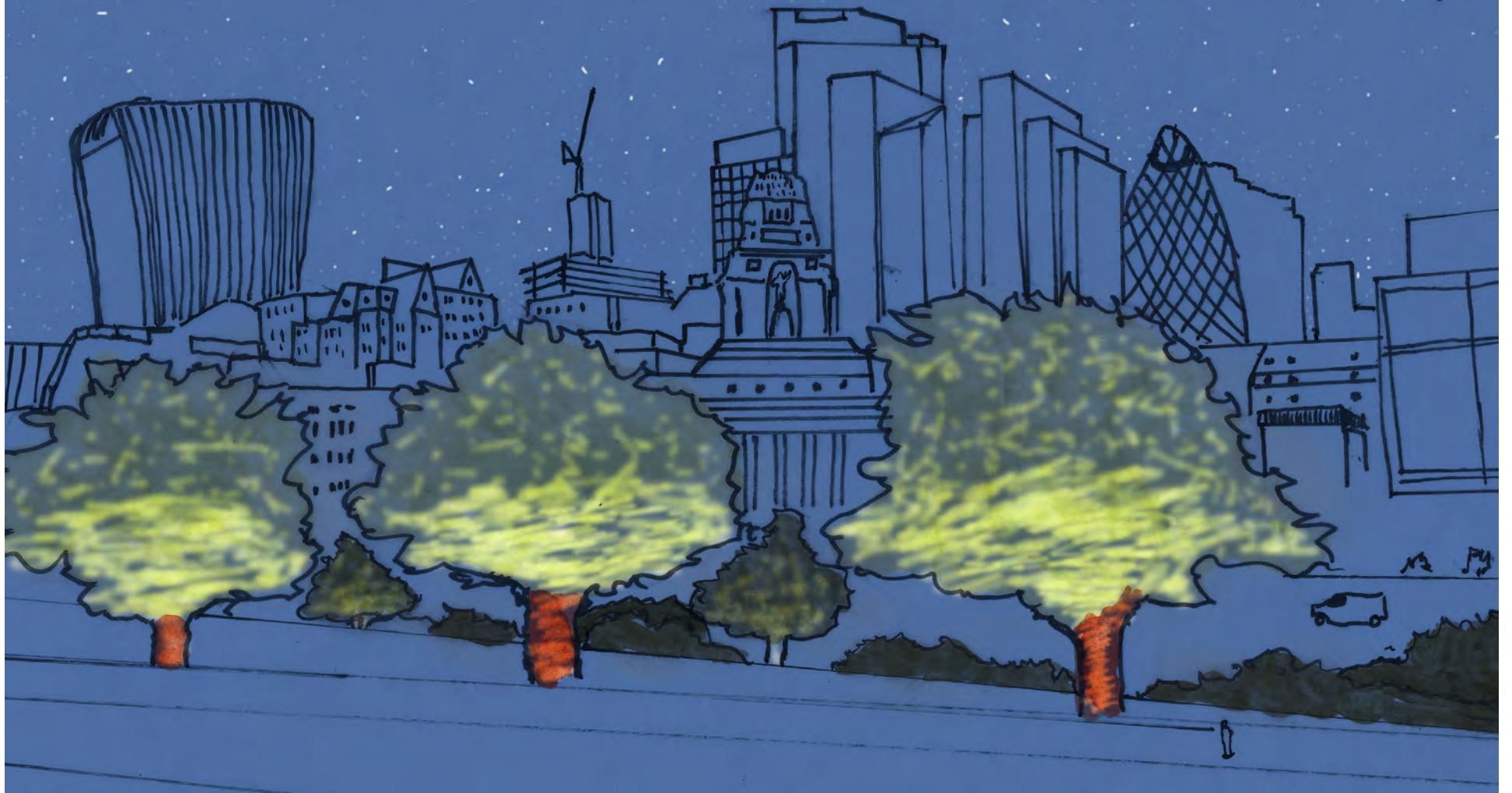


*Secret Lives of Urban Trees*





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Hunter Stoller

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Print ISBN: 979-89957264-7-0



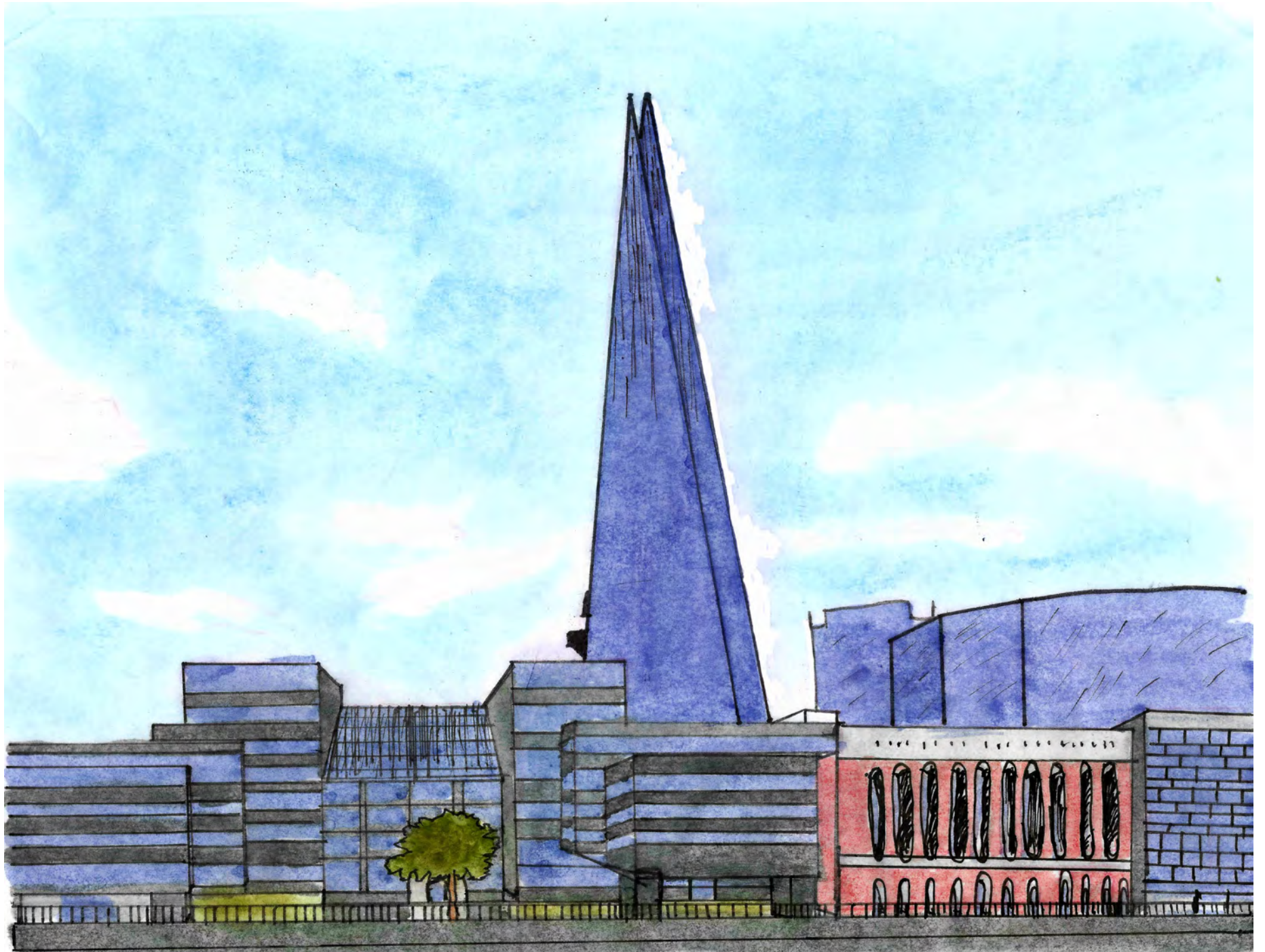
Dedicated to WayWay and Mille Sue.

I am a tree growing

in the middle of the city.

You might think I am still.

But I am always moving, just very slowly.

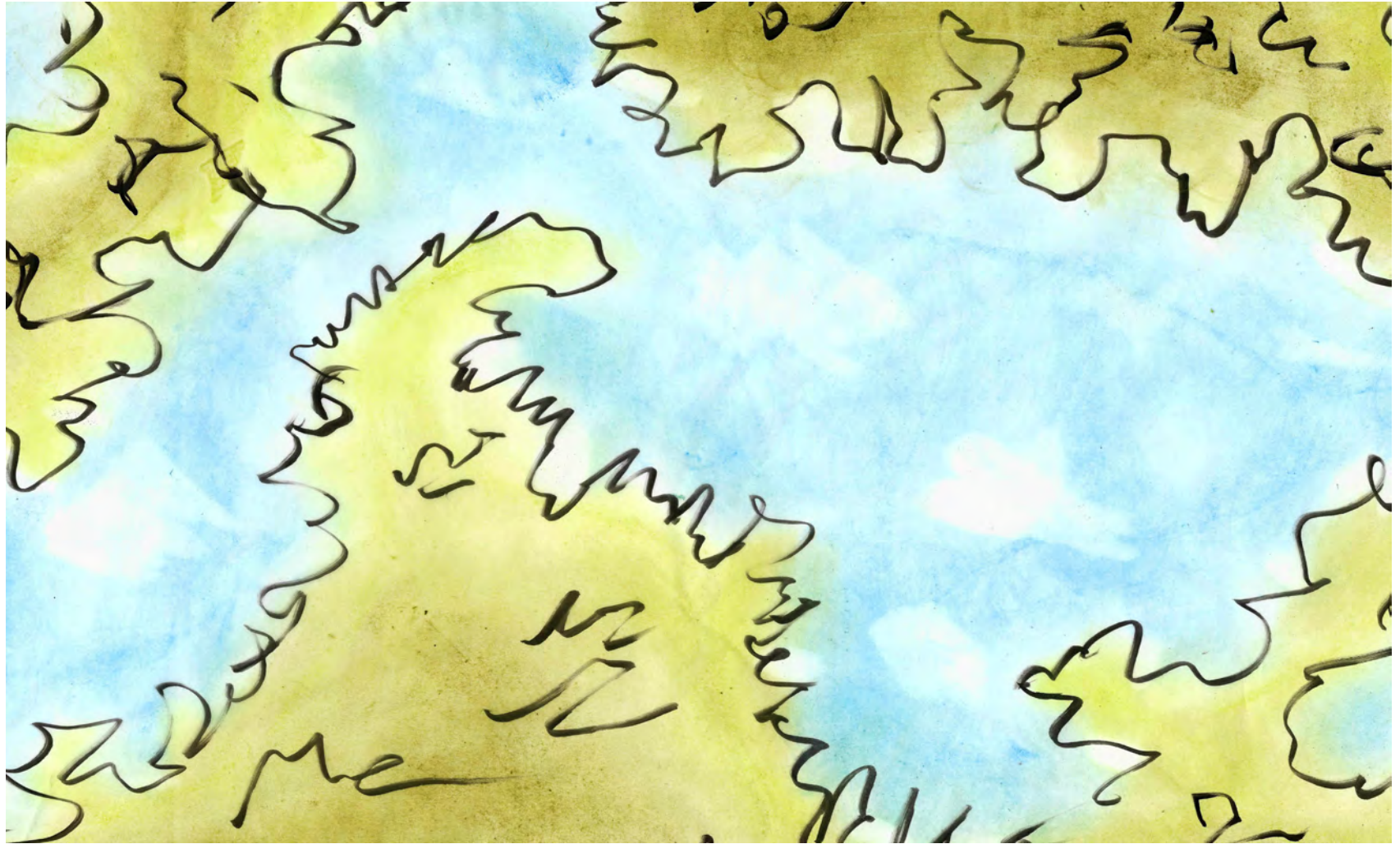


I have roots beneath the sidewalk



and leaves brushing the sky.

I belong to both worlds.



All day long, the city hums around me.

Feet hurry past.

Engines grumble and sigh.

Voices rise and fade like echoes.

I listen...

And I work.



When the sun turns the street warm and bright, I stretch out my leaves.

I pour shade onto the pavement.

I cool the air, leaf by leaf.



I turn hard, hot concrete into a cooler place to walk.

People step into my shadow and slow down.

Some don't know why, they just feel better.



I breathe, too.

The city's air can be dusty and tired.

So I take it in. I hold what hurts and  
send back what helps

fresh air, clean and light.

In and out....

In and out...

The city and I share a breath.



I am not alone.

A sparrow stitches a nest in my branches.

A squirrel naps where the sun is warm.

Beetles hide in my bark.



Ants travel my roots like tiny roads.

In the middle of all this gray and stone,

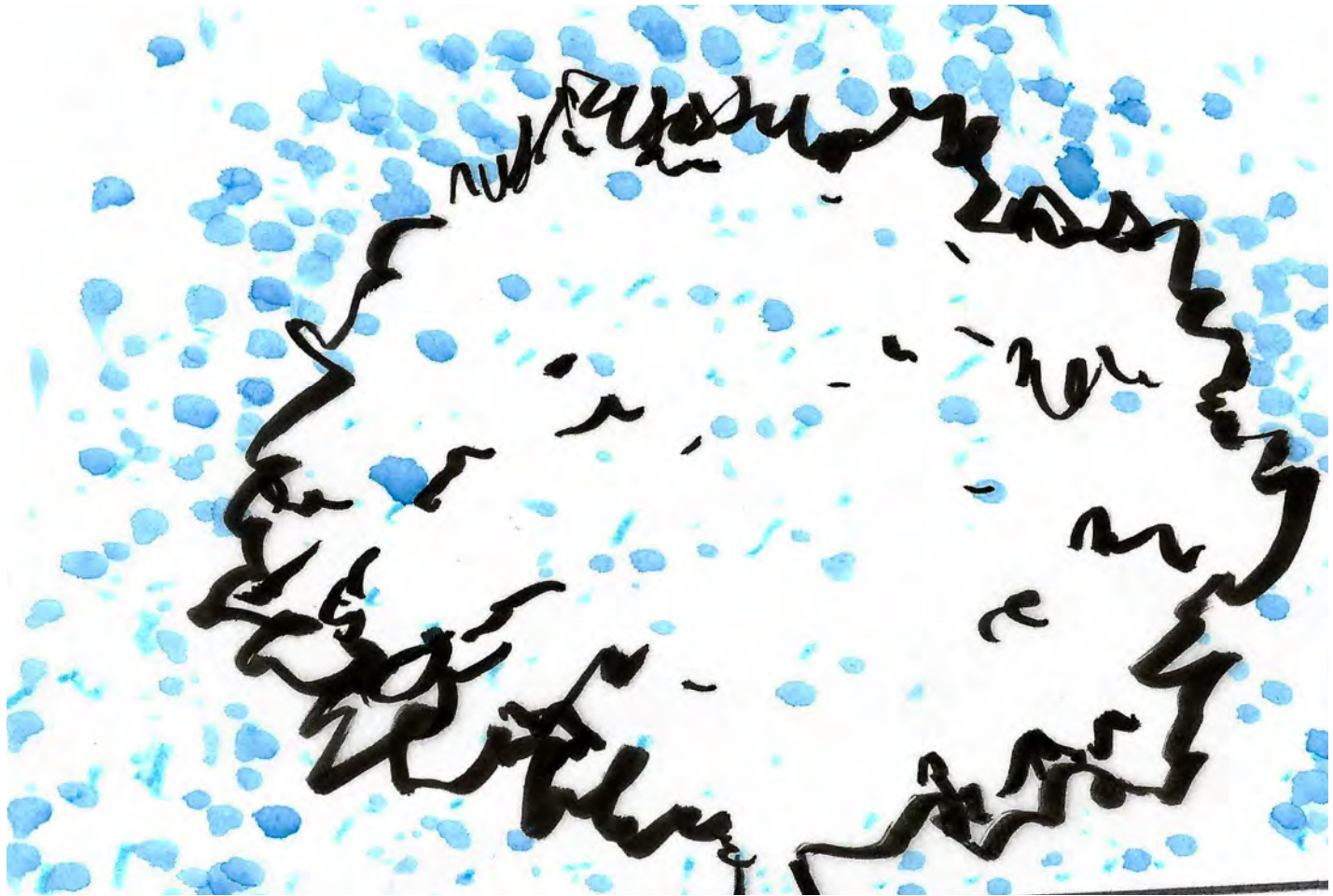
I make a small, green world.



When rain falls, I catch it first.

Drops tap my leaves.

Water slides down my trunk.



My roots drink slowly, carefully.

I help the rain stay gentle.

I help the ground remember how to drink.

Nothing has to rush.



I have watched years pass.

I have watched children grow taller,  
buildings grow wider, and streets grow louder.



Sometimes the city feels tired.

That's when I do my quietest work.

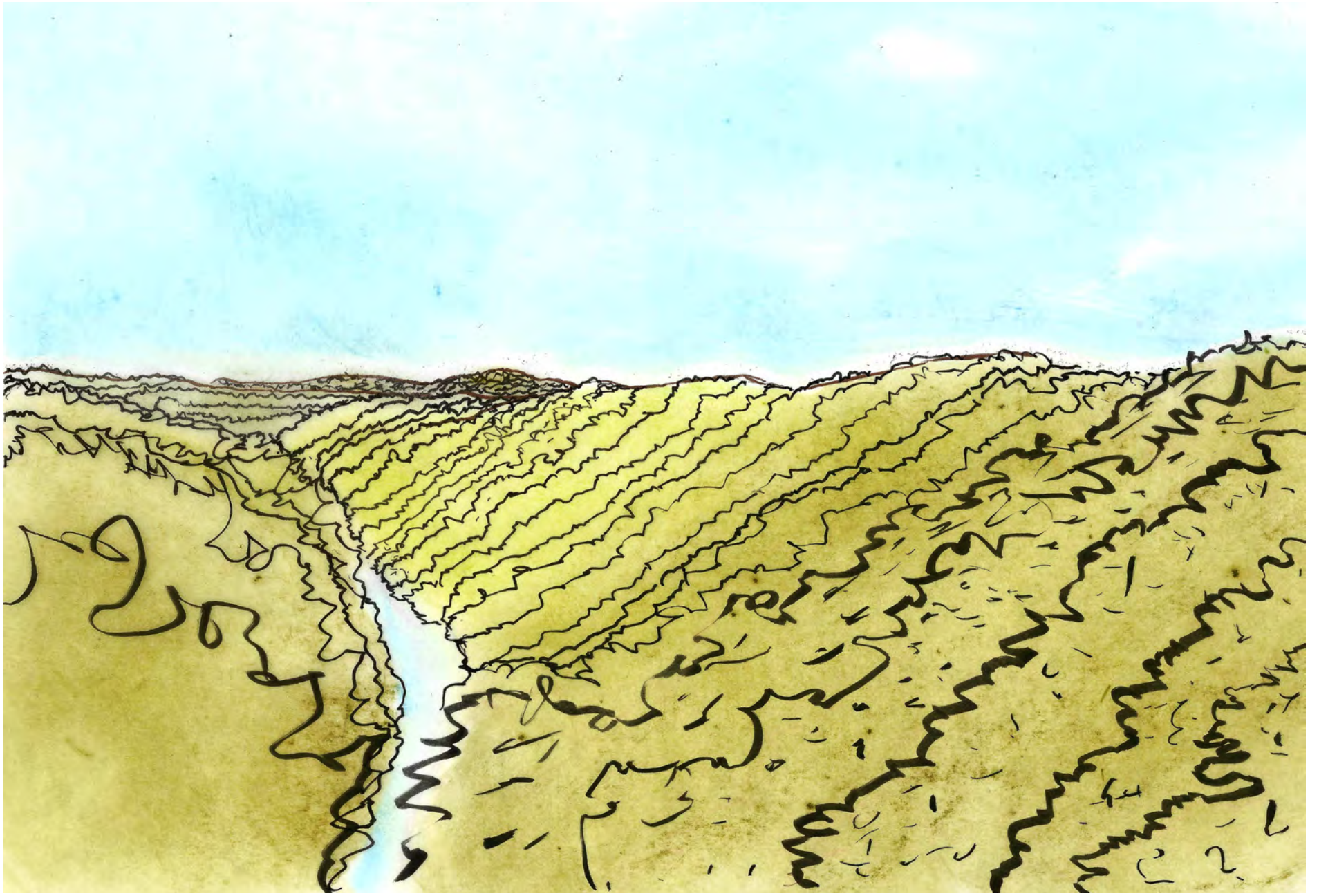
I remind people to pause.

I sway when the wind moves through me.

I flicker light and shadow on the ground.



I whisper of forests and open skies and places where time moves slowly.



People sit near me.

They breathe deeper.

They feel calmer.

Even if they don't know why.



At night, I stand beneath the stars and streetlights.

My leaves rest.

My roots hold steady.

My branches wait.



Tomorrow, I will shade again. I will clean again.  
I will shelter, soften, and soothe again.



When the city slows and streets grow quiet, I do not rest.

I keep working, silently, tirelessly, watching, holding, giving.

So, when you see me in the city, look closely.



We are not just something nice to see.

We are caretakers.

Quiet workers.

Green neighbors.

Standing here every day,  
doing far more than looking pretty.





ISBN 979-8-9957264-7-0  
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