

Tanna's Puppy

by Rachel and Sean Qitsualik-Tinsley
illustrated by Michelle Simpson



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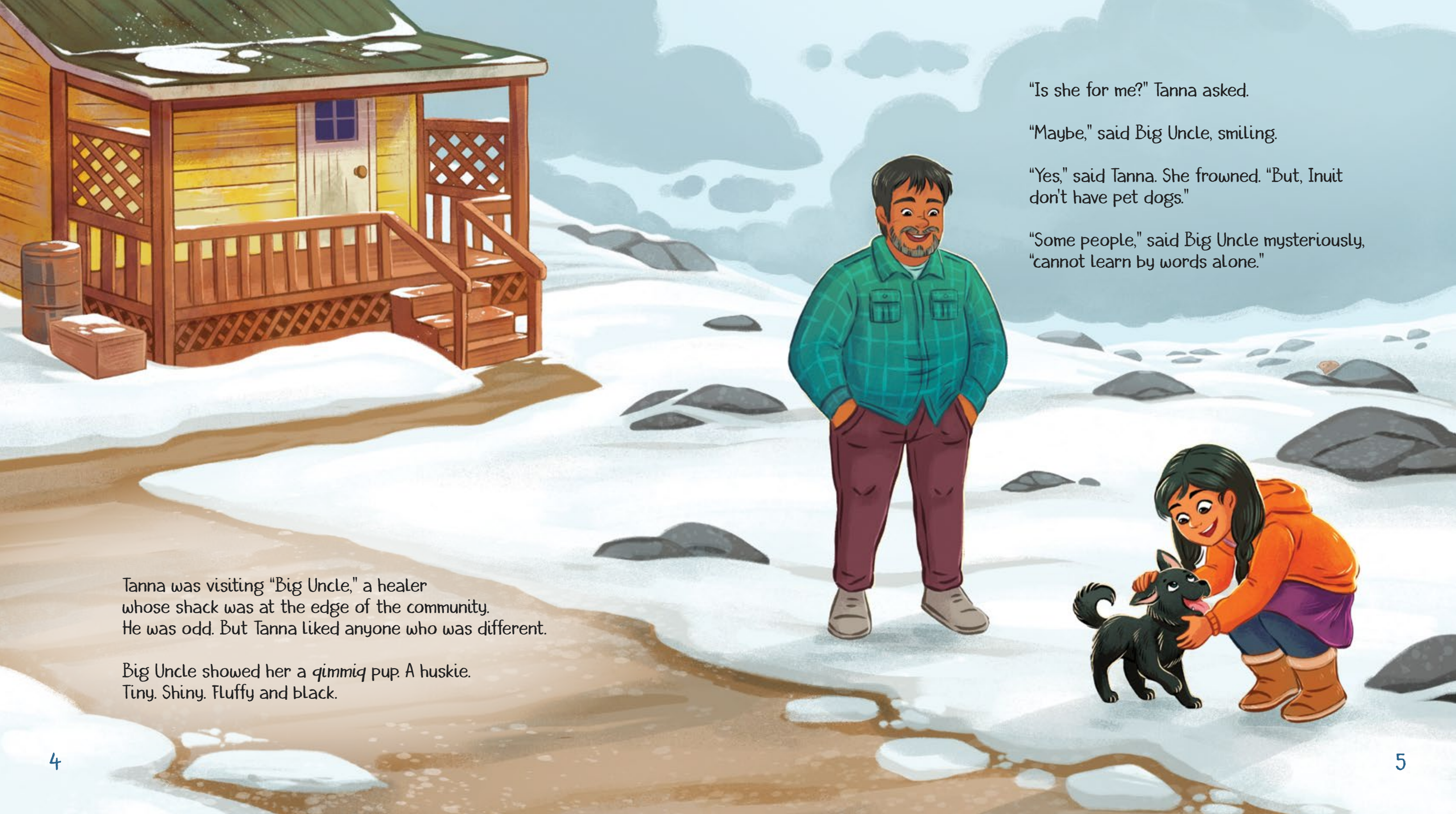


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It was the worst time of year. Tanna felt down.

Springtime in the Arctic meant lots of wet snow.
Too slushy for sledding. Mud was everywhere.
Sticking to everything. It could be weeks before
one spotted a flower.





"Is she for me?" Tanna asked.

"Maybe," said Big Uncle, smiling.

"Yes," said Tanna. She frowned. "But, Inuit don't have pet dogs."

"Some people," said Big Uncle mysteriously, "cannot learn by words alone."

Tanna was visiting "Big Uncle," a healer whose shack was at the edge of the community. He was odd. But Tanna liked anyone who was different.

Big Uncle showed her a *qimmiq* pup. A huskie. Tiny. Shiny. Fluffy and black.

Tanna took the puppy home. But her father was not happy.

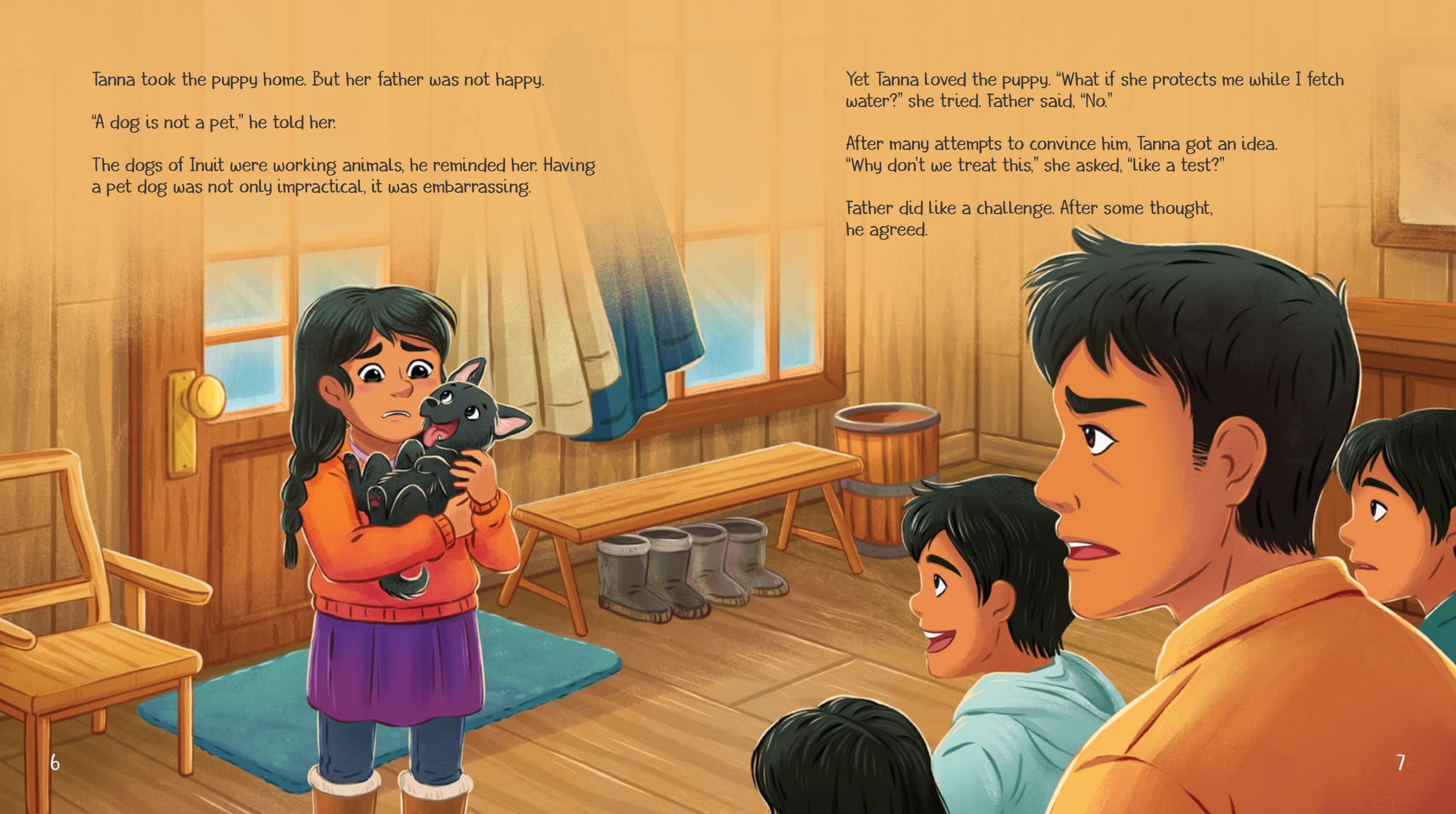
"A dog is not a pet," he told her.

The dogs of Inuit were working animals, he reminded her. Having a pet dog was not only impractical, it was embarrassing.

Yet Tanna loved the puppy. "What if she protects me while I fetch water?" she tried. Father said, "No."

After many attempts to convince him, Tanna got an idea. "Why don't we treat this," she asked, "like a test?"

Father did like a challenge. After some thought, he agreed.



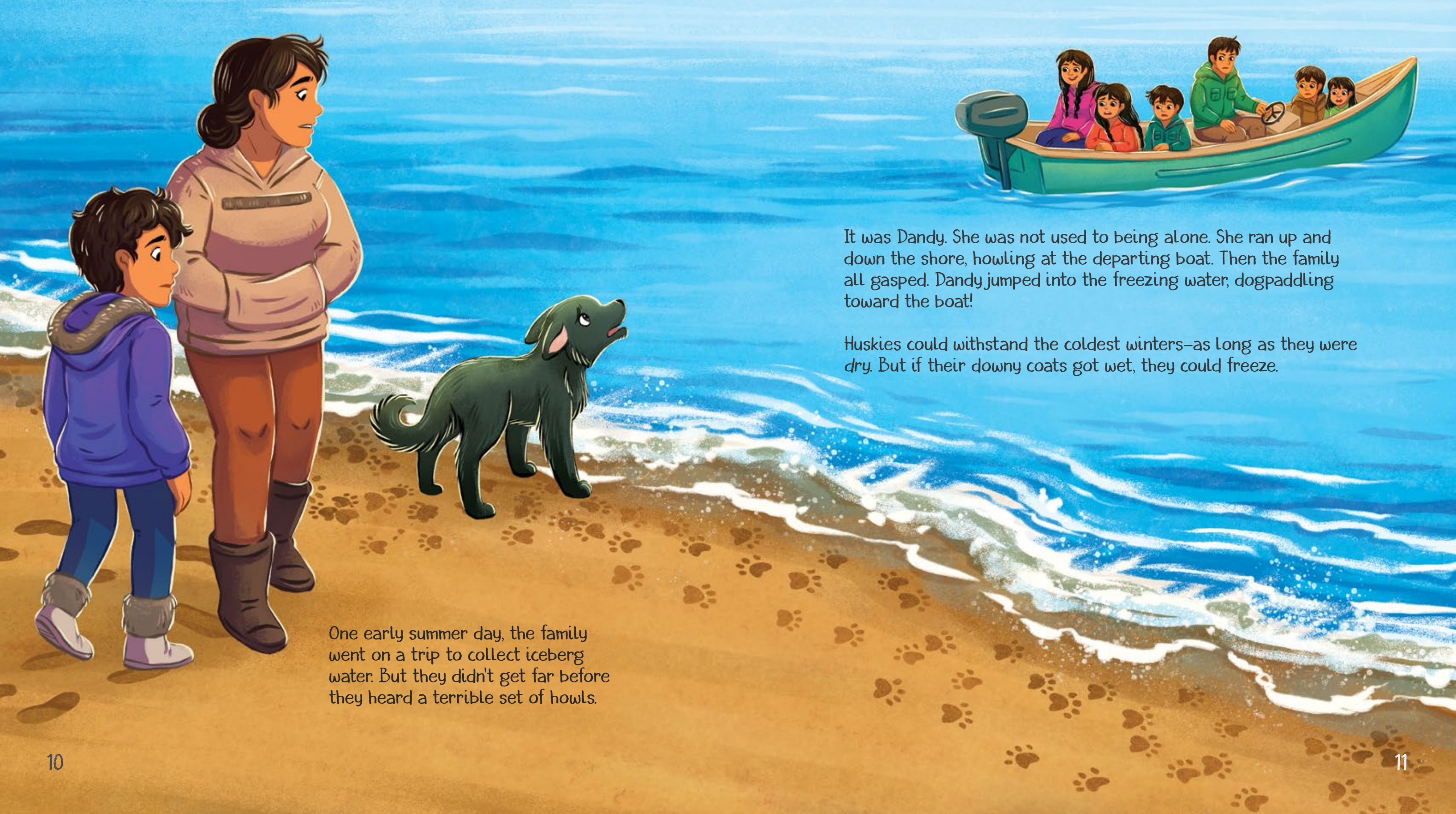


Unlike regular huskies, Dandy had to be house trained. Dogs were kept outside, even in the coldest winters. But Dandy lived inside.

Normal huskies were fed frozen fish as long as your arm. One dog could eat a whole fish in minutes. Bones and all.

Dandy was allowed human food. But, being inside, she also ate sealskin rope, antler tools, hide clothing. Tanna was always watching her.

Months went by. Dandy grew.



One early summer day, the family went on a trip to collect iceberg water. But they didn't get far before they heard a terrible set of howls.

It was Dandy. She was not used to being alone. She ran up and down the shore, howling at the departing boat. Then the family all gasped. Dandy jumped into the freezing water, dogpaddling toward the boat!

Huskies could withstand the coldest winters—as long as they were dry. But if their downy coats got wet, they could freeze.



The whole village watched, aghast, from the shore.
They'd never seen a dog try swimming in Arctic water.



Luckily, Father quickly grabbed the weak, shivering Dandy. He hauled her out and into the boat. At home, it took hours to dry her off in front of a heater.

Later, Father was mad. Inuit were proud of their dog-breeding skills. They were an ancient tradition. Teams were all siblings, trained by their mothers. They were beyond tough. They could pull a sled for days. Father saw Dandy's refusal to be left at home as a weakness.

One day, Father appeared with Dandy on a homemade leash. "It's time," he said, "to train her as a dog should be trained."

Oh, no, thought Tanna. How can she pull a sled? She can't even swim!

"Huskies are athletes of the dog world," Father added when he saw the look on Tanna's face. "One day, you'll thank me."





But Tanna resented Father. There was no more eating human food. No more toys. No more letting Dandy sleep inside.

In fact, Tanna was ordered to enforce this new training. It was all running. Eating whole char. Running. More protein. Running again.

But in time, Tanna got into pretty good shape. Dandy looked better, too. Her fur was shinier. There was a new gleam in her eyes. And Tanna forgot to be mad at Father.

Dandy got so good at running that, by the time winter came, she was allowed to run alongside the dog team. She wasn't part of the team, though. She just hadn't been raised up in a harness.

Dandy was more like a guest.

One icy day, things were going well. The team had halted, yipping and yowling as usual. Tanna ignored them while she helped Father untangle the dog traces: sealskin ropes hitching each dog to the sled.

Suddenly, the husky noises changed. Their howls became louder. Fierce. Deafening.





Tanna was dressed warmly. But she felt a chill run through her. The howls meant that the dogs had smelled a polar bear. A *nanuq*. These were the days when bears were much bigger than today. And they often hunted people.

Father acted instantly, cutting the traces to release the dogs. The idea was to let the team surround the bear. Keep it busy while he protected Tanna.

Then Tanna felt a new jolt of fear. She saw Dandy running with the released dogs. Straight toward the bear!

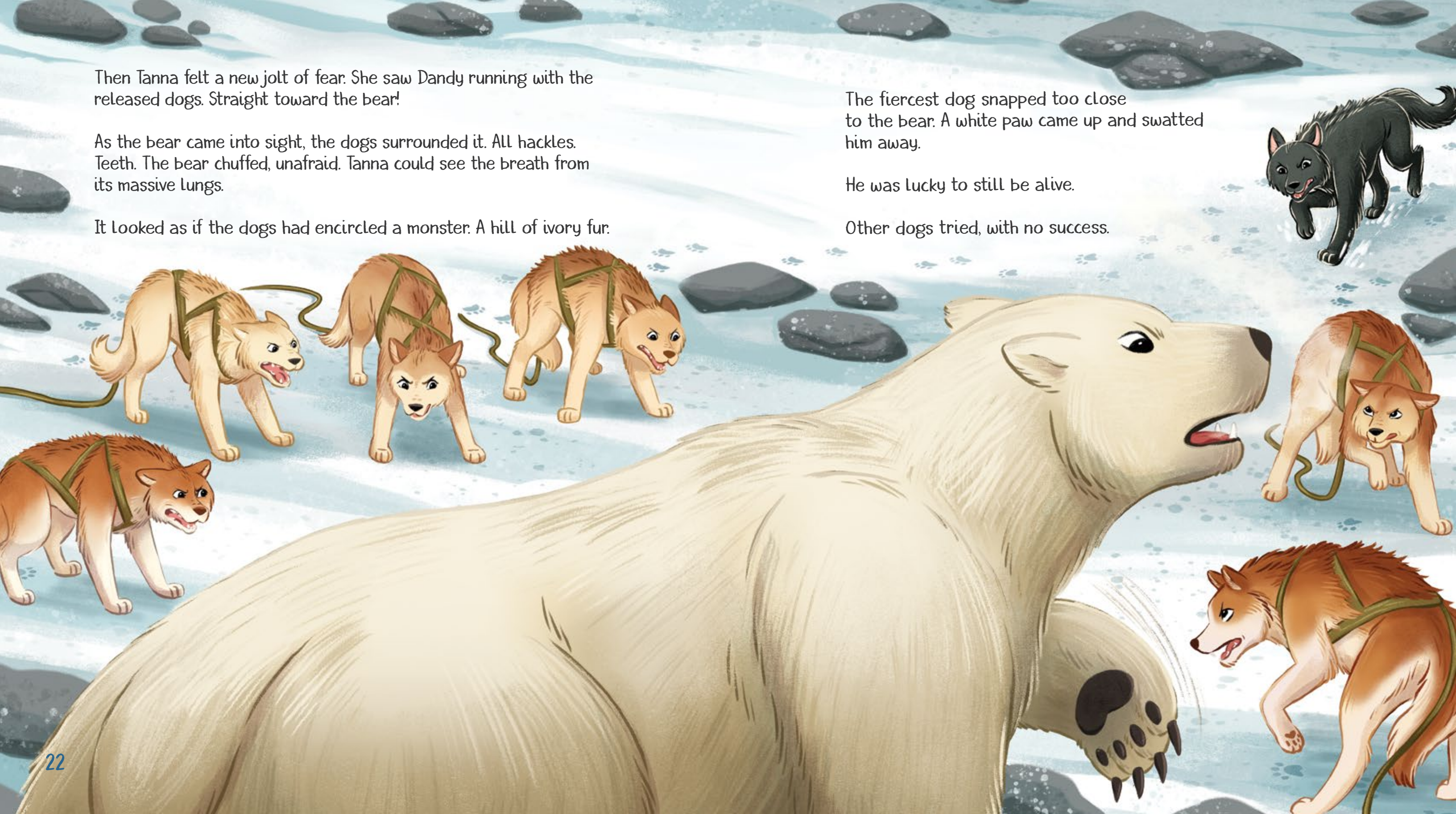
As the bear came into sight, the dogs surrounded it. All hackles. Teeth. The bear chuffed, unafraid. Tanna could see the breath from its massive lungs.

It looked as if the dogs had encircled a monster. A hill of ivory fur.

The fiercest dog snapped too close to the bear. A white paw came up and swatted him away.

He was lucky to still be alive.

Other dogs tried, with no success.





Then Tanna spotted Dandy. She was part of the dog circle. And the bear wheeled toward her.

No! Tanna screamed in her mind.
Dandy, get back!

Tanna watched, frozen, as the bear lurched toward Dandy. Its mouth was open. Tanna could see its black tongue past enormous teeth.

Dandy, still very young, was just a helpless puppy compared to the enraged bear.

So . . .

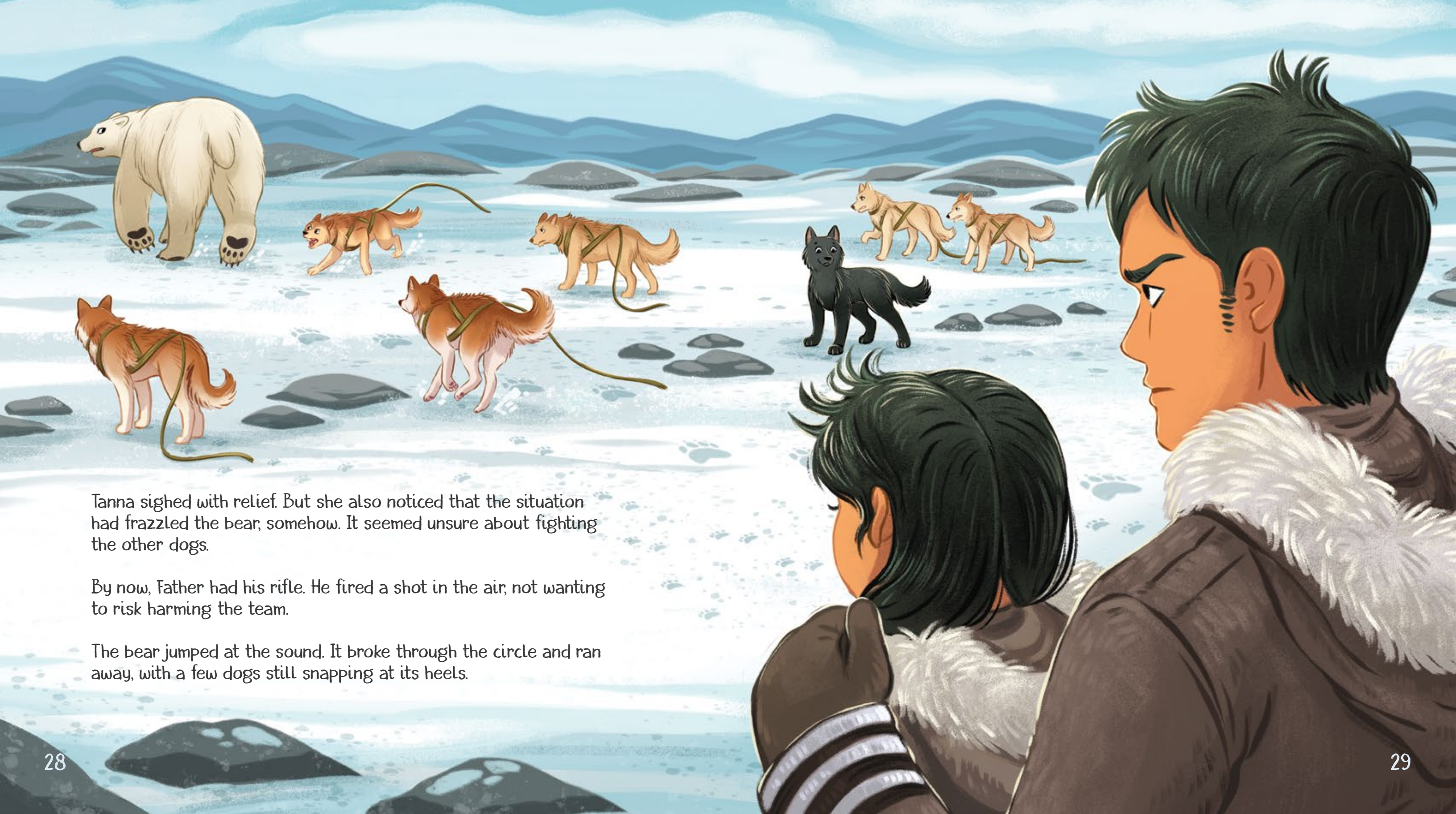


Dandy rolled over.

As Tanna watched, eyes wide, Dandy went belly up.
Right under the bear's mouth.

The bear froze. It took a moment to sniff at Dandy.
It looked confused.

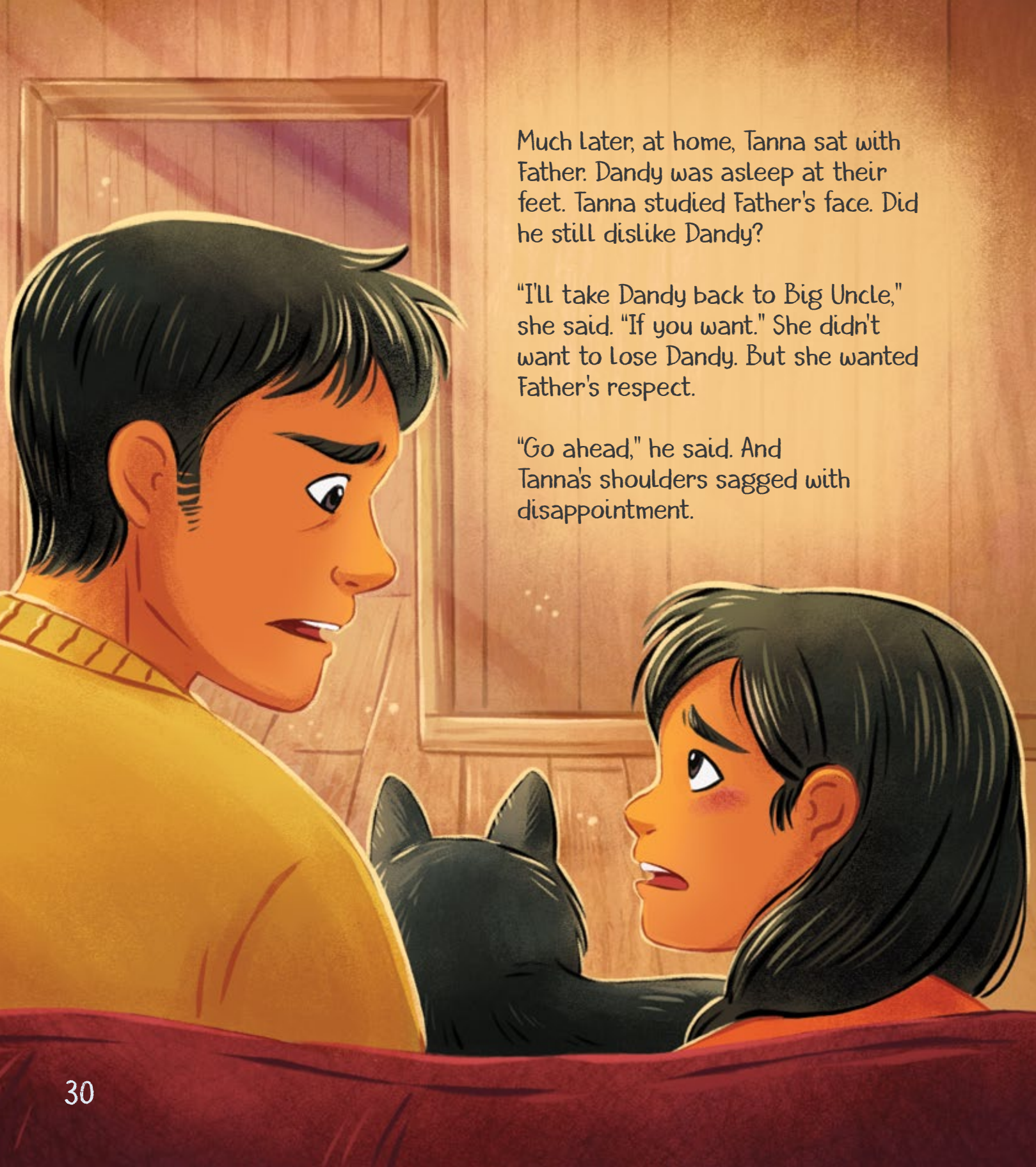
Then the bear turned away.



Tanna sighed with relief. But she also noticed that the situation had frazzled the bear, somehow. It seemed unsure about fighting the other dogs.

By now, Father had his rifle. He fired a shot in the air, not wanting to risk harming the team.

The bear jumped at the sound. It broke through the circle and ran away, with a few dogs still snapping at its heels.



Much later, at home, Tanna sat with Father. Dandy was asleep at their feet. Tanna studied Father's face. Did he still dislike Dandy?

"I'll take Dandy back to Big Uncle," she said. "If you want." She didn't want to lose Dandy. But she wanted Father's respect.

"Go ahead," he said. And Tanna's shoulders sagged with disappointment.



Then Father did an amazing thing. Smiling, he reached down to stroke Dandy.

"But only," he added, "if you no longer want our pet."

Overjoyed, Tanna hugged him. Then she called Dandy and ran outside to go see Big Uncle.

"Father likes Dandy!" Tanna told Big Uncle at his shack. "As a pet!"
"I know," said Big Uncle. "I gave you Dandy so that he might learn. Not you. Some people cannot learn . . ."

". . . through words alone!" Tanna finished.

Tanna ran off to play with Dandy. It had been about a year since she'd received her puppy. Slushy again. Muddy.

Tanna didn't notice.

