

SIBÉAL POUNDER

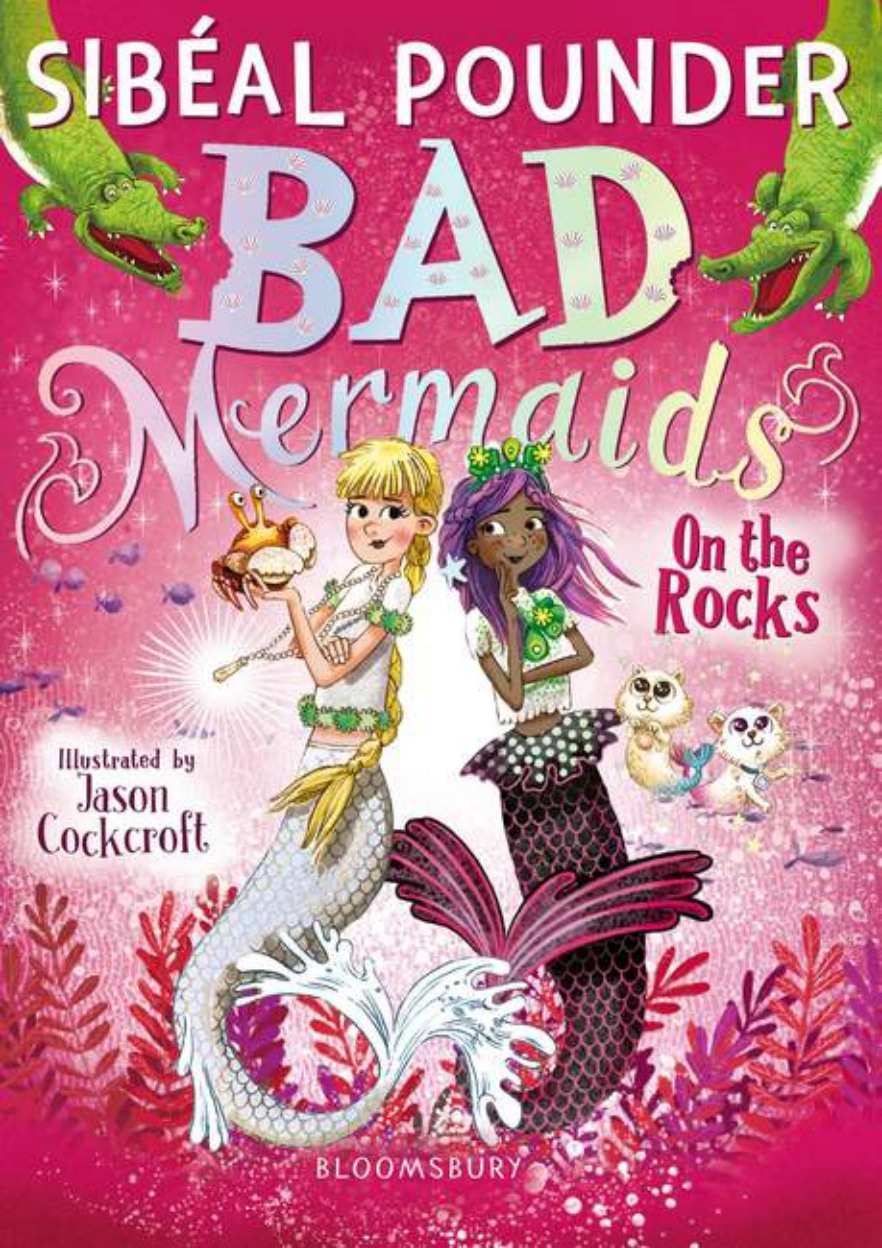
BAD

Mermaids



On the
Rocks

Illustrated by
Jason
Cockcroft



BLOOMSBURY

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Mermaids
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BLOOMSBURY
CHILDREN'S BOOKS

LONDON OXFORD NEW YORK NEW DELHI SYDNEY

The Story So Far ...

Last time in mermaid-filled waters, Beattie, Mimi and Zelda thwarted the plot of one seriously bad mermaid, and did a lot of driving in a *technically* stolen clam car.

But they failed to notice a very important thing – a small, human-shaped detail, right at the very beginning.

Maybe you remember?

There was a girl standing at the ice-cream stall as they raced to the beach to pick up a crabagram. The girl with the claw-shaped hand, bent forever from constantly holding ice-cream cones? The one with the smile and swirls of sunburn on her face? Well, her name is Paris, and it is of the utmost importance that she meets Beattie, Mimi and Zelda.

But there's a problem – Paris is a human on land, and when we left Beattie, Mimi and Zelda they were trapped



on a sunken ship called the *Merry Mary*, hurtling through the Upper Realms. They couldn't be further away from each other. Paris is about to open up her ice-cream stall for the day, and Beattie, Mimi and Zelda are about to discover that the mermaid world is a lot bigger than just their Hidden Lagoon.

And they are also about to discover that seahorses can get seasick.

But that's not important.



1

Would You Rather ... ?

The *Merry Mary* sailed sideways through a hefty hulk of firefly squid. They danced around the old ship, illuminating it with their bright blue lights. Those squid had no idea just who was trapped inside.



‘Would you rather,’ Zelda said, slapping her tail against one of the ship’s portholes, ‘have a tail that shouted insults at you every hour for the rest of your life, or be followed around by a tiny troop of sea slugs?’

Hilma stuck her nose in the air. ‘I’ve already told you, Zelda. I’m not going to answer your silly, pointless questions.’

‘But if you had to choose,’ Zelda pressed.



Hilma angrily crossed her arms and said quietly, 'Probably the sea slugs.'

Zelda shook her head disapprovingly. 'They'd slime all over your favourite hats, Hilma. They'd slime.'

At the other side of the boat's main cabin, Mimi, Zelda's twin, sat by the window, her nose pressed against a porthole and her multicoloured tail curled upward like a table. On it sat a pair of false teeth.

'There's got to be a way out!' Beattie shouted as she swam fast into the cabin. She'd searched all over for an exit – every corridor, every cupboard and door on the old sunken ship. 'It's completely on lockdown. Can you tell where we are yet?'

Mimi wiped her nose across the window, making a slightly wet smudge. 'Um ... no.'

Beattie flopped down next to her and grabbed the false teeth. 'Steve,' she said as she opened them. A tiny trail of seahorse sick floated out, followed by a seahorse wearing a mermaid cone top.

'Excuse you!' he said, then threw up again.

Steve was the only seahorse in the whole lagoon



that could speak. No one knew why. He slept in the false teeth.

Beattie leaned back to avoid the tiny trail of seahorse sick. 'Are you seasick, Steve? I know we're on a boat – but we *are* still underwater ...'

'Can seahorses even get seasick?' Zelda said as the trail of sick made its way past her. 'Ignore me,' she said as she watched it go. 'Steve has thrown up some evidence.'

'We're never getting off this ship,' Beattie said, stroking Steve's back. 'We're well and truly trapped.'

'Beattie,' Zelda said quietly, 'would you rather ... have one of Hilma's hats stuck to your face forever or –'

'STOP ASKING THE POINTLESS QUESTIONS!' Hilma roared. 'They're stupid. And always vaguely offensive about me.'

The boat tipped, sending Hilma and Zelda sliding at speed across the cabin. They splatted into Beattie and Mimi.

'Oh look,' Mimi said casually, her face smooshed against the window. 'There's something out there.'



Beattie pushed her to the side and peered out. It was dark, apart from the occasional flash of luminous blue from the firefly squid, and a strange green glow, just beneath them in a rocky canyon covered in coral.

‘What is that green thing?’ Hilma said, pointing at it, her finger shaking slightly.

Beattie squinted and wiped the window. As they got closer, she could see the green glow was coming from the eyes of a large stone carved into the shape of a crocodile.

The *Merry Mary* dived into the canyon.

The crocodile statue’s eyes began flashing.

‘No way,’ Zelda said. ‘It’s communicating with the ship.’

‘Don’t be ridiculous,’ Beattie said.

‘It might be a human device to trap us!’ Hilma wailed. ‘Humans are evil you know! They have toes! TOES!’

Beattie’s tail shook as the ship was sucked downward, sinking fast. It connected with the stone crocodile with a strange clang.

Hilma whimpered as an emerald light engulfed them. ‘The toes are coming,’ she choked.

Zelda slapped her with her tail. ‘It’s not a horror film, Hilma, calm down.’

The ship started spinning. Then came a groaning sound and everything started to rumble.

‘I don’t like this!’ Beattie shouted as Steve dived back into his false teeth.

‘WHOA! Look at that!’ Zelda cried.

In the side of the canyon the coral fell away, revealing a giant cave entrance, at least ten times the size of the ship.

‘Toes,’ Hilma said, sounding defeated.

‘No human made this,’ Mimi whispered, as their ship glided towards the rock opening and disappeared inside.

2

Everyone, Meet Paris ...

Paris smiled as she handed an ice cream to a kid with baggy swim shorts and grabby hands.

Behind her a large factory loomed.

The kid licked the ice cream. 'Why do you work at an ice-cream stall?'

'To make money to buy parts for my inventions,' Paris said.

'But my daddy says your family own that Silkensocks sock factory right there.' He pointed a chubby finger at the factory behind Paris. 'So you're really rich.'

Paris leaned forward and whispered. 'I like to keep my inventions secret. If I had to ask my mother for the money, she would want to know what it was for.'

The little boy considered her answer for a moment



and then nodded in approval. 'What inventions have you made?'

'Well,' Paris said, picking up the chocolate shavings and sprinkling some on the boy's ice cream, 'lots of things. I like to call myself the GADGET QUEEN.' She laughed.

The boy didn't.

'Are they any good, your inventions?' he asked.

'Oh yes,' Paris lied. Most of her inventions tended to fall apart. 'Almost all my inventions have been a huge sockcess!'

'Success,' the little boy said.

'Yes, that's what I said.'

'No,' he said. 'You said *sockcess*.'

Paris groaned. 'It's a habit. I tend to say sock by accident. A lot.'

'Where are your inventions?' he asked.

'The older ones are in bits in my bedroom cupboard, up there.' She turned and pointed at a sock-shaped tower in the northern wing of the factory. 'But my finest invention, well, you're looking at it.'



The boy's eyes lit up. 'You invented ICE CREAM?'

Paris burst out laughing. 'I *wish*.' She slapped the ice-cream stall. 'No, this is my secret den. This is GADGET QUEEN HEADQUARTERS.'

The little boy looked unimpressed.

'It's just a stall.'

'That's what I wanted it to look like,' Paris said with a knowing smile.

The little boy didn't look convinced.

An old woman walked past with a crab wrapped up snugly in a Silkensocks sock.

'Rock-a-bye, crabby, in a small sock, when the wind blows the socky will ... sock,' the old woman sang.

'That was weird,' Paris said, then turned back to the little boy.

'One more thing,' he said. 'Please could you ask them to change the Silkensocks socks TV advert. It's horrible.'

Paris watched as he tottered off. The advert had been the same for years – and it was terrifying. Her mother's voice sang, grandly, 'TOES DESERVE SILKENSOCKS,' and then some toes danced across



the screen, all singing, 'TOES DESERVE SILKEN-SOCKS.' It finished with a giant sock gobbling them up.

It was her mother's idea. And if you knew Paris's mother, you'd know that was exactly the kind of thing that went on in her brain.

Paris smiled as people walked past, waiting until the coast was clear. She fiddled impatiently with her hair, which she'd pulled into a chunky plait that practically reached her waist. It was time she checked on her latest invention.

A large family, all arguing and chatting loudly over each other, strode past. Paris took her chance. Glancing from left to right, she readjusted her knee-high socks, and as the family blocked the view of the ice-cream stall, she flipped open the fake ice-cream cone on the side and pressed a button. There was a click, and she was gone.



But she hadn't gone far. Hidden under the ice-cream stall was Paris's high-tech den. It was submerged in the



sea, with glass walls that gave her a clear view out into the ocean. A crab scuttled towards the glass, looking at her suspiciously as she fiddled with screens and little bits of half-made gadgets. She pulled on a pair of clam-shell headphones, which she used to listen to conversations on the beach, and pushed papers off the control panel, revealing a high-tech tracking system decorated with ice-cream stickers.

Three dots flashed on it – one purple, one green and one with multicoloured stripes.

The tracking devices she'd placed on Beattie, Mimi and Zelda were working! She punched the air in victory.

'Hang on a sockond – I mean second,' she said. She took off her headphones and turned to the crab. 'The mermaids are out in the Atlantic Ocean! Their home is a place called the Hidden Lagoon. And that's in the Pacific Ocean. Why would they be in the Atlantic?'

The crab stared at her as if to say, *You know I don't talk, yes?*

Paris leapt to her feet.



‘Wait a SOCKOND!’ she cried. ‘Oh wow, I think I might know ...’ She rifled frantically through the papers on her desk and pulled out an old book titled *IT HAD A TAIL (Stop Calling Me a Liar)*. Her mother had written it when she was young and it was full of mermaid research. She’d spent *a lot* of money finding mermaid things – ancient shell tops and seaweed letters – but she’d never found a hidden mermaid kingdom. She had lots of theories about where they were though.

‘THAT’S IT!’ Paris shouted, startling the crab. He slipped off the rock. ‘There’s a kingdom where the mermaids have crocodile tails and the water is emerald green.’ She turned the book around to show the crab a doodle of a mermaid with a crocodile-skin tail. ‘And it’s hidden somewhere in the *Atlantic*.’

She grabbed a map and placed it over the tracking screen. Carefully she traced the spot where the three mermaids were. She scrawled ‘THE CROCODILE KINGDOM?’ next to it.

‘I’m a genius!’ she cried. ‘Gadget Queen strikes again!’





She held the map up and smiled at it.

An alarm sounded and she fell off her chair with a bang.

‘Ow,’ Paris groaned from under her desk.

The alarm sounded again. ‘All right, all right, Susan Cam,’ she said through gritted teeth.

Tacked to the wall was a large screen, decorated with fuzzy spotted socks hanging like bunting. A huge red light was flashing above it.

‘I planted a tiny camera in my mother’s hair,’ Paris informed the crab. ‘It sounds the alarm when she’s close by and shows me a view from her head. Look, she’s walking towards us. I’d better go!’

She hit the button on her chair. In a flash she was back at the stall like she’d never left.

‘Paris, my disappointing sock,’ her mother sniped. Susan was wearing her trademark spotted socks and stilettos and a face so angry the inflatable pool toys on the stall next door had deflated. ‘Are you listening, Paris?’

Paris casually poured some sprinkles over the ice cream. ‘Uh-huh?’



‘We’re releasing the crabs. We need to clear the beach so no one grows suspicious.’

Paris raised an eyebrow. ‘What crabs? Why would you –’

‘FREE ICE CREAM!’ her mother began shouting.
‘FREE ICE CREAM COURTESY OF THE
SILKENSOCKS!’

There was a ripple of excitement on the beach, followed by a flurry of sand and swimsuits.

‘Distract them,’ her mother ordered as she tottered off towards the emptying beach.

The rumble of bare feet and flip-flops grew louder.

Paris held her breath as everyone lunged for the ice-cream stall.



3

On the Rocks

When the ship ground to a halt, it sounded like someone had turned the volume up. The rumble of chattering mermaids dribbled through the ship, until Beattie could barely hear the panicked wheeze-breathing Hilma was doing.

‘Who is that chattering?’ Zelda said.

‘Toes,’ Hilma whimpered knowingly. ‘It’s the toes.’

Mimi put a hand on Hilma’s elaborately decorated shoulder. ‘Toes don’t speak. Or at least, have never spoken in front of anyone. You know, I don’t think they have mouths, actually ...’

A strange green glow engulfed the ship and the portholes popped open.

‘What was that?’ Hilma said with a jump.



‘How strange,’ Beattie said, gripping the edge of the porthole and peeking out. Through the bubbles she could make out crowds of mermaids – hundreds of them – dressed oddly and entirely in shades of green. All of them had flamboyant shoulder pads.

Zelda swam up over Beattie and pushed her head aside to get a better look. ‘Oh look at the shoulder pads. You’ll fit right in here, Hilma!’

Beattie squeezed her face back in beside Zelda’s for another look. They were at some sort of port. A wonky line of impressive sunken vessels stretched off into the distance.

‘Where do you think we are?’ Zelda asked.

A crocodile swam past.

Then another.

Beattie’s mouth fell open.

The crocodiles. The weirdly dressed mermaids.

‘Um, Beattie?’ Zelda said, sticking her finger in and out of Beattie’s gaping mouth.

‘THE GREEN EVERYTHING!’ Beattie cried.

‘Yes, Beattie,’ Zelda said slowly. ‘Green.’





‘The Crocodile Kingdom,’ she spluttered. ‘I think we’re in the Crocodile Kingdom!’

‘The Crocodile Kingdom isn’t *real*, Beattie,’ Hilma scoffed. ‘That’s just something your mother believes in. And everyone knows she’s insane.’

Beattie’s mum was the travel reporter for *Clamzine* back in the Hidden Lagoon. She was a gutsy explorer, currently swimming the Upper Realms and searching for hidden mermaid kingdoms, though most mermaids thought they were entirely mythical.



‘Wait,’ Zelda said. ‘I thought crocodiles need to surface to breathe?’

‘They say the water within the walls of the Crocodile Kingdom is laced with magic,’ Beattie explained. ‘The crocodiles never have to leave.’ Her tail flopped. ‘Wait, if we *are* in the Crocodile Kingdom, then that means no one will find us here. No one believes this place exists! Well, apart from my mum, but the chances of her finding it and getting inside are about as likely as Hilma saying something positive.’

‘It’s *not* the Crocodile Kingdom,’ Hilma said. ‘Someone made the place up years ago, and silly mermaids like you have believed it ever since.’

‘I’m going to get a better look,’ Beattie said. ‘There’s no point hiding in here, waiting for someone to save us. I’ll have to find a way to get us home.’

‘We’re not letting you go alone,’ Mimi said.

‘We’re DEFINITELY coming too,’ Zelda said, brandishing a fist.

Hilma frantically waved goodbye. ‘Have THE BEST time, you three!’

Zelda narrowed her eyes at Hilma. ‘You have no guts.’

Mimi shook her head. ‘Everyone has guts.’ She patted Hilma’s belly. ‘Yep, there they are.’

Hilma shoved Mimi’s hand away. ‘I’m not going to go out there.’

Steve popped out of his false teeth and nestled into Beattie’s hair.

‘Even Steve is coming with us,’ Zelda said. ‘And he’s a seahorse.’



He poked his nose out of Beattie's hair. 'I'm a *MIRACLE*.'

'Yeah, yeah,' Zelda grumbled, pulling herself up to one of the portholes.

'We'll be back soon, Hilma,' Beattie said. 'Stay put. Don't go anywhere.'

Hilma stuck her nose in the air and crossed her arms. 'Obviously I'm going to stay put.'

Beattie nodded, and the three of them squeezed out of the porthole with a pop.

'WAIT!' Hilma cried. 'You forgot your false teeth!'

But the others were already outside and didn't hear her.

The false teeth floated slowly past Hilma's face.

She prodded them with her finger and gagged. 'Eugh, *yuck*.'



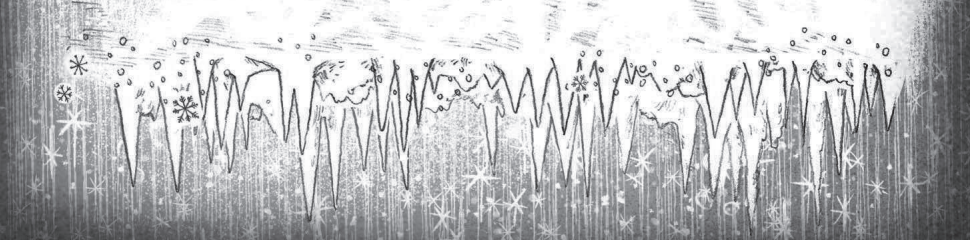


MARITZA MIST'S WATER WITCH CATALOGUE

MERMAID DUPLICATION! Double trouble or DOUBLE THE FUN?

Inspired by the water witches of Octopolli
and their sublime potion-mixing skills,
one sprinkle of this little powder will
make two of you. Yes, that's right!
Create another you in minutes.*

*Due to a slight quantity error when mixing this potion,
your duplicate is likely to shout 'FISH EYE!' every now
and again. Apologies for any inconvenience caused.



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Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
50 Bedford Square, London WC1B 3DP, UK

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First published in Great Britain in 2018 by Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

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A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: PB: 978-1-4088-7714-2; eBook: 978-1-4088-7715-9

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

Typeset by RefineCatch Limited, Bungay, Suffolk
Printed and bound in Great Britain by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY



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