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Opening extract from

Emily Windsnap and the Siren's Secret

Written by

Liz Kessler

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Emily Windsnap

and the Siren's Secret



LIZ KESSLER

Illustrations by Natacha Ledwidge

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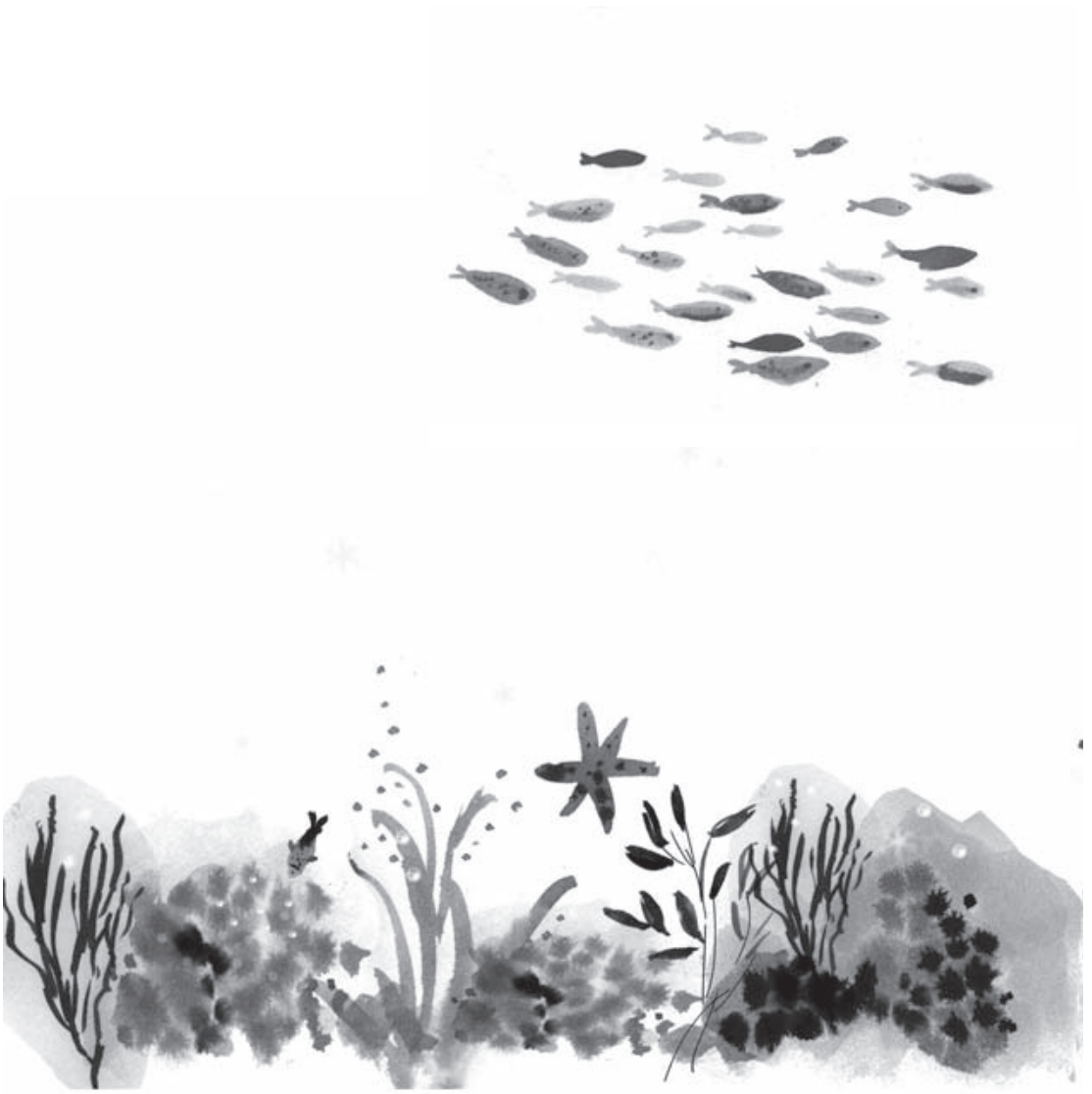
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This book is dedicated to all the Emily Windsnap fans who wrote to me asking me to write a fourth book.

Thank you for being cleverer than me and knowing even before I did that Emily wanted another adventure.





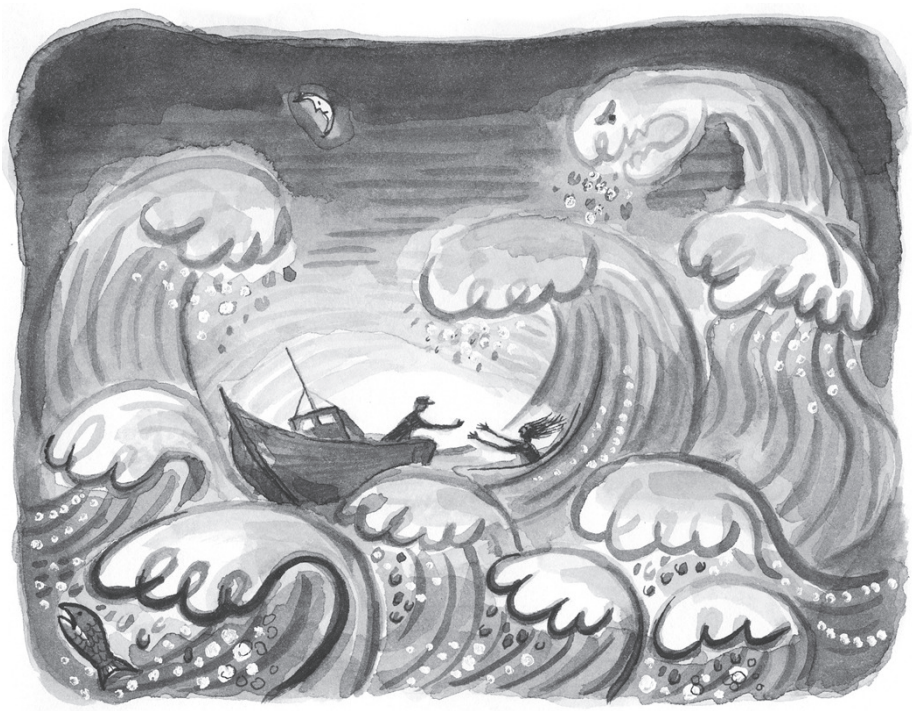
All through the sunny blue-sweet hours
I swim and glide in waters green:
Never by day the mournful shores
By me are seen.

But when the gloom is on the wave
A shell unto the shore I bring;
And then upon the rocks I sit
And plaintive sing."

From The Moon Child
by Fiona Macleod



Prologue



It wasn't a night for going out. Not unless you had to.

Sharp tunnels of wind whistled and shrieked around every corner. Trees bowed and shook and broke. Rain splattered viciously down at the pavements.

Out at sea, it was even worse. On the water, the storm had turned swells into walls the size of tower blocks. Waves foamed hungrily, like giant rabid dogs.

Anyone who knew about the sea knew this

meant one thing: Neptune was angry.

And anyone wild or crazy or brave enough to be out on such a night might have seen two figures in the distance, way out at sea, way beyond safe. A man leaned out from his fishing boat, calling to a woman in the water below him. 'Take it. Take it. Keep it close.'

'What is it?' the woman called back, shouting to be heard over the thunderous waves.

The man shook his head. 'I can't hear you!' Leaning further out, he added, 'When it's safe again, find me.'

'How?' she called, panic hitting her as hard as the waves that were now dragging them further and further apart.

He pointed to the parcel he had just given her. 'The shell!' she thought she heard him say, and then he added something that sounded like, 'There's magic in it.'

The woman thought about what she was leaving and the pain of it slapped against her harder than the next wave. 'What about –'

The wave washed the rest of her question away – but he knew what she was asking.

'I'll look after everything,' he called. 'Everything. Don't worry. It will be OK. Go now. Go, before it's too late.'

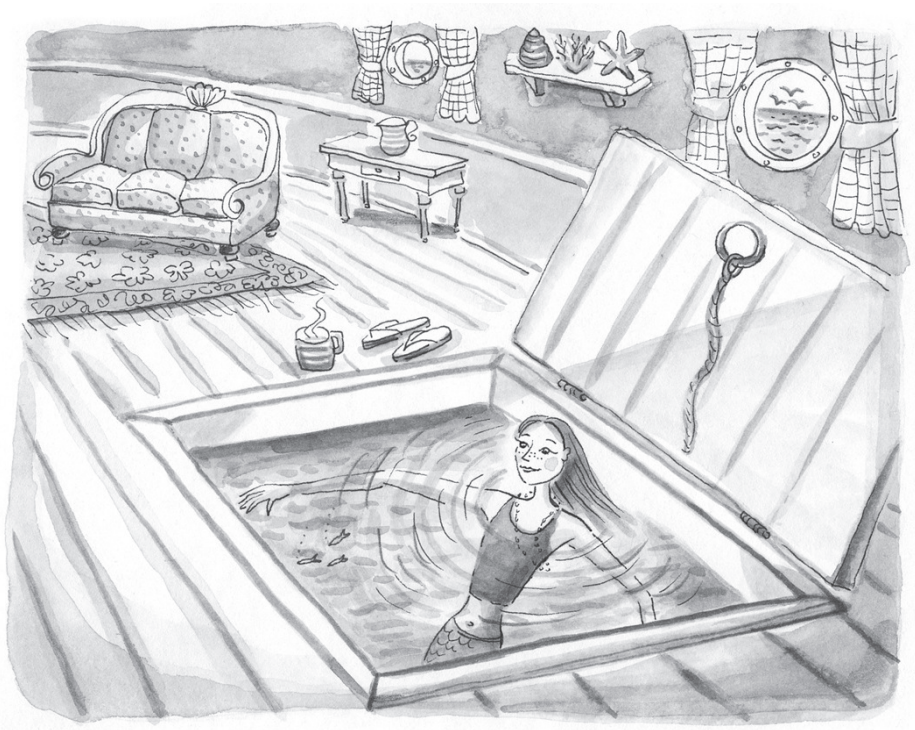
A moment later, the onlooker would have seen them part, each disappearing behind the hills and

mountains of the raging sea. Then they would have wondered if they'd imagined the whole thing, because surely no one would go out on a night like this.

Not unless they had to.



Chapter One



I know you're going to think I'm crazy when I say this, but something about my life wasn't right.

Why does that make me crazy?

Because for the first time in my life I was living with my mum and dad, together, in our beautiful home at Allpoints Island, with my best friend Shona living just round the corner and my new friend Aaron and his mum living nearby. There was *nothing* wrong with our lives.

Really. Absolutely nothing. No dad to be rescued

from prison; no sea monsters trying to squeeze the life out of me; no storms hurling our home halfway across the planet – all of which *had* happened to me in the last year.

Now all I had was day after day filled with sun, sand, friends, laughter. My life was perfect.

So why had I woken up restless and rattled every morning for the last week? I just didn't get it.

I sat up in bed and stretched, trying to remember what I'd been dreaming about. Fragments from a jumbled mass of weird dreams chased each other round in my head but I couldn't piece them together. All I could remember was the feeling they'd left behind. Not exactly unhappy – but definitely unsettled and, well, not right.

Like I said – crazy. How could anything about my life not be right?

There was something, though, and I couldn't ignore it. What's more, I had the feeling Mum felt the same way. Once or twice, while she was making dinner or reading a book, I'd seen her eyes go all distant and grey, as though she were looking for something far away, something she was missing.

I think deep down inside, I knew what was eating at us both; I knew what we were missing, even before the conversation with Archie that changed everything.

★

‘Knock knock, only me!’ A familiar voice trilled through the doorway, followed by a familiar thump as Mum’s best friend, Millie, landed on the deck.

Fortuna, the boat we lived on, was moored out in the bay, half sunk in the sand so that the lower level was under water. With Dad being a merman, and me being a semi-mer, this meant we could both swim around on the lower level. Mum’s bedroom was upstairs, but all the trapdoors in between made it easy for us to live here together. And the long jetty leading out from the beach to the boat was handy for getting on the boat without having to swim – which made it very easy for Millie to visit us without getting more than her feet wet.

She stuck her head round the door. ‘Anyone home?’

I dragged myself out of bed and over to the door. Rubbing my eyes, I gestured for her to come in. Not that she needed an invitation. She’d already clambered in through the door and was busily wringing out the bottom of her dress over the side.

‘Mum up?’ she asked.

I rubbed my eyes and yawned. ‘Not yet, I don’t think. Why?’

‘Someone’s coming home!’ she said excitedly. ‘I just heard it on the seaweed vine.’

‘The seaweed vine?’

'Just trying to keep up with the mer-speak,' Millie said, frowning. 'I meant I heard it on the grapevine. Archie's back today!'

That was when I noticed her face. Well, obviously I'd already noticed her face. I was looking straight at it. But I noticed what was on it. Bright blue eyeshadow arching high over each eye, and a thick red line of lipstick smeared across her mouth – and a few teeth. I pointed this out and she peered into the mirror by the door.

'It'sh been nearly tcho weeksh,' she said, wiping lipstick off her teeth with the edge of her sleeve. 'I've misshed him sho much!'

Archie is Millie's boyfriend. He's a merman and he'd been away on an assignment for Neptune.

'Is that Millie?' Mum's voice warbled out from her room. 'Come on in Mill, and stick the kettle on while you're passing.'

I left them to it.

Half an hour later, Mum was dressed and sitting upstairs with Millie in the saloon – that's what you call the living room on a boat. I wanted to go out and play with Shona and Aaron, but Mum said we should all wait with Millie; she was far too excitable to be left on her own.

I waited downstairs with Dad. We had a gymnastics day coming up soon at school and he was helping me with a tricky triple back spin that I had to do as part of the display. I could do two spins

perfectly but couldn't manage the third without swallowing a gallon of water.

I was just recovering from my fourth attempt when there was a sharp rap at the door.

'Archie!' I exclaimed.

'I doubt it, little 'un. When did Archie ever knock?'

I laughed. Archie was much more likely to turn up at one of the portholes. Mermen don't usually walk up to the front door.

We both poked our heads up through the trapdoor to see who it was. Mum was answering the door. 'Charles,' she said crisply. 'How nice to see you.'

Mr Beeston. Not exactly our best friend. Well, someone who's spent your entire life lying to you about who you really are, drugging you so you won't remember the truth and spying on you so he can report back to Neptune on your activities doesn't tend to fill your heart with love and warmth, in my experience.

However, after our latest batch of disasters, Neptune had made us all promise to put the past behind us and start afresh. So we'd been trying our best to be friendly and polite ever since.

Mum held the door open for him. 'Why don't you join us?' she said. 'We're just having a cup of tea.'

'Well I, I mean, I don't want to, you know,

I wouldn't like to be in your way,' he stammered, but came in anyway and sat down on the little sofa in the middle of the saloon.

'Hello, Emily,' he said, nodding at me and flattening his hair down.

'Hi,' I said and turned to swim back down, but Dad gave me a nudge.

'Go on up, now; you need to be polite, remember,' he said under his breath.

With a sigh, I pulled myself up through the trapdoor. As I did, I felt the familiar tingling feeling in my tail. Sitting on the side, I watched it flap and wave in the water. The tingling grew stronger, the purply green shimmer faded, my tail stiffened – and then it melted away and my legs emerged. I rubbed the tingle away. It always gave me pins and needles changing back from being a mermaid and my legs were wobbly for a moment, so I didn't stand up straight away.

'I believe Archieval is due back today,' Mr Beeston was saying to Mum as I dangled my legs over the trapdoor. He'd obviously been listening to the grapevine, too. That didn't surprise me. He always seemed to find out what was going on. Probably had spies working for him all over the place.

I knew we were meant to be friends now, but I still didn't trust him and I didn't see how Mum and Dad could be so happy to forgive and forget.

'So I've heard,' Mum said. Millie had got up to check herself out in the mirror again. She pulled at her hair and straightened her dress and was getting her lipstick out of her bag again when there was a noise downstairs.

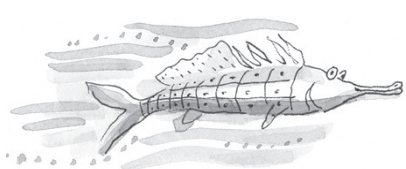
'That's him!' Millie squeaked. 'He's back!'

We all raced over to the trapdoor and looked down. Sure enough, two seconds later Archie appeared in the large porthole that we use as the downstairs door. He looked up. Grinning broadly, he flicked his dark hair off his face and swam across to the trapdoor. 'Hello all,' he said, looking straight at Millie.

Mum laughed. 'Right, come on, let's get a cup of tea and leave the lovebirds to it,' she said.

Mr Beeston gave Archie a quick nod. 'Good to see you back, Archieval,' he said before following Mum into the kitchen.

'Mine's an Earl Grey,' Millie called over her shoulder, without taking her eyes off Archie for a second.



'So let me get this straight,' Dad said as we gathered outside. Archie and Dad were in the water next to the boat, the rest of us sitting on the front deck. 'You've been in *Brightport* for the last two weeks?'

Brightport was my home. Well, I should say my