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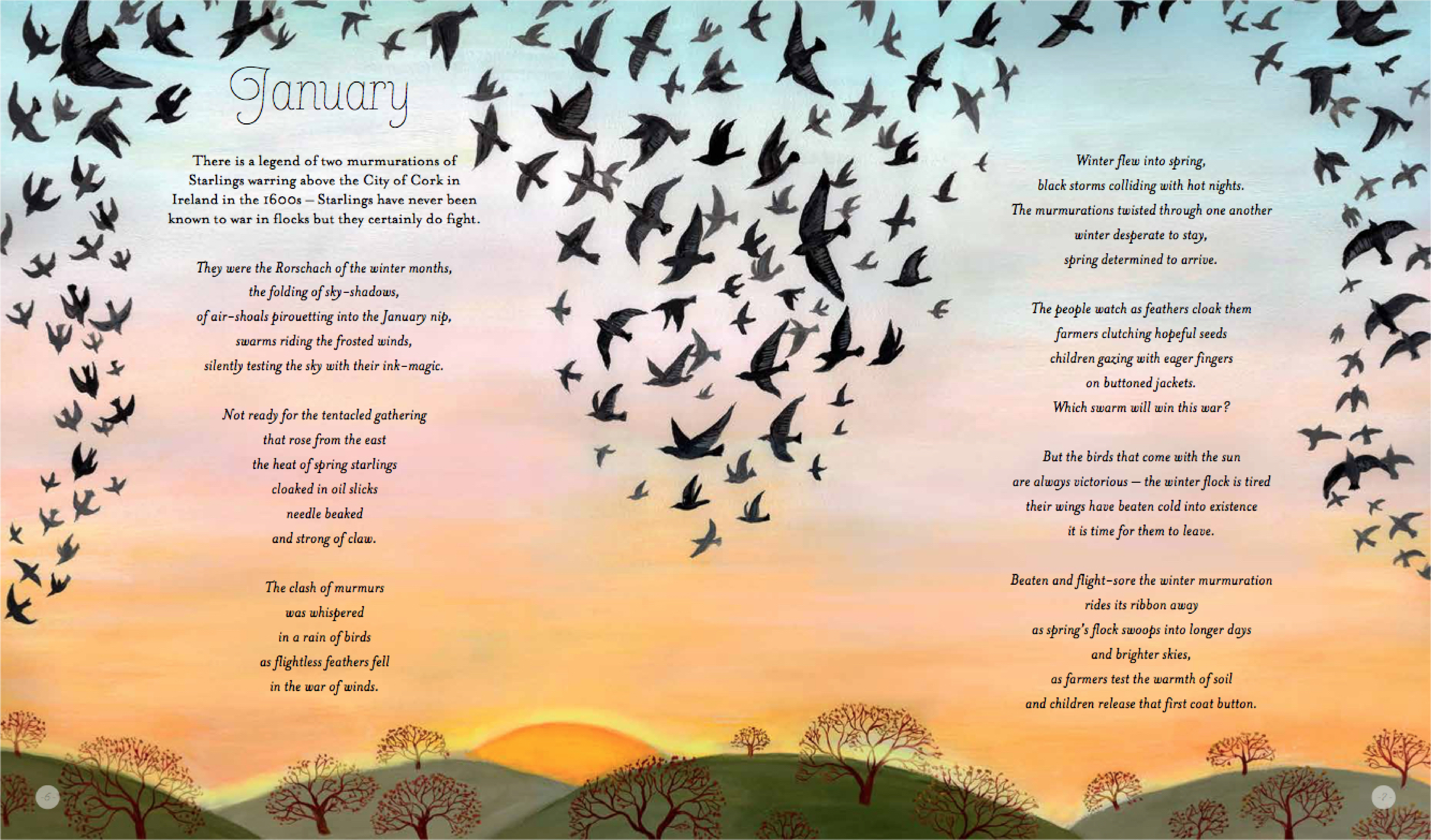

January

There is a legend of two murmurations of Starlings warring above the City of Cork in Ireland in the 1600s – Starlings have never been known to war in flocks but they certainly do fight.

They were the Rorschach of the winter months,
the folding of sky-shadows,
of air-shoals pirouetting into the January nip,
swarms riding the frosted winds,
silently testing the sky with their ink-magic.

Not ready for the tentacled gathering
that rose from the east
the heat of spring starlings
cloaked in oil slicks
needle beaked
and strong of claw.

The clash of murmurs
was whispered
in a rain of birds
as flightless feathers fell
in the war of winds.

Winter flew into spring,
black storms colliding with hot nights.
The murmurations twisted through one another
winter desperate to stay,
spring determined to arrive.

The people watch as feathers cloak them
farmers clutching hopeful seeds
children gazing with eager fingers
on buttoned jackets.
Which swarm will win this war?

But the birds that come with the sun
are always victorious – the winter flock is tired
their wings have beaten cold into existence
it is time for them to leave.

Beaten and flight-sore the winter murmuration
rides its ribbon away
as spring's flock swoops into longer days
and brighter skies,
as farmers test the warmth of soil
and children release that first coat button.

May

The Mayfly is a wondrous insect, after spending several years in its larval stage underwater it emerges as a subimago – some species only existing in this teenage state for tens of minutes, before becoming the mature Imago, others only living as mature adults for an hour.

We spent all of May
lifting the dead weight of stones,
removing the roots of tree stumps
to encourage wild life to our garden.

You could only dig so much
of the pond,
before the pain drowned you.
I could only shovel so much
dirt alone.

When the pain was too deep
you watched from beneath the windows
as I dug til my hands bled,
laid the rubber liner
like a shroud
and edged it in stone.

It took a couple of years
for life to find our watery pit.
It was a mournful May evening
that I sat alone in the garden,
fingertips playing my newly emerged stubble,
that the first mayflies arose,
pulling themselves like memories
out of the pond's eye,
clambering from the tear-well.

Wearing their pubescent wings –
puberty is mere minutes for them
spent sunning on a rock,
rather than crushed beneath it.

They're quick to shed their awkwardness.
The dead pond, I couldn't
bring myself to fill-in,
explodes into an exultation
of fairy dust
and angel light
of dancing tears
and sparkling goodbyes
as wild life fills
the hole we dug together.