

"This book hits like a sledgehammer.  
An absolutely must-read novel."

—GILLIAN FLYNN

"Kept me frantically turning the pages and  
somehow made me cry at the end. Brava!"

—KRISTIN HANNAH

**NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER**

*ALL THE  
COLORS  
OF THE  
DARK*



*CHRIS  
WHITAKER*

**AUTHOR OF *WE BEGIN AT THE END***

*For my Ten*

# ALL THE COLOURS OF THE DARK

CHRIS WHITAKER



# Contents

Dedication

Title Page

The Pirate and the Beekeeper: 1975

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

Chapter 7

Chapter 8

Chapter 9

Chapter 10

Chapter 11

Chapter 12

Chapter 13

Chapter 14

Chapter 15

Chapter 16

Chapter 17

Chapter 18

Chapter 19  
Chapter 20  
Chapter 21  
Chapter 22  
Chapter 23  
Chapter 24  
Chapter 25  
Chapter 26  
Chapter 27  
Chapter 28  
Chapter 29  
Chapter 30  
Chapter 31  
Chapter 32  
Chapter 33  
Chapter 34  
Chapter 35  
Chapter 36  
Chapter 37  
Chapter 38

The Lovers, the Dreamers: 1975

Chapter 39  
Chapter 40  
Chapter 41  
Chapter 42  
Chapter 43  
Chapter 44

Chapter 45

Chapter 46

Chapter 47

Chapter 48

Chapter 49

Chapter 50

Chapter 51

The Painter: 1976

Chapter 52

Chapter 53

Chapter 54

Chapter 55

Chapter 56

Chapter 57

Chapter 58

Chapter 59

Chapter 60

Chapter 61

Chapter 62

Chapter 63

Chapter 64

Chapter 65

Chapter 66

Chapter 67

Chapter 68

Chapter 69

Chapter 70

Chapter 71  
Chapter 72  
Chapter 73  
Chapter 74  
Chapter 75  
Chapter 76  
Chapter 77  
Chapter 78  
Chapter 79  
Chapter 80  
Chapter 81  
Chapter 82  
Chapter 83  
Chapter 84  
Chapter 85

## The Broken Hearts: 1978

Chapter 86  
Chapter 87  
Chapter 88  
Chapter 89  
Chapter 90  
Chapter 91  
Chapter 92  
Chapter 93  
Chapter 94  
Chapter 95  
Chapter 96

Chapter 97

Cops & Robbers: 1982

Chapter 98

Chapter 99

Chapter 100

Chapter 101

Chapter 102

Chapter 103

Chapter 104

Chapter 105

Chapter 106

Chapter 107

Chapter 108

Chapter 109

Chapter 110

Chapter 111

Chapter 112

Chapter 113

Chapter 114

Chapter 115

Chapter 116

The Hunt: 1983

Chapter 117

Chapter 118

Chapter 119

Chapter 120



Chapter 121  
Chapter 122  
Chapter 123  
Chapter 124  
Chapter 125  
Chapter 126  
Chapter 127  
Chapter 128  
Chapter 129  
Chapter 130  
Chapter 131  
Chapter 132

Fate: 1990

Chapter 133  
Chapter 134  
Chapter 135  
Chapter 136  
Chapter 137  
Chapter 138  
Chapter 139  
Chapter 140  
Chapter 141  
Chapter 142  
Chapter 143  
Chapter 144  
Chapter 145  
Chapter 146

Chapter 147  
Chapter 148  
Chapter 149  
Chapter 150  
Chapter 151  
Chapter 152  
Chapter 153  
Chapter 154  
Chapter 155  
Chapter 156  
Chapter 157  
Chapter 158  
Chapter 159  
Chapter 160  
Chapter 161  
Chapter 162  
Chapter 163  
Chapter 164  
Chapter 165  
Chapter 166  
Chapter 167  
Chapter 168  
Chapter 169  
Chapter 170  
Chapter 171  
Chapter 172

The Break: 1995

Chapter 173  
Chapter 174  
Chapter 175  
Chapter 176  
Chapter 177  
Chapter 178  
Chapter 179  
Chapter 180  
Chapter 181  
Chapter 182  
Chapter 183  
Chapter 184  
Chapter 185  
Chapter 186

The Prisoner: 1998

Chapter 187  
Chapter 188  
Chapter 189  
Chapter 190  
Chapter 191  
Chapter 192  
Chapter 193  
Chapter 194  
Chapter 195  
Chapter 196  
Chapter 197  
Chapter 198

Chapter 199  
Chapter 200  
Chapter 201  
Chapter 202  
Chapter 203  
Chapter 204  
Chapter 205  
Chapter 206  
Chapter 207  
Chapter 208  
Chapter 209  
Chapter 210  
Chapter 211  
Chapter 212  
Chapter 213  
Chapter 214  
Chapter 215  
Chapter 216  
Chapter 217  
Chapter 218  
Chapter 219  
Chapter 220  
Chapter 221  
Chapter 222  
Chapter 223  
Chapter 224  
Chapter 225  
Chapter 226

Chapter 227  
Chapter 228  
Chapter 229  
Chapter 230  
Chapter 231  
Chapter 232  
Chapter 233  
Chapter 234  
Chapter 235  
Chapter 236  
Chapter 237  
Chapter 238  
Chapter 239  
Chapter 240  
Chapter 241  
Chapter 242  
Chapter 243  
Chapter 244  
Chapter 245  
Chapter 246  
Chapter 247  
Chapter 248  
Chapter 249  
Chapter 250  
Chapter 251  
Chapter 252  
Chapter 253

Myths & Legends: 2001

Chapter 254

Chapter 255

Chapter 256

Chapter 257

Chapter 258

Chapter 259

Chapter 260

Chapter 261

Acknowledgements

About the Author

Also by Chris Whitaker

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# **The Pirate and the Beekeeper**

**1975**

# 1

From the flat roof of the kitchen Patch looked out through serried pin oaks and white pine to the loom of St Francois Mountains that pressed the small town of Monta Clare into its shade no matter the season. At thirteen he believed entirely that there was gold beyond the Ozark Plateau. That there was a brighter world just waiting for him.

Though later that morning, when he lay dying in the woodland, he'd take that morning still and purse it till the colors ran because he knew it could not have been so beautiful. That nothing was ever so beautiful in his life.

He climbed back into his bedroom and wore a tricorne and waistcoat and tucked navy slacks into his socks and fanned the knees until they resembled breeches. Into his belt he slid a small dagger, metal alloy but the bladesmith was skilled enough.

Later that day the cops would crawl over the intricacies of his life and discover he was into pirates because he had been born with only one eye, and his mother peddled the romance of a cutlass and eye patch because often for kids like him the flair of fiction dulled a reality too severe.

In his bedroom they would note the black flag pinned to hide a hole in the drywall, the closet with no doors, the fan that did not work, and the Steepletone that did. The antique treasure chest his mother had found at a flea market in St Louis, doubloon movie props, a replica one-shot flintlock pistol. They would bag a roll of firecrackers and the June 1965 *Playboy*, like they were evidence of something.

And then they would see the eye patches.



He looked them over carefully, then selected the purple with the silver star. His mother made them and some of them itched, but the purple was satin smooth. Eighteen in total, only one carried the skull and crossbones. He decided he might wear that one on his wedding day should he ever work up the courage to speak to Misty Meyer.

He removed the hat. His hair touched white in summer months and sand come winter, and he combed it but a tuft by the crown stood to attention like an antenna.

In the kitchen his mother sat. The night shift mortified her skin.

'You picking up signals with that thing?' she said, and tried to fix his hair with her palm. 'Pass me the Crisco.'

He ducked away as she laughed. Patch liked his mother's laugh.

The weekend before she'd taken him to Branson to see about a job. Ivy Macauley chased near misses like acceptance of place was the greatest sin. He'd fill up the Fairlane with just enough gas and she'd fill up the cab with excitement, fixing her hair into a Fonda shag and squeezing his hand and telling him *this was it*. He'd wait the interview hour alone in towns he did not know.

She'd fixed eggs, and he wondered just how tough it was to be a parent, and if at times all poor kids were some kind of well-intentioned regret.

'Today will be the best day of my life,' he said.

He said that often.

Because he could not know what would come.

## 2

He heard the mailman and ran for the door in case there was another letter from the school, but she took the envelope from him and closed her eyes and kissed it. 'It's got a St Louis postmark.'

A month before, she'd interviewed at the botanical garden while Patch smiled at symmetrical families in the shade of Tower Grove House.

He held his breath till the sag of her shoulders.

Their Monta Clare rental was the kind of temporary already growing roots, the foundations knotting around his mother's ankles no matter how hard she hacked at them with declarations of women's lib, or how loud she played Dylan to remind herself that times were changing.

'We take something from every knock,' he said, and screwed up the letter. He scanned the empty shelves in the refrigerator. 'Black Bart Roberts took near five hundred ships in his time. But he started out when he was captured himself. A legendary navigator, his captors spotted his potential and let him live. Before long they voted him captain.'

Sometimes she looked at him like he was the sum of her failings. Each night he lifted rusted dumbbells until his skinny arms burned, grinding his childhood away.

She noticed the bruise by his cheekbone as she removed his waistcoat and fixed his pants and licked her palm to smooth his hair down.

'Fighting, Joseph. Try to remember you're all I've got.' She went to move the eye patch but he gripped her wrist and she softened.

'Then it sucks to be you.' He added a smile.

Sometimes he took the album from beneath her bed and mapped the rise and fall of her.

'You need to eat breakfast,' she said, as he pushed the plate down toward her.

'They give us something at school if we forget,' he lied too easy.

'You nervous? My little pirate. No more trouble from here on. No stealing and no fighting. New school, new start, right?'

'Show me a pirate that never got in some kind of trouble.'

'I'm serious, Joseph. I don't need the school on me. That woman who stopped by, she looked at me like I can't even care for you.' Ivy cupped his face. 'Promise me.'

He could've told her he didn't ever start it. 'No more trouble.'

'You walking in with Saint?'

He nodded.

Ivy would go through this with the first responder, and then Chief Nix. She'd tell them she didn't notice anyone hanging around. Or see a dark van. Or anything much beyond the slow wake of Rosewood Avenue.

And later, when it got worse, she'd wonder how much of her son's life she had missed.