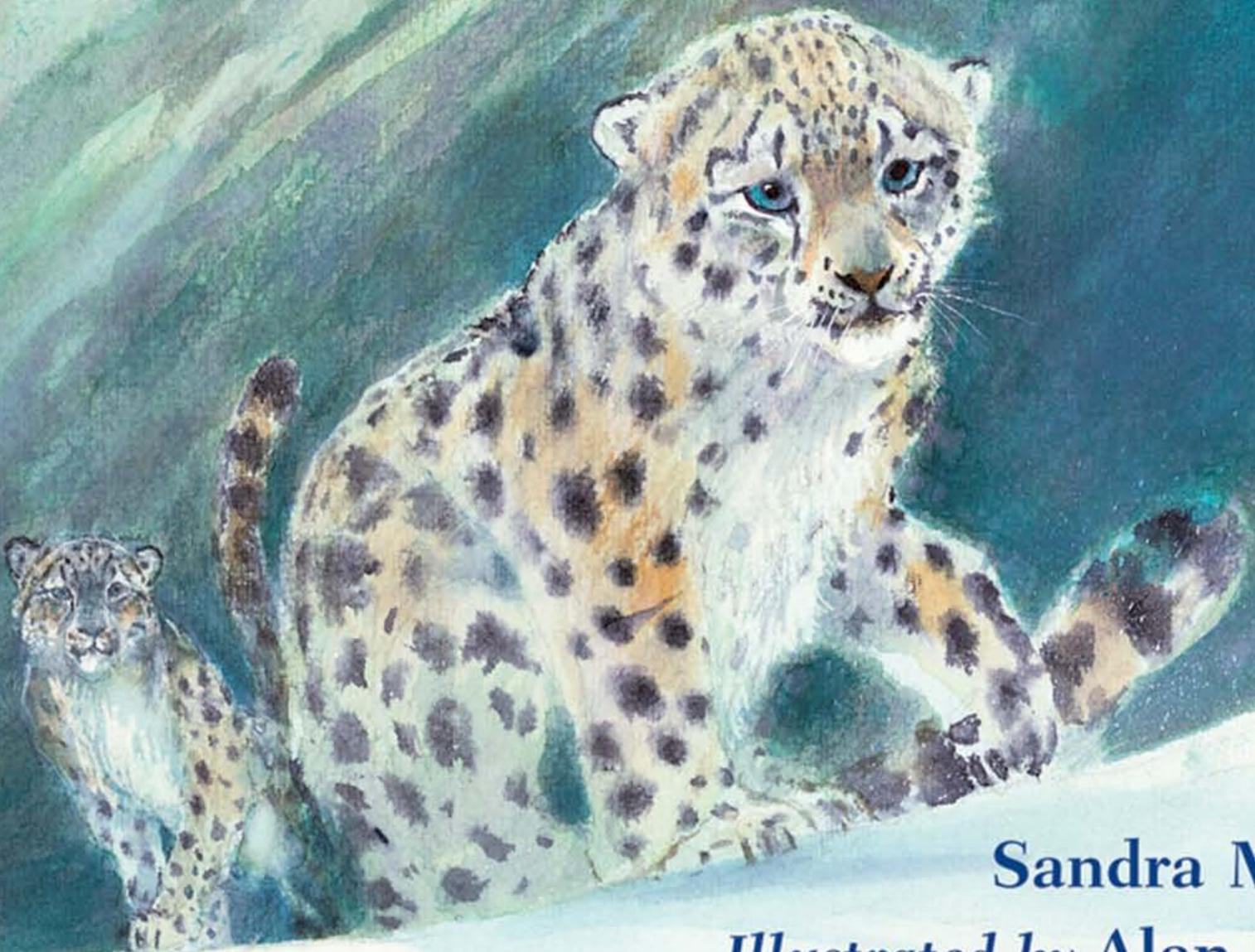


Snow School



Sandra Markle

Illustrated by Alan Marks

With love for my children, Scott and Holly Markle—S. M.

To Lucia, Cecilia, Solly, and Gabriel—A. M.

Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank Dr. Tom McCarthy, executive director of Snow Leopard Programs for Panthera, an organization dedicated to ensuring the future of wild cats. A special thank-you to Skip Jeffery for his support during the creative process.

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Published by Charlesbridge
85 Main Street
Watertown, MA 02472
(617) 926-0329
www.charlesbridge.com

Synchred Read-Along Version by:
Triangle Interactive LLC
PO Box 573
Prior Lake, MN 55372

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Markle, Sandra.

Snow school / Sandra Markle ; illustrated by Alan Marks.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-1-60734-593-0 (ebook)

1. Snow leopard—Juvenile literature. 2. Snow leopard—Infancy—Juvenile literature.

3. Learning in animals—Juvenile literature. I. Marks, Alan, 1957– ill. II. Title.

QL737.C23M2735 2013 ISBN-13 978-1-68444-686-5 (e-book)

599.75'55—dc23

2012000790

Printed in Singapore

Illustrations done in watercolor and pencil on Fabriano 5 paper

Display type set in Elroy, designed by Christian Schwartz for Monotype Imaging

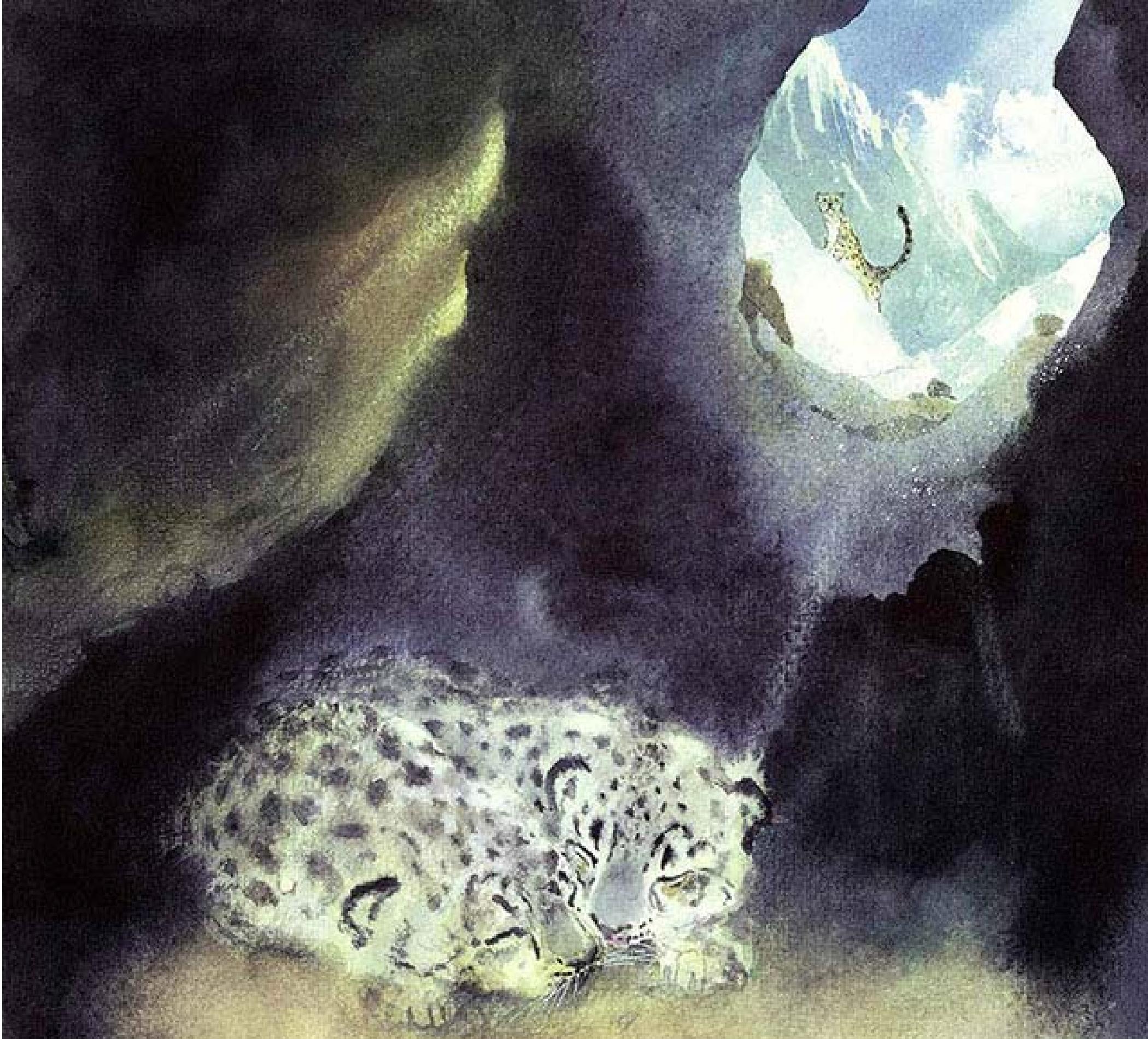
Text type set in Fairfield by Monotype Imaging

Color separations by KHL Chroma Graphics, Singapore

Printed and bound September 2012 by Imago in Singapore

Production supervision by Brian G. Walker

Designed by Martha MacLeod Sikkema



It's May—springtime in Pakistan's Hindu Kush Mountains. But high up on gravel-strewn slopes, where only the hardest plants grow, snowflakes still dance in the icy wind. Inside a den, week-old snow leopard cubs—a brother and sister—wait for their mother's return.

While his sister yowls to be fed, the male peeks outside
with newly opened eyes, spies the snowflakes,
and crawls out to explore.

Suddenly a golden eagle swoops down, with talons thrust out.
The mother snow leopard arrives just in time.

Growling and swatting, she drives the eagle away.

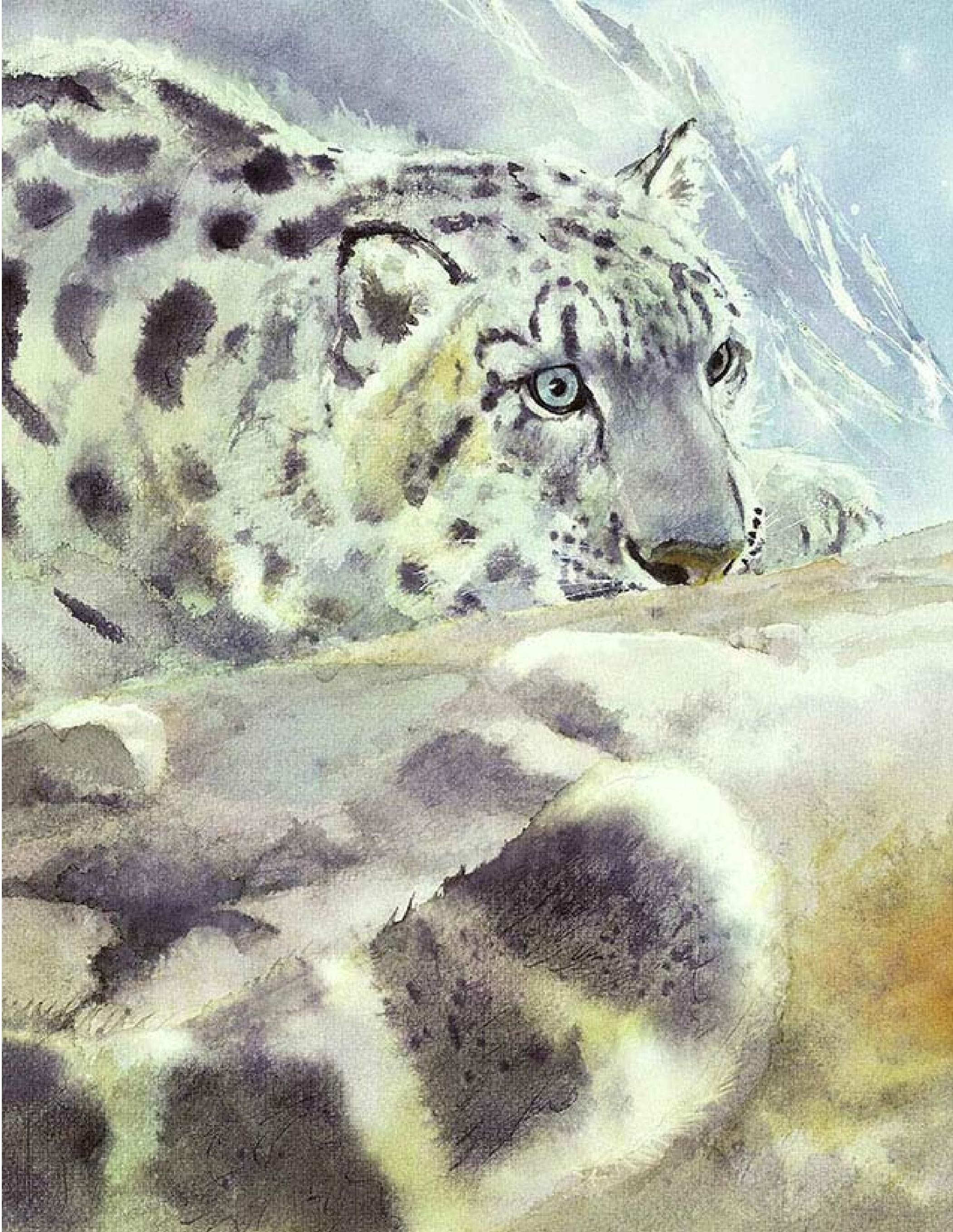
Then she picks up the cub in gentle jaws
and carries him into the den.

So the little male learns his first lesson.

Outside the den, it's a dangerous world.







Five weeks old and nearly double his birth weight,
the little male is a fuzzy ball of muscle and curiosity.
He sneaks up on the twitching tip of his mother's long tail.

Then his sister pounces on him.

The pair tumbles, swatting and biting whatever they can reach.
This way they build strong muscles and practice hunting skills.
Mother ends the training session with tongue licks.
When she flops down, the cubs snuggle against her
to nurse and nap.



At two months old, the cubs are nearly five times their birth weight. They're shedding baby teeth for adult teeth—all pointed and sharp.

One day their mother arrives, dragging an ibex she's killed. The pair attack this prey, biting the ears—the only part thin enough to fit in their young mouths.

Mother tears open the belly, and the cubs nose in, discovering the smell and taste of what they'll one day catch for themselves—if they learn their lessons.





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