
NINE LIVES
Conklin


NINE LIVES

PICTURES ARE WORDLESS POEMS


CROSSROAD IN THE MIST

Once upon a time
there was a story about this mysterious place
no one ever wanted to come across.
It was a place uncharted on any maps.
No one knew the way or how exactly to get there.
It was known that no matter how tough was a traveller
or how wise was a wiseman,
anyone who got lost into this place
rarely came back to the world they belonged.
No one knew the proper thing to do
when they actually ended up in this place.
There was a saying though:

...In a foggy day that all is quiet,
the place of the legend shall appear ahead of the unfortunated one
to offer choices of questions unknown and the answers unfound...

Hidden in the fear of men, this place
was named by some legends unheard of their origin:

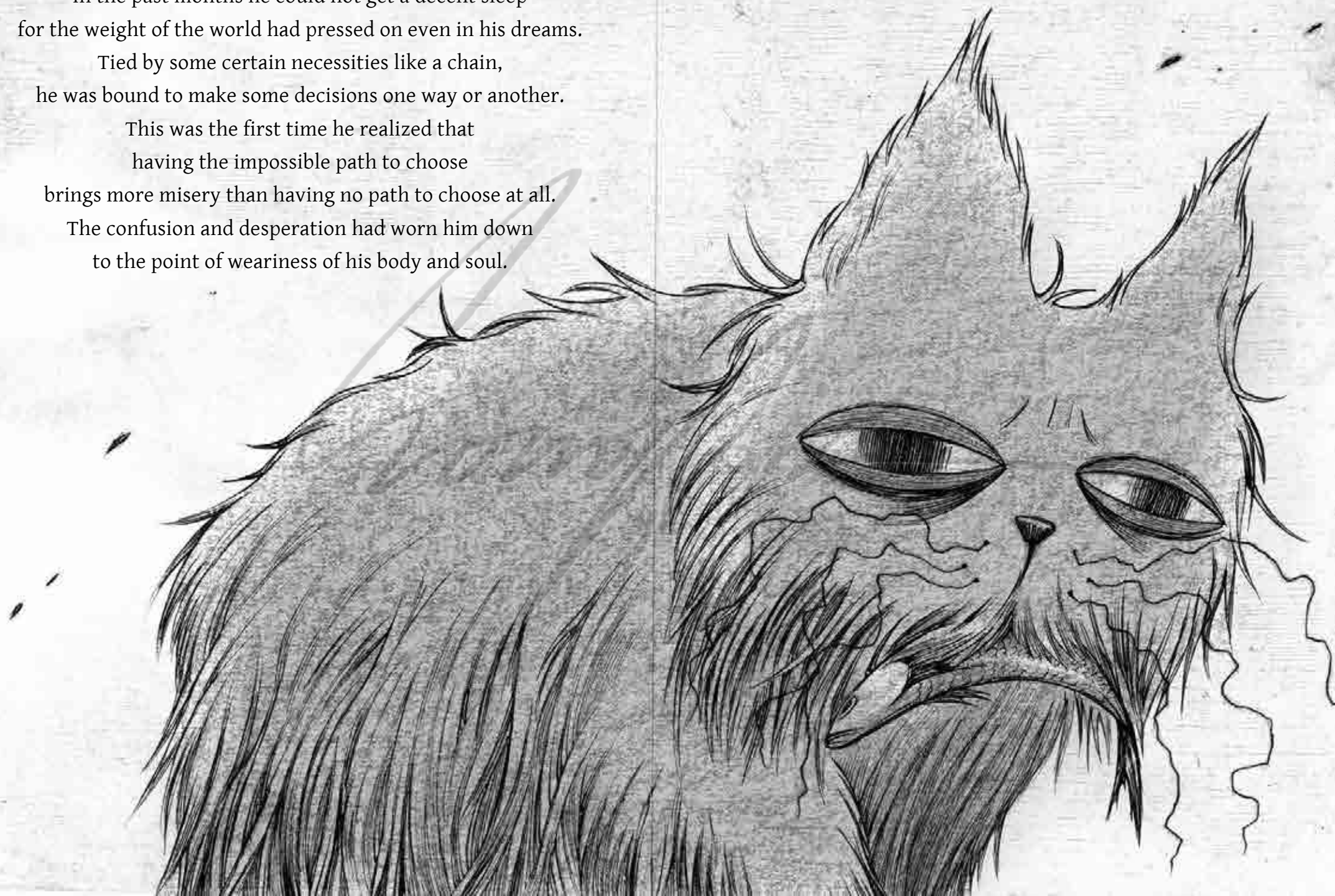
'Crossroad in the Mist'

There are so many things in this world
even unproven,
people still feel its existence
through their senses and their beliefs.
More often than not, even beyond reasons.

Just as the story of the Crossroad in the Mist.

In a chilly and misty month like this
if there was no utmost urgency,
no villagers would wander into the misty road willingly.
No one was unheard of the mysterious crossroad
except for a cat with its ragged fur
who walked through the fog wearily.
His eyes filled with confusion.
In his mouth was a thin fish from a nearby stream.

The Ragged Fur was worn out.
In the past months he could not get a decent sleep
for the weight of the world had pressed on even in his dreams.
Tied by some certain necessities like a chain,
he was bound to make some decisions one way or another.
This was the first time he realized that
having the impossible path to choose
brings more misery than having no path to choose at all.
The confusion and desperation had worn him down
to the point of weariness of his body and soul.



After a while
the Ragged Fur meant to rest under a tree
and finish up that little fish he had with him.

Under the tree
he saw something, looked like a tombstone.
The old and tattered tombstone
was covered with mud and weed.
The engraves were faded, barely legible.

The Ragged Fur had sympathy
for this abandoned grave.
"What a pity. There was no one tending the grave at all?
If it was me who was buried in the middle of nowhere like this,
I would wish for someone to give me an offering."

The Ragged Fur thought for a moment
and split his fish in two.
He placed a half at the tombstone
saying:

"I know this is not much. Take it if you don't mind.
This is the best I can do for now."

Then he ate his share of the fish under that tree.
Later on he lay down wearily.
His mind was still trying to solve troublesome
thoughts carried with him.
Soon he would need to make a decision
one way or another.
Almost as usual, he could not get a decent sleep
with these thoughts clouded his mind.

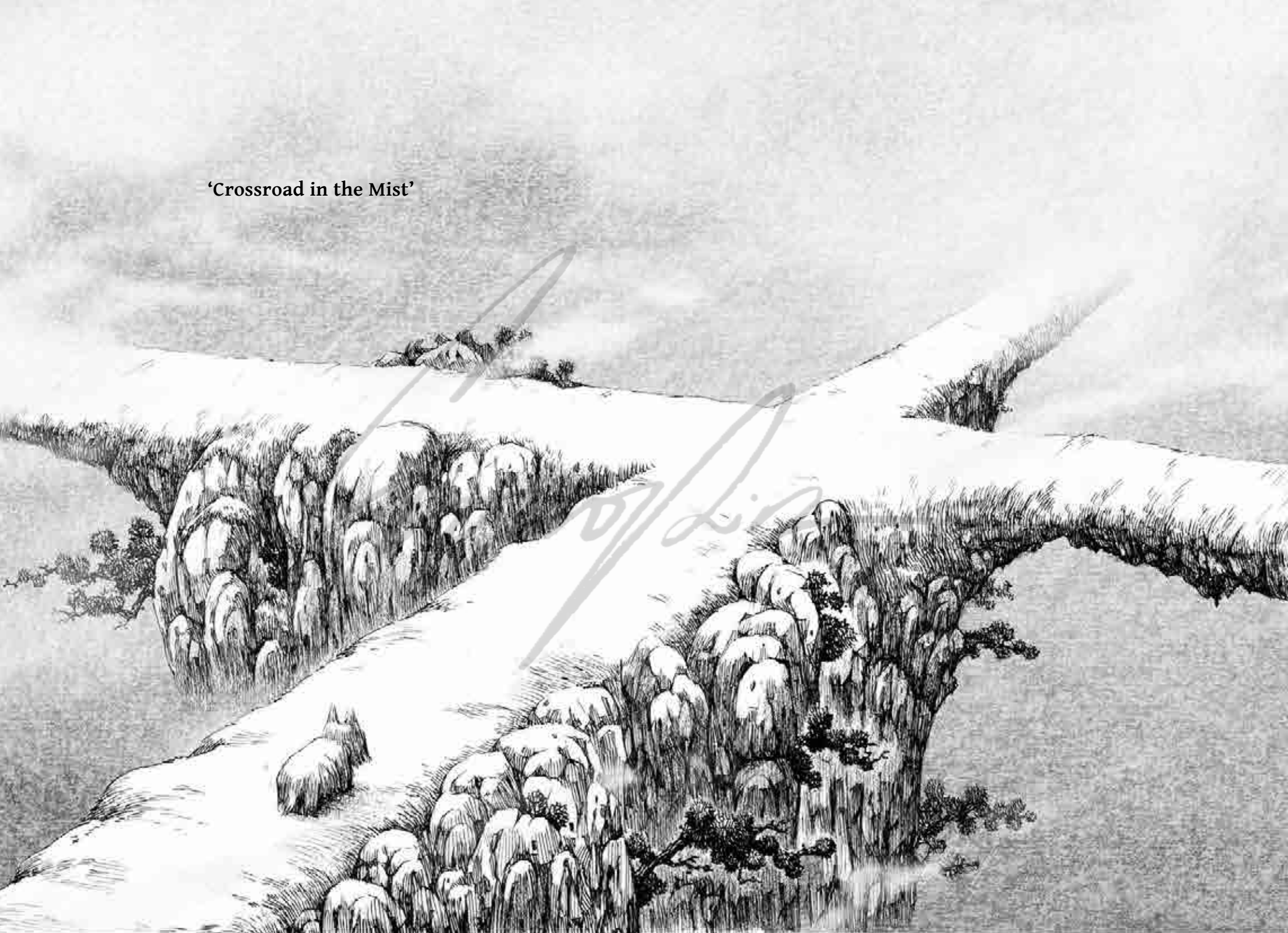
A moment later
the Ragged Fur was surprised...

He was strangely sleepy
like he had never felt before in the past months.
He barely noticed that
all around him, things grew quieter
as if lives had completely faded away.

Soon
even the sound of
the crickets was gone,
The chirping of birds
was gone.
The sound of all animals
was gone.
There was only silence.
Even so the Ragged Fur
felt his eyelids become more
and more heavy.
Slowly, they were shut.

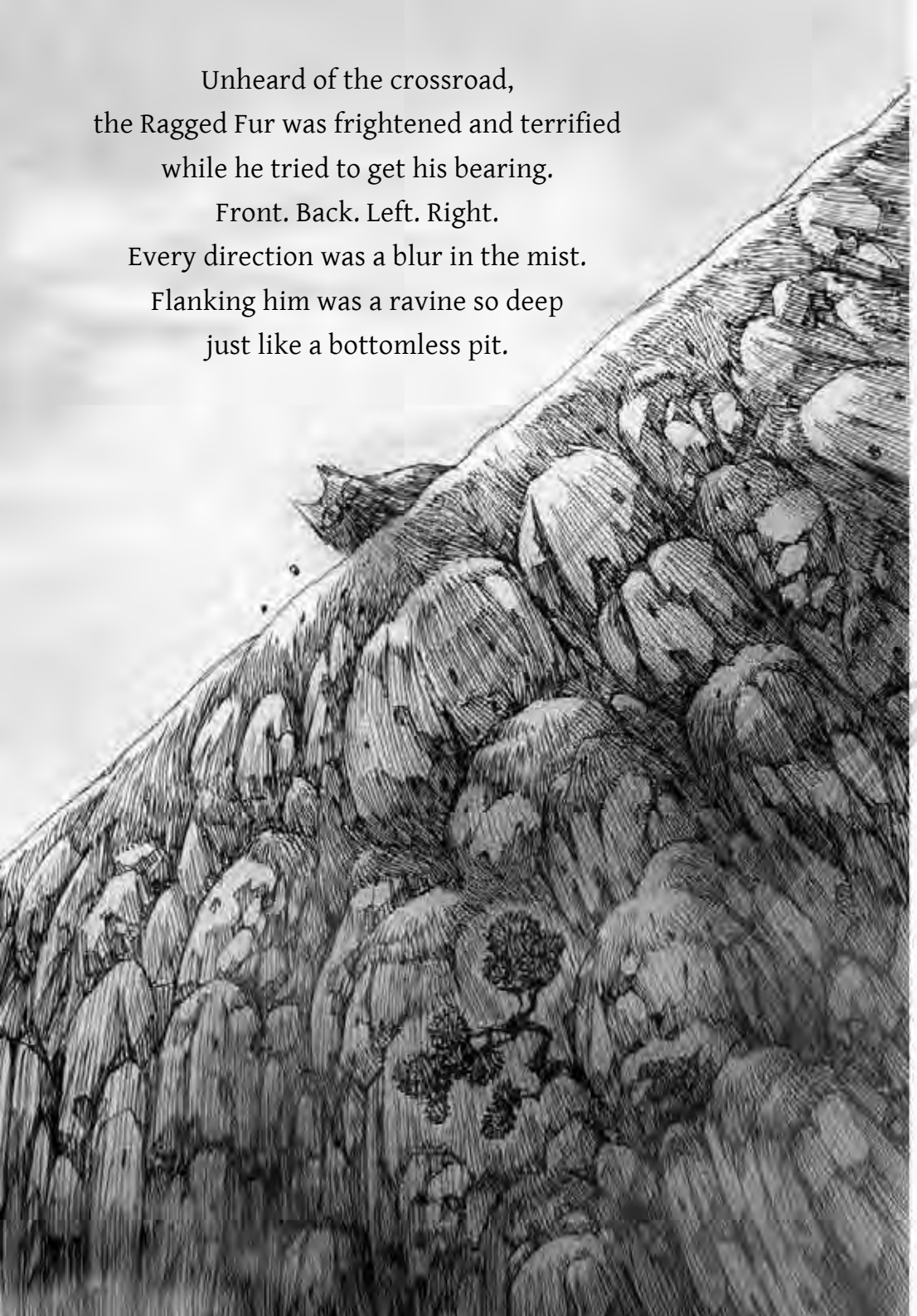

Finally
.....
the Ragged Fur was asleep under the tree.

Some times had passed.
The Ragged Fur woke up to
find himself at an unknown place.
It was a place known to men that
only few had seen,
no one wished to find,
no men knew the way
or how exactly to get there.
But right now and somehow
the Ragged Fur was here
at the place they called...



‘Crossroad in the Mist’

Unheard of the crossroad,
the Ragged Fur was frightened and terrified
while he tried to get his bearing.
Front. Back. Left. Right.
Every direction was a blur in the mist.
Flanking him was a ravine so deep
just like a bottomless pit.



He tried to wake up
from the state he believed was a dream. But he couldn't.
The Ragged Fur didn't see any other choice
but to walk along one direction
to get the hell out of this place.

However,
to choose when not knowing what would be laying ahead
was never easy for the Ragged Fur.
Not just with this crossroad, but in his life also.
He laughed bitterly, saying to himself:

"This crossroad is such an evil. The more I see it,
the more clearly that it is
the reflection of my confusion
...what do I do then?"

The Ragged Fur grew more and more desperate.
Just as he was about to lie down hopelessly

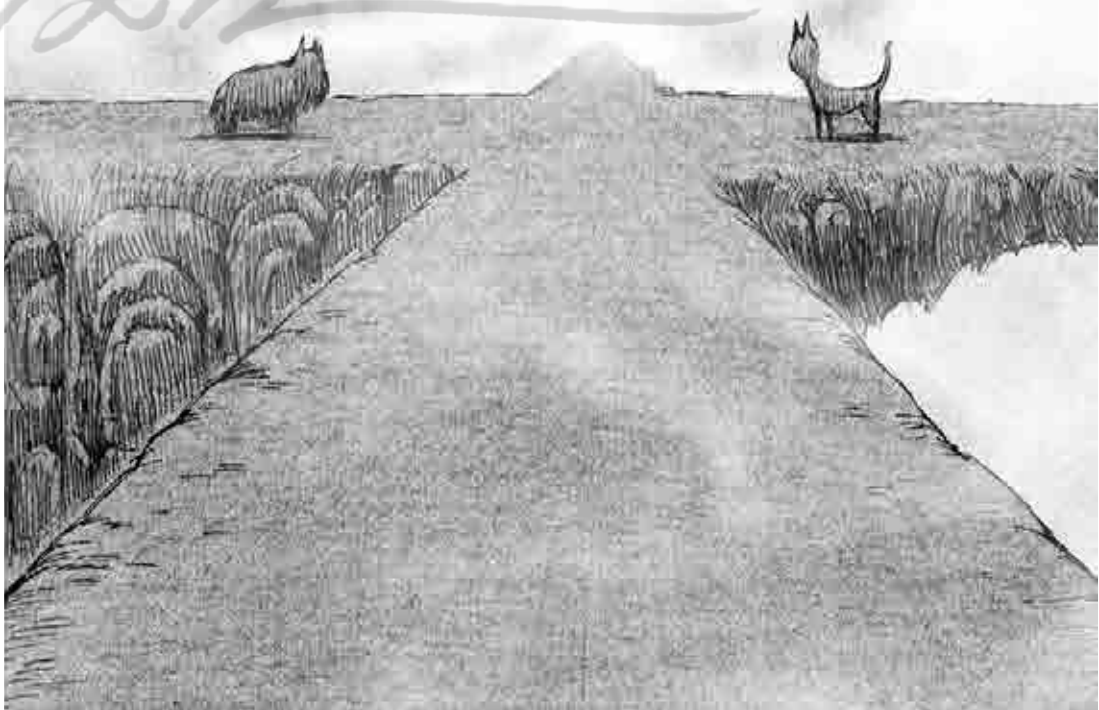
a shadow appeared
at one of the paths in front of him.

From the mist
a white feline stepped forward.

"Are you also lost?"
The White Fur asked gently.

"I truly have no idea how come I ended up at this crossroad,"
Answered the Ragged Fur,
then he asked how she ended up here.

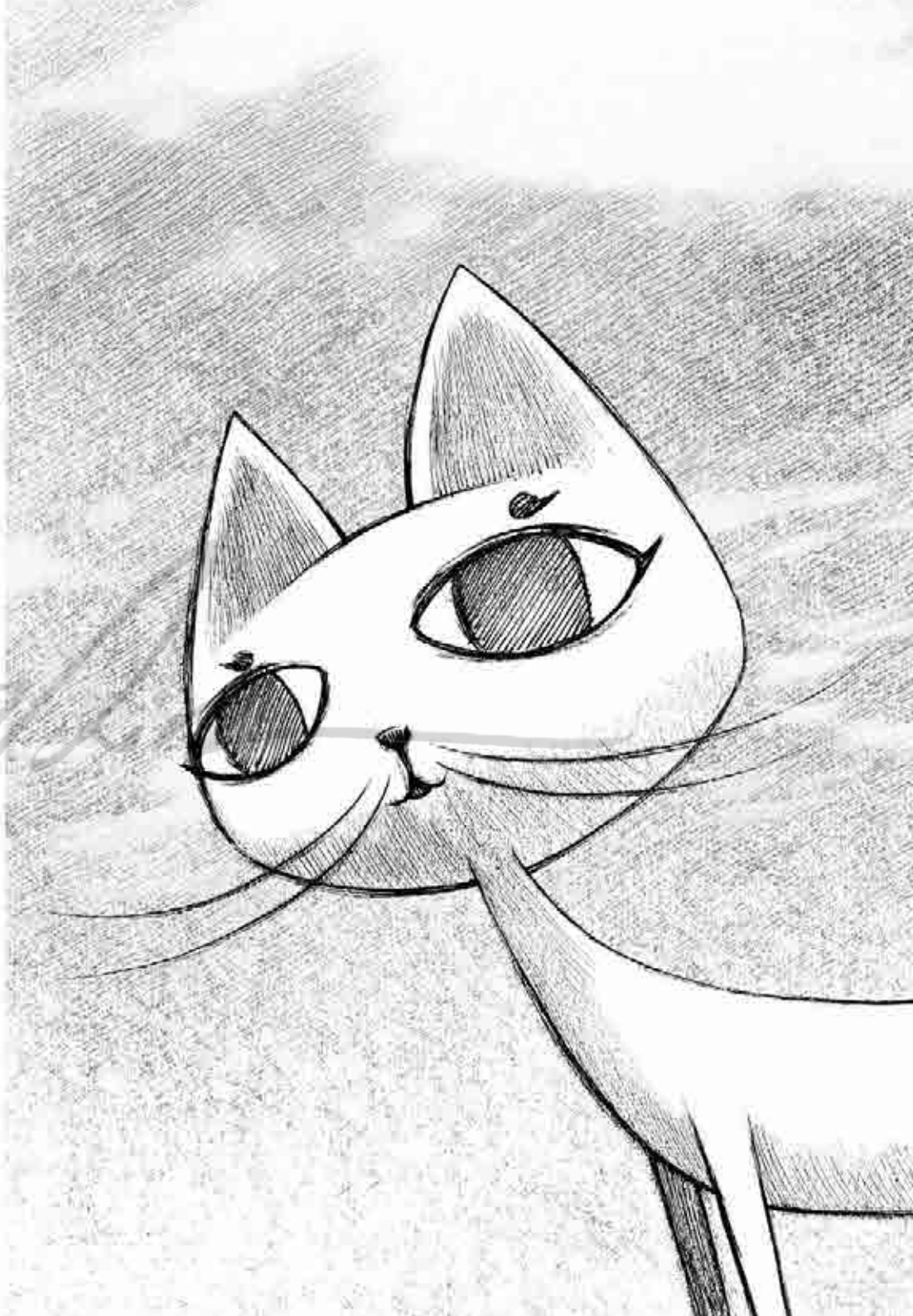
"I haven't got a clue either.
Seems like you and I appeared to be in the same situation,"
the White Fur said.



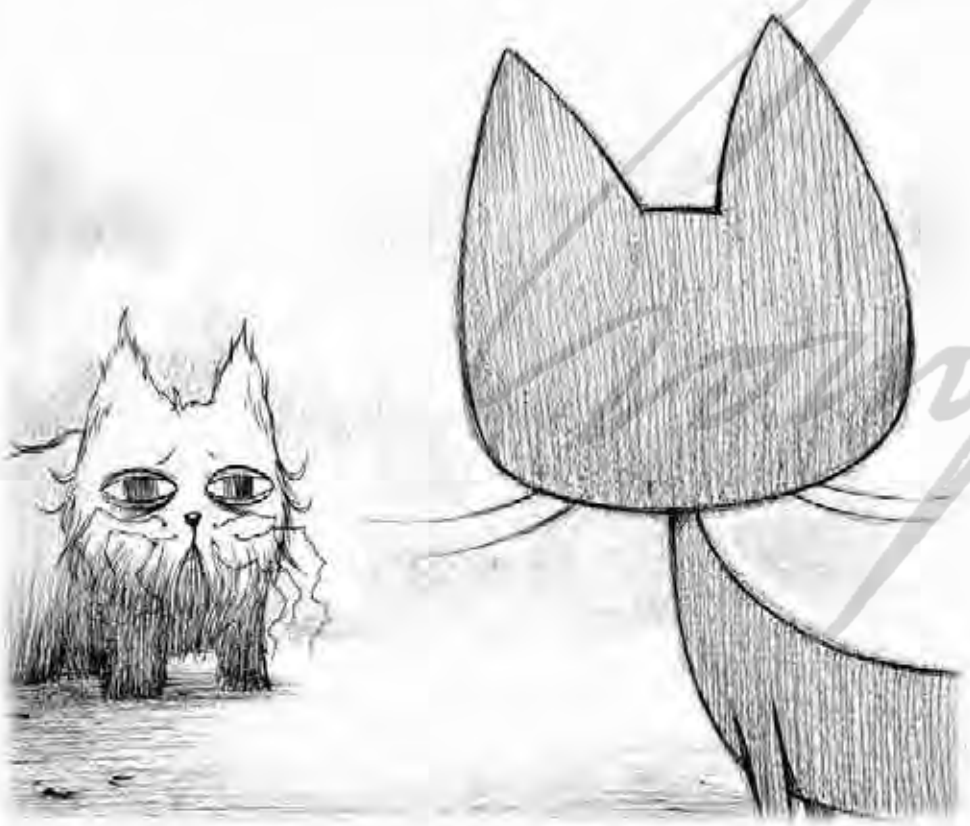
Judging from the look on her face,
he believed the White Fur was telling the truth.
Still the Raggd-Fur was amazed
to see no fear or confusion from the White Fur at all.
On the contrary, she seemed so untroubled
that the Ragged Fur could not help but asked.
To this the White Fur answered:

"It's because I have another path that I can make
even it's not a visible one."

The Ragged Fur did not understand.
From what he saw, there were 4 paths.
What did she mean by another invisible path?
Was it some kind of magic to get him out of here
or a secret pathway he had not yet seen?
He asked the White Fur to enlighten him.



"Another path, which is invisible
isn't a magic or secret pathway of any kind.
Before I tell you about it, let me ask you this:
If you have to really choose one of the way,
which way shall you walk, based on what ground?"



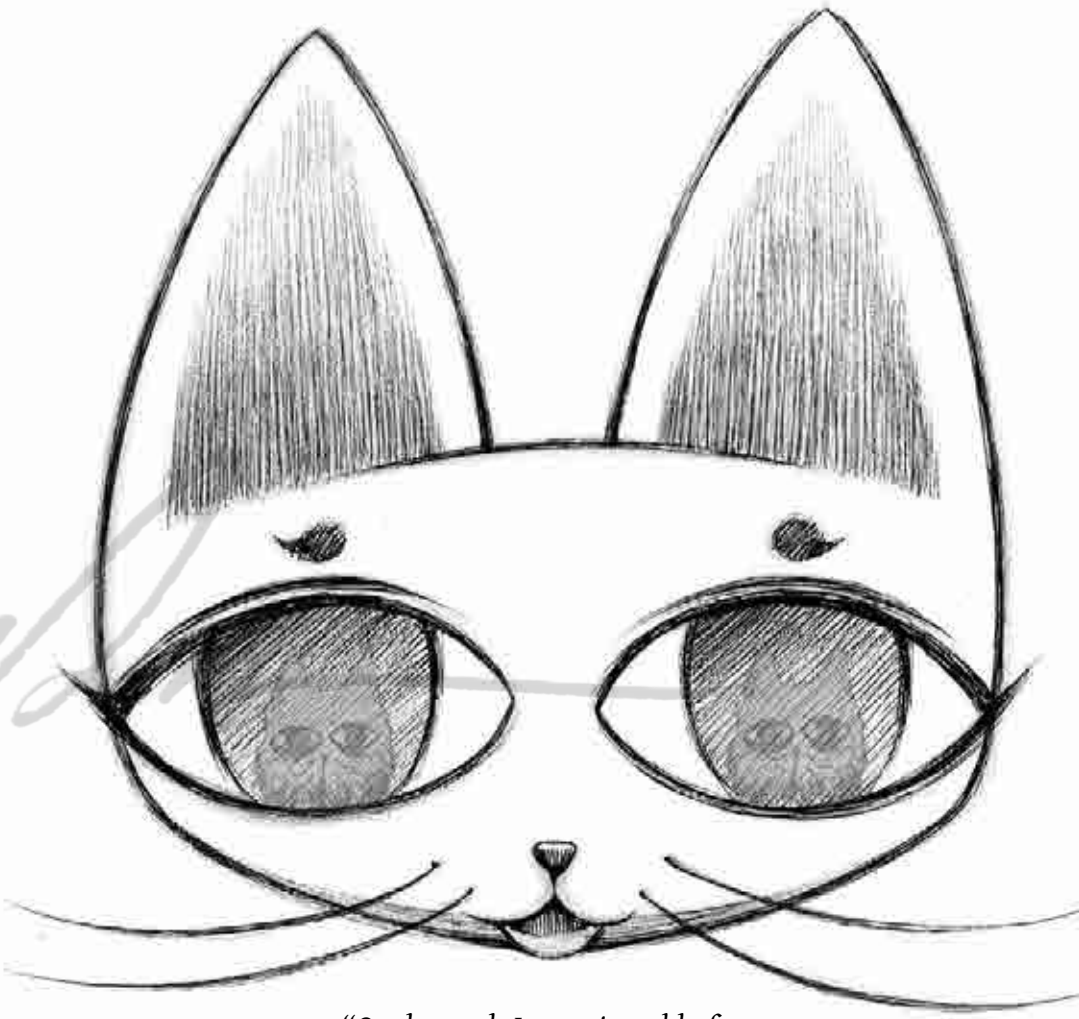
The Ragged Fur took his time and then answered:

"Based on my nature I would say the right one.
On the contrary would be left.
The forward and the backward would depend on
whether I want to head for the future
or the past that may have been altered.
The problem is right now I can't make any decision at all
because I don't know which way to go.
I'm terrified that...after I have chosen
I might not be able to get through it all the way."

Listening carefully, the White Fur
smiled softly then said:

"If you look at the crossroad again, you'll find that:
Your right is the left to me.
Your left is the right to me.
Your forward is my backward.
And of course, your backward is my forward.
So I thought if we look closely,
we'll find that
every direction bears different meaning to different individuals.
Forging ahead for some people
might have been a step back to others.
A path despised by one man
might have been the path most desired by another."

The Ragged Fur pondered the meaning of this.
The White Fur paused briefly, then continued:



"So the path I mentioned before
is actually ***the path of answering your own call****.*
Whoever came to the answer cleared to their heart
will get through any obstacles the world brought to them.
No matter what they choose, no matter what lies ahead.
That's what I believe."

The Ragged Fur felt that
the meaning of words and the voice of the White Fur
possesed some kinds of liveliness
that was soft and solid at the same time.
It was as if those words of the White Fur had lit up a fire
inside the dark and clouded corner of the Ragged Fur's heart.
Now he felt so clear.
Suddenly all the crossroads, no matter in the mist or in life,
did not seem so threatening as before.

All because of the White Fur.
Because he had met her.
So he said:

"All the things you said to me
made me feel in debt to you.
Could you kindly tell me your name?"

The White Fur smiled blissfully
and told him her name.

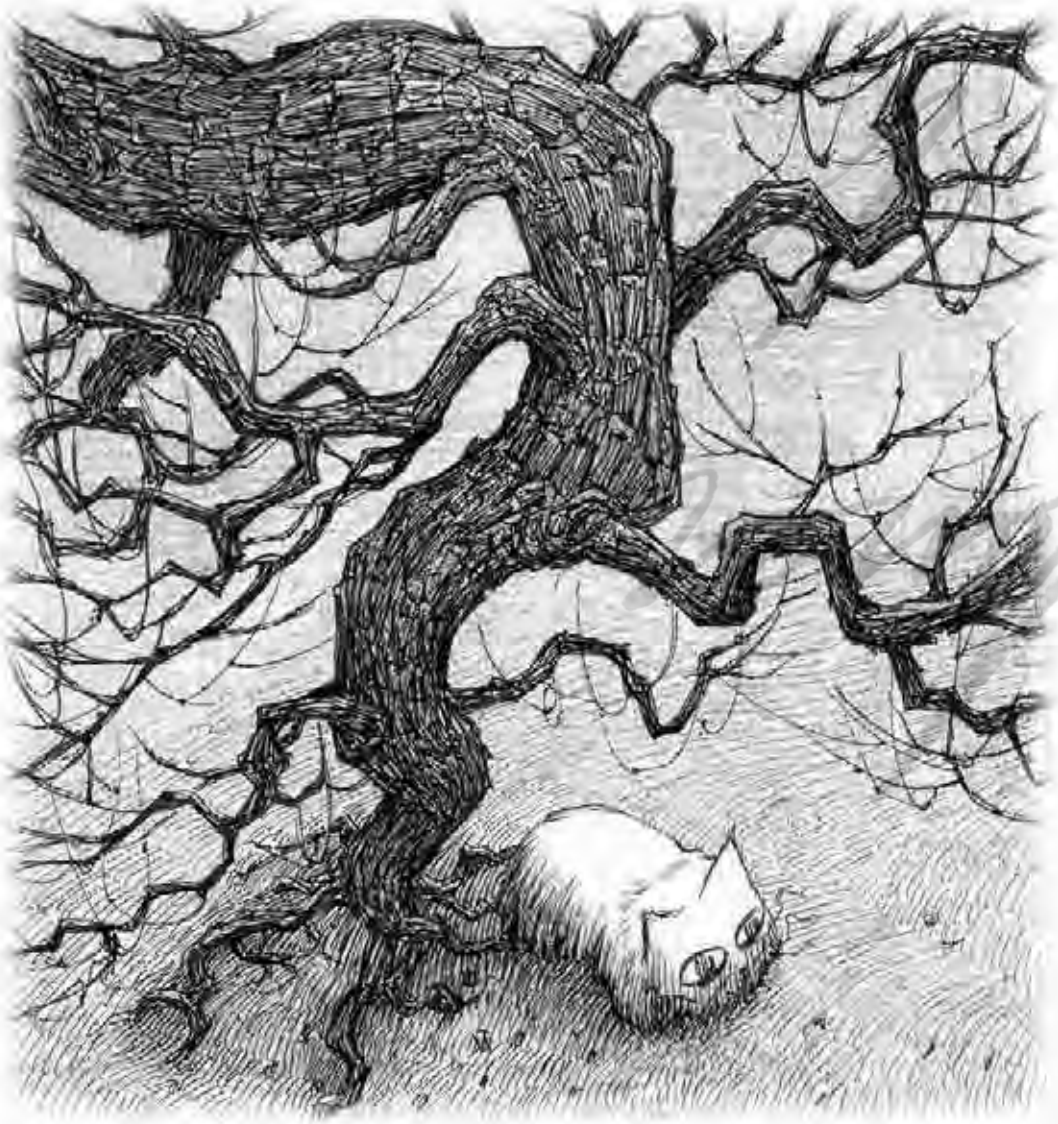
After bidding farewell,
she walked away in the mist.

For the brifest moment
a thought of following her appeared
though he did not do so.
Part of it because some kind of a natural feeling
warned him against it.
Part of it because now he thought that
it was time for him to choose his own path.

So he closed his eyes
and tried to find the right path for himself,
with a peaceful mind now.


When he opend his eyes again
to get on his way
with a heart that was true to his heart,
he then found that...

he was back under the same tree again



At the moment, the Ragged Fur heard a voice
he could never be certain
that it was just the wind
or the sound in his head.

The word was a thankful one.

He remembered that voice.
It was the White Fur's.

But what would she be thankful for...?
He should be the one who was grateful to her.
The Ragged Fur tried to search for the White Fur
for a big while.
But no matter what he did
he could not find her.

Then a thought hit him.

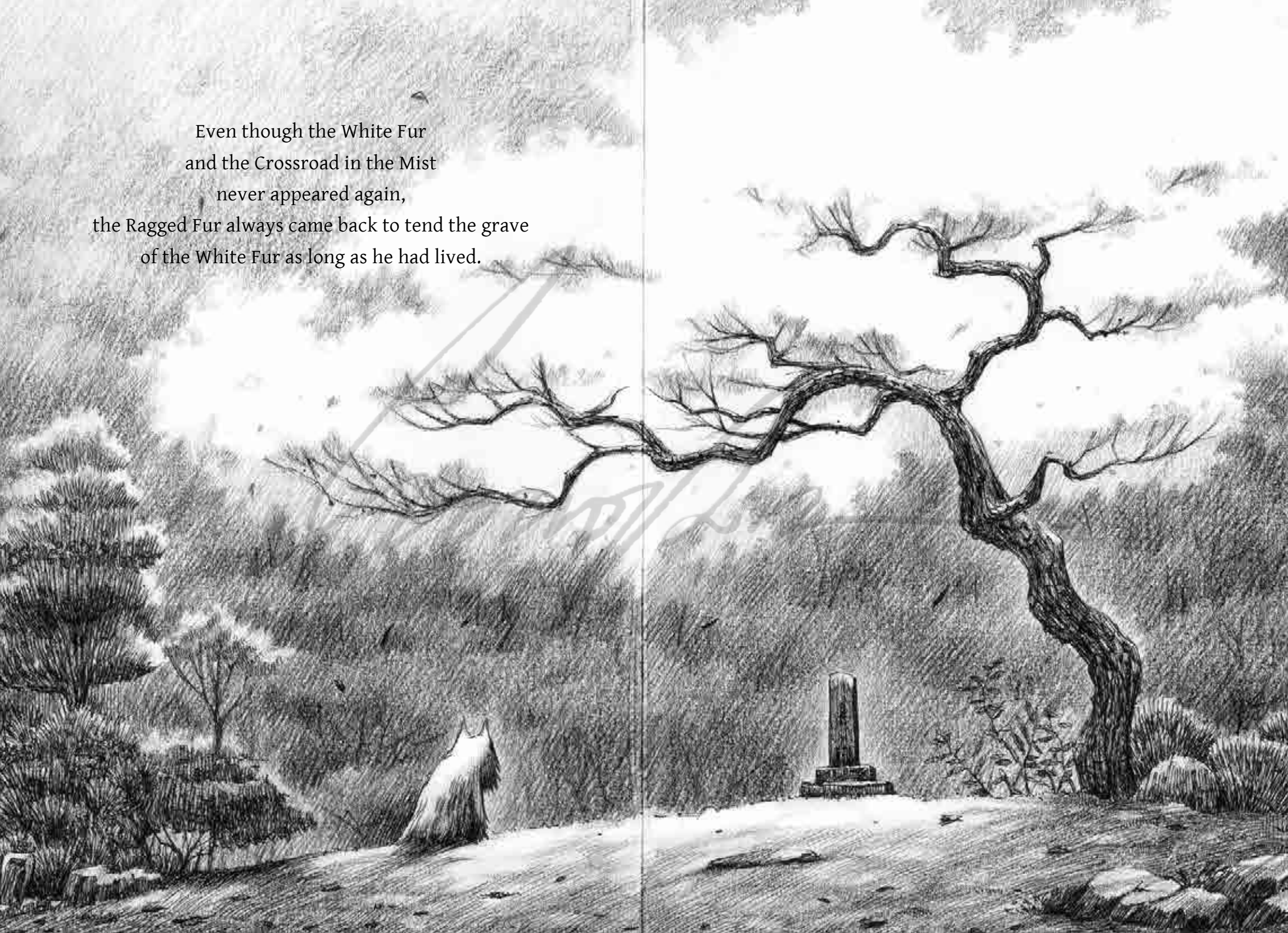
The Ragged Fur walked toward
the tombstone under the tree.
Then after ridding off of it,
the mud and the weeds

The Ragged Fur
thendiscovered that
the name on the tombstone
was the name of the White Fur.

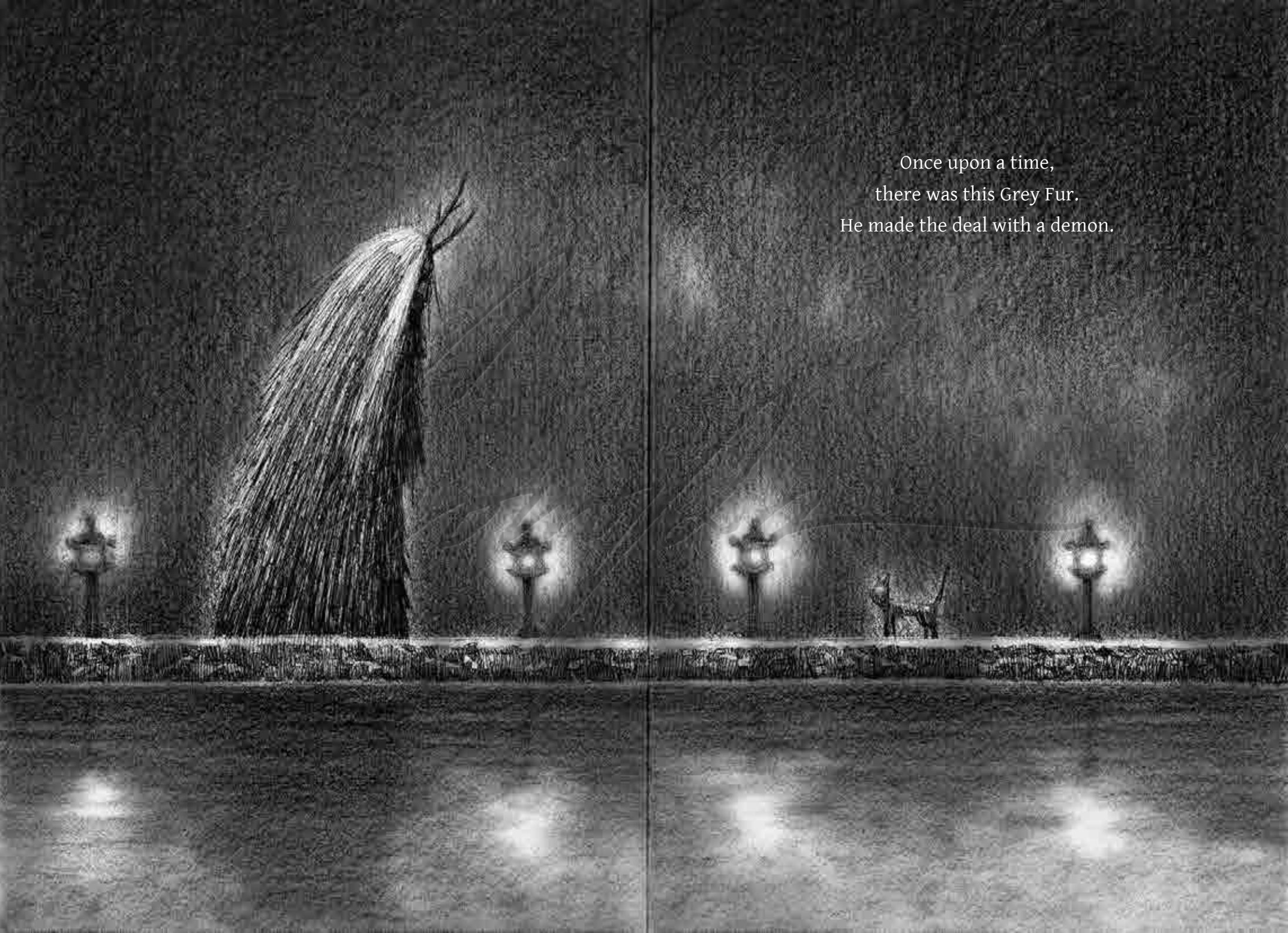
Months later
after the Ragged Fur had gotten out of
all the troubles in his life
that had been eating him alive,
he returned to the grave of the White Fur regularly
with the determination
to make the White Fur's grave
one of the most beautiful places in the world.

And with that resolve,
the grave of the White Fur
had been more lively, much more lively than before.
The air was filled with fragrant
of all flowers that flourished and bloomed.
The tombstone of the White Fur
was always tended.

Even though the White Fur
and the Crossroad in the Mist
never appeared again,
the Ragged Fur always came back to tend the grave
of the White Fur as long as he had lived.




LIVE FOREVER


Once upon a time,
there was this Grey Fur.
He made the deal with a demon.

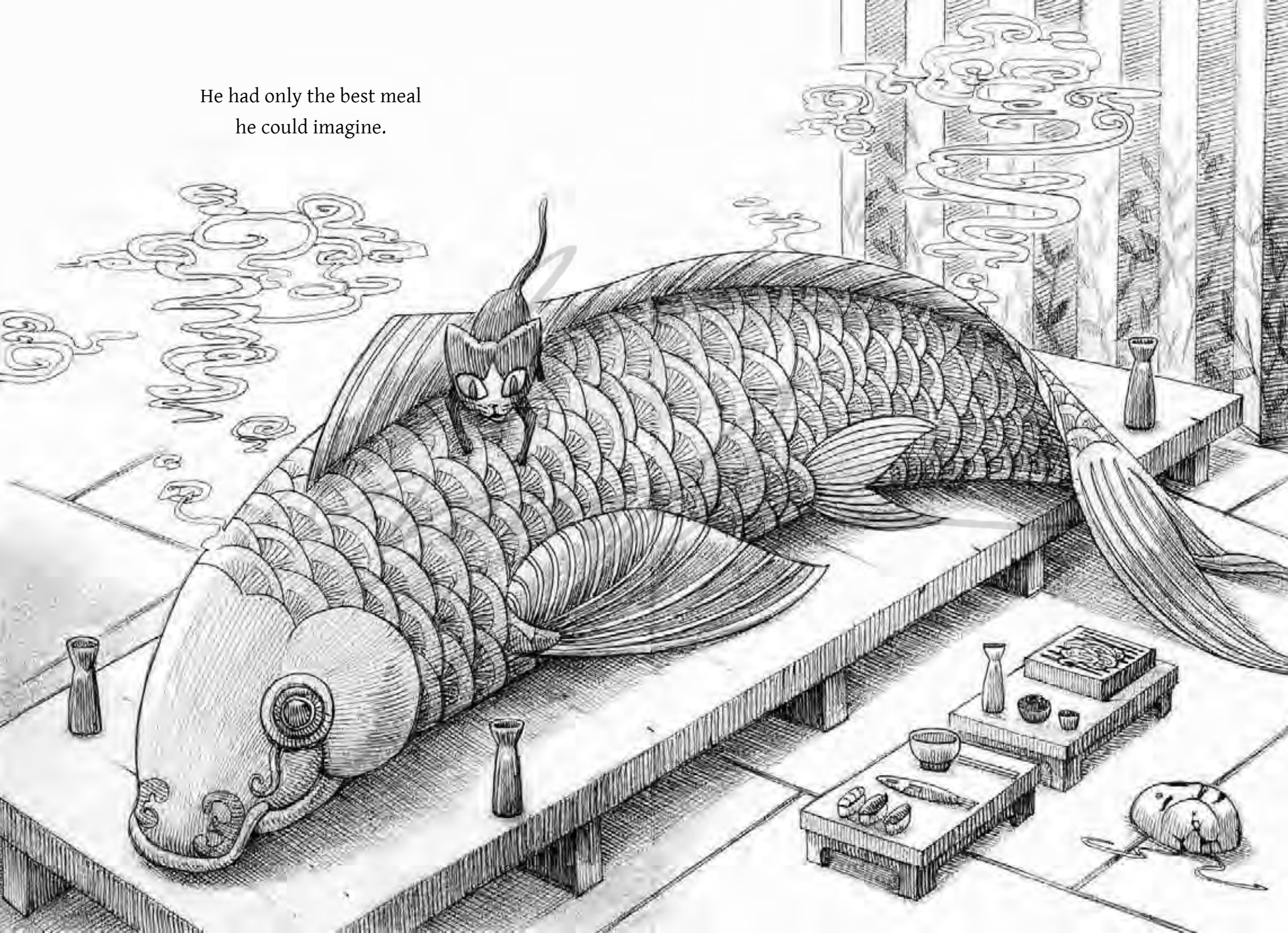
The demon who had no heart
so badly wanted one
it offered life of eternity
and everything the Grey Fur could ever want,
in exchange for the Grey Fur's heart.

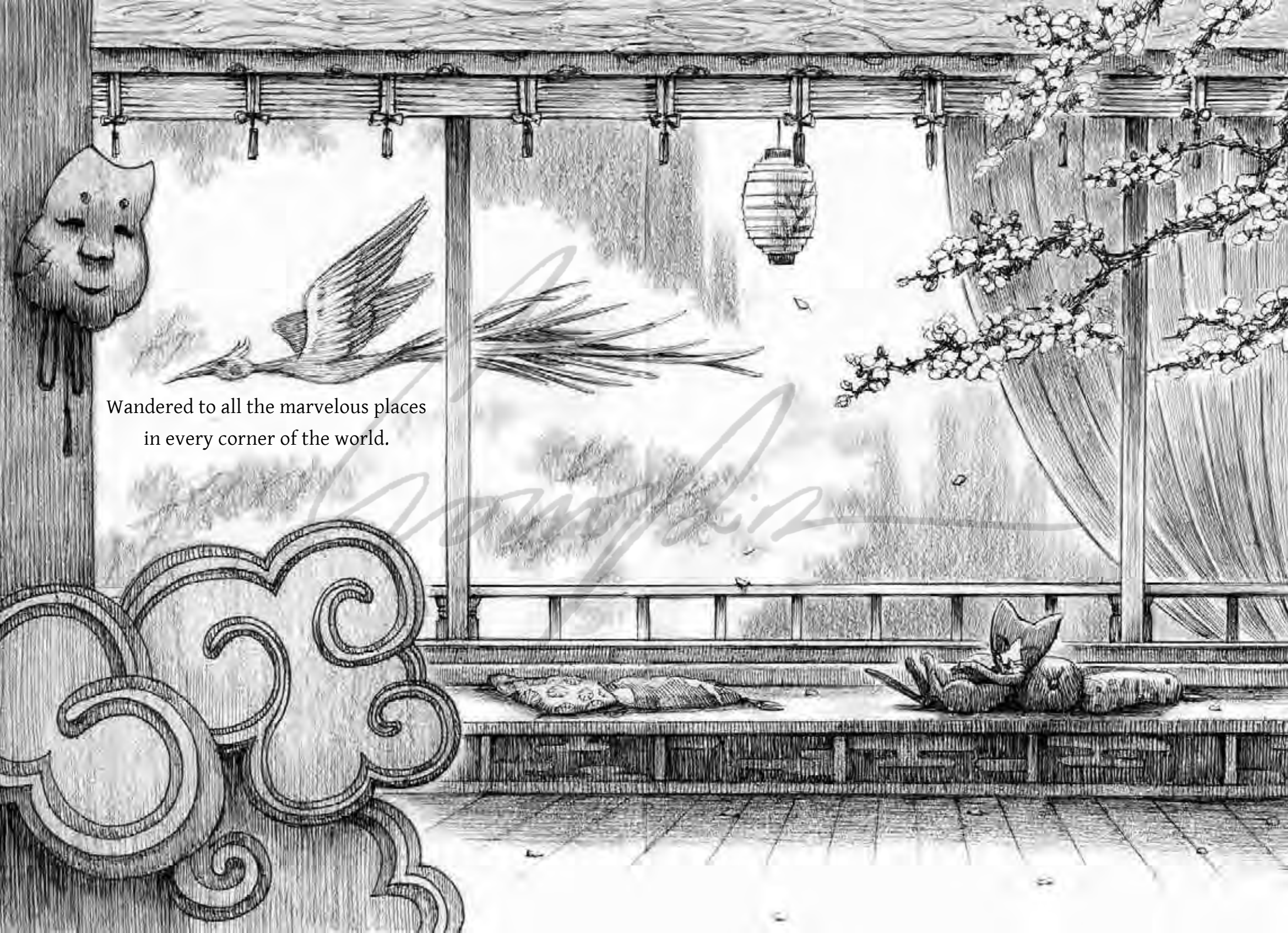
The Grey Fur took the deal.

Then the demon gave up eternity
and its utmost power to the Grey Fur
so the Grey Fur could have everything he wanted.

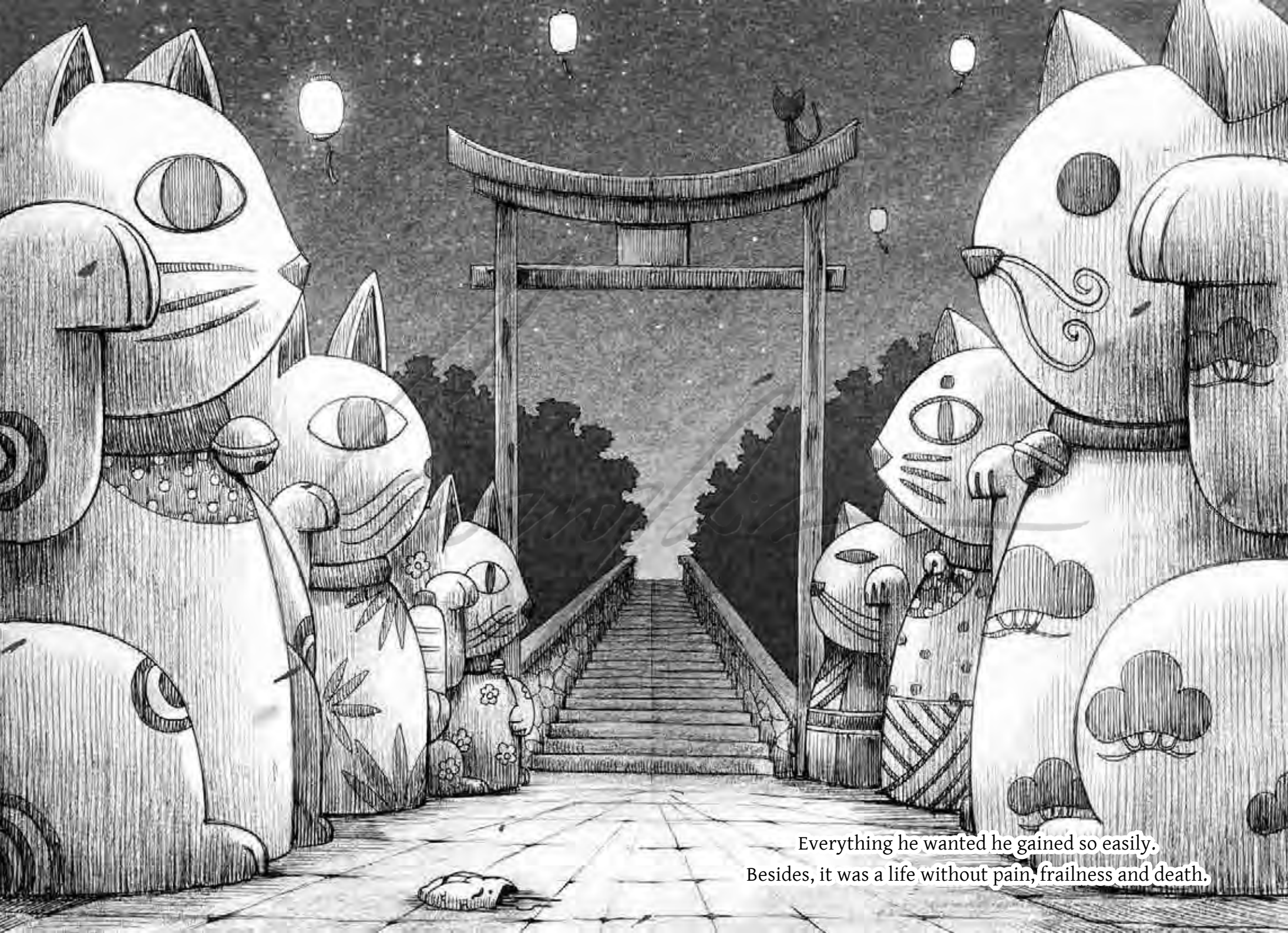

Later,
the Grey Fur was living
more than a dream.

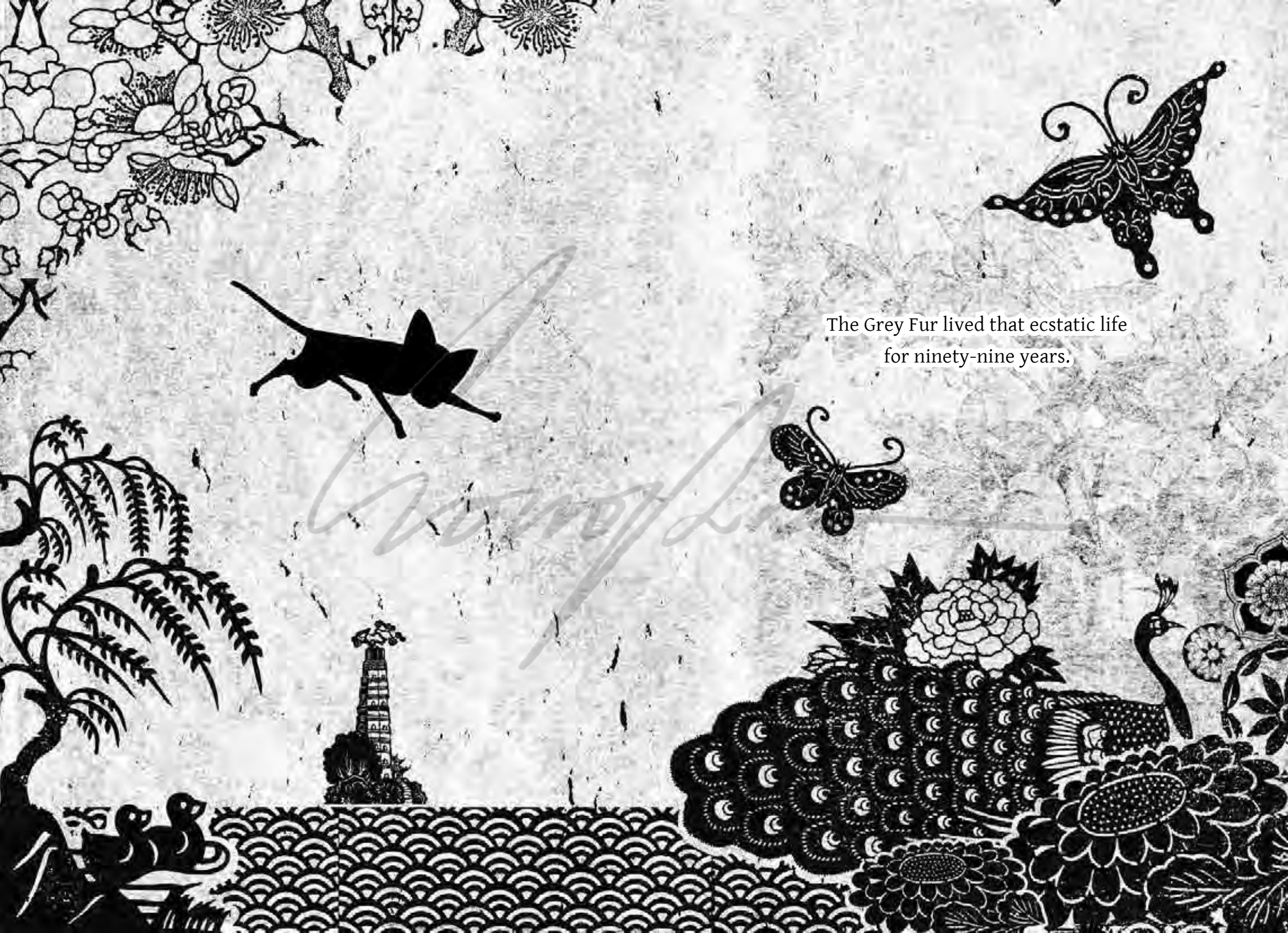
He had only the best meal
he could imagine.




Wandered to all the marvelous places
in every corner of the world.

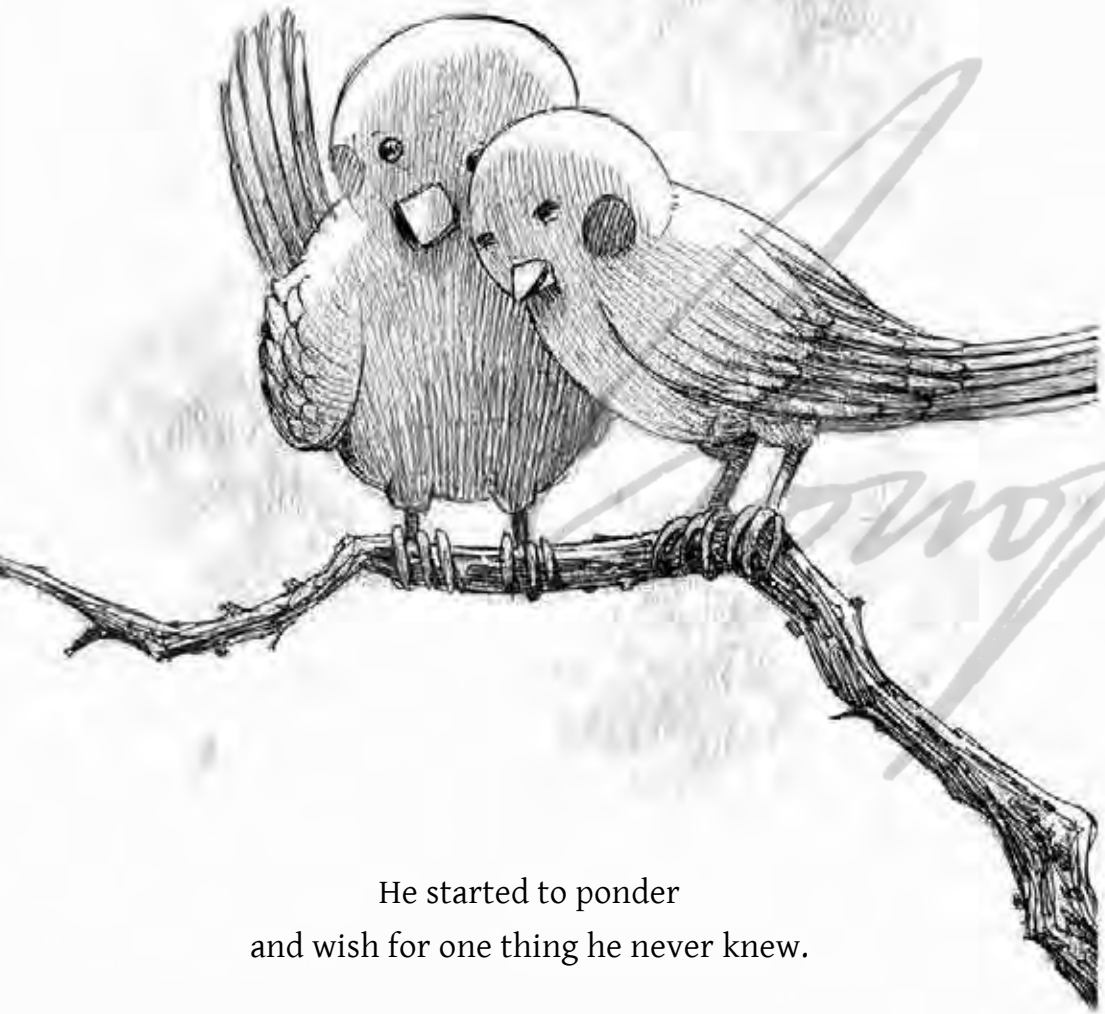
Defeated every foes,
no matter how strong they were.


Everything he wanted he gained so easily.
Besides, it was a life without pain, frailness and death.



The Grey Fur lived that ecstatic life
for ninety-nine years.

But when the hundredth year
of his eternity came.



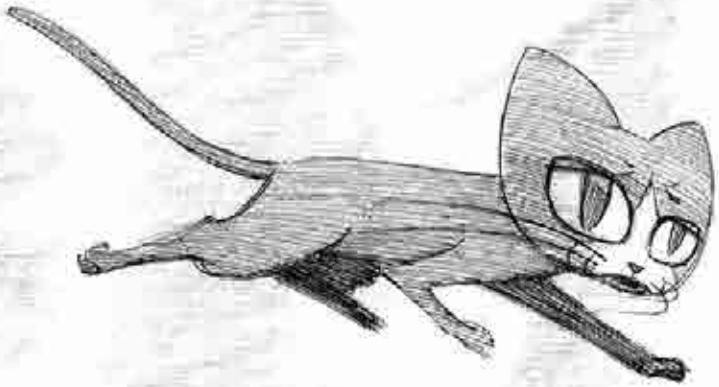
He started to ponder
and wish for one thing he never knew.

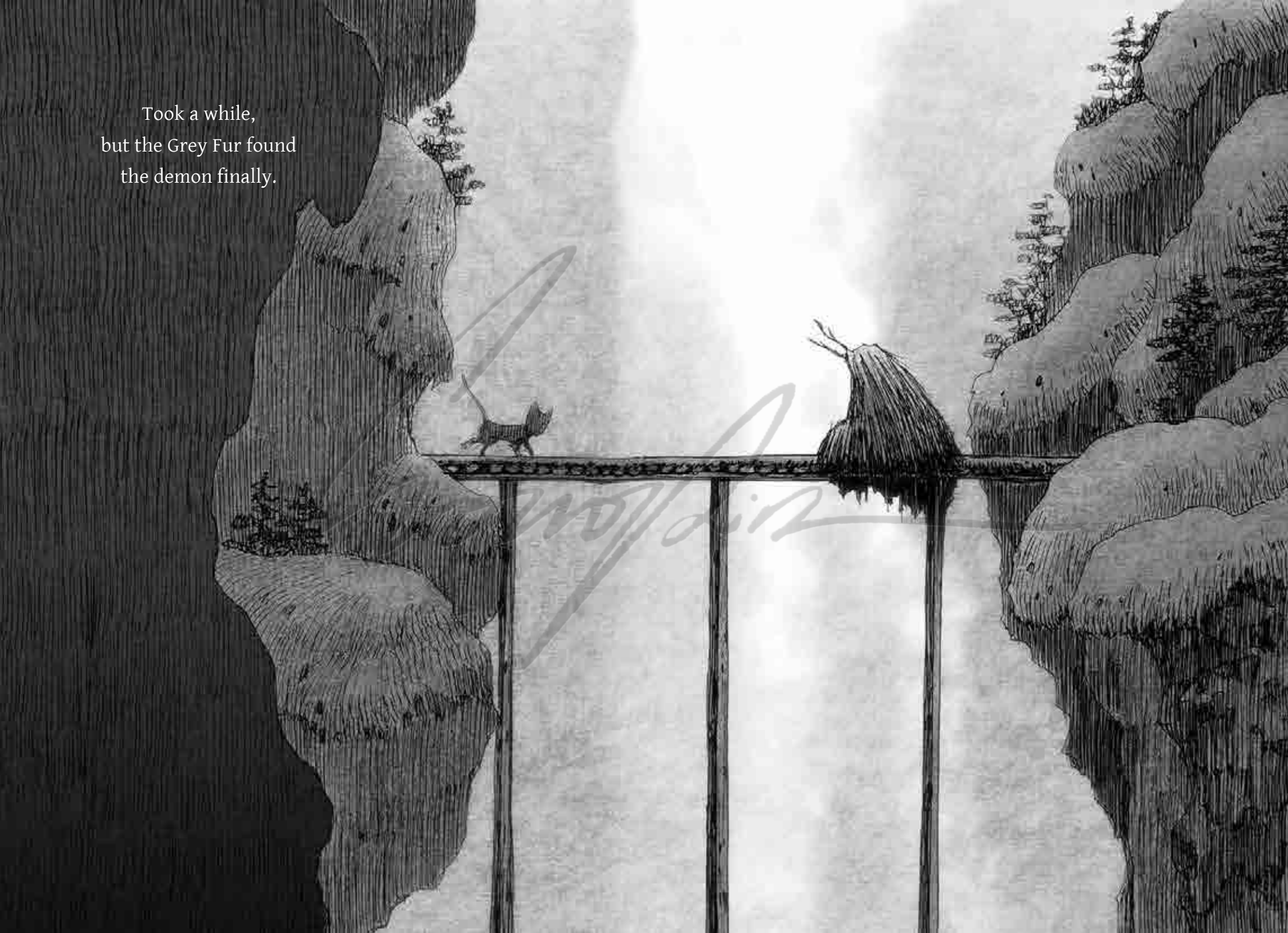
He wish to know for once
the feeling of
being in love.

Alas, no matter what he did
he still could not feel
the touch of love.

May be it has something to do with my heart,
the Grey Fur thought.

Then he sought the demon out in attempt
to get his heart back.




Took a while,
but the Grey Fur found
the demon finally.

When he tried to bargain
for his heart,
the demon said:
"The heart I can not give back
...for I am dying as we speak."

"Dying?...a demon as you are?...
You are supposed to be immortal, are you not?"
asked the Grey Fur.

"My immortality
was traded for your heart,"
answered the demon.

"But what would you need a heart for?"
asked the Grey Fur.

"...to love..."
replied the demon.

"And now you have?"

The demon nodded

"Did you have love in return?"

The demon who had so little life left in it
laughed weekly, then said:
"No ... no one could ever love a demon. But now I know
what it feels like to love someone ...
and that is more than enough."

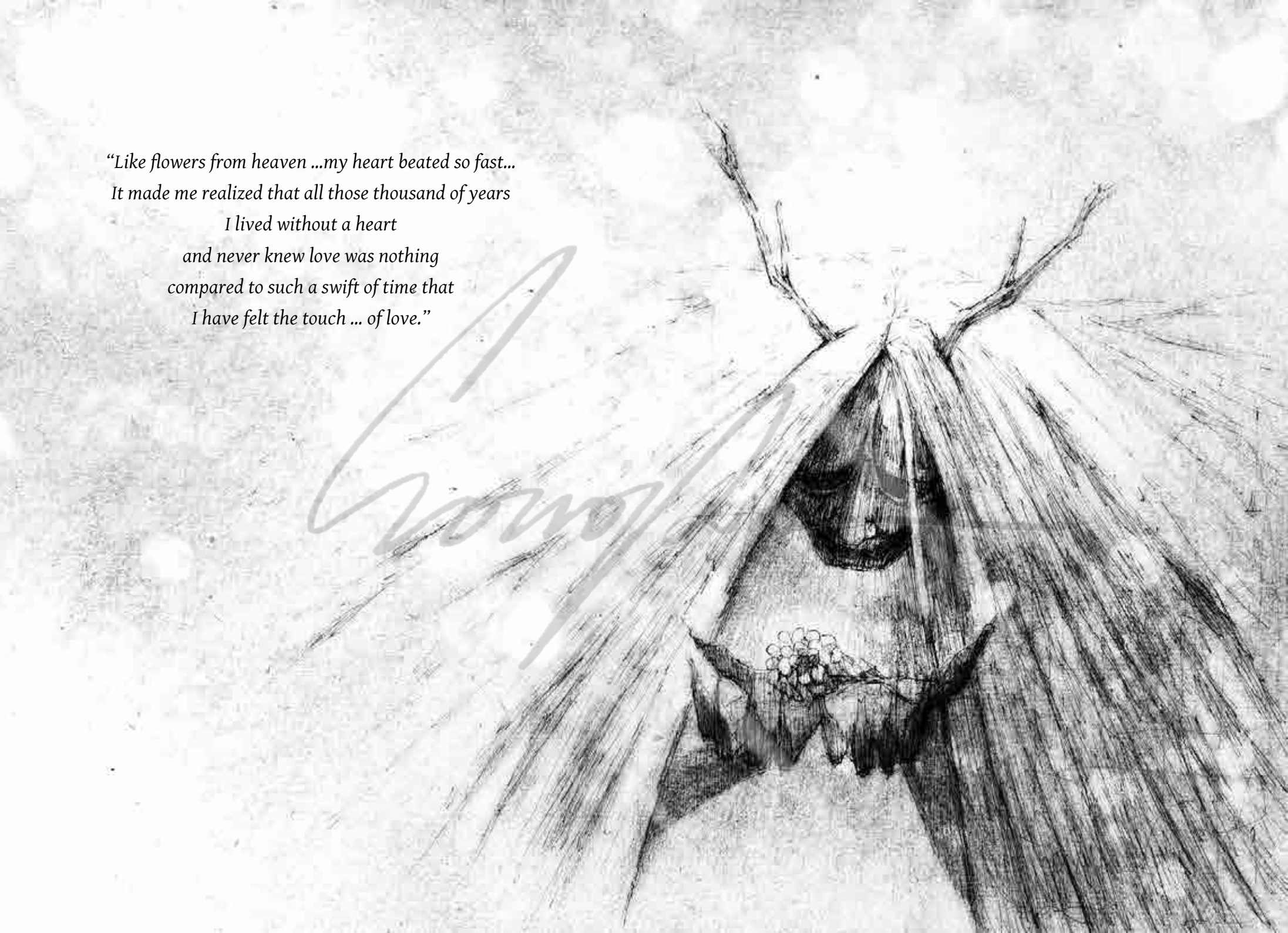
The Grey Fur pondered, but could not quite understand
so he blurted out the thing he needed an answer the most:

"What does it feel like ...to love someone...?"

The demon silenced.

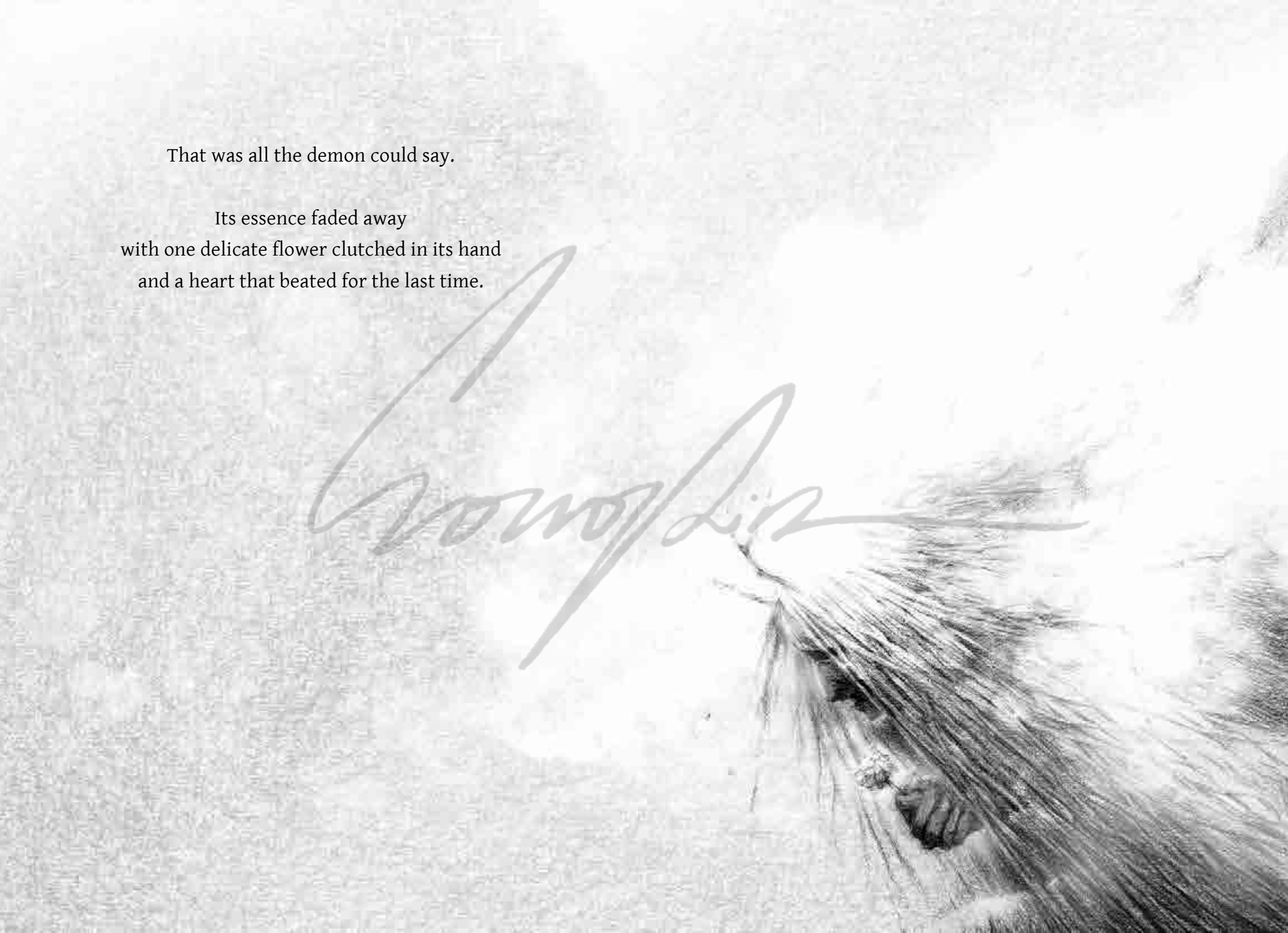
It gazed afar for a moment
before answered shakily:

"Like flowers from heaven ...my heart beated so fast...
It made me realized that all those thousand of years
I lived without a heart
and never knew love was nothing
compared to such a swift of time that
I have felt the touch ... of love."

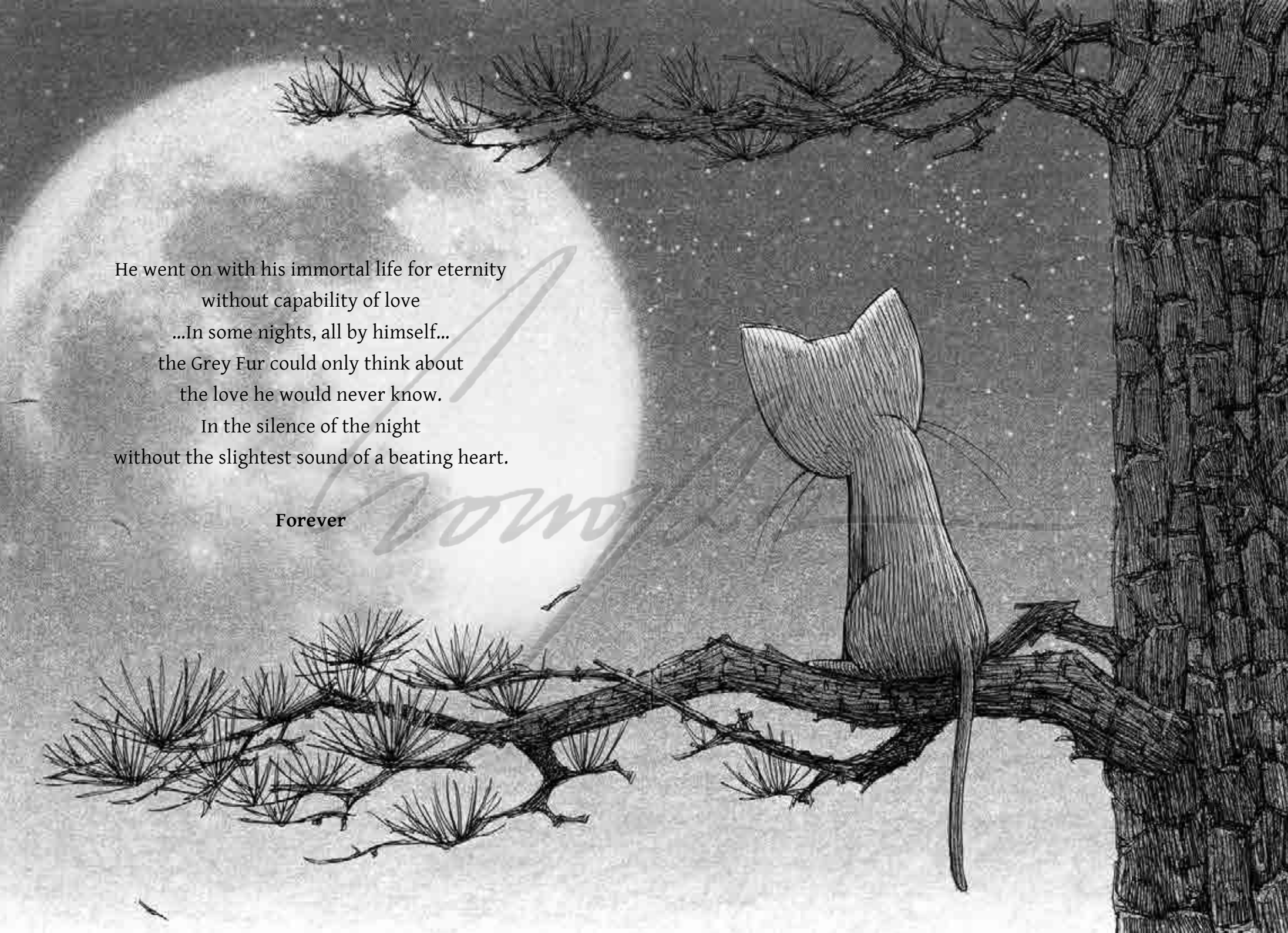


That was all the demon could say.

Its essence faded away
with one delicate flower clutched in its hand
and a heart that beated for the last time.



The Grey Fur was at the dead end.
He could not retrieve his heart.


He went on with his immortal life for eternity
without capability of love
...In some nights, all by himself...
the Grey Fur could only think about
the love he would never know.
In the silence of the night
without the slightest sound of a beating heart.
Forever


Chapter 1