

Praise for

## THE SOUND OF WHALES

Winner of the *Times*/Chicken House  
Children's Fiction Competition 2014

*I was gripped . . . There aren't enough good modern novels that explore children's relationships with animals and nature. Thomson's ambitious plot, tight, poetic prose and feel for history is a breath of island air.*

THE TIMES

*There are so many great things that I enjoyed about this book . . . a very original debut read and one not to be missed. This is a book that should be read and will be loved by many . . .*

MR RIPLEY'S ENCHANTED BOOKS blog

*Highly original without being overtly quirky.*

GLASGOW HERALD

*This magical and enlightening adventure story, set against the atmospheric backdrop of the Scottish coast, is a touching tale of friendship and hidden strengths . . . an extraordinary, must-read story.*

LANCASHIRE EVENING POST

*Another brilliant book from Chicken House. This is Enid Blyton and Malcolm Saville for the 21st century's young readers. I can't fault it, it took me back to my own teenage years when I was desperate for adventure stories like this.*

BOOKS MONTHLY

*A haunting, evocative tale . . .*

CBI RECOMMENDED READS

*A suspenseful novel, full of secrets and betrayals, this book is a real page turner . . . The plot is gripping from page one and rolls on in the most compelling manner from there . . . [a] very satisfying read with wide appeal and enduring charm.*

SCHOOL LIBRARIAN JOURNAL

*. . . the novel's mysterious air and substantive plotlines involving divorce, human trafficking, and the challenges of adolescence will keep readers hooked.*

BOOKLIST (USA)



## A MESSAGE FROM CHICKEN HOUSE

I love the wilds of Scotland's Highlands and Islands. At dusk, or in the gloaming, I often hear the most mysterious sounds. But *nothing* prepared me for the ghostly howl of the long-lost wolves in this brilliantly exciting story. Kerr's novel will immerse you in the wilding of nature, the strength of an ancient mystery and the lure of an impossible challenge. *The Rise of Wolves* is more than a fantastic thriller – it's a call to protect everything we love!

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Barry Cunningham'.

**BARRY CUNNINGHAM**

Publisher

Chicken House



# The Rise of Wolves

Kerr Thomson



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*For Samuel*





## Chapter 1

**T**he howl pierced the darkening sky and made Innis Munro stop dead in his tracks. He pulled his hood down, listened intently. The only sound was his beating heart.

*That was a wolf,* he thought.

But it couldn't have been. There were no wolves on the island of Nin, no wolves in Scotland any more, not for almost three hundred years. It was just a trick of the wind.

He pressed on but kept his hood down. The afternoon light of early March was fading fast, snow was falling, and he was still a good half-mile from home.

Innis walked faster, told himself it was not the howl that made him hurry but the gloomy sky and gathering snow. He was crossing 'the Barrens' – the middle of the island where the land was hummocky and boggy.

At the northern edge of the moorland stood a mountain called *Beinn Ainmhidhean*. Translated from Gaelic, it was the Hill of the Beasts, and Innis went there to watch the golden eagles that nested on its crags. The mountain was the only feature on the landscape. A few stumpy birch trees clung to the hollows but this was empty land; no crofts, no roads, no people.

To a stranger, a mainlander, it would have seemed he was lost in the middle of bleak nowhere, but Innis knew this ground, knew every rise and dip, every boggy pool and gorse bush. His grandfather's croft was over the next ridge and he knew Gramps would have the peat fire roaring and something thick and tasty simmering in a pot.

Another howl came; long, bloodcurdling, wolf-like.

Innis stopped again, caught his breath and held it. He turned full circle, scanning the landscape, peering through the snow and the gloom. Closer this time.

It was someone playing a trick, trying to frighten him. Someone from school looking to mock him in a new and different way. It was pretty lame, actually. There were no wolves on Nin.

Innis cupped a hand to his mouth and returned the best horror-movie wolf howl he could muster. There was an immediate response but from further away this time, in the distance up by the mountain. And then another howl, much closer, a sound that no boy could make.

Innis whirled around and stared across the moor. Twenty paces from where he stood was a shape, dark



against the brightness of swirling snow. The silhouette of an animal. It stood side-on to him, front and back legs splayed, back arched, bushy tail curved down. Innis watched the creature raise its head slowly to the sky and another howl shattered the silence.

It was the unmistakable silhouette of a wolf.

Innis turned and ran, leaping across the marshy ground, rasping air in and out. He slid down shallow slopes and sank into boggy puddles, rammed hands into the mud to haul himself out, moved forwards at speed, too frightened to look back in case the wolf was upon him and his legs gave out. In the distance, he saw the lights of four crofts that sat nestled below the higher ground of the Barrens. Home. He took a glance behind as he ran, saw nothing and stumbled and fell, landing face first in the marsh.

Innis sat up, felt water ooze beneath his trousers and melting snow run down his back. He gave a shiver and looked around. No wolves – but a boy was walking towards him, the snow lying thick enough now to hear the crunch of his steps.

Innis struggled to his feet. He didn't recognize the boy.

'Are you okay?' asked a gruff voice.

'I'm fine, I just tripped.'

The boy hesitated for a moment, then said, 'All right then.'

He was smaller than Innis but seemed older, maybe fourteen or fifteen. In appearance, the boys were the

exact opposite. Innis was tall and thin with lanky legs and straggly black hair. The stranger was squat, with short, fair hair, shaved almost to the scalp. He had dark, unfriendly eyes. Innis didn't know him.

The boy turned and took a step away, and Innis asked, 'Where are you going?'

'What's it to you?' the boy asked, without turning or stopping.

He was heading inland, across the Barrens. 'There's a wolf out there,' Innis said.

The boy stopped and headed back towards Innis. 'Where exactly?'

Innis pointed. 'Out there somewhere.'

'You saw it?' probed the boy.

'I heard it *and* I saw it.'

The boy didn't answer, asked instead, 'How far?'

'Not far, five minutes from here.'

The boy sighed and wiped snow from his face. He turned and strode off without another word.