

A NAVRITTO STORY

The Gift With *No Name.*

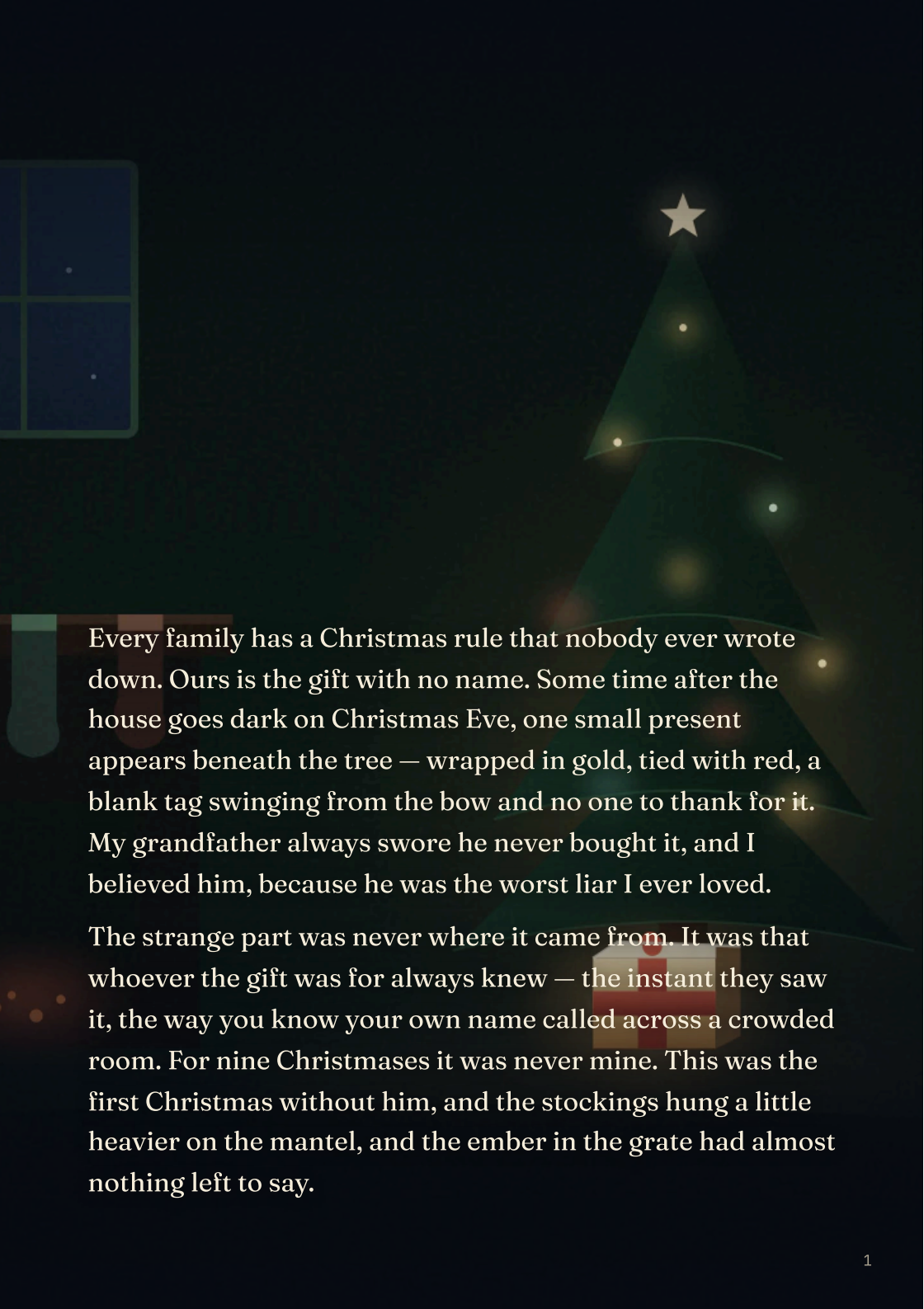
✦ NAVRITTO STORIES · MYSTERY & THE STRANGE

The Gift With No Name

Written & illustrated by Navritto.

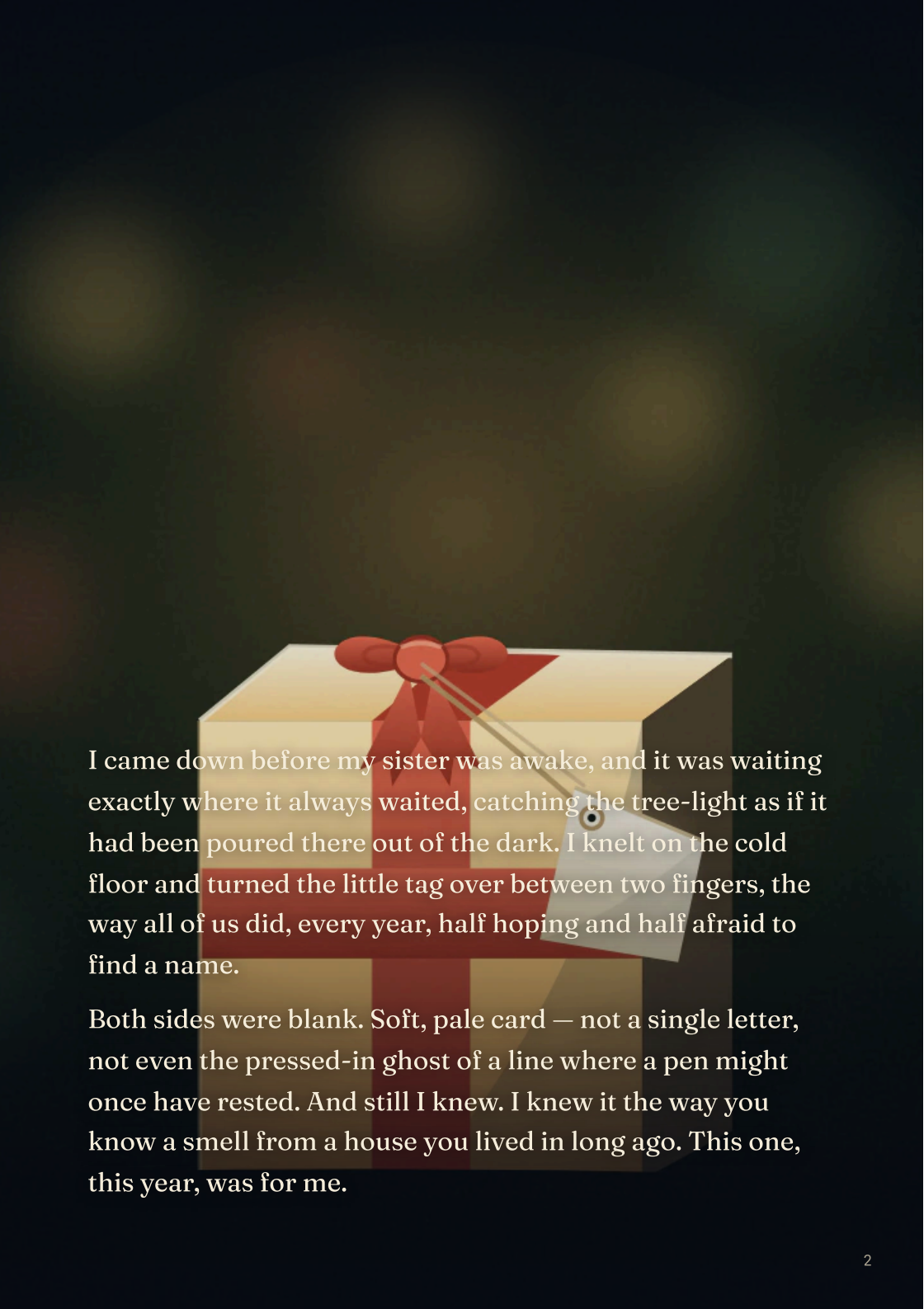
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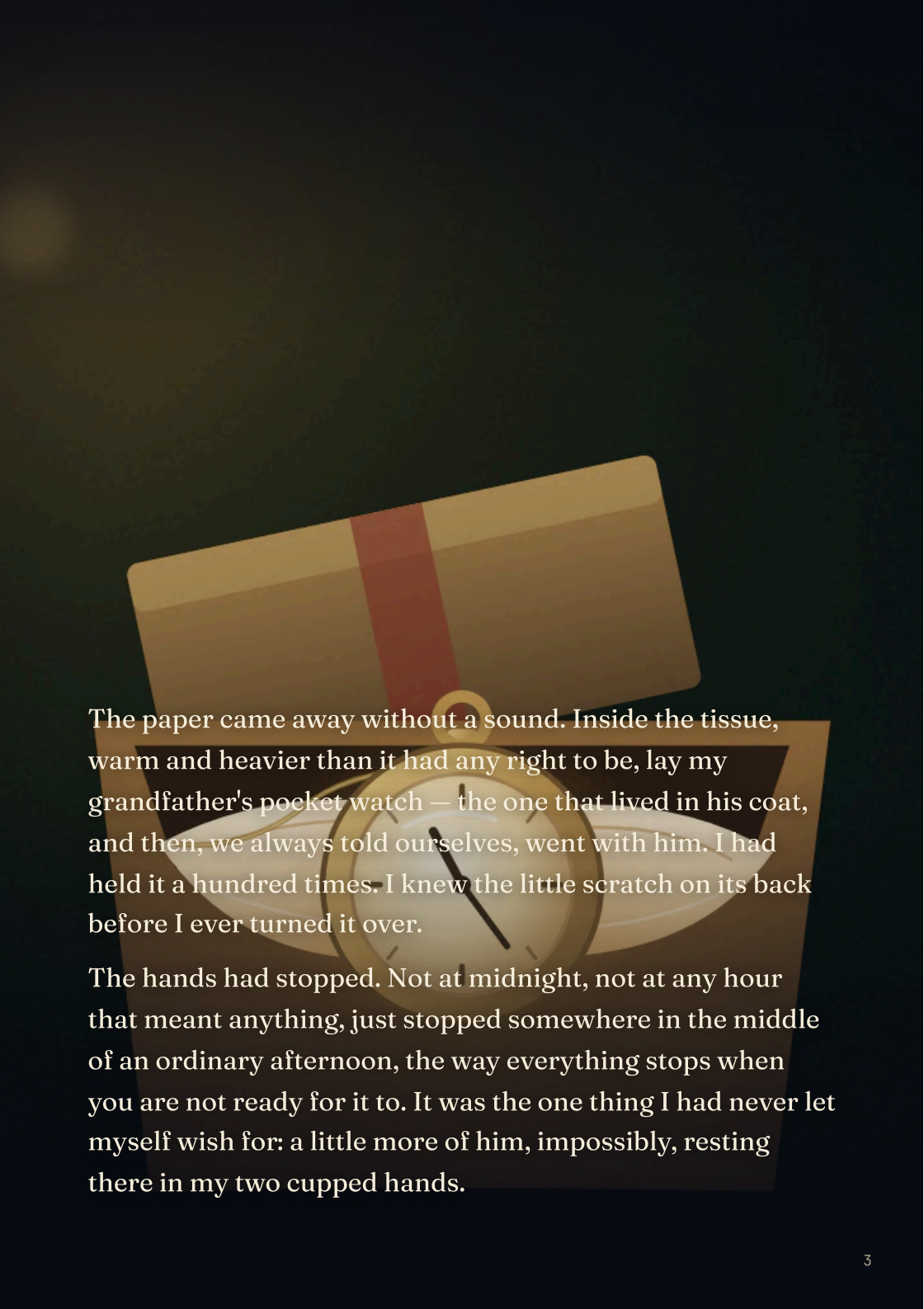
Every family has a Christmas rule that nobody ever wrote down. Ours is the gift with no name. Some time after the house goes dark on Christmas Eve, one small present appears beneath the tree — wrapped in gold, tied with red, a blank tag swinging from the bow and no one to thank for it. My grandfather always swore he never bought it, and I believed him, because he was the worst liar I ever loved.

The strange part was never where it came from. It was that whoever the gift was for always knew — the instant they saw it, the way you know your own name called across a crowded room. For nine Christmases it was never mine. This was the first Christmas without him, and the stockings hung a little heavier on the mantel, and the ember in the grate had almost nothing left to say.



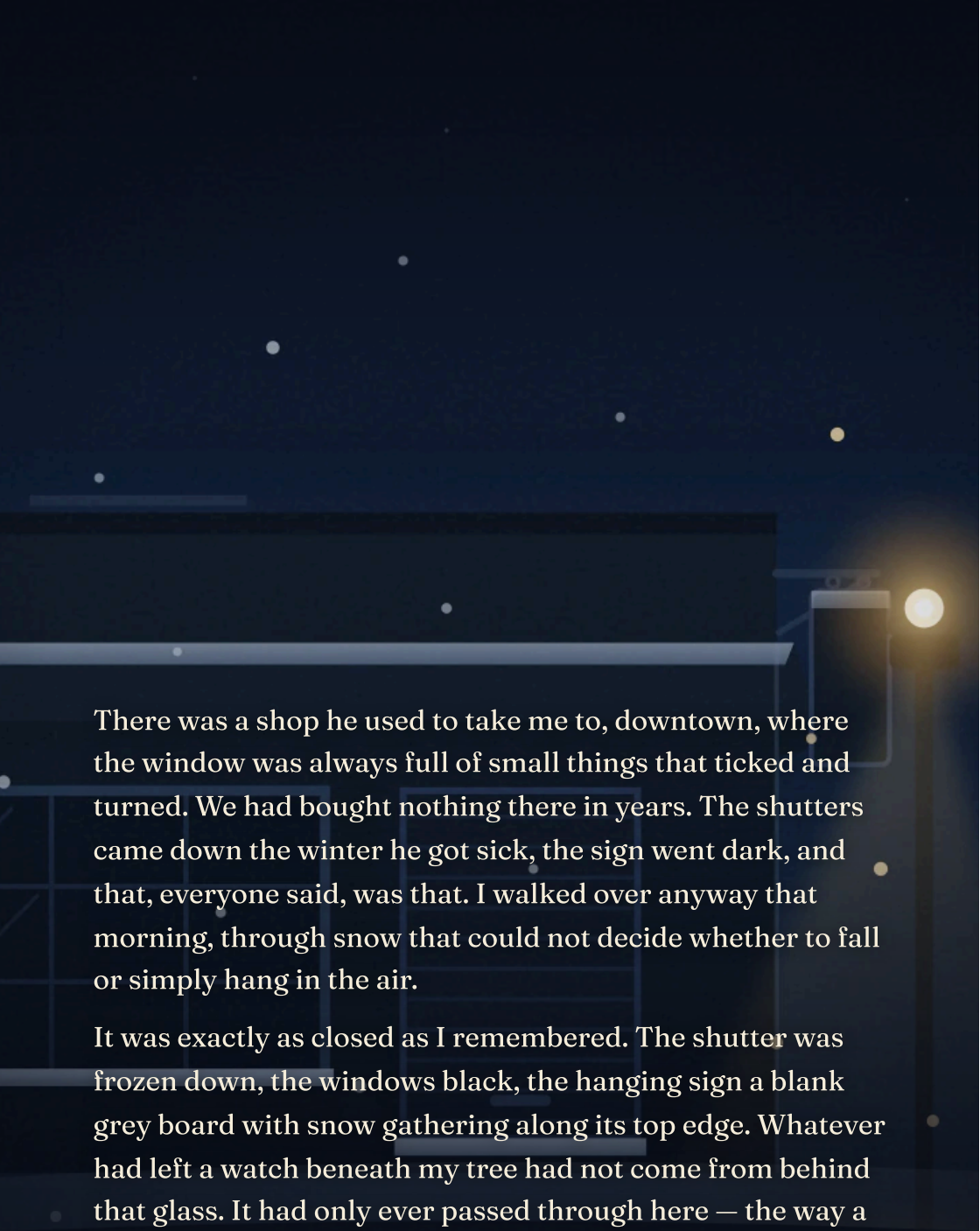
I came down before my sister was awake, and it was waiting exactly where it always waited, catching the tree-light as if it had been poured there out of the dark. I knelt on the cold floor and turned the little tag over between two fingers, the way all of us did, every year, half hoping and half afraid to find a name.

Both sides were blank. Soft, pale card — not a single letter, not even the pressed-in ghost of a line where a pen might once have rested. And still I knew. I knew it the way you know a smell from a house you lived in long ago. This one, this year, was for me.



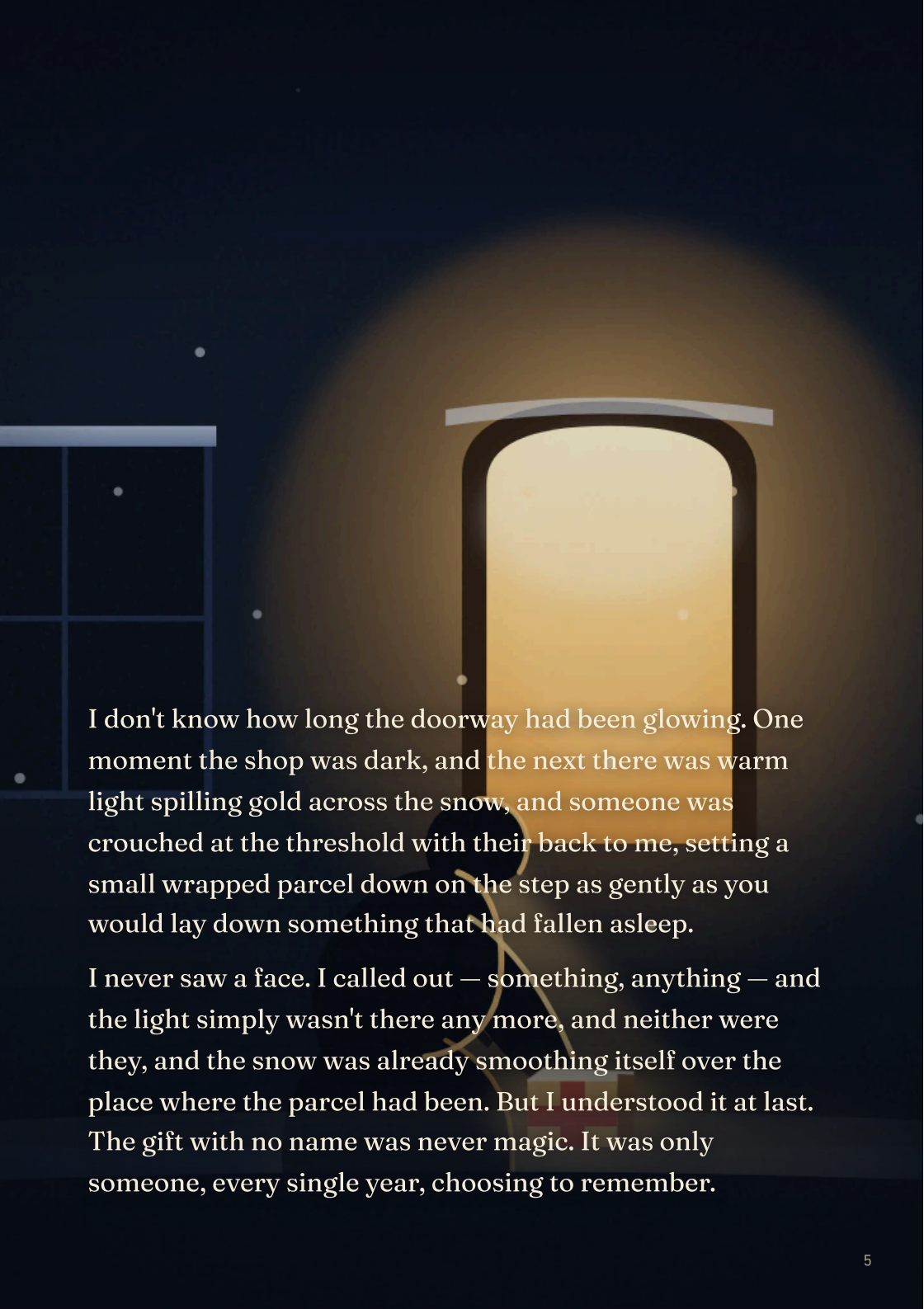
The paper came away without a sound. Inside the tissue, warm and heavier than it had any right to be, lay my grandfather's pocket watch — the one that lived in his coat, and then, we always told ourselves, went with him. I had held it a hundred times. I knew the little scratch on its back before I ever turned it over.

The hands had stopped. Not at midnight, not at any hour that meant anything, just stopped somewhere in the middle of an ordinary afternoon, the way everything stops when you are not ready for it to. It was the one thing I had never let myself wish for: a little more of him, impossibly, resting there in my two cupped hands.



There was a shop he used to take me to, downtown, where the window was always full of small things that ticked and turned. We had bought nothing there in years. The shutters came down the winter he got sick, the sign went dark, and that, everyone said, was that. I walked over anyway that morning, through snow that could not decide whether to fall or simply hang in the air.

It was exactly as closed as I remembered. The shutter was frozen down, the windows black, the hanging sign a blank grey board with snow gathering along its top edge. Whatever had left a watch beneath my tree had not come from behind that glass. It had only ever passed through here — the way a letter passes through a town, on its long way to someone.



I don't know how long the doorway had been glowing. One moment the shop was dark, and the next there was warm light spilling gold across the snow, and someone was crouched at the threshold with their back to me, setting a small wrapped parcel down on the step as gently as you would lay down something that had fallen asleep.

I never saw a face. I called out — something, anything — and the light simply wasn't there any more, and neither were they, and the snow was already smoothing itself over the place where the parcel had been. But I understood it at last. The gift with no name was never magic. It was only someone, every single year, choosing to remember.



I set the watch on the mantel when I got home, between the stockings, where the tree-light could just reach it. It has not ticked since, and I have stopped trying to wind it. Some things you keep stopped on purpose, so that the ordinary afternoon they are holding can never quite come to an end.

Late that night, long after the house had gone dark again, I crept down one last time. The watch was glowing softly on its shelf. And under the tree, where there had been one gift that morning, there were now two — a gold one, waiting, with a blank tag and no name. I didn't open it. It wasn't mine. Somewhere in the quiet house, I already knew, someone was about to know that it was theirs.

✦ THE END

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