PIRATES OF DARKSEA

CATHERINE DOYLE

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 2024 by Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

Text copyright © Catherine Doyle, 2024
Illustrations and map copyright © Manuel Šumberac, 2024

Catherine Doyle and Manuel Šumberac 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

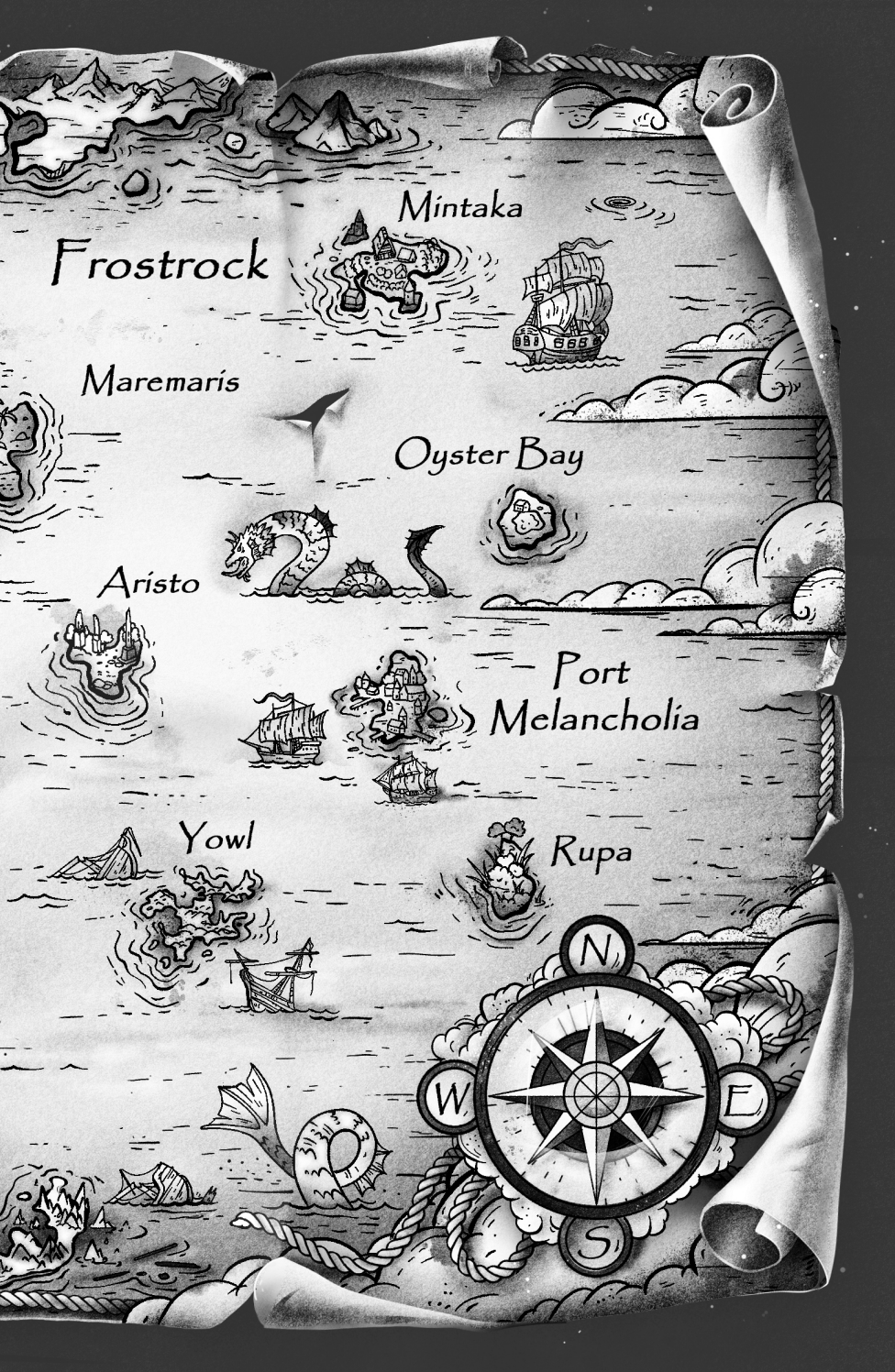
ISBN: PB: 978-1-5266-5510-3; eBook: 978-1-5266-5508-0;
ePDF: 978-1-5266-5509-7

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

Typeset by RefineCatch Limited, Bungay, Suffolk

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


Little Crab
Windwhistle
Ballista
Turtle Roost
Volcana
Fortuna
The Devil's Grin


Frostrock
Mintaka
Maremaris
Oyster Bay
Aristo
Port
Melancholia
Yowl
Rupa
N
W
E
S

CONTENTS

Prologue	The Stardust Kingdom	1
Chapter One	Message in a Bottle	3
TWO YEARS LATER		11
Chapter Two	The Unexpected Parrot	13
Chapter Three	The Midnight Pirate Ship	24
Chapter Four	Captain O'malley	32
Chapter Five	The Rogue Wave	38
Chapter Six	Darksea	41
Chapter Seven	The Half-Chewed Island	53
Chapter Eight	The Wailing Mermaid	63
Chapter Nine	The Lost and Found Cupboard	79
Chapter Ten	The Shark That Fell From The Sky	89
Chapter Eleven	Christopher's Medal	100
Chapter Twelve	The Devil's Grin	106
Chapter Thirteen	*The Wheezing Walrus*	124
Chapter Fourteen	The *Crooked Trove*	136
Chapter Fifteen	The Mapmaker's Bargain	149
Chapter Sixteen	The Dreadful Redfin	161
Chapter Seventeen	The Secret of the Sunstone	178

Chapter Eighteen	The Isle of Fire and Stardust	191
Chapter Nineteen	The Riddle in the Stone	199
Chapter Twenty	Redfin's Secret	213
Chapter Twenty-One	The Accidental Stowaway	218
Chapter Twenty-Two	A Ball for Courage	229
Chapter Twenty-Three	The Shivering Ship	231
Chapter Twenty-Four	The Captains' Duel	239
Chapter Twenty-Five	The Underwater Rescue	247
Chapter Twenty-Six	The Stardust Ball	256
Chapter Twenty-Seven	The Missing Letter	266
Chapter Twenty-Eight	The Thief in the Night	270
Chapter Twenty-Nine	The Last Wave	278
Epilogue	Two Years Later	281

Acknowledgements 285

Prologue

The Stardust Kingdom

Deep in the heart of the Atlantic Ocean, where the full moon paints the waves silver and dolphins leap over the horizon, there lies a secret kingdom called Darksea. It is ruled by a pirate king.

In Darksea, islands sprawl like lily pads, while towering ships sail the straits between them. Every night, stardust falls from the sky and gathers in pools. At dawn, the Stolen Sunrise, captained by King Thorne O'Malley, casts its mighty net, and gathers this magical dust from the sea. It is delivered in huge chests to every island, where it is used to build homes and grow food, to mend aches, and occasionally to make mischief.

The Pirate King is a protector, not a plunderer. He keeps only a small jar of stardust for himself, for Thorne O'Malley's courage is

greater than any magic. His bravery has turned him into a living legend, a leader so beloved in his kingdom that turtles clamber on top of each other to watch him sail by. Mermaids sing about him in their kelp forests, and the children of Darksea swap tales of his epic battles as they play pretend pirates along the strand.

Sometimes one of these stories finds its way over the horizon and into our world. Usually, it becomes little more than a fairytale, whispered to sleepy children at bedtime, but every once in a while it falls upon ears that decide not just to believe in Darksea, but to look for it. And when that happens, the Atlantic waves grow a little bigger, the midnight moon glows a little brighter, and, to a lucky few, the Pirate King of Darksea offers a great, life-changing adventure.



Chapter One

MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE

On a cold, blustery school night in the middle of September, Christopher Reid tiptoed downstairs and slipped outside the front door of number 7 Bellflower Lane, with the sneakiness of a jewel thief. He retrieved his school bag from a nearby hydrangea bush and peeked inside, making sure everything was still there – a spare pair of socks and clean underwear, his favourite hoody, a notebook and pen, a water bottle and a pack of granola bars for the journey.

Satisfied that nothing had been disturbed, he shrugged it on and broke into a jog, leaving the garden gate swinging on its hinges behind him.

It was almost midnight, and there wasn't a minute to waste.

But he'd barely reached the third street lamp on Bellflower Lane before a familiar voice rang out behind him. 'WAIT FOR ME!'

Christopher winced. A quick glance over his shoulder revealed his little brother, Max, thundering towards him in his bright green dinosaur pyjamas. He had shoved on Mum's clunky pink crocs in a panic, which made the patter of his footsteps sound like a runaway horse.

'Shh!' hissed Christopher. 'You're going to blow my cover!'

Max huffed as he ran. 'I'm ... coming ... too!'

'You don't even know where I'm going!'

Max juddered to a stop. His usually pale cheeks were bright red, and his sandy hair was sticking up in every direction. 'You can tell me when we get there.'

Christopher frowned as he considered his little brother. Max was two years younger than him, but he was twice as stubborn, which meant there was no sense in arguing with him. And anyway, there wasn't time.

Christopher sighed. 'Fine. But you have to stay quiet until we get down to the sea.'

Max's big blue eyes got even bigger. 'What's down at the sea?'

Christopher's gaze darted. 'Pirates.'

'*Pirates*?' Max half shrieked.

'Shhhh!'

Max flinched. '*Sorry*.'

Christopher quickened his footsteps, urging his brother to follow. 'Well, a pirate king, actually,' he confided. 'He sails on a ship called the *Stolen Sunrise*.'

Max puffed his cheeks up. He looked like he was about to explode with excitement. His hurried footsteps echoed the drumbeat in Christopher's chest. The Pirate King was coming *tonight*. Christopher could feel it in his bones. The full moon was brighter than he'd ever seen it, the rush of the ocean so loud it sounded like it was calling out to him.

'His name is Captain Thorne O'Malley,' Christopher went on. 'And he lives in a place far away from here.'

'Like ... *France*?'

'Further than that,' said Christopher. 'It's called Darksea. It's on the other side of the horizon.'

Max made a soft *oooh*.

Christopher nodded. It was so far away he could scarcely imagine it, but when he first read about it a couple of weeks ago, he decided he very much liked the sound of it. 'Darksea is full of magical islands. And since Thorne O'Malley is the King, it's his job to protect them. He's fought sea dragons and kelpies and giant, stinging eels. Once he even killed a kraken and then ate it for dinner!'

Max made a slightly louder *oooh*. 'What's a kraken?'

'No idea. But it sounds scary.'

'And yummy.'

'Thorne O'Malley's *really* brave. And he's generous. He shares the magic of Darksea with everyone.'

'Like how Nan shares her biscuit tin with us on Sundays?'

'Exactly.' Christopher's voice hitched. 'A*nd* every once in a while, when the full moon hangs low over Galway Bay, and the midnight sea behaves itself, Captain Thorne O'Malley and the crew of the *Stolen Sunrise* cross the horizon and sail into our world. If we look hard enough tonight, we just might spot him. And if we're lucky, Maxie … like, *really* lucky, he might see us too.'

'And then what?' whispered Max.

Christopher drew a breath, excitement fluttering in the pit of his stomach. 'And then we'll get to go on a pirate adventure.'

Max skidded to a sudden stop. 'Hang on …' he said, suspiciously. 'Were you going to leave me behind?'

Christopher bit his lip, feeling a little guilty. 'I thought it might be too scary for you.'

Max glowered at him.

'Well, you're afraid of Ms Hannity next door.'

'She has no teeth, and she smells like cheese!'

'You screamed at the butterfly that flew into your bedroom last week!'

'It gave me a fright!'

Christopher hesitated. 'Being a pirate *is* frightening, Max.'

Max folded his arms. 'I won't be scared if you're there.'

Christopher smiled. The truth was, the idea of a pirate adventure was a lot more fun with his little brother in tow. As long as they stuck together, they'd be all right.

'Come on then. Let's go.' They hurried down the hill and past a row of dark, spindly houses, then the dog park, and the big pink mansion with all the crooked trees, until at last the promenade unfurled before them.

The tide was out, the shoreline glimmering under the silver moon.

'Race you!' said Christopher, but Max was already running in his oversized crocs. Christopher chased after him, vaulting over a beached jellyfish and a slumbering crab, before easily overtaking him. Max cast a handful of seashells in Christopher's direction, but he dodged them easily.

Christopher fired back, flinging a pile of seaweed on to his brother's head until both of them were laughing so hard they had to stop and catch their breath. Down at the shoreline, with the waves kissing the toes of their shoes, Max brushed the mop of seaweed from his hair and peered out to sea. 'Where is he?'

'Just wait,' said Christopher. 'He'll be here. I know it.'

After all, half of wishing for something was *believing* in it first.

So the Reid brothers waited. And waited. And *waited*. When they got tired, they sat down on the sand. After a while, Max's head lolled against Christopher's shoulder. Midnight had long since gone and the hand on Christopher's watch was ticking ever closer to 1 a.m. When his legs had gone numb from the cold, and he could hardly keep his eyes open, Christopher decided, with a heavy heart, that it was time for Plan B. He reached for his notebook. Under the light of the full moon, with his brother snoring on his shoulder, he began to write.

Dear Captain O'Malley

My name is Christopher Reid and I'm almost eleven years old. I've never met a pirate, but two weeks ago I found a book about you in a second-hand shop, while Mum was selling our haunted armchair (that's a whole other story). The book was covered in dust, but I cleaned it off and taped the loose pages.

My teacher says you're not real. According to him, all your adventures are fairytales, and magical ships like the Stolen Sunrise don't exist. But he also says that stamp-

collecting is fun and learning long division is useful, so I have my doubts about his opinions.

And there's something else too. I think I saw you once when I was little. Nan and I were spending the evening picking up rubbish on the beach (she's kind of a goody-two-shoes). It was the least fun I've ever had in my life, and I've had my tonsils removed. Anyway, when the moon came out, it was so big it turned everything silver and, when I looked out at the sea, I saw a pirate ship! Nan squinted but she couldn't see that far without her glasses, and by the time we found them in the pocket of her cardigan, the ship was gone.

But I know what I saw.

Next month is my eleventh birthday and I want to go on a real-life adventure to Darksea. I'm a really good swimmer, I don't mind not eating vegetables for a while and I've been practising sailor knots on my shoelaces. I believe in you. Please come and find me.

Yours admiringly
Christopher Reid
No. 7 Bellflower Lane (house, not ship)

PS I'd like to bring my brother, Max, with me. He's two years younger than me, but he's smart for his age and small enough to sleep in a barrel, if needs be.

Christopher read over his letter for spelling mistakes. Satisfied, he carefully rolled it up and stuck it inside his empty water bottle before screwing the cap back on.

Max stirred awake as his brother stood up.

He frowned at the sea. 'He didn't come?'

'Not this time,' said Christopher, refusing to let his hopes be dampened. 'But he will.'

With the water bottle in his fist, Christopher clambered out on to the rocks. 'All right, Maxie. Make a wish.'

Max closed his eyes and puffed his cheeks up.

Christopher took a deep breath, then hurled his letter fast and far into the belly of the Atlantic Ocean. The waves rushed in to claim it, as though they knew exactly what to do.