



STEP INTO READING®

A HISTORY READER

The Bravest Dog Ever

The True Story of

BALTO

by Natalie Standiford • illustrated by Donald Cook

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THE BRAVEST DOG EVER

The True Story of

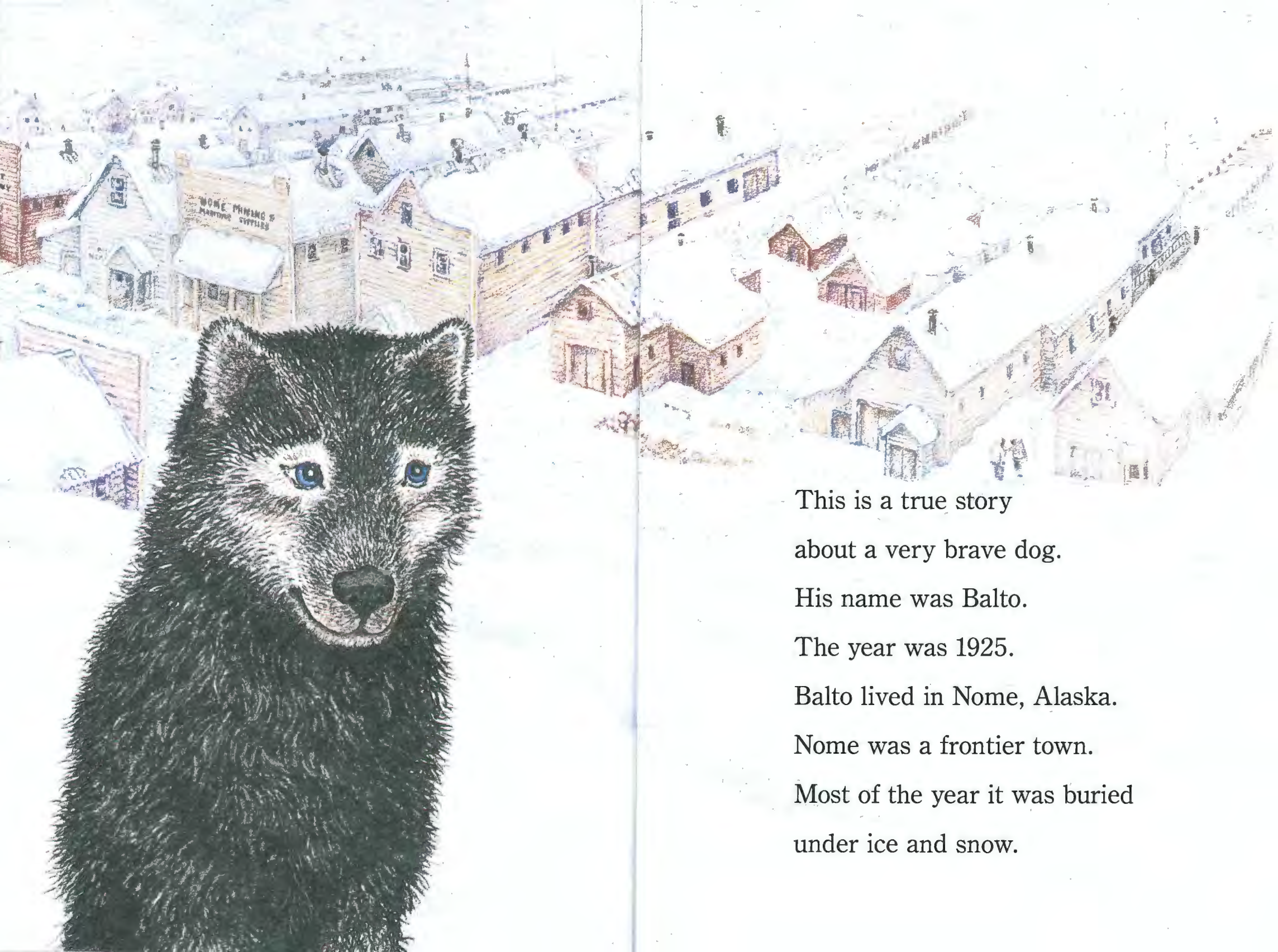
BALTO

by Natalie Standiford

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Random House  New York



This is a true story
about a very brave dog.
His name was Balto.
The year was 1925.
Balto lived in Nome, Alaska.
Nome was a frontier town.
Most of the year it was buried
under ice and snow.

In winter there was no way
to travel through all that ice and snow.
Not on planes or trains or boats or cars.
The only way to travel in Alaska
was by dog sled.



Balto was a sled dog.
He worked for a gold-mining company
not far from Nome.
He helped carry food and tools
to the miners.
It was a good life for a sled dog.





Balto's driver was named Gunnar.
Gunnar made Balto his lead dog.
The lead dog runs in front
of the team.
He follows the trail.

All the other dogs do
whatever the lead dog does.
So the lead dog has to be
the smartest and strongest dog of all.



One cold winter day
a terrible thing happened in Nome.
Two children got very sick.



Their parents called the doctor.
He was the only doctor
in the whole town.

When the doctor saw the children
he was very worried.
The children had a terrible sickness.
It was called diphtheria (dif-THEER-ee-ah).
The doctor did not have
the medicine he needed.
Without the medicine
the children would die.
Without the medicine
many other people in Nome
would get diphtheria and die too.
The doctor knew
he had to get some medicine-fast.



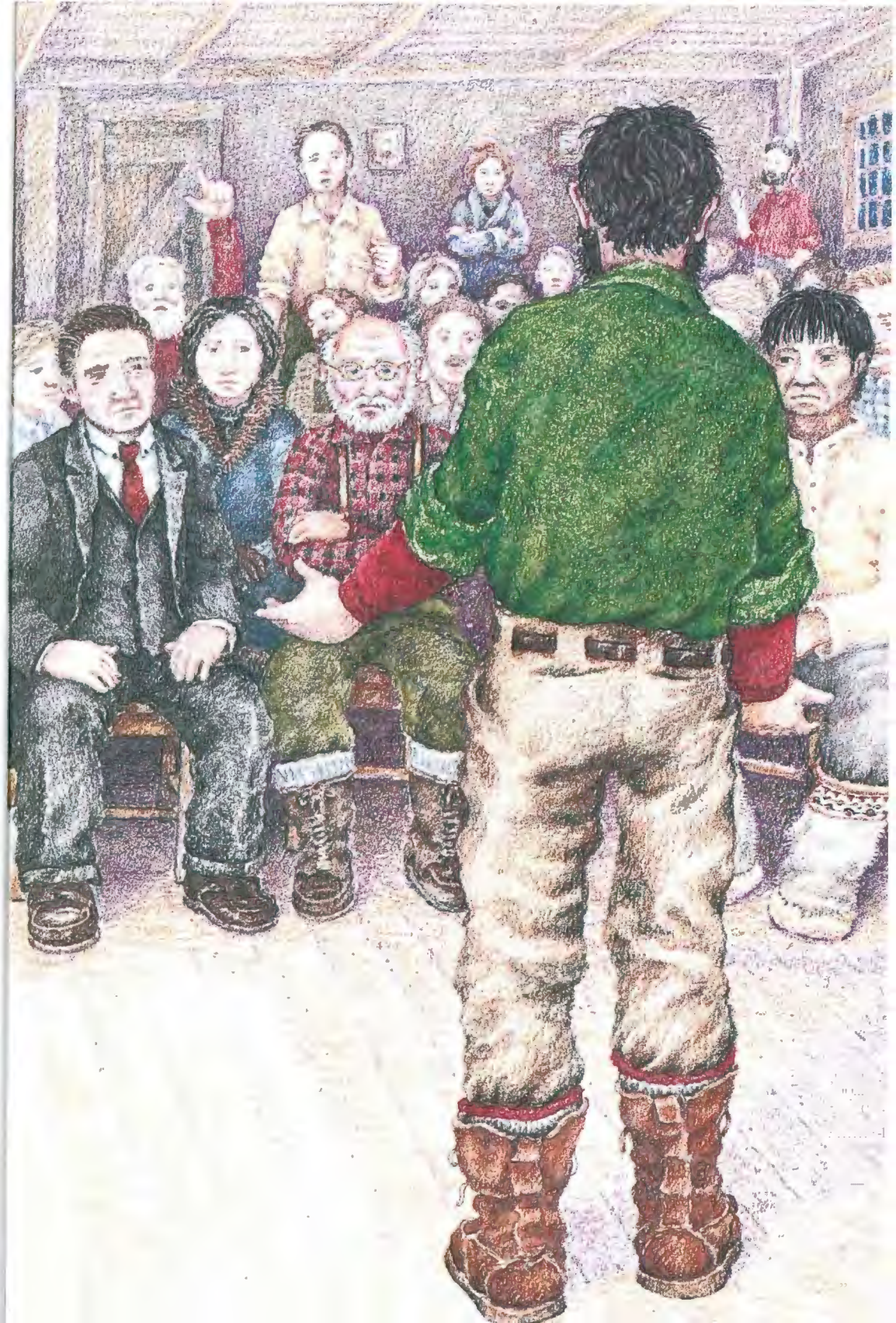


The hospital in Anchorage, Alaska,
had the medicine.
But Anchorage was 800 miles away.
The doctors in Anchorage
put the medicine on a train.



But soon the train got stuck
in the deep snow.
The train was still 700 miles
from Nome!

The people of Nome held a meeting.
Everyone was very scared.
"What are we going to do?"
asked the doctor.
"We have to get that medicine."
At last someone said,
"What about a dog-sled relay?
When one team of dogs gets tired,
a new team will be ready to take over."
The room buzzed with excitement.
That did seem like the quickest way
to get the medicine.
But the doctor frowned.
"It will still take about fifteen days.
That's a long time. Too long."



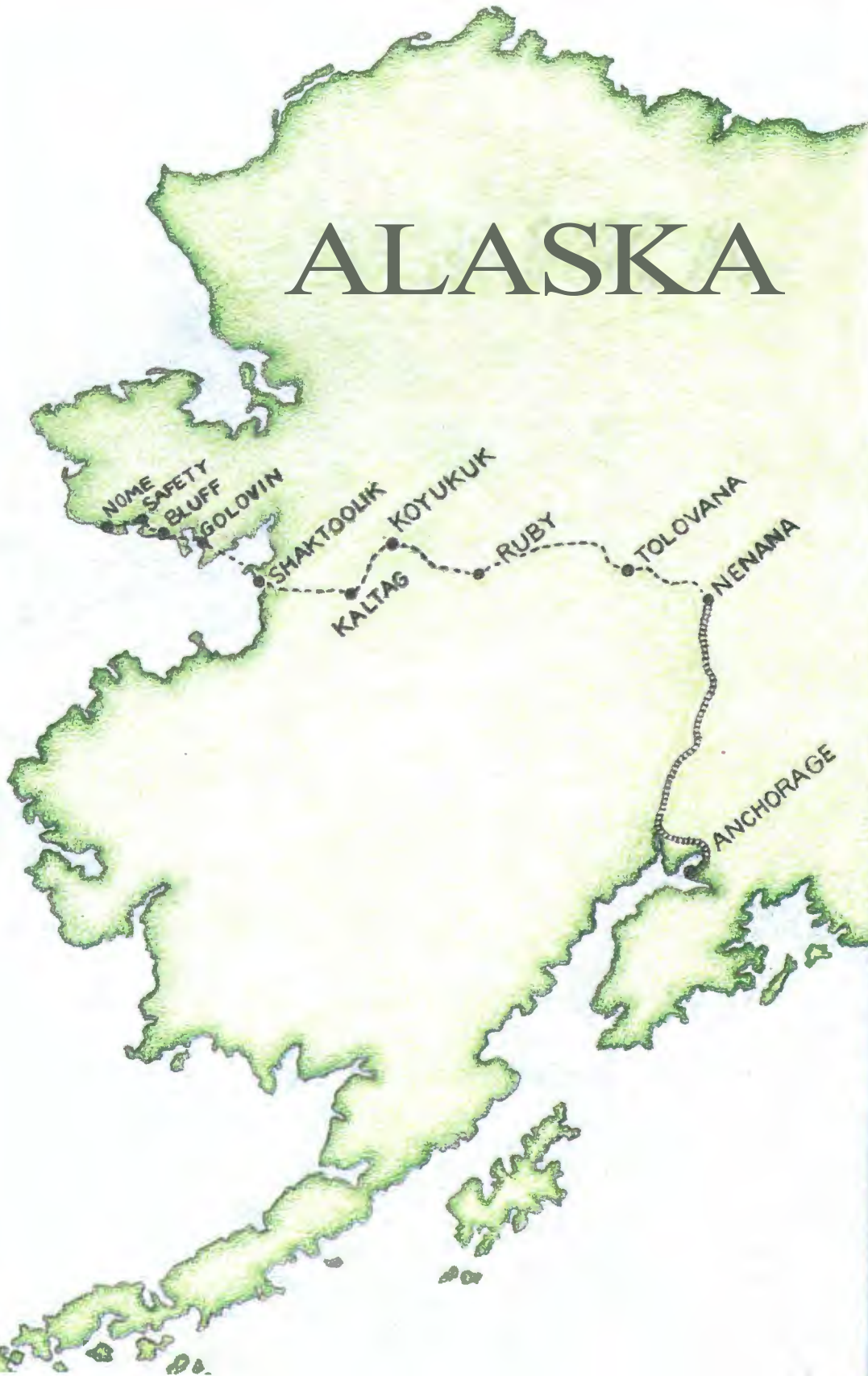


Maybe the doctor was right.
But there was no other choice.
So the mayor spoke over the radio.
"Please help!" he said.
"We need the best drivers and dogs
to help save our town!"



Gunnar heard the mayor on the radio.
Gunnar knew he had the best dog team
and the best lead dog.
Balto would come to the rescue.

ALASKA



On January 27, 1925,
the race to Nome began.
Twenty-one dog teams
were in the relay.
Each team waited at a different stop.



The first driver took the medicine
from the train.
He wrapped it in fur
to keep it from freezing.
Then he drove his dogs
as fast as he could to the second stop.
He made his run in good time.



But soon the wind began to blow hard.
The air grew colder.
A blizzard was coming!
It was one of the worst storms ever.
Still the race went on.
Somehow each dog team made it
to the next stop.

In one team, two dogs froze to death.

So the driver hitched himself
to the sled.

He helped the rest of his dogs
pull through the storm.



Gunnar and Balto waited
at their stop in Bluff.

They were going to run 31 miles from
Bluff to Point Safety.

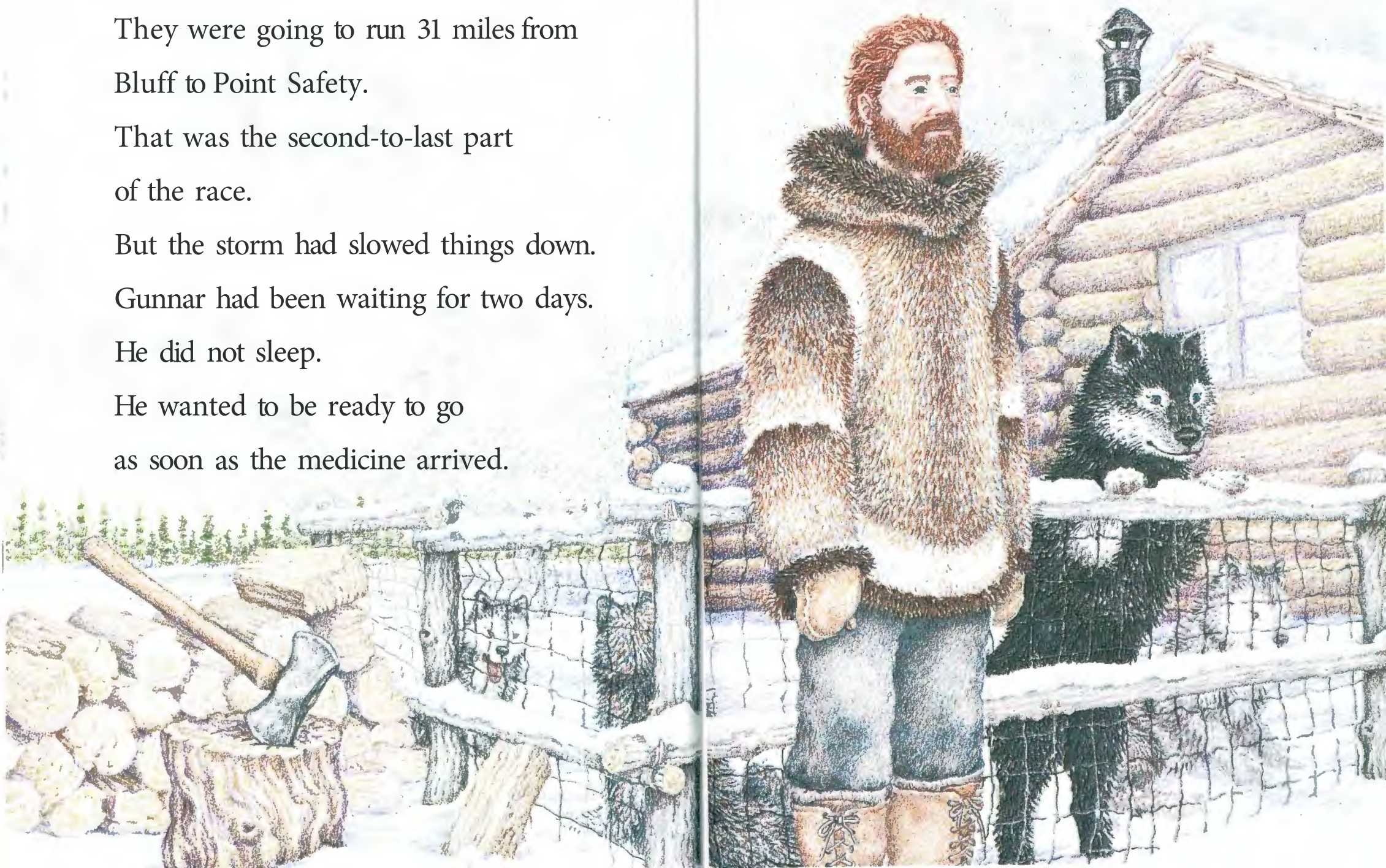
That was the second-to-last part
of the race.

But the storm had slowed things down.

Gunnar had been waiting for two days.

He did not sleep.

He wanted to be ready to go
as soon as the medicine arrived.



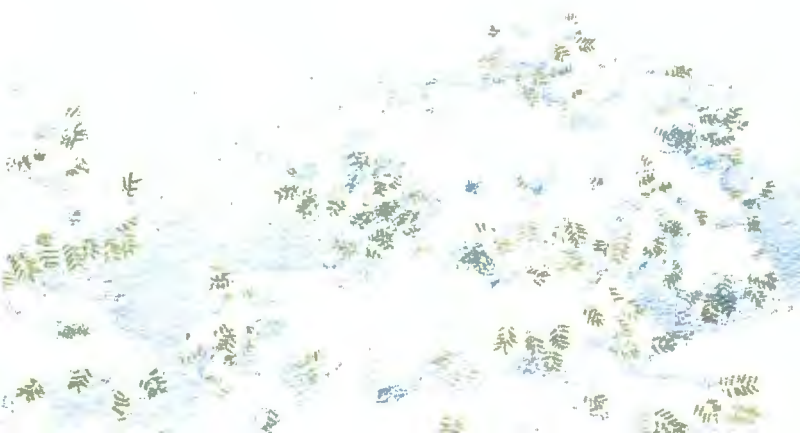


At last Gunnar heard dogs barking.
The medicine was here!
He put it on the sled
with a small stove and a little food.
Then he hitched up his dogs.
Balto stood proudly in the lead.

Gunnar cracked his whip.
"Mush!" he cried.
That meant "go."
The team ran out into the snowy night.



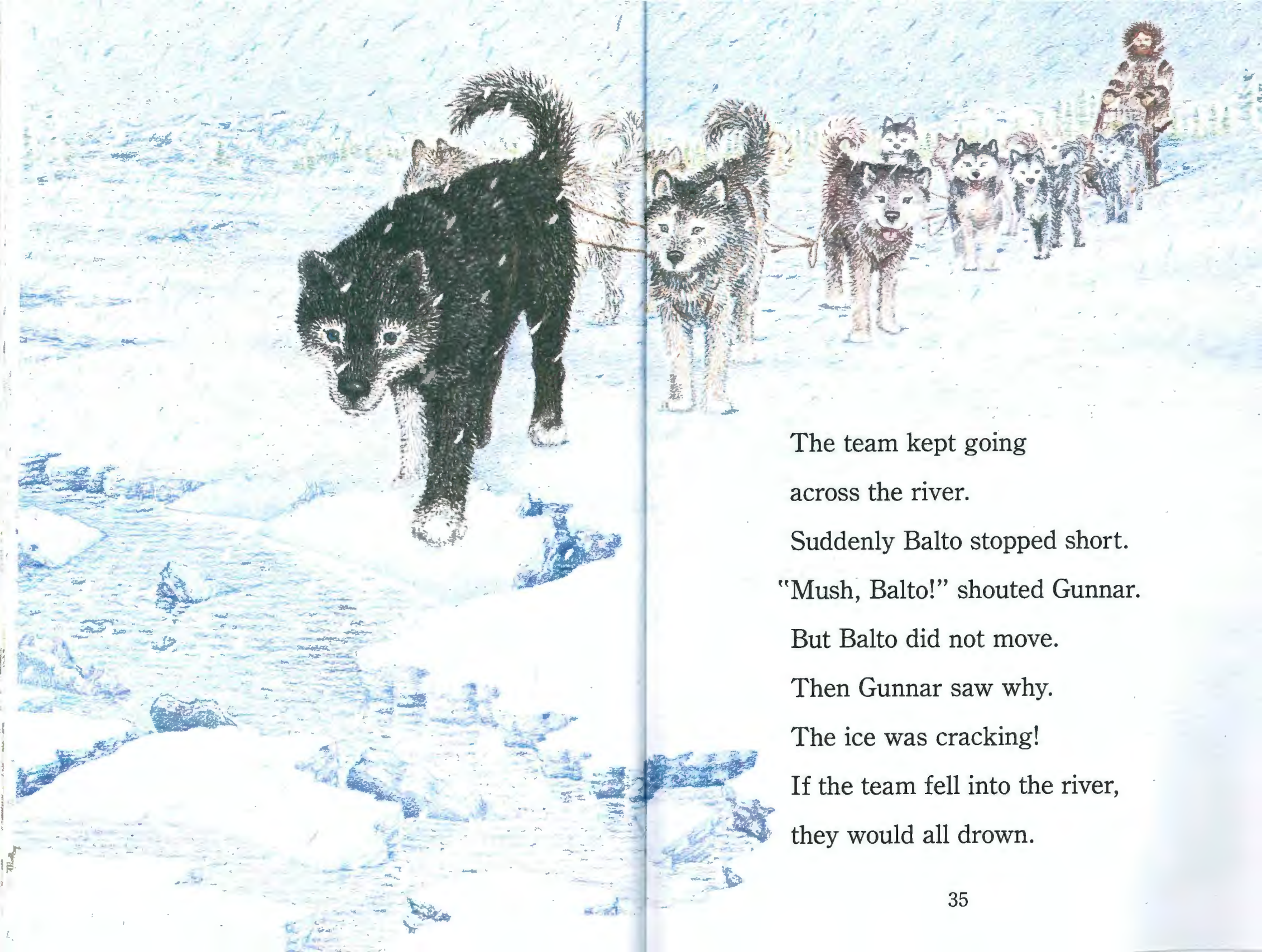
At first the team made good time.
But soon snowdrifts blocked the trail.
The dogs sank up to their necks
in snow.
They could not move.
Some began to panic.
But not Balto.
He stayed calm.
That helped the other dogs
while Gunnar dug them out
of the snow.
At last the team was on its way again.



Then the team crossed a frozen river.
The dogs and the sled
slipped and skidded on the ice.
Oh, no! Over went the sled.
Gunnar got it up again.
But the medicine was gone!



Wildly Gunnar dug for the medicine.
He could not see
through the heavy snow.
But at last he felt the package.
He put it back on the sled.



The team kept going
across the river.

Suddenly Balto stopped short.

"Mush, Balto!" shouted Gunnar.

But Balto did not move.

Then Gunnar saw why.

The ice was cracking!

If the team fell into the river,
they would all drown.

Balto had stopped just in time.

"Smart dog!" Gunnar told him.

Then he saw that Balto's feet were wet.

If they froze,

Balto would never walk again.

Quickly Gunnar unhitched Balto
from the sled.

He led the dog

to a patch of powdery snow.

Gunnar rubbed Balto's paws
in the powder.

Soon they were dry.

Balto was ready to go once more.



Balto led the team
around the cracking ice.

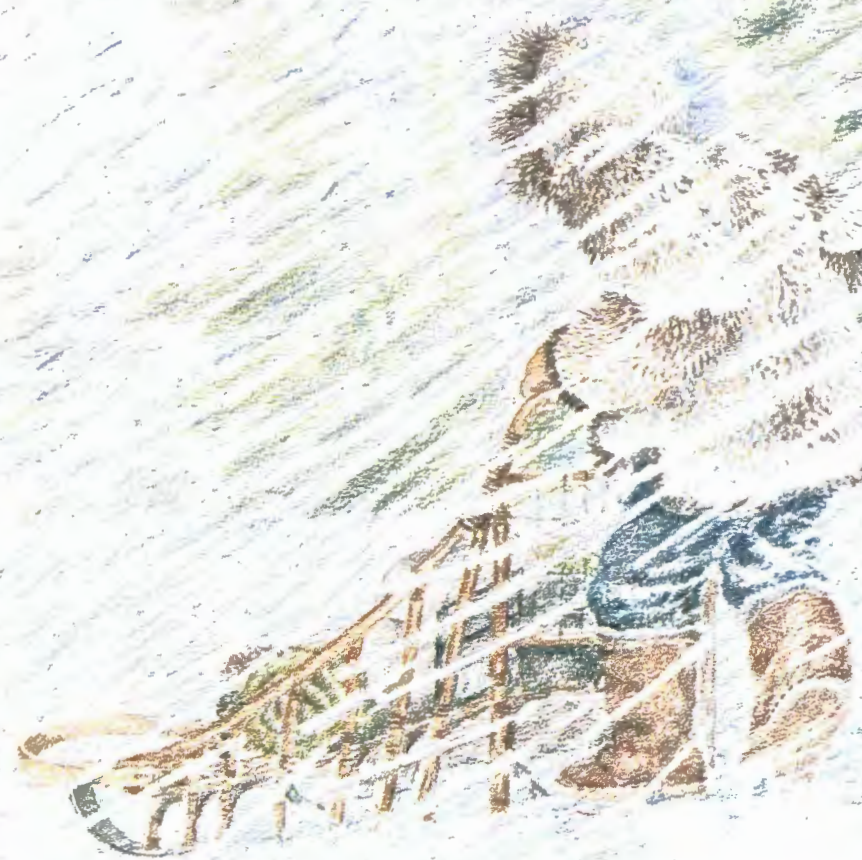
At last they reached
solid land again.

Were they still on the trail?

Gunnar had no idea.

The snow blew so hard,

Gunnar could not see
his own hands.



But Balto had run this trail
many times before.

Now it was all up to him.

Finally the storm died down.
Gunnar saw Point Safety just ahead.
“Balto did it!” thought Gunnar.
He couldn’t wait to warm his hands
by a cozy fire.
But all the lights were out
at Point Safety.
Was the next driver there?
Gunnar did not know.
And there was no time to find out.
So Gunnar and Balto did not stop.
They had never been so tired.
But they raced on through the night
toward Nome.



It was just before dawn.
The sky began to glow.
In the town of Nome
everyone was sleeping.



Gunnar and his team pulled into town.
They had made it!
Balto was too tired to bark.
They had been on the trail
for 20 hours straight.
They had driven 53 miles!





Gunnar took the medicine to the doctor.
The doctor was surprised.
He thought it would take 15 days
to get the medicine.
But Gunnar delivered it
after only five and a half days!
"Thank you, Gunnar!" said the doctor.
"You are a hero!"
"Balto is the hero," said Gunnar.
"I could not have done it without him."



The doctor went right to work.
He gave the medicine
to all the sick people.
In a few days they would be well.
The town of Nome was saved.



All over America
people cheered for Balto.
They read about his bravery
in the newspaper.
Balto was the most famous dog
in the world.

A year later
the people of New York City
put up a statue of Balto.
It still stands in Central Park.
Lots of children play on the statue.
They remember Balto,
the bravest dog ever!

