"A voice unlike any other"
STRUAN MURRAY

"Thoughtful, calm, beautiful and wise"
ROSS MONTGOMERY

nightjar



KATYA BALEN

Illustrated by Richard Johnson

Praise for … *Birdsong*

Nominated for the 2023 Carnegie Medal

"Word perfect. Note perfect" **PHIL EARLE**

"Made me cry … Beautiful" **JACKIE MORRIS**

"In the same way a great piece of music or an especially stirring sequence in film can overwhelm you, *Birdsong* fills you to the brim and threatens to spill over … It's utterly singular and a triumph" **JUST IMAGINE**

"A perfectly structured novella" **WATERSTONES**

"Pitch-perfect" **SARAH ANN JUCKES**

"Layered, subtle, strong and so, so moving, this is a very special book" **LESLEY PARR**

"A moving story about reconnecting with your feelings, and being brave enough to try" **BOOKTRUST**

"BEAUTIFUL … [Katya's] writing makes me see the world afresh" **SOPHIE KIRTLEY**

"Mesmerising … An absolute masterpiece" **KEVIN COBANE**

"A magical and memorable story, full of empathy, warmth, a rollercoaster of emotions and an uplifting ending"
THE SCHOOL READING LIST

"[Katya's] stories read like poetry, inviting us to see the world intimately … Beautiful with a touching ending" **MAT TOBIN**

"Turns perfection into simplicity. And simplicity into perfection … [*Birdsong*] finds music in a small patch of wilderness that can once again become the whole world, if we let it" **GORDON ASKEW, MAGIC FICTION SINCE POTTER**

"Pretty much the perfect children's novella" **JAMES HADDELL**

"Exquisite. I have read it three times, and each time it heals my heart a little more" **EDSPIRE**

"An absolutely stunning novella, simple, yet deeply powerful, where every sentence is carefully crafted so that not a single word is without purpose" **JEN O'BRIEN**

"A shining example of how less is more" **ANNE THOMPSON, A LIBRARY LADY**

"This year's must-read" **MELISSA JORDAN**

"I couldn't put it down and my heart is soaring. It is simply wonderful. [Katya] has written something special here" **TEACHER**

"A sheer masterclass" **GREAT BRITISH BOOKWORM**

"A lot of people will be able to connect with Annie on some level – healing, new friendships, starting over. I read it in one sitting" **KID'S REVIEW, AGED 14**


nightjar

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Barrington Stoke

First published in 2023 in Great Britain by
Barrington Stoke Ltd
18 Walker Street, Edinburgh, EH3 7LP

www.barringtonstoke.co.uk

Text © 2023 Katya Balen
Illustrations © 2023 Richard Johnson

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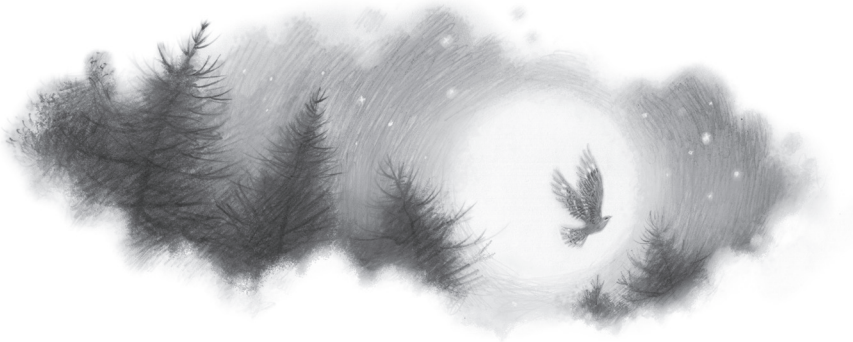
A CIP catalogue record for this book is available
from the British Library upon request

ISBN: 978-1-80090-166-7

Printed in Great Britain by Charlesworth Press

To Sara Halter – for friendship, bad TV, bagels and hippos. You are the very best.





Chapter 1

I wake up in the pink light of early morning. For a moment I'm not sure why my eyes are open. There's a trilling in my ears and in a dream-haze I panic. Has the tiny sparrow tucked away in a cosy shoebox in the bottom of my wardrobe escaped?

The sleepiness trickles out of me like sand in a timer. I rub my eyes and I remember my best friend Annie and I released the bird last week. It was just before she went away for a few weeks of summer music camp.

The trilling gets louder and louder.

I sit up and I see the soft glow of my mobile phone. The screen is flashing:

Dad calling
Dad calling
Dad calling

And the birdsong ringtone is fluttering around the room.

I can almost imagine it's spilling from the beaks of the birds on my wall. There are charcoal sketches swept in dusty lines on white



paper. All the birds I've ever seen. One day my whole room will be papered with them and the dull magnolia walls will disappear completely behind a sea of feathers and talons.

Dad calling
Dad calling
Dad calling

It must be midnight in New York but Dad is always up late. He likes to watch sports games he's recorded on his massive TV and catch up on emails and eat takeout noodles in the dark quiet of his apartment.

I've never actually been to his apartment but he sends me pictures sometimes. When he first moved in, he video-called me and carried his phone into every room so I could see the whole life he'd bought without me and Mum.

You have to call it an apartment because it's in America, but also because it's different to my flat in about a million ways. It has huge glass

windows and a view of the park. Dad says it's very important to have a view of the park if you live in New York.

I once asked him what birds he could see in the park and from his windows that frame the whole sky. He just looked blankly at me from the computer screen and said something about pigeons.

Dad calling
Dad calling
Dad calling

I can see blackbirds and crows and starlings and finches and sparrows and gulls and a thousand others from my small square window in my little flat. Once, I was watching for a nightjar because they're strange and beautiful and full of myths and secrets. Instead, I saw the wings of an owl beat in the stardusted night air and it was magic.

So I don't mind that Dad has a huge TV and a view of the park and a new girlfriend called Georgia and an apartment three thousand miles away and a job that means he can only come and see me once a year. I've got everything I need right here. Just me and Mum and Annie and the birds. The ones I've seen and the ones I will see.

Dad calling
Dad calling
Dad calling

I turn my phone over so the insistent message is shouting into my pillow. I roll over and I try to go back to sleep just as the daybirds start to sing.