

Bright Lights In The Distance



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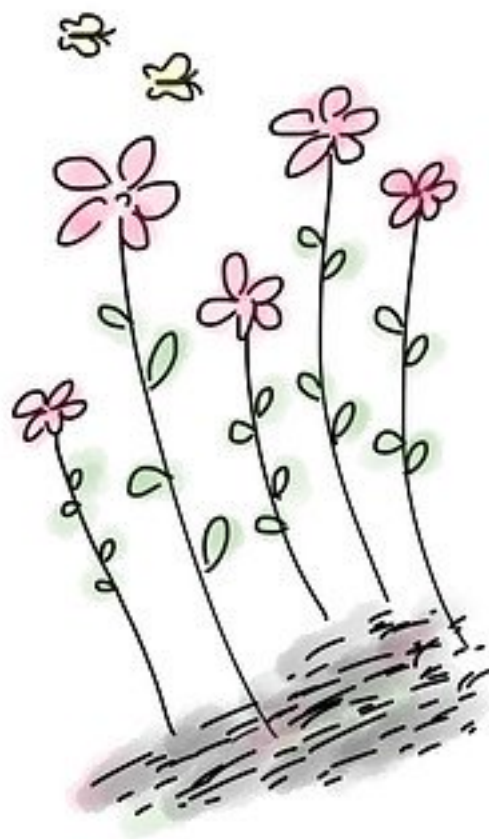
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Dedication

Ellie, my precious niece. As these characters began to take on form and personality, I continued to hear your voice. Curiosity, wonderment, a little sass at times, but always so pure! May you explore and discover who you are by what you fix the eyes of your imagination upon, leaping in and never slowing!

This story is for you sweet girl.
Love, Auntie

“The Kingdom is a gift to those, like children, who know they cannot earn it.”
Mark 10.15



Table of Content

CHAPTER 1

8

CHAPTER 2

16

CHAPTER 3

34

CHAPTER 4

38

CHAPTER 5

54

CHAPTER 6

70

CHAPTER 7

78

CHAPTER 8

90

CHAPTER 9

96

CHAPTER 10

106

CHAPTER 11

112

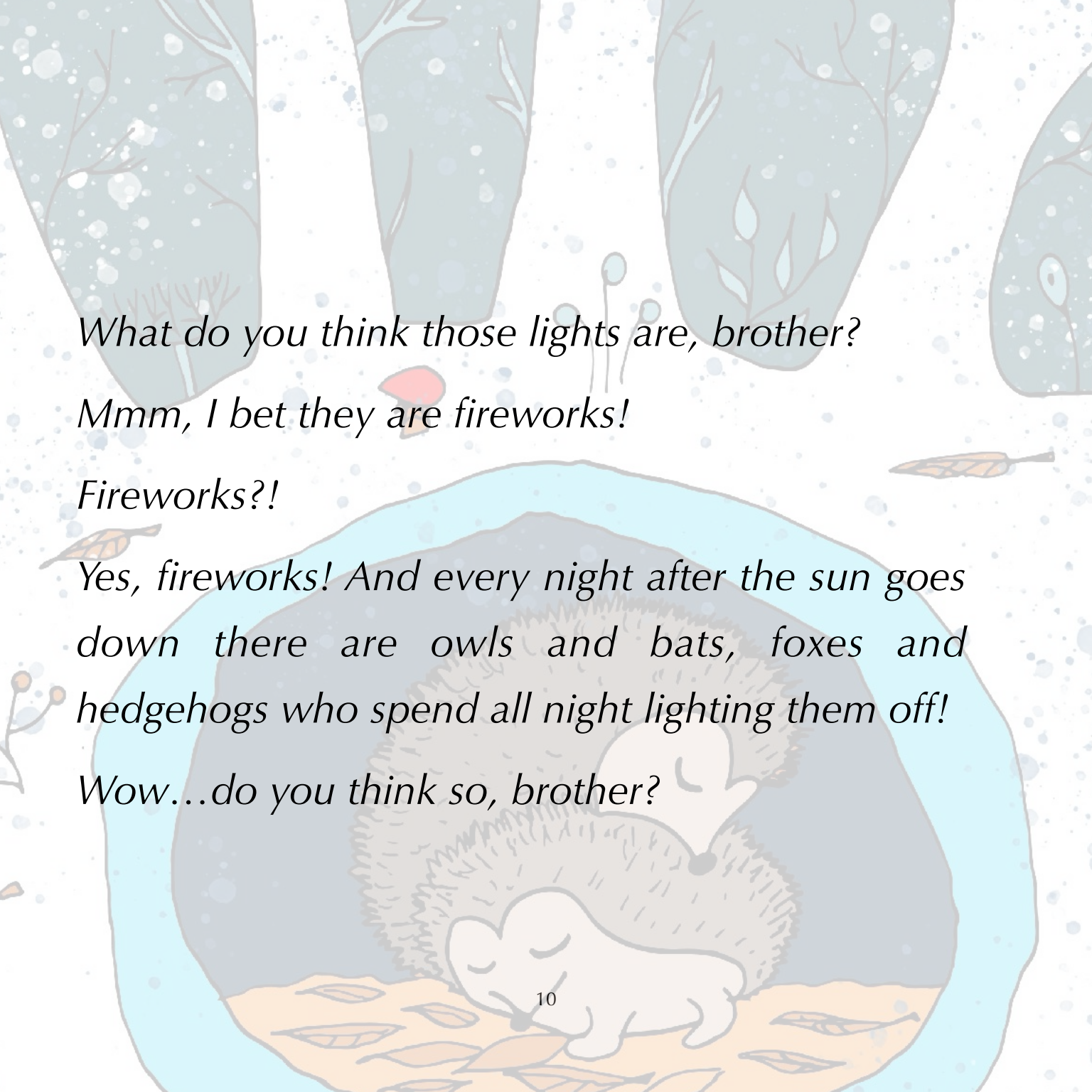
COLOR/SKETCH PAGES

118

Chapter 1

There is a room filled with toys and knick knacks, bright furniture and race cars. In the middle of this room sits a giant bay window with long soft curtains tied to its side. A cozy seat with fluffy pillows hug the wall, while this giant bay window rises clear to the ceiling. The little boy and the little girl snuggle close on this bay window seat peering at the bright lights in the distance.

Their window, along with the rest of their home, sits upon an expansive hill, and for miles all they can see are more hills, trees and lots of animals. Especially birds. Many different kinds of birds filled the air. But when night time comes the lights in the distance fill the horizon, and the little boy and the little girl dream of going there. One day they would go on an adventure to see the bright lights in the distance.



What do you think those lights are, brother?

Mmm, I bet they are fireworks!

Fireworks?!

Yes, fireworks! And every night after the sun goes down there are owls and bats, foxes and hedgehogs who spend all night lighting them off!

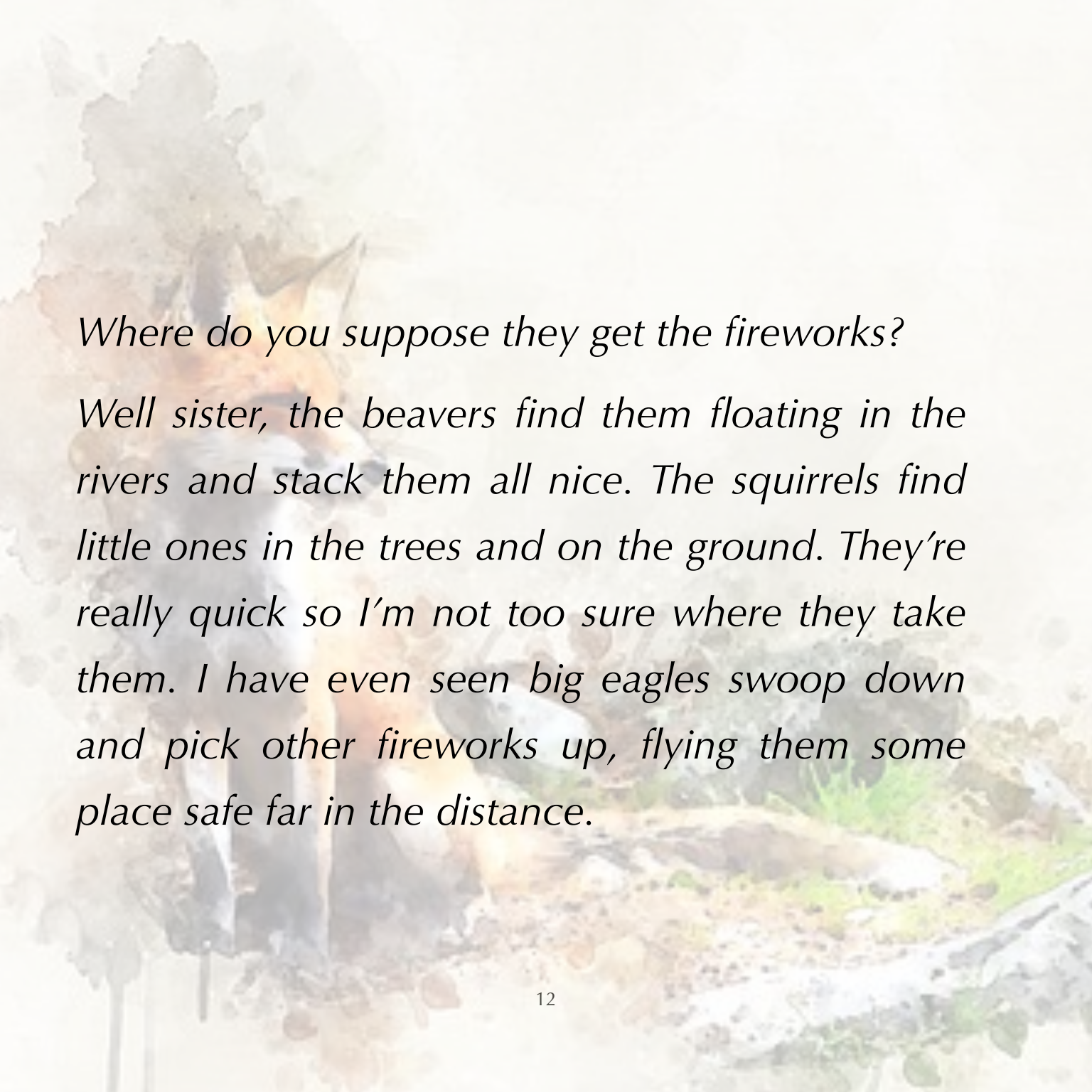
Wow...do you think so, brother?



Oh yes sister, yes. Don't you see how all those animals sleep during the day so they can stay up all night lighting them off, while other animals spend all day gathering fireworks?

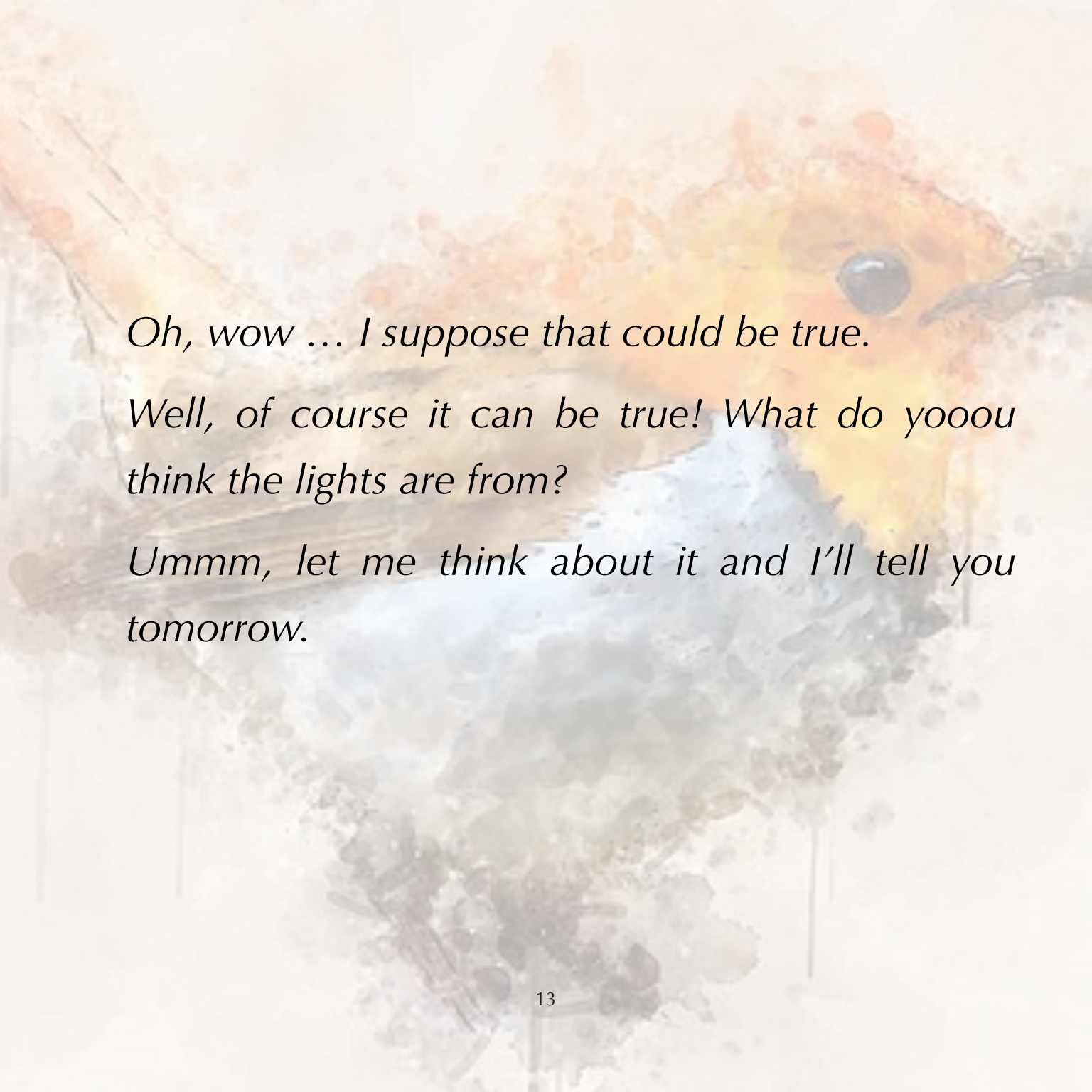
Is that what they're doing, brother?

Oh yes, it is...

A watercolor illustration of a beaver in a river, surrounded by trees and foliage. The beaver is in the center, facing right, with its tail visible. The background is a soft, painterly depiction of a natural setting with various shades of green, brown, and blue.

Where do you suppose they get the fireworks?

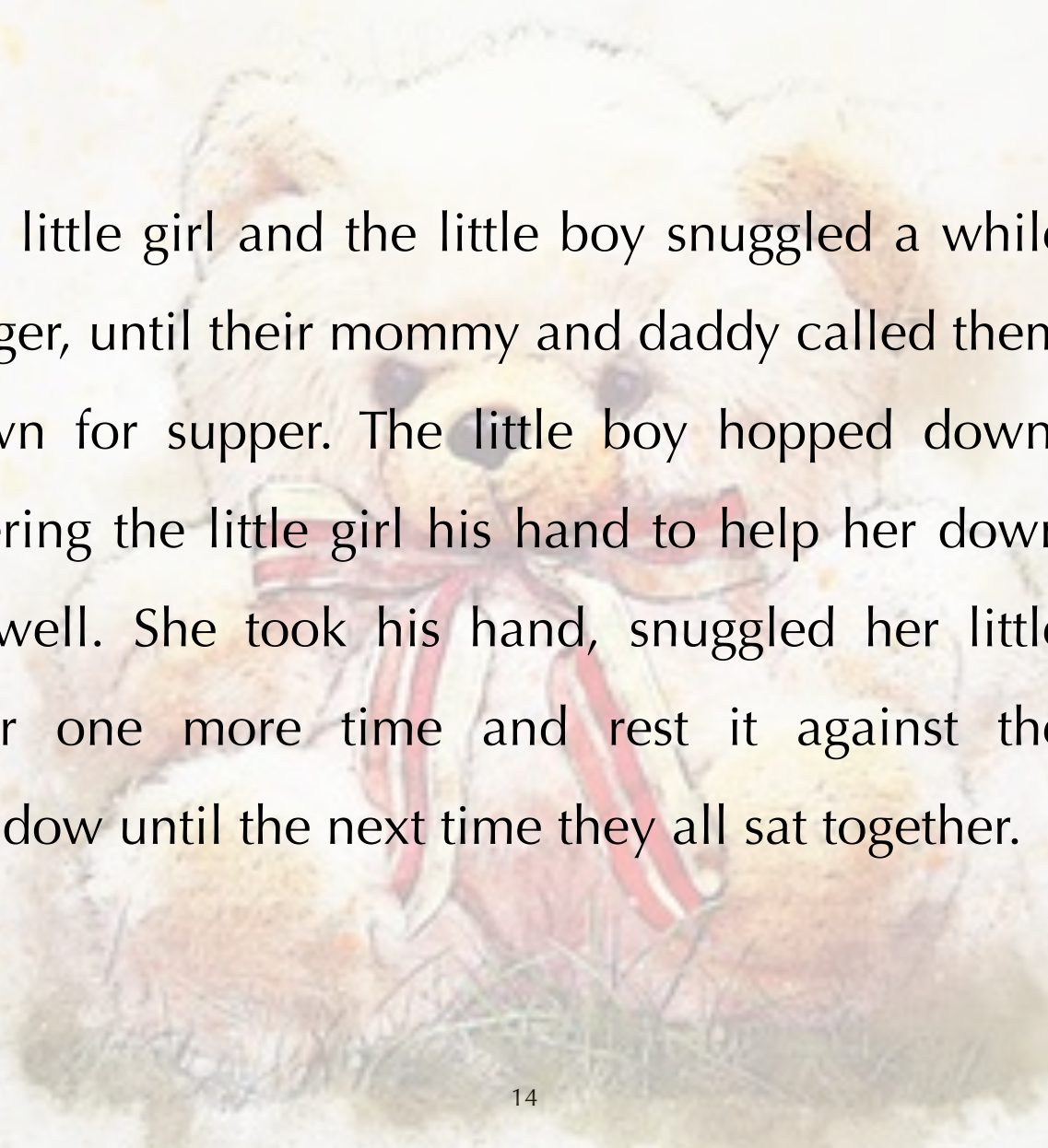
Well sister, the beavers find them floating in the rivers and stack them all nice. The squirrels find little ones in the trees and on the ground. They're really quick so I'm not too sure where they take them. I have even seen big eagles swoop down and pick other fireworks up, flying them some place safe far in the distance.



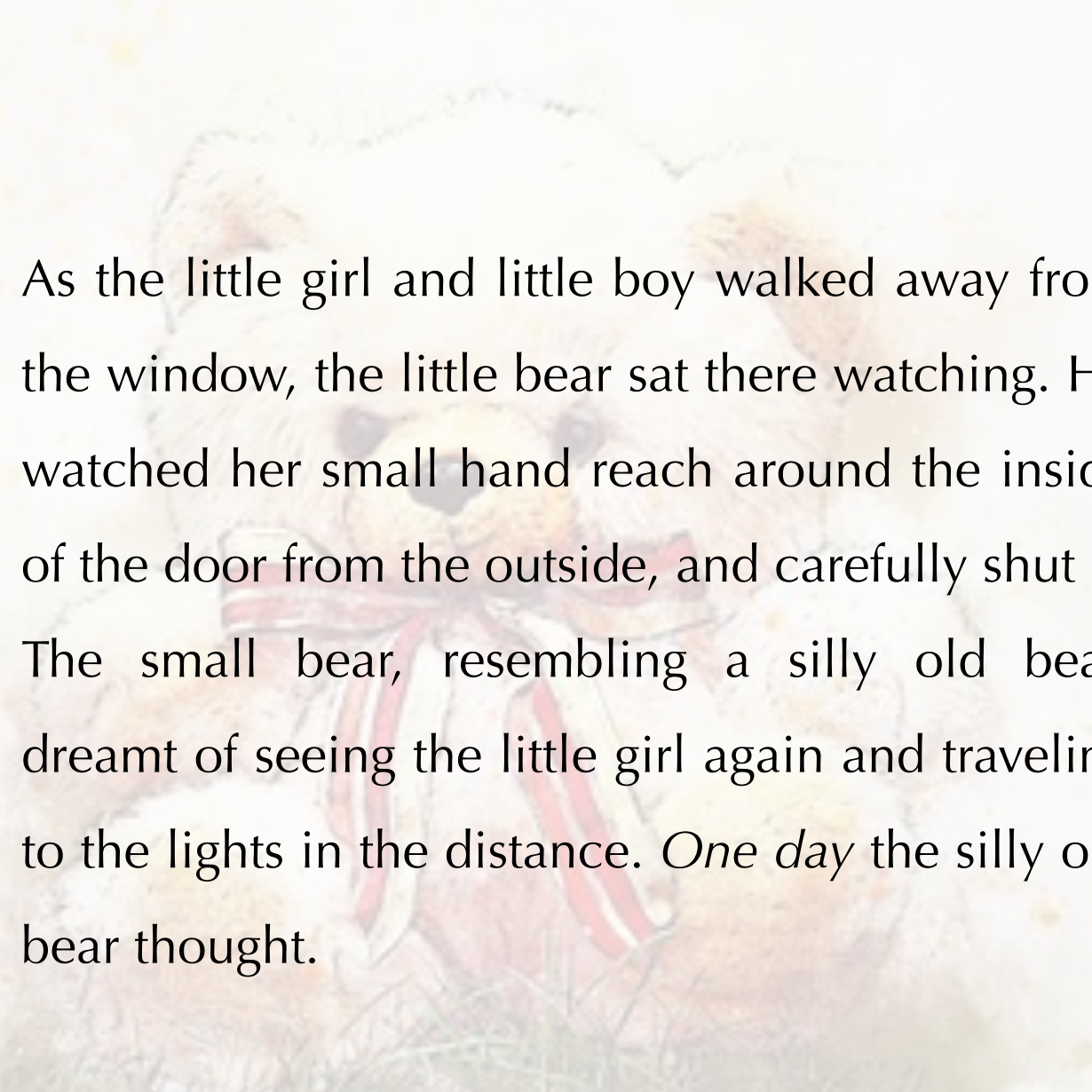
Oh, wow ... I suppose that could be true.

Well, of course it can be true! What do yooou think the lights are from?

Ummm, let me think about it and I'll tell you tomorrow.



The little girl and the little boy snuggled a while longer, until their mommy and daddy called them down for supper. The little boy hopped down, offering the little girl his hand to help her down as well. She took his hand, snuggled her little bear one more time and rest it against the window until the next time they all sat together.



As the little girl and little boy walked away from the window, the little bear sat there watching. He watched her small hand reach around the inside of the door from the outside, and carefully shut it. The small bear, resembling a silly old bear, dreamt of seeing the little girl again and traveling to the lights in the distance. *One day* the silly old bear thought.

Chapter 2

A day of play tired the little girl and the little boy. And what a perfect time to grow tired, for it had begun to rain. It rained and it rained and it rained.

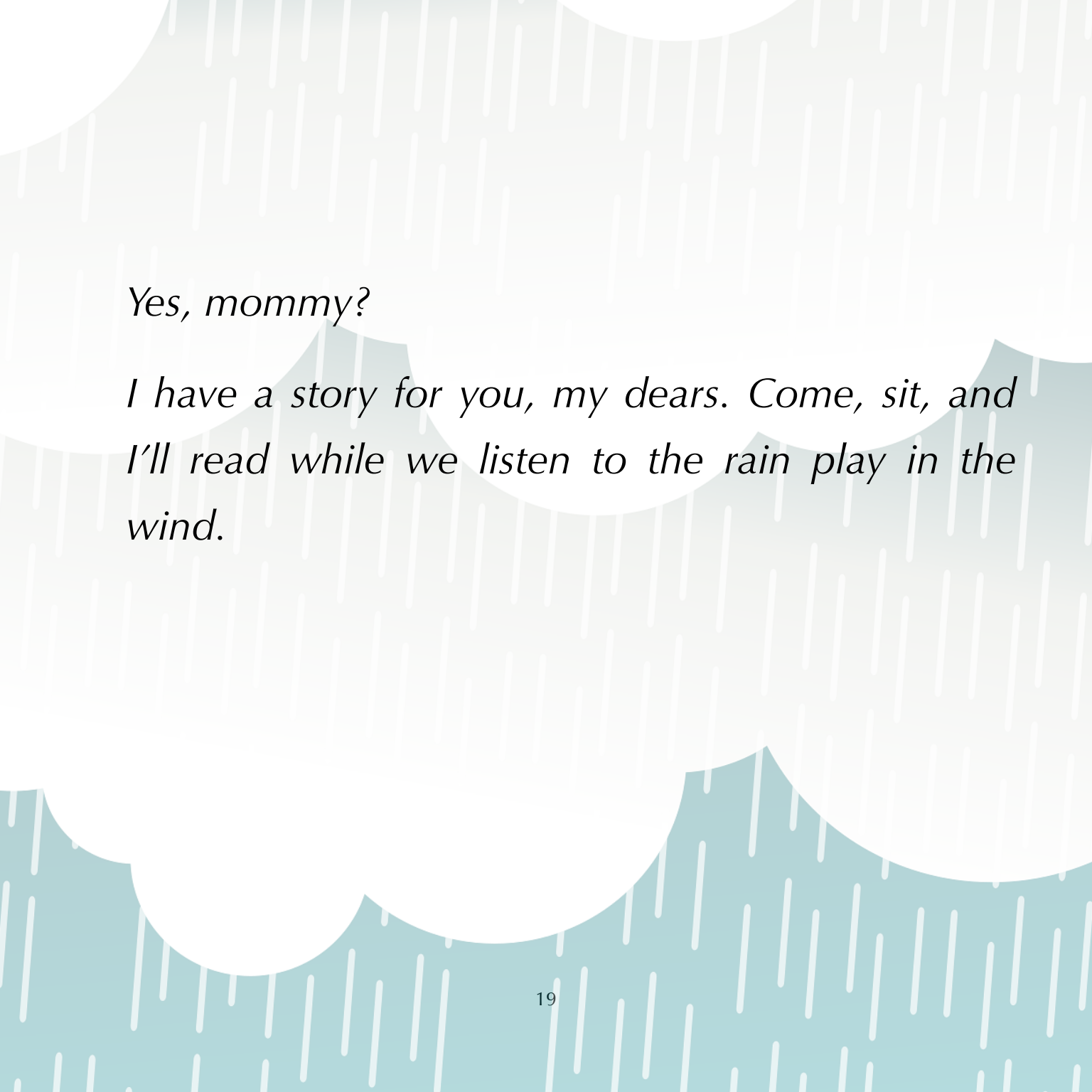
Little drops of rain burst into big puddles upon their small heads as they climbed the steps of their back door, leaping inside with smiles and giggles. They took their evening baths early and dressed for bed before they even had supper.

Come children.



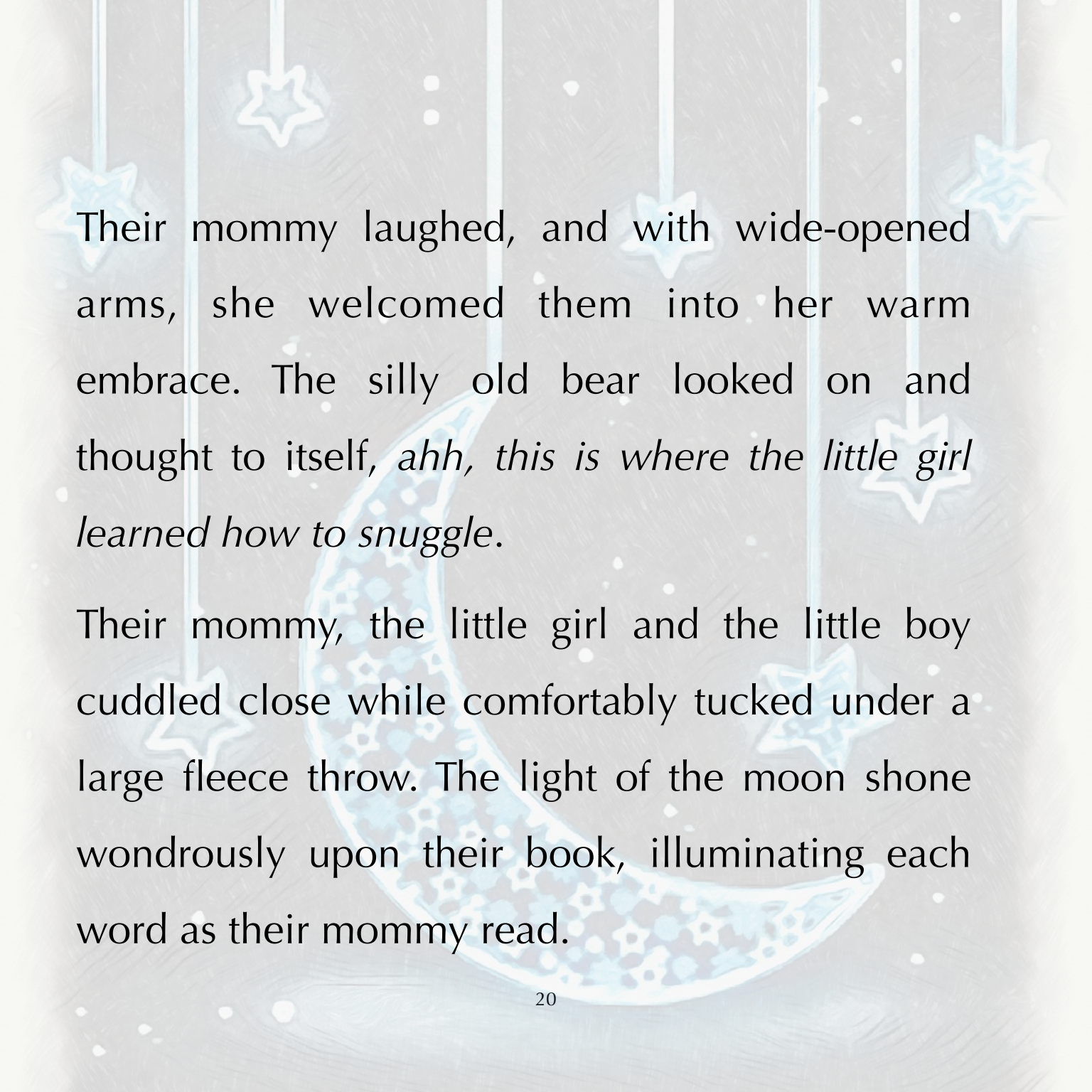
Their mommy invited them to join her.

She sat in their bedroom, waiting for them on their window seat. The little girl and the little boy ran into their room, tugging their jammies up off the ground as they went. They were twins in every way; Brown curly hair, bright captivating eyes and little floppy legs. They laughed the whole way.



Yes, mommy?

I have a story for you, my dears. Come, sit, and I'll read while we listen to the rain play in the wind.

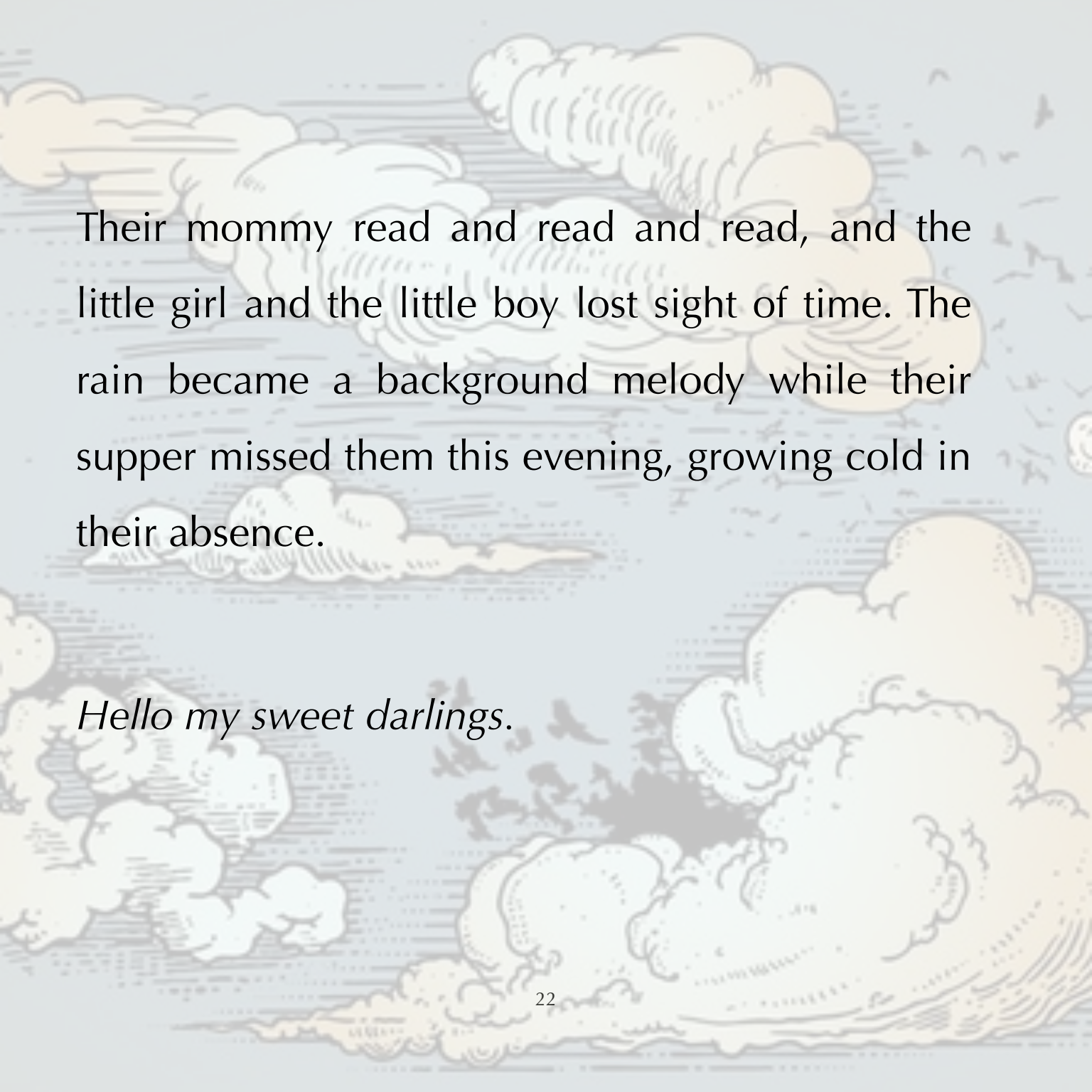


Their mommy laughed, and with wide-opened arms, she welcomed them into her warm embrace. The silly old bear looked on and thought to itself, *ahh, this is where the little girl learned how to snuggle.*

Their mommy, the little girl and the little boy cuddled close while comfortably tucked under a large fleece throw. The light of the moon shone wondrously upon their book, illuminating each word as their mommy read.

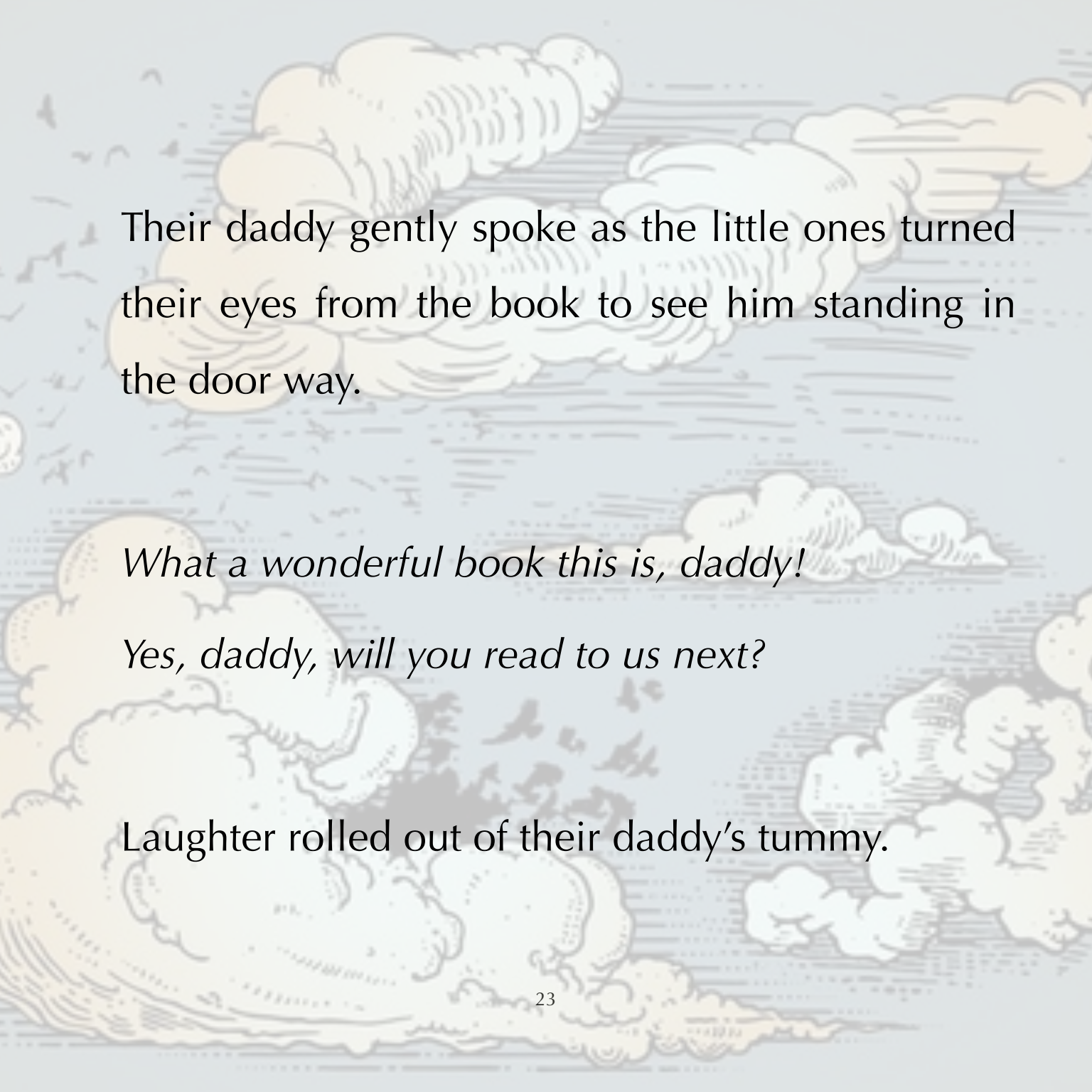
*Not long ago and yet a very long time ago, there
was a Man...*





Their mommy read and read and read, and the little girl and the little boy lost sight of time. The rain became a background melody while their supper missed them this evening, growing cold in their absence.

Hello my sweet darlings.



Their daddy gently spoke as the little ones turned their eyes from the book to see him standing in the door way.

What a wonderful book this is, daddy!

Yes, daddy, will you read to us next?

Laughter rolled out of their daddy's tummy.

I love how you are enjoying this book! My mommy read it to me many, many times. It's true, did you know that, little ones?

No daddy, I did not ... did you sister??

I did not, either, brother. Wow...

Mommy...

Yes, my sweet girl?

May we stay up for a few more minutes to look at the lights?

A warm smile filled their mommy's face as she looked at their daddy, who nodded yes in agreement.

Okay, sweet girl. You and brother may stay up a little longer. Daddy and I will be back soon.

Their daddy walked over, bent forward and kissed the little girl and the little boy on the forehead.

I love you, my children.

We love you daddy.

Their mommy placed the book on the shelf next to the window seat, and then turning back toward them, drew them together under the throw, and adjusted the pillows surrounding them. She then brushed their hair off their foreheads and kissed them gingerly.

Dream deep my dears. Let wonderment fill you up!

Their mommy and daddy left their room while they sat snuggled on the window seat, looking out the large bay window toward the bright lights in the distance.

I don't think these are fireworks, brother.

You don't? Hmm, ya, I'm not sure those are fireworks anymore, either. The rain would've gotten them wet. What do you think they are?

Angels, brother.

Angels??

Yes, like in the story mommy read to us.

But, what are they doing over there? Aren't they supposed to be over here, and in other houses with more little girls, boys and mommy's and daddy's?

Well, they are brother. They are everywhere. But that's where they meet every night before they go to see all the people all over the world.

Really, sister?

Really, brother...

Mmm, are you sure??

Well, I'm pretty sure. Do you remember when daddy took us to where he works and there were lots of soldiers in lots of buildings?

Yes, they looked very serious sister.

Well, daddy said that those soldiers were getting trained to go all over the world.

So it's a place for Angels to be trained?

Yes, I think so brother.

But, what are the lights sister?

Theeeey are the lights brother!

A lengthy giggle escaped the little girls' frame, and her curls bounced up and down with her small body. Like a tottering toddler, she slipped back into an untethered innocence, abandoned and free to dream and wonder.

Ohhh, like in the book?!

Yes, the Angles were so bright that people thought they were light. And they were light!

Wow... Okay sister, maybe they are Angels. Sister?

Yes, brother?

The little girl was leaning over the window seal with her chin resting in her hands, gazing at the lights in the distance.

If those are Angels, why aren't they moving at all?

Mmm, I don't know, brother. Maybe they're moving so fast that it looks like they're sitting still. I'll have to think about it, brother. I'll let you know tomorrow.

Okay, sister.

Down hopped the little boy, who held his hand out for the little girl, who snuggled her silly old bear one more time.

She then took her brother's hand and hopped down herself. They dreamt deeply that evening.

The silly old bear sat upon a cushy yellow pillow, peering out over the shadowed hills and straight into the bright lights in the distance. *One day soon, we will go*, thought the silly old bear. And the bear's dark brown buttoned eyes imagined the adventure they would go on.

Chapter 3

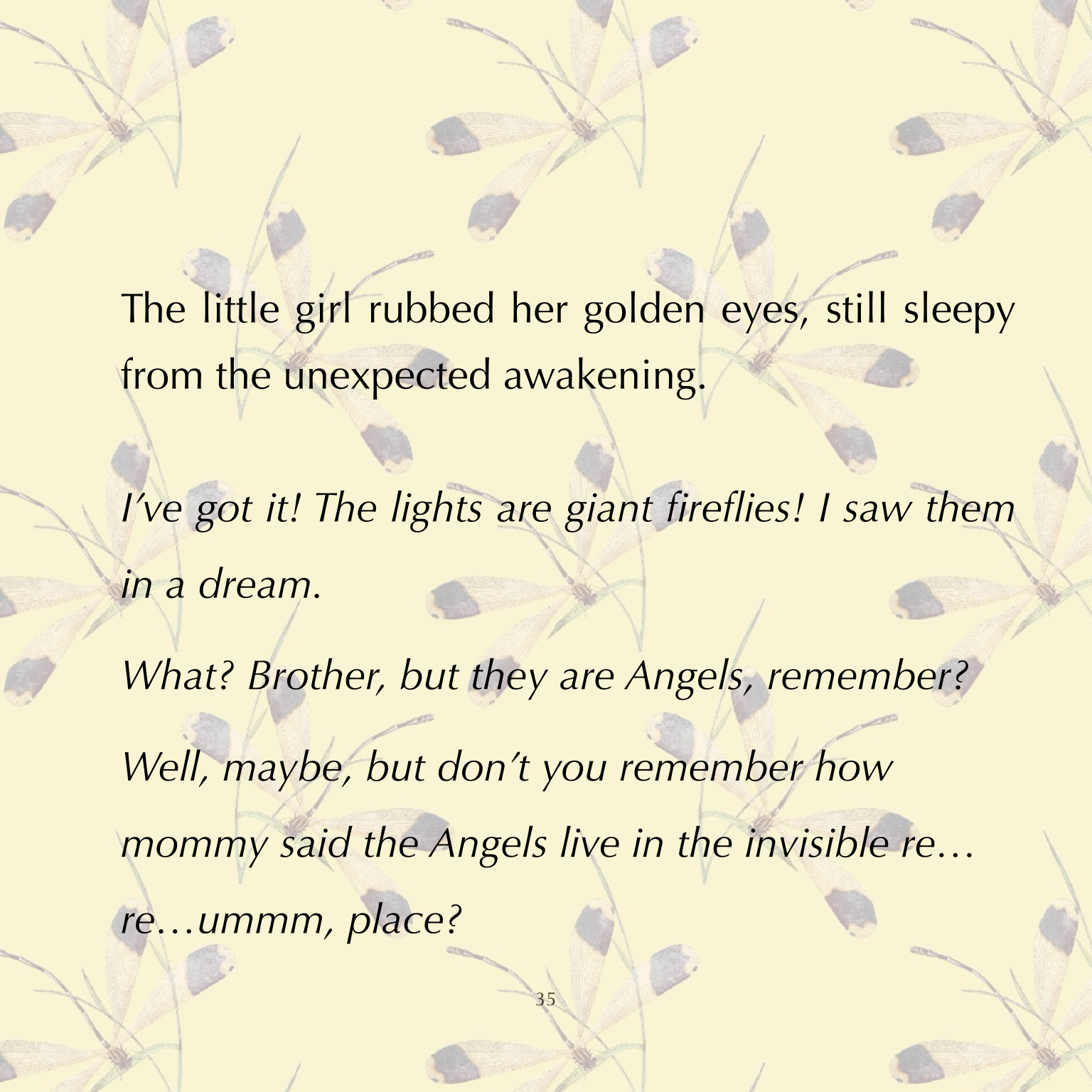
The little boy awoke, excited by a new thought!

Sister, sister, wake up!

The little boy had run over to her bed where she slept cozily, and softly shook her. Again, in a hurried whisper.

Sister, sister, wake up, wake up!

What brother, what's going on?



The little girl rubbed her golden eyes, still sleepy
from the unexpected awakening.

*I've got it! The lights are giant fireflies! I saw them
in a dream.*

What? Brother, but they are Angels, remember?

*Well, maybe, but don't you remember how
mommy said the Angels live in the invisible re...
re...ummm, place?*

Yes, but mommy also said we could see them.

But wouldn't we be able to see them right here too?

I guess so. Hmm, I don't know brother.

We'll look tonight!

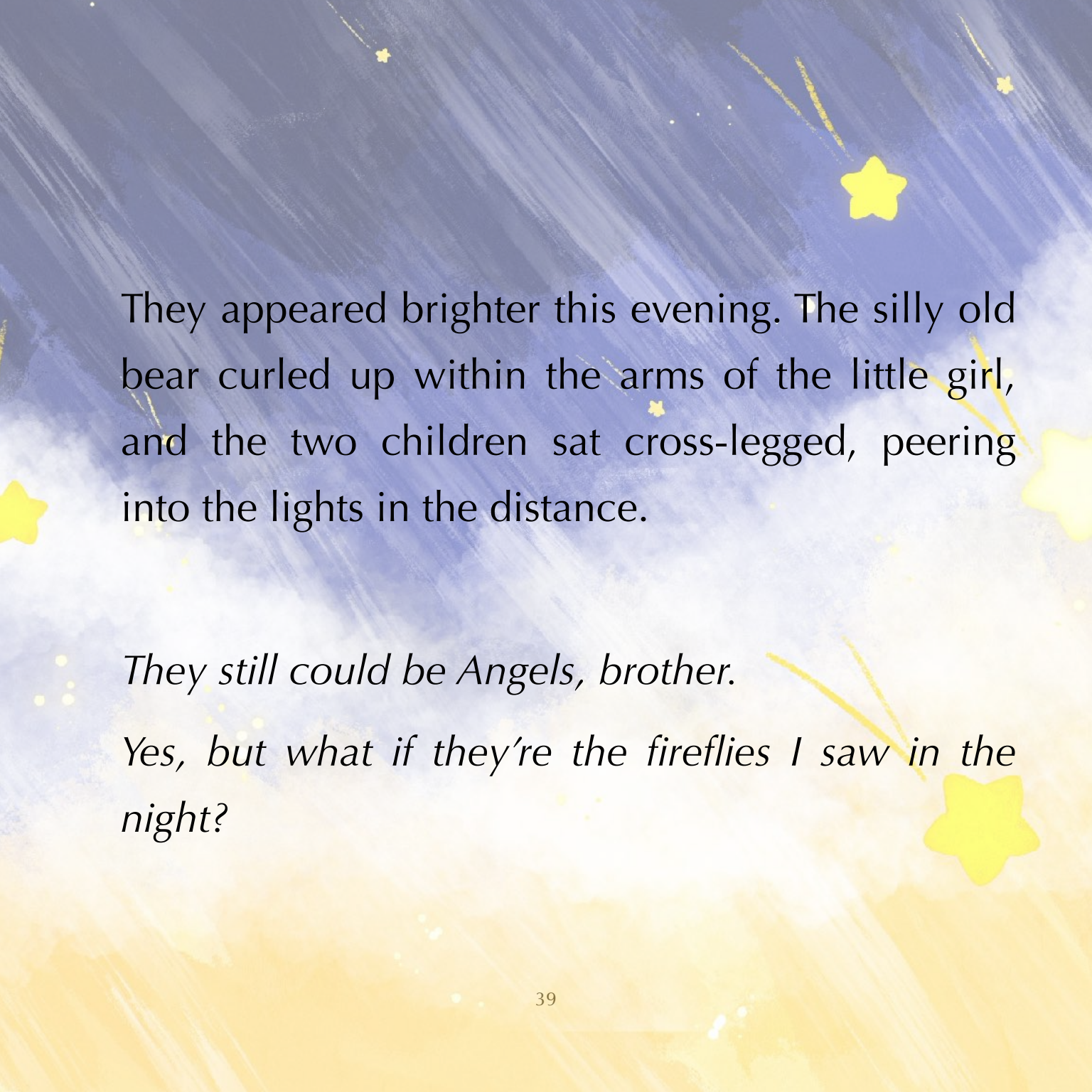
Okay ... I'm tired, brother. Go back to sleep, silly.

The little boy couldn't sleep, so he dreamt of the lights and began to dream of a new adventure they would go on.

Chapter 4

The sun was orange this evening, speckled with reds and golds throughout. Clouds dusted the sky surrounding the sleepy sun, and the little girl and the little boy anxiously looked deep to their right as the earth moved and the sun rested.

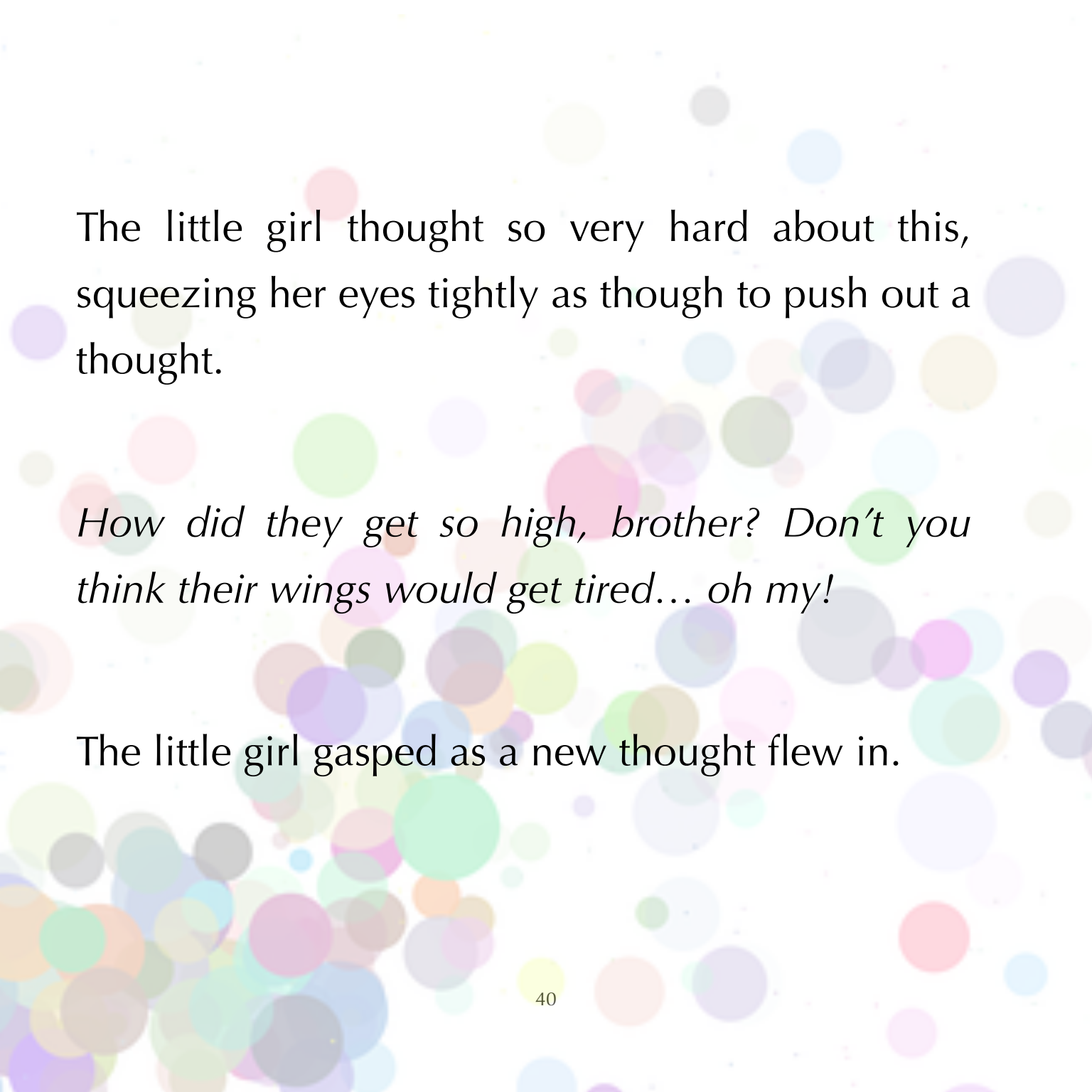
Where this one great light tucked itself away in the night, another great light shone bright in the distance. Quickly, the little girl and the little boy ran their eyes over the skyline, resting upon the new lights... yet old.



They appeared brighter this evening. The silly old bear curled up within the arms of the little girl, and the two children sat cross-legged, peering into the lights in the distance.

They still could be Angels, brother.

Yes, but what if they're the fireflies I saw in the night?

The background of the entire page is filled with numerous overlapping circles of various colors, including shades of pink, purple, blue, green, yellow, and grey, creating a bubbly, festive effect.

The little girl thought so very hard about this, squeezing her eyes tightly as though to push out a thought.

How did they get so high, brother? Don't you think their wings would get tired... oh my!

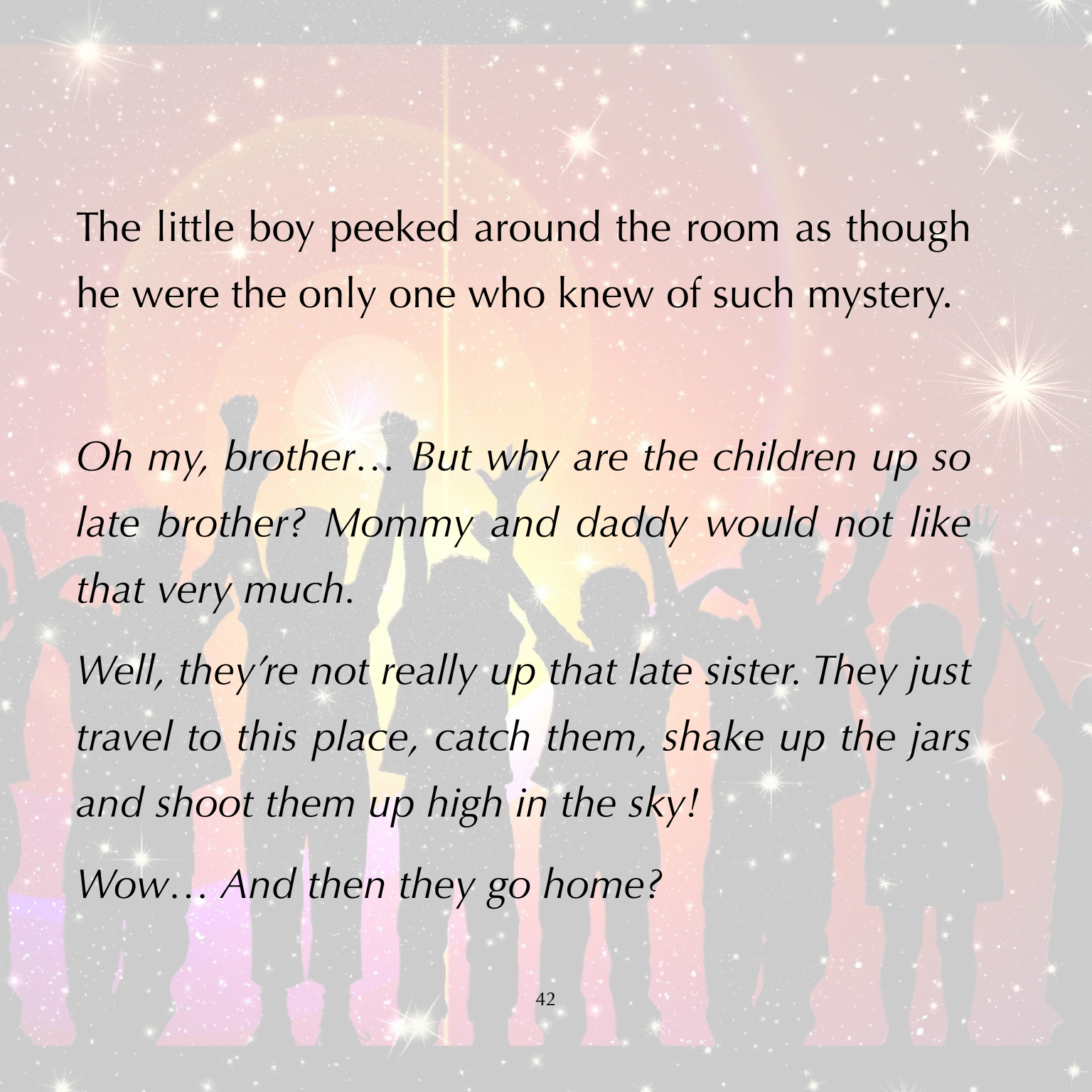
The little girl gasped as a new thought flew in.

Or worse brother ... wouldn't their wings begin to tear??

Well, these are special fireflies. And they are many different sizes, sister. Don't worry!

Ya?

Yes! And I saw how there were lots and lots of boys and girls from all over who came to this place to catch them. From trees, and out of holes in the ground. And I think some come from other worlds sister.

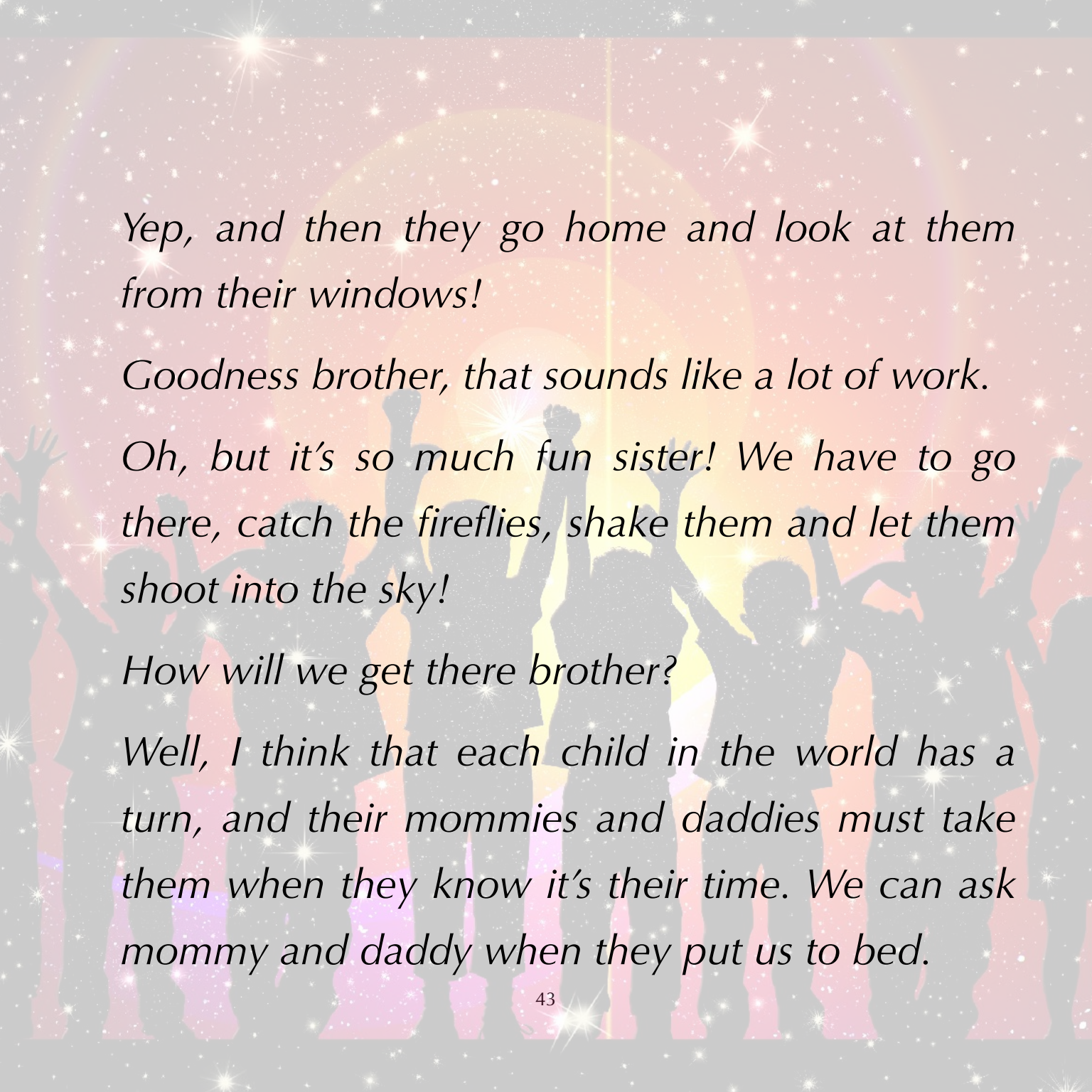


The little boy peeked around the room as though he were the only one who knew of such mystery.

Oh my, brother... But why are the children up so late brother? Mommy and daddy would not like that very much.

Well, they're not really up that late sister. They just travel to this place, catch them, shake up the jars and shoot them up high in the sky!

Wow... And then they go home?



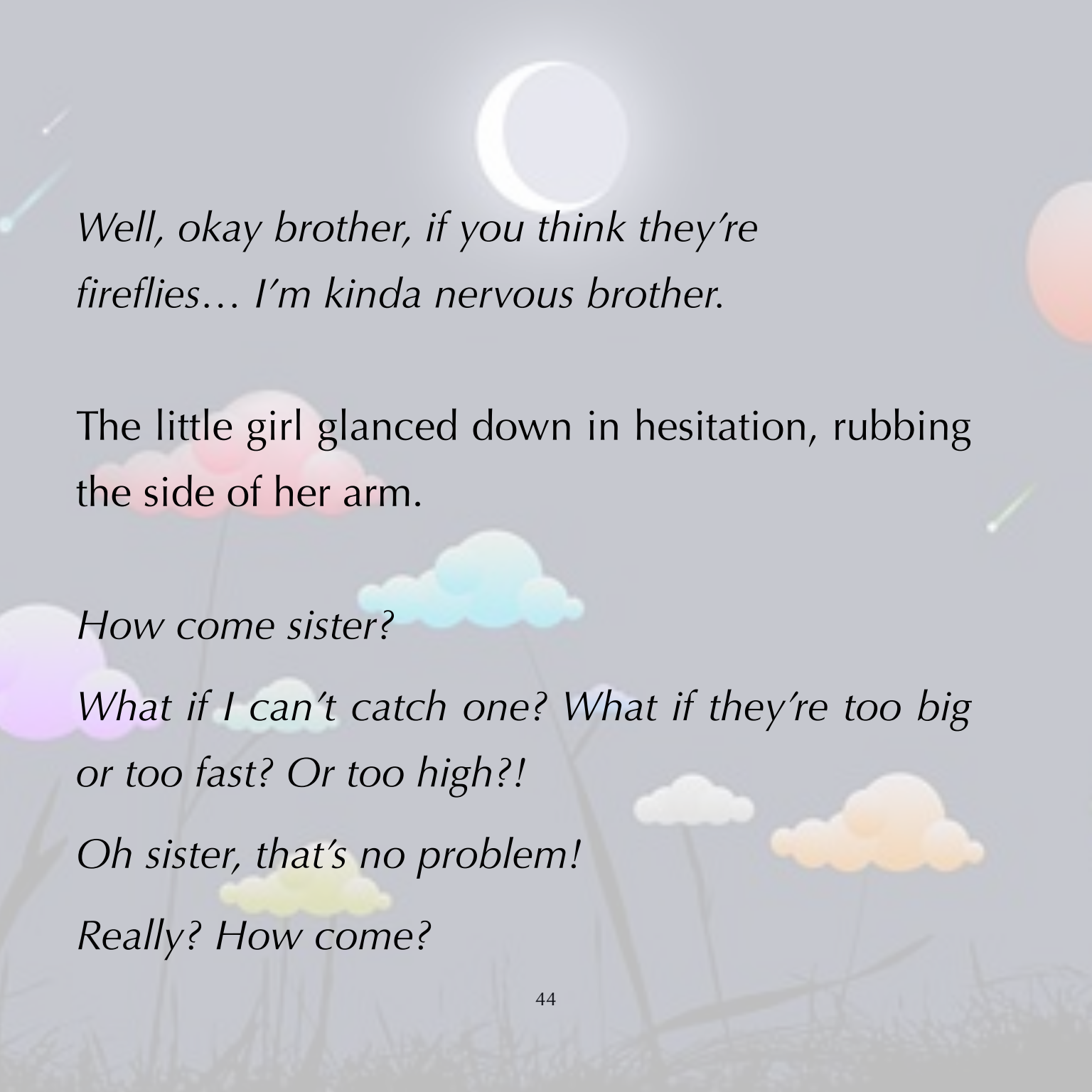
Yep, and then they go home and look at them from their windows!

Goodness brother, that sounds like a lot of work.

Oh, but it's so much fun sister! We have to go there, catch the fireflies, shake them and let them shoot into the sky!

How will we get there brother?

Well, I think that each child in the world has a turn, and their mommies and daddies must take them when they know it's their time. We can ask mommy and daddy when they put us to bed.



Well, okay brother, if you think they're fireflies... I'm kinda nervous brother.

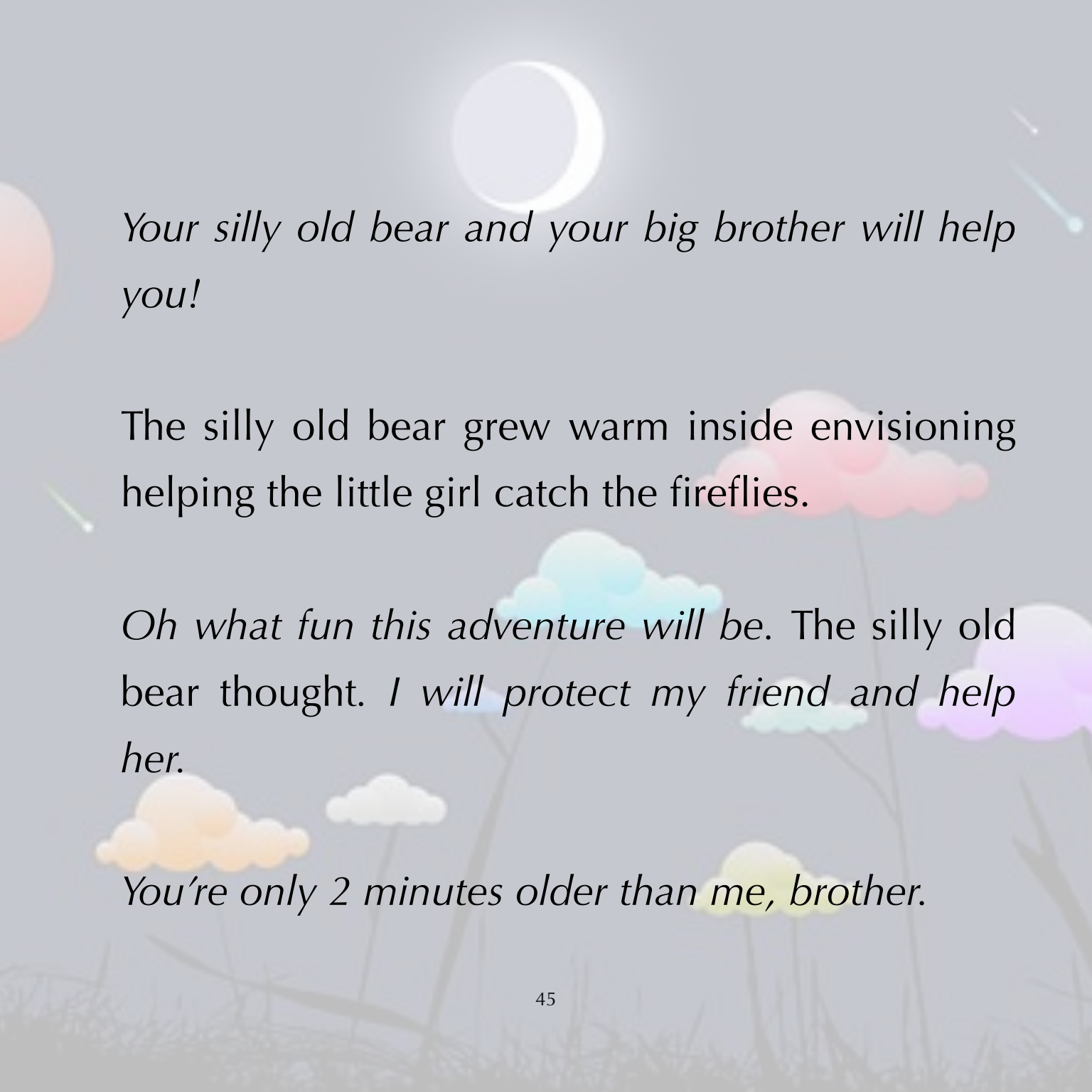
The little girl glanced down in hesitation, rubbing the side of her arm.

How come sister?

What if I can't catch one? What if they're too big or too fast? Or too high?!

Oh sister, that's no problem!

Really? How come?

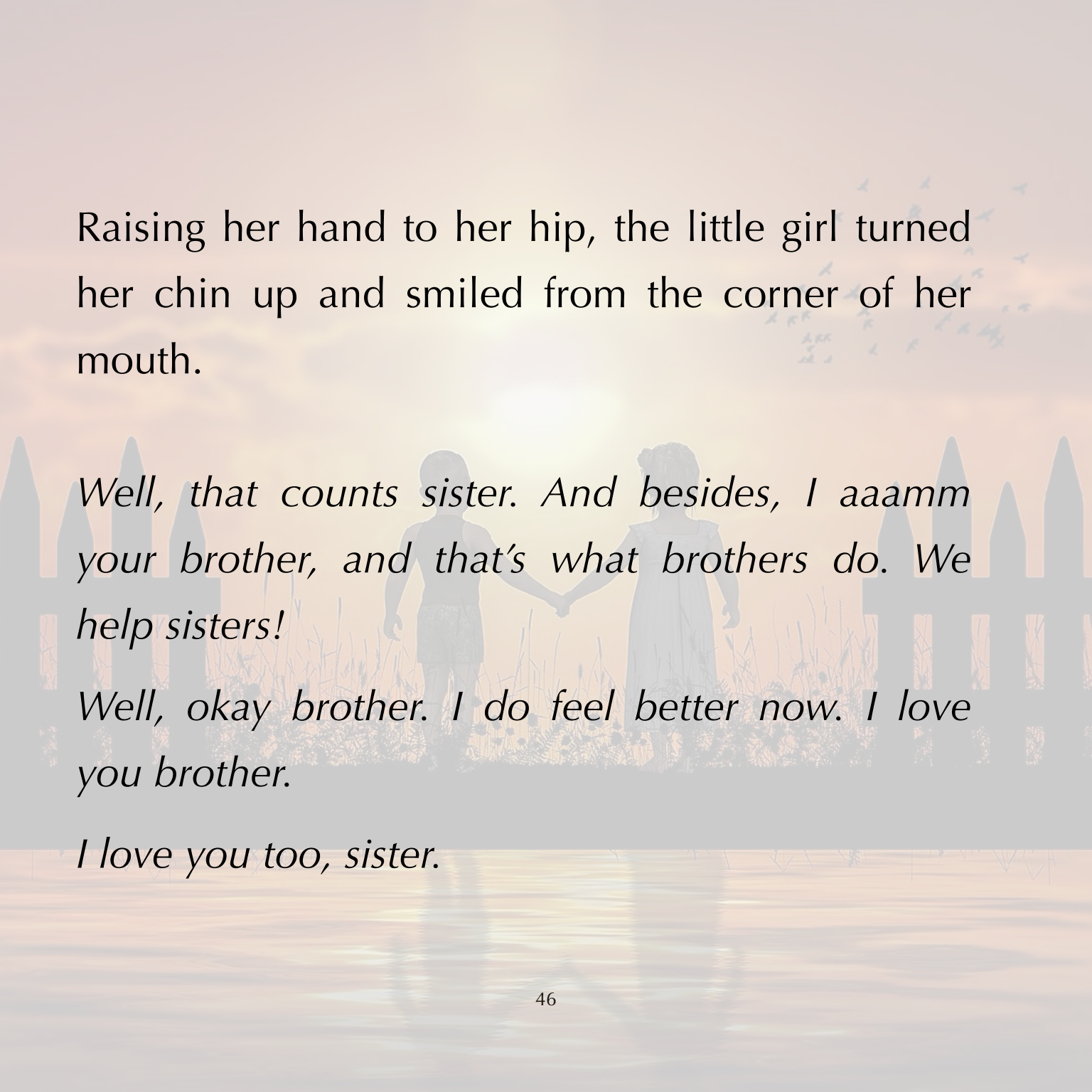


Your silly old bear and your big brother will help you!

The silly old bear grew warm inside envisioning helping the little girl catch the fireflies.

Oh what fun this adventure will be. The silly old bear thought. *I will protect my friend and help her.*

You're only 2 minutes older than me, brother.

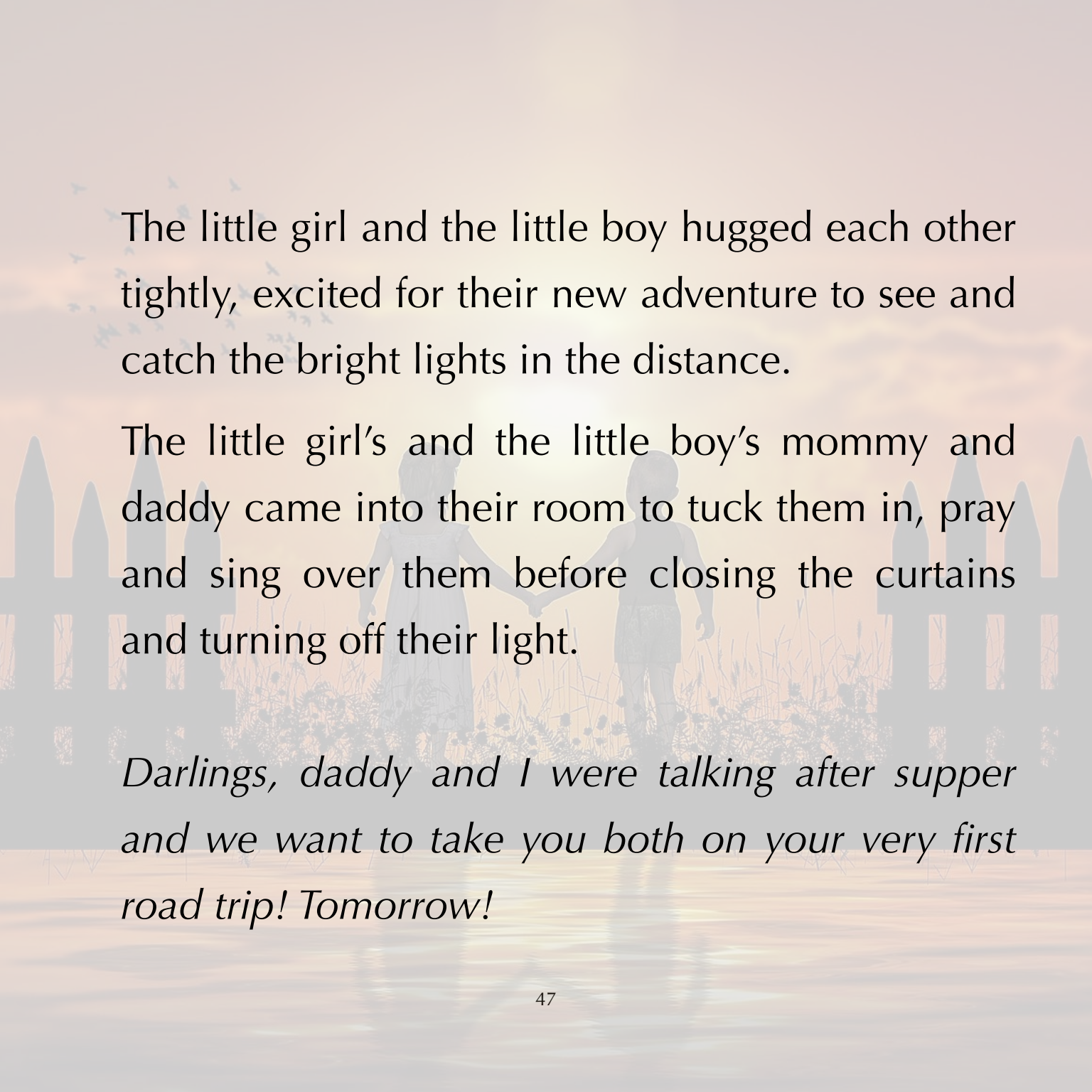


Raising her hand to her hip, the little girl turned her chin up and smiled from the corner of her mouth.

Well, that counts sister. And besides, I aaamm your brother, and that's what brothers do. We help sisters!

Well, okay brother. I do feel better now. I love you brother.

I love you too, sister.



The little girl and the little boy hugged each other tightly, excited for their new adventure to see and catch the bright lights in the distance.

The little girl's and the little boy's mommy and daddy came into their room to tuck them in, pray and sing over them before closing the curtains and turning off their light.

Darlings, daddy and I were talking after supper and we want to take you both on your very first road trip! Tomorrow!

Really?! Where, where??

Look out your window. Do you see the bright lights in the distance?

Both the little girl and the little boy looked at one another eagerly, and smiled.

Yees...

Well, beautiful ones, we are going in that direction. It is a beautiful drive and where we are going is a sight to behold.

What does “a sight to behold,” mean mommy?

It simply means, you’ve never seen anything like it before!

And their mommy tapped the end of the little boy’s nose as she spoke.

Wow. Daddy, how long will it take for us to get there?

Let’s see, it’ll take about 3 days to get there, son.

Three days?! Oh, okay!

Both the little girl, and the little boy thought to themselves, we didn't even have to ask them!

At opposite ends of the room, their mommy and daddy bounced back and forth to the little girl's and the little boy's brightly colored beds, singing softly to each one.

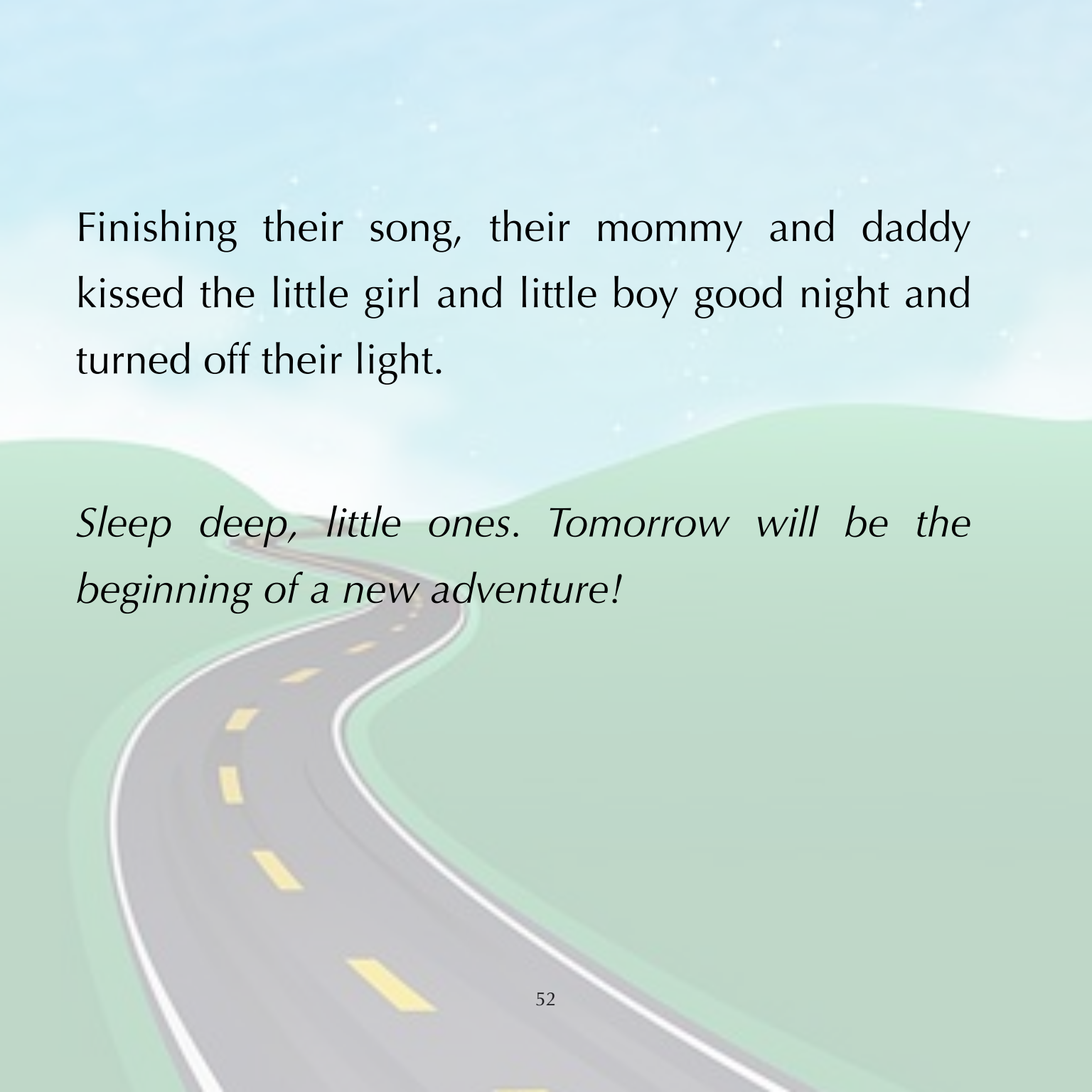
Sleep deep little ones, the day has left, the night has come. Sleep deep little ones, dreams will

...speak, your thoughts undone. Sleep deep little ones, a kiss from God...

And then their daddy jumped in with,

...and a tummy rub!

The little girl and little boy laughed at their silly daddy, because their daddy liked to make up words that rhymed with their mommy's night time songs, tickling them as he sang!

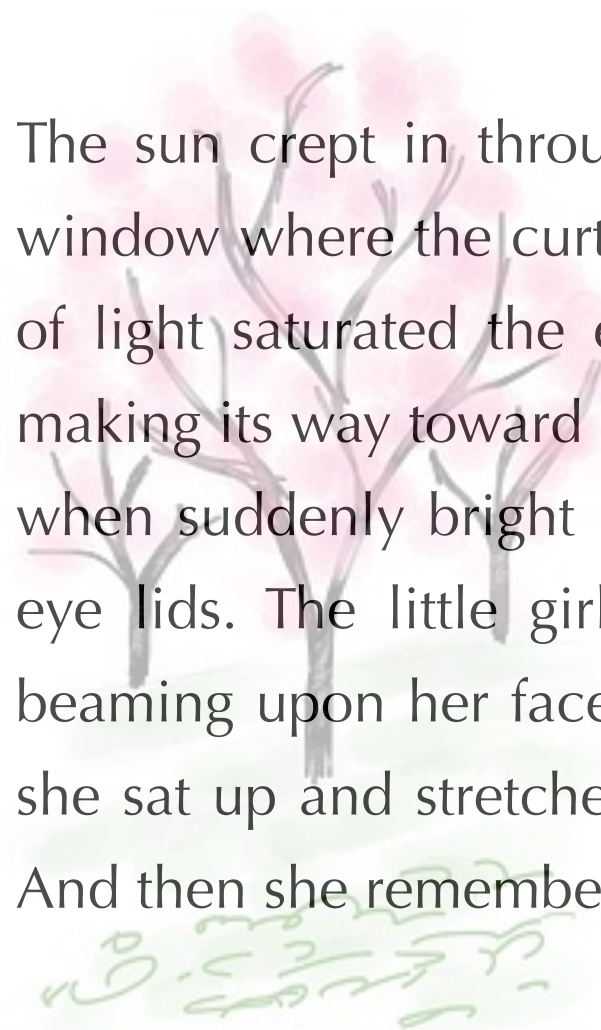


Finishing their song, their mommy and daddy
kissed the little girl and little boy good night and
turned off their light.

*Sleep deep, little ones. Tomorrow will be the
beginning of a new adventure!*



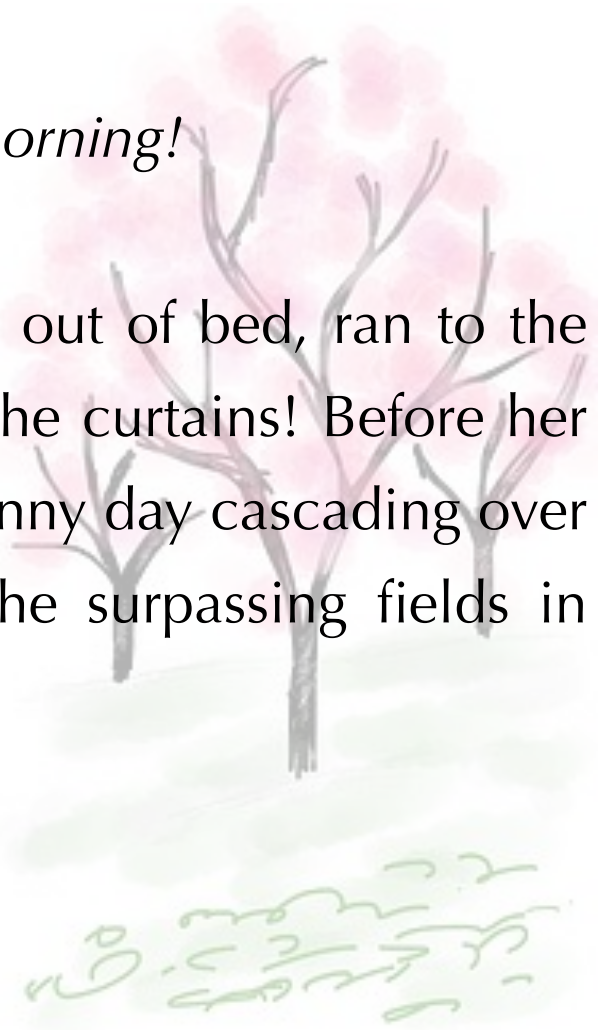
Chapter 5



The sun crept in through the middle of the bay window where the curtains met and kissed. A ray of light saturated the end of the little girl's bed making its way toward her head. Moments passed when suddenly bright light filled the back of her eye lids. The little girl batted at the warm sun beaming upon her face, and a giggle flew out as she sat up and stretched. One good long stretch. And then she remembered...

Brother, it's morning! It's morning!

The little girl drew herself out of bed, ran to the window and threw open the curtains! Before her eyes beamed a glorious sunny day cascading over every hill, tree-line and the surpassing fields in the distance.



Okay sister, I'm up I'm up.

Let's get dressed! I'll race you!

Okay!



The little boy and the little girl raced to see who would dress first. They were neck-in-neck, but brother had less clothes to put on so he beat his sister by a shirt!

The little girl quickly grabbed her silly old bear by the arm, raced past her packed bag lying next to her bed, and headed down for breakfast. The little boy was already on the way, seconds ahead of the little girl.

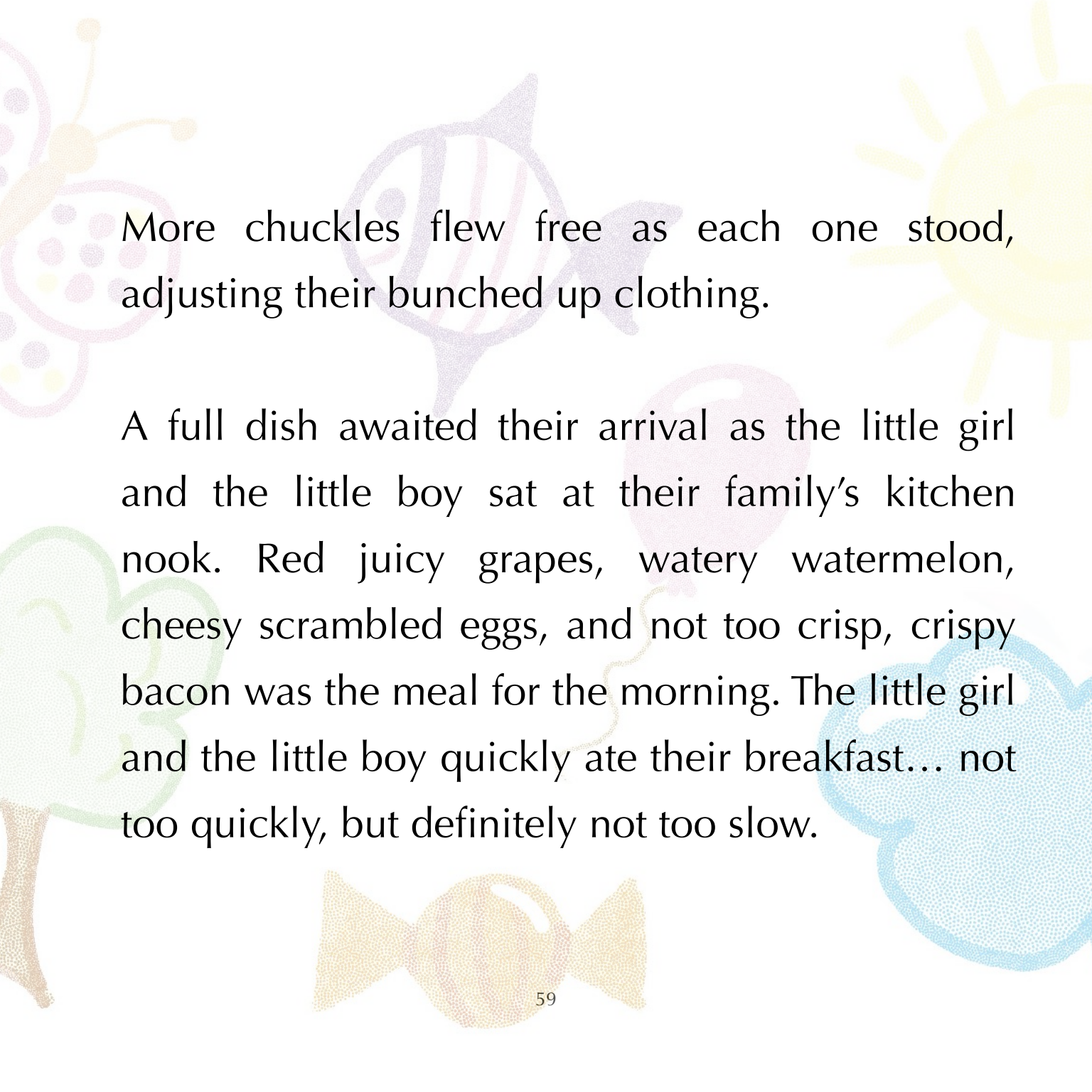
I'm coming, I'm coming! Right behind you brother!

Good luck sister, I'm still ahead of you!

That's when the little boy became caught up on a rug beyond their bedroom door. Twisting his toes loose, more laughter filled the narrow corridor leading to their eat-in kitchen. Tumbling through the opened threshold, the little boy raised an arm and beat his sister by a finger!

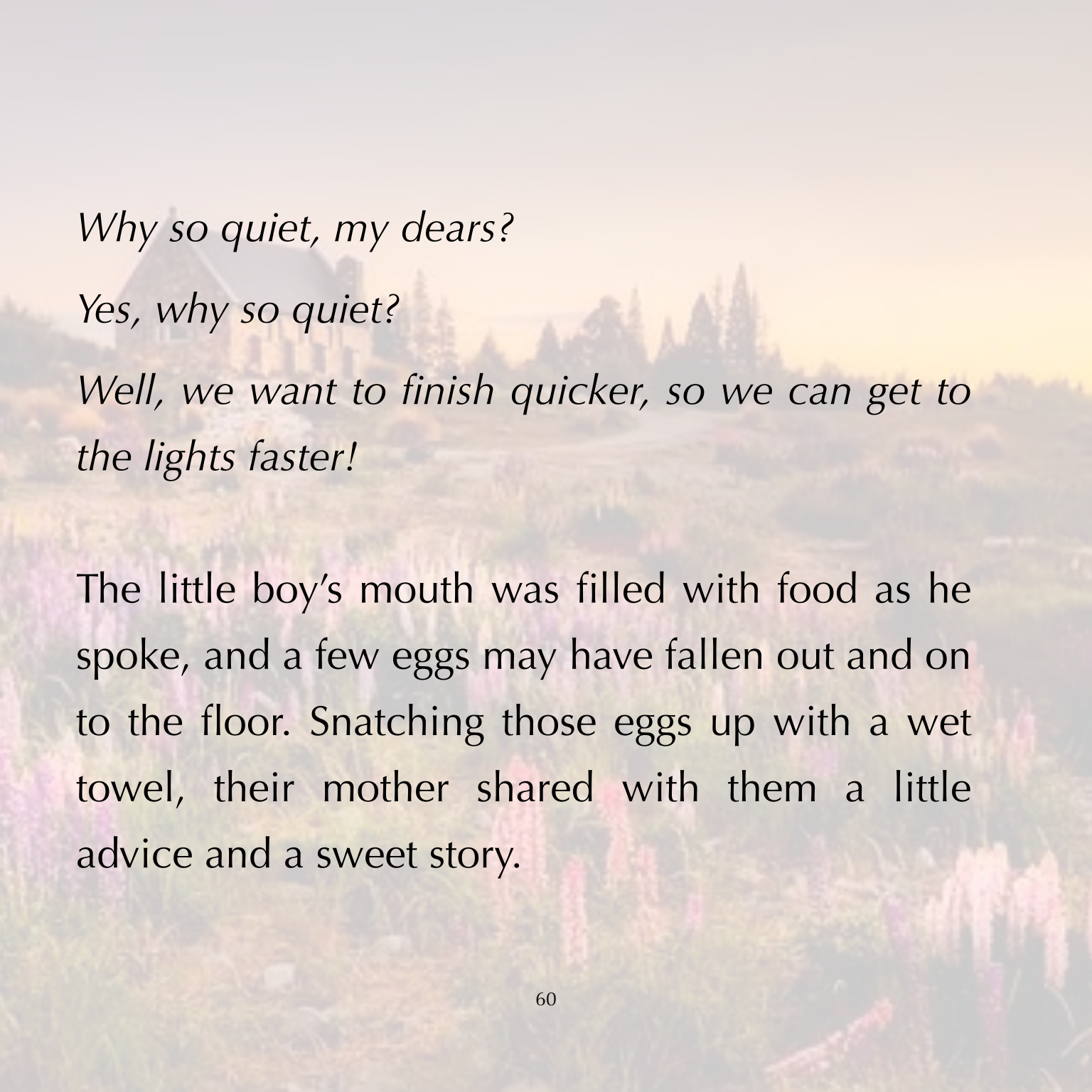
I was so close, brother!





More chuckles flew free as each one stood, adjusting their bunched up clothing.

A full dish awaited their arrival as the little girl and the little boy sat at their family's kitchen nook. Red juicy grapes, watery watermelon, cheesy scrambled eggs, and not too crisp, crispy bacon was the meal for the morning. The little girl and the little boy quickly ate their breakfast... not too quickly, but definitely not too slow.

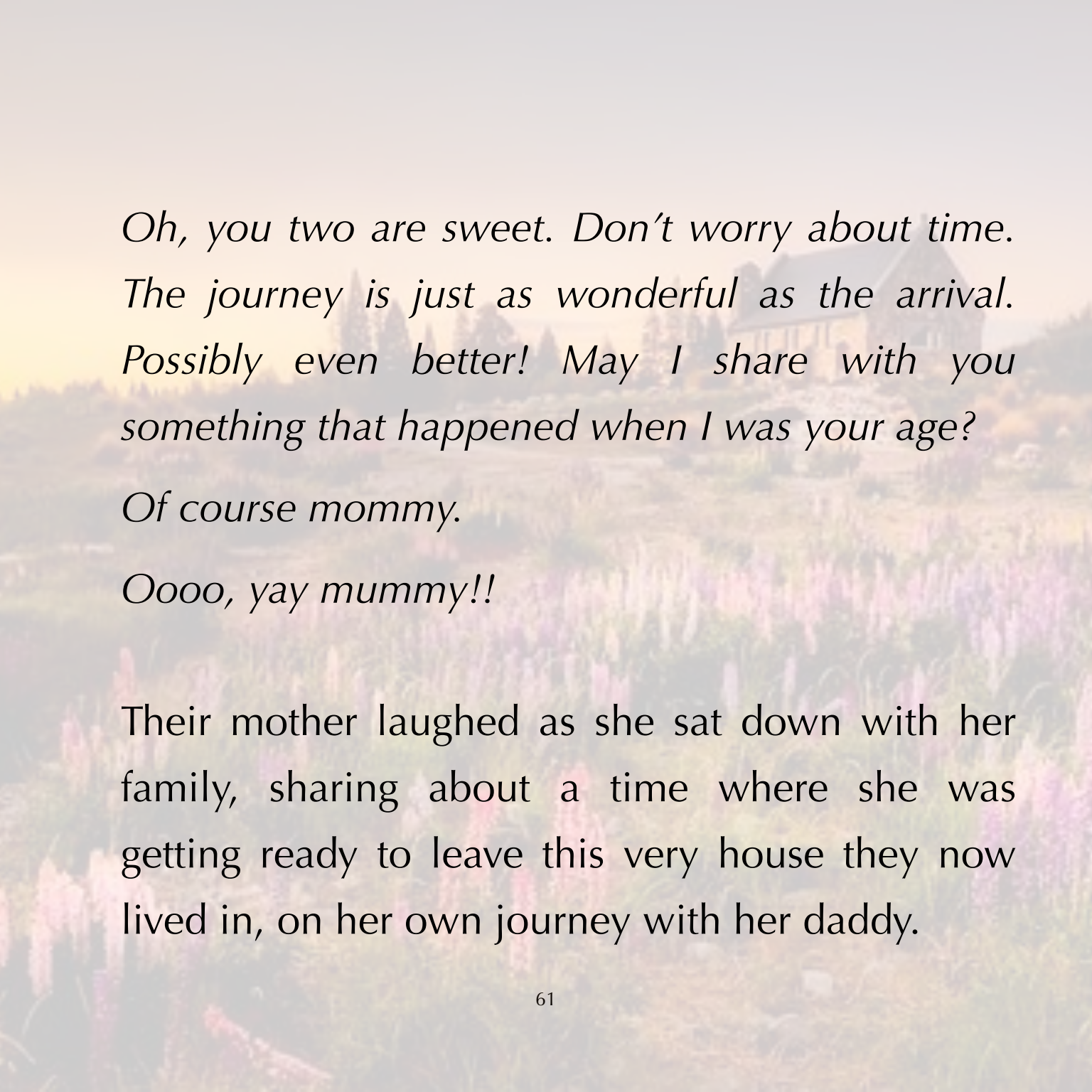


Why so quiet, my dears?

Yes, why so quiet?

Well, we want to finish quicker, so we can get to the lights faster!

The little boy's mouth was filled with food as he spoke, and a few eggs may have fallen out and on to the floor. Snatching those eggs up with a wet towel, their mother shared with them a little advice and a sweet story.



*Oh, you two are sweet. Don't worry about time.
The journey is just as wonderful as the arrival.
Possibly even better! May I share with you
something that happened when I was your age?*

Of course mommy.

Oooo, yay mummy!!

Their mother laughed as she sat down with her family, sharing about a time where she was getting ready to leave this very house they now lived in, on her own journey with her daddy.

You see, because your Mayma was the only teacher in the area, she spent quite a bit of time in town with other families, and your Papa and I cared for the land and animals. We had lots of help of course...

Their mother winked at them playfully.

Then one day, Papa asked me if I wanted to take a trip across the country. You see, we spent most of the summer working so very hard and my daddy wanted to reward me.

What didga say? What didga say??

I was so excited for this road trip that I didn't even know what to say! But eventually words fell out of my mouth...

The little girl thought about what words falling out of your mouth would look like and cupped her own mouth, letting out a quiet giggle.

...and I said yes!

Did Mayma go mommy?

No, she couldn't this time. Mayma was preparing for the next school year and meeting with leaders in the town. But boy oh boy, your Papa and I had so much fun! Just the two of us. And what I want to share with you is something Papa told me the morning I came down for breakfast, just like you two have done just now.

What?? what??

Well, I sat there eating very quietly and I was very anxious to get going. I didn't want to miss anything!

*But do you know what my Papa said to me?
Because you know your Papa ... he always knows
what's going on even when you don't say
anything.*

What mommy, what did he say?

Bright eyes leaned in all the more.

*My daddy told me that if I was going to spend all
my time thinking about where we're going, I
would miss where we are!*

The little girl and the little boy gave their mommy their famous confused look, scrunched up nose and everything.

You see my darlings, if I spent all my time thinking and worrying about what we were going to do, or when we were going to get there, or how it was going to turn out, I would have missed the very moment that I was in. For instance, my breakfast with my Mom and Dad. We were about to leave my mom for two weeks and I wasn't paying any attention to her.

Ahhh, we see ... don't we sister?

Yes, yes we do brother.

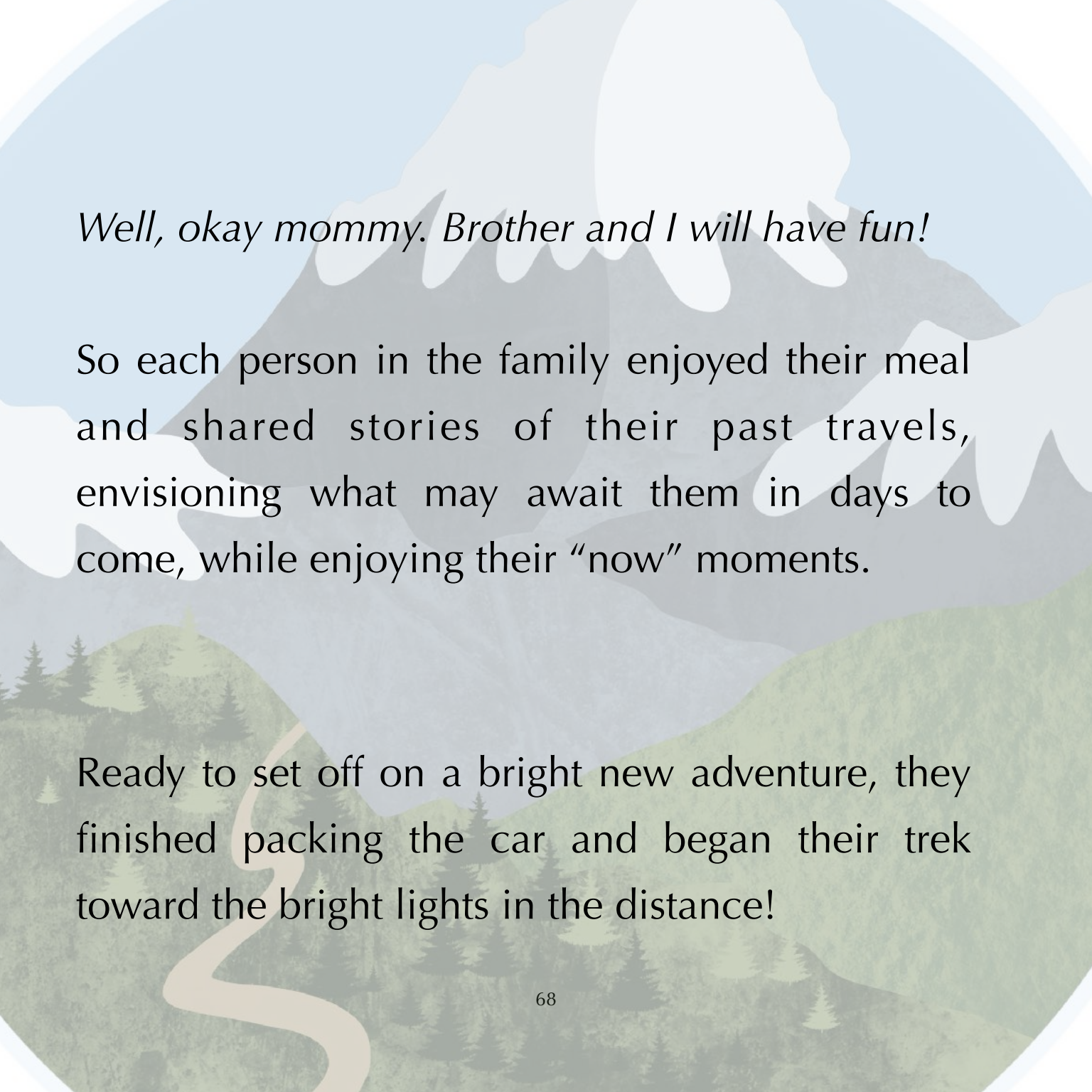
So, have fun eating breakfast?

Laughter erupted once again.

How wonderfully simple my son! Yes, have fun right now, and don't wait for later!

Hmmm...

The little girl cocked her head to the side in satisfaction.



Well, okay mommy. Brother and I will have fun!

So each person in the family enjoyed their meal and shared stories of their past travels, envisioning what may await them in days to come, while enjoying their “now” moments.

Ready to set off on a bright new adventure, they finished packing the car and began their trek toward the bright lights in the distance!

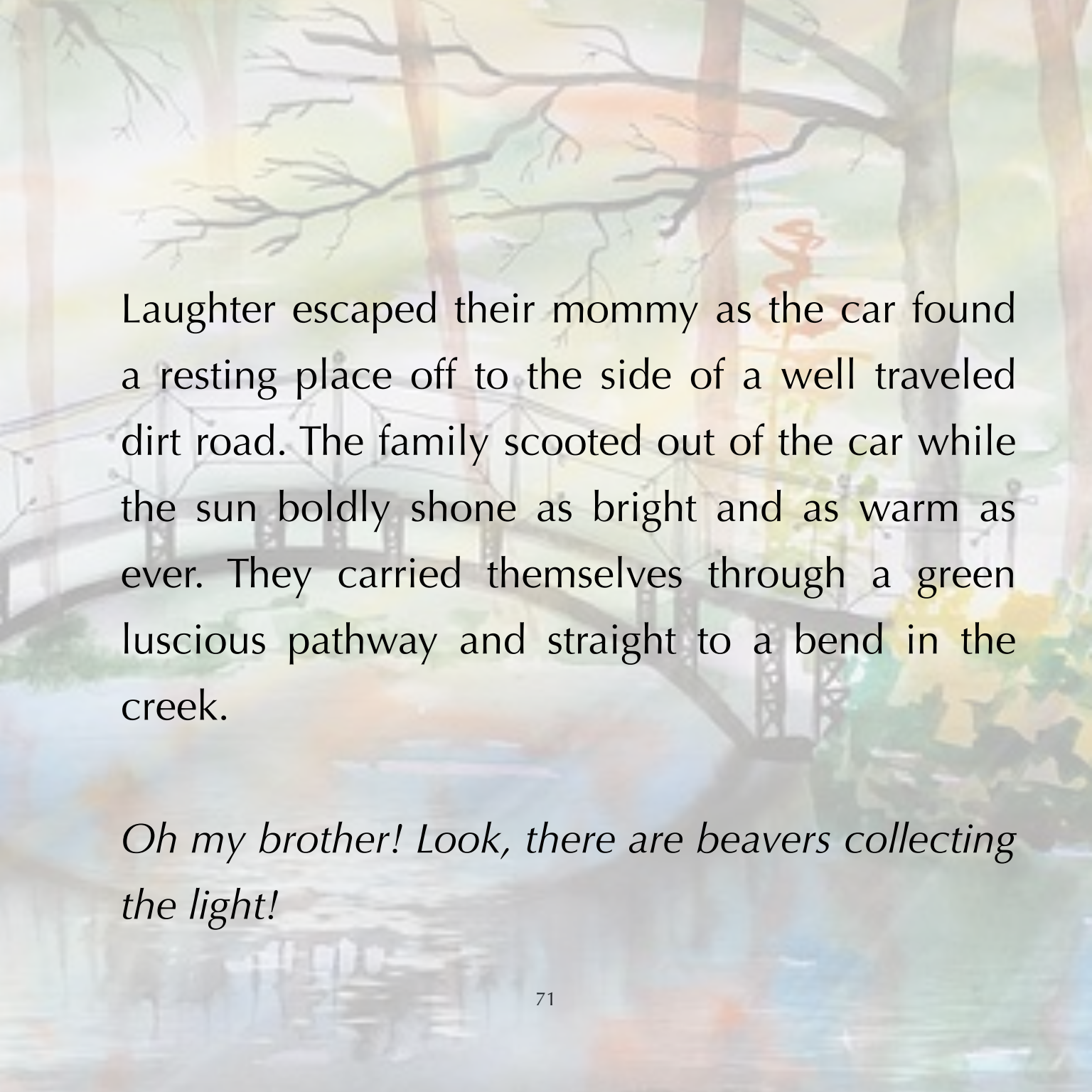


Chapter 6

They didn't get too far before the little boy cried out.

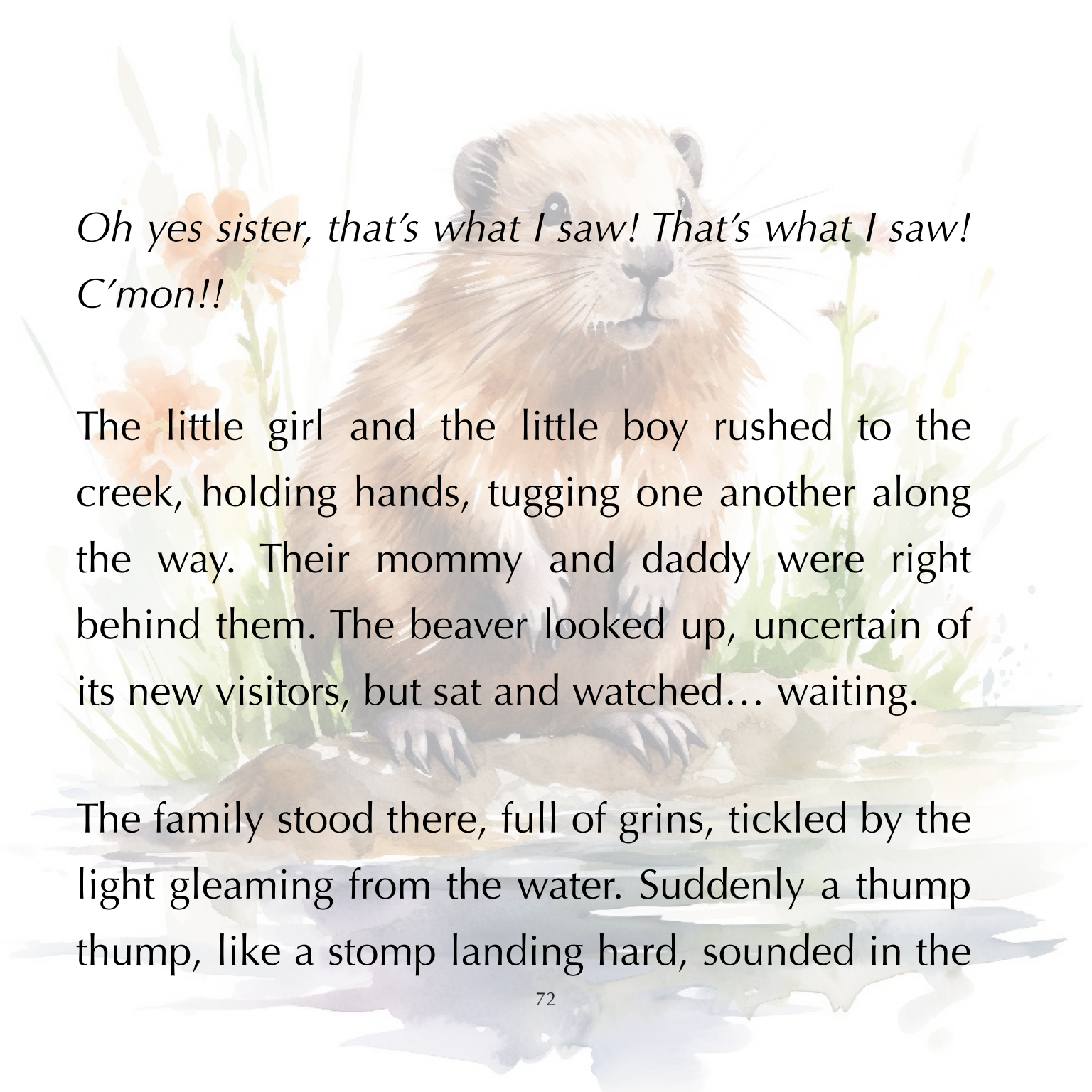
Daddy, daddy, pull over! Look, there are lights right over there ... maybe we're already here!?

The family headed toward a quaint stone bridge, crossed over a calm creek and headed toward the blinking lights.

A soft-focus illustration of a forest scene. In the background, a wooden bridge with a lattice railing spans a body of water. Tall, slender trees with bare branches frame the scene. A small, orange-colored beaver is visible on the bridge. The overall atmosphere is warm and serene, with a bright sun filtering through the trees.

Laughter escaped their mommy as the car found a resting place off to the side of a well traveled dirt road. The family scooted out of the car while the sun boldly shone as bright and as warm as ever. They carried themselves through a green luscious pathway and straight to a bend in the creek.

Oh my brother! Look, there are beavers collecting the light!



*Oh yes sister, that's what I saw! That's what I saw!
C'mon!!*

The little girl and the little boy rushed to the creek, holding hands, tugging one another along the way. Their mommy and daddy were right behind them. The beaver looked up, uncertain of its new visitors, but sat and watched... waiting.

The family stood there, full of grins, tickled by the light gleaming from the water. Suddenly a thump thump, like a stomp landing hard, sounded in the

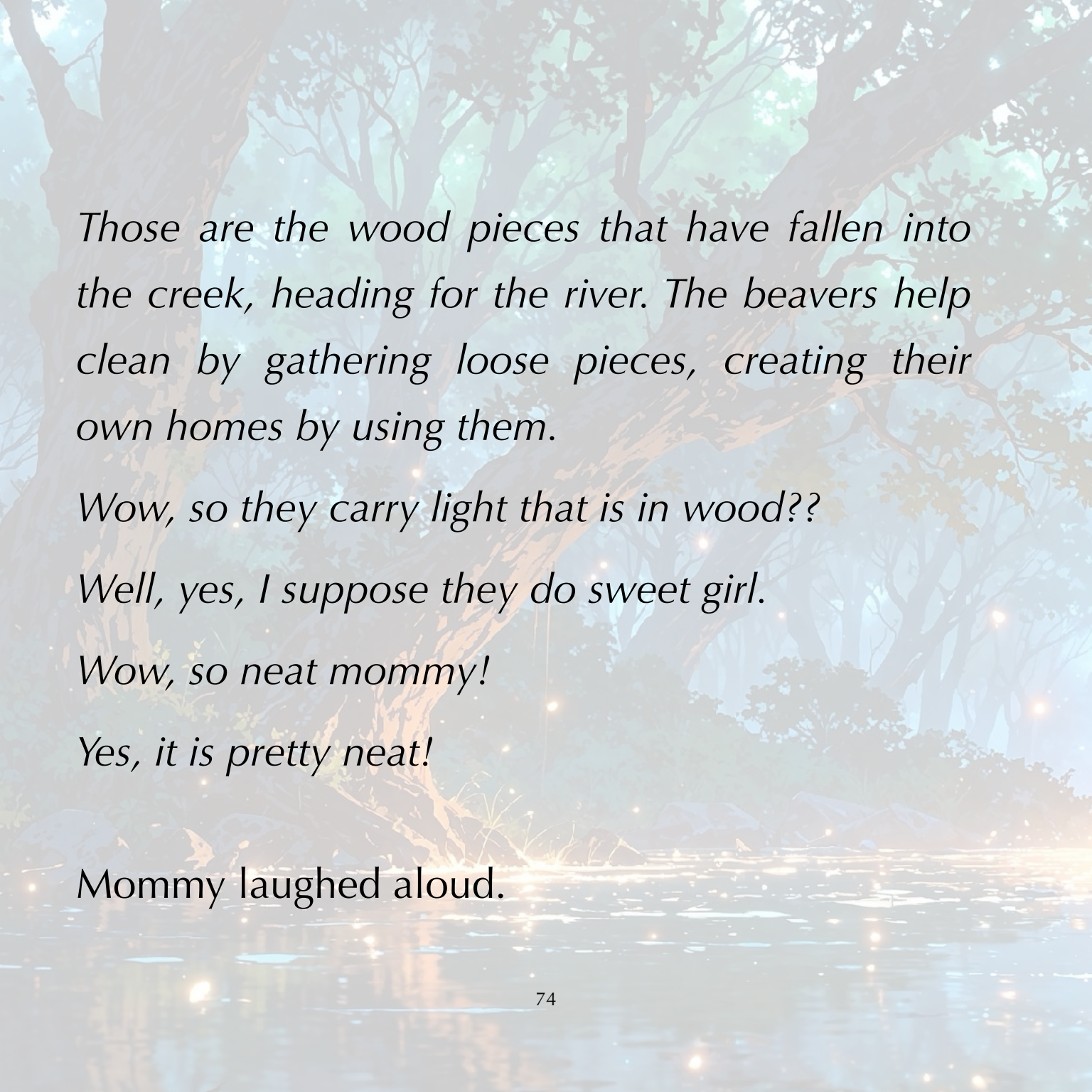


distance. The beaver swiftly floated along the middle of the widening creek, carrying something with it.

Sister, look, it's carrying the light with it! Oh wow, I told you, I told you!

But brother, look ... it's kinda brown.

Their mommy bent down, close to their small ears and whispered into them.



Those are the wood pieces that have fallen into the creek, heading for the river. The beavers help clean by gathering loose pieces, creating their own homes by using them.

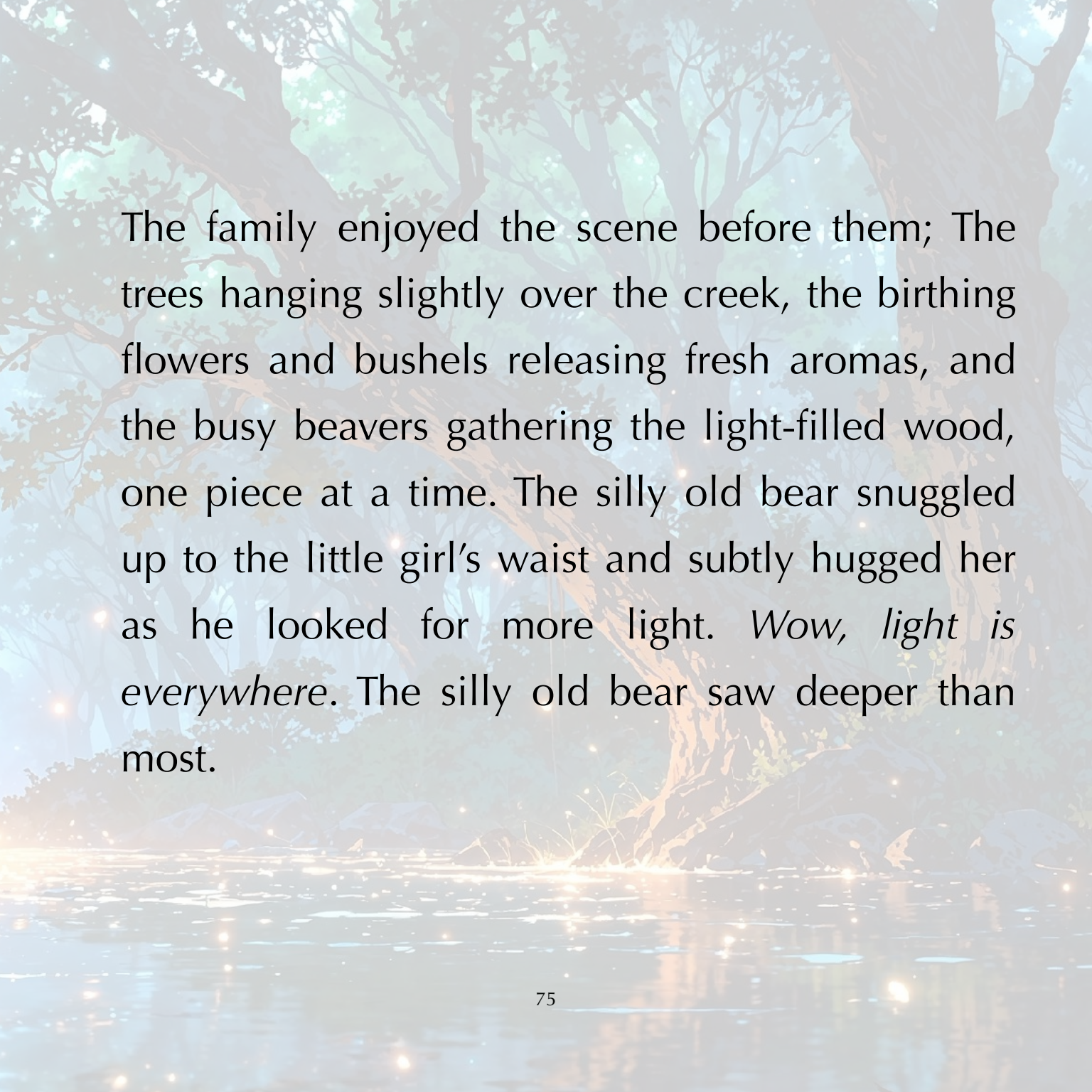
Wow, so they carry light that is in wood??

Well, yes, I suppose they do sweet girl.

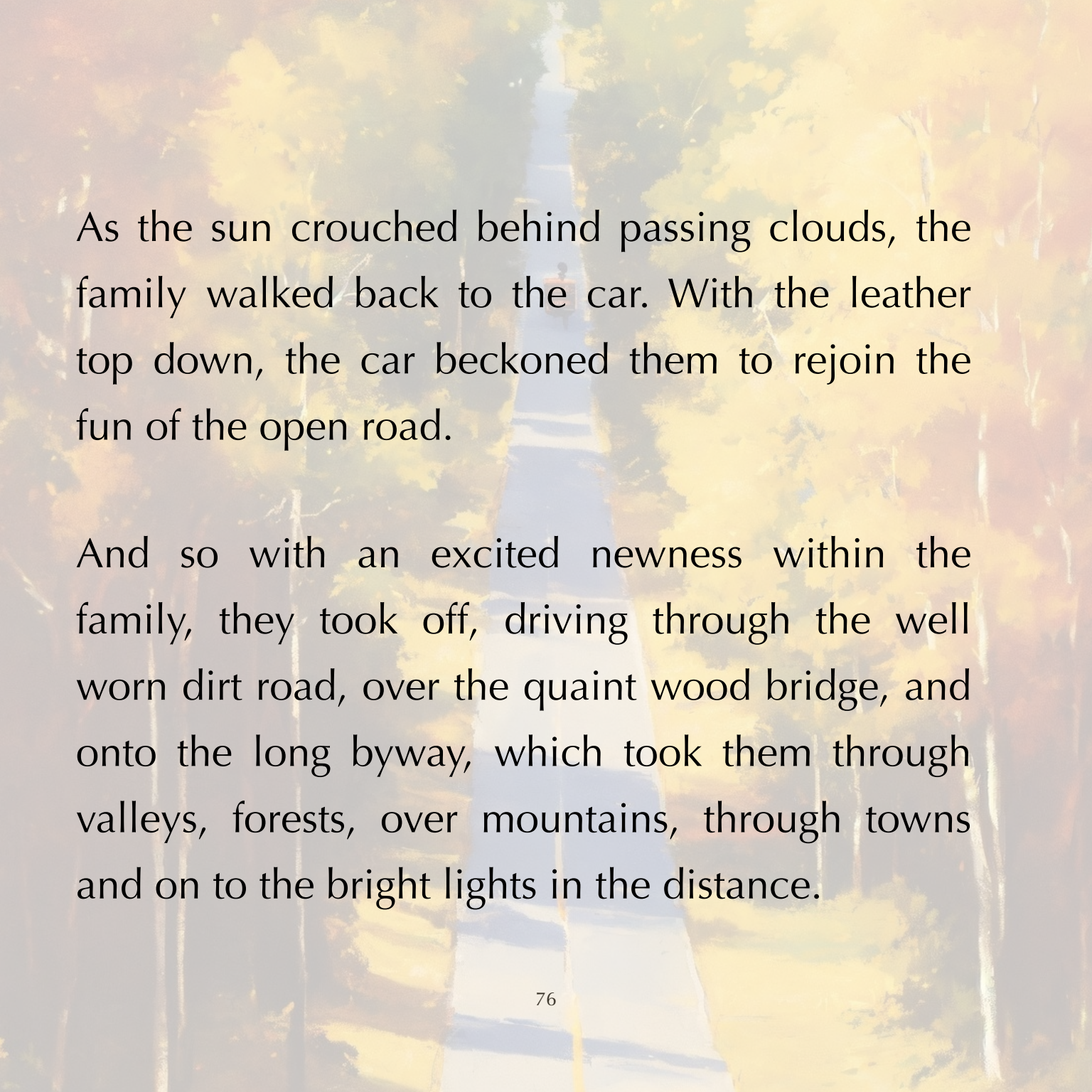
Wow, so neat mommy!

Yes, it is pretty neat!

Mommy laughed aloud.

The background of the page is a soft, ethereal illustration of a forest. In the foreground, a calm creek reflects the ambient light, with numerous small, glowing golden particles floating in the air and on the water's surface. The trees are tall and slender, with their branches reaching upwards, and the overall color palette is a mix of soft blues, greens, and warm yellows, creating a dreamlike atmosphere.

The family enjoyed the scene before them; The trees hanging slightly over the creek, the birthing flowers and bushels releasing fresh aromas, and the busy beavers gathering the light-filled wood, one piece at a time. The silly old bear snuggled up to the little girl's waist and subtly hugged her as he looked for more light. *Wow, light is everywhere.* The silly old bear saw deeper than most.

A painting of a dirt road winding through a forest. The road is light brown and leads towards a small car in the distance. The trees are tall and thin, with yellow and orange foliage, suggesting autumn. The sky is a pale blue with soft, white clouds. The overall style is impressionistic, with visible brushstrokes and a warm, golden light.

As the sun crouched behind passing clouds, the family walked back to the car. With the leather top down, the car beckoned them to rejoin the fun of the open road.

And so with an excited newness within the family, they took off, driving through the well worn dirt road, over the quaint wood bridge, and onto the long byway, which took them through valleys, forests, over mountains, through towns and on to the bright lights in the distance.



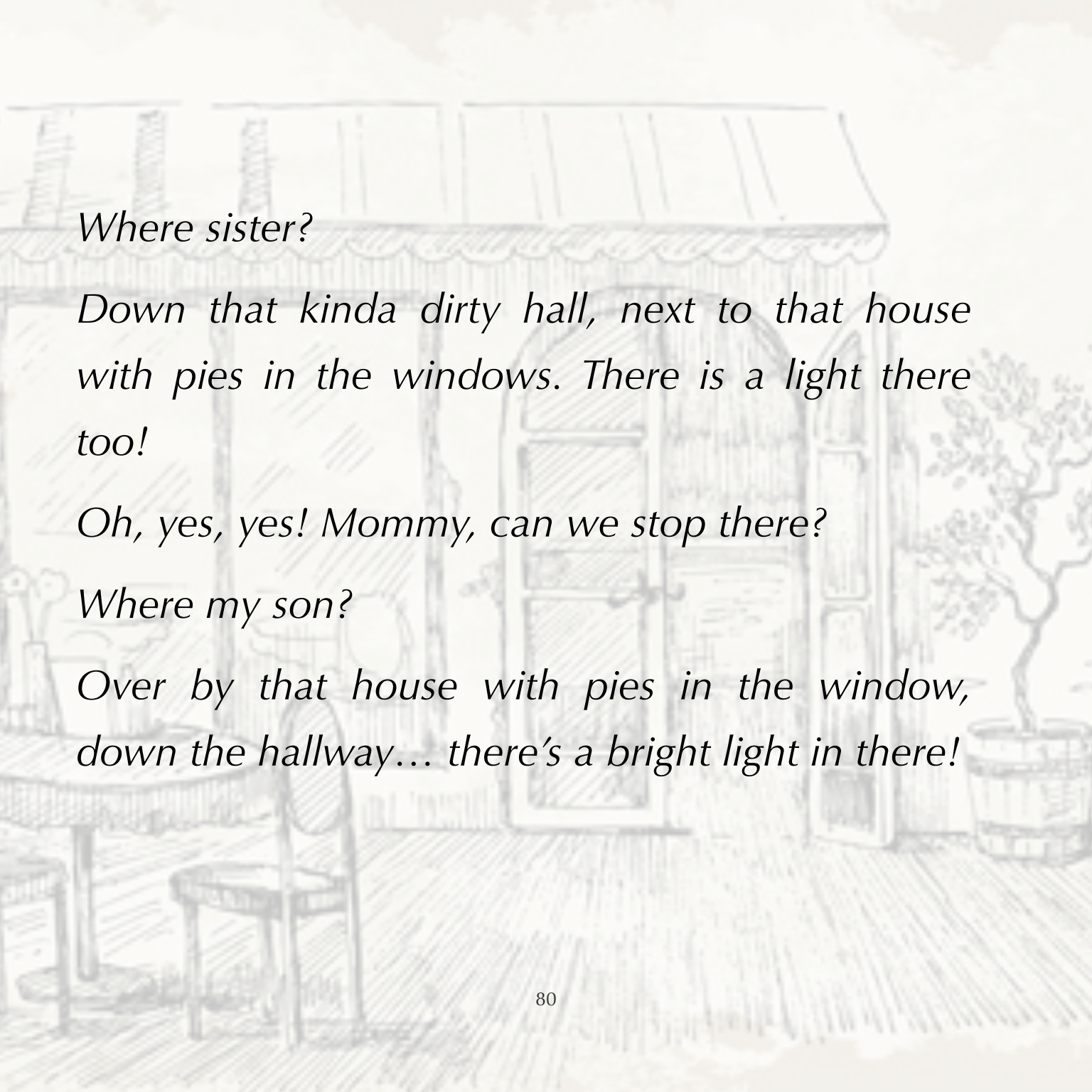
Chapter 7

A full day passed and the family stopped many times, seeking and seeing lights in many forms.

Though it was clear to the little girl and the little boy that these were not the bright lights in the distance which they were waiting for, the snow in the mountains still carried light, and this excited them! Here, they built a snowman and drank hot chocolate before heading to their first resting place. A nestled-in cabin just beyond the next town.

As the family drove into town, their daddy slowed to meet the speed of their neighboring drivers. The little girl and little boy peered out the windows, for their daddy had raised the top of the car, fastening it tight. The silly old bear was held up by the little girl, so he wouldn't miss a thing.

Look, silly old bear, look at all the colors. And look at the shapes on that house. And oh, look at the paintings on that wall! Wow... look brother, over there!



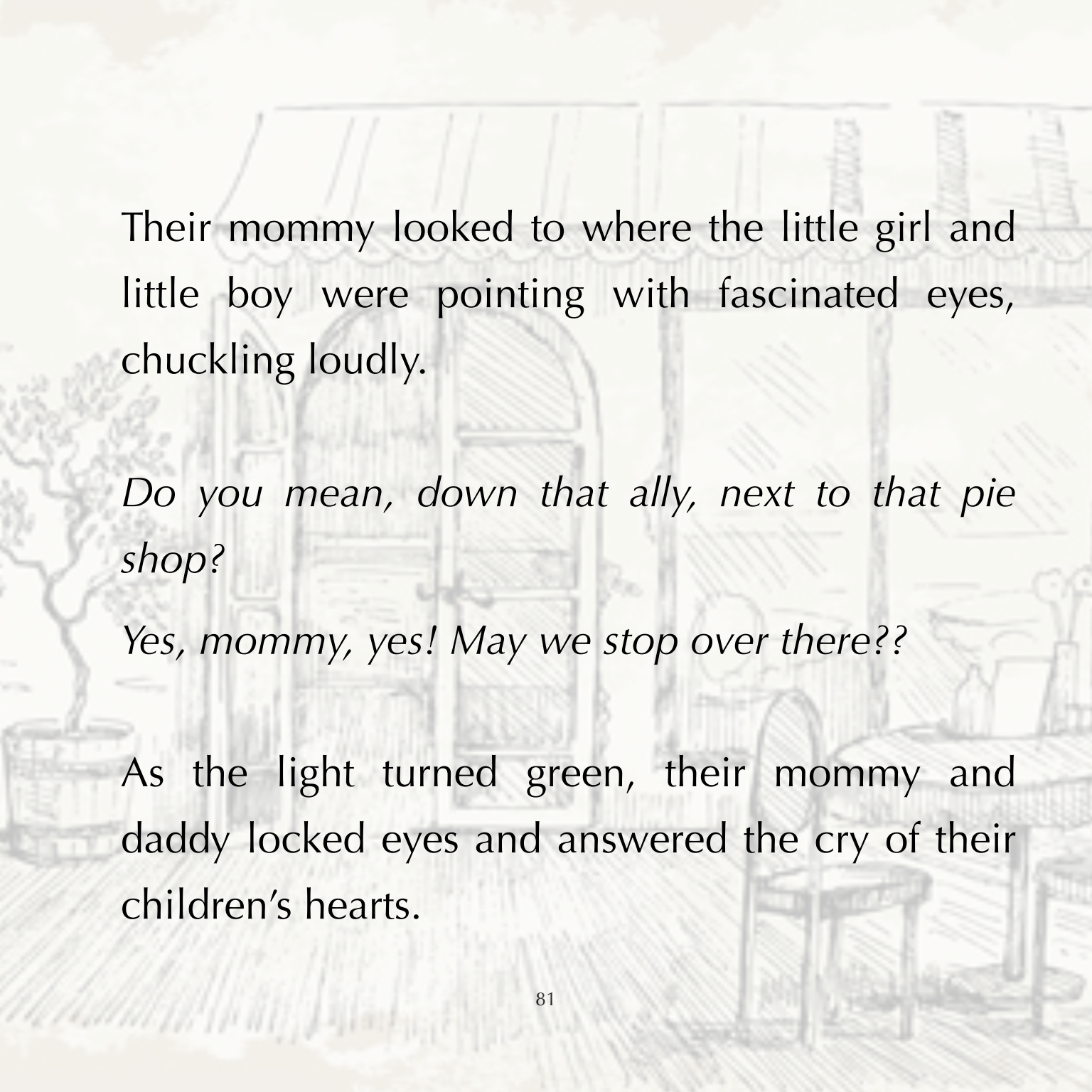
Where sister?

*Down that kinda dirty hall, next to that house
with pies in the windows. There is a light there
too!*

Oh, yes, yes! Mommy, can we stop there?

Where my son?

*Over by that house with pies in the window,
down the hallway... there's a bright light in there!*



Their mommy looked to where the little girl and little boy were pointing with fascinated eyes, chuckling loudly.

Do you mean, down that ally, next to that pie shop?

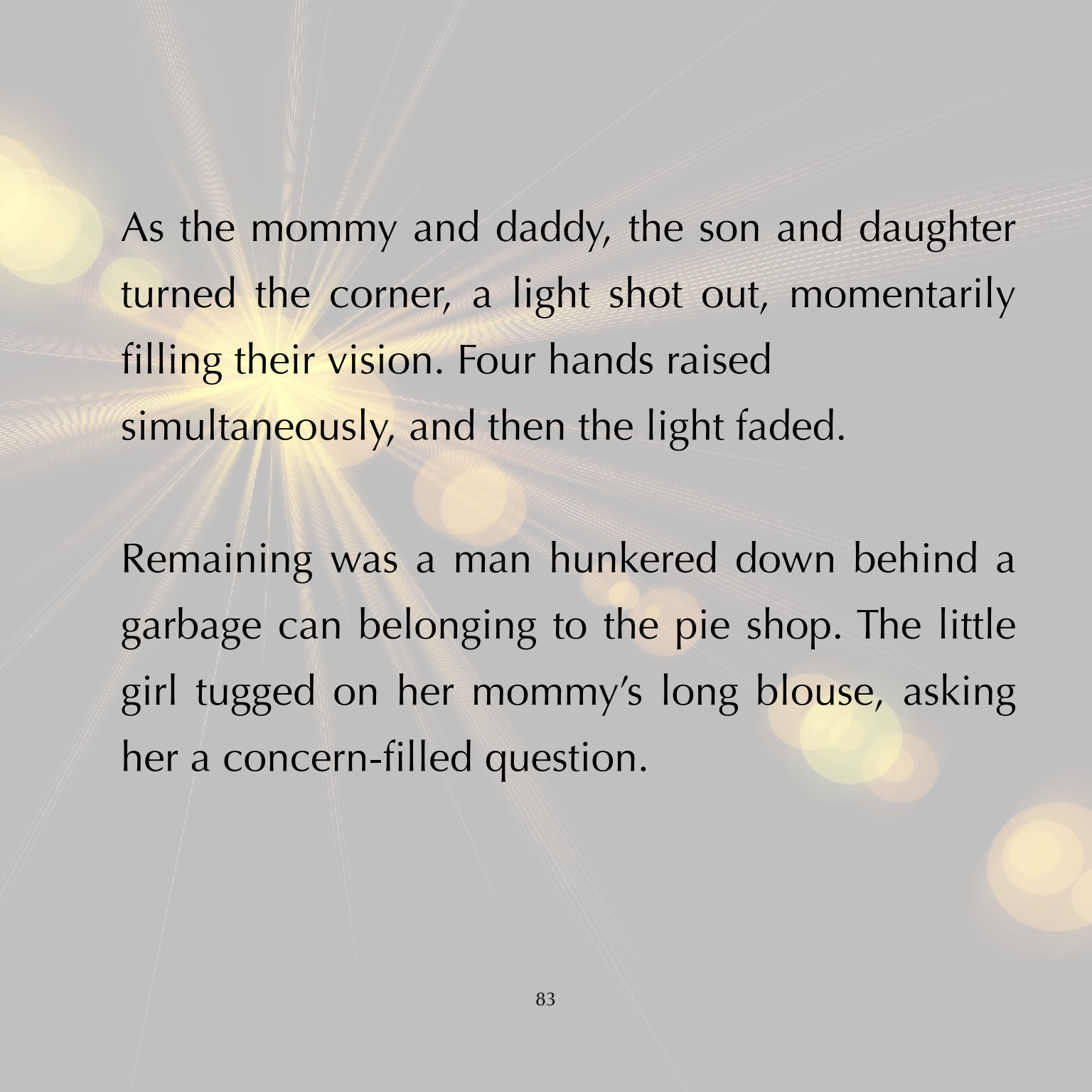
Yes, mommy, yes! May we stop over there??

As the light turned green, their mommy and daddy locked eyes and answered the cry of their children's hearts.

They made a slight move to the left, then their daddy made a U-turn so he could park on the other side of the street, directly in front of the pie shop. Once the car was in park and the key had left the ignition, all four doors opened up wide and out scampered four sets of feet. Two sets were a bit smaller than the other two sets but all carried the same hopeful stride.

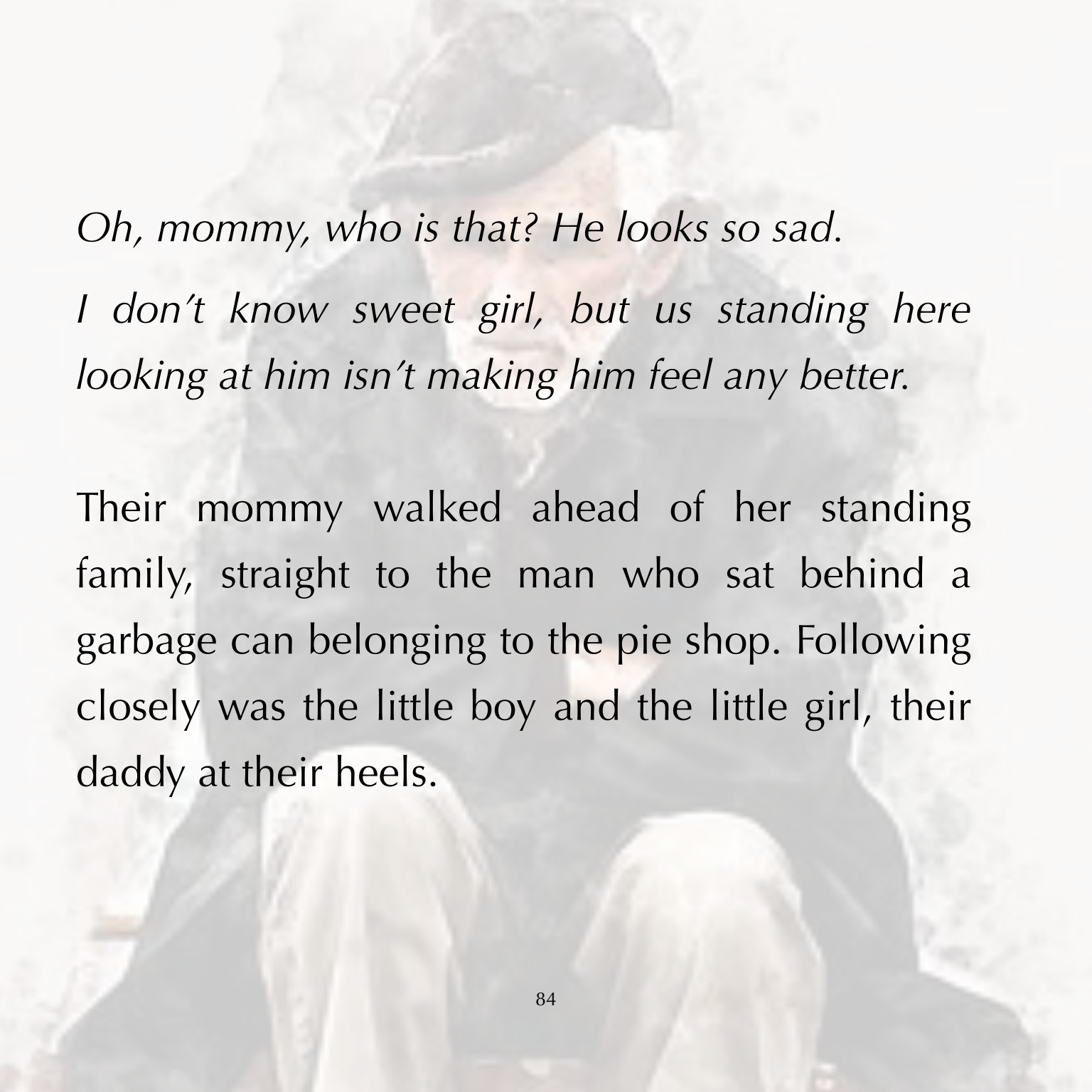
Where did you see the light, my dear?

Over there, over there!



As the mommy and daddy, the son and daughter turned the corner, a light shot out, momentarily filling their vision. Four hands raised simultaneously, and then the light faded.

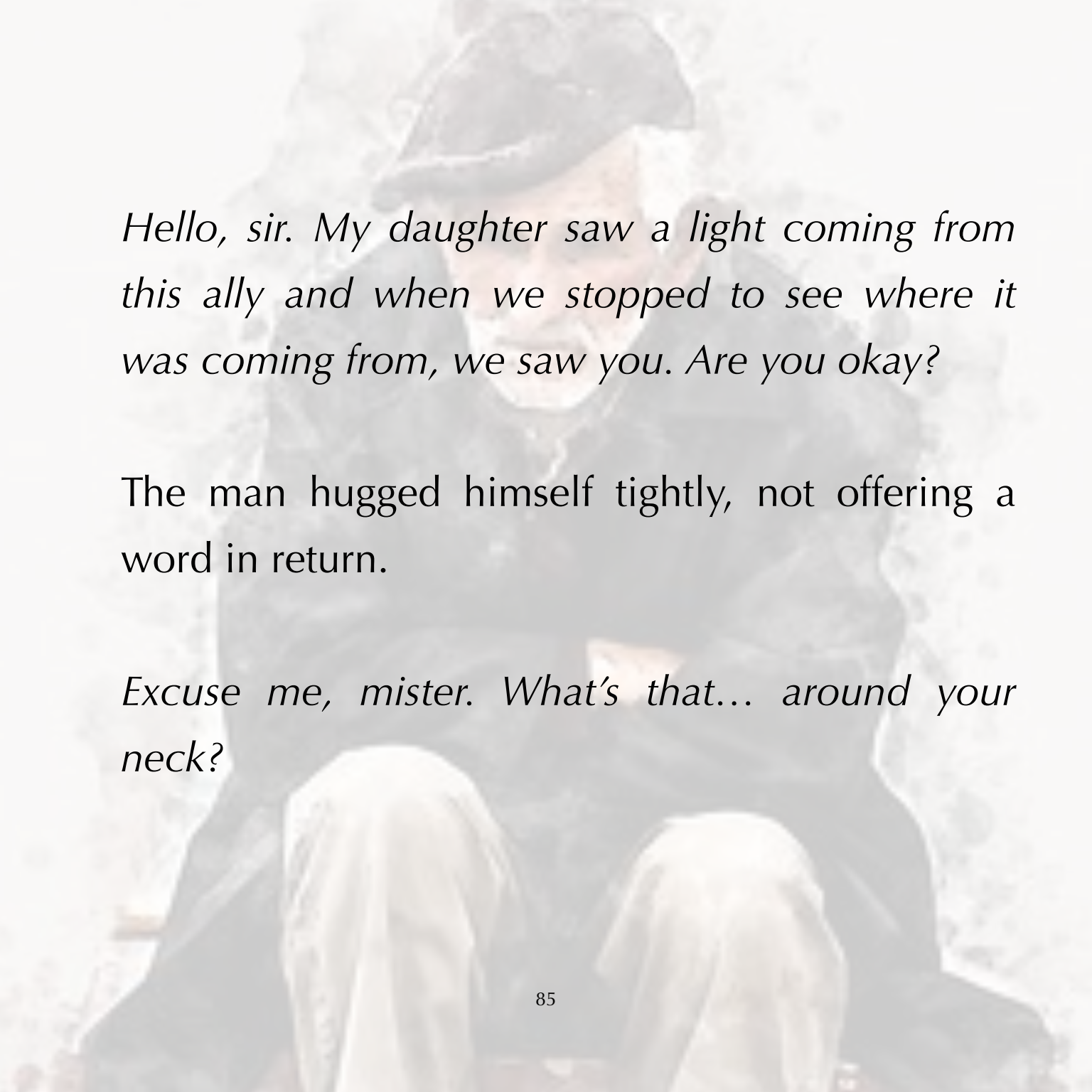
Remaining was a man hunkered down behind a garbage can belonging to the pie shop. The little girl tugged on her mommy's long blouse, asking her a concern-filled question.



Oh, mommy, who is that? He looks so sad.

I don't know sweet girl, but us standing here looking at him isn't making him feel any better.

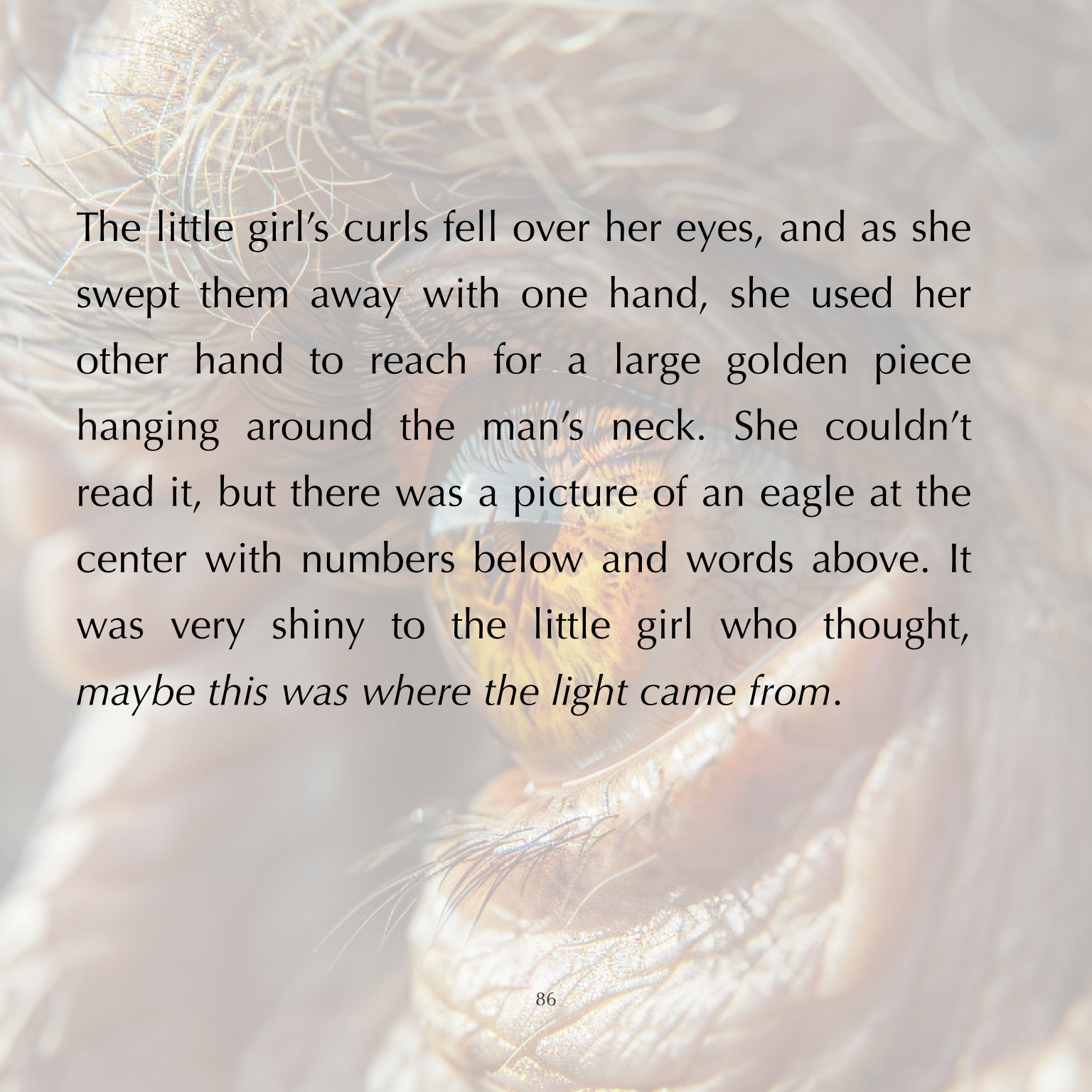
Their mommy walked ahead of her standing family, straight to the man who sat behind a garbage can belonging to the pie shop. Following closely was the little boy and the little girl, their daddy at their heels.



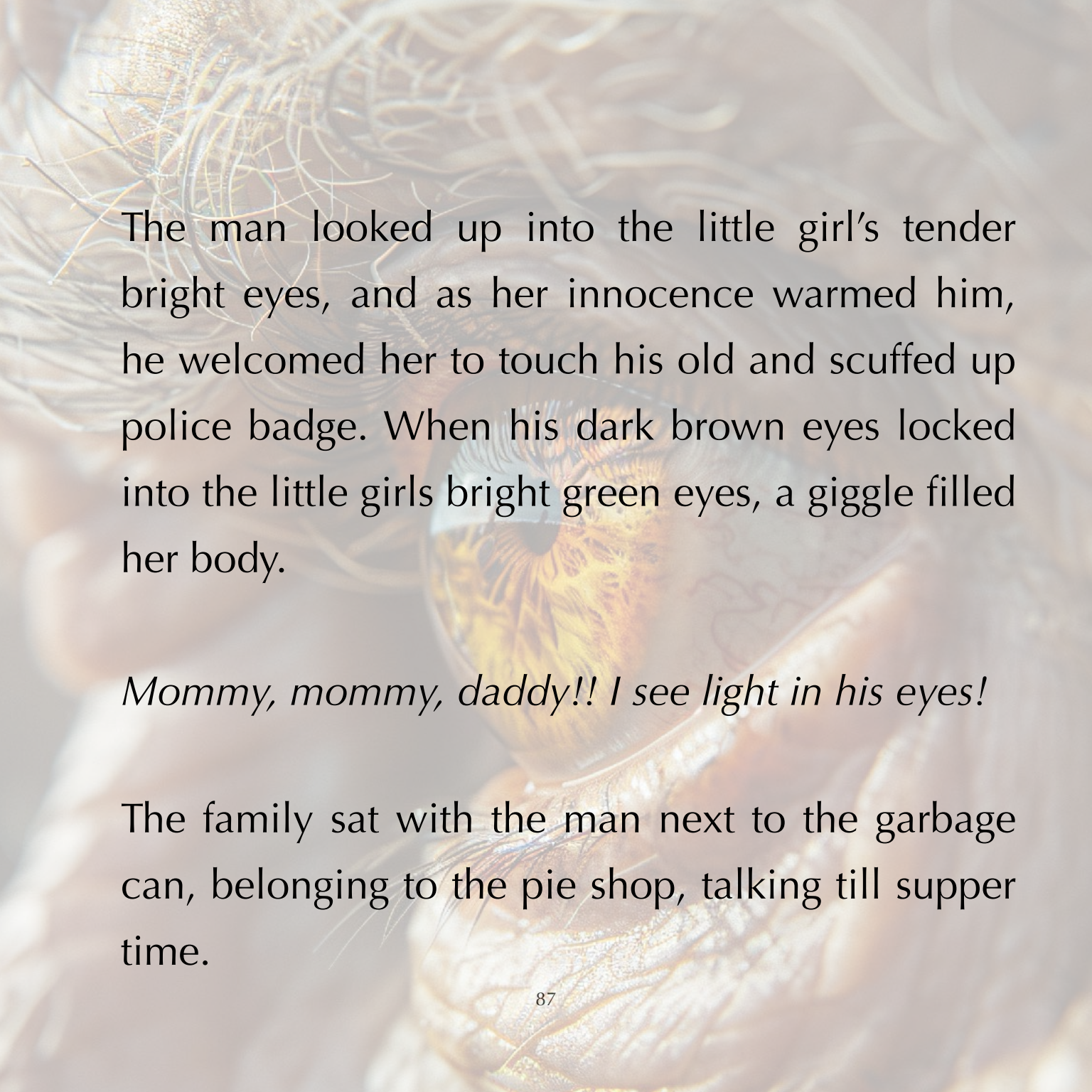
Hello, sir. My daughter saw a light coming from this ally and when we stopped to see where it was coming from, we saw you. Are you okay?

The man hugged himself tightly, not offering a word in return.

Excuse me, mister. What's that... around your neck?



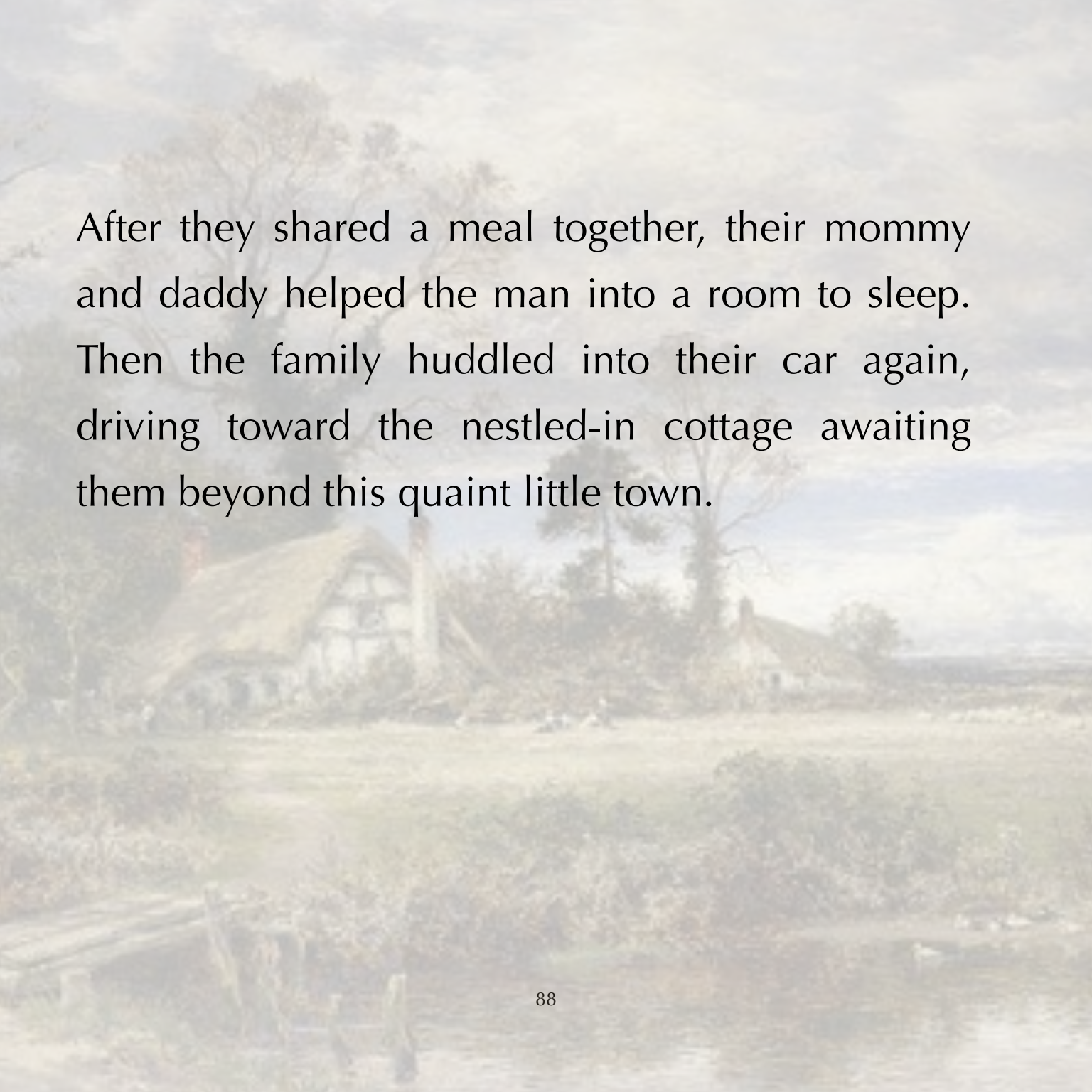
The little girl's curls fell over her eyes, and as she swept them away with one hand, she used her other hand to reach for a large golden piece hanging around the man's neck. She couldn't read it, but there was a picture of an eagle at the center with numbers below and words above. It was very shiny to the little girl who thought, *maybe this was where the light came from.*



The man looked up into the little girl's tender bright eyes, and as her innocence warmed him, he welcomed her to touch his old and scuffed up police badge. When his dark brown eyes locked into the little girl's bright green eyes, a giggle filled her body.

Mommy, mommy, daddy!! I see light in his eyes!

The family sat with the man next to the garbage can, belonging to the pie shop, talking till supper time.



After they shared a meal together, their mommy and daddy helped the man into a room to sleep. Then the family huddled into their car again, driving toward the nestled-in cottage awaiting them beyond this quaint little town.



Chapter 8

The little girl and the little boy laid next to each other in a big bed, centered perfectly in the room so they could gaze out the giant window that stood before them.

Daddy, can you leave the curtains open? We want to see outside while we fall asleep.

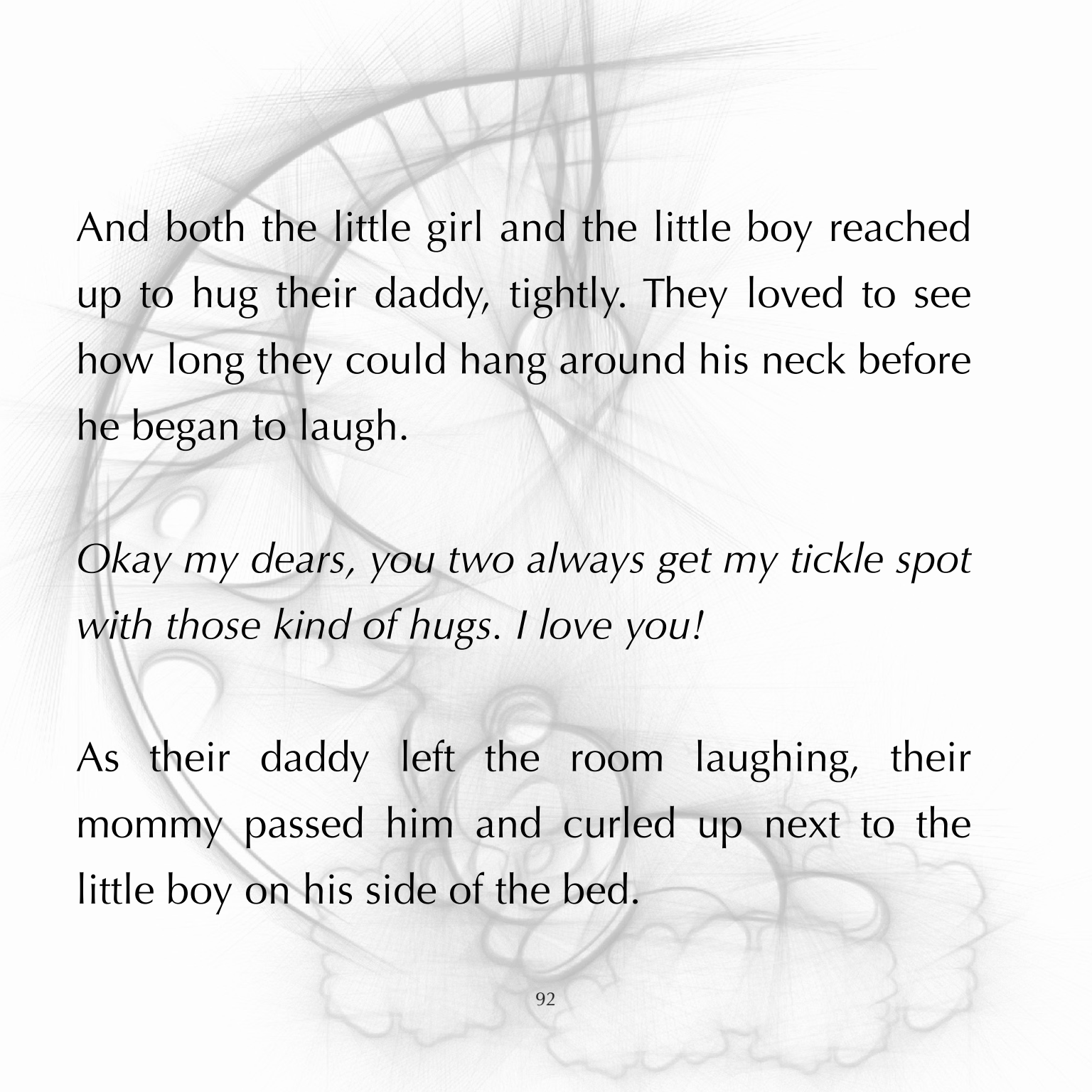
Sure, little man. If you look beyond those gathered trees, you may see a family of shooting stars. It's the season for them.

With wide eyes, both the little girl and little boy peered into one another thinking the same thing. The silly old bear began to ponder as they were. *Were shooting stars the bright lights in the distance? How will we ever find them?*

Mommy will be in after she finishes her tea, to kiss you goodnight. I love you, my little ones.

We love you daddy!

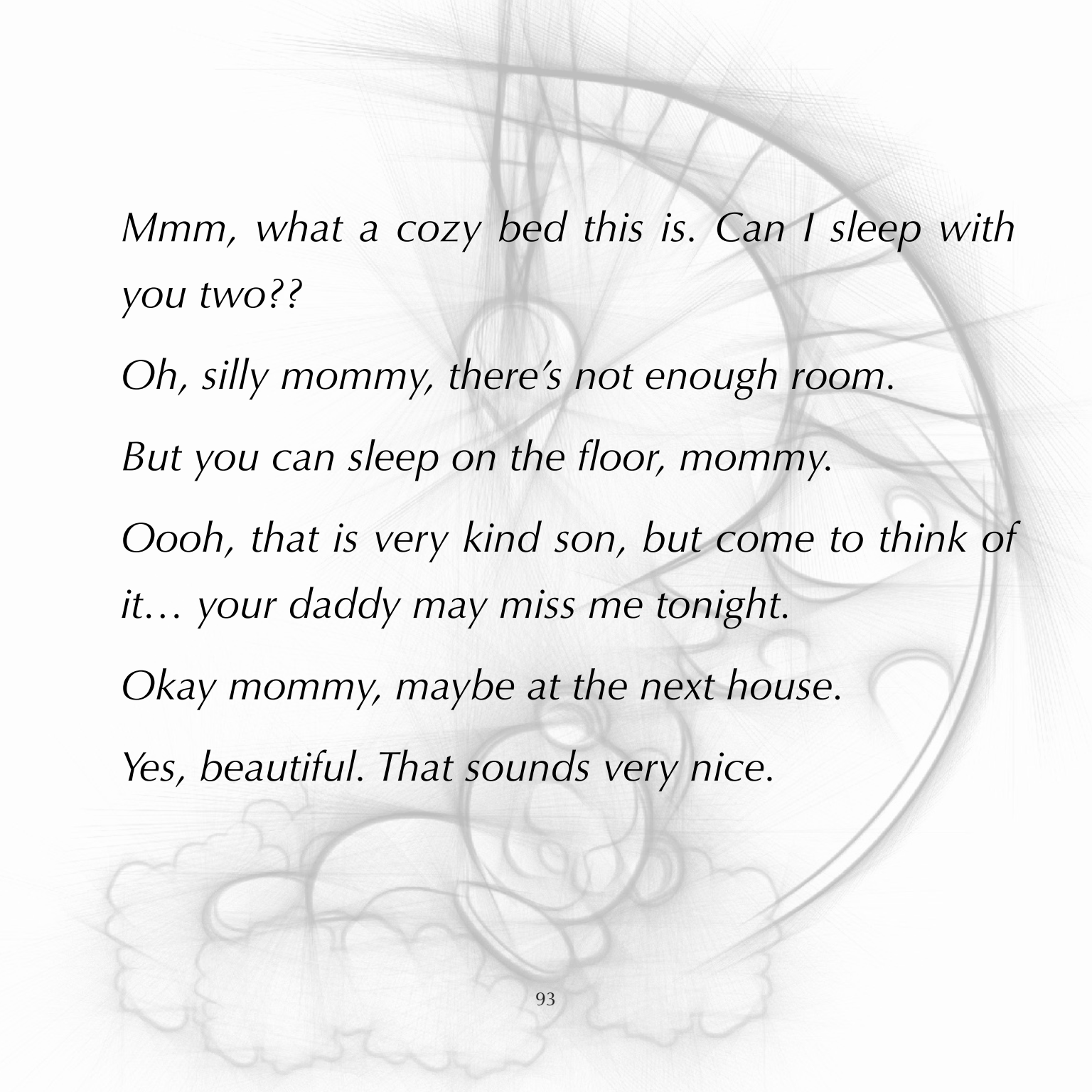
Yes, daddy, so so much!

A faint, artistic background illustration. It features a large, circular wheel-like structure with many thin, intersecting lines, resembling a spiderweb or a complex mechanical part. Overlaid on this is a very light, sketchy drawing of a child's face, focusing on the eyes and nose area. The overall style is delicate and dreamlike.

And both the little girl and the little boy reached up to hug their daddy, tightly. They loved to see how long they could hang around his neck before he began to laugh.

Okay my dears, you two always get my tickle spot with those kind of hugs. I love you!

As their daddy left the room laughing, their mommy passed him and curled up next to the little boy on his side of the bed.



Mmm, what a cozy bed this is. Can I sleep with you two??

Oh, silly mommy, there's not enough room.

But you can sleep on the floor, mommy.

Oooh, that is very kind son, but come to think of it... your daddy may miss me tonight.

Okay mommy, maybe at the next house.

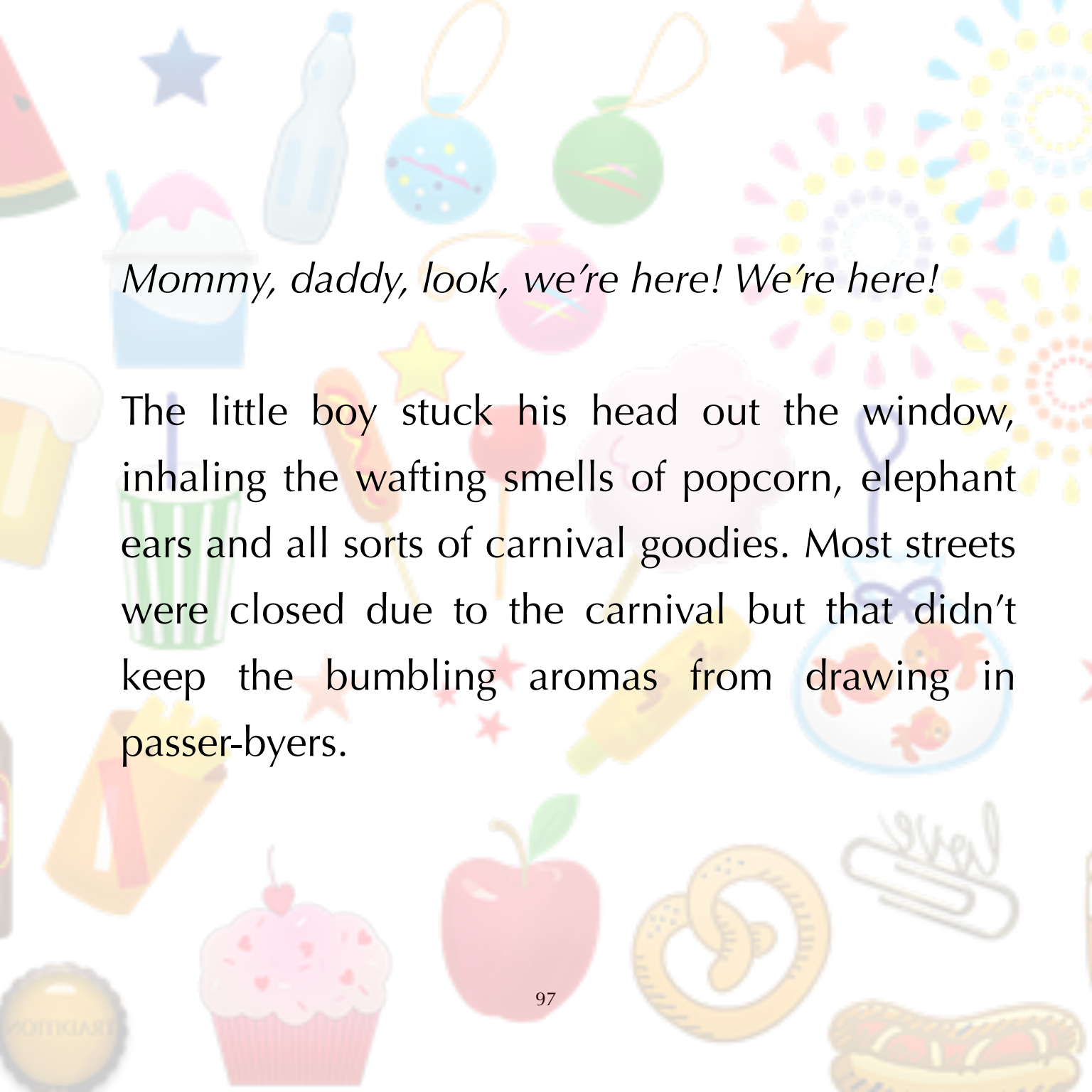
Yes, beautiful. That sounds very nice.

Their mommy stretched her arm across the little boy, gently cupping the little girl with her hand, drawing the three of them into one big, cozy hug. Their mommy prayed with them, blessed them with kisses and left them witnessing the display of fresh lights in the night sky. Not long after, the little girl and the little boy fell soundly asleep.



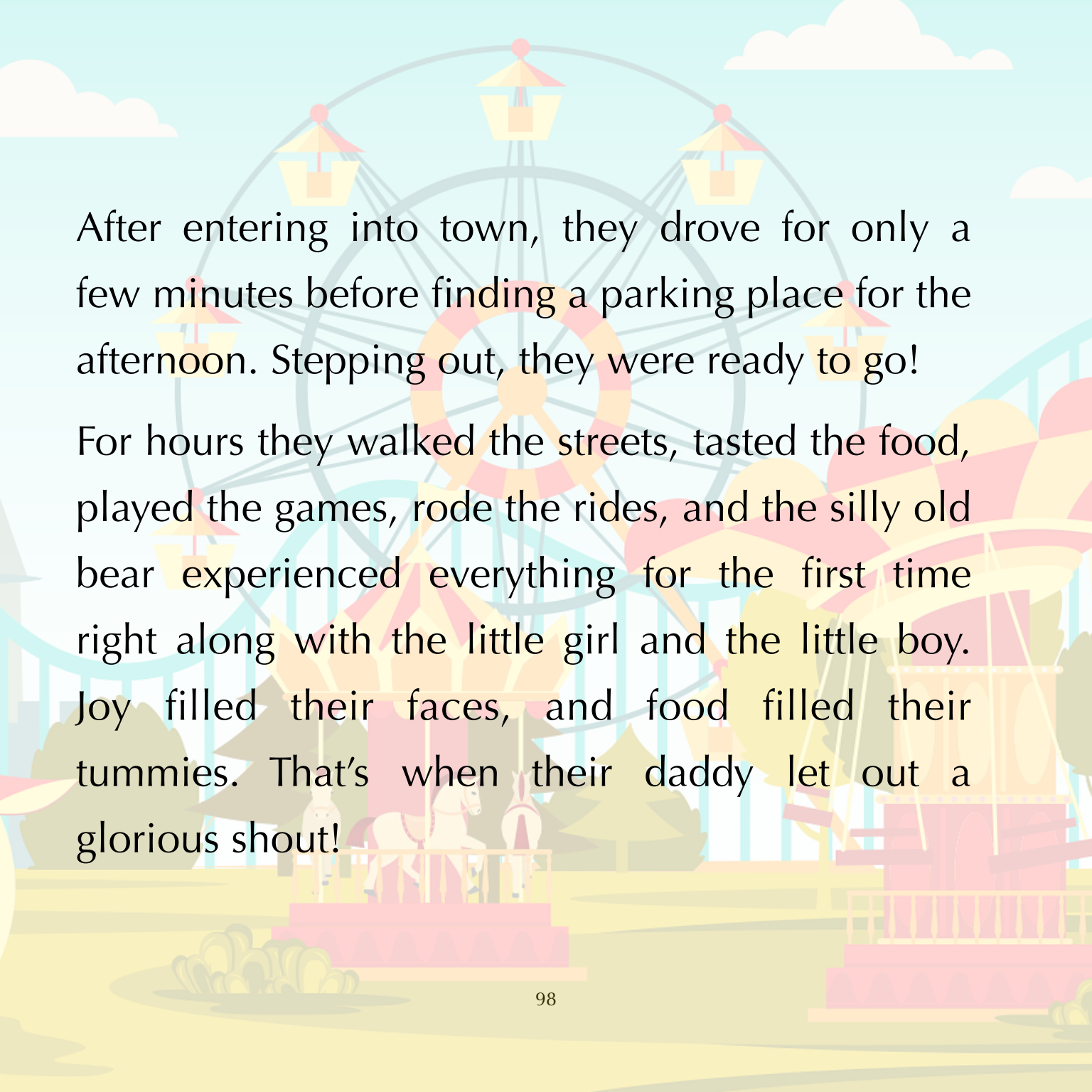
Chapter 9

The car was all packed again, ready to stroll through the next town filled with new faces and new spaces. *The Elise Bed & Breakfast* was situated near the outer skirts of town. The Inn Keeper, who prepared their rooms, suggested they stop at the annual *Maze Carnival* before checking in. *The children will love it!* And that was all the little girl and the little boy needed to hear. The silly old bear had never been to a carnival and was a little nervous, but he knew the little girl would never let him go.



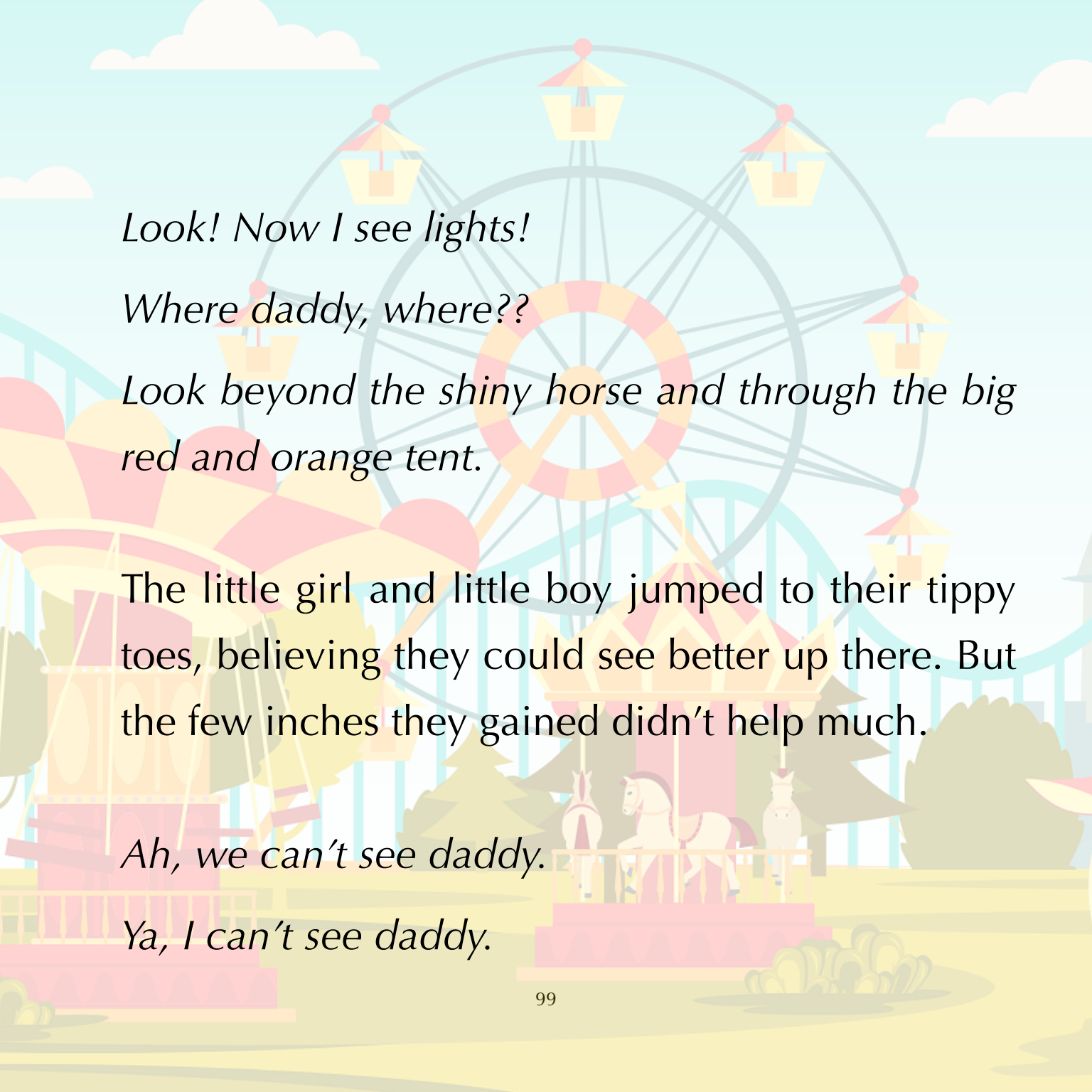
Mommy, daddy, look, we're here! We're here!

The little boy stuck his head out the window, inhaling the wafting smells of popcorn, elephant ears and all sorts of carnival goodies. Most streets were closed due to the carnival but that didn't keep the bumbling aromas from drawing in passer-byers.



After entering into town, they drove for only a few minutes before finding a parking place for the afternoon. Stepping out, they were ready to go!

For hours they walked the streets, tasted the food, played the games, rode the rides, and the silly old bear experienced everything for the first time right along with the little girl and the little boy. Joy filled their faces, and food filled their tummies. That's when their daddy let out a glorious shout!



Look! Now I see lights!

Where daddy, where??

Look beyond the shiny horse and through the big red and orange tent.

The little girl and little boy jumped to their tippy toes, believing they could see better up there. But the few inches they gained didn't help much.

Ah, we can't see daddy.

Ya, I can't see daddy.

Well, come now, we'll just have to go find them, together!

And with that, their mommy and daddy, the little girl, little boy, and the silly old bear headed toward the lights that only their daddy could see. As they moved past the carousal the little girl and little boy caught glimpses of something very special straight through two massive tents nestled side by side.

Ohhhh, brother can you see this??

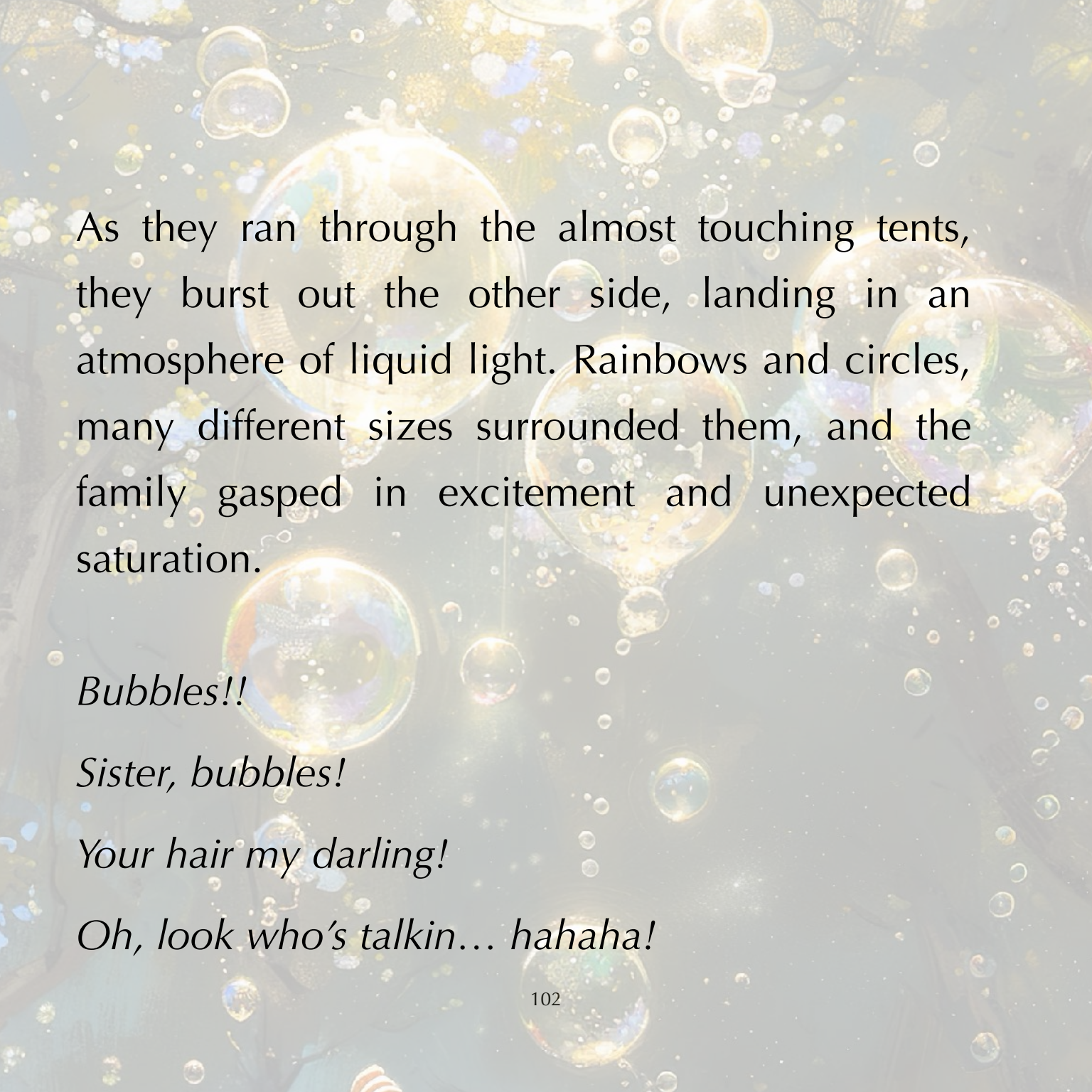
Wow, yes sister, yes I can!

There are rainbows of light floating back there!

There's one, and there's one...

Oh, and there's one!! Look, look, there are more!

As the little girl and the little boy drew closer in sight, they took off, running the remainder of the way. Their mommy and daddy followed closely behind, laughing all the way.



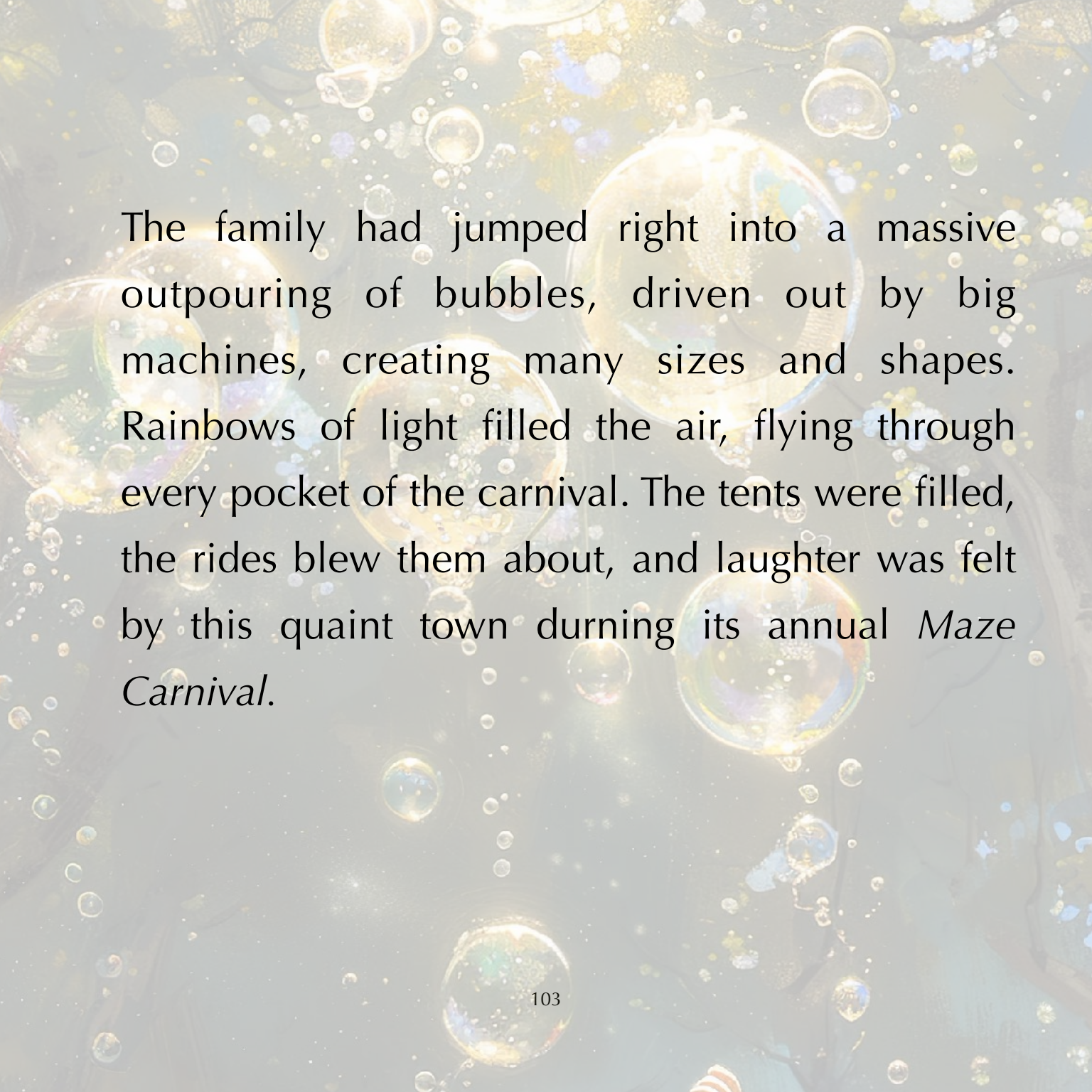
As they ran through the almost touching tents, they burst out the other side, landing in an atmosphere of liquid light. Rainbows and circles, many different sizes surrounded them, and the family gasped in excitement and unexpected saturation.

Bubbles!!

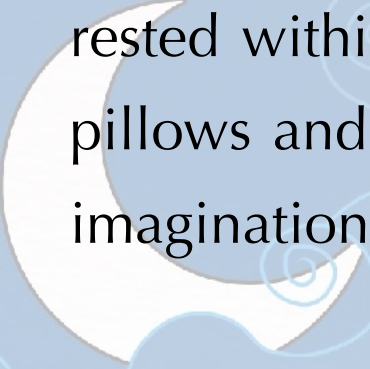
Sister, bubbles!

Your hair my darling!

Oh, look who's talkin... hahaha!



The family had jumped right into a massive outpouring of bubbles, driven out by big machines, creating many sizes and shapes. Rainbows of light filled the air, flying through every pocket of the carnival. The tents were filled, the rides blew them about, and laughter was felt by this quaint town during its annual *Maze Carnival*.



As day gave into night, the little girl and little boy rested within a bed fitted with fresh linens, fluffy pillows and a colorful quilt meant for stirring the imagination as sleep came upon the sleeper.

One more day of travel my dears.

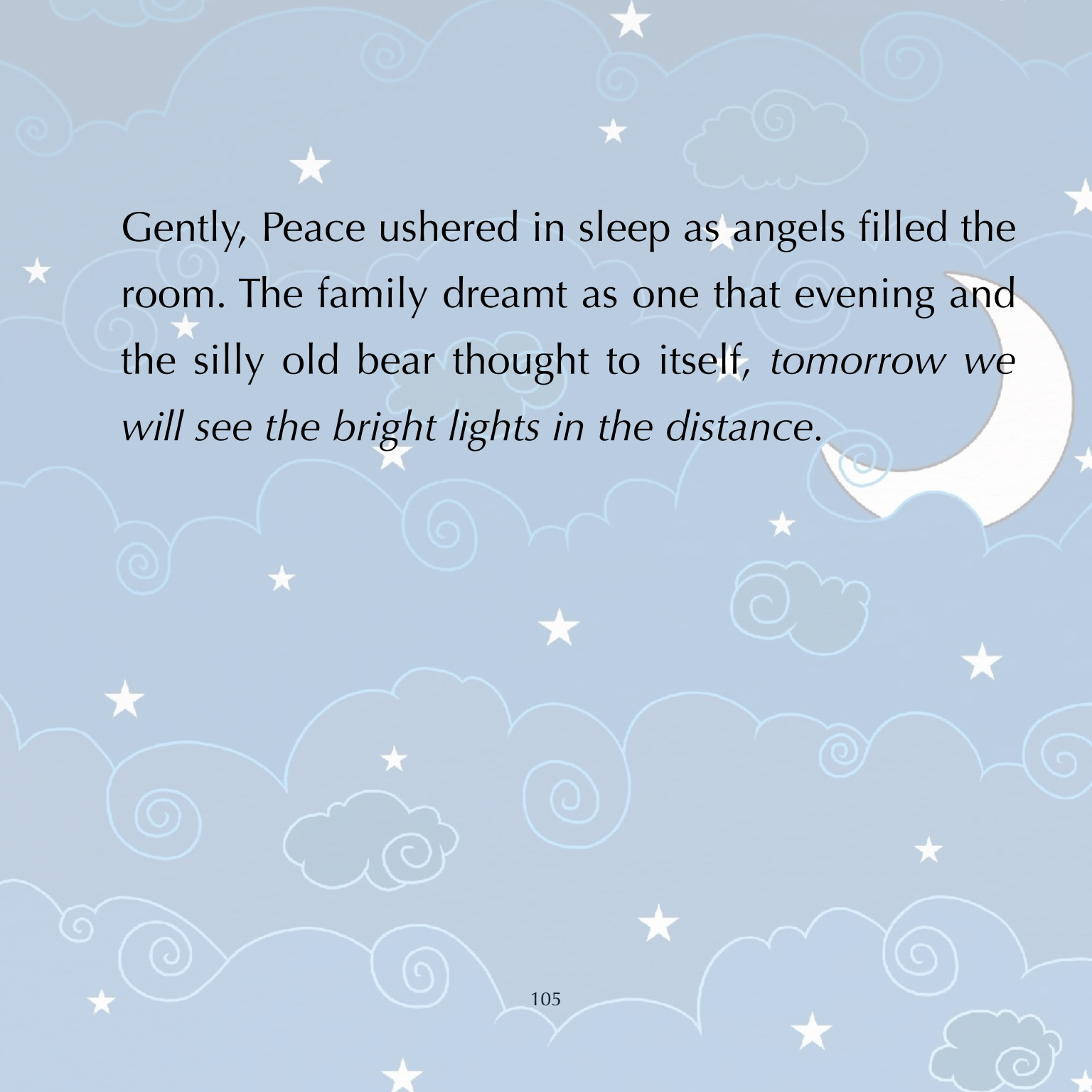
Have you enjoyed our journey so far?

Oh, yes, mommy. We saw lights everywhere.

Can we do this again, next week??

Oh my son, haha, not quite that soon but we will.

We will...

The background is a light blue gradient. It is decorated with numerous white stars of varying sizes. There are also several stylized white clouds, some with spiral patterns inside. A large, white crescent moon is positioned on the right side of the page.

Gently, Peace ushered in sleep as angels filled the room. The family dreamt as one that evening and the silly old bear thought to itself, *tomorrow we will see the bright lights in the distance.*

Chapter 10

Still huddled within the quilt, the little girl and the little boy gazed out the large window before them. Out came the sun and the sky was suddenly filled with birds declaring their morning songs.

Well, brother, today is the day!

I know, sister...

Aren't you happy?!

And the little girl leapt up on the edge of the bed, jumping for joy while the little boy just sat there with a blank face and nervous eyes.

Brother, jump with me, jump with me!

Well... okay!!

The little boy couldn't resist a good jump, and so the little girl and the little boy jumped till their mommy called them down for breakfast. The silly old bear felt warmth fill his cheeks.

Each family member had a danish, scrambled eggs and a big glass of freshly squeezed orange juice. As delightful as this Bed & Breakfast was, the family was excited to continue their pursuit.

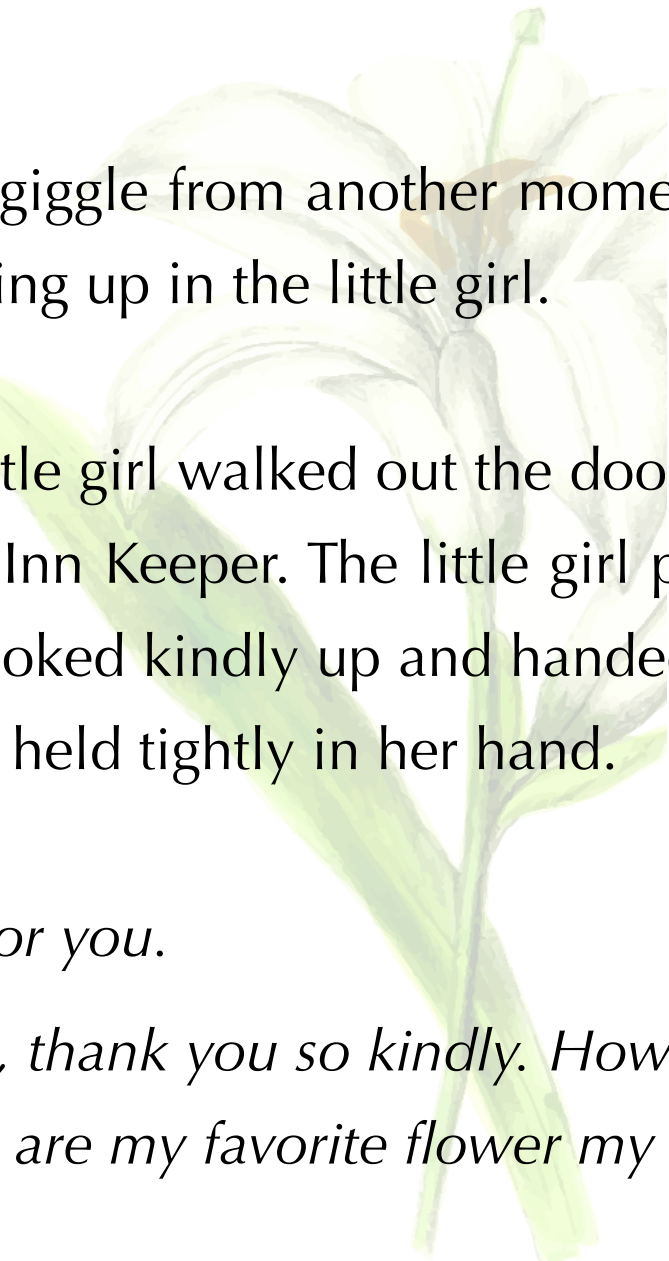
Let's get going kiddos.

Ooo, I almost forgot my flowers, daddy... I have to go get them!

Okay, sweetie. Ask your brother if he forgot anything too.

Yes, daddy!

The little girl raced back into the house, ran up the curved stairs and straight into their room. Soft white lilies were lying on the window seal right where the little girl had left them the evening before. The little girl saw the little boy's sweater on the end of the messy bed and snatched it up on her way out. *Brother, I found your sweater. Silly brother.* The little girl spoke to herself.

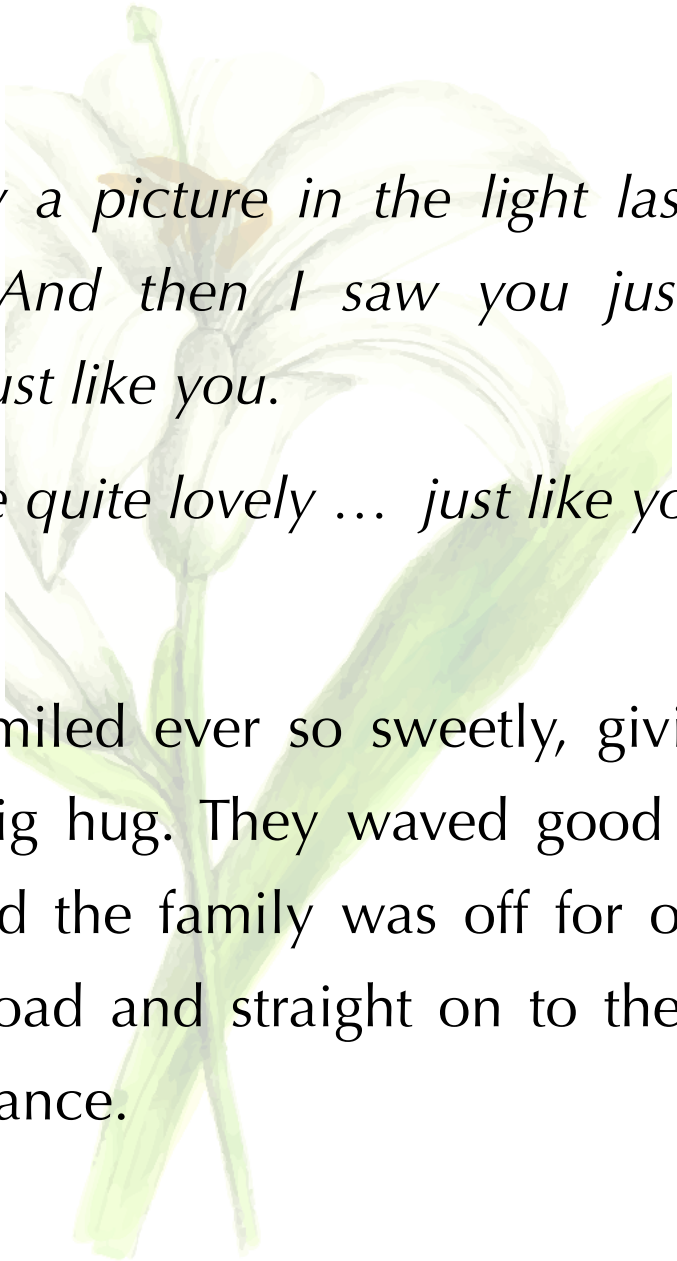


Another giggle from another moment of innocent cheer rising up in the little girl.

As the little girl walked out the door, she began to pass the Inn Keeper. The little girl paused in front of her, looked kindly up and handed her the three lilies she held tightly in her hand.

They're for you.

Oh, well, thank you so kindly. How did you know that lilies are my favorite flower my dear?



*Well, I just saw a picture in the light last night
when I slept. And then I saw you just now.
They're pretty, just like you.*

Oh my. They are quite lovely ... just like you.

The little girl smiled ever so sweetly, giving the
Inn Keeper a big hug. They waved good bye to
one another and the family was off for one last
day upon the road and straight on to the bright
lights in the distance.

Chapter 11

Songs filled the car, rain pounded upon the windows, trees swayed in the distance and the once two-lane highway turned into a giant road with many lanes and lots of cars. The little girl and the little boy had never seen such a sight. There were cars everywhere! The trees turned to buildings, the green grass became grey cement, and the melodic birds disappeared within the cacophony of honks, music and sirens.

Oh wow mommy, where are we?

This, my dear, is the beginning of the many cities we will be driving through.

Oh, like in our books at home?

Well, kind of. Except bigger, and sometimes greyer. But keep looking and you will see colors splashed all over the place! This is one of the most celebrated cities for its many artists.

Oh...

The little boy was without words.

Their mommy saw insecurity in their eyes so she decided to topple over the front seat in order to sit with them in the back. She nuzzled herself between the little girl and the little boy, inviting them into her comforting embrace. And cuddle they did. The little boy even took hold of his mommy's long soft hair and rubbed it against his face just as he once did as a baby. Their mommy smiled proudly, becoming refreshed by the love her children were pouring into her.

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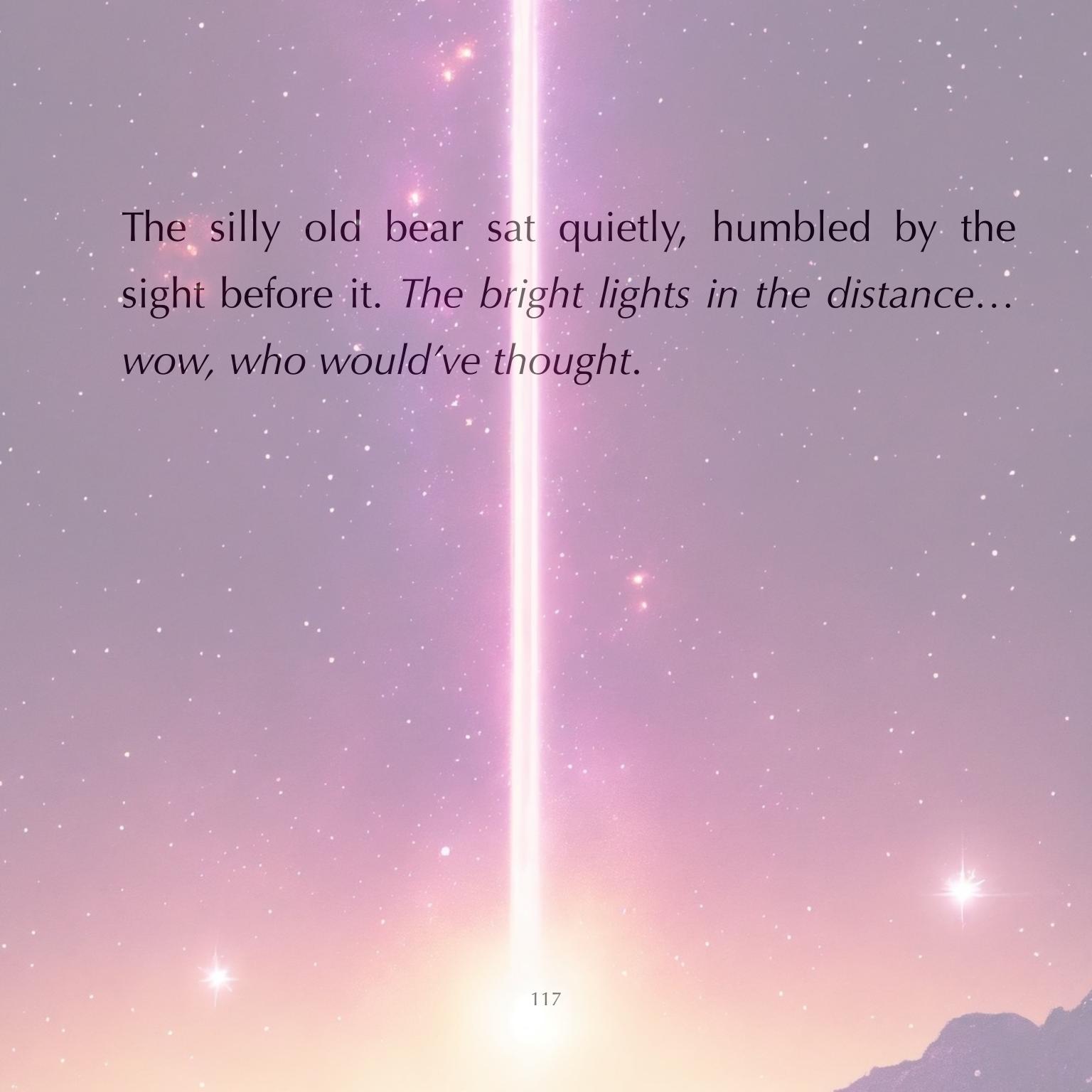
The family drove the remainder of the day
cuddled and quieted by their internal peace.
Droopy eyes closed, while new dreams
awakened.

Once again, day made way for night and the little
girl and the little boy slowly awoke to a
shadowed hill. One where their car climbed and
climbed and climbed, until it crept ever so
carefully over the top.

Before their wide, inquisitive eyes were the brightest lights they had ever seen. From east to west, and as far back as their little eyes could reach, lights illuminated all. Colorful lights, bright white lights, fiery lights ... the display was awe inspiring.

Sister ... do you see, do you see?

Oh brother, I do, I do. The bright lights.



The silly old bear sat quietly, humbled by the sight before it. *The bright lights in the distance... wow, who would've thought.*

COLORING PAGES

COLORING PAGES
