



*My Friend the*  
**OCTOPUS**  
**LINDSAY GALVIN**

Chicken  
House

2 PALMER STREET, FROME.

SOMERSET BA11 1DS

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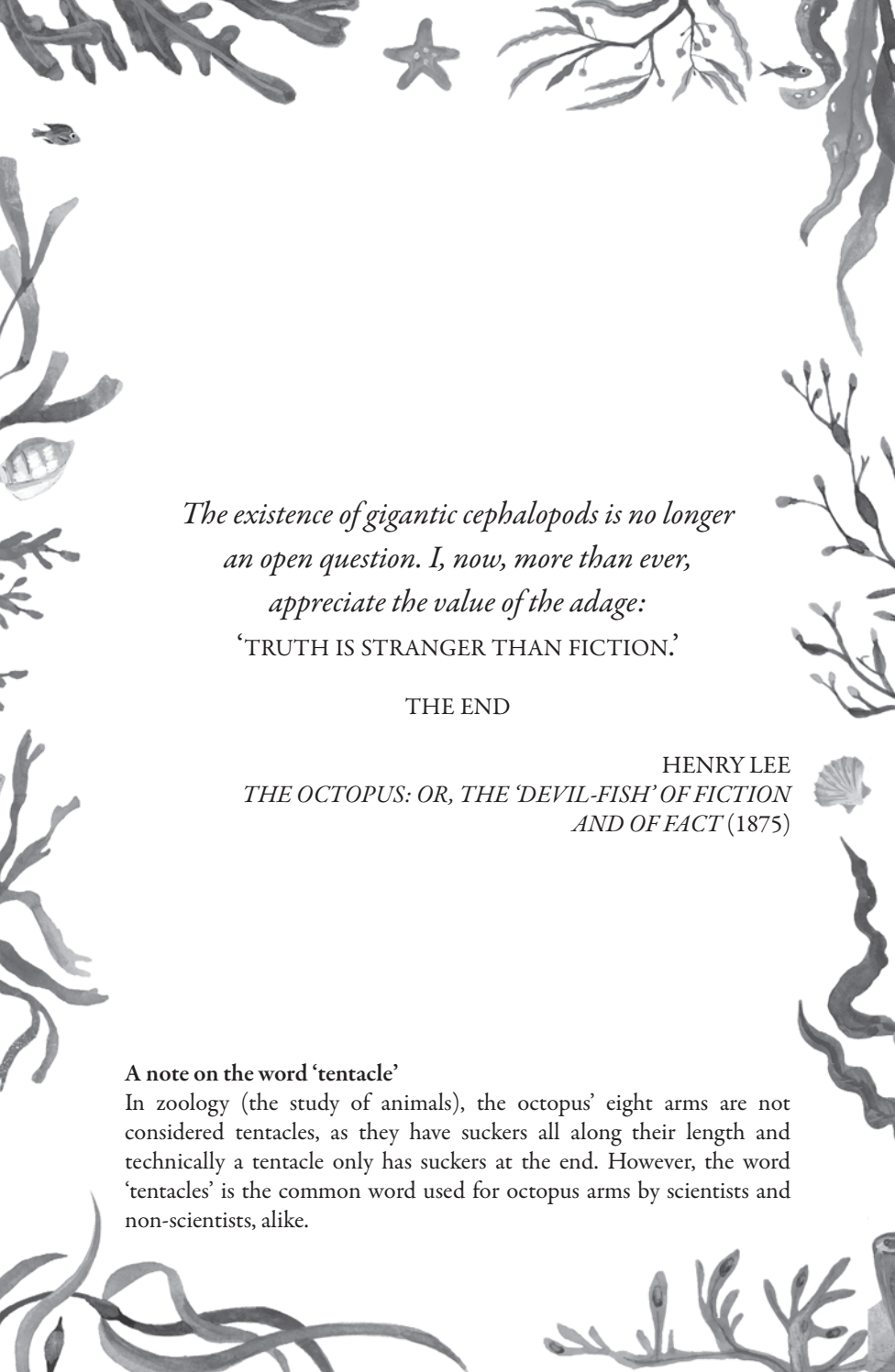
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*For Mum and Dad,  
the song and the sea.*

Also by Lindsay Galvin

*Darwin's Dragons*  
*The Secret Deep*



*The existence of gigantic cephalopods is no longer  
an open question. I, now, more than ever,  
appreciate the value of the adage:  
‘TRUTH IS STRANGER THAN FICTION.’*

THE END

HENRY LEE  
*THE OCTOPUS: OR, THE ‘DEVIL-FISH’ OF FICTION  
AND OF FACT (1875)*



**A note on the word ‘tentacle’**

In zoology (the study of animals), the octopus’ eight arms are not considered tentacles, as they have suckers all along their length and technically a tentacle only has suckers at the end. However, the word ‘tentacles’ is the common word used for octopus arms by scientists and non-scientists, alike.



## PROLOGUE

Alfonso gazed back at the shimmering island of Madeira longingly as it disappeared over the horizon. Soon the sun would join it.

‘We’ll start around here, my good man,’ said the English gentleman, Senhor Bickerstaff. He dabbed his forehead with a purple silk handkerchief, although the evening was cooling.

Alfonso’s father released the sails and the boat rocked as it dropped speed, but Bickerstaff repeated his instruction loudly.

*‘Aqui, aqui. Compreendo?’*

Alfonso suppressed a smile at the man’s exaggerated

Portuguese accent, and his older brother shot him a glare. This *estrangeiro* had paid very well.

His father nodded at Bickerstaff. '*Compreendo, senhor.*' He unspooled the rope, and the net hit the water and sank.

'Deeper, man, I need something that hasn't been seen before. *Profundo!*' He circled his finger, eyes wide and bulging, as if showing the fisherman how the pulley worked.

With a nod from his father, Alfonso tugged the rope so just a breath of breeze caught in the sail, edging them forward, dragging the net behind them in the deep. If the English gentleman wanted to waste his money cruising empty seas at night, it was his lookout.

The boat gave an almighty lurch to one side so the sea surface was in touching distance for a few brief moments, and they all grasped something to stop themselves toppling in. A cry of alarm from Bickerstaff. They must have hit a wayward shoal after all. Alfonso leapt to release the sails as his brother and father heaved on the winch.

This really was a haul—

But Alfonso's first glimpse was not of a mass of writhing silver fish.

The net was swollen, but what filled it was darker and denser than the ocean below it. Something huge.

Not the shape of a deep-water fish big enough to feed the whole village.

Not a shark, dolphin or young whale.

Alfonso heard his father gasp, ‘*O meu Deus*’, his brother curse, and Bickerstaff bark a stream of orders . . . but all he could do was stare. He turned his head this way and that to try to make sense of it.

As the net met the surface, something slipped through. Something . . . long. An eel? The skin was smooth like one, but too big. Far too big.

His father called for his brother to stop and hold, and took over the winch alone, turning the handle more slowly.

His brother gasped. ‘*Polvo!* Turn it back, it is—’

‘No!’ yelled Bickerstaff, bouncing up and down. ‘This is *it!* A large Octopoda will do nicely.’

Alfonso’s brother shook his head, making the sign of the cross. ‘*Não. Polvo, senhor*, this devil-fish. Too big, too big.’

The boat rocked, sea slopping over, and Alfonso’s father muttered to his brother.

It didn’t make sense. Devil-fish were small, soft crawling creatures, wrapping their ribbon legs around their heads as they hid in crevices of the reef just offshore.

This creature was a thousand times bigger.

‘Looks to be a giant Pacific *Enteroctopus dofleini*, but

we are thousands of miles from their usual—’

Alfonso helped Bickerstaff roll over a barrel, which when righted was taller than the boy himself.

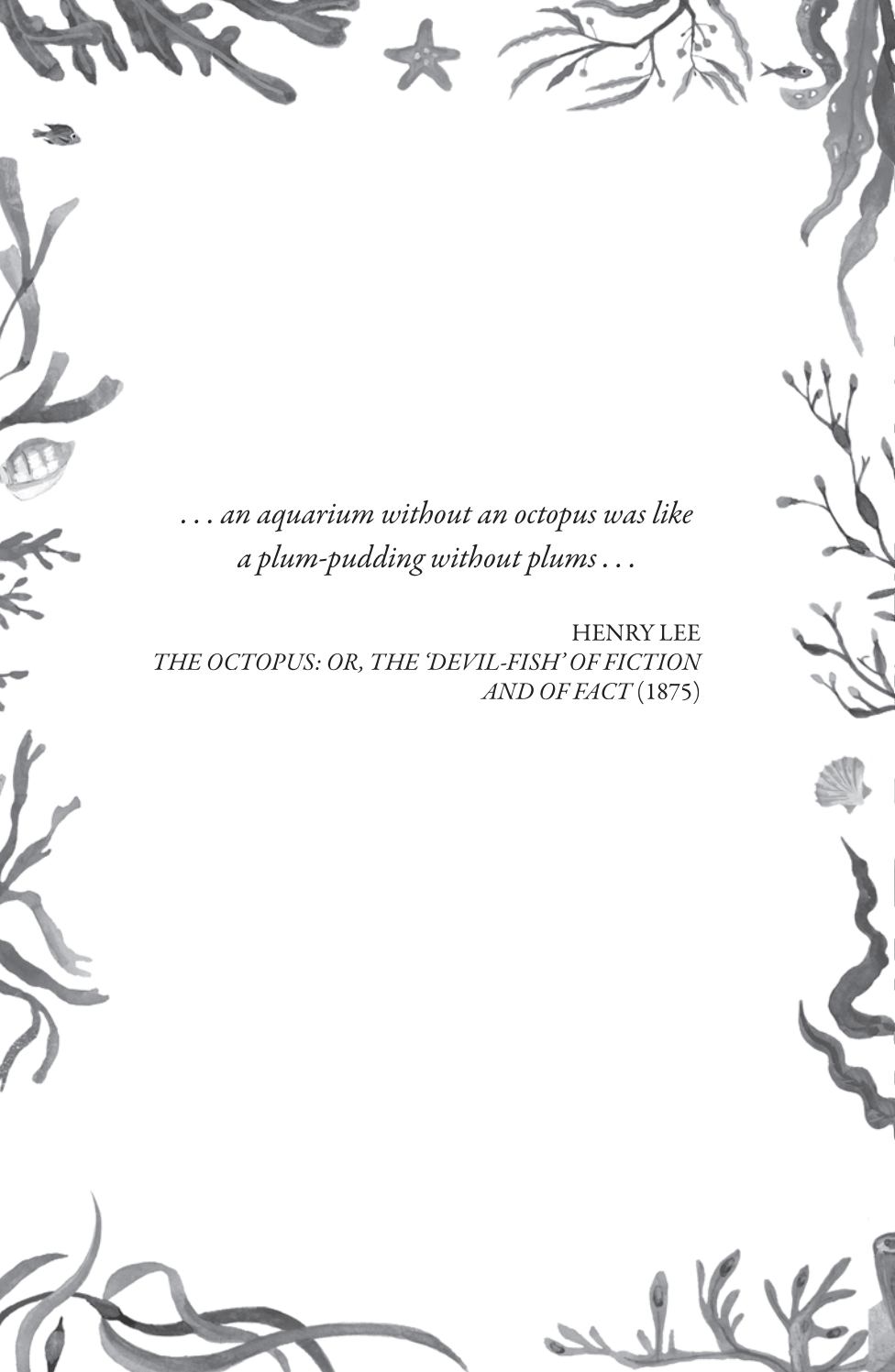
The boat creaked and shuddered as the devil-fish shifted. More arms emerged from the bulging lattice of rope, exploring the surface of its prison, as it hung suspended above the open cask. Alfonso caught glimpses of circular suckers pale in the moonlight, silken arms in constant movement.

It was Alfonso’s turn to make the sign of the cross as the animal was dropped unceremoniously into the barrel and the boat rocked with the new weight. The devil-fish retracted its arms in alarm and Bickerstaff and his father slammed the lid. His brother bashed in the nails, swinging the hammer as if he were sealing the entrance to hell.

But Bickerstaff rubbed his hands together. ‘This beast will suit me very well indeed.’



THE FIRST  
HEART



*... an aquarium without an octopus was like  
a plum-pudding without plums ...*

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*THE OCTOPUS: OR, THE 'DEVIL-FISH' OF FICTION  
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## CHAPTER ONE

**M**y pencil lines blurred, my eyes gritty with tiredness. Mother's voice could have been coming from another room, it was that muffled. We were working by candlelight, a few crumbs of ginger cake and the remains of my bedtime milk – laced with honey and brandy – on a tray. It was so cosy working together in her four-poster bed, but now I wished we'd continued at the bureau where it was easier to stay awake.

'Oh, you are fit to drop,' said Mother, 'that's enough for tonight, dear heart. We haven't even done your hair yet.'

She swung out of the blankets and padded to her dressing table to fetch the bundle of rags.

I shook my head and the drowsy fog cleared enough for me to inspect the lines of my sketch. I was pleased with this hat design. Mother had said that the loops of gauze ribbon down one side would balance the large silk peony bloom that covered the entire base. That was what I had intended, but I didn't say that. Mother had such an eye and I was happy she had taught me so well. That was why Fyfe's Milliners had become so popular with the fashionable set. I smiled up at her.

'What colour?' I said, and hunched forward as her deft fingers wound my long hair around strips of cotton.

'Tell me who you see wearing it, picture her.'

I closed my eyes. 'She's just married, taking a stroll through Hyde Park with her husband—'

'Oh no. I'm afraid this creation is going to be very . . . expensive. Too much for most young wives.'

She waited for me to go on. I tried not to sigh. Truth was, I saw colours and lines, not the people who might buy the finished headwear. My head felt filled with cotton wool. But I'd heard enough society women describing the occasions where they would build their look around one of Fyfe's designs to be able to cobble together an answer.

'Madam is attending her first grandchild's christening,' I said, 'but thinks of herself as young.'

Mother laughed. 'Yes, yes, they all like to think of

themselves as young, clever heart,' she said, and her cool fingertips wound the last curls at the top of my scalp. 'Too tight?'

I shook my head, and my thick snakes of hair bobbed as she kissed my forehead. I stifled a yawn.

'Colour?' said Mother.

She had said expensive.

'Paris Green?'

'Yes. Both the base and flower in Paris Green, the ribbons in chartreuse.'

'She must be at least a countess, then?' I said.

'I should hope so,' said Mother, and we both laughed.

Mother's customers were becoming more and more elegant since we had moved to Grosvenor Square half a year before. I knew this shop and apartment were much more expensive, but Mother had ambition. She wanted to rival the famous Parisian milliner Caroline Reboux.

Suddenly I was so exhausted I could do nothing but nod as Mother led me out of her warm bed and into my own, at the front of our first-floor apartment above the shop. The sign hung directly below my window: *Mrs Rosamund Fyfe and Daughter*.

Mother tucked in my covers and checked the window was open just a crack at the top to allow some air in. Moments later I was asleep in a haze of green silk.