

The Good Thieves

By Katherine Rundell

Vita set her jaw and nodded at the city in greeting, as a boxer greets an opponent before a fight. She stood alone on the deck of the ship. The sea was wild and stormy, casting salt spray thirty feet into the air, and all the other passengers on the ocean liner, including her mother, had taken sensible refuge in their cabins.

But it is not always sensible to be sensible. Vita had slipped away and stood out in the open, gripping the rail with both hands as the boat crested wave the size of an opera house. So it was that she alone had the first sight of the city.

'There she is!' called a deck hand. 'In the distance, port side!'

New York climbed out of the mist, tall and greyblue and beautiful; so beautiful that it pulled Vita forwards to the bow of the boat to stare. She was leaning over the railing, as far out as she dared, when something came flying at her head.

She gasped and ducked low. A seagull was chasing a young crow across the sky, pecking at its back, wheeling and shrieking in mid-air. Vita frowned. It wasn't, she thought, a fair fight. She felt in her pocket, and her fingers closed on an emerald-green marble. She took aim, a brief and angry calculation of distance and angle, drew back her arm, and threw.

The marble caught the seagull on the exact centre of the back of its skull. The gull gave the scandalised cry of an angry duchess, and the crow spun in the air and sped back towards the skyscrapers of New York.

They took a cab from the docks. Vita's mother carefully counted out a handful of coins, and gave the driver the address.

'As close as we can get for that, please,' she said, and he took in her carefully mended hems and nodded.

Manhattan sped past outside the window, bright bursts of colour amid the storm-beaten brick and stone. They passed a cinema, its walls adorned with pictures of Greta Garbo, and a man selling hot lobster claws out of a cart. A tram thundered past at a crossroads, narrowly missing a van advertising The Colonial Pickle Works. Vita breathed in the city. She tried to memorise the layout of the streets, to build a map behind her eyes; she whispered the names: '*Washington Street, Greenwich Avenue.*'

When the money ran out, they walked. They went as fast as Vita could go in the ferocious wind, suitcases in hand, along Seventh Avenue, dodging pinstripe men and sharp-heeled women. 'There!' said Vita's mother. 'That's Grandpa's flat.'

Monday 15th June

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Vocabulary

1. What does the word 'casting' mean in the context of the third sentence?
2. Refuge is closest in meaning to: a) safety, b) sleeping, c) sitting.
3. What does the 'crested wave the size of an opera house' tell the reader about the size of the wave?
4. What does the word 'scandalised' mean?
5. What does the phrase 'adorned with pictures' mean?

Retrieval

1. Which city have Vita and her mother just arrived in?
2. Find and copy a word which describes the sea.
3. What did Vita see in the air after first sighting the city?
4. What phrase is used to describe the seagull's cry after being hit by the marble?
5. Whilst in the cab, name two things Vita and her mother travelled past.
6. Where are Vita and her mother travelling to?

Inference

1. Why are the passengers taking 'sensible refuge in their cabins'?
2. What do you think the phrase 'But it is not always sensible to be sensible' mean?
3. Why did Vita think the fight between the young crow and seagull is not a 'fair fight'?
4. What do you think the lack of money to pay for a cab all the way to the flat suggests about Vita and her mother?
5. What impression do you get of Vita? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

Challenge

What genre do you think this book is? How do you know?