

A Big Move

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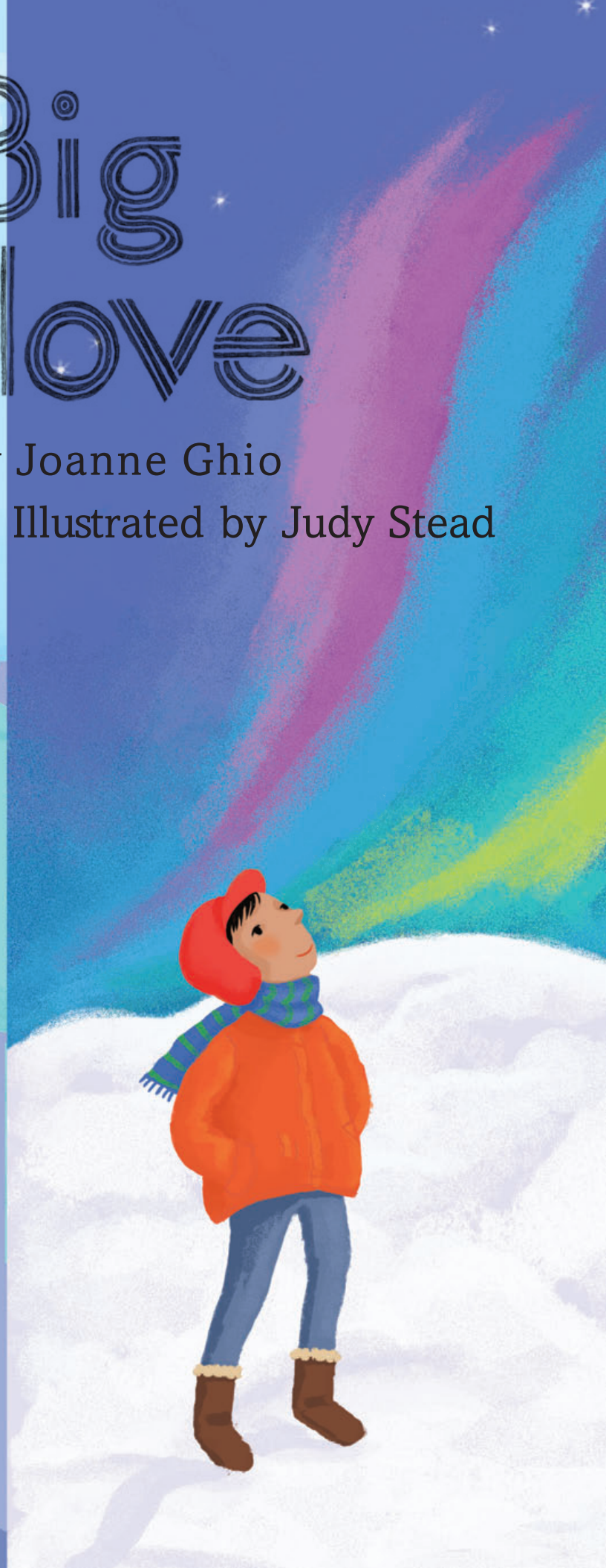


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Chapter One

A New Life in Alaska

“Dad, I’m not very excited about going to Nate’s house for a sleepover,” Jack whined. “Can I call him and make up an excuse not to go?”

“You accepted the invitation, Jack. You need to follow through on your commitment. I don’t understand why you don’t want to go. Nate seems like a friendly boy,” commented Dad.

“He is nice, but I think it will be boring to spend the night at his house. There’s nothing to do here in Alaska. I wish we had never left New York City,” Jack said.

“We’ve only been here a few months. You have to give it a chance,” Dad responded patiently.

Dad sent Jack to finish packing his backpack. “Don’t forget your parka, gloves, and boots. It’s starting to snow again.”

“That’s part of the problem,” muttered Jack. “It was special when we got occasional snowstorms in New York. It snows all the time here!”





Chapter Two

Missing New York

Jack tossed his backpack in the trunk and settled into the car.

“How long will it take to get to Nate’s house?” he asked.

“It should take about an hour,” Dad said.

“In New York, we lived in a huge apartment building. Most of our friends lived in the same building. Here, we are in the middle of the wilderness,” grumbled Jack.

Dad ignored Jack’s negative comments. Instead he pointed out things he observed along the route. He pointed to an eagle soaring overhead and an abandoned Gold Rush town in the distance.

“Look, there’s your school. You seem to like your new teacher and classmates,” Dad remarked cheerfully.

“They are nice,” Jack admitted. “It’s hard to have fun at recess, though. It’s always so cold.”

Dad sighed and drove on in silence until they arrived at Nate’s house.

Chapter Three

Dreamscape Landscape

Jack said goodbye to Dad and greeted Nate as his friend opened the door. He stomped the snow off his boots and entered the sprawling log cabin. The boys spent the afternoon playing computer games and watching videos about dogsled races. Nate's mother made halibut and rice for dinner. Then they ate bear paw cookies for dessert.

After dinner, Nate asked Jack about New York City. Jack explained how much he missed being able to walk out of his apartment to the delicatessen next door. He described visiting the zoo, riding the carousel, and swimming in the pool in Central Park. Talking about New York only made Jack more homesick.

When it was time for bed, the boys snuggled down under heavy, woolen blankets and kept talking. Finally, they fell asleep. Jack dreamed he was back in New York, going to a Broadway play.



Jack woke up disappointed to discover that he was not in New York. He was still in his new home state of Alaska. He felt depressed and lonesome. Then he heard Nate whisper, "Are you awake? Let's go outside. I want to show you something cool."

"Are you crazy?" Jack whispered back. "It is freezing out there. The cold would cut right through my parka. Besides, what could be so cool here in Alaska?"

"You just need to know how to dress for the cold," Nate told him. He pulled turtlenecks and sweaters out of his drawers. He told Jack to layer on the clothes.

"Here, you'll need two pairs of woolen socks inside your boots, too."



Chapter Four

Lighting the Way

Once the boys were dressed, Nate led Jack out to the yard. The night sky was sparkling clear. The air was frigid. Nate spread out a waterproof tarp on the snow and lay down, looking up at the sky. Jack stood there watching his new friend. He wondered what in the world he was doing. Suddenly Nate yelped, “Look!” and pointed skyward.

Jack saw beautiful lights in the sky.

“What is that?”

“People call them the Northern Lights, but their scientific name is aurora borealis. For a while, astronomers weren’t completely certain what caused them, but with research, they now have a better understanding. Alaska is one of the few locations in the world where they can be seen, and then only at specific times of the year. Aren’t they fantastic?”

Jack had to agree that the Northern Lights were one of the most amazing things he had ever seen. He stretched out on the tarp beside his friend so he could get a better view.

“Native Americans tell various tales about the Northern Lights,” Nate explained. “Some traditions say the lights are flaming torches carried by our ancestors, lighting the way for us. The lights are a very special part of the Alaskan culture.”

Chapter Five

Making Connections

As Nate shared more tales of his ancestors, Jack could see them in his head, walking proudly with torches in their hands.

“Your stories make me think of an important part of New York City culture that involves a torch. We have the Statue of Liberty, whose torch symbolizes lighting the way to freedom,” Jack shared with his friend.

As Jack lay there looking at the beautiful, crystal-clear sky, he realized he wasn't feeling cold and uncomfortable anymore. In fact, he couldn't wait to tell his parents what he had seen. He loved New York City, but now he knew there were amazing memories to build in Alaska, too.

