



AN INTERVIEW WITH CATHERINE DOYLE

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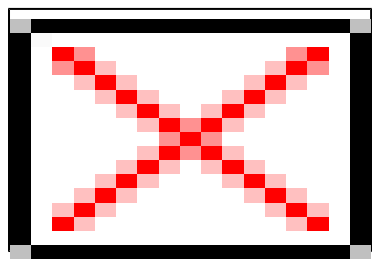
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Catherine Doyle talks about her new book **The Storm Keeper's Island**

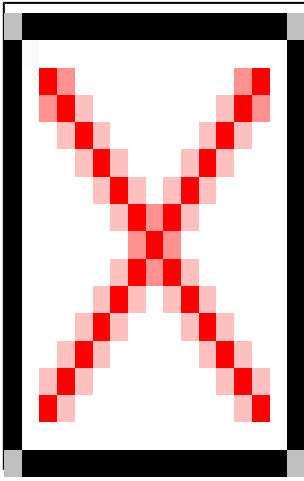
Just published, [The Storm Keeper's Island](#) [3] by Catherine Doyle is already one of 2018's most talked about books: Bloomsbury acquired world rights for a six figure sum, editorial director Ellen Holgate describing it as a book that will be around for many years to come. A classic but refreshingly original piece of fantasy writing, the book tells a brand new story, though one that seems to have grown organically out of old myths. It explores the power of story to keep memories alive, and posits memory itself as a form of magic. **Andrea Reece** interviewed author **Catherine Doyle** for **Books for Keeps**.



With the successful [Blood for Blood](#) [4] YA series to her name, readers might have expected Catherine Doyle to continue writing high-octane, crime-based YA dramas, but [The Storm Keeper's Island](#) [3] is something very different indeed. Set on the tiny island of Arranmore off the North West coast of Ireland, it is the story of Fionn who arrives with his stropy big sister Tara to spend time with their grandfather. Fionn has never visited the island before, but feels immediately its sense of magic. His grandfather is the mysterious Storm Keeper, responsible for storing the island's weather and with it its memories which he mixes magically into candles. With his own memory now fading, it's time for Grandfather to step down and appoint a new Storm Keeper, and crucially before the sorceress Morrigan arises from under the island to unleash havoc. Could Fionn be the one to take over?

Catherine explains how a visit to Arranmore inspired the story: 'I wrote the [Blood for Blood](#) [4] trilogy while I was doing my master's thesis in YA publishing, and while it was something I've always wanted to do, it was probably more of a head book than a heart book. I'd always wanted to write something that was set in Ireland, where I grew up, I just didn't have the right story. Then when I finished the trilogy I got invited by this tiny school on Arranmore to come and teach creative writing to the children, and because I was at a loss as to what to do next and because I love teaching, I decided to go. I hadn't been to Arranmore in years but my grandparents were born there and grew up there. The few times I had been as a child and a teenager I never cared much for it - because I was a teenager and there was no cinema or McDonalds! So I went back with my mother and on the ferry going across the sea the island just rose up - much in the same way as it does for Fionn - and the most peculiar feeling came over me, it was really magical - it felt like a part of me was coming home. I spent that week travelling round the island, exploring the places my grandparents used to talk of when I was very small - the hidden cliff steps, the lighthouse, the lifeboat station, all these incredible places and I just started to get so inspired, it is such a magical setting.'

It wasn't just the setting and the scenery that inspired Catherine, but another unique aspect of Arranmore: "The second



thing was that the island is full of cousins "I'm probably related to just about everyone on the island, there's only around 450 - 500 people there - and they all started to invite me to come for tea in the evenings. As I went, I was learning all of these stories about my grandparents when they were young, and their parents, and it just fascinated me how well the stories kept on Arranmore. Nothing was forgotten, no-one was forgotten "everything was as fresh as it was 60/70/ 100 years ago. And I just felt a sense of oneness with my own identity and own history. It was such a powerful feeling that I thought "I'm going to start writing this down??"

One of the stories she heard, which forms an important part of **The Storm Keeper's Island**, is that of the *SS Stolwijk* and a daring rescue that took place in 1940. The Arranmore lifeboat set out in hurricane conditions to rescue the crew of a Dutch cargo ship that had gone aground on rocks, saving 18 sailors. Catherine's great-grandfather was on the lifeboat and awarded a medal for his gallantry.

The fact that her grandfather has Alzheimer's and is beginning to lose his memories was an extra spur to Catherine to start writing. "I was fascinated with memories at that point as I was watching my grandfather lose his memory, and having grown up very close to my grandparents it was very hard to see. But there would be times when I'd ask him about something from his younger years and he would just light up with it. The memory sort of descends upon him, and his eyes get very bright and very blue and he tells me about being 12, standing on the pier, waving his father off in the lifeboat, and it's like in that moment he is a young boy and all of his faculties are about him and it's the most magical thing. It's rare but when it happens it's just incredible. I just thought I want to bottle this feeling, bottle it in a more magical way I suppose and put it in a story?"

The relationship between Fionn and his grandfather is tender and real. Through the device of the candles, which operate as a form of time travel, the story also allows Fionn to meet his own father, who died before he was born, in a dramatic and very moving scene - one of Catherine's own favourites. Fionn's relationship with his sharp-tongued teenage sister Tara is another highlight, and family relationships are beautifully described throughout. Talking about another favourite episode "a life and death rescue from a cave filling with sea water " Catherine describes a sense of feeling the "rightness" of what she was writing: "Sometimes when I'm writing there's this magic feeling I get. I knew that it was good." Readers of **The Storm Keeper's Island** [3] will feel that same sense of magic, it is absolutely a book in which all the elements come together perfectly; in the words of one of Catherine's friends, also an author and asked to read an early draft, it's "a goosebumps story".

Andrea Reece is managing editor of **Books for Keeps**.

The Storm Keeper's Island [3] is published by Bloomsbury Children's Books, 978-1408896884, £6.99 pbk.

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