Books by Katya Balen

The Thames and Tide Club: The Secret City

The Space We're In

October, October

The Light in Everything

KATYA BALEN

Illustrated by RACHAEL DEAN





BLOOMSBURY
CHILDREN'S BOOKS
LONDON OXFORD NEW YORK NEW DELHI SYDNEY

BLOOMSBURY CHILDREN'S BOOKS
Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
50 Bedford Square, London WC1B 3DP, UK
29 Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin 2, Ireland

BLOOMSBURY, BLOOMSBURY CHILDREN'S BOOKS and the
Diana logo are trademarks of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

First published in Great Britain in 2023 by Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

Text copyright Katya Balen, 2023
Illustrations copyright © Rachael Dean, 2023

Katya Balen and Rachael Dean have asserted their rights under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as Author and Illustrator of this work

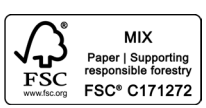
All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publishers

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

ISBN: PB: 978-1-5266-4048-2; eBook: 978-1-5266-4046-8;
ePDF: 978-1-5266-4047-5

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

Typeset by RefineCatch Limited, Bungay, Suffolk
Printed and bound in Great Britain by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY



To find out more about our authors and books visit www.bloomsbury.com
and sign up for our newsletters

For Mia and Meirav, who are so bright and brilliant



It was midnight and everything was exactly as you'd expect it to be in London on a chilly April night.

Except for one thing.

In the middle of the river.

Right there. In the water.

A swirl of what looked like a bright pink ballgown.

A screech. A wail. A cry that sounded a lot like

I want it back nooooooooooooow!

A very, very big splash.

And then the drains all around the river exploded.



CHAPTER 1

The day that everything went completely wrong and really quite weird started off like every other Saturday.

Clem Carden put on her green raincoat, red wellies and her knitted yellow hat, just like she always did. She looked a bit like a Christmas tree.

She checked her pockets for her emergency

Oyster travel card in case she needed to get an emergency bus, and for her emergency money in case she needed to buy emergency cake. Then Clem picked up her bucket and her trowel from beside the front door and ran down the stairs of her building, just like she always did. She tripped over Raj's toy teddy bear on the next landing, just like she always did. She got up, brushed off her knees and darted down the next flight of stairs. She took extra special care to avoid Mrs Henderson's evil ginger cat, Floofer, on floor 3, just like she always did. Floofer yowled at her menacingly. He was a thug with whiskers and a love of cod.

Floofer neatly avoided, Clem jumped down three steps in one go in a whirl of flapping green raincoat. She knocked her special secret knock on Ash and Zara's door. There was the usual scuffling and the unmistakable sound of someone being shoved into an umbrella stand, and then the door was flung open.

'Let's go!' shouted Ash, because he always shouted. He was stuffing his pockets with cheese and pickle sandwiches and trying to pull on his muddy boots at the same time. He fell over, and Floofer darted in and took a sandwich.



‘Talk quieter, dingus,’ said Zara, because she hated Ash’s shouting. In fairness, Ash’s voice was easily as loud as a jumbo jet. Zara was completely ready, and her boots were perfectly clean. Ash and Zara were about as different as two people could be, which was why they both suspected the other one had been discovered by their parents in a bin as a baby.

‘Have you got your buckets?’ asked Clem, because Ash always forgot. Like clockwork, he bounced back into the flat and returned holding his red finds bucket.

They carried on down the stairs, knocking on Raj’s door and Mrs Drummonds’s door. Outside their block of flats, they knocked at Mr Zafar’s house right in the middle of Elm Estate, and then finally Sol’s house just by

the community centre. It was time to head off to the river in a rowdy group.

They were going mudlarking.



CHAPTER 2

‘Mudlarking is the best thing in the world,’ said Ash as they bounded along the road. ‘Except for maybe laser sharks.’

Clem definitely agreed, except for the laser shark bit. Mudlarking was treasure-hunting. It was story-finding. It was magic. The group visited the river every week to see what had washed up on the shore. Clem was a very

good mudlark. She had eagle eyes – she could spot things no one else seemed to see.

'Last week I found a glass eye, you know,' said Mr Zafar. 'I've stuck it on my front door so I can always see what's going on.' He winked at Clem as Ash squealed in horror. Which was a bit ridiculous, because last week Ash had found a *very* dead bird and been utterly delighted.

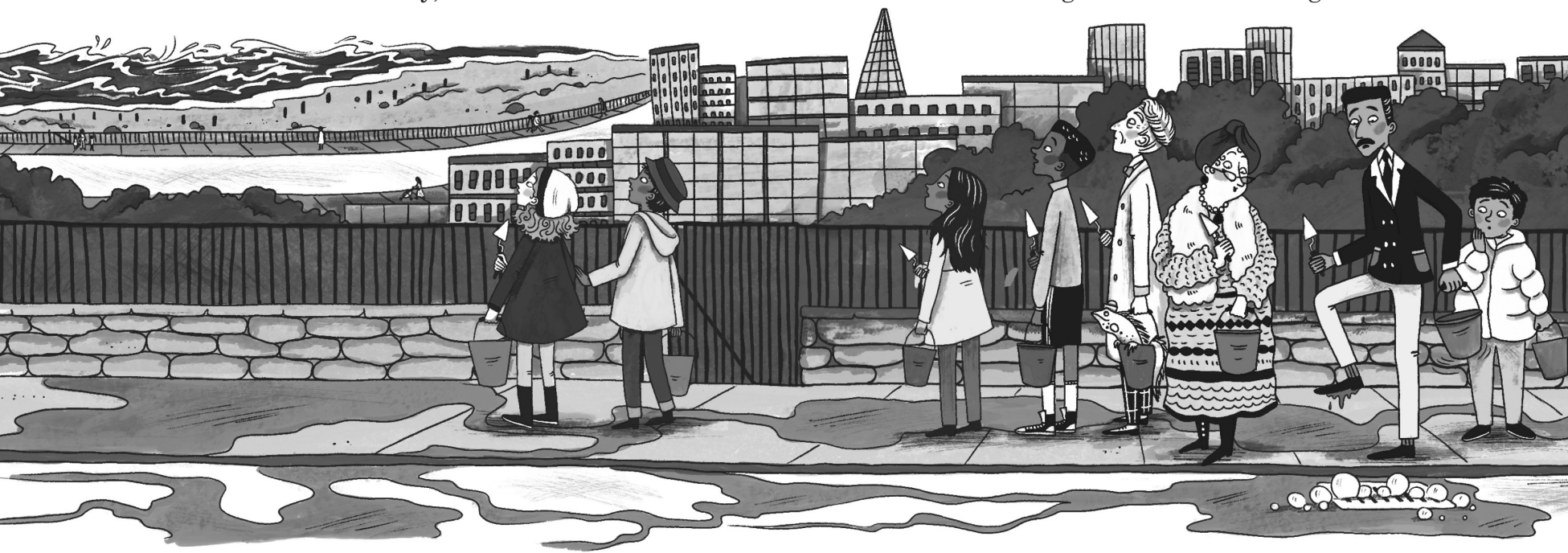
'Look at that,' said Mrs Drummonds. She was pointing at the river in the distance. There was no wind today, but the river was whirling and frothing and spitting. 'It looks angry! I've never seen that before.'

'Maybe the tide is very energetic today,' said Zara. She loved science, facts and rational explanations.

'Maybe it's a shark!' said Ash. He did not like any of those sensible things.

'It's very strange,' said Mr Zafar. 'And all the drains are bubbling! It's not even rained and the ground is soaking.'

Clem was glad she was wearing wellies.



The group went past Mr Kostas's bakery and Clem's mouth watered at the smell of fresh bread. She used her emergency money to buy enough of his famous cherry cupcakes for the group for their tea break. Clem thought Mr Kostas looked a bit distracted as he put her cakes in a brown box and tied it with green string. But then he gave her a free chocolate coin with a big smile, and she was sure she'd just imagined it. She walked out, not noticing puddles of water gathering on the shop floor.

They reached the mudlarking museum, where they always left their bags. Oswald the museum owner was standing in the doorway, feeding some salad to his pet iguana, Gerald. Gerald was wearing a small sailor's hat. To some people, this might have

looked odd, but it was completely normal for the mudlarks, and for Gerald.

'Hello, Thames and Tide Club,' said Oswald as he gave Gerald a cherry tomato. 'All set for today?' Oswald was the one who had set up the mudlarking group. He never came with them because he said he couldn't leave the museum unattended, but he always wanted to see what they'd found.

'What do you think we'll find today?' asked Ash excitedly. 'A shark? A laser shark? A laser shark with a million pounds attached to its fin?'

'Coooooool,' said Sol. 'Yeah, I want to find that shark! Imagine bringing it to show-and-tell!'

'Mrs Bingham would *hate* it,' said Raj happily, as Mr Zafar passed round pieces of

his world-famous, or at least Elm Estate-famous, halva.

'I want a fossil,' said Zara firmly. 'Something I can study under my microscope.'

Ash opened his mouth but Clem shoved him gently into a bush. She didn't want another argument.

Oswald squinted at the spitting river and the drains that were bubbling strangely in the gutter.

'I think today might just be the day for finding something quite extraordinary,' he said quietly. So quietly that Clem thought she might have been the only person who heard him at all.



CHAPTER 3

The group climbed down the steps to the riverside. Clem stared at the churning water. It was definitely furious. It was like the sea during a storm, but the sky above was blue and beautiful. Or was it? Clem squinted up at the sun.

It disappeared almost instantly.

The sky was turning storm-cloud purple.