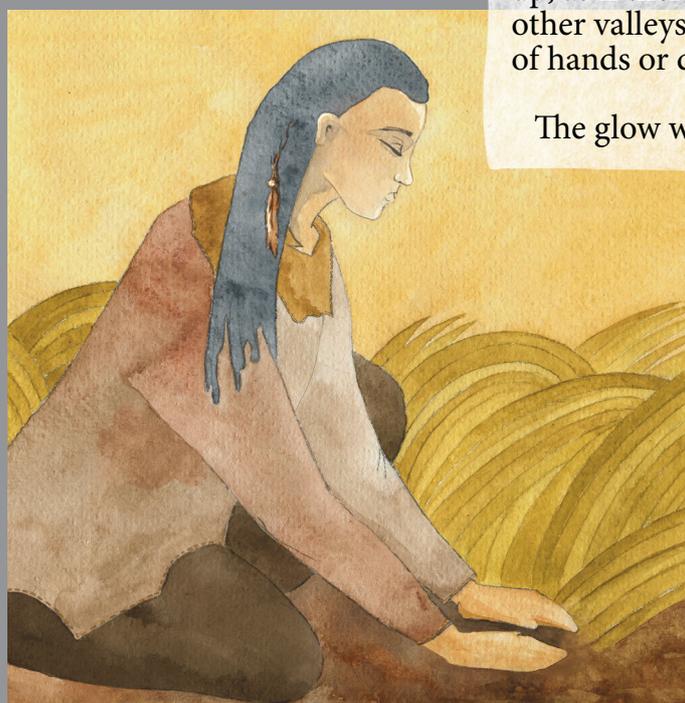


The land breathed.

She felt it even riding a horse. Heat rose from the grass up her feet, knees and above, trapping the power in her spine, tickling her neck and face with goosebumps.

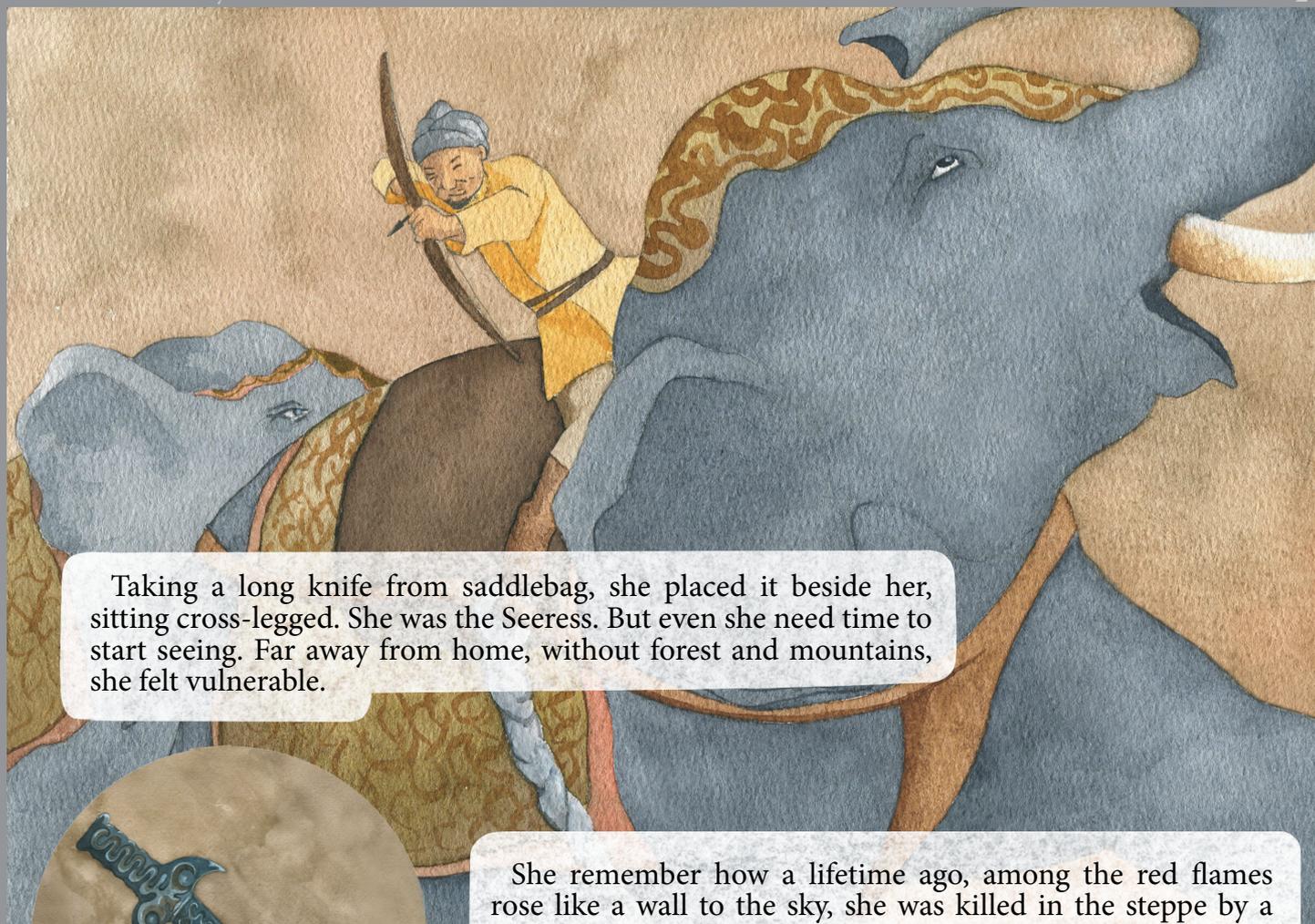
Oyuna put her palms on the ground. They instantly heated up, as if there was a bright solar ball between them. But in other valleys this ball was barely perceptible, strove to slip out of hands or disappear. Here it did not need to be held.

The glow was everywhere.



– Powerful earth.





Taking a long knife from saddlebag, she placed it beside her, sitting cross-legged. She was the Seeress. But even she need time to start seeing. Far away from home, without forest and mountains, she felt vulnerable.

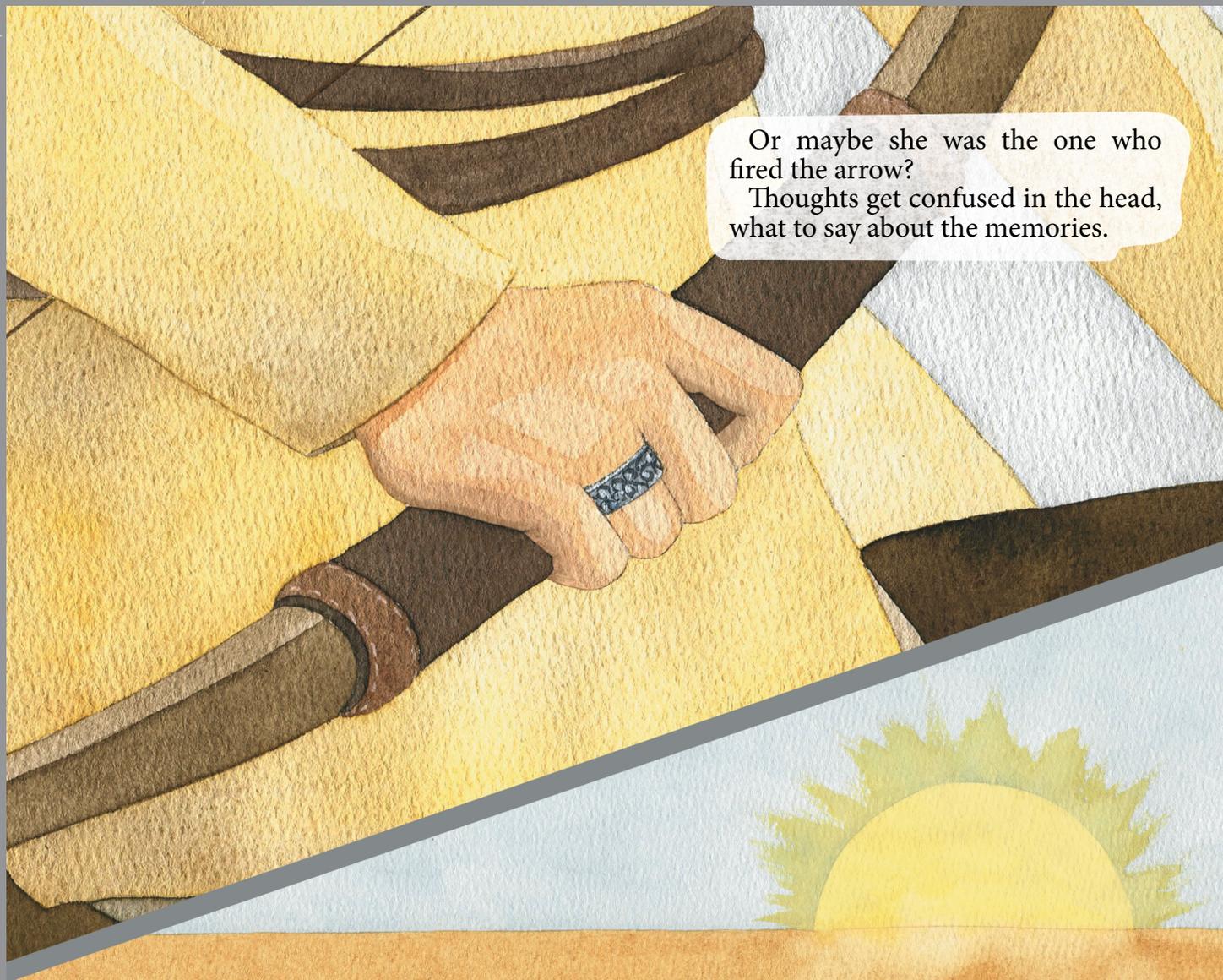


She remember how a lifetime ago, among the red flames rose like a wall to the sky, she was killed in the steppe by a strong warrior. Persecution for the faith was usual. Islam and Christianity seizing territories, gaining supporters.

She was also a fast and brave warrior. But the enemy's arrow was faster.

– I am a Mughal, I am a Christian!» – he whispered, dying.

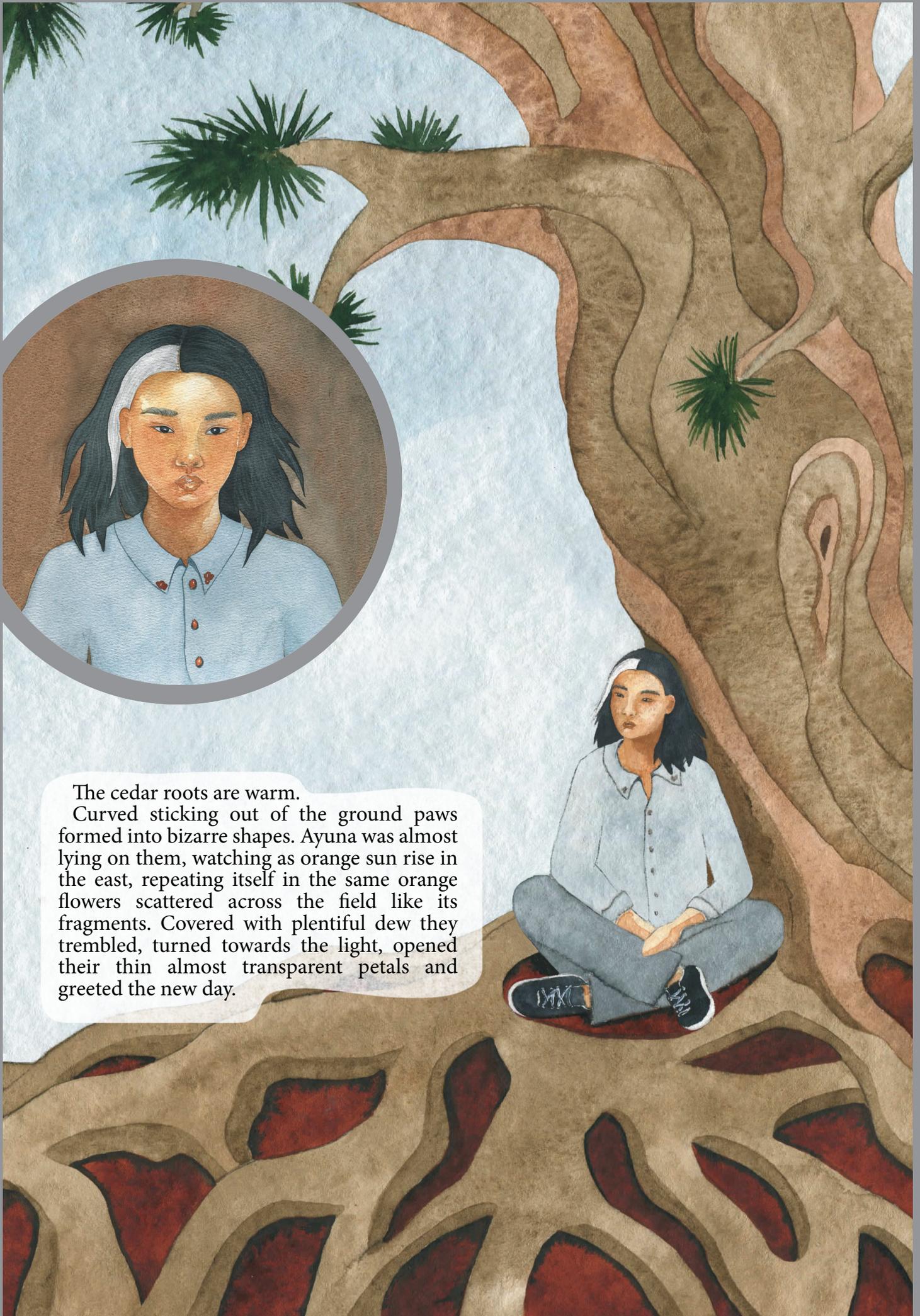




Or maybe she was the one who fired the arrow?  
Thoughts get confused in the head,  
what to say about the memories.



She wasn't looking for anything.  
People like her are not looking for, leaving their  
home, but are trying to understand the answer to the  
question they saw in a dream. Sometimes it takes a  
lifetime, sometimes even several lives, but it's worth it.  
She was the one who unravels dreams.



The cedar roots are warm.

Curved sticking out of the ground paws formed into bizarre shapes. Ayuna was almost lying on them, watching as orange sun rise in the east, repeating itself in the same orange flowers scattered across the field like its fragments. Covered with plentiful dew they trembled, turned towards the light, opened their thin almost transparent petals and greeted the new day.



This was her favorite place.

She comes here again and again to walk in the dew, drink from the mountain river, hug the bearstone and see a new story.



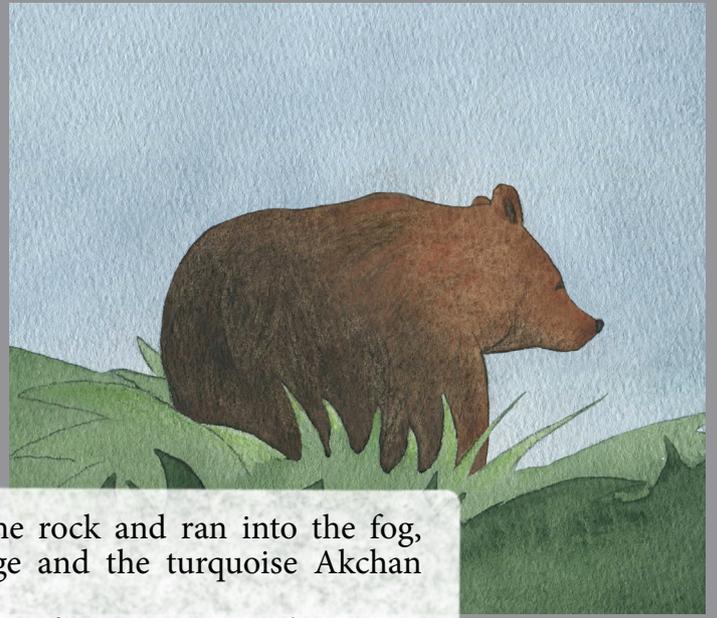
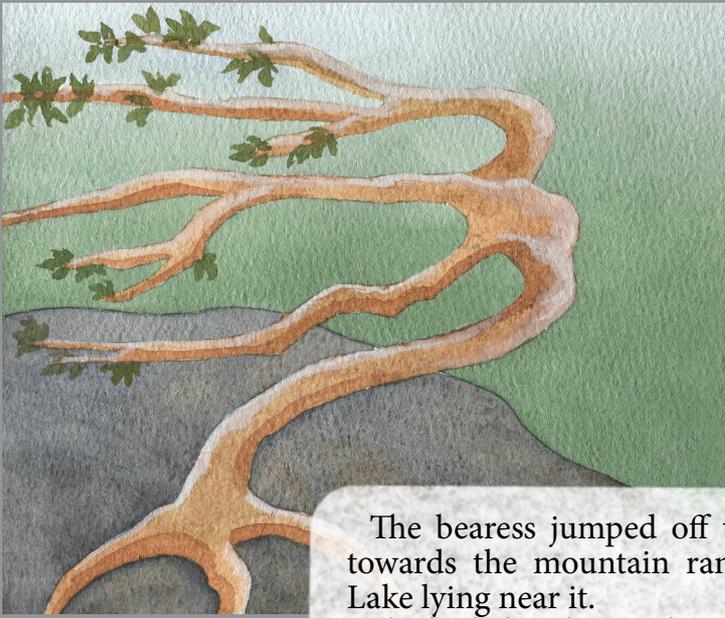
The bearstone was her treasure – a huge moss-covered boulder sticking out of the grass.

The girl climbed onto it, holding on to the trunk of a dwarf birch that had grown on it, turned to the snow-covered mountain range that was going to appear among the fog, and fell silent.

From long immobility her arms and legs hardened, became an extension of the stone. She felt how they filling with strength, getting stronger, acquiring other features.

She looked down at her palms. Her hands began to become covered with thick brown fur, which thrived higher and higher until it completely covered her face.

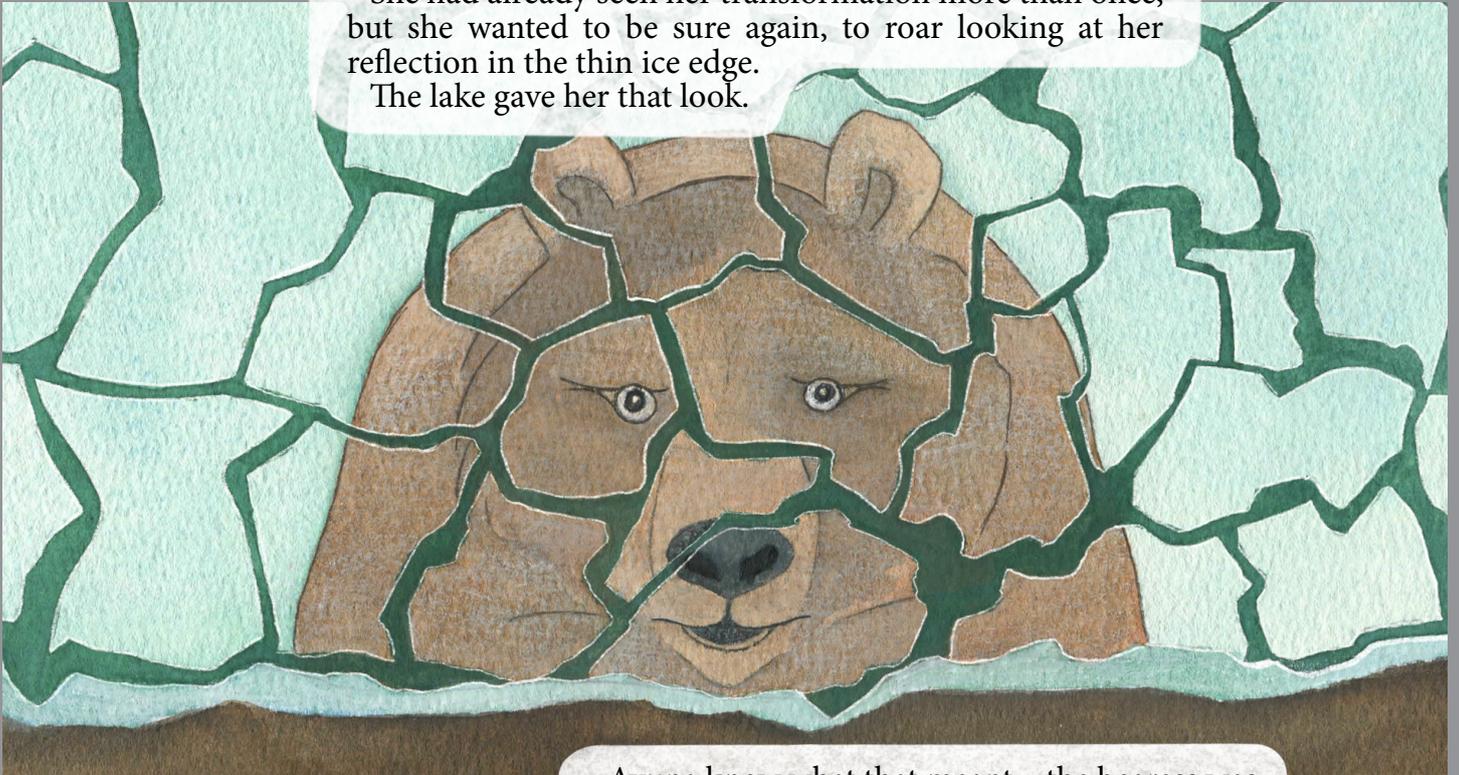




The bearess jumped off the rock and ran into the fog, towards the mountain range and the turquoise Akchan Lake lying near it.

She had already seen her transformation more than once, but she wanted to be sure again, to roar looking at her reflection in the thin ice edge.

The lake gave her that look.

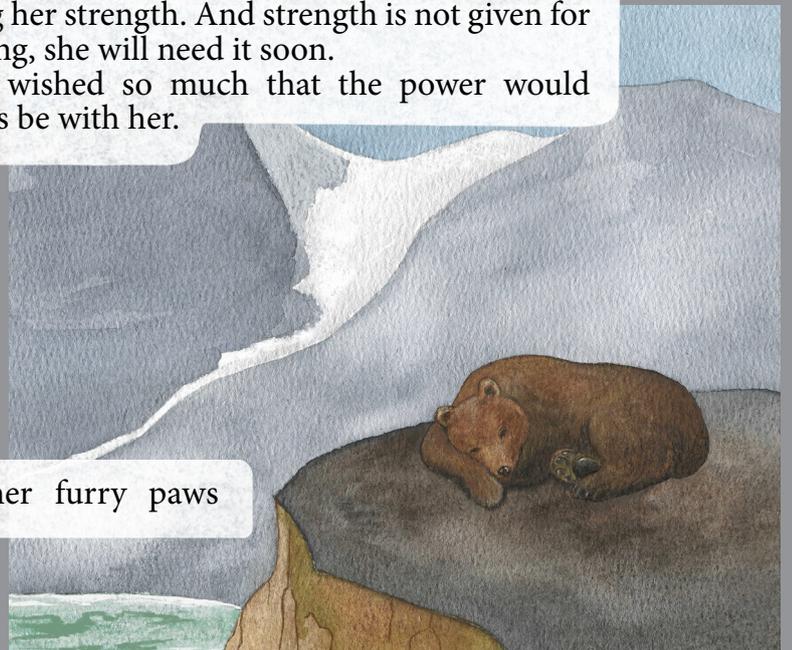


Ayuna knew what that meant – the bearess was giving her strength. And strength is not given for nothing, she will need it soon.

She wished so much that the power would always be with her.



The girl happily stretched her furry paws forward and dozed off.





It's chilly in the steppe at night.

To make a fire – bring misfortune. It can be seen far away. Strangers are not coming to the fire for warmth, but to bring with them devastation. And it is impossible to relax with the campfire. If let mind wander, the flame flies through the dry sun-burned grass for many lands ahead, where the voice of the warrior cannot reach. You can't catch it up with a strong horse.

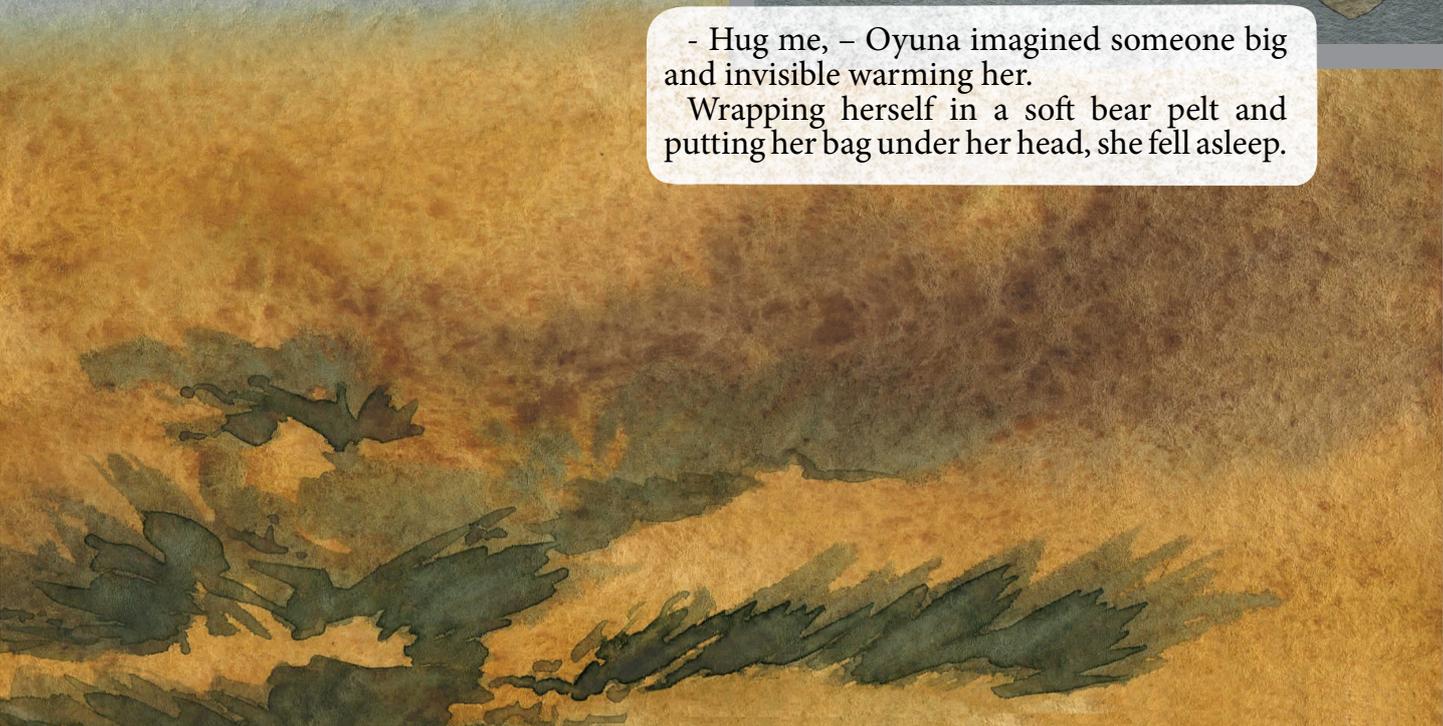
It's safer without the fire. Eyes accustomed to the darkness, discern the slightest rustle. Foxes are timid, and wolves are too clever.

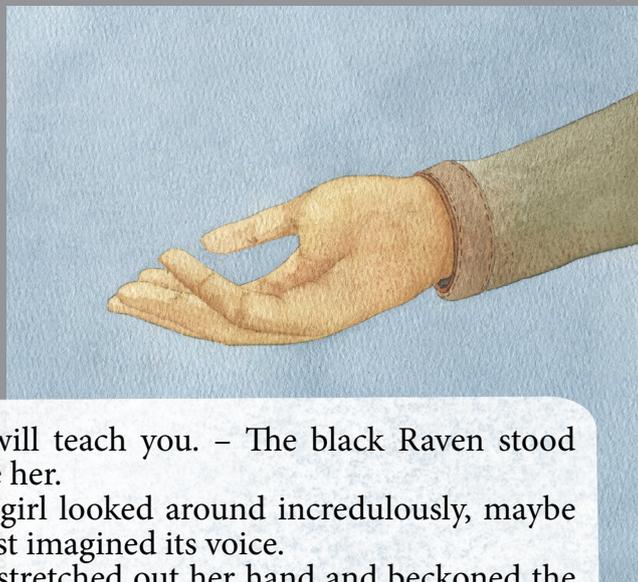
It's not animals you should be afraid of at night, but other wanderers.



- Hug me, – Oyuna imagined someone big and invisible warming her.

Wrapping herself in a soft bear pelt and putting her bag under her head, she fell asleep.





- I will teach you. - The black Raven stood beside her.  
The girl looked around incredulously, maybe she just imagined its voice.  
She stretched out her hand and beckoned the bird toward her.



The Raven flew over her head and, noisily beating its wings, began to scratch her eyes with its talons.

Black wings were the last thing Oyuna saw.  
Since that moment, the darkness had become her eternal friend.

The Raven sat on her right shoulder.

- You don't need them anymore. People have forgotten how to see with their eyes. You are too naive to distinguish truth from illusion. You easily fall for deception, unable to discern what is true.

I will tell you.

- And I will listen, – replied the Crow on her left shoulder. – What remains between us, you will take with you – it will be your knowledge.

Every day the birds came to her and whispered their stories, which she often could not even understand. The voice of the old Raven on her right shoulder hummed like a wind. The Crow on her left was quiet, listening.

