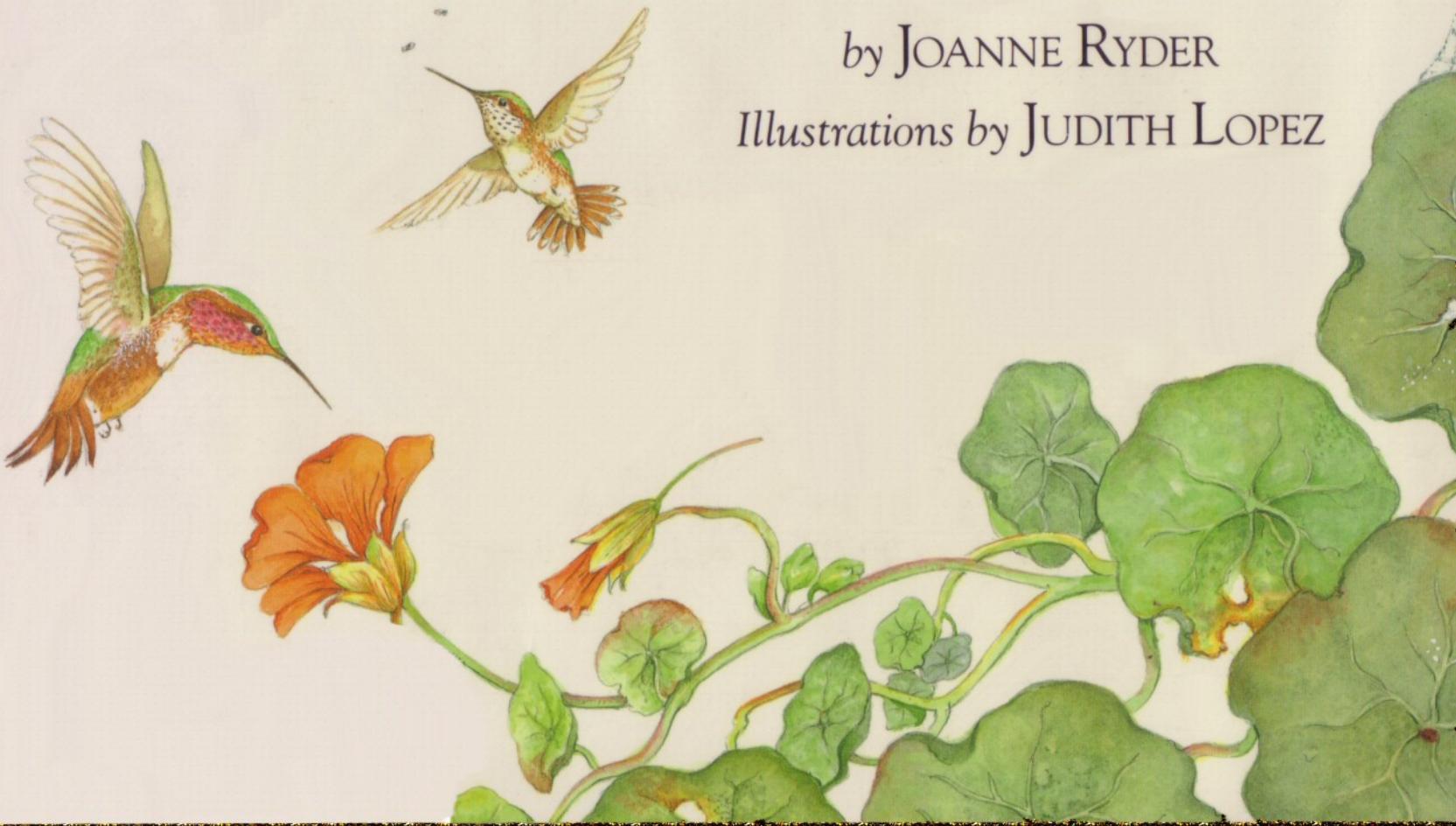


DANCERS IN THE GARDEN

by JOANNE RYDER

Illustrations by JUDITH LOPEZ



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In the chilly morning,
soft fog paints the garden gray.
Pink petals drift from the trees,
and leaves dangle, damp with dew.

Tucked among the shiny leaves,
a fluffy ball of dark feathers breathes softly.
The tiny bird sleeps so deeply
he does not wake when squirrel races by,
leaping from branch to branch to breakfast.



Quietly the sun rises, spreading its light,
turning the garden green and the pond gold.
Gently the warm sun touches the sleeping bird,
till he stirs, stretching his wings
like a small dark fan, and flies into brightness.
As he dances in the sun,
hummingbird sparkles red, orange, green —
his colors flashing in the morning light.



Dancing in the brightness,
hummingbird dips down
where silken webs dangle,
trapping tiny flyers.
Quickly he plucks a web,
stealing his breakfast from spider.
Then he is gone,
soaring high into the trees.



Young children race through the green garden,
their feet thumping softly across a wooden bridge.
Curious hummingbird dips under the trees,
watching them watch him dance by.
The children laugh, each stretching farther,
trying to touch his bright feathers just out of reach.

Bzzzz . . . bzzzz . . . bzzzz . . .
Through the garden hummingbird dances,
his wings buzzing as he flies.
In the grassy shadows a gray cat listens,
turning her large ears up
to hear the soft whirring beyond her reach, too.



In the warm sun, red flowers open like lanterns,
and hummingbird rises to meet them.
He reaches deep inside each flower
with his thin, dark bill
and quickly licks the sweet nectar
with his long, long tongue.

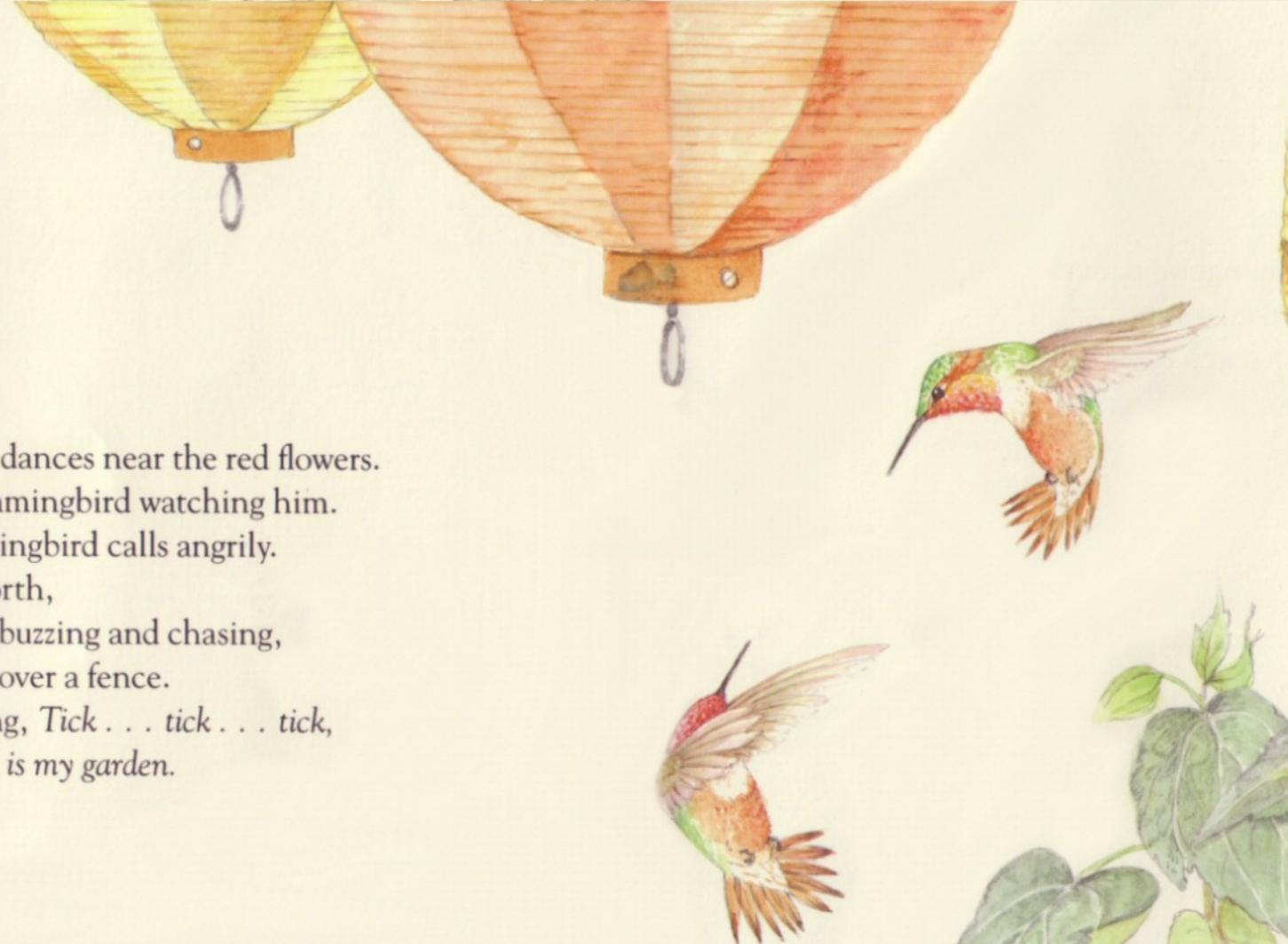


Hummingbird dances from flower to flower,
hanging in space, pausing in mid-air,
his wings blurring, beating too fast to see.
No one dances quite like hummingbird —
forward, backward, even upside down!

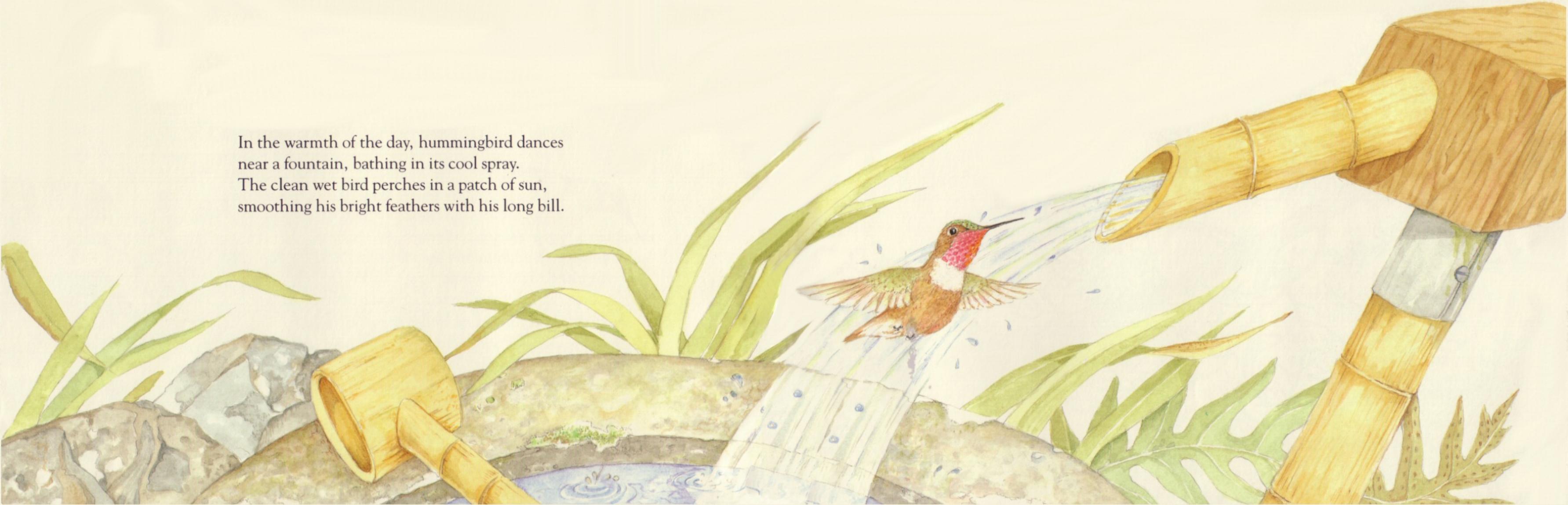


Bzzzz . . . bzzzzz.

Another bright bird dances near the red flowers.
He does not see hummingbird watching him.
Zeet . . . zeet, hummingbird calls angrily.
He darts back and forth,
his tail spread wide, buzzing and chasing,
till the stranger flies over a fence.
Then he rests, calling, Tick . . . tick . . . tick,
telling all birds, This is my garden.
These are my flowers.



In the warmth of the day, hummingbird dances
near a fountain, bathing in its cool spray.
The clean wet bird perches in a patch of sun,
smoothing his bright feathers with his long bill.





At the edge of the garden,
trees stand tall.
Within their graceful branches,
a small bird tucks her nest.
She weaves together
soft feathers and strong grass,
green moss and pale spiderwebs
to make a tiny cup.
And when she's done,
she dances down,
down to the garden . . .

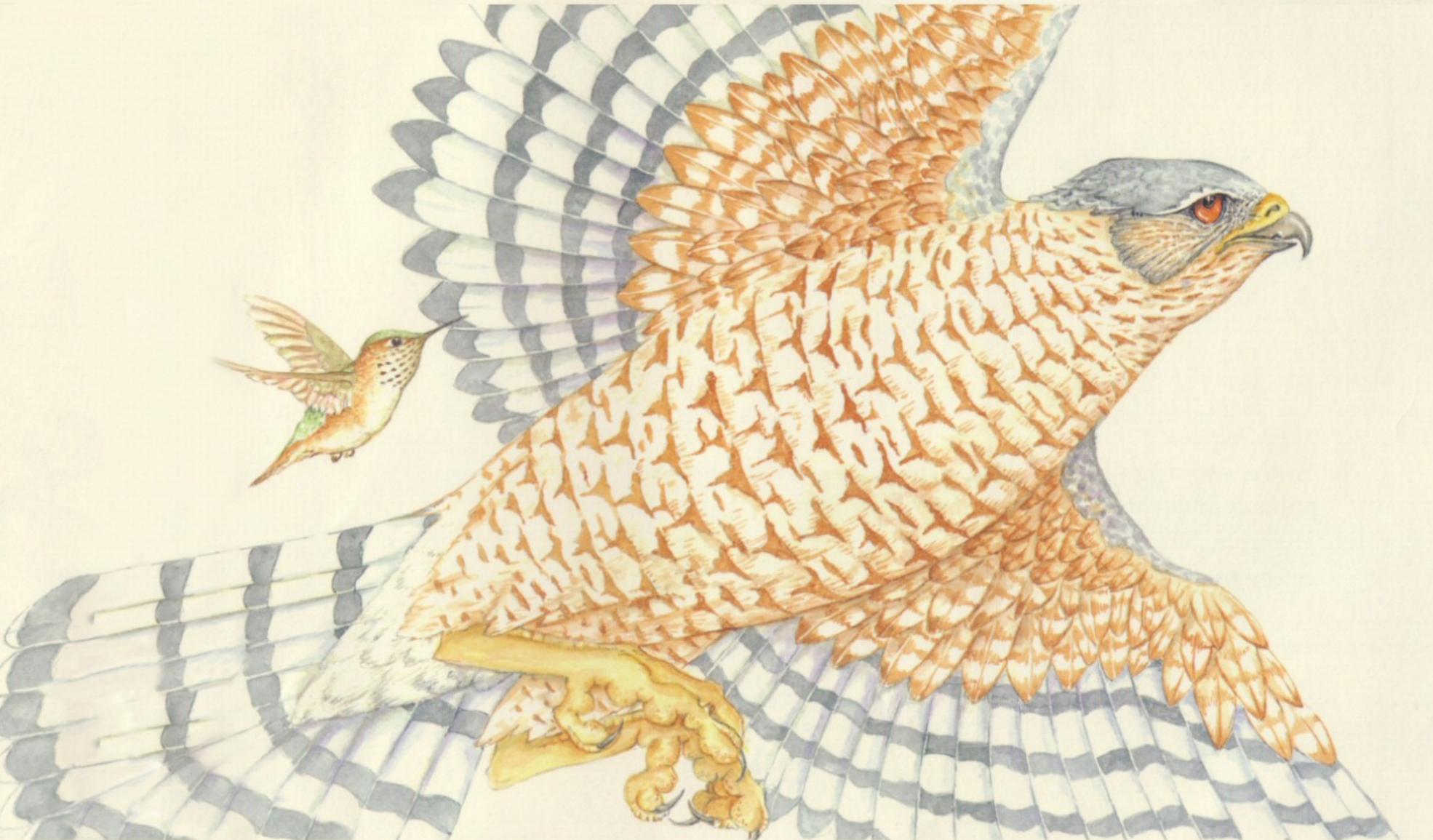
Tick . . . tick . . . tick,
hummingbird calls, ready to chase her away.
But then he stops . . . and flies above her.
He does a special dance, dipping and rising,
his feathers buzzing, his feathers sparkling.
Zeeka . . . zeeka . . . zeeka, she calls to him.
And he flies higher, then dives —
falling quickly, buzzing loudly — from the sky.
He dips and soars again and again,
dancing a fast wild dance — just for her.

At last he buzzes closer,
darting back and forth in front of her,
till both fly off, dancing in the sunlight,
to a shadowy place where they mate.

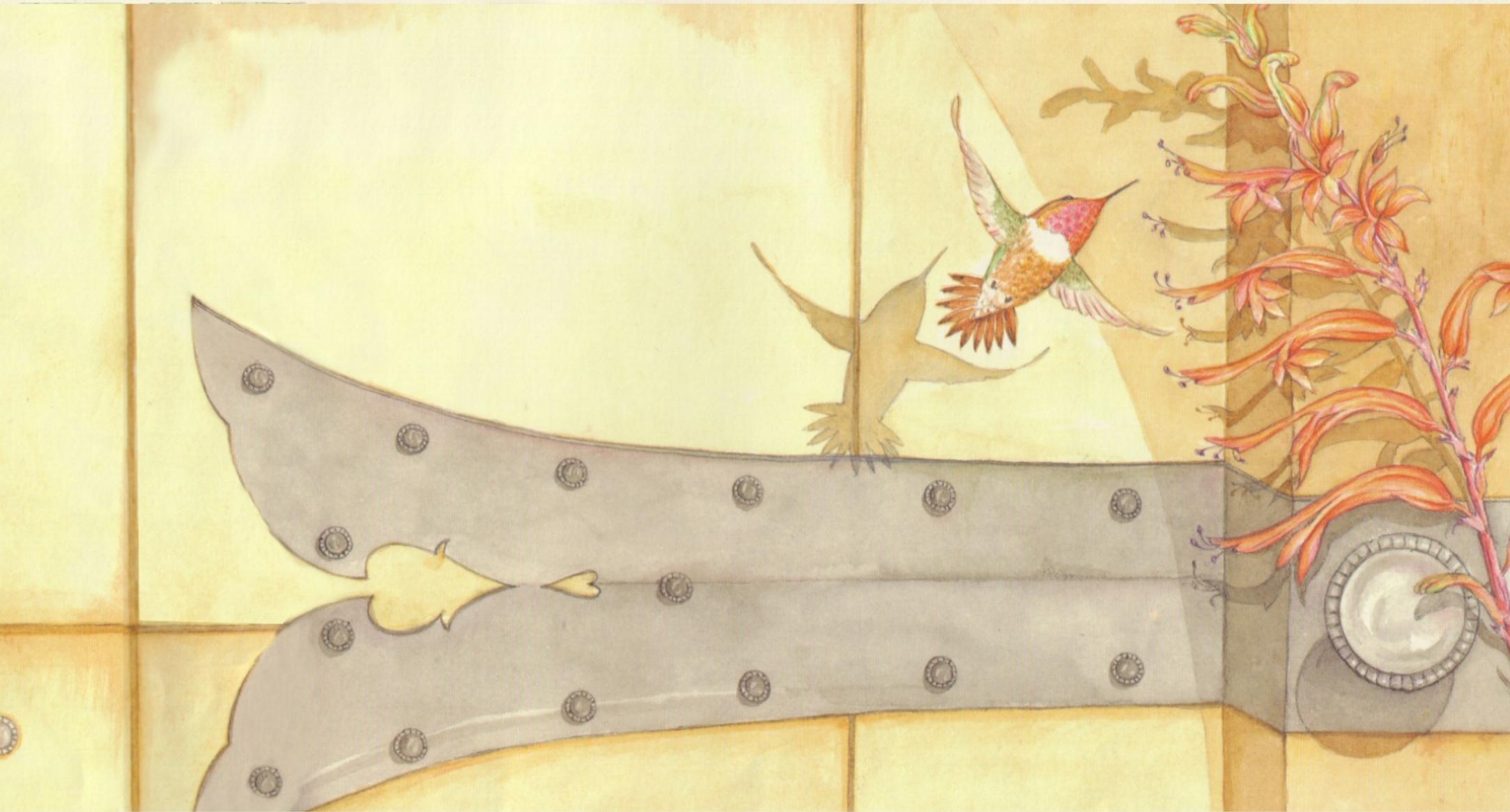


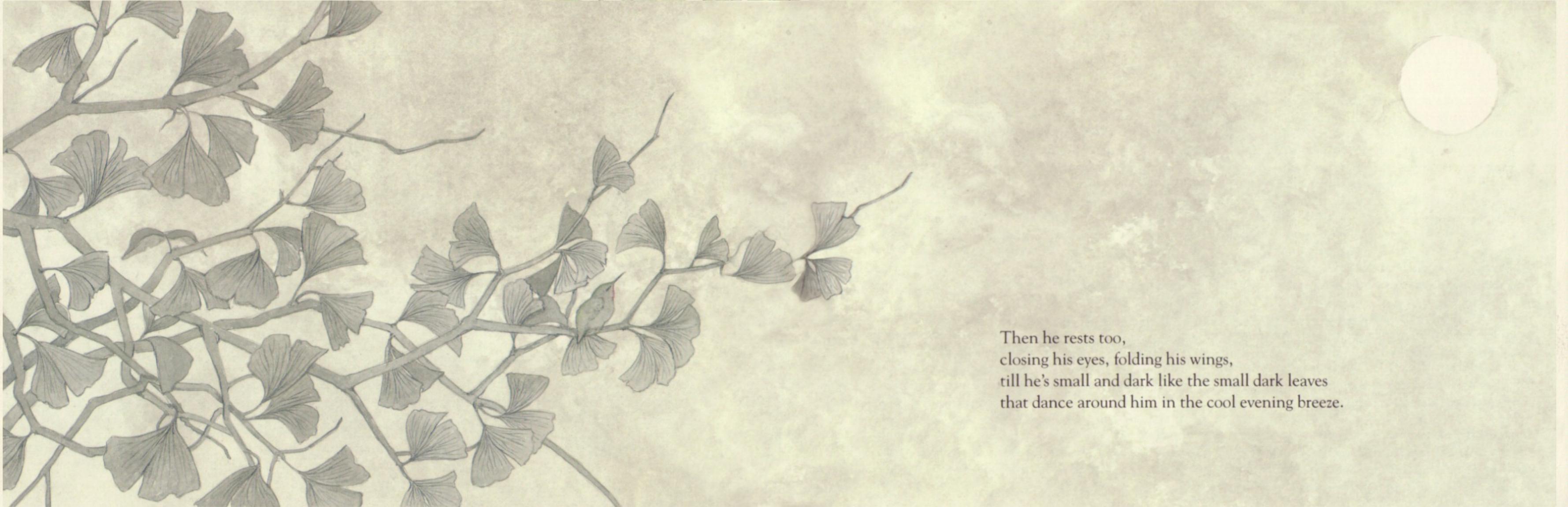


Then the hummingbirds part —
one to his flowers, one to her nest.
She rests by the small mossy cup
till hawk circles, gliding too near,
and she chases him far,
far away from the home
she has made for her young.



As the sun creeps behind the tall trees,
animals find places to rest in the shadowy garden.
Hummingbird buzzes from flower to flower,
eating his last meal of this spring day.





Then he rests too,
closing his eyes, folding his wings,
till he's small and dark like the small dark leaves
that dance around him in the cool evening breeze.



And in the tall trees, a small bird sleeps in her nest.
Soon she will lay a tiny white egg, then another.
Before long, there will be more hummingbirds
whirring and dancing in the bright sun.