Big Sky Mountain

The Forest Wolves

ALEX MILWAY



Piccadilly
PRESS

First published in Great Britain in 2022 by
PICCADILLY PRESS
Bonnier Books UK, 4th Floor, Victoria House,
Bloomsbury Square, London, WC1B 4DA
Owned by Bonnier Books
Sveavägen 56, Stockholm, Sweden
www.piccadillypress.co.uk

Text and illustrations copyright © Alex Milway, 2022
All rights reserved

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

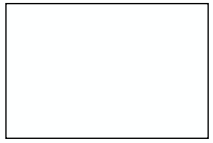
The right of Alex Milway to be identified as Author and Illustrator of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988.

This is a work of fiction. Names, places, events and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.
ISBN: 978-1-84812-973-3
Also available as an ebook and audio

1

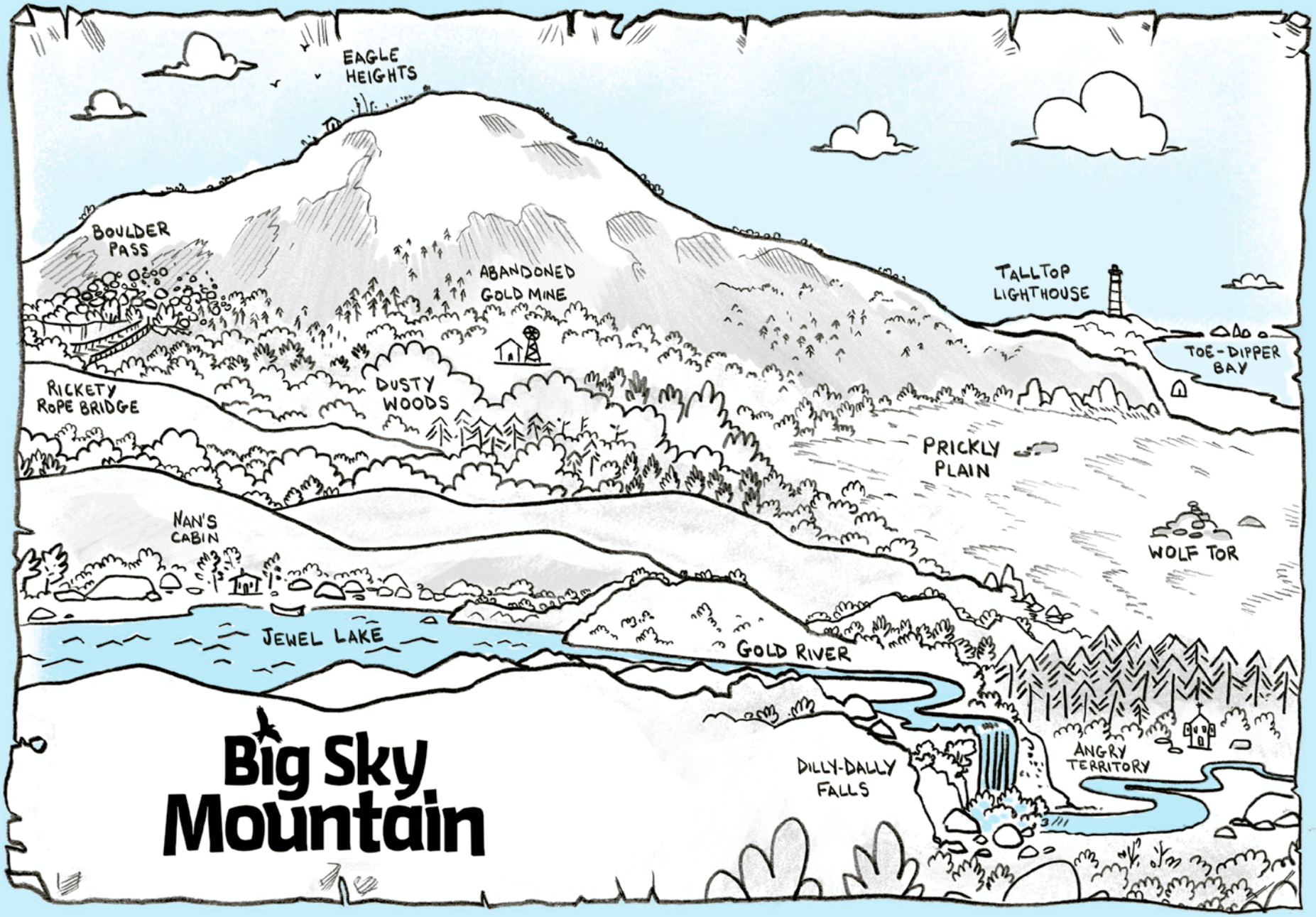
Printed and bound in China

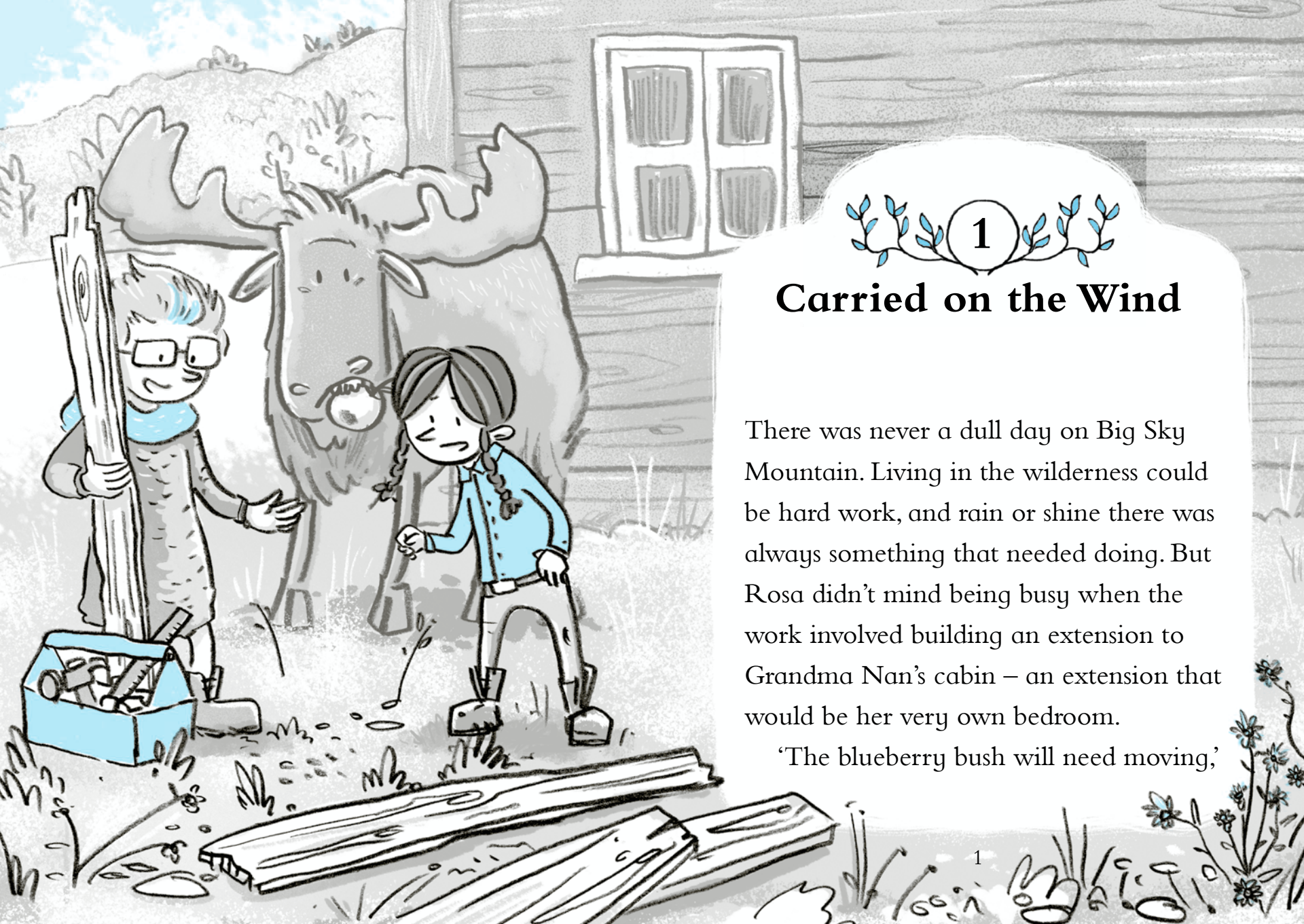


Piccadilly Press is an imprint of Bonnier Books UK
www.bonnierbooks.co.uk



For the Herbert Howards


EAGLE HEIGHTS
BOULDER PASS
ABANDONED GOLD MINE
TALLTOP LIGHTHOUSE
TOE-DIPPER BAY
RICKETY ROPE BRIDGE
DUSTY WOODS
PRICKLY PLAIN
NAN'S CABIN
WOLF TOR
JEWEL LAKE
GOLD RIVER
DILLY-DALLY FALLS
ANGRY TERRITORY
Big Sky Mountain



1
Carried on the Wind

There was never a dull day on Big Sky Mountain. Living in the wilderness could be hard work, and rain or shine there was always something that needed doing. But Rosa didn't mind being busy when the work involved building an extension to Grandma Nan's cabin – an extension that would be her very own bedroom.

'The blueberry bush will need moving,'

said Nan, mulling over the building site, 'but it's a small price to pay for a better night's sleep.'

'How do you even start to build a house?' asked Rosa.

'Don't ask me, small hooman,' said Albert the Moose, who was enjoying an apple while watching them work.

'You can help, Albert,' said Nan, who was always good at roping people into things.

'Who? Me?' said Albert.

Nan passed him the end of a long piece of string, and he dutifully held it between his teeth while she walked a few metres away. Nan then tied the other end of the string to a pole and eyed its length up and down.

'Longer than I thought,' she said.

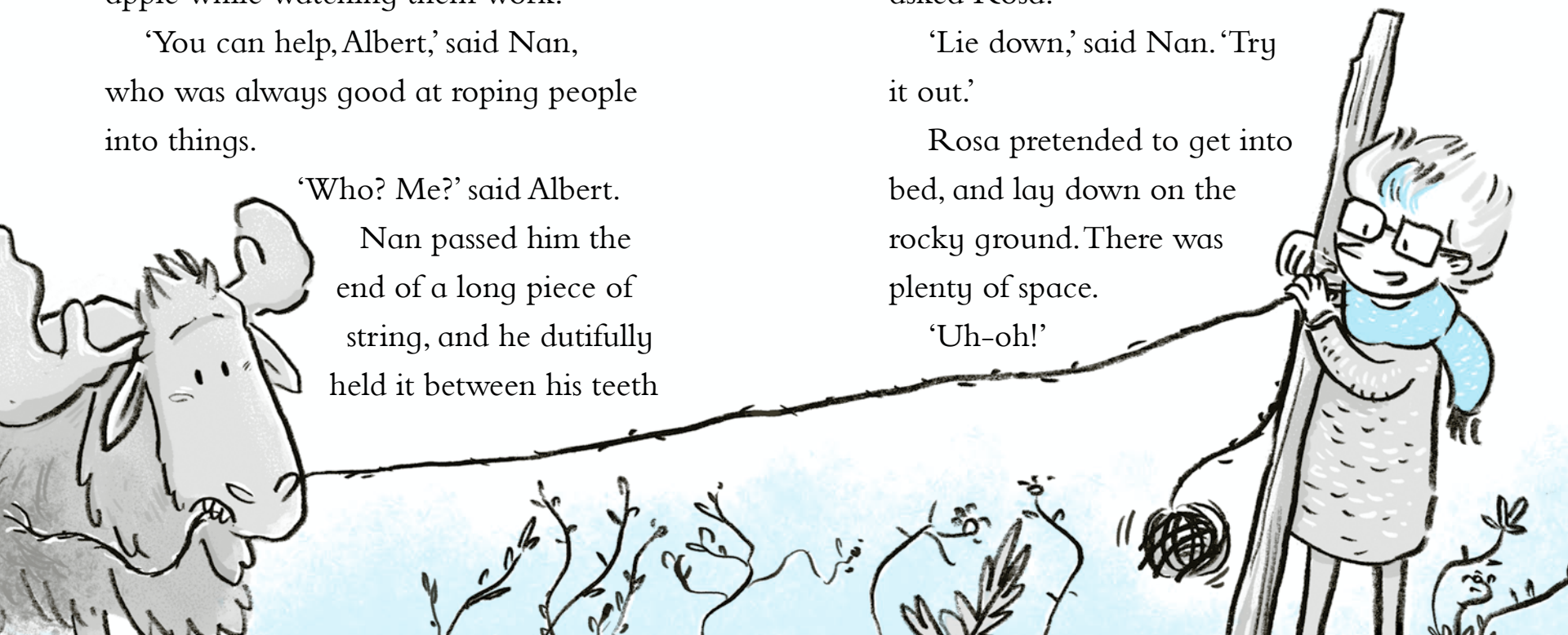
'String's not as tasty as apples,' muttered Albert through his teeth.

'Are you sure a bed will fit in there?' asked Rosa.

'Lie down,' said Nan. 'Try it out.'

Rosa pretended to get into bed, and lay down on the rocky ground. There was plenty of space.

'Uh-oh!'



she said, looking up at the thick black clouds overhead.

'Not big enough for you?' said Nan. 'What do you want, a castle?'

'No!' said Rosa. 'Rain.'

A few heavy spots hit the ground.

'It'll pass,' said Nan. She took the string from Albert and secured it on to another pole. She placed her hands on her hips in thought. 'We don't have anywhere near enough seasoned timber.'

'Nor apples,' said Albert.

A crack of lightning split the world in two, striking a tree high up on the slope.

'Nan?' said Rosa.

'Can't let a spot of rain stop us working!' she said.

A booming growl of thunder shook the mountain, and like a dam bursting its banks the rain roared down from the sky.

'NAN!' pleaded Rosa.

'Oh, blow my trumpet,' said Nan, realising the world was against her. 'Come on then, inside!'

They ran under cover, as the world turned to gloom. The trees trembled, the lake swooshed and frothed, and stony-faced crows burst up into the air, tossed from their nests and dumped into the open by the furious wind.



‘Do you think everyone’s all right?’ asked Rosa, as the windows rattled and the chimney ‘hee-ed’ and ‘hoo-ed’ like a trapped ghost.

‘I reckon so,’ said Albert the Moose, calmly chewing on an apple. ‘We’re used to storms out here.’

‘And yet, here you are, inside,’ said Nan. ‘Knocking everything off everything!’

With every turn of his head, Albert’s antlers swept objects off shelves and tables. It was no different to outside, though, as the wind was ripping branches from trees and blowing Nan’s bushes and tools across the shore.



Rosa had never seen the weather so bad. She pressed her nose up to the windowpane, her breath steaming a heart shape on the glass. She spotted lots of silhouettes moving high up on the distant slopes.

‘Are they . . . wolves?’ she muttered, an icy chill racing up her spine.

‘Out here?’ said Nan. ‘Not a chance. I haven’t had a pack come through the valley in years.’

‘That’s right,’ said Albert. ‘And we don’t want ’em either.’

Nan found herself a pencil and notepad, and started working out some sums.

'You know,' she said, 'once this storm's passed, we should go and talk to my friend Mr Higgs, up in Dusty Woods. He'll have some wood we can use.'

Rosa had seen just a small part of the mountain so far, and the thought of travelling further filled her with excitement.

'I'd love that,' she said, turning back to the room. The silhouettes had disappeared, and Rosa wondered whether she had imagined them.

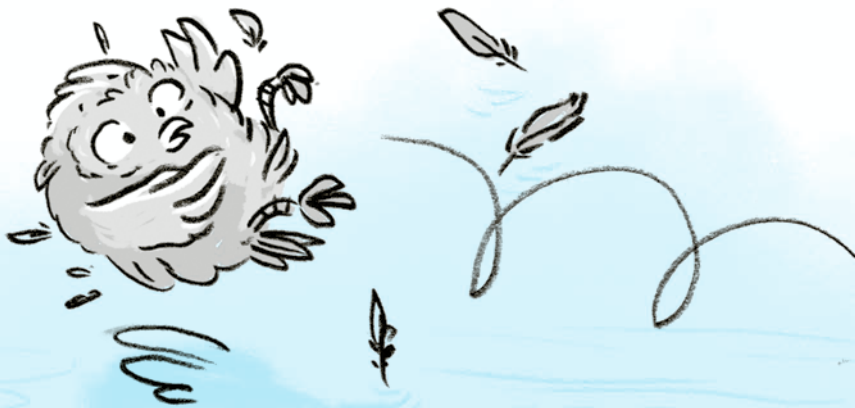
'There are trees as high as skyscrapers out there,' said Nan.

'Wow,' said Rosa, struggling to imagine them. Everything on Big Sky Mountain was so gigantic compared to what she'd known in the city.

Suddenly there was a frantic tap at the door.

'Let me in!' wailed Little Pig, the pygmy owl. 'The wind is blowing my feathers off! HELP!!!'

Rosa rushed to the door, yet barely needed to open it. The elements took hold and blew it wide open, throwing the tiny owl inside, wrapped up in a roar of wind and rain.



A lumbering dark shadow out on the lakeside drew Rosa's attention.

'That looks like Mr Hibberdee!' said Rosa, with rain scouring her face. She called out to him, waving furiously.

Another huge rumble of thunder rippled across the mountain and lightning coursed across the clouds. The ground shook beneath Rosa's feet. It didn't feel like normal thunder.

'Get him in, before he gets hurt!' said Nan.

'Come on!' cried Rosa.

'It's worse than having a bath out here,' said Mr Hibberdee, plodding towards the cabin.

'You're soaked!' said Rosa, as Mr Hibberdee squeezed through the doorway, rain running down his fur.

'What a sight!' said Nan, staring at all the animals. 'If I'd known we were having a party, I'd have baked a cake.'

Mr Hibberdee shook his body and showered the cabin with stinky, oily bear water.



‘Lovely, thanks,’ said Rosa, wiping her face.

Mr Hibberdee apologised profusely. ‘I was wetter than I thought,’ he said, delving into his backpack. ‘Not to worry. I’ve brought assorted jams and biscuits. I won’t charge you this time.’ The bear passed round a plate of crackers loaded with berry jam.

Little Pig’s eyes widened with excitement, while Albert licked his lips and shuffled closer, knocking a row of empty pots from a shelf with his antlers.

Rosa loved Mr Hibberdee’s food. She picked up a cracker and breathed in its sweet, syrupy scent. Rosa thought it was far preferable to the smell of wet bear.

The storm raged, but inside the cabin

everyone enjoyed a moment of calm. One pack of crackers ran out, then another, and Rosa was about to bite into her sixth when there was another scratchy knock at the door.

Grandma Nan turned her head. ‘I thought everyone was already in here?’

Rosa opened the door to the storm once again.



Sat shivering on the rocky porch, cold and alone, was a tiny wolf cub. She took one look inside the cabin full of strange, seemingly terrifying creatures and yowled, before zipping away through the trees.

‘Come back!’ cried Rosa. ‘Come back!’