



Aalai Goes

Flying

Story: Bharati Jagannathan
Illustration: Preeti Krishnamurthy



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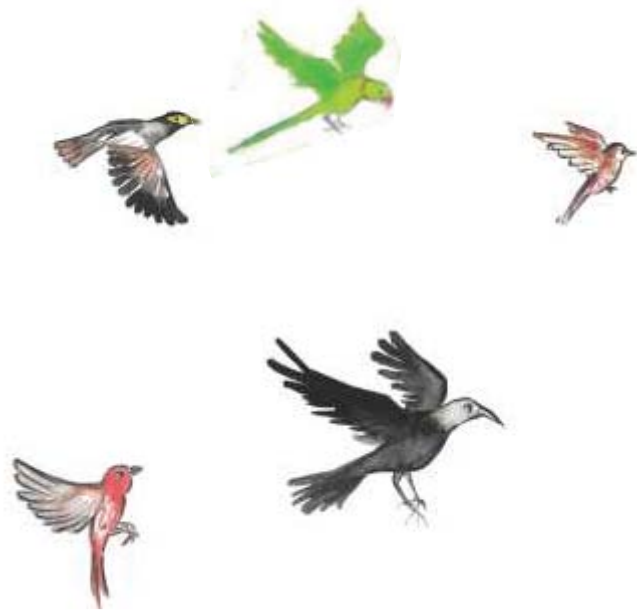


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For Nandini, Nitya and Shruti





In the branches of Aalai lived hundreds of sparrows, parrots, mynahs and bulbuls. Early in the morning, just when the owl would be returning from her nightly outing, they would all fly away to look for food. They would fly in as evening came, and twitter away excitedly, telling one another about all the places they had been to and all that they had seen during the day.

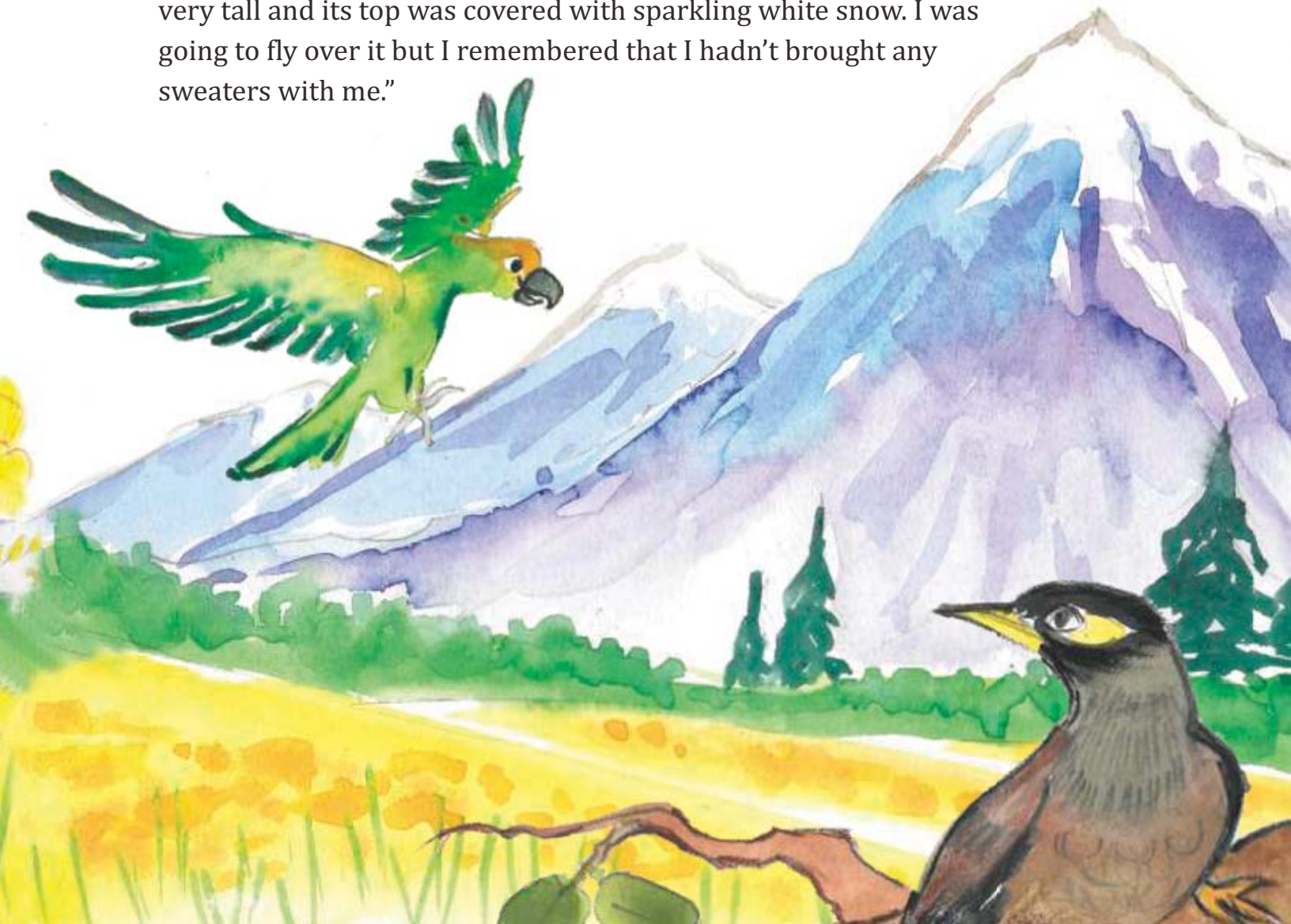


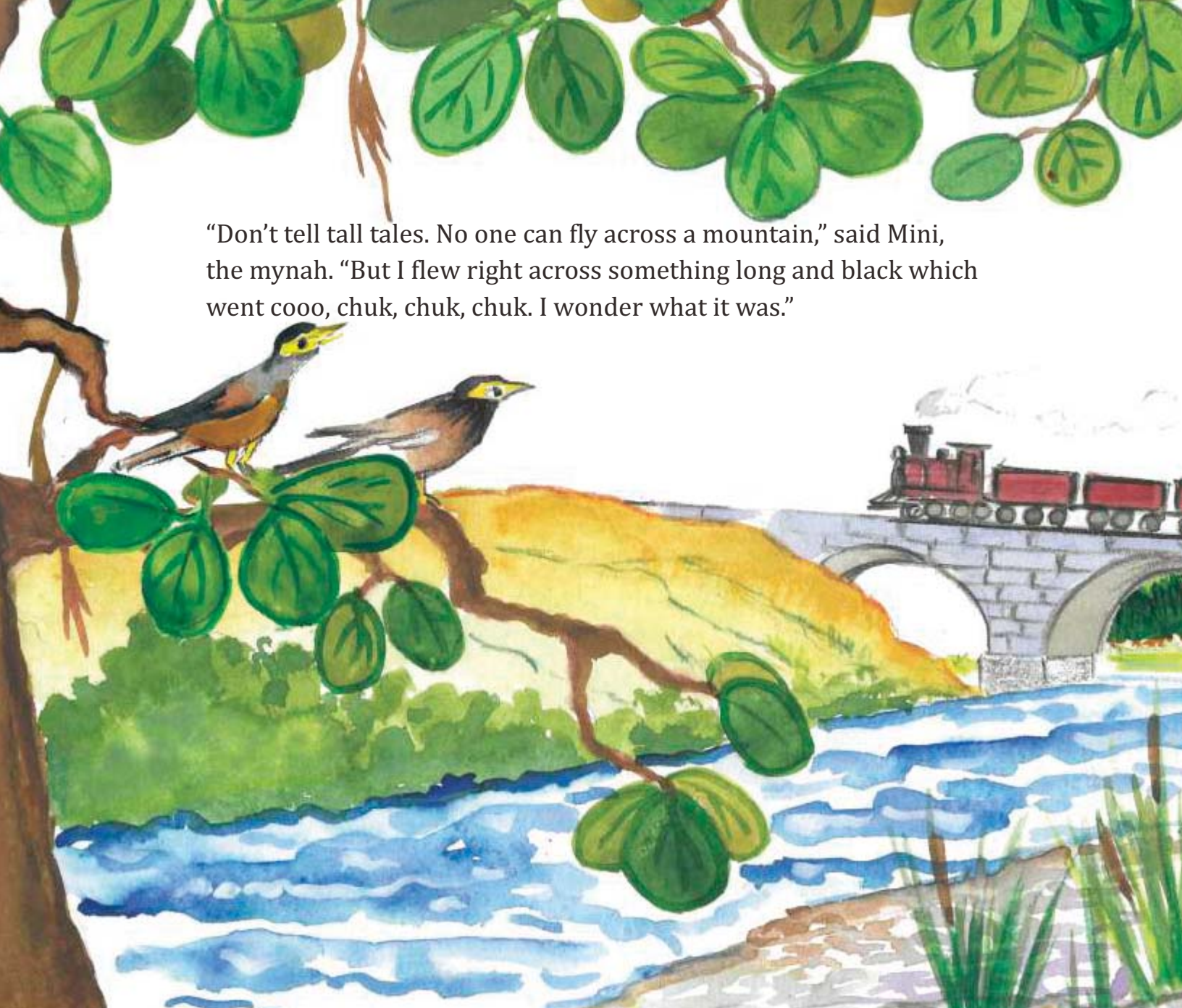


“Guess where I went today,” Chweet, the sparrow said, “I flew over a field where mustard was blossoming, a deep, lovely yellow. What tasty little worms I found there!”

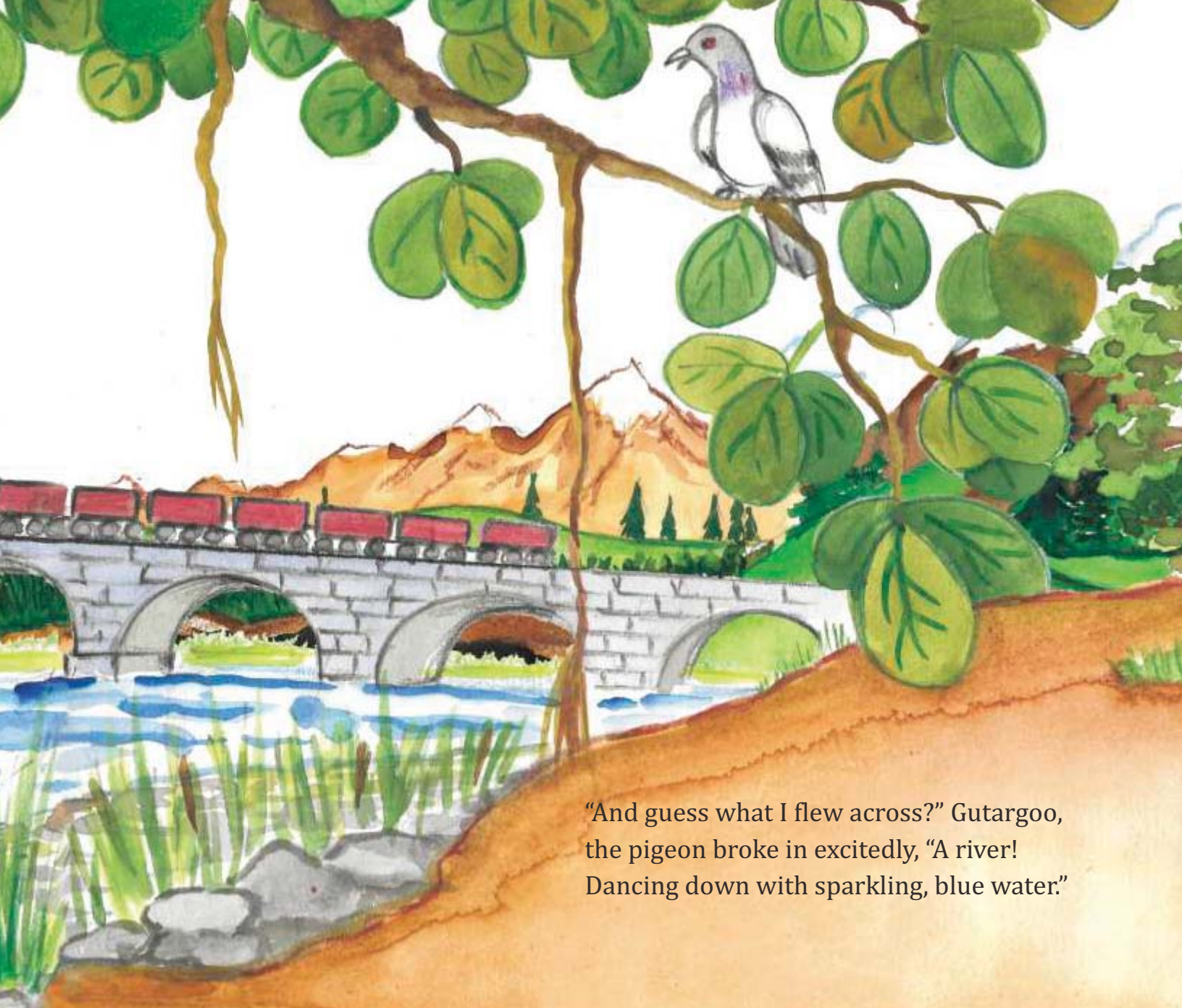


“And I saw a mountain,” boasted Hareelee, the parrot. “It was so very tall and its top was covered with sparkling white snow. I was going to fly over it but I remembered that I hadn’t brought any sweaters with me.”



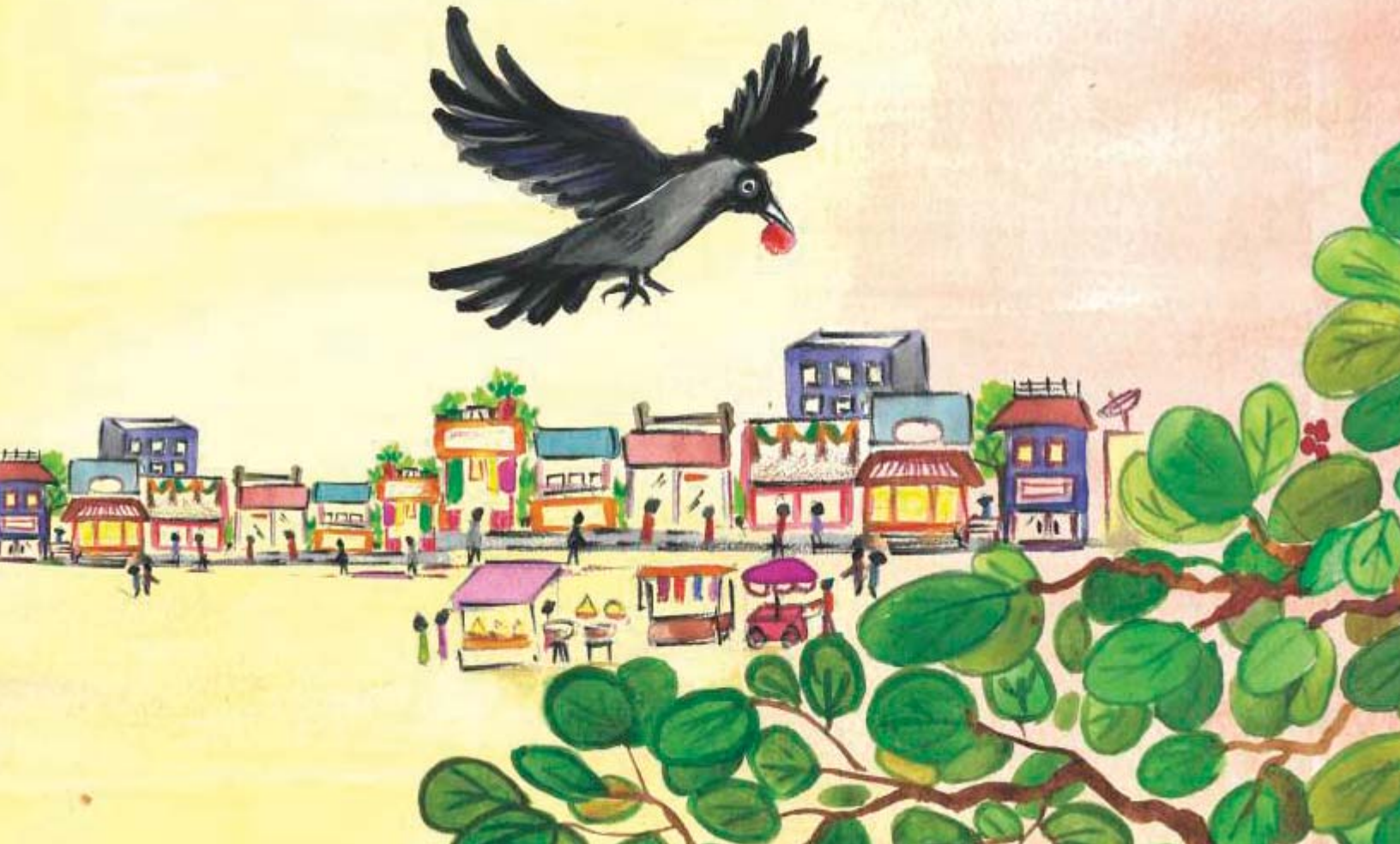
An illustration of two mynah birds perched on a tree branch. The birds have brown bodies, grey heads, and distinctive yellow patches around their eyes. They are looking towards the right. The tree has large, rounded green leaves. In the background, a blue river flows under a stone bridge with three arches. A red steam train with a black smokestack and two red passenger cars is crossing the bridge. The sky is light blue with some white clouds. The overall style is a soft, painterly illustration.

“Don’t tell tall tales. No one can fly across a mountain,” said Mini, the mynah. “But I flew right across something long and black which went coo, chuk, chuk, chuk. I wonder what it was.”



“And guess what I flew across?” Gutargoo, the pigeon broke in excitedly, “A river! Dancing down with sparkling, blue water.”

“And I flew over a big town,” said Kaw, the crow. “There were roads full of people and markets packed with all kinds of colourful goods. I swooped down and picked up a tasty pakora from a shop. Oh, it was so exciting!”



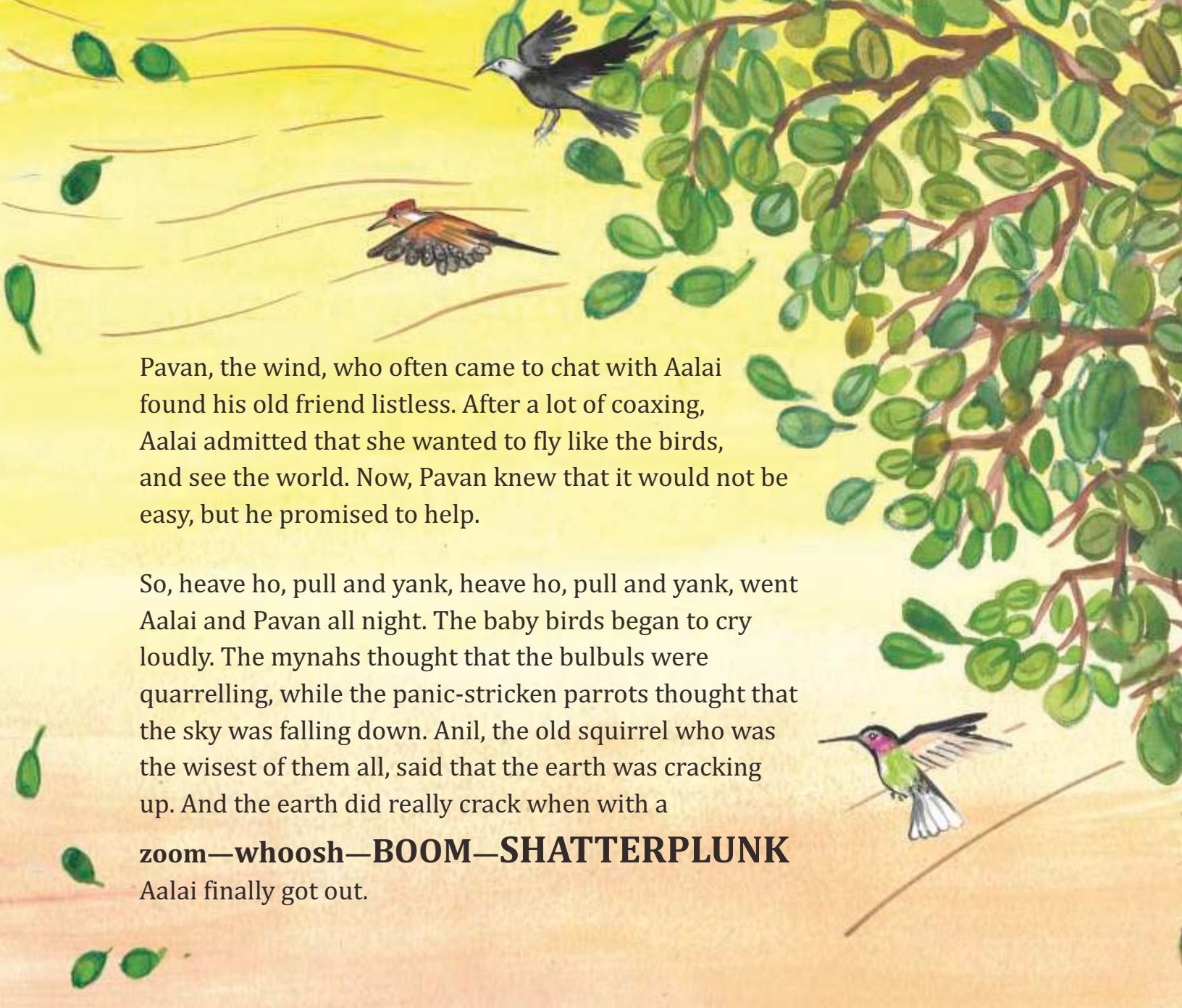
Aalai would listen to their tales contentedly. Then she would stretch her arms, oops, branches, and out the owl would fly for the night while all the other birds fell into a deep slumber. Quiet would fall over the great old banyan tree, broken only by the wind whispering with the leaves.



This had happened every evening for many, many, many years, and Aalai had grown huge. But one day, Aalai started feeling very restless. For long she had been merely listening to the news the sparrows and bulbuls brought. But now she wished to see the rivers, the mountains and the beautiful fields herself. So Aalai became very sad wondering how she could get to the fields and flowers. So sad that even the tailorbirds who stitched together Aalai's leaves to make their nests could feel the sadness coming through.






A vibrant illustration of a tree with dense green foliage and brown branches on the right side of the page. In the sky, a black and white bird is flying towards the left, and a brown and white bird is flying towards the right. The background is a light yellow-green color with some faint, horizontal lines suggesting wind or movement.

Pavan, the wind, who often came to chat with Aalai found his old friend listless. After a lot of coaxing, Aalai admitted that she wanted to fly like the birds, and see the world. Now, Pavan knew that it would not be easy, but he promised to help.

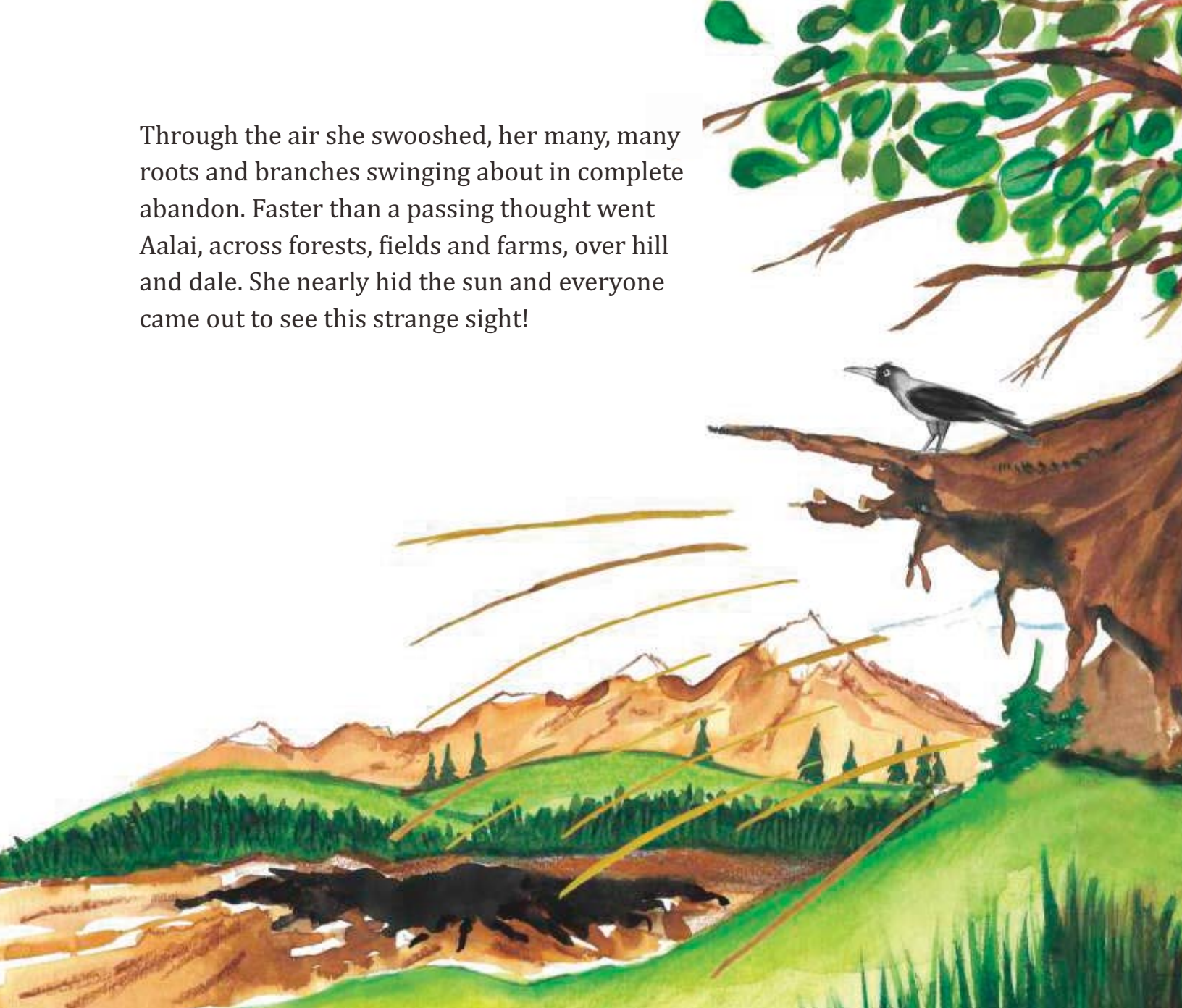
So, heave ho, pull and yank, heave ho, pull and yank, went Aalai and Pavan all night. The baby birds began to cry loudly. The mynahs thought that the bulbuls were quarrelling, while the panic-stricken parrots thought that the sky was falling down. Anil, the old squirrel who was the wisest of them all, said that the earth was cracking up. And the earth did really crack when with a

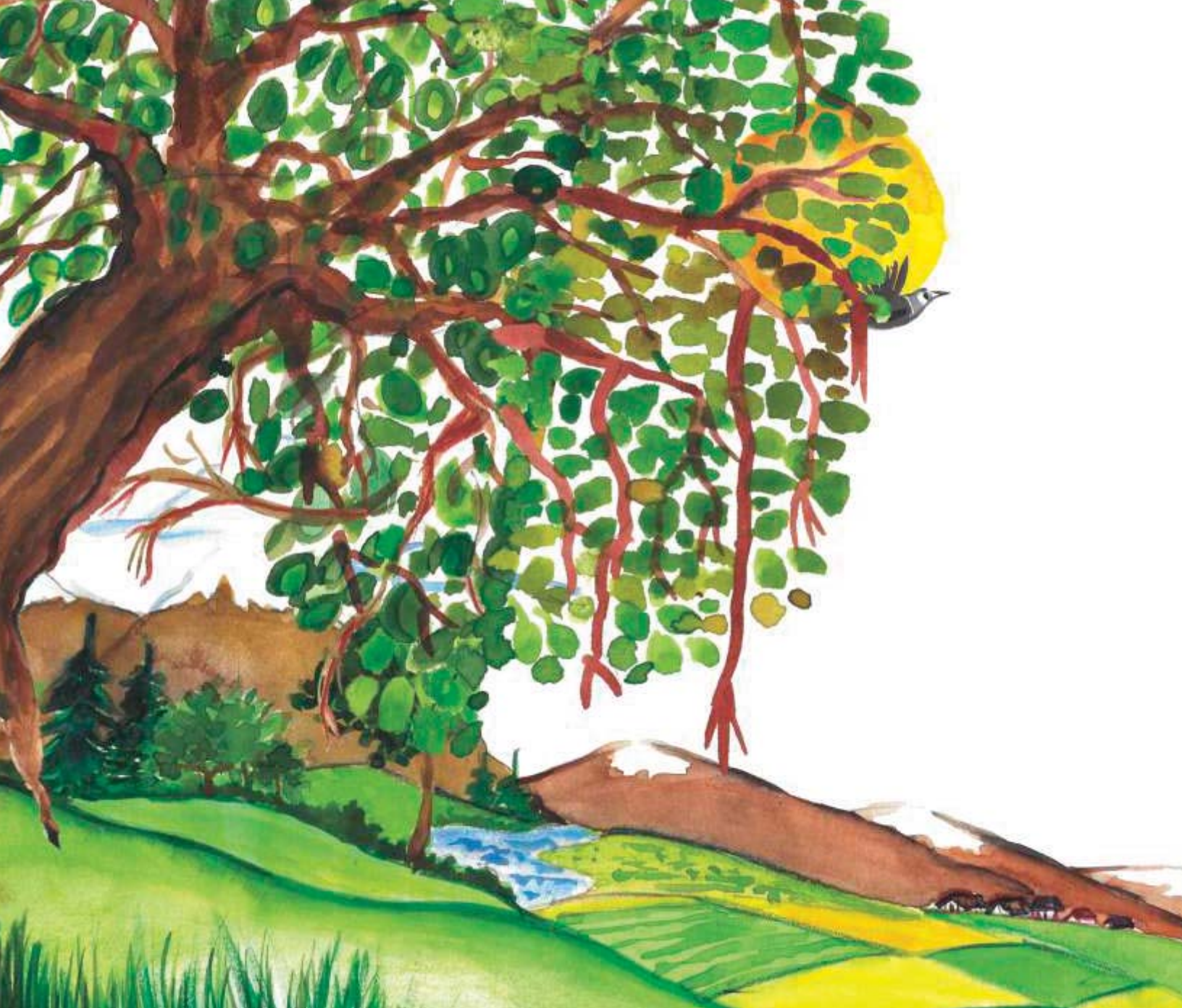
zoom—whoosh—BOOM—SHATTERPLUNK
Aalai finally got out.

A small, colorful hummingbird with a pink and purple head and green body is flying towards the left. It is positioned in the lower right quadrant of the page, near the bottom of the tree's branches.

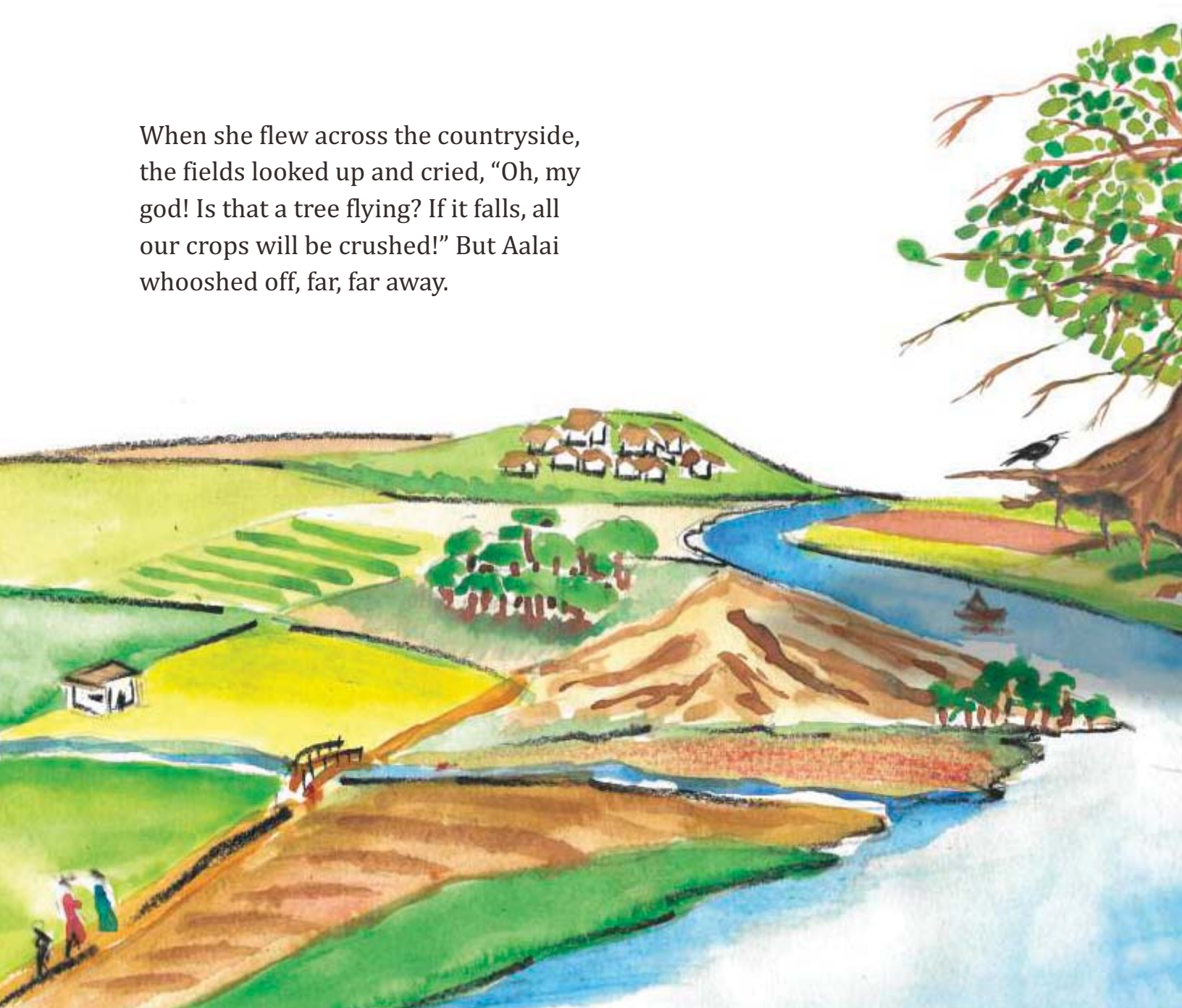


Through the air she swooshed, her many, many roots and branches swinging about in complete abandon. Faster than a passing thought went Aalai, across forests, fields and farms, over hill and dale. She nearly hid the sun and everyone came out to see this strange sight!

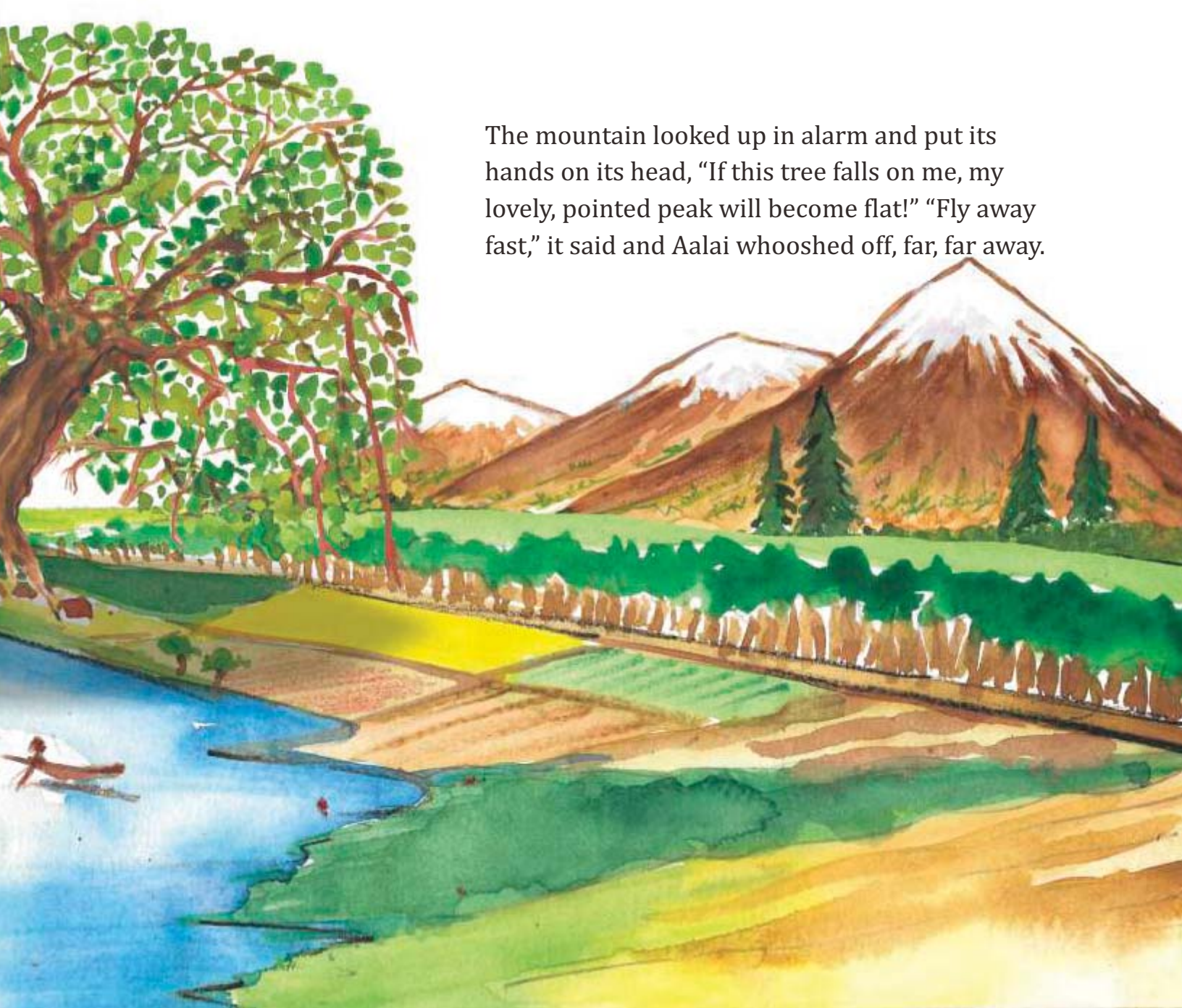


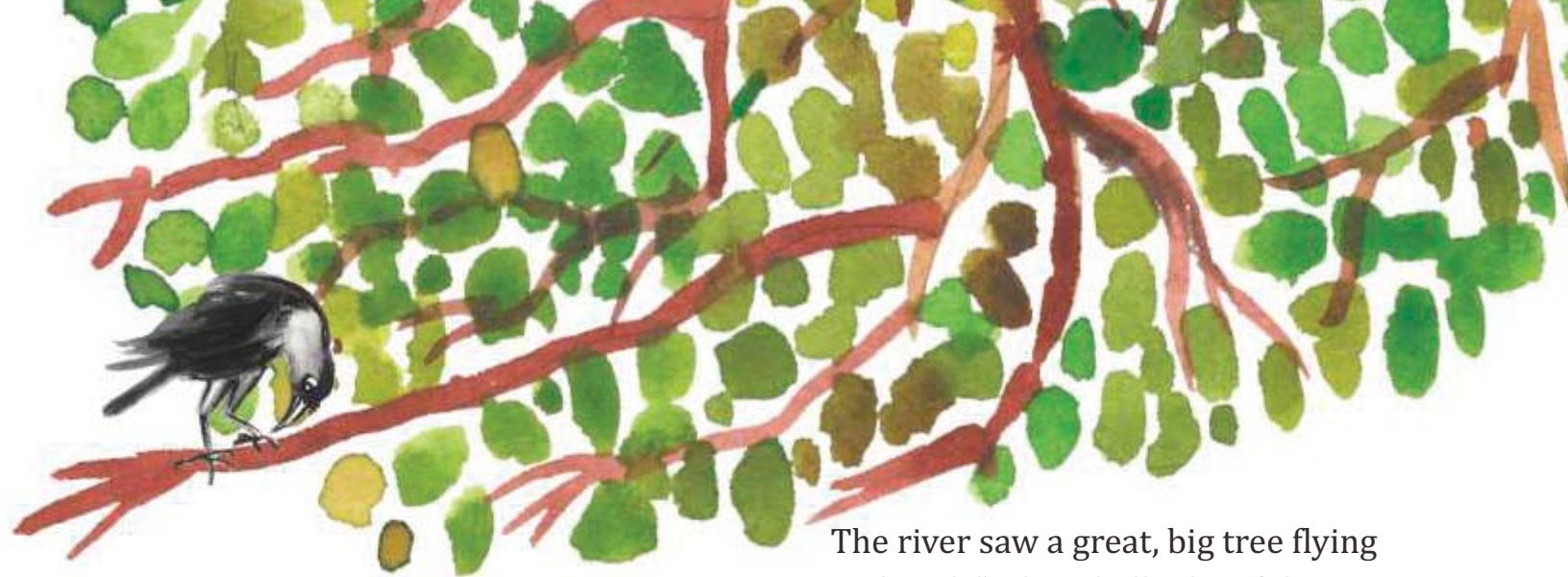


When she flew across the countryside, the fields looked up and cried, "Oh, my god! Is that a tree flying? If it falls, all our crops will be crushed!" But Aalai whooshed off, far, far away.

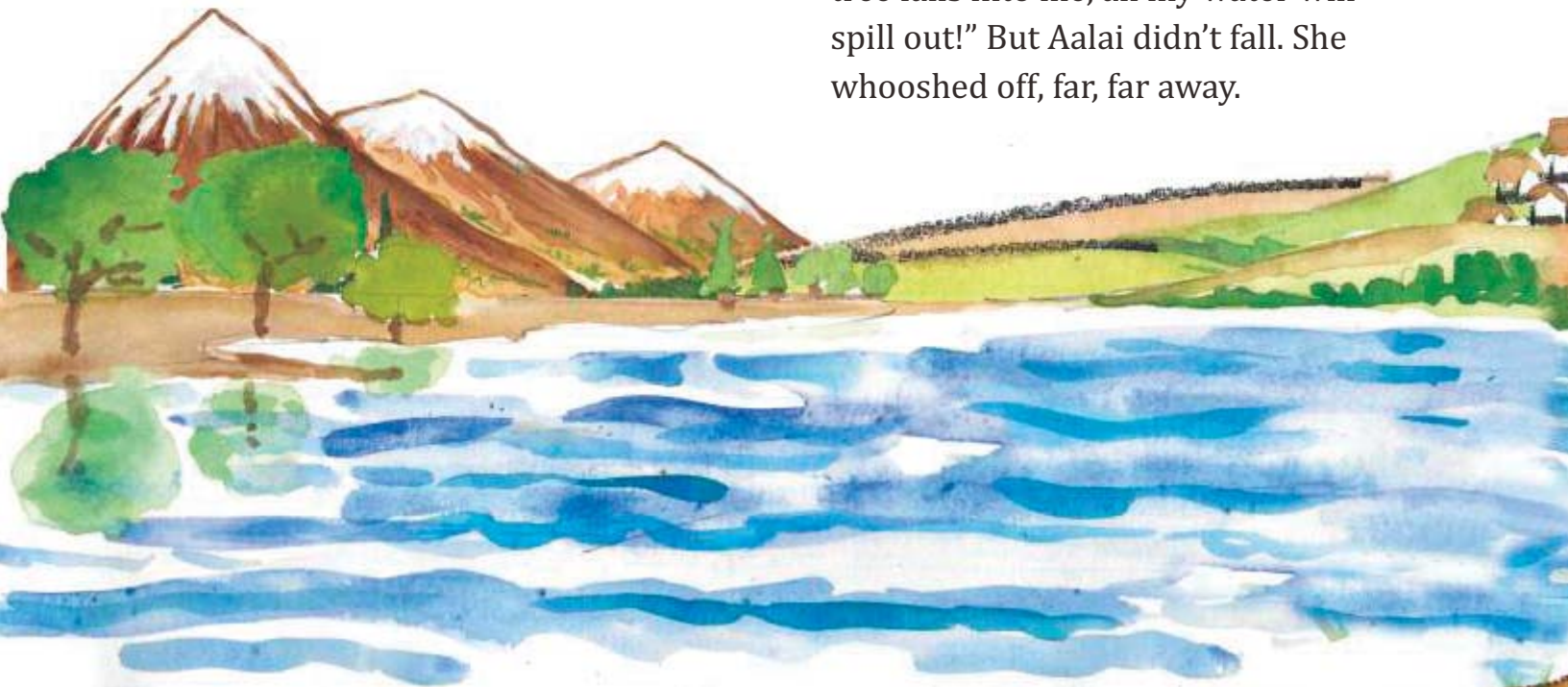


The mountain looked up in alarm and put its hands on its head, "If this tree falls on me, my lovely, pointed peak will become flat!" "Fly away fast," it said and Aalai whooshed off, far, far away.

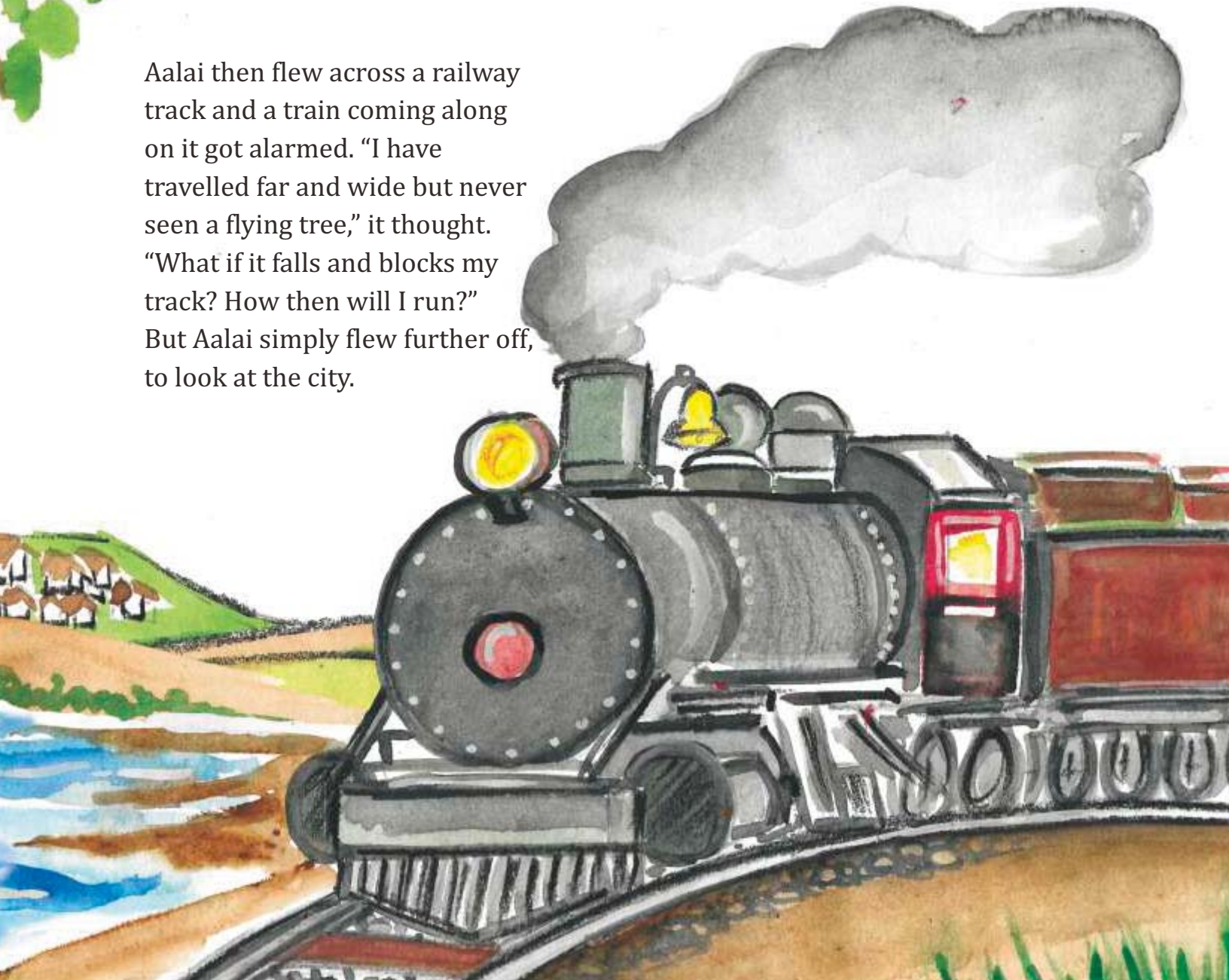




The river saw a great, big tree flying and said, "What shall I do? If this tree falls into me, all my water will spill out!" But Aalai didn't fall. She whooshed off, far, far away.

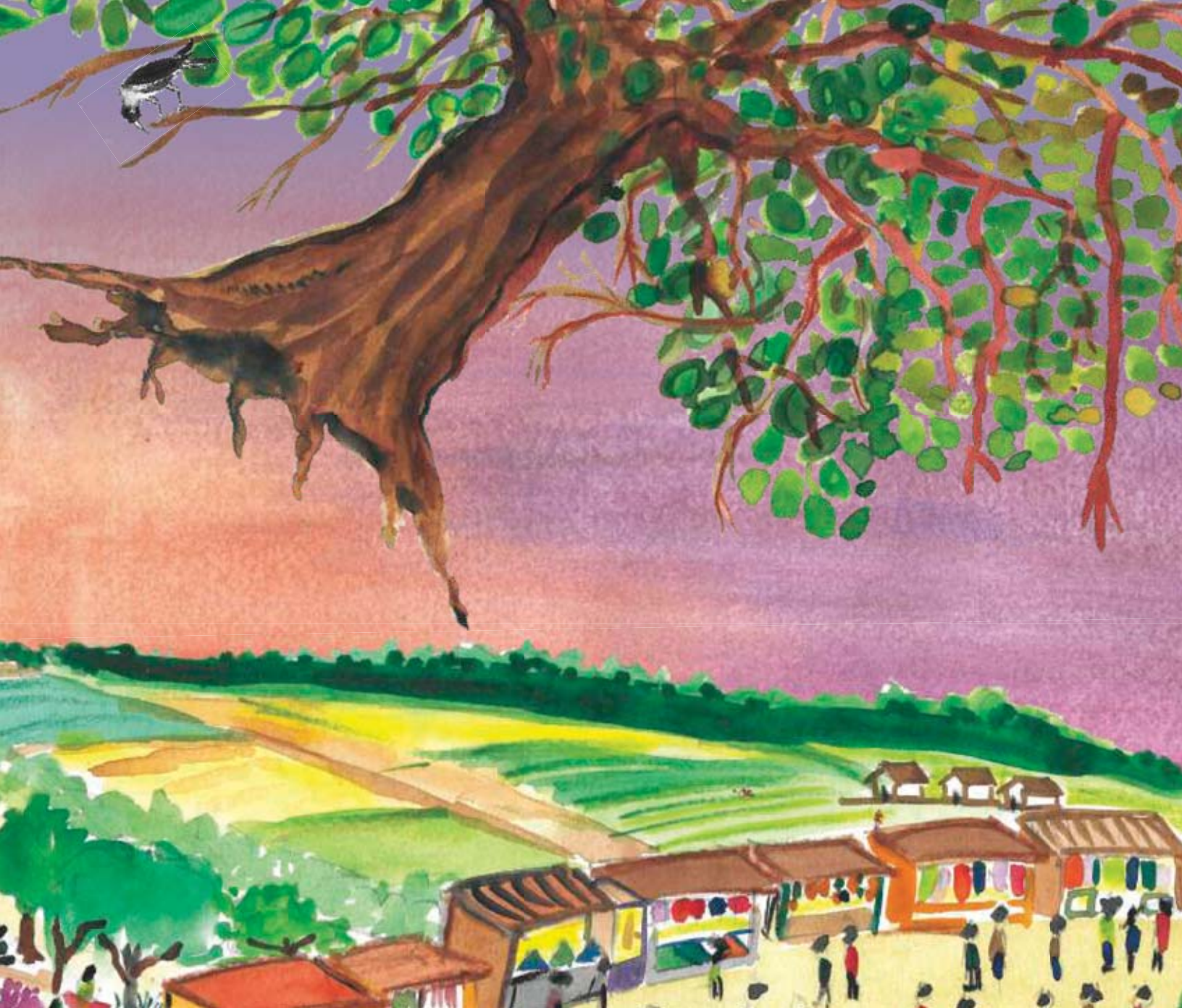


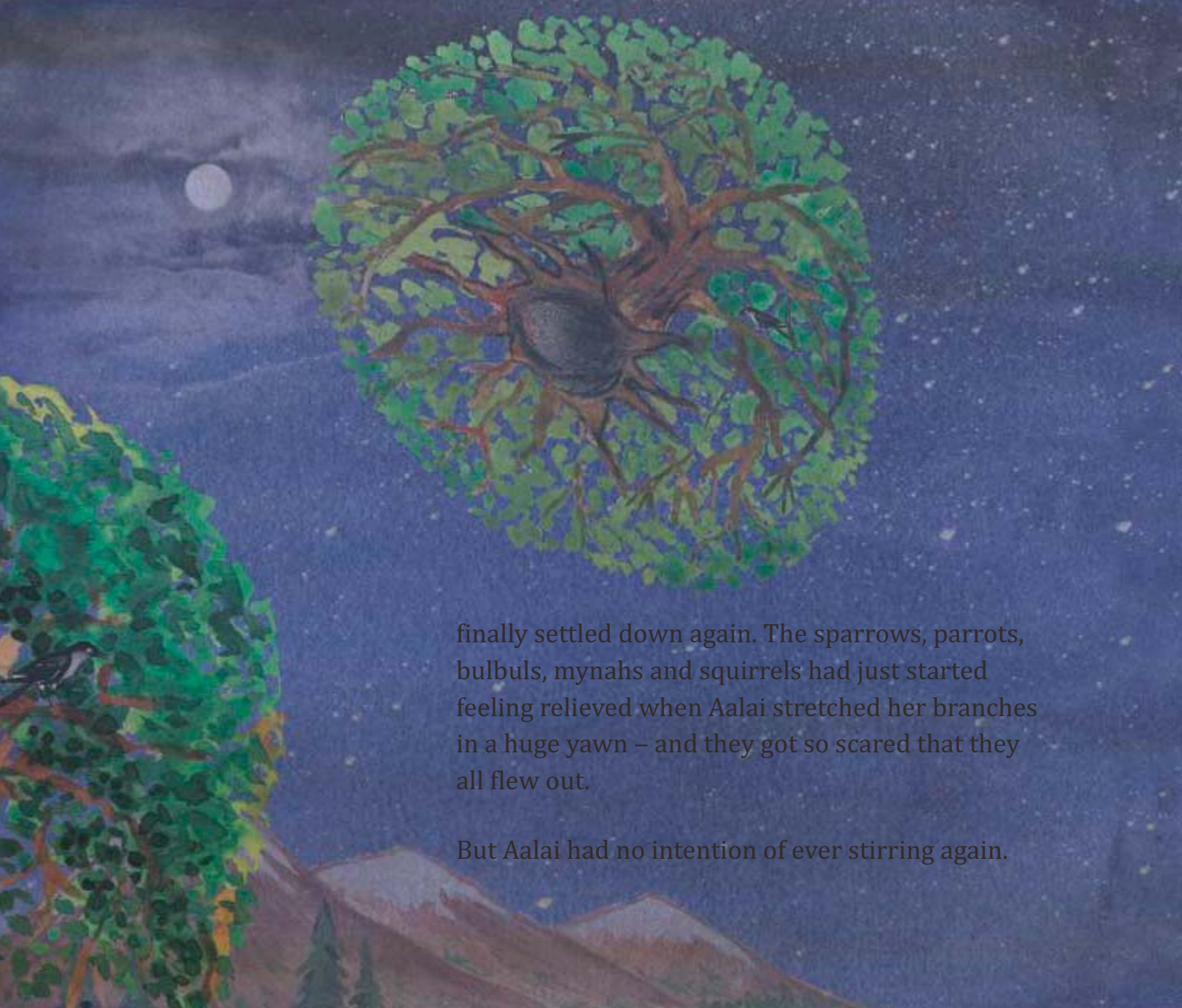
Aalai then flew across a railway track and a train coming along on it got alarmed. "I have travelled far and wide but never seen a flying tree," it thought. "What if it falls and blocks my track? How then will I run?" But Aalai simply flew further off, to look at the city.



The people looked up, and covering their heads, said, "Oh, heavens help! Who ever heard of a flying tree? We will all be flattened if that giant tree falls on us."





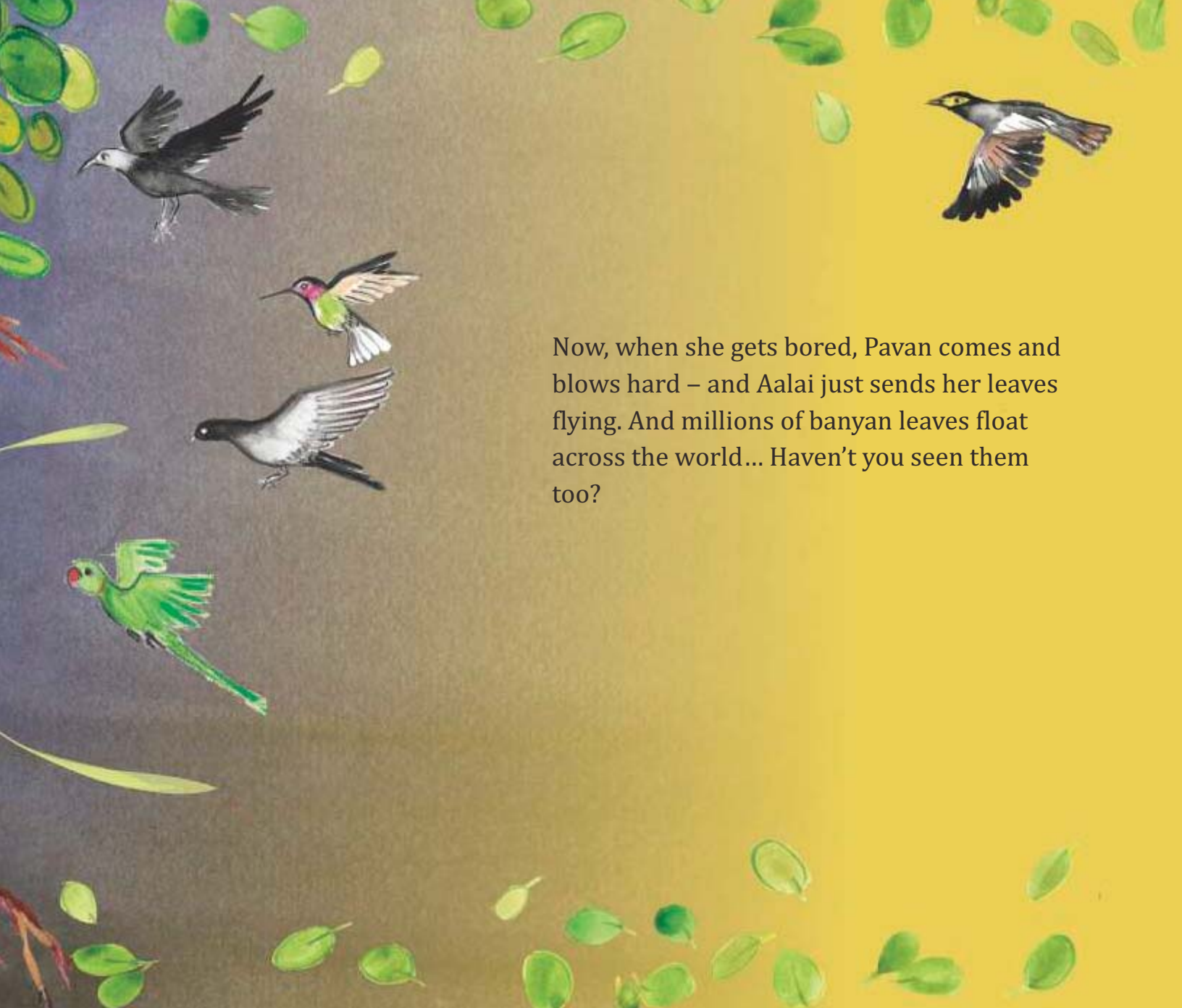


finally settled down again. The sparrows, parrots, bulbuls, mynahs and squirrels had just started feeling relieved when Aalai stretched her branches in a huge yawn – and they got so scared that they all flew out.

But Aalai had no intention of ever stirring again.







Now, when she gets bored, Pavan comes and blows hard – and Aalai just sends her leaves flying. And millions of banyan leaves float across the world... Haven't you seen them too?

Aalai goes flying

Story: Bharati Jagannathan

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Design: Kanak Shashi



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**“Heave ho, pull and yank,
heave ho, pull and yank...”**

Who is making so much noise in the
middle of the night?

Oh no, is the sky about to fall down?!
Or is it this strong wind? Are we going
to have a storm? No, wait a minute,
could it be Aalai? She was not in a
good mood today, was she?

Come, let us go to her and find out...



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