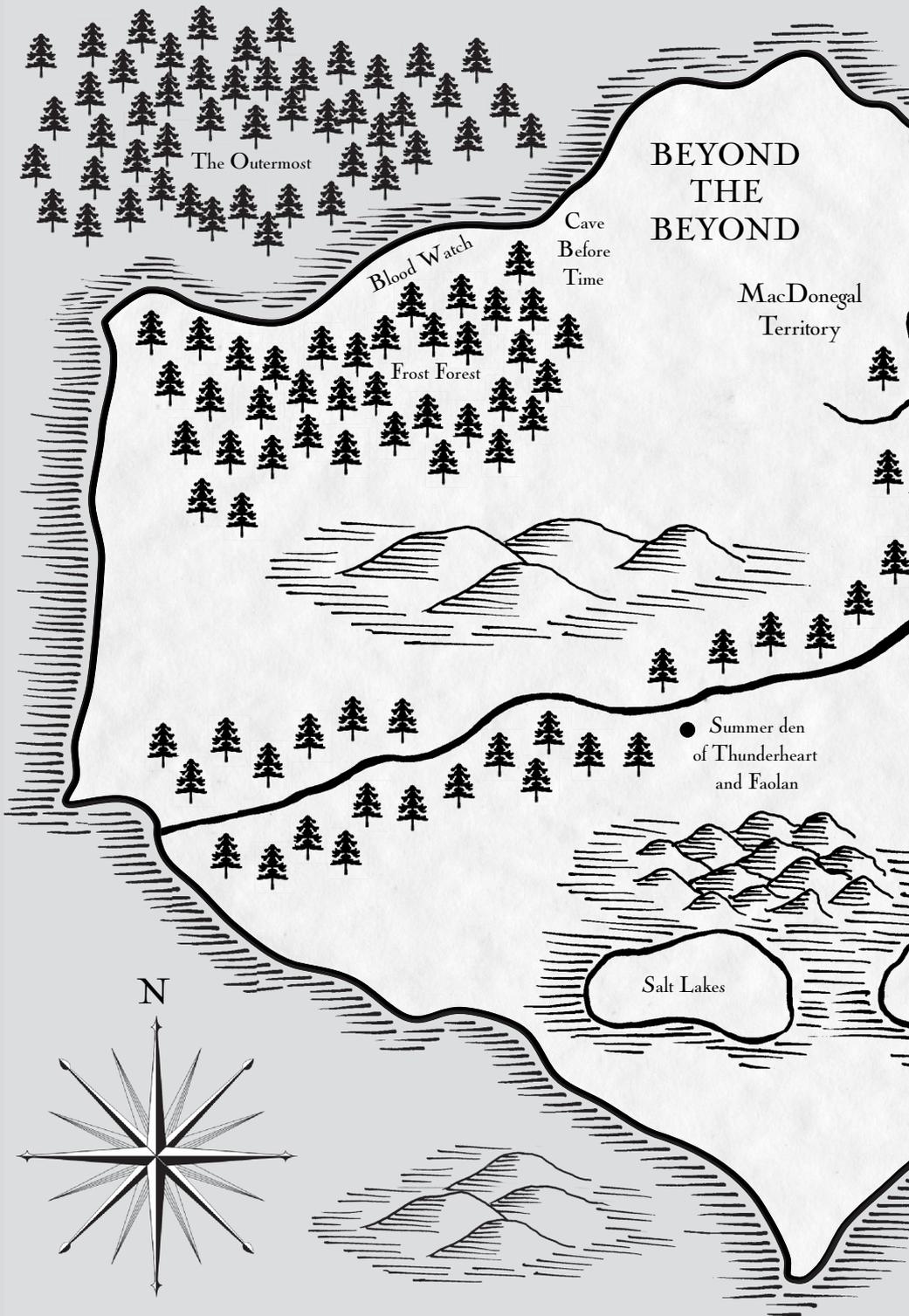


WOLVES OF THE
BEYOND
SPIRIT WOLF



BEYOND THE BEYOND

MacDonegal
Territory

The Outermost

Blood Watch

Cave
Before
Time

Frost Forest

● Summer den
of Thunderheart
and Faolan

Salt Lakes

N

SEA OF
VASTNESS

HOOLIAN
KINGDOMS



MacHeath
Territory

The Pit

MacNamara
Territory

MacDuncan
Territory

Black
Glass Desert

Broken
Talon Point

Crooked Back Ridge

MacAngus
Territory

Ring of Sacred
Volcanoes

Place where
Faolan was
found

Den of
the Sark
of the
Slough

MacDuff
Territory

MacNab
Territory

Salt Lakes

Shadow Forest

KATHRYN LASKY

WOLVES OF THE
BEYOND
SPIRIT WOLF



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*The darkness drops again; but now I know
That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?*

William Butler Yeats, "The Second Coming"









DREAM SHARDS

THE SILVER WOLF STOOD UP IN the cave where he had been sleeping. Something had woken him. He was not sure what — a slight tremor in the floor of the cave? He shook his head as if to clear it. He had been dreaming something important, but he could make no sense of it. The dream had fractured and its shards were now scattered around him. He could only feel pieces of it, but they drew him closer to the very heart of a secret, a secret deep within his soul, that had long perplexed him and haunted his sleep.

He put his nose close to the ground as if he might be able to track the scent of these shards. He knew it was stupid, but he couldn't fight the compulsion. In the dream there was a pelt, silver like his own, but tattered, raggedy, like that of a very old wolf. He had thought of it as a first

pelt, whatever that meant. How many pelts could one wolf have? But the words “first pelt” rattled in his marrow. Faolan’s anxiety increased as he paced the tight space of the cave. He shut his eyes to concentrate and a dim memory of a very old, very frail wolf came back to him. He began scraping the ground hard with his misshapen paw as if to dig deeper into the secrets. Was the wolf some sort of messenger? Words from the dream began to stream through his head. *My service is not over. I am in but my first pelt of a new season. Can this be so?*

Faolan stepped toward the cave opening and saw his two sisters limned in the light of a full moon. They were diligently gnawing the bones of their mother, Morag, in order to honor her. When they were finished, they would place the bones with others that Faolan had carved on a cairn, a *drumlyn*, on this lonely prospect of Broken Talon Point. Faolan had selected this specific place because on a clear night he would be able to see the *drumlyn* from his watch at the Ring of Sacred Volcanoes. And from here, on this peninsula of land that hooked out into the Sea of Hoolemere like the broken claw of an owl, he could see the jagged ring of flames that shot from the volcanoes.

Tonight every volcano was active, so the five crowns appeared like a circle of glowing rubies against a sky roiling with silver-lit clouds. The snow of Broken Talon Point

had been scoured by the sea winds, leaving a sheath of ice. As Faolan stepped from the cave, he felt something shiver beneath his paws. The ice began to splinter. Beezar, the small constellation known as the blind wolf that stumbled across the night, gave a great lurch and seemed to crash. The stars shuddered and the sky began to slide as the earth convulsed. Mhairie and Dearlea stood locked with fear. There was a deep rumbling that burst from the very center of the earth and then a shattering crack that threw the two sisters onto their backs.

They scrambled to their feet again but the earth was still shaking too violently. They tried to wrap their paws and legs around each other, clinging to each other as they looked toward the sky.

“Look! Look!” Mhairie gasped, her eyes wide with terror. Flames swept through the night.

“It’s the Ring!” Dearlea cried. One by one, like stars dying, the volcanoes collapsed into themselves, shooting rivers of flame and smoke into the sky.

“What’s happening?” Dearlea shrieked. “Look to the east!” But once again the earth was seized with a deep and terrible spasm. A huge rock shot straight up into the air, almost crushing Faolan as it crashed to the ground.

Then there was a new sound. A jagged, tearing noise from the north. The three wolves wheeled about and

caught sight of a white tide of ice advancing toward them, the leading edge jagged with frozen fangs. The H'rathghar glacier, anchored for centuries, had cut loose and was plowing across the open water. They felt another tremendous quaking beneath their paws and were thrown down again onto the frozen ground. It was as if the center of the earth could not hold.

On his back, Faolan saw the moon throbbing in the flame-ripped night. He began slipping on the ice and clawed feebly at the sky as if to gain purchase. Beneath him he felt the spasms of the dying earth. *I am rocking in the cradle of my lost souls*, he thought. The constellation of the Great Bear blazed above him, and Lupus and Skaarsgard had suddenly reappeared, in defiance of the season.

The earth had slipped its moorings and the constellations hung haphazardly in the sky without rhyme or reason.

His sisters screamed and Faolan whipped his head around to see the peninsula fracture. The two she-wolves scrambled and struggled, but slid inexorably off the edge into the sea. The last thing Faolan saw was Dearlea's bright green eyes roll back into her head until they showed only white — the white of the glacier's fangs that tore across that sea.

CHAPTER ONE

A SCARLET RAIN



THAT SAME EVENING AT THE Ring of Sacred Volcanoes, Edme had just finished her watch and was descending from the volcano Morgan. The shift had been tinged with unbearable sadness, as had the last several. For more than twelve moons, the wolves had endured the most desperate of times in the long history of the Beyond. Their prime source of meat, the caribou herds, had disappeared. Famine had set in. It was a period of endless hunger moons, for springs and summers seemed to have vanished along with the herds, leaving only ice. So many wolves had died, and if that were not bad enough, a false prophet had emerged in the midst of the chaos. He wore the mask and helm of a heroic warrior owl, Gwyndor, and under the guise of helping the starving wolves, had instead led many to their death.

Together Faolan and Edme had helped capture the Prophet, but the damage he caused could not be undone. And in the meantime, Faolan had taken his sisters to the *drumlyn* of their mother, so that the three of them could pay homage to her. This had left Edme alone, away from her closest friends. She missed them all and of course she missed those who were gone forever, those who had died in the famine. First there had been the death of her dear *taiga*, Winks, and her friend Tearlach. Now with Faolan and his sisters gone, Edme felt utterly bereft. She was alone, so alone.

By the time she was at the base of the cairn where she had stood watch, tears had begun to spill from Edme's single eye. Then there was a deep rumble from the volcanoes, and a tall slim flame scratched at the sky. It was an unusually deep bloodred color. Edme's tears caught the reflection of the flame just as Twist was passing by. He stopped in his tracks.

"I say! Are you all right, Edme? Have you been cut?"

"What? What are you talking about?" Edme asked.

"Oh," said Twist. "For a second, I thought there was blood coming from your eye, Edme. But I see it was just the light. Ha! Silly old me."

He turned his head toward the H'rathghar volcano. "I tell you, the old girl's been acting up a bit lately. They

all have — all five of them.” He paused. “Gone a bit peculiar. Well” — he turned back to the path — “these are peculiar times, my dear. Had a good watch, I take it?”

“Oh, yes. A fine watch.”

There was a terrific cracking sound and Edme saw Twist stagger. The ground beneath their paws ruptured and Twist vanished before her eyes. Another jolt rocked her, and she felt a hot gust that sucked her straight up into the air. The world turned black and there was a rain of red embers.

The Ring is collapsing. The ember is no more. My service is over, I am free, soon to die alone. Alone, alone!

These were the last thoughts to rake through her consciousness, then all went black.



Far from the Ring, in the Shadow Forest above a blue spruce tree, the Masked Owl Gwynneth floated in the smooth velvet air of the night. The tree was the site of her father, Gwyndor’s, grave and hero mark, which had finally been restored after it was desecrated by the Prophet. In a high hollow in the tree, his bones and his mask rested — peaceful at last after the despicable treachery of Liam MacDuncan. The MacDuncan chieftain had stolen Gwyndor’s mask to disguise his identity as he led

the starving wolves of the Beyond to their destruction. A “prophet” he had called himself. The very idea of his using her father’s mask for such vile deception made Gwynneth want to yarp up a pellet. But now that the hero mark had been restored, it was time for her to seek peace.

Splendid, splendid, the voice that was not quite a voice whispered as Gwynneth placed the last bone in the hollow. A scroom appeared as a vaporous mist, floating down through the branches of the tree.

On the ground below Gwynneth, the Sark tipped up her muzzle. “Do you smell that? No, of course you don’t. Owls can’t smell worth a pile of caribou scat.”

“I smell it,” Liam MacDuncan said. He seemed to have sunken into a permanent posture of submission. His tail was tucked so firmly between his legs that he might have been without one entirely, tailless.

Suddenly, a gust of wind blew the scroom apart and the spruce began to shake.

The tiny vertebrae that Gwynneth had just placed so carefully in the tree’s hollow flew out like white hailstones.

“Great Glaux!” Gwynneth shreed in the earsplitting screech of a Masked Owl. She looked below and saw the

Sark stagger. A boulder from an escarpment tumbled down the hill and Liam MacDuncan gave an agonized howl as his bones crunched under the weight of the rock.

“Run, Sark, run!” But when Gwynneth looked down, she couldn’t see the Sark anywhere. Below was a scene of utter devastation. Great gouges scored the thick blanket of snow that had so long covered the Beyond and the Shadow Forest. Trees had toppled, and the blue spruce tilted at an alarming angle, casting vertebrae out from the hollow, though Gwyndor’s mask remained firmly lodged.

“This is where the mask belongs, whatever happens,” Gwynneth whispered to herself. This was her father’s hero mark.

The air around her once again began to shiver. The trees began to twitch in some sort of antic dance and Gwynneth, hovering above it all, saw the roots of this ancient forest begin to pop from the ground. She felt her wings seizing up. *Glaux, I am going yeep!*

Fear had stalled her gizzard and the instinct to fly deserted her. She heard the deafening *crack* of the blue spruce as it crashed down in the scalding moonlight, streaked with fiery traces of volcanic embers. Her father’s helm twirled down, down, slowly down, as if a red devil

owl were spinning through the night. Gwynneth's wings locked against her sides and she hurtled toward the ground.



The Whistler, a painfully thin wolf assigned to the Blood Watch far to the west of the Ring of Sacred Volcanoes, had taken to sleeping in the strange cave that Faolan had shown him more than a moon ago. It was a peculiar place with odd drawings on many of the walls, passages, and underground tunnels, but it reminded him of his best friend, Faolan.

The Whistler had met Faolan when Faolan had rejoined the MacDuncan clan after almost a year as a lone wolf. The Whistler and Faolan were both gnaw wolves, having been cursed at birth with some sort of deformity. They were called *malcadhs*, a word that meant “cursed” in the language of the wolves. The Whistler’s curse was almost invisible until he opened his mouth to growl or speak and revealed his twisted windpipe. There was a jagged hole in it that made his spoken words sound like a shrill whistling hiss. Some young pups delighted in calling him “Snake,” because of the hissing, but all that taunting had disappeared in the time of the famine. No one had the energy for bullying and abuse when the hunger moons had continued unendingly and the wolves were starving.

In the past month, the Whistler had been assigned a post that would once have been unthinkable for a gnaw wolf. He was a member of the Blood Watch that guarded the border between the Beyond and the Outermost, where the savage outclanners lived. Now, no one called the gnaw wolf anything but Whistler or the Whistler. He had already been promoted to lieutenant, the second-highest officer at the watch. There was no wolf quite like him.

The Whistler had just done a double shift on the Watch and was terribly tired. And yet he could not sleep. He missed his friends, not only Faolan, but also Edme and Faolan's two sisters. He walked around the spacious cave to pick up the remnants of their scents from when they had all slept here together. When he had sniffed his fill, the pictures on the walls caught his interest, and he wandered down some of the passages he had not yet visited to take a closer look. One spot in particular drew him close. It showed a *byrrgis*, a hunting party, streaking to the east with a frail old wolf in the lead.

There was something about the image, an age and majesty that made the Whistler feel as if he were at the confluence of two worlds and two histories. The stories swept around him, wrapped him tightly, and for the first time he felt himself bound fast, *ycleped*, by clan scent. But this was not the clan scent of the MacDuncans and their

packs; this was an ancient scent of ancient clans and creatures from far away and long ago.

The Whistler followed the wall paintings down into another passage he had never seen before. The glittering mica chips in the stone offered the only light, but he could make out the dim scratching on the walls. It was a large drawing and the Whistler had to back up to see it in its entirety. He could just make out what appeared to be wings, a *hoole*, the ancient wolf word for owl. It appeared to be hovering over what at first glance looked like a mountain, but on closer examination, the Whistler realized it was not a mountain at all, but a bear. A huge grizzly bear curled up in sleep, its muzzle buried under its forearm.

Something flashed in the Whistler's brain. Even with its head partially covered, there was something vaguely familiar about the bear. The Whistler closed his eyes for just a moment, straining to remember.

A violent trembling ripped through the cave, buckling the rock floor and tossing the Whistler in the air. The mica chips glittered before his eyes like a constellation sliding down from the sky. *The star ladder descends, but I can't climb. My legs are caught! Skaarsgard, help me! Help me!* But the darkness enveloped him.