



Song Beneath the Tides by Beverly Birch is a love story, ghost story and thriller.

Ally arrives from England with her brothers to stay for a month in Africa – weeks of running wild on an unspoiled, untamed coast amid mangrove creeks, vast white sandy beaches, coral reefs and warm seas. But on their first walk through the forest to the beach, Ally is swamped by a sense of an unseen presence close to her – of being spoken to. The feeling increases as a local teenager, Leli enthusiastically sweeps her into the world of his village and their offshore island (Kisiri – the place of secrets). It's the beginning of a friendship that swiftly becomes an intense, overwhelming bond between them.

Kisiri is a place of local legend, protected and feared: village youngsters dare each other to go there. Village elders forbid it. Ally and Leli feel drawn to it, and land on its shores. At once Ally feels again that invisible presence, a whispered voice.

But fear can change things, divide people. The bond between Ally and Leli feels unbreakable. Suddenly everything, everyone, conspires to drive a wedge between them. She is, after all, an outsider – a visitor, no more. Only weeks away, she will leave for England, simply walk away, never to return, how can she possibly share, or help?

Beverley Birch spent her childhood roaming vast plains and deep forests near her home in East Africa, dreaming of becoming an intrepid explorer in fantastic, far-away places. Instead she became a writer, and explores people and places through her books. She travels widely, and says, 'Wherever I go, I'm fascinated by the way people and events of the past seem to me to leave a gleam, or a shadow, or a resonating murmur of sound in a place. In a way, that's where all my stories begin.'

'A magical layered story weaving past and present that stole my heart.'

Jasbinder Bilan

'Rich and gripping... at its heart a story about hope and the importance of working' together.'

The Scotsman



PACK CONTENTS

1. Extract: SETTING

- **Activity:** Select techniques and media to create a collage representing the forest.
- Write a description in the present tense of a place that makes you feel unsettled.

2. Extract: TOURISM

- **Activity:** Write a speech in which you argue for or against this statement:
“Luxury hotels should never be built in small rural fishing villages.”

3. Extract: SECRETS

- **Activity:** Write a diary entry in character as one of the minor characters in the story (e.g., Jack, Huru, Carole, Mzee Kitwana) and reveal secrets they are hiding.

4. Extract: LEGACY

- **Activity:** Research an example of historical colonialism. What were the impacts on the colonised people? Present your findings.

5. Extracts 1-4





Extract 1: SETTING (pages 3 and 4)

Objectives: Explore the setting of the story opening; write descriptively.

- How does the writer convey Ally's feelings in the forest?
 - What is the effect of the use of present tense in this extract?
 - What is the effect of the phrase, 'breaking through the last trees into the blinding brilliance of the open bay'?
 - How does the writer use language to create an impression of the forest and a tense atmosphere? (Consider use of onomatopoeia, similes, personification, alliteration, sentence structure and choice of adjectives and verbs.)
- Select techniques and media to create a collage representing the forest.
- Write a description in the present tense of a place that makes you feel unsettled.

Subjects: Creative Writing: Writing descriptively, Art and Design





Extract 2: TOURISM (pages 190 and 191)

Objectives: Discuss the impact of tourism on local communities; write a speech.

- Compare the way the writer presents the guests at the hotel with the powerboats in the sea.
- Would you want to stay in a luxury hotel like Tundani Paradise Village? Why or why not?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of a large tourist hotel being built in a place like Tundani or Shanza?
- What does Ally want to protect Leli from?
- Do you think the bubble metaphor conveys effectively the experience and impact of the hotel guests?
- How could the tourist industry be better controlled to avoid people's territory being seized and livelihoods threatened?

-Write a speech in which you argue for or against this statement:

“Luxury hotels should never be built next to small rural fishing villages.”

Subjects: Creative Writing: Writing to argue,
Speaking and Listening, PSHE





Extract 3: SECRETS (pages 58 and 59)

Objectives: Explore how secrets are presented in the story; write a diary entry from the perspective of a character who is concealing secrets.

- Consider the meaning of the name of the island: Kisiri. Does secret mean the same things as scared? In what ways is the island both secret and sacred?
- Why is the island forbidden for strangers?
- Do you think Leli and Huru are right to take Ally and her brothers to Kisiri?
- What secrets do you think Ally and Leli share?
- Should you always keep secrets? When should secrets be revealed?

- Hot seat one of the characters from the story and ask them about any secrets they are keeping.

- Write a diary entry in role as one of the minor characters in the story (e.g., Jack, Huru, Carole, Mzee Kitwana) and reveal secrets they are hiding.

Subjects: Creative Writing: Writing in role, Speaking and Listening, PSHE





Extract 4a: LEGACY (pages 138 and 139) and extract 4b: LEGACY (page 283)

Objectives: Explore the theme of legacy.

- What is your understanding of the terms *legacy* and *colonialism*?
 - Why do you think Portuguese explorers invaded East Africa?
 - How are the consequences of Portuguese colonisation in East Africa presented in the novel?
 - How does the discovery of the buried fort impact Shanza?
 - Consider the legend and the legacy of Fumo and Zawiti. What do you think will be Ally and Leli's legacy in Shanza?
- Research an example of historical colonialism.
What were the impacts on the colonised people? Present your findings.

Subjects: Literacy, History, Speaking and Listening, PSHE





Extract 1: SETTING (pages 3 and 4)

It begins with a forest, and with Ally.

Light slants green through a high, leafy canopy. Hanging creepers sway and rustle. Everywhere, chirrups and cheeps and whistles and trills, and the flit of small, busy wings...

She spins round, braced to run.

No one there: the path empty. Sunlight dapples the scuffed sand so that it seems to move, but it's just a track, curling back to a dark outcrop of coral rock, then turning out of sight.

The hair on the back of her neck prickles. Something's about to appear. Between the curtain of leaves. Or the bushes. Or from behind that rock.

She watches. She shifts her gaze to a claw of roots from a tumbled tree. Arches of shadow like a vast skeleton, sheltering - *what?*

The forest stirs. Ripples of light speed towards her. She fights the urge to back away. A rush of sound. Birds whirl in fright.

Common sense says a ripe coconut has fallen.

It takes all her nerve to hold still, listen, then turn away, present her back to the path and resume her trek towards the sea. She should yell out for her brothers – moments ago she'd seen them against the sheen of water beyond the trees ahead, Jack's tall silhouette beside Ben's stocky little shape.

She's reluctant to probe the forest with her voice.

She walks faster. And at once she has the same unnerving sensation of *nearness*, of brushing the warm contours of something live, of eyes following her, of a soft breath exhaled.

This time she runs, breaking through the last trees into the blinding brilliance of the open bay. She clears the mounds of drying seaweed in a single bound, kicks off her shoes, grabs them and leaps down through the soft powdery sand towards the reef, putting distance as fast as she can between herself and that menace – that *terror* of the forest.



Extract 2: TOURISM (pages 190 and 191)

They stood, ringed by petal-shaped swimming pools and sunbeds sporting a few guests, lobster red and stupefied by the heat. Others lay under umbrellas. A few floated in the pools. No one on the beach below or in the sea – though three gleaming sharp-nosed powerboats bobbed by a bright-painted pontoon extending from the hotel. Ben squinted through binoculars and read the names. *Cool running. Lucky star. Blue Marlin.* In the distance a boat whined across the bay, the water skier rising onto skis, bouncing a few yards before collapsing in an arc of white spray.

Ally pictured the boat nosing past her, Joseph and Grace in the creek, the name on its bow. '*Blue Marlin!* That's the one we saw.'

A snip of conversation with Leli came to her. *Visitors from the hotel will like this?* he'd asked, steering the boat through the mangroves. *It is interesting for them, Ally?*

Brilliant! she'd said.

Magic! Ben had echoed.

Standing here, it was a ludicrous idea. Once she'd have been so excited to stay in a hotel like this. All the luxury! Now all she saw was that none of these people had come to look at anything. They were in a bubble. The bubble could be anywhere. Even another planet. No idea of the ripples spreading out from their beautiful bubble like the after-shock of an explosion. She thought of the purple-clawed receptionist. Probably really just like Eshe's sister inside. But she'd found herself a job.

Ally pictured Leli's face, excited at new people coming. She wanted to fold him away, protect him from all this, appalled by an overwhelming, stark recognition of how huge was the juggernaut rolling inexorably toward his village, his life.



Extract 3: SECRETS (pages 58 and 59)

‘We could land just for a while, couldn’t we?’ Jack said. ‘I know it’s forbidden for strangers, but we’re with *you* – that counts for something, right? We’re not really strangers any more. Shame to come all the way out and not even land for a minute!’

Huru flicked a look at Leli. ‘True, Leli!’ They are not *strangers*.’

‘Why do you look at me?’ Leli demanded. ‘It is not me that says yes or no!’

There was a long, taut silence. Leli looked at Huru and Huru looked at Leli. In a flash Ally understood. *The Elders’ll be furious! It’s really serious for them.*

‘Leli – ‘ she began, but Jack cut across her.

‘Look, don’t want to get you two into trouble!’

Leli gave a nod. He turned to look at the island. They were entering the shadow of the coral bluff and its cave, and he looked up, to where a lone bird soared from its heights. Ally saw how he followed its flight. The bird wheeled over them, veered towards the mangroves, and vanished.

Again, Leli looked back at Kisiri; then at Ally.

Abruptly he said, ‘We tell Mzee Shaibu, so it is not secret. *Tutafika*, we must arrive quickly. Now the tide is gentle, but it will change. We must not be long, or it will be difficult to go against strong water.’

‘*Haya*, yes, yes, we go!’ Huru at once began to paddle the boat round. Ben eagerly followed his lead; within minutes the boat was skimming back along the island’s northern shore.

Ally sounded the island’s name under her breath. ‘*Kisiri*.’ Secret. *Secret and sacred*.

As if he’d heard her, Leli caught her eye, for a moment held it.



Extract 4a: LEGACY (pages 138 and 139)

‘Fumo and Zawati. Great warriors, wise leaders, to whom we owe our place, our good life here, the lives of our ancestors and the lives of our children yet to come.

‘Many hundreds of years in the past, their tale begins. Five hundred years – perhaps more, perhaps less. Not far from here... a day or two’s journey by the water, so they say.

‘In those days, my young friends, many towns were on this coast, with many ships. To and fro, from city to city and far beyond, they carried the wealth of our land. And many ships from far away come on the ocean winds, bringing riches beyond dreams! Life was good, and the people prospered.

‘But listen, now. One year, strange ships appeared. Great oceans they had crossed! Great dangers passed! They had dreams too, these strangers. To see new lands, to encounter wonders. But also – *also* – to take the good things of these lands for themselves and become rich with them.

‘In one town, then another and another – the people felt the strangers’ iron fist! Each day the strangers demanded more. Obedience to the King across the sea in Portugal! Taxes from every ship that passed!

‘Sometimes, when the towns gave what they asked, the strangers sailed on quickly across the ocean to India and Arabia. But *sometimes* they were too late to catch the monsoon winds to carry them there. Ah, then, then... For many months these men had nothing to do, except feed their greed. And oh, what greed, my young friends! They wanted *everything*. Like pirates, they were. They wandered this coast. They captured ships. They took men and women and children as slaves. They stole cargos.

Extract 4b: LEGACY (Page 283)

Buried forts, treasure, ruins in Shanza forest – it really has stopped everything! Just think, Ally – you, Leli, Lumbwi and his father, Jela – you did that by falling smack in that hole!