

Salom led Kevin behind one of the derelict shops in the old shopping precinct.

They walked up an alley scattered with papers and broken bottles. Doors were covered with metal to stop vandals from getting inside, but they had reckoned without the ingenuity of the gangs around here. Or one of them, the Tribe.

'I hope they never knock these old shops down,' Salom said. 'This is our place.' And with that he swung one of the metal doors across and stepped inside.

They were all waiting. Tonight, all of the Tribe were there. Standing, sitting, crouching on upturned boxes, or on old chairs. The shop wasn't dark. It was lit by the eerie glow from candles, which were placed all around the shop floor.

It reminded Kevin of church.

'What are we here for?' For one awful moment he thought that yet another initiation test was involved.

'The oath of allegiance, what else?' Salom said.

Kevin laughed. 'Aw, come on, you're not serious. You expect me to take an oath?'

'It's nothing,' Salom assured him. 'It's the final ritual, then you really *are* one of us.'

This was stupid. Kevin knew it was stupid. But he

said nothing. He let them gather around him, there in the candlelight.

'So, what do I say?' he asked at last.

Salom's voice was solemn. He took a scroll, covered with dark stains, from his inside pocket and began reading. 'Repeat after me. I, Kevin Davidson . . .'

'I, Kevin Davidson . . .'

'Do solemnly swear . . .'

'Do solemnly swear . . .'

'To be a true and faithful member of the Tribe.'

Kevin repeated everything after Salom. Part of him wanted to laugh, but there was also a part that was impressed: by the atmosphere, by the candlelight, by the serious faces all around him.

'I will never disclose any of the Tribe's secrets, I will never betray another member of the Tribe and, if I do, may my heart be ripped out and I be haunted for the rest of my life by ghosts and demons.'

'Is that it?' Kevin said when he had finished.

'No.' Doc stepped from the gloom in a far corner. 'Now you sign it in blood.'

Kevin hesitated. 'My blood?'

'Well, it better not be mine!' This was Torry, and it made everyone in the dark shop laugh.

Except Kevin. He didn't like the idea of this 'blood' at all.

'We've all done it,' Salom reassured him, 'and lived to tell the tale.'

Except Stash . . .

Suddenly, Salom produced a knife from his pocket.