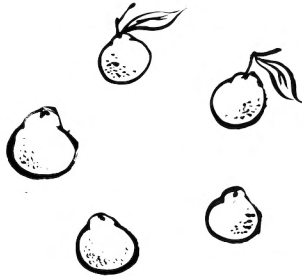




citrus skins



citrus skins

what is home?

it lies stretched across oceans
it's a soft voice calling

it's a body made up of
your arm,
my leg,
and the space in between

grafted like the branches of a tree
or bones in a rib cage

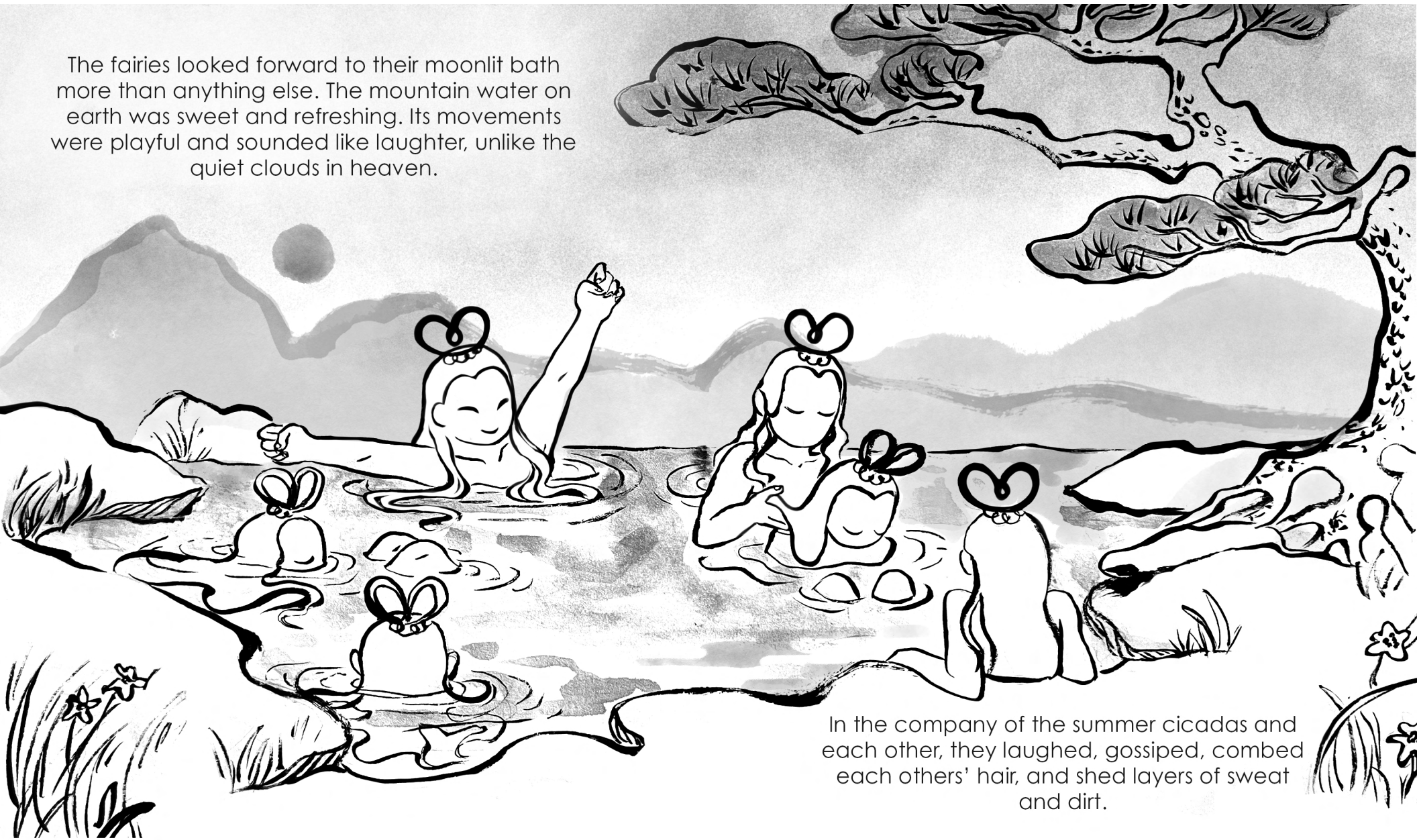
by sophie lee
for anchovy studio

april 2023



Once upon a time,
high up in the mountains
where the wind quietly dances,
there was a pond where heavenly
fairies would come to bathe.

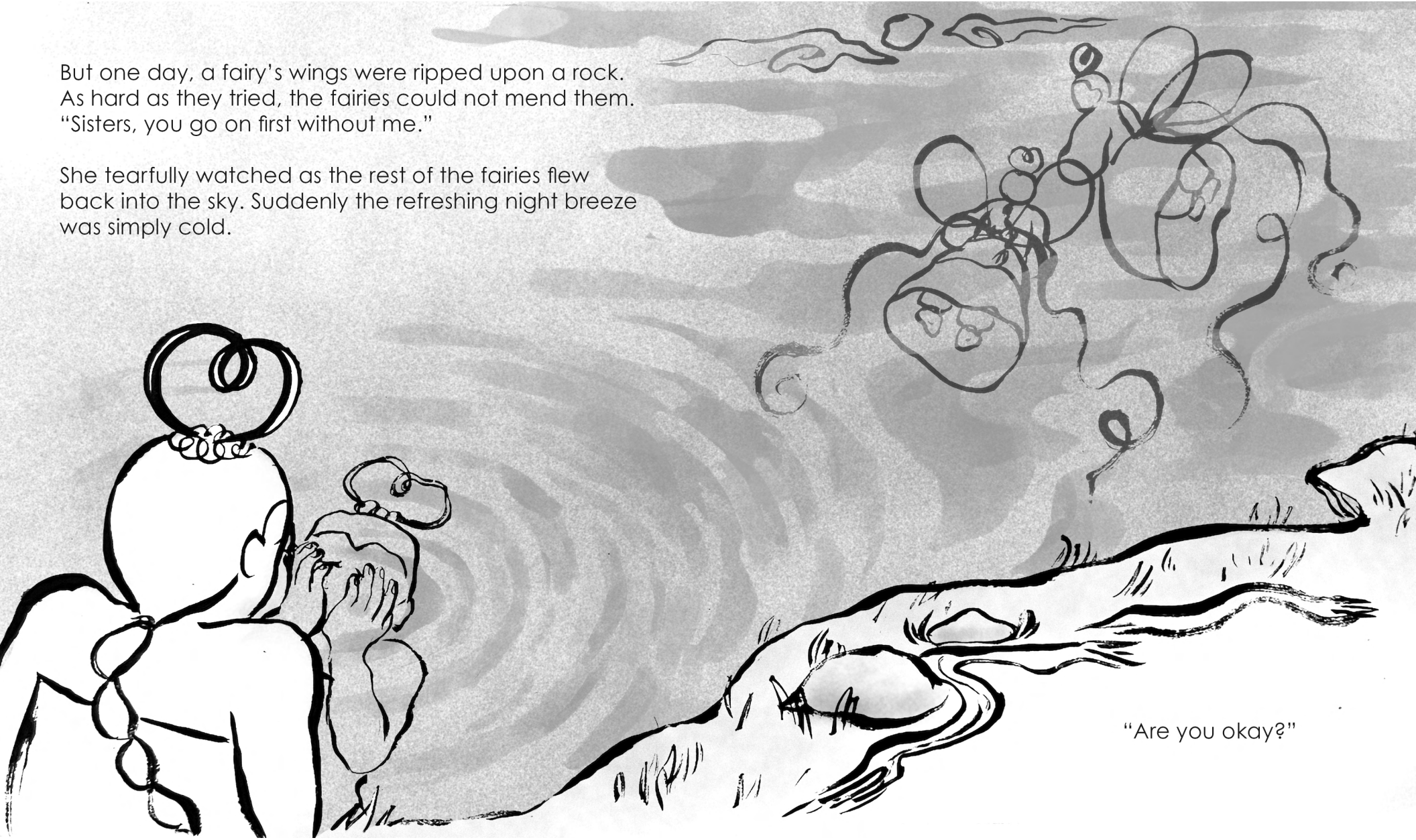
The fairies looked forward to their moonlit bath more than anything else. The mountain water on earth was sweet and refreshing. Its movements were playful and sounded like laughter, unlike the quiet clouds in heaven.



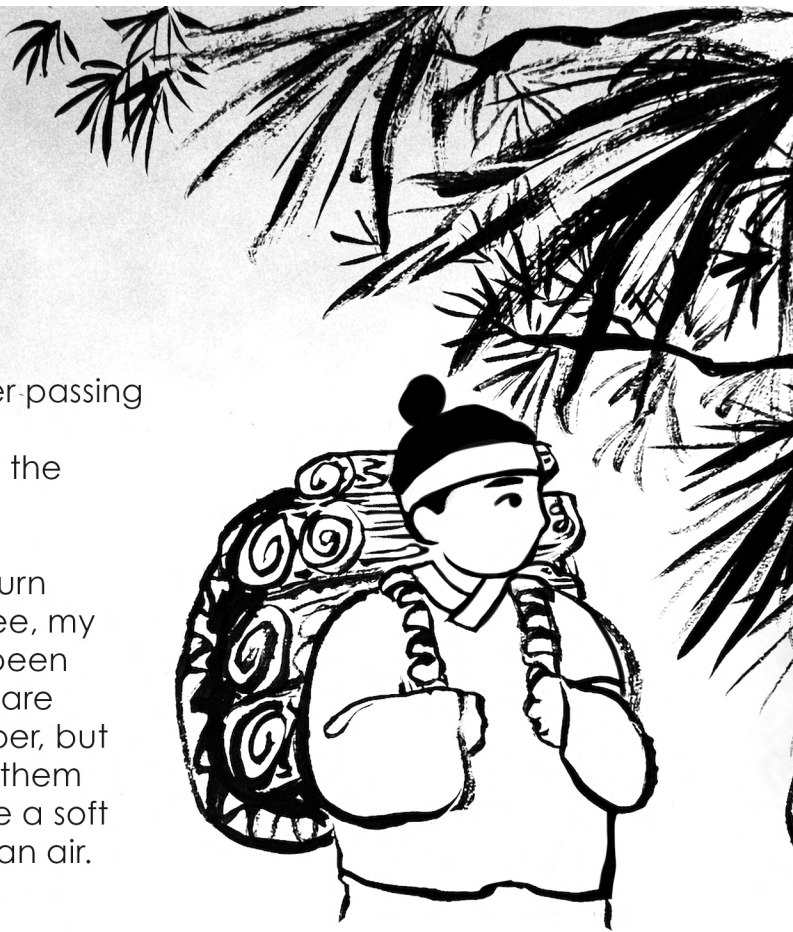
In the company of the summer cicadas and each other, they laughed, gossiped, combed each others' hair, and shed layers of sweat and dirt.

But one day, a fairy's wings were ripped upon a rock.
As hard as they tried, the fairies could not mend them.
"Sisters, you go on first without me."

She tearfully watched as the rest of the fairies flew
back into the sky. Suddenly the refreshing night breeze
was simply cold.



"Are you okay?"




A woodcutter passing by the forest approached the crying fairy.

"I cannot return home. You see, my wings have been ripped. They are made of paper, but when I wear them they become a soft silk, lighter than air.

The woodcutter carefully examined the fairy's wings.

"Indeed, these are exquisite. I cannot imagine I can come close to the heavenly magic that made these, but I can try to mend them. In the meantime, if you cannot return home, you can stay with me and my mother."



And so the fairy came to live on earth.

It wasn't easy adjusting to life on earth.

Besides the bathing pond, the mountain valley was unfamiliar to the fairy. Wolf cries haunted impossibly dark nights.

Without her wings, the fairy's body suddenly felt heavy. Sometimes she would lose her balance or be struck with stiffness and aches.



Often, she was overwhelmed with longing to see her sisters again. Or was it anger at her helplessness? Alienation? Grief? Sorrow?

What word could possibly describe how she felt?

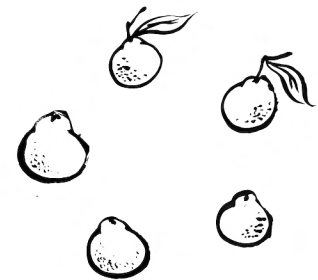


Then again, there were some things on earth she could not do in heaven.

Things she had enjoyed occasionally at the bathing pond were now her everyday. She quite liked how the sun fell on her face in the morning, and how the chorus of cicadas lulled her to sleep every evening.

She found that, here, dirt had a smell after rain. And that things died and changed and grew back again.

In time, the fairy found that her heavier body was actually quite good at chopping wood.



Soon enough, she had a family, too, one she could never have imagined. A mother, a husband, and two young children – each human so different from the other, yet inseparable.

Life on earth wasn't so bad.

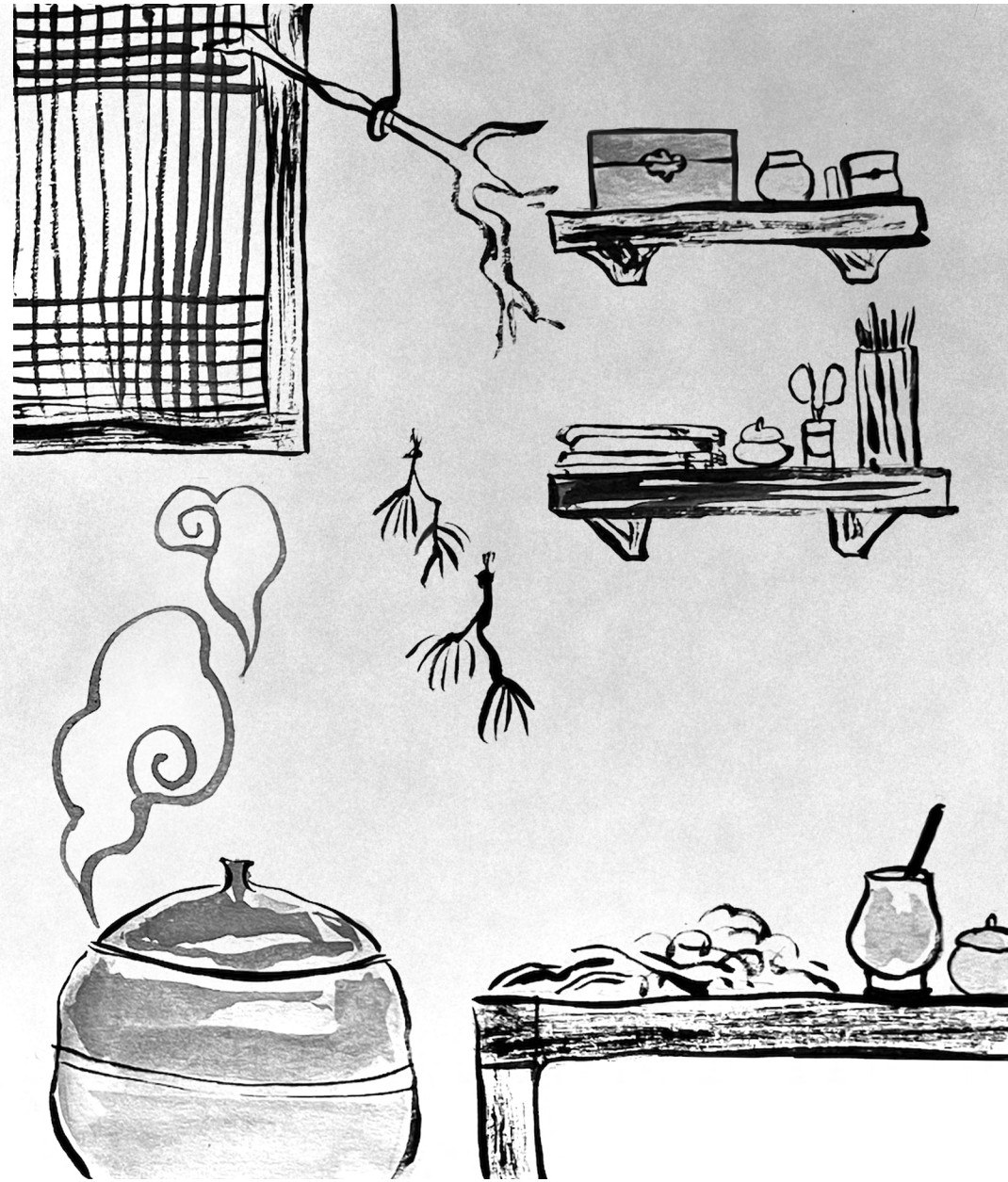
After all, there were people here she loved, and many moments of joy.



The woodcutter searched the mountains for the freshest young pine saplings to make paper with.

He tried shredding the softest parts of the bark, fermenting the pulp, even grinding the needles – every kind of paper-making he could think of.

Each full moon, the fairy held the wings in her hands to see if they would transform. And month after month they would remain still and coarse between her fingers.

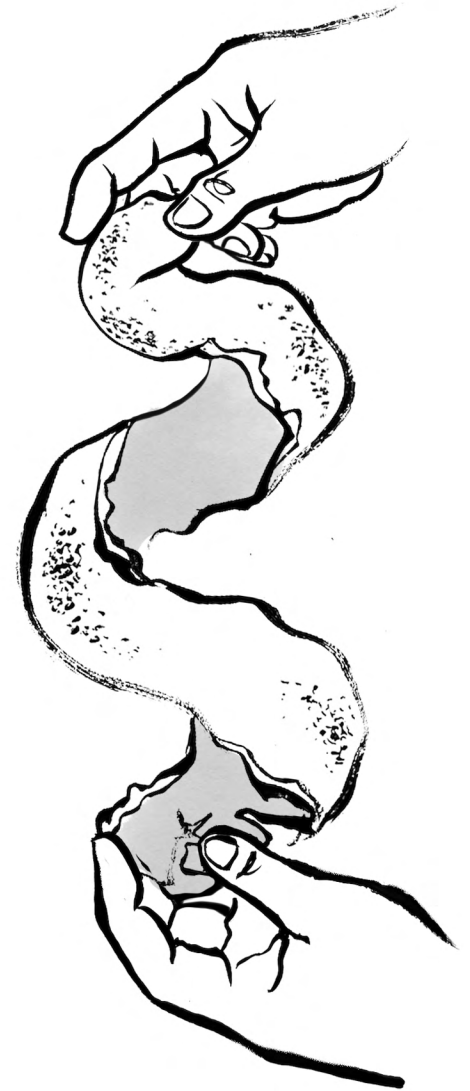




Autumn came, and then winter. Soon enough it was spring,
and summer again...

...and so the years passed
both sweet and sour, like a tangerine

and like a citrus peel wound between two hands
she felt stretched out between heaven and earth.





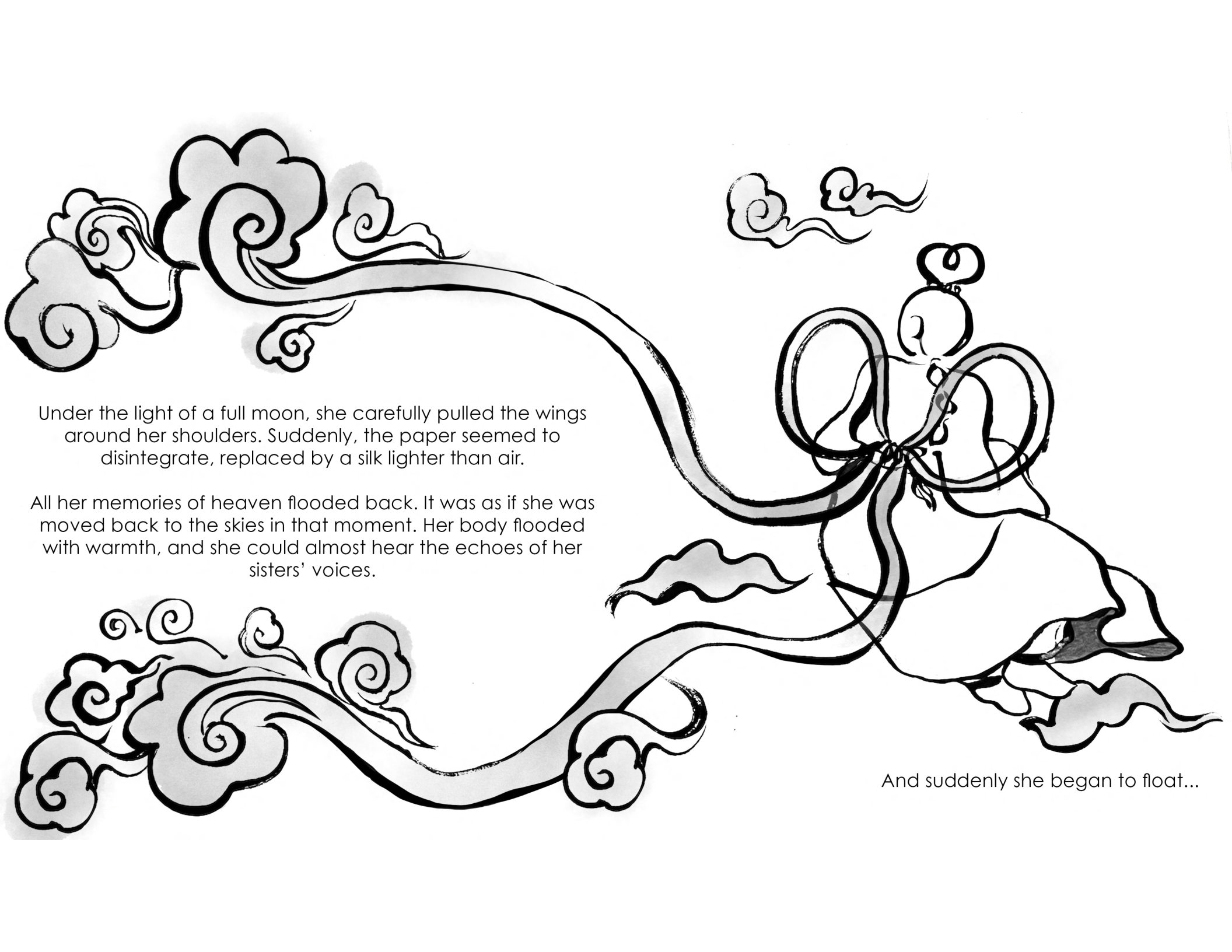
One day, the woodcutter discovered he could knit the finest of the pine fibers, mere splinters, together into a sort of cloth. It was painstaking and slow, but it was the last idea he could think of trying.

Each day he managed to thread together one more row, each thinner than a fingernail. Sometimes the pine shards were too brittle, and he had to weave in something else to strengthen the fabric.

Over the years, the wings came to include strands of his mother's hair, tiny fish bones, persimmon seeds, and leaf stems. It collected salt from the fairy's tears, the sounds of their children laughing, dirt from the woodcutter's ax, and the colors of all the mountain's seasons.

Finally, it became long enough to wrap around the fairy's body.





Under the light of a full moon, she carefully pulled the wings around her shoulders. Suddenly, the paper seemed to disintegrate, replaced by a silk lighter than air.

All her memories of heaven flooded back. It was as if she was moved back to the skies in that moment. Her body flooded with warmth, and she could almost hear the echoes of her sisters' voices.

And suddenly she began to float...



The fairy looked around in surprise as she rose further into the air. Her heart's desire seemed too strong to control.

She managed to grab her two children as she drifted away. Together, they floated up towards heaven as she cried, "Husband! I'm sorry!"

The woodcutter and his mother shouted and shouted for the fairy to come back. But no matter how high he climbed up the mountain, he could not see the fairy, nor their children.

The woodcutter ran to the bathing pond. Gazing far up at the heavens, he saw a bucket swinging down from beyond the clouds until it landed at the pond's waters.

He carefully stepped inside and held tight onto the rope as it swayed through the sky. His stomach flipped upside down and he watched the mountains, which had always towered over him, become tiny.

Was this what flying felt like?



“Oh my! No wonder the bucket was so heavy this time, it wasn't just carrying mountain water!”

The fairy and the children were overjoyed to be reunited. She held the woodcutter's hands.

“Husband, it is so strange. Everything here is just as I remembered. But I feel I have changed. Or is it the other way around? Either way, I feel better now that we are all together again.”



Indeed, the air felt different here – perfectly, almost impossibly still and gently sweet-smelling. The moon did not merely shine, but you felt you could touch its warmth. Walking atop the clouds felt more like floating, or swimming.

The heavens were beautiful and strange in ways the woodcutter could never have imagined.

“Let's live here together.”

In time, though, the woodcutter began to worry for his mother. "Is there no way I could visit her, just once, to tell her I am alright?"

The fairy understood how he felt, and led him to a flying horse.

"But you must remember this: if you touch the earth with your body, you can never come back to this place."

The woodcutter's mother was relieved and grateful to see him once more, even if it was for a short time, and to hear news of the fairy and her grandchildren.

"Let me at least make you the pumpkin porridge you like so much. Just eat one bowl and go."



As he lifted the spoon, a drop of hot porridge spilled onto his hand.

“Ah, hot!”

In surprise, he spilled the bowl onto the flying horse's back.



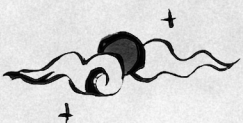
“Neigh! Neigh!”

The frightened horse reared and threw the woodcutter to the ground. With a few beats of its wings, the horse disappeared into the sky.

The woodcutter ran to the bathing pond, but the bucket never appeared again.

For the rest of his days, he visited the bathing pond each night of the full moon, thinking of the fairy and his children so far away.

And on those nights, the fairy felt she could hear a voice echoing from the stars surrounding her in heaven:



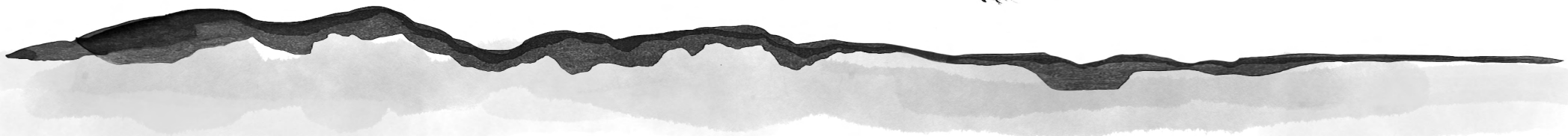
we live in opposite worlds
neither completely here nor there

yet even if we turned the sky upside
down perhaps we would still not be
home

but when you think of me and
breathe deep
I'll be at home

as the wind that lies between
your ribs

under the citrus moon





citrus skins is inspired by the Korean folktale, *fairy and the woodcutter* (선녀와 나무꾼). We listened to this bedtime story as children and it always stayed with us as literally one of the saddest fables we'd ever heard.

The original fairytale usually emphasizes a few themes – ill-fated love, children's faithfulness to parents, lowkey entrapment of women, mystical forest creatures, an explanation for why the rooster crows.

Revisiting the story as adults, though, it suddenly felt obvious that this was also story of diaspora: being split between homes, missing something you're not quite sure exists, constant discovery of the new and unfamiliar, the makings of community, love, and connection that happens in unexpected ways in unexpected places.

This is our take on the tale as a story of home and longing and how it feels to be complete and incomplete as love (for place, for people, or for ourselves) stretches us out over many geographies.

Home is many places, and home is many things. But most of all, I think, it lives between our ribs, always breathing.



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