

From the Eisner  
Award-Winning  
Author of the  
Tea Dragon  
Society Series

# The Moth Keeper

K. O'Neill









The  
Moth  
Keeper





# The Moth Keeper



K. O'Neill



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*The Moth Keeper* was created on an iPad Pro with Procreate.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

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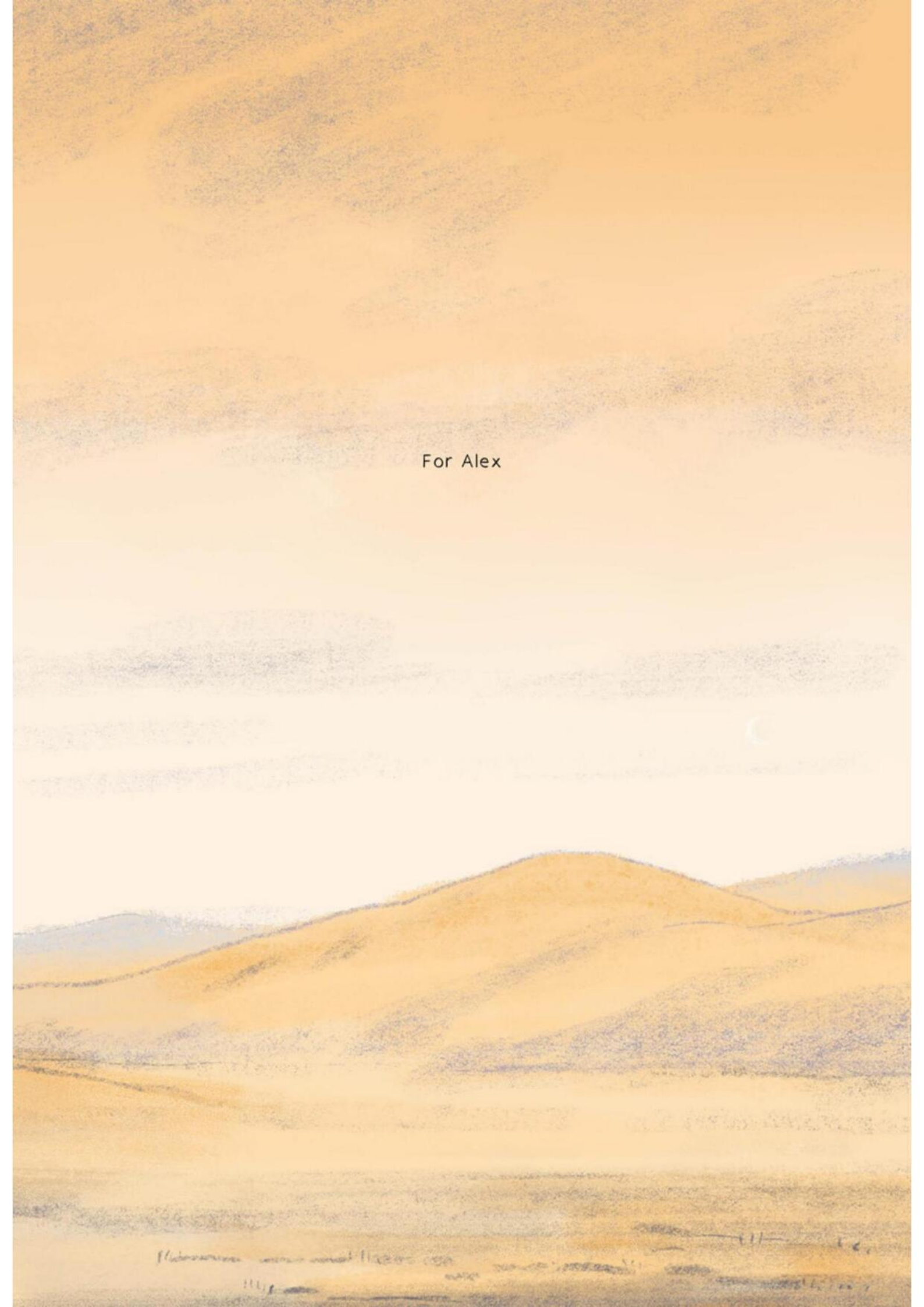
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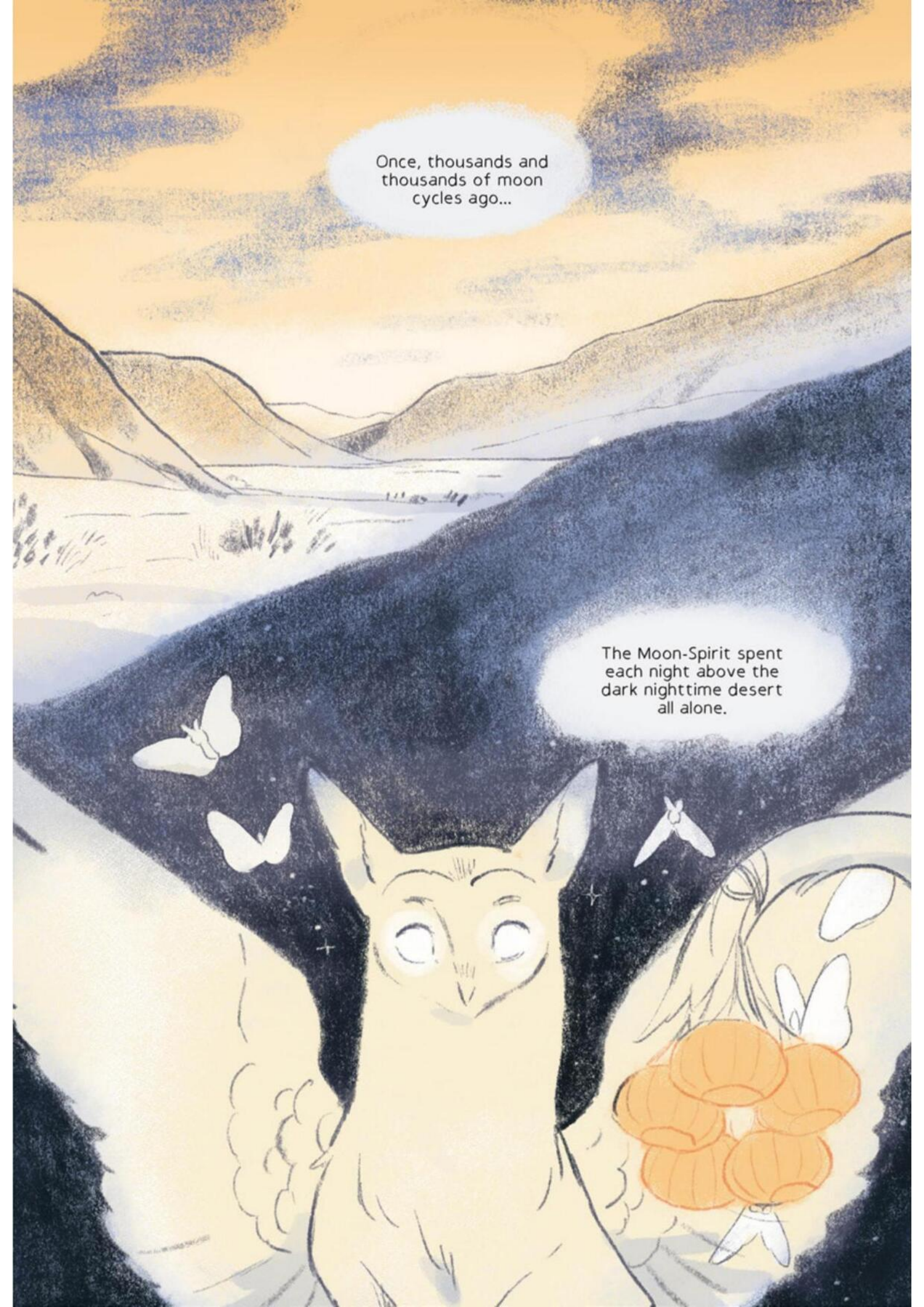
For Alex





# Chapter One






Once, thousands and  
thousands of moon  
cycles ago...

The Moon-Spirit spent  
each night above the  
dark nighttime desert  
all alone.










All the creatures lived  
by daylight and slept by  
night, sheltering from the  
dark and cold.

Which was why no  
one had ever noticed  
the beautiful blanket  
of stars that the  
Moon-Spirit laid out  
every night.






Then one night, a young quail lost track of time, and hurried home to the village, long after the sun had set.


The sigh of an eerie night-wind reached his ears, along with the sound of raindrops. Surprised, he looked up at the sky.

The Moon-Spirit was crying.



A character with spiky, light-colored hair and a plaid robe is running towards a building at night. The building has a thatched roof and a large, glowing orange doorway. The character is looking back over their shoulder.

The sound broke his heart. All the way home, he thought of the Moon-Spirit crying in the darkness.


A group of characters are gathered together in a dark setting. There is a character with long ears, a character with a hood, and a character with a long tail. They are all looking towards the left.

When he told the others what he had witnessed, about the loneliness of the Moon-Spirit...

...together, they chose to forsake the sun, and learn to live beneath the moon and stars.







The illustration depicts a vast desert landscape at night. In the background, a range of dark, jagged mountains is silhouetted against a deep blue sky filled with stars. A thin, horizontal line of light, possibly a path or a ridge, stretches across the middle ground, where a group of small, dark figures stands. In the foreground, two characters are shown from the chest up. On the left is a cat-like creature with orange fur and a striped scarf, looking towards the right. On the right is a woman with long, flowing blonde hair, wearing a brown tunic and a large hoop earring, looking upwards with her eyes closed in a peaceful expression. A glowing orange lantern hangs from a pole on the far right. A large, white, oval-shaped speech bubble is positioned in the center of the image, containing text.

They soon discovered  
that the desert at  
night was very cool and  
peaceful, with a quiet  
splendor of its own.









To thank the villagers for their kindness in joining her at night, the Moon-Spirit offered a special gift—her enchanted Moon-Moths.



She taught the villagers how to care for the Moths so that they would pollinate a special tree called the Night-Flower once a year.

From this tree they would receive gifts and blessings to make their life by night easier.

In time, other folks who were enchanted by the stories of life beneath the stars came from across the land to join the nocturnal community.





From that night on,  
the folks of the desert  
were entrusted with  
the care and protection  
of the Moon-Moths.

























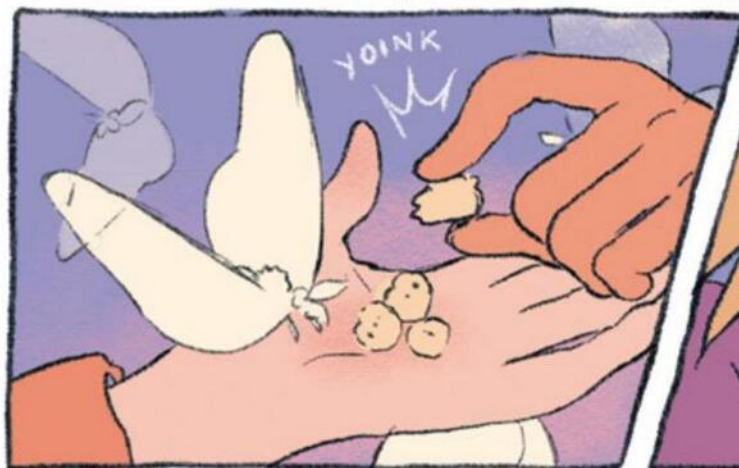












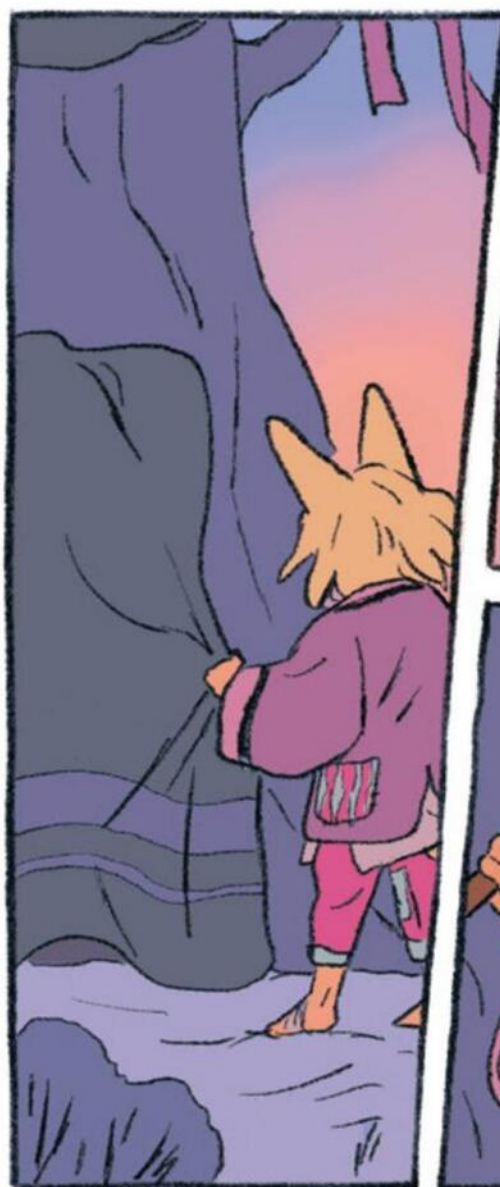
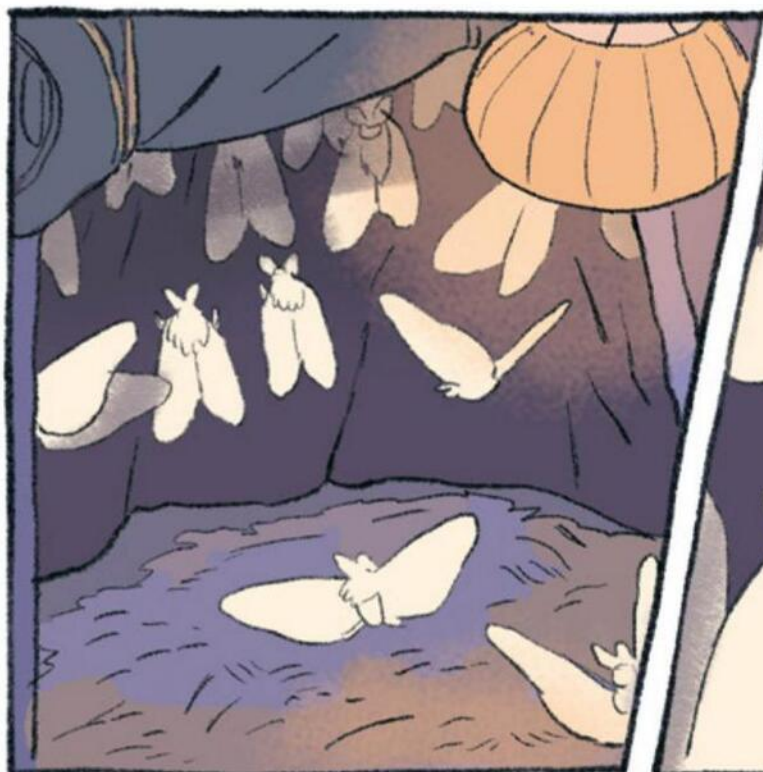








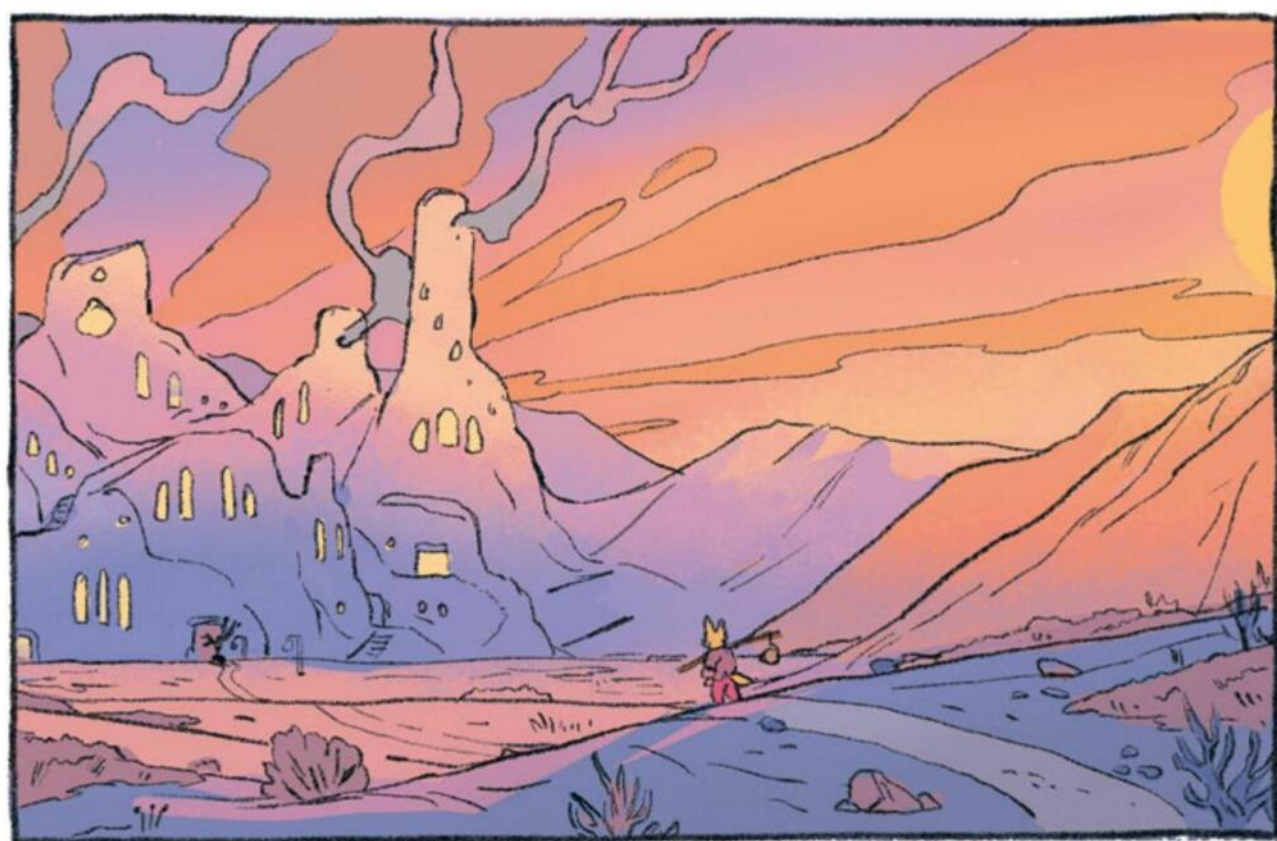














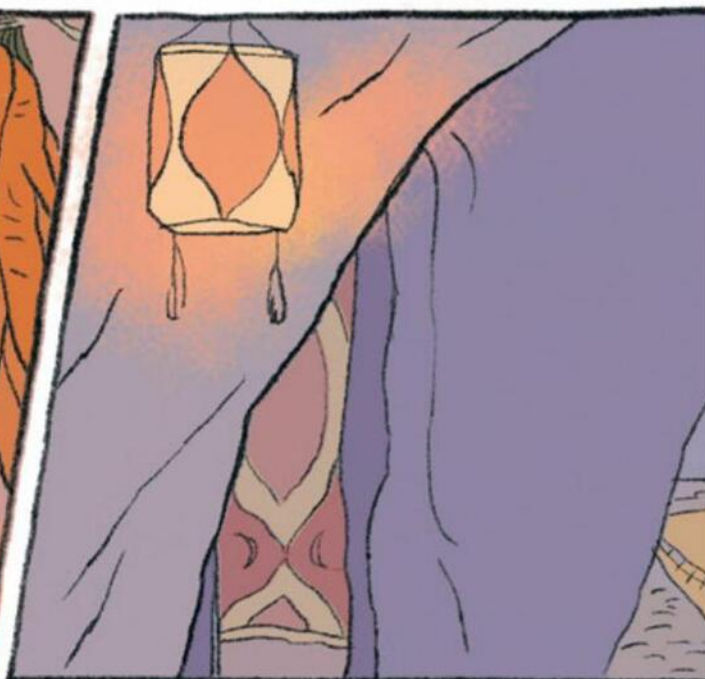


## Chapter Two





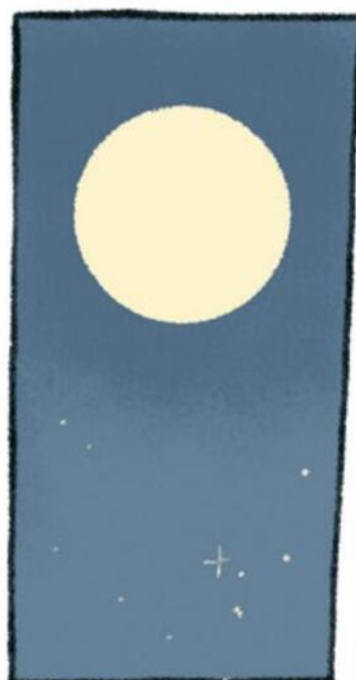








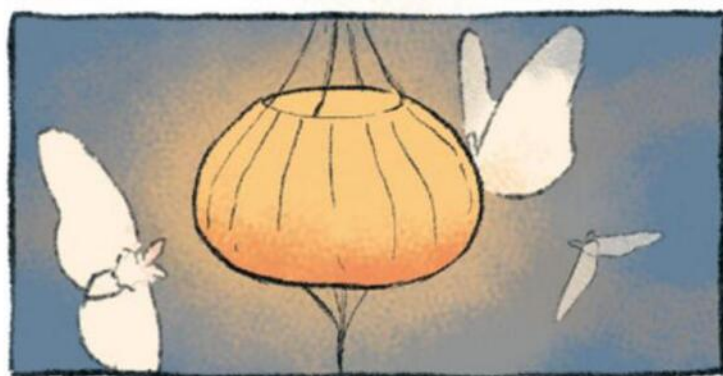
































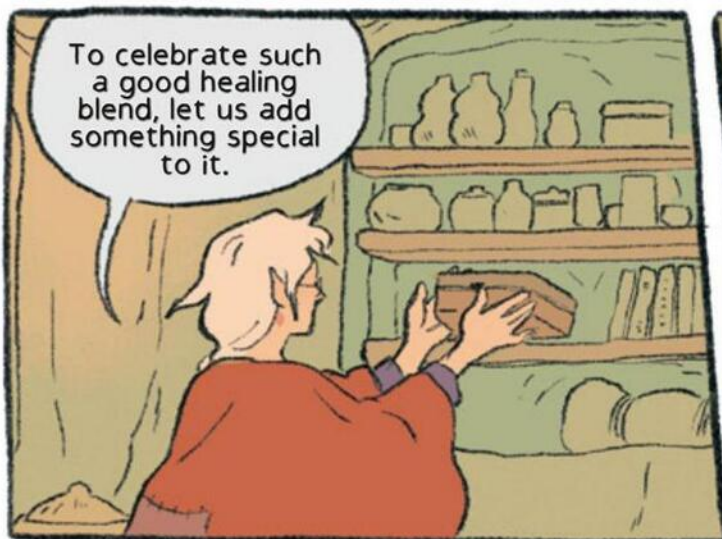












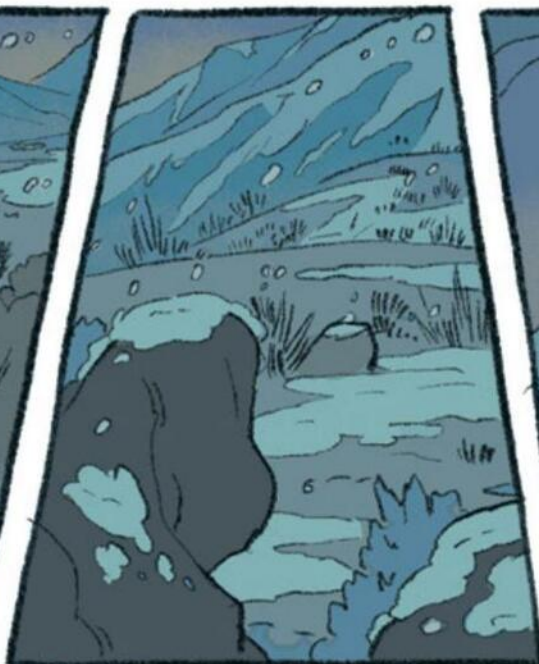








We wait for the  
Night-Flower to  
bloom again.



















Everyone understands what you and Yeolen give up for us.



It's strange to feel so important all of a sudden.

...It's nice.

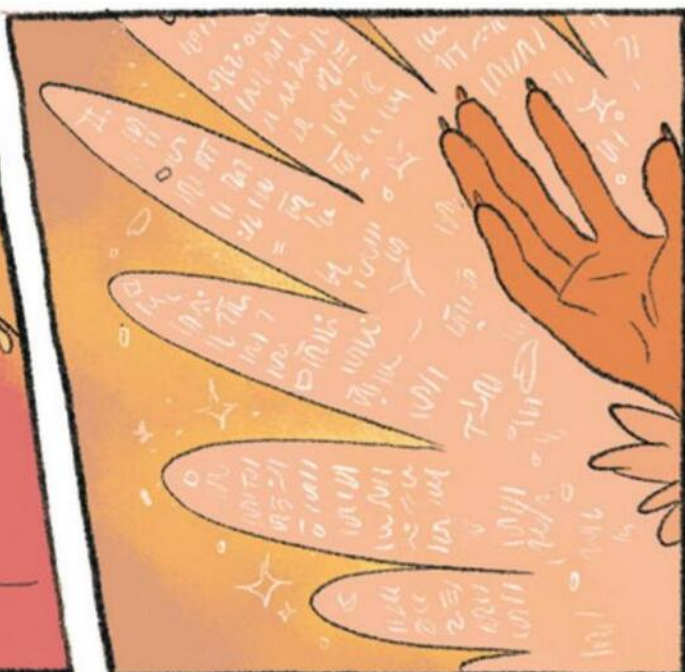


Good evening, one and all. Come and make yourselves comfortable.

Now is a moment to be thankful for the bowls of broth in your hands, here inside where it is warm and light.









It began many  
hundreds of moon  
cycles ago.

A young girl was  
crossing the sands  
as she did every  
night, carrying her  
little brother while  
she gathered  
cactus flesh for  
their supper.

Wrapped  
safely on her  
back, he slept  
soundly as she  
worked.

All was well,  
until she turned  
back for home.







Just at that moment, the moon shone brightly through the clouds—and a huge golden moon it was.

The girl stopped short, suddenly breathless.

The basket she had been carrying slipped and fell to the ground.

She ceased to feel her little brother's weight against her back.





She became  
utterly  
entranced by  
the beauty  
of the moon  
before her.





From that night onward, it was as if her spirit had flown across the vast sky and tied itself to the moon...

...leaving only her body grounded on the earth.



Each night, she felt herself grow small and withdrawn as the moon waned...

...and when it grew full again, her heart became so full she felt it might burst.





Many nights  
passed in  
this way.

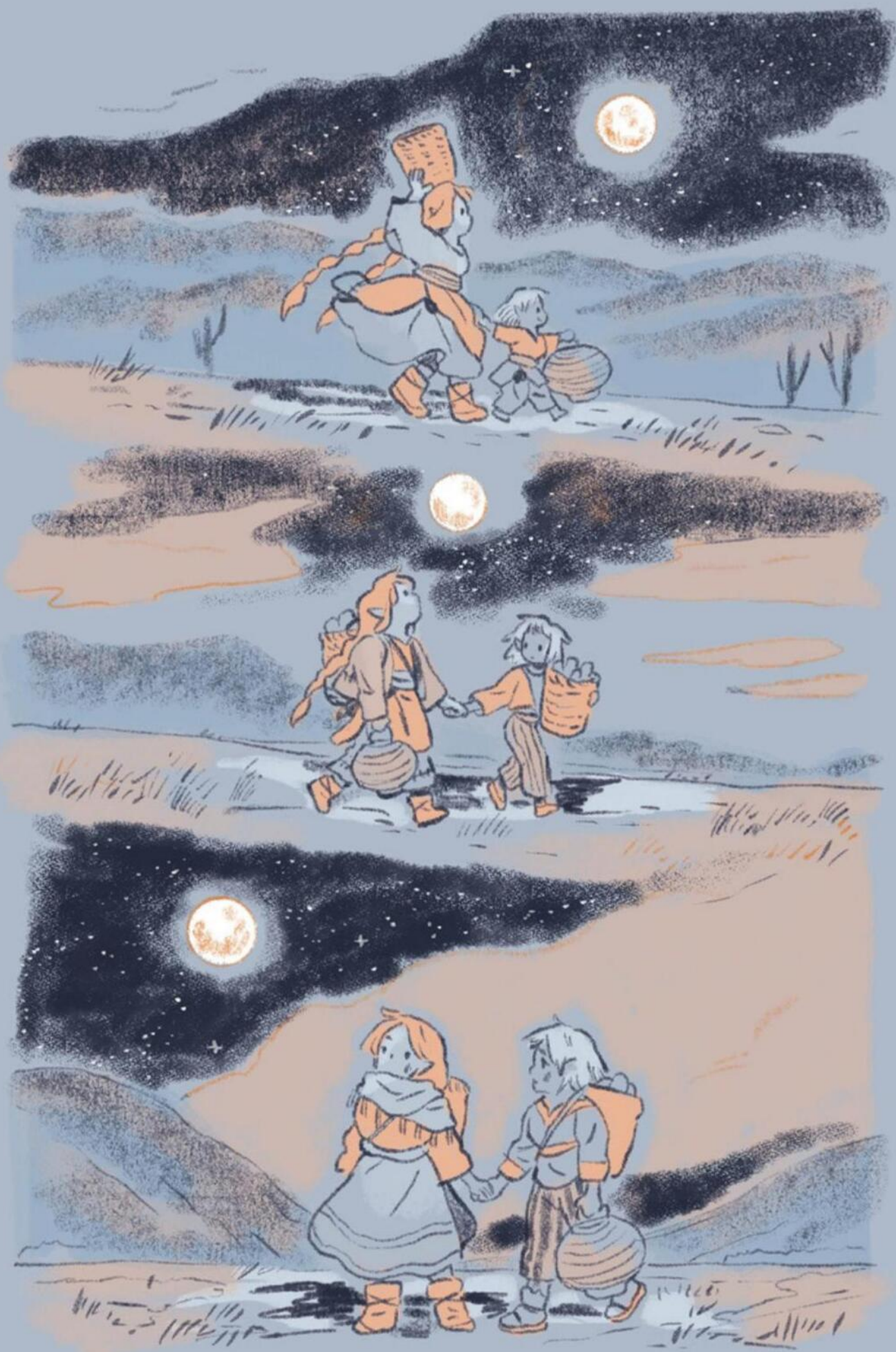
Even at the moon's  
peak, she was filled  
with an indescribable  
sadness, knowing it  
could only last a night  
before it would begin  
to shrink again.



Her soul  
was trapped  
breathing in  
and out with  
the moon.

She thought  
of nothing  
but the  
moon.














She began to  
fade into a  
half-existence,  
trapped on  
earth forever by  
her obsession.

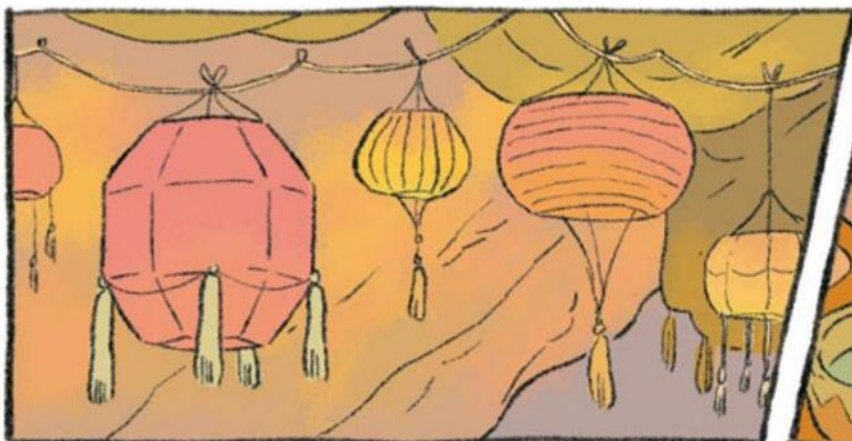
To this day, she  
wanders. I have  
heard that her  
form is most  
clear during the  
full moon.



So you'd best be  
careful little  
creatures, or she  
may draw you  
under the spell of  
the moon, too!







What stories shall be told about you, young Moth Keeper?



Good ones, I hope.



You hope?



I—I know I haven't felt the hardest nights yet...  
...but I understand what the Moths mean to everyone.



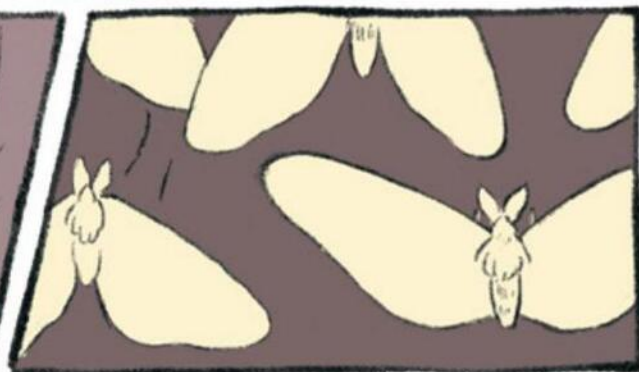






## Chapter Three









To be honest, Anya,  
it's been tough to  
find someone willing  
to take on the Moth  
Keeper job.

I can well  
understand—most  
folks can't imagine  
spending so long  
away from their  
loved ones.

Since my mentor  
passed, it's only been  
me. And before me,  
it was only her.





Could you tell me more about her?

Hm? About Yura?



Yes...she helped me once. I was too shy to speak to her again afterward...then it was too late.



Hm...

Well, she was very wise, and very patient. Took her time to trust me an inch with the Moths.

See, at your age, I was a bit of a ruffian.



Yeah, as a kid I was always on edge, mistrustful.

Pushed others away before they got a chance to do the same.



I didn't want to be a part of the village.

I couldn't understand why everyone didn't just fend for themselves.









Gradually,  
the other  
villagers saw  
that I was  
helping in my  
own way.



So now,  
Anya, what  
about you?



What drew  
you to a role  
so few are  
willing to  
choose?



I knew...that  
it would be  
hard at times.



But I thought  
doing this job—so  
important to our  
village—would keep  
me warm inside  
even on long, cold  
nights.

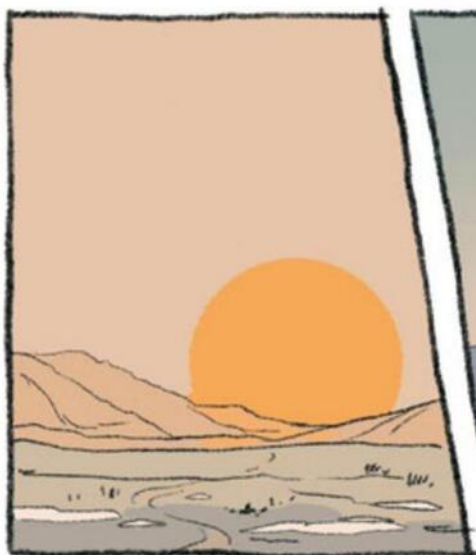




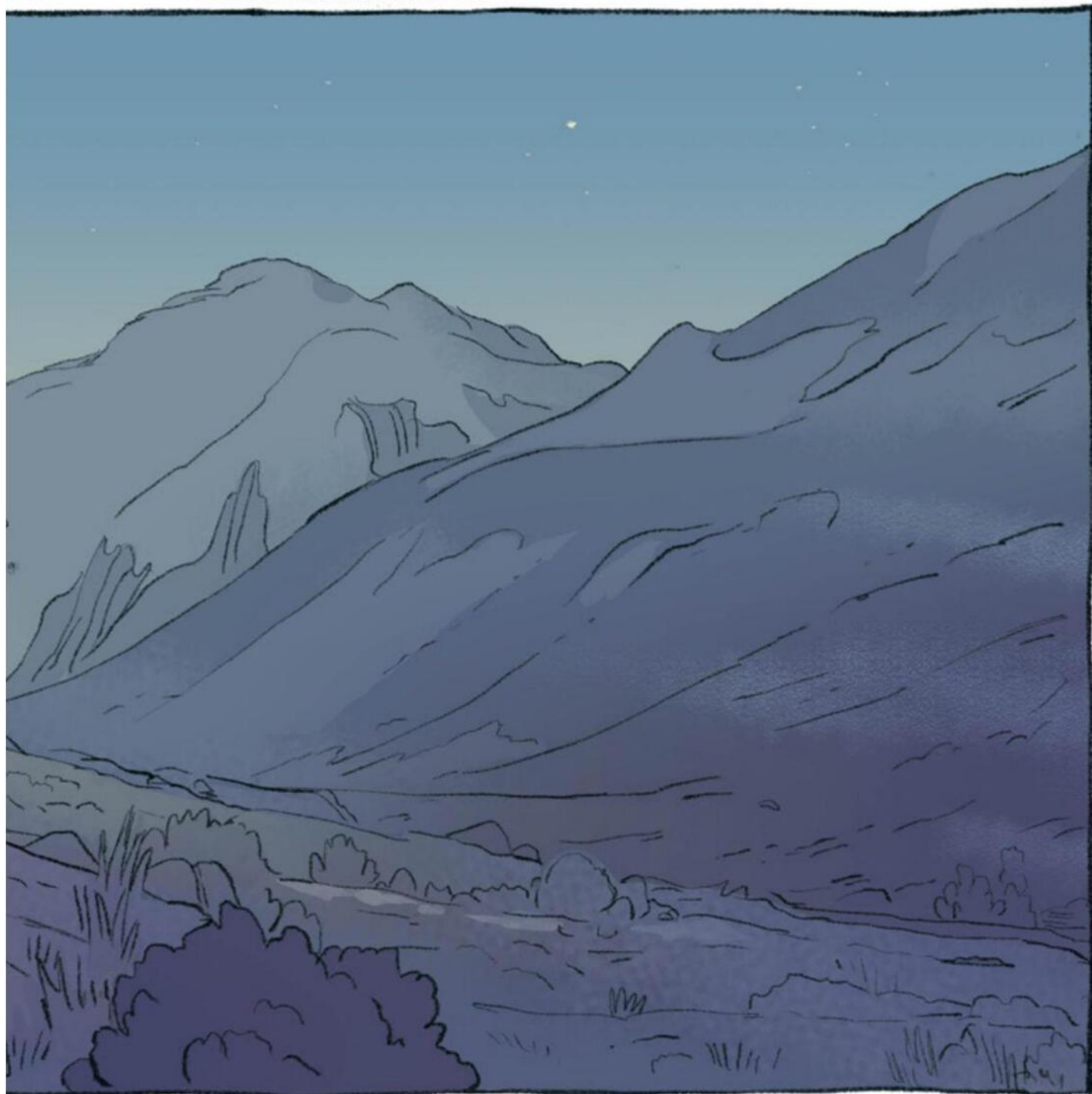




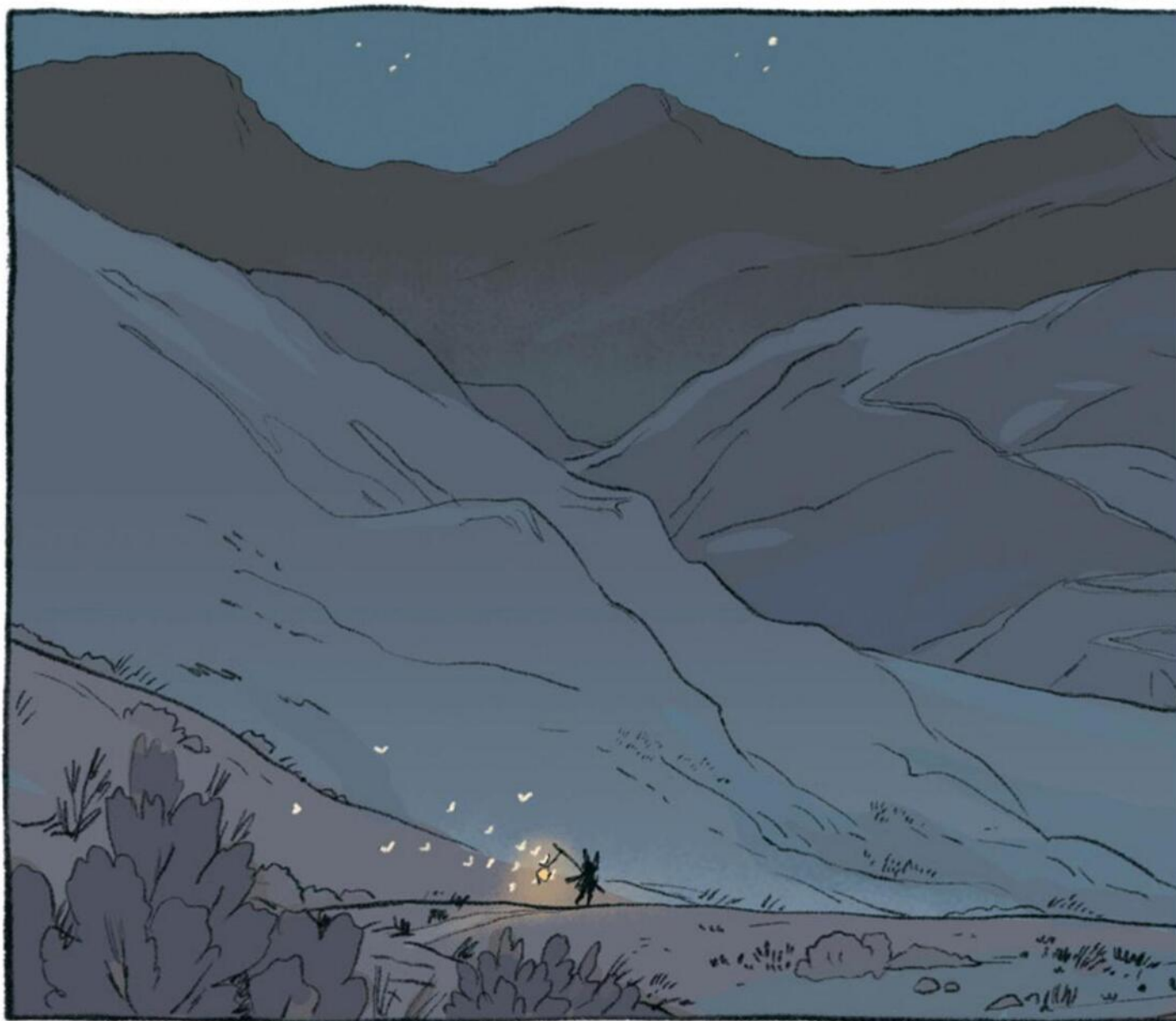
























Tonight I learned how to make these.

Herb snacks for energy! You're already out by yourself so often.



Thank you, Estell. I feel all right, though.

The Moths are good company. They remind me why I'm out there.



I've been learning about how the Night-Flower pollen spreads.

It's amazing!



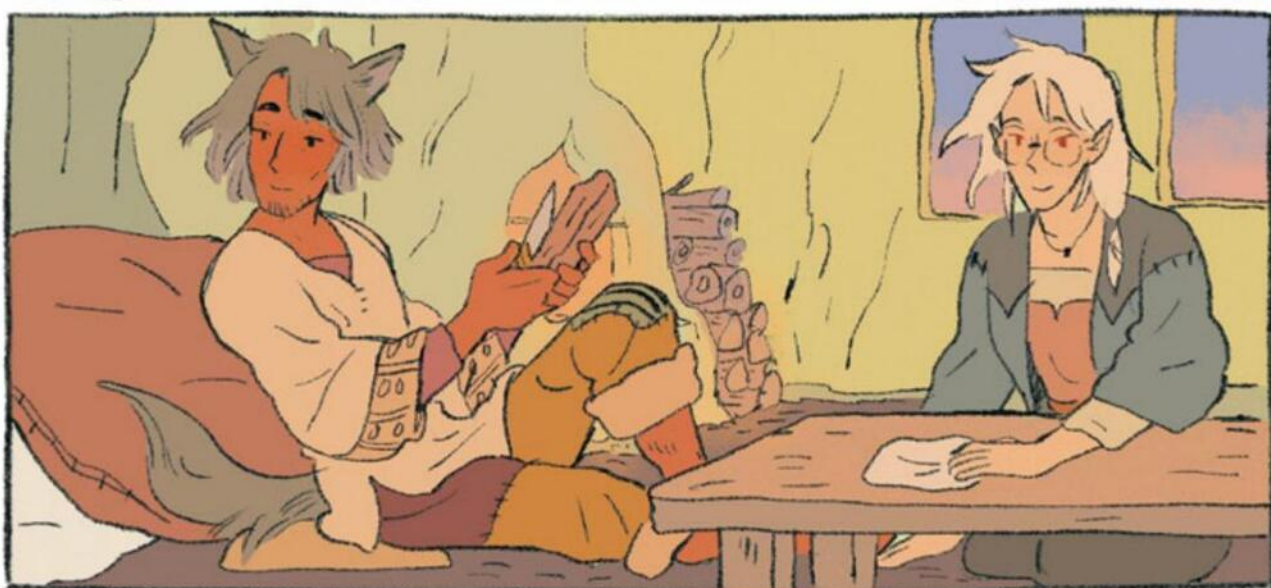








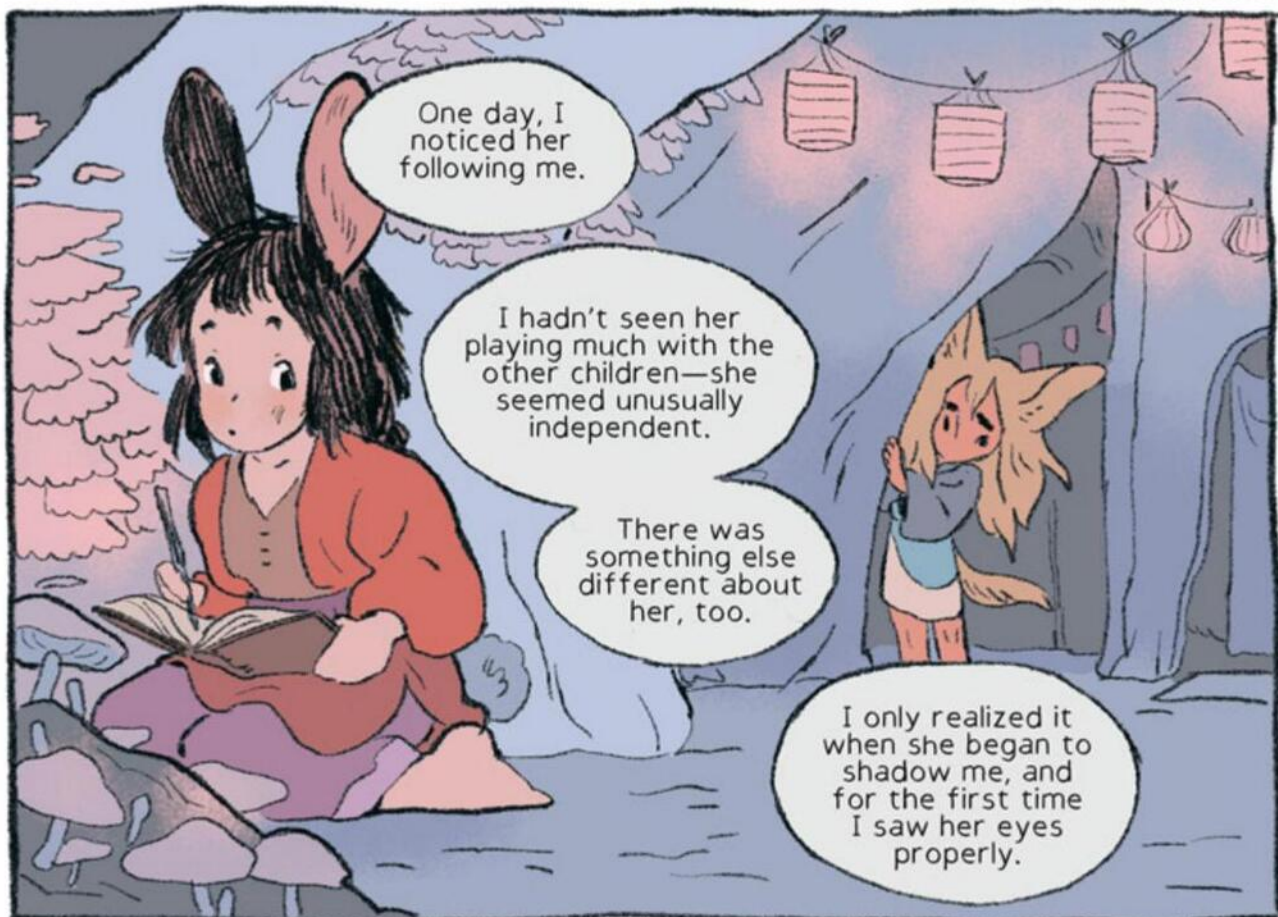
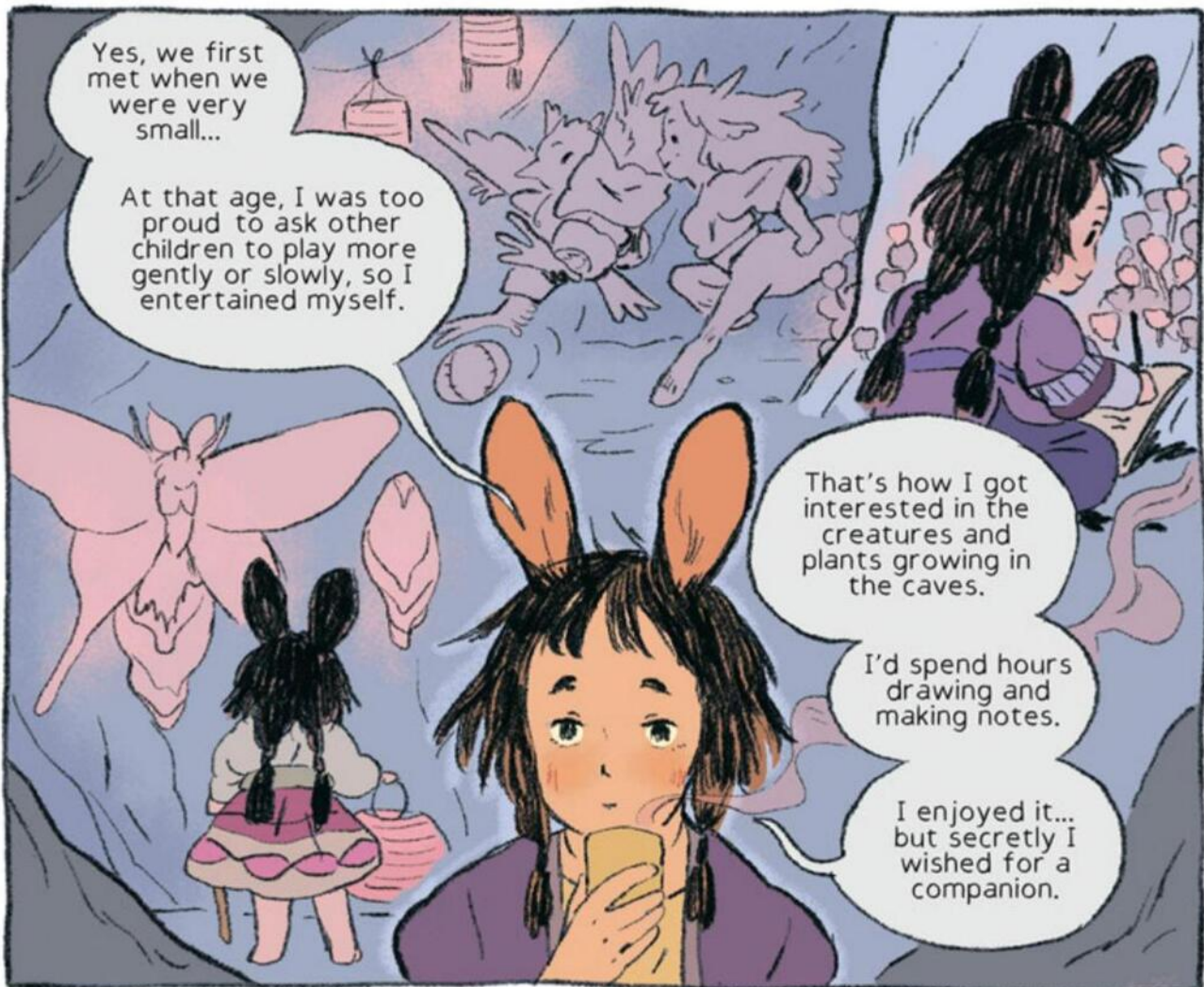




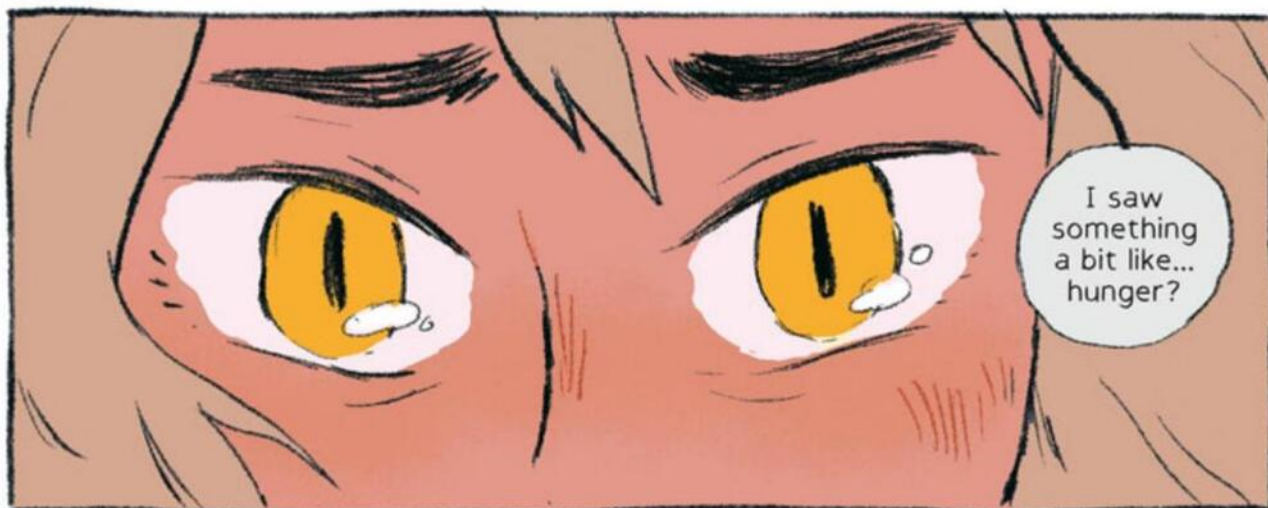












I saw something a bit like... hunger?



I could tell she wanted to join me but didn't know how, or was scared of being a burden.



So I made it seem like she could help me more than I really needed, to make it easier.



I don't know if that was right, but I was young. Anyway, it worked, and she became more comfortable around me.

I sensed that she was a good person who was aching to be praised by someone.





























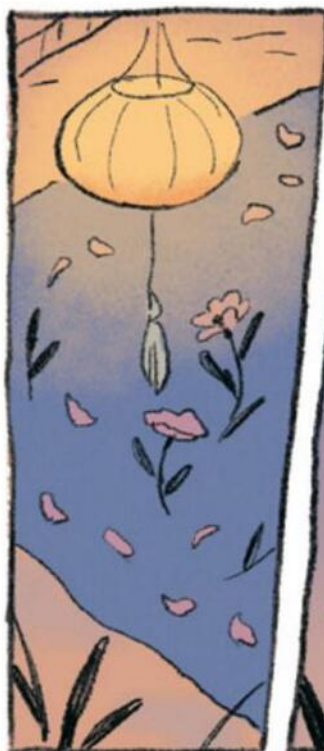




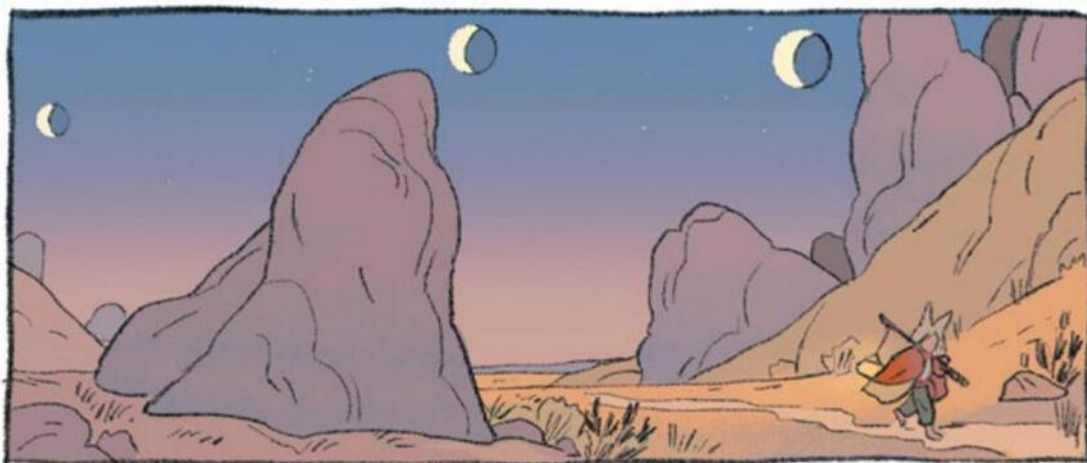
























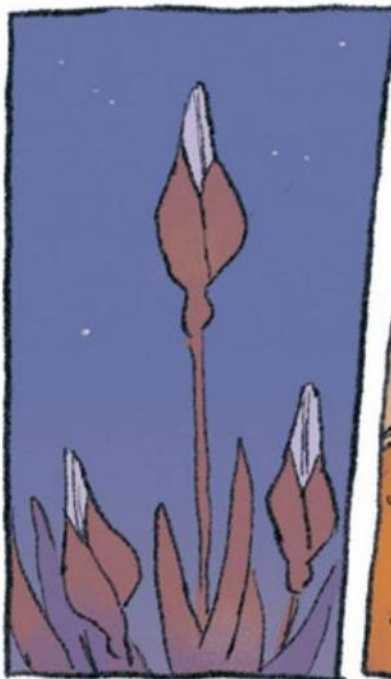




My, aren't  
you busybodies  
today!



This should  
keep you  
happy.

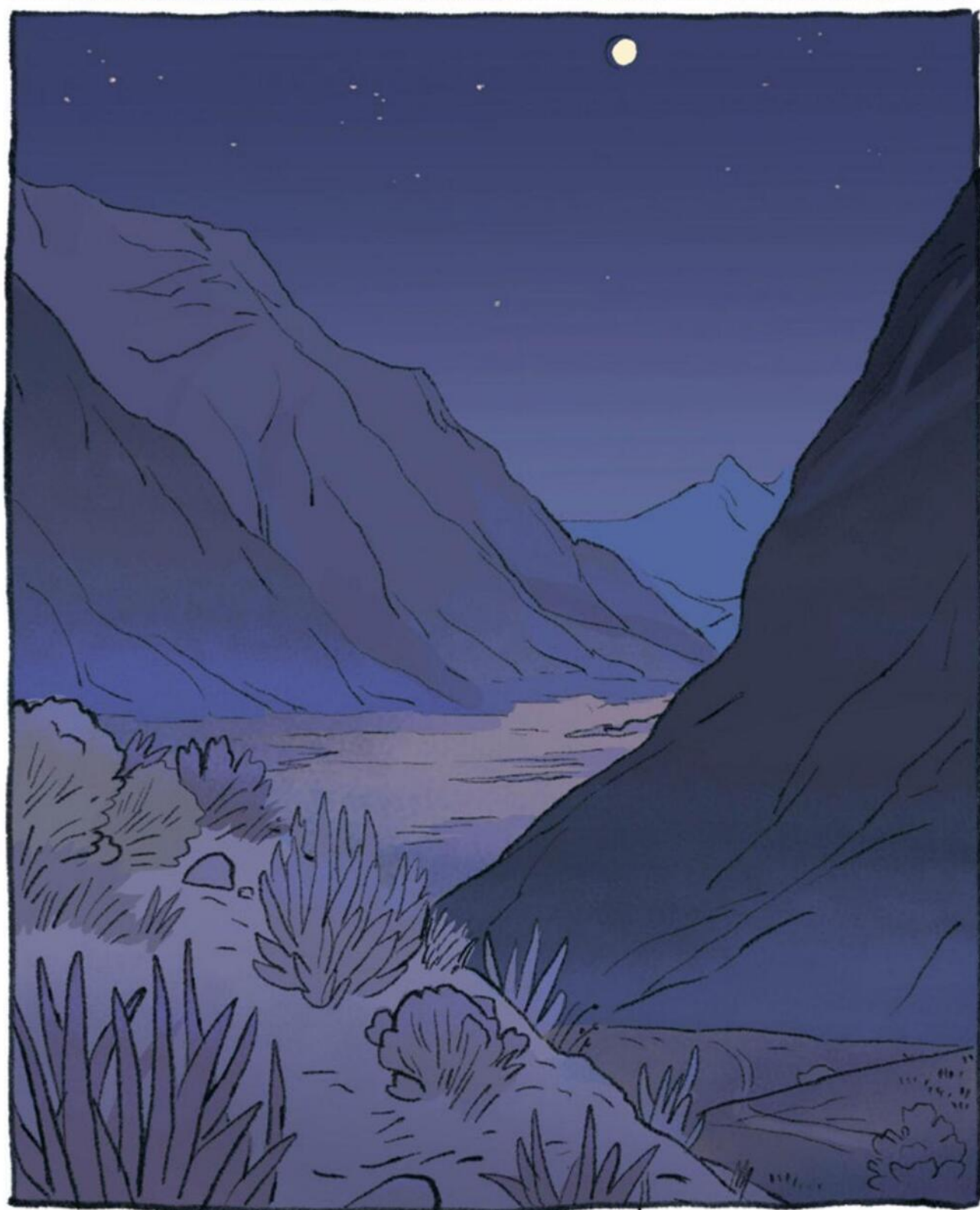


Another flower  
that I'll never  
see in full  
bloom...

















If you look  
through the eyes  
of the stars, I'm  
really nothing  
more than a Moth  
myself...





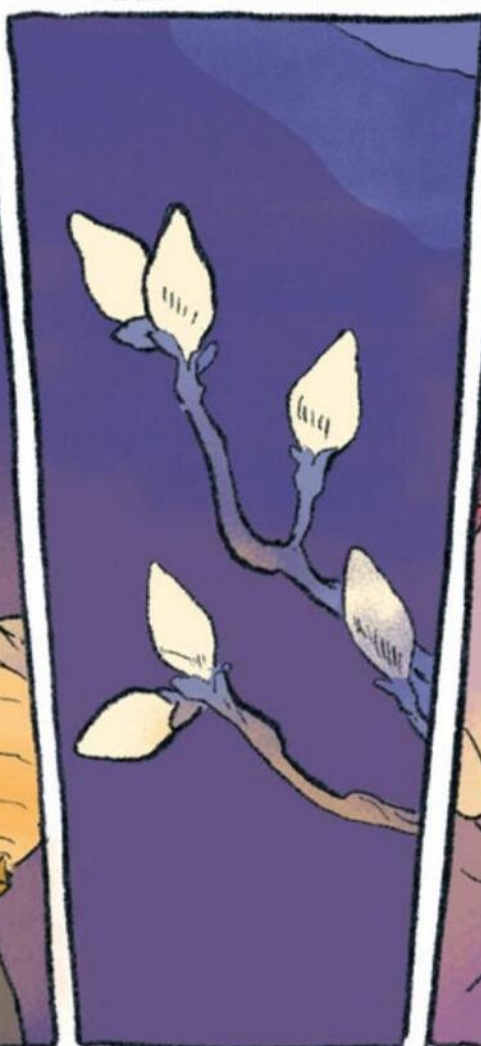






## Chapter Four





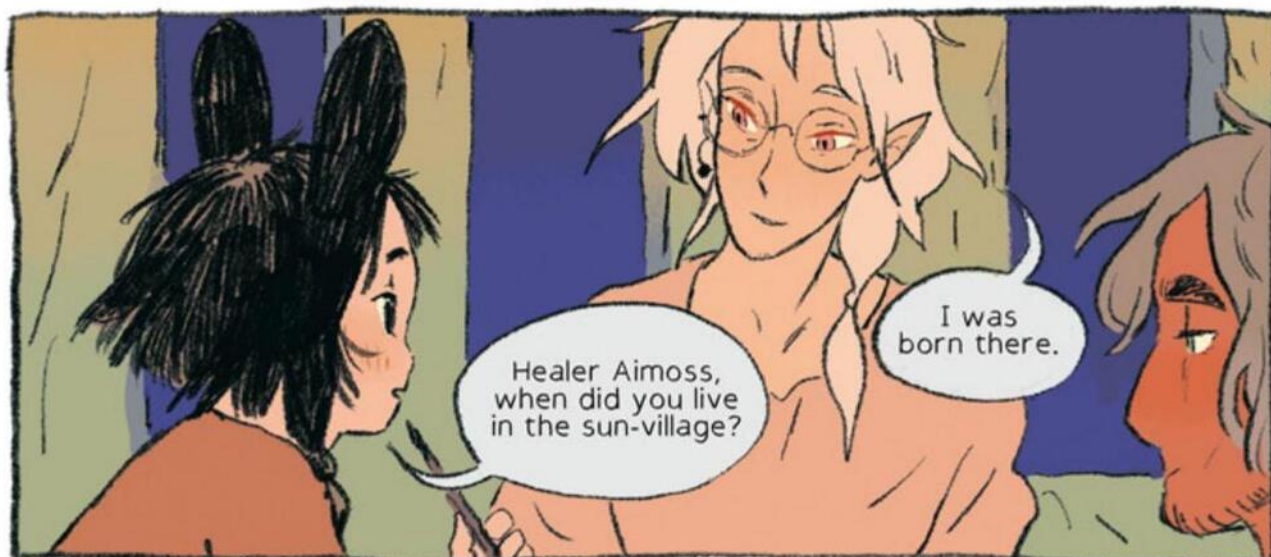












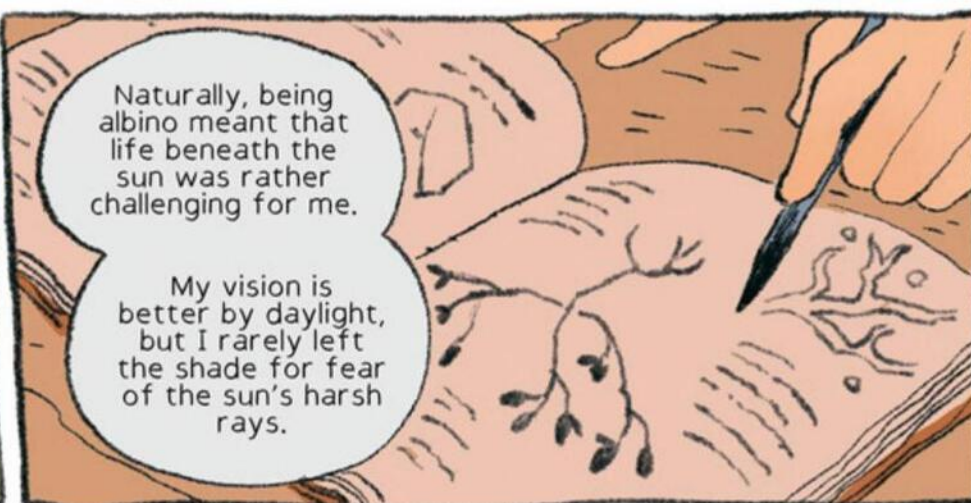
Healer Aimoss,  
when did you live  
in the sun-village?

I was  
born there.



Naturally, being  
albino meant that  
life beneath the  
sun was rather  
challenging for me.

My vision is  
better by daylight,  
but I rarely left  
the shade for fear  
of the sun's harsh  
rays.



Rather than  
a life spent  
chasing refuge  
in the shade, my  
parents decided  
to bring me to the  
night-village.




I haven't  
seen them  
in a while.




Do you  
remember what  
life was like in  
the sun-village?






It was truly the opposite to all of our rhythms and ways of life.

Noisy and bright, and the things we work so hard to produce were simply abundant—insects, plants.




It was different in another way, too...




There, it felt as though each person played their own instrument to their own tune, occasionally harmonizing with others by chance.

When I came here, I quickly saw that we all play as one in order to get by.



Some of us night folks play solo, too.



True, we need a few soloists as well.

You and Anya must be cut from the same cloth.

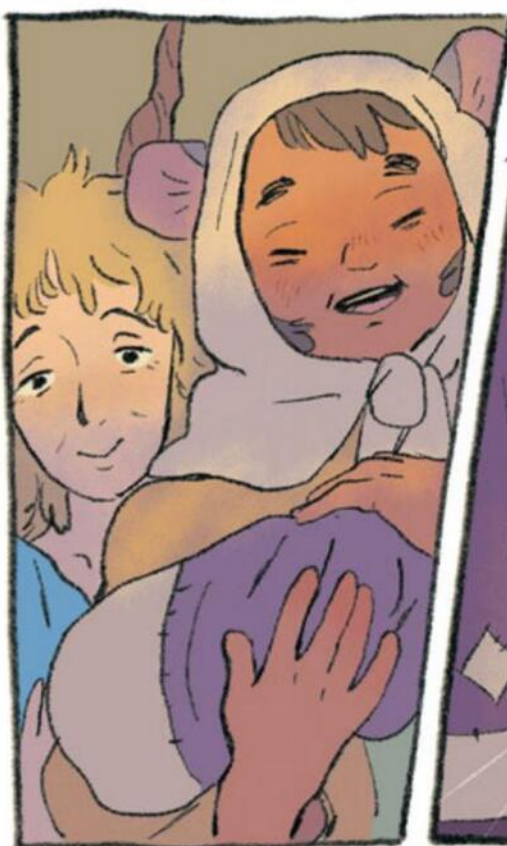
























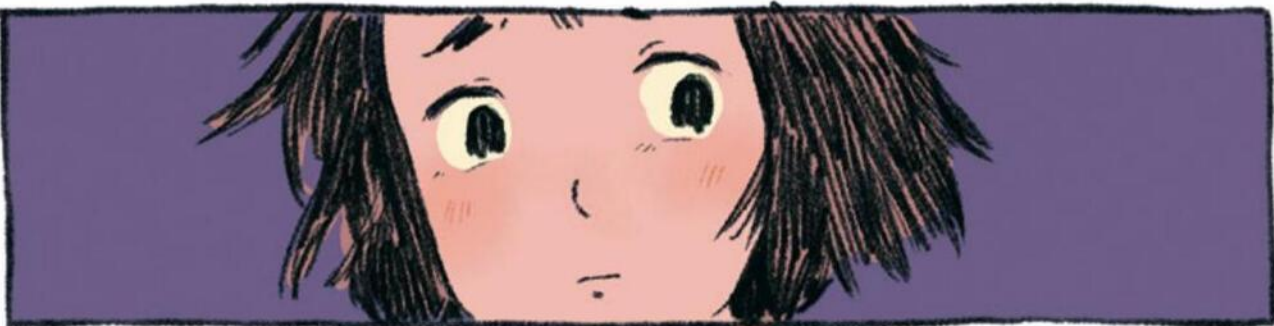




















Estell...?

I'm sorry to disturb you at home.

Is Keeper Yeolen here?





What is it,  
Estell?



I think...Anya  
is getting  
worn out.

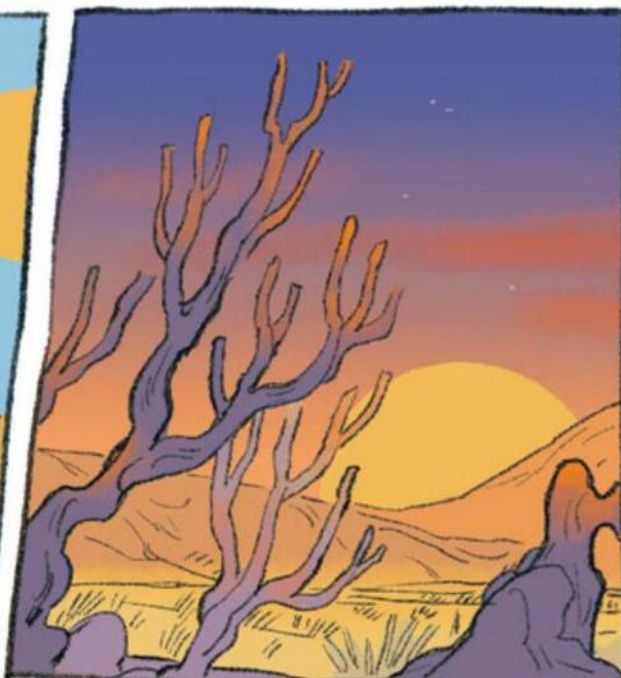
It might...it might  
be good for her  
to stay in the  
village for a night  
or two.



I see.

Of course,  
I'll take over  
for a while.

Thanks for  
keeping an  
eye out,  
Estell.



















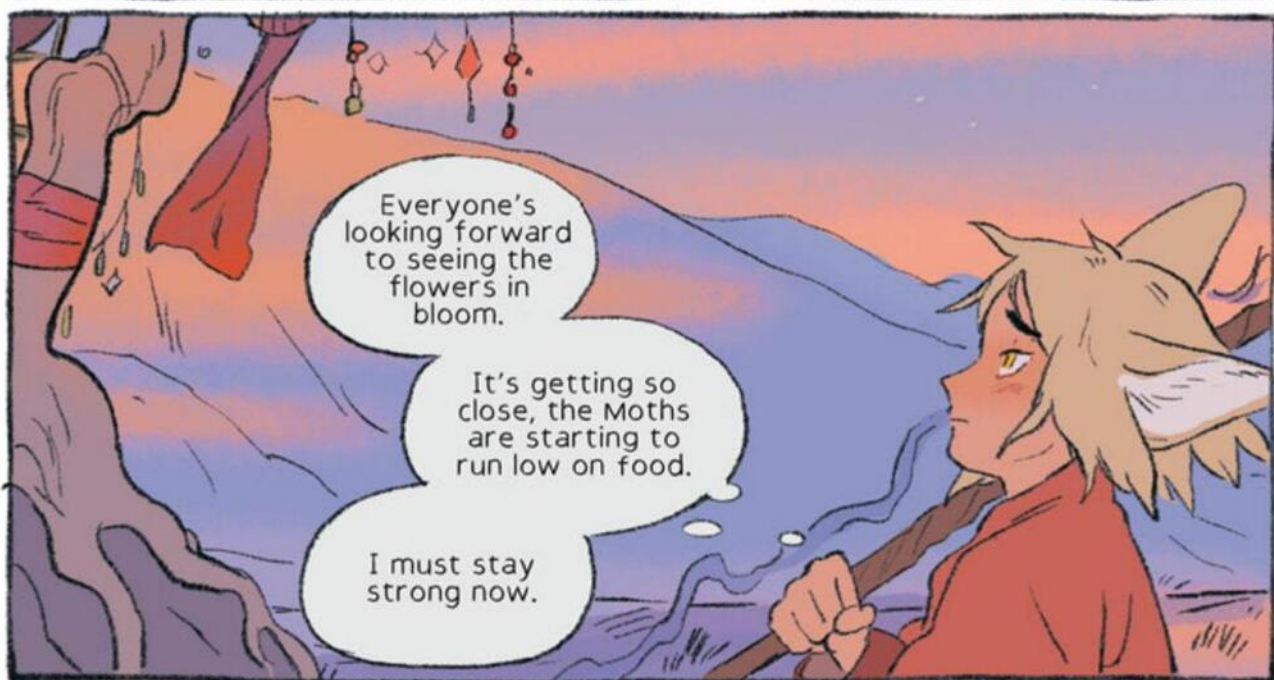








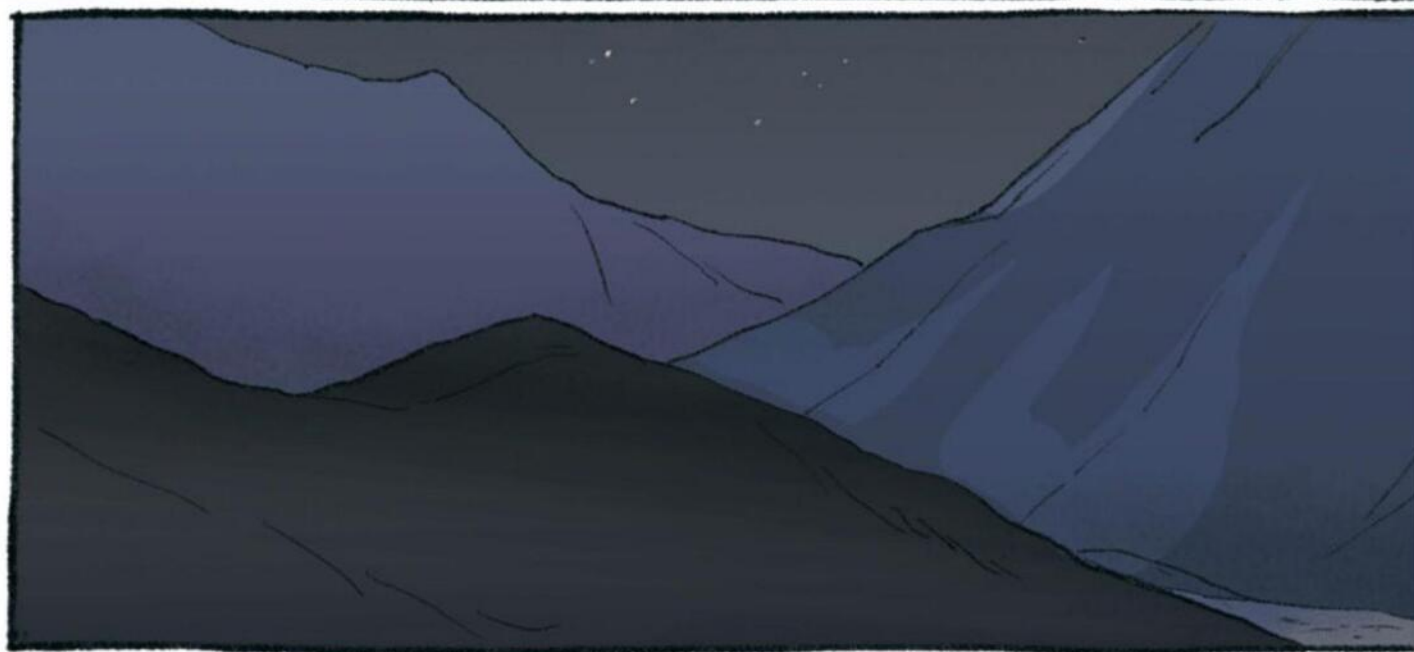












Why does the  
darkness scare  
me if it's all I've  
ever known?

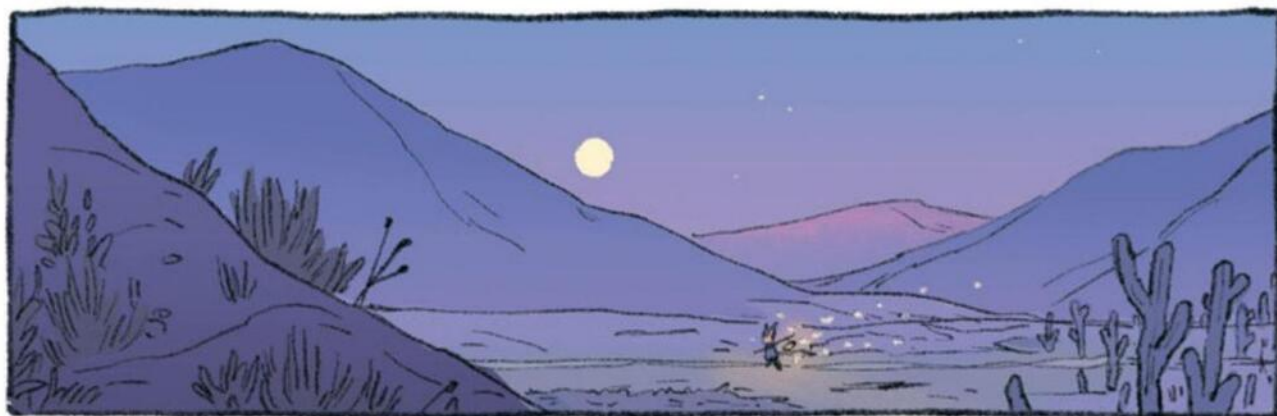
























## Chapter Five

















Anya, let go  
of my scarf,  
please.





I can't see the  
lights of the  
village, Mama...

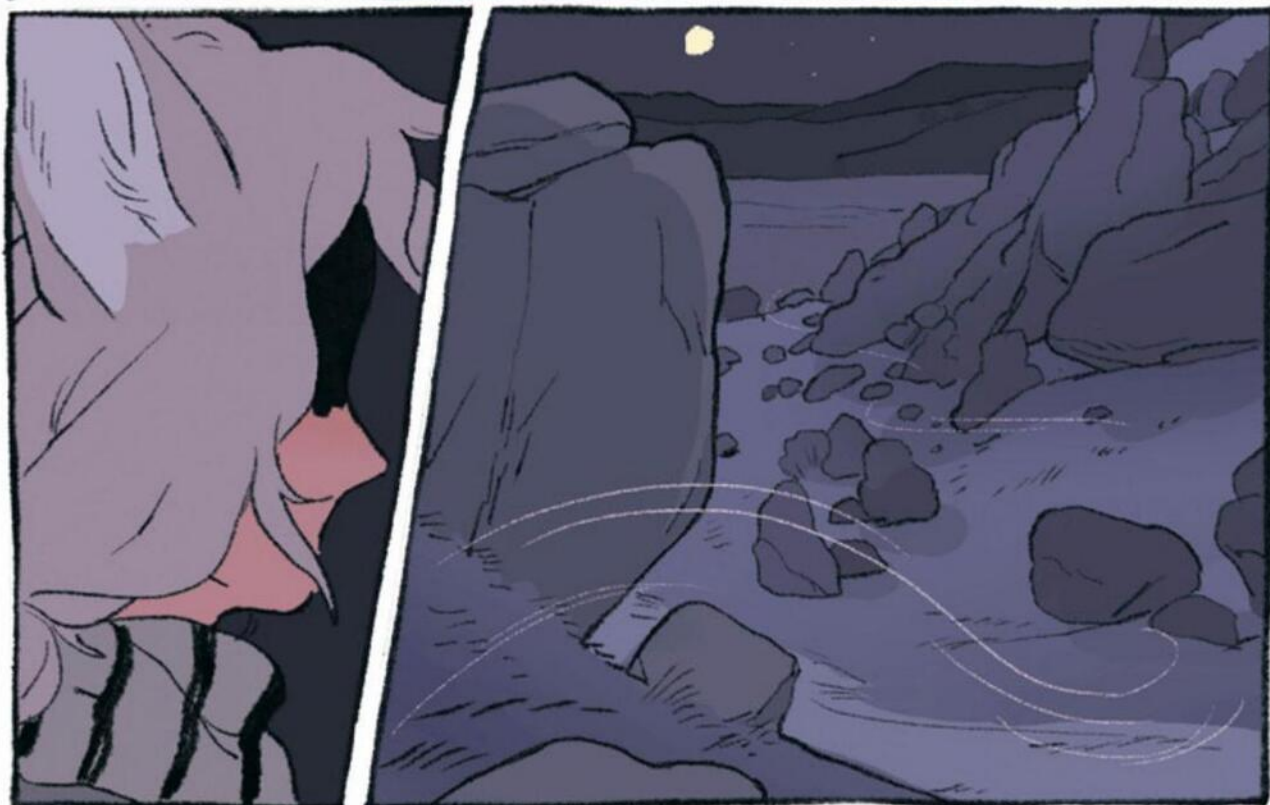












































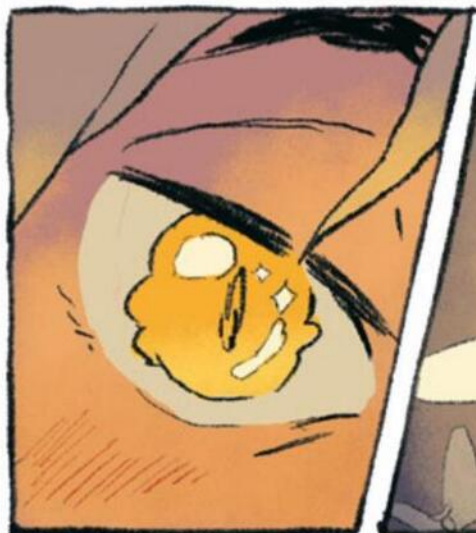












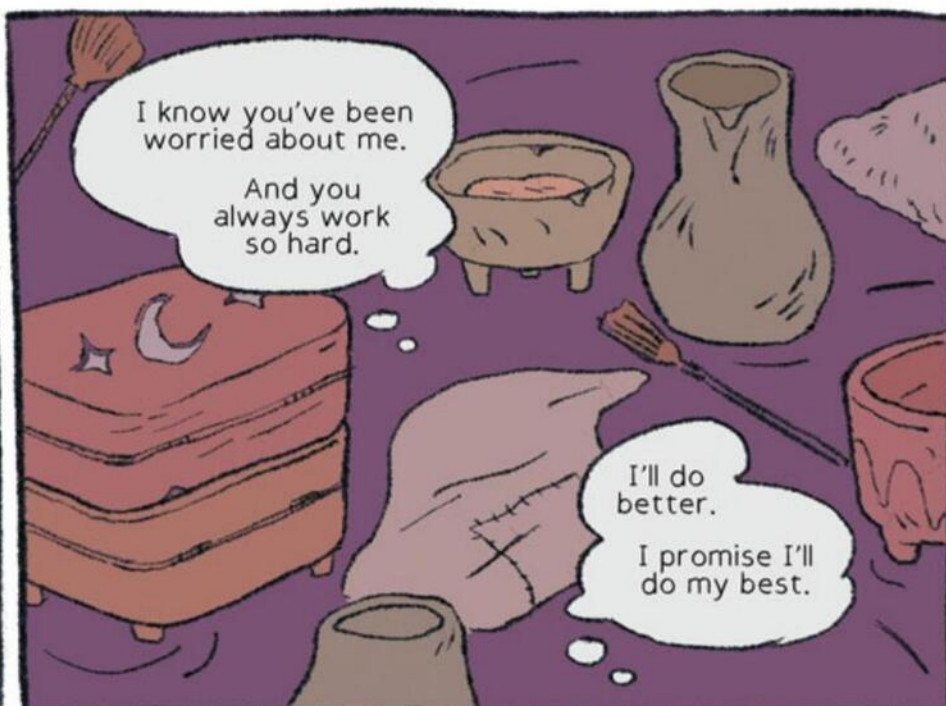




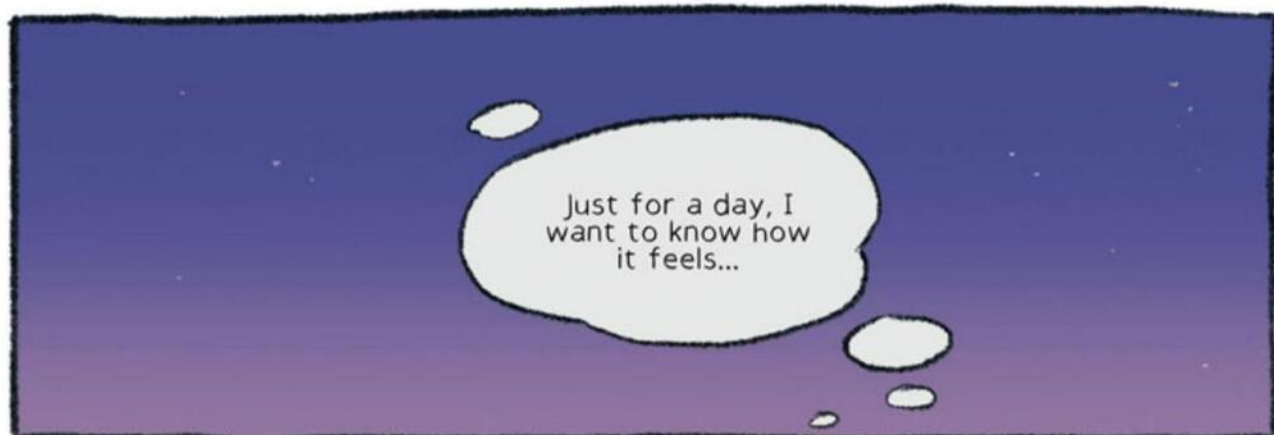








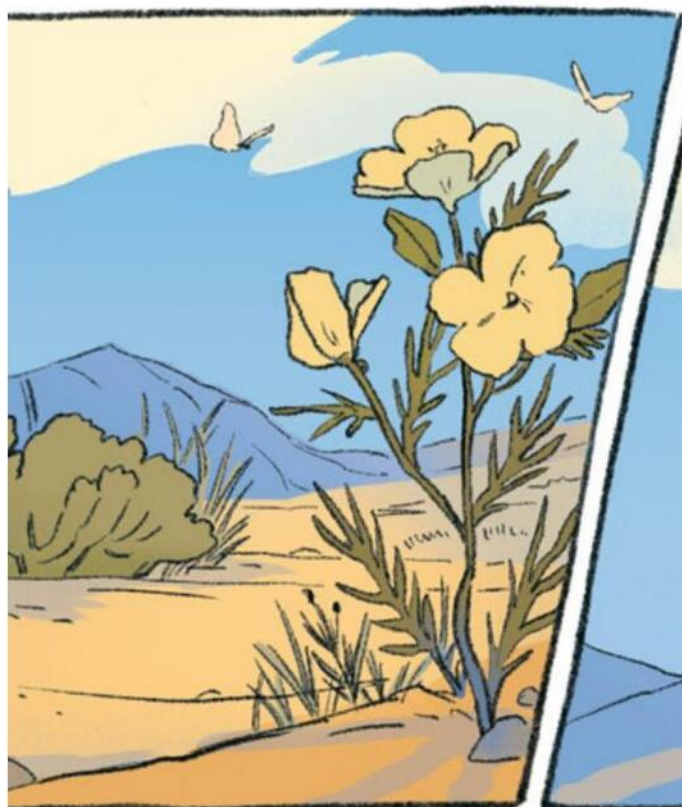




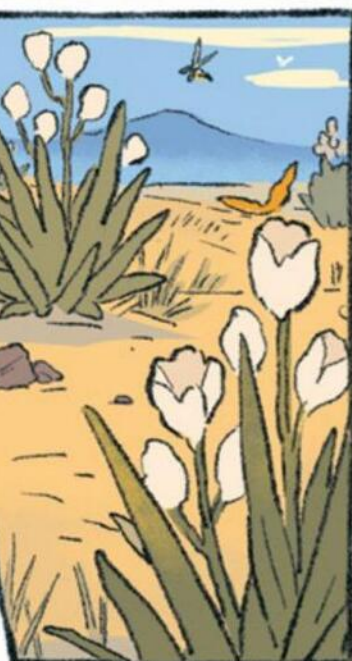
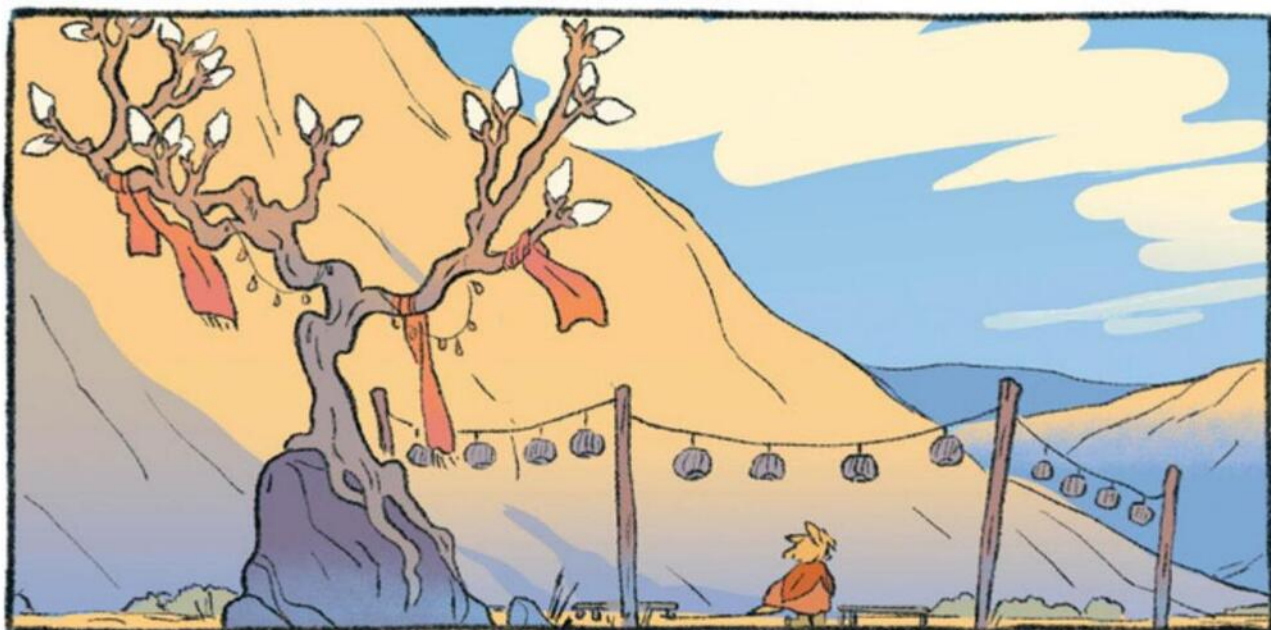




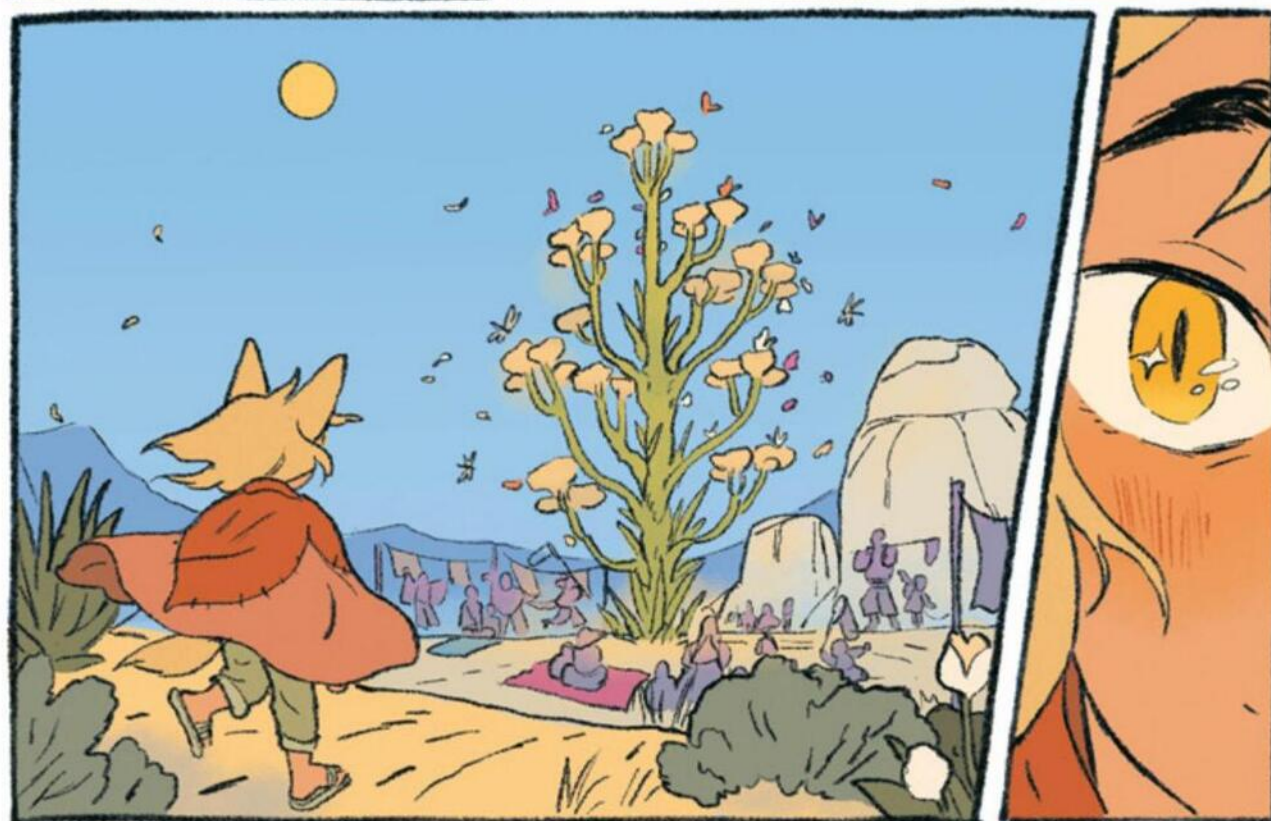








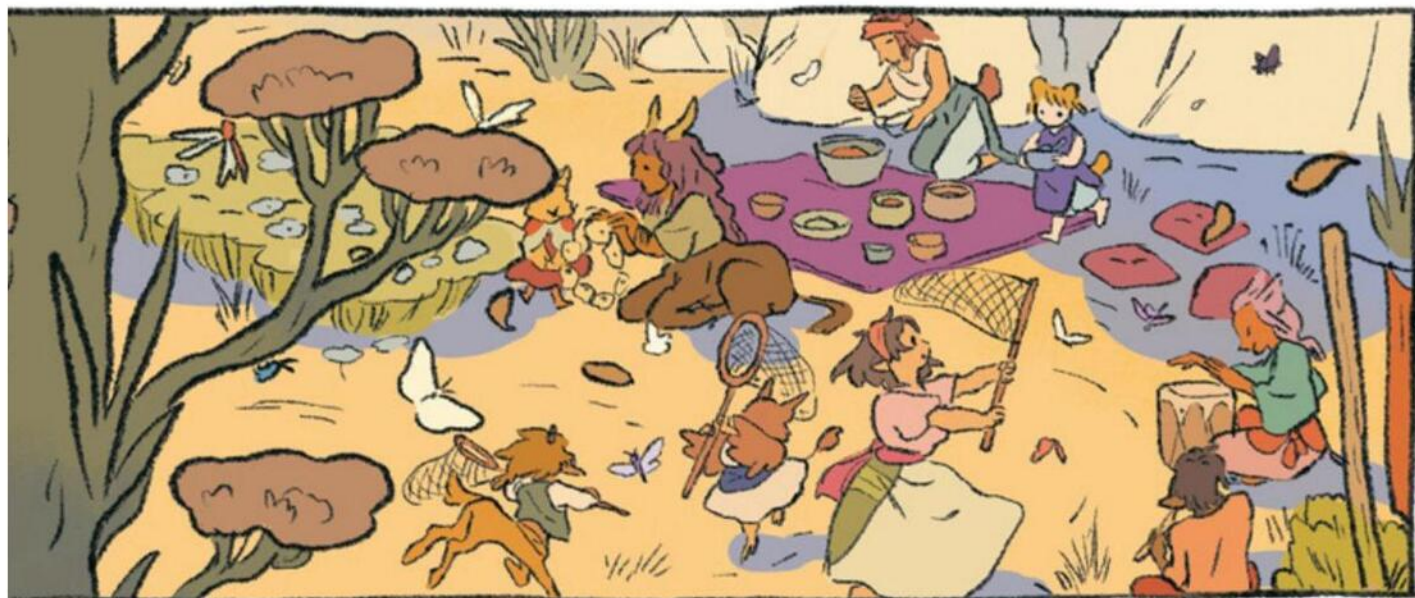




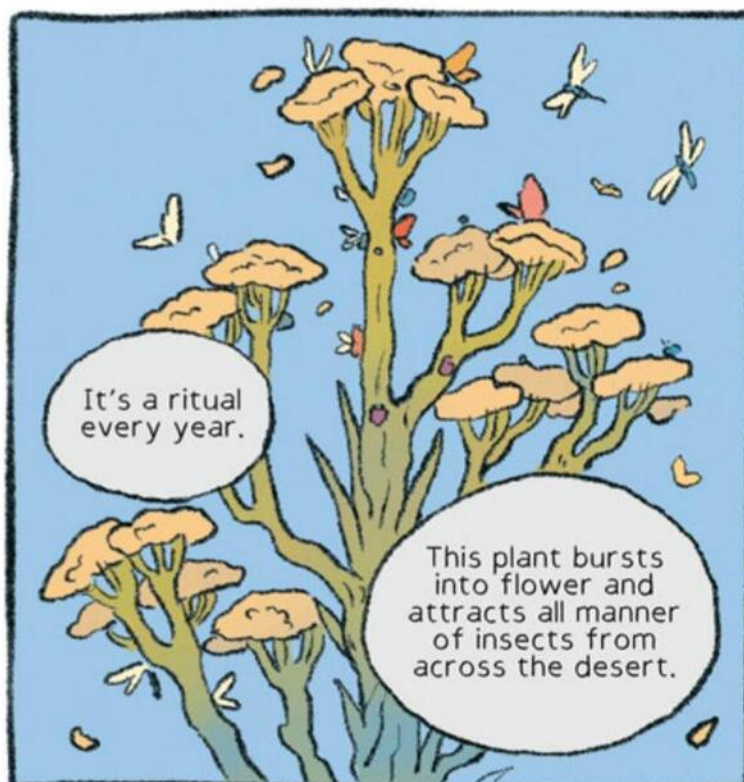




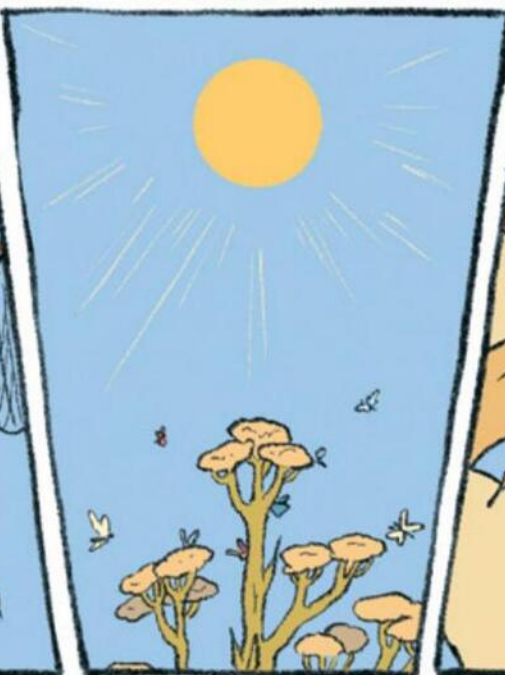
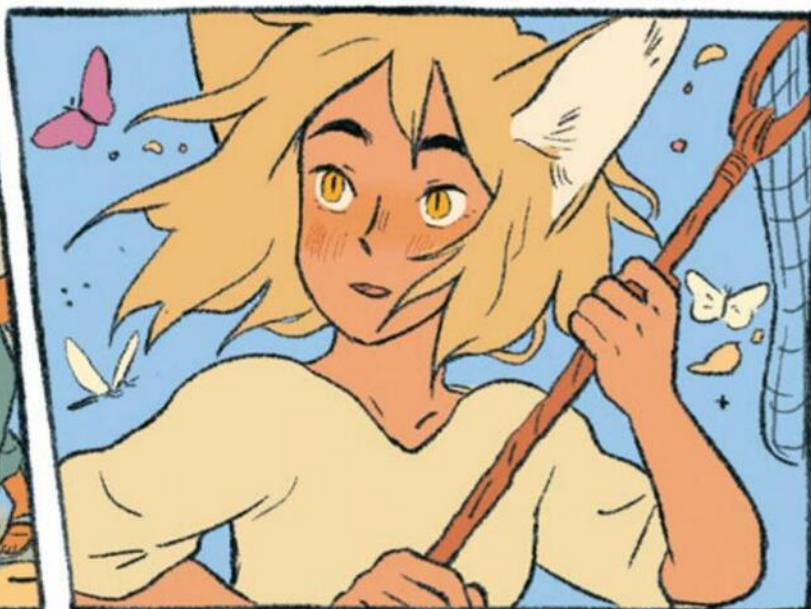




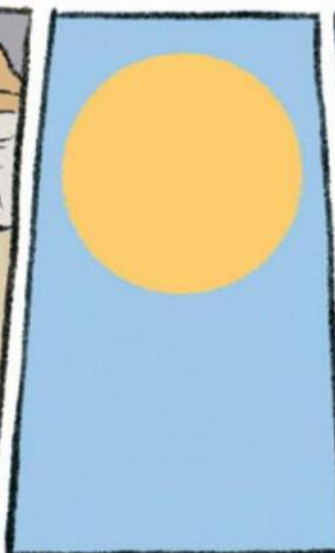




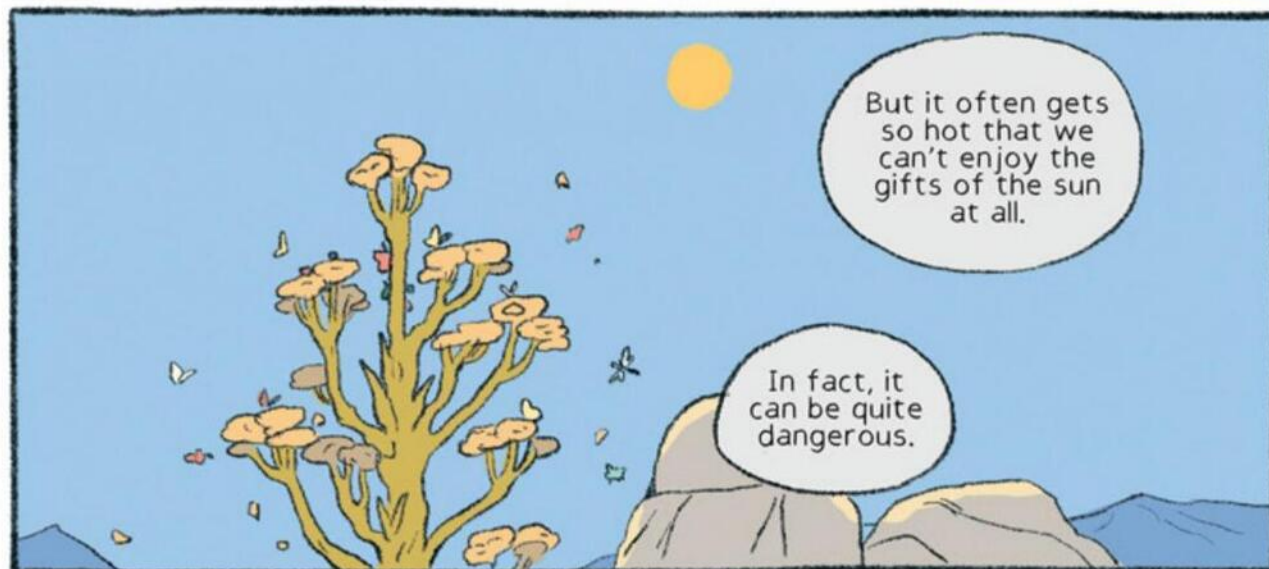
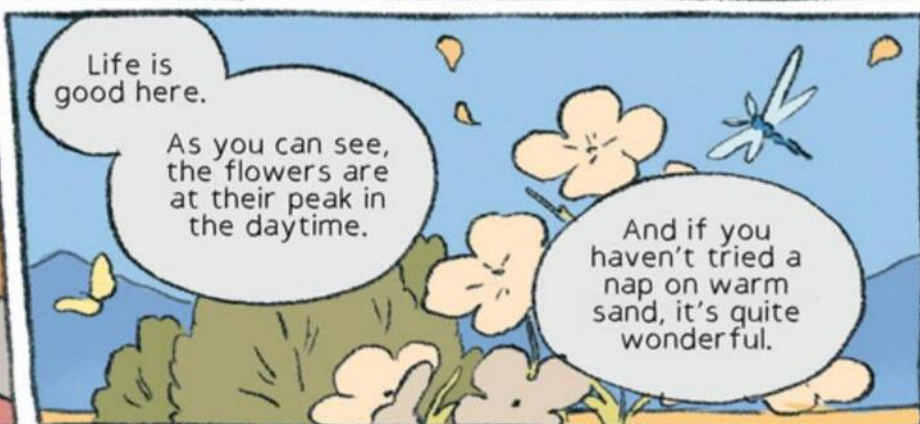




































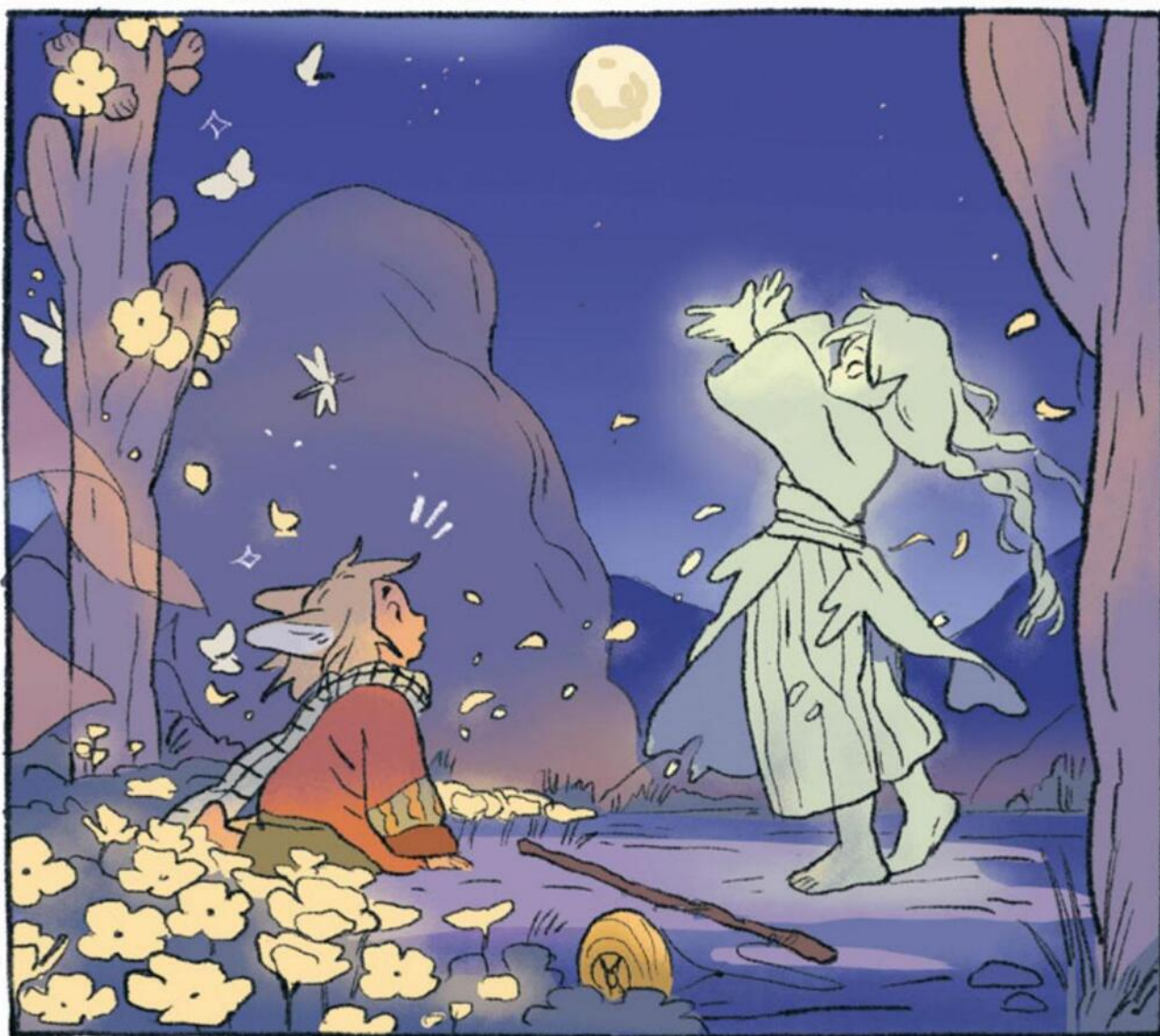




























## Chapter Six





















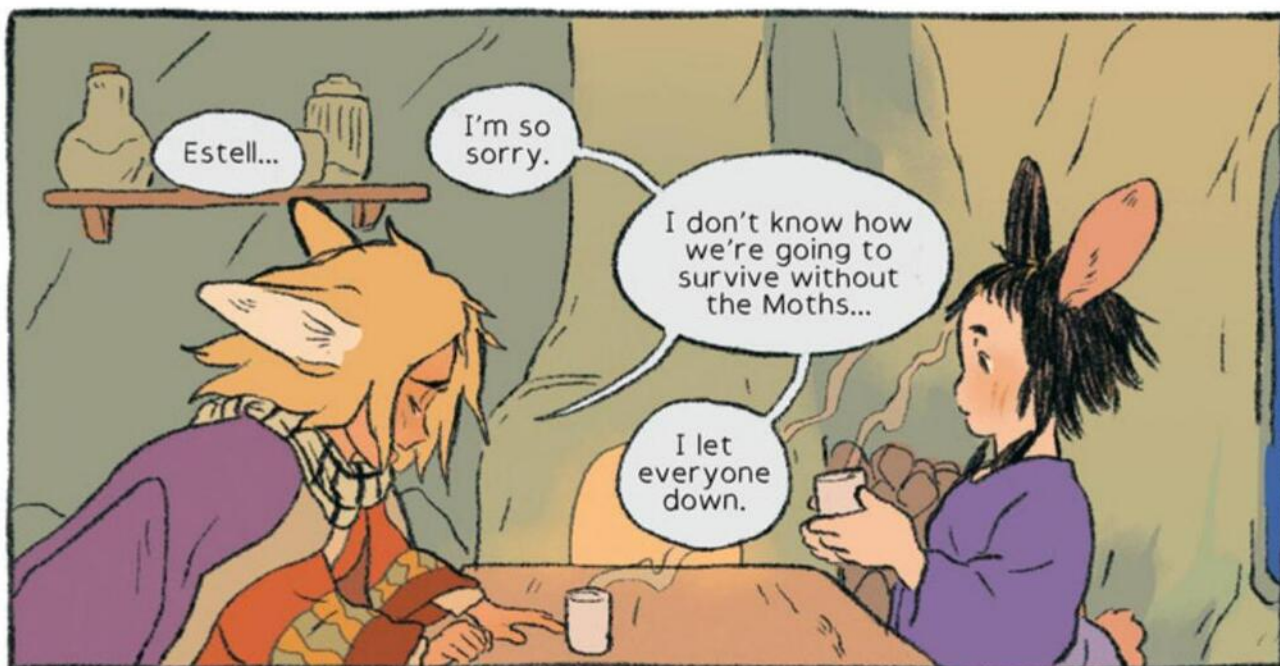


































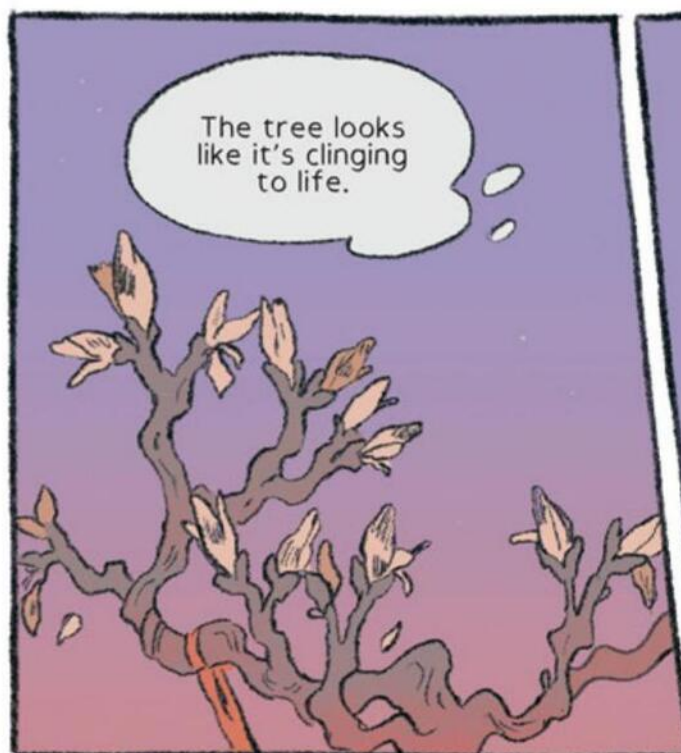


## Chapter Seven





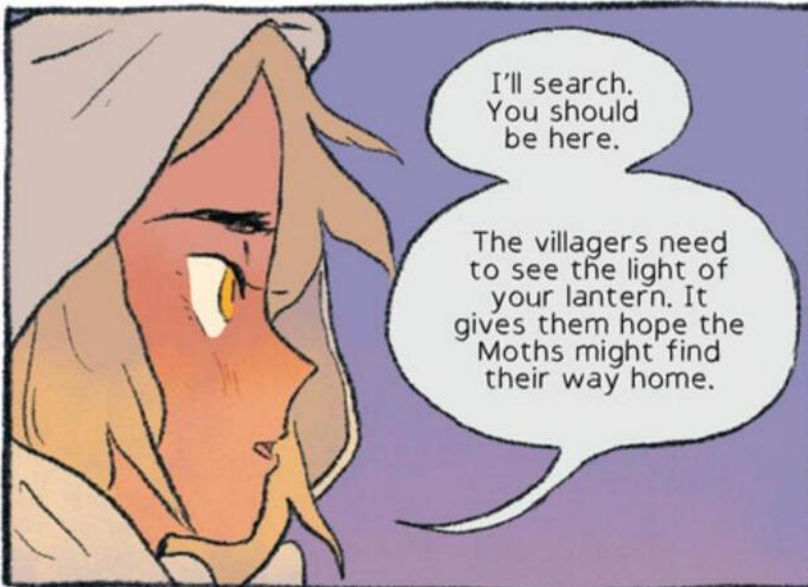




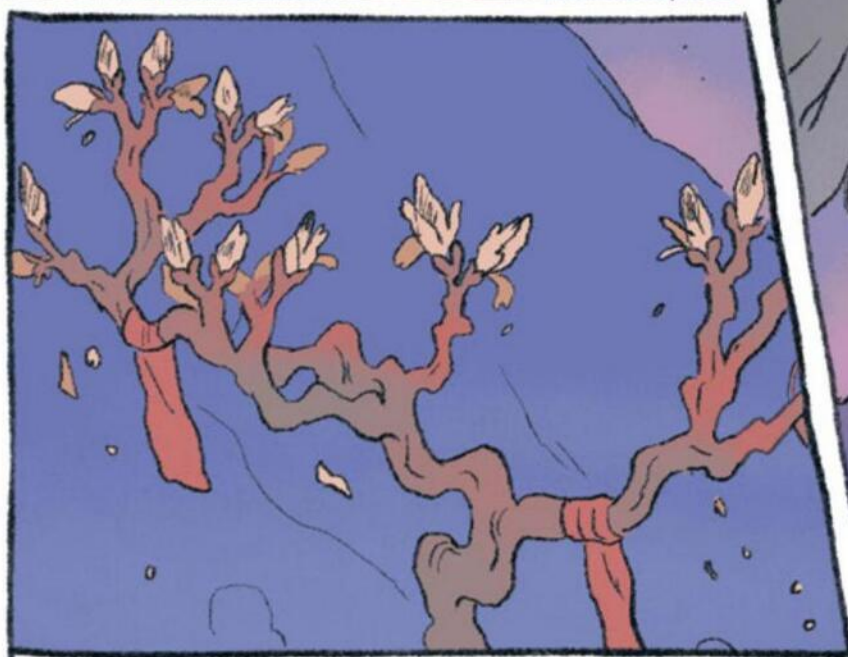












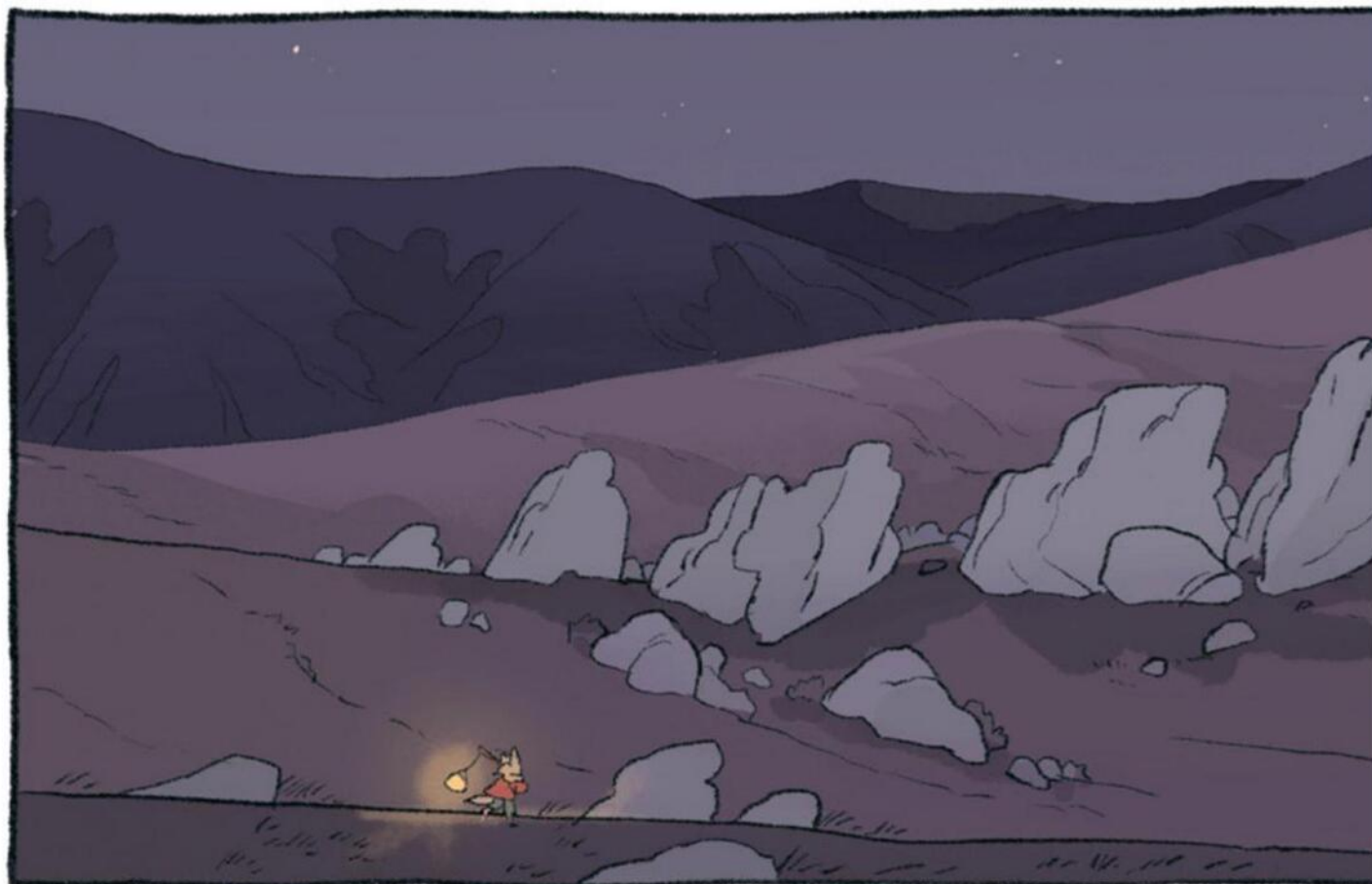












I don't know  
where to  
begin...



























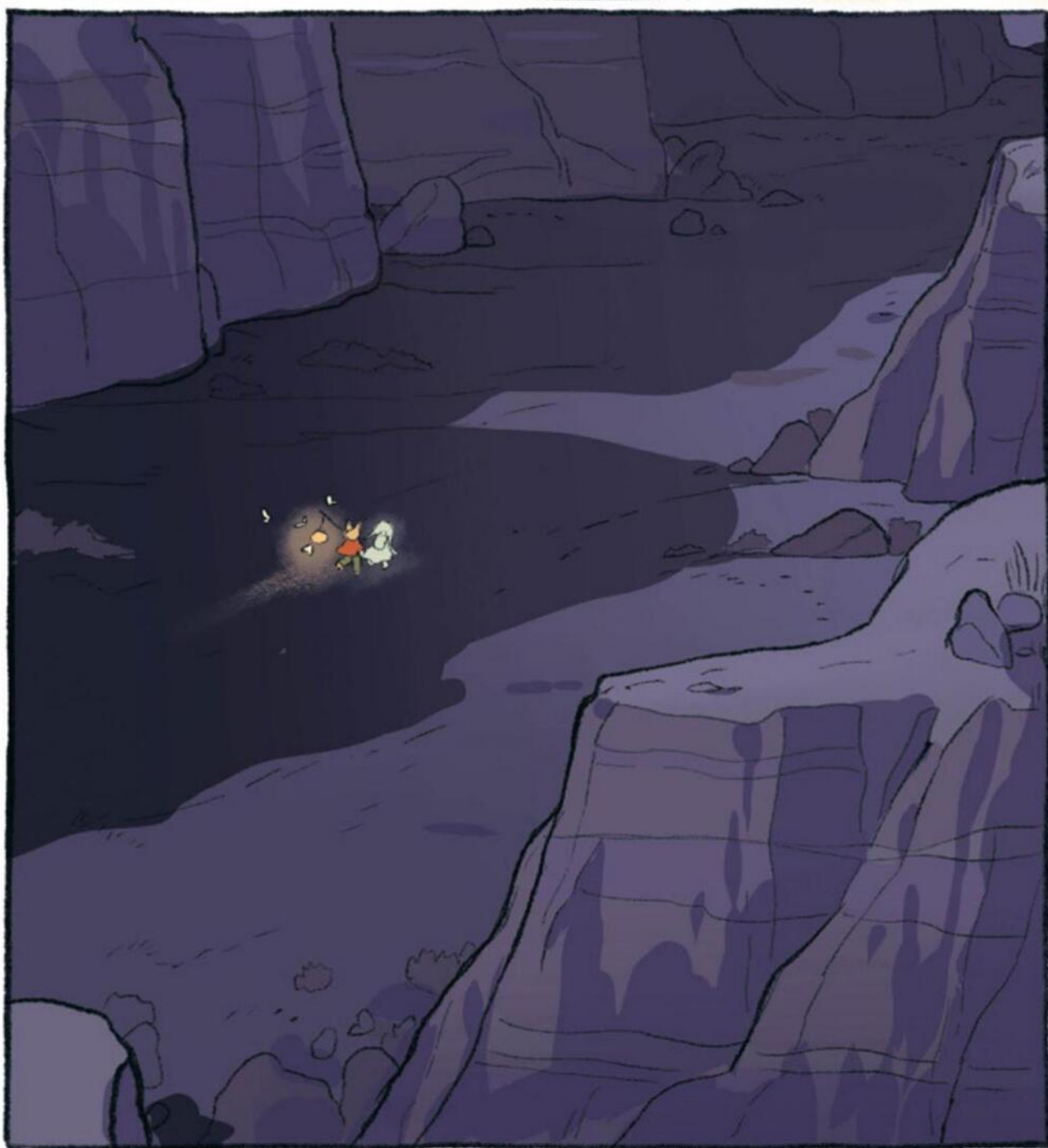


All this time I've  
tried not to look  
past the light of  
my lantern...

...but when I do,  
I can see familiar  
shapes even in the  
deepest shadows.











I have to find as many Moths as possible before dawn.

We must keep going.







I smell a  
fragrance on  
the wind...  
like incense.



Is that  
the scent  
of the  
Moths?



Can you  
smell it,  
too?





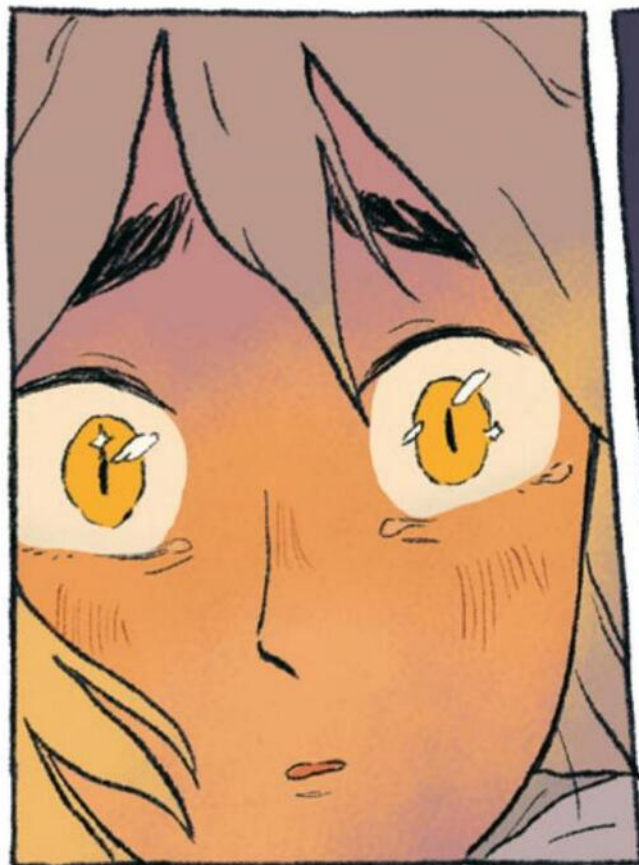
























## Chapter Eight









Estell...

...She packed  
Moth food.

























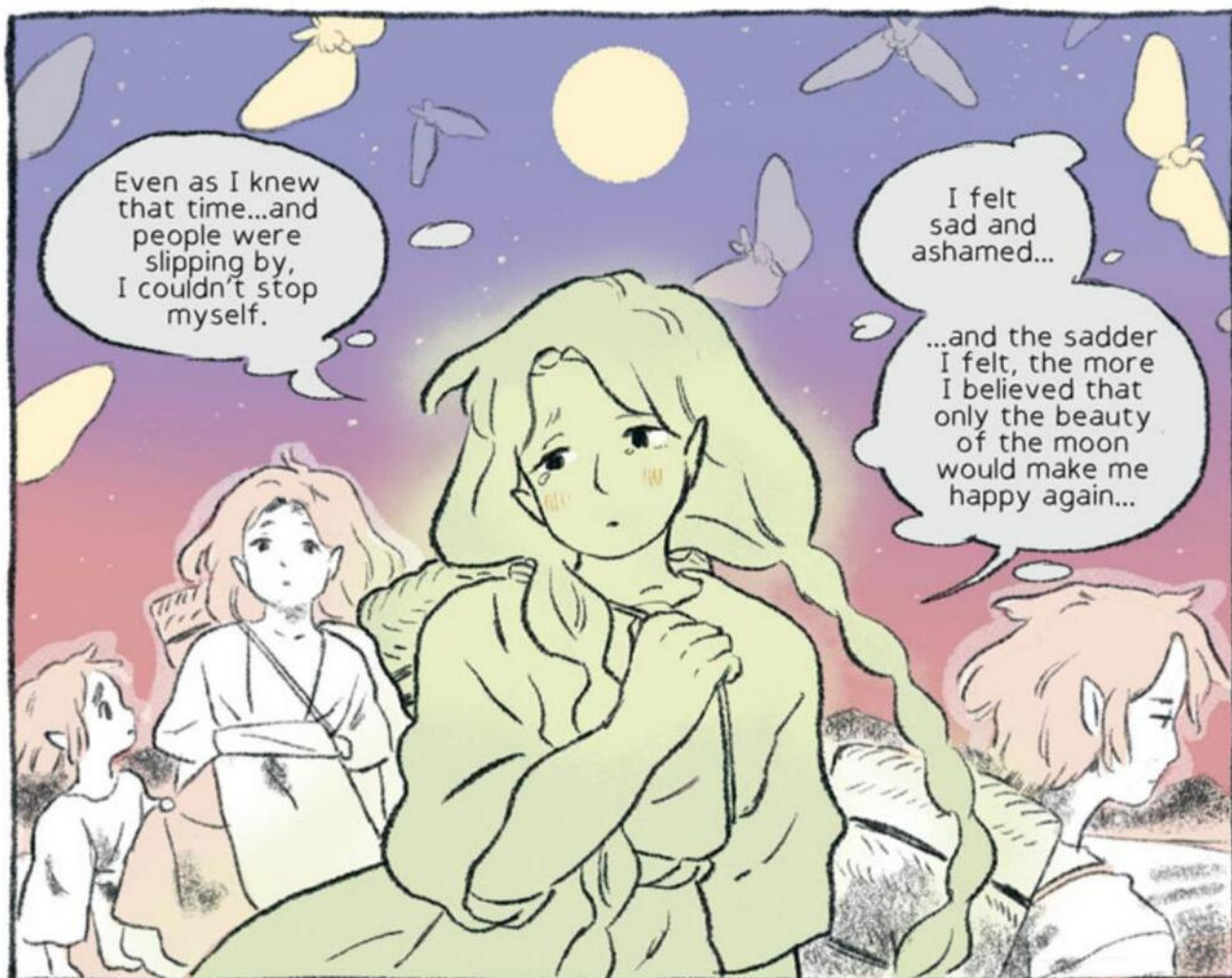
























I have watched  
this little one's  
steps across the  
sand for a very  
long time.

It would have only  
caused pain to  
take her to the  
stars before her  
heart was ready.



Thank you  
for helping  
her.



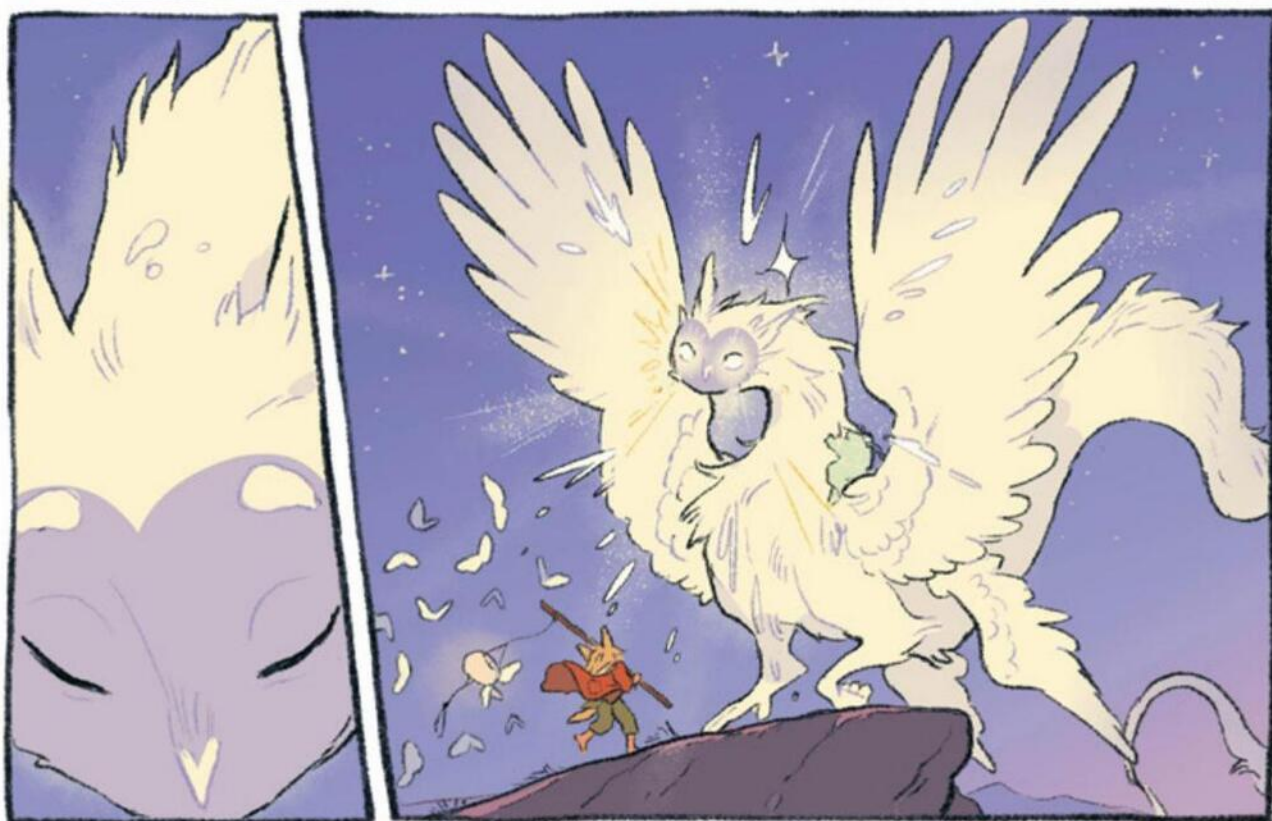
Thank you, for  
the gift of the  
Moths.

Our village  
has treasured  
them...

But...







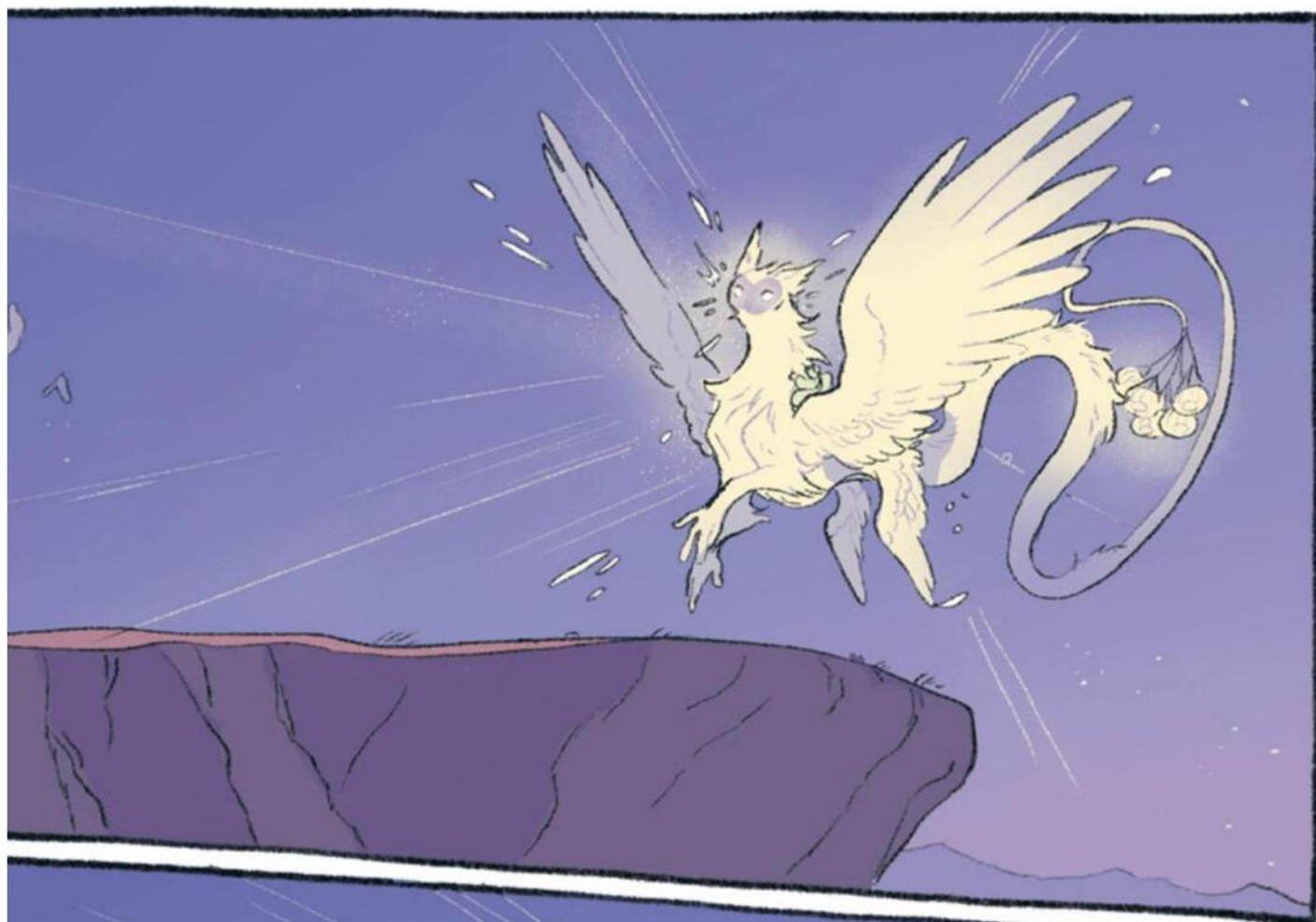










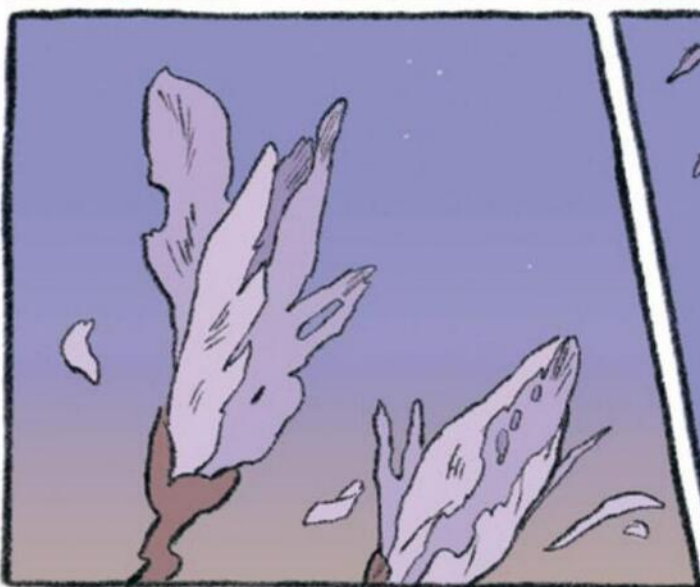






## Chapter Nine





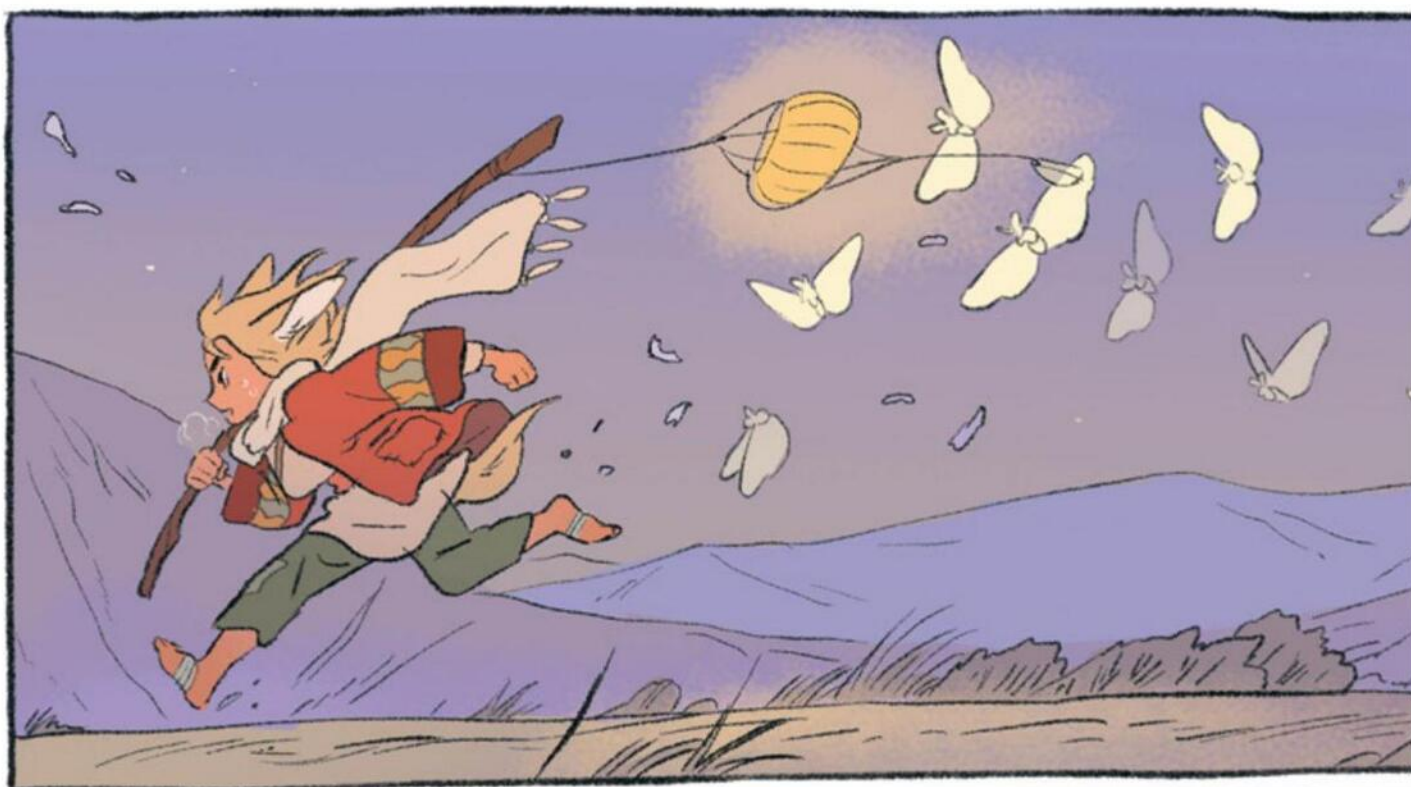








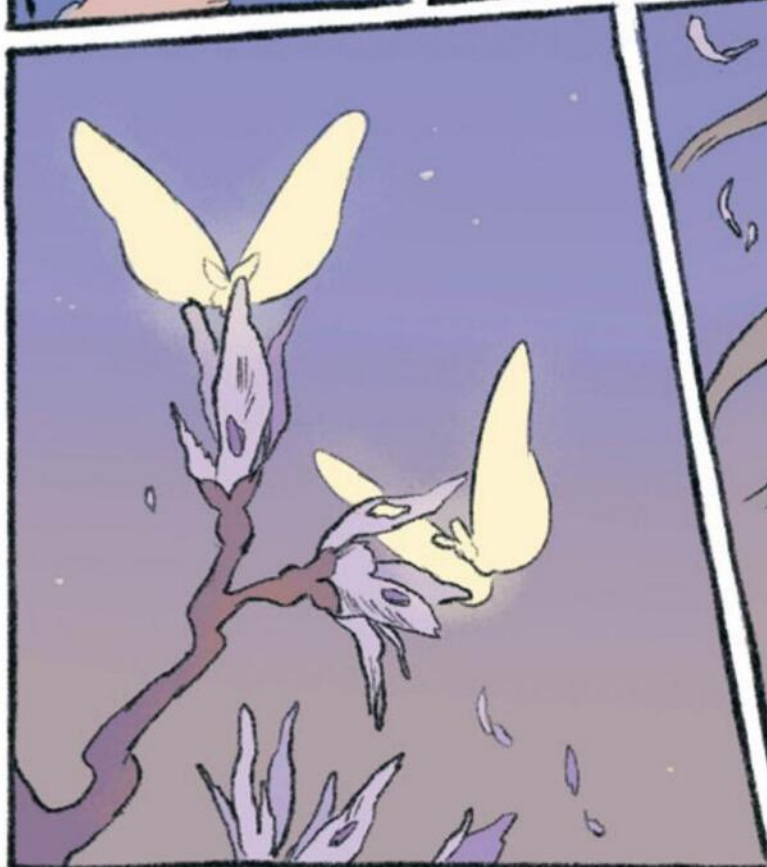
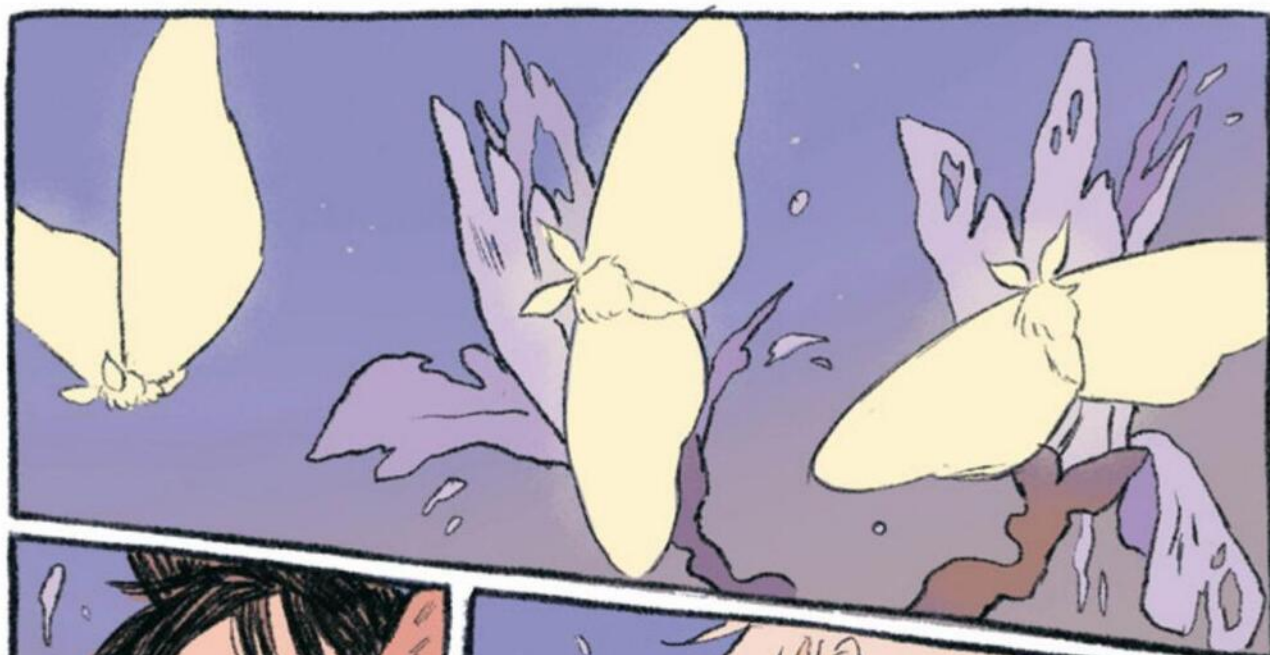




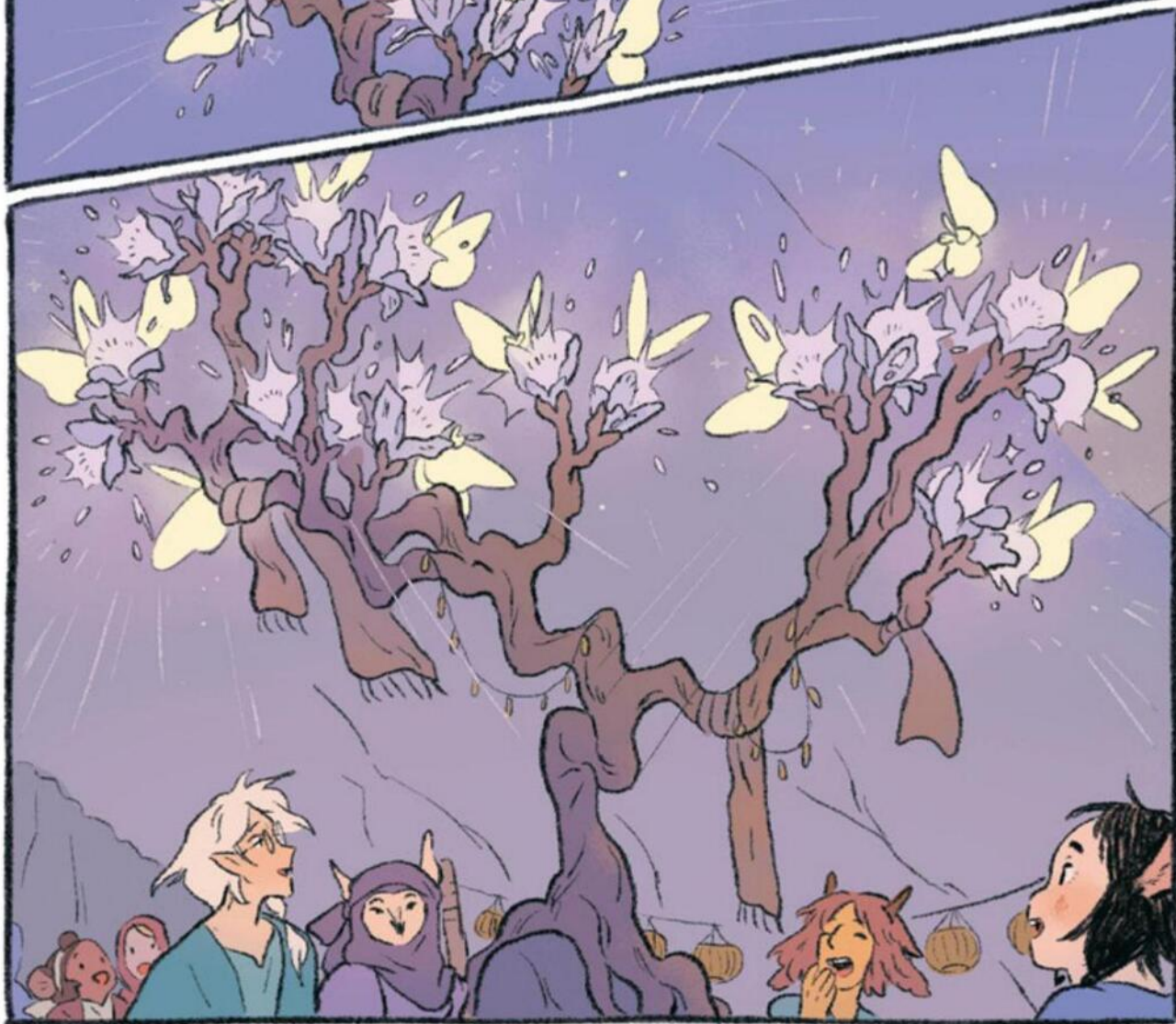












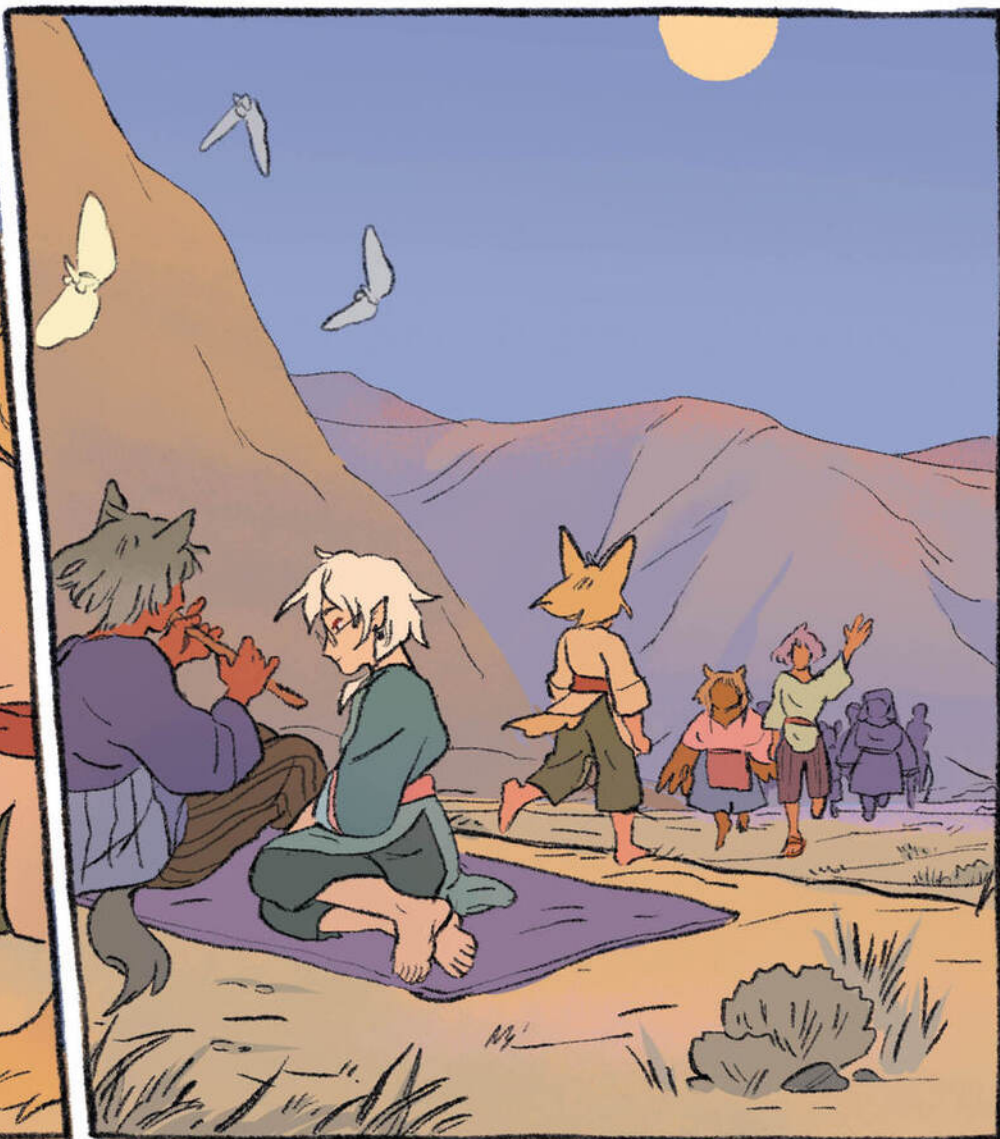
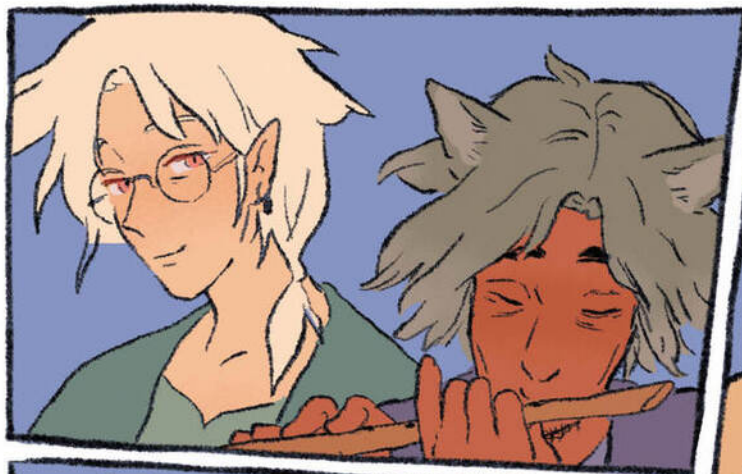
















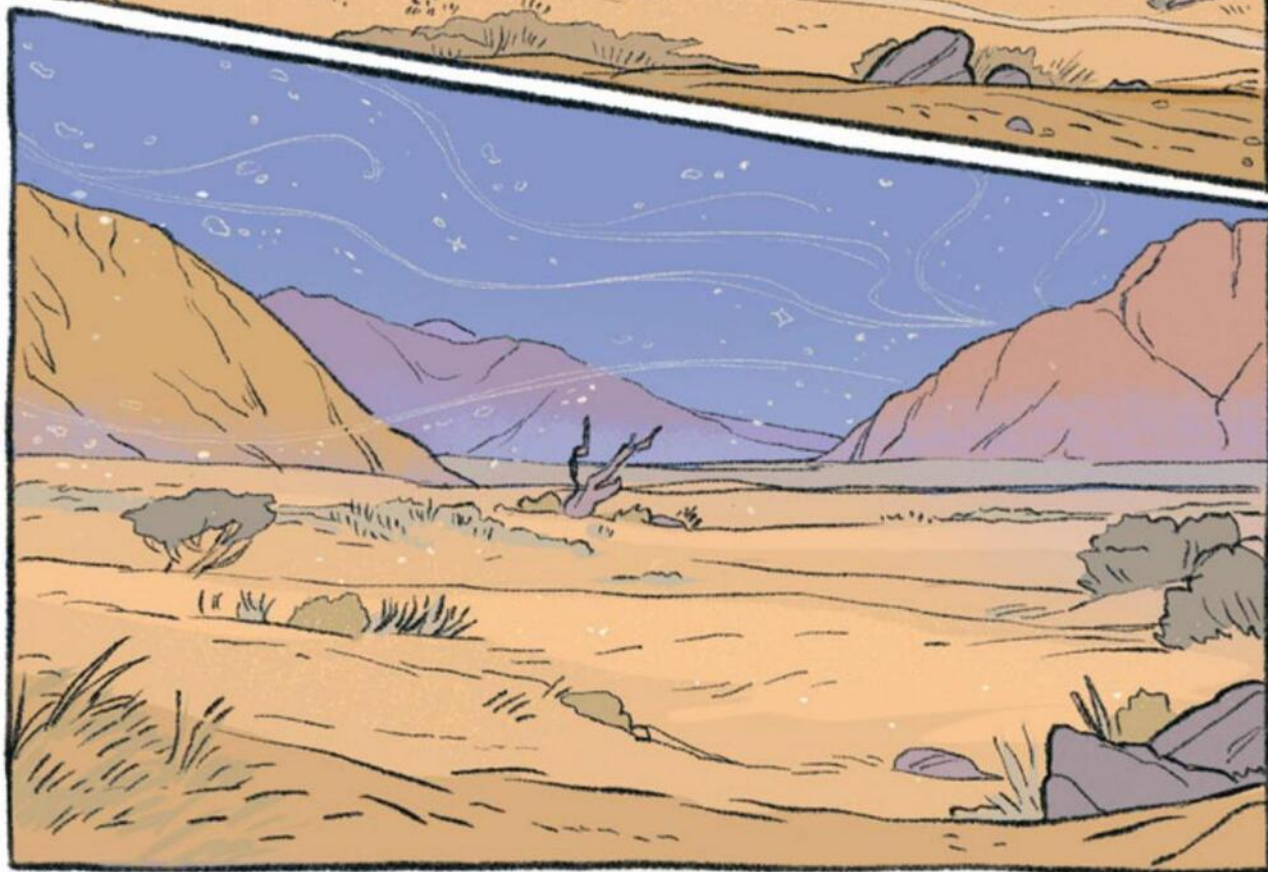
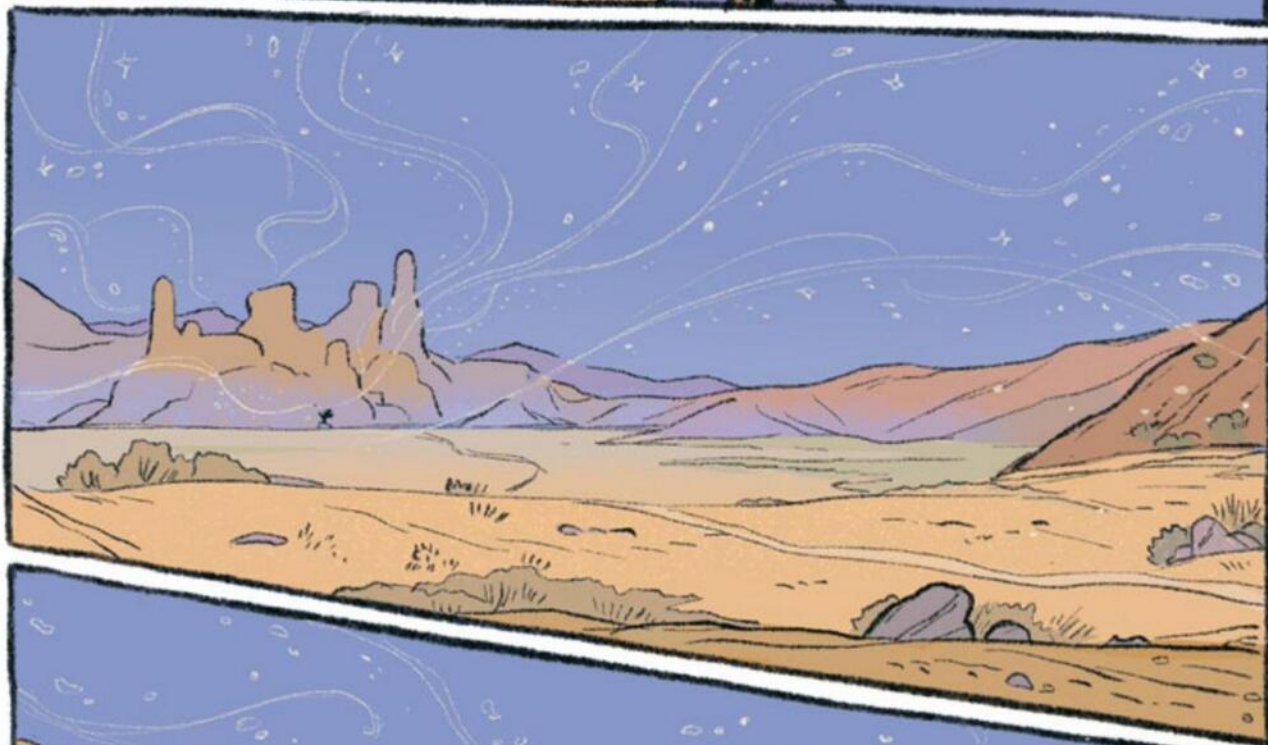




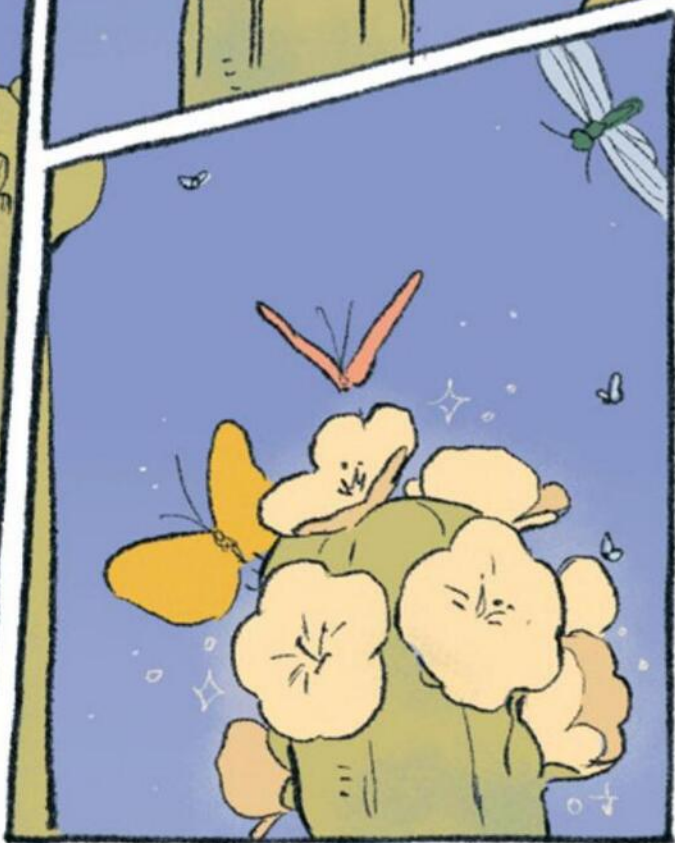
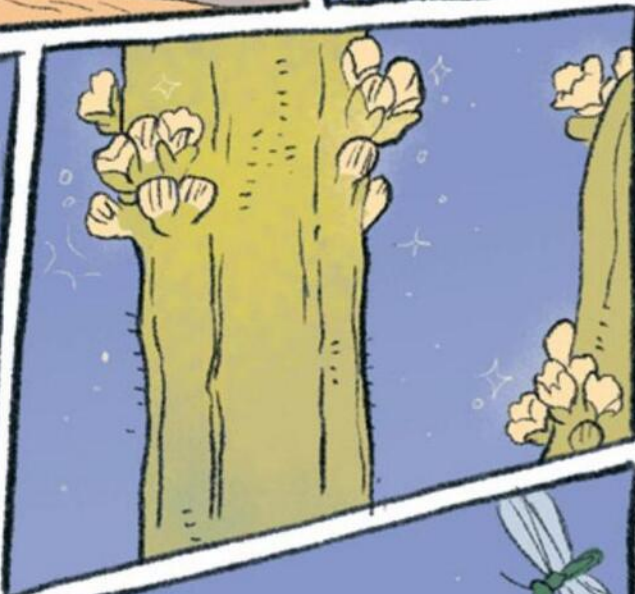
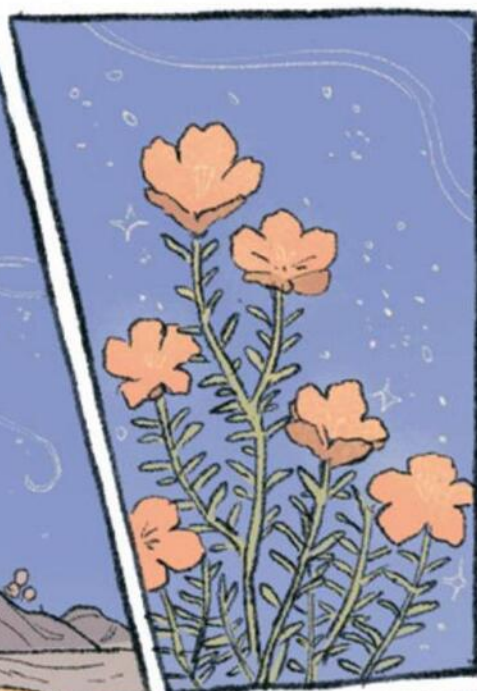
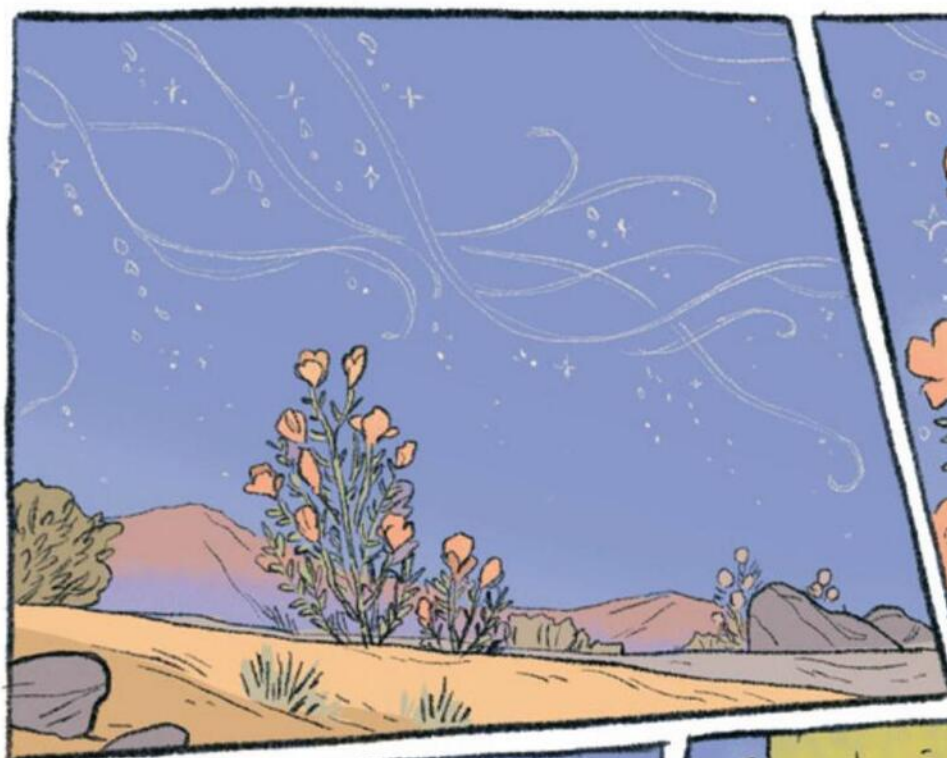




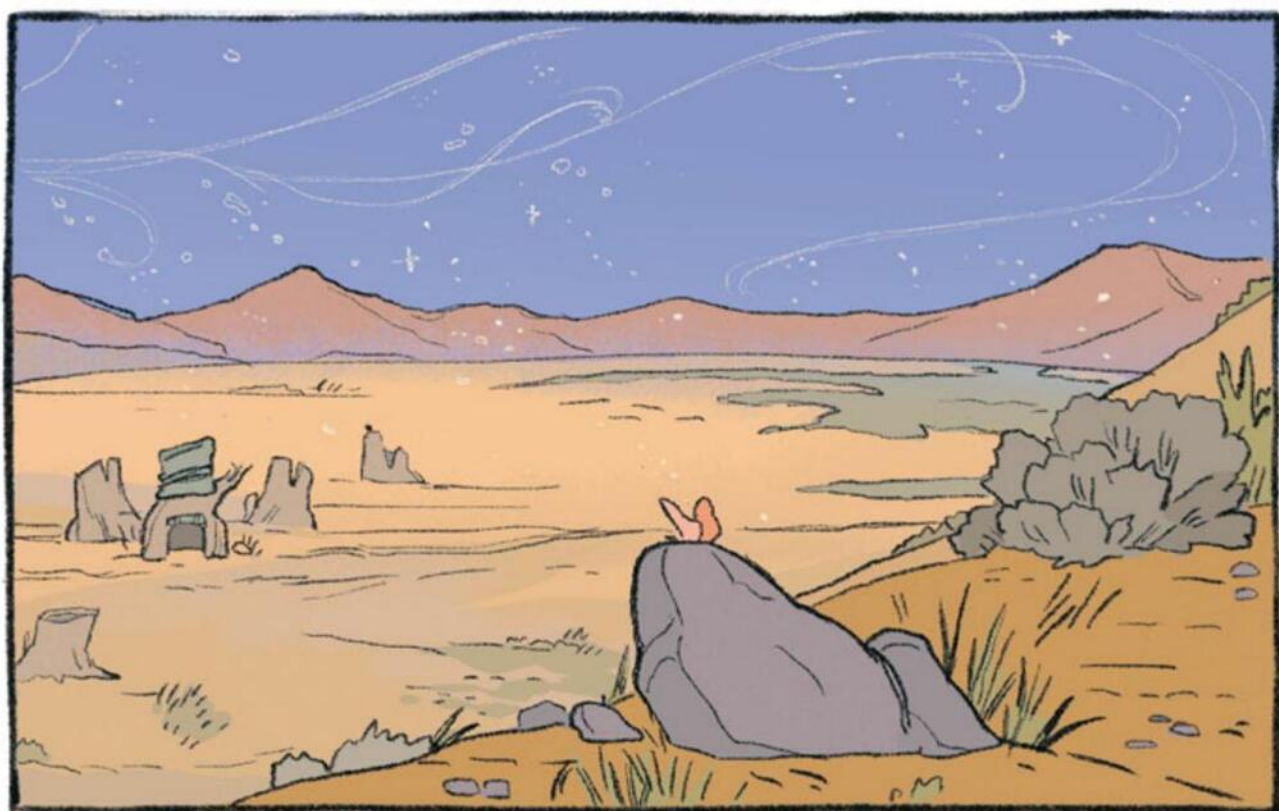
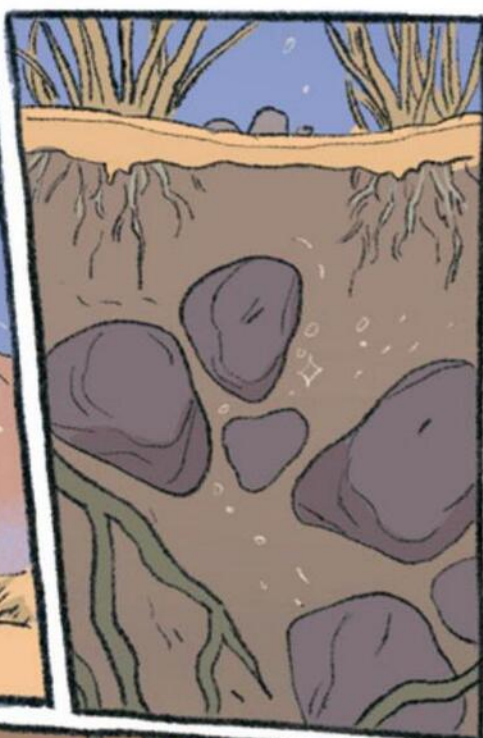
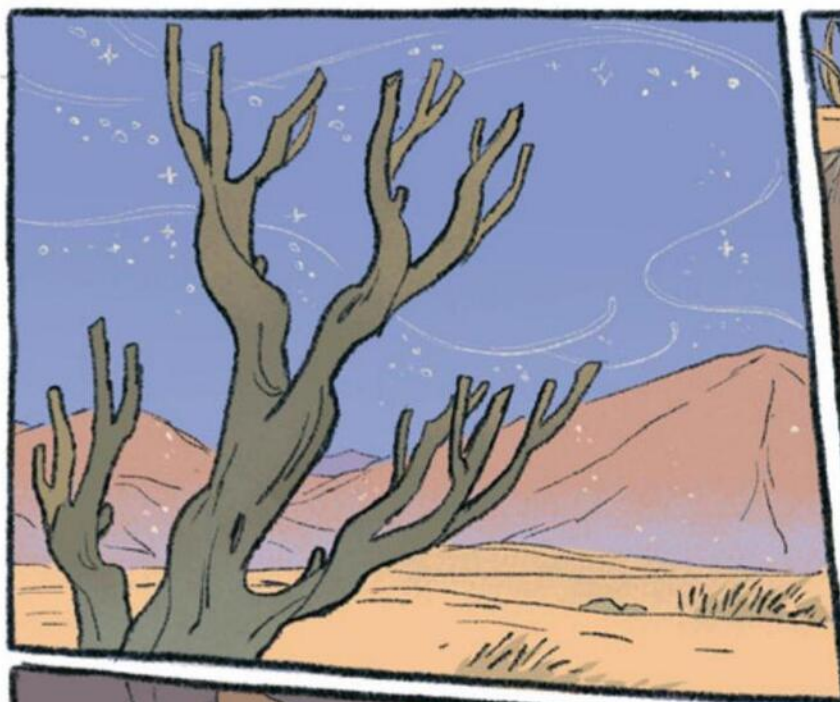


















I search until  
I feel like I've  
become nothing...

...invisible  
in the dark.



But if I stop and  
notice what's  
around me, beneath  
my two feet...



When I hear  
the voices,  
music, sounds  
of the village  
and desert...





I think I'll  
always be a  
little bit afraid  
of the dark...

But...that's  
only natural,  
isn't it?









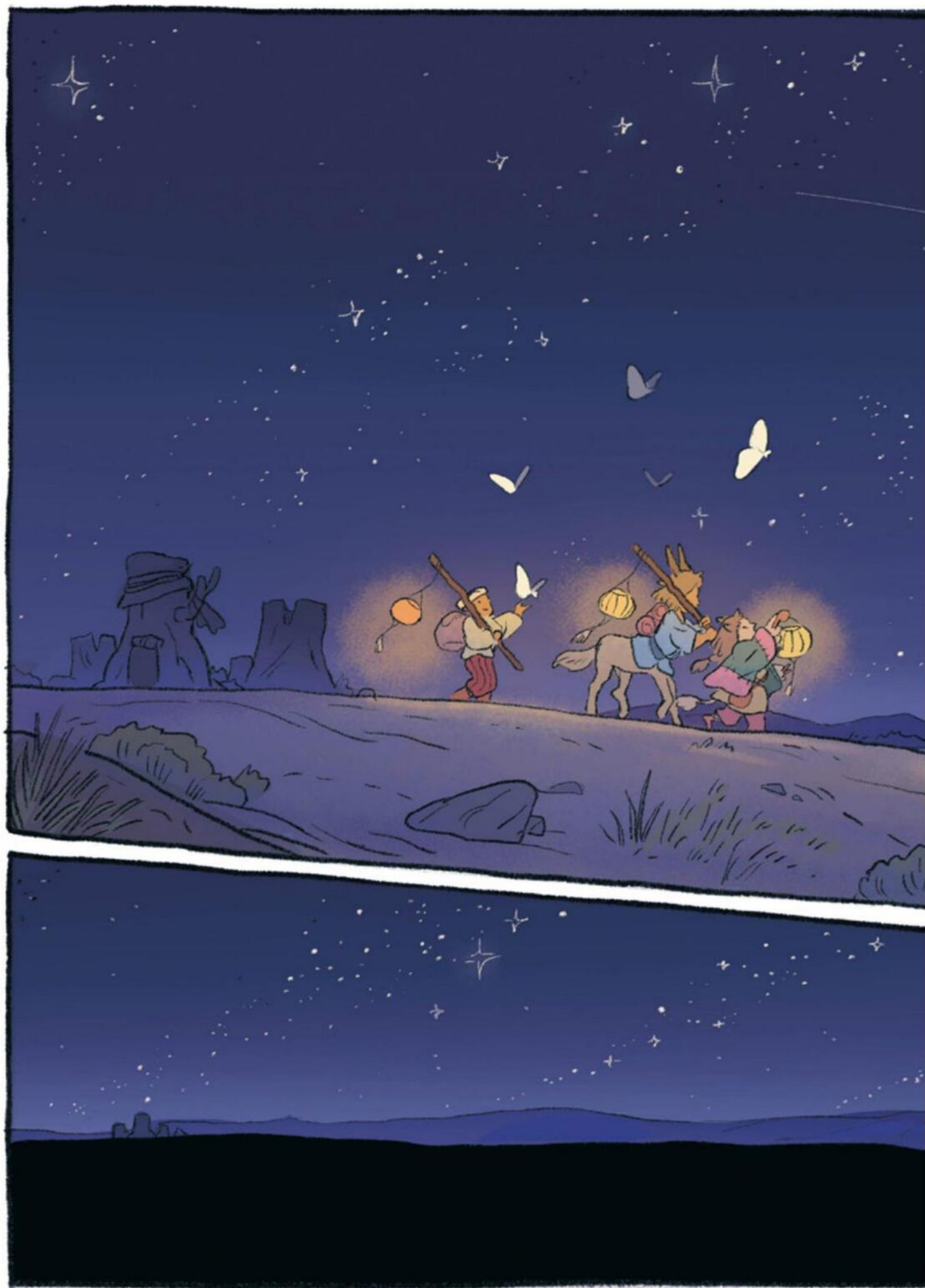
















THE END



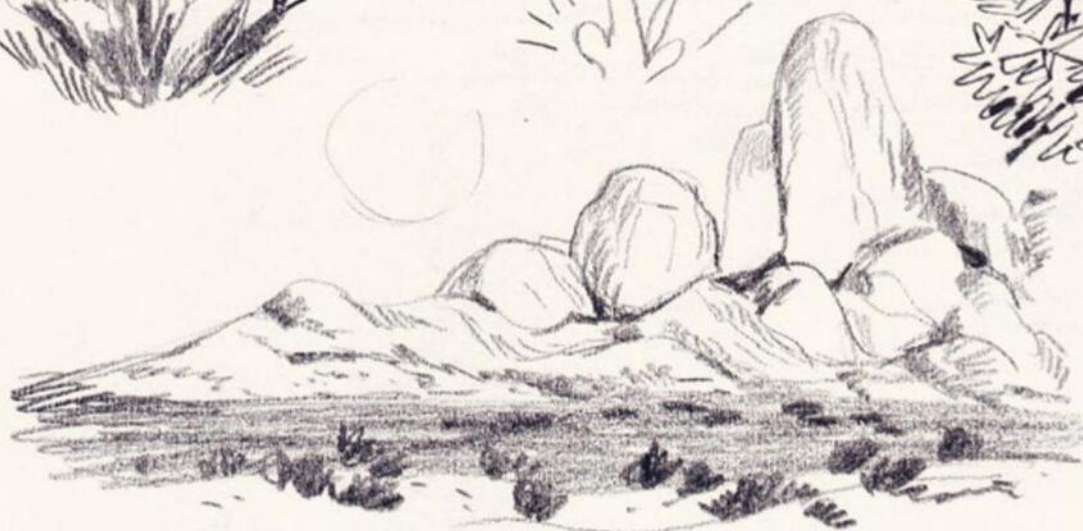
# INSPIRATION

Although Aotearoa New Zealand doesn't have what you'd typically think of as a desert, the high alpine regions around the Tongariro National Park and Kā Tiritiri o te Moana (Southern Alps) are very dry, covered with beautiful tussock fields and stony scree slopes. I was inspired by the rolling, undulating landforms, the lines of the mountain ranges, the colors of the receding distance, and the smallness one feels standing amid such scenery. Not far from my hometown, the dark sky reserve at Lake Tekapo, with its ocean of stars, also served as inspiration for this book.

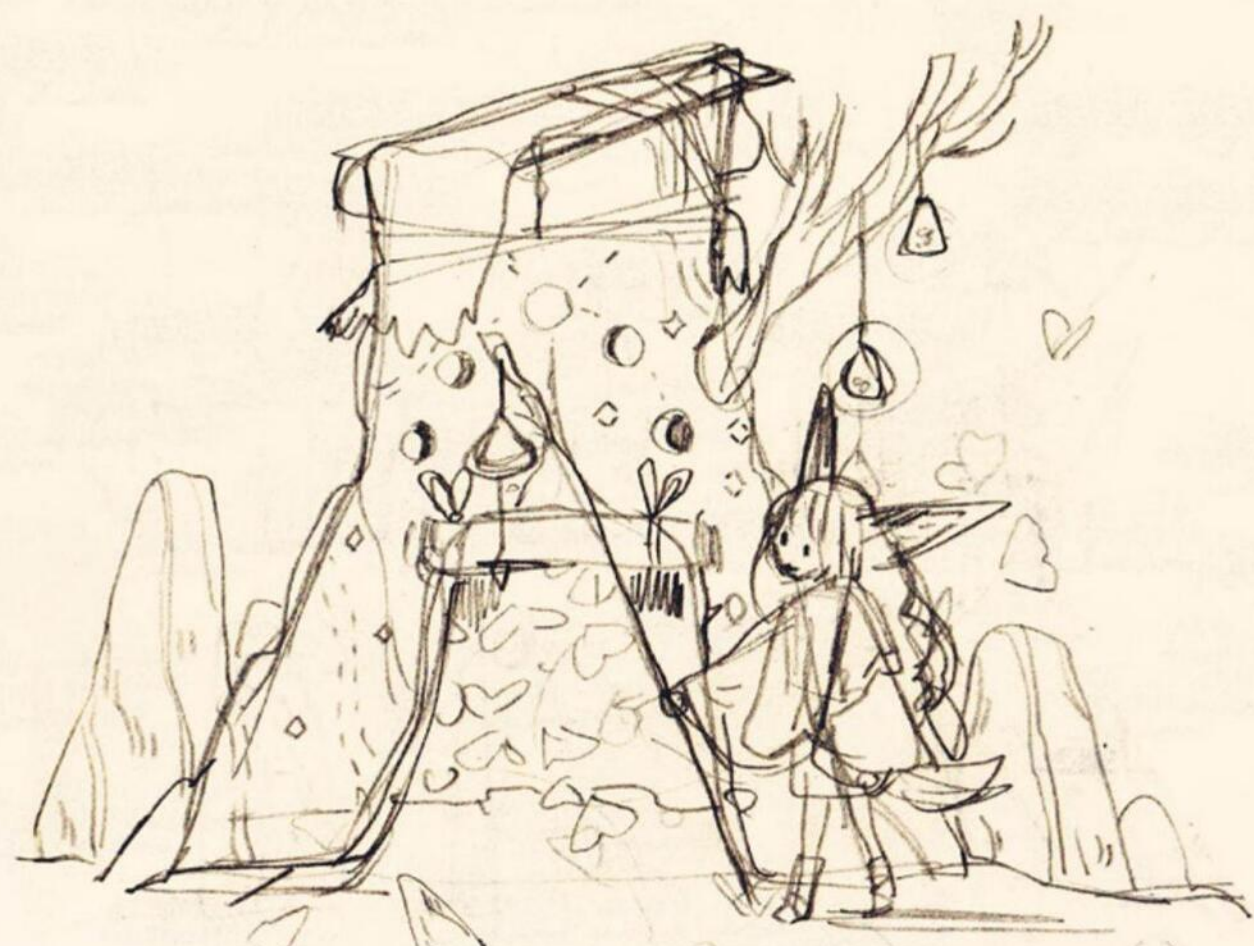
Aotearoa, being made up of small islands isolated from other continents for millions and millions of years, has endless examples of highly specialized relationships between flora and fauna—plants and creatures that require one another to survive. There is a species of native moth that will only lay its larvae in a type of rush plant found in just a handful of wetland areas.

An example from the United States is the Joshua tree and the yucca moth. The Joshua tree flowers save their energy by producing only a small amount of pollen, which the moths have evolved to be able to carefully harvest and spread to other flowers. In the process, they lay batches of eggs inside that will eventually hatch and feast upon some of the pollinated seeds.









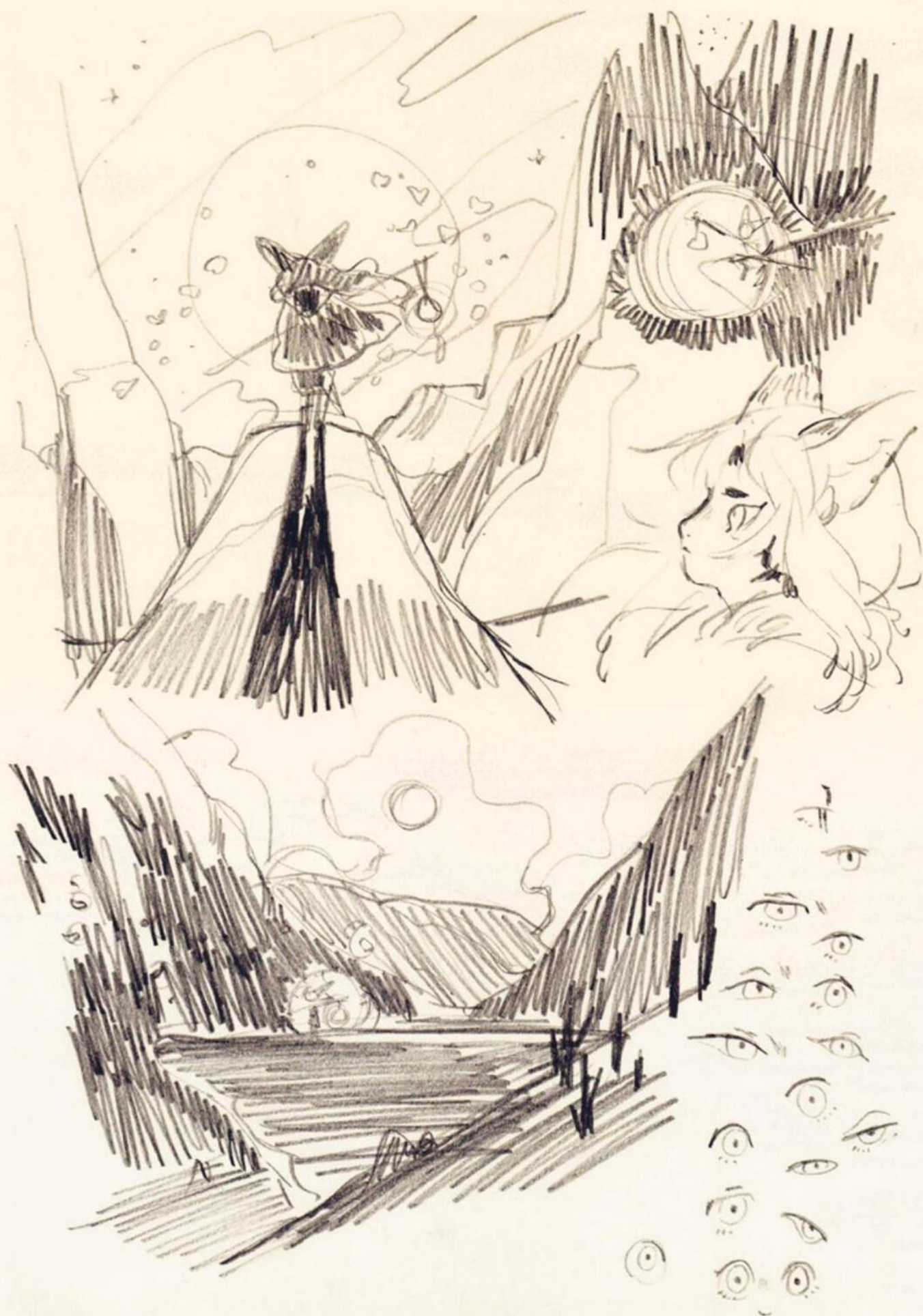
















visible  
stitching



lots  
of  
patch  
work

layers



## ABOUT THE CREATOR

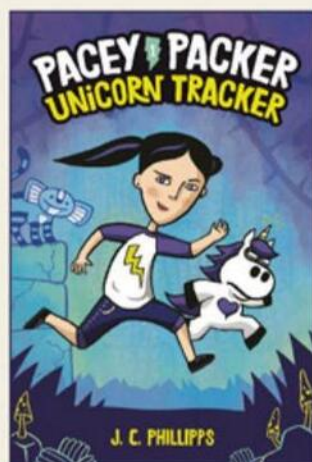
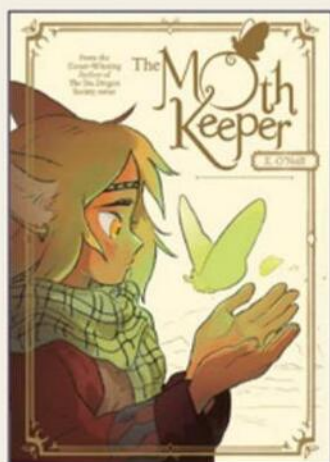
**K. O'Neill** is an author and illustrator based in Aotearoa New Zealand who is a lover of nature, tea, and growing things. They strive to make books with themes of kindness, inclusiveness, and well-being, creating worlds that children can play in and characters they can identify with and admire.

K.'s books *The Tea Dragon Society* and *Princess Princess Ever After* have garnered numerous awards, including Eisner Awards for Best Children's Comic and Web-comic, the Dwayne McDuffie Award, and the Harvey Award, and have been included on the ALA Rainbow and Amelia Bloomer Lists.





# MAGIC AND ADVENTURE AWAIT!



**RH GRAPHIC**

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A GRAPHIC NOVEL ON EVERY BOOKSHELF









# Being the Moth Keeper is a great honor.

Anya is finally taking her place as protector of the Moon-Moths.  
The luminous creatures enable the Night-Flower to bloom.  
And the night-village needs the flower to thrive.

# Being the Moth Keeper is a great responsibility.

Night after night, it is lonely in the desert, with only one  
lantern for light. Still, Anya is eager to prove her worth,  
to show her thanks to her friends and her village.

# But is it worth the cost?

And yet something isn't right.  
What happens when Anya glimpses the one thing  
that could destroy what she's meant to protect?  
The one thing she has secretly longed for her whole life?



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GRAPHIC

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