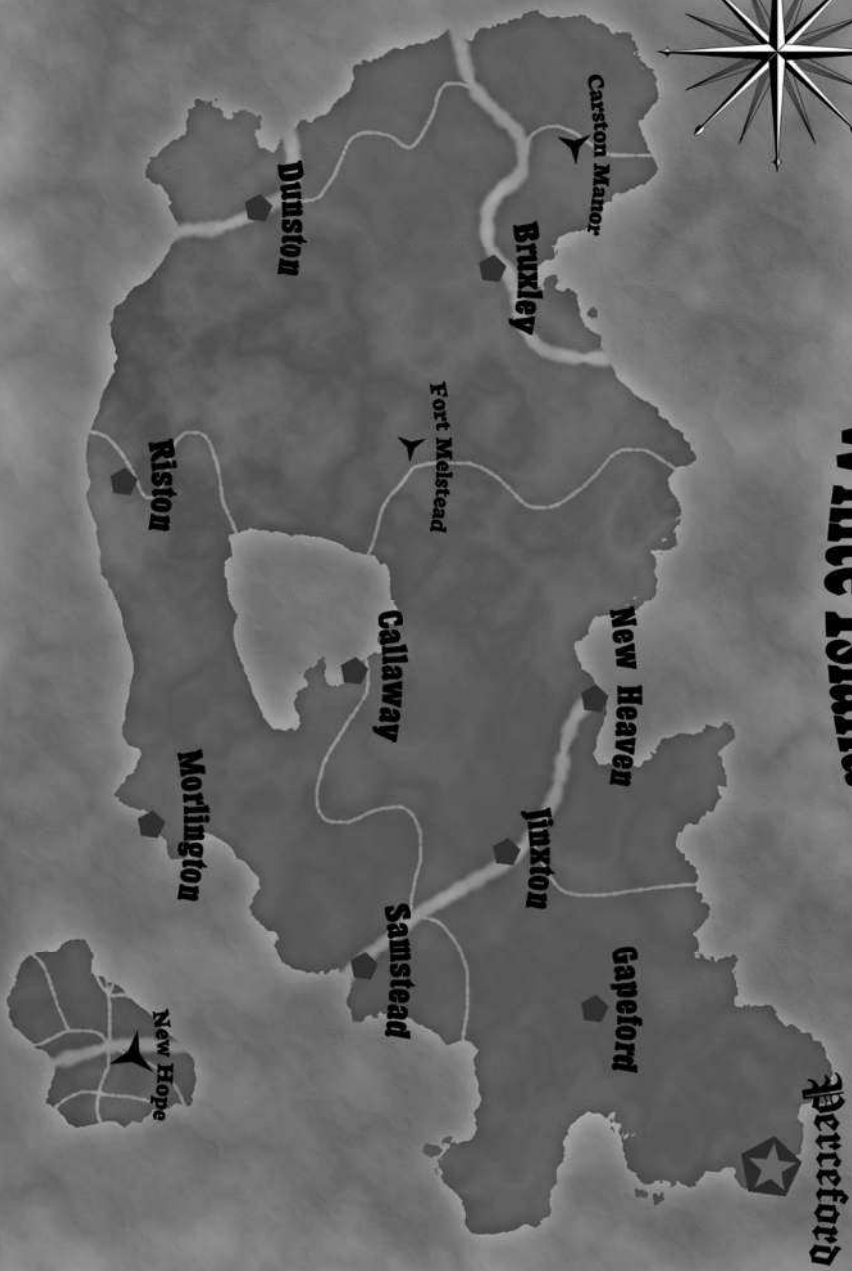
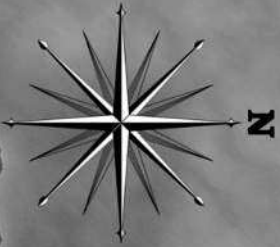


The World



- City
- Large city
- Capital

White Island



Preface

The story you are about to embark on was written over the course of eighteen months. Eighteen extraordinary months which have changed my life immeasurably. I want to thank every single person who has been a part of it in some way or another. There are way too many to be able to name in this preface, but if you have even so much as said a word to me in these past months, you've probably helped me write the words on these pages.

Just like last time, I want to offer special thanks to my former teacher, and now, friend, Mrs Roelant. None of the pages written, nor any of those yet to be inked would have come to pass without your devotion to your students.

Of course I would also give some words to my family, my mother, and many others who have supported me. They mean the world to me.

I want to thank Abhay (abhay1029), he's the freelancer on Fiverr who made my cover, for a very democratic price. I love what he did with my idea.

And before I forget, I want to thank Eline Tahon, one of my best friends, she took the picture of me, on the back cover. Dylan, Mister Sir Steven Meert and Sarah took time to read parts of my story, so I owe them special thanks, too. Kenzo Warrens, you made the world map, you did it amazingly! And many others, many, many others ! Too little time, too many names.

Lars Stevens

Blackfort's
Crown

Lars Stevens

Perceford, 8th of December, 1900

Claire was dragged on the stage, wearing nothing but a tunic.

“Claire Johnston, you have been found guilty of the following crimes:

Killing the leader of the Blackfort Revolution, illegally ceasing power in the empire, the attempted murder of Elena Gutfield, and the murders of Florence Johnston, Jules Taylor, and Hannis Utolla. Furthermore, the court has decided the recent war was brought to our shores solely by your ambition to oppress. Therefore, you are hereby sentenced to die.”

Claire's head was placed on a chopping block. The executioner lifted his axe. She took a final look over Percival Square. All her planning, all these years, her moment to shine, her time in power. None of it could have prevented this.

BLACKFORT'S CROWN

I

Another Year

Dunston, the 29th of October, 1900

"Adam, are you ready?" his mother shouted up the stairs. "I'll be right down, mum!" Adam answered, matching his mother's decibel levels.

"Right, let me look at you," she said when Adam came into the small kitchen. His mother was right by the kitchen table. A shabby old piece of wood. She walked over to him and let her pitch-black eyes run over him.

"Mother, it's only school, you know," the boy sighed. "Be that as it may, you're going to leave a good impression on your new classmates, I'll make sure of that." She dusted his jacket with her hands. "Besides," she continued, "you're a Blackfort, you've got an act to keep up." When Adam heard his last name, he looked up, into the living room.

Battling with the other clutter above the fireplace, there was a small portrait which featured a brown haired, green eyed man in a red and golden uniform. Alexander Blackfort.

Once revered as the saviour of the people, he was beheaded for treason in 1858 by his best friend, Percival. Today, Percival still wore

the crown in the capital. His mother noticed him staring up. "The country bears your name, you've got a legacy to live up to," she said, still fiddling with his jacket.

"I'll make sure to send my people to slaughter at the earliest opportunity, just like Alexander would have done if Percival hadn't stopped him," Adam answered, getting his mother's hands off his body.

"Oh boy, you don't know half the story of your late uncle," she tried to find his eyes. "And frankly, I don't care for the other half. Let it be," he ended the conversation.

"Ah Adam, glad to catch you." His father mercifully entered the kitchen. "Dad," Adam replied, staring at the grey haired, green eyed man. "You promise to do your best this year? We can't afford you fail again, we can barely manage as it is," he said on a serious note. "Yes, father," Adam replied, staring at his feet. His father stood there, looking at his son for a while before shifting his eyes to his wife.

"Well then," he started cheerfully, "I'll be off. Hyacinth, when are you serving dinner tonight?" he asked. "I'm thinking around seven tonight dear, I'm preparing mutton soup, so it'll take me a while."

"Mutton soup, my, do we have anything to celebrate?" the man said as he kissed his wife.

"I hear Claire has a cough," Hyacinth answered. The man chuckled and set out for work. Adam never understood why they always mentioned the queen in these kinds of situations.

"Time for you to get up too darling, it's nearly half past seven. You need to catch the train to school."

Adam got up from his chair, grabbed his bag and, after a kiss to his mother and her repeating *'he had to do very well this year since it was the only way he was ever going to get what he wanted in life, and he would fail miserably and end up in the slums if he didn't'*, quickly made his way outside. His mom repeated her speech as he left and asked if Adam really understood, but he had already closed the door behind him.

Adam would have to catch the eight o' clock train from Dunston South Station, travel on the train all the way to the centre of the city, and then arrive in time at school.

Arriving there wasn't a big deal, he lived only two blocks from the modern Dunston South Station. He walked over the square in front and observed the building. It was quite a sight. Dunston South wasn't really that wealthy of a district, so the station, with its beautiful large windows and stone statues on the roof, looked ill-placed between these shabby ruins the people called home. It had a clock face on the front of the building, and that was probably one of the few clocks in the entire district, Adam thought.

When he reached platform five, where he remembered from last year the train to Central Station would leave, he caught a group of students standing near the stairs, readying themselves for the first day of school. "Do you think we'll be in class together?" a small brown haired girl asked her friend. The darker haired fellow next to her said he would do anything to not let his *little dove* be in a class all by herself. She hugged him and gave him a little kiss. Further down the platform stood a newspaper-boy. He was screaming the headlines of *The Dunston Times* out loud. Something about the mayor going to Velance soon. A city on the other side of the Great Sea. Adam had heard a lot about it. Especially since there was trouble in the sunny paradise.

An individual, known only as the Velance Killer, had been roaming the city at night, killing young girls, which he then exposed in the streets. Luckily that was all none of his business. There was an entire sea between them, and he wasn't a young girl.

An automated message, a woman's voice, read out an announcement which boomed through the station hall.

'Attention all passengers. The. Eight. O. Two. Train. To. Dunston Central. And. Bruxley. Is arriving. Platform three. This train will stop in –'

Adam froze. He had been waiting for his train on the wrong platform. After melting, he shot off towards the stairs to go down again in the lobby area.

By now, with the eight o' clock hour coming up, this room was packed with people, all trying to get somewhere, all equally annoyed.

Dunston in the morning was charming, Adam thought. People falling over suitcases, conveniently placed in the middle of walkways, the homeless waking up and departing from the station to go and beg. The loud trains arriving, only seeming to do so in packs of ten. The City Watch officers whistling away outside. And the everlasting odour of the Dunstan Beer Company. He made his way through the masses, bumping into only five other students, and quickly found room to go up to platform three.

Storming onto that platform, he saw his train, made his way over and boarded.

Finding his way through the packed carriages, he managed to secure a place where personal space was still considered a thing.

The train left the station and started to roll over the tracks, raised among the rooftops of the city. Looking out of the window, he could already see the centre of the city. It was marked by four tall white chimneys, towering over the houses. The Dunston Science Institute, DSI for short. Dunston served as technological heart of the empire. Ever since the Industrial Revolution started, the DSI had continuously tested the boundaries of science.

Coming into view behind the Institute was an old estate, the Dunston Adrianna School. A structure, at least as impressive, but less appreciated by Adam, for this building was tied in his mind to his history professor, the lovely Mrs Wiggins.

He'd failed last year, and so, because of Mrs Wiggins' judgement, or lack of, as Adam put it, he'd have to go through it, all over again. Even the thought of it dampened his mood. He loathed the fat lady who taught him. He loathed her voice, her presence and her corpulent stature.

It was coming up to 8:30 when the train arrived in the Central Station. People who travelled from Dunston South to the Central Station for the first time would have felt a slight shiver. The station building was twice as big as down South. The ceiling twice as high, and there were twice as many trains.

The overpopulation of the station down South seemed like nothing compared to this place. Shops inside the gilded halls made it double as a centre for all those who were crazy enough to go and browse through shops at this time in the morning.

There was no beer odour here however. The station wanted to give out the impression it was somehow floating above the city, instead of being inside it. Coffee beans simmered and gave off their distinctive smell, in which the station was drenched.

Otherwise the scenes were mostly the same. The only other difference was that the *Dunston Times* newspaper boy here had competition. The elitist *Perceford Daily Gazette*, which was the capital's paper, was read by many superior snobs in Dunston as well. *The Island Standard*, the only newspaper printed throughout the entire empire, from Perceford over Velance to Akancord, was also represented. It gave the poor *Dunston Times* boy quite the challenge getting his hometown paper sold.

Traversing the station wasn't that hard for an experienced student, Adam was able to reach the exit in three minutes, a new personal best.

Emerging into the cityscape was always exciting. The smell of drunk men lying in the streets, children running all over the place, mothers gossiping in the muddled streets. The distinguished reception of the station and the smell of coffee beans was long gone. *What an age to be alive*, Adam thought. The streets were dirty and occasionally flooded by the sewers, which ran underneath.

Adam praised himself a lucky man when he found out today was one of those high-tide days.

After he had finally arrived at school, he checked himself in with the reception clerk in the central hall, and received his schedule for the first day.

Class schedule for first school day

08.45 English

09.30 Geography

10.15 History

11.00 Mathematics

This was alright, though that history hour with Mrs Wiggins would test his patience, he already knew that much.

"Excuse me," a blonde haired, blue eyed girl attracted Adam's attention. He turned around. She didn't wait for him to reply before speaking again. "Do you know where the English class, by mister ... Fondue, is taking place?" Adam cracked a smile, "Come with me, mister Fondo's classroom is this way." The girl's cheeks went red when he corrected her pronunciation.

"I haven't seen you around," Adam broke the silence as they made their ways over to class. "I'm new in Dunston, my father and I moved here from Bruxley in August. Something about a job offering he couldn't let slip," the girl answered.

"I see, I'm Adam by the way," he revealed. "Adam, after the old Adam Callaway?" Lucy asked. "I highly doubt it, I'm a Blackfort," he answered. "Are you related to Alexander Blackfort then?" Lucy asked, slowing down. "He was my uncle," Adam answered.

He was used to the question.

"Ah mister Blackfort, come in, come in," Mister Fondo said when Adam and Lucy appeared in the doorway. He stared at Lucy, his eyes shrunk. "I haven't seen you around school yet, take a seat next to Adam, miss," the teacher ordered. It wasn't like she had a lot of choice, the seat next to Adam was the only available chair in the room.

“Well, as I was saying,” the professor continued after Adam had pulled out his notebook. “English is not going to be a major subject this year, the headmaster hopes you’ve all mastered the skills by now, so we’ll be doing literature for most of the year,” he explained.

Lucy and Adam were at the back of the class, and Lucy quickly found out Adam didn’t hold paying attention too highly. She got distracted when she saw him drawing on the edge of his notebook. “What’s that all about?” she asked. “Just some ideas I have,” he answered, clearly showing off.

If it hadn’t been for Wiggins, he’d be at the College today.

The Callaway College was a revered institution, and only graduates of this school were allowed to join the DSI.

“So what are you going to do after this year?” Adam asked Lucy after a while. She stopped taking notes and turned to him. “Probably something theoretical, I really want to go to the University in the capital,” she said. “To study what?” Adam followed up.

“Probably something in the history department. I’d love to learn more about our island. “Well, you’re going to love Mrs Wiggins then,” Adam said. “Why’s that?” Lucy wondered. “Because she has force-fed me history of the island for twelve years, and you’ll be allowed to enjoy her in all her glory later today, too,” he clarified. Lucy didn’t show it, but she was delighted at the prospect.

"So class, welcome then to the twelfth, and hopefully, last year of your mandatory education. I'm Mrs Wiggins, your history teacher."

Adam started sinking away in his chair the moment that fat woman opened her mouth. Lucy was sitting next to him, more excited. Fifteen minutes later they were already studying the history of the isle. Adam didn't care, he'd never visit New Heaven anyway and if he would, he wouldn't care for its history in the slightest. He didn't have to hear of all these wonderful places and cities on the island.

However, Mrs Wiggins didn't care, she would give him the longest version of the Blackfort Revolution a tenth time, regardless of his interests.

Adam was drawing a silly moustache on the face of Lord Demarnos Proctar. Lucy found it all too interesting, her face probably gave it away when Mrs Wiggins looked in her direction.

"..And even though he fought with the Callaways at the Battle of New Heaven in 1468, he st – Mister Blackfort!" Mrs Wiggins interrupted her interesting story of how New Heaven was founded and walked over to Adam. Her heels were barely managing to keep up her enormous attitude. Gazing down at his paper she had an expression that normal people only have when they see a dead body being eaten by wasps whilst at the same time being on fire. "Adam. Detention. My Office. Noon," she said, apparently unable to make out full sentences after seeing such a disgraceful scene in her classroom. Adam knew this was going to be the talk of her and her chubby friends for the rest of the week.

At a quarter to twelve, Adam said goodbye to Lucy, and went over to the office of the fat lady. Detention lasted two hours. Two hours of Adam and Mrs Wiggins, together in a small office. She gazed over at his desk every so often, to check what he was doing. She probably knew he was only drawing more strange contraptions, but couldn't be bothered to get up and walk all the way over to him, Adam figured. He was here, and that was most important to her.

Dunston, the 30th of October, 1900

School had started again. The second day was easier to justify than the first one for Adam. Once again that lengthy process of kissing mom goodbye, travelling by train, hearing fifty different headlines, seeing drunk men and arriving at school, unfolded. He met Lucy in the courtyard and they discovered their definitive schedules matched.

After school they went to lunch in the city centre. “What are you doing this afternoon?” Adam wondered as they were eating their lunch in a cosy tavern near the city hall. “I’m just going home, read a book I think,” she answered.

“How about I show you something impressive about Dunston instead,” Lucy hesitated a while. “Alright,” she finally said.

They quickly finished their meals, as they both got excited.

“Where are we headed?” she asked after ten minutes of meandering through Dunston. “You’ll see,” Adam said.

After turning a corner, they arrived at a beautiful square with a big white façade at the other side. “This was the palace of the Callaways, when they ruled Dunston. You know, before the revolution,” he said to Lucy. Her mouth fell open, and that was saying something. “Imagine what it’s like inside the place,” she said as they walked closer to the gilded gates.

“I don’t have to, there is a way to get inside,” Adam answered. Lucy’s head jerked in a split second. “Can we go in?” she asked. “Follow me,” Adam answered.

He led her through small alleys near the building until they finally reached some cobblestone stairs, hidden away in the corner of an alleyway.

“You’re sure about this?” Lucy asked as Adam started descending. “I’ve been there loads of times,” he said.

The stairs ended up in the sewers. Occasional iron barred windows let in shards of light. Adam had no trouble navigating these corridors. Lucy struggled a little. It was so dark, and she didn’t know the route. Luckily, they didn’t have to go very far in this underground labyrinth.

Before long they ended up at a small black door. Adam turned around and checked on Lucy. “Ready?” he smiled. “Yes, let’s go,” she answered. He turned the door handle and they were in. “All right, stay close to me, we should stick to the abandoned part,” he whispered.

Pacing through several small walkways, they finally entered one of the palace's rooms through a hidden servant door.

The room had clearly been left alone for a while, yet it was still breath-taking to her. She spent several seconds in awe, before noticing Adam had seated himself on the lounge. "You feel quite at home here, don't you?" Lucy teased. "At least someone enjoys it," Adam answered.

Lucy joined him on the sofa. "So, you come here often?" she asked.

"A few times a month, when I have time, or when I just need to think," he answered. "How did you even find this place?" she asked.

"Dunston's full of hidden underground passages leading to all sorts of places. Mostly dug by thieves who lived a hundred years ago. Me and my friends used to make a sport out of discovering them," he said. "Where are your friends now?" she asked.

"They finished school last year. Some went on a trip to Snowbay, Matthew is studying in Callaway I think. Julia died on the Buxton when it sank in July," Adam said.

He went silent.

"I'm sorry," Lucy said. "It's alright," he answered.

"So what's your story?" Adam asked after a while. "My father and I moved from Bruxley to Dunston a few months ago. He got a promotion, we even got the house we live in with it, if we sold our own to his foreman," she started.

"And where in Dunston is this house?" Adam asked.

"In the High District, on Queen Charlotte Avenue."

"That's a fancy neighbourhood alright," he answered.

"I know! The street is so colourful, all these tall brick houses with all those trees and bushes," she described. "It's the best part of the city." Adam recalled his last visit to the district. "Where do you live?" she asked. "Dunston South, not really such a nice place to be, I'll tell you that."