



*For my granddaughters,
Jaya and Kami*

Once upon a time, there were two little sisters named Jaya and Kami. They lived in a snug stone cottage beside a great, whispery forest with their loving mother, where birds sang in the morning and tall trees waved hello.



One sunny morning, Jaya and Kami asked, “May we play in the forest?” Their mother smiled and said yes, but she knelt down and gave them a gentle warning. “Stay together and don't go too far, as children have gotten lost in the forest. Come home before supper, as there may be a storm coming.”



Hand in hand, the sisters skipped into the forest. They chased fluttery butterflies, watched frogs hop, and picked bright wildflowers. The forest felt friendly and full of magic, and the girls went wherever the path led them.



After a long while, the air turned cold. The wind began to howl, and soft white snow started to fall. The forest grew darker, and Jaya and Kami suddenly remembered supper.



They hurried, but the snow swirled around them. Without knowing it, the girls walked the wrong way—deeper into the forest. They had no coats, and soon they were cold, wet, and shivering.



Kami began to cry. Jaya hugged her close and wiped away her tears. “We’ll be okay,” she whispered, even though she felt scared too.



**Suddenly, they saw two pink eyes glowing near the ground.
The girls froze. Then the eyes blinked—and hopped!**



A white rabbit sat in their path. She hopped ahead, then stopped and looked back at the girls. “She wants us to follow her,” Kami said softly.



The rabbit led them to the biggest tree they had ever seen—the oldest tree in the forest. She ran right up to it and disappeared!



The girls followed the rabbit tracks and found a small hole behind the tree. Cold and tired, they crawled inside.



Inside the tree, it was dark—but warm and quiet. Soon their eyes adjusted, and there sat the pink-eyed rabbit. “She’s helping us,” Jaya said.



The rabbit left, and the girls lay down to rest.
It was hard to sleep because the floor was rocky and hard.
Soon they heard scratching sounds on the sides of the great
tree.



Squirrels peeked in and brought pine boughs and dry leaves. They built a cozy bed just for the girls. Seeing the girls shiver, the squirrels wrapped their fluffy tails around them like a blanket. Soon, Jaya and Kami were fast asleep.



In the morning, the squirrels were gone. To Jaya and Kami's amazement, there were many names of other children carved into the tree walls —some very old. The girls carved their own names: Jaya and Kami.



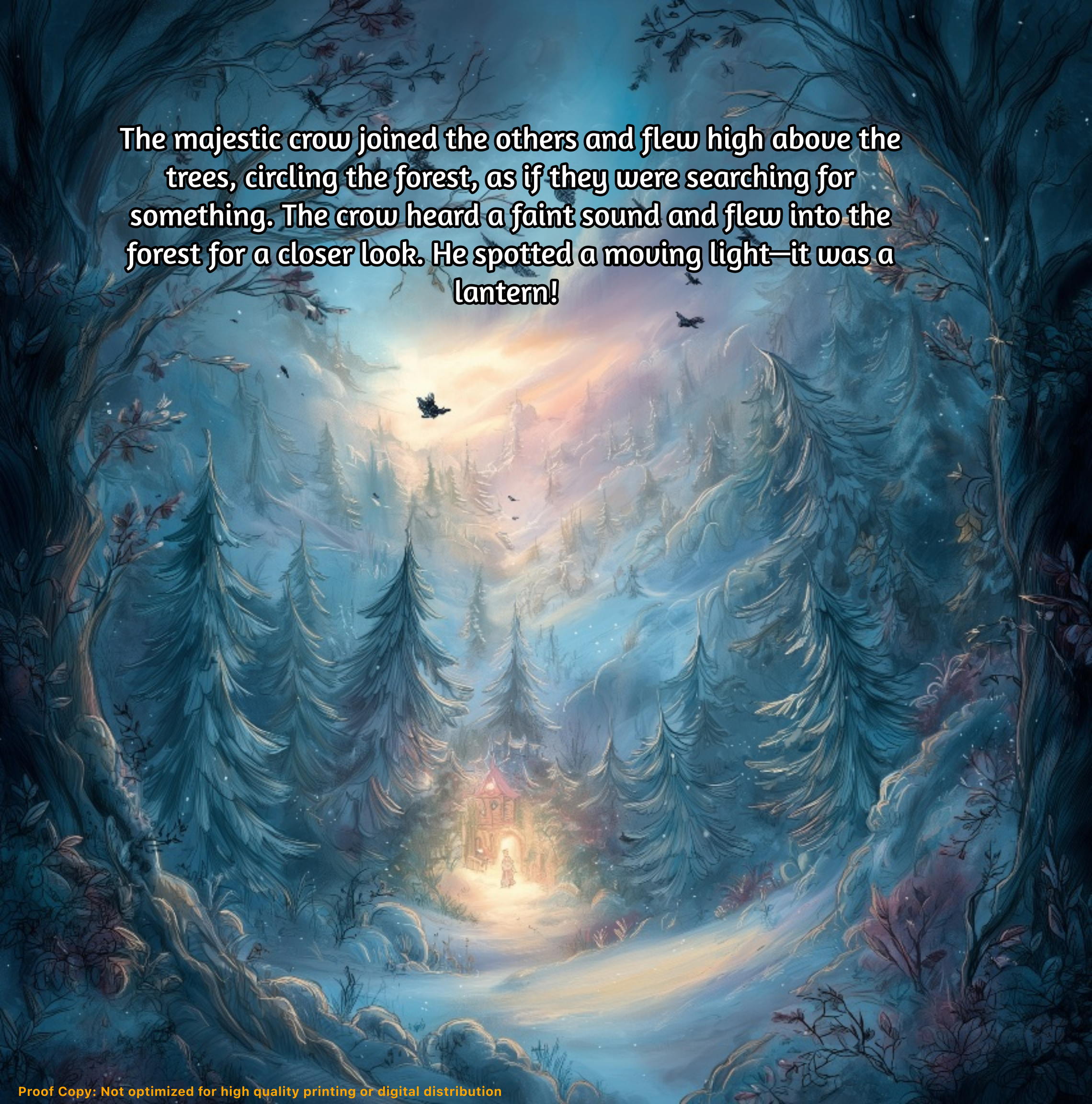
The rabbit returned with berries. The squirrels brought nuts, already cracked open. The girls ate and felt stronger—but still worried about home.



High above, crows cried “Caw! Caw!” as if they were answering to the chittering squirrels below. A great black crow landed and strutted toward the girls, its majestic red eyes and black shiny beak, glistening in the morning light.



The majestic crow joined the others and flew high above the trees, circling the forest, as if they were searching for something. The crow heard a faint sound and flew into the forest for a closer look. He spotted a moving light—it was a lantern!



**Below, a mother cried and called, holding her lantern.
The crow hurried back to tell the others.**



The animals made a plan: Crows would guide from the sky, Squirrels from the trees, and the rabbit would lead the girls on the ground on the long journey home.



Soon, the mother saw crows swirling above her, squirrels chattering, and a white rabbit waiting on the path.



The girls heard their mother calling. They ran as fast as they could and jumped into her arms. There were hugs and kisses and happy tears.



Back at the cottage, there was a roaring fire, hot baths, and blueberry pancakes. That night, the girls slept safely beside their mother.



**In the morning, the rabbit, squirrels, and crows watched from the forest edge. The girls waved goodbye, and their friends faded into the trees. And ever since that day, a rabbit, a squirrel, or a crow can always be seen near the cottage—
Watching over the girls at the edge of the forest.**





*Written with love,
Papa*

