The EDGE of the SILVER SEA

Praise for Alex Mullarky

The Edge of the Silver Sea

"Sparkling with myth, magic and the wonder of wild places, this enchanting tale will make readers look at the world with glittering eyes."

– Sophie Anderson, Carnegie-shortlisted author of *The House with Chicken Legs*

"A clever twist on Scottish folklore... If you like faery bargains, fantastic creatures and wild magic, you will love this book!"

– Skye McKenna, author of *Hedgewitch*



The Sky Beneath the Stone



"*The Sky Beneath the Stone* is beautiful, bright and brilliant – a perfect blend of magic, adventure and heart, with a gorgeous Cumbrian setting, a wonderful weaving of nature, folklore and history, heart-lifting incidental inclusivity, and OS grid references at the start of each chapter so you can map the journey! It is one of those books I want to press into every young reader's hands, because I know so many of them will fall in love with it."

– Sophie Anderson, Carnegie-shortlisted author of *The House with Chicken Legs*

"A beautifully written adventure steeped in the myths and magic of the Lake District. I long to journey through the wall and explore the enchanted, dangerous wilds of Underfell!"

– Ross MacKenzie, author of the *Nowhere Emporium* trilogy

"Mullarky's deep love of nature and the Lake District creates a stunning backdrop to this captivating and magical tale of loyalty and love."

– Bren MacDibble, Aurealis-award winning author of *The Dog Runner*

"An assured fantasy debut. The richly drawn Lake District setting is enhanced by Ordnance Survey grid references at the beginning of each chapter."

– *The Bookseller*

"An action-packed adventure that makes you ask yourself if you'd be brave enough to go through the wall."

– *Armadillo*

"A fantastic magical adventure full of hope, courage and a little sprinkle of magic."

– *My Book Corner*

"Filled with folklore, adventure and characters you can't help but root for, in one of the most original magical worlds we've ever travelled through."

– *Roaring Reads*

For my parents, who brought me to the magic,
and in memory of Rouk, the best bad kelpie.

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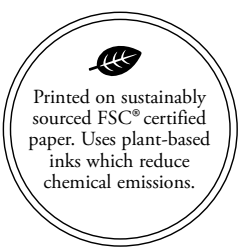
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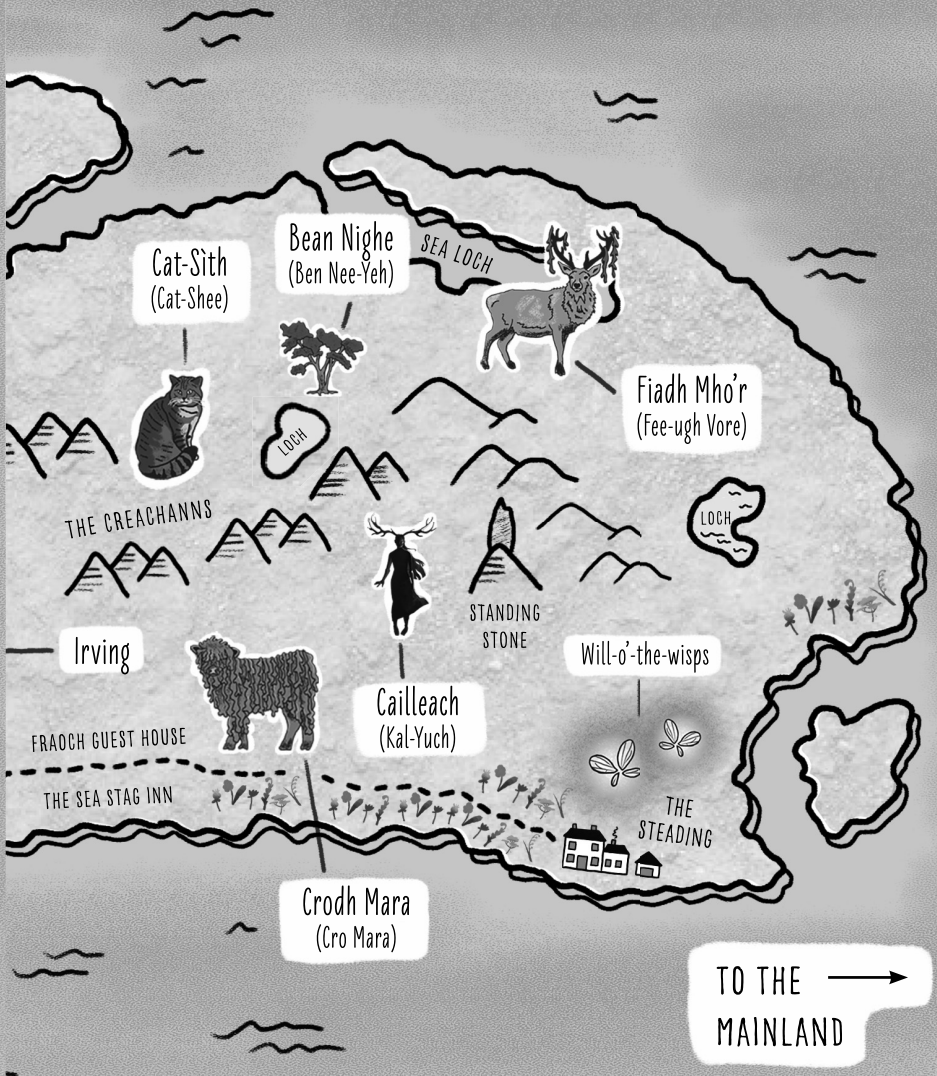


The EDGE of the SILVER SEA

ALEX MULLARKY

Kelpies


N
W
E
S
WHALEBONE BAY
Selkies
Kelpie
LOCH
THE VILLAGE OF ROSCOE
RIVER IRVING
ALASDAIR'S HOUSE
SHOP
HARBOUR
Cù-Sìth
(Coo-Shee)



THE ISLE OF ROSCOE

THE LEGENDARY ISLE

The legendary isle of Roscoe was cloaked in mist. Blair Zielinski stood at the prow of the ferry, gripping the cold metal railing. Every passing second brought her closer to the place her parents had been talking about all her life, but she couldn't see a thing.

In the poster that had always hung above their mantelpiece, Roscoe's vivid emerald and lavender hills rose from a silver sea. Before Blair now, white-capped waves rolled over the steel-grey Atlantic, blurring into a dark sky streaked with rain. She squinted into the cloud, waiting for the island to reveal itself.

The ferry lurched as another huge wave rolled under it, and Blair clung tight to the railing. She'd been too nauseous to stay inside the cabin as the boat swayed, but she wasn't sure she was any better off out here, with rain driving into her face and soaking her clothes.

When Blair looked up again, shapes were starting to appear through the cloud. The hills of Roscoe loomed

over her, much closer than she'd expected, and suddenly they were silhouetted by a bright burst of lightning.

Just for a moment, Blair thought she saw something on the ridge of the highest hill – a stag with great antlers, or the tall figure of a human, or something between the two. The hairs on the back of Blair's neck rose as she peered up at the hillside and felt a strange certainty that the figure peered back.

But it was only a brief flash, and then the hills were murky shapes once more. Blair tried to shake off the uneasy feeling that she was being watched.

A low rumble of thunder grew until it felt like it was vibrating through her very bones, sending her heart skittering. She had to admit defeat. It was no use scaring herself out here, where she might be pitched overboard at any moment.

Blair retreated to the cabin, her glasses steaming up as she stepped inside. The few passengers were all getting to their feet. It was time to return to their cars.



As the ferry ramp lowered with a shriek, Blair sat in the passenger seat of the rented moving van beside her dad. She had an uncomfortable suspicion that anyone could guess they were related: it was their messy, mousy hair, their fair skin and rounded faces, and a slight hunch in the way they sat.

Discarded on the middle seat was a folded timetable for the ferry. While her dad navigated the rickety ramp onto

the harbour, Blair slipped it into the pocket of her damp denim jacket. Her dad glanced over and she pretended to be adjusting one of her badges – the one that read *OUR PLANET! OUR FUTURE! SCHOOL STRIKE FOR CLIMATE*.

"Here we go," her dad said as they hit the cobbles. "After all these years!"

The worst of the storm seemed to have passed: the thunder had moved away, but the world was still mired in drizzle as they followed a small yellow hatchback, piloted by Blair's mum, into the village of Roscoe.

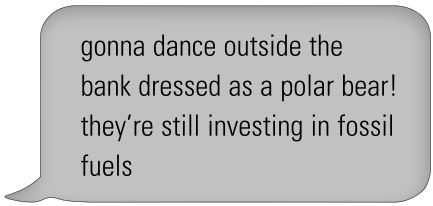
The village had the same name as the island because it was the only village *on* the island and, from what Blair had gathered, the only really habitable part of it. There was just one road, overgrown lanes branching off it leading to long, low houses with lumpy, whitewashed walls and windows in their sloping roofs. At the edge of the harbour were the island's only shop and a pub. There were a few bed and breakfasts in a row, but Blair observed no signs of life other than a calico cat sitting on a fence post, watching them pass.

This place was a ghost town. Did it really need *another* B&B?

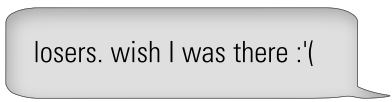
Worse still, the hatchback and the van continued past the village. The road became a winding, single-track lane leading seemingly to nowhere, bordered by a restless sea on one side and bleak moorland on the other.

Blair dug her phone out of her pocket and angled the screen away from her dad.

She had a message from Libby. It was a video of her best friend rehearsing a silly dance routine, and there was a message underneath.



Blair quickly tapped out a response.



A red exclamation mark lit up her screen. No signal.

"There it is!" Blair's dad cried in excitement. He gave her knee a squeeze, which startled her into looking up.

The van was slowing, which made sense as the road appeared to be ending. As a matter of fact, Blair couldn't think of a time she had seen the *end* of a road before. The tarmac disappeared into turf, which rolled under a stone wall inset with an iron gate. Beyond that stood the house that Blair's parents had bought without their daughter ever having seen it.

Blair was surprised to discover that there was another level her heart could sink to. The sprawling, dilapidated farmhouse looked like it had had rooms added on at random over the course of a very long life. The exterior was dull and grey, the garden wild and overgrown.

Piles of junk spilled from the outbuildings onto the grass in the front.

It seemed like no one had lived here for a long, long time. Blair's parents had never mentioned that.

"It's a fixer-upper, all right," said her dad delightedly. "I remember when we first laid eyes on this house thirteen years ago, Blair. On our holiday not long after you were born. I thought, *Now that place has potential.*"

The hatchback parked up in front of them. By the time Blair had climbed out of the van, her mum was already gazing up at the house, hands on hips. The frown lines around her eyes seemed fainter than usual as she said, "It's bigger than I remembered."

Blair pulled her jacket tighter against the wind, but her parents didn't even seem to notice the miserable weather.

"See how much has been done already, myszka." Blair's dad gestured to a fresh patch of black tiles on the roof. "That was all collapsed – uninhabitable!"

"It's a miracle it's ready for us to move in," her mum remarked.

Her dad nodded gravely. "It certainly is, when every builder in the Hebrides is convinced our house is cursed."

"Cursed?" Blair repeated. They'd never mentioned *that* either.

Her mum waved them onwards, ignoring Blair. "Let's get inside."

Blair trailed her parents up the overgrown garden path. Her dad unlocked the front door and turned to Blair, gesturing her through first.

Blair stepped through the porch into the shadowy kitchen. Wires dangled from the ceiling, which was stained brown in patches. Beside the old stove, tiles were cracked and missing from the wall. Cupboard doors hung from their hinges, and the lino flooring was burnt and peeling. Her dad was looking to her for a reaction, but she couldn't find any words.

Her mum bustled in behind them and moved determinedly to the window above the sink. "All it needs is a little light," she said, pushing back the curtains, then cutting short a shriek as a fat brown spider dropped out of the frilly pink fabric.

Her dad took a few strides deeper into the room, throwing his arms wide. "Home, sweet home!" he declared. One of his boots crunched on a snail; Blair covered her mouth and tried not to gag.

Even though it was mostly empty, there was something about the place that gave it the air of being freshly abandoned. A painting of deer on a hillside still hung crookedly from a hook, and a single shoe waited beside the porch. Blair felt like an intruder.

Her parents gave her a tour of their plans for the B&B, but most of it went in one ear and out the other as Blair turned her unresponsive phone over in her hands. Through the hallway were the pantry, a bathroom, and two rooms destined to become a sitting room and the breakfast room. Upstairs, three guest rooms, another bathroom and her parents' bedroom. In the attic, up a narrow staircase, they planned to install *another* two bedrooms.

There would be a lot of strangers around, basically. "Where do I sleep?" Blair asked, suddenly troubled by the realisation that they hadn't pointed out a space for her.

With conspiratory smiles, her parents led her back down to the ground floor, into the kitchen. At the far side was a door Blair hadn't noticed. Her mum pushed it open, beckoning for Blair to take a closer look.

She stared through the doorway at a bare room with a window looking out to sea, and no furniture besides an ancient, lopsided wardrobe against one wall.

"Your own wing!" her dad said from behind her.

"A bit more private here, isn't it?" her mum added. "Out of the way."

Out of your *way*, Blair thought.

"What do you think?" her dad prodded.

Blair shrugged. "Yeah."

Her dad's laugh was incredulous. "Yeah?!"

Blair's mum cleared her throat. "If we could have brought you with us to view the place you know we would have. But we knew this was the house of our dreams and we had to make a quick decision—"

"It's fine," Blair cut over her. Hearing her mum trying to be reasonable was almost too much to bear. She did what she had to do: she bared her teeth in what she hoped was a convincing smile. Then she reached for the handle and gently closed the door in her parents' hopeful faces. A moment later she heard them shuffling away and their voices raised in exclamation over something new.

Blair turned back to the room and took a deep breath.

The rain had picked up again and was lashing against the window, the wind howling beyond.

She pulled her phone out of her pocket. No messages, no notifications – no signal.

She was hundreds of miles from the only home she'd ever known, and she couldn't even send a message to the friends she'd had to leave behind.

She couldn't help it. Hot tears were rolling down her face before she could stop them. Blair pushed her glasses up her head and dashed the tears away with the back of one hand.

Cheep!

Blair froze. The sound was loud and sharp and animal.

Were there birds nesting in the rafters? She glanced through the window but couldn't see anything nest-like. And it had sounded so close…

Cheep!

She jerked around – she hadn't imagined the sound. Could it have been a mouse? But she hadn't seen anything move.

Cheep!

There it was again! The sound, more urgent than before, echoed like it was in a chamber.

Blair's eyes landed on the tilting wardrobe against the far wall. She approached it warily, laid her hand on the doorknob and then pulled it open in one quick movement, ready to confront whatever lay in wait inside.

Light from the room flooded into the dark cupboard and revealed only a single furry, moth-eaten coat hanging

at one end of the rail. The back of the cupboard was missing, and there was a crack in the stone where light shone through from the world beyond.

The gap in the wall was filled with dried grass and moss, sculpted into a cosy round space.

A nest.

Cheep!

Blair looked down and there, on the base of the wardrobe, was a little pink alien: a baby bird, fresh as anything, only a little feather fluff on its jellyfish body. She wondered if that meant it was freshly hatched.

"Hello there," said Blair. The bird wriggled and chirped at her again. She peeked into the nest and saw fragments of pale eggshell; her suspicions were confirmed. But if it was that fresh, it must have fallen out of the nest, and there was no way it was going to get back up.

Blair crouched down. She was surprised by the way her heart sped up when she reached for the creature, by the hesitation she felt before she scooped the soft, warm body into her palms. She paused for a moment, feeling the little life in her hands. The bird was quiet; its eyes were closed, and it seemed soothed by her touch, calmly radiating heat like a tiny hot water bottle. But then its eyes opened, and her breath caught. They were pale violet, shockingly bright, like heather shot through with an electric current. She hadn't known there were birds with eyes like that.

Blair cleared a patch of eggshell so that she could deposit the little creature gently into the centre of the nest. "There you go," she said as she set it down. There was no

sign of another chick or any other eggs. She wondered whether she ought to get some food and water for it. But what would it eat? She had no idea what kind of bird it was. Besides which, it was bound to have parents.

Where were they, though?

"Out finding food, probably," she reasoned to herself under her breath.

The safest thing to do was wait, and hopefully they would return to take care of it soon.

"Try not to fall out of your nest again, okay?" she told it.

The bird stared at her with those strange eyes, but it didn't make another sound.

Gently, Blair closed the wardrobe.