The SECRET *of* HAVEN POINT

LISETTE AUTON

The SECRET *of* HAVEN POINT

Illustrated by Valentina Toro





PUFFIN

PUFFIN BOOKS

UK | USA | Canada | Ireland | Australia
India | New Zealand | South Africa

Puffin Books is part of the Penguin Random House group of companies
whose addresses can be found at global.penguinrandomhouse.com.

www.penguin.co.uk
www.puffin.co.uk
www.ladybird.co.uk



Penguin
Random House
UK

First published 2022

001

Text copyright © Lisette Auton, 2022
Cover illustration copyright © Gillian Gamble, 2022
Interior illustrations copyright © Valentina Toro, 2022
Map and lighthouse illustration copyright © Luke Ashforth, 2022

With thanks to Inclusive Minds for connecting us with their Inclusion Ambassador network, in particular Rebecca Thorne for their input.

The moral right of the author and illustrators has been asserted

Typeset in 12.5/18.5pt Bembo Book MT Std by Jouve (UK), Milton Keynes
Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

The authorized representative in the EEA is Penguin Random House Ireland,
Morrison Chambers, 32 Nassau Street, Dublin D02 YH68

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978–0–241–52203–5

All correspondence to:
Puffin Books
Penguin Random House Children's
One Embassy Gardens, 8 Viaduct Gardens, London SW11 7BW



Penguin Random House is committed to a sustainable future for our business, our readers and our planet. This book is made from Forest Stewardship Council® certified paper.

*This book is dedicated to Alex David Gray**

* 'Aunty, what are you doing?'

'Editing my book.'

'Who are you going to dedicate it to?'

'I don't know yet.'

'You could do it to me, Marky or Mum.'

'OK, I'll have a think about it.'

'Me. Dedicate it to me. They can have books two and three.'

On Language

A Note from the Author

In *The Secret of Haven Point*, Cap'n teaches Alpha and all the Wrecklings that language is really important and powerful. He is able to teach them that because *I've* been taught it too, by incredible disabled people who I've had the good fortune to meet and work alongside and then call my friends. I made conscious choices in this book about the way the characters choose to describe themselves. These choices are based on the way I describe myself as a disabled person. I also asked my disabled friends about the language they use to describe their impairments and conditions, and then I used those words too.

Person-first language: Some people choose to use the phrase 'people with a disability'.

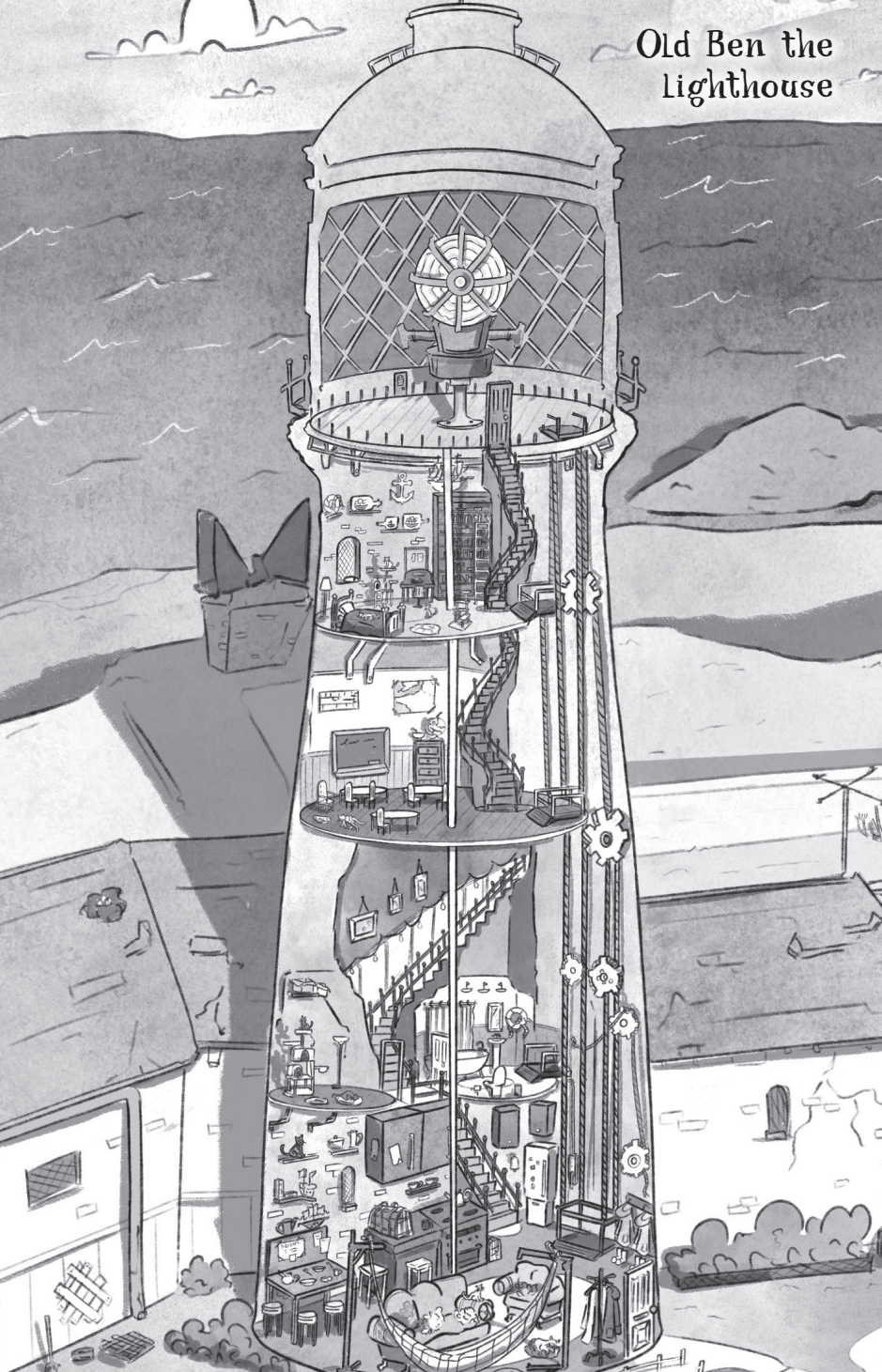
Identity-first language: I choose identity-first language when I say 'I'm a disabled person' and it's the way my characters describe themselves too. It means that I focus on the fact that I think my body and brain are brilliant exactly the way they are. It says that society needs to change – not me. *Disabled* is a strong, empowering word. There is no shame in using it!

Individual choice is very important, and we must always respect each other's decisions and be kind to each other when it comes to the words we choose for ourselves, and the ways in which we describe our own impairments.

I loved writing this book and getting to know all the characters, but I'm a bit nervous about my words going out into the world, not least because of the pressure I felt to get everything 'right'. There are millions of books with non-disabled characters, and no one expects an author of one of those to get everything 'right'. Those books feature lots of different characters doing all sorts of things, and if, as a reader, you don't like it, you can

easily put that book down and pick another up instead. There are still too few books with disabled people getting up to things. That means there is a lot of pressure on a disabled author like me to represent everybody by using all the 'right' words. So I have done my very best to write the story I wished *I* could have read, and write the characters that were missing from *my* bookshelf.

I really, really hope that if you enjoy this book you might ask your librarian, your bookseller, your teacher for more books with disabled characters written by disabled people. And if they can't find many, perhaps you could ask them to find out why. And then, just maybe, we can make a big enough noise that tells the IMPORTANT PEOPLE that these books are very necessary and wanted. And maybe then, if you'd like to be an author too when you grow up, *your* book describing characters in the important words that are right for you will find a home. Then there will be lots of books full of all sorts of disabled characters, having lots of different sorts of incredible adventures, written in different sorts of the 'right' words that fill the shelves, so that everybody can have a choice about which powerful and important words they read.


Old Ben the
lighthouse




Haven Point



Chapter One

Here are the facts:

1. My name is Alpha Lux. *Alpha* because it's the first letter of the Greek alphabet and I was Wreckling number one. *Lux* because the box I was found in had LUX SOAP FLAKES written all over it.
2. My face looks like a flame-grilled jellyfish.
3. I was raised by a mermaid.
4. I always tell the truth.

I'll give you a bit of time to let that sink in.

Ready?

Then let's begin . . .



Chapter Two

I was Haven Point's first Wreckling, but I certainly wasn't the last. There are forty-two of us now, not including the mermaids. When you're a Wreckling, you mainly spend your days squabbling, eating and planning adventures. Well, at least that's what my gang does. Oh, and Wrecklings also carry out *wreckings*, which is how we got our name.

These days we leave blankets in the Lux Soap Flakes box, and it's under the porch so no new Wrecklings have to get damp and cold like I did.

★

There was a full moon the night Cap'n found me. He thought I was a dead 'un, nowt but blisters and scrawn.

Back then he lived in Old Ben, the lighthouse, all by himself. (The mermaids only started coming ashore after I arrived.)

Cap'n was outside because he's terrified to sleep on a full moon. He says it's the height of sea-magic and he worries that the waves in his dreams will steal him away. So imagine this: he's leaning on the rat-a-tat tree where the woodpecker lives, watching storm clouds roll across the horizon with the big sea-magic moon in the sky, Old Ben with his red and white stripes standing to attention behind Cap'n just like his shadow.

The full moon sets Cap'n's nerves on edge. It's like he can feel the blood pulsing through him in time with the waves. All his senses are heightened and shadows are making ordinary things look sinister and unreal. And then . . .

(This is where you get to meet me.)

. . . he hears the cats fighting. They sound like babies squalling, and Cap'n is fed up of them unsettling the kitten that lives in his beard. He sighs and gets the broom from the porch.

The whole world is made of shadows on a night like

this. His boots crunch along the gravel and then *shloop* into the damp grass as he follows his ears, chuntering to himself as he goes.

There's a box by the wall and he thinks the bloomin' cats must have got themselves stuck in there. It's a really old box; it probably came from one of Cap'n's wreckings. (I'll tell you about them later.) And printed all over the top it says:

Lux Soap Flakes - cares for special things

I guess it did just that.

I love it when Cap'n tells me this next bit, cos he acts it out and does all the faces. He's really good at them.

Cap'n sees that the lid of the box has been closed in that way where the four flaps fold over each other. He doesn't wonder how the box got folded back up after the cats got in. Instead, he's on guard with his broom drawn like a sword because he knows furious cats are about to come hurtling out at him, and the kitten in his beard is mewing and scrabbling.

He holds his breath.

He pauses.

Then whips open the box, closes his eyes and prepares to be attacked.

Nothing happens.

He opens one eye.

He opens the other eye to see if it tells him what the first one did.

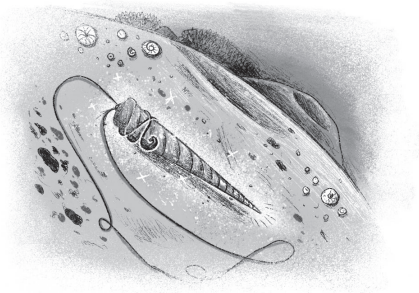
He sees me.

'Holy Neptune!' he whispers.

Then he drops the broom and goes helter-skelter skidding on the shloopy grass and rings the huge brass bell, which has a handwritten label above it that says:

EMERGENCY USE ONLY

I mean, I was there and I don't remember any of it. But it's a damn good story the way he tells it.



Chapter Three

At Haven Point, we're all bound by the laws of the water. Did you know that waves make different noises, depending on how the day is feeling? When it's angry, the sea is just this low-down, rolling roar that sets your tummy a bit iffy.

Today is Sunday and it's indifferent. I knew it the moment I woke up. I could hear the sea gliding in and out, like it can't even be bothered to make waves. A sound like can't-be-botheredness.

If it stays like this, it'll be perfect for tonight's wrecking.

None of the other Wrecklings are up yet. Not Jericho or Willis, or Badger – my best friend who goes

everywhere with me, except for this morning when I've left her snuffle-snoring in her hammock. She's not an actual badger – that'd be silly. She has a pitch-black Afro with one white streak, which is where her name comes from.

She can't get to In Deep with the mermaids anyway; none of the other Wrecklings can. And that's where I'm headed today – In Deep – to see Ephyra and the other mermaids for the first time in ages.

I'm leaning over the thick whitewashed wall at the end of the lighthouse garden. From here, I can see all the way out to the foghorn that squats on the cliff edge, and the lift beside it that leads down to the beach – and, beyond it all, the sea. This is the exact place where I was found in the box nearly twelve years ago. I love it when I have this spot all to myself. You don't get hardly any time alone here. Moments like this, with no one yelling? Brilliant.

I head through the gate, knocking twice on the wall as I go. That way I know I'll return. We're a superstitious lot here – I reckon it comes from Cap'n and his seafaring days. The sea is wild and we'll do anything we can to calm it. Knock on the wall, cross our fingers and think of knots: we're all for it.

I walk towards the foghorn. It's a white bell shape, like a short windmill, but instead of blades it's got two black horns sticking out of the top. I strike out to the left of the foghorn and reach the lift that will take me from the clifftop down to the beach. I press the button and wait, taking in a deep lungful of salty air.

Beyond the rickety steps that start beside the lift and zigzag down to the beach, I can just see the edge of Camel's Island, the humpback lump of rock that separates our bay from the salt beds.

I turn and look back at Old Ben, the lighthouse. His posh name is Old Benevolent – he's a burst of bright red and white stripes on the clifftop, surrounded by a little clump of ramshackle houses and outbuildings, all kept in place by the thick whitewashed wall. The wall needs to be solid because when the wind howls – which it often does – the sky and sea churn, trying to outdo each other, and it feels like the wind could whip us all up and drop us over the cliff edge into the sea. When the lightning flashes, the whole bay lights up and makes your eyes burn. Not literally. You wouldn't like that. My left eye must've got burned when I was a baby, Cap'n says. It melted, fusing my eyelid with my cheek. My left ear too, so it works, kind of, but it's just a hole

with no fancy bit to protect it, or to wear shells in like Ephyra does. When the wind howls, it just goes straight on in there and stays.

Haven Point, Wrecklings' territory, is like our very own island, even though we're attached to the mainland. I sometimes lie on my back, stare up at the sky and imagine that I'm soaring like a seagull and I can look down and see Old Ben in the centre of Haven Point – he's like our castle with all our higgledy-piggledy buildings surrounding him. I flap my wings and catch an uplift to glide round the edges of our territory. I fly from the point where the salt beds touch the sea, all the way up the cliff face to the green, grassy Leas where Old Ben stands guard behind the whitewashed wall. I drift south and skirt the edge of our allotment at Spuggie's Lawe, then west to the quarry with the white horse we painted on the hillside, and north right up to the old pillbox. I finish the loop to land back at Old Ben.

Every good castle needs a moat because they keep people out. The way we do that here is with the Boundaries. They're the reason why you don't find us on any map and why you've never heard of us before. They are our invisible moat that keeps us safe and hidden from the Outside. At the start of every year, we

sing the Boundaries. Everyone, even the toddlers. We fuel their power.

Cap'n made the Boundaries when he first moved here and set up his home in the abandoned lighthouse where he could watch and wait for his sister who was lost at sea. He'd pace round and round, hoping for her return. I know what it feels like to wait for someone.

The big word for the thing that started to creep inside Cap'n when he lost his sister is 'agoraphobia', which you say like *ag-or-a-foe-bee-ya*. It means he doesn't go outside. He can force himself when it's an emergency, and he has to, but Cap'n feels better when he's indoors.

When he first arrived at Haven Point, the only way he could keep going outside was to sing made-up songs to help him feel safe. He hoped the songs would guide his sister home, but they never did.

And that's all we know about his sister. Cap'n clams up if we ask about her. I don't even know her name.

After some time Cap'n realized there must be sea-magic in his songs because they'd built an invisible wall round his lighthouse, the moat protecting our castle. Eventually, Old Ben and the whole of Haven Point disappeared from memories and maps. Vanished.

That's a good thing, by the way. Because there was

more than just the Boundaries in the sea-magic of Cap'n's songs: they became an invitation and a map too. You see, everyone who finds this place and becomes a Wreckling is disabled. If you're not, you're an Outsider, and no Outsider has ever made it past the Boundaries. Cap'n, without even realizing it, made us a home here to live as we want, exactly as we are. No need to change, or hide, or have to try to do things the 'proper' way.

I don't remember life beyond the Boundaries. I was a tiny baby when I arrived. Haven Point is my home, my life, all I've ever known. From what I can gather from the other Wrecklings, well, the world outside Haven Point is cruel. I'm not scared of much, but I am terrified of the Outside, of Outsiders.

★

The lift pops me out at the bottom of the cliff, just along from the sea caves, and I trudge down the beach. The soft sand knackers my legs, and the seagulls slumped on their nests caw in sympathy.

I'm nearly In Deep, nearly with Ephyra.

Ephyra is my not-mam, my not-big sister – she's my everything.

She's a mermaid, the one who came when Cap'n

rang the EMERGENCY USE ONLY bell, way back when he found me.

She's the one who always comes.

We share the sea with the mermaids. Marsden Rock, which looms offshore, just in front of me, is really mermaid territory, but we have their permission to climb it. It's massive. At high tide, the rock rises out of the sea and you have to swim out to it, but it's low tide now and it looks like it's been plonked on the wet sand.

Marsden Rock is flat, as if a sea god had reached up and beheaded it with a trident. On the side, there's a metal ladder and a pulley system to raise us up to the top. It's a tall rock. Like, really-don't-go-near-the-edge sort of tall, and it's always covered in seagulls. Badger has to watch out if she gets close to Marsden Rock because she always gets bird-luck poop spattered on her head. I reckon it's because the birds appreciate that she can imitate all their calls, and they want to mark her as one of their own. But she hates that it gets her hauled in for a bath by Norma.

Marsden Rock is as big as a football pitch on top, though I wouldn't recommend playing it up there. We tried once, but ended up just sitting around, waiting the

whole time for someone to go all the way down the ladder, swim to get the ball, and then come back up again.

Beyond Marsden Rock is In Deep. That's where the mermaids live and no Wreckling goes there. Ever. Not even Cap'n.

Except, of course, for me.

I'm the only one who was given the special saltwater charm that allows me to enter the mermaids' home. Well, it's more like a lair. The word 'home' makes you think of crumpets and curtains and cats, and it's really nothing like that at all.

★

The bored waves still keep me in trudge-mode even though the sand is easier to walk on here – hard, licked by the sea.

Then I feel it.

I've suddenly got goosebumps. The bad kind.

Something's wrong.

I glance back over my shoulder. Is Badger sneaking up on me?

No. Was that something on the clifftop? Something catching the light?

I shake my head to knock the silly out of me. A small glint on the clifftop doesn't mean it's *her* coming for me. She couldn't get through the Boundaries anyway – she's an Outsider. Sometimes the sound of the sea eats my sensible head and makes my mind race.

It's not the first time I've got goosebumps like that, and this last fortnight it's happened more than ever, to the point where I haven't been able to hide it like I usually can. Badger caught me looking over my shoulder the other day when we were eating pilfered stotties and pease pudding on the cliff edge. 'Do you think it's *her*?' she asked.

I pretended I didn't know who she was talking about, hoping she'd get the hint and shut up. She didn't. 'You know, your *mam*?'

'Don't be daft,' I said.

I pinched a bit of her stottie, knowing she'd duff me up and would miss me catching my breath.

★

I'm *really* excited to see Ephyra. I've heart-missed her. Recently, Ephyra and her mermaid clan have had Important Meetings and Things and I haven't been invited.

Ephyra took my charm away to make sure I couldn't go In Deep by myself any more.

I humphed. She patted me on the head. I growled. She kissed me and swam away.

But this morning there was a shark tooth on my pillow, with its gummy edges still bloody. A proper mermaid invitation if ever I saw one.

★

At last, I'm standing in front of a mass of scrubby bushes at the edge of the shore, in line with Marsden Rock. This is No Entry, the only entrance to In Deep. It's covered with plants that smell of cat wee, brambles with dagger thorns, and the kind of nettles that sting so deep they reach your bones and then knack for weeks.

You can only get to In Deep if you go *through* No Entry. That's sea-magic for you.

In Deep is the part of the undersea where Ephyra and her Northern Clan live. She's the head, which makes her the boss.

The fairy tales got it half right about mermaids, as most fairy tales do. They say that mermaids use their song as a trap to attract the attention of sailors and lead

them to their death. Which is a bit overdramatic and completely misses the point of the really useful bit.

And that's exactly the way the mermaids want it.

The mermaids' song stops memories from forming. There are some gossamer strands of the fantastical left inside sailors' heads and these grow into legend as all good sea stories do.

There's only one sailor who has ever outwitted the mermaids, and he runs our lighthouse.

★

I take a step into No Entry – and a bramble snags on my leg.

That never happens. I usually glide straight through. When I bend to remove the bramble, the dagger thorn lurking just beside it doesn't shimmer and disappear like it should. Instead, it slices my right arm from my jutty wrist bone all the way to my elbow.

At first, there's no pain, just shock.

Then I see the blood and all the 'ow' comes in one heat spike of every swear word only Badger knows I know. I sit down fast, not cos I want to, but because that's what my legs do. The edges of the cut are white

and the blood is red and it's dripping into the damp sand, making patterns in its ridges.

I tried to enter without my saltwater charm.

That's what excitement does: turns you into a newbie and makes you go all helter-skelter into half-baked unthinkings.

Suddenly the burrs and dagger thorns shimmer, showing the hidden path I couldn't find, and there's Ephyra.

'Hey, my sweet,' she says, making a grand entrance with her arms raised. She's dangling my silver urchin-spine charm from her fingertips. Then she realizes I'm all bloody.

'Alpha! What have you done?'

Ephyra plops down beside me and kisses my forehead, takes my hand. She's the only one who's ever kissed my scarred face. Cap'n says it's the first thing she did when we met and that's how he knew I'd be hers and she'd be mine, even though Ephyra herself didn't know it yet.

'You forgot you didn't have your charm?'

My charm. The first time Ephyra put it round my neck and we walked through No Entry together. I toddled then, barely came up to her knees. She said I needed to

find my water legs. Back then I thought everyone went In Deep. When I found out I was the only Wreckling who'd ever been there, this special bit of me filled up with honey as sweet as when the bees have been feasting on lavender. I felt gooey and warm. When I asked Cap'n what it meant, he said it was love.

I nod in response to Ephyra's question. Then remember I'm cross she took it from me, and I don't want her to know that my excitement at seeing her made me forget.

So I shake my head. 'It's your fault. If you hadn't *unlawfully* taken and exercised *unlawful control* over my charm with intent to deprive me *thereof*, I would've been fine.'

'Kelvin been teaching criminal-law classes again?' asks Ephyra.

'Yup. That's the first time I've ever been able to use any of it, mind.'

'Feeling a bit smug, are we?'

'Nope, not smug. Vindicated, correct, injured – and mainly just really angry.'

'Why angry? At me?'

'Yes, of course at you! You took my charm! I've got a gouge out of my arm because of you!'

'Fair enough.'

Ephyra looks at me. She's not one of those adults who try to make it better when you don't want them to. I hold on to my rage for seven more seconds, then I let it go. It's impossible to stay angry at Ephyra.

Mermaids aren't magic – they get really huffy if you call them that – but bits of them really behave as if they are. Like their legs. Mermaids have tails, not legs. But if they're wearing their saltwater charm, then what they need appears, which are legs, *land legs*. That's how Ephyra reached me on the sand. Not that she uses them very often. Ephyra just about tolerates being on the beach or the salt beds, but now I'm bigger and more self-sufficient she won't come any further Up Top.

From the net bag at her waist, she pulls out a large clamshell and opens it.

Pine sap. It's like superglue. She trades it with Cap'n for squid ink.

She puts a blob of sap on her right index finger and takes my arm. 'Ready?' she asks. 'Think nice things.'

I say, 'Yes,' but inside my head I say *no*, so I clamp my teeth tight instead, hard enough to make the bit below my earholes jut out where my gills will appear. I close my right eye. My left one permanently does the job for me.

Think nice things. Override the pain.

OK.

Ephyra presses the sap on my arm and I completely lose my stuff, my happy things, and yell all those swear words only Badger knows I know.

Now Ephyra knows too.

'Potty mouth,' she says.

When I open my eye and look down, there's an amber track along my arm, like a slug trail. It's bloody, but that's just dried stuff that had already come out; the rest of me is now staying in. Mermaid healing works fast.

I snort. 'Potty mouth? Is that the best you can do?'

'Well, I certainly can't beat you, can I? Ready?' She takes my hand and hauls me up with her.

'I'm ready.'

I take a deep breath as she places the silver spine round my neck. The strand is long and narrow, almost invisible. It comes from an urchin that never stops growing, so many fathoms deep that it barely exists in memory.

Ephyra drops it over my head and, as soon as it lands on my skin, it scuffles round and round and digs, digs, digs. It's not painful, it's woozy – like landsickness, like

the sea is claiming me as one of its own. Then it's over and I touch my neck. The spine is in my skin and on my skin, like the echo of a silver necklace.

Ephyra's charm is a vial of saltwater made of abalone, a shell with a shiny rainbow inside. The stopper is a pear-shaped pearl. My charm doesn't look anything like hers, but it's like they're two halves of a whole and, when they're together, it's electricity and balance. Same as us. When I asked why mine is just an urchin-spine strand, not anywhere near as pretty as hers, she said not everything beautiful *is* beautiful. Sometimes she speaks proper weird.

I *covet* her charm, which means I really, really want it. It's silly because I have no need for it. It's what allows Ephyra and her clan to be on land, gives them their land legs, just like my charm is the thing that allows me to get through No Entry and then gives me my tail and gills when I'm In Deep. Without her charm, Ephyra couldn't leave the sea. If she lost it on land, she would drown in the air. That's another reason for her sharpened teeth, as it is with all animals: to protect the things she needs.

I'm one of those things.

★

This time the brambles and branches shimmer, like Ephyra's land legs, and hand in hand we make our way through No Entry together.

The air becomes damp and cool as we walk inside the base of Marsden Rock, which seems impossible to reach from No Entry and yet we always arrive here. We come to a stop inside a cave that the sea has gouged out of rock. Sometimes the sea is a sculptor: it gave us the Stacks on the beach, like tall, skinny Cleopatra's Needle, which Badger perches on when we do wreckings, and Lot's Wife that stands to attention out beyond the foghorn.

Layers of yellow and gold sandstone lie above us, sparkle motes drifting in the air.

We face a gap in the rock the size of a lighthouse windowpane, in a perfect right-angled triangle. The edges are sea-smoothed and old. It's the only thing between us and the sea. The Triangle is what I call it. Mermaids don't go in for names, so I've had to do loads of labelling around here.

We wait.

You can't hurry this bit.

It took me a long time to be able to go In Deep without Ephyra. I'm not sure I was ever meant to learn, which was why she had to take my charm away.

You can't see when it's the right time to go In Deep. You have to *feel* it.

The waves dance at an angle behind the Triangle.

We're waiting and, when the waves form a web, we dive through.