

**The Boy and the Girl and the
Miracle in the Cave of Snow**

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1.

There was the universe, the solar system, the Earth, Greenland, the village, the green house, Andreas, Sofie, Dad and Mum, and inside Mum's belly was an astronaut floating around in its own universe. In a month, it would land on Earth, climb out of its spaceship and greet them. But was it a boy astronaut or a girl astronaut? Nobody knew, because Mum hadn't had it checked.

What would you two like? she asked.

I'd like a little brother, said Andreas. But of course I'd also really like a little sister, he added, just to be on the safe side.

A little sister, said Sofie. No, wait, a little brother. No, a sister, argh, I don't know. Can I please have some time before I make up my mind?

I think it's a bit late to choose, said Mum. It's whatever it wants to be.

You can just have another one afterwards, said Sofie. Then maybe you can let me choose what it should be.

Do you think I'm a baby-making machine? said Mum, laughing.

2.

That night Andreas woke up to find the house as noisy as though an angry giant were shaking it, and he knew there was a storm. It wasn't the first time it had happened, so he wasn't scared, even though it sounded like the house was about to topple over. Still, he couldn't fall back to sleep. He looked across at Sofie, who was looking across at him.

Don't be scared, said Sofie. Kraka is outside. He'll look after us.

Kraka was Sofie's raven. He'd appeared when they learned they were getting a little brother or a little sister. Now Kraka was always perched outside the house, waiting for Sofie to come out with a treat. In fact, Sofie knew that Kraka wasn't a raven at all, but a person. He was a dead shaman who had got himself reborn as a raven.

If he can make himself be reborn, why didn't he come back as a person? asked Andreas sensibly.

Because shamans like to fly, of course, said Sofie. And because he's waiting for the right person to be reborn as.

Andreas didn't really believe her. Sofie was two years younger than him, and she could be a bit childish sometimes. Still, he found it comforting to think of Sofie's raven out there in the storm somewhere.

When they got up, it was still stormy. Sofie went outside to give Kraka a treat. He was nestled in among Sofie's puppies, which were in a close-packed pile in a cardboard box, asleep. He looked up at Sofie when she came out, staring at her with his blue shaman's eyes.

Good morning, Kraka, said Sofie. Here's some pâté for you.

School was shut on account of the storm, but Dad said, Let's go down to the shop. There's a couple of things we need.

They put on thermals and snowsuits and fur hats and masks and snowmobile goggles and thick mittens. By the time they'd put on all the warm things they had, Andreas and Sofie were so padded with clothes that their arms stuck out to the sides.

Dad tied a rope around their waists and around himself, so they couldn't get separated, because anything more than two metres away was invisible or simply white.

It was too windy to walk upright, so they crawled along on all fours, Dad first, and Andreas and Sofie following right behind. The only thing they could see was Dad's bottom, wagging from side to side in front of them. The storm was very noisy, and they couldn't talk. They had to turn their faces away from the wind even to breathe. But they weren't

scared. They were tied together with rope, after all, and they were sure their dad would find his way.

There was no trace of the shop anywhere. It was completely hidden. But then they found a cave in the snow. They saw people coming out of the cave, and people disappearing in. Sofie and Andreas and their dad slid down to the bottom of the cave, where two men from the council were shovelling snow to keep it open to customers. From here, a tunnel led to the entrance of the shop. They loosened the rope around their waists and took off their masks and goggles. Then they went into the shop. It was very cold inside, and all the staff were clad in thermals and mittens. But over by the counter was a stove, and beside it was a shelf of hot, freshly baked bread that smelled divine.

They bought enough things for a few days, porridge and milk and flour and meat and spaghetti and rice and butter and two warm wholemeal loaves that Andreas and Sofie were allowed to tuck down their snowsuits, where they were lovely and cosy. Then they walked back out into the tunnel of snow, roped themselves together and tied the shopping firmly to one end, then dragged the whole lot behind them through the snow, using their combined efforts. When they got home, Kraka peered up at them from the heap of puppies.

Kraa! he said.

Kraa! said Sofie, putting down her hand and scratching his neck.

3.

Easter came. The snow was still several metres thick, and there was ice on the fjord. The spring sun made the air shimmer and vibrate, and although it was five degrees below freezing, people were wandering around without outdoor clothes, moaning and going, Phew, this heatwave is practically African!

It would soon be time for Mum to have the baby. One day they went with her to the nurses' station to have her belly checked. Andreas loved the nurses' station. It was the nicest place he knew, apart from their house. There were cupboards with glass doors full of funny instruments. There was a big cabinet full of all sorts of medicine, which their dad gave to people who were ill. There was a scales to weigh the babies and one for grown-ups, and there were boards on the wall where you could have your eyesight checked. There was also a dentist's chair that could go up and down and tilt all the way back so you were lying down, and a light you could shine into people's mouths.

I want to be a dentist when I grow up, said Sofie.

I thought you wanted to be a vet? said Andreas.

That too, said Sofie, touching the scar on her cheek with the tips of her fingers. But you can be both, can't you? What do you want to be?

I don't know, said Andreas. I've still got ten years to think it over.

Dad was examining a newborn baby. It had been born at home, and their dad had been the midwife, and it had gone off without a hitch. Andreas and Sofie were allowed to help examine the newborn.

They weighed the baby and looked into its ears and mouth and pressed its stomach.

Feel this here, said Dad, putting first Andreas's then Sofie's hands to the top of the child's head. What do you feel?

A hole, said Sofie, alarmed. It's got a hole underneath the skin on the top of its head. Isn't that dangerous?

Dad laughed. No, it's completely normal. It's because the bones of the skull haven't fully grown together yet. It has to be that way, otherwise the child's head wouldn't come out of the mother.

Now it was Mum's turn to be examined. She climbed effortfully up onto the table, where Andreas and Sofie were allowed to press her stomach and take her blood pressure

and listen to the child's pulse with a stethoscope. When they placed their palms on her big belly and pressed them gingerly down, they could feel something moving down there.

It's incredibly big, said Andreas.

Yes, I think it's pretty big too, said Mum. Sometimes it feels like I've got a whole circus in there. She looked at Dad. Are you sure there's only one?

Quite sure, said Dad.

Just so long as it's not twins, said Mum anxiously.

Trust me, it's not twins, said Dad. It's just a very lively child.

4.

When the time came for Mum to go into the town to give birth, the helicopter that flew between the town and the village was being repaired. Okay, well then we'll just have to take the sled, said Dad. The weather's good. It doesn't take more than four hours across the fjord.

Are you sure the ice is thick enough? said Andreas worriedly.

Quite sure, said Dad. I talked to some hunters the other day, and they said the ice was a metre thick all the way to the mainland. We'll be in town in less than four hours. Practically a day out, that's all.

Dad went and got the dogs and harnessed them to the sled. Andreas stood upright at the back, and Sofie sat at the front on the sled with the whip in her hand, and then Mum came rocking and wobbling and snorting through the snow, flopping down onto the sled with a bump.

Yoo-hoo, said Dad to the dogs. That was their signal to go.

They drove down through the village, past the big oil tank and down the hill to the shop, and the men there shovelling snow straightened up and waved as they whizzed past, and then they jolted out onto the ice. Before ten minutes had passed, they were so far away that the village was only a small clump of houses amid the vast mountains.

We're making good time, said Dad contentedly. He sat sideways on the sled between Sofie and Mum, merrily jiggling his feet over the edge. We'll be there in three hours.

Half an hour later, Sofie could no longer see the village. They were in the middle of the fjord. To the east, the big mountain loomed behind the village. It was called Crater Mountain, because it looked like a volcano. In the west were the mainland mountains, countless peaks like thousands of snow-topped pyramids, and beyond them, Sofie knew, was the inland ice that stretched several hundred kilometres towards the west coast of Greenland. She sat listening to the whistle of the runners and the dogs' gasping breath. Above her was the clear blue sky, and beneath her, she knew, was six hundred metres of ice-cold water, full of seals, whales and fish. When she was outside in nature, either in a boat or, like now, on a sled, she got a proper sense of how big a country Greenland was, and how small the people were in comparison. She felt like she could see the whole thing from above, the sled with herself and Dad and Mum and Andreas, where they looked like ants crawling across a big, white piece of nothingness.

Suddenly she heard something in the air and turned her head.

Kraka! she cried. Look, he's following us.

The raven, high above, was resting on its wings, turning its head and peering down on her, first with one eye then the other.

Well, well, looks like your friend couldn't do without you, said Dad.

He's looking after us so nothing happens, said Sofie.

Good old Kraka, said Dad.

Andreas stood holding the driving bar at the back. He was wearing sunglasses so as not to be blinded by the dazzling light. Apart from the sound of the runners, all was quiet.

Mum sat leaning against the handlebar with her legs spread out in front of her because of her pregnant belly, and on it she rested a cup of steaming coffee, which she lifted to her mouth every now and then and sipped. The sky was blue, the mountains on the mainland were dark and angular, the ice spread out before them, the air was mild and pure, it was spring, and Andreas was happy.

Sofie felt the ice pitch a little beneath them. It was the great waves coming in from the sea that made it move up and down. The first time Sofie had felt the ice pitch like that, she'd thought it was ominous. But now she knew it wasn't dangerous, and she simply thought it was a funny feeling. Sitting at the front of the sled, she kept an eye on the dogs, which were running in a fan shape. She peered inland to see if she could make out anything. But the whole sight was always exactly the same. The world stood quite still. The only thing that moved was Kraka, up in the air, and the sled with herself and her dad and mum and big brother, and now, she reminded herself, a little brother or sister in Mum's belly as well.

Halfway across the fjord they came to the edge of the ice, which they drove alongside for a while. There was open sea beyond the ice, a sea that reached all the way to Iceland and Norway and Denmark. Stopping to take a short break, they sat side by side on the sled, gazing out across the water.

Listen, said Sofie. What's that sound?

They listened. It sounded almost like someone blowing their nose or sneezing.

Hooded seals, said Dad. Big ones. Look, out there on the ice, that's where they are.

Now she could see them. Maybe twenty giant seals lying on their sides, wriggling and sunbathing on an ice floe that was drifting nearer. The seals had caught sight of them. They lifted their heads and exhaled into the air and sniffed.

Aren't they afraid of people? asked Andreas.

Oh yes, said Dad. But the sun makes them so lazy that they can't be bothered to jump into the water. They're molting, so they're very lazy. If we wanted to, we could have shot the lot of them.

But we're not going to! shouted Sofie to the seals. Don't worry, my dear seals. We'll let you live!

And the hooded seals shook their heads a little and grunted good-naturedly, as though they'd understood what she'd said.

A short while later, they drove on. Andreas squinted at something over the mountains. Something that looked different. It was a cloud, a bit flat and round, and it was floating low in the sky.

Dad, what's that funny cloud? said Andreas. It looks like a UFO.

Dad looked up. Oh no, he said. *Piteraqaq*. We'd better get a move on.

What does *piteraqaq* mean? asked Sofie.

Dad didn't answer. Suddenly he was busy taking the whip from Sofie and cracked it, hurrying the dogs.

Half an hour later, they all found out what *piteraqaq* meant. It meant hurricane.

5.

It started with an innocent but icy little gust from the west, which made the dogs jump in fright. Evidently they knew all too well what a *piteraqaq* was. They ran very quietly, their heads bowed towards the snow, and Dad had to jump out of the sled and run beside them so they didn't turn around and head back home. Then came the next gust of wind, this time much stronger and much colder.

Sit on the sled, Dad told Andreas. Put on your mittens and ski mask. You too, Sofie.

Andreas jumped off the back and sat in front of his mother. Sofie shifted back towards them. The wind was ice-cold. Together they put on mittens and masks. Mum drew them close and folded a thick blanket over them, turning them into one big bundle with three heads poking out. That way they could share each other's body heat. Andreas leant back against his mother's belly. He could feel the child moving behind him.

Don't be scared, Mum, said Andreas. We'll get you to town, you'll see.

Kraka will show us the way, added Sofie.

Mum didn't say anything. She just put her arms around them and hugged them close. Dad was running beside the lead dog, Thor. Andreas knew the dogs hated running against the wind, and if they weren't led they were bound to end up way out to sea.

The wind whipped into their faces; they could barely breathe. This wasn't the kind of snowstorm they were used to when the weather turned gusty. Quite the opposite: the sky was deep blue, like a warm summer's day, and they could still see the mountains on the mainland just as clearly. The only sign of stormy weather was that the peaks were smoking as though they had caught fire. That had to be the wind whipping up the snow and making it fly, thought Andreas. But down there on the fjord the snow was hard as stone, and the air was absolutely pure.

Andreas had never seen a *piteraqa* before, but the quieter Mum got, the more deafeningly the wind blew, and the more the ice rocked beneath them, the more scared he became, and the harder he hugged Sofie. He was scared the ice would break up and they would drift out to sea on an ice floe. And he was scared the others would be scared, that his mother would be so frightened she would give birth right there on the ice; but he was far too scared himself to know what to do about it. The only thing he could do was to sit quite still and not say a word, like Mum and Sofie, while the monstrous storm brewed and came rolling towards them from the inland ice.

6.

Sofie could tell now that they were nearing land. She could see no sign of Kraka, and wondered what had become of him.

Kraka! she called out. But there was no Kraka to be seen anywhere.

Now the dogs, too, had sensed that they were reaching solid ground under their paws, and they sped up. First they came to some small rocks poking out of the ice. They were black and glinting with ice. Dad steered around them, because going over was impossible. The sea ice slid up and down the rocks with a creaking and whining noise, as though it were being ground into tiny pieces, and seawater splashed up through the cracks every time the ice dipped down. Further in there was land, but it was much too steep to climb.

Dad stopped and peered, using his hand to protect his face.

Can you see anywhere we can get on land? Mum shouted to him. But he just shrugged and looked doubtful.

At that moment, Sofie spotted something. Something black fluttering up then diving down by the beach.

Kraka! she roared, pointing, Dad, he's showing us the way! Drive that way!

Dad turned his head and stared, as though in disbelief. He tugged at Thor. They moved towards the creaking, complaining coast, where the seawater splashed up through the cracks in the ice.

Kraka was waiting for them in a tiny bay. They squeezed in and dragged themselves up onto the beach. He stared at them with his blue eyes. Andreas and Sofie helped their groaning mother up the rocks, and then they were safe, at least for the time being.

But what now? They were surrounded on all sides by steep cliffs that were impossible to climb with a sled. And there was no knowing what was on the other side – probably more cliffs that were at least as steep. The sea ice was the only way into the town, but they didn't want to go back out there again, because it was impossible to tell when it might break up and blow into the sea.

We'll have to dig ourselves in, said Dad. And wait for the storm to subside.

He took the shovel from the back of the sled and began digging a hole in the steep, snowy slope. Andreas and Sofie helped him. The dogs had dug themselves their own little caves in the snow and were now nearly hidden. They didn't care that the hurricane was howling over their heads. Mum got down on all fours and shovelled snow with a plastic plate.

After a while they had a cave large enough for them to crawl inside for shelter and keep warm. Dad dragged in the bag from the sled and unpacked blankets and sleeping bags. Mum and Sofie lay in one bag while Andreas shared the other with his father. They had some candles in the bag, and they lit a few. Now, lying two to a sleeping bag, they snuggled close and warmed up.

How are you doing? Dad asked their mum.

I think I'm alright, said Mum. But it's getting pretty lively in there.

I can feel it against my back, said Sofie. It's jumping around.

You just lie back and rest, said Dad. We've got to wait until this calms down.

But what about food? asked Mum. I should have brought something.

We've still got a couple of rolls, a packet of biscuits and a bar of chocolate, said Dad. We'll have to get by with that for now.

They settled down to sleep. There was nothing else to do in the little snowy cave. Outside, the storm howled on. It followed Andreas and Sofie into their dreams. They were dreaming, and it's impossible to say who dreamed what, because it was like their dreams mingled into one – something about a spirit hiding on the inland ice. It was blowing the wind at them. But then Kraka appeared. He puffed himself up to a gigantic size and blew the other way, and then the spirit tumbled down and the wind stopped.

Sofie woke up. She woke up not because it was noisy but because it was quiet. She listened in the dark, but couldn't hear the wind any more. Kraka had silenced the storm. All she could hear was her mum breathing strangely. She realised that Andreas was awake now too. He was looking anxiously at their mum.

What's wrong? he asked.

Mum, said Sofie, are you in pain?

I'm sorry, said Mum, but I think I'm about to give birth after all. Would you mind waking your father? Andreas sat up. Where's Dad? he said.

7.

Dad? called Andreas. Where are you?

No answer.

Andreas and Sofie crawled out of the snow cave and cried in chorus: Dad!

Dad didn't reply.

He's probably gone up the mountain to find somewhere with phone signal, said Mum.

The storm had passed. But it was dark. The sky was freckled with stars, and they spotted a couple of satellites sailing quietly past. Climbing all the way out, they got to their feet.

Dad! they called. Are you there? Mum's about to have a baby. You need to come back!

But the night was quieter than anything they'd ever heard in their whole lives. It was so quiet they could almost hear each other's heartbeats. Now, however, they could hear another sound. It was coming from inside the cave. A drawn-out moan, followed by their mother's voice: Children, I think you'll have to come and help me.

They crawled back into the cave. Mum had unzipped the sleeping bag and lay on top of it, her belly enormous. She said nothing, but looked at them wide-eyed. Andreas was completely rigid; he felt like he was about to cry. Sofie sat down with her mum.

I'm sure Dad will be here soon, she said, but she could hear her voice trembling.

Her mother now began to gasp. Her face twisted, and she put her arm over her eyes and gave a long groan.

Mum! said Sofie. What should we do? Tell us what to do.

Mum pursed her lips and breathed rapidly in and out several times. Then she smiled. Don't worry, she said. We'll manage. But please put your hands here. Hold my belly and support it. Sofie put her hands on her mother's belly, and now Andreas came over and did the same. A fresh attack was on the way. They felt her belly contract and go rock hard. The more it contracted, the more their mother gasped. Then it was over, and her belly became soft again.

What's happening, Mum? said Andreas.

They're contractions, groaned Mum. I've started having the baby. Ugh, I'm so sweaty.

Andreas took a cloth out of the bag and wiped her forehead.

You lovely children, said Mum. I'm so lucky to have you.

I'll go out and try to find Dad, said Andreas, and made to crawl towards the exit. But Mum grabbed his sleeve and held him back.

No, you mustn't go. Stay with me. I need you both.

A new contraction was coming. Mum grabbed Sofie's and Andreas's hands and squeezed them hard.

Now listen carefully, she said earnestly. The baby is coming. We'll have to do this together. You mustn't be scared. Women have given birth to children for thousands of years without doctors or hospitals. It happens all by itself. You just have to give me a bit of help. I've done this twice before, after all, she added with a pale grin.

What should we do? asked Andreas.

When you see the head sticking out, just hold it and support it, said Mum. You mustn't pull it – just support it so it doesn't get hurt. Can you do that for me?

The children nodded mutely.

And when the baby has come all the way out, you've got to wrap it up as quickly as you can in all the clothes you can find, all the blankets and towels, because it's too little to cope with the cold.

Mum had another contraction, and this time it lasted longer than the others. She moaned louder and louder, then she tore the sleeping bag aside, and at the same moment some water sprayed out between her legs.

The baby's coming right now, she groaned. You'll have to be ready for it.

8.

Mum lay on her back. She was groaning all the time now, and it seemed like she was in terrible pain. Her forehead was damp with sweat. Suddenly she let out a long, wailing shriek and tore off the sleeping bag so that Andreas and Sofie were looking right at her belly. They could see it contracting. Mum made some very deep noises that almost sounded like a growling animal, but in a pause between the contractions she craned her neck and looked down. There it is, she groaned. It's coming. Make sure you hold its head carefully.

The baby was slippery and warm to the touch. They could see now that it was more black than red, and they could tell it was covered with hair, and then they realised this must be the baby's head. They held it with their hands as it fought its way out.

A tiny face now came into view – a face that looked like it was furious at being chucked out into this cold and unpleasant world, and angry that they hadn't planned its arrival a bit better. Mum grunted and groaned and gasped for breath, and they could hear her using all her strength to push the baby out, and then she gave a long wail.

Support my legs, she groaned. Push them back.

Sofie grabbed her mother's knees and pushed them as far back as she could.

Yes, like that, groaned Mum. Push as hard as you can, sweetheart.

Andreas was holding the baby's head. He could see that its eyes were open, and he was careful not to poke them. It was hard to hold on, because it was slippery and slimy.

There was another little break now. Their mother snorted and groaned, and she laughed too and swore a bit, and then she looked at them and said, Gosh, you're so good at this. She asked for some water, which Andreas gave her, and Mum emptied the bottle greedily in a few sips before the next contraction began. It was bigger than the others, but it was also the last. The baby's shoulders slipped out, and once they had emerged the rest of the body came of its own accord, in one long movement. Andreas held the slimy body close and felt it shiver slightly, and then it burst into tears. Sofie came over with a blanket and wrapped it up.

Andreas pressed the baby to his chest and held it firmly. It had a very special smell, warm and sweetish. They pulled back the blanket slightly and looked inside. There was the baby in the darkness, staring at them with big black pupils.

Kraka? whispered Sofie.

What? said Andreas.

Nothing, said Sofie, gingerly stroking the baby's head. There's another one, said Mum. Argh, argh, there's more! Now Sofie saw yet another head poking out between her mother's legs.

I *told* your father there were two! groaned Mum.

Sofie held the other child's head and it slipped out almost immediately, much faster than the first. It lay spluttering and trembling in her hands. She found another blanket.

Suddenly, Mum began to snort and moan again.

Are there more? asked Andreas frantically.

No, no more, said Mum. Those are just after-pains. The placenta will be out in a minute.

Sofie and Andreas each held a baby. They were moving under the blankets, turning their heads and squeaking. It seemed like they were looking for something.

Bring them here, said Mum, and suddenly her voice was warm and tender. Let me have them.

They laid the children on their mother's belly, and packed sleeping bags and blankets around them. It was a bit difficult, because the newborns were still attached to their mother: each had a cord that led between her legs.

What have we got? Is it a boy or a girl?

Let's have a look, said Mum. She lifted the blankets and looked. Then she said, You've got one of each!

9.

When Sofie climbed out of the cave a bit later, she bumped into a pair of legs. She looked up. Her dad was looking down at her with a broad grin.

Gosh, are you awake already? he said.

Sofie didn't know where to start, but Dad got there first.
I've got a surprise, he said.
I've got one too, said Sofie.
I think my surprise is bigger than yours, said Dad.
I don't think so, said Sofie.

10.

I hope you weren't frightened because I wasn't there? said Dad. But something really strange happened. When I heard the wind stop blowing, I climbed out to see if I could make a phone call. But there was no signal. Then I spotted your – what do you call it?

Kraka, said Sofie. He's a dead shaman.

I almost believe you, said Dad. Anyway, the raven was sitting there, staring at me in the light of the torch, and then it flew a few metres away, and when I searched around for it, I saw it was looking at me as though it wanted me to follow. So I did. And you know what? It led me to a mountaintop up there. I'd never have found the way by myself, but the raven showed me where to go, and I reached the top, and my phone had signal. I called the hospital, who said they would ring the heliport to find out what was happening with the helicopter, and they'd call back as soon as they knew, and then I just wandered around up there, waiting and waiting. And the raven kept me company.

Kraka, said Sofie.

Yes, it was sort of talking to me, and so I talked to it. We had quite a nice chat. Then the hospital called back and said they'd send the little helicopter to fetch us. I think they'll be here in an hour or so, because it's getting light. Isn't that fantastic?

What were you and Kraka talking about? asked Sofie.

Oh, we were putting the world to rights, said Dad. Anyway, how did you three sleep?

Five, said Sofie.

Five? said Dad, his face a question mark.

Five, said Sofie.

11.

The weather was calm. The sun rose above the sea in the east, and the mountains behind them blushed a reddish hue. The dogs came to life. Jumping out of the hollows they'd dug, they shook off the snow and lumps of ice and stretched their paws in front of them, yawning their heads off. It was a beautiful morning. But something was different. Andreas couldn't immediately work out what it was, because everything was so normal, and yet it seemed wrong – like those pictures where you have to find five mistakes. He walked around for a bit outside the snow cave. He heard the waves washing ashore, and suddenly he realised what it was. There was no longer any ice along the coast. The hurricane had torn it up and pushed it so far out that there were several hundred metres between the beach and the edge of the ice. It must have happened some time in the night. They'd been lucky to drag themselves ashore before it did.

He turned his head slightly. There was a funny sound. And it was getting closer.

The helicopter is coming! Andreas yelled into the snow cave.

Sofie crawled out. Standing side by side, they caught sight of the small, mosquito-like helicopter gliding over the ridge of mountains.

We should have something to wave, so they'll see us, said Andreas.

The red blanket, said Sofie. She crawled back in and fetched it. Then they ran up the cliffs and stood at the top, waving the blanket like mad. For a while the helicopter flew back and forth along the mountains, moving further away then approaching, then once again moving further away.

They can't see us, said Sofie.

Just keep waving, said Andreas.

At last, it was as though the helicopter paused in mid-air. Then it tilted to one side and headed straight for them.

They've seen us! cheered Sofie. They're landing!

There was a little flat area further inland. The helicopter wobbled and reared as it hovered close to the ground, whipping up the snow, then it sank the last few metres, rocked a little side to side, and stood still. The big propeller kept turning. The helicopter's side doors slid open, and four people in orange overalls jumped out. They were carrying loads of equipment. Andreas and Sofie waved at them, and the four paramedics came running down.

The one who arrived first grabbed them and almost shook them, bellowing over the noise of the helicopter. Are you okay? Are you hurt?

We're fine, said Andreas. My Mum and Dad are down there, in the snow cave. She's just had two babies.

The paramedics ran on.

The two siblings stood on the top of the cliff. Holding hands, they gazed at the sea knocking against the foot of the cliff beneath them, lit by the flat, dazzling light of the morning sun. They found themselves in the middle of a cold, radiant and shining world.

12.

Spring had reached the village. The snow was melting. The flats that stretched across the island were still covered with snow, but here and there tufts of grass peeked out, and the rocks were free of snow, so you could go walking on the island by jumping from rock to rock without getting your feet wet. The river that ran from the big lake in the middle of the island had been hidden under a thick layer of ice all winter, but now the water started murmuring in the holes, and every day more of the river came into view until finally there was no ice at all. There were fish in the river: small, thin trout that were hungry after a long winter, and easy to catch with a rod and bait. Andreas and Sofie went there often to fish, coming home with trout which they cleaned, covered in flour and fried in a pan. There was nothing better than fried, freshly caught trout.

Kraka had disappeared. He hadn't turned up after they got back from hospital. But Sofie knew he wasn't really gone. When she held her little brother and looked deep into his eyes, she knew exactly what had happened to the old shaman. She told Andreas, but not the grown-ups. They wouldn't be able to understand.

As ever, Andreas and Sofie went to school, played Nintendo, read books, watched films, played with Sofie's puppies, and skied and sledged on the little glacier behind the village. By the end of May, the snow was so wet and slushy that they had to put their skis and sleds away. And that was winter over.

But most of the time, Andreas and Sofie were with their new little brother and sister. They could spend hours lying on a lambskin rug on the floor with the two small children between them. It was a whole new life, and it felt like years since they'd set off on that journey by sled.

I know what I want to be now, said Andreas one day.

What? said Sofie.

I want to be a midwife.

I know what I want to be too, said Sofie.

What's that?
A helicopter pilot!