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ALEX MILWAY



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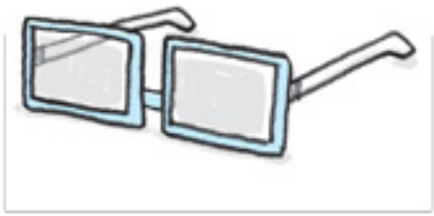
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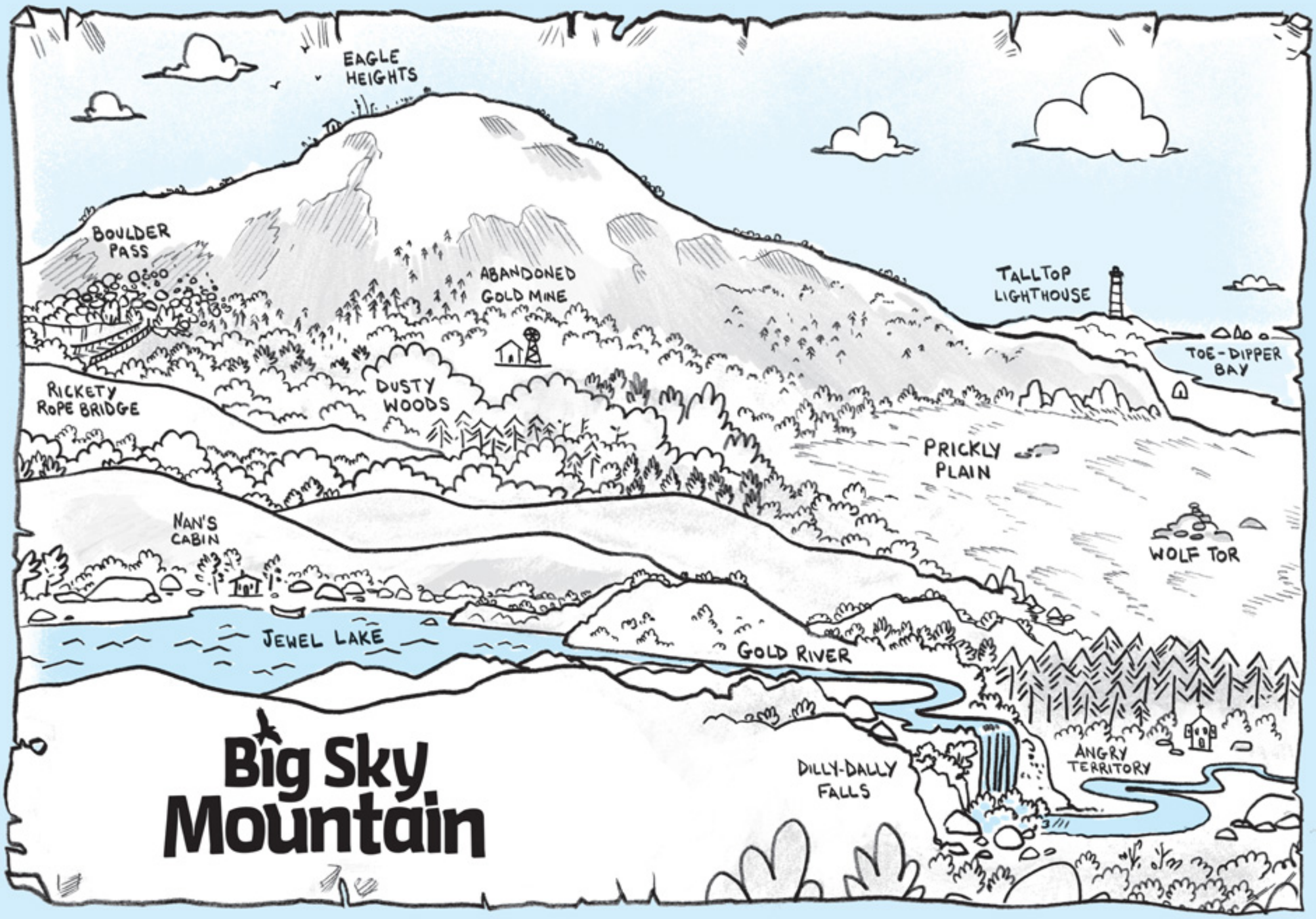
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JEWEL LAKE
GOLD RIVER
Big Sky Mountain
DILLY-DALLY FALLS
ANGRY TERRITORY



1
Grandma Nan

After an hour of travelling across miles of wilderness, the tiny plane carrying Rosa Wild dipped down and landed effortlessly on Jewel Lake. It chugged slowly across the water, its twin floats sending ripples across the glassy surface.

'Here we are then,' said Tom, the pilot. 'Quite something, huh? Told you this place was unlike anywhere on earth.'

Rosa sat up in the back seat and gazed in wonder – and no small amount of panic – at the boulder-strewn slopes and spire-like trees that rose up around her.



The emptiness of Big Sky Mountain and the never-ending horizon was terrifying to someone who'd only ever known the city.

'It's so . . . big!' said Rosa.

Tom's moustache twitched as he cut power to the engines and sailed the plane towards the gravelly beach.

'It definitely is that,' said Tom.

'And where are all the houses and shops?' asked Rosa.

Tom laughed. 'About two hundred miles away,' he said. He pointed through the window. 'There's your grandma now. She always hears me coming in to land.'

Rosa pulled her heavy cloth bag tight to her chest. She had never met Grandma Nan before, and seeing the wild-haired old lady striding out of the trees towards them, Rosa feared the worst. She didn't look like the sort who appreciated visitors.



'Will you come back?' asked Rosa hopefully.

'Next delivery's in a few months,' said Tom.

'That long?' said Rosa.

'Uh-huh,' he replied, getting out of the pilot's seat. He pushed open the door and hung his legs out as the plane gradually stopped moving. A burst of fresh air entered the cockpit. 'Nan looks after herself, but she always likes her winter supplies brought in early before the lake freezes over.'

'It freezes over?' said Rosa.

'Oh, sure,' said Tom, dropping out on to one of the long floats that took the place of landing wheels. 'Come on.'

Rosa clambered over boxes filled with

tins of fruit and powdered milk, and all the sorts of dried food that might last a year or two in a cupboard. She stepped down, and Tom helped her cross the float on to dry land.

Grandma Nan stood watching with a puzzled air.

'Who's this then?' she asked. She wiped her thick glasses, hoping cleaner lenses might change her view. 'I didn't ask you to bring me a girl, Tom.'

'It's Rosa,' said Rosa. 'Your granddaughter.'

Nan smeared down her bristly shock of hair – it promptly leapt back into place – and walked closer.

'Granddaughter, eh?' said Nan. 'Rosa?'

'I sent you a letter about coming to stay,' said Rosa.

'She did,' said Tom. 'I delivered it myself.'

Nan scrunched up her nose in thought.

'I don't remember reading a letter,' she said. 'But I do have a granddaughter –'

'While you discuss this,' said Tom with a smile, 'I best get all your supplies out and move on. There's a storm rolling in from the north.'

'I heard the crows warning of it this morning,' said Grandma Nan.

'Course you did, Nan,' said Tom.



Nan peered down at Rosa. 'Are you sure you're my granddaughter?' she said, her eyes peeking over the top of her glasses. 'She's just a baby.'

Rosa caught sight of a naughty twinkle in her eyes. Was she playing a game?

'We have the same name,' said Rosa. 'You're a Wild. I'm a Wild.'

'You don't look very wild.'

Grandma Nan squeezed Rosa's arm in search of muscles. Her grip was as strong as a vice.

'And you don't *feel* too wild either,' said Nan. 'You're all skin and bone.'

Rosa pulled her arm free. 'Look. I am a Wild,' said Rosa, 'and –'

'And what?' said Nan.

Rosa was edging close to tears. 'And I don't have anywhere else to go,' she said.

Grandma Nan huffed. 'It's true. A girl's got to be in a real pickle to end up out here,' said Nan.

Tom placed the last box of supplies on the gravel.

'Right, that's it then!' he said. 'You'll be OK, Rosa?'

Rosa wasn't sure. 'What happens if we need help?' she asked.

'We won't need help,' said Nan with a shake of the head. 'I've lived out here for twenty-three years so far, and look at me! Still alive.'

'Told you,' said Tom. 'Nan looks after herself better than anyone. She'll see you right.'

And with a smile and a salute Tom was back in the plane. The engine kicked into life and within seconds he was motoring along the water, building up speed for take-off.



The plane rose into the air and disappeared over the mountain.

The world was silent once more.

'Well, this is something,' said Nan, thrusting her hands on to her hips.

Rosa slung her bag over her shoulder. 'I *am* your granddaughter,' said Rosa.

'I know you are,' said Nan. 'You have my eyebrows.'

She picked up a crate of tins and marched off into the trees. 'This way! And bring a box!'

Rosa grabbed a box of dried beans and hurried on. Birds were chattering in the trees, butterflies were whispering, and even the midges buzzing about her head seemed to have things to say. If Rosa hadn't known better, she'd have thought they were all discussing her arrival. Little did she know there was a big surprise in store for her.