

PROLOGUE

In a field full of wild flowers, a boy and a girl stood side by side beneath an ancient oak tree. The sky was angry, the thunder growling like an angry beast.

'Are you ready?' asked the boy nervously.

The girl raised her chin, her wheat-blonde hair sweeping down her back in a curtain. 'I've *always* been ready.'

They pressed their palms against the gnarled trunk. The tree began to quiver, its branches stretching as it shook itself awake. There was a brief silence and then a crack exploded above them. A whip of lightning leapt from the clouds and split the centre of the tree in two. Flames erupted along the bark, climbing across the branches and devouring the leaves until everything was a bright, brilliant gold.

'Betty?' said the boy uncertainly. 'Should we –'

'Sssh!' hissed the girl. 'It's about to say something.'

The tree began to whisper. It was much louder than

the boy expected – the crackle and hiss of surrounding flame slowly turning into words. '*Ssssspeak or be sssspoken to.*'

The girl asked her question. As the tree considered it, she grew restless, tapping her fingers against the charred bark. The air grew heavier, a veil of mist curling the strands around her face.

The tree did not speak to the girl again.

Instead, it turned its attention to the boy and climbed inside his head. He fell to the ground, twisting and writhing, as a vision unfurled in the blackness of his mind.

He was standing on the edge of a headland with the clouds gathering in his outstretched hands and the wind wreathing his body. He felt the sea rushing through his veins, leaving salt crystals in the lining of his heart.

He knew that he was changed forever.

Betty had been wrong.

The island had chosen him.

He tried to blink himself awake but the tree tightened its grip on his mind. Another vision pushed its way through. Something they had not asked to see.

'Watch,' hissed the tree. '*Pay attention.*'

A boy appeared before him. He was a little younger, but he was wearing the same nose and the same eyes. In one hand, he held an emerald as green as the island grass. In the other, a crooked staff that pointed out to sea. They

stood apart from each other, looking but not really seeing as ravens filled the sky in plumes of feathers. The earth cracked beneath their feet and a shadow crept across the island and buried them in darkness.

The boy woke up. Back in the field of wild flowers, it was pouring with rain.

'Betty,' he said, a droplet landing squarely in his mouth. 'You won't believe what I've just seen.'

The girl was standing over him, her narrowed eyes like burning coals. She kicked him in the ribs. 'Don't you mean what you just *stole!*'

'Stop!' He twisted away from her as she kicked him again. 'I need to tell you something. Can you stop, please? Ow! Listen to me. I saw ravens, Betty. I think ...'

The girl wasn't listening. She was stalking away from him, through wild flowers and sodden grass, her chin tipped to the weeping sky.

The boy wanted to call her back, to tell her this was much bigger than her – that it was bigger than both of them – but she had disappeared into thin air, leaving only the faintest ripple behind.

The boy tried to swallow his fear. Somewhere deep inside the earth, the darkness was rising again, a darkness more terrible than anything the world had ever seen.

It was too late to stop it now.

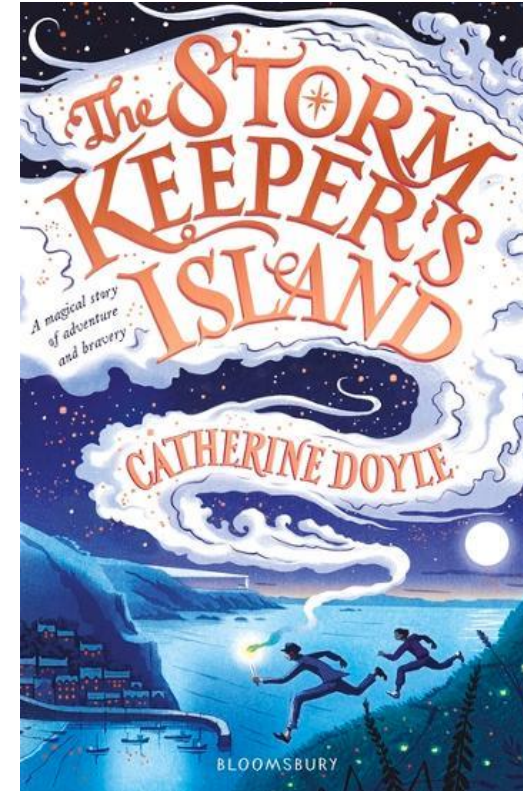
The Storm Keeper's Island
Catherine Doyle

1. Order these events as they appear in the prologue.
 - (a) The boy wanted to explain to the girl but she wouldn't listen.
 - (b) The tree was split into two by lightning.
 - (c) The boy asks the girl if she is ready.
 - (d) Ravens filled the sky in plumes of feathers.
 - (e) The boy felt the sea rushing through his veins.
 - (f) The tree began to whisper.

2. Which word is closest in meaning to and could replace 'restless' in the line '*As the tree considered it, she grew restless, tapping her fingers against the charred bark.*'

- (a) fidgety
- (b) tense
- (c) upset
- (d) dismayed

3. How has the author used the weather to show the mood of the prologue?



MISS POWIS' TOP TIP FOR ANSWERING QUESTIONS LIKE THIS: Find the line in the text and read the sentences either side of it. Replace restless with each of the options – which one suits the girl's actions best?