

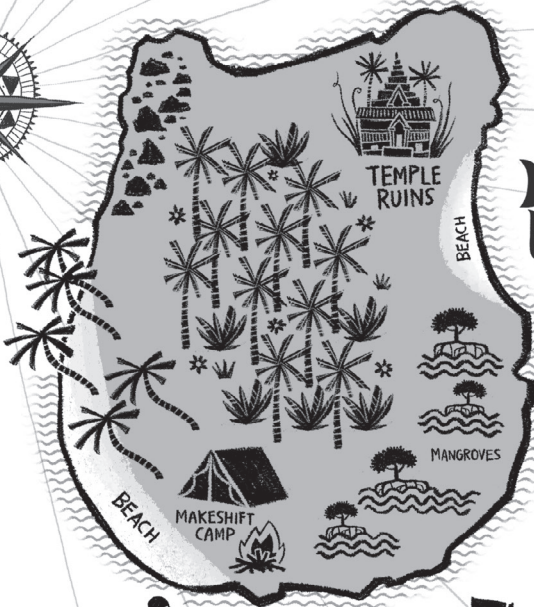
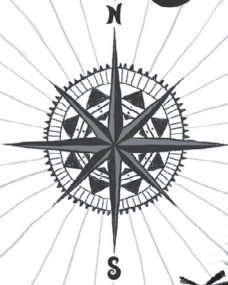


JESS BUTTERWORTH

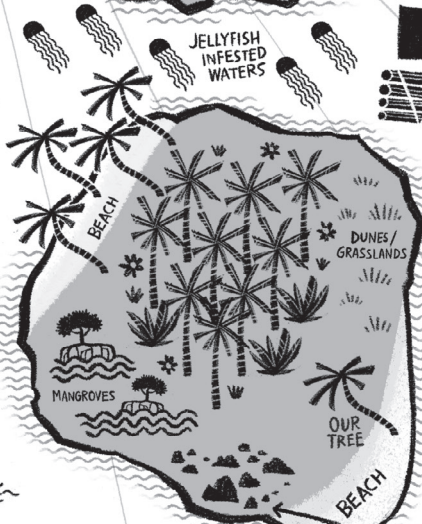
Orion



# GIBBON ISLAND



**NORTH ISLAND**



**SOUTH ISLAND**

SEAGRASS BEDS

JELLYFISH INFESTED WATERS

RAFT

WRECK

WHERE I LANDED



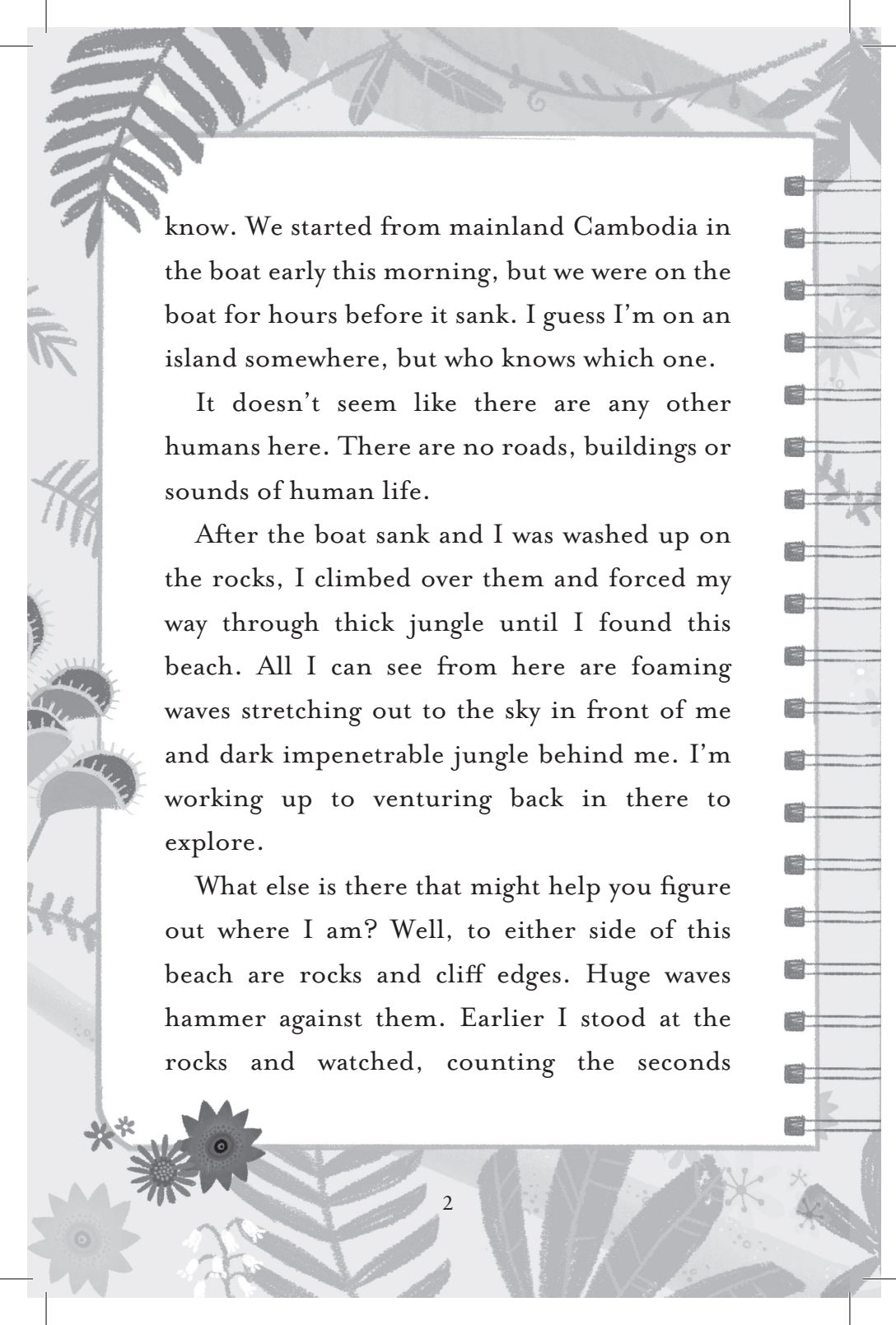
## DAY 1

### *Midday*

If you're reading this, hopefully you're coming to rescue me. My name is Lark. I'm twelve years old and I've been shipwrecked on an island. Writing 'shipwrecked' makes it sound as though I was washed up on an island by mistake, but I'm pretty sure it wasn't an accident. I think someone was trying to kill me. On purpose. In fact, I'm ninety-nine-point-nine per cent certain.

If someone doesn't find me soon, I'm going to send this notebook out in a bottle over the ocean to try and get help. And if help doesn't come in time . . . well at least you can use this diary as evidence for what happened to me.

You'll need to know where I am to come and rescue me, but the problem is I'm not sure I

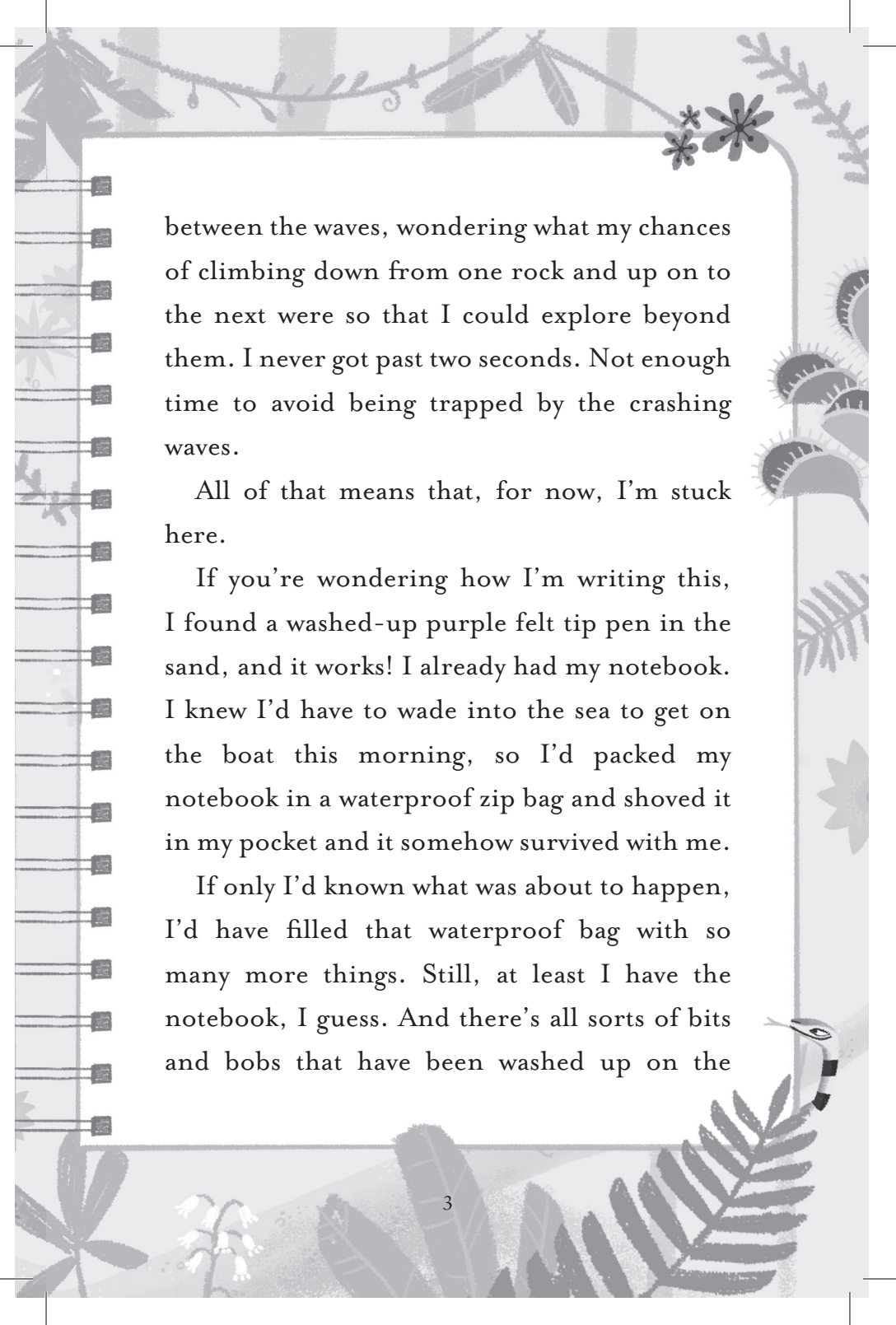


know. We started from mainland Cambodia in the boat early this morning, but we were on the boat for hours before it sank. I guess I'm on an island somewhere, but who knows which one.

It doesn't seem like there are any other humans here. There are no roads, buildings or sounds of human life.

After the boat sank and I was washed up on the rocks, I climbed over them and forced my way through thick jungle until I found this beach. All I can see from here are foaming waves stretching out to the sky in front of me and dark impenetrable jungle behind me. I'm working up to venturing back in there to explore.

What else is there that might help you figure out where I am? Well, to either side of this beach are rocks and cliff edges. Huge waves hammer against them. Earlier I stood at the rocks and watched, counting the seconds





between the waves, wondering what my chances of climbing down from one rock and up on to the next were so that I could explore beyond them. I never got past two seconds. Not enough time to avoid being trapped by the crashing waves.

All of that means that, for now, I'm stuck here.

If you're wondering how I'm writing this, I found a washed-up purple felt tip pen in the sand, and it works! I already had my notebook. I knew I'd have to wade into the sea to get on the boat this morning, so I'd packed my notebook in a waterproof zip bag and shoved it in my pocket and it somehow survived with me.

If only I'd known what was about to happen, I'd have filled that waterproof bag with so many more things. Still, at least I have the notebook, I guess. And there's all sorts of bits and bobs that have been washed up on the



beach. Later, I'll look for a biro or a pencil in case this pen runs out. I know there are other things I should be doing too, but to tell the truth . . . I'm scared. Every time I look up from this notebook the vastness of the sea stretches in front of me and I feel more alone than I've ever felt before. I have bruises and scratches all over my body, but I haven't felt the pain yet – my mind is moving too quickly, thinking about everything else.

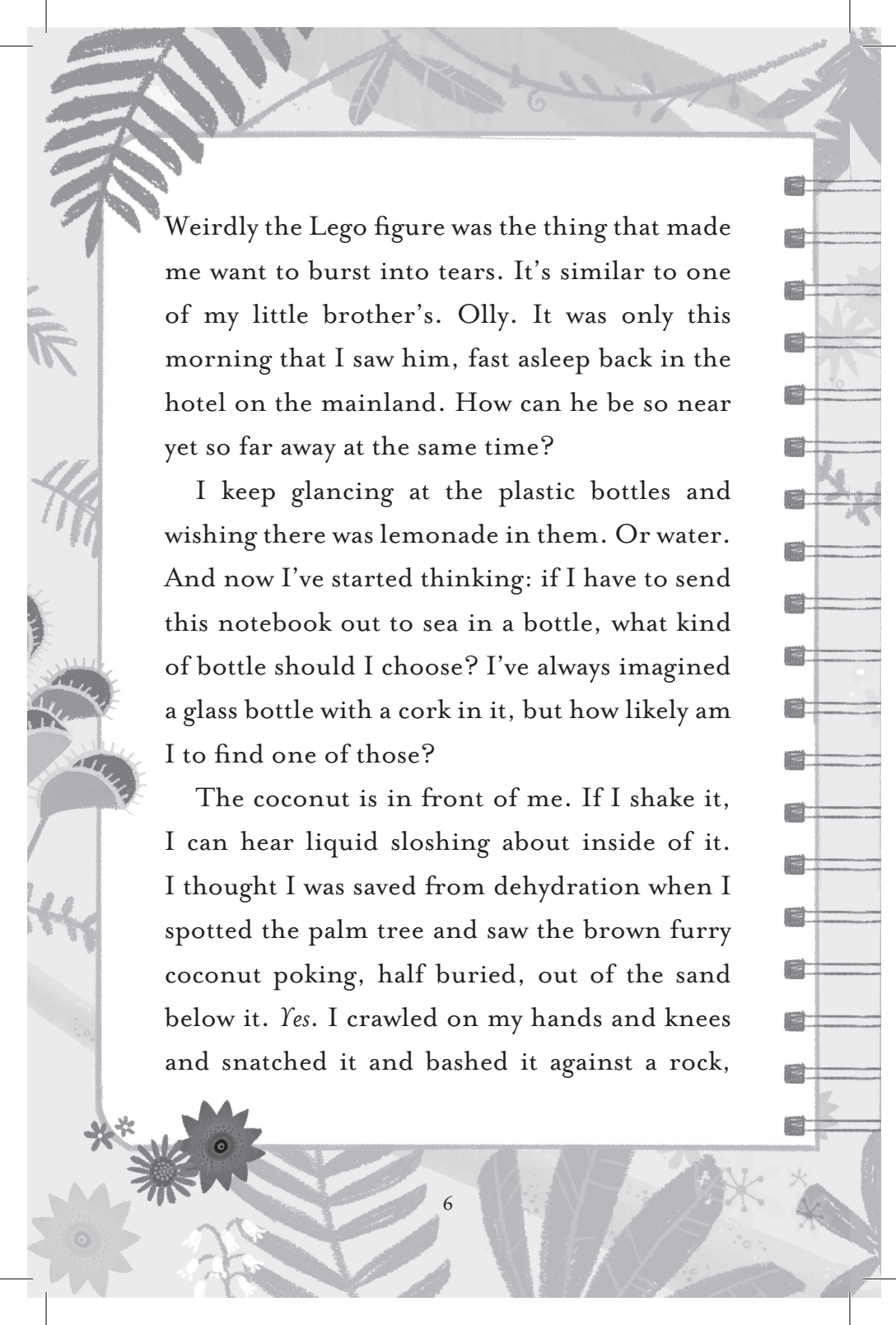
I need water and food and shade from the sun. I need to make a flag or a sign – something that any rescue boat or helicopter could spot from far away. There's so much I need to do – but I just can't get myself to move. Dad's voice is in my head, telling me to make sure I drink water when it's hot. That's what I'm going to do first. Find something to drink. I'll come back to writing this soon. Wish me luck.

## *Afternoon*

I'm back from my search along the beach for fresh water. I didn't get very far because the scorching sand burned the soles of my feet. I had to keep ducking into the shade of the treeline, or out into the sea, to let my feet recover. I didn't find any fresh water, but I collected a bunch of other things, and now I have a little pile of items next to me.

Things I've found so far:

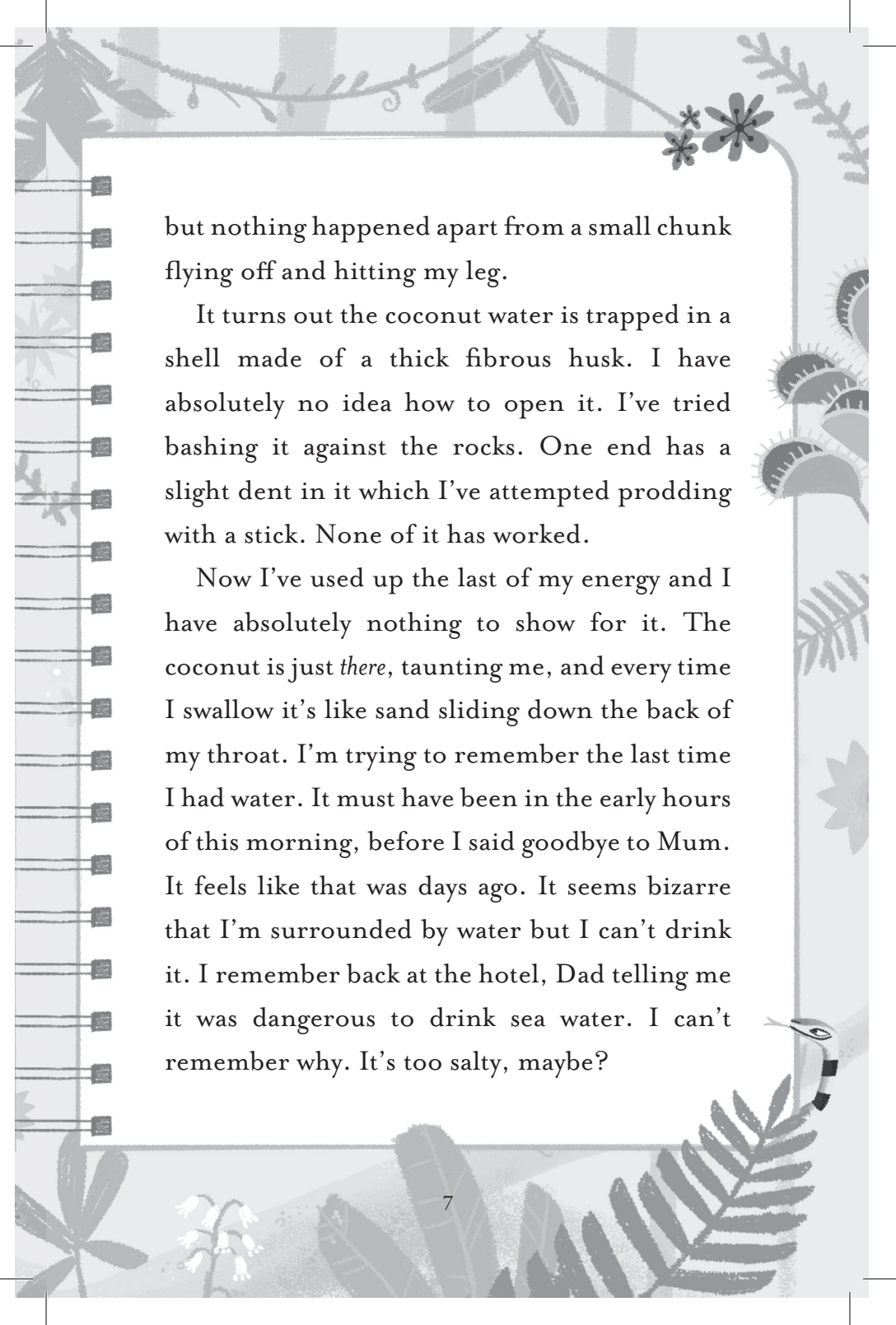
- A coconut (Not as great as that sounds. More on that in a minute)
- Seven empty plastic bottles
- Nine plastic bags
- Rope
- Broken fishing net
- A fishing buoy
- A yellow Lego figure



Weirdly the Lego figure was the thing that made me want to burst into tears. It's similar to one of my little brother's. Olly. It was only this morning that I saw him, fast asleep back in the hotel on the mainland. How can he be so near yet so far away at the same time?

I keep glancing at the plastic bottles and wishing there was lemonade in them. Or water. And now I've started thinking: if I have to send this notebook out to sea in a bottle, what kind of bottle should I choose? I've always imagined a glass bottle with a cork in it, but how likely am I to find one of those?

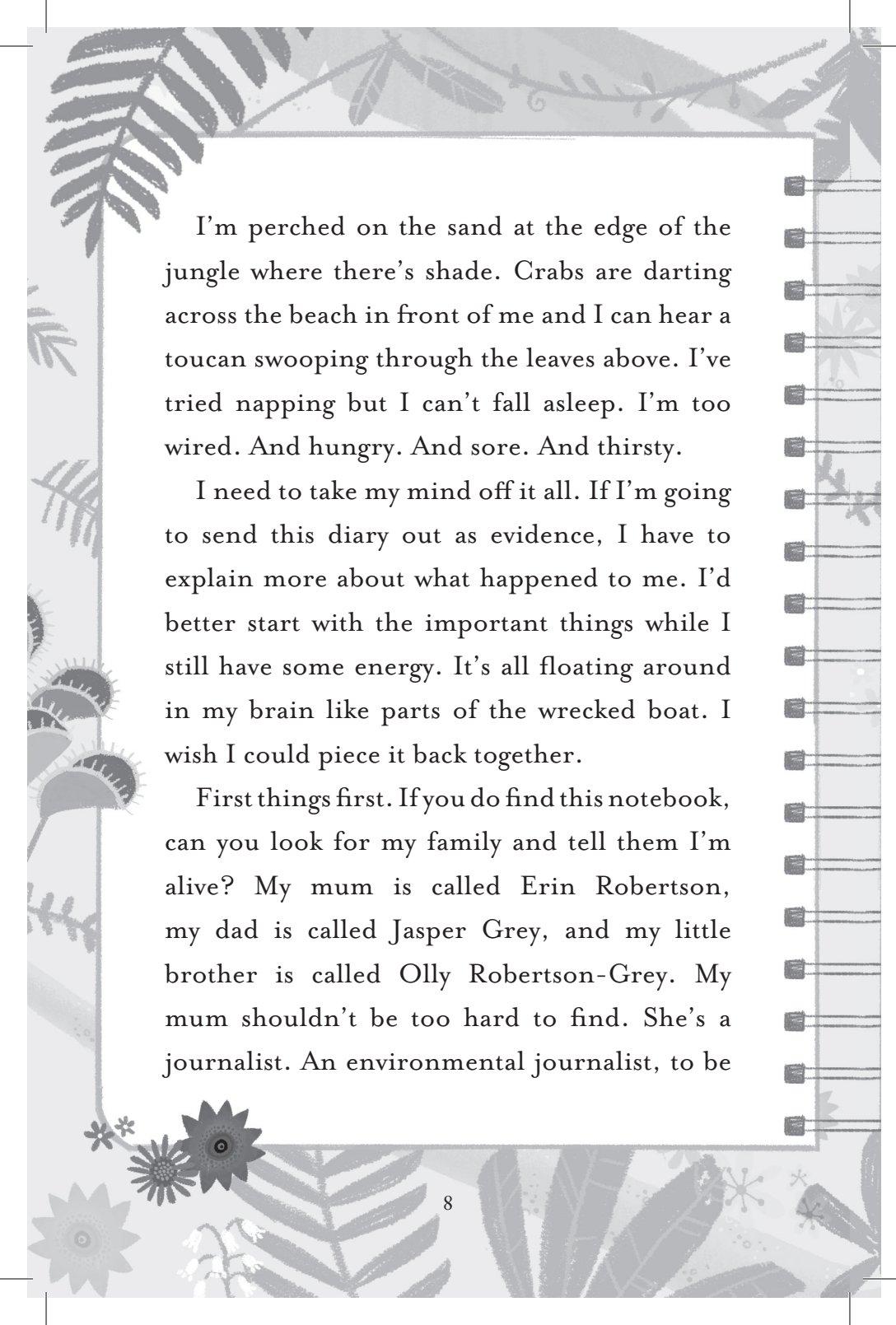
The coconut is in front of me. If I shake it, I can hear liquid sloshing about inside of it. I thought I was saved from dehydration when I spotted the palm tree and saw the brown furry coconut poking, half buried, out of the sand below it. *Yes*. I crawled on my hands and knees and snatched it and bashed it against a rock,



but nothing happened apart from a small chunk flying off and hitting my leg.

It turns out the coconut water is trapped in a shell made of a thick fibrous husk. I have absolutely no idea how to open it. I've tried bashing it against the rocks. One end has a slight dent in it which I've attempted prodding with a stick. None of it has worked.

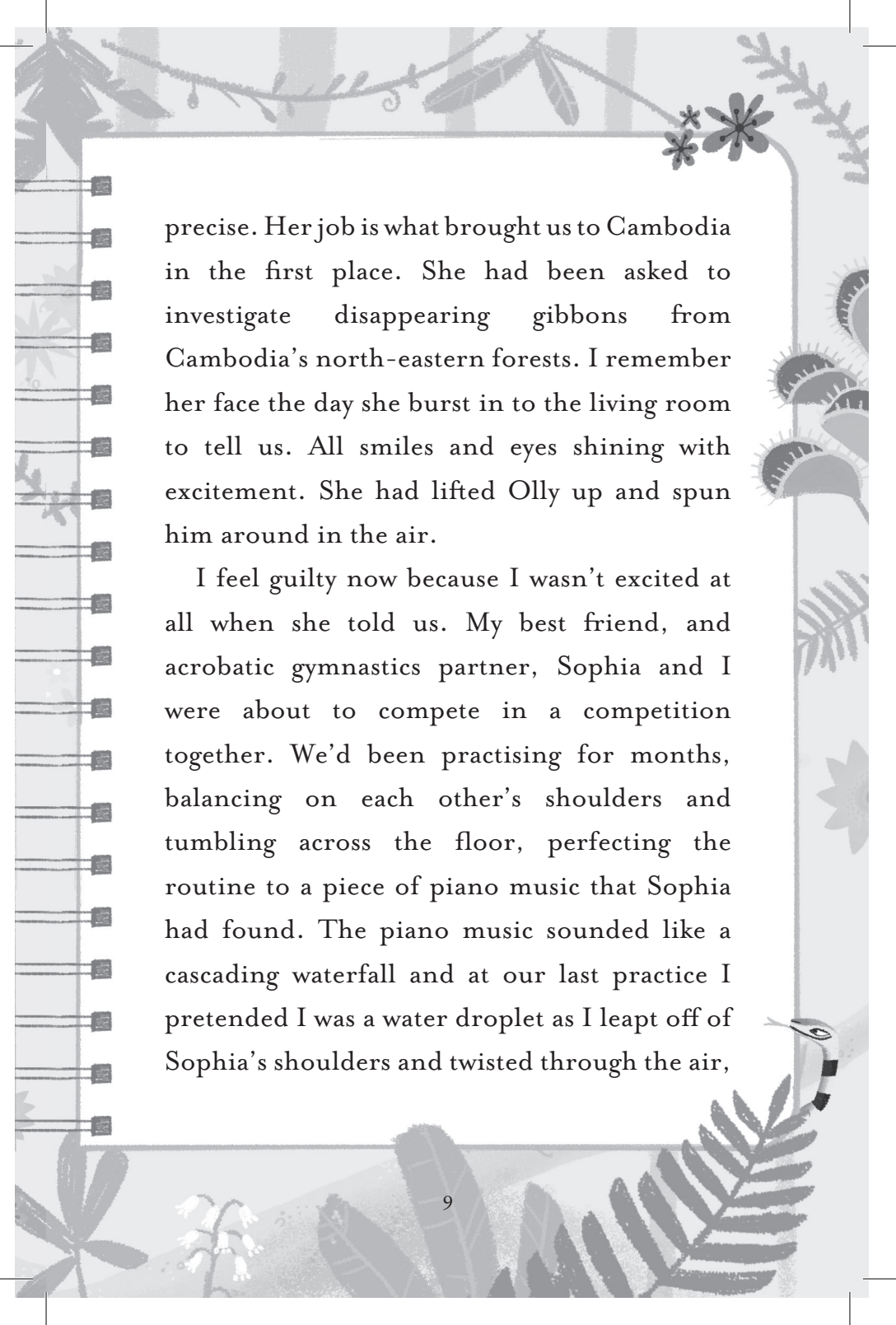
Now I've used up the last of my energy and I have absolutely nothing to show for it. The coconut is just *there*, taunting me, and every time I swallow it's like sand sliding down the back of my throat. I'm trying to remember the last time I had water. It must have been in the early hours of this morning, before I said goodbye to Mum. It feels like that was days ago. It seems bizarre that I'm surrounded by water but I can't drink it. I remember back at the hotel, Dad telling me it was dangerous to drink sea water. I can't remember why. It's too salty, maybe?

A decorative border surrounds the page, featuring various tropical plants and flowers. On the left, there are large, dark green fern-like leaves and several sunflowers with dark centers and light petals. At the bottom, there are more sunflowers and smaller, delicate white flowers. On the right side, the spiral binding of the notebook is visible, with several rings. The background of the page is a light, muted green color.

I'm perched on the sand at the edge of the jungle where there's shade. Crabs are darting across the beach in front of me and I can hear a toucan swooping through the leaves above. I've tried napping but I can't fall asleep. I'm too wired. And hungry. And sore. And thirsty.

I need to take my mind off it all. If I'm going to send this diary out as evidence, I have to explain more about what happened to me. I'd better start with the important things while I still have some energy. It's all floating around in my brain like parts of the wrecked boat. I wish I could piece it back together.

First things first. If you do find this notebook, can you look for my family and tell them I'm alive? My mum is called Erin Robertson, my dad is called Jasper Grey, and my little brother is called Olly Robertson-Grey. My mum shouldn't be too hard to find. She's a journalist. An environmental journalist, to be

A decorative border surrounds the text, featuring various floral and leaf motifs. At the top, there are sprigs of leaves and flowers. On the right side, there are stylized sun-like shapes with rays. At the bottom, there are large, detailed leaves and a small white flower. The left side of the page has a vertical strip with small, dark, rectangular shapes, possibly representing a book's spine or a decorative element.

precise. Her job is what brought us to Cambodia in the first place. She had been asked to investigate disappearing gibbons from Cambodia's north-eastern forests. I remember her face the day she burst in to the living room to tell us. All smiles and eyes shining with excitement. She had lifted Olly up and spun him around in the air.

I feel guilty now because I wasn't excited at all when she told us. My best friend, and acrobatic gymnastics partner, Sophia and I were about to compete in a competition together. We'd been practising for months, balancing on each other's shoulders and tumbling across the floor, perfecting the routine to a piece of piano music that Sophia had found. The piano music sounded like a cascading waterfall and at our last practice I pretended I was a water droplet as I leapt off of Sophia's shoulders and twisted through the air,

landing perfectly. If I close my eyes and breathe in deeply, the sound of the sea takes me right back there.



It's hard to remember that day and everything that followed – I can't help but feel like it's my fault I ended up here alone – but I need to tell you everything. I've always doodled whenever I'm trying to remember something uncomfortable. It helps get me ready to think. My favourite doodle is a lark. I've drawn them since I was little. Here goes . . .



Later that same day, Mum told us her news. I realised in that moment that I wouldn't be competing in the competition, but instead travelling across the world for Mum's job – again. That's the thing about Mum's job.



It always comes first.

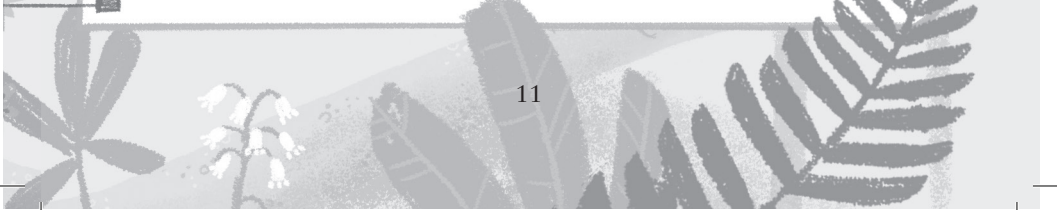
‘There will be more gymnastics competitions,’ Mum said. ‘But there might not be any gibbons left soon.’

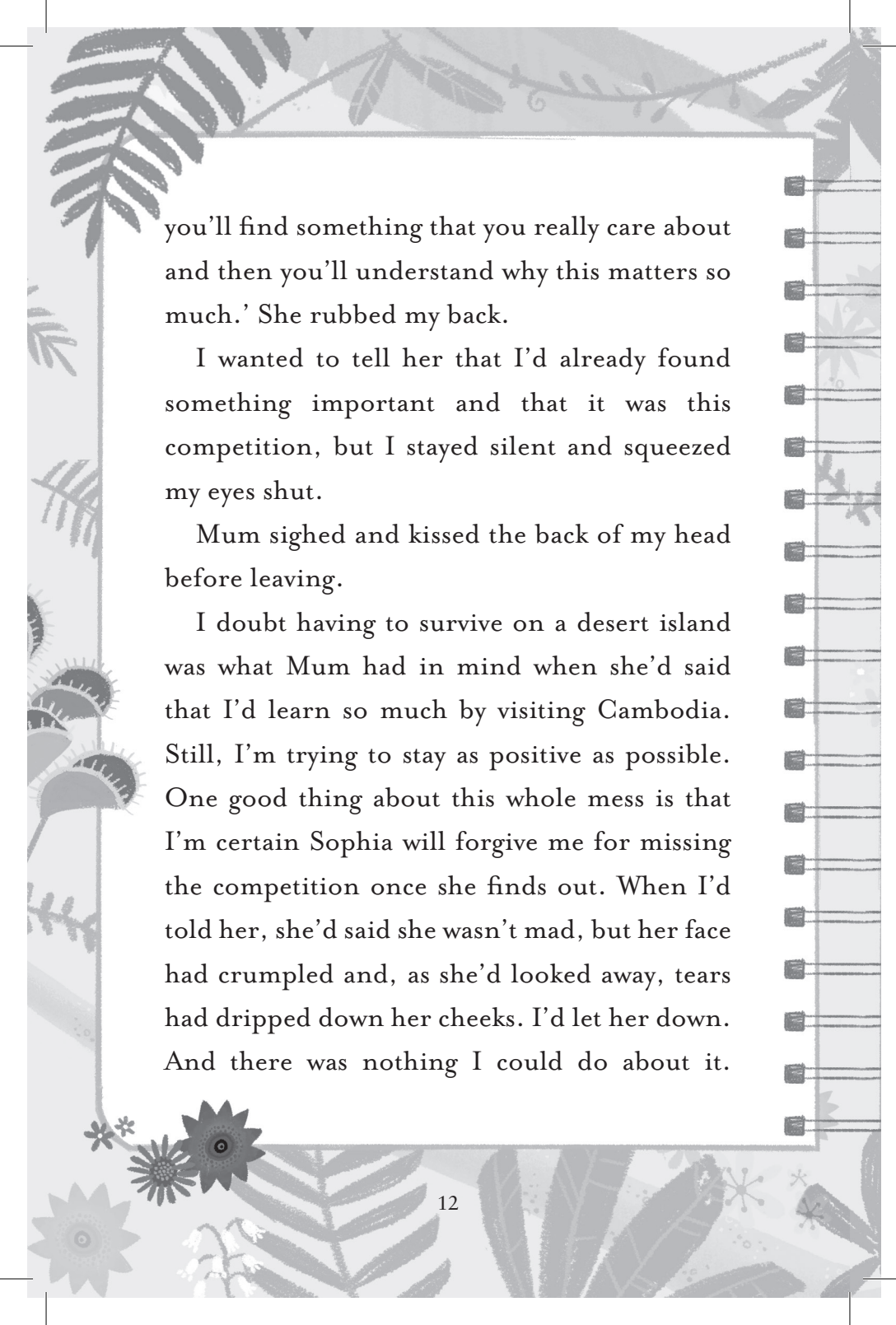
‘Why do *I* have to go?’ I asked. ‘I’m sure that I could stay with Sophia. You know her parents.’

‘Oh sweetheart, this is such a great opportunity for you,’ she said. ‘You’ll learn so much. I know you will. I want to show you Cambodia. I fell in love with it and the gibbons there when I visited in my twenties.’

I remember how I ran up to my room, biting back tears and throwing my head under my pillow. She didn’t get it. She’d never even been to one of my competitions. She was always working on something.

Mum followed me in and sat down next to me on the bed, speaking softly. ‘I know it’s difficult, Lark. But I need to stand up for what’s important and for what I believe in. One day,



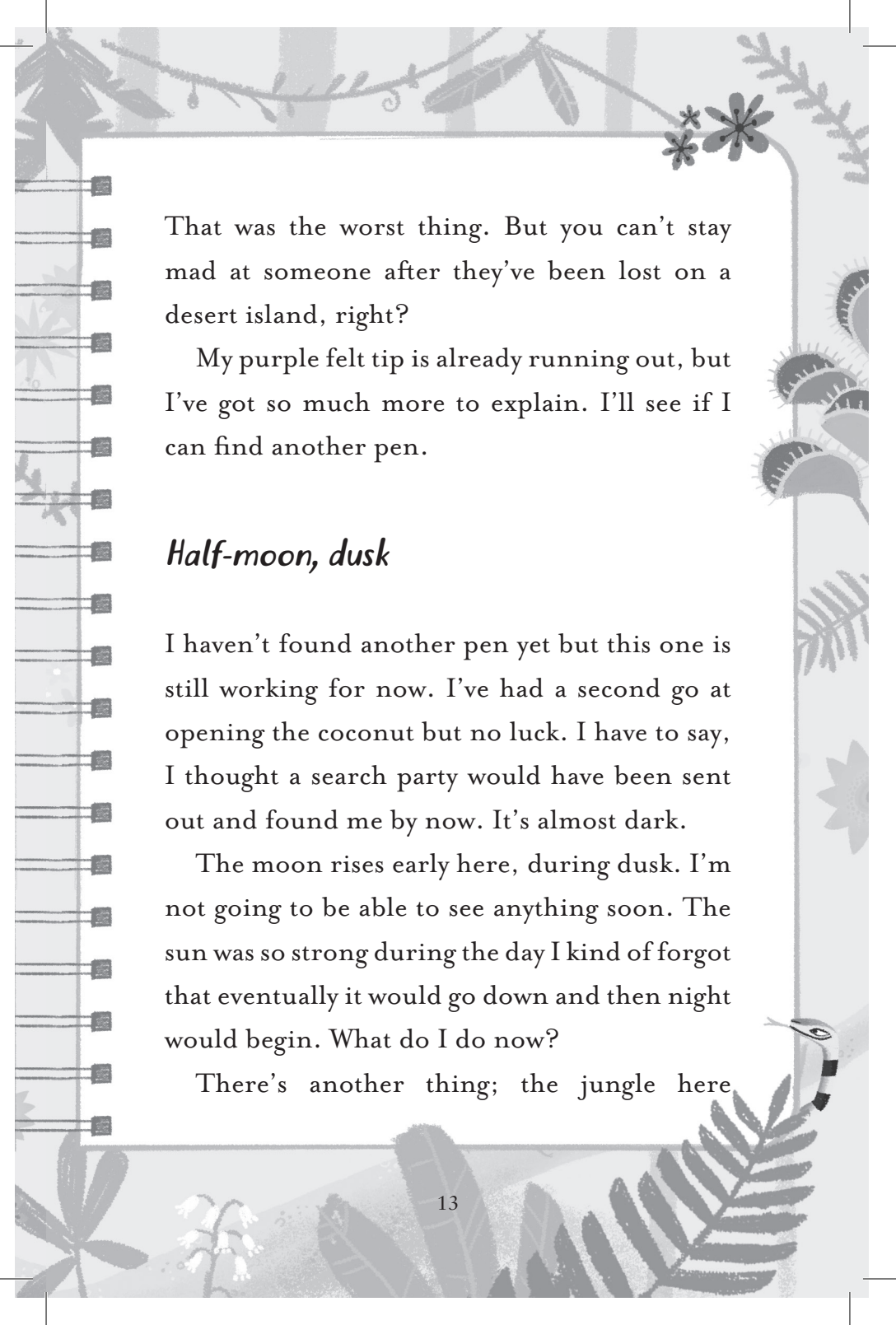


you'll find something that you really care about and then you'll understand why this matters so much.' She rubbed my back.

I wanted to tell her that I'd already found something important and that it was this competition, but I stayed silent and squeezed my eyes shut.

Mum sighed and kissed the back of my head before leaving.

I doubt having to survive on a desert island was what Mum had in mind when she'd said that I'd learn so much by visiting Cambodia. Still, I'm trying to stay as positive as possible. One good thing about this whole mess is that I'm certain Sophia will forgive me for missing the competition once she finds out. When I'd told her, she'd said she wasn't mad, but her face had crumpled and, as she'd looked away, tears had dripped down her cheeks. I'd let her down. And there was nothing I could do about it.



That was the worst thing. But you can't stay mad at someone after they've been lost on a desert island, right?

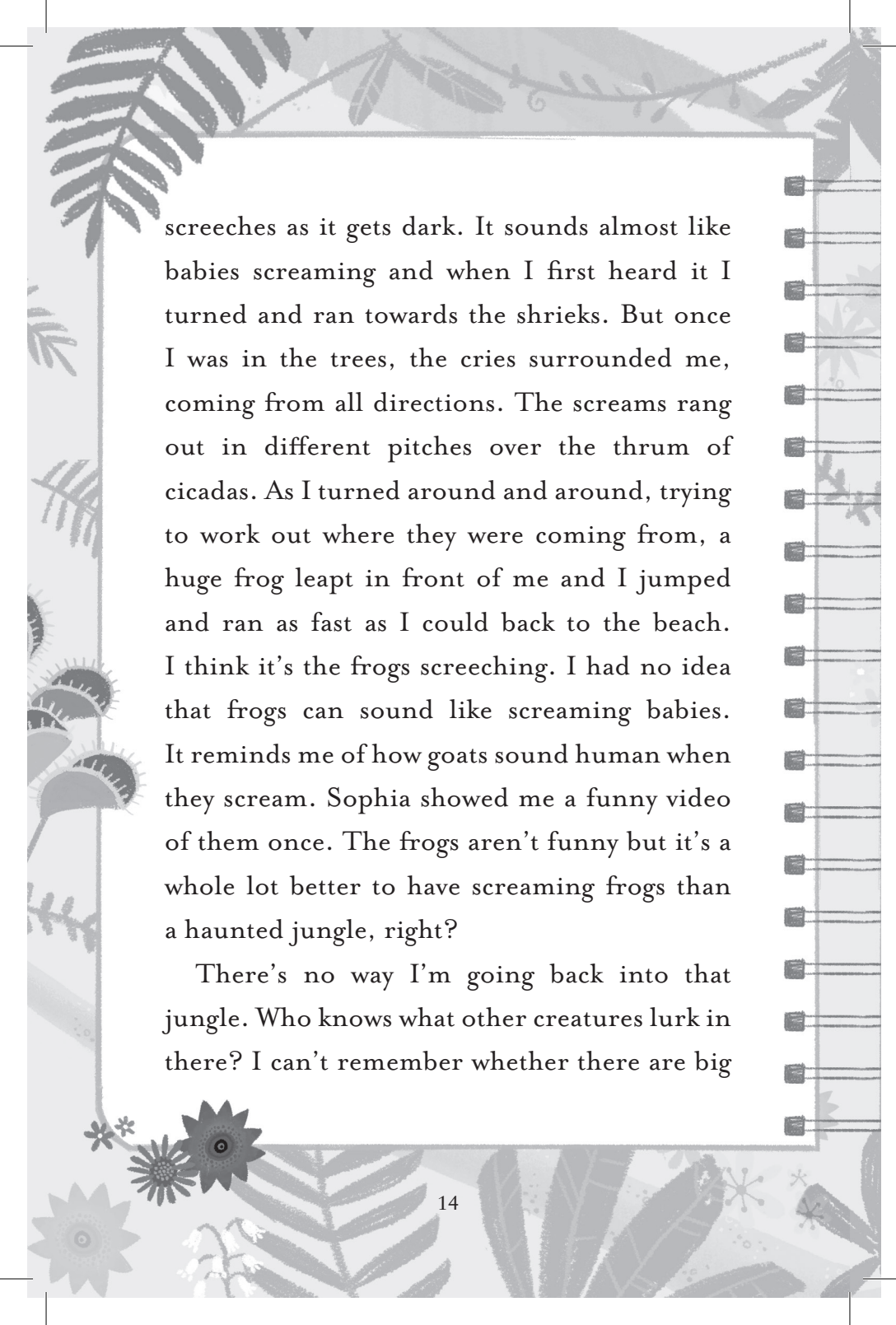
My purple felt tip is already running out, but I've got so much more to explain. I'll see if I can find another pen.

### *Half-moon, dusk*

I haven't found another pen yet but this one is still working for now. I've had a second go at opening the coconut but no luck. I have to say, I thought a search party would have been sent out and found me by now. It's almost dark.

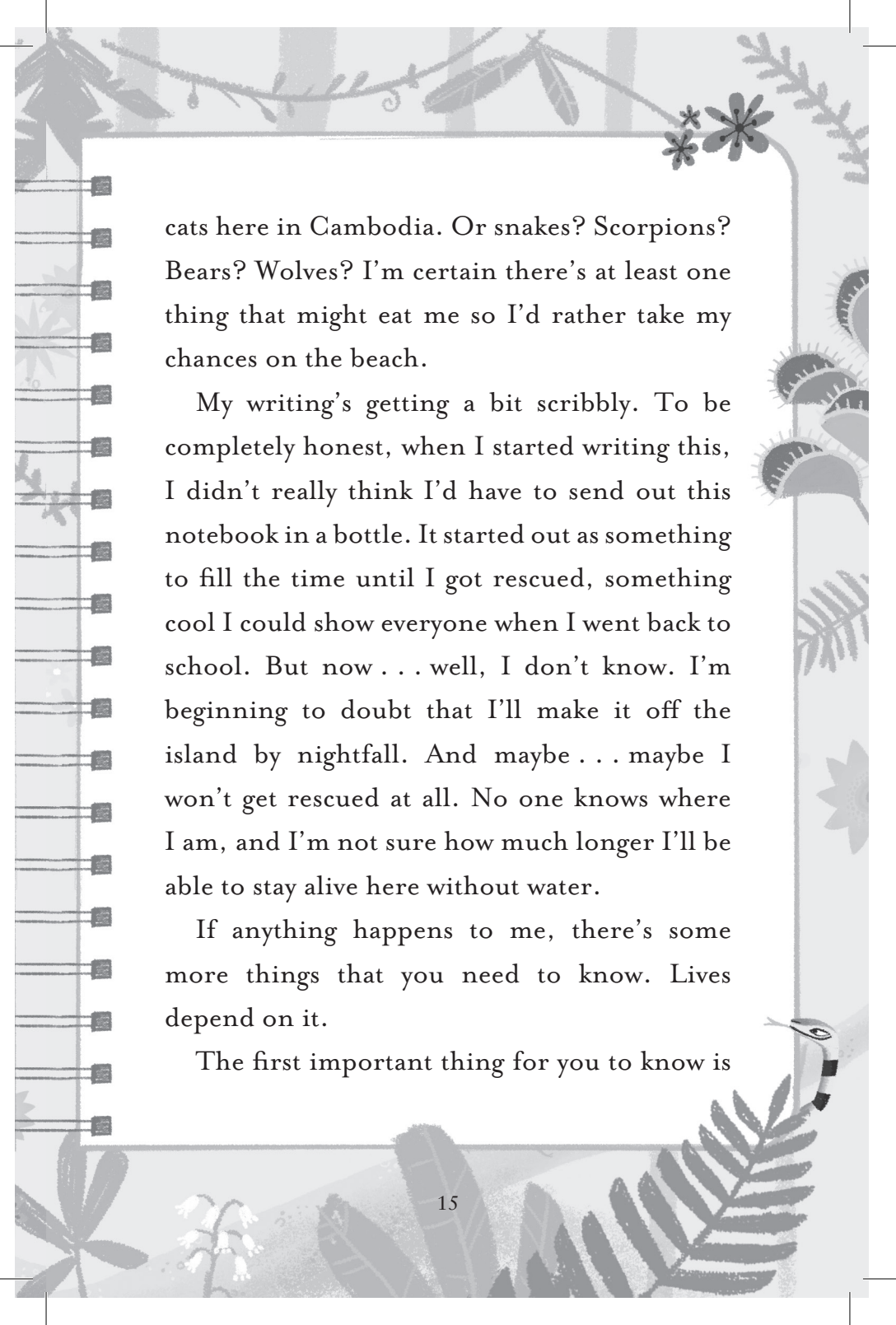
The moon rises early here, during dusk. I'm not going to be able to see anything soon. The sun was so strong during the day I kind of forgot that eventually it would go down and then night would begin. What do I do now?

There's another thing; the jungle here

The page is framed by a decorative border of various plants and leaves. On the left side, there are large fern-like leaves at the top, followed by smaller leaves and several stylized sunflowers or daisies. At the bottom left, there are more sunflowers and a small white flower. The right side of the page features a vertical spiral binding. The background of the page is a light, textured grey.

screeches as it gets dark. It sounds almost like babies screaming and when I first heard it I turned and ran towards the shrieks. But once I was in the trees, the cries surrounded me, coming from all directions. The screams rang out in different pitches over the thrum of cicadas. As I turned around and around, trying to work out where they were coming from, a huge frog leapt in front of me and I jumped and ran as fast as I could back to the beach. I think it's the frogs screeching. I had no idea that frogs can sound like screaming babies. It reminds me of how goats sound human when they scream. Sophia showed me a funny video of them once. The frogs aren't funny but it's a whole lot better to have screaming frogs than a haunted jungle, right?

There's no way I'm going back into that jungle. Who knows what other creatures lurk in there? I can't remember whether there are big

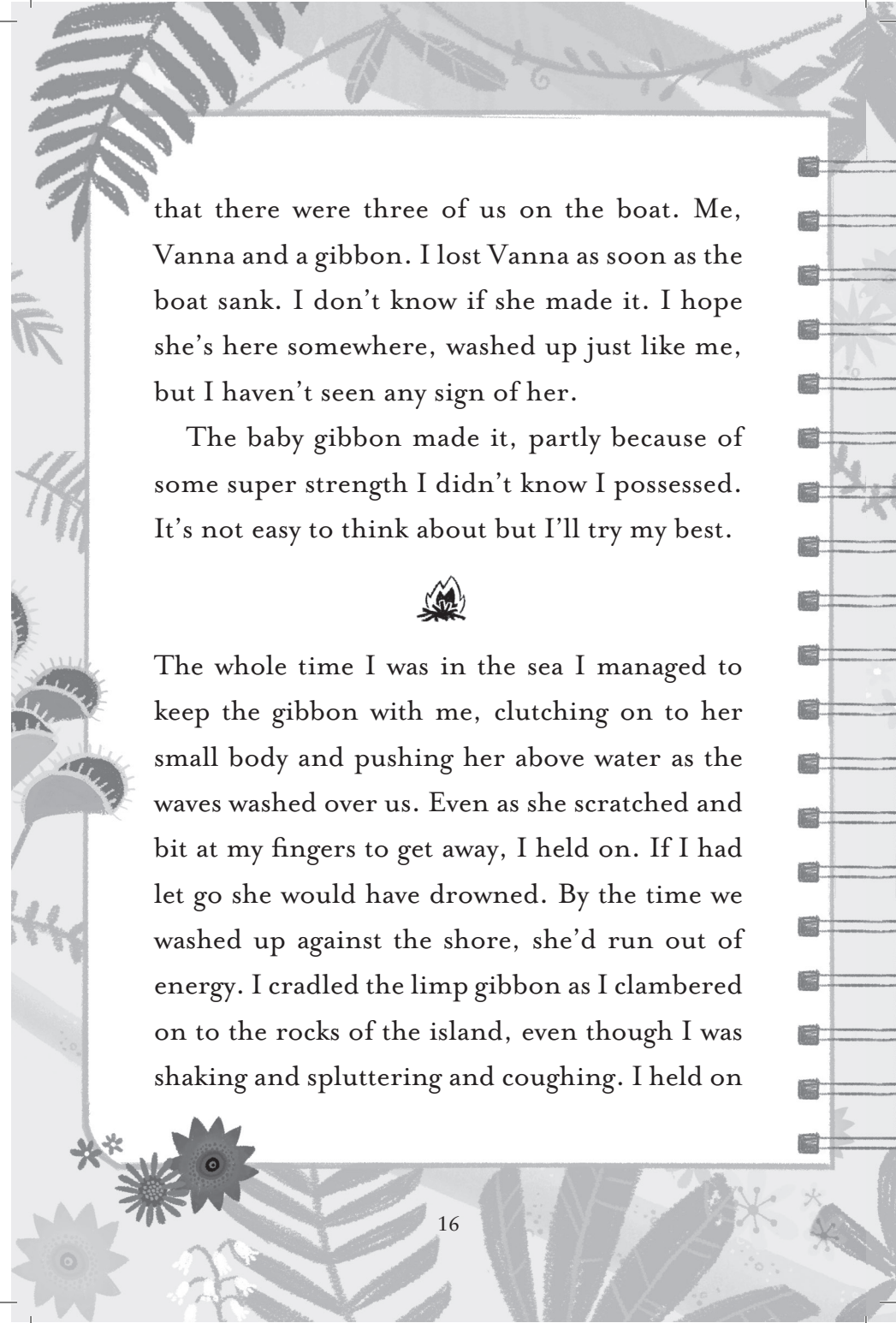


cats here in Cambodia. Or snakes? Scorpions? Bears? Wolves? I'm certain there's at least one thing that might eat me so I'd rather take my chances on the beach.

My writing's getting a bit scribbly. To be completely honest, when I started writing this, I didn't really think I'd have to send out this notebook in a bottle. It started out as something to fill the time until I got rescued, something cool I could show everyone when I went back to school. But now . . . well, I don't know. I'm beginning to doubt that I'll make it off the island by nightfall. And maybe . . . maybe I won't get rescued at all. No one knows where I am, and I'm not sure how much longer I'll be able to stay alive here without water.

If anything happens to me, there's some more things that you need to know. Lives depend on it.

The first important thing for you to know is

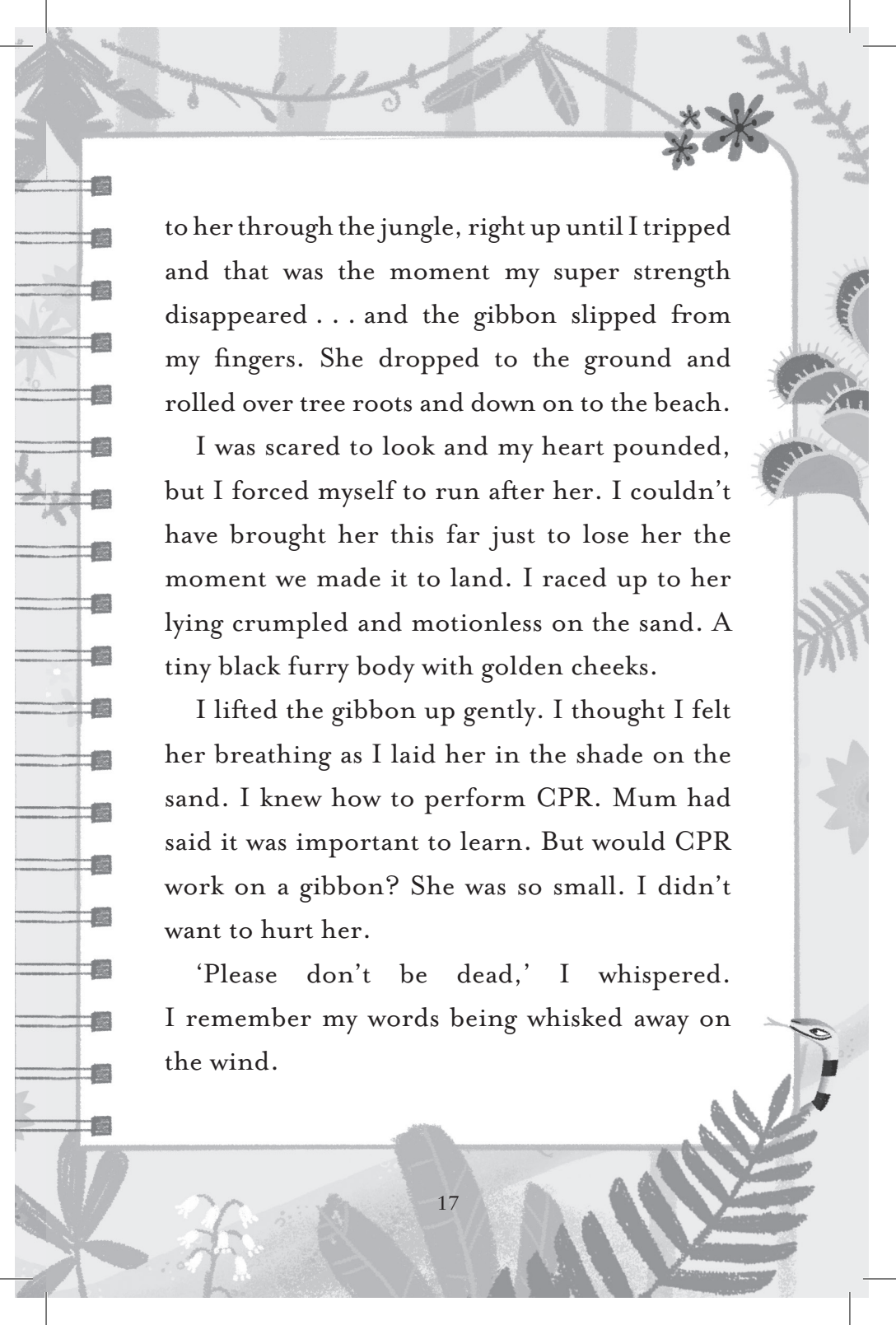


that there were three of us on the boat. Me, Vanna and a gibbon. I lost Vanna as soon as the boat sank. I don't know if she made it. I hope she's here somewhere, washed up just like me, but I haven't seen any sign of her.

The baby gibbon made it, partly because of some super strength I didn't know I possessed. It's not easy to think about but I'll try my best.



The whole time I was in the sea I managed to keep the gibbon with me, clutching on to her small body and pushing her above water as the waves washed over us. Even as she scratched and bit at my fingers to get away, I held on. If I had let go she would have drowned. By the time we washed up against the shore, she'd run out of energy. I cradled the limp gibbon as I clambered on to the rocks of the island, even though I was shaking and spluttering and coughing. I held on

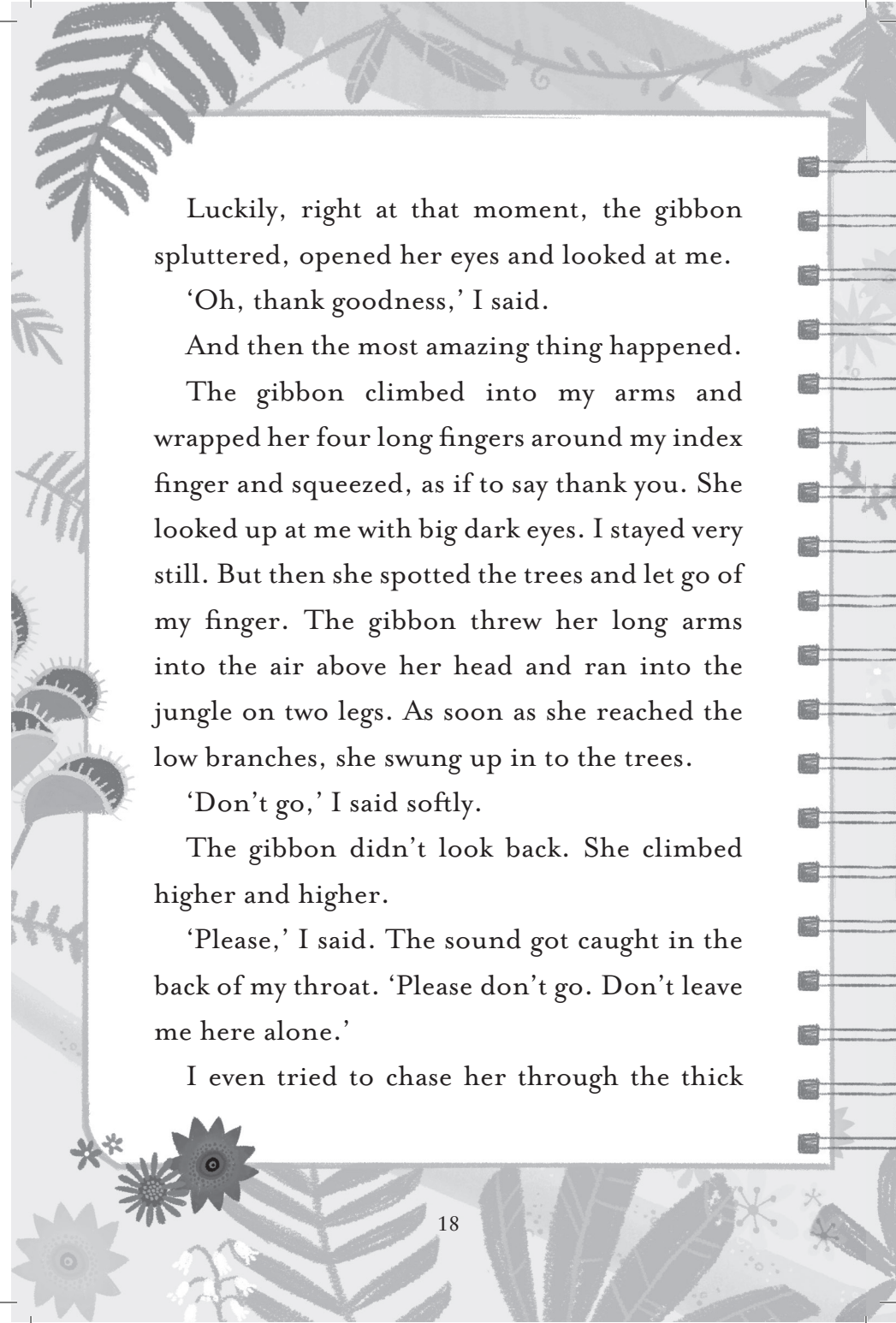


to her through the jungle, right up until I tripped and that was the moment my super strength disappeared . . . and the gibbon slipped from my fingers. She dropped to the ground and rolled over tree roots and down on to the beach.

I was scared to look and my heart pounded, but I forced myself to run after her. I couldn't have brought her this far just to lose her the moment we made it to land. I raced up to her lying crumpled and motionless on the sand. A tiny black furry body with golden cheeks.

I lifted the gibbon up gently. I thought I felt her breathing as I laid her in the shade on the sand. I knew how to perform CPR. Mum had said it was important to learn. But would CPR work on a gibbon? She was so small. I didn't want to hurt her.

'Please don't be dead,' I whispered. I remember my words being whisked away on the wind.



Luckily, right at that moment, the gibbon spluttered, opened her eyes and looked at me.

‘Oh, thank goodness,’ I said.

And then the most amazing thing happened.

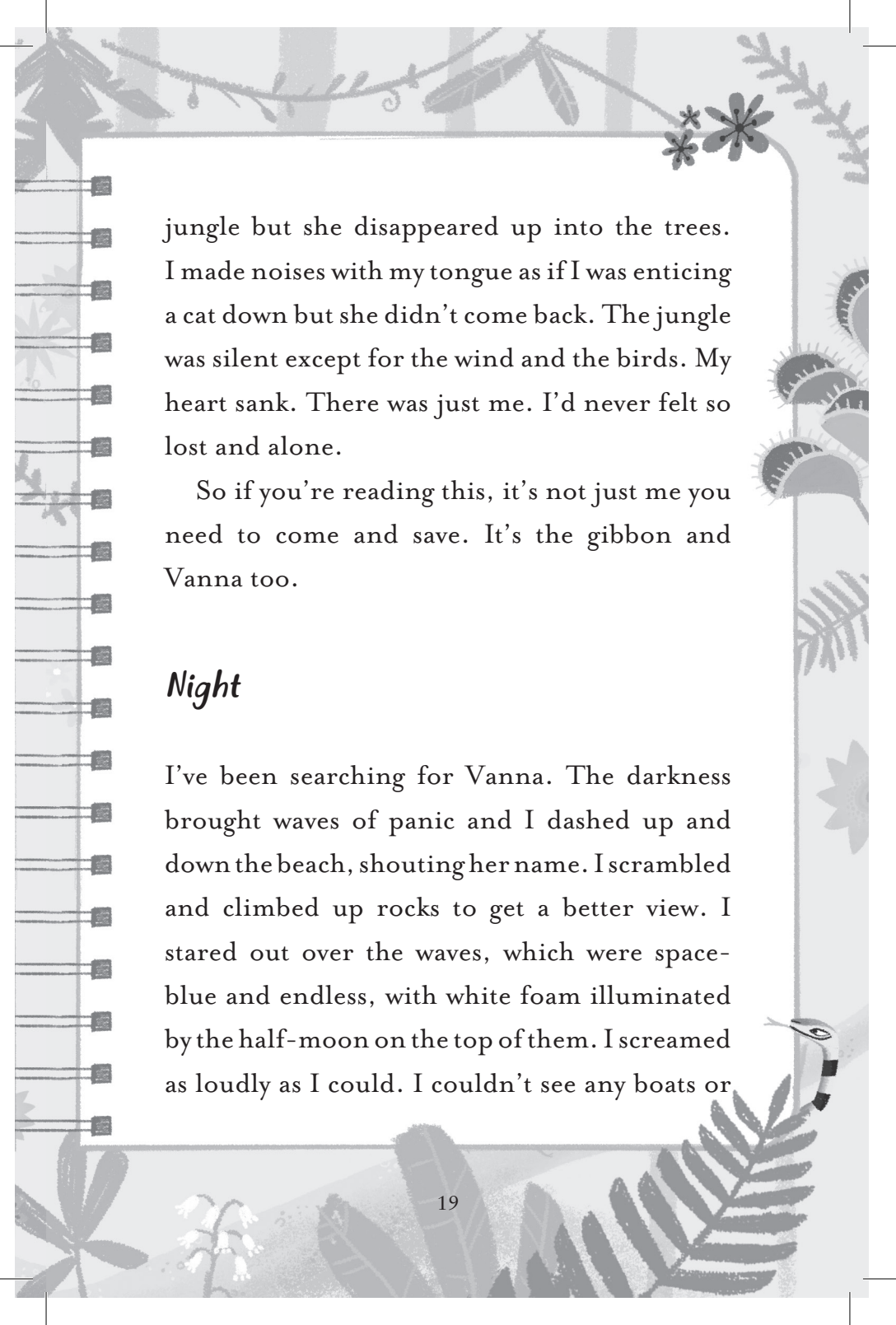
The gibbon climbed into my arms and wrapped her four long fingers around my index finger and squeezed, as if to say thank you. She looked up at me with big dark eyes. I stayed very still. But then she spotted the trees and let go of my finger. The gibbon threw her long arms into the air above her head and ran into the jungle on two legs. As soon as she reached the low branches, she swung up in to the trees.

‘Don’t go,’ I said softly.

The gibbon didn’t look back. She climbed higher and higher.

‘Please,’ I said. The sound got caught in the back of my throat. ‘Please don’t go. Don’t leave me here alone.’

I even tried to chase her through the thick

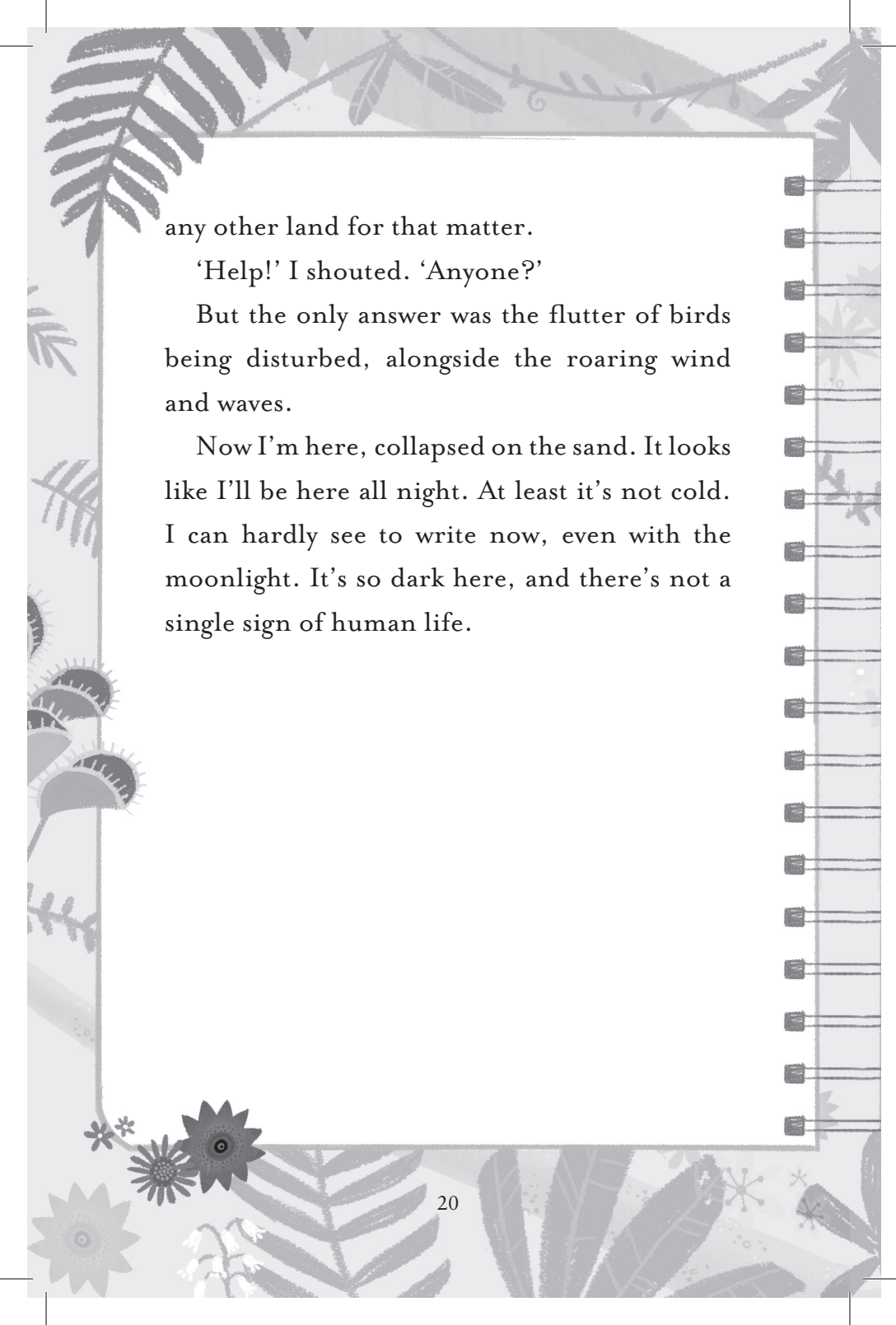


jungle but she disappeared up into the trees. I made noises with my tongue as if I was enticing a cat down but she didn't come back. The jungle was silent except for the wind and the birds. My heart sank. There was just me. I'd never felt so lost and alone.

So if you're reading this, it's not just me you need to come and save. It's the gibbon and Vanna too.

## *Night*

I've been searching for Vanna. The darkness brought waves of panic and I dashed up and down the beach, shouting her name. I scrambled and climbed up rocks to get a better view. I stared out over the waves, which were space-blue and endless, with white foam illuminated by the half-moon on the top of them. I screamed as loudly as I could. I couldn't see any boats or

The page is framed by a decorative border of various plants and flowers. At the top left, there are large fern-like leaves. On the right side, there are stylized flowers and leaves. At the bottom, there are several large, detailed flowers, including a prominent one with a dark center and radiating petals. The background of the border is a light, textured grey.

any other land for that matter.

‘Help!’ I shouted. ‘Anyone?’

But the only answer was the flutter of birds being disturbed, alongside the roaring wind and waves.

Now I’m here, collapsed on the sand. It looks like I’ll be here all night. At least it’s not cold. I can hardly see to write now, even with the moonlight. It’s so dark here, and there’s not a single sign of human life.