
The Weather-Exposed Skeleton
A visual journey of wind, rain, and wandering.
Based on the records of a traveler seeking
eternity in the fleeting world.

I left my crumbling riverside home to the biting autumn wind.

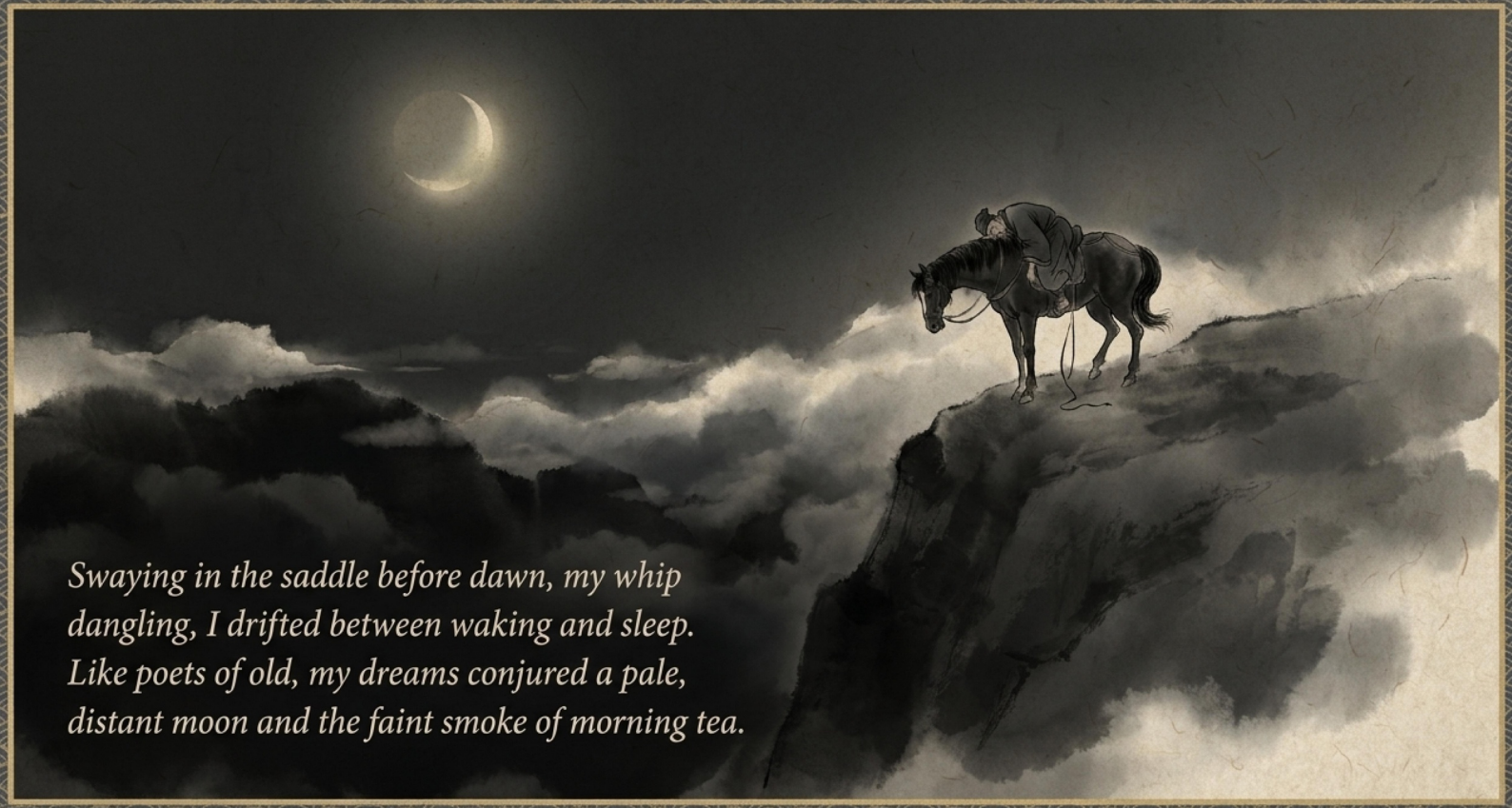
I expected to fall on the road, my bones bleached white by the sun.

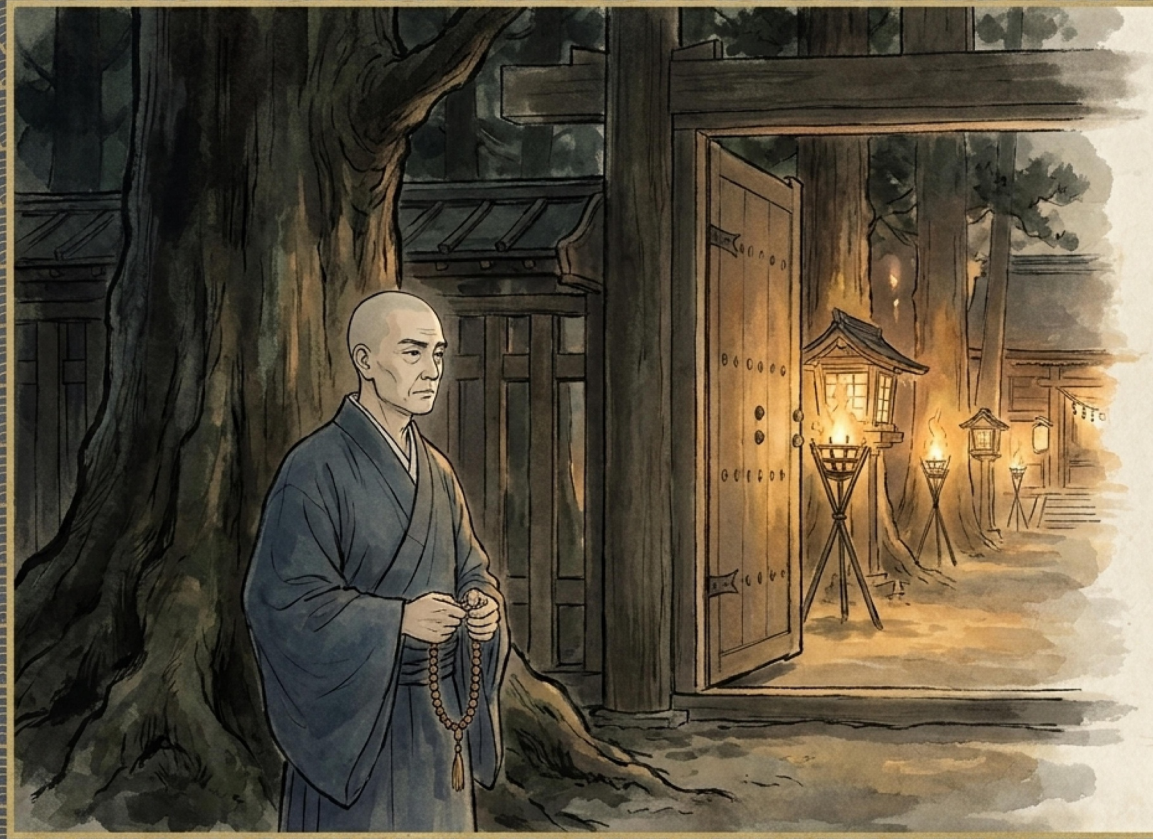
Yet, a decade later, my heart still calls that city my true home.




Heavy rains at the Hakone gates
swallowed the mountains whole.
Still, there is a strange, quiet joy in
imagining a majestic peak hidden
behind a thick curtain of dreary fog.

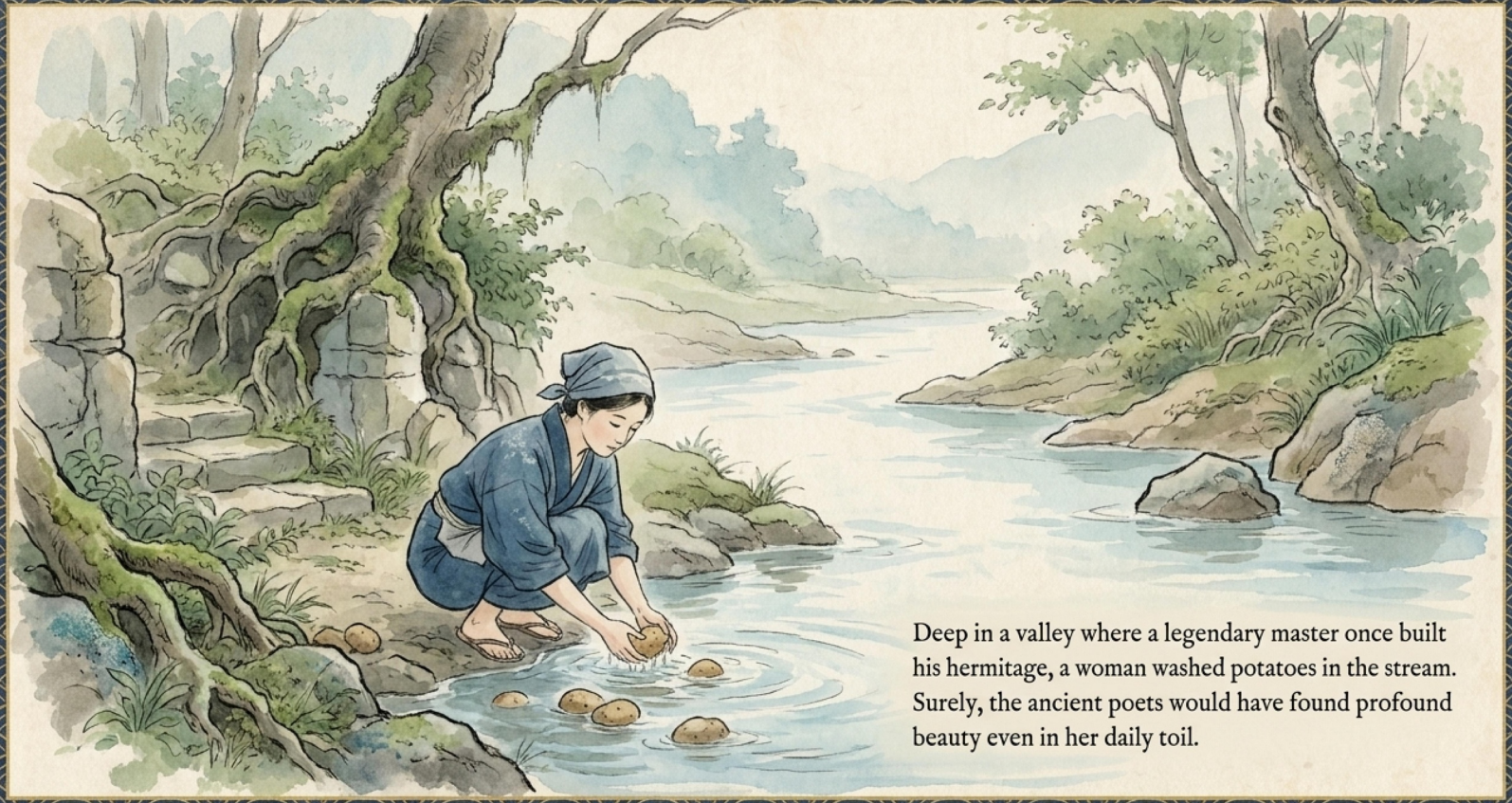

Ceaseless rains swelled the river, halting our steps. We watched roadside blooms wither and fall, devoured by a grazing horse. I imagined friends far away, counting the long autumn days of our absence.


Swaying in the saddle before dawn, my whip
dangling, I drifted between waking and sleep.
Like poets of old, my dreams conjured a pale,
distant moon and the faint smoke of morning tea.



Dusk fell at the grand shrines. With my shaved head and plain robes, I looked the part of a holy man, yet worldly dust clung to me.

Kept from the inner sanctum, I let the roaring wind in the ancient cedars move my soul.



Deep in a valley where a legendary master once built his hermitage, a woman washed potatoes in the stream. Surely, the ancient poets would have found profound beauty even in her daily toil.

At a rustic teahouse, a young girl named Butterfly offered me pure white silk, asking for a verse. I wrote:

A winged creature rests upon a tender orchid,
its wings made fragrant by burning incense.



Arriving at a fellow poet's hermitage,
I found a simple scene: a spray of ivy trained
across the wall, and a few stalks of bamboo
standing ready to invite the coming tempest.





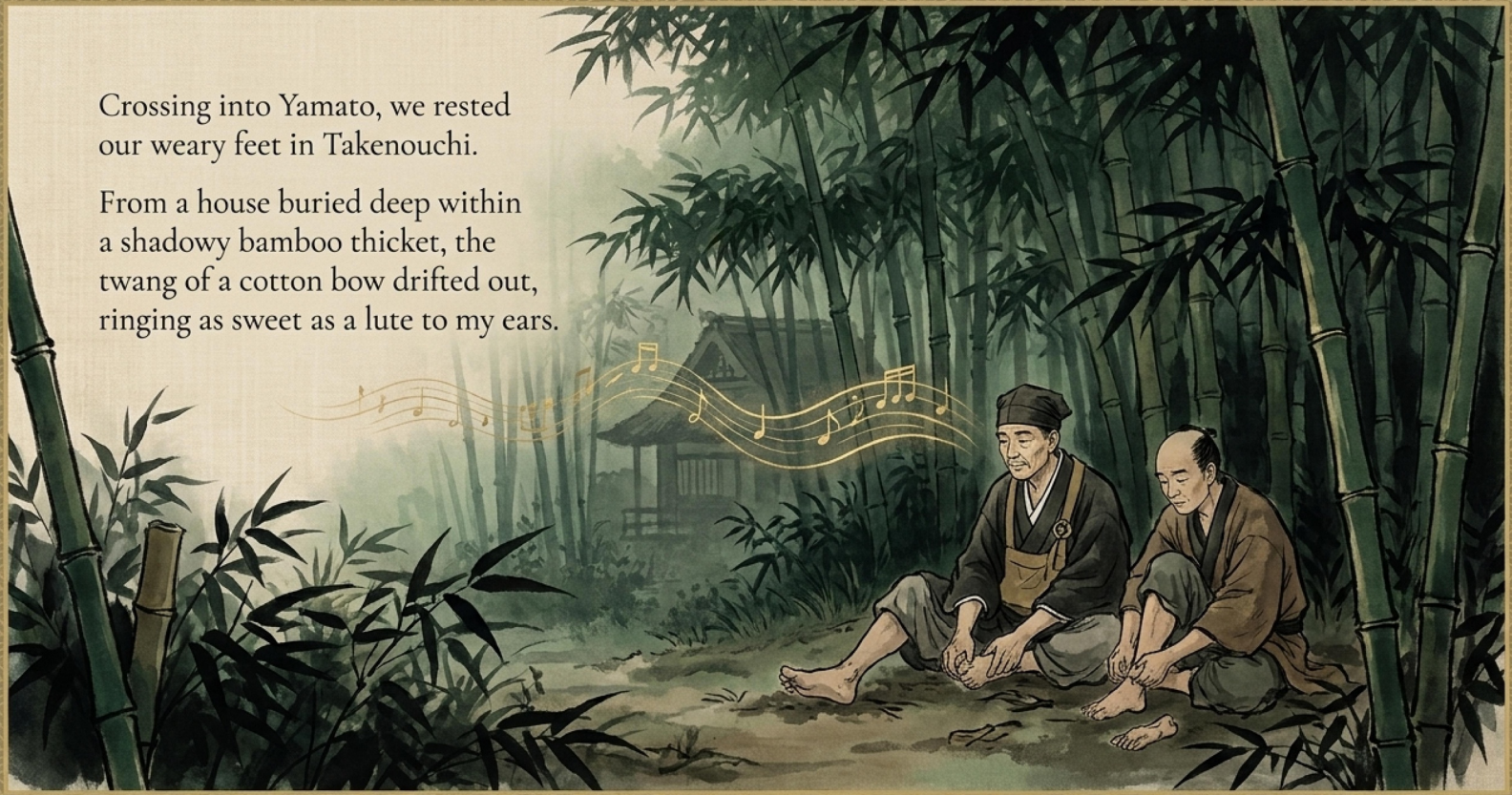
Returning home in September, I found my mother's garden bitten to nothing by frost. My brothers had aged, their faces lined, their hair white. We rejoiced simply to be alive in this changed world.



Gemini Notebook

Crossing into Yamato, we rested
our weary feet in Takenouchi.

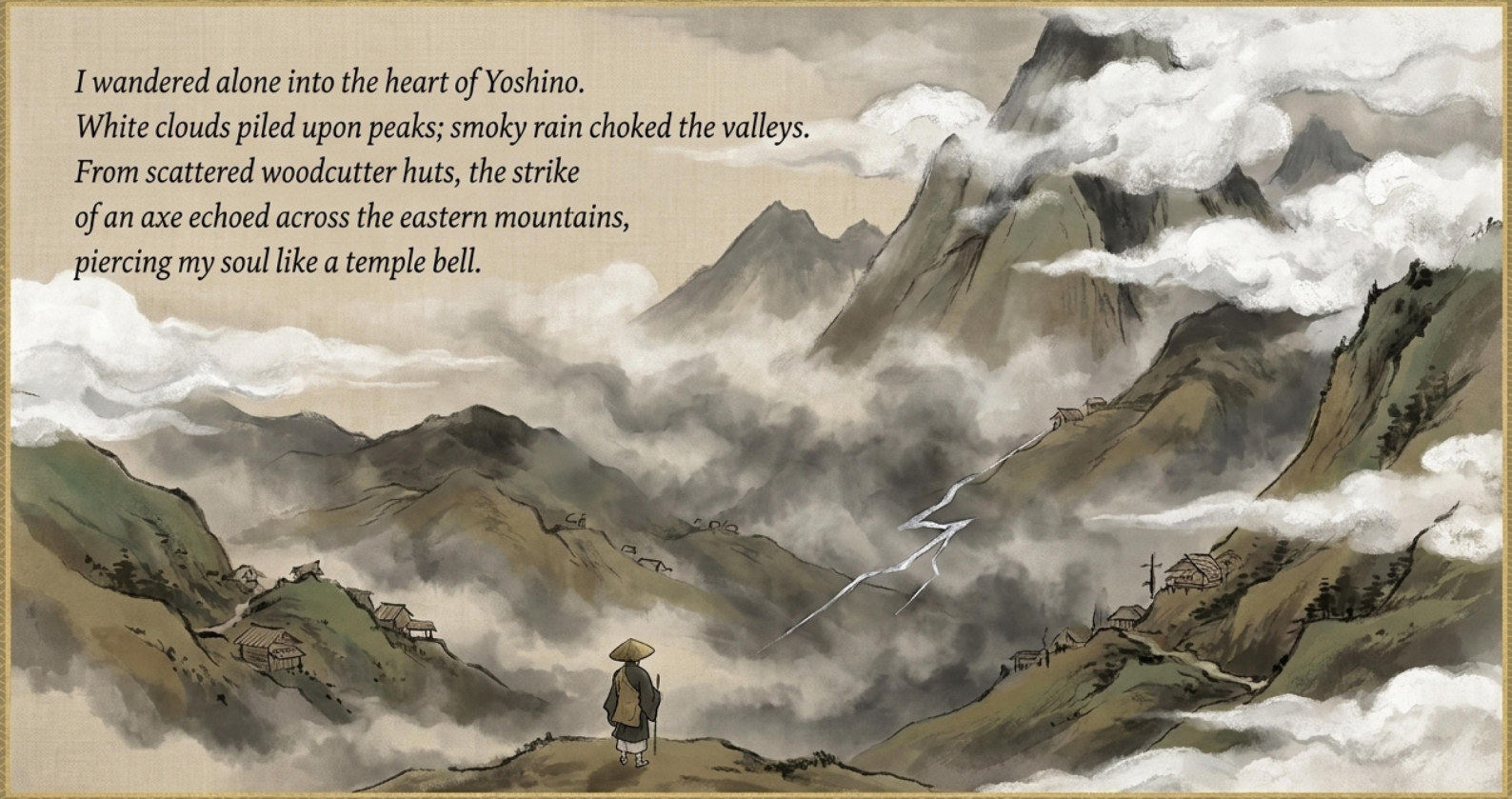
From a house buried deep within
a shadowy bamboo thicket, the
twang of a cotton bow drifted out,
ringing as sweet as a lute to my ears.

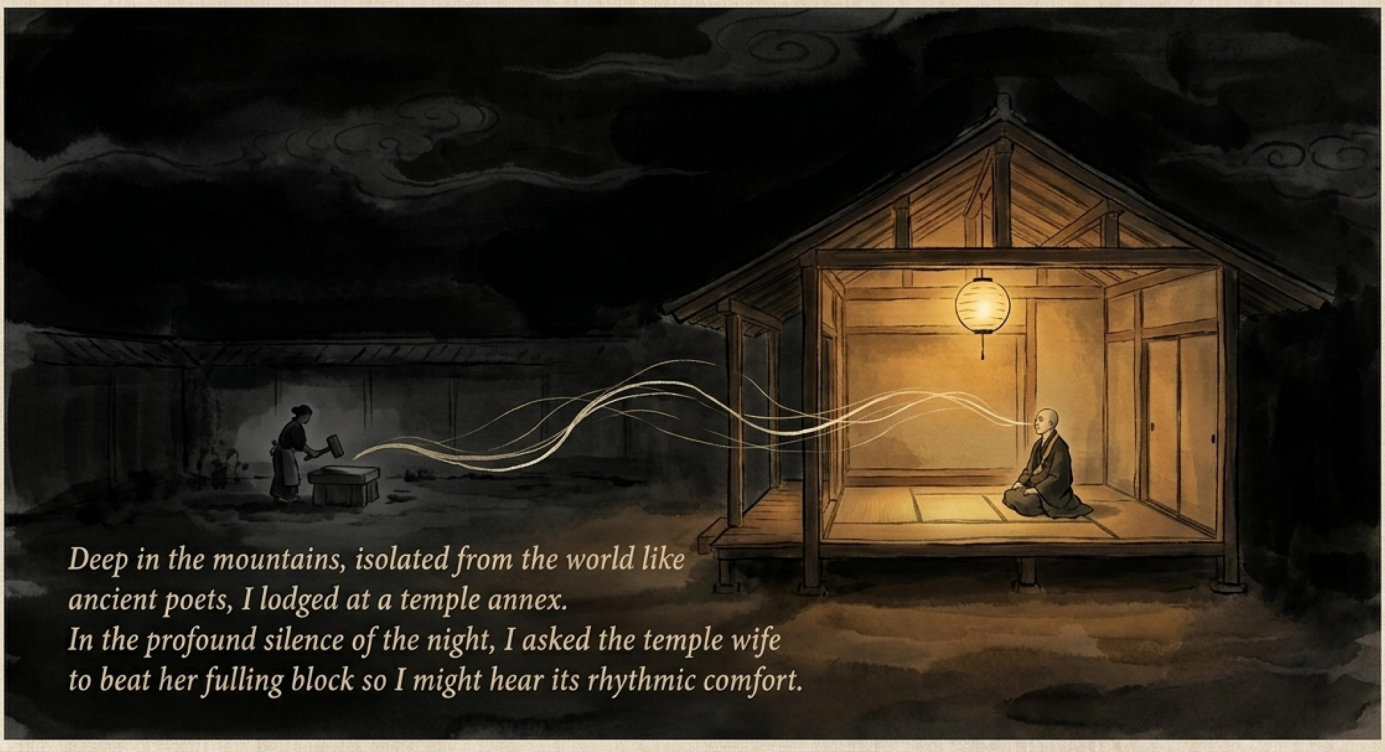


The Scale of Endurance

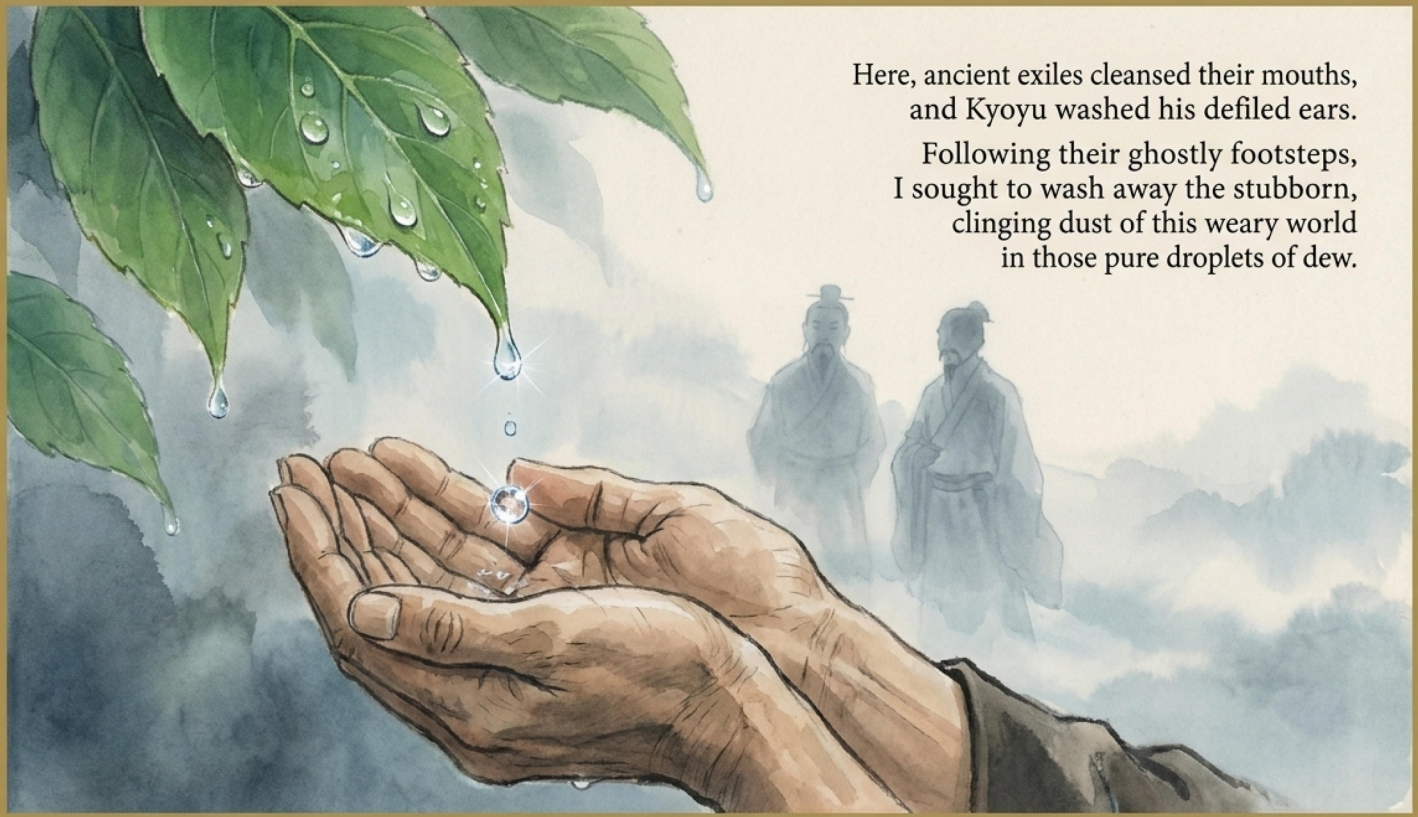


The Taima pine stood massive, surviving a thousand years of axes under divine grace. Compared to this eternal law, how many mortal priests and delicate morning glories have perished beneath its unchanging boughs?


I wandered alone into the heart of Yoshino.
White clouds piled upon peaks; smoky rain choked the valleys.
From scattered woodcutter huts, the strike
of an axe echoed across the eastern mountains,
piercing my soul like a temple bell.


Deep in the mountains, isolated from the world like
ancient poets, I lodged at a temple annex.
In the profound silence of the night, I asked the temple wife
to beat her fulling block so I might hear its rhythmic comfort.


Behind the innermost temple lay Saigyo's grassy hermitage, reachable only by a steep trail blanketed in autumn leaves. The famed spring flowed exactly as the ancient poet described, shedding clear droplets with a resonant, eternal drip-drop.



Here, ancient exiles cleansed their mouths,
and Kyoyu washed his defiled ears.

Following their ghostly footsteps,
I sought to wash away the stubborn,
clinging dust of this weary world
in those pure droplets of dew.


Descending the mountain, the late autumn sun poured its level, golden light across Emperor Godaigo's mausoleum.
The royal tomb was choked with tall, weedy grass they call "reminiscence"—a fragile, living memory of bygone days.



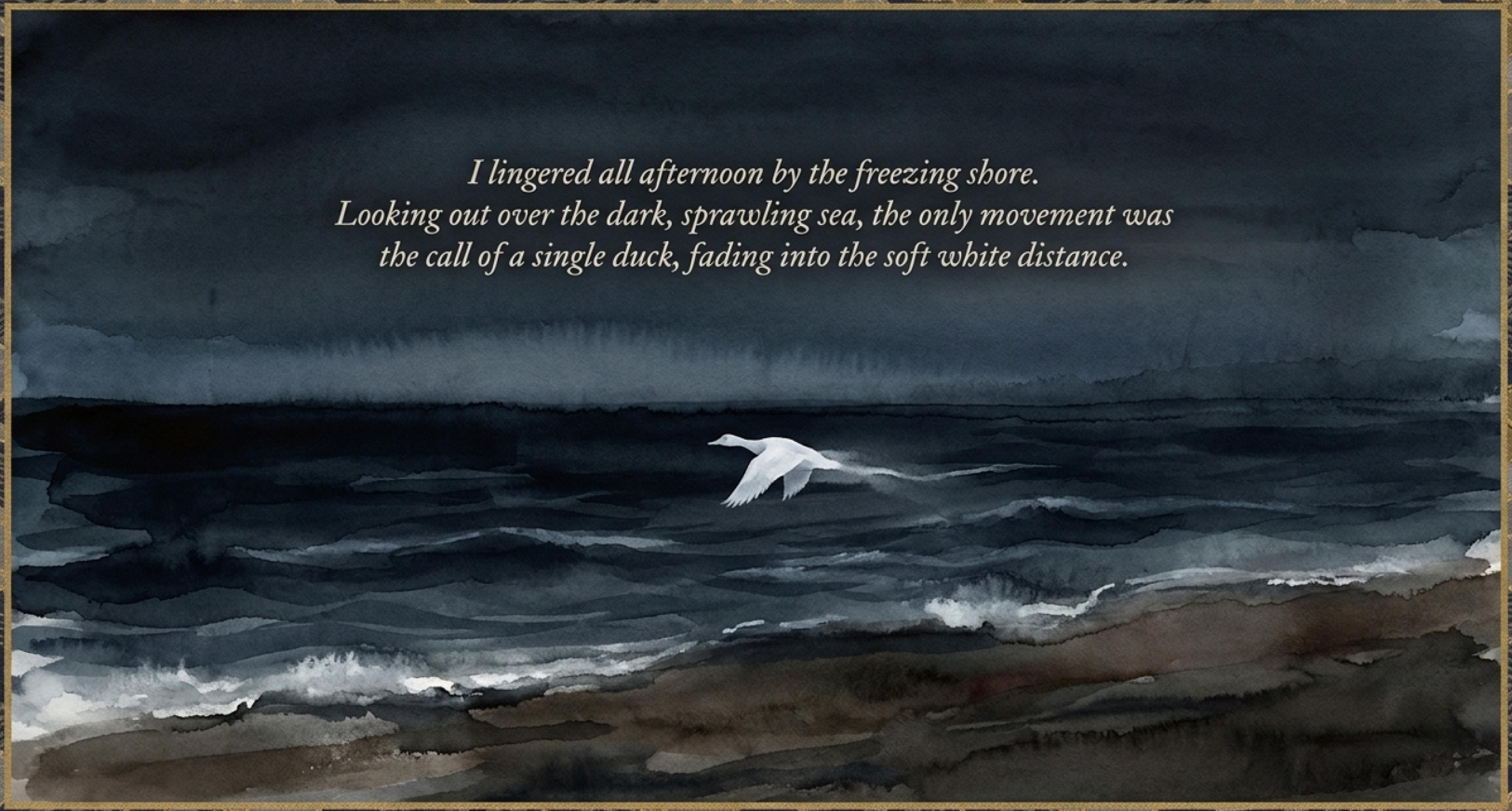
In Yamanaka, the autumn wind raged bitterly around the tomb of Lady Tokiwa. I wrapped my robes tighter, feeling that this freezing gale was a perfect, lingering echo of the cold, wicked heart of her master, Lord Yoshitomo.



The year’s end finds me wandering.
My woven hat is heavy with snow—
a beautiful burden I would gladly
sell to town merchants.



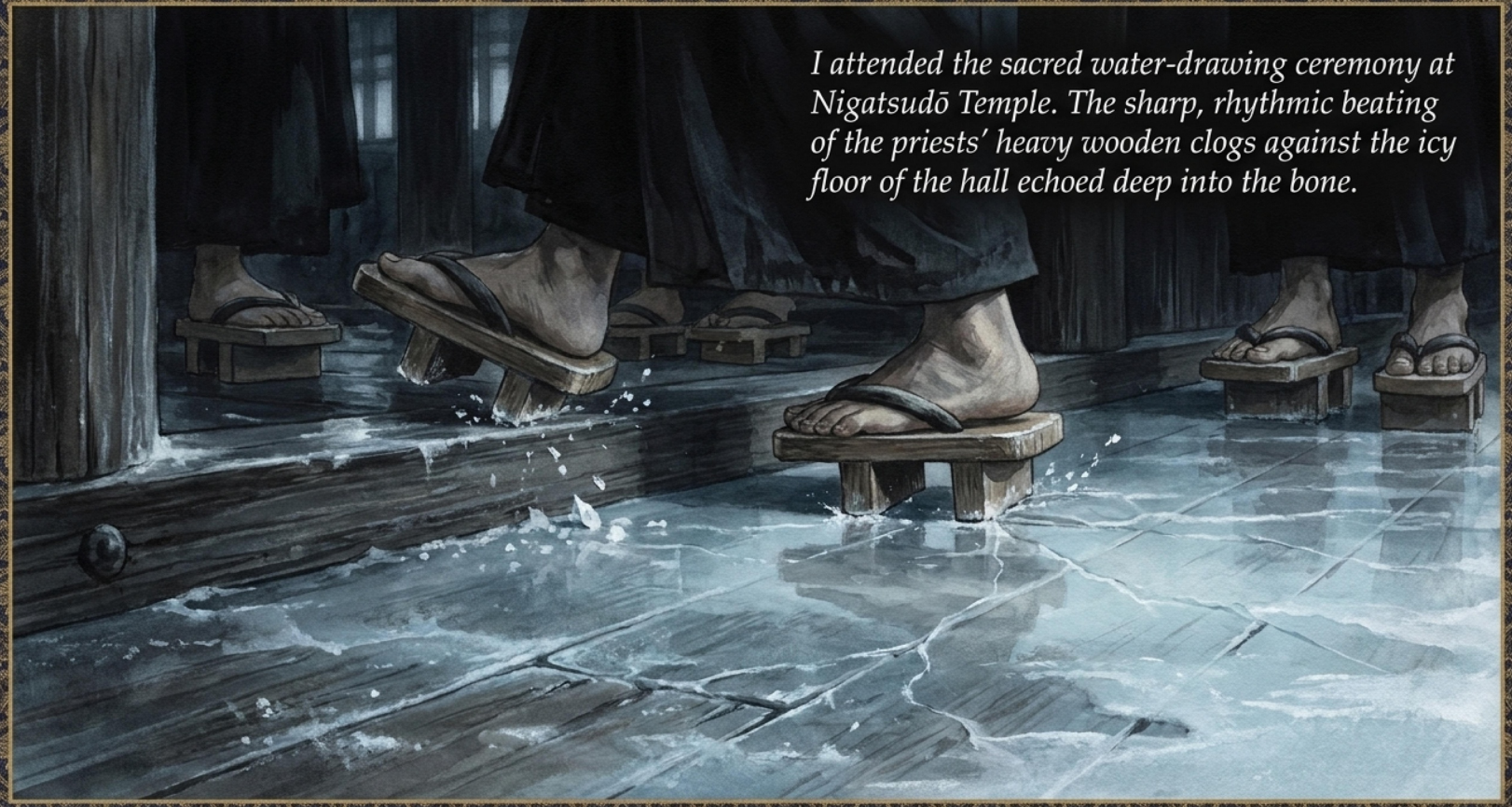
On such a pristine morning,
even a solitary horse
becomes a wondrous sight.

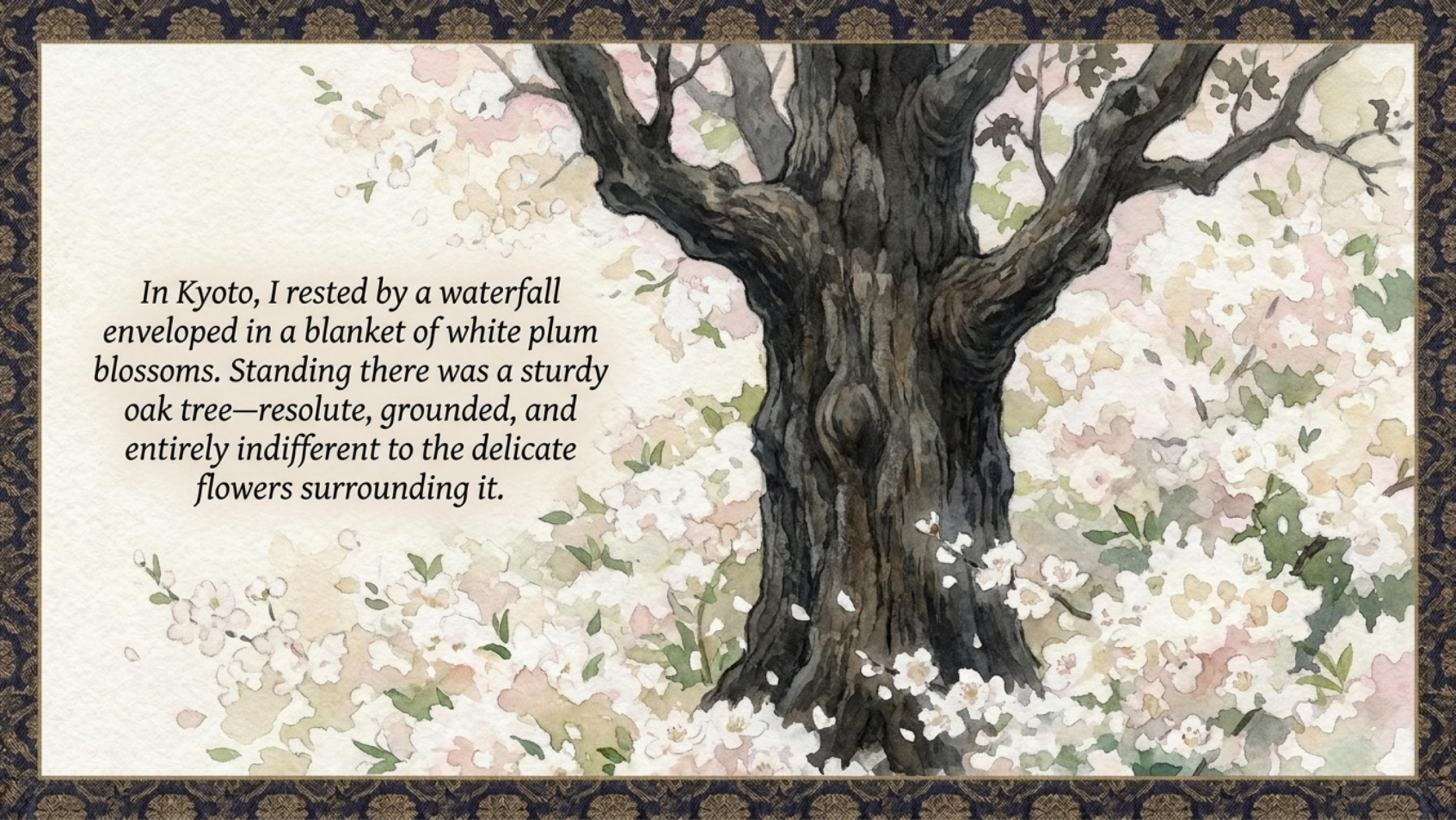

I lingered all afternoon by the freezing shore.
Looking out over the dark, sprawling sea, the only movement was
the call of a single duck, fading into the soft white distance.

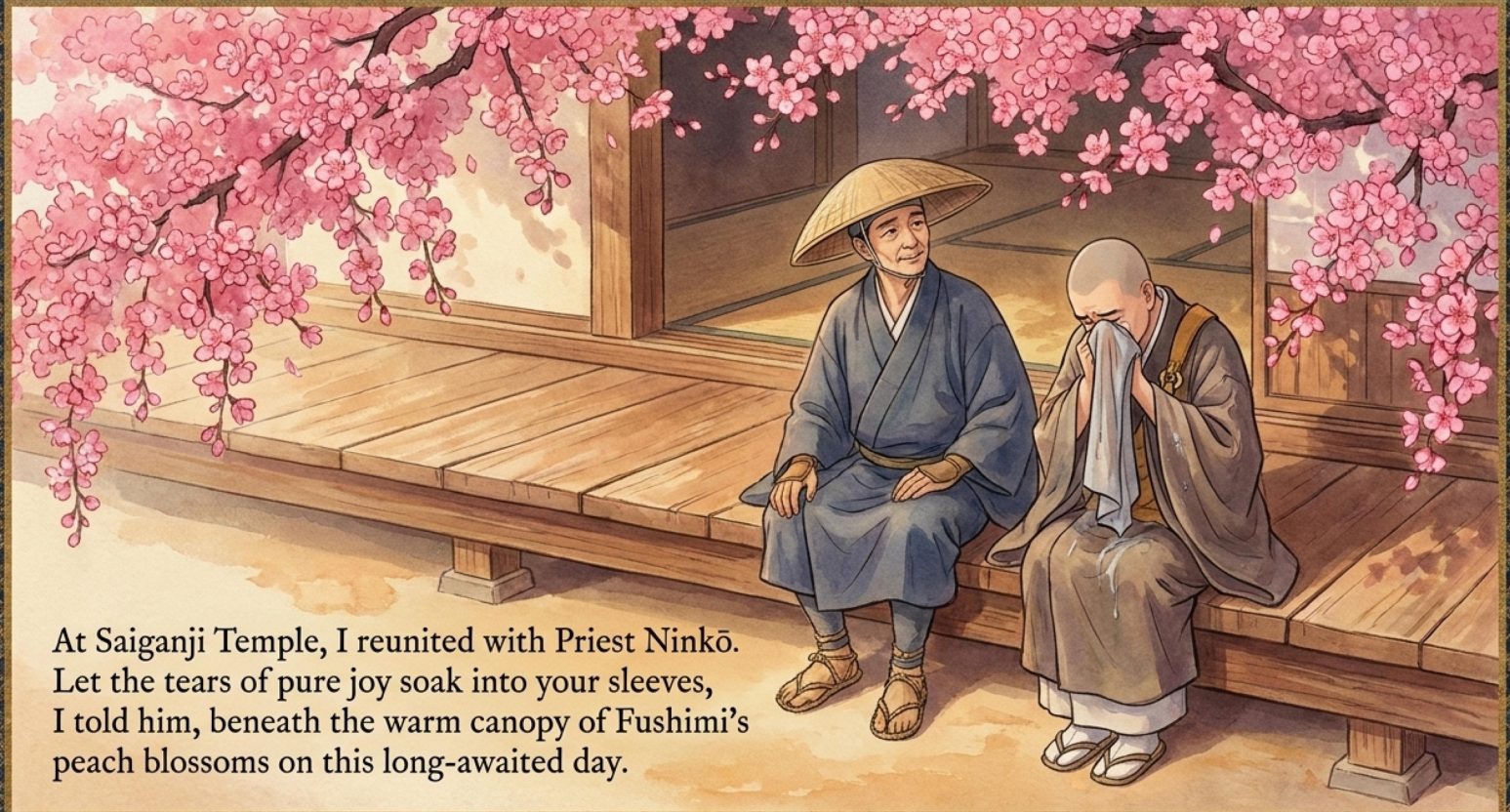


Still in my straw sandals and travel hat, I finally reached my native village for the New Year.
I watched a cow pass by, heavy with festive rice cakes and ferns, welcoming the season.


The bitter cold eventually yielded.
Walking the path toward Nara, I marveled at how spring
dresses even the most nameless, ordinary hills in
delicate, shimmering films of morning mist.


I attended the sacred water-drawing ceremony at Nigatsudō Temple. The sharp, rhythmic beating of the priests' heavy wooden clogs against the icy floor of the hall echoed deep into the bone.

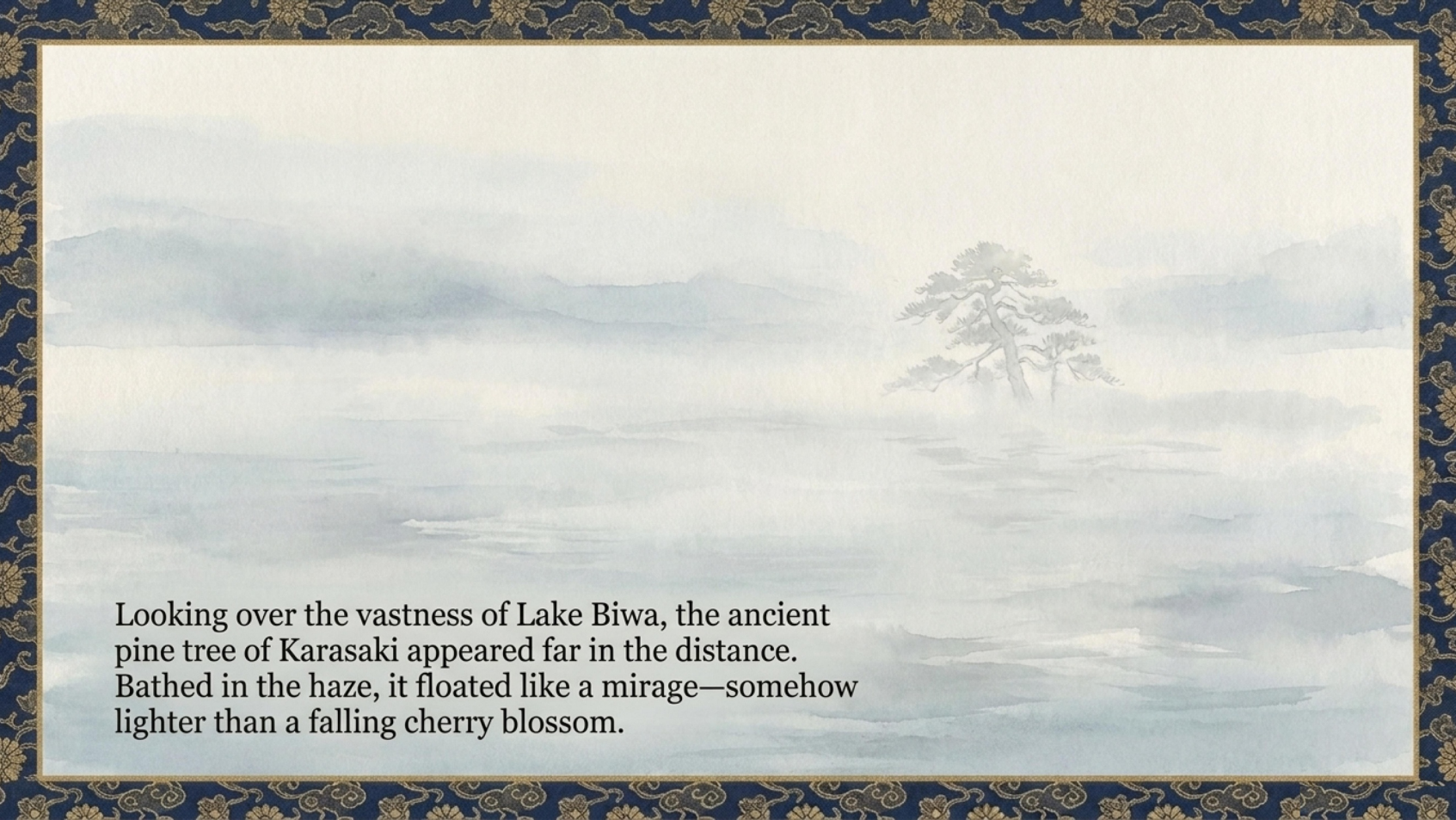

In Kyoto, I rested by a waterfall enveloped in a blanket of white plum blossoms. Standing there was a sturdy oak tree—resolute, grounded, and entirely indifferent to the delicate flowers surrounding it.


At Saiganji Temple, I reunited with Priest Ninkō.
Let the tears of pure joy soak into your sleeves,
I told him, beneath the warm canopy of Fushimi's
peach blossoms on this long-awaited day.

Crossing the treacherous mountain pass toward Ōtsu,
the journey was exhausting.

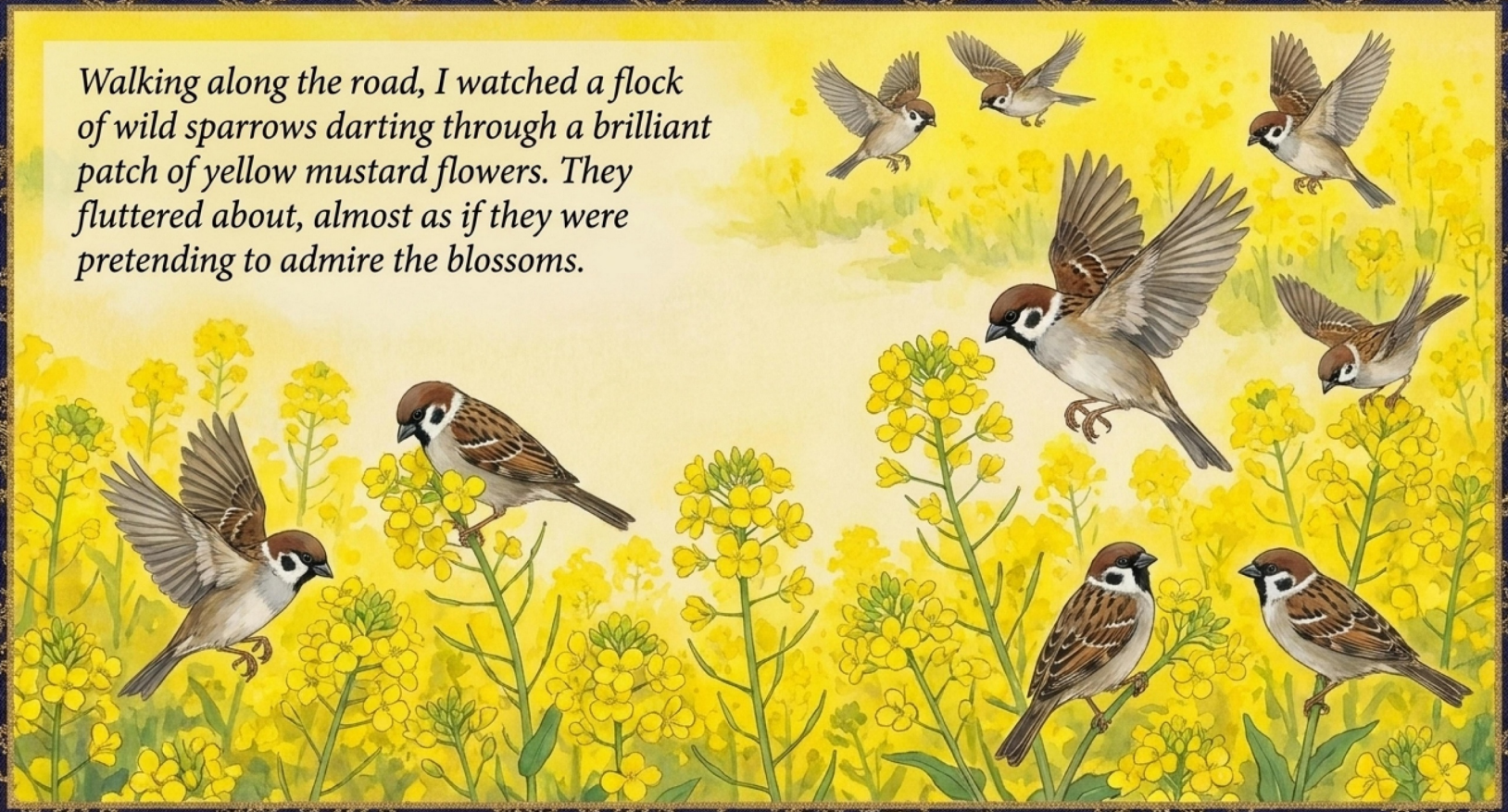
Yet, picking my way through the harsh rocks,
I found myself quietly greeted by the face of
a single, smiling violet.

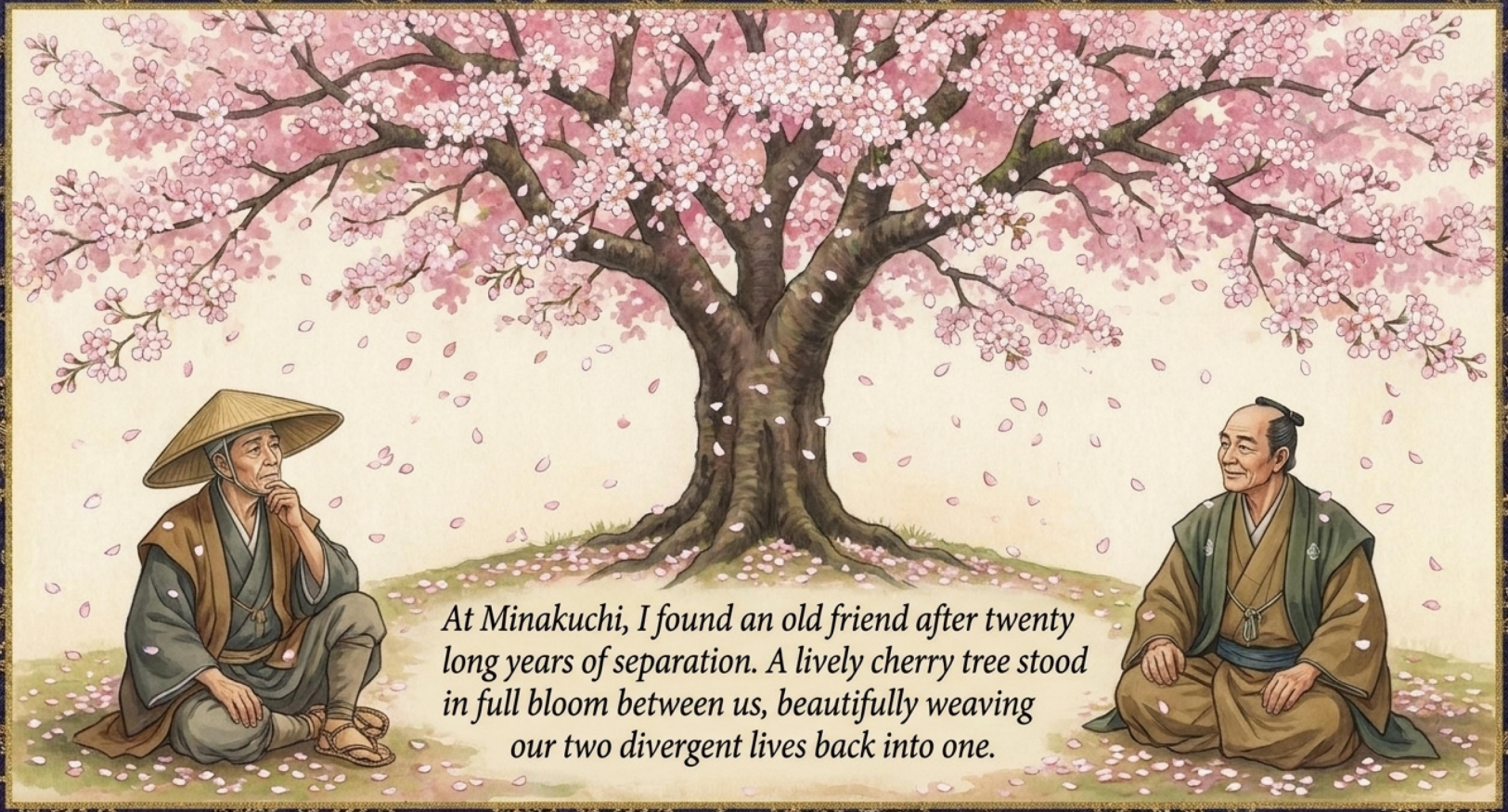


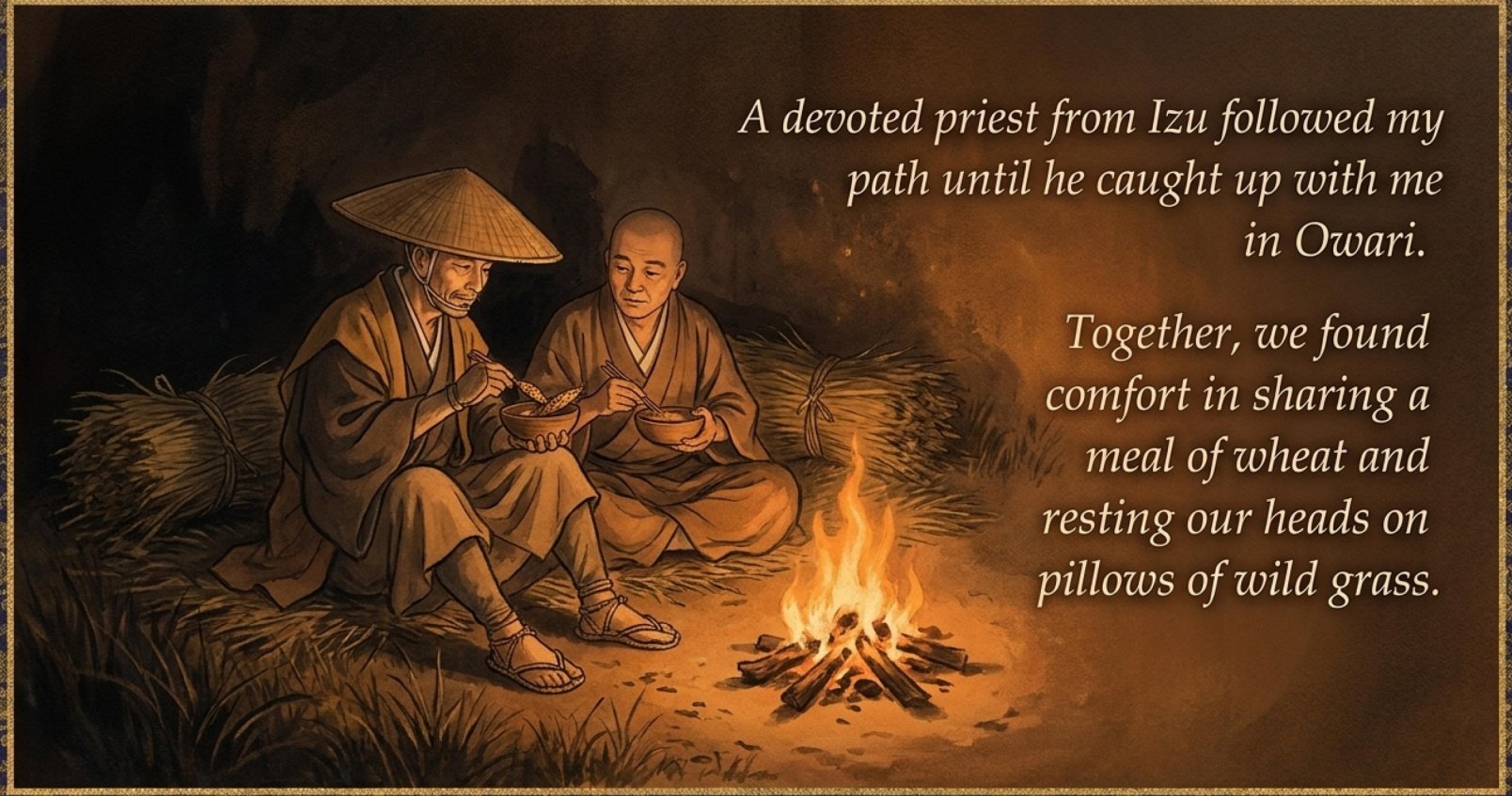


Looking over the vastness of Lake Biwa, the ancient pine tree of Karasaki appeared far in the distance. Bathed in the haze, it floated like a mirage—somehow lighter than a falling cherry blossom.


I stopped at a roadside shop. Before me lay a striking contrast: a delicate branch of wild azalea carelessly tossed into a bucket, while right behind it, a woman tore fiercely into the meat of a dried codfish.


Walking along the road, I watched a flock of wild sparrows darting through a brilliant patch of yellow mustard flowers. They fluttered about, almost as if they were pretending to admire the blossoms.

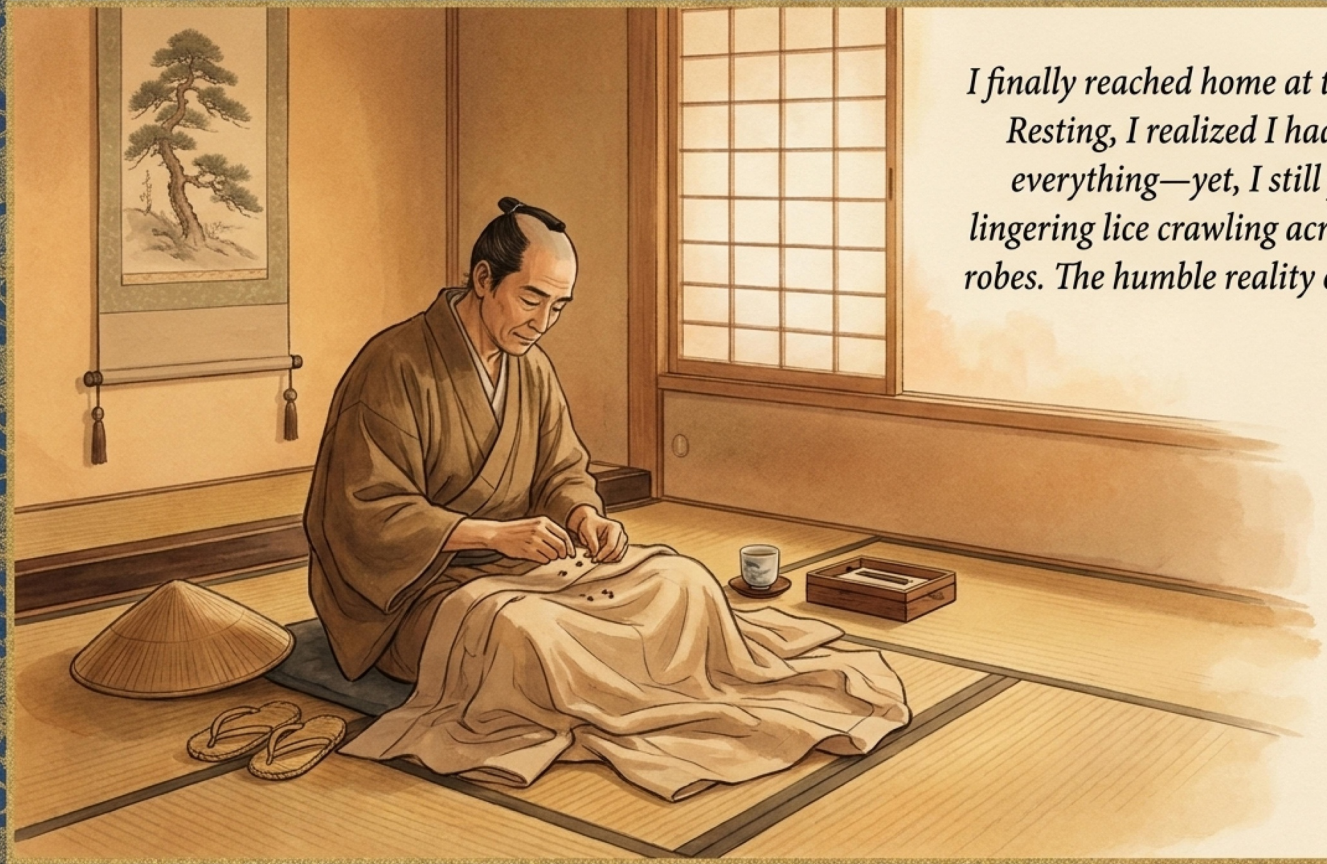

At Minakuchi, I found an old friend after twenty long years of separation. A lively cherry tree stood in full bloom between us, beautifully weaving our two divergent lives back into one.


A devoted priest from Izu followed my path until he caught up with me in Owari.
Together, we found comfort in sharing a meal of wheat and resting our heads on pillows of wild grass.

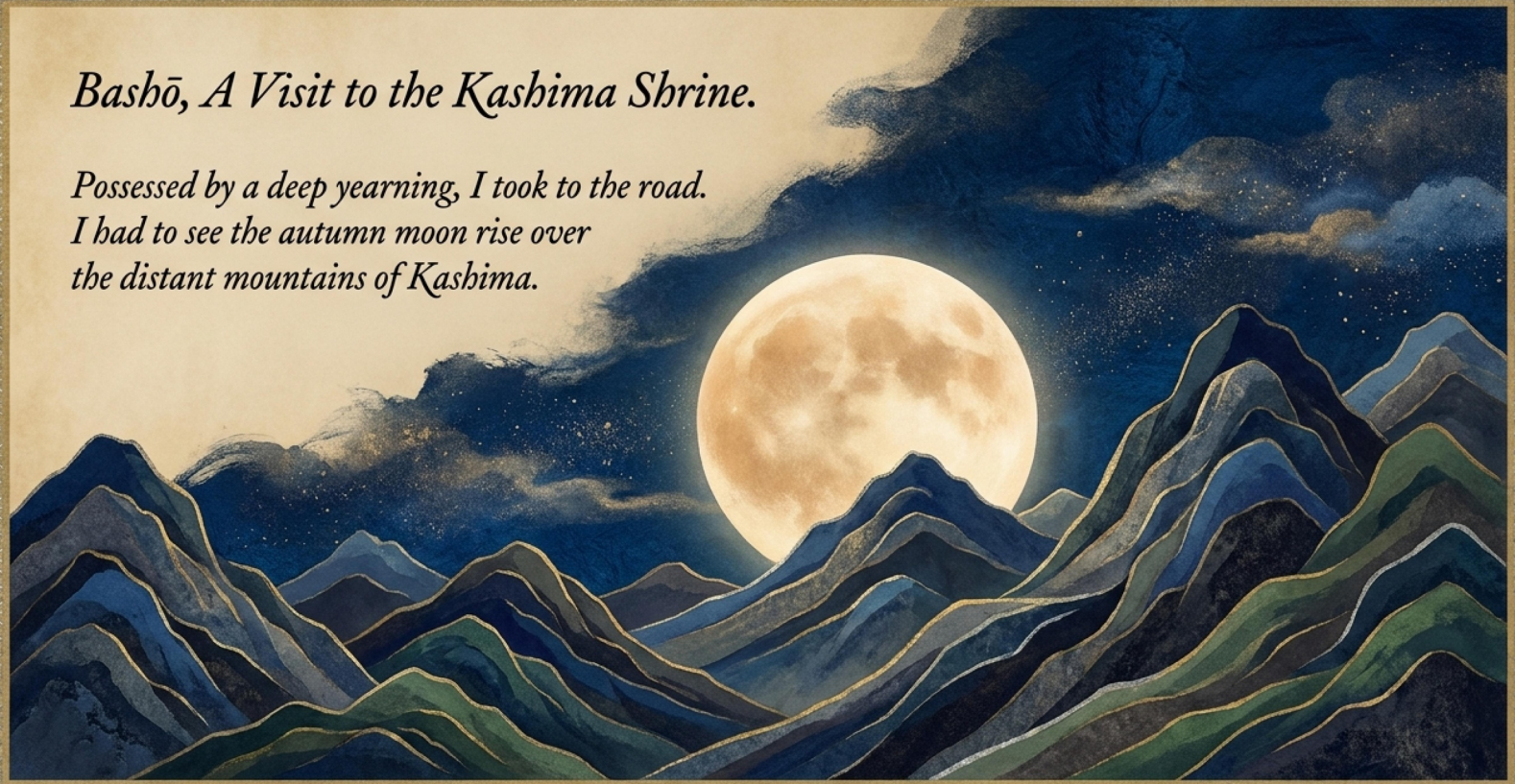
The journey brings both grief and sweetness. I wept upon hearing of Priest Daiten's passing, mourning the scattered blossoms. Yet soon after, I departed a friend's house, having drank deeply from the sweetness of a rich peony.







I finally reached home at the end of April. Resting, I realized I had shed nearly everything—yet, I still picked a few lingering lice crawling across my summer robes. The humble reality of the wanderer.


Bashō, A Visit to the Kashima Shrine.
Possessed by a deep yearning, I took to the road.
I had to see the autumn moon rise over
the distant mountains of Kashima.

Three travelers shared the path.

A youth unburdened.



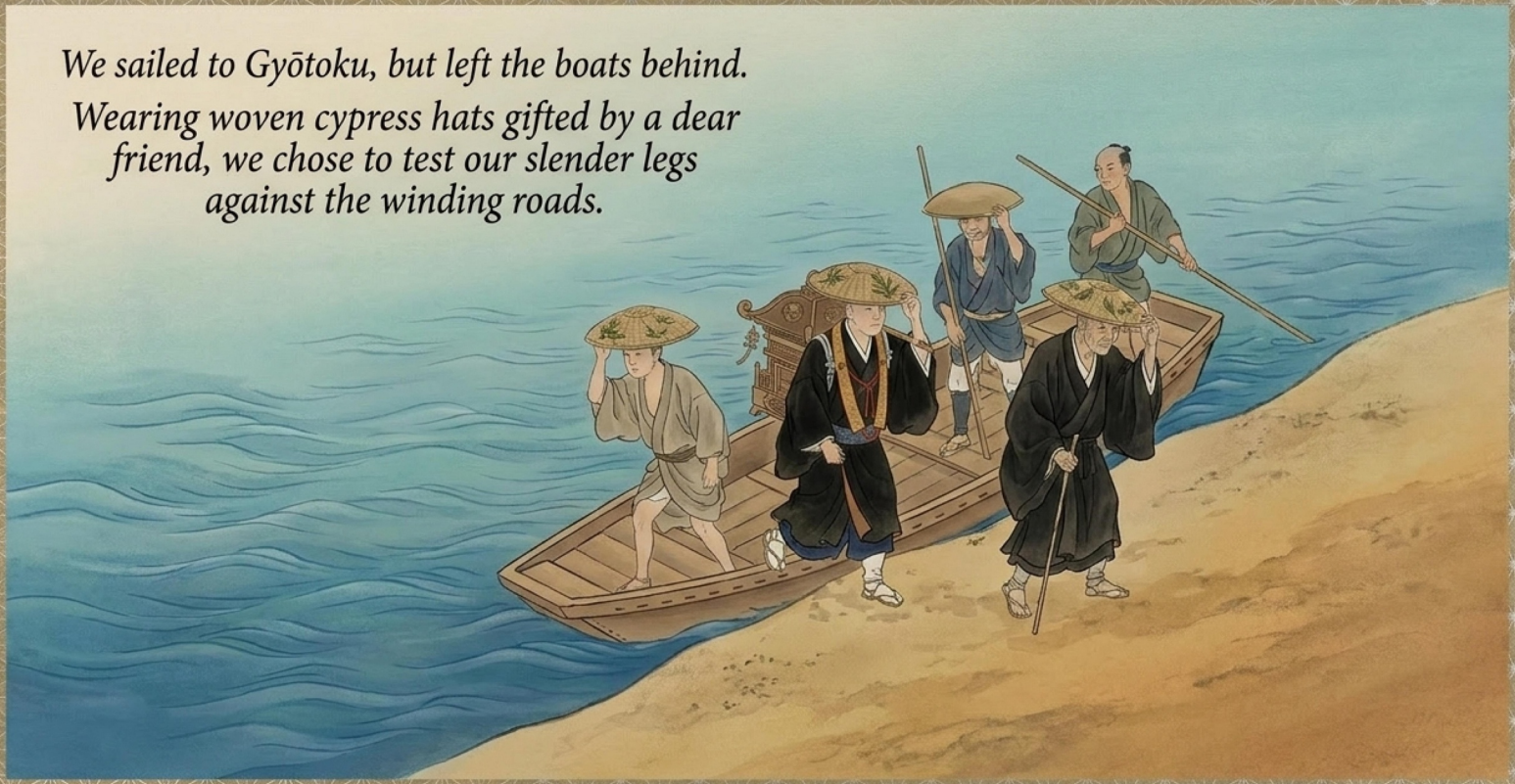
A wandering priest striding boldly, carrying a sacred shrine on his back.

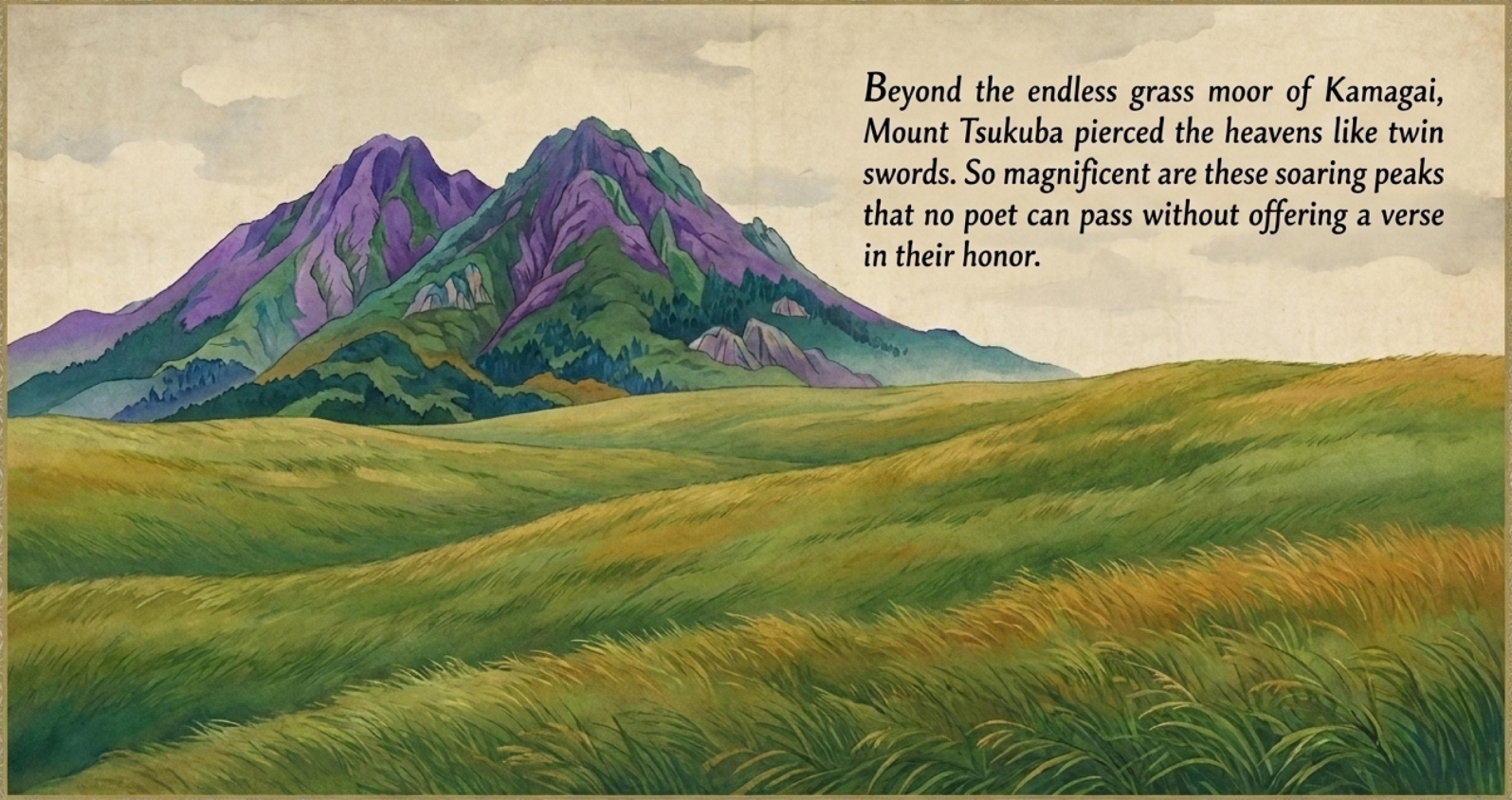


And I, clad in black, wavering endlessly between the spiritual and the earthly.



We sailed to Gyōtoku, but left the boats behind.
Wearing woven cypress hats gifted by a dear friend, we chose to test our slender legs against the winding roads.



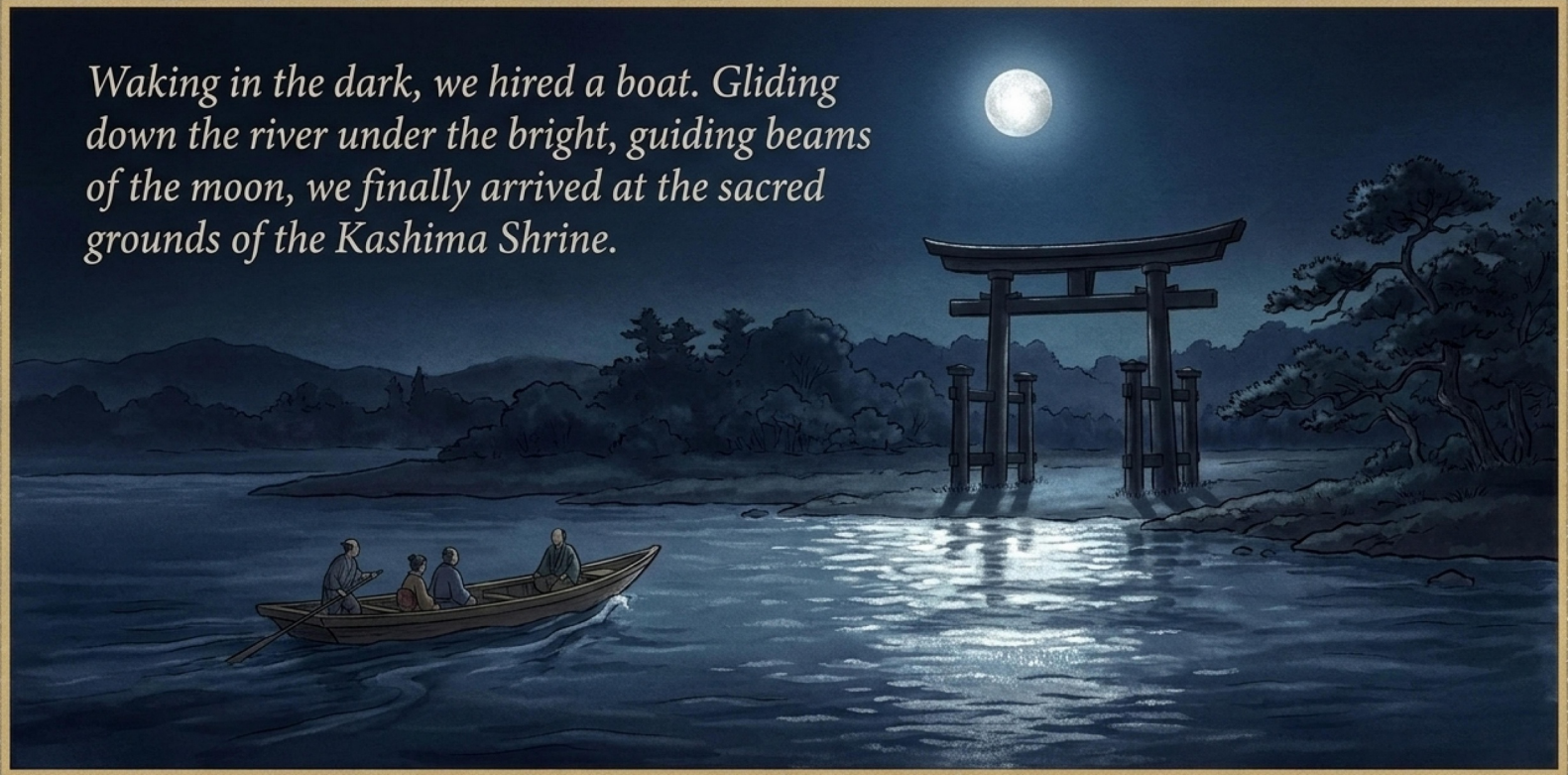


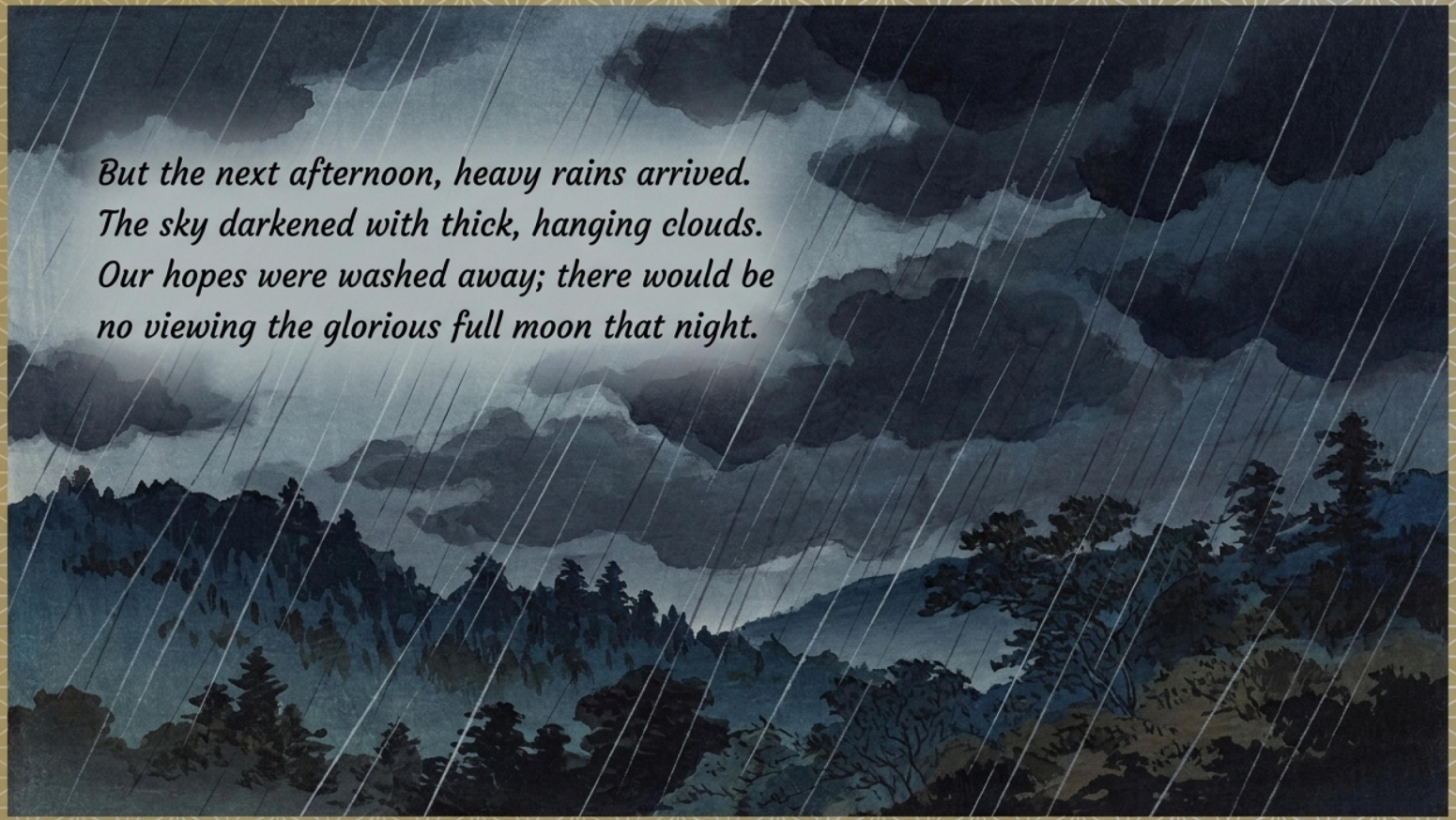
Beyond the endless grass moor of Kamagai, Mount Tsukuba pierced the heavens like twin swords. So magnificent are these soaring peaks that no poet can pass without offering a verse in their honor.

The landscape was a tangled tapestry of wild bush-clover, bellflowers, and tall pampas. Wild stags called out to their mates, while herds of horses trampled proudly through the autumn blooms.

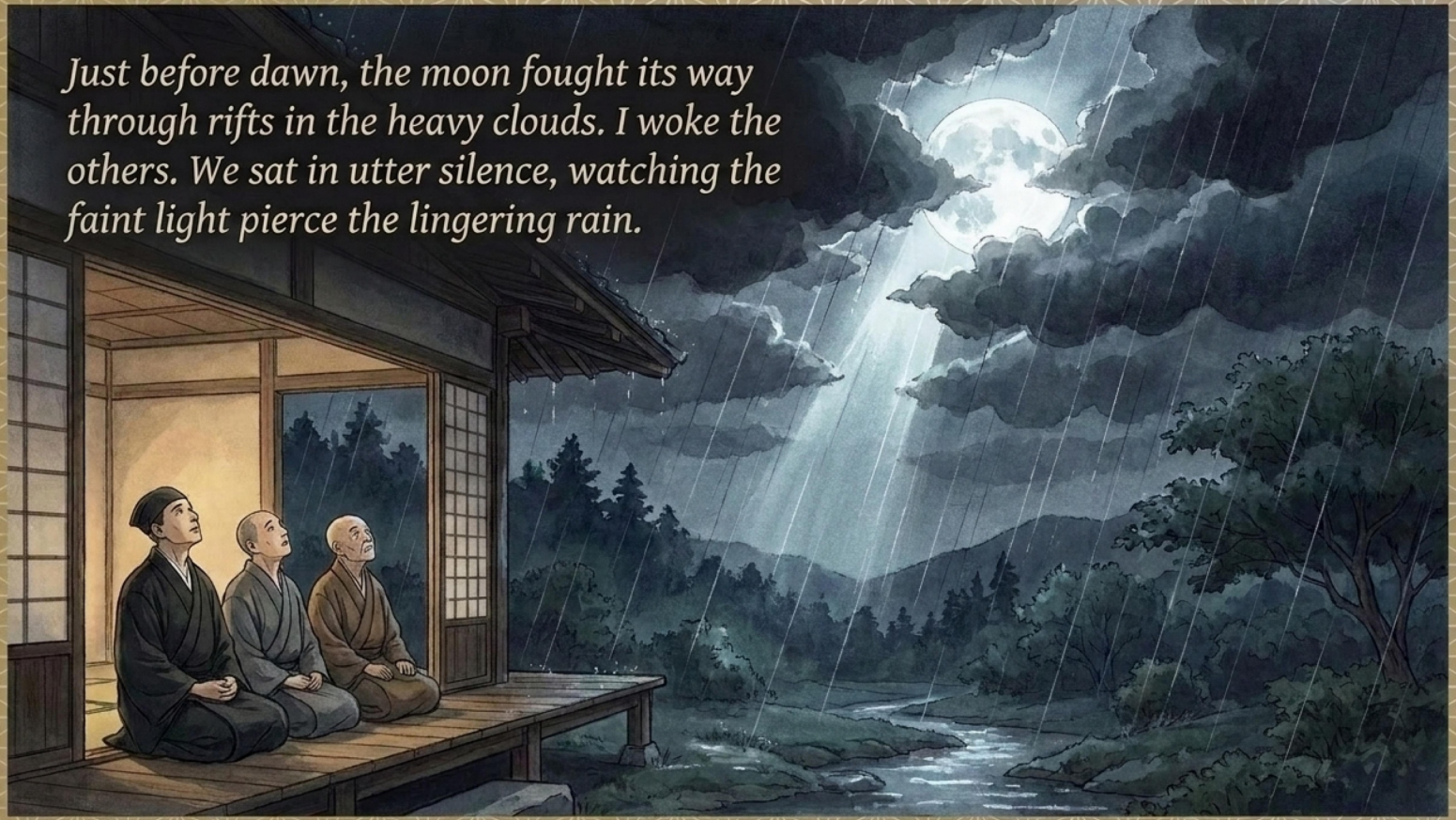


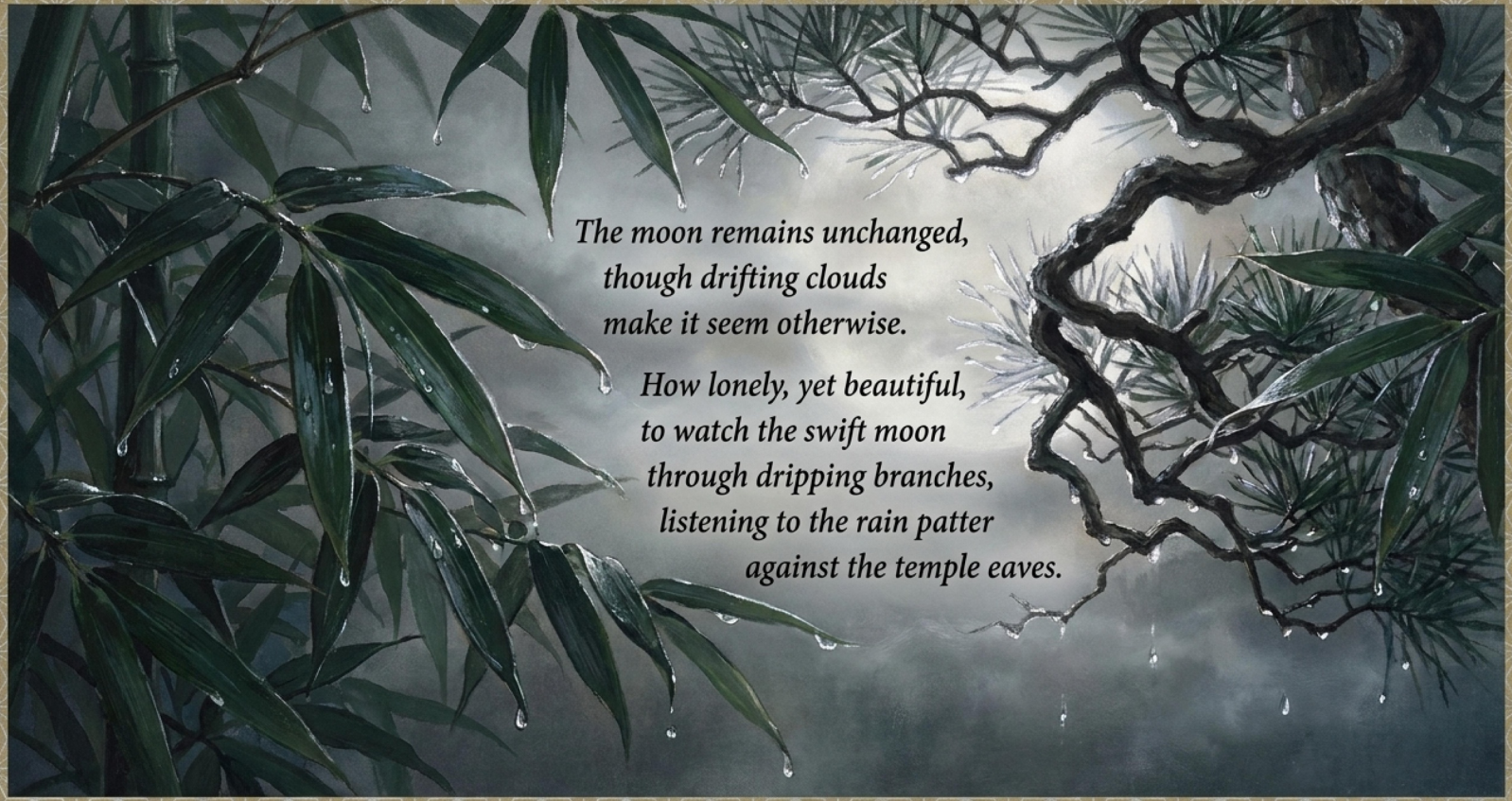

At nightfall by the River Tone, fishermen set wicker traps for salmon. We rested in one of their humble huts, finding quick sleep amidst the overpowering scent of the day's catch.

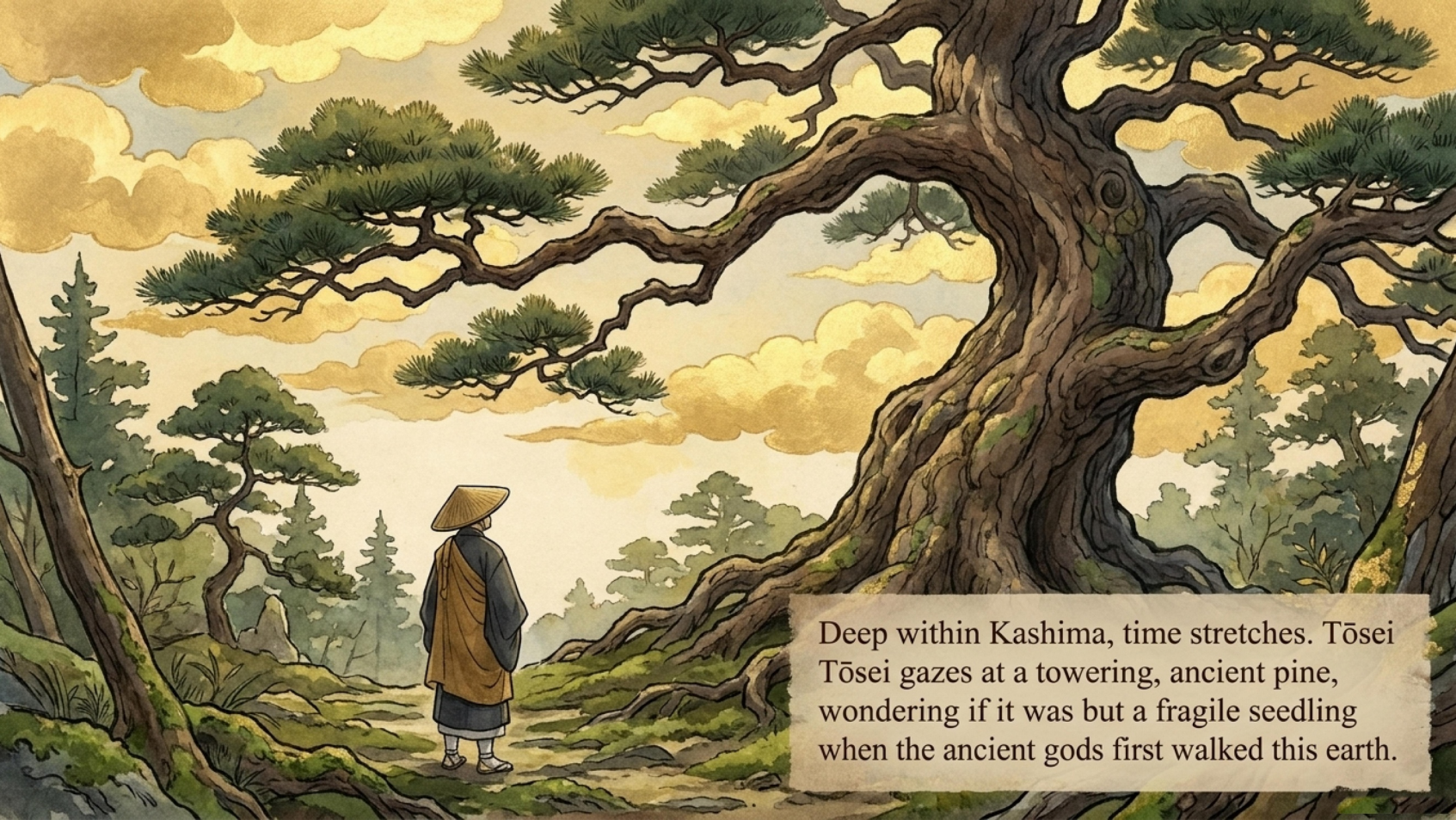

Waking in the dark, we hired a boat. Gliding down the river under the bright, guiding beams of the moon, we finally arrived at the sacred grounds of the Kashima Shrine.


But the next afternoon, heavy rains arrived.
The sky darkened with thick, hanging clouds.
Our hopes were washed away; there would be
no viewing the glorious full moon that night.


Seeking shelter at a retired priest's hermitage at the hill's base, I found profound stillness. In that quiet meditation, my fretful disappointment over the hidden moon simply melted away.


Just before dawn, the moon fought its way through rifts in the heavy clouds. I woke the others. We sat in utter silence, watching the faint light pierce the lingering rain.


The moon remains unchanged,
though drifting clouds
make it seem otherwise.
How lonely, yet beautiful,
to watch the swift moon
through dripping branches,
listening to the rain patter
against the temple eaves.


Deep within Kashima, time stretches. Tōsei Tōsei gazes at a towering, ancient pine, wondering if it was but a fragile seedling when the ancient gods first walked this earth.



Before the shrine, Sōha humbles himself. In quiet penitence, he gently wipes the gathered morning dew from the mossy surface of a sacred stone.


The holy presence touches all beasts. Sora watches wild stags drop to their knees before the shrine, their pitiful cries echoing through the trees as if in deep worship.


Leaving the holy grounds, the travelers enter a village.
In half-reaped paddies, a solitary crane stands perfectly still.
Here, Tōsei feels the autumn deepening in the rural silence.


Under the brilliant light of the harvest moon, the sacred meets the everyday. Sōha rolls up his sleeves, joyfully helping the local villagers gather their rice.


The moon commands absolute reverence.
A farmer's child, busy hulling rice, pauses his arduous labor.
His hands fall still as he marvels at the glowing autumn sky.


Standing in a charred field of potato leaves,
Tōsei cannot wait. He rises eagerly on his tiptoes,
stretching to catch the moon's very first ascent.


The path dissolves into wilderness. Sora wades through overgrown bush-clovers in vibrant bloom. Their rich petals brush against him, playfully dyeing his traveling trousers a joyful hue.


In the cool mid-autumn air, nature offers its own harvest.
Wild horses are left to graze freely, resting only when
completely replete among the lush, flowering grasses.


Weary and small against the wild, Tōsei pleads with the overarching bush-clovers. He asks the giant blossoms to shelter their ragged pack of mountain dogs for just one night.

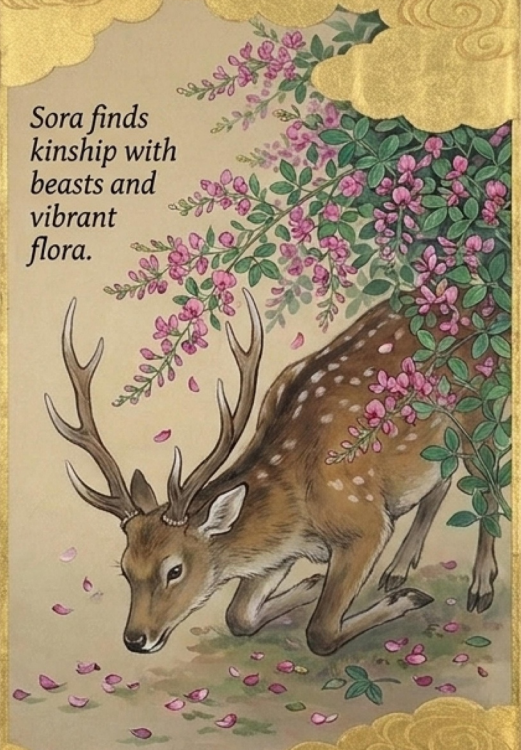
三種一月

Three paths under one moon.

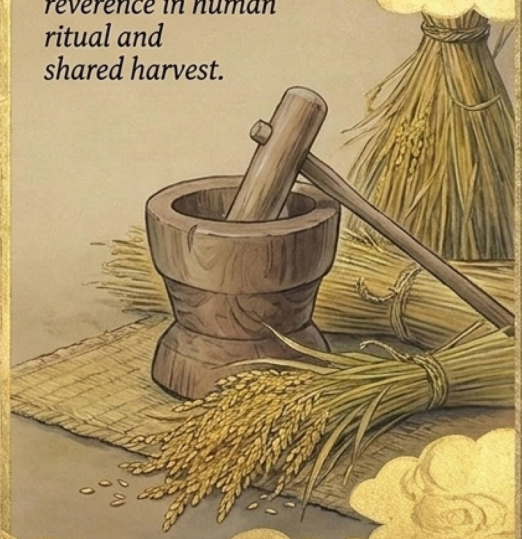


Tōsei seeks vast time and celestial solitude.

Sora finds kinship with beasts and vibrant flora.



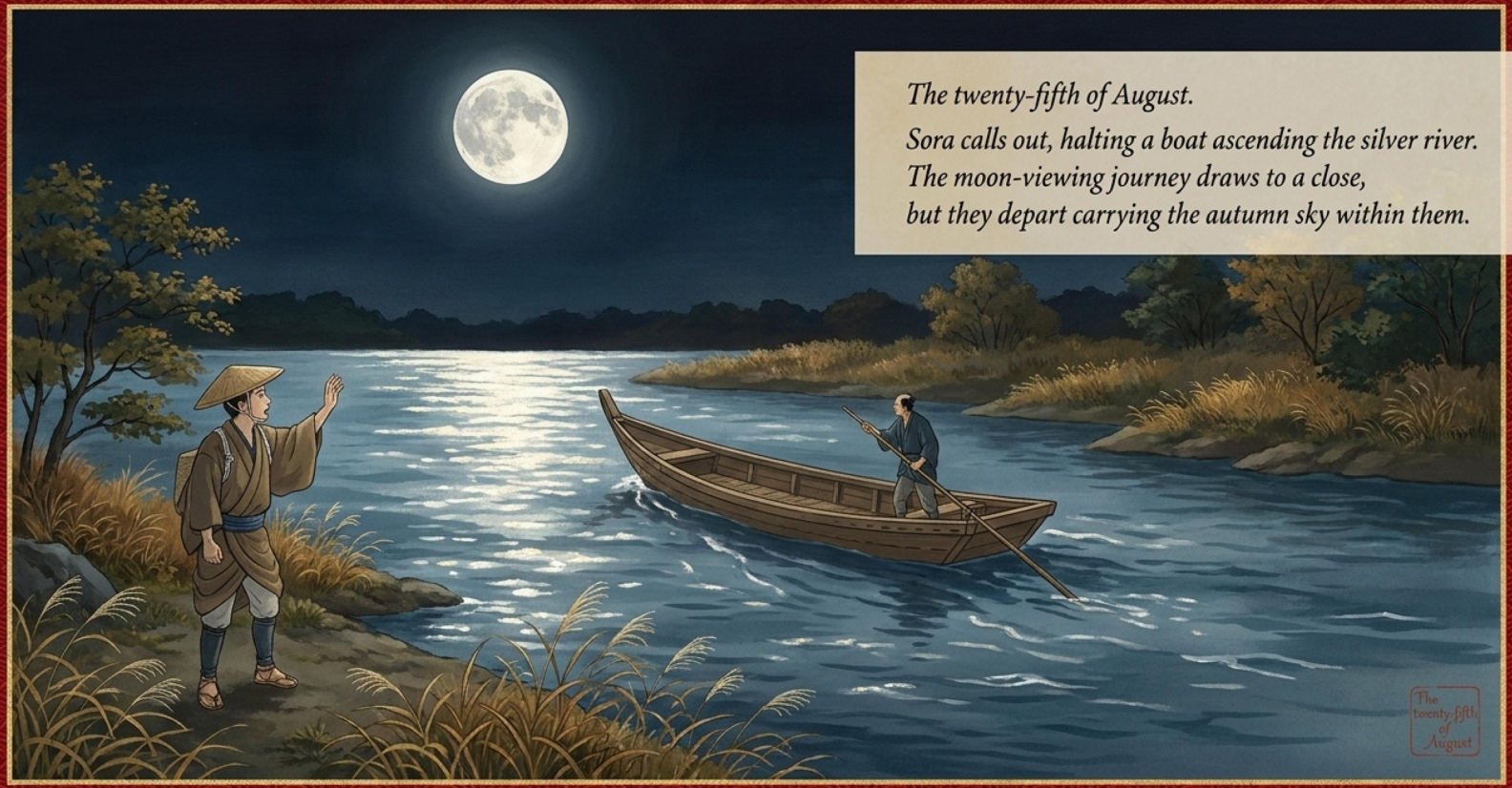
Sōha discovers reverence in human ritual and shared harvest.




The journey brings them to Jijun's home. The kind host welcomes them in, noting how friendly sparrows already sleep peacefully within the warm enclosure of his haystacks.



Resting as a grateful guest, Tōsei observes the quiet home. Surrounded by a thick, dark foliage of cedars, the house itself feels heavy—perfectly pregnant with autumn.


The twenty-fifth of August.
Sora calls out, halting a boat ascending the silver river.
The moon-viewing journey draws to a close,
but they depart carrying the autumn sky within them.
The twenty-fifth of August

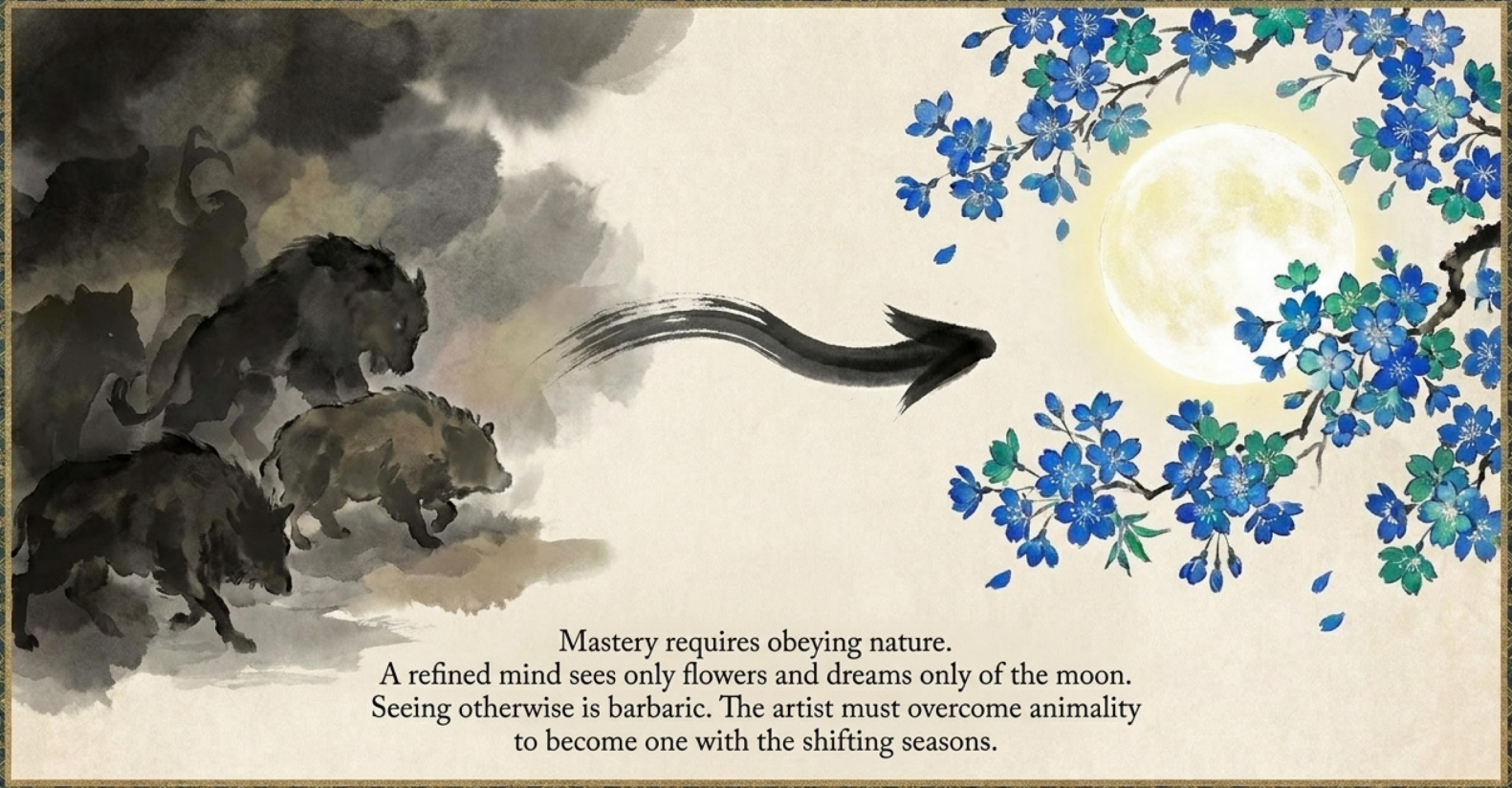
The Records of a Travel-worn Satchel

The Journey of a Wind-Swept Spirit





A wind-swept spirit inhabits my mortal frame.
Seeking security in court and wisdom in scholarship, it found only failure.
It clings blindly to its one unquenchable love: poetry.
It has never found peace.



Mastery requires obeying nature.
A refined mind sees only flowers and dreams only of the moon.
Seeing otherwise is barbaric. The artist must overcome animality
to become one with the shifting seasons.


In October, beneath an uncertain sky, I I departed with vague misgivings.
I step out today as a wandering traveler into the early rains, hoping to sleep among blooming sasanqua flowers.

Generous friends supplied winter gear,
farewell poems, and travel money.

“Though setting out in winter,
spring will pack your bundle with cherry blossoms.”

I almost suffered the illusion of being an important man.





Past masters perfected the factual road diary. I cannot equal them by listing ordinary weather. My journal captures random images left lingering in my heart. Consider it a dreamer's rambling, intoxicated babble.

Dreamer's Rambling



Captures lingering images, isolated feelings, and personal reflections. Intoxicated babble and rambling talk of the dreaming.



Stopping at Narumi, the vast distance weighed heavily on me. The dark sea seemed to sever me from Kyoto. *I have only traveled halfway, yet heavy snow clouds already press upon my head.*

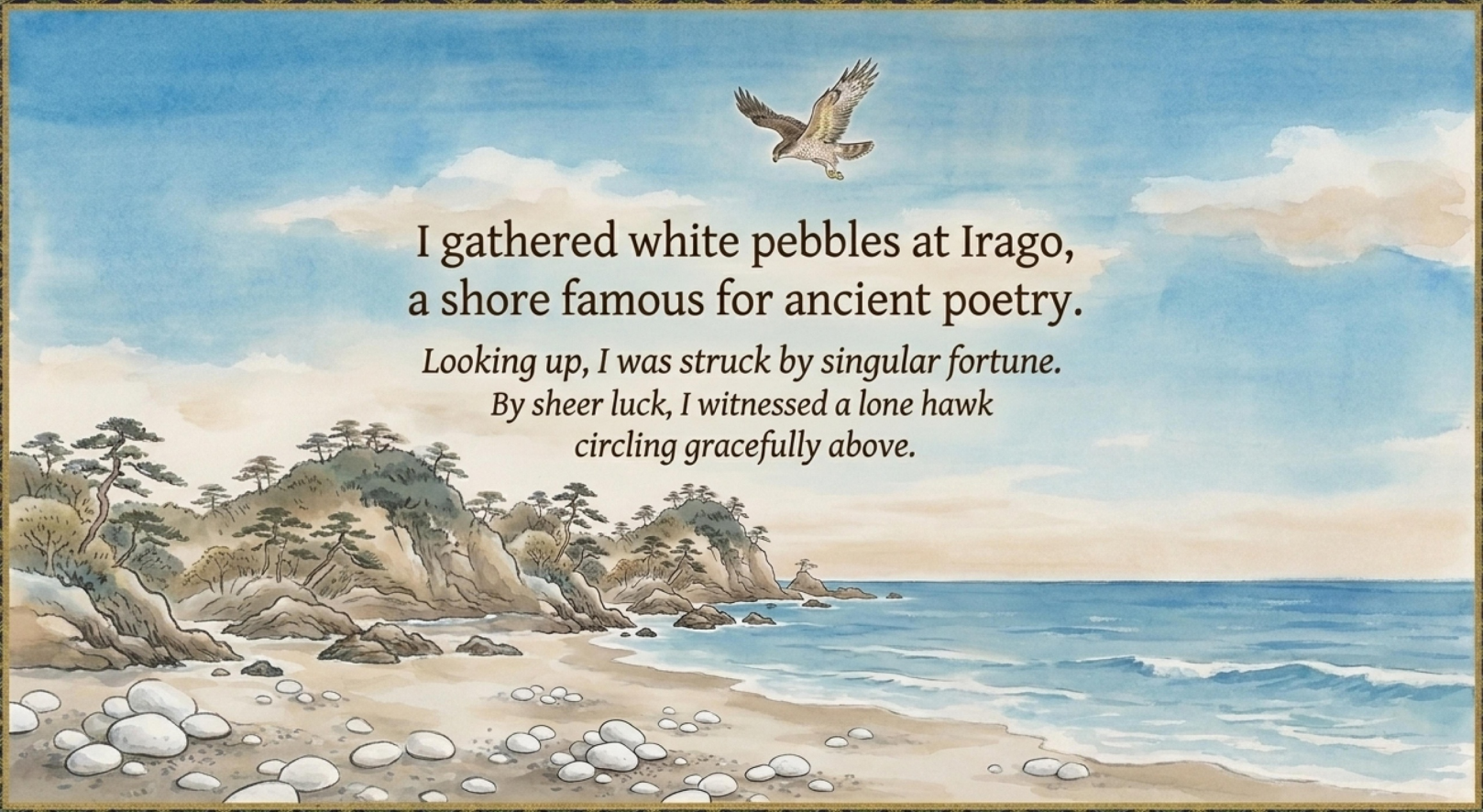


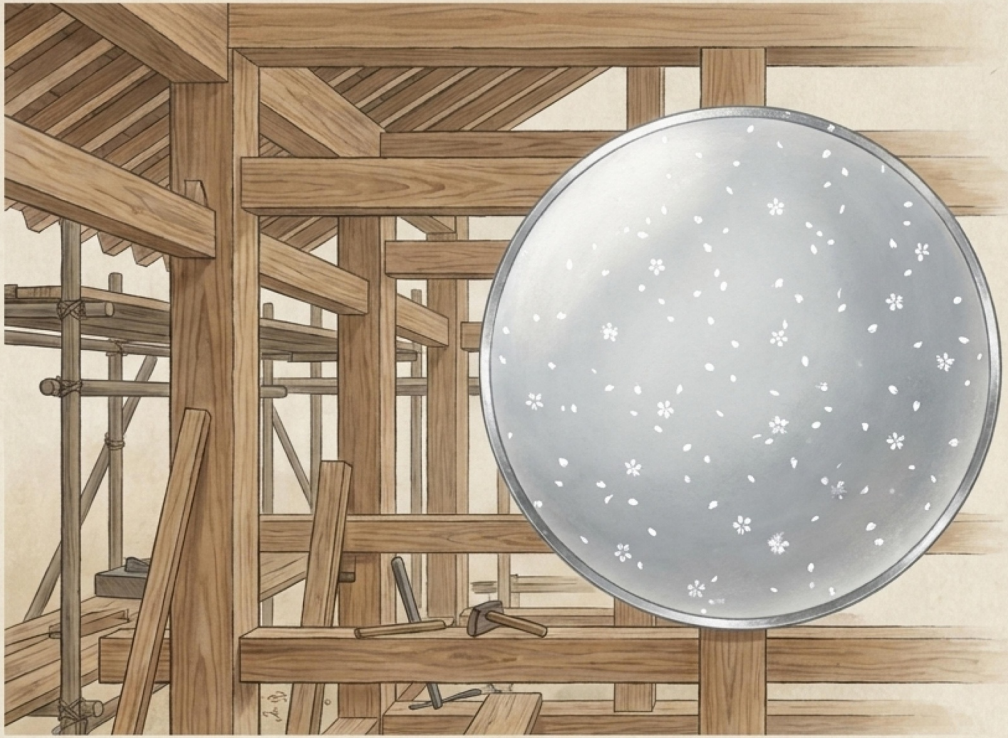
Walking twenty-five miles to Mikawa with Etsujin, we reached Yoshida.
Despite the biting chill, sleeping side-by-side in one room wrapped us in profound warmth and security.



Following a narrow path through Amatsu Nawate rice fields, fierce ocean blasts struck us.

Riding under the cold winter sun, my very shadow seemed to freeze stiff upon the horse.


I gathered white pebbles at Irago,
a shore famous for ancient poetry.
Looking up, I was struck by singular fortune.
By sheer luck, I witnessed a lone hawk
circling gracefully above.



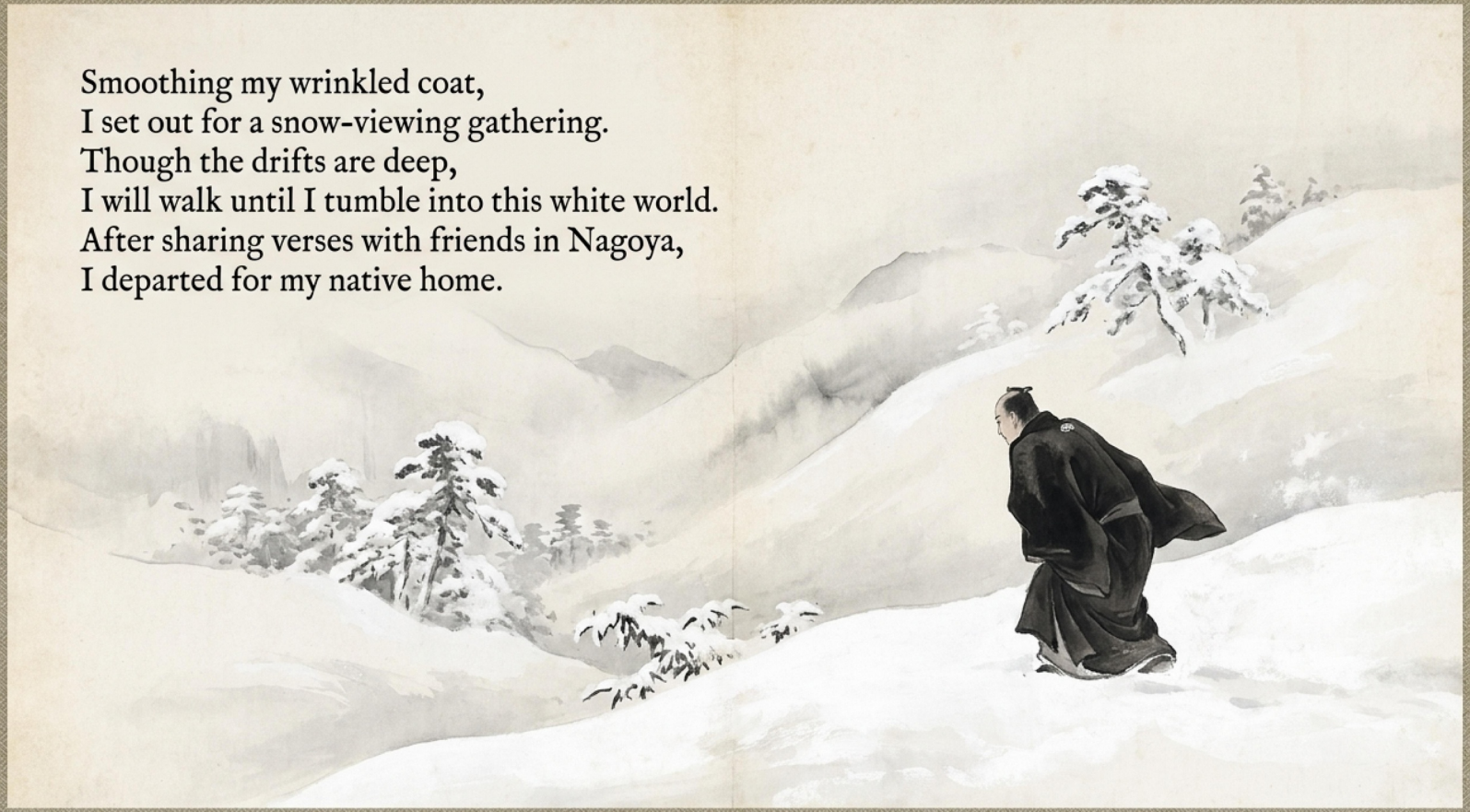
The Atsuta Shrine was undergoing reconstruction.

The polished surface of the divine glass remains utterly flawless, purely adorned with falling flowers of snow.

From there, I was invited to Nagoya for a brief rest.


The wind-swept spirit
wanders to unlearn its barbarism.
Through freezing shadows and solitary hawks,
the harsh road strips away illusions.
This journey is not a factual record, but
a pursuit of becoming one with nature.

Smoothing my wrinkled coat,
I set out for a snow-viewing gathering.
Though the drifts are deep,
I will walk until I tumble into this white world.
After sharing verses with friends in Nagoya,
I departed for my native home.





Unaccustomed to riding, a sudden jolt threw me from my saddle on the steep mountain path. Had I simply crossed the pass leaning on my trusty walking stick, I would have spared myself this bitter tumble from the horse.

Reaching my childhood home
at year's end, I wept holding
my old umbilical cord.

Unwilling to let the year pass,
I drank late into the night.

Waking midday, I resolved
to rise early tomorrow
to greet the floral spring.




At Awa's ruined temple, the great Buddha stood cloaked in green moss, his divine face still shining. The heated spring air shimmers in tiny waves from the empty foundation stones, rising as high as the crumbled statues.

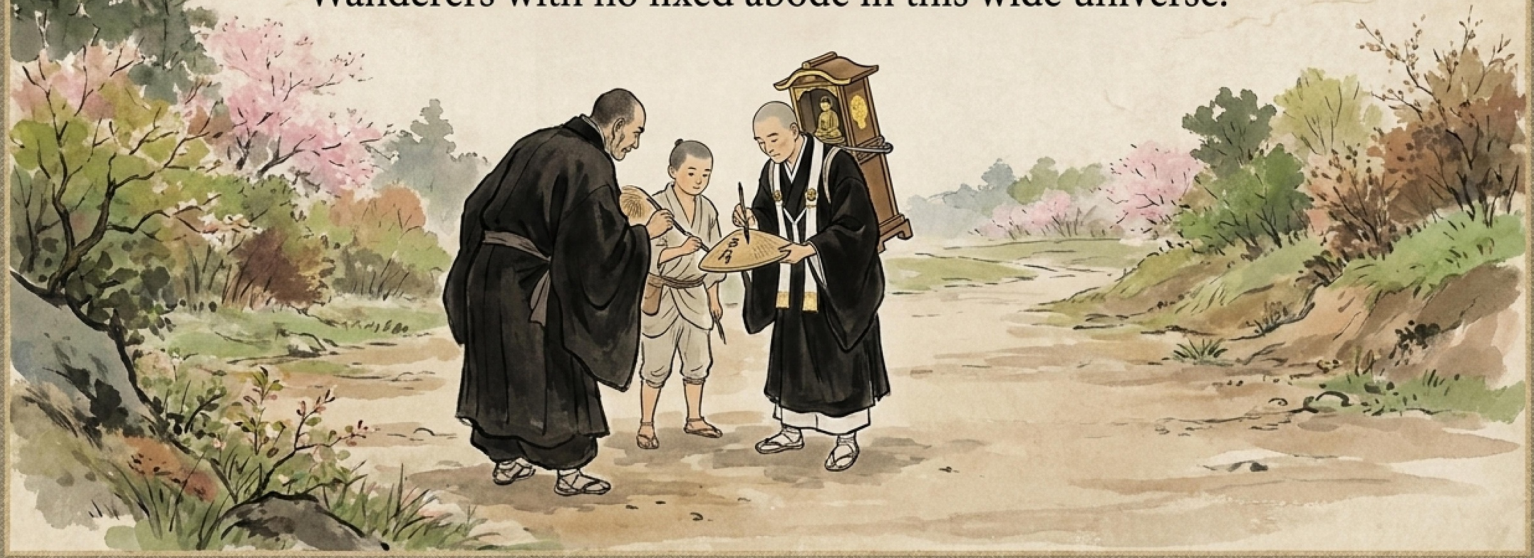
I wondered why the holy Ise
Shrine lacked plum trees.

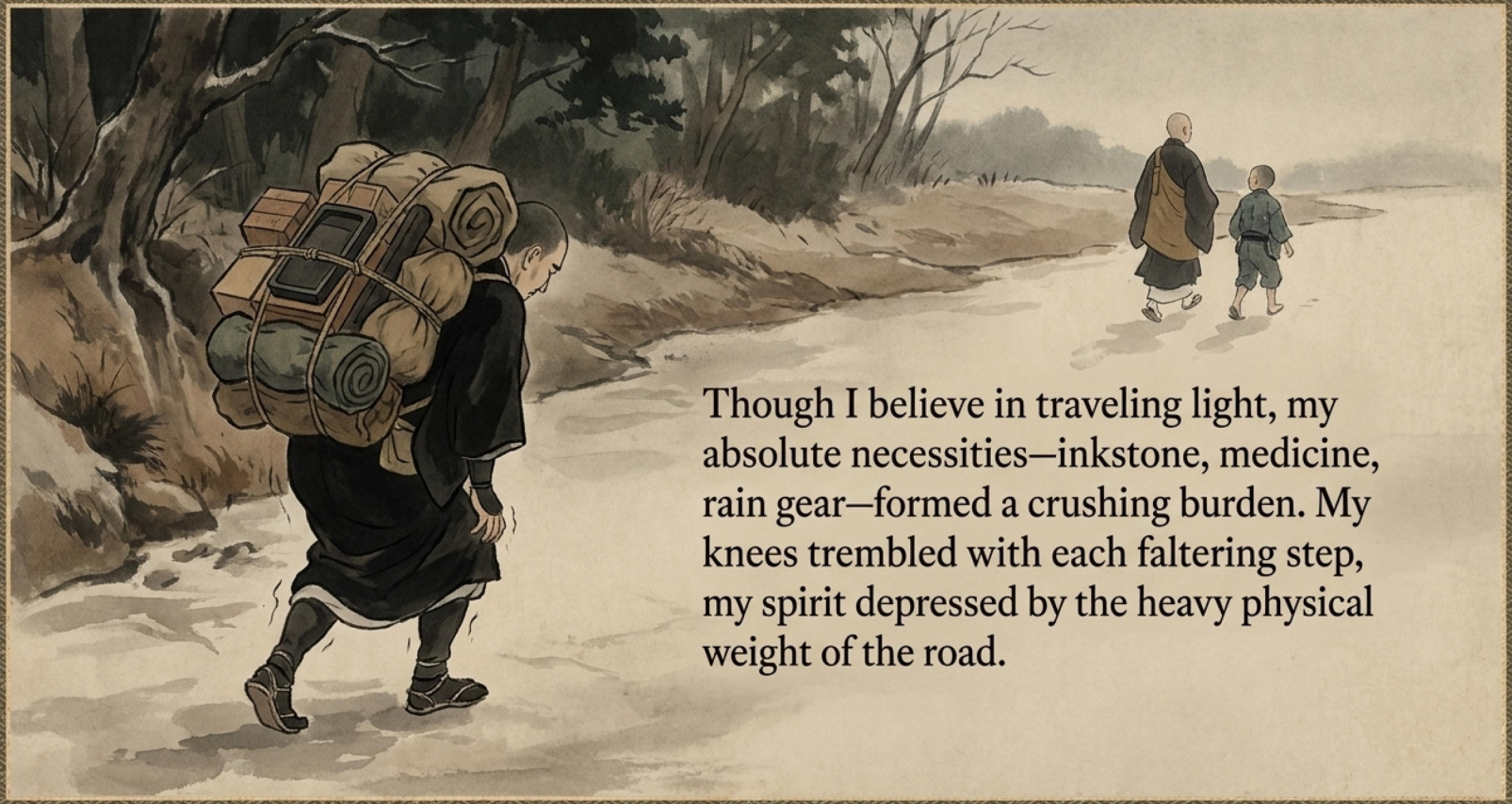
A priest revealed a solitary
stock blooming quietly behind
the sacred virgins' quarters.

What profound fortune to
find this perfect, fragrant
vision of Nirvana hidden
within the holy grounds.



Bound for Yoshino’s cherries, a boyish wanderer
named Mangiku-maru joined me.
Alongside a traveling priest bearing a portable shrine
on his back, we marked our cypress hats:
Wanderers with no fixed abode in this wide universe.





Though I believe in traveling light, my absolute necessities—inkstone, medicine, rain gear—formed a crushing burden. My knees trembled with each faltering step, my spirit depressed by the heavy physical weight of the road.



Exhausted from relentless walking, I abandoned the day's **journey** to rest at a roadside inn. Too tired to take another step, I found deep, welcoming comfort wrapped in the gentle embrace of blooming wisteria.


A spring night enveloped Hatsuse temple, where a solitary man sat in deep meditation. Outside, priests paced in high wooden clogs, their footsteps echoing through the gentle rain that fell upon the darkened cherry blossoms.

Climbing the steep passes of Mount Kazuraki, we ascended higher than the larks, pausing for breath in the thin air.

I prayed the mountain god would kindly reveal his face amidst the dawning blossoms.

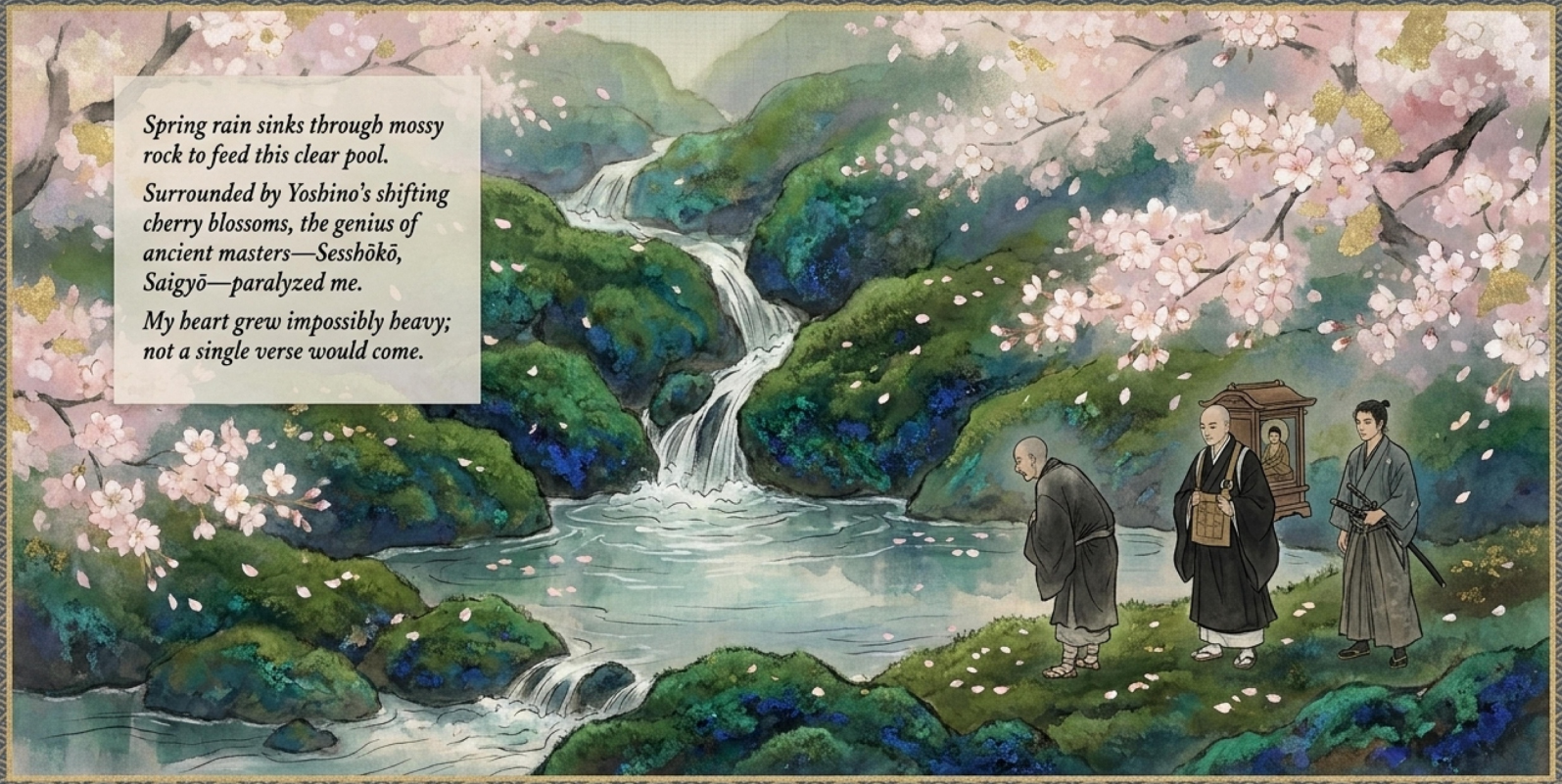


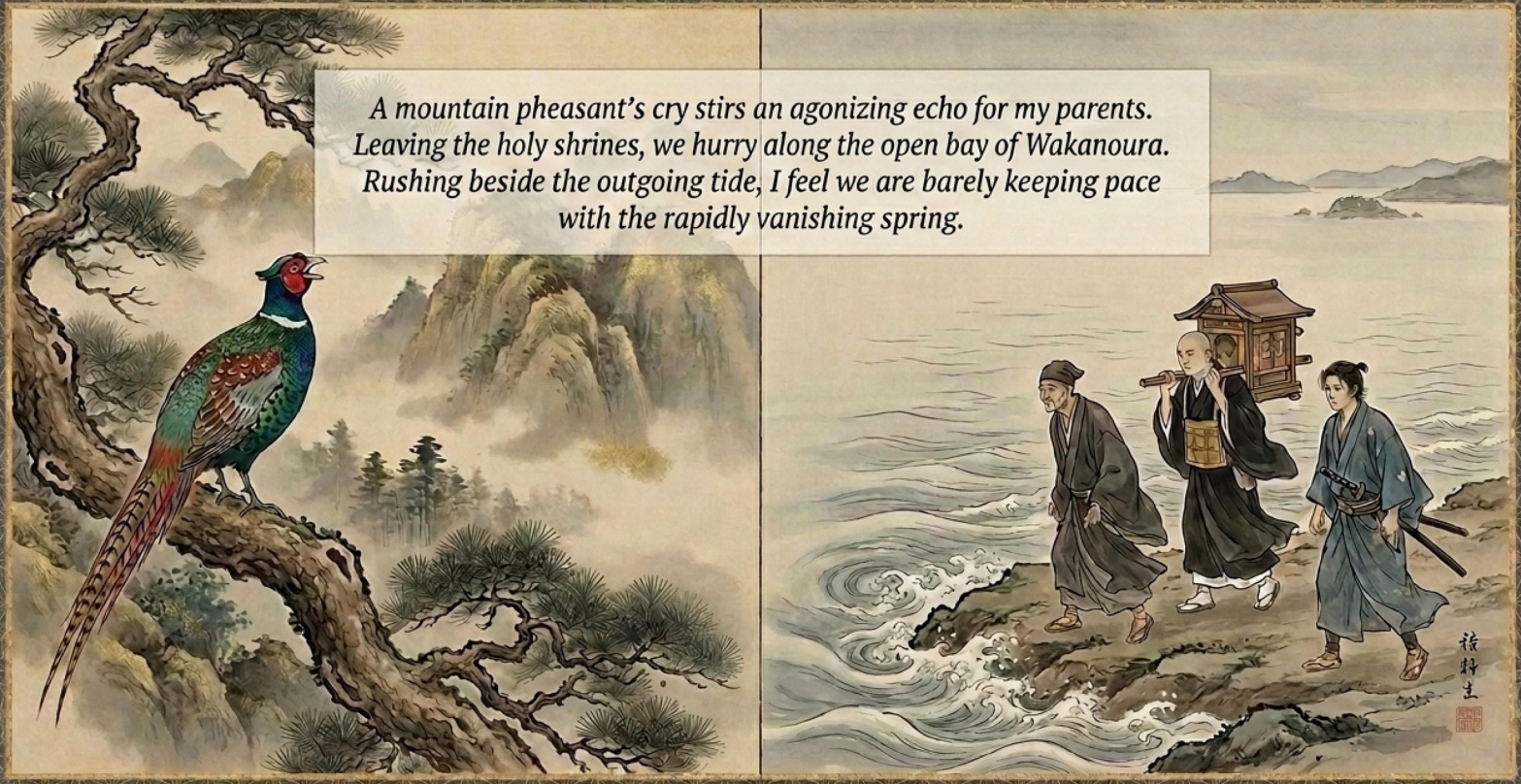
We sought magnificent waterfalls. At Dragon's Gate, a delicate bridge of blossoms spanned the roaring water. Drinkers would rejoice to hear of this floral spray, silently dropping yellow rose petals into the violent torrent below.



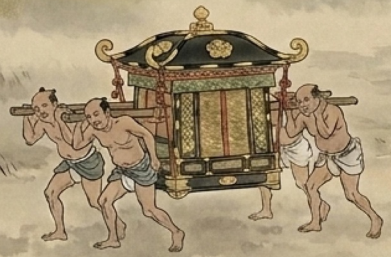
I walked miles daily in
relentless pursuit of the
perfect bloom.
Beneath scattering petals,
I shaped my fan into a cup,
pretending to drink in the
fleeting beauty of the
blossoms against the
melancholy, darkening sky.




Spring rain sinks through mossy rock to feed this clear pool.
Surrounded by Yoshino's shifting cherry blossoms, the genius of ancient masters—Sesshōkō, Saigyō—paralyzed me.
My heart grew impossibly heavy; not a single verse would come.


A mountain pheasant's cry stirs an agonizing echo for my parents.
Leaving the holy shrines, we hurry along the open bay of Wakanoura.
Rushing beside the outgoing tide, I feel we are barely keeping pace
with the rapidly vanishing spring.

Walking empty-handed removes all fear. Distainning the luxury of palanquins, we sustain ourselves on coarse food. Our only earthly concerns are finding a dry place to sleep and ensuring our straw sandals fit our aching feet.





Descending the
mountain, I sell my
cotton-stuffed winter
coat.
My body feels
instantly lighter.

Here in Nara, on the
very day of the
Buddha's birthday,
a newborn fawn
struggles to stand in
the spring grass.
What a profound,
divine coincidence.

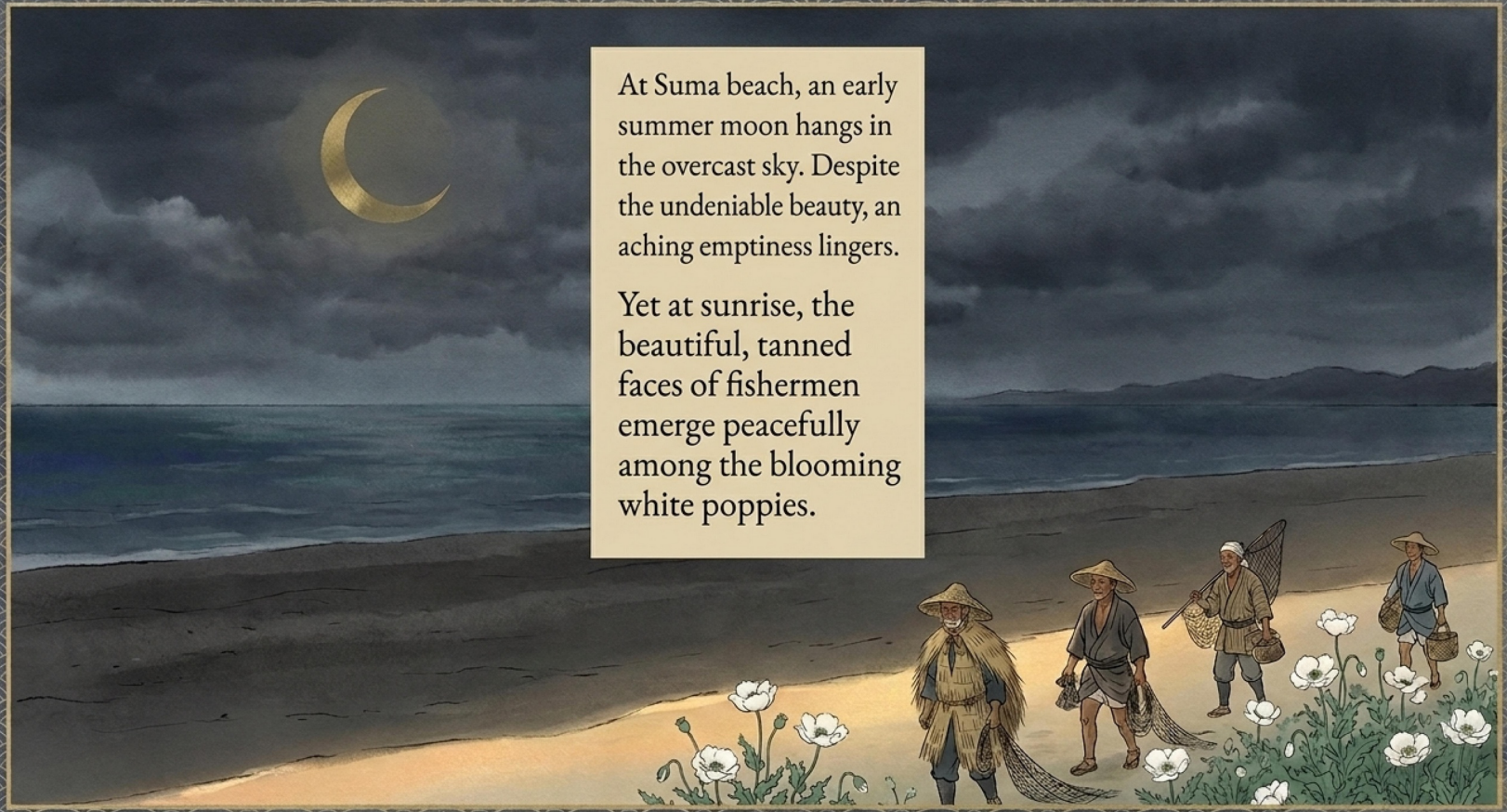



The revered founder Ganjin lost his sight to harsh sea salt during his punishing voyages to Japan. Bowing devoutly before his statue at Shōdaiji, I desperately wished to wipe his unseeing eyes with these fresh, cool green leaves.



Parting from a dear friend in Nara felt as painful as tearing a stag's antlers in two.

Yet in Osaka, the greatest joy of this wandering life was simply sitting with a host, talking casually about a blooming iris.


At Suma beach, an early summer moon hangs in the overcast sky. Despite the undeniable beauty, an aching emptiness lingers.
Yet at sunrise, the beautiful, tanned faces of fishermen emerge peacefully among the blooming white poppies.


Villagers draw crude bows to guard drying kisugo fish from diving crows.
Watching such casual cruelty over food without guilt brings back grim, bloody memories of the ancient wars fought in the shadowed mountains directly behind this peaceful beach.


I hired a reluctant sixteen-year-old boy to guide us up Mount Tetsukai's steep, root-tangled paths. Slipping constantly and clinging to wild azaleas, he only pressed onward because I promised to buy him a warm dinner upon our return.



Looking down the terrifying precipice of Ichi-no-tani, history violently rushed back. Over this very drop, Yoshitsune launched his legendary downhill cavalry raid, shattering his enemy's camp in the valley below. The tragic confusion of that day rises afresh.

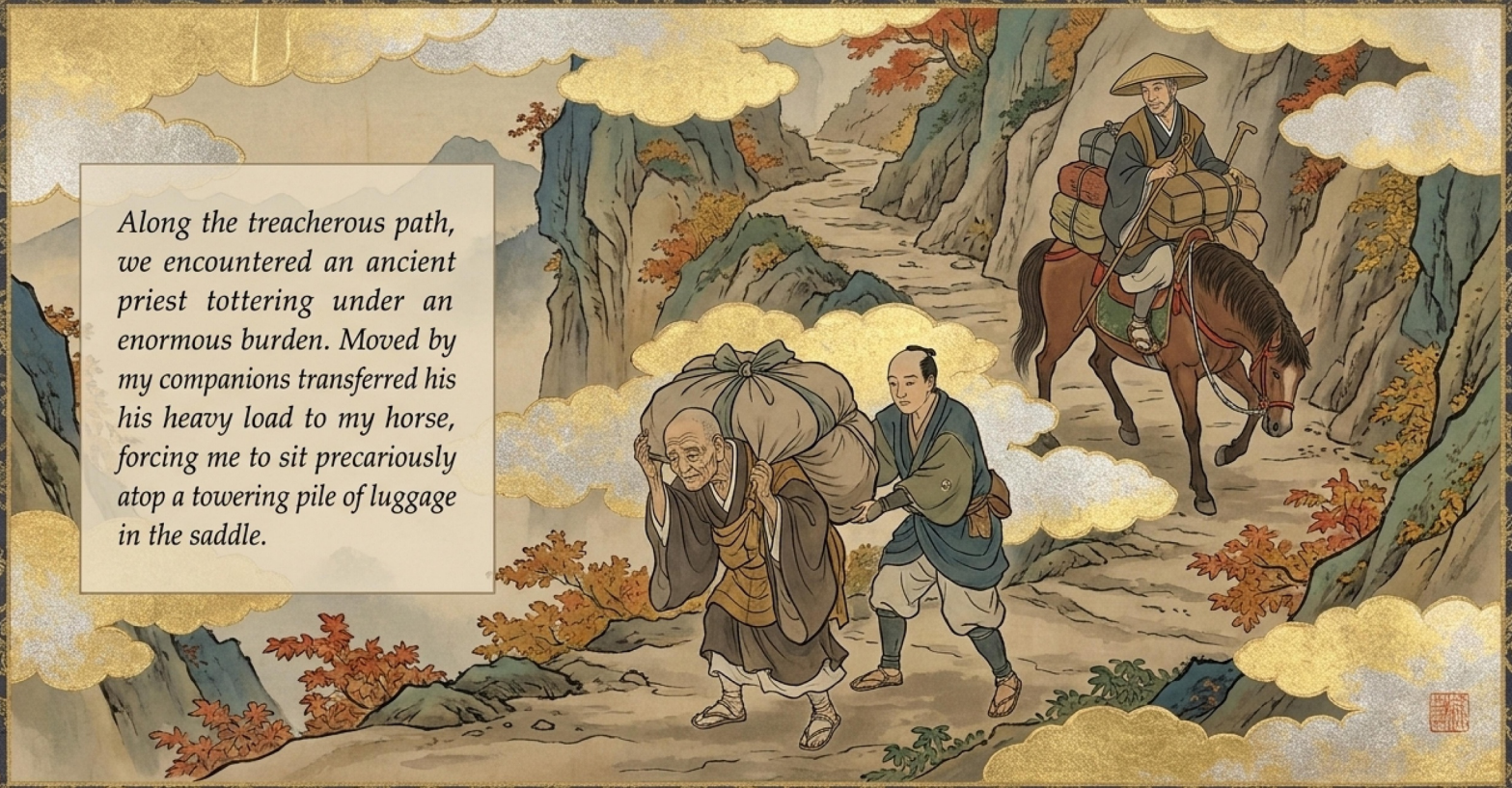

Fleeing that ancient slaughter, desperate court ladies dropped their precious vanity boxes and instruments into the sea. This is surely why, even a thousand years later, the waves here still break with such a profound and sorrowful sound.


A Visit to Sarashina Village
A journey of steep paths, hidden dangers, and quiet revelations, illuminated by the lonely autumn moon.

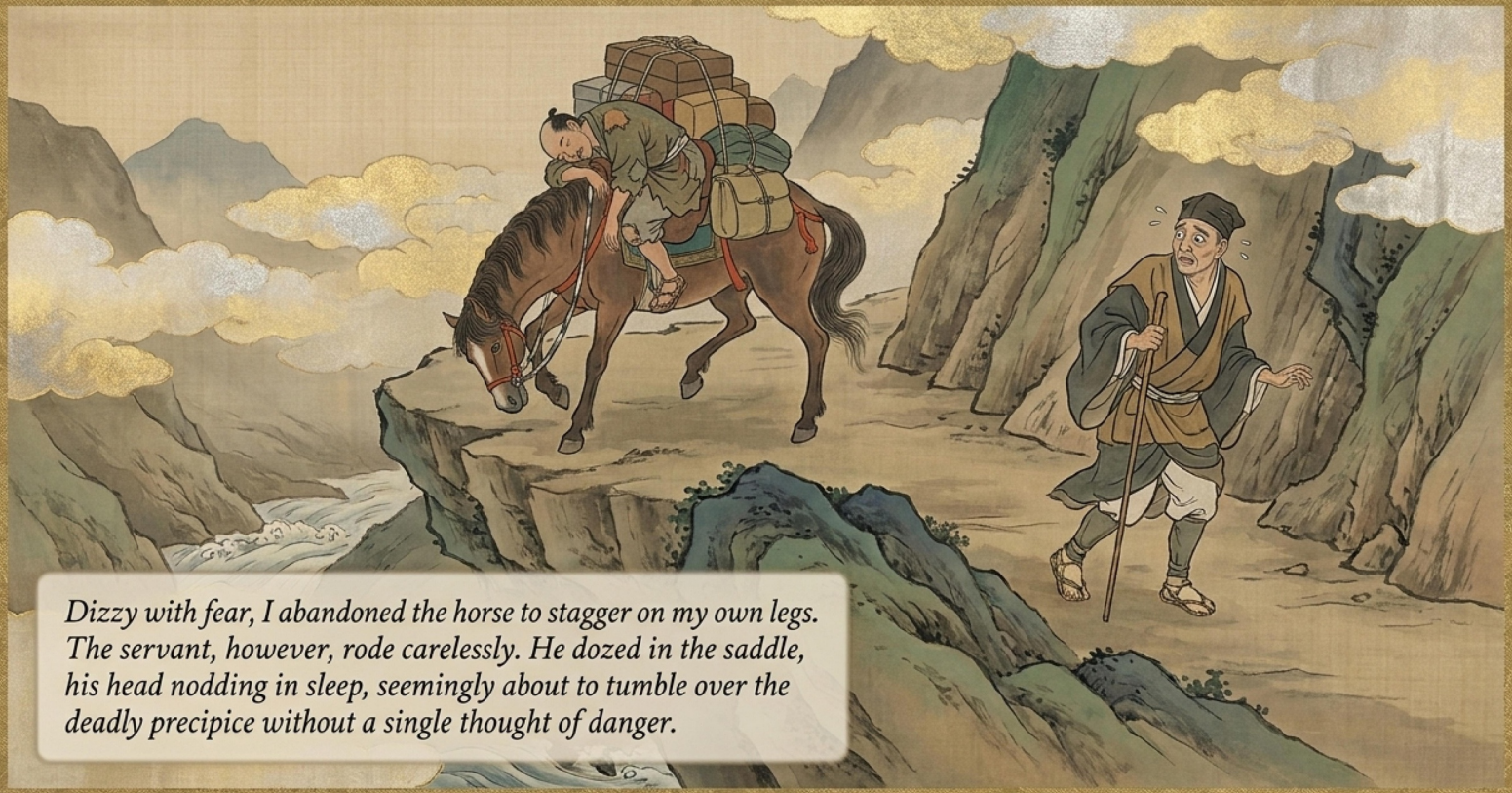

The autumn wind stirred a deep yearning to see the moon rise over Mount Obasute. This rugged peak holds the dark legends of a remote past, where villagers were said to abandon their aging mothers to the cold stones.

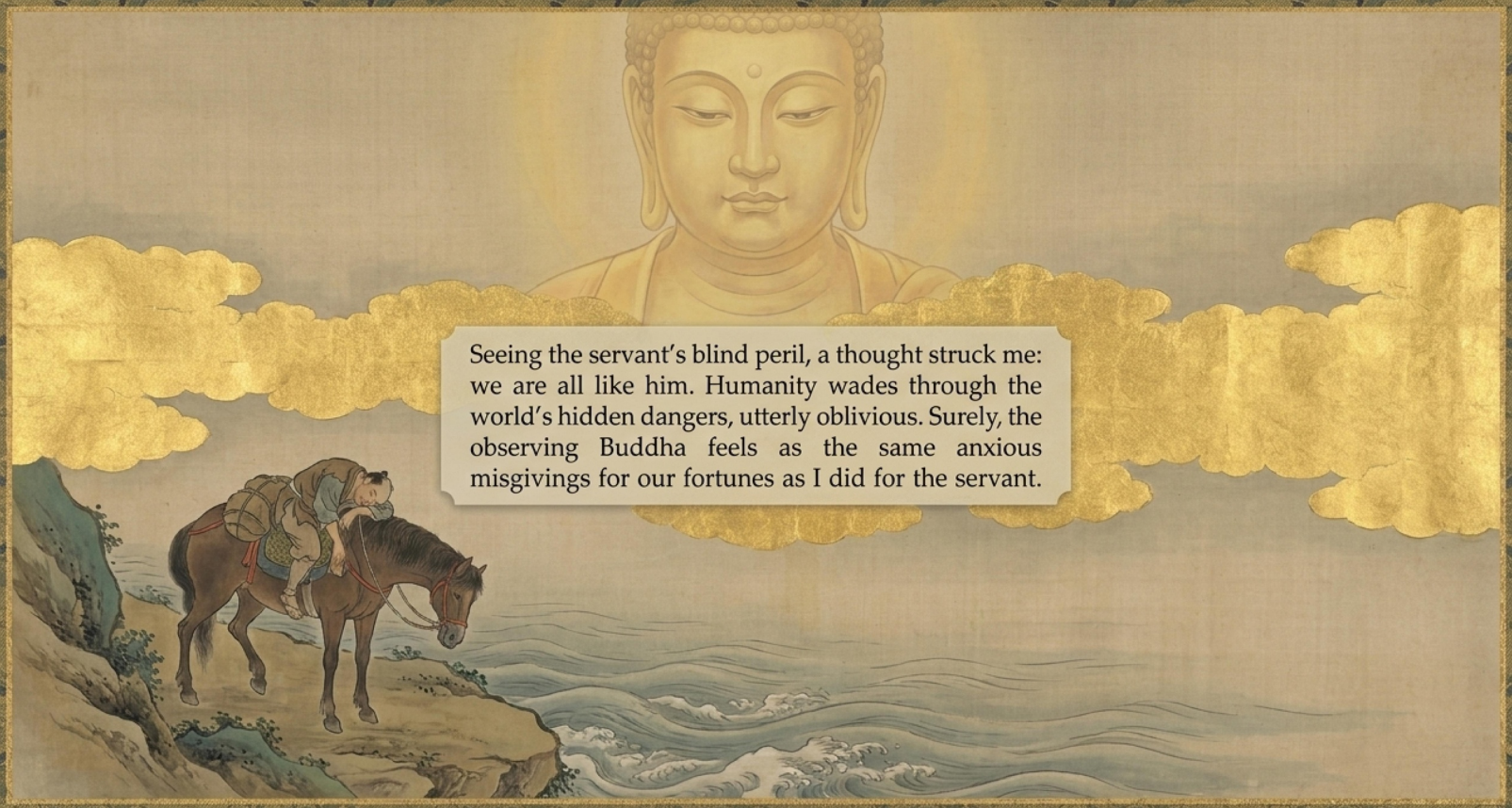


I was not alone. My disciple, Etsujin, and a servant joined me on the dangerous Kiso road. We were inexperienced travelers, constantly stumbling and making mistakes. Yet, our blunders provoked shared laughter, giving us the necessary courage to press on.

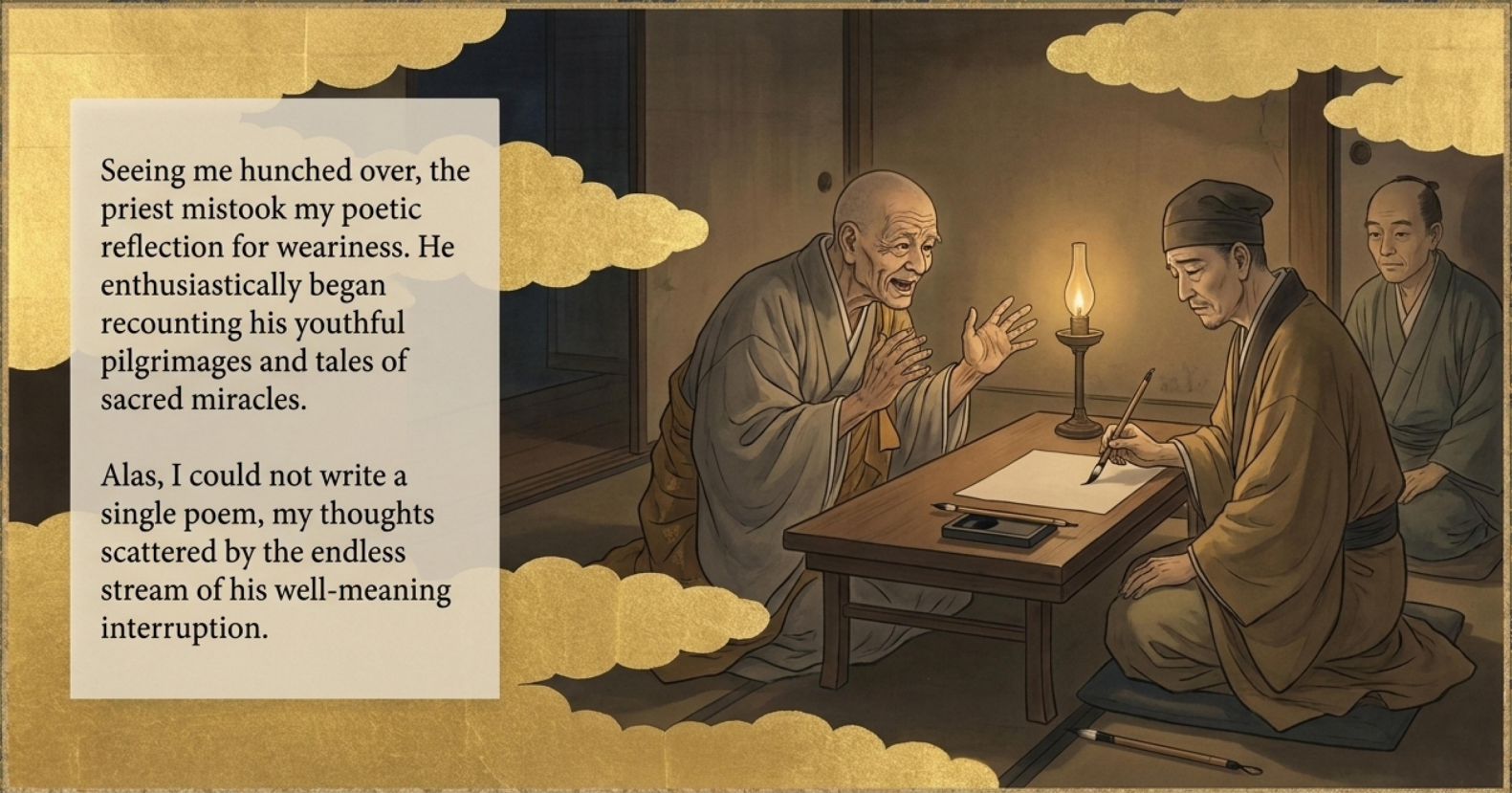

Along the treacherous path, we encountered an ancient priest tottering under an enormous burden. Moved by my companions transferred his his heavy load to my horse, forcing me to sit precariously atop a towering pile of luggage in the saddle.


The landscape was terrifying. Mountains stacked upon mountains. To my left, a precipice plunged a thousand feet into a boiling river. Perched high on the saddle, every sudden jerk of the horse struck terror into my heart.


Dizzy with fear, I abandoned the horse to stagger on my own legs. The servant, however, rode carelessly. He dozed in the saddle, his head nodding in sleep, seemingly about to tumble over the deadly precipice without a single thought of danger.

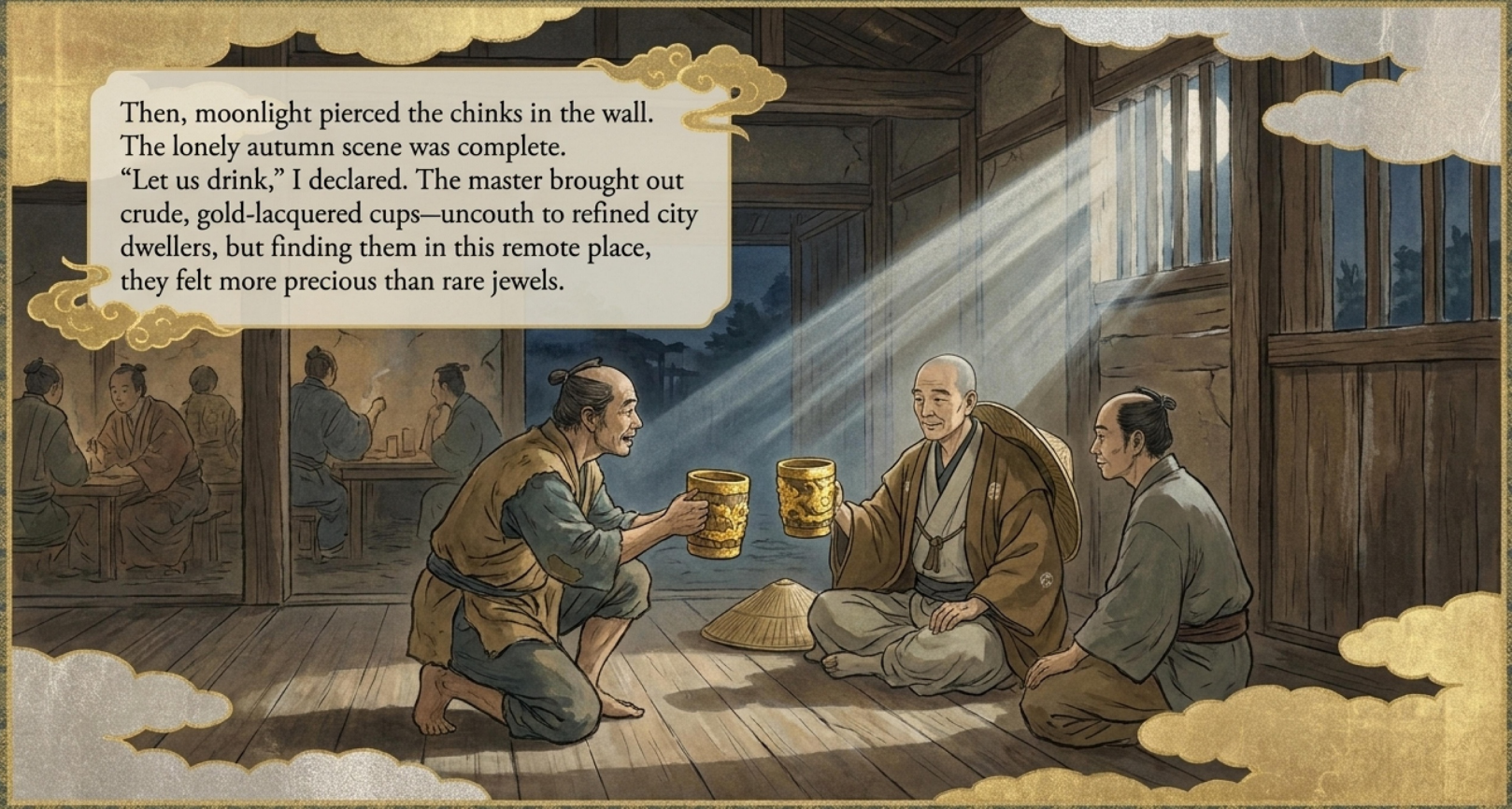

Seeing the servant's blind peril, a thought struck me: we are all like him. Humanity wades through the world's hidden dangers, utterly oblivious. Surely, the observing Buddha feels as the same anxious misgivings for our fortunes as I did for the servant.


At dusk, we found a humble inn. I lit a lamp, laid out pen and ink, and closed my eyes. I desperately wanted to distill the day's majestic sights and the verses I had composed into written poetry.



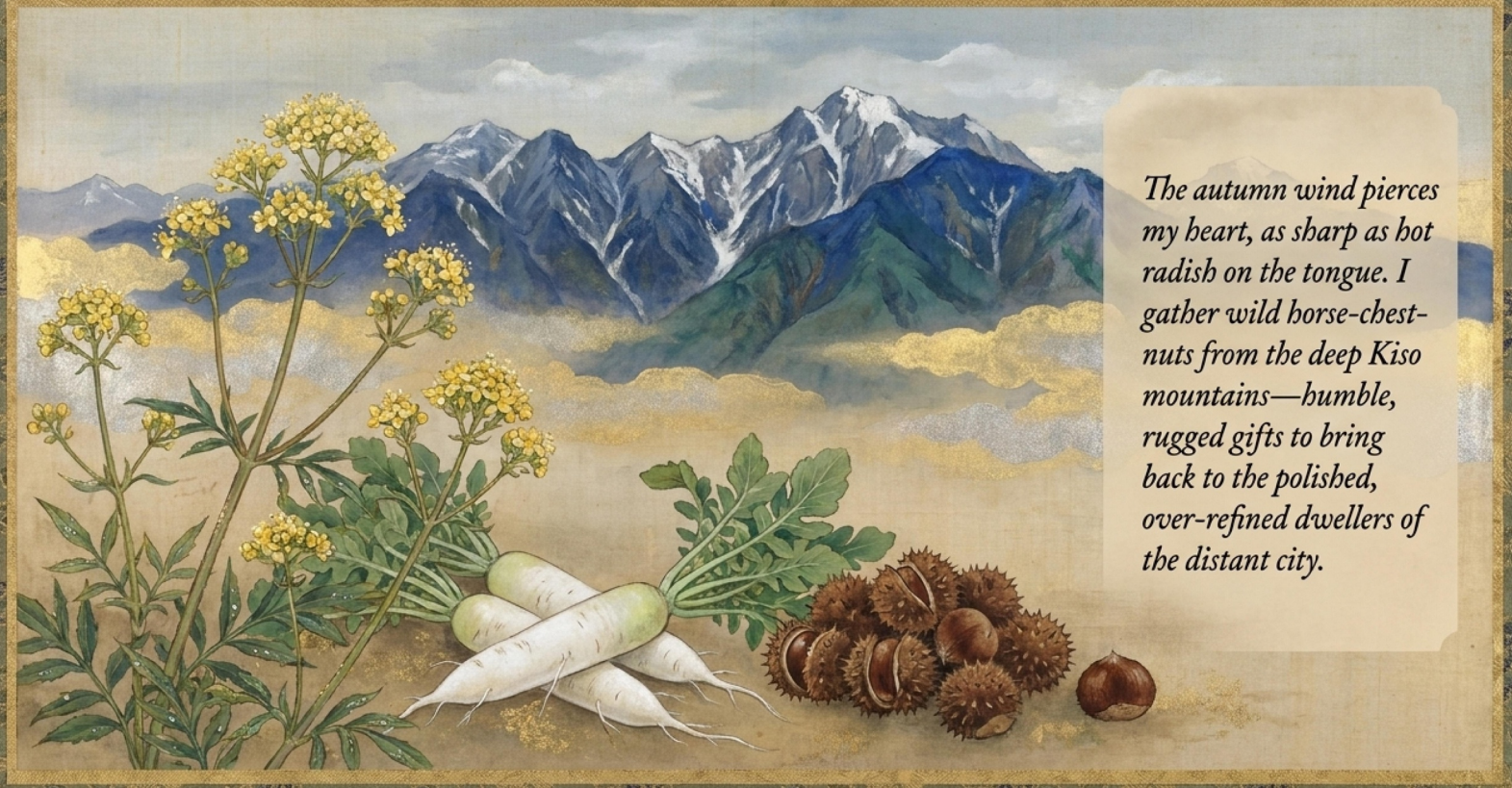
Seeing me hunched over, the priest mistook my poetic reflection for weariness. He enthusiastically began recounting his youthful pilgrimages and tales of sacred miracles.

Alas, I could not write a single poem, my thoughts scattered by the endless stream of his well-meaning interruption.


Then, moonlight pierced the chinks in the wall.
The lonely autumn scene was complete.
“Let us drink,” I declared. The master brought out crude, gold-lacquered cups—uncouth to refined city dwellers, but finding them in this remote place, they felt more precious than rare jewels.


‘Sitting in quiet tears beneath the sky, I imagine the abandoned woman of legend weeping beside me.
Though days have passed and the moon begins to wane, I cannot tear myself away, captivated still by the bright, cloudless glow over Sarashina.

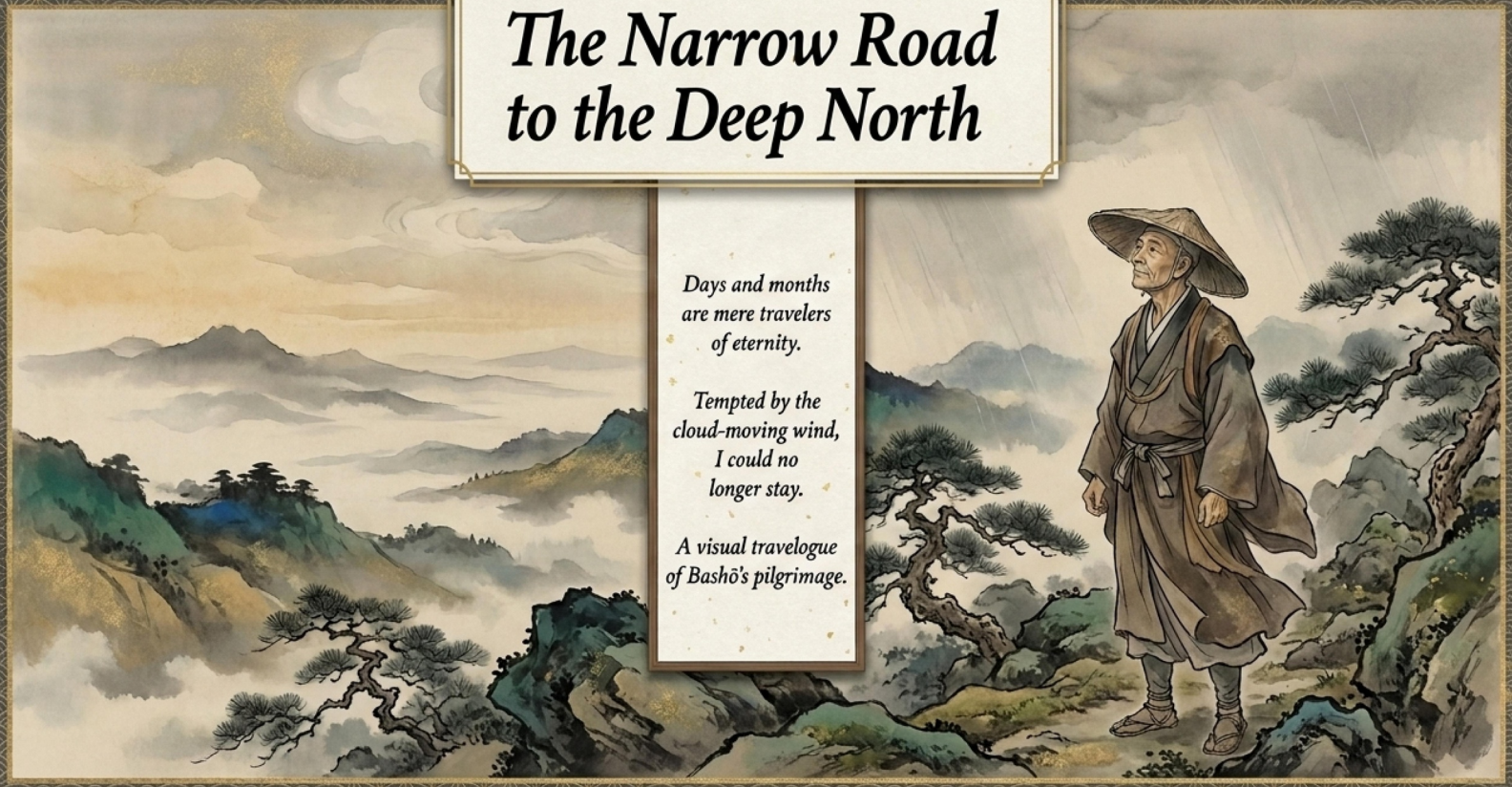

Clinging like ivy to a precarious bridge over the abyss, body and soul barely hold together. Even ancient imperial steeds must have crossed this fog-shrouded path to Kyōto, a place where one dares not even blink.


The autumn wind pierces my heart, as sharp as hot radish on the tongue. I gather wild horse-chestnuts from the deep Kiso mountains—humble, rugged gifts to bring back to the polished, over-refined dwellers of the distant city.


Under the unifying moonlight, the four divided sects of **Zenkōji** *Temple sleep as one. But peace is fleeting; a violent storm sweeps down from Mount Asama, blowing harsh stones over my path as I bid farewell and journey deeper into autumn.*


Through steep climbs, shared burdens,
and moonlit cups, the rugged heart
of Sarashina leaves an indelible mark
upon the traveler's soul.

The Narrow Road to the Deep North



Days and months are mere travelers of eternity.

Tempted by the cloud-moving wind, I could no longer stay.

A visual travelogue of Bashō's pilgrimage.



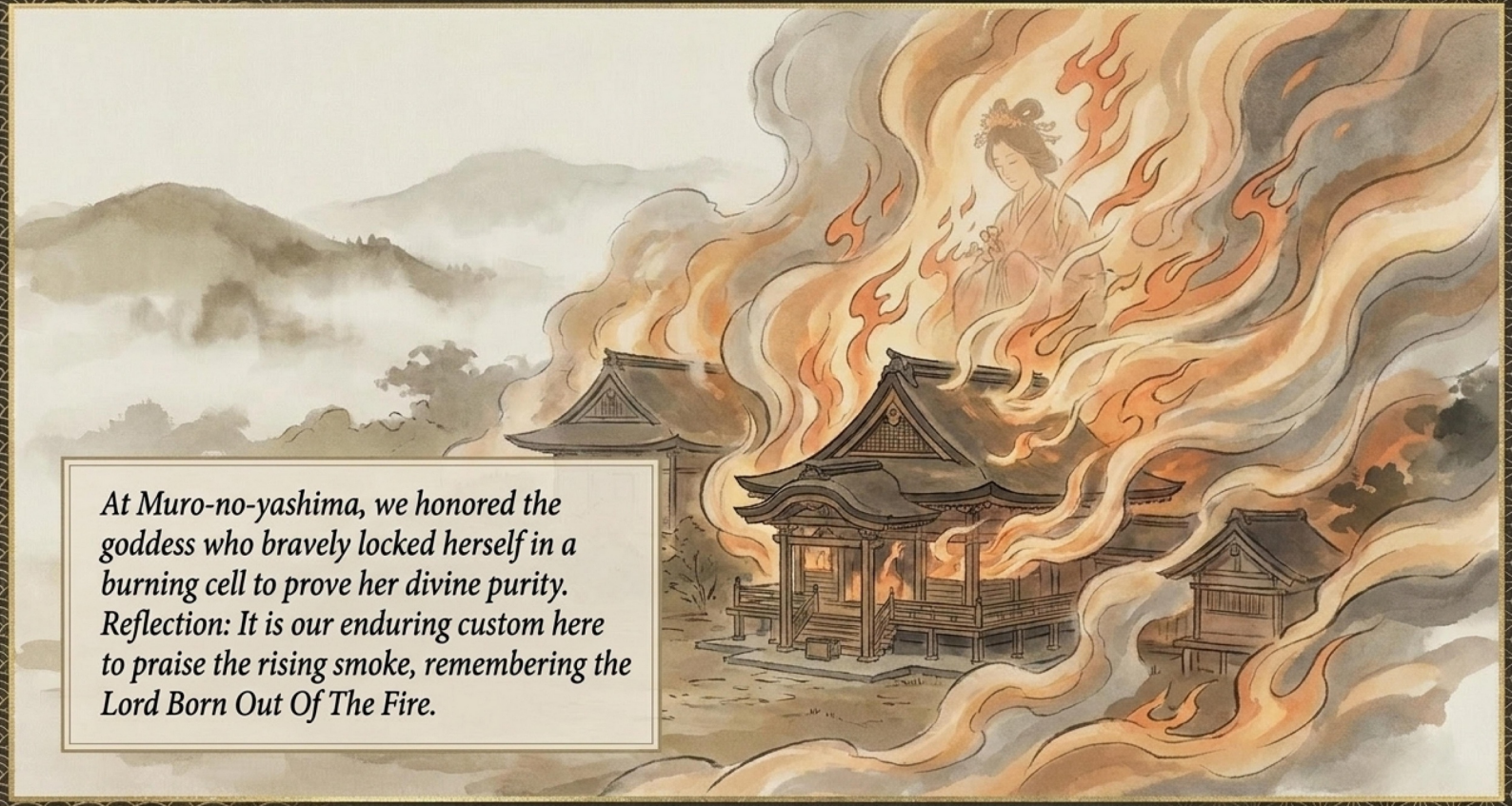
I swept the cobwebs from my broken house one last time and sold it.

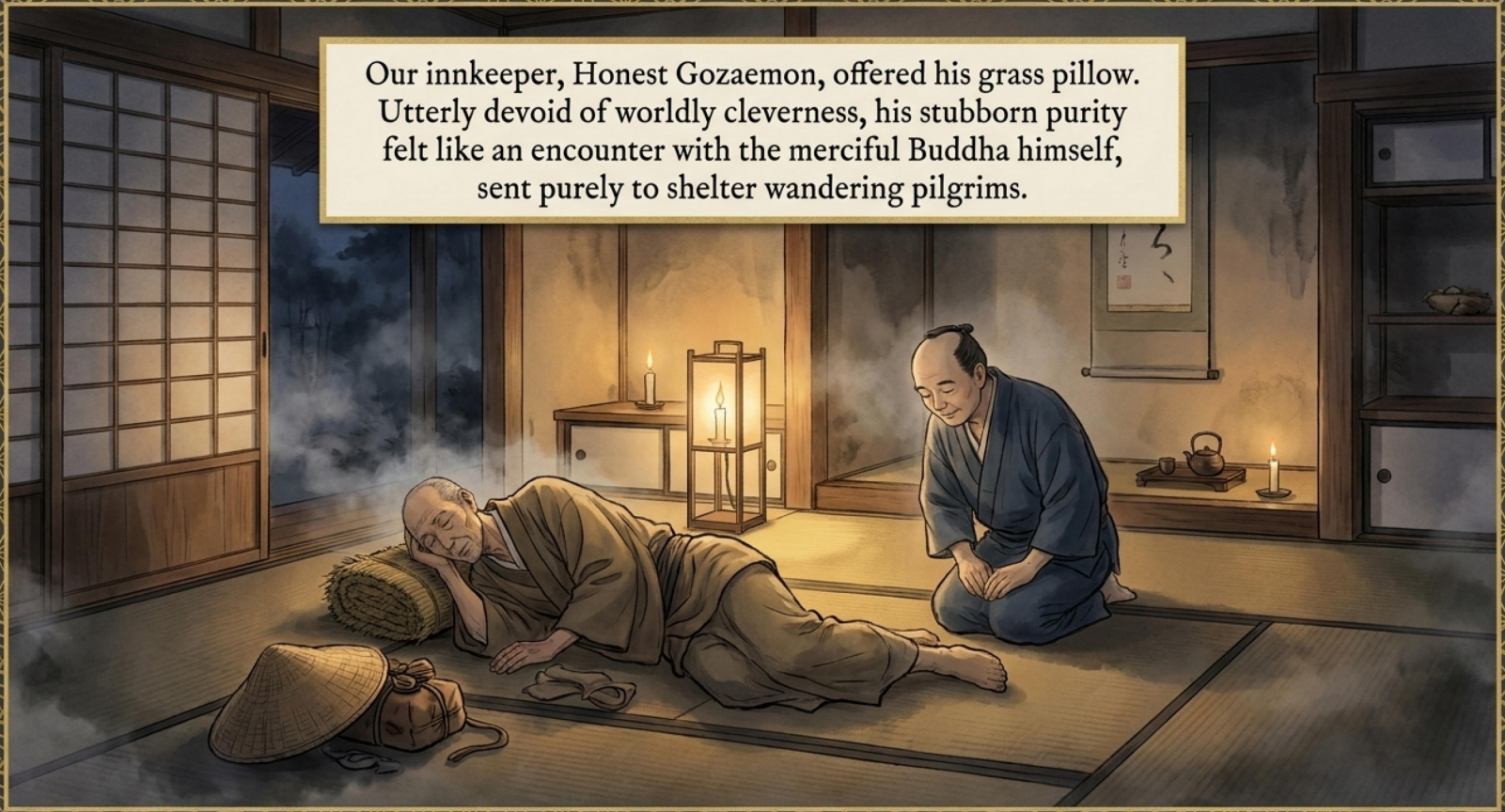
Reflection: The wooden door is now lost to tall grass; soon, strangers will celebrate the festival of dolls in my place.


Three thousand miles stretched before my tearful eyes.
The faces of waving friends blurred into a fleeting vision.
Reflection: Spring slips away; the birds cry out in sorrow,
and even the fish seem to weep at our parting.



Reaching Sōka by evening, my bony shoulders ached immensely under the burden of a paper coat, ink, and sentimental gifts. The romantic dream instantly gave way to the heavy reality of the road.


At Muro-no-yashima, we honored the goddess who bravely locked herself in a burning cell to prove her divine purity. Reflection: It is our enduring custom here to praise the rising smoke, remembering the Lord Born Out Of The Fire.


Our innkeeper, Honest Gozaemon, offered his grass pillow.
Utterly devoid of worldly cleverness, his stubborn purity
felt like an encounter with the merciful Buddha himself,
sent purely to shelter wandering pilgrims.



Mount Nikkō radiates the bright beams of the sun. To speak too much of the shrine would violate its immense holiness.

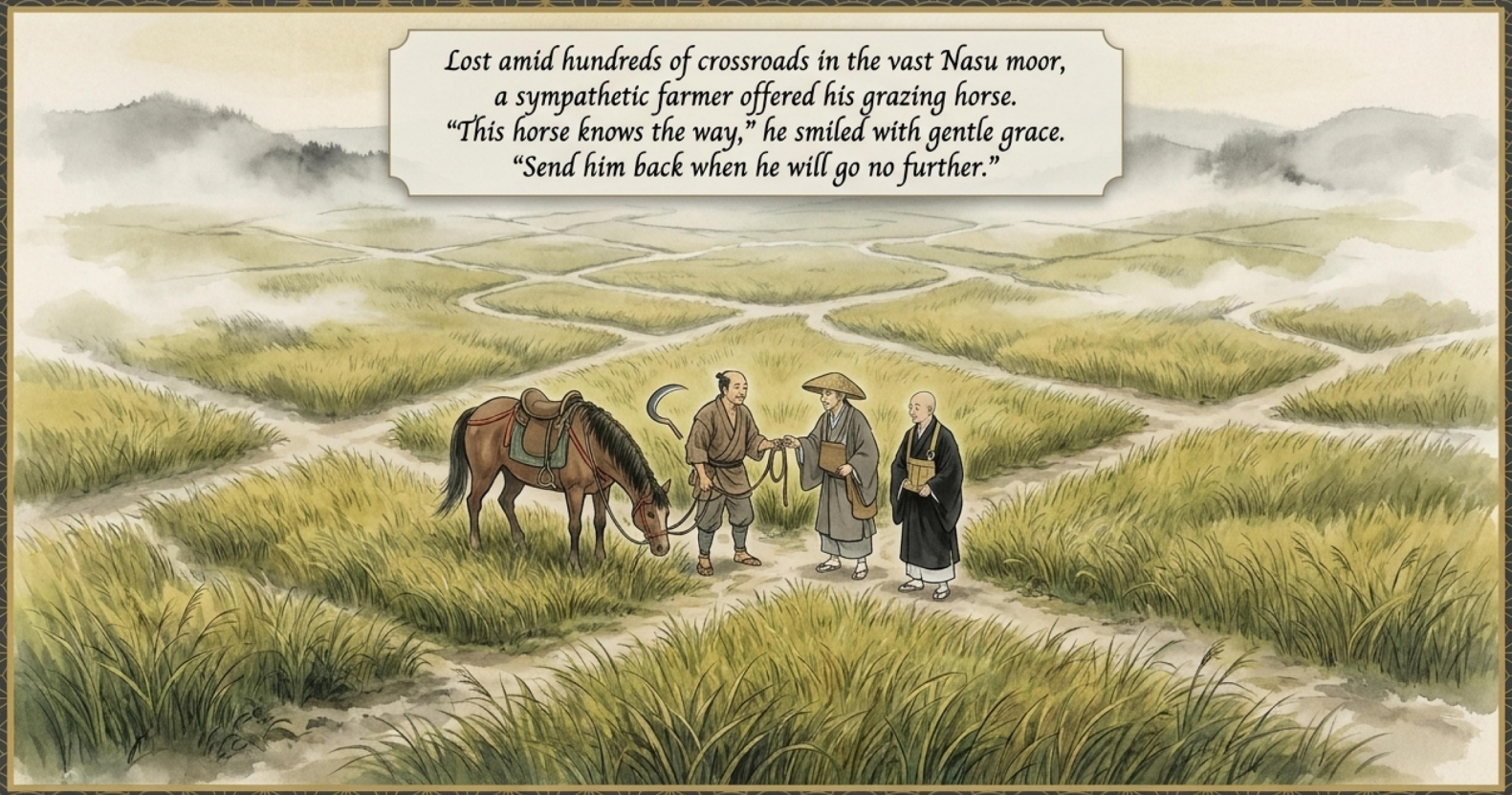
Reflection: I stood in absolute awe, bathed in the brilliant, benevolent light filtering through the fresh, vibrant green leaves.



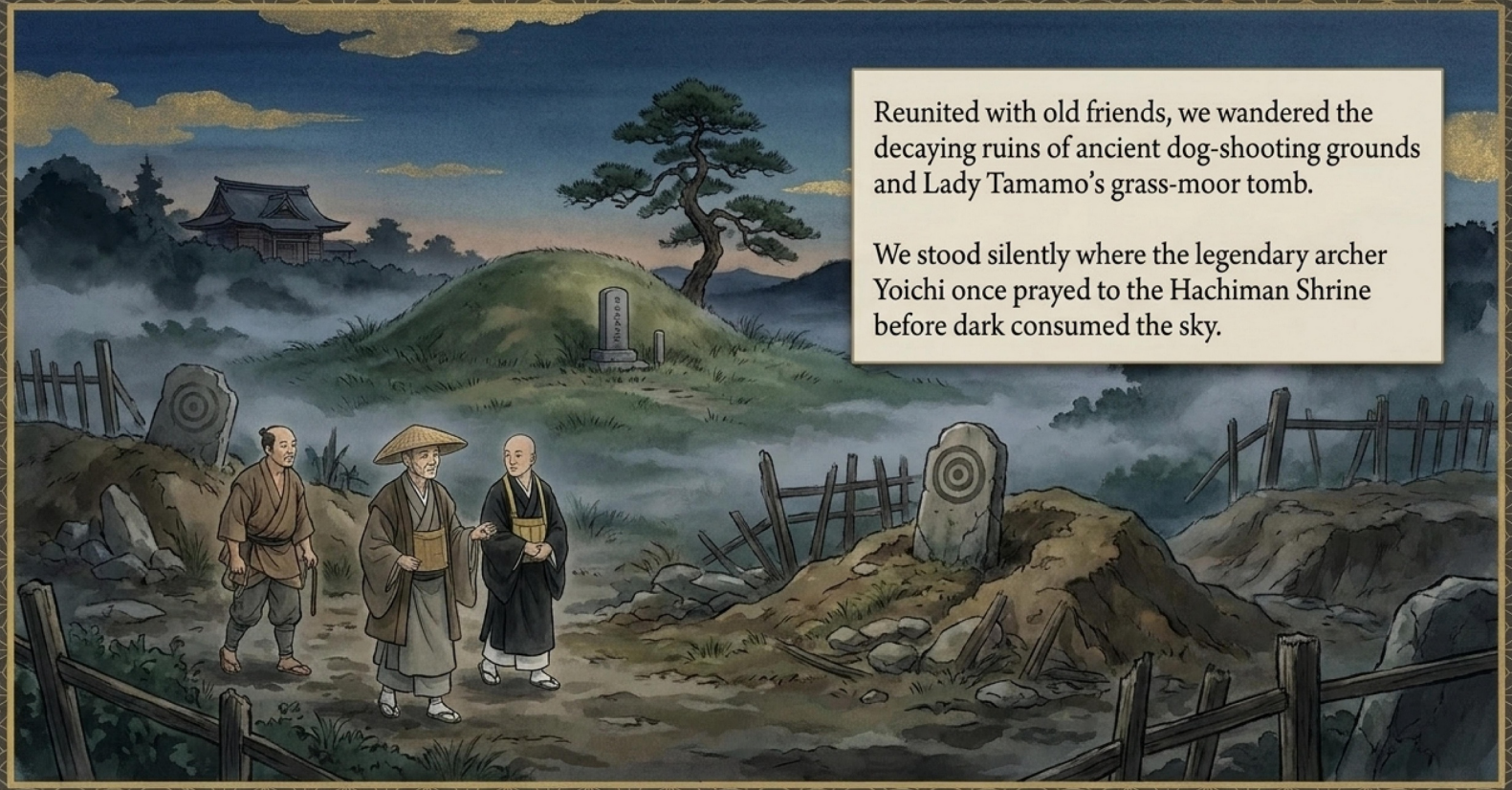
My companion Sora shaved his head, donned black robes, and took the name Religiously Enlightened.

Reflection: Leaving worldly burdens entirely behind, we change into clean summer clothes beneath the pure snows of the Black Hair mountain.


A dark pool swallowed the rushing water. The rocks were carved perfectly, allowing us to watch from a hollow ridge completely behind the falls.
Reflection:
Hidden silently inside the craggy cave, I witnessed my first sacred observance of the summer.


Lost amid hundreds of crossroads in the vast Nasu moor,
a sympathetic farmer offered his grazing horse.
“This horse knows the way,” he smiled with gentle grace.
“Send him back when he will go no further.”

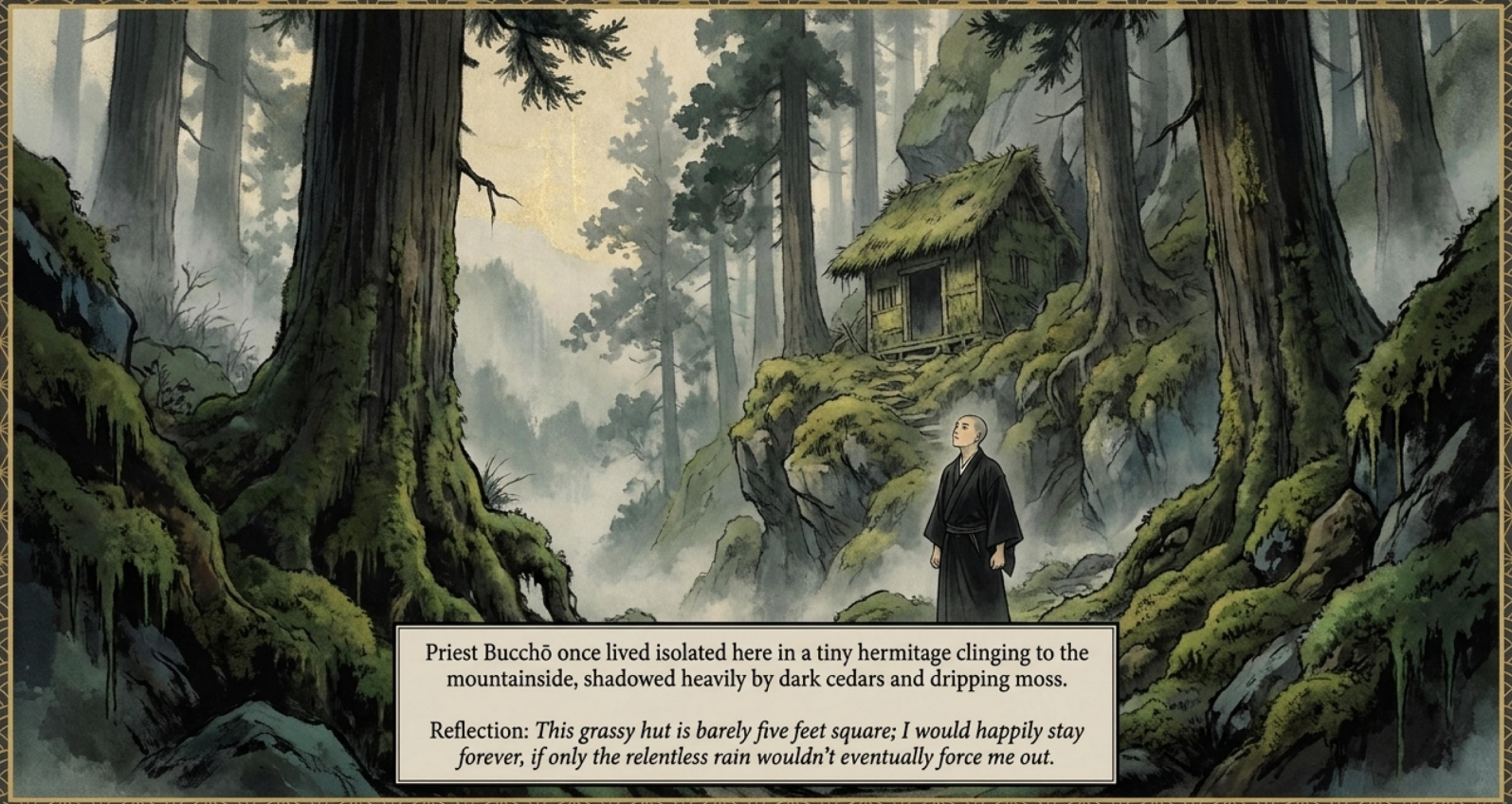

Two small children chased joyfully after my borrowed horse. The little girl was named Kasane, meaning manifold.
Reflection: Such an exceptionally beautiful name; it perfectly suits a delicate, double–flowered pink blossom opening proudly in the wild.



Reunited with old friends, we wandered the decaying ruins of ancient dog-shooting grounds and Lady Tamamo's grass-moor tomb.

We stood silently where the legendary archer Yoichi once prayed to the Hachiman Shrine before dark consumed the sky.


The founding master of the Shugen sect once walked the entire country preaching in simple wooden clogs.
Reflection: Deep in the summer mountains, I bowed respectfully before his towering shoes, praying for strength on my own endless journey.

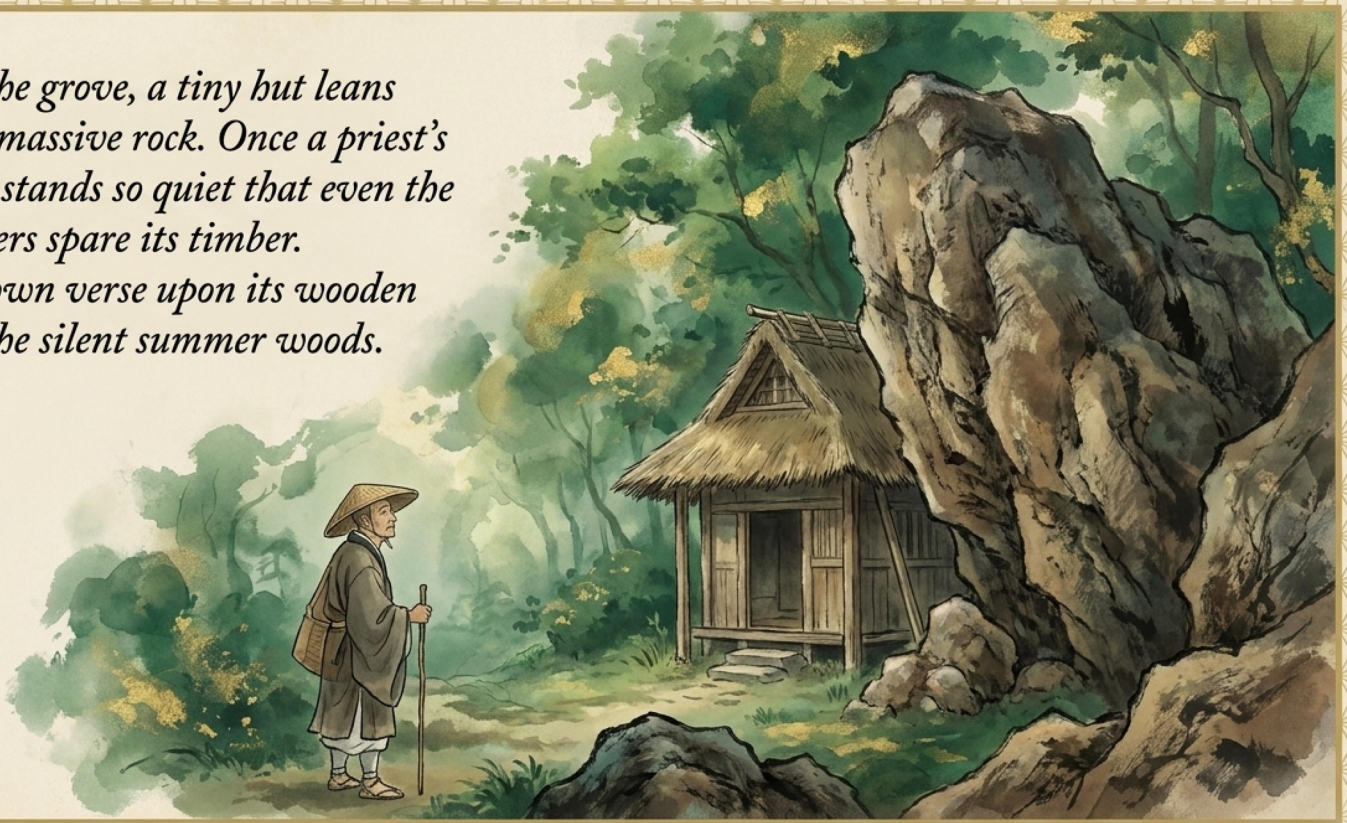


Priest Bucchō once lived isolated here in a tiny hermitage clinging to the mountainside, shadowed heavily by dark cedars and dripping moss.

Reflection: *This grassy hut is barely five feet square; I would happily stay forever, if only the relentless rain wouldn't eventually force me out.*

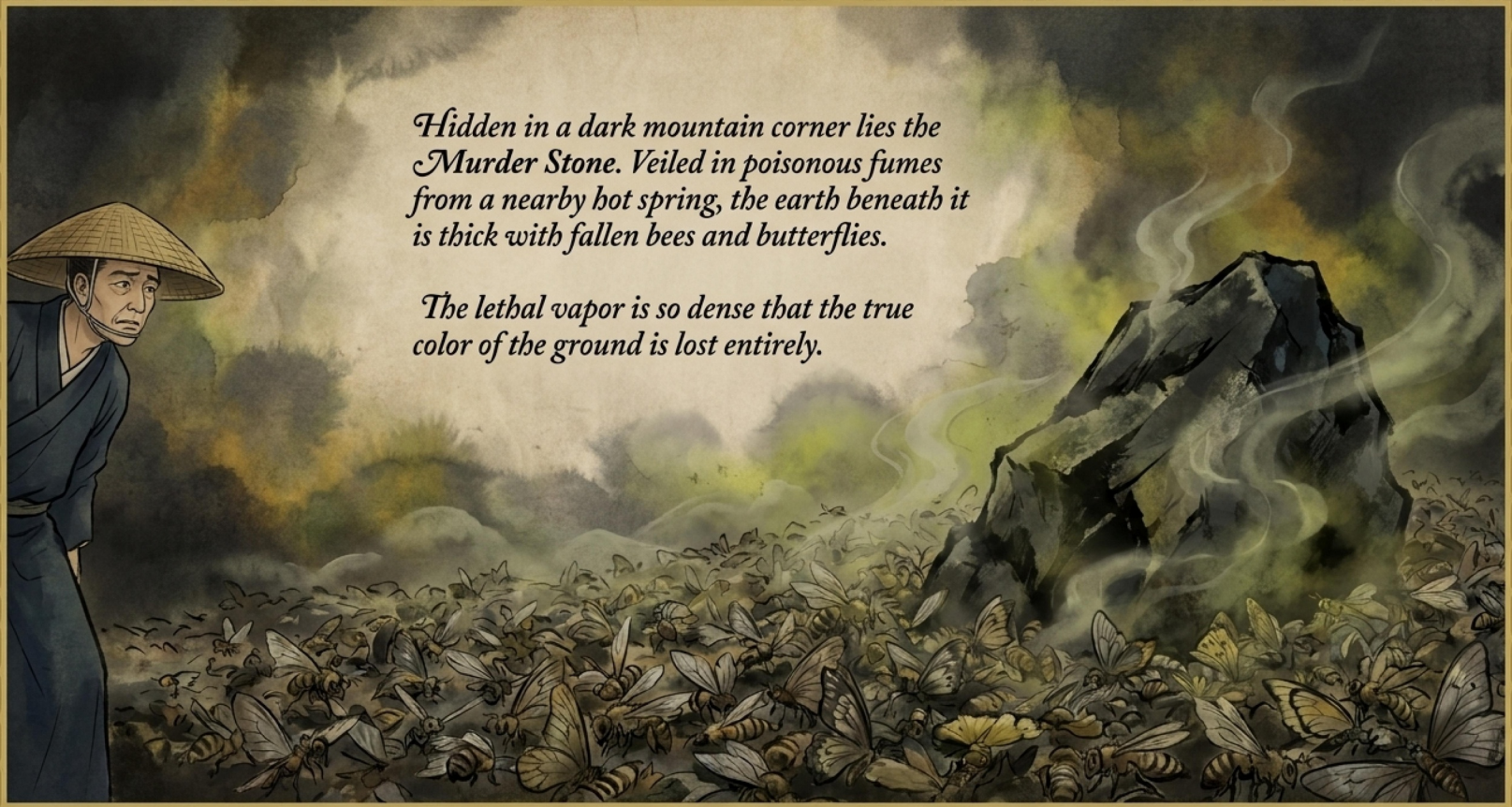

The journey north perfectly balances the crushing, tangible weight of the road with absolute, weightless spiritual awe. Days, months, and men are all mere travelers of eternity. We are forever pulled forward, swept along by the cloud-moving wind.

Deep in the grove, a tiny hut leans against a massive rock. Once a priest's retreat, it stands so quiet that even the woodpeckers spare its timber.
I left my own verse upon its wooden pillar in the silent summer woods.

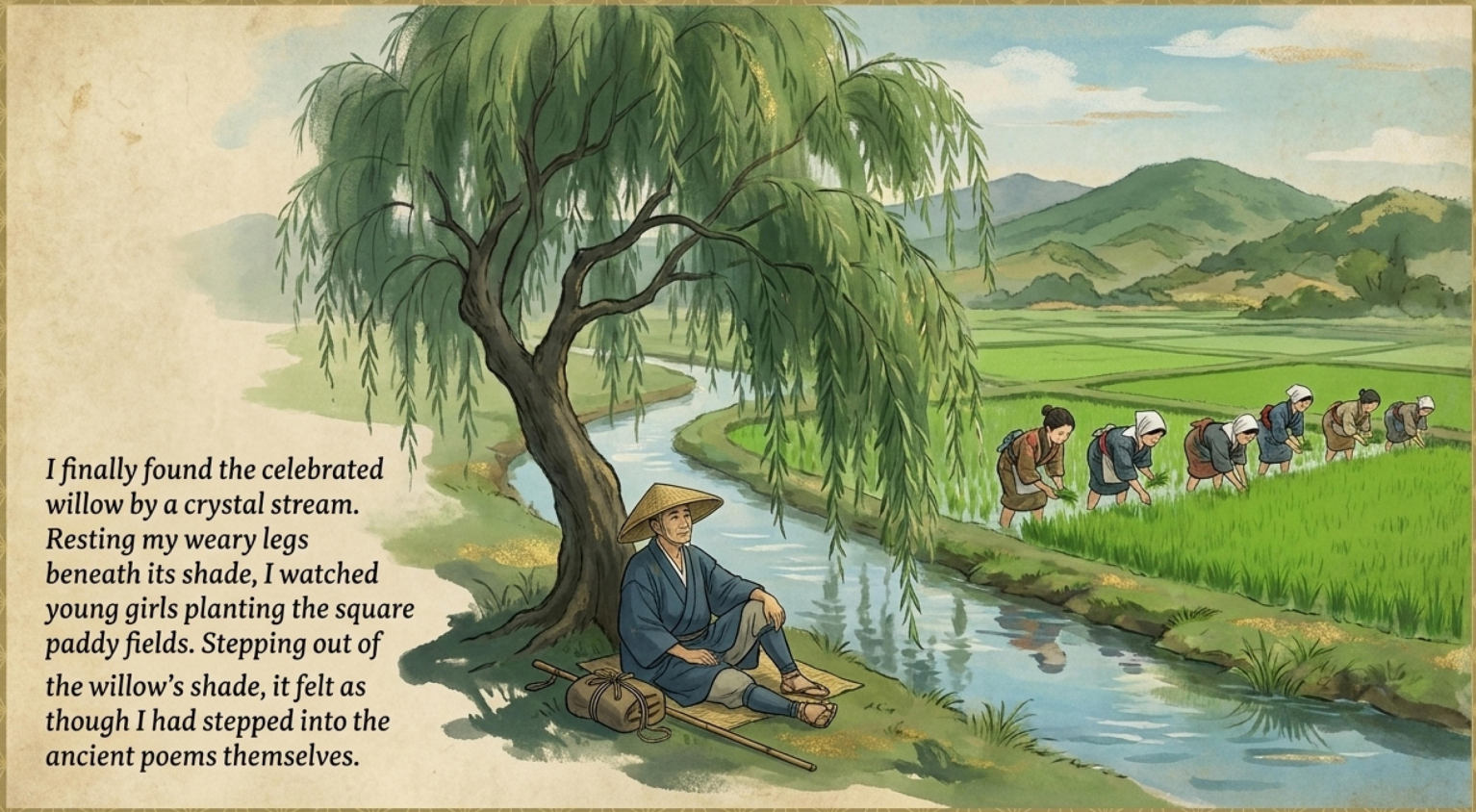


Riding toward the mountains, the farmer leading my borrowed horse humbly asked for a poem.
Touched by his unexpected request, I wrote of turning the horse's head sideways
across the wide fields, just to catch the song of a passing cuckoo.




Hidden in a dark mountain corner lies the Murder Stone. Veiled in poisonous fumes from a nearby hot spring, the earth beneath it is thick with fallen bees and butterflies.

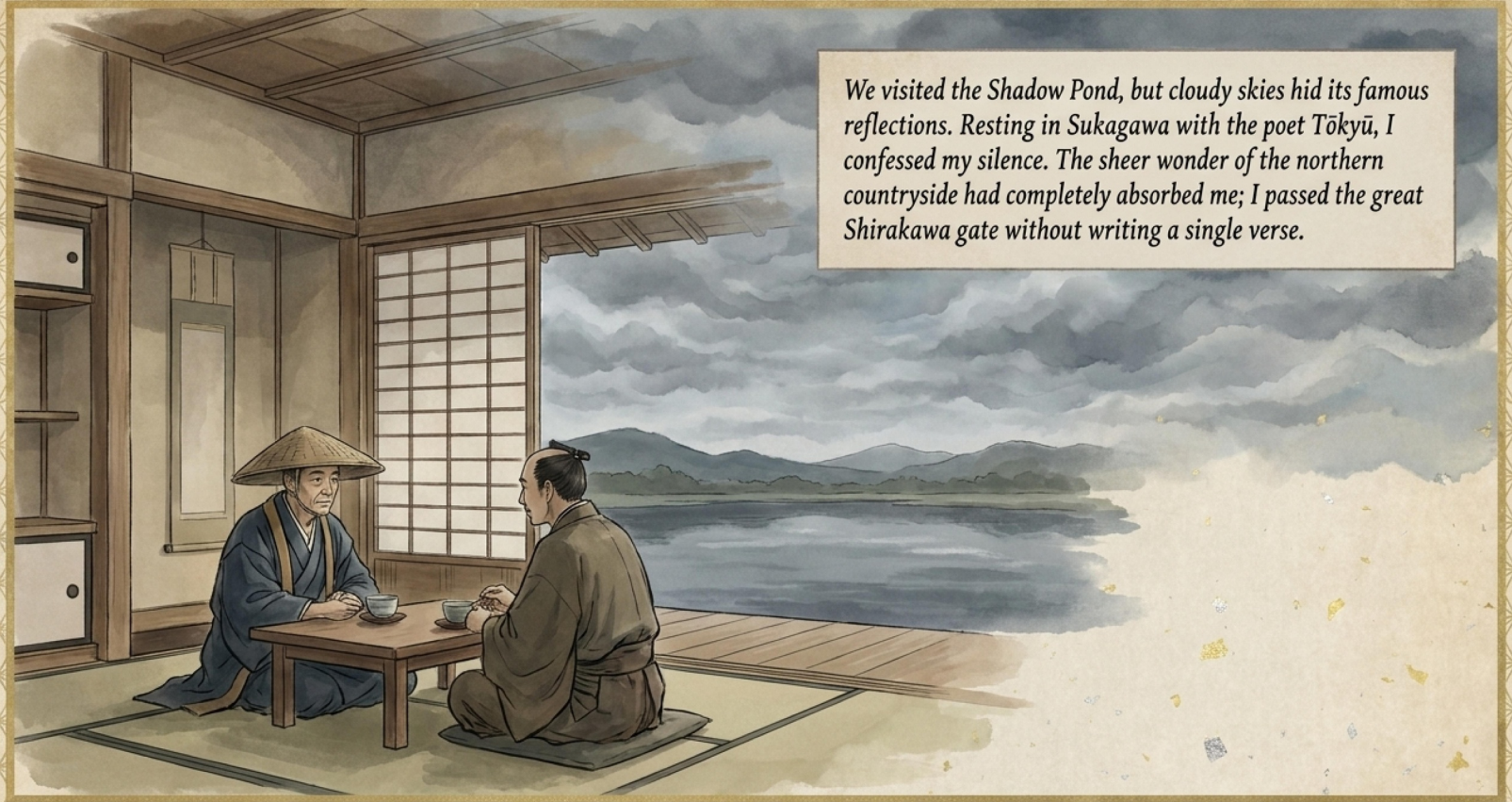
The lethal vapor is so dense that the true color of the ground is lost entirely.

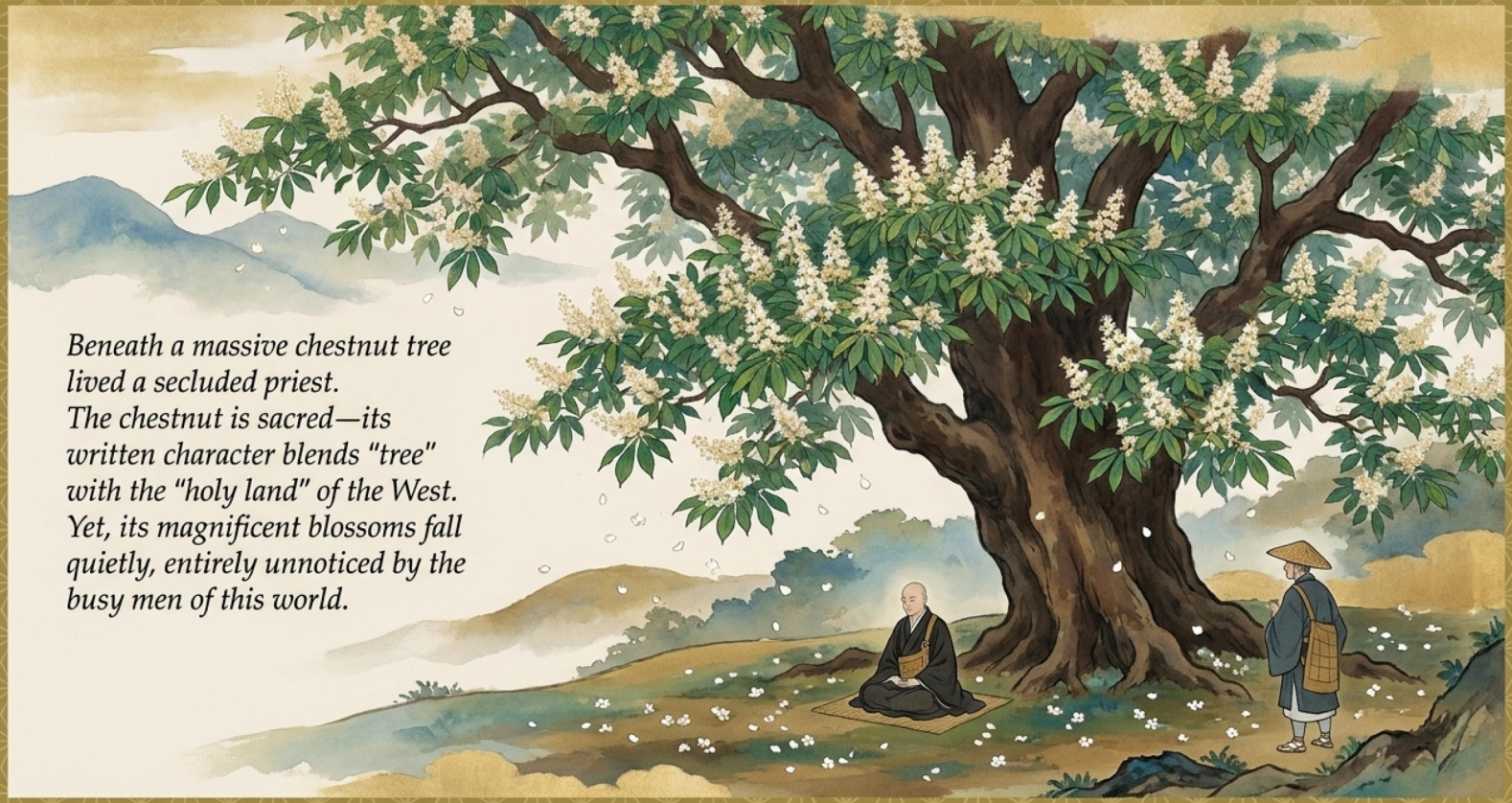


I finally found the celebrated willow by a crystal stream. Resting my weary legs beneath its shade, I watched young girls planting the square paddy fields. Stepping out of the willow's shade, it felt as though I had stepped into the ancient poems themselves.

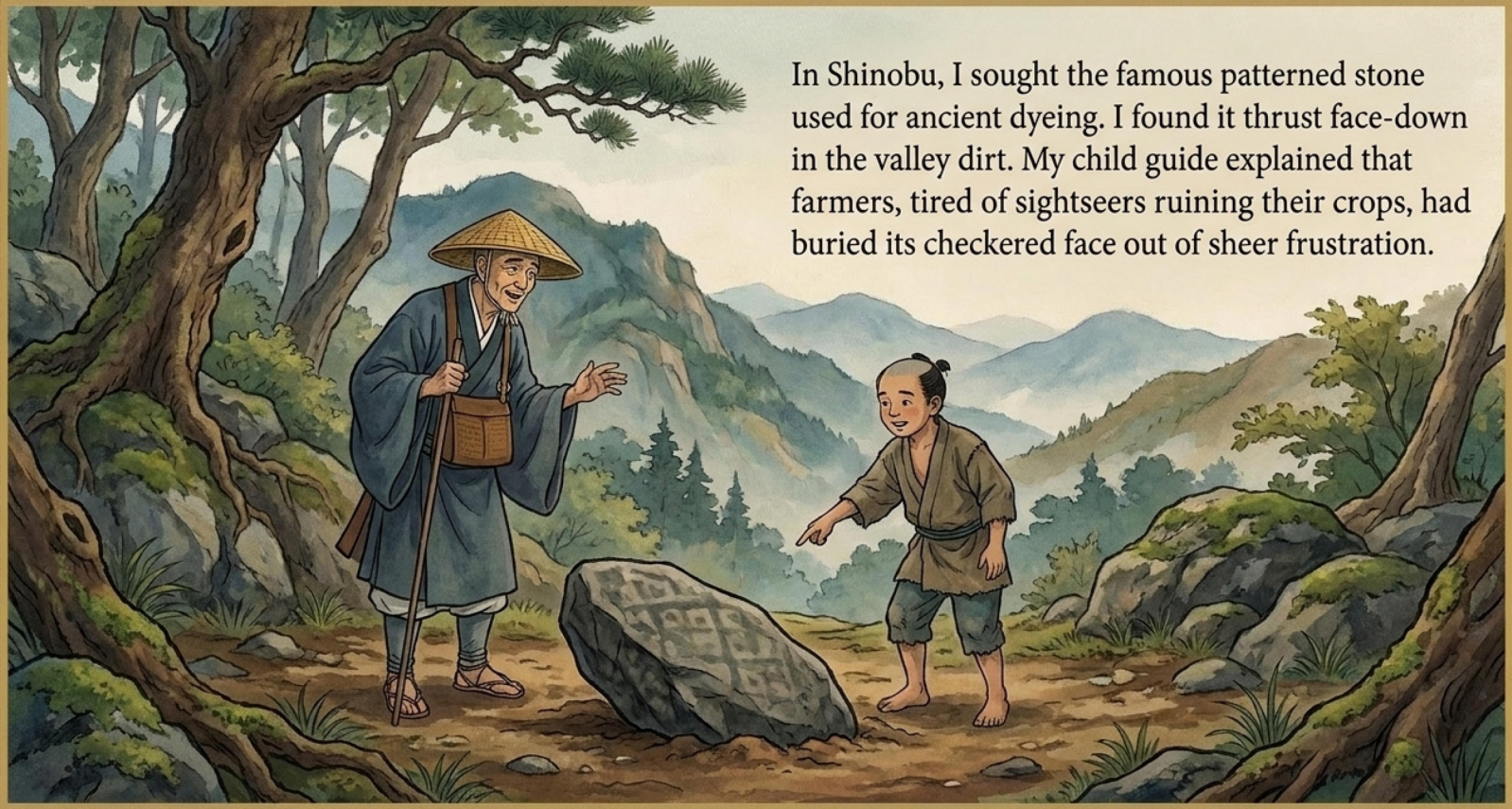
At last, we reached the Shirakawa gate—the true entrance to the deep North. Here, my wandering mind finally found composure. White blossoms lined the road like early snow, a fitting, beautiful garment to wear while passing through this ancient threshold.




We visited the Shadow Pond, but cloudy skies hid its famous reflections. Resting in Sukagawa with the poet Tōkyū, I confessed my silence. The sheer wonder of the northern countryside had completely absorbed me; I passed the great Shirakawa gate without writing a single verse.


Beneath a massive chestnut tree lived a secluded priest.
The chestnut is sacred—its written character blends "tree" with the "holy land" of the West.
Yet, its magnificent blossoms fall quietly, entirely unnoticed by the busy men of this world.


Near the hills of Asaka, I wandered from pool to pool searching for the rare katsumi iris. Strangely, not a single soul knew of it. The sun slipped behind the mountains before I could catch even a glimpse of its petals.


In Shinobu, I sought the famous patterned stone used for ancient dyeing. I found it thrust face-down in the valley dirt. My child guide explained that farmers, tired of sightseers ruining their crops, had buried its checkered face out of sheer frustration.



Watching the busy, muddy hands of the village girls planting the rice fields, I was suddenly reminded of that hidden stone. Their working hands beautifully echoed the forgotten art of that ancient dyeing technique. The northern road stretches on...


At Iizuka's ruined Sato estate,
the past moved me to tears.
I wept at the graves of two loyal wives
who bravely donned armor
after their husbands fell in battle.



Inside a lonely temple, history felt vivid.
Monks preserved Lord Yoshitsune's
blade and the carrying pack of Benkei,
his fierce retainer.

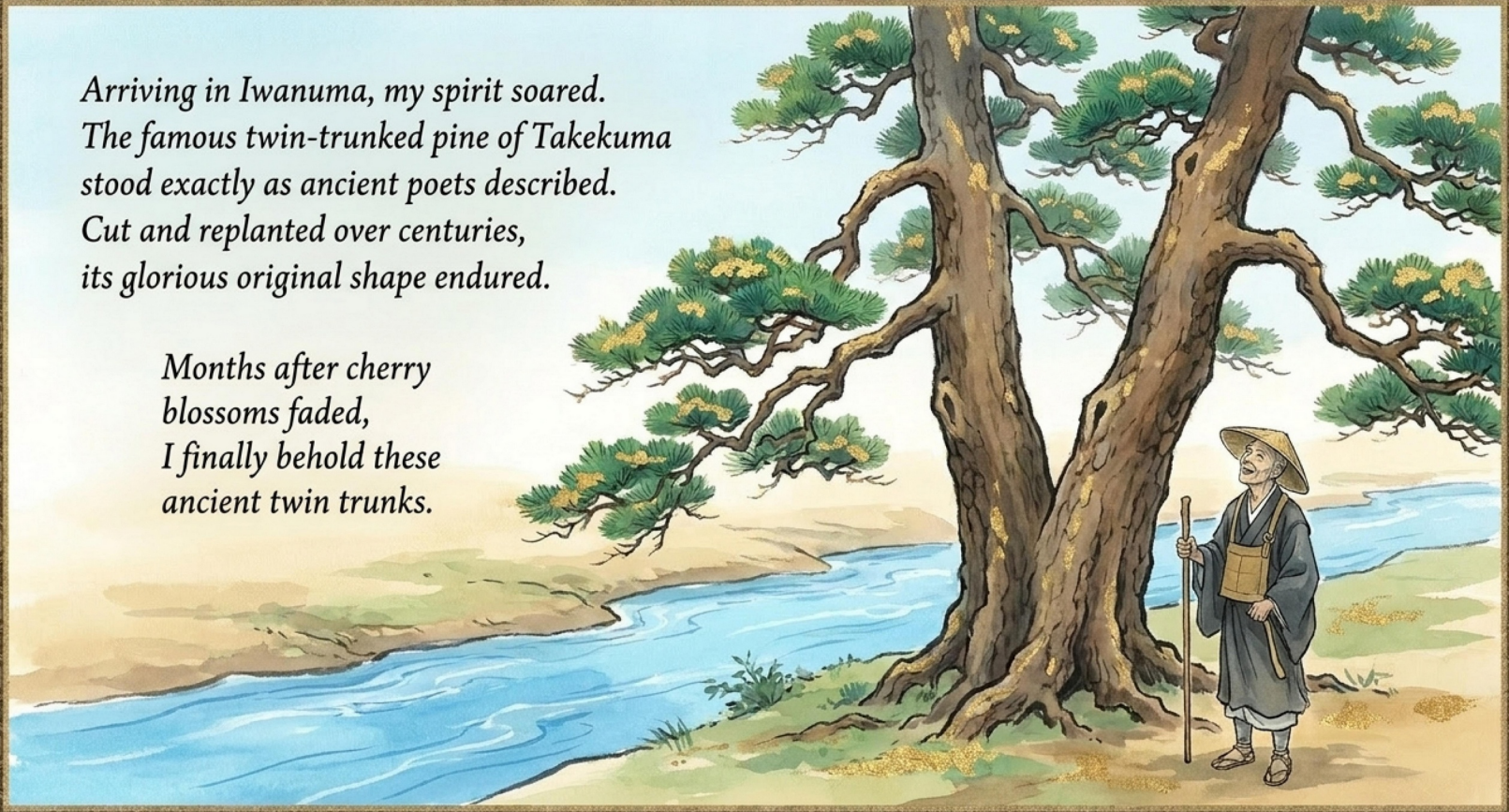
Today we raise festival banners high,
honoring the ancient blade and pack.


Night brought intense misery. Thunder rolled, rain leaked in, and fleas swarmed the filthy mats. Tormented by my chronic illness, I feared I might to perish on this unforgiving road.


I pushed onward, desperate to visit Lord Sanekata's distant tomb. Yet heavy seasonal rains and my lingering sickness made the deep mud completely impassable.
How many miles must I trudge through this endless, muddy rain?

Arriving in Iwanuma, my spirit soared.
The famous twin-trunked pine of Takekuma
stood exactly as ancient poets described.
Cut and replanted over centuries,
its glorious original shape endured.

Months after cherry
blossoms faded,
I finally behold these
ancient twin trunks.




In Sendai, I met the painter Kaemon, a kindred artistic soul.
He graciously guided me through the Miyagino plain, alive with blooming bush-clover and brilliant white rhododendrons.

Before we parted, Kaemon gifted me exquisite landscape drawings and straw sandals dyed the deep blue of irises.

It feels as if vibrant iris blossoms have bloomed directly upon my traveling feet.

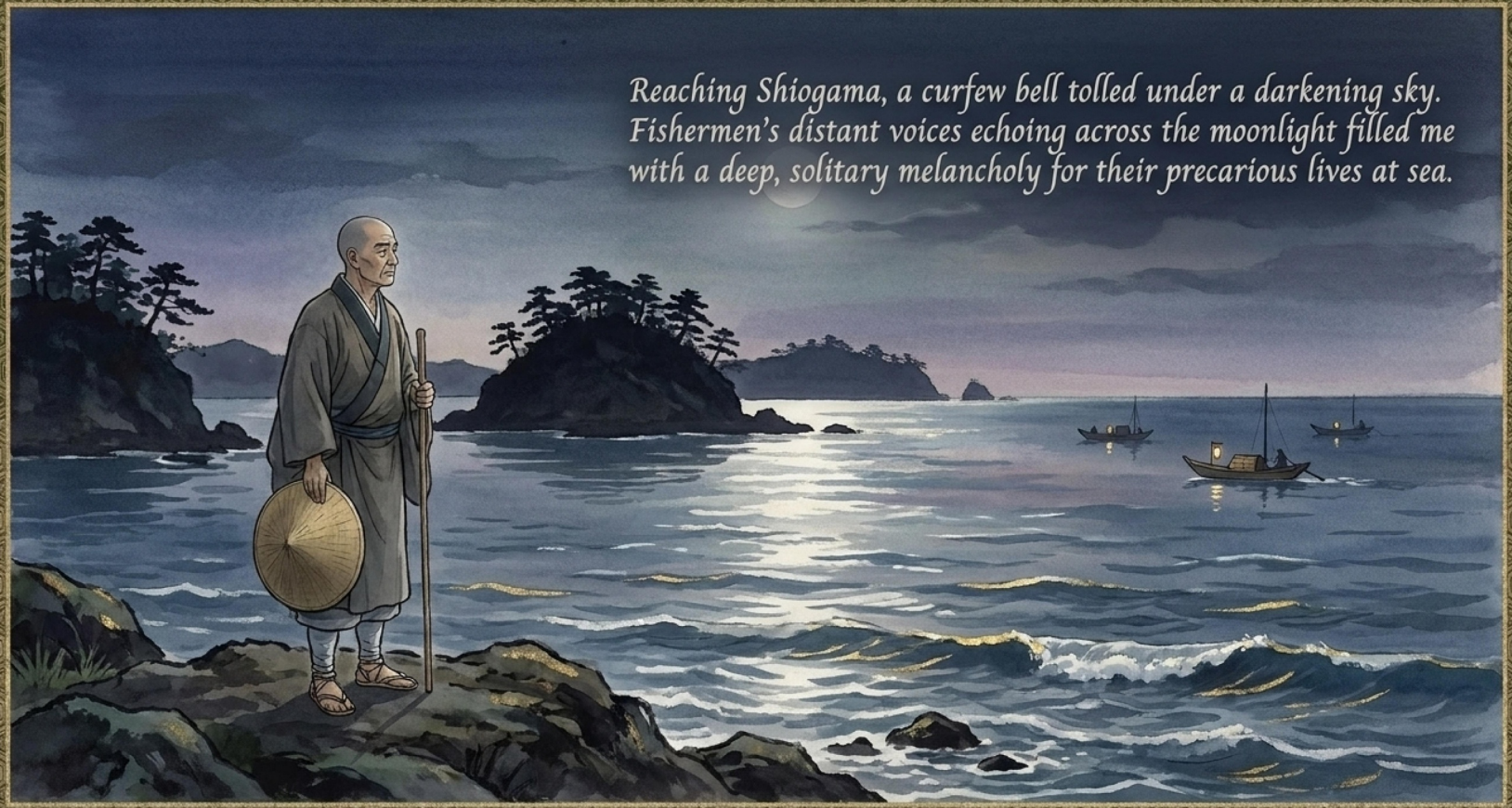



Pushing further, I discovered
a stone monument erected a
thousand years ago.
Beneath thick layers of
ancient moss, the carved
letters of our ancestors
were still faintly visible.

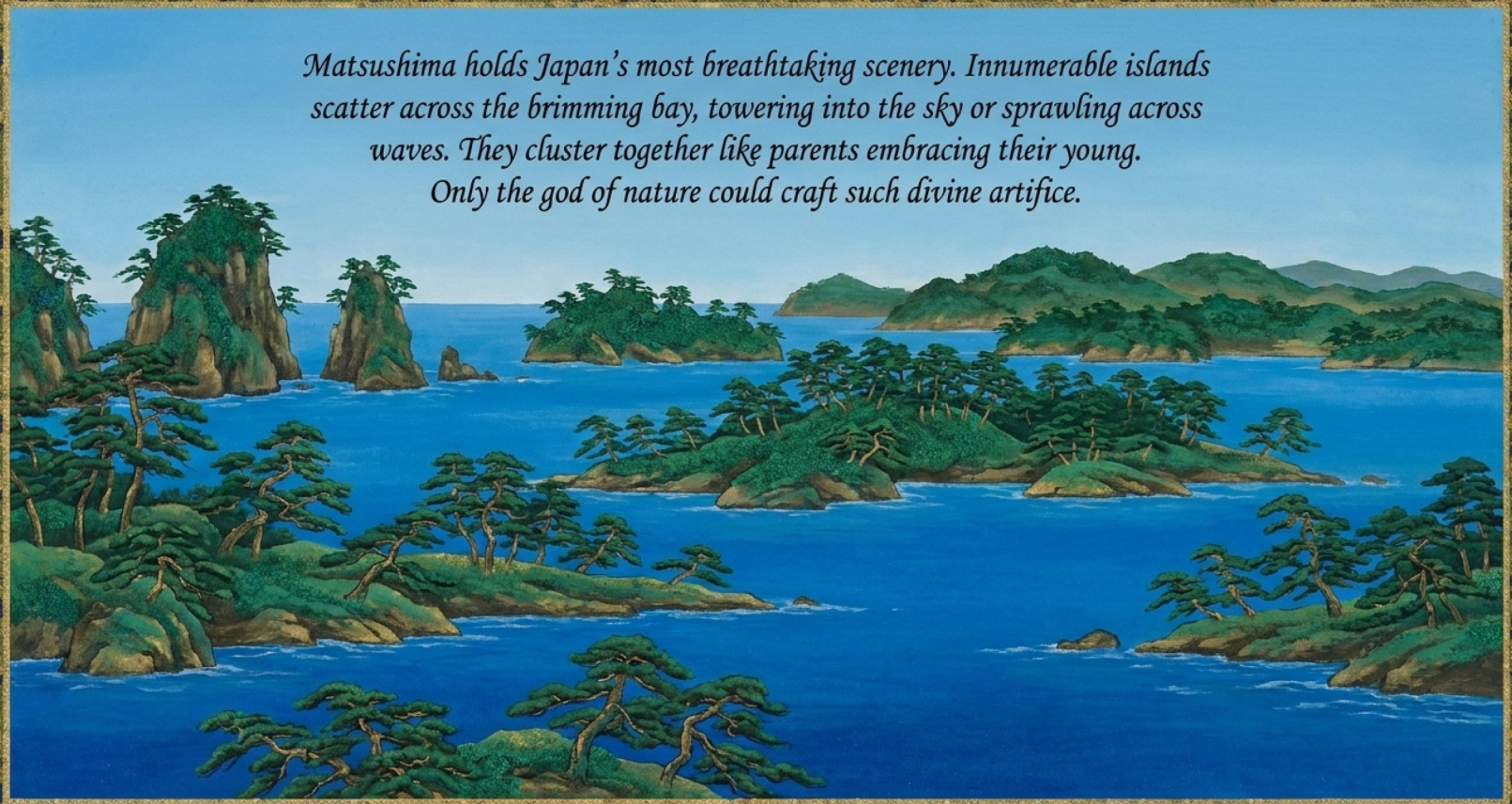
Mountains crumble, rivers shift, and roads vanish. Yet this single ancient stone survived the battering of centuries. In an ever-changing world, I wept joyful tears, standing in the eternal presence of the ancients.

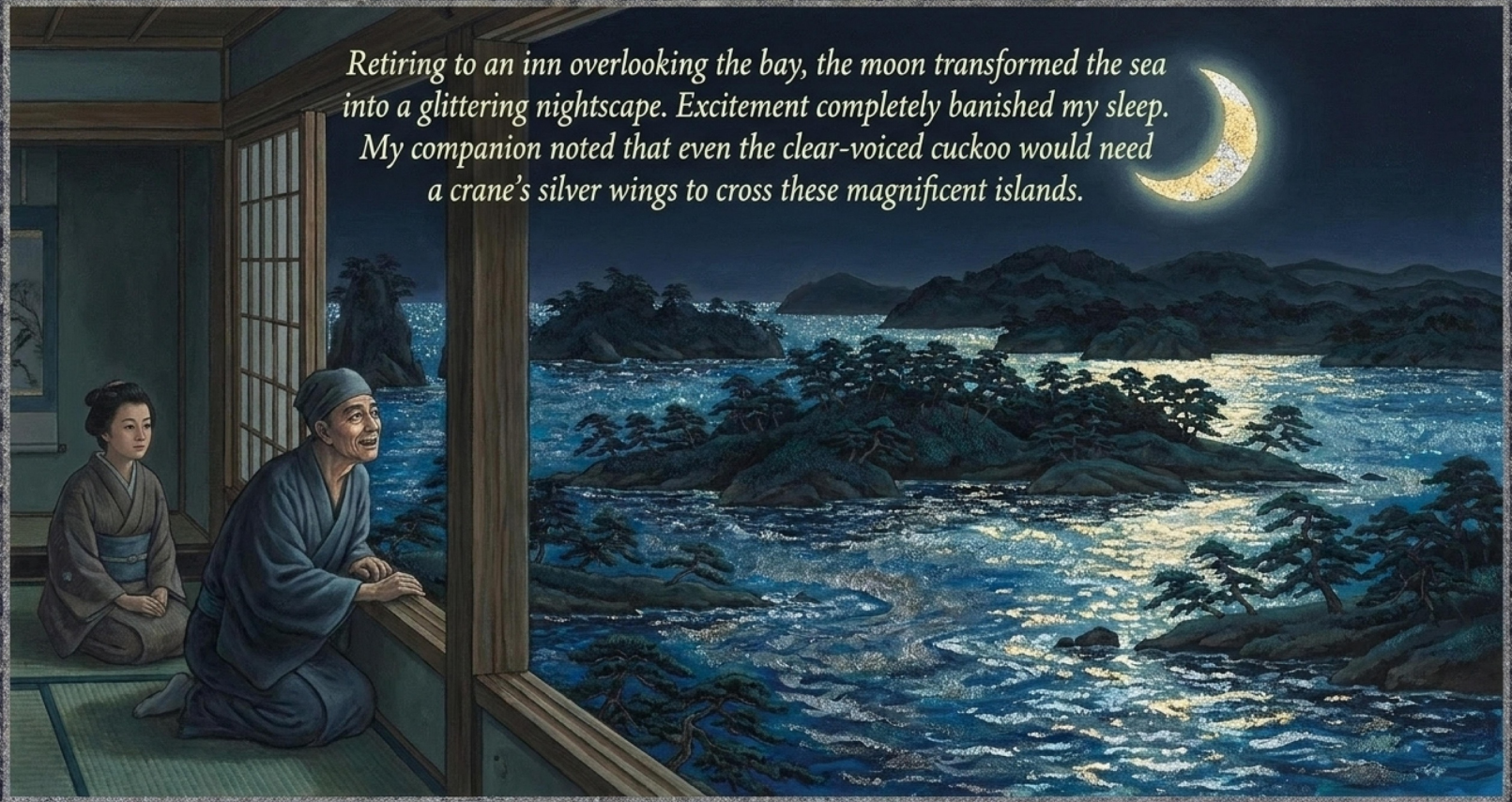





Reaching Shiogama, a curfew bell tolled under a darkening sky.
Fishermen's distant voices echoing across the moonlight filled me
with a deep, solitary melancholy for their precarious lives at sea.


At Shiogama's Myōjin Shrine,
morning sunlight illuminated
the vermilion fences.
I bowed in deep reverence,
awestruck that divine power
extended to the extreme north.
An ancient iron lantern stood
as a testament to the enduring
legacy of faithful warriors.


Matsushima holds Japan's most breathtaking scenery. Innumerable islands scatter across the brimming bay, towering into the sky or sprawling across waves. They cluster together like parents embracing their young. Only the god of nature could craft such divine artifice.


Retiring to an inn overlooking the bay, the moon transformed the sea
into a glittering nightscape. Excitement completely banished my sleep.
My companion noted that even the clear-voiced cuckoo would need
a crane's silver wings to cross these magnificent islands.

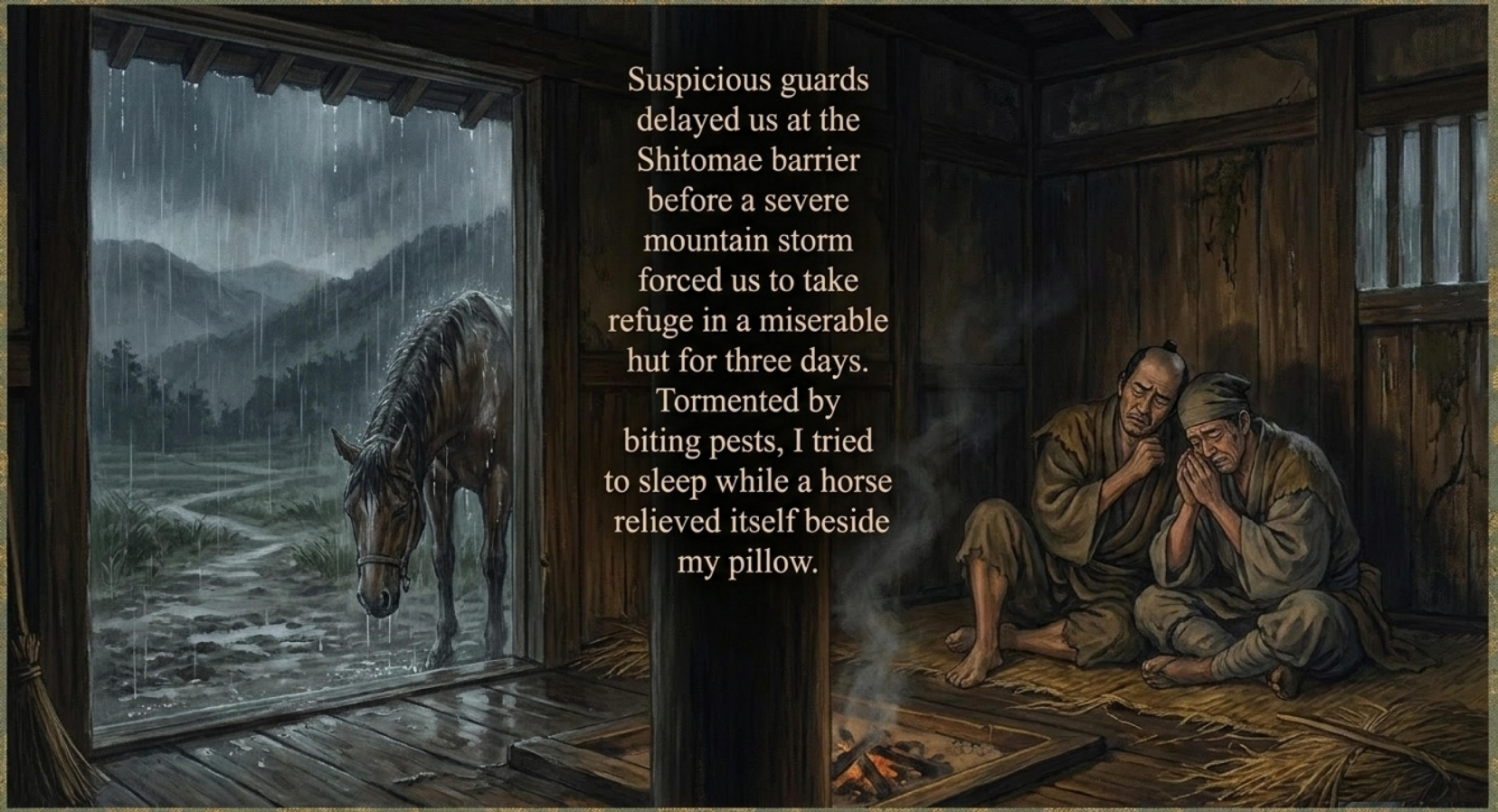
At Hiraizumi, three generations of Fujiwara glory had vanished like an empty dream. Where mighty fortresses once stood, only desolate fields remained. I sat upon my hat and wept bitterly. Wild summer grasses are the only monuments left of ancient warriors' fleeting ambitions.





The sacred Golden Chapel somehow survived the all-devouring grasses. Enclosing the coffins of three nobles, its jewelled doors and golden pillars were shielded by an outer tile roof. Even the relentless spring rains spared this sanctuary, leaving it glowing softly in the shadows.

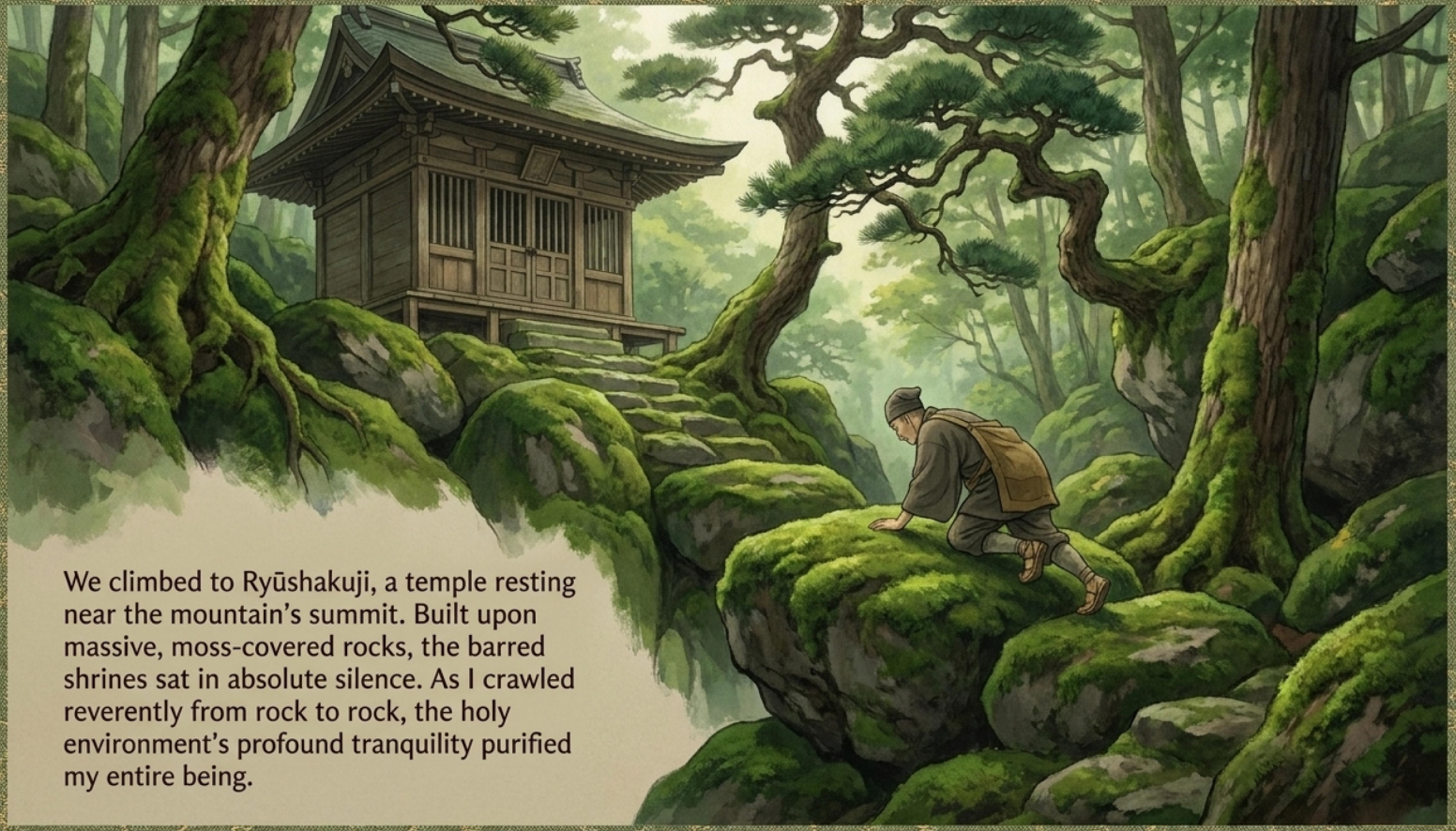



Suspicious guards
delayed us at the
Shitomae barrier
before a severe
mountain storm
forced us to take
refuge in a miserable
hut for three days.
Tormented by
biting pests, I tried
to sleep while a horse
relieved itself beside
my pillow.


We hired a rugged, sword-bearing local to guide us through imposing mountains. The foliage was so thick the air felt like black soot. Groping through dense bamboo and stumbling over hidden rocks, we emerged safely, dripping in cold sweat.



In Obanazawa, we visited Seifū, a wealthy merchant with a poetic soul. Understanding the intense hardships of the road, he offered boundless hospitality. In his refreshing home, I felt completely at ease, lazily sprawling out as as if it were my own.



We climbed to Ryūshakuji, a temple resting near the mountain's summit. Built upon massive, moss-covered rocks, the barred shrines sat in absolute silence. As I crawled reverently from rock to rock, the holy environment's profound tranquility purified my entire being.


'Waiting out the rain at Ōishida, I encountered local poets struggling between old and new styles. I guided them in linked verse, leaving our shared poetry as a parting gift—a profound comfort on this wandering journey.'



海か山波かりたむう

The swollen Mogami River was perilous. Our tiny rice boat navigated sharp rocks, heavy foliage, and cascading silver waterfalls. Looming mountains threatened to crush us. Gathering the May rains, the Mogami plunges into a violent, rushing stream.

地裏の地山神は
恵本の降を覩
間た松を頗にし
天吉と遊びを光る
光の間衞げギし
クター流れた
すっし穫風を
ひきまに給ます、
德しさいみく香い

Ascending Mount Haguro,
high priest Egaku
welcomed us.
Here, the Tendai
doctrine of Absolute
Meditation shines,
illuminating utter darkness
with clear lunar beams.

A gentle breeze graces this
valley, carrying the faint,
blessed aroma of snow.





Wrapped in white paper ropes and cotton hoods, we braved slippery ice and thin air for eight grueling miles. Reaching Gassan's summit frozen and breathless, I slept on pliant bamboo branches beneath a glistening moon.

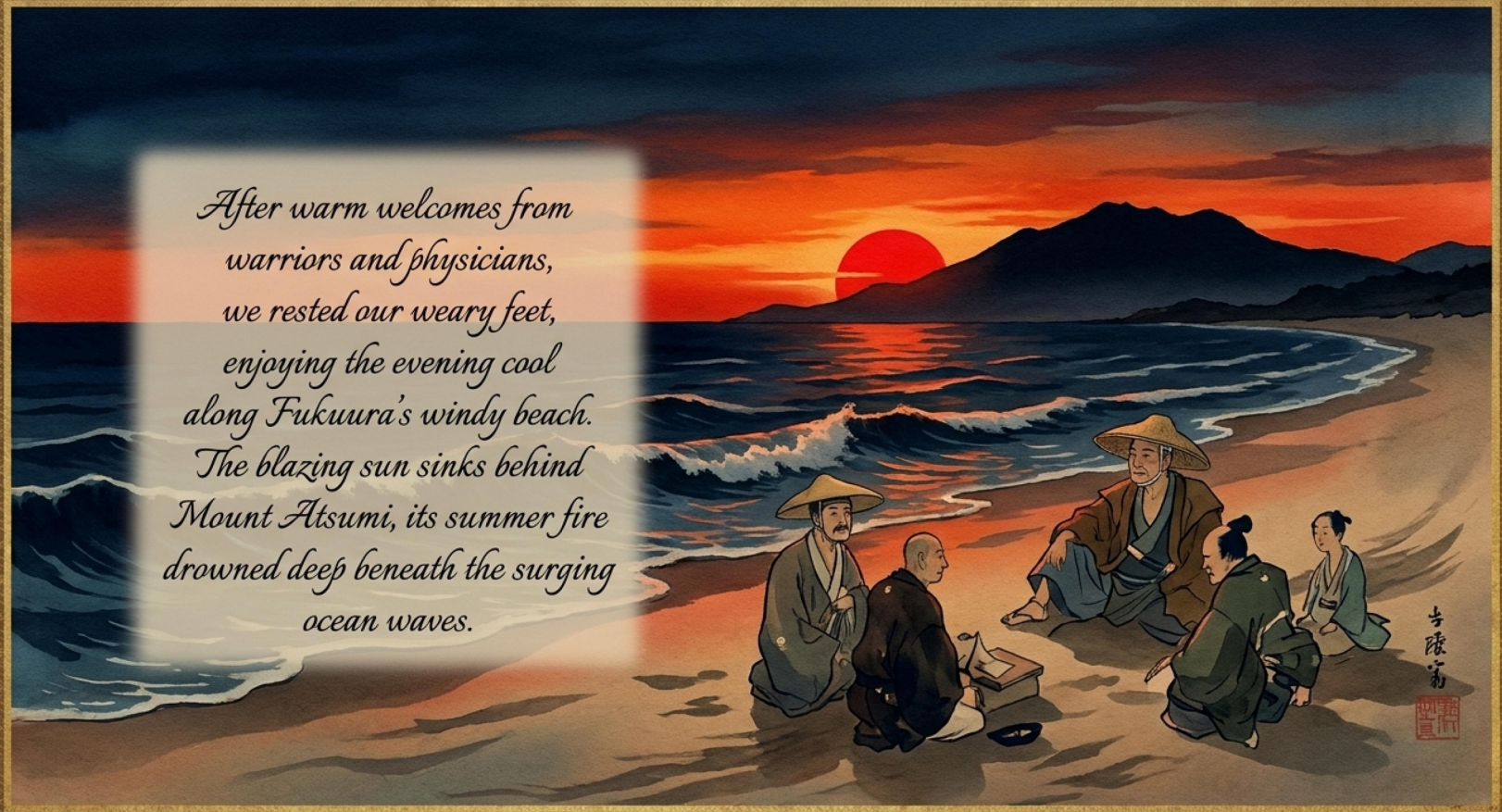

Descending toward Mount Yudono, we found the legendary smithy of Gassan built over a crystal stream. He forged world-renowned swords here, proving that uncovering the mysterious power latent in water requires absolute devotion.



Nearby, a tiny cherry tree blossomed stubbornly against the crushing snow. Moved by its victorious resilience, it recalled old poems praising fragrant summer plums.

A pale crescent moon shines cool above Haguro's dark hollows.


The holy secrets of Mount Yudono
are strictly forbidden to speak.
Overwhelmed by the awe of the sacred road
and the pilgrim coins scattered upon it,
I drenched my sleeves in tears of reticent weeping.

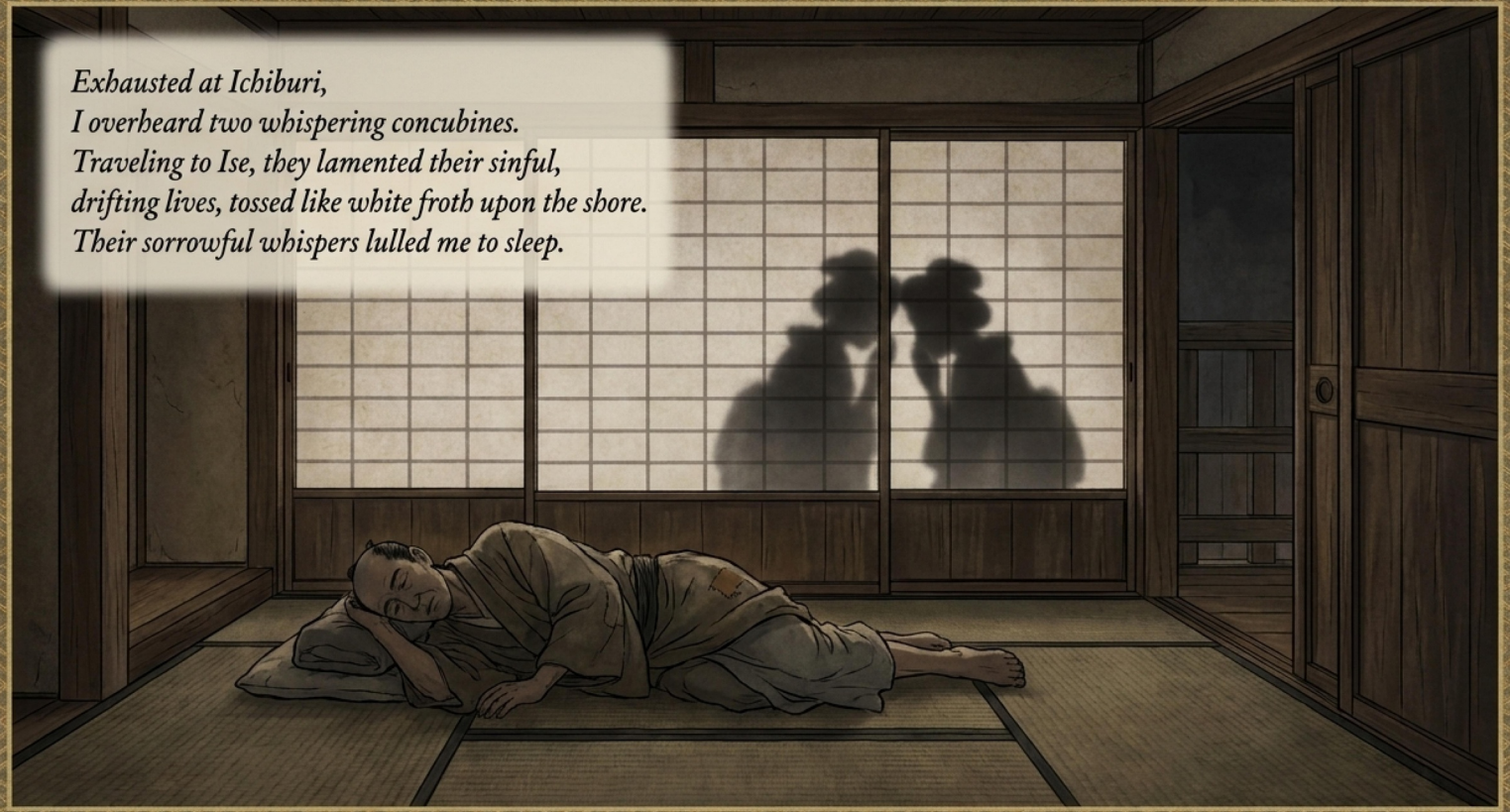

After warm welcomes from
warriors and physicians,
we rested our weary feet,
enjoying the evening cool
along Fukuura's windy beach.
The blazing sun sinks behind
Mount Atsumi, its summer fire
drowned deep beneath the surging
ocean waves.

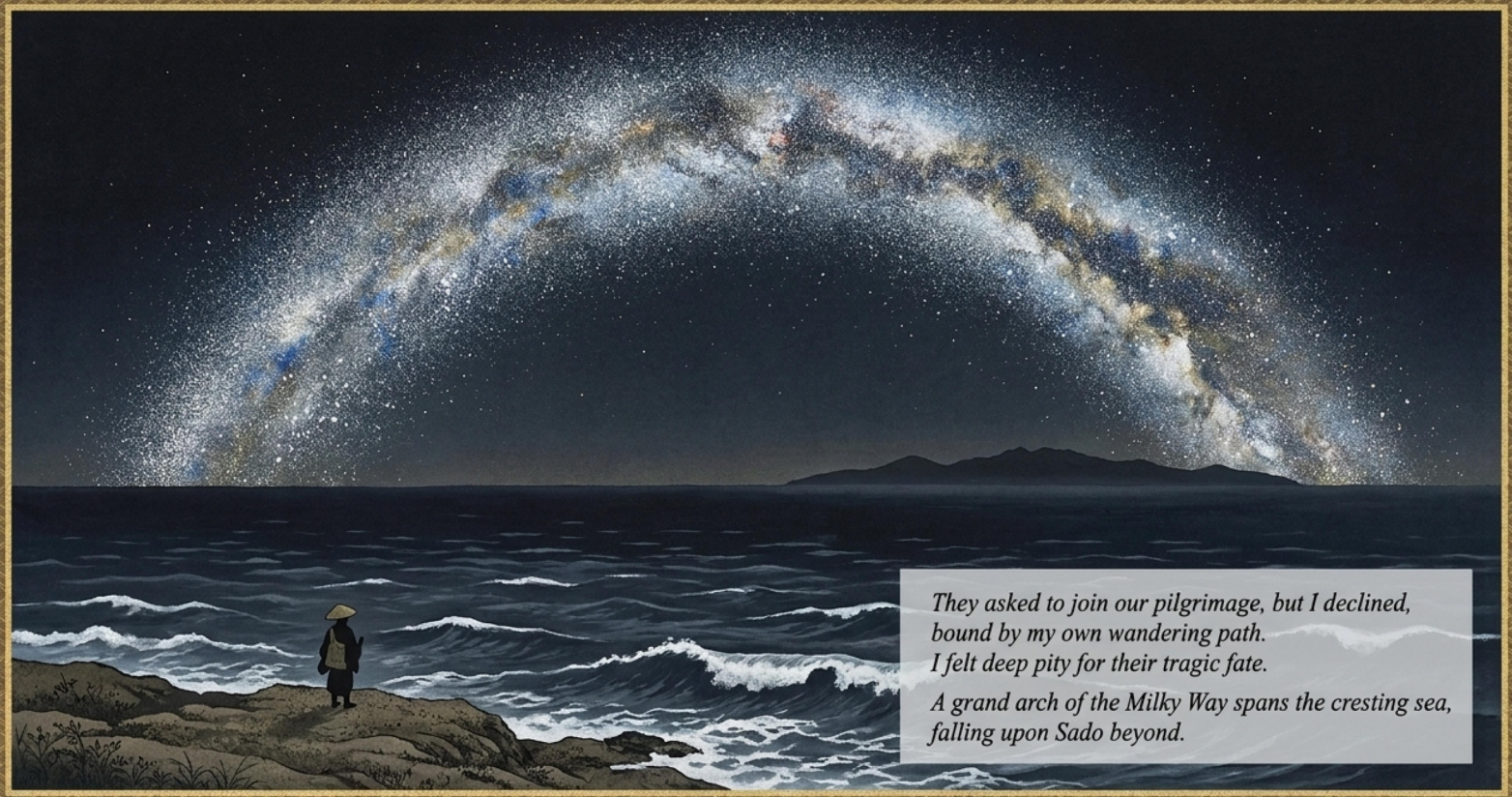

Driven to see Kisagata, we hiked rocky shores.
A sudden storm wrapped the sky in grey,
rendering us semi-blind.
Yet, taking shelter with fishermen,
I knew this dark rain promised
brilliant beauty for the morrow.



Morning revealed Kisagata's extraordinary grace.
Where Matsushima possesses a cheerful, laughing beauty,
Kisagata holds a sorrowful, weeping countenance.
It resembles a troubled, penitent mind, solitary in the rain.


Touched by pity, I declined the forlorn women's plea to follow us, trusting in divine protection. Beneath one roof we shared our sleep, travelers and concubines alike, much like delicate bush-clovers bathed in the same moonlight.

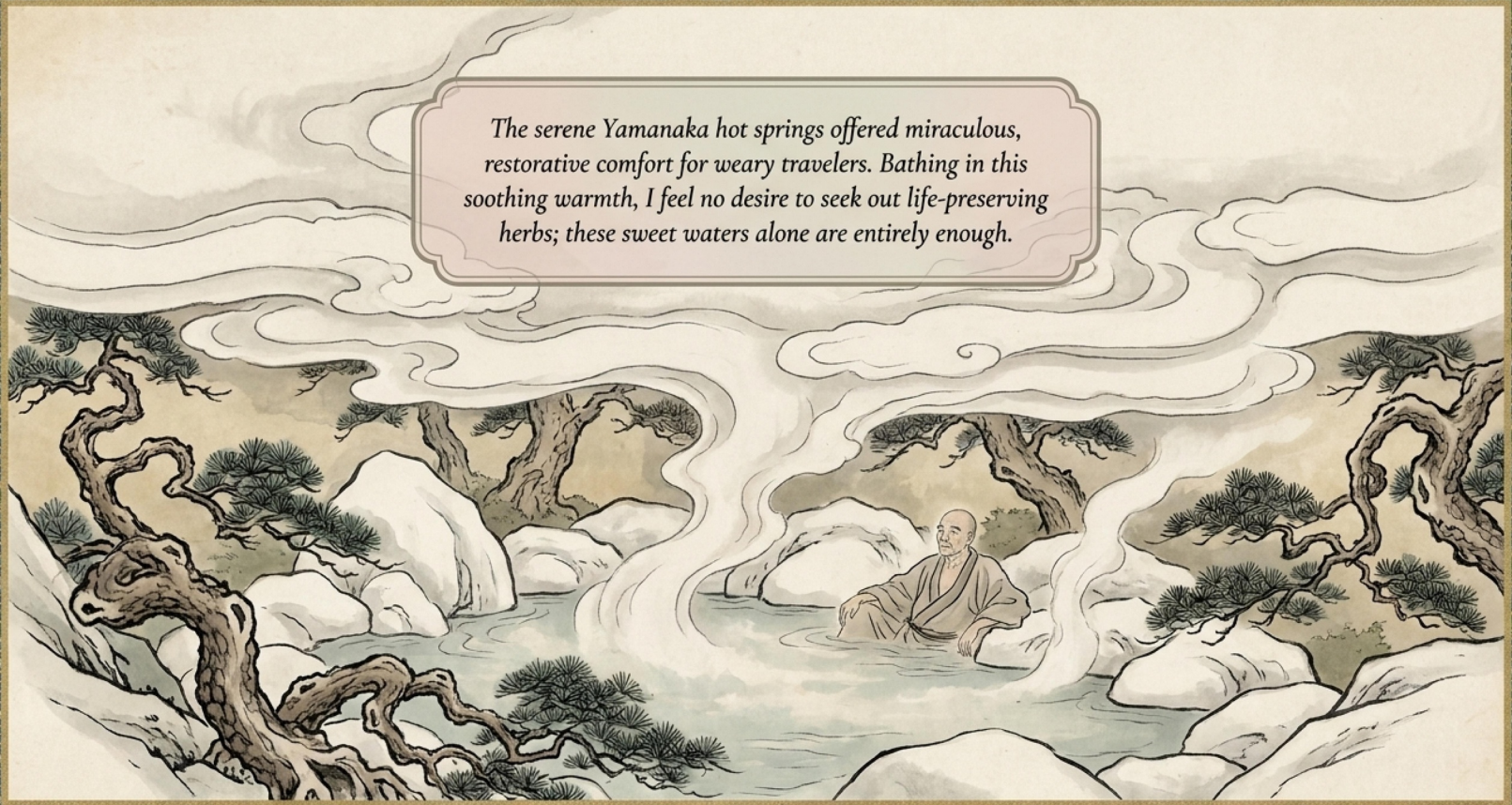

Exhausted at Ichiburi,
I overheard two whispering concubines.
Traveling to Ise, they lamented their sinful,
drifting lives, tossed like white froth upon the shore.
Their sorrowful whispers lulled me to sleep.

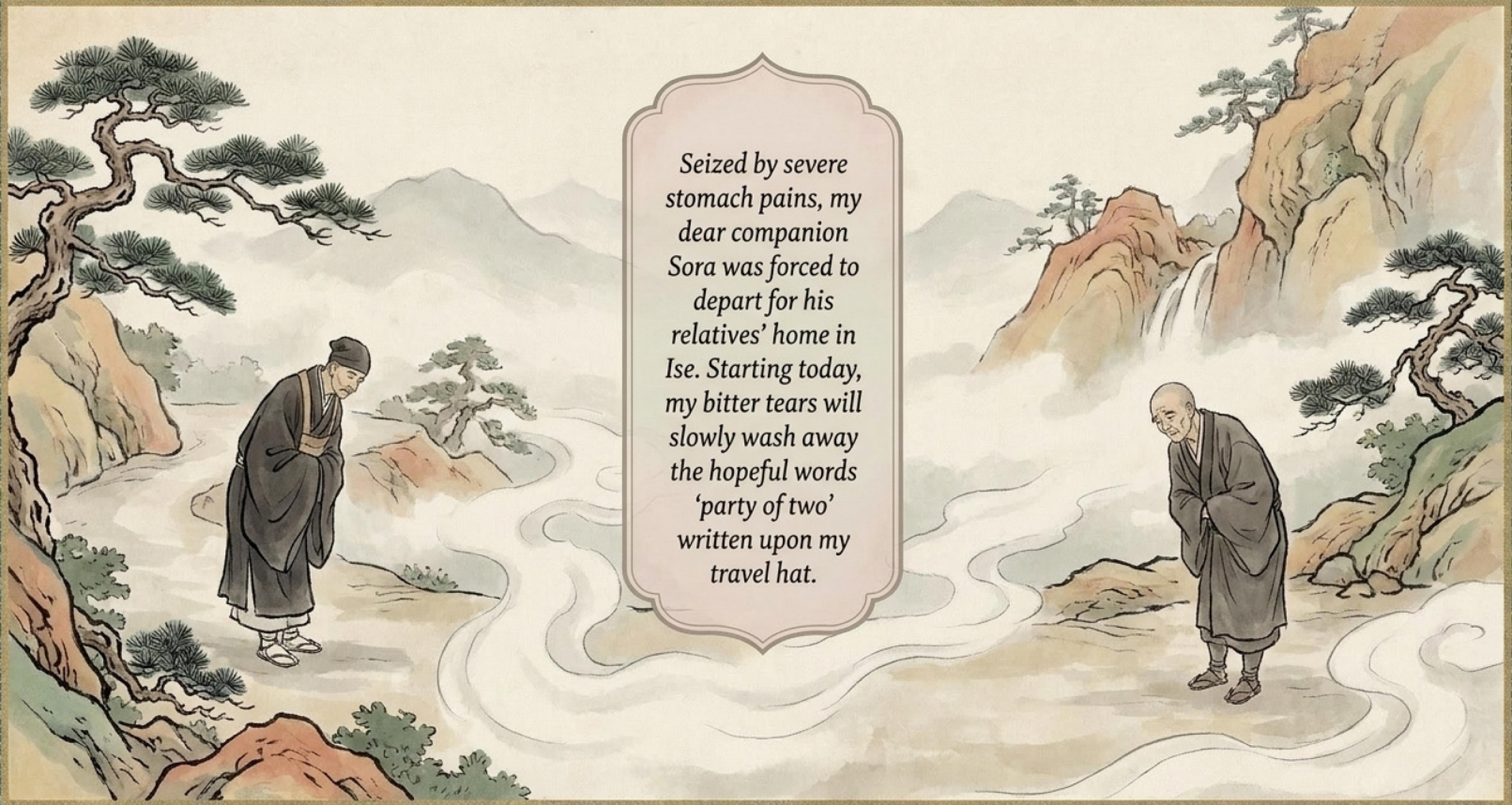

They asked to join our pilgrimage, but I declined,
bound by my own wandering path.
I felt deep pity for their tragic fate.
A grand arch of the Milky Way spans the cresting sea,
falling upon Sado beyond.

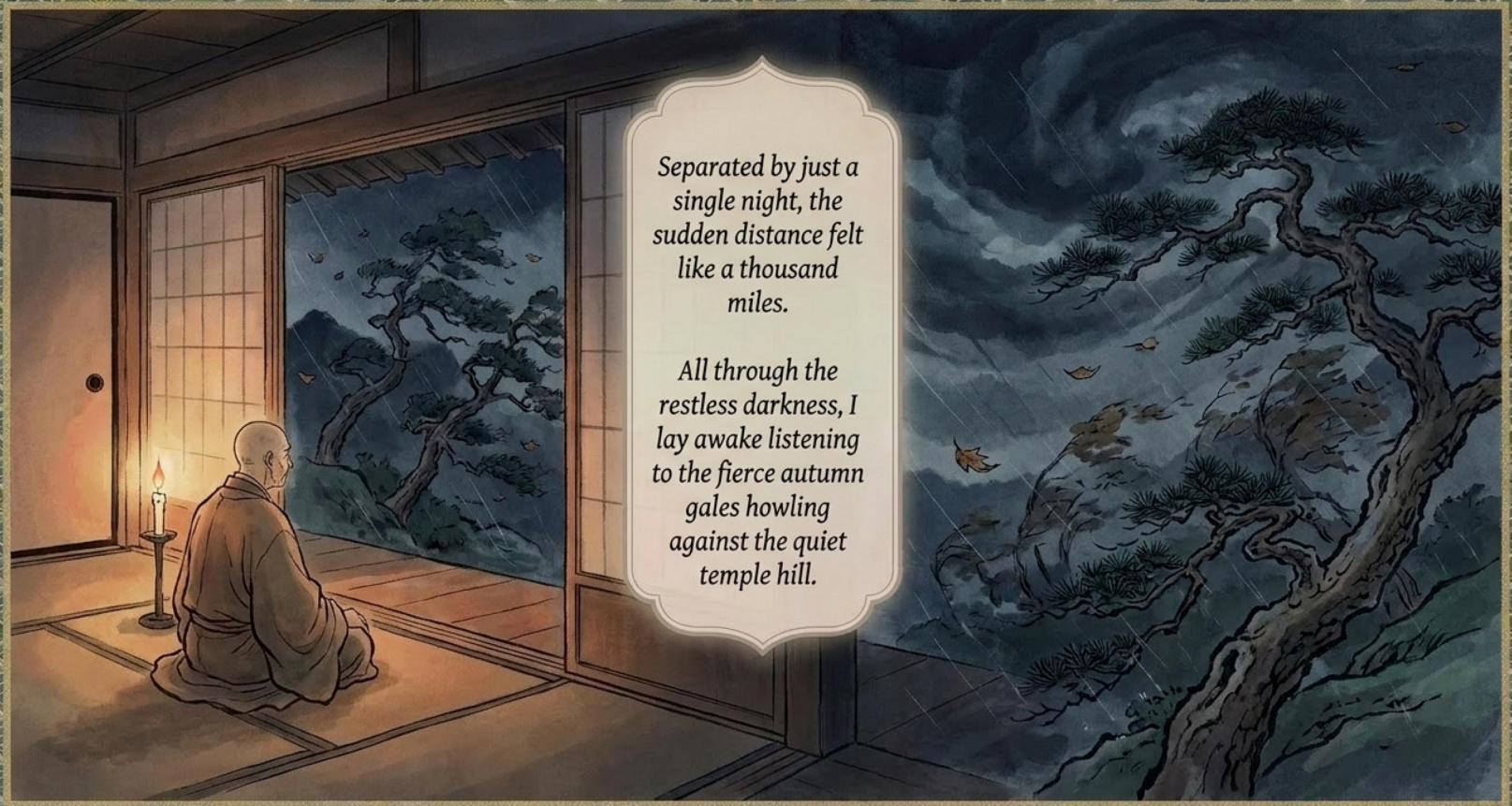

Touched by pity, I declined the forlorn women's plea to follow us, trusting in divine protection. Beneath one roof we shared our sleep, travelers and concubines alike, much like delicate bush-clovers bathed in the same moonlight.


Reaching Kanazawa, I attended a memorial for the poet Isshō, who passed unexpectedly last winter. Awaken if you can hear me, dear friend; my deep sorrow merely echoes the roaring autumn wind.


At Tada Shrine rested Lord Sanemori's legendary helmet, a magnificent relic of ancient battles. I stand in profound awe, listening to a solitary cricket chirping softly from the dark, hollow cavity of this golden armor.


The serene Yamanaka hot springs offered miraculous, restorative comfort for weary travelers. Bathing in this soothing warmth, I feel no desire to seek out life-preserving herbs; these sweet waters alone are entirely enough.


Seized by severe stomach pains, my dear companion Sora was forced to depart for his relatives' home in Ise. Starting today, my bitter tears will slowly wash away the hopeful words 'party of two' written upon my travel hat.


Separated by just a single night, the sudden distance felt like a thousand miles.
All through the restless darkness, I lay awake listening to the fierce autumn gales howling against the quiet temple hill.

Anxious to reach
Echizen, I departed
hastily.
A young priest ran
down the stone steps,
requesting a parting
verse.
I offer you these
scattered willow leaves
from your own garden
to repay your warm
hospitality.





I hired a boat to behold the famous pine of Shiogoshi, a coastal beauty best captured by Saigyō's legendary words.

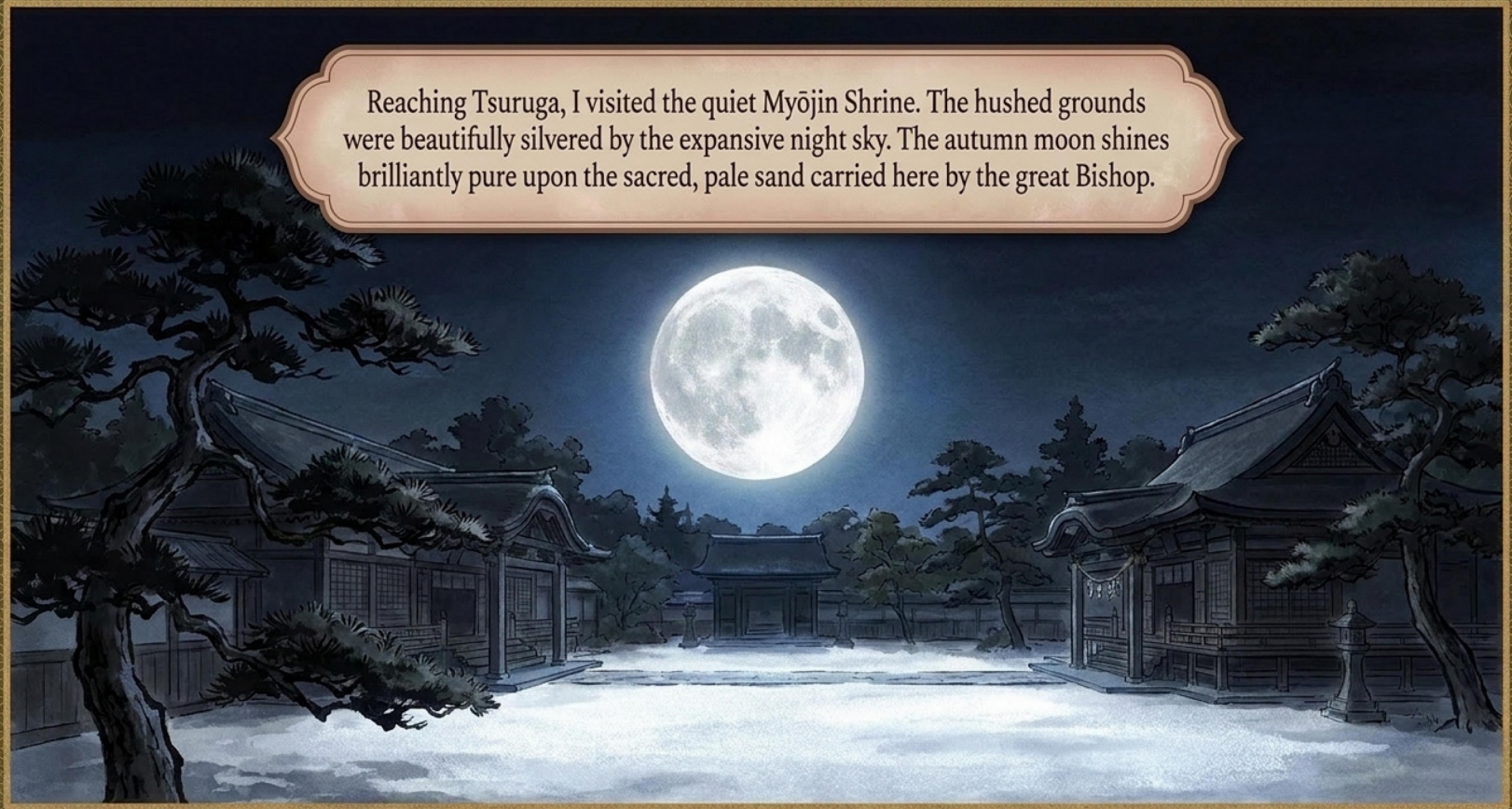
The ocean breeze carries salty waves, while the great dark pine trickles with heavy drops of silver moonlight.

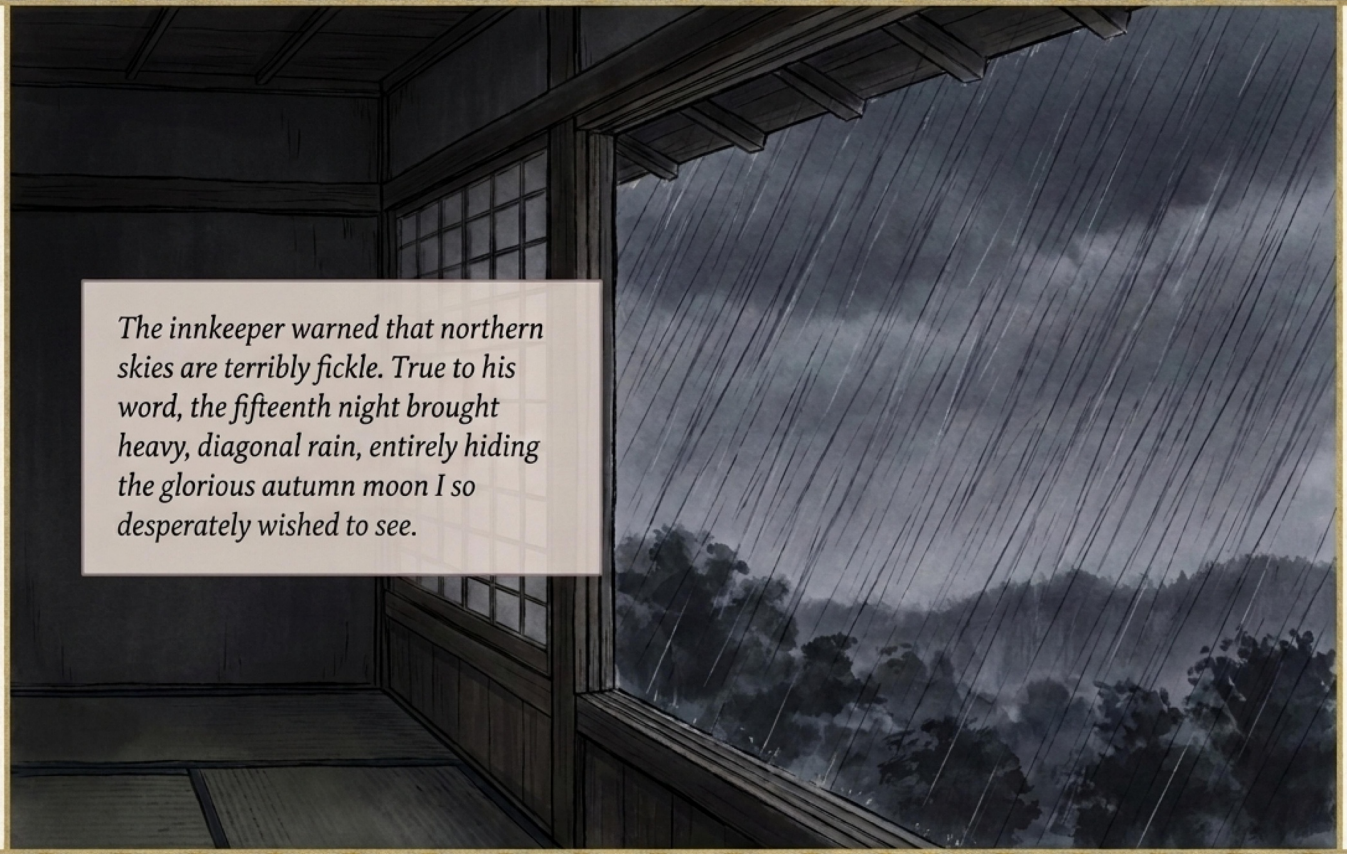
The poet Hokushi
walked alongside me,
sharing beautiful
verses as we
journeyed together.

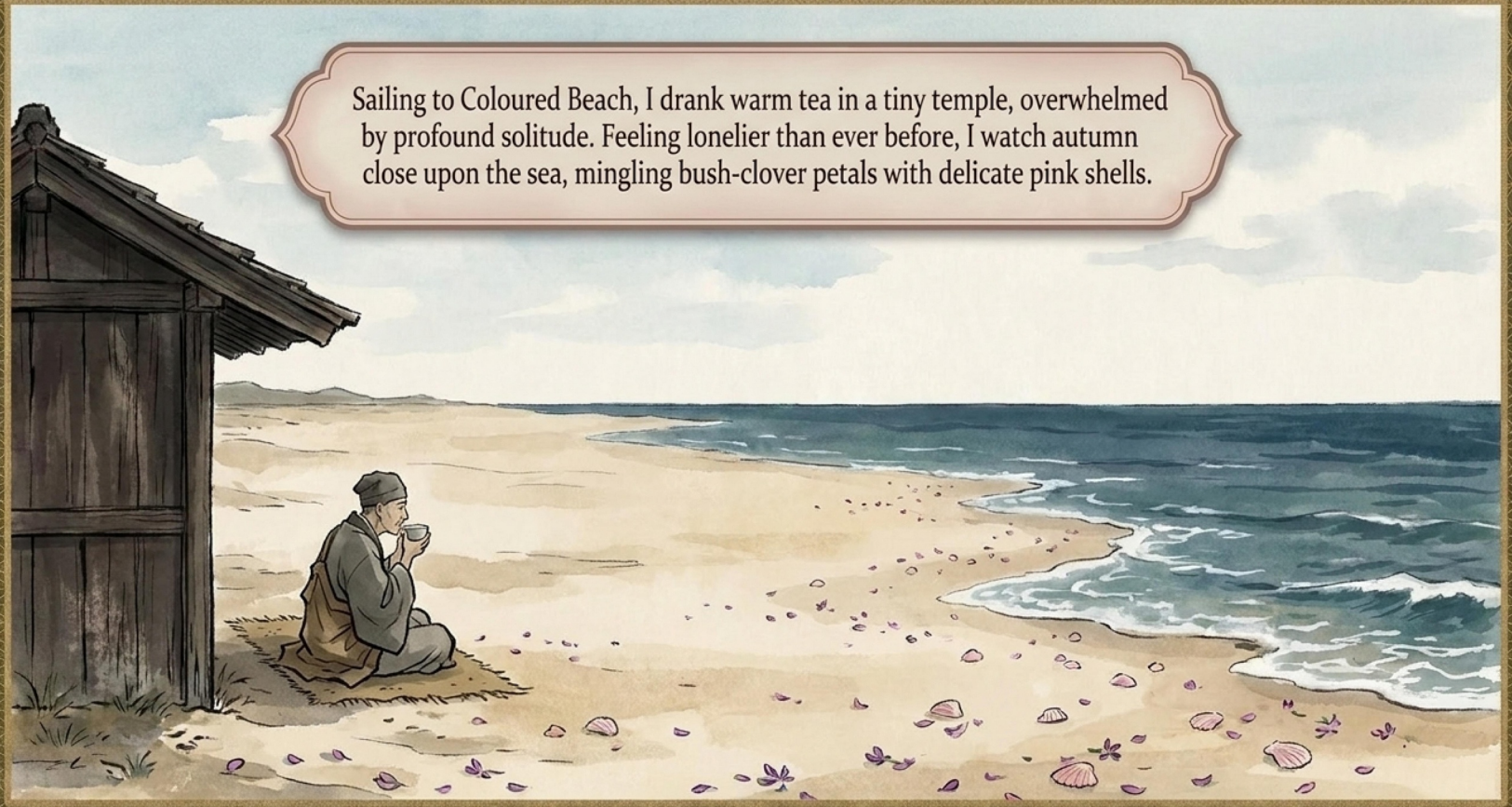
Farewell, my faithful
travel fan.
Covered entirely in
our poetic scribbles,
what is left but to tear
you at summer's end?




Walking toward Fukui in darkness, I sought my old friend Tōsai.
I discovered him living quietly in a humble cottage obscured
by creeping gourds. We shared two joyful nights.


Reaching Tsuruga, I visited the quiet Myōjin Shrine. The hushed grounds were beautifully silvered by the expansive night sky. The autumn moon shines brilliantly pure upon the sacred, pale sand carried here by the great Bishop.


The innkeeper warned that northern skies are terribly fickle. True to his word, the fifteenth night brought heavy, diagonal rain, entirely hiding the glorious autumn moon I so desperately wished to see.


Sailing to Coloured Beach, I drank warm tea in a tiny temple, overwhelmed by profound solitude. Feeling lonelier than ever before, I watch autumn close upon the sea, mingling bush-clover petals with delicate pink shells.


Arriving in Ōgaki, my joy was absolute. Sora safely rejoined me, along with Etsujin, Jokō, and dear friends. They warmly celebrated my arrival as if I had unexpectedly returned from the dead.

On September the sixth,
still weary but relentlessly driven,
I departed for the Ise Shrine.

Like tightly bound clam-shells torn
apart by the bitter autumn chill,
I must take to the road again.

Farewell.

