

ALL THE
COLORS
OF THE
DARK
CHRIS
WHITAKER

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF
WE BEGIN AT THE END

ALSO BY CHRIS WHITAKER

Tall Oaks

All the Wicked Girls

We Begin at the End

*ALL THE
COLORS
OF THE
DARK*

A NOVEL

CHRIS
WHITAKER



CROWN
NEW YORK

This is a work of fiction. All of the characters, organizations, and events portrayed in this novel either are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

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Contents

[Dedication](#)

[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 and 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](#)

[The Break: 1995](#)

[Chapter 172](#)

[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 and Legends: 2001](#)

[Chapter 254](#)

[Chapter 255](#)

[Chapter 256](#)

[Chapter 257](#)

[Chapter 258](#)

[Chapter 259](#)

[Chapter 260](#)

[Chapter 261](#)

[*Acknowledgments*](#)

[*About the Author*](#)

[*Reading Group Guide*](#)

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For my Ten

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.