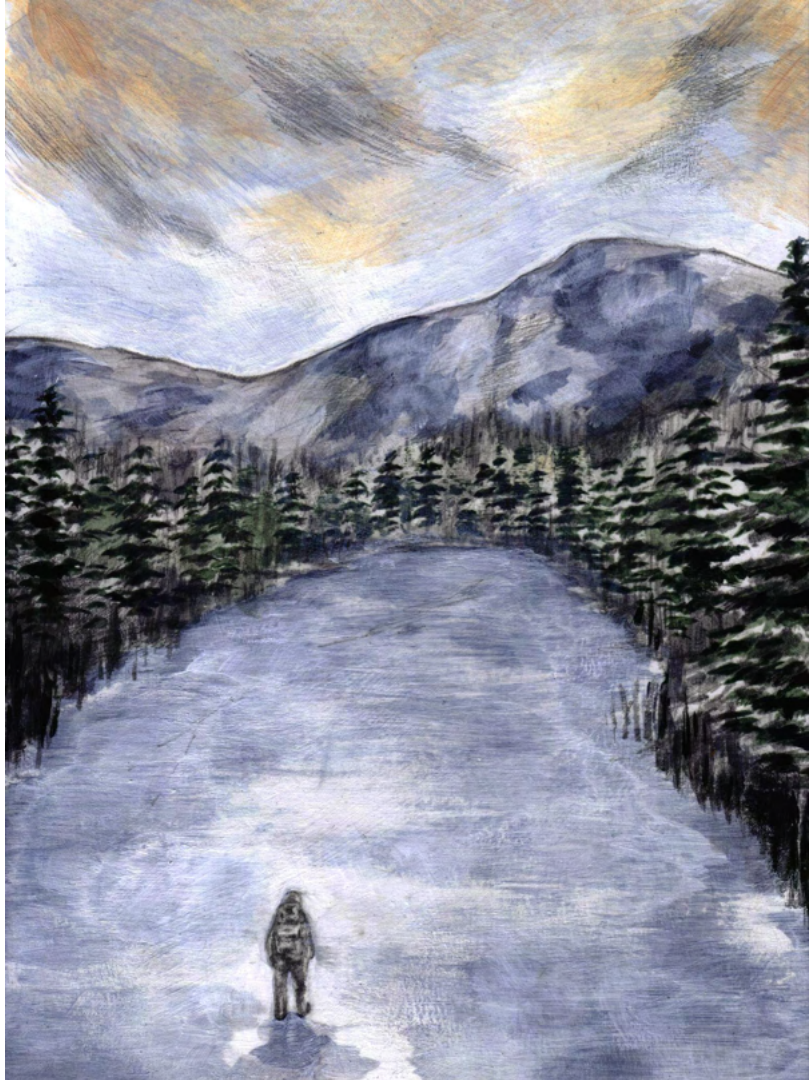


EARTH
IS A
BREATHING
VALLEY



Many lifetimes later, a traveler found themselves at the shore of an icy lake on a snowy winter's day. The wind was cold and they wrapped a furry hood around their face, exposing only their eyes to the scraping air. Bundled and prepared, they set out towards the edge of a forest which lay between them and Mount Part.



Approaching the boundary of a woods which lay at the lake's edge, the traveler shuddered as a mysterious force rippled through them - a cautious invitation. In between the creaking rustle of slow air and dry leaves, the traveler heard - felt? - a faint heartbeat pulsing from the trees.



With anxious excitement, they crossed the threshold into what can only be described as a forest of forests, which is to say that looking in any direction the forest would yield continually smaller yet equally expansive worlds. Bristling ferns in a melted cave took on the size of maples, moss-covered rocks became hillside. Time itself froze like the river.



Having made itself known to the traveler, the forest collected itself and reassembled into a single vision of simple beauty. Remembering their purpose, the traveler's feet began to walk themselves slowly through the green and grey forest with glee. Emblazoned by a sense of potential, they climbed upwards towards the falling snow.



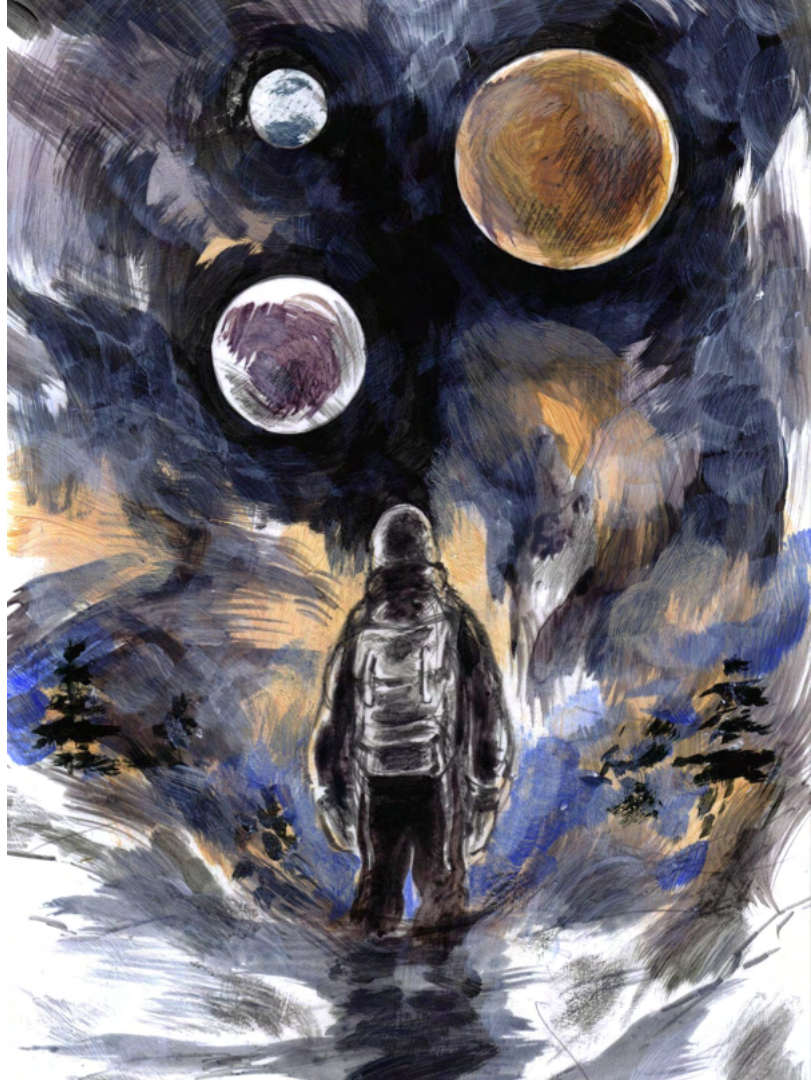
A few miles later, as the treeline came near, the sky began to darken and the traveler felt a stiff wind blow through them like a shouted whisper. The traveler paused. Hesitantly, they stepped out onto the summit clearing.



What they saw in front of them made almost no sense, yet was perfectly comprehensible. Their mind swelled outward and gingerly settled back into place. Making peace with an impossible truth, the traveler accepted what their eyes implored: the valley was breathing. Long, slow inhales brought cloud cover in, shrouding the surrounding mountain with their density. Deep, strong exhales sent the clouds receding, exposing a horizon of staggered peaks. With each breath, a wave of air bent the pine trees like coral swaying in unison. Sensing the travelers presence, the valley let out a terrestrial groan.



The traveler trembled at its singular immensity, at the intensity of its truth. They inched towards the edge of the cliff. The ground sunk and rose beneath them. Mount Part, too, was breathing. The picture aligned in the traveler's mind; the breathing valley, the heaving ground, the pulsing forest: it all formed a web of obvious purity: the land below them was not inert; not dead mass piled up over aeons but the living tissue of a giant being. At the speed of light, memories oozed from an unknown source. Circling planets of cooling life, explosive questions fracturing infinitude, a plane of existence where wave-beings rewrote the narratives of loss and love. All of these crystallized in the traveler's imagination.



As the history of things condensed in a moment, the traveler returned to their body - to the sight and sound of what they now understood to be a set of planetary lungs. They noticed they had stopped shaking and were now swaying with the trees In a gesture of kindness, Mount Part sent a soft, strong gust of wind that cradled the traveler like a hug. Their rhythms, breaths and heartbeats began to align and a chord of complexity held out between them.