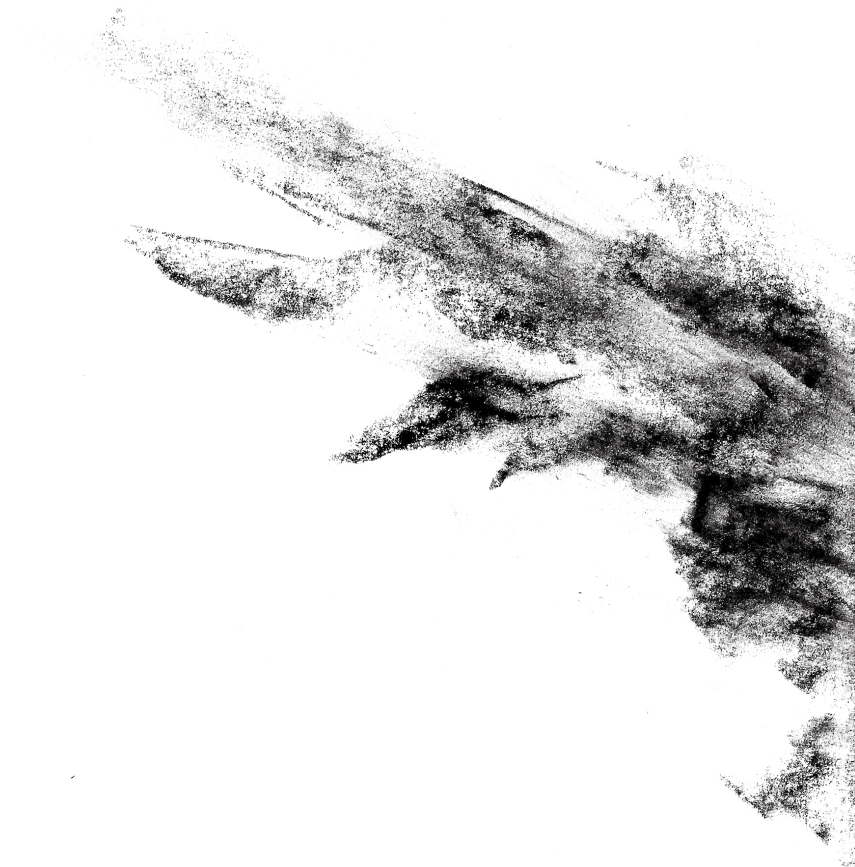




By Georgianna Smith

Illustrations by Louise Garbs

Standing here, back pressed into the bark of a large tree, ○



○



I am gone.

I run until I break into the forest and leave behind the sunny open road full of blazing heat, the stink of decorative dogwood, and rules that no longer apply to me.

Gone to the forest on the edge of town, where the full bloom trees stand tall, their branches tangled and staggered and brushing against each other in whatever order nature saw fit, or still sees because they're that way now and have been that way for who knows how long.



I feel like wings have sprouted out of my back, as my bare foot touches the mixture of soil and grass and fallen leaves that coat the ground and mush like a satin padded carpet.



The sea of beeches and elms fills my lungs with fresh air.

No worries about dirtying my vest
or slacks,

or disarranging a hair upon my head

-- I am on my own.

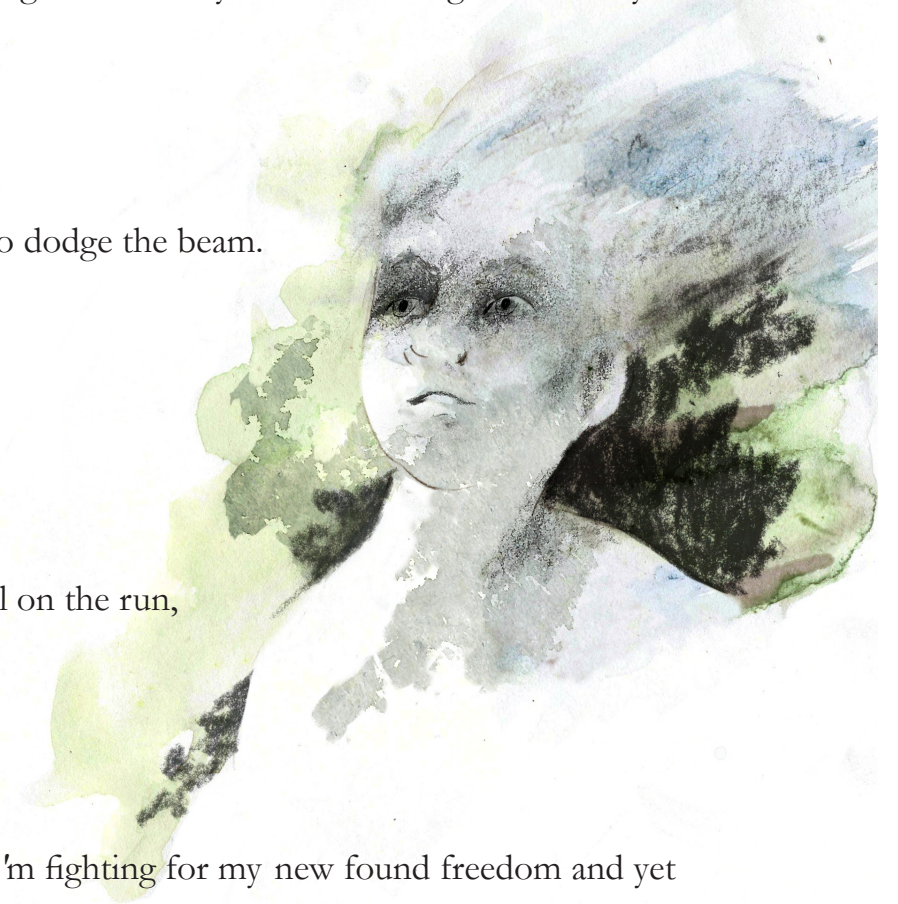
There's only a soft grey light seeping through the canopy where the sun is fighting the green-blue sky to break through and hit my cheek like a searchlight.

I pretend to dodge the beam.

Like a criminal on the run,

I'm fighting for my new found freedom and yet

I'm at ease flapping a gentle breeze



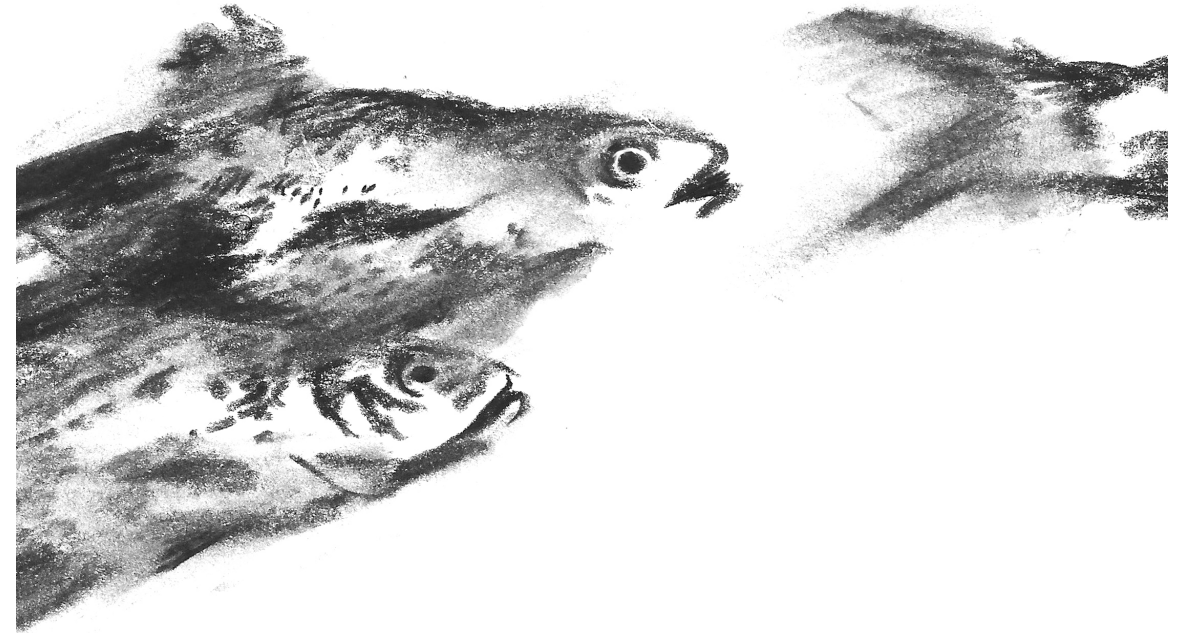
Lounging on a natural hammock of vine tangle, rocked and lulled, I imagine what it'd be like to live in this sanctuary for a time.



Perhaps I'd find a creek that flowed and flowed and never dried up.

I could wade in a deep section when it got too hot and muggy, then there would be fish, big and small, and the smaller might come to nibble my toes as I soaked in the water.

With practice I could catch the bigger ones to eat and grill them over a fire I'd make with the sun-dried dead brush.



With enough practice maybe I could catch an animal.