



Once Upon Our Planet

By Vitta Murrow

Once Upon a Mountain



Once upon a place where now stand the tallest peaks in the world, there swirled a boundless ocean. Its waters ruled over everything.



The ocean's tides governed time. The ocean's waves
pounded everything in their path. The ocean's crash!
Was the most powerful sound of all.



And the ocean's salt saturated the air. The only body to share space with the ocean was the sky – and in it, two birds. A couple of white-capped water redstarts.



They were plump and sweet birds who zoomed above the water in a lithe and easy manner. Their wings buzzed like kite tails on a windy day, a sound that zipped alongside the roar of the ocean.



The white-capped water redstarts were determined to make their home among the forces of the ocean. Year after year, the couple sought tall rocks among the waves. There, they would build a nest of sticks and feathers. And within, the couple would lay a ring of blue eggs.



Sadly, every year, when the nest was unattended, the ocean waters would sweep the eggs out of the nest and into the waves. The tiny eggs never stood a chance.



They sank like stones, their promise of new life
quieted forever.



The white-capped water redstarts mourned and cried with sadness. Then anguish. Then despair. Each year, the birds poured their grief into the ocean. Yet the ocean took no notice of their sorrow. It just crashed its waves and rolled its tide.



On what would be the final chance for the white-capped water redstarts to have a family, they built their last nest. Before they laid their set of eggs, they muttered a little prayer. In that prayer they pleaded to the great creatures of the region to protect the nest from the waters.



The white-capped water redstarts flew their prayer over the ocean to the place where shadows of the giant white-coated bears twisted beneath the waves. The couple skimmed low over the water, their insistent whistle ringing out.



Beneath the water, the bears heard the birds' searing cry. The intense, high-pitched sound cut through the muffle of the water. Their prayer pierced the bears' hearts.



The white-coated bears surfaced and followed the birds as they flew to their nest.



The bears could see that the ocean's demanding waves splashed and leaped close to the fragile nursery. Witnessing the peril of the birds filled the bears with sorrow.



They did the only thing they could do; they drank the waters in huge gulps to protect the birds, giving the unborn offspring their last chance at survival.

The white-coated bears drank and drank. They drew the waters of the ocean into their furry mouths until they were full to the brim. They guzzled until their bellies bloated with the sloshing salty mix of the ocean.



Until all that was left of the ocean was a soft earthen bed.
And a bed was just what the massive white-coated bears needed!
Their gorging had exhausted their giant bodies. They felt crowded
with all they had consumed and they needed to lie down.



As the birds protectively warmed the eggs in their nest, the white-coated bears curled up in a furry pile on the dry ocean bed and fell fast asleep.



The girth of the bears was immense. As they snored and flopped in their slumber, a groove formed in the soft earth beneath them. As the bears snoozed, their weight drove into the ground and they began to sink, like a footprint.



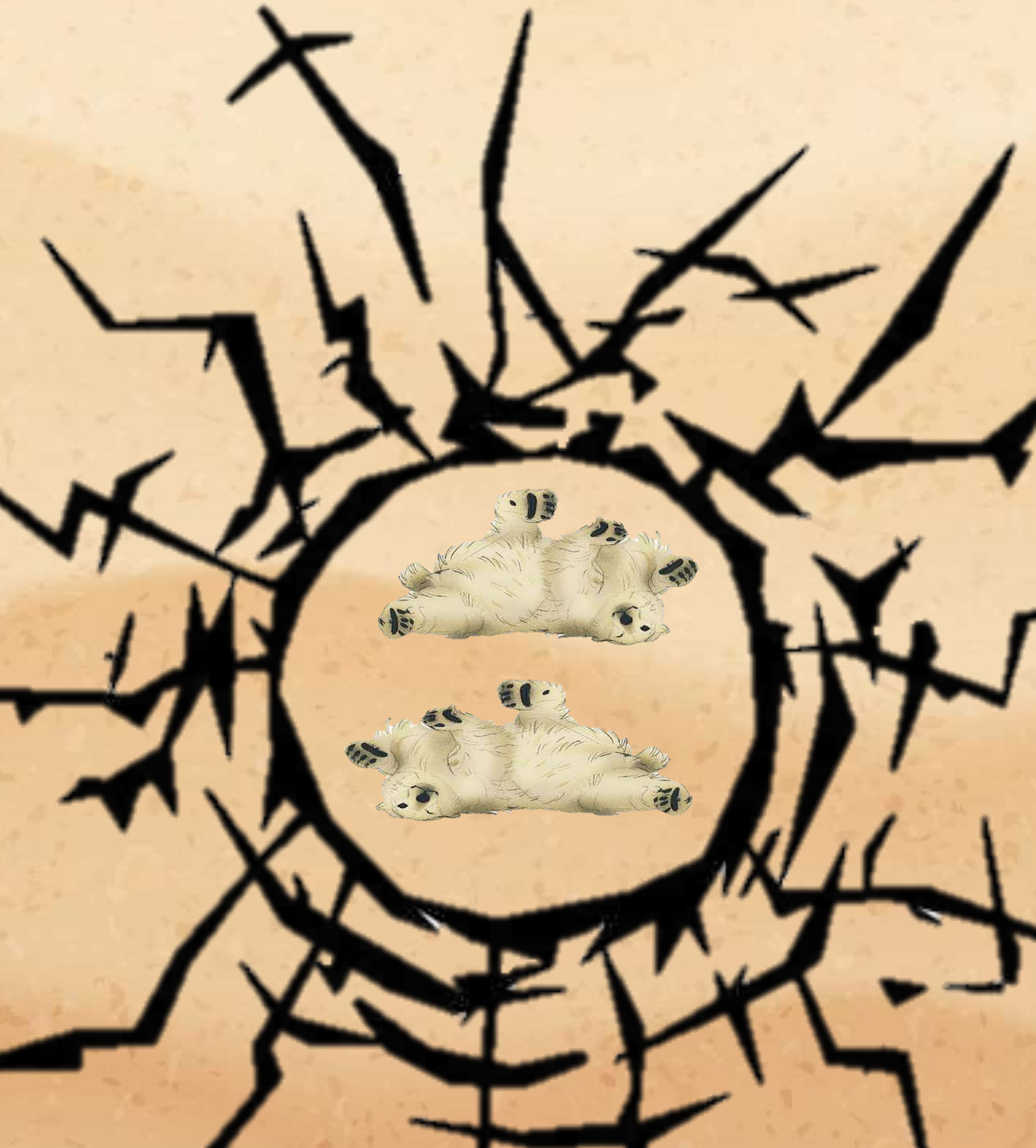
The earth in return pushed back upon them. To stir the bears, the earth released small tremors. But the bears just shifted and nuzzled deeper into the earth.



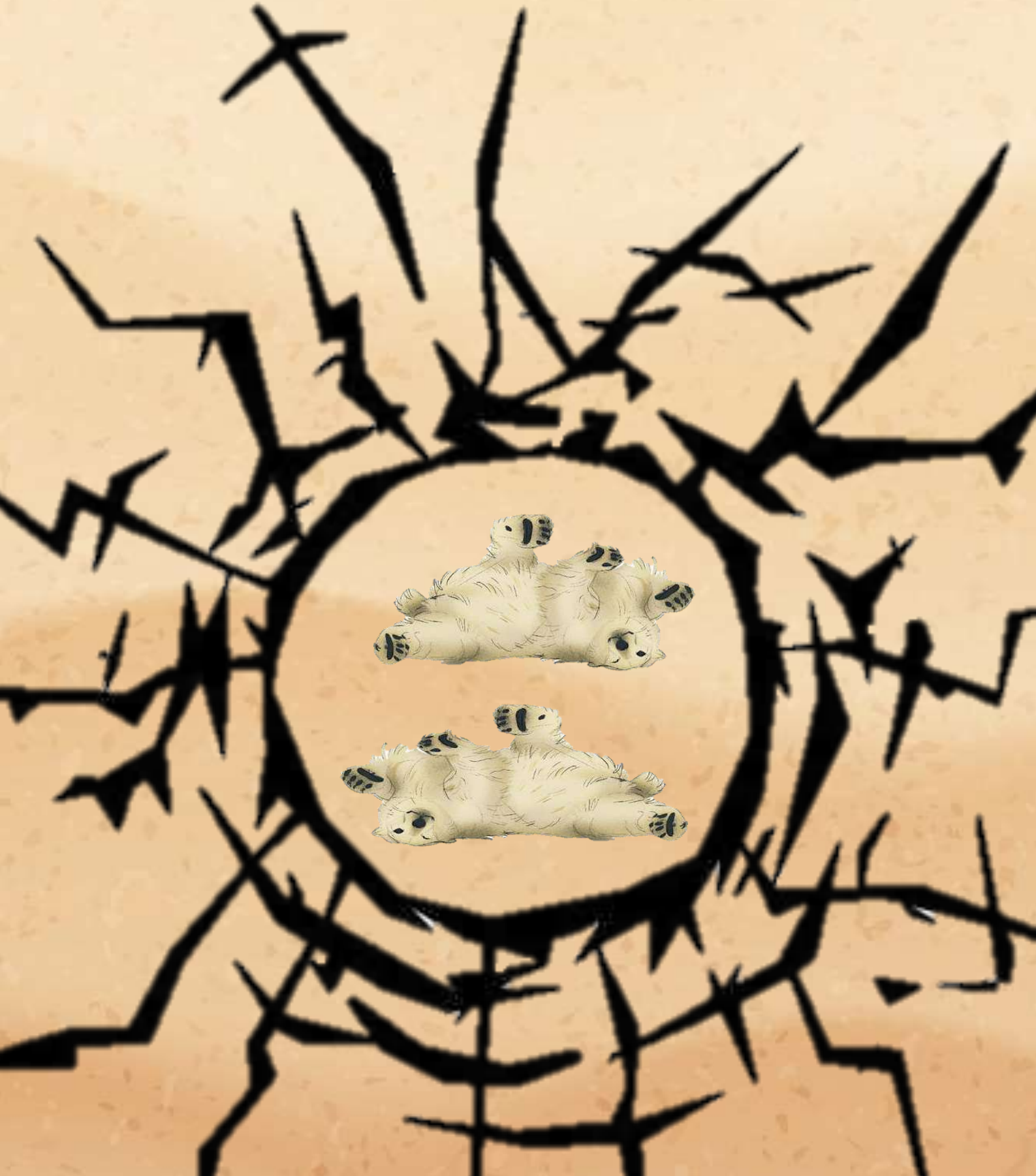
A small fissure broke open beneath the bears. The fissure travelled in a long curving arc that wrapped all the way round. The bears simply rolled over, their sleep undisturbed. The earth needed to let out a stronger message.



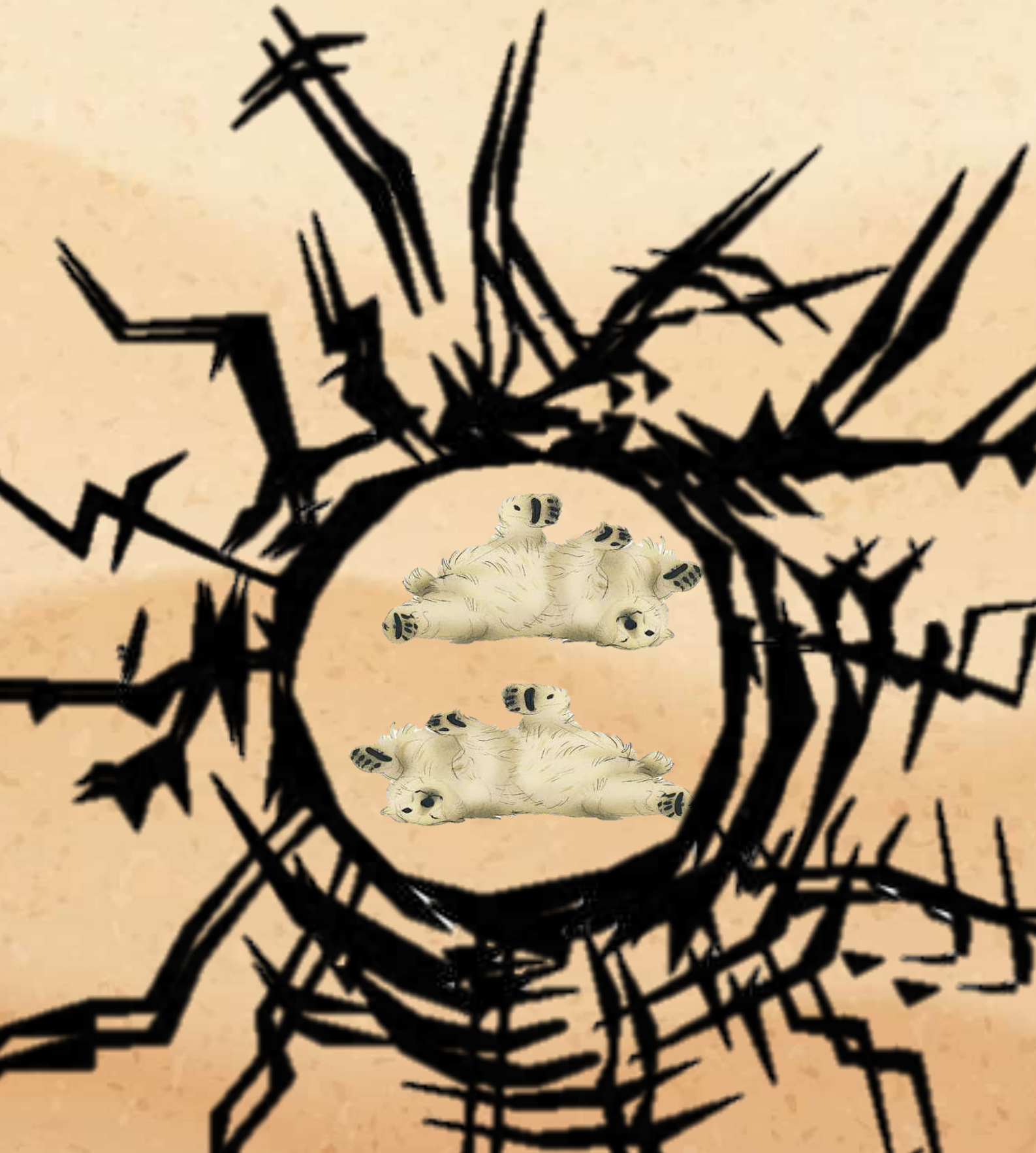
It moved in a giant shift of weight that separated the land into big slices along the fissure. But the bears just lolled and rolled. One teetered precariously close to the edge of a deep crack.



The earth took offence at the loss of an ocean. The white-coated bears had become an immovable nuisance. It decided on a dramatic course of action to stir the sedated animals. It began with a shudder, but grew to a massive quake!



The earth wriggled and trembled, and it shook and rolled. It was as if the land had become one big ocean wave. But the bears slept so deeply the commotion hardly registered



The earth let loose a final, powerful reel. It fractured a deep line that extended for miles.



The land turned itself inside out. And earth's hidden depths reached to the sky in sharp spikes.



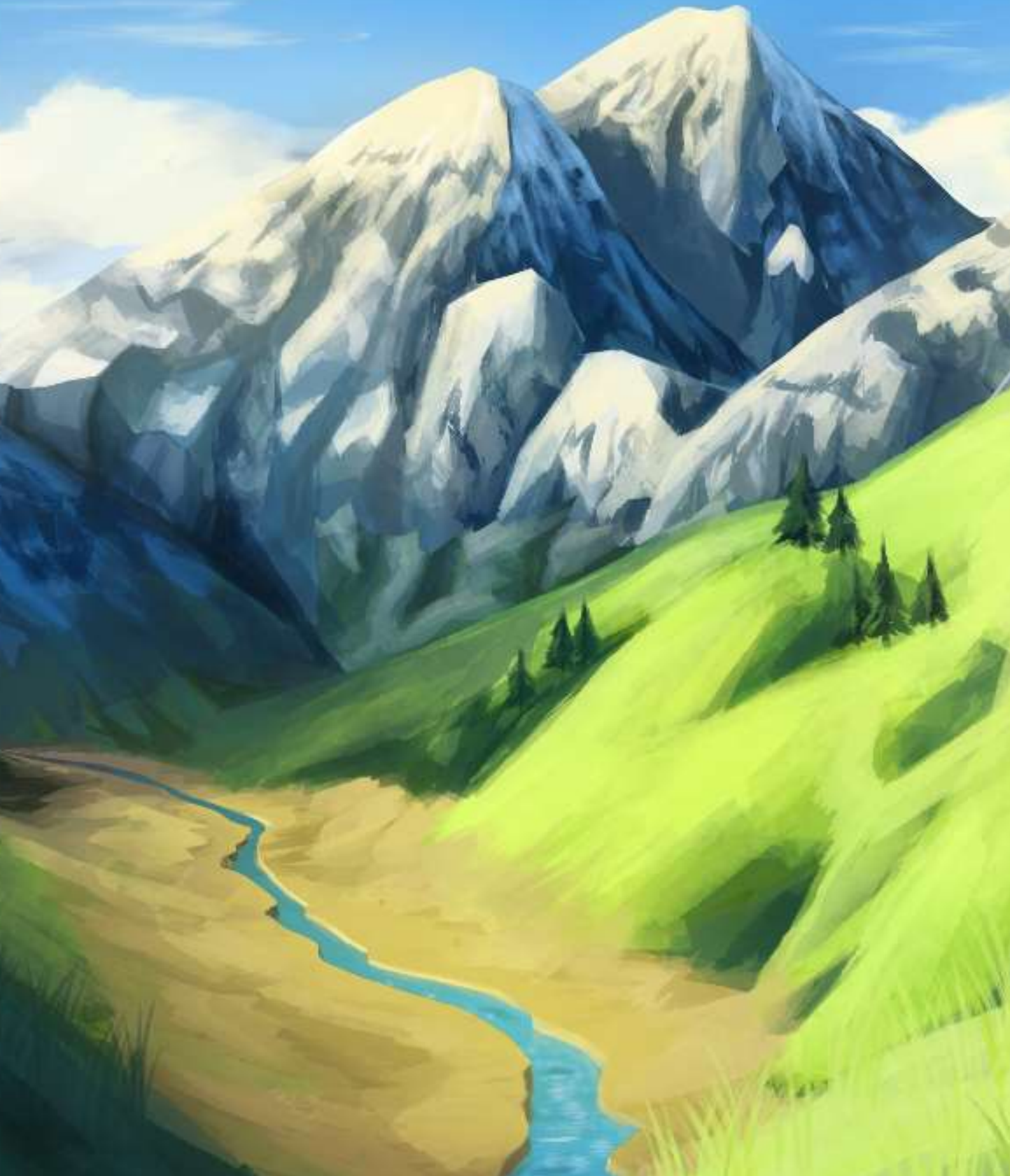
The rising of these peaks finally woke the bears. They stood on two feet and clung to the peaks with their legs. They held on for dear life as the earth took a different shape ...



... a silhouette that now included a massive ridge that stood tall in the clouds. Its contours looked like giant teeth, higher and sharper than anything before and anything since.



To this very day, perched among these peaks are the white-coated bears. They snooze on rocks or splash in glacial pools. Shrouded in white, they are careful never to be seen and never again to disturb the earth.



The efforts of the white-coated bears are not forgotten though, for soaring above them, roosting at every height, can be found their friends, they plump and cheery white-capped water redstarts. They take to the skies by day with their sweet whistle of freedom.



And by night, they cosy up
safely in nests, beneath a sky
lit with an ocean of stars.





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