

*The
Last
Phoenix
Gladys Fung*





The autumn breeze rustled the leaves of a tree and blew one of its strange red flowers into the air. Just before reaching the ground, it burst into flames, growing bigger and bigger until it was half as tall as an adult.

Then, a red bird with gold-tinted wings rose from the fire. The last phoenix glowed and disappeared.





Melody Legend stared at the window sadly.

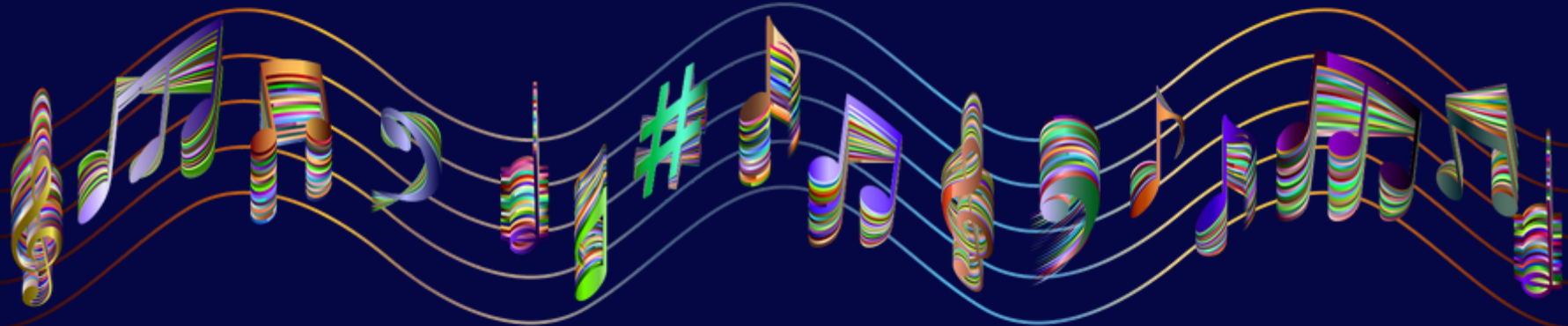
“Don’t feel so sorry for yourself. She’ll find you soon.” Kiyomi Winters said reassuringly.

“You don’t know how it feels. I mean, you have your anima, Strawberry!” Melody replied.

Strawberry, a small mouse, squeaked when it heard its name.



Melody sighed. Kiyomi was lucky to have bonded with her anima, a special kind of pet, as soon as she had set foot in Anima High School. Just then she heard a burst of song. “Kiyomi, can you hear that?” Her friend shook her head in confusion and replied, “No! I can’t hear anything.” “My anima!” Melody yelled gleefully. “It’s calling me!”





Two hours later, Melody had packed all her belongings and asked the headmistress for emergency leave. She was just about to set foot in the crisp autumn evening when a voice yelled out.

“Wait!” Kiyomi was running towards her with Strawberry on her shoulder.

“I’ve asked..the headmistress... to come with you..” Kiyomi panted.



“Kiyomi, there’s no need!” Melody said, trying to hide her emotions. “I think the song was trying to pull me to the Stray Isles. You know how dangerous they are! I can’t bring you to such a dangerous place!”

“That’s exactly why I have to go with you. I can’t let you go to such a dangerous place alone! I will have your back as a best friend always does!” Kiyomi said decisively.





“I’ve always wondered how these carpets stay up,” Kiyomi wondered whilst sitting on the flying carpet. Without raising her head from the book she was reading, Melody answered, “It defies gravity, acting like wings with a body in the middle, like a bird.”





“Is that The Stray Isles Visitor’s Guide?” Kiyomi asked pointing to the book in Melody’s hand.

“Yeah, I’ve borrowed it from the school library,” Melody replied. “It says here that the stray animals are vicious because it’s their duty to guard the...the ancient tree of the phoenix.”

Kiyomi gasped. “I’ve heard about that legend. Supposedly, a prophecy was made that someone would chop it down...”



“We’re here!” Melody woke up to the sound of Kiyomi’s excited voice. Melody looked down. To her surprise, The Stray Isles looked...beautiful. There were plants and trees and flowers everywhere, with singing animals dancing around. In the middle of it all was a tree with red, orange and yellow flowers. “Carpet...Land!” Melody cried.



The first stray animal they met was a cat. “Thank the phoenix tree that you’re here!” it purred. “The bad tall man is already in the woods. He has an axe with him and a phoenix was born just a few hours ago. Hurrah!”



Melody and Kiyomi shared a look. What a strange cat!

“This way, please. Let’s go to stop the bad tall man. This way to the celebrations!” the cat continued.

Kiyomi sighed. “I suppose your anima is in the woods. Let’s go.”



When they arrived in the centre of the wood they saw the bad tall man smoking. He had almost reached the protective circle the strays had made around the phoenix tree.



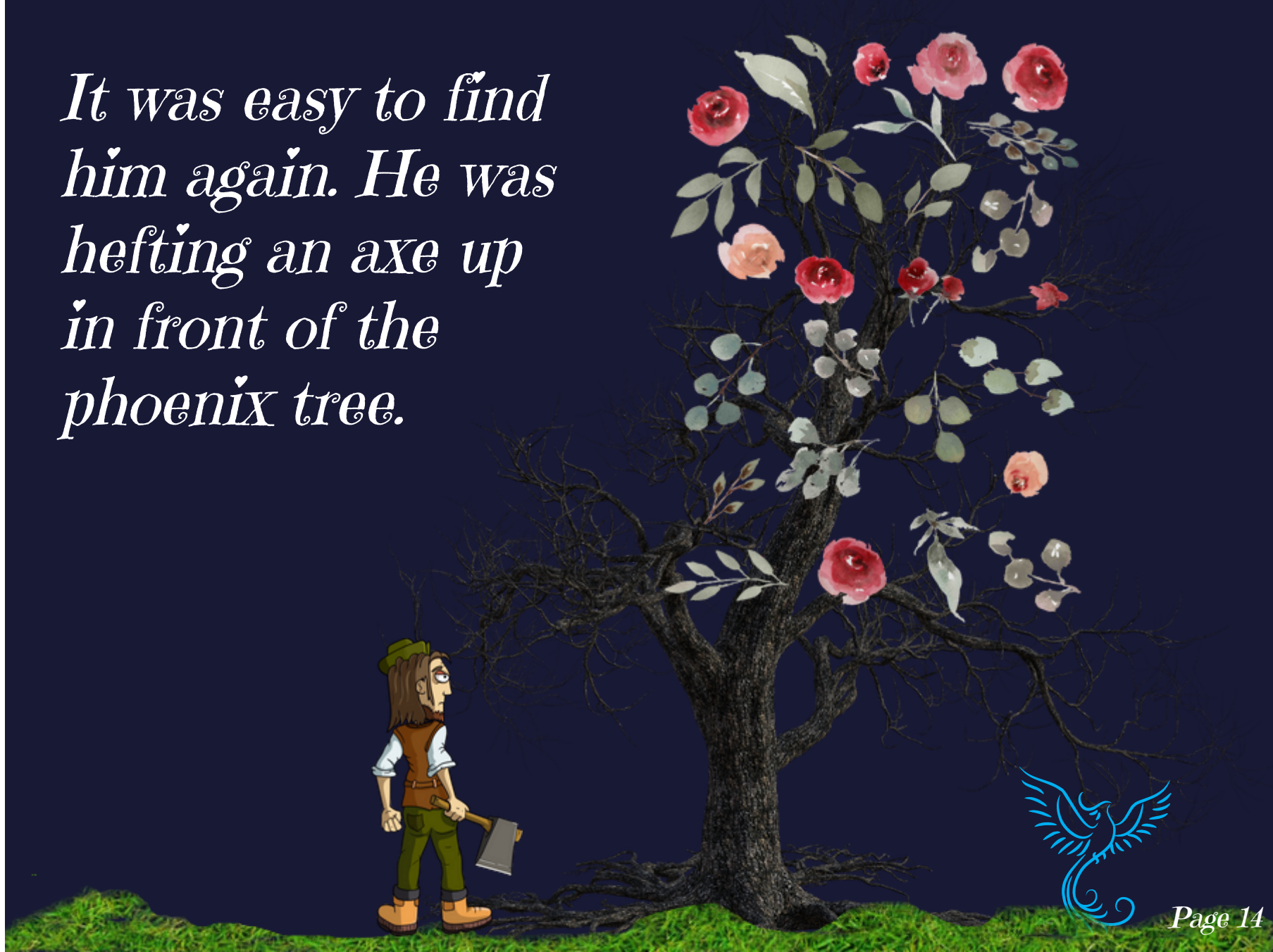
*“He could burn the whole place down with that fire,”
Kiyomi muttered.*

*“We’ve got to stop him,” Melody whispered. “Let’s try
to overtake him.”*

*But as soon as they quickened their steps, Kiyomi
tripped over something, which turned out to be a
tree root. Once she had regained her footing, the
man was gone.*



*It was easy to find
him again. He was
hefting an axe up
in front of the
phoenix tree.*



“No!” Melody yelled. She closed her eyes and willed her anima to appear. Only with her anima’s help could she defeat this tyrant. Beside her, Kiyomi was slowly transforming. Melody knew how easily Kiyomi could use her powers. Soon she would have the reflexes of a mouse and the abilities of a girl. “Come to me now, my anima. I need your help! Let’s save the tree together!” Melody summoned her anima through her mind.





The tyrant turned around slowly.

“Come to protect this tree? I’ll let you watch it fall down!” He sneered and raised his axe, ready to swing.

All of a sudden, the grass under his feet turned into sand and a phoenix erupted into the air.



Melody felt her body being lifted by a soft wing. She was in the air, floating! She had finally bonded with her anima! Her shock disappeared in a flash. She had to save the tree, whatever it took. The tyrant's eyes glowed red.

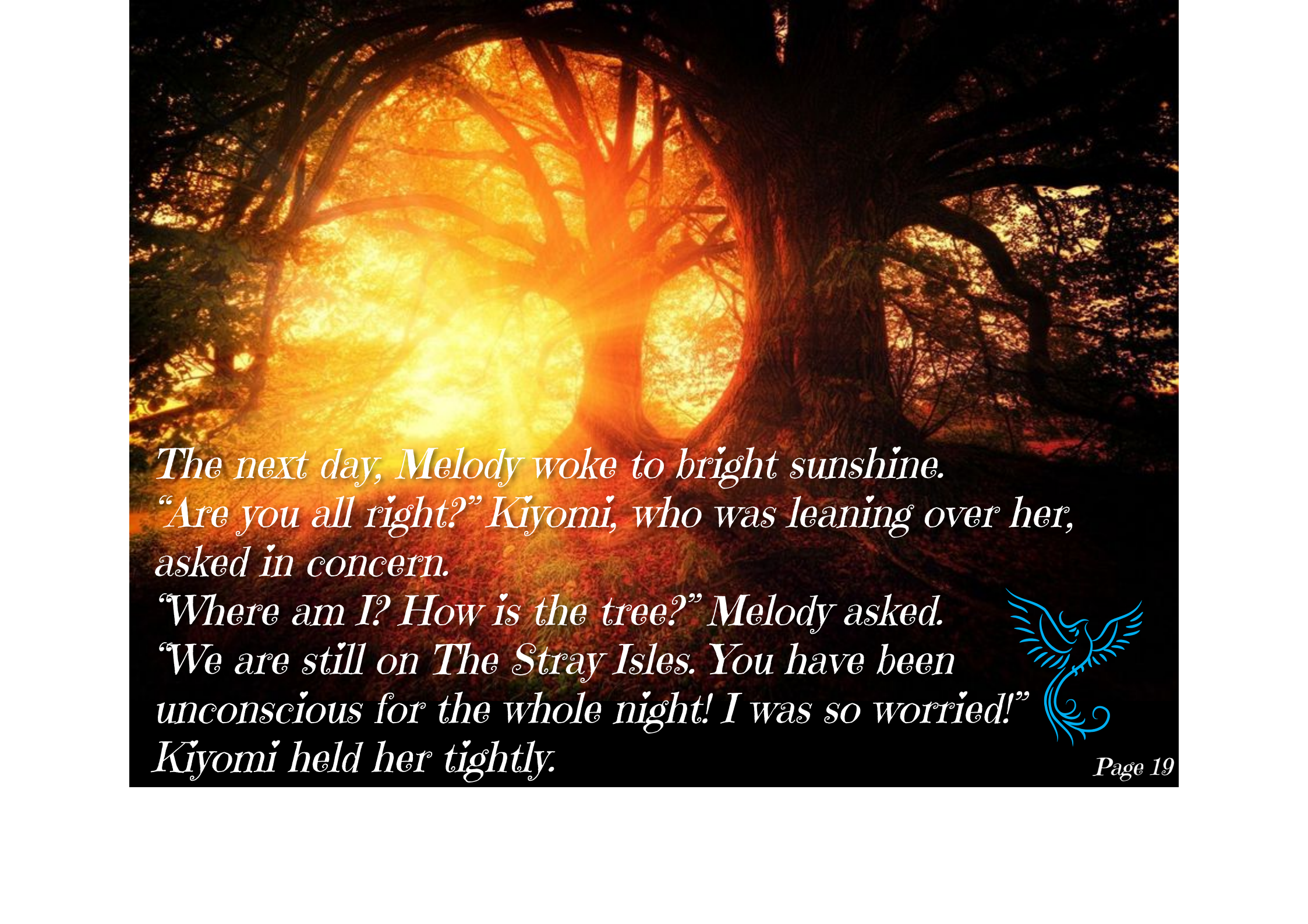




He rasped in a low menacing voice, “You won’t win, little animie.” With that, he swung his axe and chopped the tree in half.

“No!” Melody’s enraged scream echoed through the forest. Every stray animal raced towards the tyrant with anger in its eyes. Melody pounced onto the man...





*The next day, Melody woke to bright sunshine.
“Are you all right?” Kiyomi, who was leaning over her,
asked in concern.*

“Where am I? How is the tree?” Melody asked.

*“We are still on The Stray Isles. You have been
unconscious for the whole night! I was so worried!”*

Kiyomi held her tightly.



“What happened?” Melody said feeling groggy.

“The bad tall man disappeared as soon as you touched him. You fainted when the tree regrew. I think you’re not used to anima power yet,” Kiyomi replied.



Just then, Melody felt a soft wing touch her.

*“I’ll call you Ruby,”
Melody told the phoenix lovingly.*

“Ruby, it’s time to go home.”





The End