



Ants in the Oak





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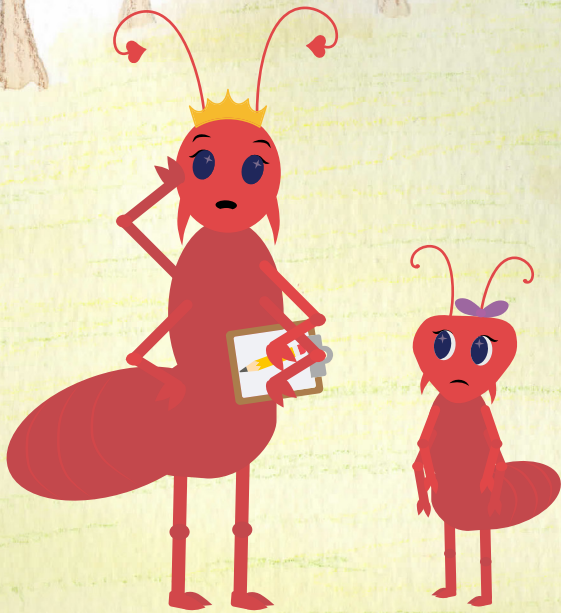
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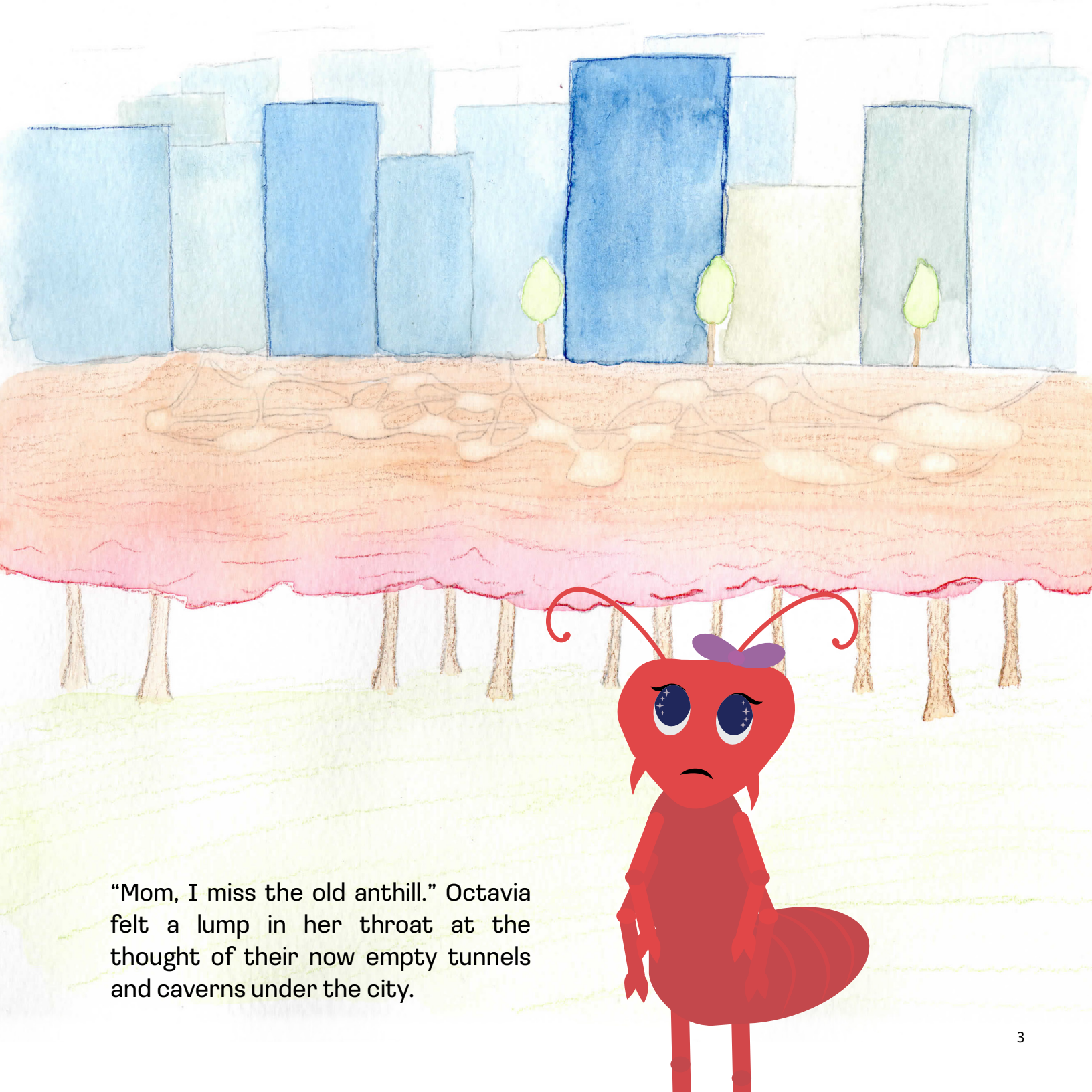
Octavia spat out a chunk of wet wood and
looked back at the tree it came from,



“Ptooh- Moving is hard,” she sighed.

“Do you want to take a break?” Mom asked, looking down from her move-in clipboard.





“Mom, I miss the old anthill.” Octavia felt a lump in her throat at the thought of their now empty tunnels and caverns under the city.



“You’re going to like it here,” Mom hugged her tight. “There are lots of things to explore and no big feet trying to step on you. This will give you a chance to make friends outside the colony too.”

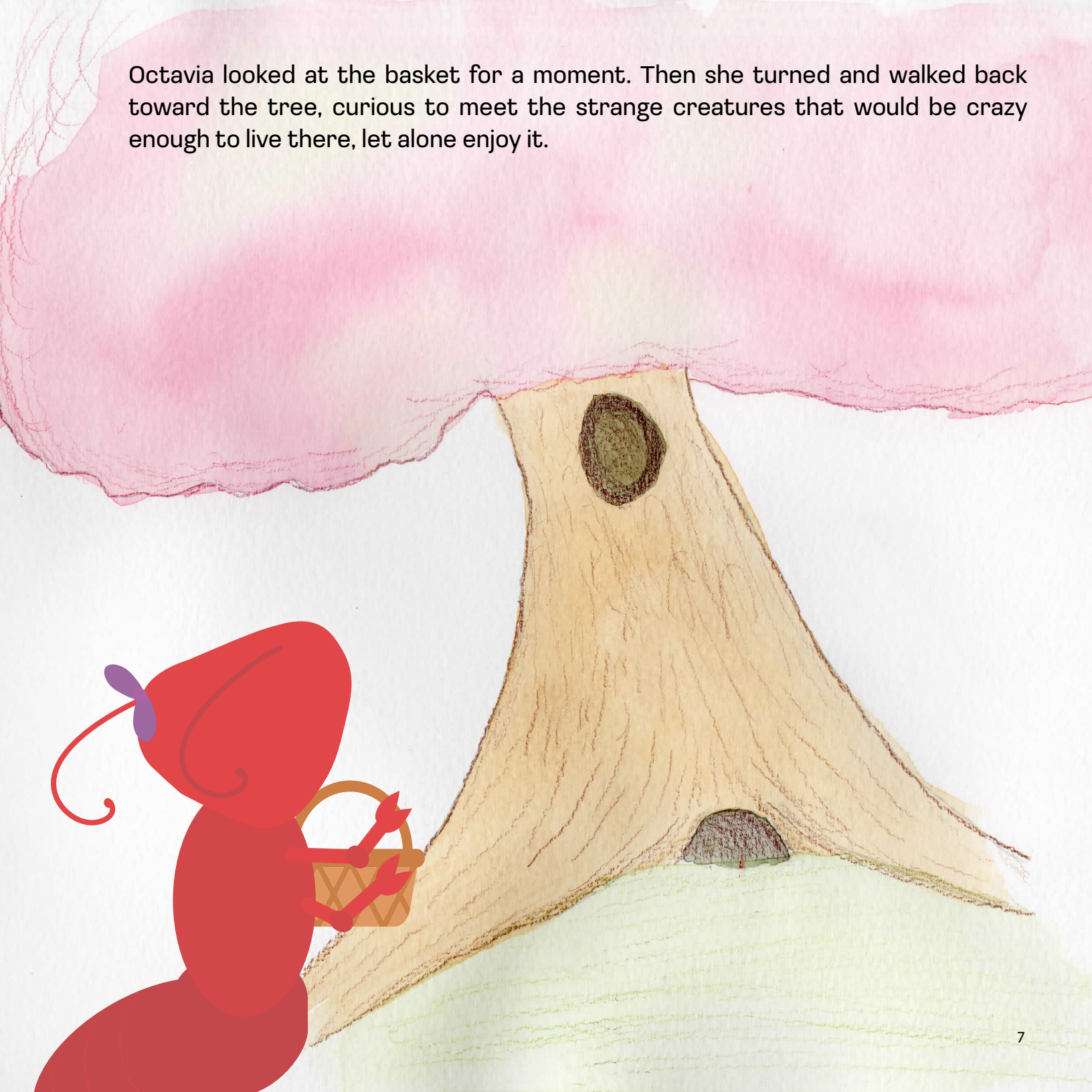


Octavia sniffed and rubbed her eyes.
“What’s so great about a tree anyway?”



“Why don’t you ask our neighbors?” Mom said, handing Octavia a basket.
“Give out these snacks for me, and see what everyone else likes about living here.”

Octavia looked at the basket for a moment. Then she turned and walked back toward the tree, curious to meet the strange creatures that would be crazy enough to live there, let alone enjoy it.



Knock knock knock. The first to open their door to Octavia was Rosy. "Do you and your family want some snacks? My mom made plenty."

"Oh, my parents are moths so they're still sleeping," Rosy said, barely above a whisper, "and I've been eating leaves all day, but thanks for the offer."

"That's a leaf?" Octavia asked, looking at the strange shape Rosy was holding.



"Well of course it's a leaf! It's a red oak leaf to be exact," Rosy giggled. "You can tell because they have these pointy bumps called lobes. At this time of year it's obvious because red oak leaves turn red! Plus, they're the tastiest leaves. Everyone in my family agrees."



“I’ve never thought about leaves having different shapes and tastes,” Octavia thought as she waved to Rosy and continued up the tree to her next neighbor.



Knock, knock, knock. Next at the door was Stephen, the squirrel.

“Would you like a snack? My mom made plenty.”

“As long as it’s not these bitter acorns. The acorns next door at the white oak are much better,” Stephen huffed.



“Well if you don’t like the acorns, what do you like about living here?” Octavia asked, wiggling her antennae with interest.

"I love running and leaping through the branches. This red oak is one of the fastest growing trees you'll find. It gives me the space I need to stretch my legs."



Octavia still felt disappointed, but she waved goodbye to Stephen and continued on her way.



She talked to the Chickadees nestled in their hollow.



“We love these bitter acorns,” they sang.

Chancy the chipmunk told her,
“When it snows, the dark bark
heats up my burrow and keeps me
warm while I hibernate!”







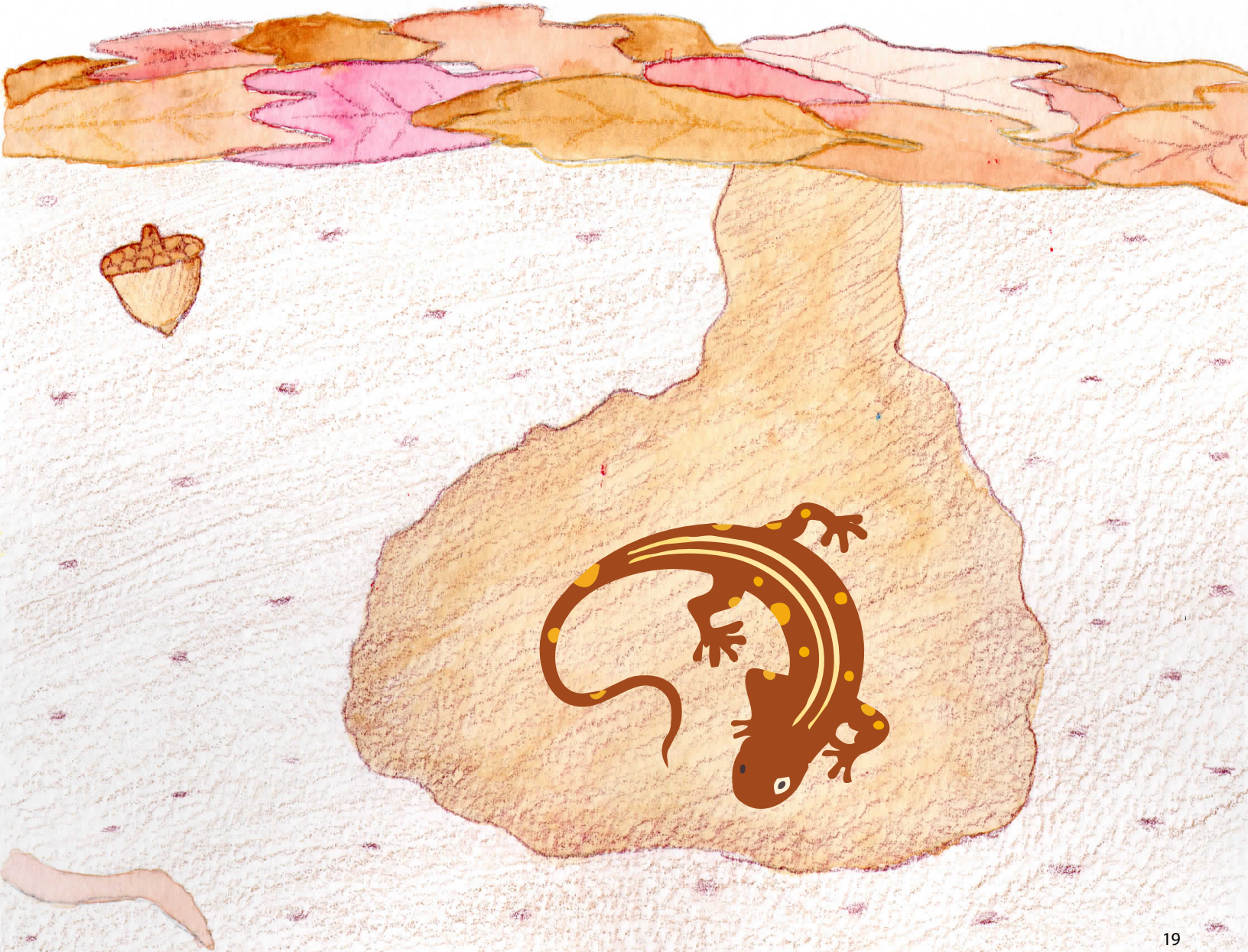
A family of robins in their nest said, "In the summer we get a lot of shade, and our homes all have air conditioning coming from the roots up to the top of the tree. Phew!"





She found Simone the salamander in the leaf litter at the base of the tree.

“It’s getting colder out these days so it’s about time I get underground,” she explained.
“These leaves will keep me warm while I hibernate.”



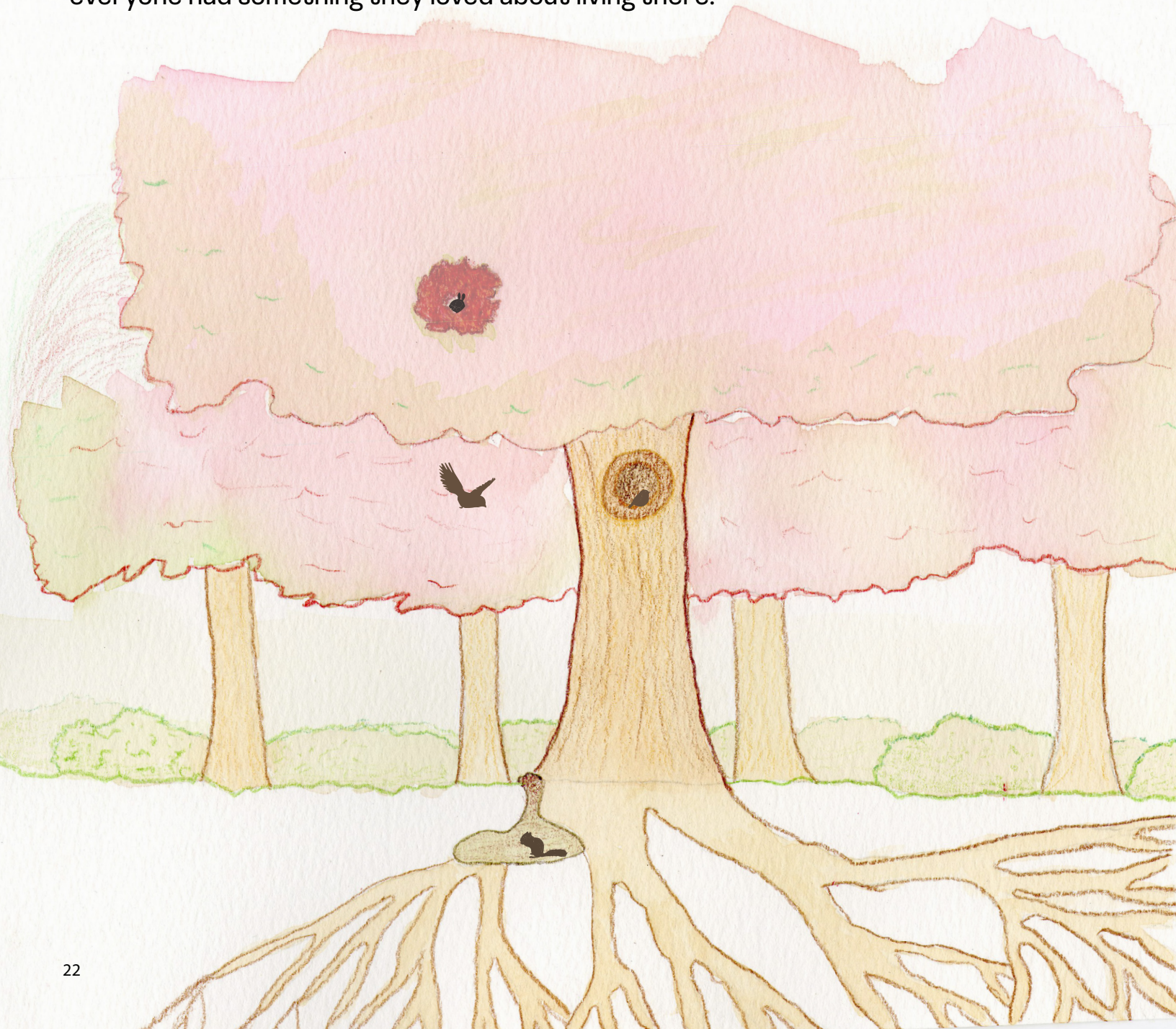
Miss Milly Mole invited Octavia in for a cup of tea.

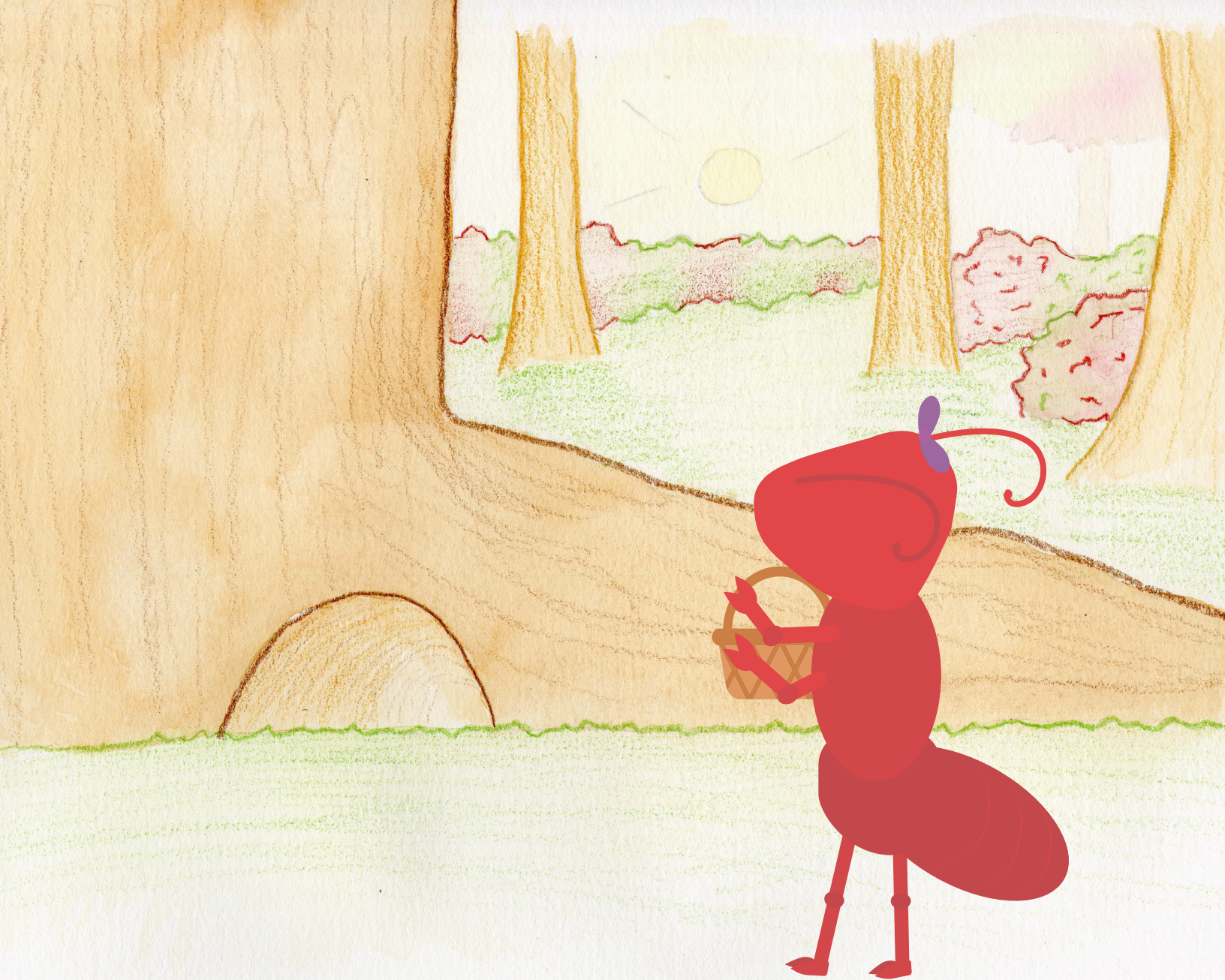




“This old tree’s roots keep my ceiling from falling on our heads! They help keep the soil in place so it doesn’t get washed away with the rain. The tastiest worms live in that soil,” Miss Milly chuckled.

All around the tree, inside and out, from top to bottom,
everyone had something they loved about living there.



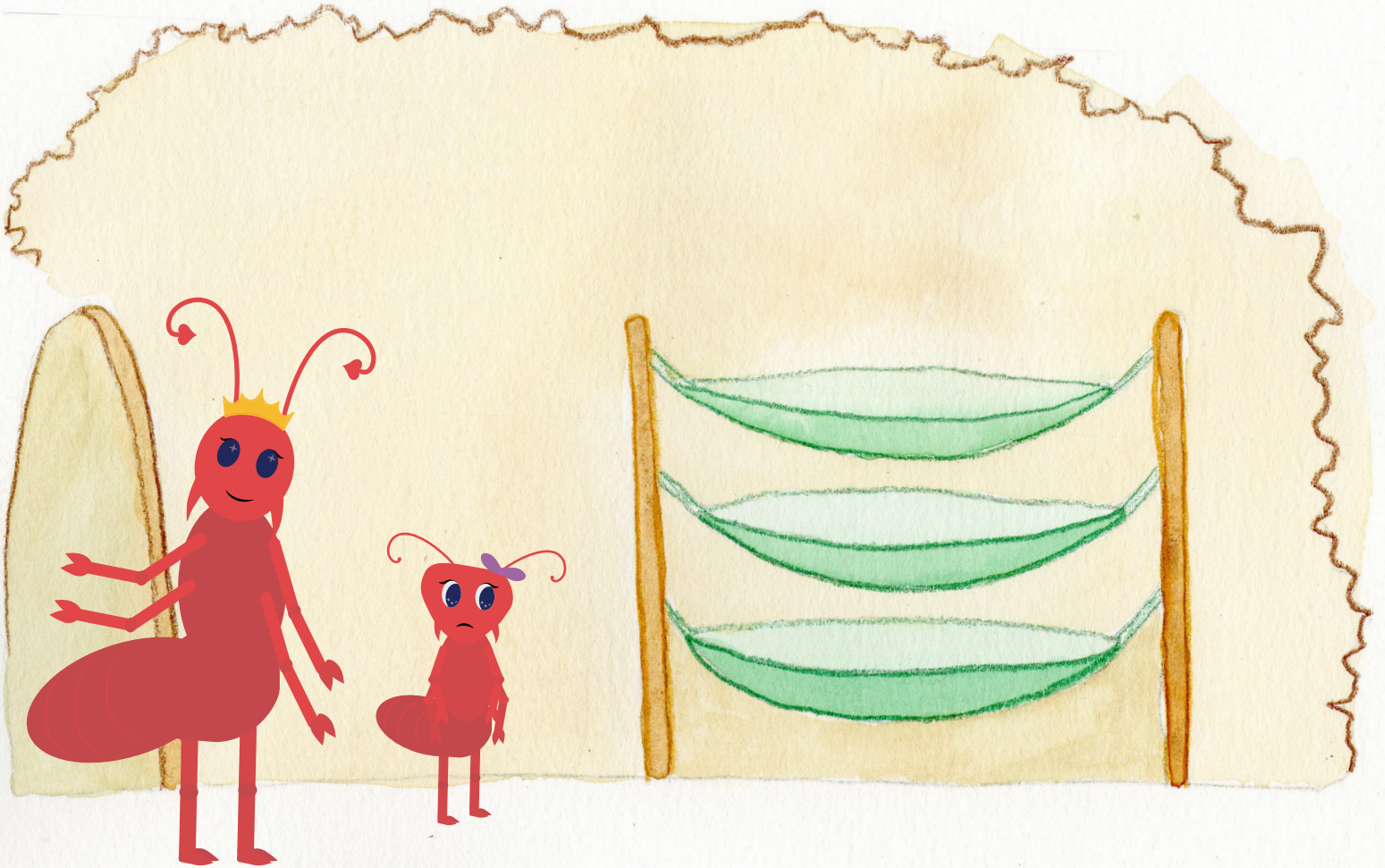


And as the sun started to set, Octavia was sure she had met all her neighbors. Still, as she headed back to the colony, this place didn't feel much like home.

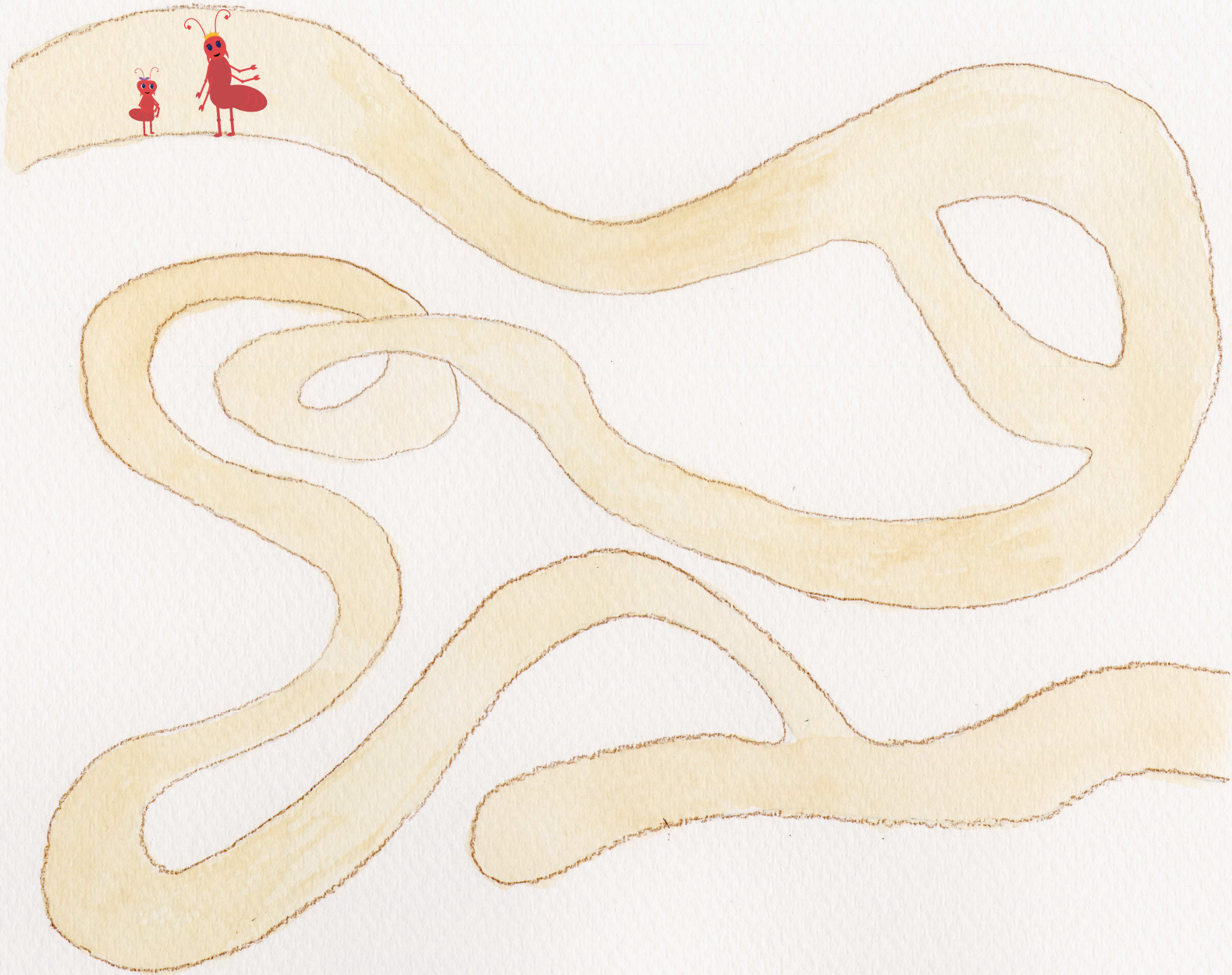


“How are you feeling my dear? You’ve been gone all day!”
Mom greeted her at the entrance to the new colony.

Octavia thought about all the new creatures she'd met and how much they all loved their old oak tree, "I'm feeling ready for bed Mom."



Mom smiled and said "Before you go, I want to show you something."



Mom took Octavia through the tunnels her brothers and sisters had dug that day, under and around the oak, through twists and turns that made Octavia's head spin.

Finally, moonlight broke through the dim light of the tunnels and they emerged in the understory rich with leafy ferns.

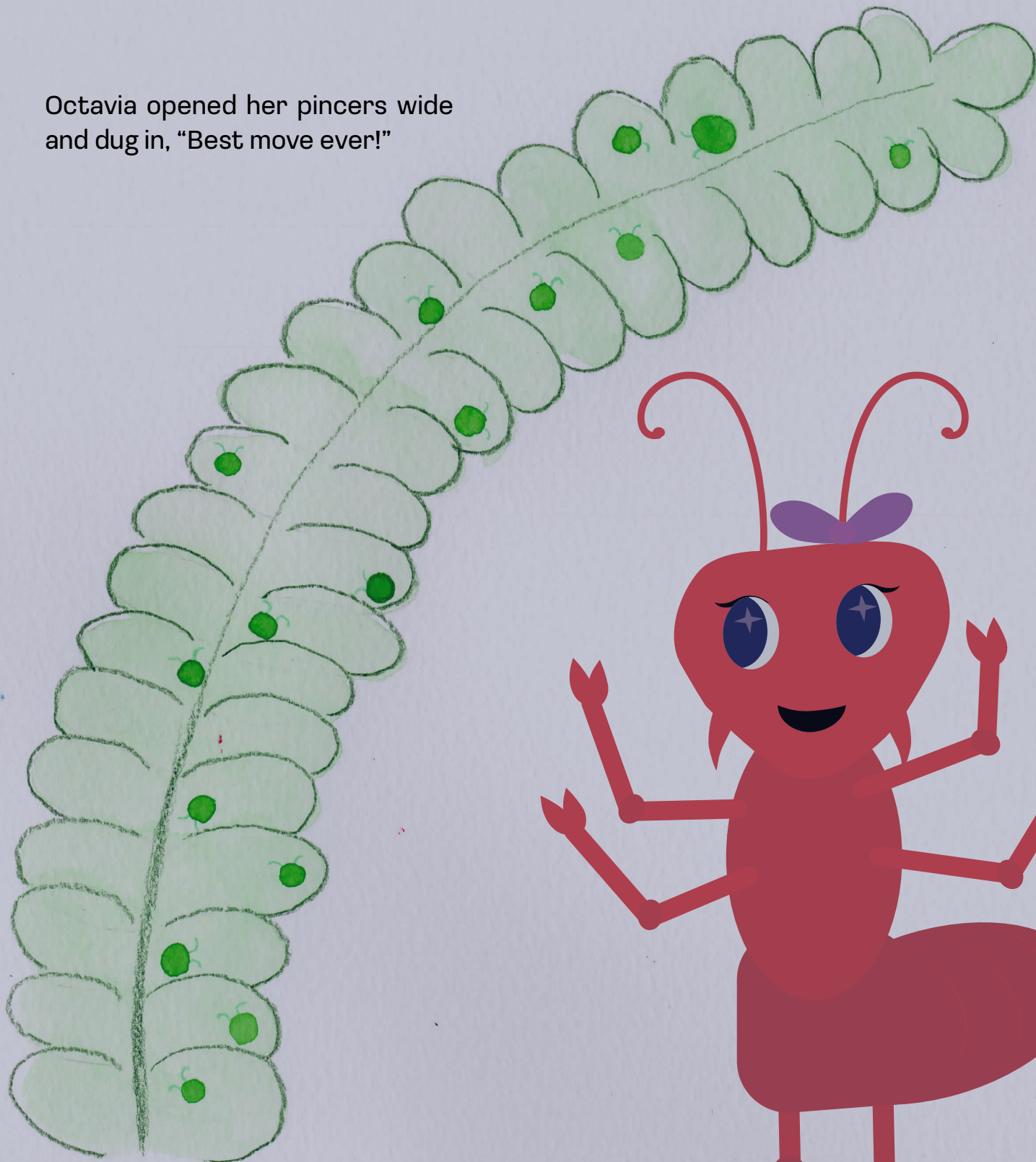


Octavia gasped at the fat green little creatures slowly crawling along the stems. "Aphids?! They're my favorite!"

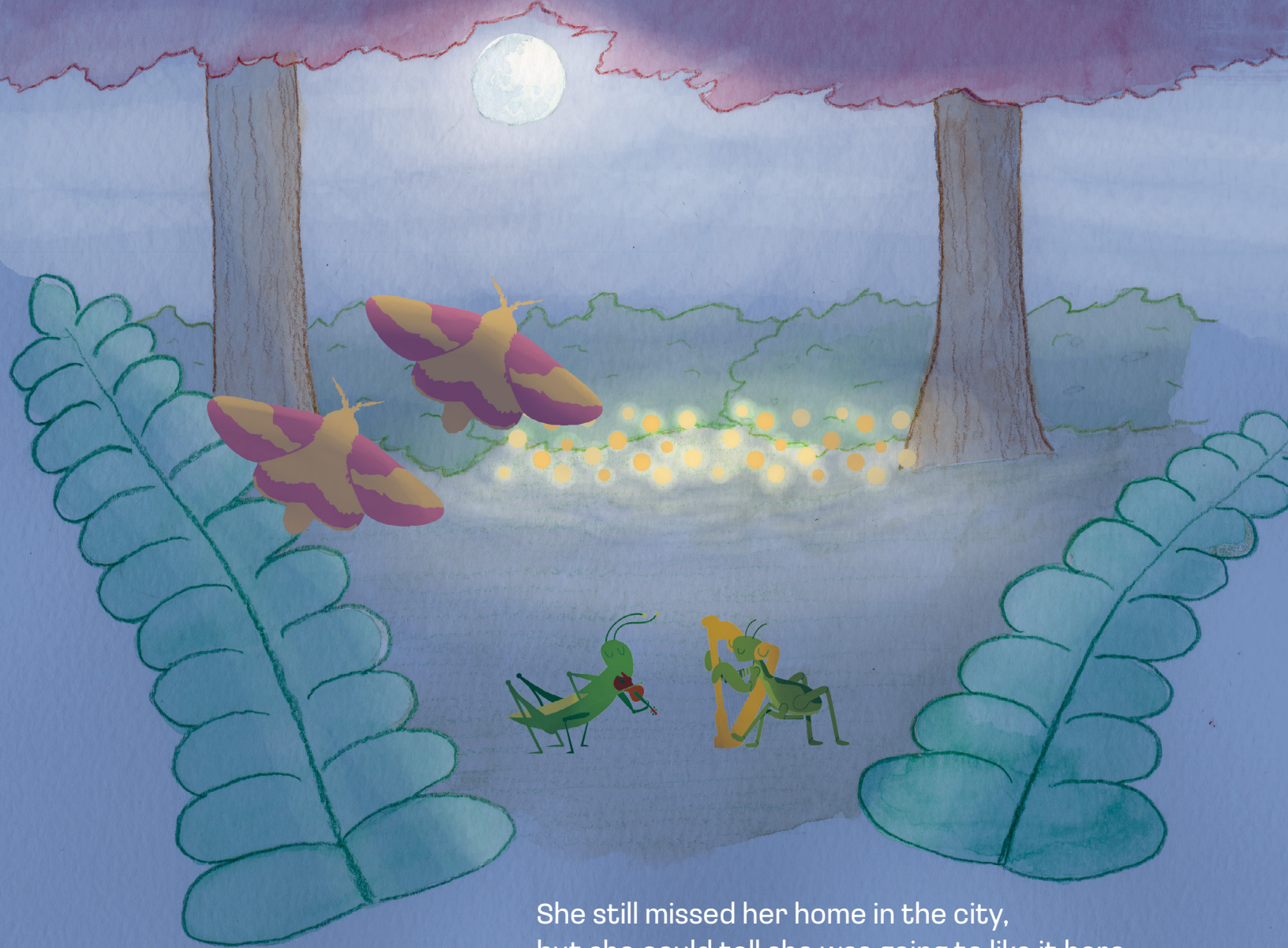
Mom smiled from pincer to pincer, "The move has been hard, so I thought we'd have some for dinner tonight."



Octavia opened her pincers wide
and dug in, "Best move ever!"



As she looked up into the night sky all around her, she saw her neighbors. There was the moth family taking flight, the cricket band striking up a tune, and a family reunion of fireflies dancing.



She still missed her home in the city,
but she could tell she was going to like it here.

Octavia's family just moved from their anthill in the city into an oak tree in the forest. She knows what she liked about her old home, but now she has to figure out what her nutty neighbors like about living here.



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