KATHERINE RUNDELL

The Wolf Wilder

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There were, in Feo's experience, five kinds of cold. There was wind cold, which Feo barely felt. It was fussy and loud and turned your cheeks as red as if you'd been slapped, but couldn't kill you even if it tried. There was snow cold, which plucked at your arms and chapped your lips, but brought real rewards. It was Feo's favourite weather: the snow was soft and good for making snow wolves. There was ice cold, which might take the skin off your palm if you let it, but probably wouldn't if you were careful. Ice cold smelt sharp and knowing. It often came with blue skies and was good for skating. Feo had respect for ice cold. Then there was hard cold, which was when the ice cold got deeper until at the end of a month you couldn’t remember if the summer had ever really existed. Hard cold could be cruel. Birds died in mid-flight. It was the kind of cold that you booted and kicked your way through.

And there was blind cold. Blind cold smelt of metal and granite. It took all the sense out of your brain and blew the snow into your eyes until they were glued shut and you had to rub spit into them before they would blink. Blind cold was forty degrees below zero. This was the kind of cold that you didn't sit down to think in, unless you wanted to be found dead in the same place in May or June.