



# Mischa & the bird

By Amy Han



*Mischa & the Bird*

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Based on a much longer story that is taking much longer to write.

*Once upon a time,* there was

a girl with a bird stuck in her chest. Her name was Mischa. When she was happy it would stretch its wings into her shoulders and puff its chest, chirp and shout with glee. When she was sad, it curled into her ribage, making itself small. And when she was mad - oh, how it flapped! It squawked and rattled her bones. You would think she had a hurricane whirling in her chest, clouding her whole self with debris and dust.

*Every day,* she climbed a giant tree.

The tree lived in a the middle of the city, and she lived in that tree. She had only been there a month, but already it felt more like home than the place she had lived in her whole life. She shared the tree with other Climbers, other humans who for one reason or another had the openness to notice that the tree even existed. It was right in the heart of the city, yet most people just passed on by.



*The girl* had a best friend in this tree.

His name was Luka. Luka's mum was sick, and he climbed to remind himself that he could do things on his own...*just in case*. He taught Mischa to climb: three points of contact, one branch at a time. He helped her climb a little higher each day. He watched as she grew braver, faster and stronger, swinging from branches and landing on platforms like she had been doing this since the day she was born.



*The higher she climbed,*

the more the bird hopped around with excitement.

She had been feeling for some time that the bird needed to fly; it had lived with her long enough.

The bird wanted to go higher, to be set free into the sky, and she would take it as high as she could.

*One day,* while climbing on her own,

Mischa slipped. Her foot caught on a small branch and she tumbled head-first through the foliage, plummeting towards the ground unable to catch hold of any of the branches.

At last, she landed on a platform and rolled to her feet, catching her breath and checking the bird for injuries. It was fine, just rattled. Quietly, it crept into a safe place, sorry for ever asking Mischa to take it further than she was comfortable.

*After this incident,* Mischa

was afraid to climb. She stayed close to the ground, and even moved her bed to the lowest platform. Luka tried to encourage her to climb again.

Just to here, he said.

But she wouldn't.

*She decided to stay  
safe. To not challenge  
herself any further.*



*The bird, curled  
against her ribcage,  
resigned to its fate,  
would understand.*





*Mischa huddled* near her

small campfire and thought of her old life, before the tree. It had only been six weeks, yet she felt this life must have happened in another lifetime, or belonged to someone else altogether.

She lived in a big house with her parents and little sister. Her parents didn't understand the bird in her chest, had been waiting since she was three for her to admit it wasn't real. She did as she was told and said what was expected, but it came across as acting (because it was) and this infuriated them.

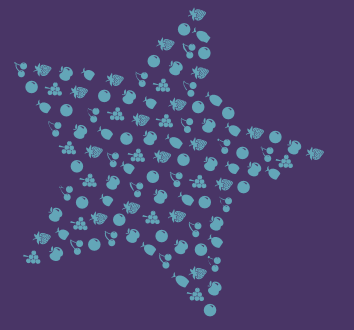
Her sister, Em, smiled and showed off her school report, a proud collection of A's. This annoyed Mischa, who rarely got A's, but she also appreciated the attention being diverted from her.



*She was never going  
to be who they  
wanted her to be.*

Even if she freed the bird, she would still be the girl *who'd had* a bird inside her chest. She would always know the feeling of its wing-tips pressing into her shoulders, its tiny feet hopping around the walls of her heart. She would always read the world through its eyes and make decisions based on how she knew the bird would feel.

*And so,* when she stumbled upon the tree, one afternoon when she should have been at school, she knew she'd found her place. The bird stretched and puffed, chirped and shouted. *This was the place.* And when she met Luka, she found someone who understood her. Someone who didn't need to see the bird to know that it existed.

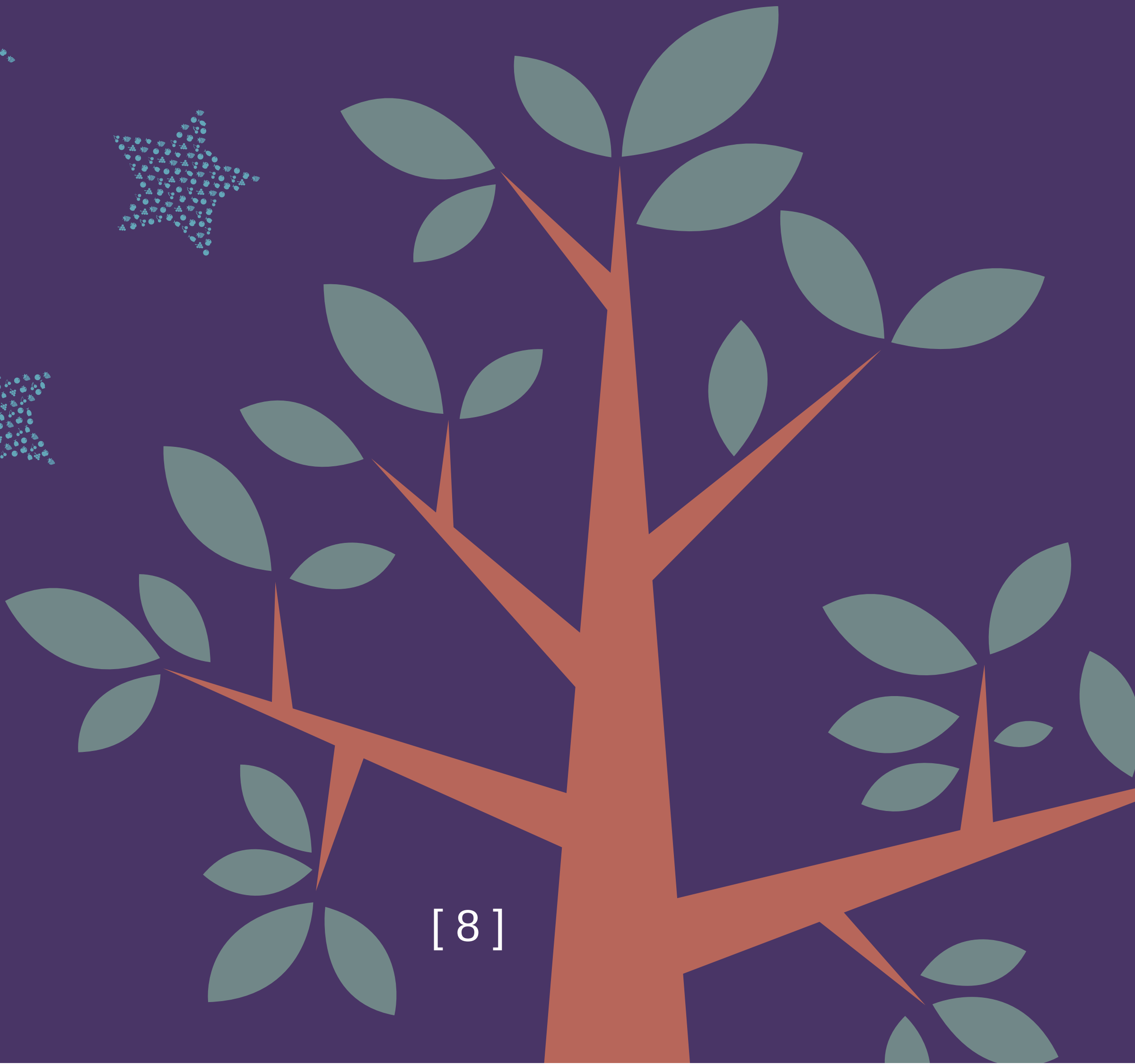
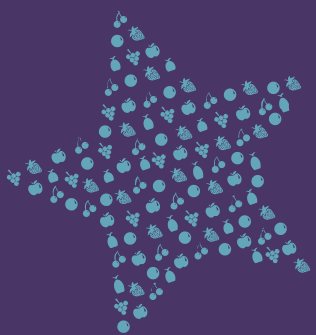
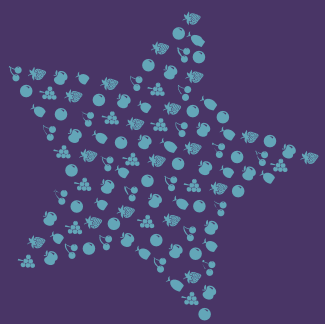
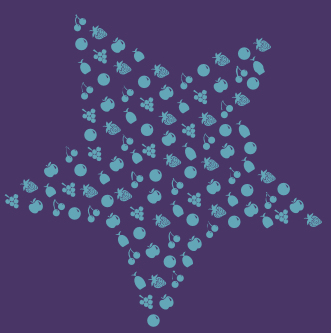


*She wished* she could help Luka's  
mum, but the doctors said she was incurable.

It was such a hard word to believe. *Incurable*. It  
sounded so much like

i-n-c-r-e-d-i-b-l-e

It was then she realised she hadn't seen Luka  
for days. Maybe more than a week.



*Tentatively,* she scampered up the  
tree:

three points  
of contact  
one branch  
at a time

*Soon* her hands stopped shaking and her mind  
was calm. Her body knew what to do. She climbed  
until she reached Luka's platform, where he  
wasn't. In fact, his bed was made, and his bag was  
gone.



*Have you seen Luka?  
she asked the other  
Climbers.*

*But no one had seen  
him for days.*

*Mischa hurried* down the tree,

to the ground and out into the city. The concrete felt strange against her bare feet, but she remembered the way to the hospital.

*She ran* through crowds of people in dresses and suits, people with earphones connected to mobile phones connected to other people via signals in the air.

*She ran* between buildings with windows like mirrors and ducked around cars that beeped and braked too hard. She remembered sitting in the backseat of her parents' car, their complaints and criticisms no more than background noise, and gazing past her reflection towards these streets, these buildings, crowds of people just like these.

*Inside the hospital,*

on the eighth floor, she found Luka. His shoulders curled in and his knees were pulled close. He reminded her of the bird against her ribcage, trying to disappear. His mum had already breathed her last breath.

i'm alone, luka said  
no, never, mischa replied

*The bird*

stamped its feet, confirming  
Mischa's words were true.

And then it started to stretch and flap again, for the first time since the fall.





*Together,* they raced back to the tree.

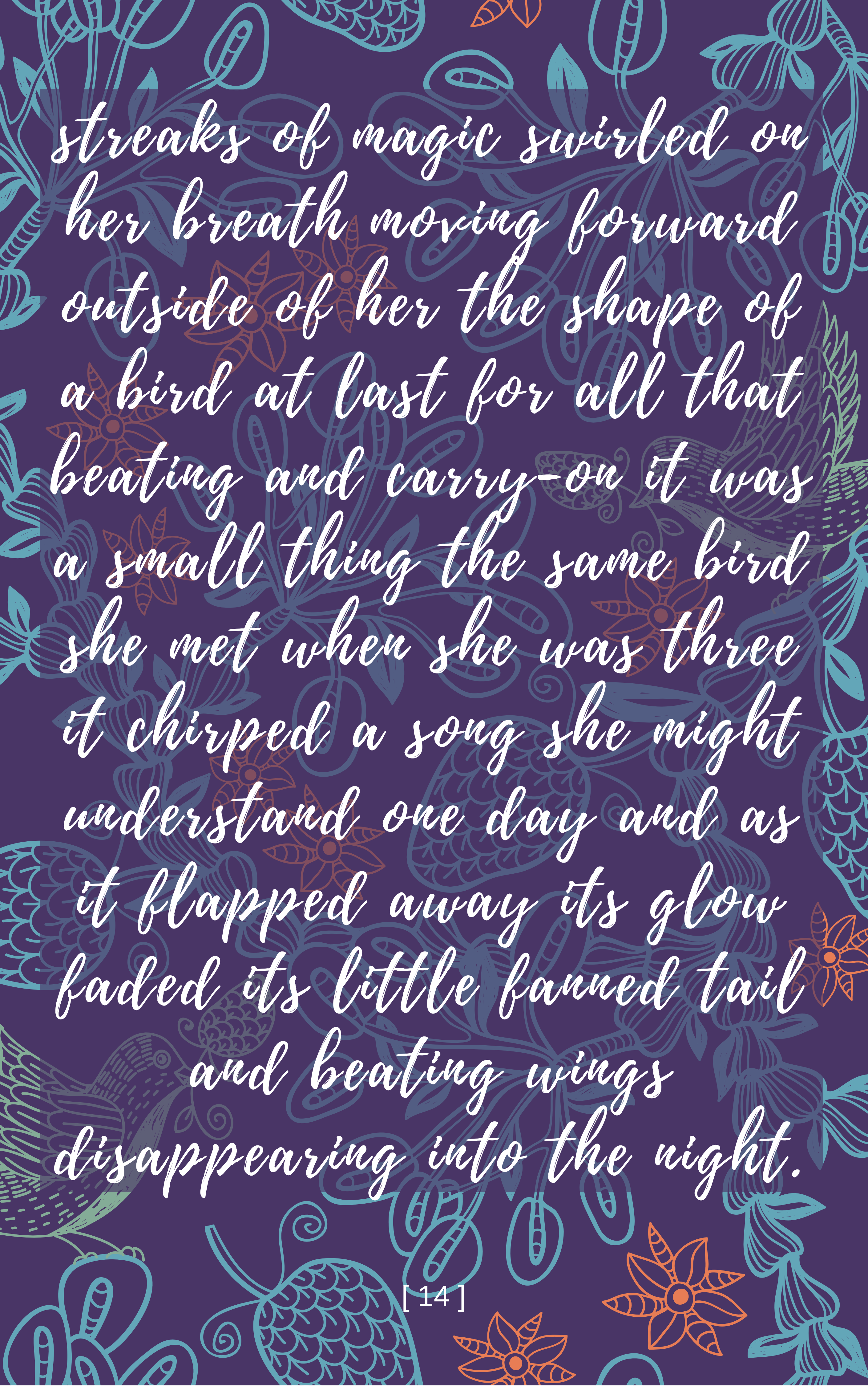
*They climbed* like their lives depended on it.

*They climbed* for themselves and they climbed  
for all the birds that needed to be free.

*And they climbed* for all the people who  
couldn't. Because for one reason or another they  
couldn't see the giant tree, as full of possibility as  
it was laden with danger, or they were no longer  
around to see it.

*And as if time* had somehow folded forward  
without leaving so much as a seam, they reached  
the top.





streaks of magic swirled on  
her breath moving forward  
outside of her the shape of  
a bird at last for all that  
beating and carry-on it was  
a small thing the same bird  
she met when she was three  
it chirped a song she might  
understand one day and as  
it flapped away its glow  
faded its little fanned tail  
and beating wings  
disappearing into the night.



*At last,* Mischa collapsed against the tree,  
feeling like an empty shell. And yet, she felt more  
alive than she had felt before. She felt more  
herself. She felt she *was* the bird, gliding through  
the air just by holding out her wings.

will you ever stop  
climbing again? luka  
asked

no, never, mischa  
replied







*the end*