

ENGLISH EDITION



*Lullaby
of the
Valley*

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LULLABY OF THE VALLEY



Far away in a distant mountain valley, a family was getting ready to turn in for the night. Kaina sat by her grandchildren's bed, gently stroking their heads. She was humming a lullaby, the same song she used to sing to her son when he was a child.

*A caravan moves slowly under a starry sky.
An eagle in the valley soars above, so high.
A little child falls asleep before the night.
Her mother smiles and turns down the light.*

Amira, the children's mother, looked out of the window. All she could see in the darkness was light coming from the other houses.

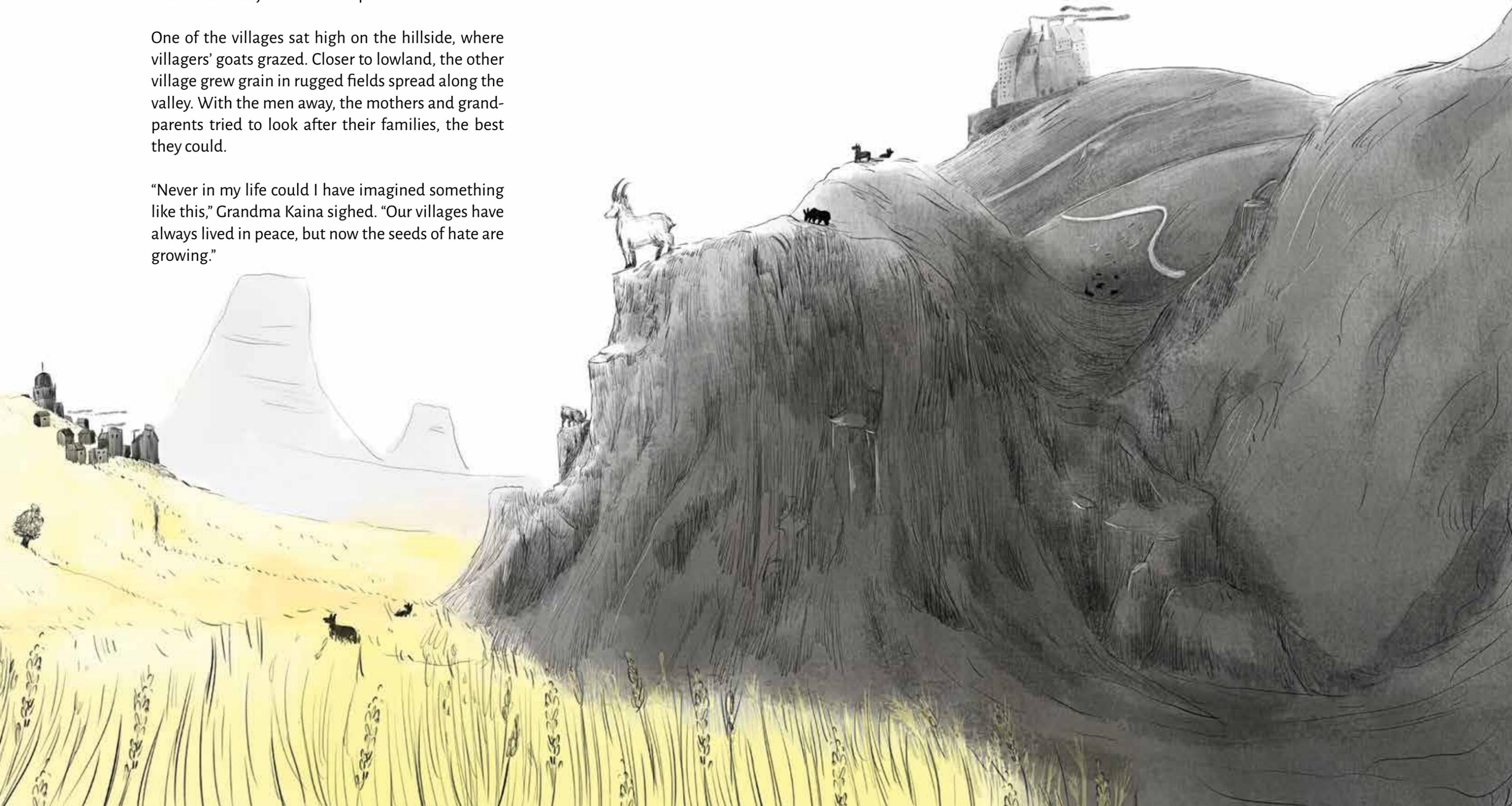
"If only he would come back," the young mother sighed.

Grandmother Kaina knew whom she was talking about.

Everything had changed in the distant mountain valley when its only two villages became enemies. Young men had risen up against each other and taken to the mountains to battle. Kaina's son Karam had joined the troops.

One of the villages sat high on the hillside, where villagers' goats grazed. Closer to lowland, the other village grew grain in rugged fields spread along the valley. With the men away, the mothers and grandparents tried to look after their families, the best they could.

"Never in my life could I have imagined something like this," Grandma Kaina sighed. "Our villages have always lived in peace, but now the seeds of hate are growing."





Once the children had fallen asleep, Kaina took her steaming cup of tea and sat by the window. She wrapped her cold fingers tightly around it to warm them. There was not much firewood left; nobody wanted to leave the village to fetch it.

The grandmother wondered how all this evil had come about. That was a subject of debate in the villages, and accusations flew back and forth.

“You’ve taken our cattle!” the upland people claimed.

“You’ve fed your goats with grain from our fields!” the lowland people snapped back.

The dispute had grown worse bit by bit. One day, at the market, a fight broke out among men from the different villages. Women and children had withdrawn to the safety of their homes.





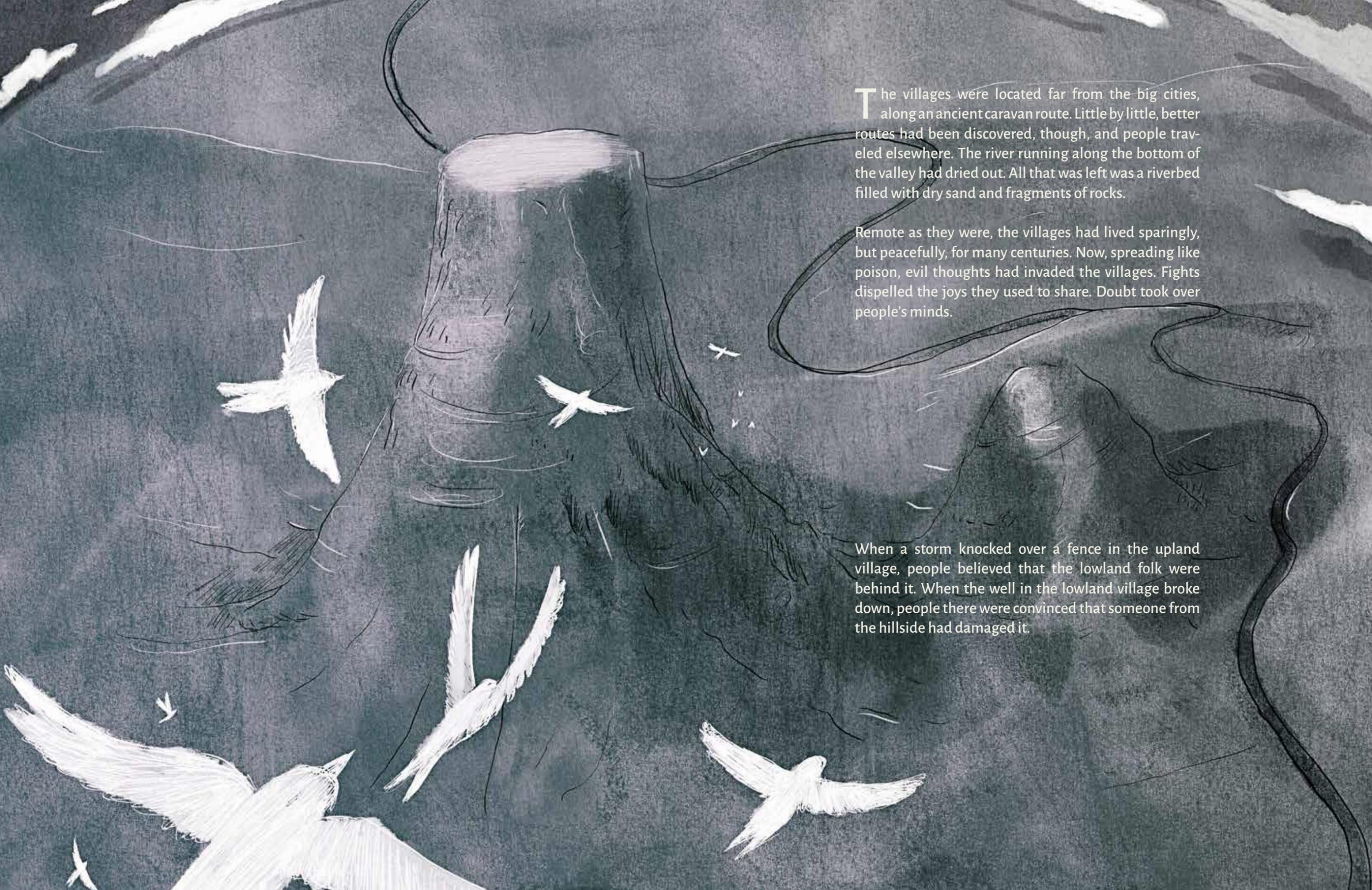
Kaina had lived in the valley all her life, as had many generations before her. She had many close friends in the neighboring village up on the hill. Now they couldn't see each other.

"In a faraway corner of the world like this, what's the use of stirring up hate against anyone?" Kaina said to Amira, who was finishing her kitchen chores.

"I'm sure it's no use anywhere," the young mother agreed. "Children should have a safe home to live in."

Kaina nodded and thought about life in the villages. In earlier days, nobody had minded that each village had its own customs and language. People understood each other well. They were brought together by the valley, where the joys and sorrows of big families were very much alike.

"What matters most is that all the children have enough food to eat and warm clothes to wear," Grandma Kaina said. "That's the most important lesson to learn in life."

A dark, textured illustration of a landscape. In the center, a large, weathered tree stump stands prominently. To its right, a well is visible, partially obscured by shadows. Several birds are depicted in flight, their white wings contrasting against the dark background. The overall mood is somber and desolate.

The villages were located far from the big cities, along an ancient caravan route. Little by little, better routes had been discovered, though, and people traveled elsewhere. The river running along the bottom of the valley had dried out. All that was left was a riverbed filled with dry sand and fragments of rocks.

Remote as they were, the villages had lived sparingly, but peacefully, for many centuries. Now, spreading like poison, evil thoughts had invaded the villages. Fights dispelled the joys they used to share. Doubt took over people's minds.

When a storm knocked over a fence in the upland village, people believed that the lowland folk were behind it. When the well in the lowland village broke down, people there were convinced that someone from the hillside had damaged it.

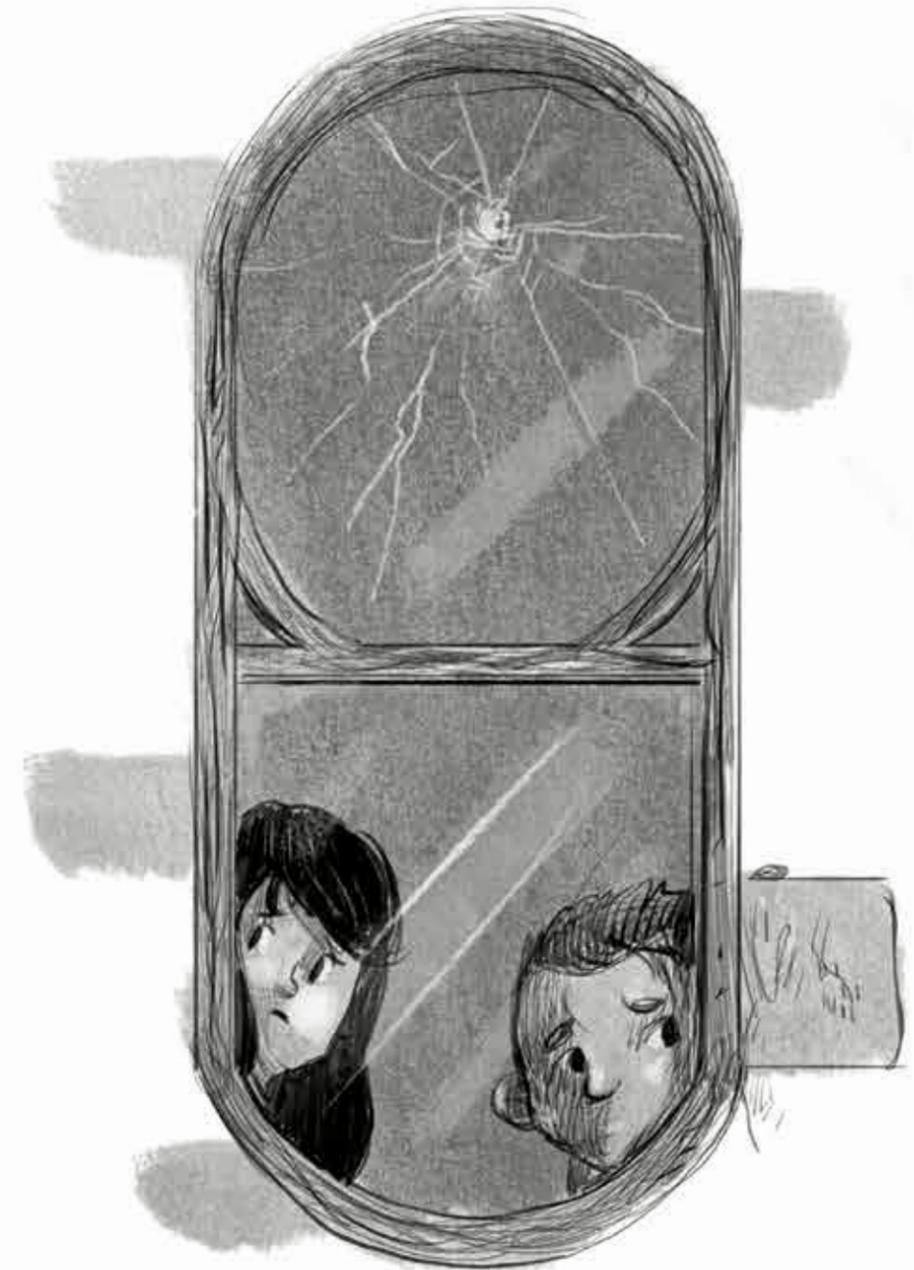
Fear started to spread among the villagers. Mothers did not allow children to go out to play far from home. At sunset, people locked their doors and covered the windows with thick cloths.

“How can this be?” Grandma Kaina said one evening. “We’ve been inside day after day.”



“When can we go to the market again in the uplands? Or get fresh water from the spring?” the children kept asking impatiently.

“Soon we may not let you go out at all,” their mother sighed. “If only your father were here!”





Grandma Kaina had lived a long life. In all her years, she had had plenty of time to learn the most important things in life. She had tried to pass on these lessons to children, especially her own son.

“My dear son Karam has forgotten everything I taught him about what truly matters,” Kaina said sadly. “He’s out there somewhere with other angry young men, fighting against our neighbors.”

“But he wants to take care of us,” Amira defended her husband.

“It’s very hard to do good with a gun in your hand,” Kaina insisted. “There are far better tools for taking care of one’s family.”

Amira went back to her chores, while her children played indoors close to her. Even though it was already getting dark, Kaina wanted to go outside.





With a lantern in hand, Kaina took a familiar path that led away from the village. She wanted to pay a visit to the spring bubbling up at the bottom of the valley, halfway between the two villages. The sun had set some time ago; the air had grown colder.

In the darkness, only the mountaintops could be seen, silhouetted against the starry sky. Somewhere out there was Karam. With a heavy heart, the woman made her way to the spring, and sat on a stone with her bucket. She put down the lantern, sheltered it from the wind, and then wrapped the shawl more tightly around herself.

“I wish Karam were here with me,” she whispered to herself, stroking her shawl. “The same way he used to be every night when he was a little boy.”

She started humming, rocking herself slowly from side to side. Then she sang in a trembling voice:

*Hush, little child, the night is falling.
Hear, little child, the winds start calling.
They take you to dreamland, your mother too.
She's holding your hand and comes with you.*