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Only when it's  
darkest can you  
see the stars.



THE  
GIRL  
AND THE  
STARS

THE FIRST BOOK OF THE ICE

MARK  
LAWRENCE

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### THE BOOK OF THE ICE

*The Girl and the Stars*

THE  
GIRL  
AND THE  
STARS

*The First Book of the Ice*

MARK LAWRENCE

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*To the succession of English teachers  
who kept this scientist from forgetting  
that there was more to learn at school*

# PROLOGUE



**M**ANY BABIES HAVE killed, but it is very rare that the victim is not their mother.

When the father handed his infant to the priestess to speak its fortune the child stopped screaming and in its place *she* began to howl, filling the silence left behind.

Omens are difficult and open to interpretation but if the oracle that touches your newborn dies moments later, frothing at the mouth, it is hard even with a mother's love to think it a good sign.

In such cases a second opinion is often sought.



ON THE DIAMOND ice out past the northern ridges is an empty place where the wind laments and no one listens. Alone in all those miles is a cave where a witch lives. Or rather she exists there for there is little about her that might be called living. Agatta waits, nothing more. With the blood frozen in her veins she waits, moving only to crack the ice that forms around her and to let it fall.

The father and the mother came wrapped in sealskins and the furs of hoola, so bulky that they might be great bears roaming from the south. They set the salt price before the witch, and then the baby, swaddled in skins.

“Go.” Agatta creaked when she moved. She sniffed the air, and scowled, her face cracking. “The present.” She looked down at the baby through frozen eyes. “This smells like the present to me. Such a thin slice between what was and what will be, and yet always so much going on in it . . .”

The witch waited for the parents to retreat from view. She watched the silent baby, aware of its pinkness. Her hand, in contrast, was the white of early frostbite.

“What have we here? A little drop of warmth in a cold world.” Agatta reached for the child, stretching her senses into the future and the past as she did, seeking out the roots leading to the seed and following the shoot across the years, branching into possible tomorrows.

“Let me see . . .” Icy hand touched warm skin.

Instantly there was fire. A fierce bright fire consuming frozen flesh.

The parents returned, cautious, summoned less by the single piercing scream than by the silence that followed. They entered the cave, blinking at the gloom and wrinkling their noses against the stink of burned meat.

Agatta stood where they had left her, one hand pointing at their infant, the other behind her back, still smouldering.

“Take your child and go.” Her voice creaked like the pressure ridges where the ice flows.

“A-and the oracle?” The father stuttered the words out, wanting to run but having come too far to leave without answer.

“Greatness,” Agatta said. “Greatness and torment.” A pause. “And fire.”

# 1



**I**N THE ICE, east of the Black Rock, there is a hole into which broken children are thrown. Yaz had always known about the hole. Her people called it the Pit of the Missing and she had carried the knowledge of it with her like a midnight eye watching from the back of her mind. It seemed that her entire life had been spent circling that pit in the ice and that now it was drawing her in as she had always known it would.

“Hey!” Zeen pointed. “The mountain!”

Yaz squinted in the direction her younger brother indicated. On the horizon, barely visible, a black spot, stark against all the white. A month had passed since the landscape had offered anything but white and now that she saw the dark peak she couldn’t understand how it had taken Zeen’s eyes to find it for her.

“I know why it’s black,” Zeen said.

Everyone knew but Yaz let him tell her—at twelve he thought himself a man, but he still boasted like a child.

“It’s black because the rocks are hot and the ice melts.”

Zeen lowered his hand. It seemed strange to see his fingers. In the north where the Ictha normally roamed the whole clan went so heaped in hide and skins that they barely looked human. Even in their tents they wore mittens anytime that fine tasks were not required. It was easy to forget that people even had fingers. But here, as far south as her people ever travelled, the Ictha could almost walk bare chested.

“Well remembered.” Yaz would miss her little brother when they threw her into the pit. He was bright and fierce and her parents’ joy.

“You’ve spotted it then?” Quell came alongside them. He had no sled to drag and could move up and down the line checking on the thirty families.