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Winter Shadow

written by

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Suddenly, on the rough path out of the village, in the darkness of the trees to our right, we heard a rustling. Grandfather stopped and listened. There was nothing.

'Maybe just a rabbit or something,' he said. Still, he gripped my hand a little more tightly as we continued. As we approached our cottage, where Grandfather had left a lantern shining on the porch, there was another noise, and this time a voice spoke from behind us…

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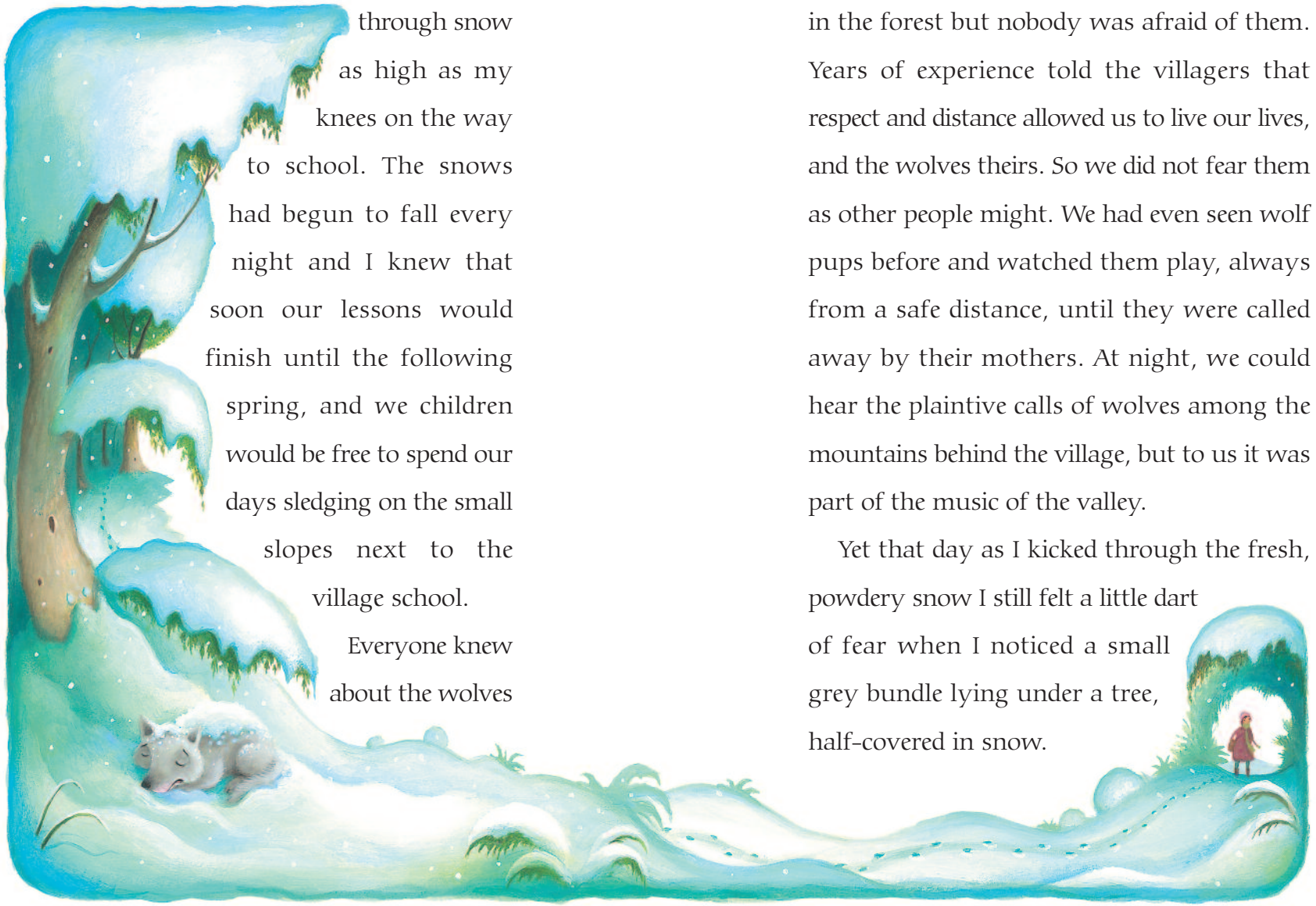
CHAPTER ONE



THE DISCOVERY

SHADOW ARRIVED IN OUR LIVES unexpectedly on a cold winter's day and I loved him more than anything else, except perhaps for Grandfather himself. We lived in a small mountain village far away from the world beyond the flood plain, and we liked it that way. The winters were harsh, when the snow would cut us off from other villages for several months. But spring, when the snow melted and filled the streams and rivers of our valley, was always for us a time of celebration.

That morning I had kicked my way



through snow as high as my knees on the way to school. The snows had begun to fall every night and I knew that soon our lessons would finish until the following spring, and we children would be free to spend our days sledging on the small slopes next to the village school.

Everyone knew about the wolves

in the forest but nobody was afraid of them. Years of experience told the villagers that respect and distance allowed us to live our lives, and the wolves theirs. So we did not fear them as other people might. We had even seen wolf pups before and watched them play, always from a safe distance, until they were called away by their mothers. At night, we could hear the plaintive calls of wolves among the mountains behind the village, but to us it was part of the music of the valley.

Yet that day as I kicked through the fresh, powdery snow I still felt a little dart of fear when I noticed a small grey bundle lying under a tree, half-covered in snow.