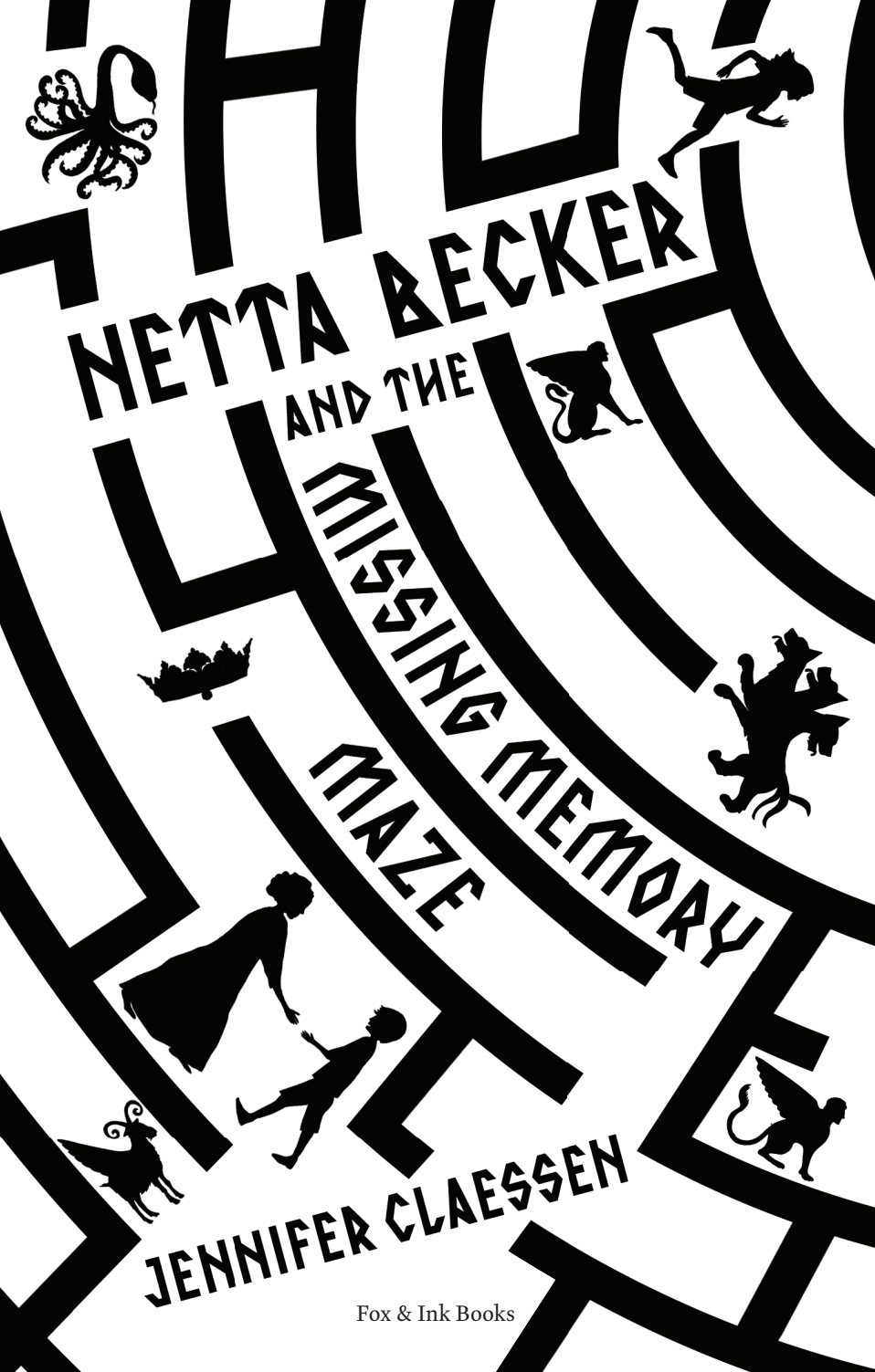

NETTA BECKER
AND THE
MISSING MEMORY
MAZE
JENNIFER CLAESSEN
Fox & Ink Books

For my dad, Martin.

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CHAPTER 1



Remy Becker has his nose in a book.

That is his job, between him and his sister. She time travels, he reads.

He reads now about the Titans. Not many people get to meet one, but Remy has. The memory is already sliding sideways though, somehow – so he has turned to his book to try and remember.

"Impossible, immeasurable power," Remy murmurs.

"Pfft," Netta says. "Did she write that herself? Might be a Titan but looks like a 73."

Remy smiles. He had only caught a glimpse of the power of the Crone, clinging on to his sister's hand as he was whipped backwards across thousands of years. Mother Time herself had indeed looked like a grandmother but, made of Earth and Sky, she pre-dated the Olympians – she pre-dated everything.

Some have called them 'former gods' or 'forgotten gods'. But Remy won't forget her.

Netta sighs.

Remy can tell his sister is already bored. It's in the way her leg twitches. She's already done at least three circuits

of the airport, riffled through her whole bag, begged some coins from their parents to go round and round the shop.

But now she is back, flumped down next to him, legs kicked all the way in front of her.

As brother and sister, they seem to have been made as opposites.

Now, Remy closes the book with a sigh. "Yes?" he asks, feeling Netta's eyes on him.

But she isn't looking at him – she's looking at the shiny embossed swirls of his book. *Greek Myths and Legends*.

"When you're done, can I have a go?" she asks, like it's a swing or a bike.

"With this?" Remy asks back, hefting the huge volume. Netta has never asked to borrow one of his books before.

"Yeah," she says. "I should try it."

The most thumbed page in his book is about the labyrinth, which Netta had escaped from yesterday. Now, he folds the top corner so that she can find it easily.

They are sitting on two hard plastic chairs opposite their parents. Dad, with one headphone in, probably half-listening to a podcast about numbers. Mum, two newspapers spread over her knees, one English, one Greek, scanning them both.

"I can't believe it didn't make the front page," Mum mutters, then holds up one of the papers so they can see. "How often do giant sink holes open up like that?"

The photo is taken from above and shows a huge hole in the earth that looks like a dark monstrous mouth.

Remy grimaces. They'd done that, him and his sister.

"We were lucky to make it out alive," Mum says for probably the hundredth time.

The Beckers are meant to be on holiday but they are heading home early because, as Dad said when the house they'd been staying in disappeared into that hole, they are a family not made for holidays.

Remy unsticks his thighs from the warm plastic of his chair again and glances up at the departure board. Of all the places in all the world they could go, he wouldn't choose Uncle Kev's caravan, but that's where they are heading back to and he is grateful just to be safe. And to be back with Netta, even if she is an impatience-radiator.

"Here," Remy says, flipping the heavy cover down on to the pages and offering it up. It takes both of his hands to hold but Netta picks it up with only one. She's two years older and much stronger.

"Has it – um – changed?" Netta whispers, hefting the book up and tucking it under her arm.

Remy has read the Greek myths dozens, maybe even hundreds, of times. He thought he knew all of them. But it was Netta who had been sucked back into Daedalus's labyrinth, and what she had seen was not what was written in this book.

The words on the page stayed obstinately black and white – and inaccurate. There had been no minotaur at the middle of the maze, and they were the only ones in the whole world who knew what had really happened in there.

Netta's knee still hops up and down. Maybe it isn't possible to defeat a four-thousand-year-old King, rescue one of the first gods, and feel normal.

Remy hears another low whisper: "Look."

It's Dad, elbowing Mum so that she'll look up and notice them.

"Lovely to see," Mum says with a grin at both of her children.

"What is?" Remy asks.

"Oh, all of it. You two having a civil conversation. Netta picking up a book – voluntarily! You sharing your precious myths, Rem."

Remy snorts, even if it is a bit true. The Becker siblings are closer and more friendly to each other now than they'd ever been before.

But the bar is still low, and Netta is still capable of ignoring her whole family. Even with the most important book in her lap, he watches her turn to her phone now.

Remy, a compulsive reader, peers over her shoulder.

Where have you been?

Are you even alive?

They are from Phoebe, Netta's best friend and swim teammate at home.

Netta taps out a quick reply.

I was in hospital with time travel sickness but I did manage to save fourteen children from certain death at the hands of an evil king.

The words disappear backwards as Netta deletes them and tries again.

This guy called Oz was our tour guide but he turned out to be some ancient 'Archon King', keeping the Titan of Time trapped in a maze so he could be immortal. And that made me and a bunch of other kids get sucked back through time and nearly die.

Remy watches her delete this with a wince. The next version is shorter.

Met a bad king, got stuck in the past, freed a powerful monster-like god.

Remy stops reading. Those things had happened but mostly to his sister, not him.

When Netta had gone back in time, Remy had worried so much about the way the world might change. He was the careful one, the 'going to be a historian' one day, but he had been stuck in the present.

Remy had sat up for whole nights next to Netta's body without any Netta in it. She was free-wheeling, racing back and forth across time without a body, and he'd felt

so . . . jealous. He'd had to hold the jealousy in like a bad burp.

Now, he realises he barely featured in the telling of their story at all.

Next to him, Netta sighs again and puts down the phone. She hadn't sent anything. Phoebe wouldn't believe any of it anyway.

"Families with young children and anyone who needs further assistance may board first," a tinny voice says, first in Greek, then in English, through a Tannoy.

Remy glances up. That's not him, not any more, but he is ready to get on the plane. A short flight to Athens, then a longer one.

It's time to go home.

like a weapon.

The Crone hunches her tiny shoulders in what might be a shrug. "Like a sister," she says, then smiles. "And sisters are always weird."

Rude. Netta frowns. Remy looks far too delighted with this.

"When I have passed, she is what remains," the Crone says.

"Is that a riddle?" Remy asks.

"She has no now, yet now is all she is," the Crone says. "Words are inadequate!" She waves them all away. "She is much more human than I am. My sister is hard to talk to, even for me."

"Where is this 'no time' place?" Netta insists. But she is moving towards the Crone. She can already feel the building excitement, the readiness to dive in. Her breathing has already changed. This is how she looks at any body of water, filling her lungs, breathing all the way down to the bottom of her belly: fearless, confident, ready to move from air to water.

"I already said. Keep up, mortal: out of time. Now, you two are not big enough to necessitate a door. Hop on through there, small ones, to the timeless place."

"Our parents . . ." Remy says, sounding a bit pathetic.

The Crone looks at the Becker grown-ups, still smiling into space. "They will keep," she says, like parents are

pastries who aren't going to go off yet.

"Wait – Netta—" she hears Remy call.

But Netta is already on the move, plunging headfirst straight in through the small dark hole between the airport detectors.