

Also by Catherine Barter

Troublemakers

Shortlisted for the Waterstones Children's Book Prize
Nominated for the CILIP Carnegie Medal
Longlisted for the Branford Boase Award

'A sparky and timely coming-of-age tale about
politics, activism & morality'
Katherine Woodfine

'I loved it, so much so that as soon as I finished I started
reading it again. Completely brilliant'
Keren David

'I couldn't put *Troublemakers* down. It's a real page-turner,
with utterly believable characters who are all trying to do
their best. Barter is a fresh, exciting new voice, and
I can't wait to see what she does next'
Susin Nielsen

'A thought-provoking, richly layered YA novel about politics,
love, grief and coming of age'
Guardian

'Wonderfully individual and heartbreakingly real'
Kirkus, starred review

'A touching, truthful depiction of an unconventional family life'
Observer

'A clever, thoughtful novel with a wonderfully
realistic main character'
Irish Independent

'It's refreshing to see a contemporary YA novel that focuses
so much on family and politics'
Irish Times

First published in 2021 by
Andersen Press Limited
20 Vauxhall Bridge Road
London SW1V 2SA
www.andersenpress.co.uk

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data available.

ISBN 978 1 83913 006 9

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.



PART
ONE

ONE

HYDESVILLE

MARCH 1848

They weren't allowed in the cellar.

It was dark and earthy, directly below the kitchen, with a dirt floor, and if you stood still down there, ignoring the sounds from the rooms above, you could feel some kind of movement beneath the ground. Their older brother David had said that it was probably water, running below the house.

Maggie and Kate had left the door at the top of the stairs open. It threw a rectangle of natural light on to the floor.

Kate was holding something. She was standing in the middle of the cellar, her skirt trailing on the ground, getting filthy. There was a narrow slit of light between the ceiling and the far wall. It was bitterly cold.

'What's this?' she said.

'Let me see.'

Kate came forward, holding something out, dirty and yellow, the length of her forearm.

Maggie took it for a moment, felt its weight, and then handed it back. 'It's a human bone.'

Kate frowned, turned it over, looked at Maggie and then back at the bone.

Upstairs, Maggie could hear her mother humming softly as she sat sewing in the parlor.

'A what?' Kate said.

'I think it's a leg bone.'

Some girls might have dropped it then, but Kate held it

up in the light and squinted. 'Whose is it?' A typical Katie question, that nobody could possibly know the answer to.

'Where did you find it?'

'Over there.' She pointed to a cluttered corner of the basement. Rotting bits of wood and an old bucket. 'On the ground.'

Maggie had no idea what it was, except that it was a bone for certain. And something about it was suggestive of some part of a human leg, perhaps. She'd seen sketches of the human skeleton before.

'I know whose it could be,' Maggie said. 'There was a woman who was murdered out here. They hanged her from one of the trees in the woods.'

She could see the war in Kate's head, the way her brow creased: her instinct that she was being lied to against her desire to believe it.

'When?'

'A few years ago. Fifty years ago.'

Kate waited.

'They hanged her because they thought she was possessed by the Devil.'

'They didn't.'

'They did. And when she was dead they cut her down, and they cut her body into parts and scattered them all over the woods so that if the Devil tried to bring her back, she'd be in pieces.'

Upstairs, their mother stopped humming. In a few moments she would probably call their names.

'They didn't,' said Kate.

'But they say that the Devil is still searching for all the pieces, and if you find one of the bones, the Devil will find you too.'

Kate blinked slowly. 'I don't believe you. And you're not supposed to tell stories like that anymore.'

'It's not a story. It's true.'

'I don't believe you,' Kate said again, but Maggie could see that she did.

It was possible to believe and not believe something at the same time. It was easy.

TWO

David visited on Thursday afternoon, with Calvin. Maggie heard them coming, and waited on the porch. Pale sunlight was scattered through the trees, and the ground was hard, snow cleared on the main paths but lingering in shaded places where the sun hadn't reached. As David and Calvin climbed down from the horses, they were flushed with cold, breath clouding in front of their faces. Calvin gave her a lazy salute as he walked up to the house. Maggie hit his arm gently as he passed her.

They brought a basket of apples that David had picked up from a neighboring farm, and David presented it to their mother with a kiss. Then they gathered in the kitchen while their mother made coffee and their father examined the apples silently.

'We can't stay long,' said David. 'Have to pick up some supplies from the Taylors' before it gets dark.'

'Can I come back with you?' Maggie said.

Kate elbowed in. 'Can *we* come back with you?'

'I'm not sure—' David began.

'Absolutely not,' their mother said. 'I have a hundred things I need help with.'

'Can I help you with anything, Mrs. Fox?' said Calvin. He'd hung his coat over the back of his chair and pushed his shirtsleeves up to his elbows as if it was a summer day.

'You have your work, Calvin,' she said, with an affectionate

smile. She gave Maggie a pointed look. 'And my dear *daughters* need to learn their household duties.'

Calvin still called their mother *Mrs. Fox*, although Maggie wondered why he didn't call her Margaret or even Ma by now. He'd lived with them since he was a boy, fourteen or fifteen, since his parents died. Mr. and Mrs. Fox had taken him in so he could help with the farm work, but he was close in age to David and Leah and so he'd gotten mixed in with them, the oldest Fox children. He'd become part of the family, even if his light hair and blue eyes made him different. Maggie and Kate were just little girls then, but Calvin had been their favourite. He was kinder than Leah, and more fun than David.

When their father had eventually abandoned farming for blacksmithing, and they had moved from town to town while he looked for good work, Calvin came with them.

He'd lived with David the last few months, working on the farm, and Maggie was brutally jealous of them – two men, grown, with work to do, proper work, outdoor work, laughing together. If she'd been born a boy she might be out there too by now.

'All come on Saturday,' said David. 'Snow might've cleared by then.'

'There'll be floods if it has,' their father said dourly. He had begun peeling an apple with a knife. 'These are half rotten,' he added.

'If you want apples in March you'll have to take what you can get,' said David.

'They're lovely,' their mother said. 'Thank you, boys.'

'We saw Mary Redfield on our way here,' said David.

'Did you, how nice,' said their mother, without conviction.

'She was asking about the girls.' David looked at Maggie. 'Said she saw them running around the woods yesterday.'

'We weren't running around,' said Maggie.

'We weren't running around,' Kate echoed.

'What were you doing?'

'Picking flowers,' said Maggie, which seemed like the kind of thing Mary Redfield would expect girls to do.

'Find many?' David raised an eyebrow. It had been a brutal winter and spring had not yet stirred any wild flowers out of the dirt.

'Plenty.'

'Oh, why shouldn't they run around in the woods if they want to?' said their mother.

'Maybe they should be careful, is all,' said David. 'You don't know these woods. You could get lost.'

'Somebody was murdered out there,' said Kate. 'Fifty years ago. They thought she was possessed by the Devil so they hanged her from one of the trees. And then they cut her body—'

'Enough of that,' said their father, putting down the apple and the knife.

'—into pieces, so that—' She hesitated, glanced at Maggie. 'So that – if the Devil found her again – something happens. I can't remember.'

'They cut her into pieces so that the Devil couldn't bring her back to life,' Maggie said.

Scarcely before she'd finished the sentence, their father pounded the table with his fist. '*Enough*,' he said.

A short, cool silence. Sunlight dappled the table.

'Well, of course,' said Calvin lightly. 'You would, wouldn't you?'

'And they say the Devil is still looking for all the pieces,' Maggie said, 'so if you find one of the dead woman's bones—'

Their father stood. His chair scraped the floor. He raised

a hand as if to strike somebody, but then pressed it, shaking, to his forehead instead. *'Enough.'* His face was a knot of anger.

Maggie folded her arms, felt her heart fluttering. She had gone too far.

David cleared his throat. *'It's not the Devil you need to be afraid of out here,'* he said. *'It's animals. Wild animals. That's what'll tear you to pieces.'*

Their father turned away, to the window. *'There's nothing in these woods.'*

Nobody replied.

'You shouldn't tell these stories, Maggie,' said their mother quietly.

David and Calvin exchanged a glance. *'I'm passing along the message that Mary Redfield saw the girls running around the woods, is all,'* said David. *'She seemed to think you'd want to know.'*

'I don't need to be told what my own children are doing, thank you.'

'I'll be sure to let her know next time.'

'I'm not a child,' Maggie said.

She followed David out to the wagon as Calvin said his goodbyes. *'I could come back to the farm with you,'* she said. *'I could. I could help with the children—'* David and Maria had so many children she could hardly remember them all sometimes. It had been five, but was it six, now? David wasn't yet thirty but already looked permanently exhausted.

'Come on Saturday.' He adjusted a saddle strap as the horse huffed in the cold and stamped a foot. *'You heard what Ma said. There's work for you to do here.'* He looked at her. *'And stop telling stories.'*

She scowled at him, and wrapped her arms around herself, shivering. 'You don't know what it's like here, David.'

'Plenty worse places you could be.'

'I doubt that.'

'Just do as you're told, Maggie,' he said. 'You won't be here long. Just try and – try and be *quiet*.' He bent to remove a branch that was lodged beneath the front wheel of the wagon. Then he broke it in half over his knee. The crack echoed in the quiet and sent a startled bird flying from a tree.

Kate was pale today. She'd said that she'd woken up with a headache. They both got headaches sometimes, sickening ones. When Maggie came back into the kitchen, Kate was leaning into their mother's side, asking if she could go and lie down.

Fragile as a spring flower, Maggie thought. One of those phrases she'd tried to come up with in Rochester when the teacher tried to get her to write poetry, which Maggie was no good at. *Pale as the moon*. *Cold as* – something else.

As Kate slipped out of the room, Maggie picked up her shawl and started to wind it around her shoulders. But when she went to fasten it, the silver pin was missing. A silver bird pin that David's wife had given her at Christmas.

She searched the kitchen, the front room, the little room downstairs where her parents slept, the bedroom upstairs, furious with herself at the thought of having lost it. She hardly owned anything nice.

And then she was at the door to the cellar. Their father had gone out again, their mother wasn't paying attention, so she crept back down the steps.

The sound and light and smell of the cellar was as abruptly different as entering a church. Cool and damp and dark.

Their mother had been afraid of the cellar ever since they came here.

She couldn't see her bird pin. She couldn't see the leg bone either, or whatever it was.

If you find one of the bones then the Devil will find you too.

The story already had the quality of a memory. She could see it all – the hanging woman, the creak of the tree, a man with an ax. She could imagine it.

Her imagination. Such a dangerous thing, supposedly. A kind of disease.

Perhaps it wasn't a human leg bone, anyway. Perhaps it was from a horse, or something else, a wolf, a cat. Perhaps it had never been there at all.

Down here alone, she felt something different in the air from before, a sense that the shape of the cellar had shifted a little, that something had moved. There was a pressure around her head, a warning that a headache of her own was on its way. A dark shape at the edge of her vision; a feeling like something was knocking on her brain, wanting to be let in.

Maggie wasn't sure how old the house was. It felt old. It felt used and lived-in, and sometimes it felt as though it was full of scratches and whispers, sounds that made their mother jump and press her hand over her heart.

They would all say it was the wind.

The bird pin wasn't there. Perhaps Kate had stolen it, hidden it under the bedclothes. A thoughtless little crime, just to have something to do. Maggie went back up the stairs, closed the door and locked it. She heard a muffled sound on the other side, like footsteps, following her up.

TROUBLE MAKERS

CATHERINE BARTER

SHORTLISTED FOR THE WATERSTONES CHILDREN'S BOOK PRIZE

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Fifteen-year-old Alena never really knew her political activist mother, who died when she was a baby. She has grown up with her older half-brother Danny and his boyfriend Nick in the east end of London. Now the area is threatened by a bomber who has been leaving explosive devices in supermarkets. Against this increasingly fearful backdrop, Alena seeks to discover more about her past, while Danny takes a job working for a controversial politician. As her family life implodes, and the threat to Londoners mounts, Alena starts getting into trouble. Then she does something truly rebellious . . .



9781783445240