UTTERLY DARK
AND THE FACE OF THE DEEP

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PHILIP REEVE

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AND THE FACE OF THE DEEP

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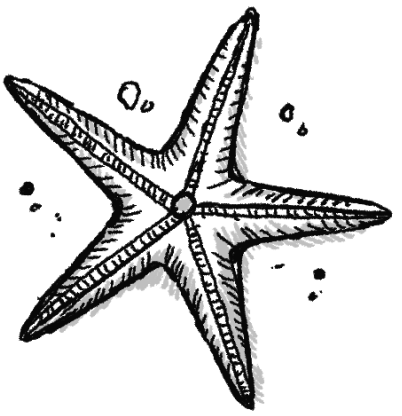
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For my mother, Jean Rosemary Reeve,
and her mother, Lilian Whittle, because
they loved the sea.


N
Three Sisters
Whitlake Mouth
Goat Tarn
High Tarn
Dizzard Tor
Mawgan Cove
R. Trollbrook
Trollbrook Mouth
Trollbridge
Hill Fort
The Knacker's Knife-rack
Crannock Mouth
Stinhall
Stinhall Bay
Compiet's Cove
Stack Head
Stack Bay
Owlsbarrow
Stack
Wheal Tizzy
The Black Hill
Undercliff
Dunes
Stannary
Marazea Bay
Marazea
The Pikelet
Lord Gilpin's Knob
Sundown Watch
St. Chyan's Head
St. Chyan's Common
Long Wood
Merriport Bay
Merriport Hill
Merriport
The Spillikins
WILD SEA



1
AT SUNDOWN WATCH

Utterly Dark lay dreaming of the sea. She dreamed she rode the night wind like a gull, gliding out over the cliff's edge, out over the breaking surf in the cove, and far, far out across the western deeps where all the world was water. The huge waves rolled unbroken for thousands of miles, and the moonlight danced along their crests. It was very quiet, except that the waves rustled a little sometimes when one rose too high and its top broke briefly into foam.

'*Utterly*,' the waves were whispering. '*Utterly . . .*'

A rush of white caught her dreaming eye, and she saw that the waves were starting to part around a rock or reef which lay just beneath the surface. The sea grew troubled. It ceased its whispering and began to roar.

'*Utterly! Utterly Dark!*' Fountains of spray smashed upwards; shattered waves were dragged back like sheets of liquid marble from some vast darkness rising slowly, slowly from the depths . . .

Utterly woke with a start. The memory of her dream was already fading, but she could still hear the sea rolling like soft thunder in the cove. She climbed out of bed and felt her way past the washstand and across the room to the window. When she opened the shutters she saw it was still nearly dark outside. A few last stars were lingering above the crown of ancient standing stones on the headland. Yet strangely, although it was so early, she could hear voices. Something had happened to upset the unvarying rhythms of the house, and Utterly sensed that it was something bad.

Perhaps that was what the sea had been trying to tell her . . .

She dressed without bothering to wash, and went padding barefoot along the passage towards the sound of the voices.

Mr and Mrs Skraeveling were both in the kitchen, talking to some men who had come up from Marazea. The men were not used to being in such a grand old house as Sundown Watch. They held their shapeless hats in front of them in rough, red hands, and spoke shyly in low voices. When Utterly came in, they stopped and stood staring at her in a wary, watchful way, like deer poised to run.

Mrs Skraeveling came over and hugged Utterly. It was a consoling sort of hug, but Utterly did not yet know what she was being consoled for. 'You come along with me, little kitten,' said Mrs Skraeveling, leading her out of the kitchen and into the drawing room. There she broke the news which the men had brought from Marazea.

Mr Andrewe Dark, the Watcher on Wildsea, had been drowned.

❖

Utterly was not sure how to feel. Mr Dark was the kind gentleman who had found her washed up on the shore when she was only a baby, and taken her into his home. She could not exactly claim that she had *loved* him, for he had been rather too stiff and sombre and reserved to love. For love she had always turned to Mr and Mrs Skraeveling, who gave it freely, glad of a new child about the place now that all their own had grown and moved away.

But Mr Dark had always been there, one of the three pillars of her life. Each day had begun with him sitting down opposite Utterly in the breakfast room, taking the top off his boiled egg, and saying, 'Good morning, Utterly, I trust you slept well?' Each day had ended with him stomping up the steep stairs of the Tower to make his observations, and then stomping back down an hour

later to read in his study. In wintertime, Utterly would look in on him there to say goodnight before she went to bed. In summer, when the Watch was later, he would generally say goodnight before he climbed the Tower. Then Utterly would lie in bed and think of him up there in the Watcher's Loft, and wonder what he was seeing through his telescope . . .

She had never particularly liked those things, or disliked them, or even thought about them at all; they had just been part of the settled, comfortable routine of life at Sundown Watch. Now they would never happen again: the morning egg, Mr Dark's footsteps on the Tower stairs, his gruff goodnight, they all belonged to the past, and Utterly's future seemed suddenly uncertain.



The little church behind the dunes at Marazea was as busy as Christmas for the funeral. Everyone wore their Sunday best, and Mrs Skraeveling had tacked a black taffeta veil to her hat. People had come all the way from Stack and Trollbridge to pay their respects to the Watcher, for it was not every day a Watcher died, and none in living memory had drowned. During Reverend Dearlove's sermon, the women in the pew behind Utterly's discussed the affair in scandalized whispers.

'He was *beachcombing*, they do say, and no good did

ever come of that. The Gorm saw him there, and the sea reached out for him and swallowed him up.'

'Yet he had walked the beaches often enough. You would think he'd be wave-wise, being Watcher and all. And they found the body cast up upon the shore, which proves the Gorm did not want him. If the Gorm decides it wants you, it takes you down into its deeps and there is no body to bury, just a memorial service and the less said the better.'

Then the first woman lowered her voice to an even quieter whisper, so soft that Utterly could barely hear it. 'They say the pockets of his coat were full of *stones* . . .'

Utterly did not see what that had to do with anything. Mr Dark had often filled his pockets with little stones and shells and old corks and all the other curious things he found upon the shore. Sometimes when she was little he had let Utterly go beachcombing with him, and while he picked his way along the tidelines she had amused herself by peeking into the rock pools, where anemones waved their pink arms, and the billowy weeds parted sometimes like curtains of mermaid hair to reveal tiny crabs, or limpets out for a walk, or transparent shrimp, almost too small for even Utterly's sharp eyes to see. It was beautiful in those underwater worlds. Once, Utterly had grown so fascinated that after she had been watching for ages and ages she realized that she had pushed her face down through the pool's surface and

was breathing underwater quite contentedly, just like a mermaid.

If only she could have taught Mr Dark that trick, she thought, he would never have been drowned. But Mr Dark had not believed her when she told him about it, and now he lay at the front of the church inside a wooden coffin with brass handles. Utterly had placed a bunch of sea-pinks on the lid. She did not know if Mr Dark had liked sea-pinks, but they grew all over the cliffs around Sundown Watch and she had never heard him say he *disliked* them.

She kept looking at the coffin all through the service, trying to believe that Mr Dark was really in there. It looked too small somehow. But after the last hymn, when Mr Skraeveling and some of the village men lifted it up onto their shoulders to carry it outside, you could see how heavy it was, and that made her realize that poor Mr Dark really was inside it, and that he really was dead.

Outside, a sea wind was blowing clouds across the sky. The graveyard was plunged into shadow each time one passed across the sun. The grass between the gravestones leaned over in the wind, and so did the pink and white daisies that grew in the cracks of the churchyard wall, and the tall, sinister foxgloves which stood sentry upon the top of it. Utterly's long black hair streamed out sideways, for the busy fingers of the wind had undone the ribbon she had tied it with. The white bands of Reverend Dearlove's

collar fluttered wildly as he read the funeral service. Mrs Skraeveling held her hat on and dabbed at her eyes with a handkerchief. The other mourners cast sidelong glances at the dunes, as if they half expected the sea to come rushing over them, filling the grave with water before the sexton could fill it with earth.

❖

Everyone Utterly knew was frightened of the sea. That was why there were no harbours on the western shores of Wildsea, no fishing fleet to be seen in Gorm's Bite or Belfriars Bay, and no one throwing in lines or crab pots to catch the crabs and lobsters which thronged there. That was why people lowered their voices when they talked about the sea. That was why none of the cottages in Marazea had windows on the seaward side. That was why you seldom saw anyone strolling on the beach. Most people tried not even to look at the sea, and when they did they just cast nervous glances at it, as though it were a big, fierce animal which might pounce on them at any moment.

And they were right, thought Utterly. The sea *was* a big, fierce animal – but big, fierce animals could be beautiful, couldn't they? She loved the way the great waves moved under the surface of the sea like muscles flexing beneath its chameleon skin. She loved the way it twinkled so

merrily on sunny days, and raged so furiously on winter ones. Sometimes she thought she could remember how the sea had gently rocked her up and down in the little boat that had carried her to Wildsea's shores before Mr Dark had found her. She thought the sea remembered that too, because she sometimes sensed it watching her, and sometimes if she woke at night she would lie in bed and listen to the waves whispering *hush, hush, hush* against the shore, and let her own breathing fall into the rhythm of it, until the sea sang her back to sleep.

She wished she could explain those things to the grown-ups. She thought it sad they were so fearful of the sea. If they could not even bring themselves to look at it, then who would take over Mr Dark's duties? Because now that Mr Dark was dead someone would have to take his place. Someone had to be the Watcher on Wildsea.