

Miss Mary-Kate Martin's
GUIDE TO

MONSTERS

'Charmingly
perfect.'

KATRINA
NANNSTAD



The Trouble with the Two-Headed Hydra

KAREN FOXLEE

Illustrated by FRED A CHIU

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Allen & Unwin
Cammeraygal Country
83 Alexander Street
Crows Nest NSW 2065
Australia
Phone: (61 2) 8425 0100
Email: info@allenandunwin.com
Web: www.allenandunwin.com

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For Conor Nathan Foxlee.

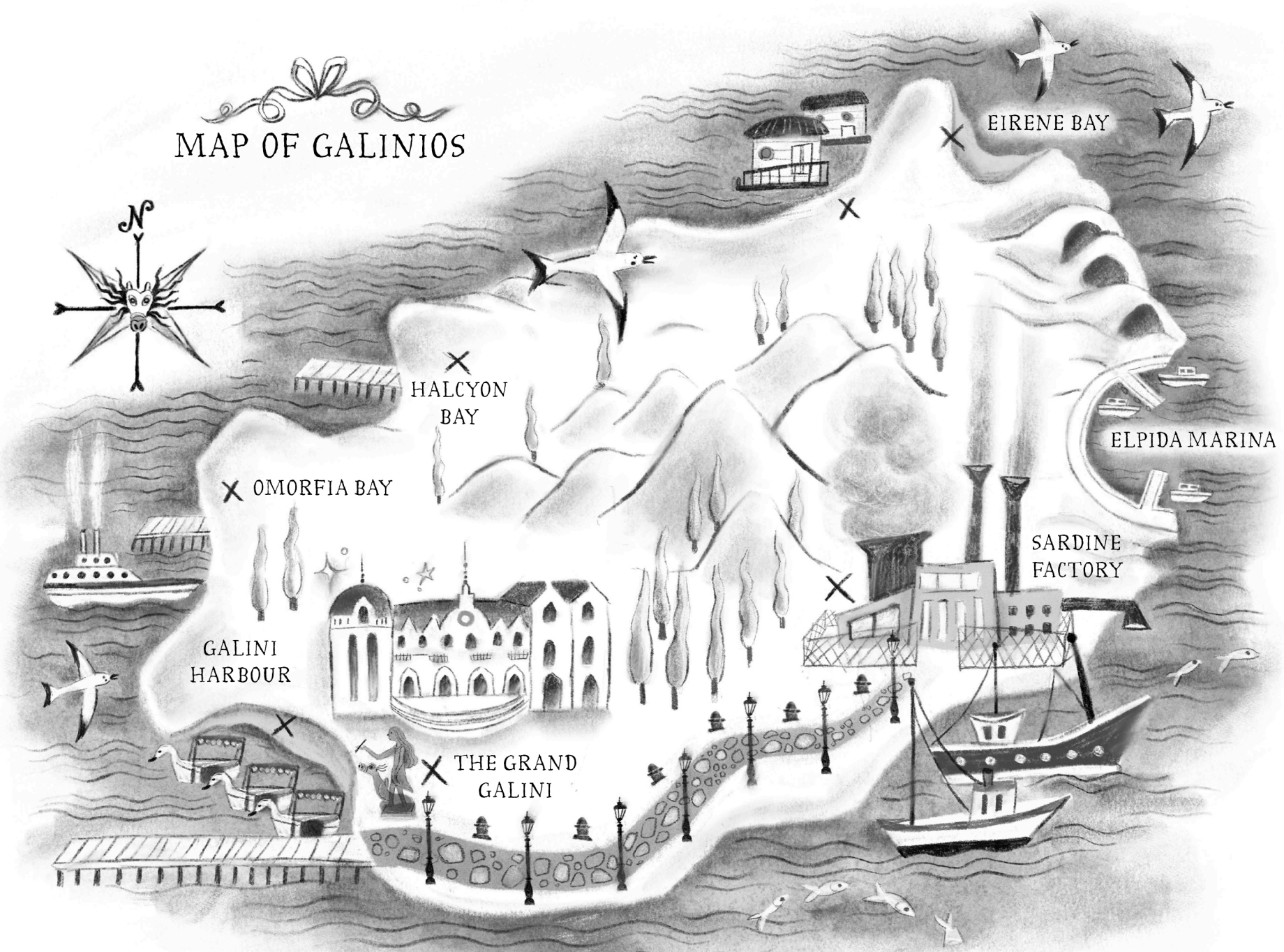
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For Maa-meh (Mum).

FC

MAP OF GALINIOS



Some other antiquities that show our hydra

The monster slid swiftly under the surface. Barely a ripple passed above, where the ferry rode the gentle waves.

Onboard, passengers dozed on the deck in the late afternoon sunshine or drank coffees at the bar. Two men argued over a game of cards. An old woman stood up to stretch her legs, holding onto her cane. Three small girls danced to the traditional Greek music playing over the ferry's PA system. Travellers watched the setting sun as the boat skimmed over the calm seas.

Down beneath, the monster writhed. Its blue scales glimmered.

The captain, in his crisp white clothes, stood at the prow and took the microphone. The PA system crackled. He pointed to a small port in the distance, with hills covered in houses and hotels.

'Welcome to the island of Galinios,' he said. 'Did you know it means *tranquillity*?'

No one sensed what lurked below.



The Rule of Monsters states that people who have met one monster are statistically much more likely to meet another.

*P.K. Mayberry's A Brief Guide to
Monsters and Monster Hunters*





Mary-Kate stared at her outfit in the mirror. Brand new sparkly red shoes, blue shorts and a blue and white striped T-shirt. She wondered what she needed to balance the stripes. Her red sparkly backpack had helped, but she needed something else. She sighed and looked through her bow box. A bow was definitely what she needed. A red bow or a blue bow, or preferably a navy bow patterned with small white anchors. Although she knew she didn't own such a bow, she searched anyway.

She placed a plain navy bow in her long brown hair and sighed again. Mary-Kate had tried very hard to create a seaside theme because she knew it would make her feel better. If everything in her suitcase matched, nothing terrible could possibly happen, only she didn't own nearly enough nautical type clothes. Professor Martin, Granny and Mary-Kate

only went once a year to Scarborough and that wasn't really the same as the Greek Islands. Just thinking the words *Greek Islands* made her stomach begin to churn with butterflies. The Greek Islands were far, far away. There was deep ocean and tall mountains in-between with the potential for great calamities. Avalanches maybe. Quite possibly volcanoes.

Thinking *volcanoes* made her go straight to her lucky items collection, which was stored neatly on the top shelf of her bookstand. She took her lucky silver packet of chewing gum that contained the last six pieces of gum her father had left behind before he disappeared on Mount Shishapangma when she was five. She placed it in her shorts pocket. She took her lucky international coin collection containing thirty-three coins in its new jar and placed it in her backpack. She touched the old jar, which now held Woolington Wyrmslime. It was brown and glittered slightly. Even though she shuddered at the sight of it, a strange thrill of excitement coursed through her and her breath caught in her throat.



‘La-la-la,’ she said aloud so she would stop thinking about that adventure. She continued to sift through her collection. She would definitely need her lucky Big Ben-shaped novelty torch, she decided. She probably should also take her lucky backup torch in case her first lucky torch’s batteries ran out. She chose the little novelty LED torch shaped like a turtle that her granny had brought back from the Orkney Islands. She wondered if she should bring a third torch in case both torches failed.

‘I do not need three torches,’ she said firmly aloud. ‘Two torches is a perfectly lucky number.’

Mary-Kate was almost certain though, that she should take the miniature music box that played ‘Swan Lake’. She quickly placed these items into her backpack, followed by her lucky protractor and compass set. She took a deep breath, picked up her lucky world globe stress ball and squished it hard, then added it to the pile. She placed her strawberry-scented notebook and her glitter pens in their plastic case on top. Finally, she opened the top

dresser drawer and retrieved something that she'd only recently acquired. It was a star-shaped medal attached to an old striped ribbon. The colours were magenta, blue and green. She slipped it into her pocket beside the chewing gum.

'Just in case,' she murmured.

'Mary-Kate,' called her mother, Professor Martin. 'Could you bring your suitcase through to the front door? The driver will be here in a minute. And then run upstairs to say goodbye to Granny. Don't forget to pack your bathers.'

'Okay,' called Mary-Kate, glancing at her hideously patterned bathers that lay draped over the chair. She was a good swimmer but her bathers were green and decorated with cats in boats. Her granny had bought them for her.

'Patterns are good,' her granny sometimes said when she came downstairs in a floral skirt and a striped shirt and an emerald-green overcoat. She liked to smile at Mary-Kate to see if she'd disagree. Mary-Kate loved her granny, even with clashing

patterns, although sometimes her outfits were so brightly mismatched that Mary-Kate had to look away and hope that a disaster wouldn't happen. It wasn't just mismatched clothes that set off these thoughts of disaster, though. Many things could.

For instance:

- * Brown colouring-in pencils
- * Beginnings and endings
- * Facing backwards on trains
- * Saying the wrong thing during small talk
- * Or sudden changes.

And there had been a rather large sudden change in the Martin household since the phone rang late last night. Professor Martin had been summoned to an important find at an archaeological dig site on a remote Greek Island. She'd come into the sitting room where Granny and Mary-Kate had been watching the shopping channel and informed Mary-Kate that she'd be coming on the trip as well.

'Me?' Mary-Kate had gasped. She hadn't long returned from Woolington Well with the Professor,

and the adventure she'd had there still filled her head with a mix of dread, confusion and strange fluttery excitement.

'Oh, the Greek Islands are simply wonderful. You'll love it, Mary-Kate,' cried Granny. 'What's the find, dear?'

'A wonderful tiled floor unearthed in the expansion of a sardine processing plant. Apparently, it shows some type of sea creature,' said the Professor.

'C-creature,' Mary-Kate had stammered. She'd been looking forward to her term holidays from her school Bartley Towers, time spent with Granny and the soothing sounds of the shopping channel.

'It's made of tile, darling, it should be safe.' Granny smiled. 'Oh, how wonderful, a visit to a Greek Island. If only I hadn't had that small accident on my bus tour to Birmingham, I'd have come along too.'

Granny had sprained her ankle and was confined to her bed or a chair for a week.

'Creature,' whispered Mary-Kate now, in her room. She glanced at the Woolington Wyrmslime

jar on her lucky things shelf. In Woolington Well she'd met Arabella Woolington and together they'd crawled through muddy tunnels and met a giant fire-breathing wyrm. They'd solved a mystery and helped a monster and saved a village. She'd done things that she never, ever would have thought herself capable of.

Mary-Kate deliberately left the bathers where they were and zipped up her suitcase.

Surely nothing like that could EVER happen again.



Upstairs, Granny was reading a book near the window. Granny had a very large library, shelves stretching from floor to ceiling, and nearly all of the books were romance novels. A fluffy and rather old ginger cat slept curled beside her. Outside it was raining.

'At least it will be sunny where you're going,' said

Granny cheerfully, patting the cat. Her bandaged leg was up on some cushions and she wore a zebra-patterned dressing-gown and fluffy green slippers.



‘I wish I could stay and look after you,’ said Mary-Kate. ‘I don’t even know why I have to go with Prof.’

Prof was what Mary-Kate called her mother.

‘I think she quite enjoyed you tagging along last time, didn’t she?’ said Granny, smiling. She had purple-tinged hair and always wore pink lipstick. Despite all her mismatching bits, Mary-Kate loved her granny very much. She’d helped raise Mary-Kate since her father disappeared all those years ago.

‘She said you were very brave,’ added Granny.

‘Did she tell you about it?’

‘Why of course she did,’ said Granny.

That surprised Mary-Kate. She didn’t think her gentle and mismatched grandmother, who liked bus tours and spicy takeaways, needed to know about a giant fire-breathing wyrm. Mary-Kate had been surprised by many things lately, including how her mother had reacted to the whole Woolington Wyrms situation, as though it was almost normal.

‘Did you believe what happened?’ Sometimes, when she thought about it, she could hardly believe what happened herself.

‘There are all sorts of weird and wonderful things in the world,’ said Granny, laughing. ‘Including myself! Have a good time and try to stay out of trouble.’

‘I will try very, very, very hard,’ said Mary-Kate. She kissed her granny’s pink powdered cheek and ignored the puzzled feeling she had.



On the plane, Mary-Kate drew a map of the Greek Islands with her glitter pens. Professor Martin had set her this task. She said it was always important to have a geographical understanding of the place you were visiting. Mary-Kate also knew it was to keep her occupied so she didn’t worry. There were many islands so she divided them

into smaller groups. The Ionian, the Saronic, the Cyclades, the Sporades, the North Aegean and the Dodecanese.

‘Which islands are we going to?’ she asked her mother.

‘The Dodecanese,’ said the Professor, looking up from her *Underwater Archaeology Weekly* magazine.

‘Oh,’ said Mary-Kate, feeling a small tremor of anxiety. ‘And what are you doing again?’

Perhaps the mission had changed.

Perhaps she hadn’t heard that word *creature* last night.

‘There is a sardine processing factory on the island that is being expanded. During the foundation excavation a large tiled floor has been discovered. It depicts ...’

‘A sea creature,’ said Mary-Kate. It would help to say the word *creature* out loud. She hoped it was an ordinary sea creature. A small, pleasant starfish, for instance.

‘Yes, a magnificent big thing by all accounts.

They're everywhere in the myths of these parts.'

'Really?' said Mary-Kate. Her hand shook slightly as she drew the Dodecanese Islands in lilac glitter.

'There's sure to be a marvellous myth about it,' repeated Professor Martin. 'Maybe that can be something you can look into for me. Myths related to Galinios. Is there a giant sea creature involved? You could use the plane wi-fi. Maybe another mystery to be solved?'

'I think there's been too many mysteries lately,' said Mary-Kate, firmly. 'I hope it is extremely boring in the Dodecanese.'



Each new monster adventure should
be approached with optimism.

*P.K. Mayberry's A Brief Guide to
Monsters and Monster Hunters*





After the plane trip, there was a taxi ride through crowded Athens. The place was bursting with noise, mopeds whining, horns tooting and snatches of music seeping out of crowded laneways. Professor Martin pointed out landmarks with enthusiasm.

‘Mary-Kate, the Acropolis! And that’s the Parthenon and that bit is the Temple of Athena,’ she said, as Mary-Kate peered through the smudgy taxi window. ‘So much wonderful history.’

Mary-Kate squished her stress ball rhythmically because she was worried about sea creatures and the sea in general and ferry rides and if her seat would face backwards and shipwrecks. But with each new landmark, each new noise and smell, her mind was momentarily distracted from these troubles.

‘Perhaps we’ll spend a day here on the way back,’ said Professor Martin. ‘I’d love to show you the sights.’

‘I’d like that,’ said Mary-Kate, willing herself to mean it.

The port was filled with jostling crowds and more noise than Mary-Kate thought she could bear. She followed her mother’s calm, straight-backed example as she navigated the throng with ease, quietly uttering *thank you* and *excuse me*. Their ferry was large and modern, to Mary-Kate’s relief, and decked out with multiple lifeboats. She counted them immediately. Her seat also faced forwards.

‘The Aegean Sea is truly something,’ said Professor Martin as the ferry entered open waters, and again Mary-Kate had to agree. It was the most beautiful blue she’d ever seen. ‘And this sunshine! It will do us the world of good.’

The sun was warm against the glass and the sea sparkled. Term holidays and no Bartley Towers. Mary-Kate breathed out slowly.

‘Did you get a chance to read about any myths on the plane?’ asked Professor Martin.

‘No,’ said Mary-Kate, the sunshine making her

feel drowsy. ‘And there won’t be any internet out here.’

Athens had disappeared behind them. There was no land to be seen. Just blue sky and azure sea.

‘Well, fortunately I have this book with me,’ said Professor Martin, retrieving a well-worn book from her briefcase. It was called *Mythical Monsters of Ancient Greece*. ‘I always find it’s useful to know the history of a country’s monsters before arriving.’

Mary-Kate took the book reluctantly and eyed her mother quizzically. But Professor Martin only smiled and returned to reading her magazine.



The book title did in fact mention the word *ancient* and Mary-Kate was relieved that it did. *Ancient* was a long time ago. *Ancient* was nothing to worry about, she told herself. Because it seemed Ancient Greece had been teeming with monsters.

Mary-Kate closed her eyes and opened pages at random. The first monster was the Cyclops, a one-eyed giant. She quickly closed the book. The second page-opening led her to centaurs. Centaurs were half-man, half-horse and if there ever was a mismatched combination, it was that. Mary-Kate shuddered as she sounded out the names of some famous centaurs. But she wondered about them too. What would it feel like to have the back legs of a horse? Did centaurs think humans were strange? The third page-opening led her to the Lernaean Hydra, which was a many-headed sea monster. It ate humans whole.

‘Well, that’s just lovely,’ said Mary-Kate, but she wondered if it liked to eat other things too. Sea cucumbers, for instance. And maybe it only ate

humans that poked it with large sticks. She closed the book again. She longed for a small, fluffy Greek monster. She'd try one more time to see if she could find one.

The page she opened featured Charybdis, a sea monster that created deadly whirlpools that sucked entire unsuspecting ships into the ocean depths.

Mary-Kate gazed at the calm blue sea through the window from her seat and wished she hadn't opened that page at all.



The houses and hotels were blindingly white in the sunshine. They nestled on the cliffs overlooking the crystal-clear sea. Mary-Kate squinted her eyes against the glare and read a large sign painted with blue letters.

'Galini Harbour, main port of the island of Galinios,' she said.

‘Galinos means *serenity* or *tranquillity*,’ said Prof. ‘A fitting name.’ She pointed out to the mirror-like bay, the ferry departing in the distance.

The sun was warm on Mary-Kate’s cheeks as she stared up at the jumble of whitewashed buildings. All the window frames and doors were painted a bright sky-blue. *These little laneways are like a puzzle*, she thought and couldn’t help but smile. Seagulls perched sleepily on a statue at the end of the jetty and as they drew closer, Mary-Kate saw that it was a stone girl in flowing stone robes, with long stone hair rolling over her shoulders. The girl statue held a flute-like instrument in an outstretched hand. She didn’t seem to be at all worried about the huge carved snake-like creature coiled around her lower legs. It stopped Mary-Kate in her tracks.

‘Oh, how marvellous,’ said Professor Martin, stopping before the statue too. ‘Quite ancient, indeed. She’s lost an arm unfortunately, and whatever was wrapped around her, some kind of serpent I’d say, has lost its head.’



Mary-Kate hadn't noticed the statue was missing an arm, but she was secretly glad that whatever was wrapped around the girl's lower body didn't have a head. The stone girl didn't seem concerned, though; she stared out to the calm water peacefully. Mary-Kate followed her gaze and noticed that down below the jetty there was a crowd gathered around a tumbled pile of small red-hulled boats. The boats were upturned on the beach, wood splintered, some reduced to nothing more than planks.

Mary-Kate gasped as she moved closer to the railing. The boats were the small pedal-powered type used by holidaymakers to explore the tranquil harbour. Down below, the people appeared worried. Maybe the harbour wasn't so serene after all.

'What happened to those boats?' wondered Mary-Kate aloud. Then, softly, 'I hope it wasn't the Charybdis.'

'No, that lives further north,' muttered Professor Martin absent-mindedly as she came to stand beside Mary-Kate. 'Interesting. Maybe a freak wave. Perhaps something you can find out. A mystery already! And who is the statue and what creature was wrapped around her?'

Mary-Kate shivered, turning back to the statue. The sun suddenly didn't feel so warm.

A voice close by interrupted her thoughts.

'Yassou! Excuse me, are you Professor Martin?' asked a dark-haired boy, who looked Mary-Kate's age. 'Here for the Grand Galini?'

He had bright brown eyes and a constellation of

freckles on his nose. He grinned as he pointed to the imposing white building behind the jetty that had a purple-flowered vine trailing from every balcony.

‘Would you like me to help with your bags?’ he asked as he began wheeling them.

‘Yassou. Thank you very much,’ said Professor Martin. ‘Excuse me, are you working at the hotel?’

‘No, I’m not, but I have a message for you when you have arrived safely at your destination,’ the boy said, mysteriously, and raced ahead. He called back, ‘It’s the prettiest hotel in all the world. Don’t you think?’

‘It is indeed,’ replied Professor Martin. To Mary-Kate, she said, ‘What a friendly face he has.’

‘Yes,’ Mary-Kate agreed, but really her head was filled with worries about the wreckage on the sand below the jetty. Her concerns increased when she saw the expression on the boy’s face had changed as they approached. He stood on the front steps looking solemn.

‘My name is Nikos Nikolaou,’ he said, his dark eyes grave. ‘And I have a message for you from Kyria Eva Nikolaou. She’s my grandmother. And she is the Custodian. She is glad you have arrived.’

‘I see,’ said Professor Martin, just as solemnly. ‘And what is the message?’

‘It’s here in this letter,’ he said, fishing in his pocket. ‘Somewhere. Here it is. She hopes you can read it.’

He passed a rather crumpled envelope to Professor Martin.

‘Thank you very much, Nikos Nikolaou. We will be sure to read it.’

Custodian. Mary-Kate’s fingers suddenly itched for her strawberry-scented notebook. She needed to write down those words and find out what they meant. Battered boats and a Custodian. A Custodian of what?

Nikos smiled. ‘Beside the letter,’ he said, looking relieved that the important message-giving part was over, ‘Eva Nikolaou asked me to tell you that I am very good at giving island tours. I do it in

school holidays to earn money for my Save the Seas Foundation. Perhaps your daughter would like an island tour while you carry out your important work, Professor Martin?’

He rushed past them, not waiting for an answer, and collected a bicycle lying on its side behind a large pot of hot-pink flowers. It was a rickety bicycle, rusted in parts, bright green with a red seat. Two very clashing colours. He grabbed a black cap from the handlebar and placed it on his head. It was embroidered in gold with the words **NIKOS’S ISLAND TOURS.**

‘I know all the best places, all the history, and my English is very good,’ he said, beaming. ‘I charge thirty euros.’

Mary-Kate couldn’t understand how they’d get around the island. It wasn’t like Nikos could drive a bus. She smiled politely and hoped her mother would say no.

‘A day tour on a bicycle to raise money to save the sea,’ said Professor Martin, thoughtfully.

‘That really is wonderful. What do you think, Mary-Kate? To learn some local history?’

Mary-Kate’s eyes widened. She tried to send a signal that she in no way wanted to take a tour with Nikos on a bicycle. Her mother knew she didn’t like bicycles. She didn’t even like the word *bicycle*. It was sharp and pointy. She didn’t like looking at bicycles, either. Especially bicycles with clashing colours. She certainly didn’t like *riding* bicycles. And certainly not with strange boys.

‘Would you be available tomorrow morning, Nikos? The sun’s setting now. Perhaps around nine?’ asked Professor Martin.

‘Yes, tomorrow morning at nine!’ cried Nikos, pumping his fists in the air before remembering himself. He grew serious. ‘Your name, please? So I can book you in.’

‘Mary-Kate,’ said Mary-Kate reluctantly yet politely.

‘Mary-Kate, at nine,’ repeated Nikos. He waved as he pedalled away down the esplanade.

‘How delightful,’ said Professor Martin.

Mary-Kate didn’t answer. She lugged her bag up the hotel steps, refusing to look at her mother.

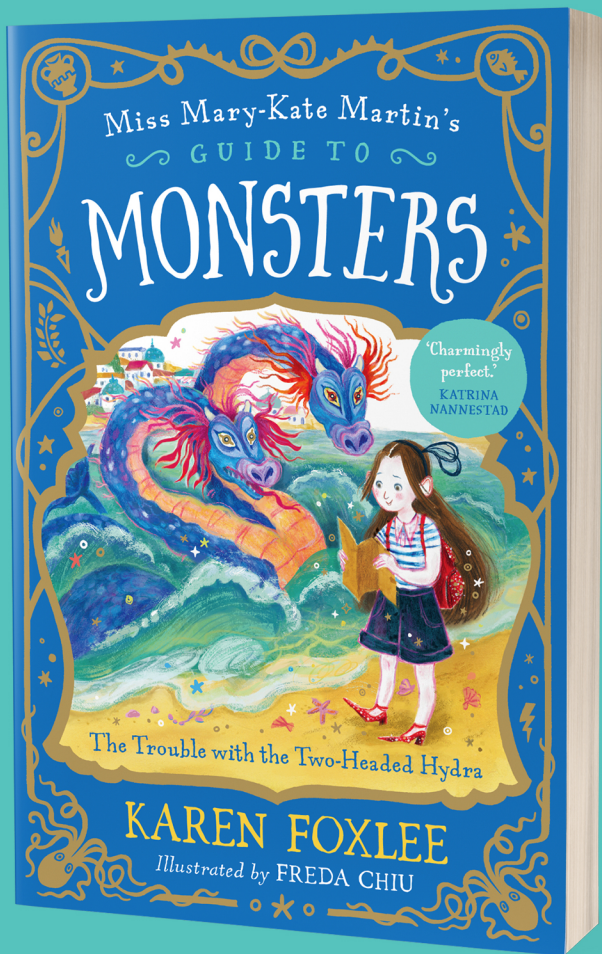
‘It will do you good, Mary-Kate, to have a friend during our stay,’ said Professor Martin. ‘And what a fine young boy, raising money to protect the sea. That is to be admired.’

Mary-Kate sighed. *A friend*. Friends were hard. She thought of Bartley Towers and her triple H days. Horrible, Horrendous and Hideous. Especially if Amelia Blythe-Tompkinson was involved. Then she remembered Arabella Woolington, who had become her friend on her last adventure.

Mary-Kate needed her stress ball. ‘The sea doesn’t really look like it needs saving.’ She pointed to the picture-perfect beach.

‘Come on, let’s not worry about it now,’ said the Professor, taking her by the shoulders as the bellman opened the grand hotel doors. ‘Let’s settle in for the evening. I can read the message from this mysterious Custodian.’

From the bestselling author of
Dragon Skin



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