





# A dark night in the garden

*The Garden of Gethsemane, from Luke 22, Mark 14, John 18*

THE WIND WAS picking up now, blowing clouds across the moon, shrouding the garden in darkness.

“Stay up with me?” Jesus asked his friends. They said yes and waited under the olive trees, but they were tired and soon they fell asleep.

Jesus walked ahead alone, into the dark. He needed to talk to his heavenly Father.

He knew it was time for him to die. They had planned it long ago, he and his Father. Jesus was going to take the punishment for all the wrong things anybody had ever done, or ever would do.

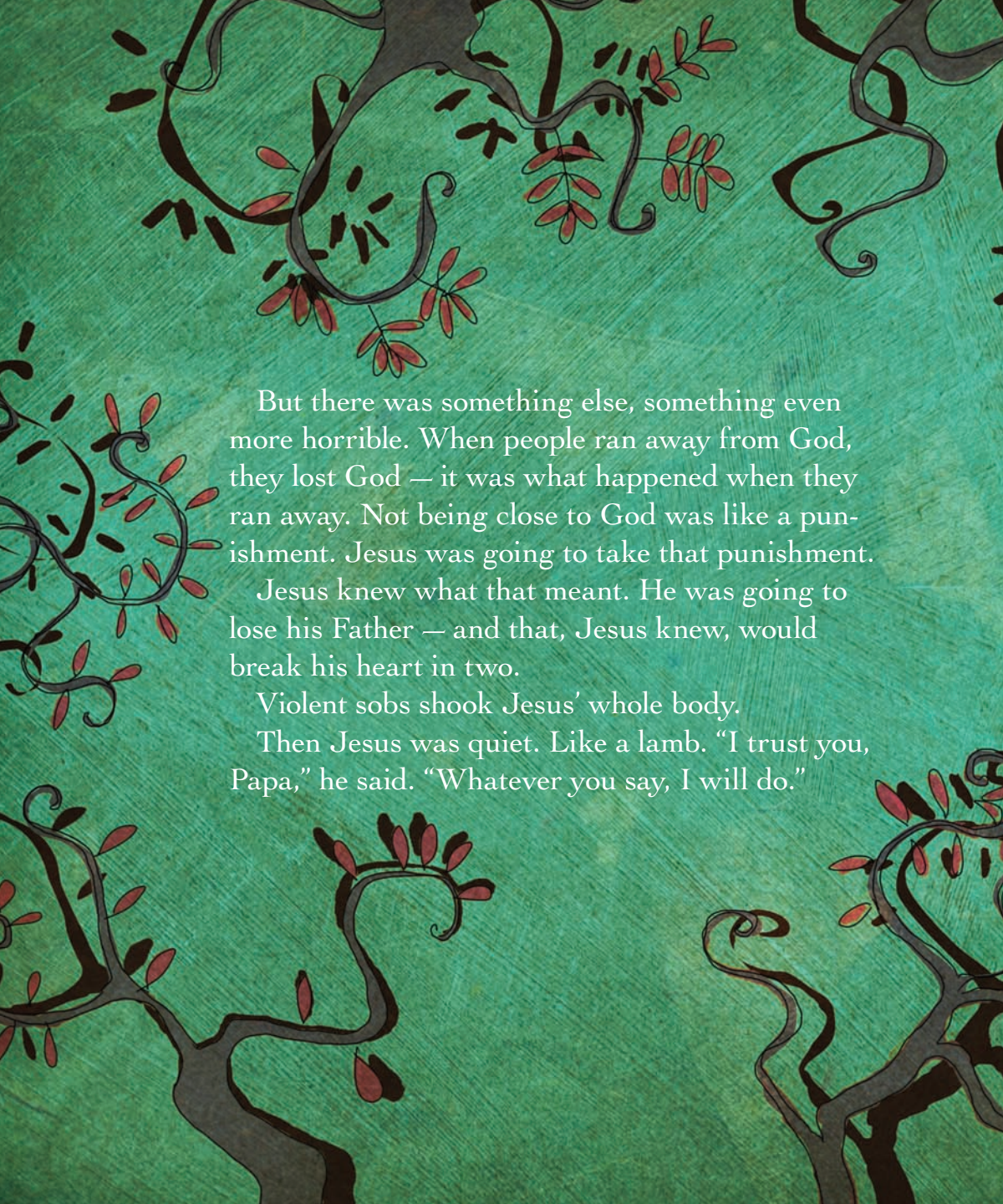
“Papa! Father!” Jesus cried. And he fell to the ground. “Is there any other way to get your children back? To heal their hearts? To get rid of the poison?”

But Jesus knew — there was no other way. All the poison of sin was going to have to go into his own heart.

God was going to pour into Jesus’ heart all the sadness and brokenness in people’s hearts. He was going to pour into Jesus’ body all the sickness in people’s bodies. God was going to have to blame his son for everything that had gone wrong. It would crush Jesus.







But there was something else, something even more horrible. When people ran away from God, they lost God — it was what happened when they ran away. Not being close to God was like a punishment. Jesus was going to take that punishment.

Jesus knew what that meant. He was going to lose his Father — and that, Jesus knew, would break his heart in two.

Violent sobs shook Jesus' whole body.

Then Jesus was quiet. Like a lamb. "I trust you, Papa," he said. "Whatever you say, I will do."













Suddenly, through the trees, a glitter of starlight flashed off steel. Into the quiet garden came whispers, muffled voices, clanking metal — and the sound of boots marching.

Jesus stood up.

He woke his friends. “Now is the time,” he said gently. “Everything that was written about me — what God has been telling his people all through the long years — it’s all coming true.”

And into the night, with burning torches and lanterns, with swords and clubs and armor, they came — an army of soldiers. Judas led them straight to Jesus so they could arrest him.

Jesus was waiting for them.





Peter leapt up, took a sword, and tried to defend Jesus. He sliced off a guard's ear. Jesus immediately touched the guard and healed him.

"Peter," he said, "this is not the way."

Peter didn't realize that no army, no matter how big, could ever arrest Jesus. Not unless Jesus let them.

Then Jesus, who had never done anything except love people, was arrested, as if he were a criminal.

Jesus' friends were afraid. So they ran away and hid in the dark shadows.



The guards marched Jesus off and took him to the Leaders.

The Leaders put Jesus on trial. "Are you the Son of God?" they asked.

"I Am," Jesus said.

"Who do you think you are? To call yourself God? You must die for calling yourself the Son of God!"

Only the Romans were allowed to kill prisoners, so the Leaders made a plan. "We'll tell the Romans, 'This man wants to be our king!' And then they will crucify him."

But it would be all right. It was God's Plan.

"It was for this reason that I was born into the world," Jesus said.





# The sun stops shining

*The Crucifixion, from Matthew 27, Mark 15, Luke 23, John 19*

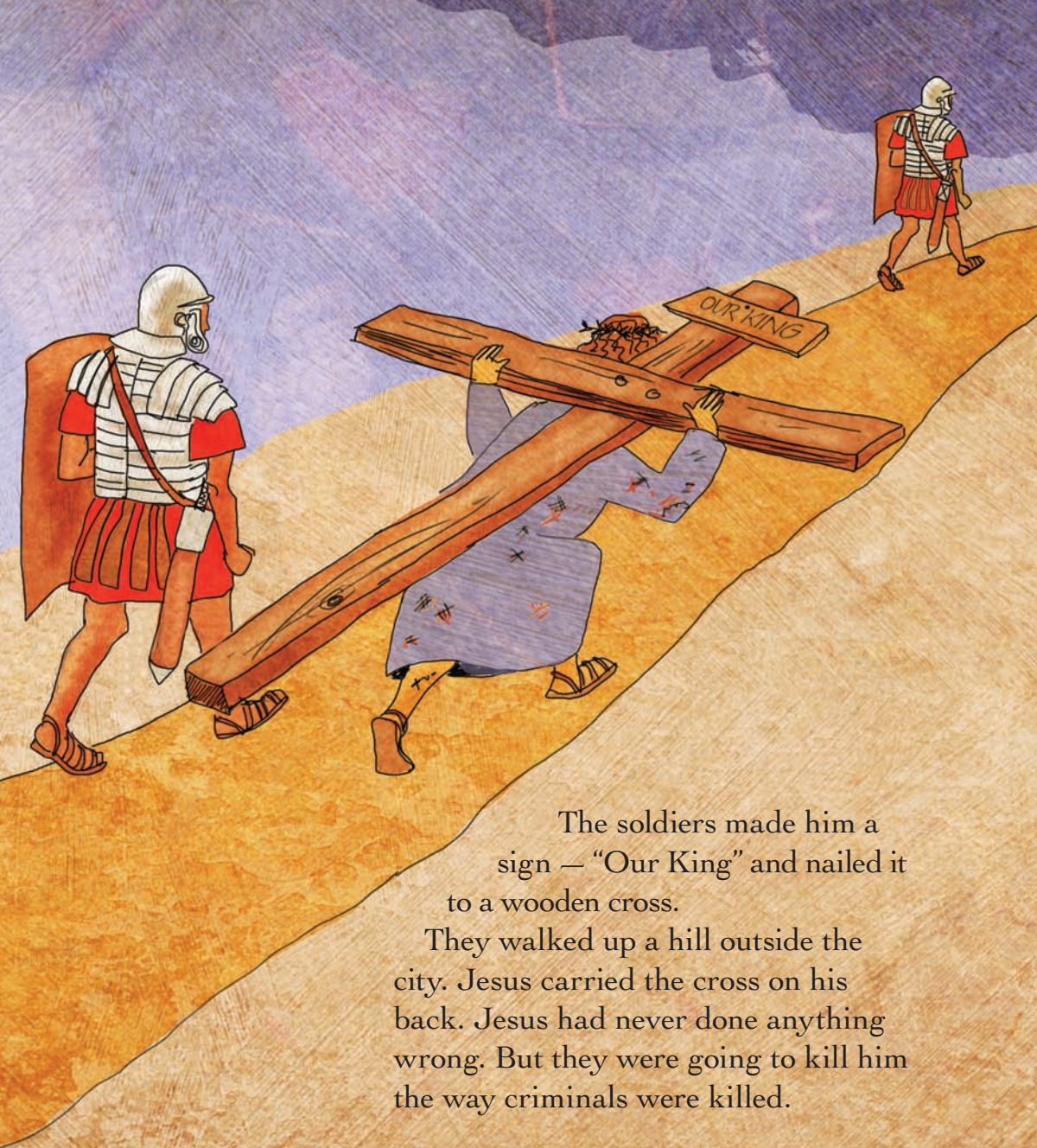
“SO YOU’RE A KING, are you?” the Roman soldiers jeered. “Then you’ll need a crown and a robe.”

They gave Jesus a crown made out of thorns. And put a purple robe on him. And pretended to bow down to him. “Your Majesty!” they said.

Then they whipped him. And spat on him. They didn’t understand that this was the Prince of Life, the King of heaven and earth, who had come to rescue them.







The soldiers made him a sign — “Our King” and nailed it to a wooden cross.

They walked up a hill outside the city. Jesus carried the cross on his back. Jesus had never done anything wrong. But they were going to kill him the way criminals were killed.



They nailed Jesus to the cross.

“Father, forgive them,” Jesus gasped. “They don’t understand what they’re doing.”

“You say you’ve come to rescue us!” people shouted. “But you can’t even rescue yourself!”

But they were wrong. Jesus could have rescued himself. A legion of angels would have flown to his side — if he’d called.

“If you were really the Son of God, you could just climb down off that cross!” they said.

And of course they were right. Jesus could have just climbed down. Actually, he could have just said a word and made it all stop. Like when he healed that little girl. And stilled the storm. And fed 5,000 people.

But Jesus stayed.

You see, they didn’t understand. It wasn’t the nails that kept Jesus there. It was love.

“Papa?” Jesus cried, frantically searching the sky. “Papa? Where are you? Don’t leave me!”

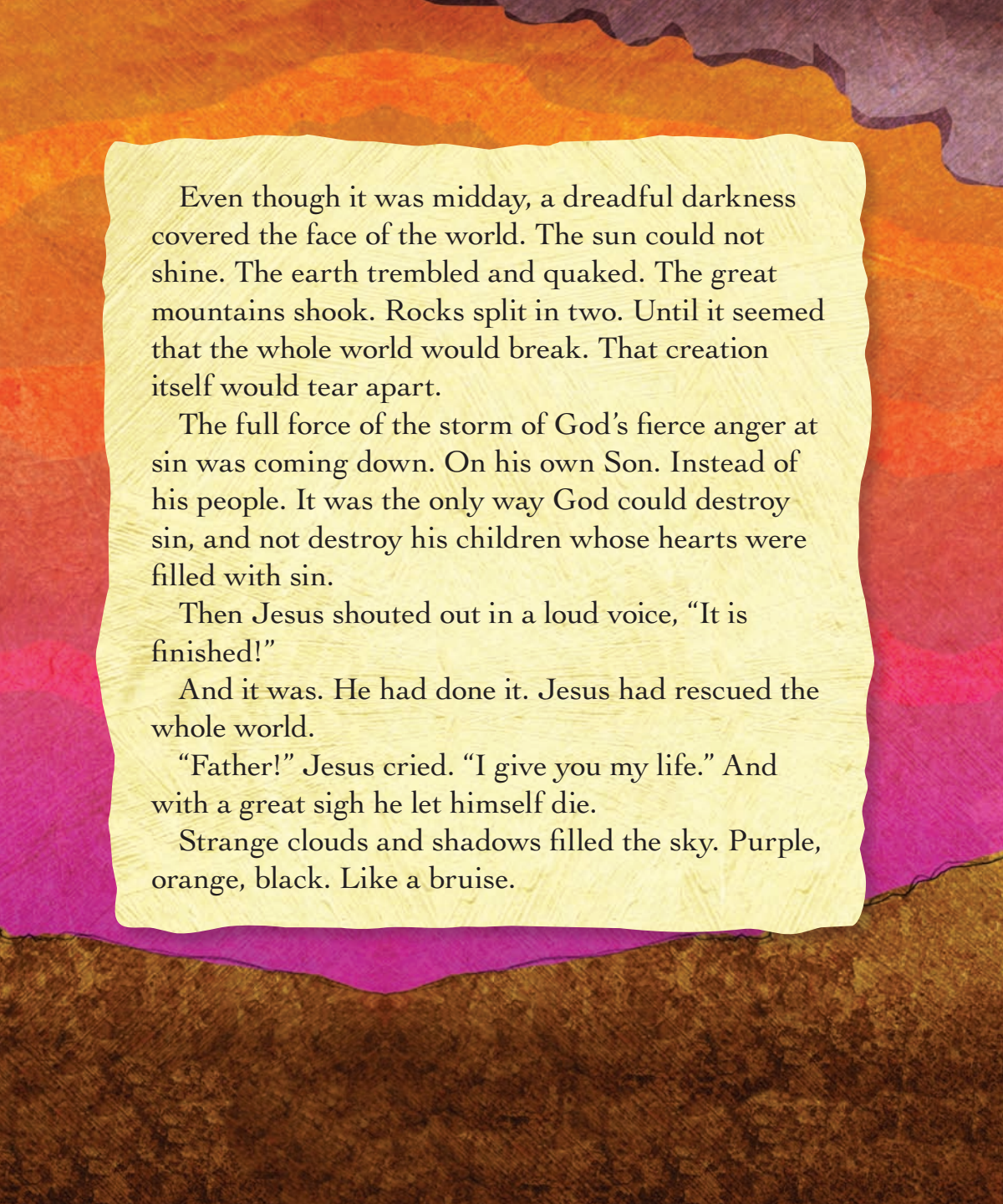
And for the first time — and the last — when he spoke, nothing happened. Just a horrible, endless silence. God didn’t answer. He turned away from his Boy.

Tears rolled down Jesus’ face. The face of the One who would wipe away every tear from every eye.









Even though it was midday, a dreadful darkness covered the face of the world. The sun could not shine. The earth trembled and quaked. The great mountains shook. Rocks split in two. Until it seemed that the whole world would break. That creation itself would tear apart.

The full force of the storm of God's fierce anger at sin was coming down. On his own Son. Instead of his people. It was the only way God could destroy sin, and not destroy his children whose hearts were filled with sin.

Then Jesus shouted out in a loud voice, "It is finished!"

And it was. He had done it. Jesus had rescued the whole world.

"Father!" Jesus cried. "I give you my life." And with a great sigh he let himself die.

Strange clouds and shadows filled the sky. Purple, orange, black. Like a bruise.







Jesus' friends gently carried Jesus. They laid Jesus in a new tomb carved out of rock.

How could Jesus die? What had gone wrong? What did it mean? They didn't know anything anymore. Except they did know their hearts were breaking.

"That's the end of Jesus," the Leaders said.

But, just to be sure, they sent strong soldiers to guard the tomb. They hauled a huge stone in front of the door to the tomb. So that no one could get in.

Or out.











# God's wonderful surprise

*The Resurrection, from Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, John 20*

JESUS' FRIENDS WERE SAD. They would never see their best friend again. How could this happen? Wasn't Jesus the Rescuer? The King God had promised? It wasn't supposed to end like this.

Yes, but whoever said anything about the end?

Just before sunrise, on the third day, God sent an earthquake — and an angel from heaven. When the guards saw the angel, they fell down with fright. The angel rolled the huge stone away, sat on top of it, and waited.

At the first glimmer of dawn, Mary Magdalene and other women headed to the tomb to wash Jesus' body. The early morning sun slanted through the ancient olive trees, drops of dew glittering on leaves and grasses — little tears everywhere. The friends walked quietly along the hilly path, through the olive groves, until they reached the tomb. And immediately noticed something odd — it was wide open.

They peered through the opening into the dark tomb. But wait. Jesus' body was gone!







And something else: a shining man was there, with clothes made from lightning.

“Don’t be scared,” the angel said.

But (they couldn’t help it) they screamed anyway.

The angel asked them, “What are you doing here? This is a tomb and tombs are for dead people.”

The women couldn’t speak.

“Jesus isn’t dead anymore!” he said. “He’s alive again!”

And their hearts leapt. And then the angel laughed with such gladness that they felt, for a moment, as if they had woken from a nightmare.









The other women rushed home, but Mary stayed behind. How could it be true? Jesus was definitely dead — how could he be alive? Just then Mary heard someone else in the garden. *Perhaps it's the gardener*, she thought. *He'll know where Jesus' body is.*

"I don't know where Jesus is!" Mary said urgently. "I can't find him."

But it was all right. Jesus knew where she was. And he had found her.

"Mary!"

Only one person said her name like that. She could hear her heart thumping. She turned around. She could just make out a figure. She shaded her eyes to see ... and thought she was dreaming.

But she wasn't dreaming. She was seeing.

"Jesus!"

Mary fell to the ground. Sudden tears filled her eyes and great sobs shook her whole body, and all she wanted in that moment was to cling to Jesus and never let him go.

"You'll be able to hold on to me later, Mary," Jesus said gently, "and always be close to me. But now, go and tell the others that I'm alive!"





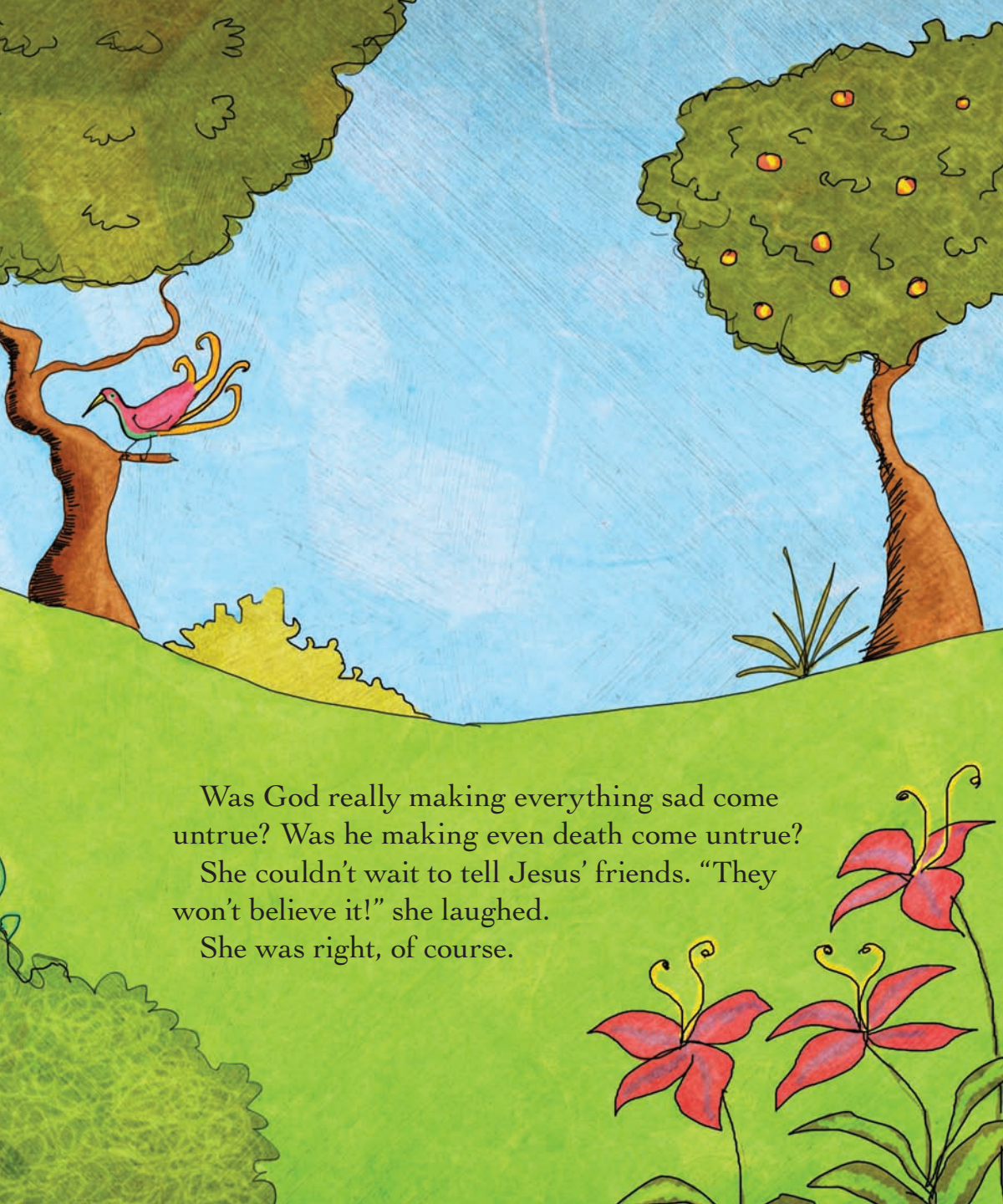




Mary ran and ran, all the way to the city. She had never run so fast or so far in all her life. She felt she could have run forever. She didn't even feel like her feet touched the ground. The sun seemed to be dancing and gleaming and bounding across the sky, racing with her and shining brighter than she could ever remember in the clear, fresh air.

And it seemed to her that morning, as she ran, almost as if the whole world had been made anew, almost as if the whole world was singing for joy — the trees, tiny sounds in the grass, the birds ... her heart.





Was God really making everything sad come untrue? Was he making even death come untrue?

She couldn't wait to tell Jesus' friends. "They won't believe it!" she laughed.

She was right, of course.



