

BEARS OF THE ICE

The Den of
Forever Frost

Book 2

KATHRYN LASKY

SCHOLASTIC PRESS

Text copyright © 2018 by Kathryn Lasky
Interior illustrations by Angelo Rinaldi

All rights reserved. Published by Scholastic Press, an imprint of Scholastic Inc.,
Publishers since 1920. SCHOLASTIC, SCHOLASTIC PRESS, and associated logos are
trademarks and/or registered trademarks of Scholastic Inc.

The publisher does not have any control over and does not assume any
responsibility for author or third-party websites or their content.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or
transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying,
recording, or otherwise, without written permission of the publisher. For
information regarding permission, write to Scholastic Inc., Attention:
Permissions Department, 557 Broadway, New York, NY 10012.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either
the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any
resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments,
events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data available

ISBN 978-0-545-83688-3

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 18 19 20 21 22

Printed in the U.S.A. 23

First edition, October 2018

Book design by Bailly Crawford

CHAPTER 1

A World Unhinged

As the red comet soared through the darkness, turning the moon and the stars crimson, three young bears swam through the ice floes of the N'yrrthghar Straits — Stellan and his sister, Jytte, and their friend Third. It was almost the time of the Dying Ice Moons, and these straits that connected the sea of Nunquivik with the Everwinter Sea of the Northern Kingdoms were filled with fragments of bobbing ice. As the cubs plied their way through the maze of broken bergs that stirred slowly in the currents, their thoughts converged on one thing: their quest, a desperate mission to save both Stellan and Jytte's mother and the threatened world of the bears.

Svenna had been captured by power-hungry bears called Timekeepers, who worshipped the Ice Clock and were trying to take over the bear kingdoms. Their brutal methods included seizing cubs, who were then sacrificed to the clock. The only

reason Stellan and Jytte hadn't met this grisly fate was because Svenna had offered herself in their place. When they'd first learned this, Stellan and Jytte had been frantic to launch a rescue mission. But their beloved teacher, Skagen, had explained, "You can't free her until you free your own kind." By *own kind*, Skagen meant the honorable bears whose lives were threatened by these tyrants of the Ice Clock.

The only way to rescue Svenna was to break the clock and destroy the power of the Grand Patek, the ruler of the Ice Cap. To do that, they had to find their father, Svern — a famous rebel who'd long fought against the Timekeepers. But he had been missing for years. It was rumored that he had gone back to the Northern Kingdoms and possibly the legendary Den of Forever Frost.

"We're getting so close to our father. I can feel it!" Jytte said, her voice brimming with excitement.

It always disturbed Stellan slightly when his sister spoke this way. He knew she was eager to find the father they had never met, but their mission had become about so much more. "It's not just about finding Da. We have to convince him to help us break the clock, and then we actually have to *do* it." His voice sounded brittle to his own ears. But he was frightened. Behind the brittleness was a sob waiting to break like a cresting wave.

Jytte splashed the water with her paw. "Are you accusing me of not taking this seriously? You're not the only one who cares about our mission, Stellan."

"But *you* only seem to care about finding Da. This is so much bigger than that."

Third looked from Jytte to Stellan. The smallest of the three cubs often served as the peacemaker between the sister and brother. When Svenna had been taken by Roguer bears, her cubs were left with Third's mother, Taaka, as cruel a she-bear as ever walked the frozen lands. Stellan and Jytte had escaped, and finally Third, the runt of Taaka's litter, fled too.

"You're both right," Third said gently. "It's hard to separate Svern from this mission. But regardless of whether we find him, we have to remain focused on breaking the clock."

"He's near the Den of Forever Frost. He must be!" Jytte said hotly. She was convinced they'd find her father and refused to think otherwise. "Skagen said so."

"Skagen said he was most likely there, Jytte. Most likely." Stellan spoke in a soothing voice. He had to be patient with his impetuous sister, whose passion could be overwhelming.

"We're getting closer." She stopped swimming and tipped her head toward the sky. "Remember, Skagen said that these straits turned south and west and led into the firths — the firths where our mum and da came from. He showed us that on the maps."

The other two cubs paused to look up at the stars sparkling through the skin of the cloudless night.

"We're just south and west of the Svree star," Stellan said, lifting a paw toward one of the two stars that pointed north to the Nevermoves star. "Our guide star. The one Mum . . ." His voice dwindled as he recalled those nights before their mother had been taken. She'd begun to teach them about the stars

and how one could use them to navigate through a territory unknown, a world they had never seen.

“They’ll start to fade soon. Dawn will be coming. And our guide star will disappear,” Third said.

“I’ll race you to the dawn,” Jytte yipped. She was always ready for a race.

“Ha!” Stellan said. “Then you’d be going backward. The dawn will be breaking behind us in the east. We’re going west.”

“Oh, Stellan. Don’t be so . . . so . . . exact. I mean I’ll race you until the light comes. Comes and eats the night.” She tore off and began pulling her forearms through the water. A wake curled evenly off her rear paws.

Stellan had always envied his sister for her power in the water. Her rear paws were just right for boosting her speed, whereas one of his had a slight turn that made paddling difficult. The water curled off in a lopsided way.

Jytte swung her head around and looked at him with a slightly anxious expression. Anxious or sad? A dimness had veiled her eyes, as if she was recalling some sorrow or loss. Was she perhaps thinking of Skagen? Stellan wondered. His sister’s moods could change so quickly. Although Skagen was a snow leopard, he had taught them nearly as much as their mother had. The beautiful creature had shown them how to read ancient maps, instructed them about timepieces, and told them about the Ice Clock where the Tick Tocks were sacrificed. “Remember, cubs,” he had once said. “A clock is only a tool, invented by the Others — it is not a god to be worshipped.”

“Are you all right, Jytte?” Stellan asked.

“I’m fine,” she said in a cheerful voice that didn’t quite match the wistful look in her eyes. If she had felt grief for Skagen, she would never betray it.

Racing ahead, Jytte glanced up at that pointer star Svree. Just to swim under its light now reflected on the glassy dark water excited her.

Svree had been the chieftain of the first Bear Council in the Den of Forever Frost, and the cubs’ very own ancestor. Their mum had often referred to that period as the “time of the way of Svree” — an age of old traditions, and most important, the old stories and legends of the clan bears. That was what Jytte was racing toward — not a dawn but a time before time in a dawn they had only heard about. That time of Svree that was linked in all bears’ minds to the noble bears of the Ice Star Chamber who gathered in the very depths of the Den of Forever Frost.

“Come on, Stellan!” Third shouted. “Remember Marven!”

Yes, *Marven!* Stellan thought gleefully as he swam past Jytte. Svree was not their only illustrious ancestor. There was also Marven, a hero from the time of the Great Melting, when most of the bear lands were awash with sea monsters. Marven, a renowned swimmer, had vanquished many of the savage dragon walruses who cut bloody swaths through the rising waters, killing thousands of bears.

“You beat me!” Jytte called ahead, breathing heavily. “Don’t you ever complain to me again about how you can’t keep your hind paws flat for ruddering.” But Jytte laughed as she swam up

to her twin brother and tugged playfully on his ear. “Wanna water wrestle?”

“No time for wrestling,” Stellan said, pulling away. “Come on, Jytte, we have a mission. I think we’re about to enter the firths where our mum and da came from. According to Skagen’s maps, they lead to the Den of Forever Frost.”

A loud crack suddenly split the air, and the cubs swiveled to look behind them. A huge iceberg had cleaved in half. It was close enough that they felt the disturbance in the water.

“Just another berg cubbing,” Stellan said as he watched the two chunks of ice bobbling about in the dark water of the straits. The split was almost perfect, which made the two parts appear like the ice wings of some gigantic mythical bird.

“This passage is getting narrower and narrower. Soon even I won’t fit.” Third forced a chuckle, but Stellan was alert to the anxiety in his voice. This would not be a good place to be trapped. It didn’t take much effort to imagine a vicious toothwalker, a descendant of the dragon walruses, swimming toward them.

“Now what do they call this sort of channel in Krakish?” Again, Third tried to sound cheerful and curious.

“A *byssenskitch*,” Stellan said.

“Byssenskitch,” Third repeated thoughtfully. He’d always felt that Stellan and Jytte were lucky to have a mother like Svenna who knew the language of their ancestors. His own mother, Taaka, had also come from the Northern Kingdoms, but she apparently had forgotten Krakish and only spoke Nunqui to him and his two siblings. However, there was more to fault about

Taaka than her language. She was foul tempered and the most unmotherly creature who ever lived.

The byssenskitch had narrowed enough to prohibit them from swimming side by side. Jytte took the lead, with Third behind her and Stellan behind Third.

The passage was studded with fractured sea ice threaded with the bluest water the cubs had ever seen. The pieces bobbed gently as the currents stirred beneath them. It was sometimes possible to climb out onto a large chunk and hop from one floating fragment to another.

“Ice hopping! I love it!” Third cried out. As the smallest cub, he was the most capable of landing on very small fragments, balancing for a split second, then skipping off to the next. They all paused for a moment and sat on individual fragments and looked about at this new landscape, this new country where Stellan and Jytte’s parents had been born and raised.

One of Jytte’s favorite things to do was imagine stories about her father. Svern must have been an incredibly brave bear to lead a rebellion to break the clock, even if he hadn’t succeeded. Had he fought paw to paw with the horrific Roguer bears whose faces were crisscrossed with battle scars?

Jytte was not alone in imagining Svern. Stellan’s mind also stirred with dreamlike images of this nearly mythic father they had only heard about. Skagen had told them of Svern’s special talent. “He was a Yinqui, young’uns.”

“A Yinqui?” Stellan had asked. “What’s that?” This odd word only deepened the mystery surrounding their father. Was a

Yinqui a good thing or a bad thing? Could they ever hope to know their father as they had their mum?

“An ice listener. It’s a strange talent. He could listen through ice. In short, spy on the Timekeepers at the clock.” In his mind, Stellan pictured a bear with very large ears, one pressed to a slab of ice, his eyes keen and sparkling as he picked up enemy chatter.

The passage had widened a bit, and the fragments of pack ice had diminished and cleared the watery path. The three cubs looked about in wonder as they swam. This land was much different from where they had come. They could see now that it was mountainous country with tall, jagged peaks scraping the sky. The flanks of these mountains pitched steeply down to the sea.

Third began to observe the animal life that skittered across the ice near the edge of the straits. A small troop of lemmings ambled over a shrinking patch of snow. He noticed that the blinding-white pelt of a fox had begun to turn darker in anticipation of the coming snowless days. Flying above, the tiny birds known as blue widgies had started to lose their winter plumage and were now sprouting brownish feathers for spring.

“It’s different here,” Third said, relishing the unfamiliar, for it confirmed that he was entering a world far from that of his savage mother, Taaka. Third was still plagued by his dreams of her, and the farther he could get, the safer he would feel. For Stellan and Jytte, this was a journey toward something dear to them — their father — but for Third, it was a journey away from something he had loathed — his mother.

“Even the clouds are strange,” Jytte said. “Look, they’re turning purple. Have you ever seen a purple cloud?”

“No,” Third replied, his voice suddenly taut.

Stellan looked up. He didn’t like Third’s tone, nor did he like the color of those early morning clouds. The wind abruptly switched direction, and then he felt a slight pull on his port hind paw. Was this one of the mysterious currents he had heard about from Skagen? The lemmings were beginning to race wildly toward a precipice of ice. A fox suddenly stopped, seemingly frozen to the ground, and the blue widgies were pitching randomly in the sky, tossed by supercharged gusts of wind.

“Look at that!” Jytte shouted as she pointed. The sky that had been a misty blue, tinged with the purple of the gathering clouds, was starting to fracture. Spikes of lightning split the blue, sparks danced off peaks, and a juddering wind rattled the ice-sheathed flanks of the mountains. The mountain themselves seemed to quake as flashes of lightning streaked through the sky. A torrent of water cleaved one mountain, and a river that seconds before had been invisible raced toward them, sweeping the cubs to the sea.

In a single moment, the world became unhinged. Jytte felt the water’s power surging around her, through her, beneath her. *I am being devoured!* The force of the river sucked the cubs under. Stellan saw Third thrashing in the water and grabbed the smaller cub with his mouth. As he struggled to fight the current, he searched desperately for Jytte but couldn’t see her.

Stellan’s lungs began to burn, but he couldn’t open his mouth to breathe without losing his hold on Third.