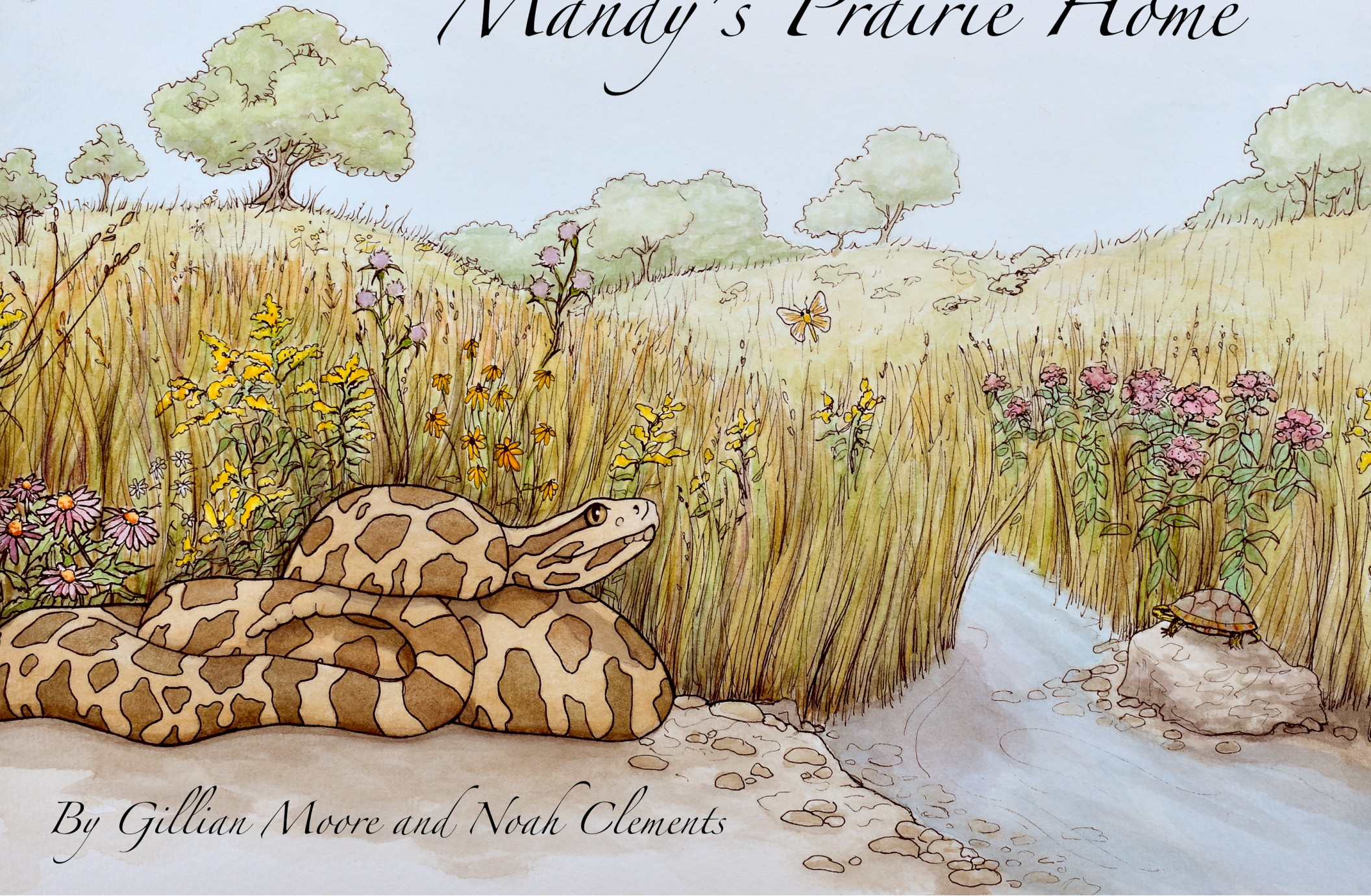


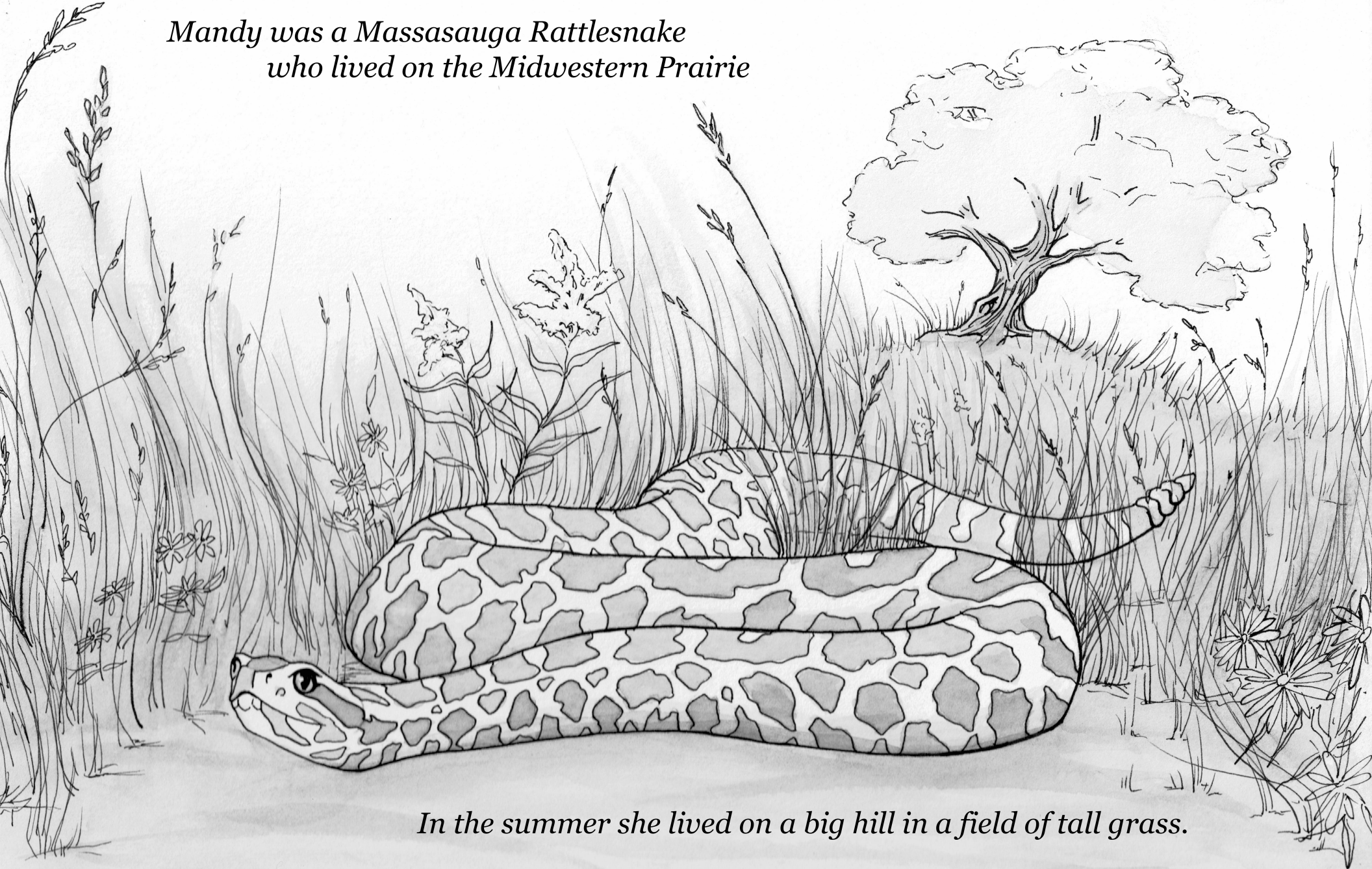
# *Mandy's Prairie Home*



*By Gillian Moore and Noah Clements*



*Mandy was a Massasauga Rattlesnake  
who lived on the Midwestern Prairie*



*In the summer she lived on a big hill in a field of tall grass.*





*In the winter, she moved to the bottom of the hill.  
There she hid from the snow and the cold wind in a burrow by the stream.*



*Mandy loved her prairie home.*

*But something was wrong...*

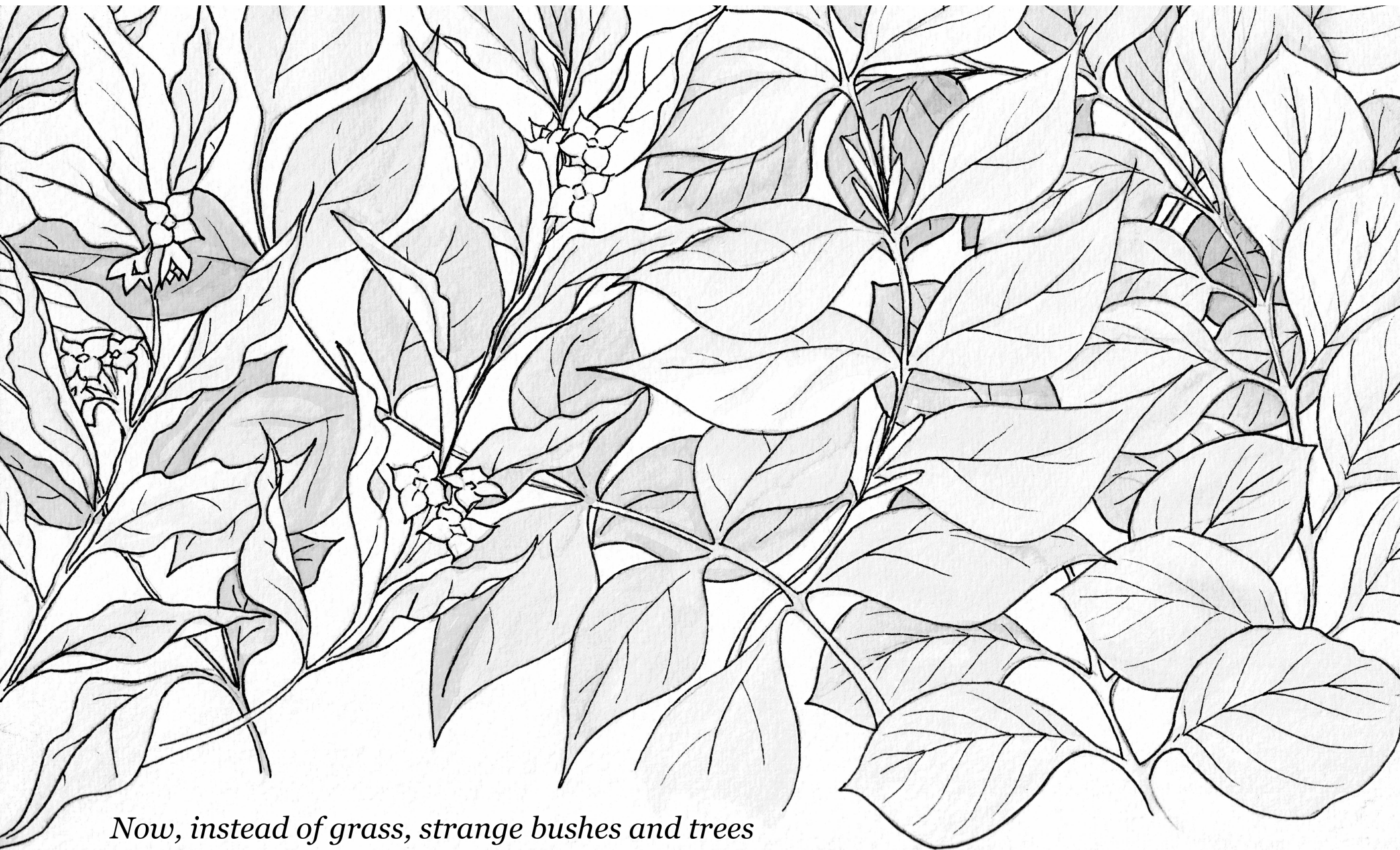




*The prairie was  
vanishing.*

*Mandy needed  
the open grass  
to warm  
herself in the sun  
and hunt for  
mice and  
shrews...*



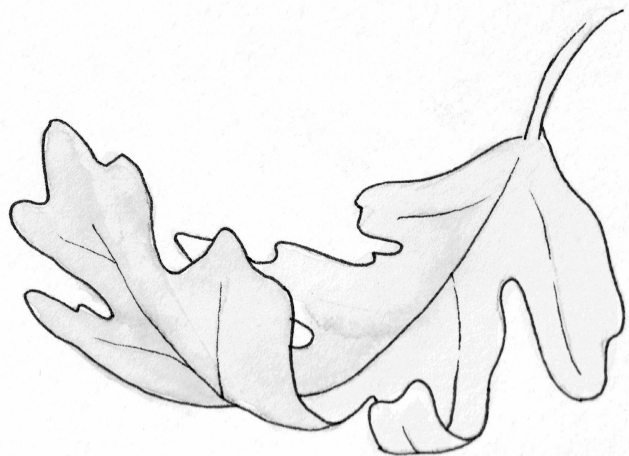


*Now, instead of grass, strange bushes and trees  
were moving into the meadow.*

*These plants grew into a cold, dark forest that held no food for a hungry rattlesnake.*



*As the weather got colder,  
Mandy knew it was time  
to leave her sunny hillside  
for the winter.*



*She stopped to say goodbye to the Wise Old Oak  
who stood at the top of the hill.*



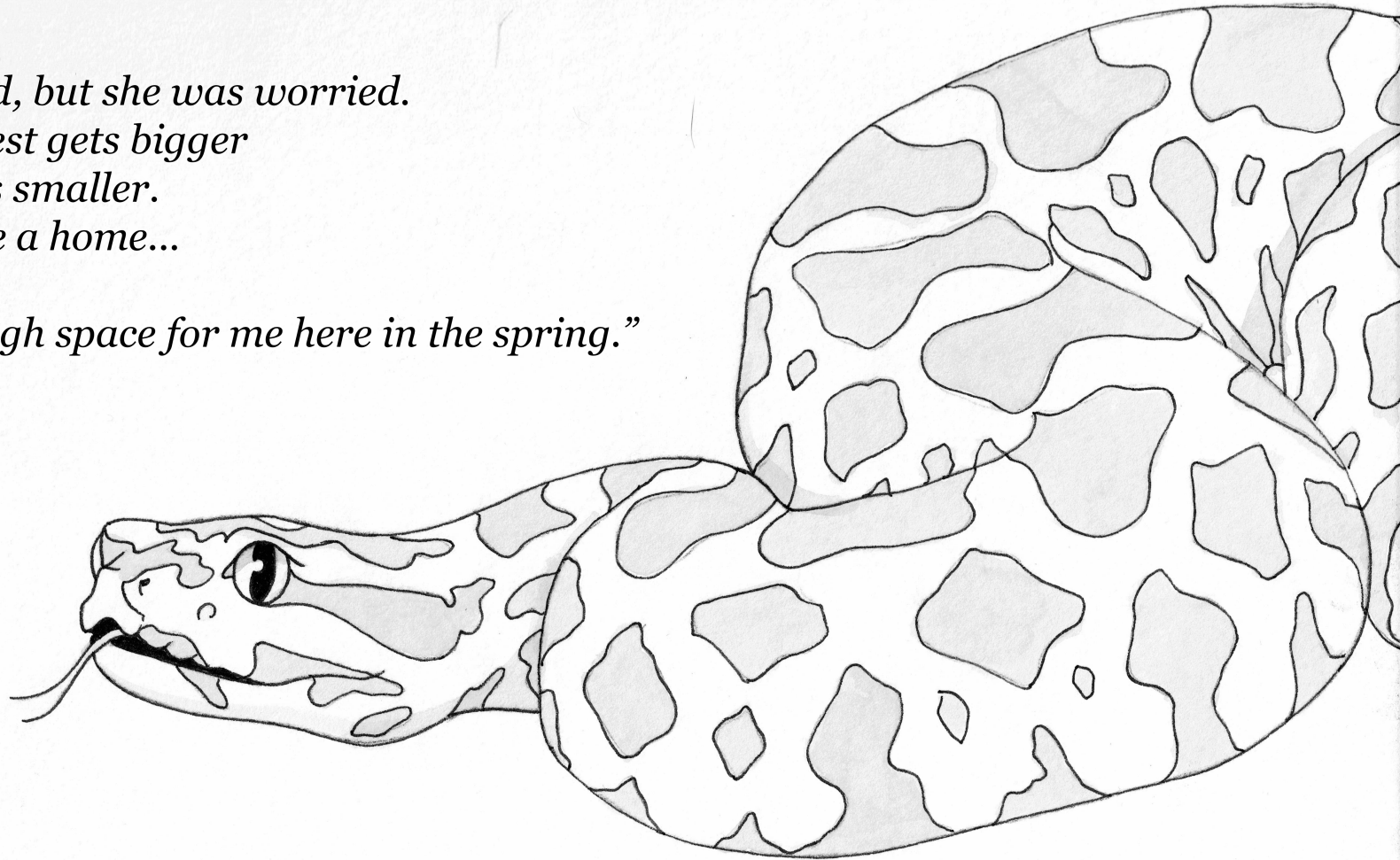
*“Goodbye, friend,” she told him.*

*“Will I see you again in the spring?” he asked her.*

*“I think so,” she said, but she was worried.*

*“Each year, the forest gets bigger  
and the prairie gets smaller.  
Soon I will not have a home...*

*I hope there is enough space for me here in the spring.”*





*“I hope so too,” said the Wise Old Oak.*

*“Honeysuckle, Buckthorn, and Autumn Olive are the bushes who are taking over our home. They travelled here on the wind from far away. They are selfish plants who grow quickly and take all of the sunlight for themselves.*

*For many years, I have watched my acorns fall into their shade. Not one has become a seedling, and so I have no children.”*

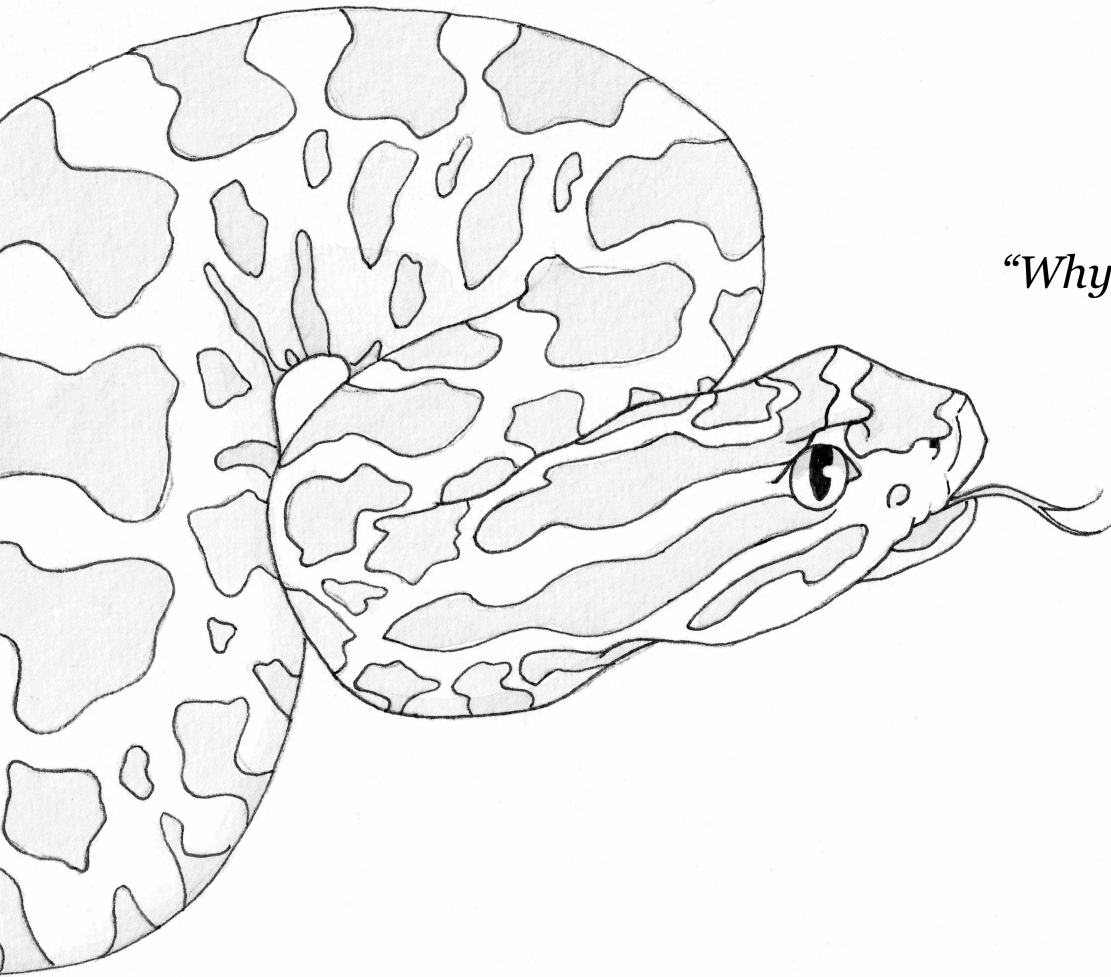
*The Wise Old Oak rattled his leaves sadly.*

*“When I die, there will be no oak trees left on this hill.”*



*Mandy couldn't imagine a world without the Wise Old Oak.*

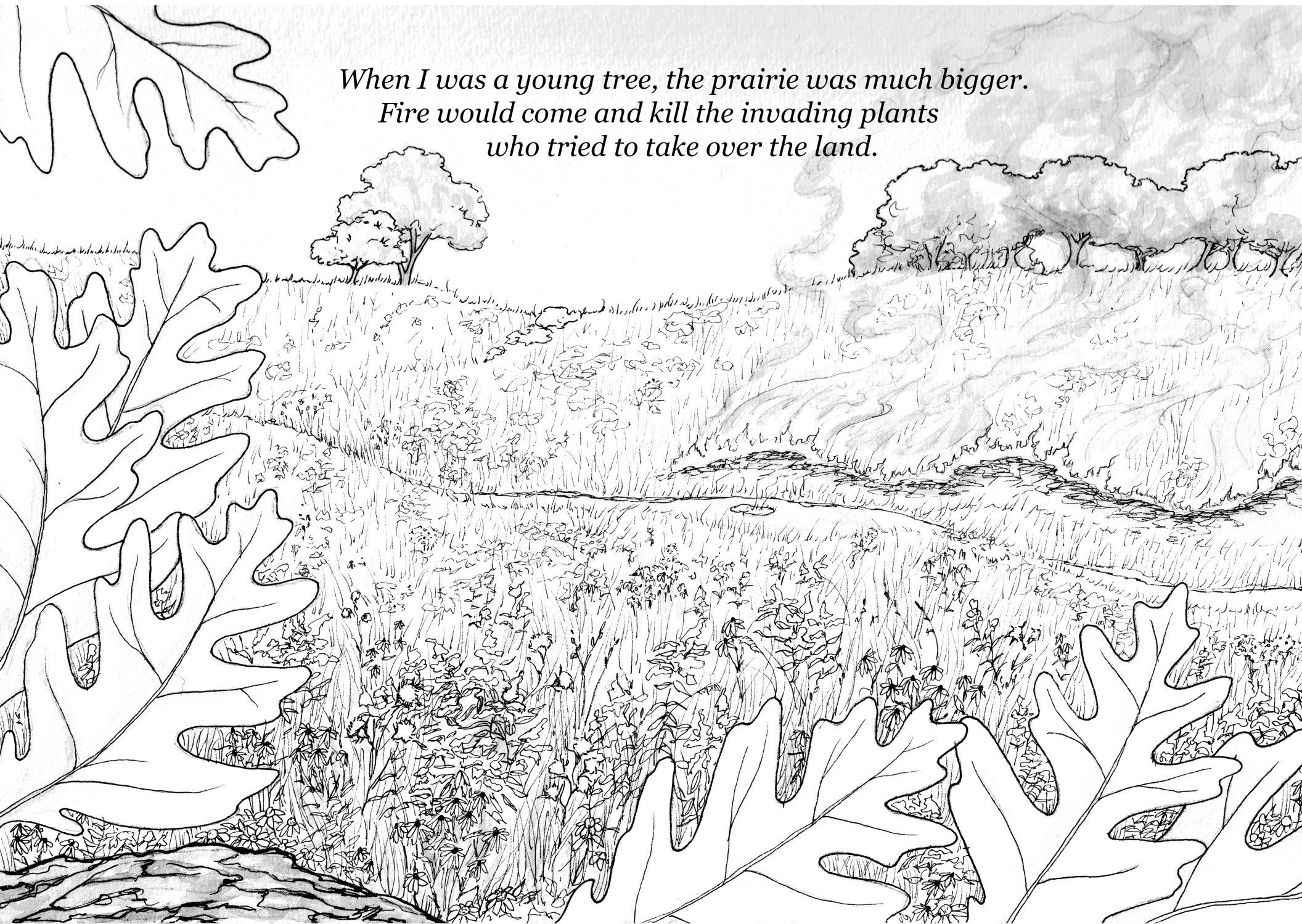
*He had been there for as long as she could imagine.*



*“Why is this happening to us?” asked Mandy.*



*When I was a young tree, the prairie was much bigger.  
Fire would come and kill the invading plants  
who tried to take over the land.*



*“I have not seen fire for many years,” the Wise Old Oak said.  
“It is the only thing that can save us now.”*

*Mandy had never seen fire. She had many more questions,  
but it was too cold to stay on the hill any longer.*

*She crept down to her burrow and fell asleep.*



*Mandy slept for many months through the cold Michigan winter.*

*She dreamed she was lost in the forest of invading plants.*

*She tried to escape to the sunshine of the prairie,  
but she could not find her way through the dark, tangled foliage.*

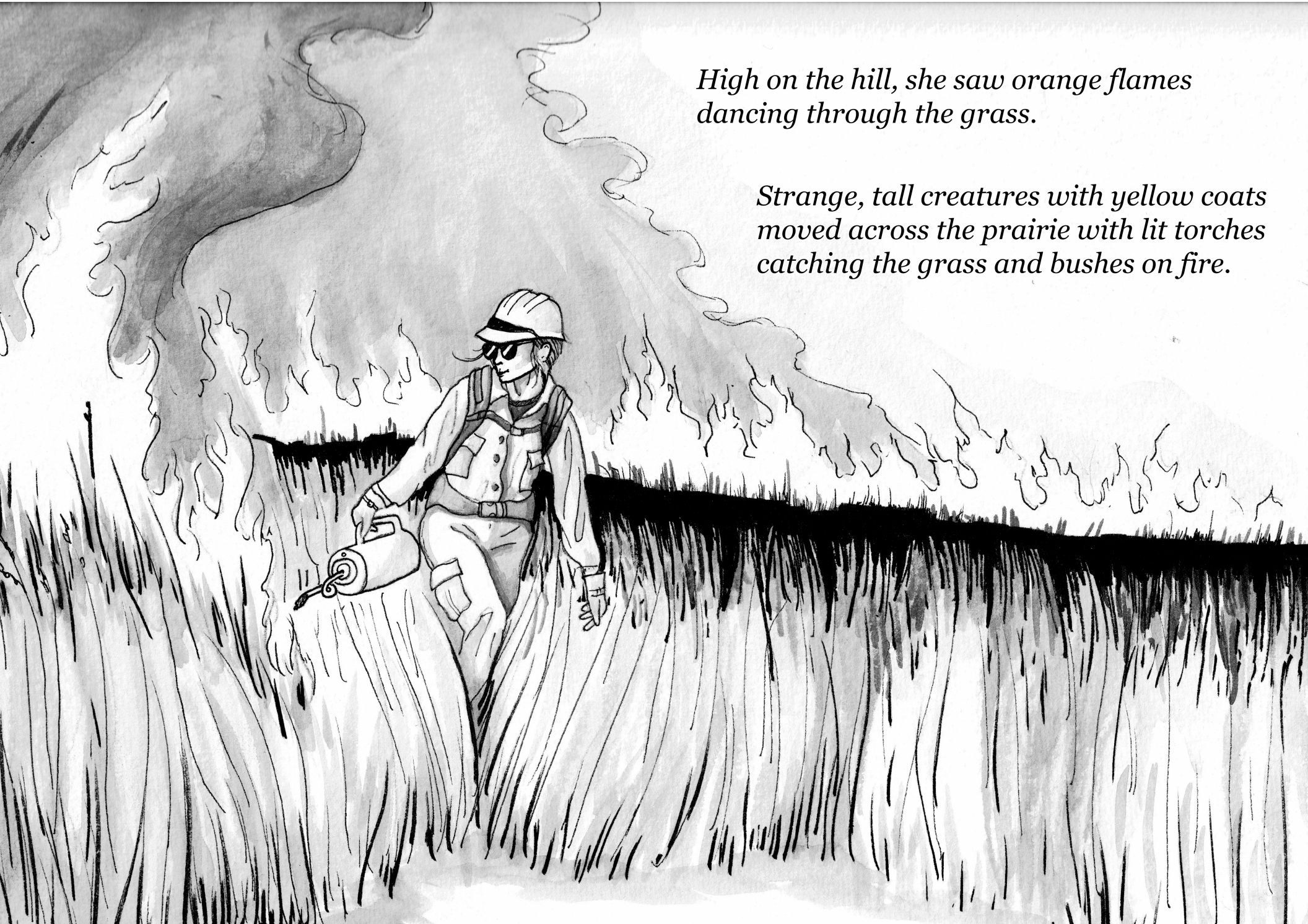
*One spring day, Mandy awoke to the smell of smoke.*

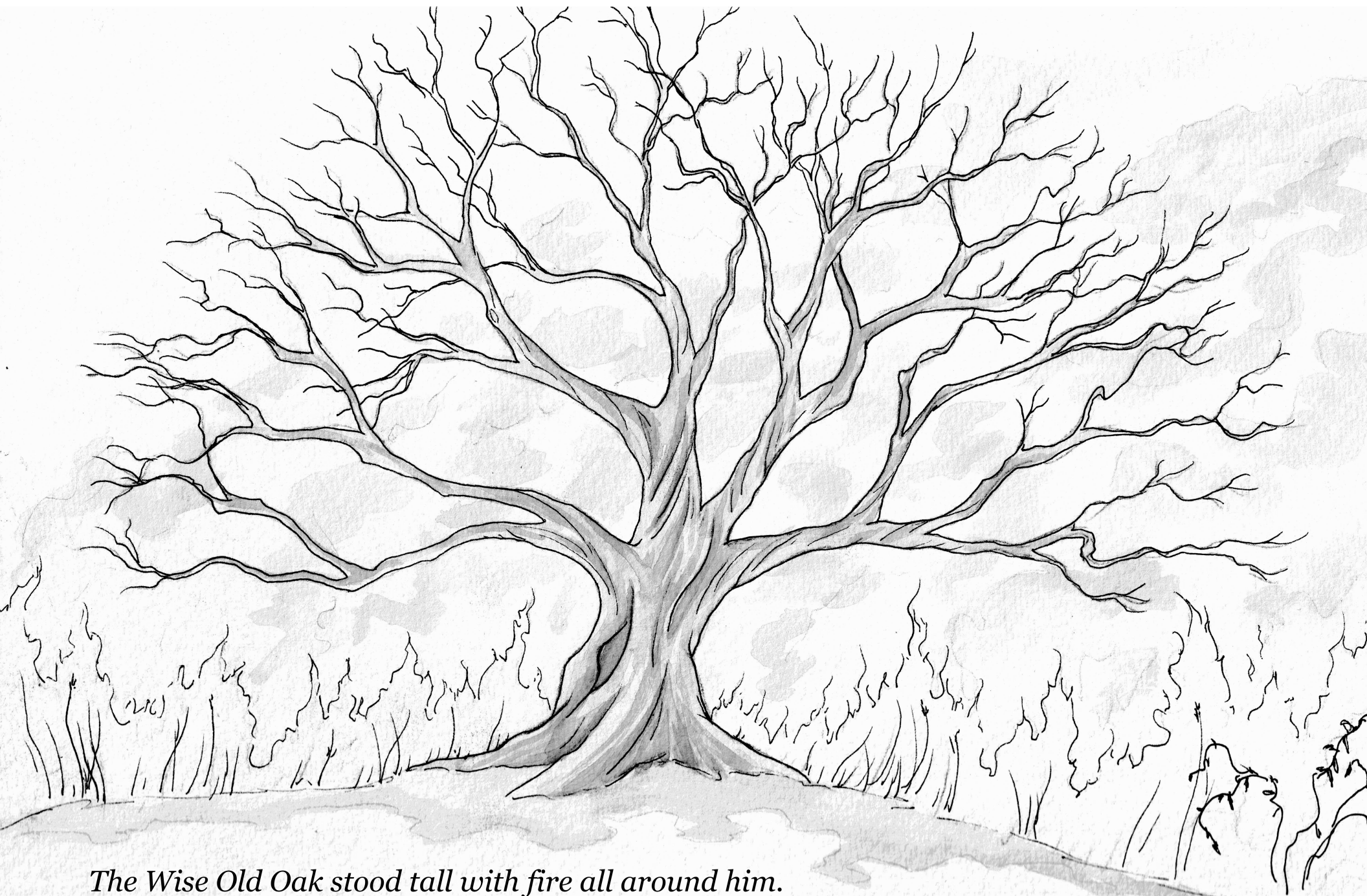
*She peeked outside of her warm burrow.*



*High on the hill, she saw orange flames  
dancing through the grass.*

*Strange, tall creatures with yellow coats  
moved across the prairie with lit torches  
catching the grass and bushes on fire.*





*The Wise Old Oak stood tall with fire all around him.  
His bark shimmered in the heat, but he did not seem afraid.*



*When the flames finally burned out, Mandy climbed the hill.*

*“Are you alright?” she asked her friend.*

*The Wise Old Oak laughed.*

*“This is how it should be!*

*Many creatures are afraid of fire. They see only the blackened grass  
and the smoke which blocks the sun. But look around Mandy!*

*The fire brings new life to the prairie! It gives nutrients to the grass  
and chases away the invading plants who steal the sunlight!”*

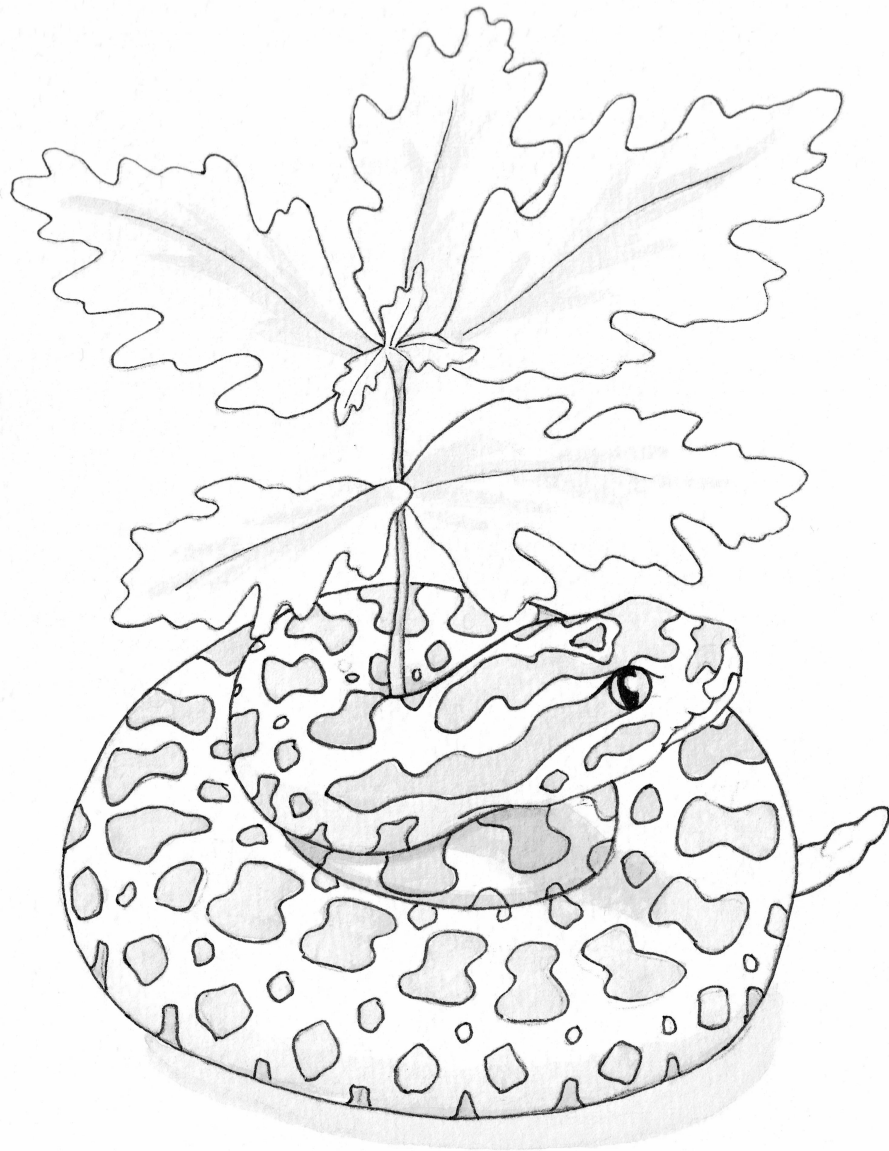
*Mandy knew he was right.*

*Everywhere she looked, there were little stalks of new grass  
poking through the blackened ground.*

*The Honeysuckle, Buckthorn, and Autumn Olive bushes sat drooping  
with withered leaves.*

*They could no longer invade the prairie.*





*As seasons came and went,  
fire returned to the prairie many times.*

*The Wise Old Oak swayed joyfully  
in the breeze as his acorns grew  
into seedlings.*

*In time, Mandy brought her own children  
to visit them, and the whole prairie  
bustled with new life.*

*So long as the fire returned,  
Mandy never worried about losing her home ever again.*

