



Mikkal leaps across on to the boat. “You almost left without me!”

Kaiku bounds after him effortlessly, and noses into my side.

“Hi, Mikkal!” Pia calls, smiling as Kaiku moves on to her with her exuberant nudges. “I was hoping you would both join us.”

“Someone needs to check Rory doesn’t get eaten by bears!” Mikkal exclaims. “What would Greenlight think to that?”

I give him a playful push. “Do you think we’ll see bears today?”

“They are unpredictable.” Mikkal waves his arm over the vast expanse. “But there’s always a chance here. This is a wilderness, you know!”

Pia has moved to the front of the boat with Jonne. They're deep in conversation, easy in each other's company.

Mikkal and I are too, any residual awkwardness slipping away as we get further from the town, sailing over the dark water.

"How were the ice mice last night?" he asks conversationally.

"Maybe it's all in my head," I say with a shiver. "That's what Mum says. She says it's this place, the old buildings and the dark..."

"But that's not what you think?"

I hold his gaze for a moment, wondering how much I should tell him. "Sometimes I hear footsteps, outside in the corridor, and above in the attic. A child, I think. A girl."

The lines above Mikkal's eyebrows crease. "One of the town kids? Nina, up to her tricks? I'll talk with her. I'm surprised she went up alone. She's genuinely scared of that building."

I shake my head quickly. "I don't think it was Nina."

"Buppha and Nan? Those girls get everywhere!"

"No," I start, but when I think how impossible any other explanation is I stop. "Maybe. Maybe it was them, or one of the others. I thought they were trying to play tricks on me in the beginning, to scare me. But it doesn't feel like that any more. It feels almost ... friendly."

Mikkal stares at me strangely.

"Anyway," I say firmly. "Today's going to be about real people. And a real fox," I add, as Kaiku curls up in my lap.

Mikkal nods his head in agreement. "Only bears and ice today, yes?"

I smile. "Ice and a bear from a far, far distance, maybe."

Mikkal laughs and I feel warm inside that we have a shared secret, even if the memory of it makes me recoil in shame.

The closer we get to the glacier, the more ice there is in the water. We pass a tall iceberg and Mikkal and I hang over the guardrail. If we were any closer, we could reach out and touch it.

"The glacier is calving," Pia explains, leaving Jonne at the tiller to stand next to us. "Parts of it are breaking away."

"What will happen to the iceberg now?" I ask.

"This one will probably drift south and melt," Pia says.

I snap a photo with my phone, imagining the ancient blue chunk of ice melting into the sea. We might be the last people to ever look at it.

"We have to hope the world woke up in time. We have to hope this place will survive. Either way, we're lucky we get to see it." Pia touches my shoulder.

I nod intently. We're much closer to the edge of the glacier now. It's high and steep, and blue waterfalls cascade down from the side in a couple of places. There's a lower section where the glacier slants down into the fjord, and

this is where we're obviously heading. Pia shows us how to strap crampons – frames of metal spikes – to the underside of our boots.

“You'll need these too,” she says, handing both Mikkal and me an ice axe. “To steady yourself if you start to fall.”

“Will it be dangerous?” I ask, looking at my axe and then back to the icy landscape we're about to explore.

Pia smiles. “We've picked our landing place carefully. It's one of the flatter places, without too many crevasses.”

Jonne takes the boat in as close as he can get to the edge of the glacier, before throwing down an anchor. We basically have to jump over the gap and hope for the best. My heart drops as my feet leave the relative safety of the boat, but I manage to scramble on to the ice, the spikes of the crampons giving a satisfying crunch as they land. I look around with exhilaration. Wait till I tell Dad about this!

I stick close to Pia as we learn how to traverse the ice. Nothing feels very solid and we have to walk with our feet apart, like penguins, because of the crampons over our boots.

Kaiku in contrast slips around helplessly, and Pia and Jonne double over laughing at her.

“She's too small,” Mikkal says defensively, scooping her up.

Pia laughs. “I reckon she knows how to manage this

landscape better than any of us.”

“I’m not having her falling down a crevasse,” Mikkal insists.

Just as he speaks, an unearthly moan sounds below us.

If it wasn’t for my crampons’ grip on the ice, I’d have jumped a couple of metres in the air. “Is that normal?” I cry.

Pia smiles. “It’s air, moving in the ice. You get used to it. The ice is talking to us. Part of my job is to learn its language.”

“What’s it saying today?” Jonne asks, stopping to stare at her.

Pia brushes her hair back from her face and crouches down, her head tilted to the ice playfully. She’s silent for a few moments, then she smiles. “It’s saying welcome to Rory. It’s saying what an honour it is to have her here.”

I laugh and give a pretend bow to the ice while Jonne rolls his eyes, though he’s different today. More at ease. We’re all so much more relaxed away from the town.

“Why’s the ice blue?” Mikkal asks. “Shouldn’t ice be clear, or white?”

“Not when it’s so tightly packed,” Pia answers. “The pressure forces out the air bubbles – that’s some of the sounds you’re hearing – and the change in structure means it absorbs light differently. Much more red light is absorbed than blue, and so here you have it. So blue

that it's turquoise."

Pia gazes across the peaks and troughs of the crystalline landscape.

Mikkal nudges me, and tilts his head towards his brother, who's watching Pia adoringly, his pale cheeks flushed red. I take a quick photo of them and then move on to nimble-footed Kaiku, who's back down on the ice. The blue fox against the blue glacier. It's like seeing her in her own queendom.

"Will you take a photo of me?" I say to Mikkal shyly. "So I can show my dad that we came here?"

"That's a great idea!" Pia exclaims, overhearing. "Stand with Mikkal, Rory. I'll take one of both of you."

Mikkal and I hold our ice axes in the air like Vikings, with Kaiku between us, tail in the air like she's posing too. Mikkal and I roar into the camera. Even though my nose is numb and my fingers burn with cold, I'm happier than I've been in ages.