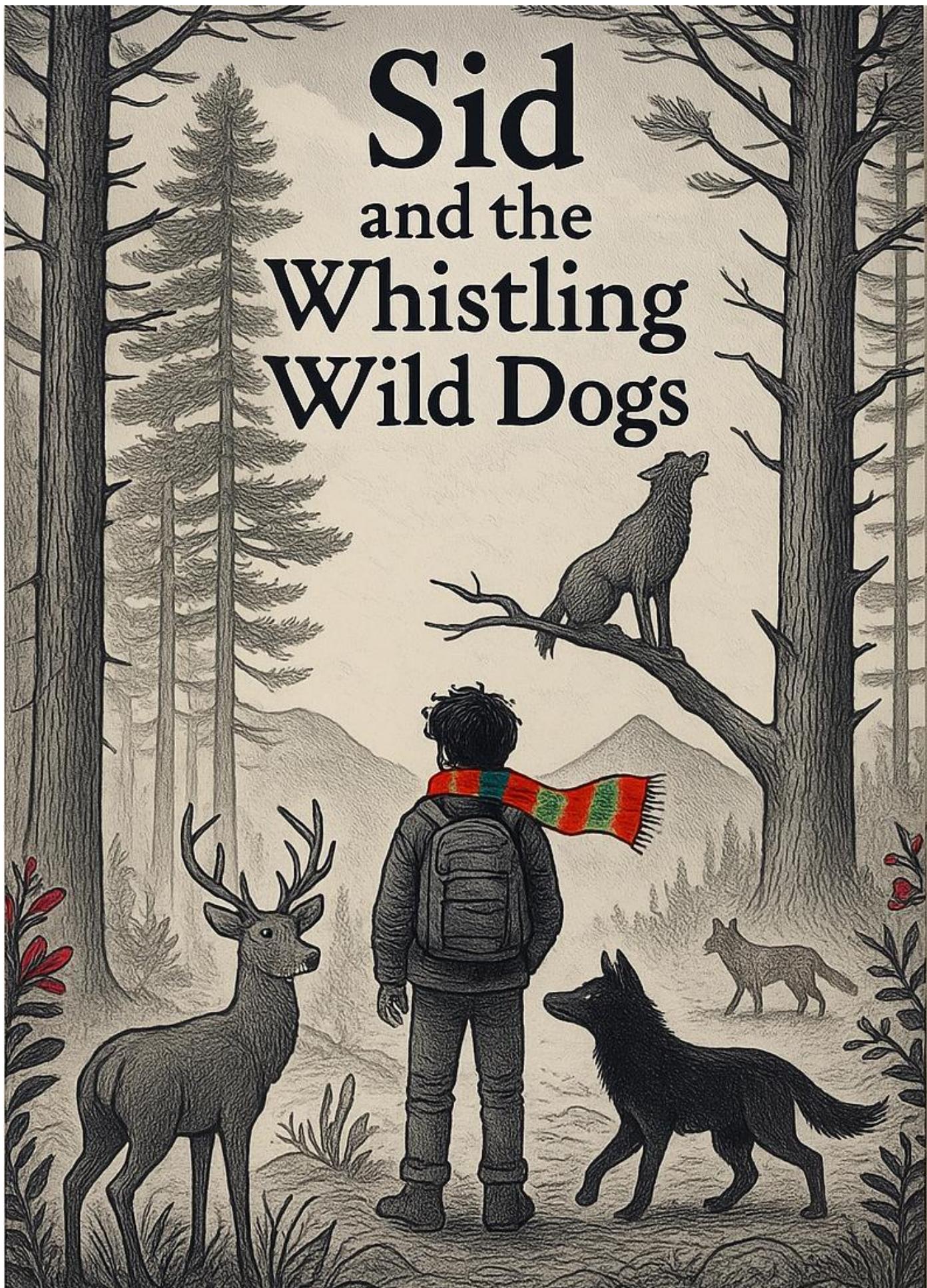


Sid and the Whistling Wild Dogs



Sid had never forgotten his last visit to his *hajurbuba* (grandfather), a gentle old man who herded cattle in the peaceful mountains. Now, with winter break finally here, Sid begged his parents for another visit. They smiled and agreed. Soon Sid was traveling back along winding trails and snow-dusted ridges, excited to see his grandfather and the forests once more.

The crisp mountain air welcomed Sid as he arrived at the corral. Birds chirped in the towering trees and distant waterfalls whispered like old friends. Sid hugged his *hajurbuba*, who chuckled, “You’ve grown taller, my boy!”



That afternoon, while wandering near the corral, Sid spotted a bushy-tailed creature leaping from branch to branch high up in a tree. “What is that?” he whispered. The animal vanished into the treetops.

Later, with a warm bowl of *popcorn* and *bhatamas* (roasted soybeans) and a cup of hot ginger tea, Sid asked his grandfather. “Ah, that’s *lokharke*, the giant squirrel,” *hajurbuba* explained. Sid smiled, already planning the next day’s adventure.

The next morning, Sid slipped quietly into the forest. He breathed in the smell of pine and earth. Suddenly, a strange sound echoed through the trees—a sharp, melodic whistle. Sid paused. “Hunters?” he wondered nervously. But no, it was different. Curious, Sid walked toward the sound, deeper into the woods, until he realized he was lost.

Just as panic set in, familiar rustling caught his ear. “Sid!” called a cheerful voice. It was his old friend, Langur, the clever monkey. They laughed and hugged.



“I’ve missed you,” Langur said. “Why are you here?”

Sid explained about the strange whistle. Langur nodded. “I’ve heard it too. It doesn’t come from birds or hunters. I think it’s the wild dogs—dholes! They live in packs and use whistles to talk to each other.”

Sid’s eyes widened. “Dholes? I’ve never seen one!”

Langur grinned. “Maybe today’s your lucky day. Be careful, and keep exploring.”

As Sid wandered on, he spotted a tall, sturdy animal with magnificent antlers grazing quietly. “Wow!” Sid whispered. “A deer with a crown?”



The animal chuckled softly. “I am Sambhar, the largest deer of Asia.”

Sid stared to wonder. “How do your antlers grow?”

“They fall off every year and grow back stronger,” Sambhar explained. “But we suffered greatly in the past from hunting and habitat loss.”

Sid listened carefully. Sambhar continued, “Thankfully, people like your grandfather protect these lands. We are beginning to recover.”

Sid asked, “Do you know what makes the strange whistle?”

Sambhar nodded. “Most likely the dholes. They live as a family group and communicate with high-pitched whistles. They’re rarely seen but very special.”

The next day, Sid walked cautiously along the forest path. Suddenly, he froze. Two reddish dog-like creatures were sniffing the ground nearby. Their bushy tails flicked as they moved silently through the undergrowth.



Sid's heart raced. Were these the dholes?

One of the dogs noticed him and approached slowly. Its intelligent amber eyes showed no aggression. "Hello," it said gently.

Sid gasped. "You can talk?"

The dhole laughed softly. "In this forest, anything is possible."

The second dhole trotted up. "I am Rana, and this is Tara. We are dholes, also known as Asiatic wild dogs."

Sid was mesmerized. "Are you the ones who whistle?"

Rana wagged his tail. "Yes, we use whistles to call our pack, warn of danger, or coordinate a hunt."

Sid smiled wide. "That's amazing! You really are nature's team players."

As they walked, Sid learned more. Tara explained, "We live and hunt in close-knit packs. Each of us has a role—some lead, some follow, some watch for threats."

Sid asked, "Why don't people know about you?"

Rana sighed. "We are shy and misunderstood. People used to fear us and harmed us. Our forests are shrinking. Roads and farms break our home into pieces."

Sid felt sad. "That's not fair!"

Tara nodded. “But conservationists and local communities are now helping. Protected areas and education are giving us hope.”

Sid looked determined. “I’ll tell my friends about you, like I did for the clouded leopard. We must protect you too!”

The dholes wagged their tails. “Thank you, young friend.”

Rana added, “Do you want to hear our whistle?”

Sid nodded eagerly. The forest filled with soft, haunting whistles that danced between the trees. Sid’s eyes widened with wonder.



As the sun began to set, Sid knew it was time to return.

“Goodbye, my friends. I’ll come back soon.”

“Stay curious, Sid!” Tara called as they disappeared into the shadows.

Back at the corral, Sid shared his adventure with *hajurbuba*, who smiled proudly. Sid promised to keep learning and teaching others about the beautiful, wild creatures of the mountains.

As he drifted off to sleep under a star-filled sky, Sid whispered, “Next time, I’ll find even more friends in the forest.”

