



Sky Song

ABI ELPHINSTONE

SIMON & SCHUSTER

First published in Great Britain in 2018 by Simon and Schuster UK Ltd
A CBS COMPANY

Copyright © 2018 Abi Elphinstone

This book is copyright under the Berne Convention.
No reproduction without permission. All rights reserved.

The right of Abi Elphinstone to be identified as the author of this work
has been asserted by her in accordance with sections 77 and
78 of the Copyright, Design and Patents Act, 1988.

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Simon & Schuster UK Ltd
1st Floor,
222 Gray's Inn Road
London WC1X 8HB

www.simonandschuster.co.uk

Simon & Schuster Australia, Sydney
Simon & Schuster India, New Delhi

A CIP catalogue record for this book
is available from the British Library.

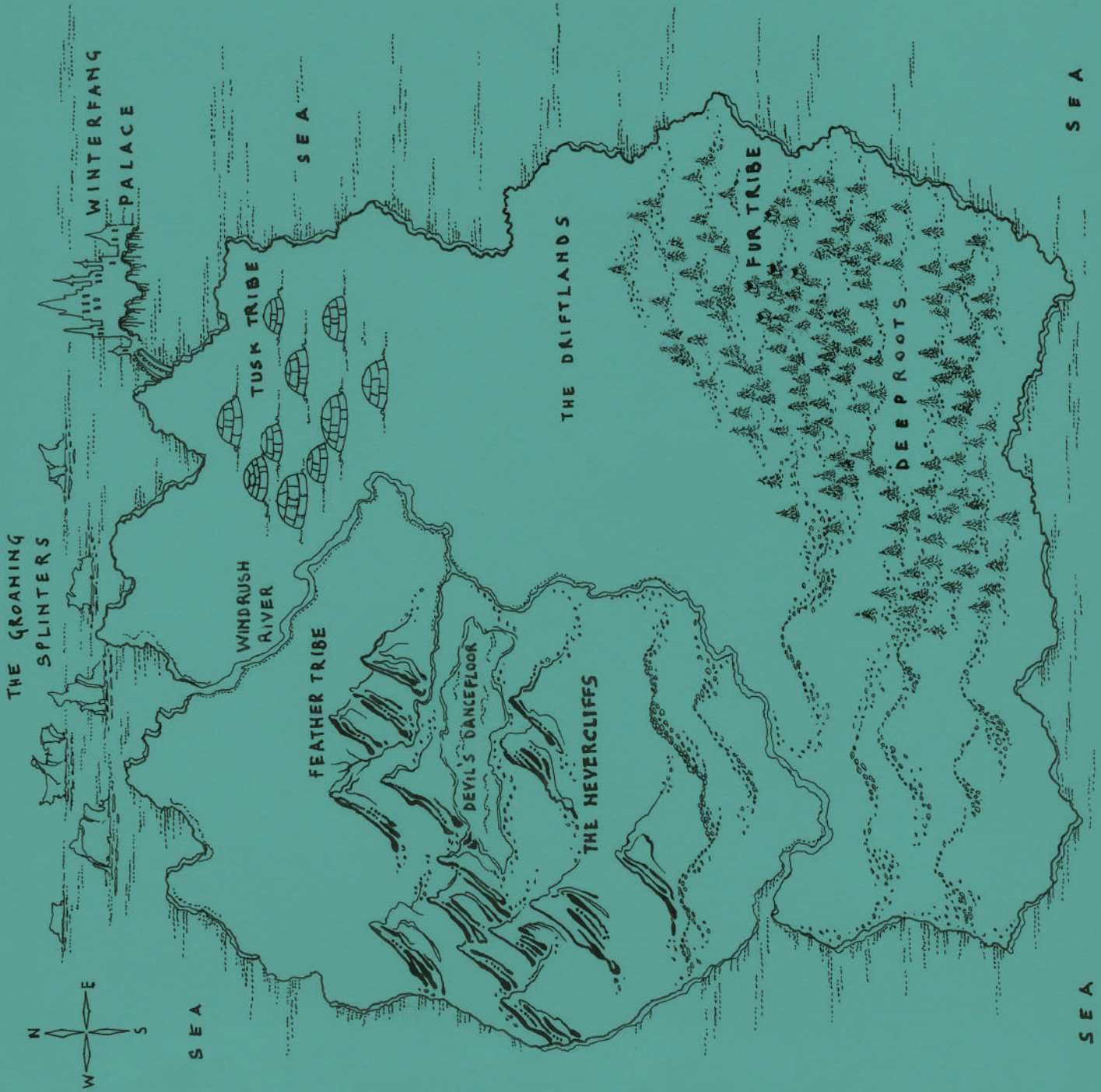
PB ISBN 978-1-4711-4607-7
eBook ISBN 978-1-4711-4608-4

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. Any resemblance to actual people living or
dead, events or locales is entirely coincidental.

Typeset in Goudy by M Rules
Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY



Simon & Schuster UK Ltd are committed to sourcing paper
that is made from wood grown in sustainable forests and support the Forest
Stewardship Council, the leading international forest certification organisation.
Our books displaying the FSC logo are printed on FSC certified paper.





Prologue

Beyond the footsteps of the greatest explorers and up past the reach of the trustiest maps there lies a kingdom called Erkenwald.

Here, the sun still shines at midnight in the summer, glinting off the icebergs in the north and slipping between the snow-capped Never Cliffs in the west. But it does not rise at all in the long, cold winters. Then, the nights bleed on and on and the darkness is so thick you cannot see your hands in front of your face.

This far north, even the stars do not behave as you might expect. And that is probably just as well because without Ursa Minor breaking a few rules we would not have a story at all . . .

The Little Bear, some call this constellation, but if astronomers knew the truth – if they could see into the heart of things and out the other side – perhaps they would have used a different name. For these seven stars are in fact Sky Gods, mighty giants carved from stardust, and the brightest of them all, the North Star, was the one who first breathed life into Erkenwald.

Such was his power that he only needed to blow the legendary Frost Horn once and the empty stretches of ice many miles below began to change. Mountains, forests and glaciers appeared. Then animals arrived: polar bears to roam the tundra, whales to glide through the oceans and wolves to stalk between the trees. Finally, the music of the Frost Horn conjured people: men and women of different shapes, sizes and colours scattered throughout the land.

As the years passed, these men and women formed three tribes: the Fur Tribe built tipis from caribou hides in a forest to the south of the kingdom; the Feather Tribe settled inside caves in the Never Cliffs to the west; and the Tusk Tribe built igloos along the cliff tops on the northern coast. Each tribe had their own customs and beliefs, but they lived in harmony with one another, sharing food whenever they passed and offering shelter when the weather closed in.

Because magic often lingers long after it has been used, the power of the Frost Horn hovered over Erkenwald, and as time went by the people learnt how to use it. They spun hammocks from moonlight which granted wonderful dreams; they trapped sunbeams in lanterns which burned through the winter months; they stored wind inside gemstones which granted their boats safe passage through stormy seas. And the people knew all was well in their kingdom whenever they saw the northern lights. For these rippling colours were a sign that the Sky Gods were dancing – and that meant the world was as it should be.

But darkness can come to any kingdom, and so it came to Erkenwald.



The
WAY
PAST
WINTER



Chicken
House



2 Palmer Street, Frome, Somerset BA11 1DS
chickenhousebooks.com

Kiran Millwood Hargrave

Text © Kiran Millwood Hargrave 2018

First published in Great Britain in 2018

Chicken House
2 Palmer Street
Frome, Somerset BA11 1DS
United Kingdom
www.chickenhousebooks.com

Kiran Millwood Hargrave has asserted her right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 to be identified as the author of this work.

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Cover and interior design by Helen Crawford-White
Typeset by Dorchester Typesetting Group Ltd
Printed and bound in Great Britain by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY

The paper used in this Chicken House book is made from wood grown in sustainable forests.

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

British Library Cataloguing in Publication data available.

HB ISBN 978-1-911077-93-0
eISBN 978-1-911490-35-7

*For N, & my brother John,
the brave ones*

Also by Kiran Millwood Hargrave

The Girl of Ink & Stars
The Island at the End of Everything



Part 1
HOME





Chapter One

The House in Eldbjørn Forest

It was a winter they would tell tales about. A winter that arrived so sudden and sharp it stuck birds to branches, and caught the rivers in such a frost their spray froze and scattered down like clouded crystals on the stilled water. A winter that came, and never left.

Three years passed, then five. People spoke of curses and offered up prayers and promises. They blamed mages, their neighbours, the jarls who ruled their villages and towns. But blame didn't break the winter, and soon no one could remember warmth except from fire, or green apart from the silvery hue of the fir trees.

Carts were abandoned in favour of sleighs, fine horses lost their worth until they were all traded for mountain ponies or mewling husky pups, or other animals that knew snow. Bears sank into perpetual hibernation, wolves slunk into the shadows of the vast forest. Some folk moved from their frozen land, but most stayed and,



as people do, changed to fit their changed world.

They changed their stories too. Gone were tellings of honey and plenty: tales became warnings, sharp as bee stings. The fire-geese who bore the sun on their backs in summer became ice-swans who nip at exposed fingers and toes, snapping them clean off. The river nymphs became ice maidens who stalk the bottom of frozen lakes, waiting to pull wayward children under. Wistful voices spoke of magical islands where spring waited, of waterfalls of gold streaming into pools of sunlight, but always these places were beyond reach, just past the frozen horizon.

In the winter's fifth year, its grip still tightening on the southern river towns and northern mountain cities, a whole new order of cold wove itself tight as a basket about the families that lived in the remotest parts of the land. And it was in a small house tucked in a narrow pocket of forest rimed with snow thigh-deep, that three sisters and their brother were having a disagreement over a cabbage.



A MURDER
MOST UNLADYLIKE
MYSTERY



DEATH IN THE SPOTLIGHT



THE STAGE IS SET FOR MURDER . . .

ROBIN STEVENS

PUFFIN BOOKS

UK | USA | Canada | Ireland | Australia
India | New Zealand | South Africa

Puffin Books is part of the Penguin Random House group of companies
whose addresses can be found at global.penguinrandomhouse.com.

www.penguin.co.uk
www.puffin.co.uk
www.ladybird.co.uk



Penguin
Random House
UK

First published 2018

001

Text copyright © Robin Stevens, 2018

Cover, maps and illustrations copyright © Nina Tara, 2018

The moral right of the author and illustrator has been asserted.

Set in 11/16 pt New Baskerville Std

Typeset by Jouve (UK), Milton Keynes

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-0-141-37382-9

All correspondence to:

Puffin Books

Penguin Random House Children's

80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL



Penguin Random House is committed to a sustainable future for our business, our readers and our planet. This book is made from Forest Stewardship Council® certified paper.

yet, but everything tells us it will be, soon enough! Oh, Hazel, this is why I'm still the President of the Detective Society, despite all that business in Hong Kong.'

Daisy really *is* still quite cross about Hong Kong.

Of course, as soon as she mentioned the well, I realized she was correct. I felt rather foolish not to have thought of it. Perhaps I am still not as good a detective as Daisy. Perhaps . . .

But then I remembered that Daisy and I are a brilliant detective double act because we notice different things. There are many things I have seen that Daisy never could have – it's no good either of us trying to measure up to each other.

And I knew that I needed Daisy at that moment. We had come out into the low dark under-corridors of the Rue, stuffy and hot as I breathed in. Around us were the enormous hulking shapes of the theatre's boilers and generators, spiderwebbed and casting jumpy shadows behind shadows as we turned the pocket torches we always carry on them. I reached out and seized Daisy's hand.

'It's all right, Hazel,' she murmured. 'You know perfectly well that I shall kill anyone who tries to hurt either of us.'

I felt comforted.

At last we came to the dark doorway that led down into the well room. We had to turn, one by one, and

climb down a short ladder into the room itself. The rusting iron of it scratched my hands and left them stinging, and as I climbed I could feel the quiet space of the room at my back. It seemed to be waiting for me.

When we were both down, Daisy and I turned and played our torches around the crumbling stone walls of the room. There was nothing on them but a few unlit candles in sconces. Everything smelled of damp, and the walls breathed cold. I shuddered. On the floor we saw a few smudged footprints, and discarded cigarette butts that showed that people had been here – but we couldn't tell who. And there was the covered well itself sitting in the middle of the room, dark and low down like something crouching.

Of course, Daisy went scampering up to the very lip of the well and pushed aside its wooden cover to peer down. She leaned out over it and I had to bite my tongue to stop myself calling out to her to be careful.

'Nothing in here,' said Daisy, her voice booming out hollowly. 'Apart from— Oh look, some cigarette butts floating in the water—'

'Come away!' I said at last, because she was leaning further and further down. 'I don't want to have to get you out!'

'It would be terribly difficult,' agreed Daisy, mercifully leaning back again and sitting down on the chilly stone floor. 'In fact, I think that if I did fall in you would be

unlikely to get me out alive again. It's very narrow – I should be stuck!

'Daisy!' I cried. 'Stand up and let's go. I don't want to be here any longer. There's nothing to see.'

'Suit yourself,' said Daisy, rolling her eyes. 'I like it here. It really would make the perfect place to commit a murder, wouldn't it?'

'NO!' I said. 'I hope we never come here again.'

But, as it turned out, Daisy was quite right. And we *did* come back, just a few days later.