

Isinulat ni

Melvin John B. Atole

si  
**PONYANG**  
at aNG  
**Lihim**  
ng  
**KUWEBA**

Ponyang and the  
Secret of the Cave

Iginuhit ni Sarah M. Geneblazo

Winner of  
CANVAS'  
Romeo Forbes  
Children's  
Storywriting  
Competition

**Siyang  
PONYANG  
at ang  
Lihim  
ng  
KUWEBA**

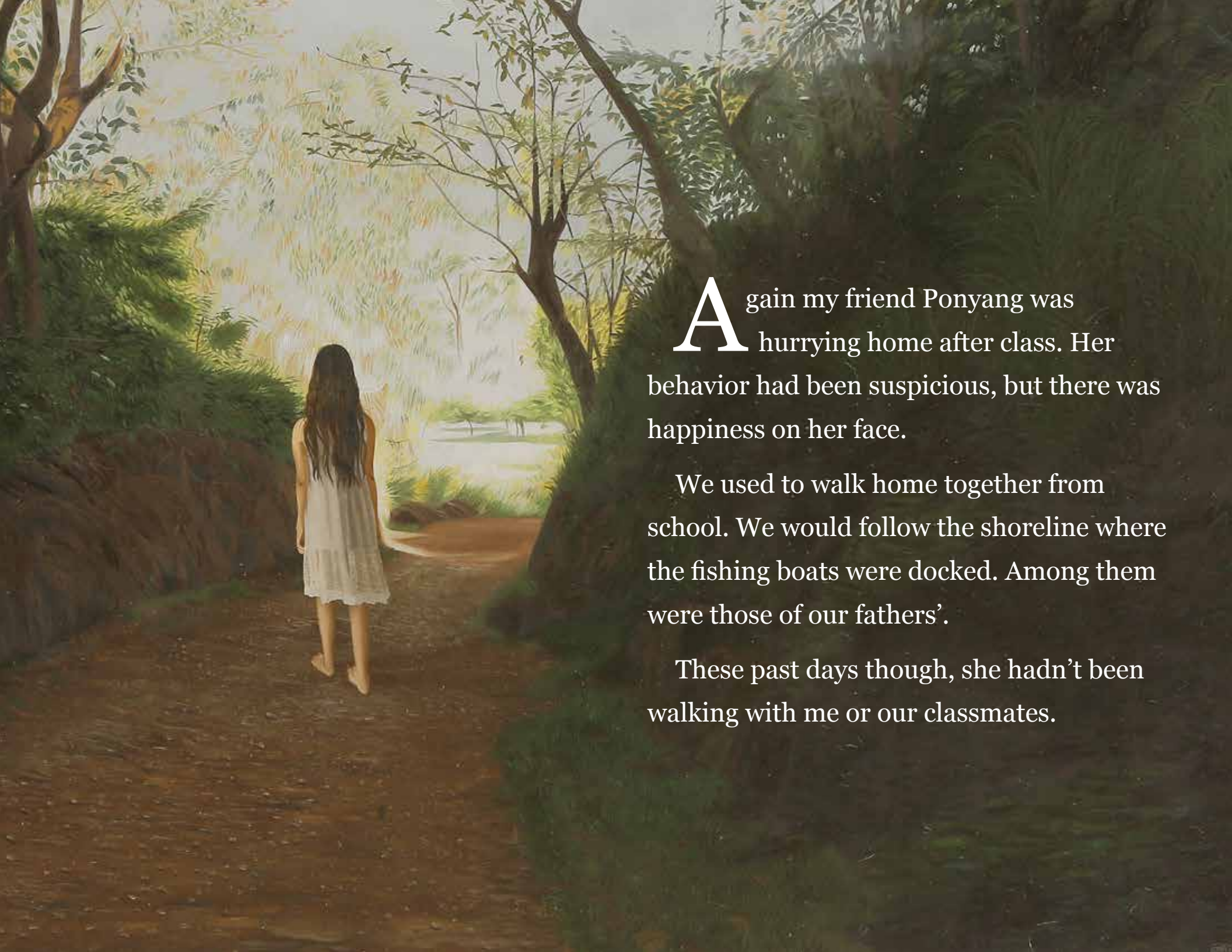
**Ponyang and the  
Secret of the Cave**

Kuwento ni  
Melvin John B. Atole

Likhang-sining ni  
Sarah M. Geneblazo

*Isinalin sa Ingles ni*  
Angelo V. Suarez

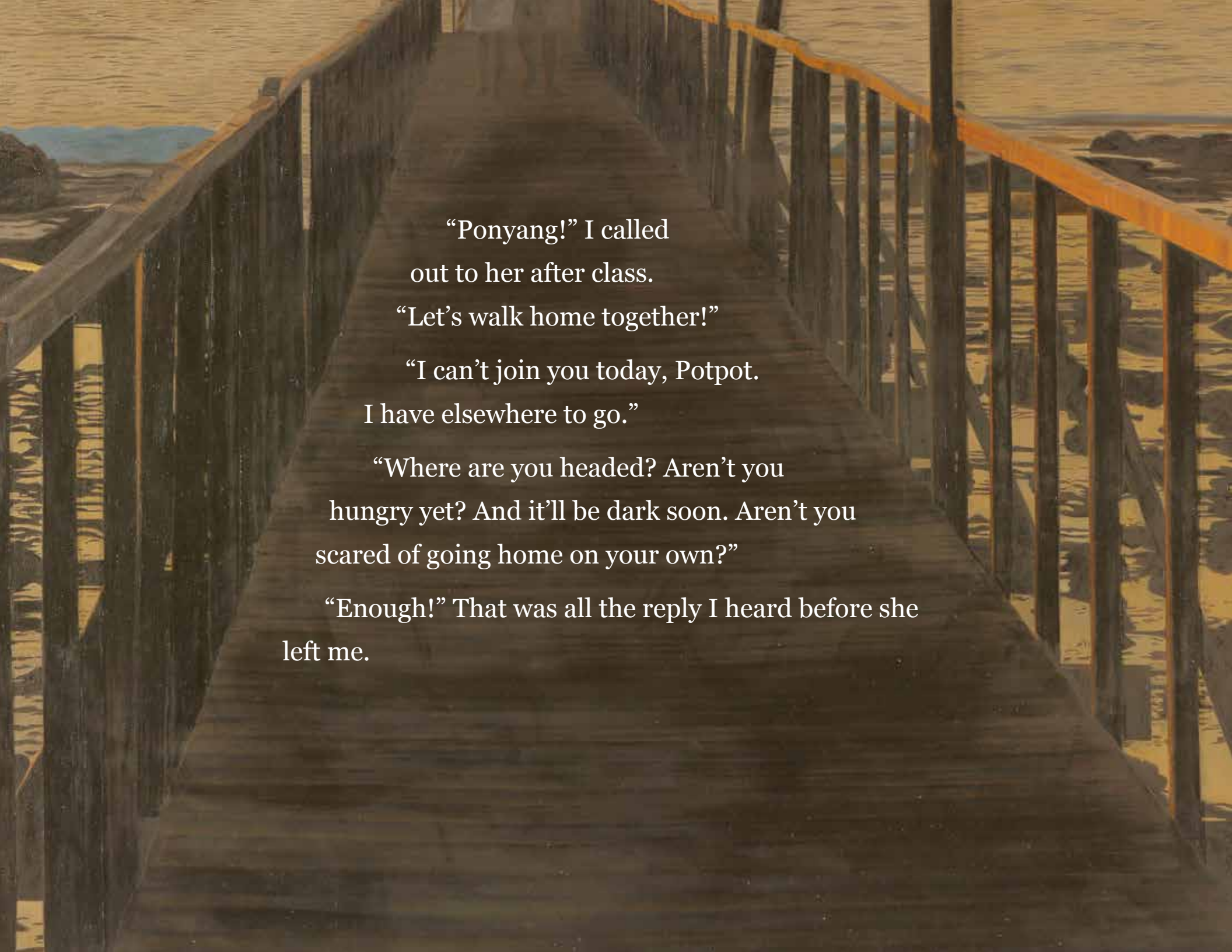




Again my friend Ponyang was hurrying home after class. Her behavior had been suspicious, but there was happiness on her face.

We used to walk home together from school. We would follow the shoreline where the fishing boats were docked. Among them were those of our fathers’.

These past days though, she hadn’t been walking with me or our classmates.

A long, narrow wooden walkway with dark railings extends from the foreground into the distance, crossing over a body of water. The scene is bathed in the warm, golden light of a sunset or sunrise, with the sky and water reflecting the low sun. The walkway is flanked by dark wooden posts and railings, creating a sense of depth and perspective.

“Ponyang!” I called  
out to her after class.

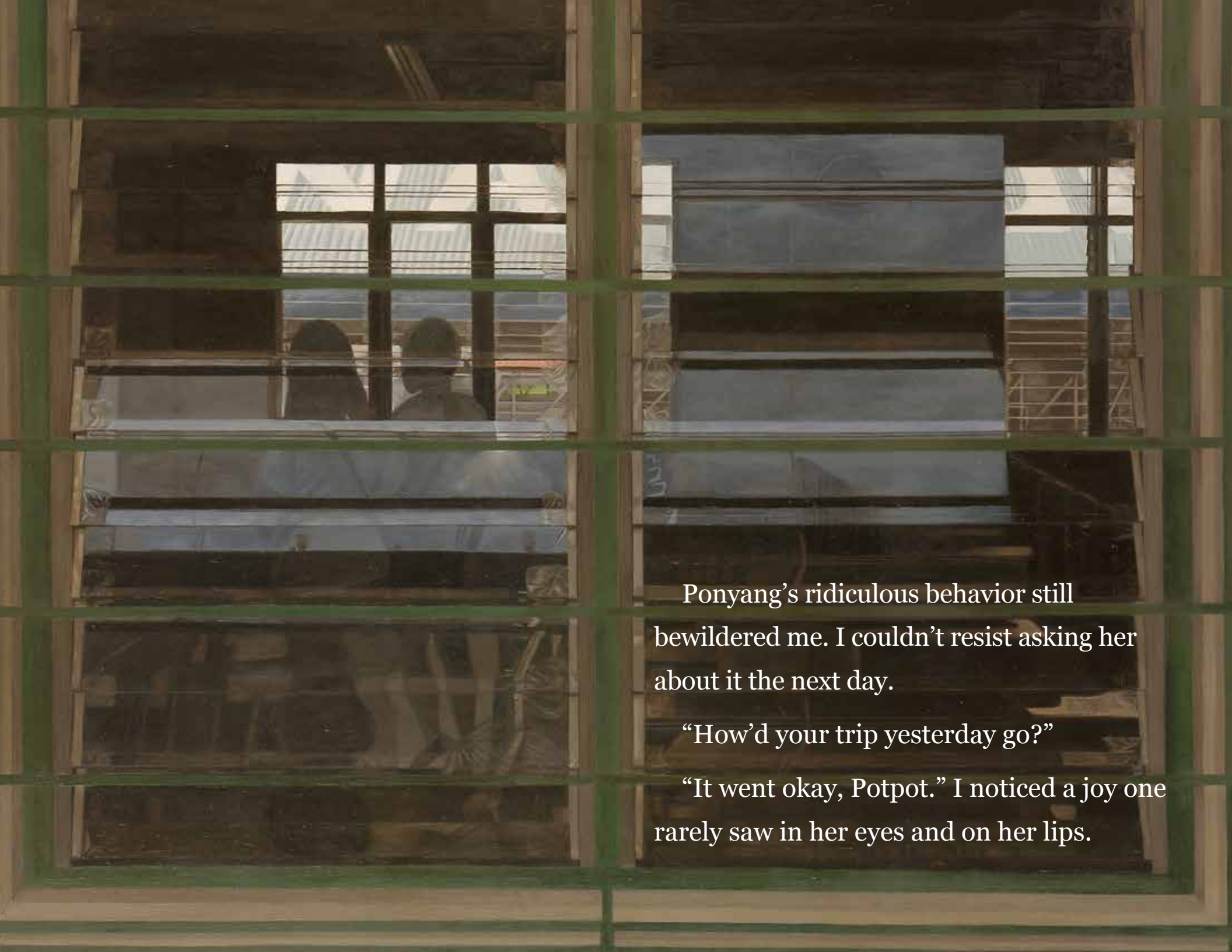
“Let’s walk home together!”

“I can’t join you today, Potpot.  
I have elsewhere to go.”

“Where are you headed? Aren’t you  
hungry yet? And it’ll be dark soon. Aren’t you  
scared of going home on your own?”

“Enough!” That was all the reply I heard before she  
left me.

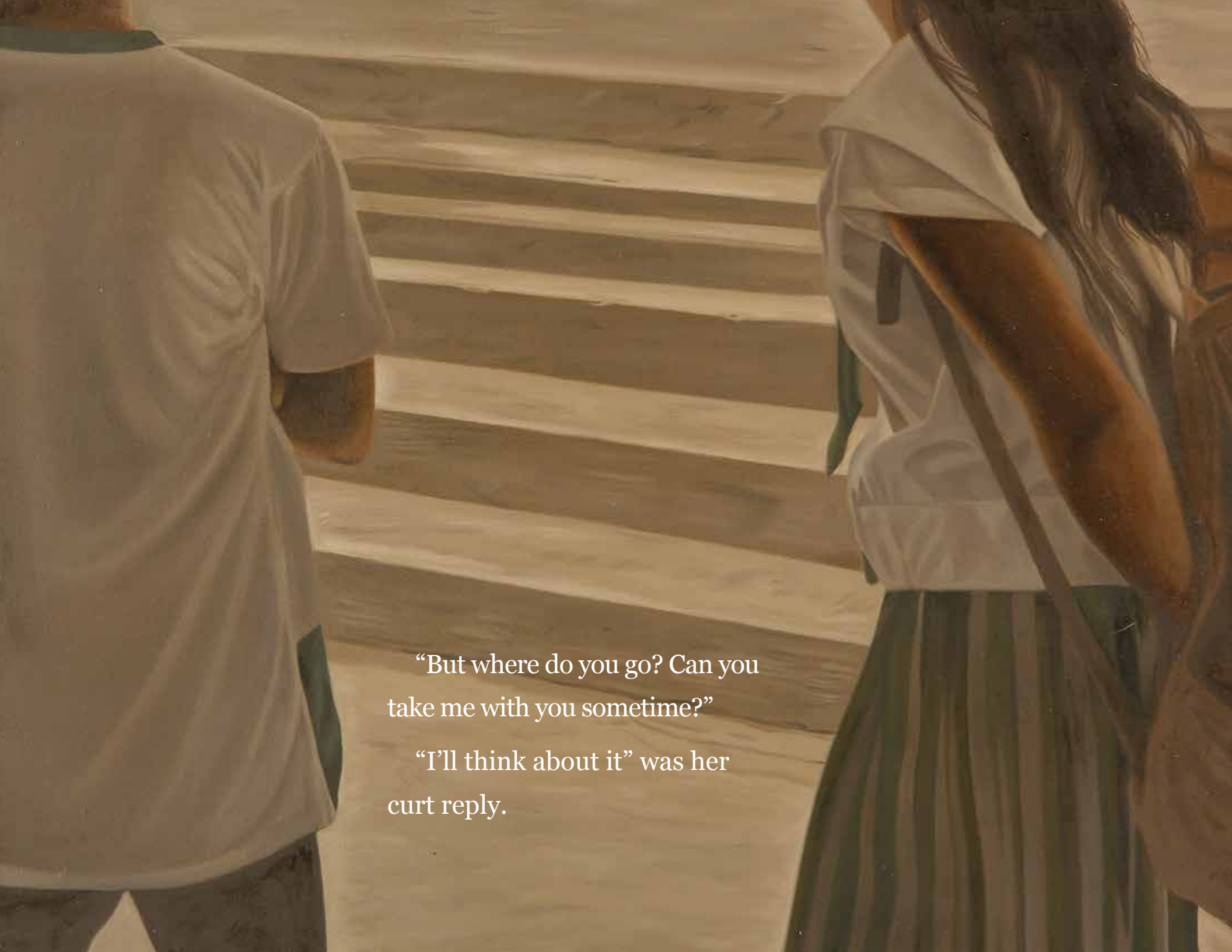




Ponyang's ridiculous behavior still bewildered me. I couldn't resist asking her about it the next day.

"How'd your trip yesterday go?"

"It went okay, Potpot." I noticed a joy one rarely saw in her eyes and on her lips.

A painting depicting a man and a woman on a staircase. The man, on the left, is seen from the back, wearing a white t-shirt. The woman, on the right, is seen from the side, wearing a white short-sleeved shirt and a dark skirt. She has long dark hair and is carrying a brown bag. The staircase is made of light-colored wood, and the lighting is warm and soft, creating a contemplative atmosphere.

“But where do you go? Can you  
take me with you sometime?”

“I’ll think about it” was her  
curt reply.

Ponyang was often quiet in class. But when the school bell rang, signaling the end of class, energy and joy returned to her, discernible on her face.







One time, I followed her in secret, but she walked so fast.






I lost sight of her when we passed through the woods.

It was already dark out, so I got worried. But then I also thought she was brave and wouldn't mind the danger.

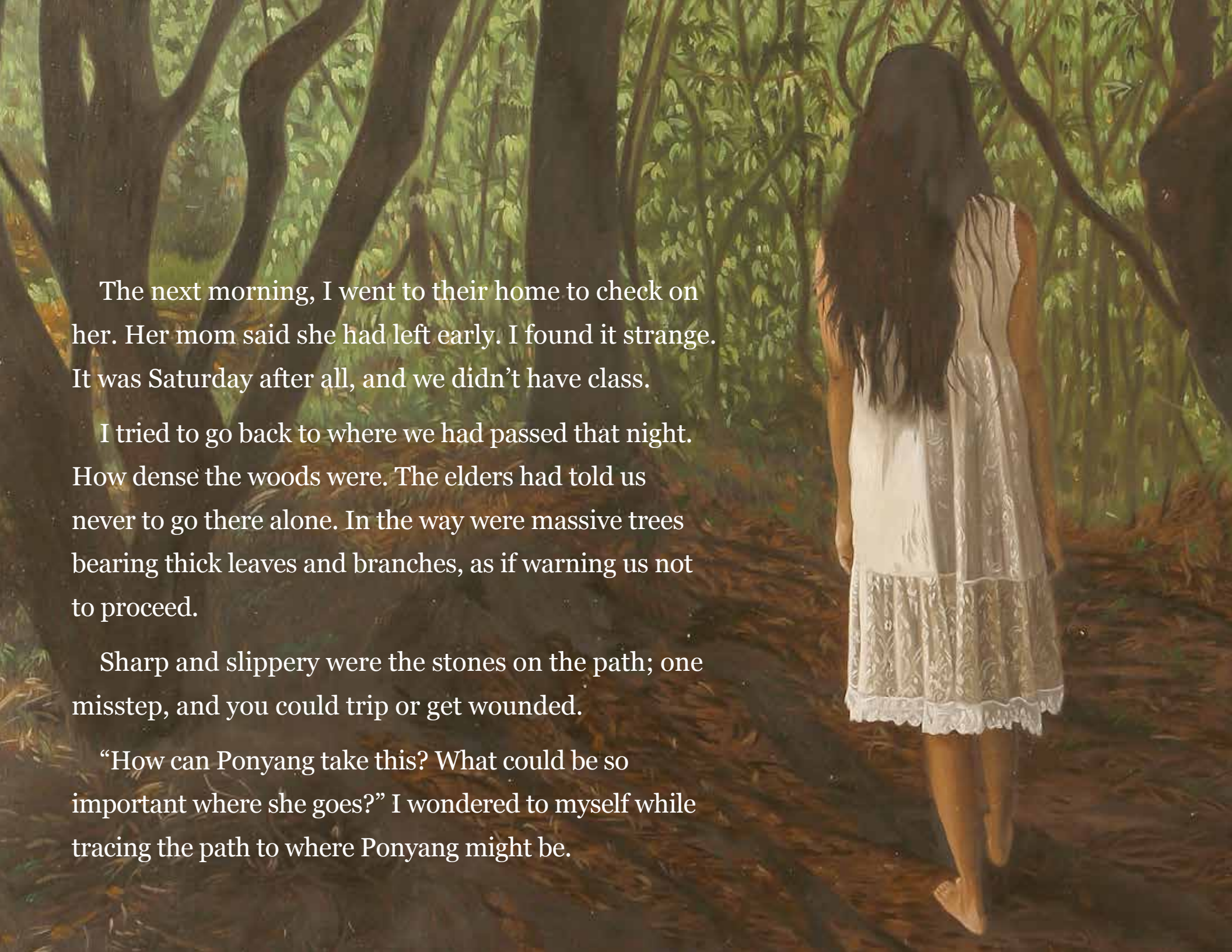






The next morning, I went to their home to check on her. Her mom said she had left early. I found it strange. It was Saturday after all, and we didn't have class.





The next morning, I went to their home to check on her. Her mom said she had left early. I found it strange. It was Saturday after all, and we didn't have class.

I tried to go back to where we had passed that night. How dense the woods were. The elders had told us never to go there alone. In the way were massive trees bearing thick leaves and branches, as if warning us not to proceed.

Sharp and slippery were the stones on the path; one misstep, and you could trip or get wounded.

“How can Ponyang take this? What could be so important where she goes?” I wondered to myself while tracing the path to where Ponyang might be.





There was a mighty pounding in my chest as I followed Ponyang, so I took a quick break. Moments later, a heavy rain fell.

Not too far from where I was, I caught sight of a big chunk of rock shaped like a tree. I thought of taking cover in its shade. Getting there wasn't easy — the path was slippery, and the weeds were tall.

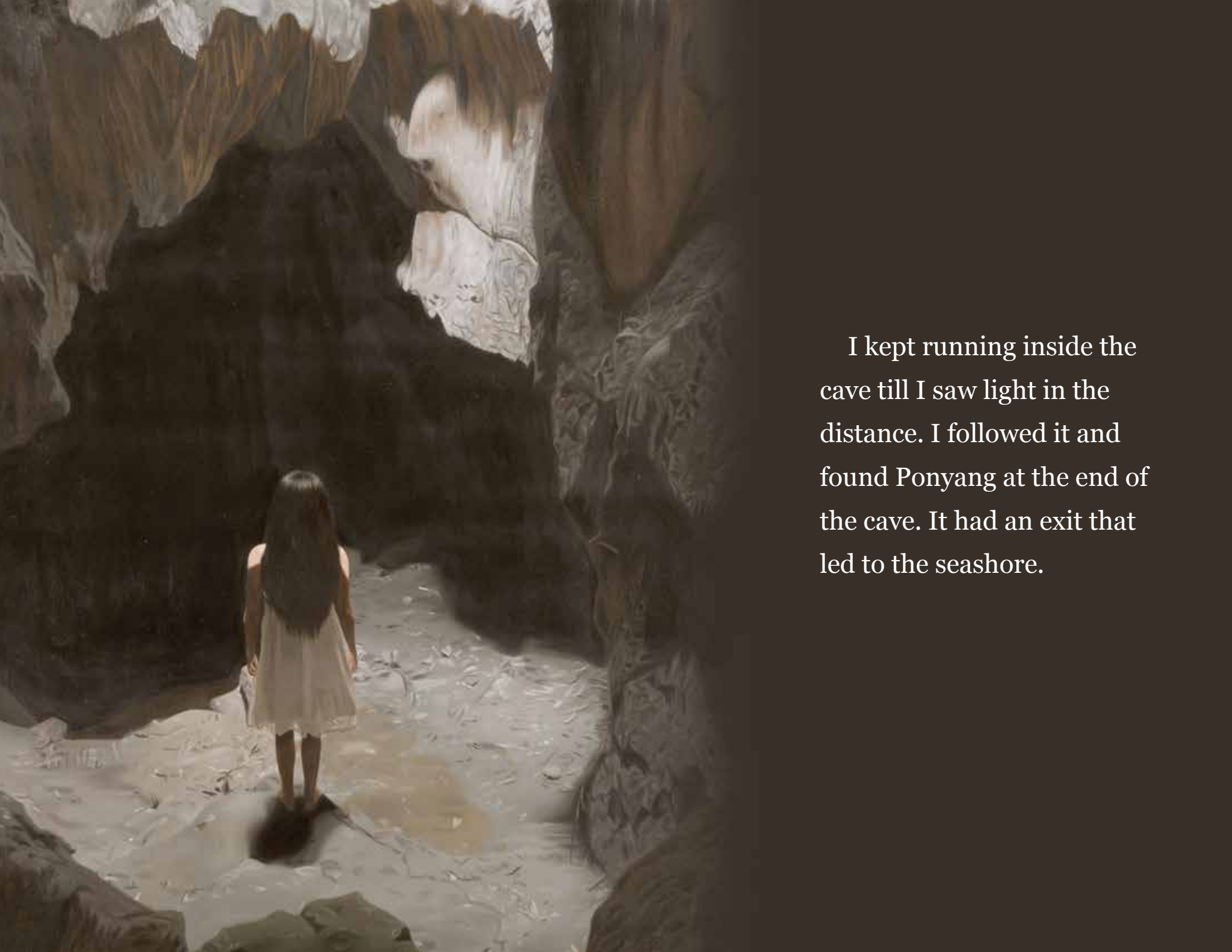
When I finally made it, what I saw astonished me. It turned out to be the entrance of a cave. Even if it was dark inside, I dashed in to get dry.

Inside I felt a different kind of cold. I was even more alarmed when I heard a sound; I couldn't tell whether it was the chirp of a bird or the groan of a beast. Despite my fear, I went deeper in and explored the cave.

My eyes widened, I screamed when it perched on my shoulder — the native *kabag*, a small fruit bat.







I kept running inside the cave till I saw light in the distance. I followed it and found Ponyang at the end of the cave. It had an exit that led to the seashore.

She sat there as if in conversation. I examined where she was, but saw no other person.

I gathered my courage and called out to her.

“How did you get here?” inquired Ponyang, surprised.

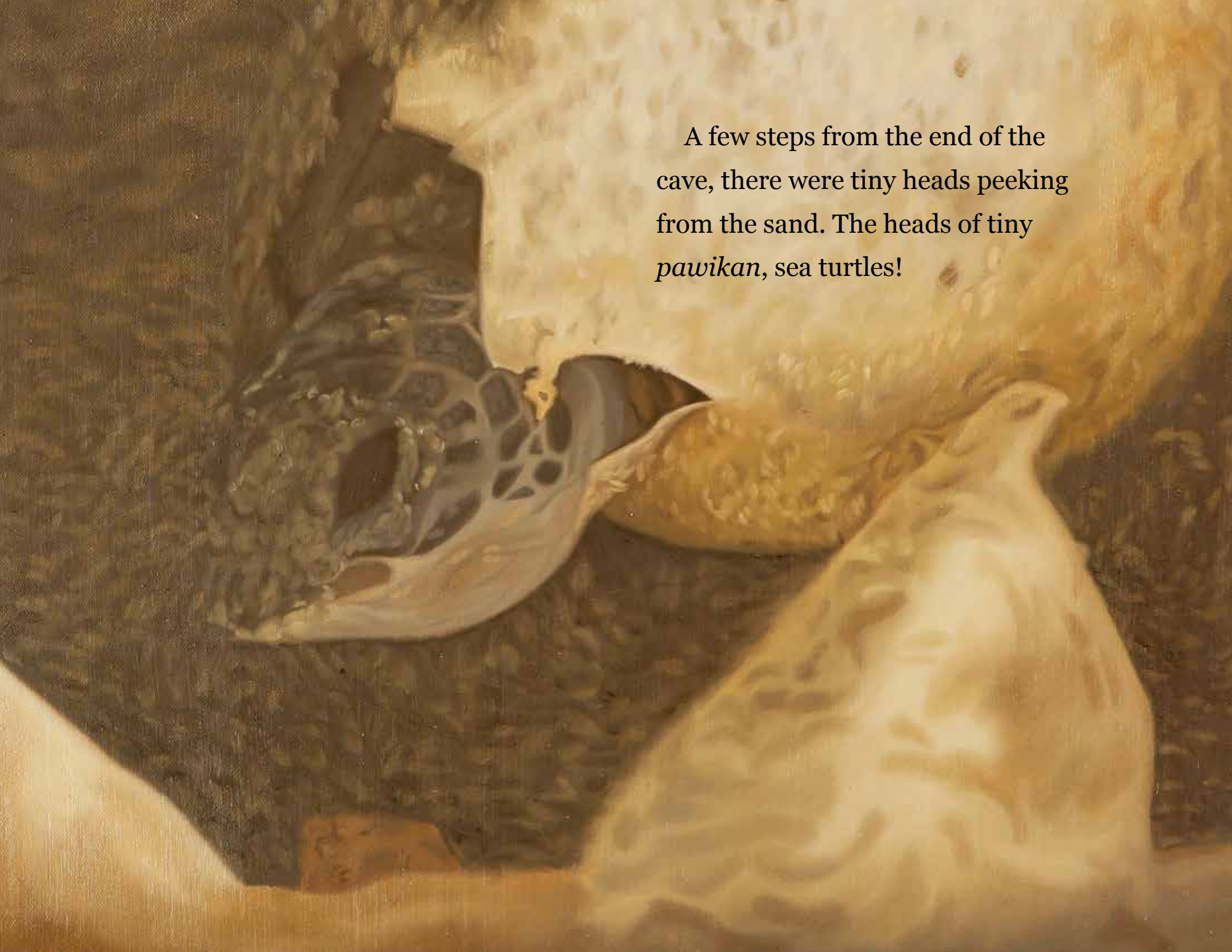
“I came from your place. Your mom said you had left early. So I followed you here. Except you walked so fast that I couldn’t catch up.”

Ponyang smiled. She held my hand and helped me down. She said she had something to show me.





A few steps from the end of the cave, there were tiny heads peeking from the sand. The heads of tiny *pawikan*, sea turtles!



A large sea turtle is resting on a sandy beach. The turtle's head is on the right, and its body extends towards the left. The sand is a light brown color, and the turtle's shell is a darker brown with visible scutes. The background is a soft, out-of-focus view of the ocean and sky.

My eyes widened.

Who knew the end of the cave Ponyang had been visiting was a *pawikan* haven? I witnessed the tiny sea turtles struggling out of their shells, watched their little seaward dashes.

What a marvelous sight!

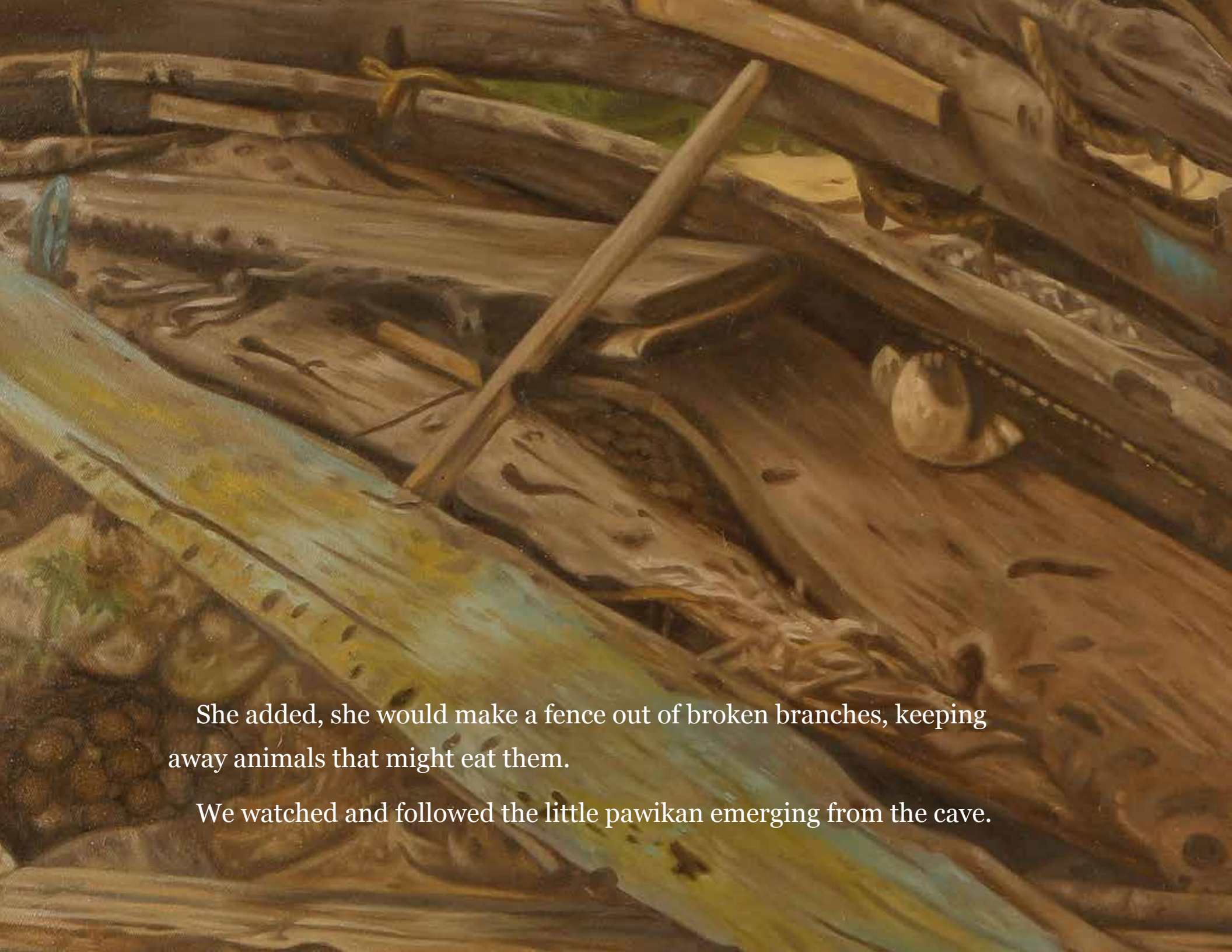




“They’re why I’ve been rushing out of school after class. I make sure they’re safe from anything that might eat or take them,” Ponyang explained.

In her tale, she first saw a number of mother *pawikan* when once she had gone fishing with her dad. She saw the sea turtles from afar, entering the cave. “They say entering the cave is forbidden, dangerous,” her dad mentioned to her.

But her desire to see the turtles up close prevailed, so she made her way to the cave. Snooping around, she saw the mother turtles lay eggs and eventually return to sea.



She added, she would make a fence out of broken branches, keeping away animals that might eat them.

We watched and followed the little pawikan emerging from the cave.

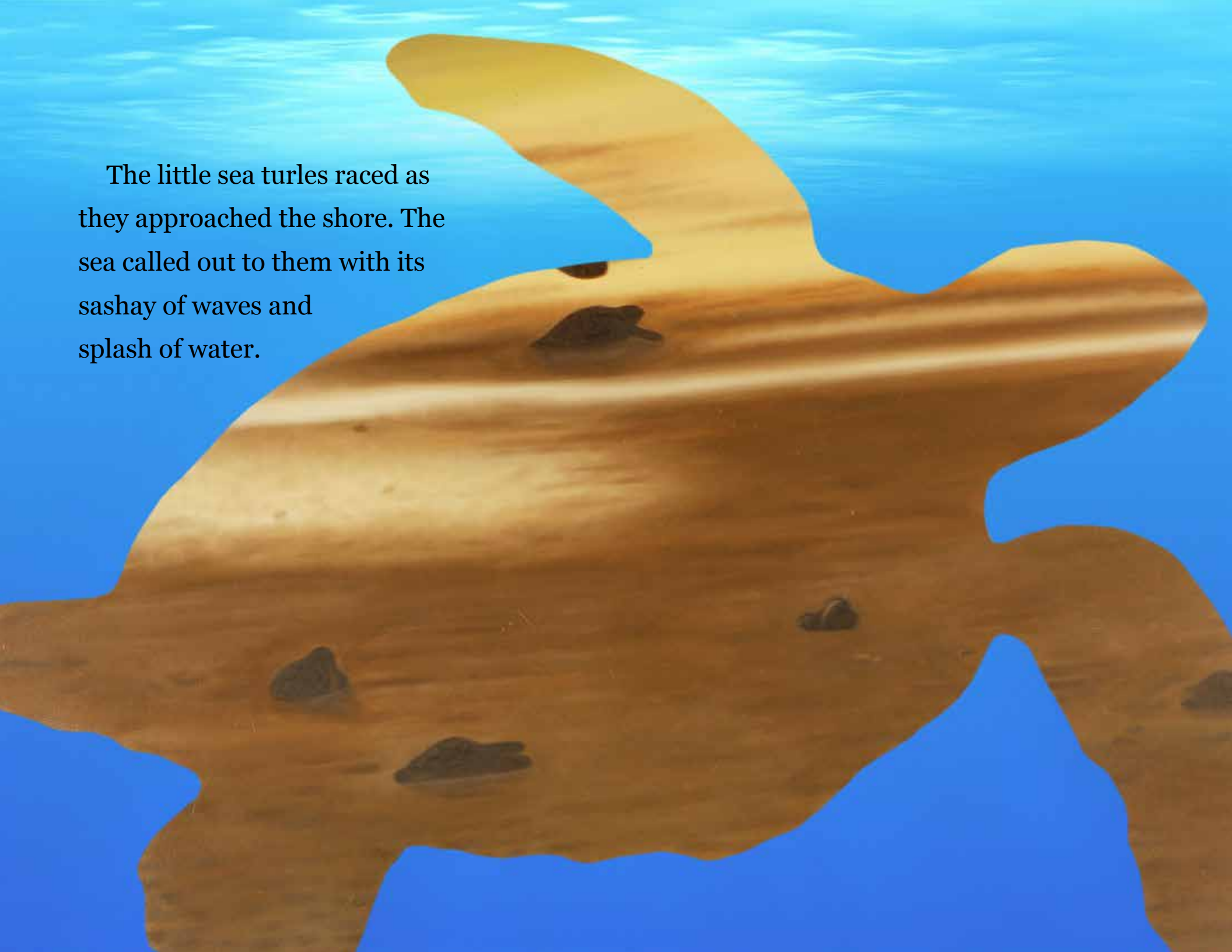




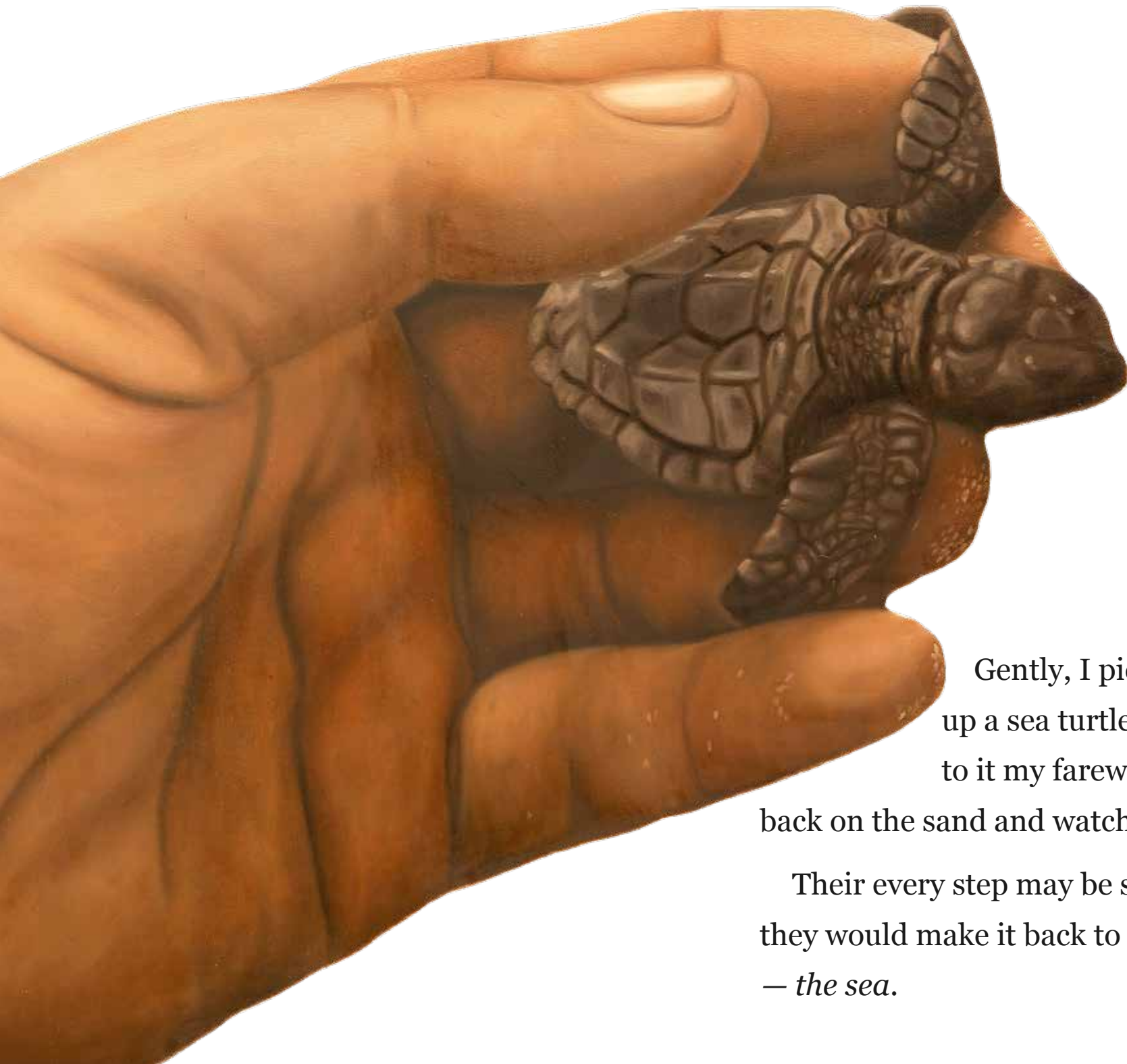
From its opening, I could see another astonishing secret of the cave. Aloft the cavern was a rock hanging like a sword. Inside flowed a small stream. Aside from the fruit bats, there were also *maya* birds — sparrows — flying out. What a remarkable place!

“I’m glad I’m not the only one to know about the cave anymore,” giggled Ponyang, giddy with relief.

The little sea turtles raced as they approached the shore. The sea called out to them with its sashay of waves and splash of water.







Gently, I picked  
up a sea turtle and whispered  
to it my farewell, then I put it  
back on the sand and watched it go.

Their every step may be small, but surely  
they would make it back to their true home  
— *the sea*.



## About the Author

**MELVIN B. ATOLE** is a teacher from Sumilang Elementary School at the City Schools Division Office of Antipolo. Mr. Atole finished his M.A. in Educational Management at the Thomas Claudio Colleges in Morong, Rizal. Melvin is known as an excellent adviser. Recently, he won 3rd place in the Best Elementary School Paper in Filipino entitled “*Ang Pagsilang*” in the 2018 National Schools Press Conference held in Dumaguete City. He was recognized by Mayor Casimiro ‘Jun’ Ynares III of Antipolo City as Most Outstanding School Paper Adviser, and also by the Hamaka Awards of Excellence in Education in 2018.

He joined the Romeo Forbes Story Writing Contest to test his prowess in writing. Through his story, he hopes to contribute to raising awareness about nature and the value of loving and taking care of it.

## About the Artist

**SARAH M. GENEBLAZO** is a graduate of fine arts major in visual communication at the University of the Philippines College of Fine Arts, and is the current president of Neo Angono Artists’ Collective, Inc. Her works narrate her personal experience with childhood trauma; a therapeutic art process towards self-healing. She was a finalist in the PLDT -DPC National Art Competition in 2010. She also placed first in the Department of Agrarian Reform Mural Painting Contest in 2006 in Lipa City, Batangas, the prize of which helped her pay her tuition during her first year in UP Diliman.

She has showcased her work abroad and in Art Fair Philippines 2016, as well as local art galleries Galerie Stephanie, Blanc Gallery, West Gallery, and J Studio.





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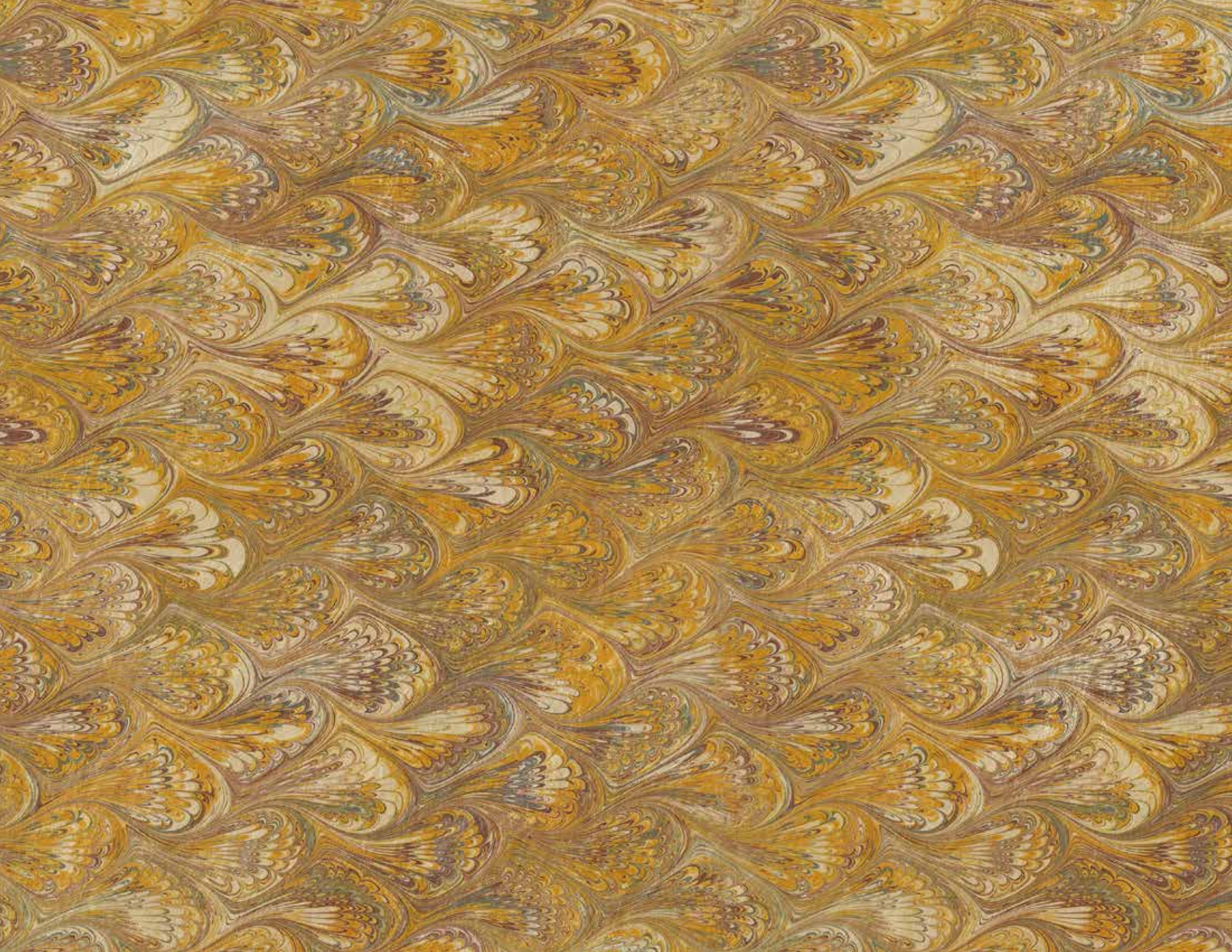
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CANVAS, a non-profit organization,  
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explore national identity, and broaden public awareness  
of Philippine art, culture, and the environment.







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