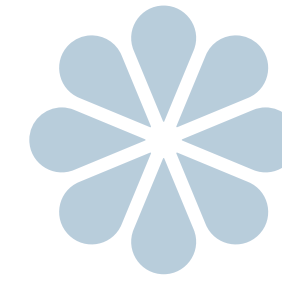


Murasaki Shikibu

The woman behind the worlds first novel



Concept Summary

This graphic novel tells the story of Murasaki Shikibu, a Japanese woman credited with writing the world's first novel, *The Tale of Genji*. Murasaki was born into an aristocratic family in the 970's. She grew up sheltered from the outside world where women were expected to be able to read and write. Murasaki was a prodigy and could speak and write in both Japanese and Chinese. When she was in her twenties, she was married to a man twice her age. He died two years later, but the two had a daughter. Instead of remarrying, Murasake began to write *The Tale of Genji*. She used her novel and the characters in it to give the world a glimpse into the life of a woman in her time. She lived a comfortable life, but she was lonely and spent most of her time by herself, often being the subject of other aristocratic gossip. The Tale of Genji earned her a spot on the imperial court, where she became the tutor of Empress Shoshi, whom she secretly taught Chinese. The Chinese language was something only men were supposed to know.

Goals

- I want to be more dynamic when it comes to framing and angles.
- I want to improve at drawing the same style consistently.
- Explore drawing different body types, faces, ages.

Pitch Board

Spread 1: The novel opens with young Murasaki learning to read and writing in her diary. She reflects on how her aristocratic upbringing gave her literacy, and her rare talent for reading Chinese. A flashback shows her father stating its a shame she wasn't a boy. The next scene moves quickly through her marriage to an older man, the birth of their child, and her husband's death.

Spread 2: This spread would depict her life after her husbands death and her beginning to write *The Tale of Genji*. One page would be dedicated going into her imagination and exploring the world she was creating as well as some of the characters and plot points. The world in her book would be drawn in the style of Heian Period art.

Spread 3: The final spread would be of how she was treated in the imperial court and how she was gossiped about. It would also depict her teaching Empress Shoshi the Chinese language. The final panel is a narration of how her work helped form the Japanese culture as well as literature around the world with a visual of her statue in Kyoto.



Pinterest

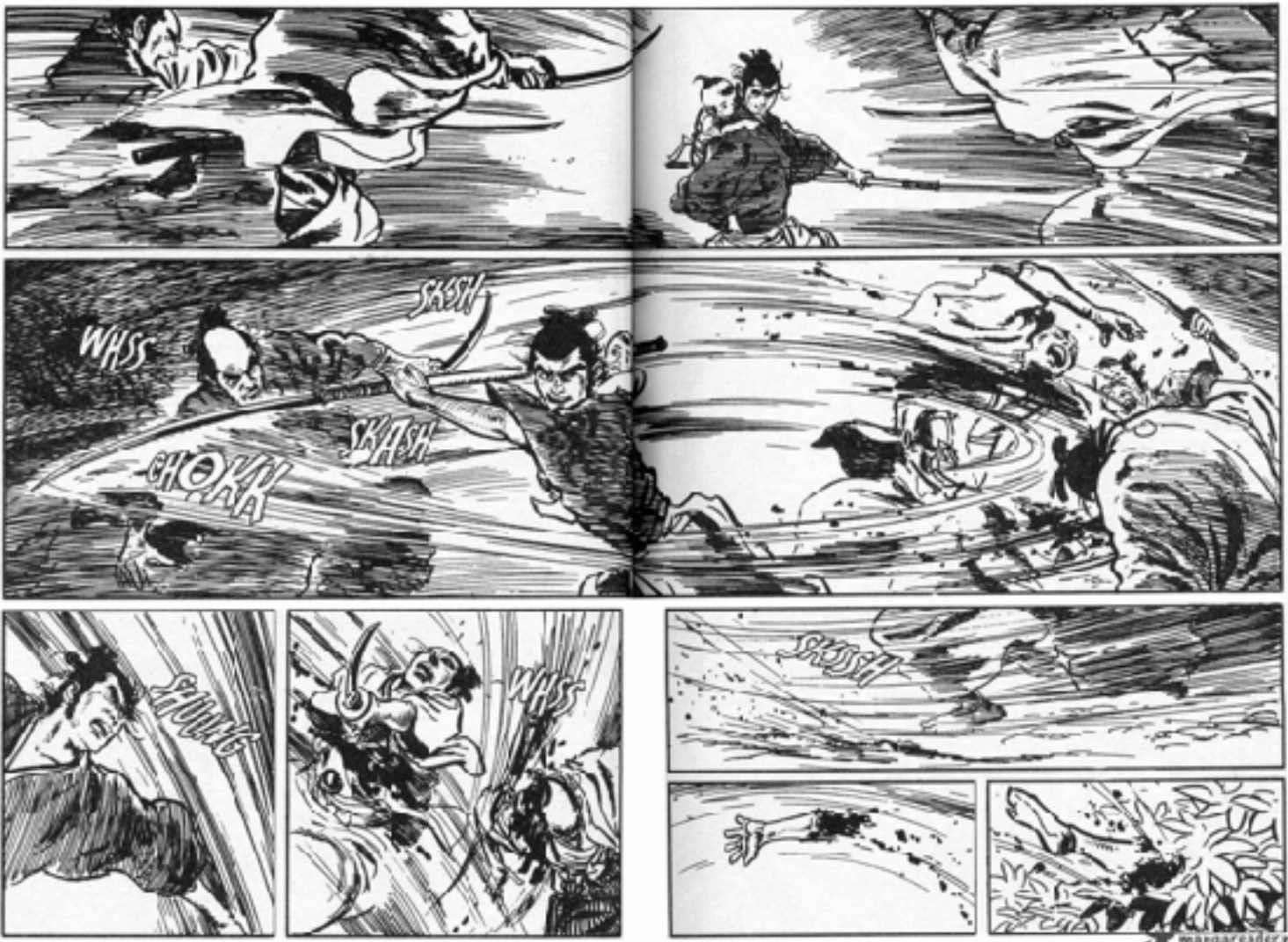
Layout Inspiration



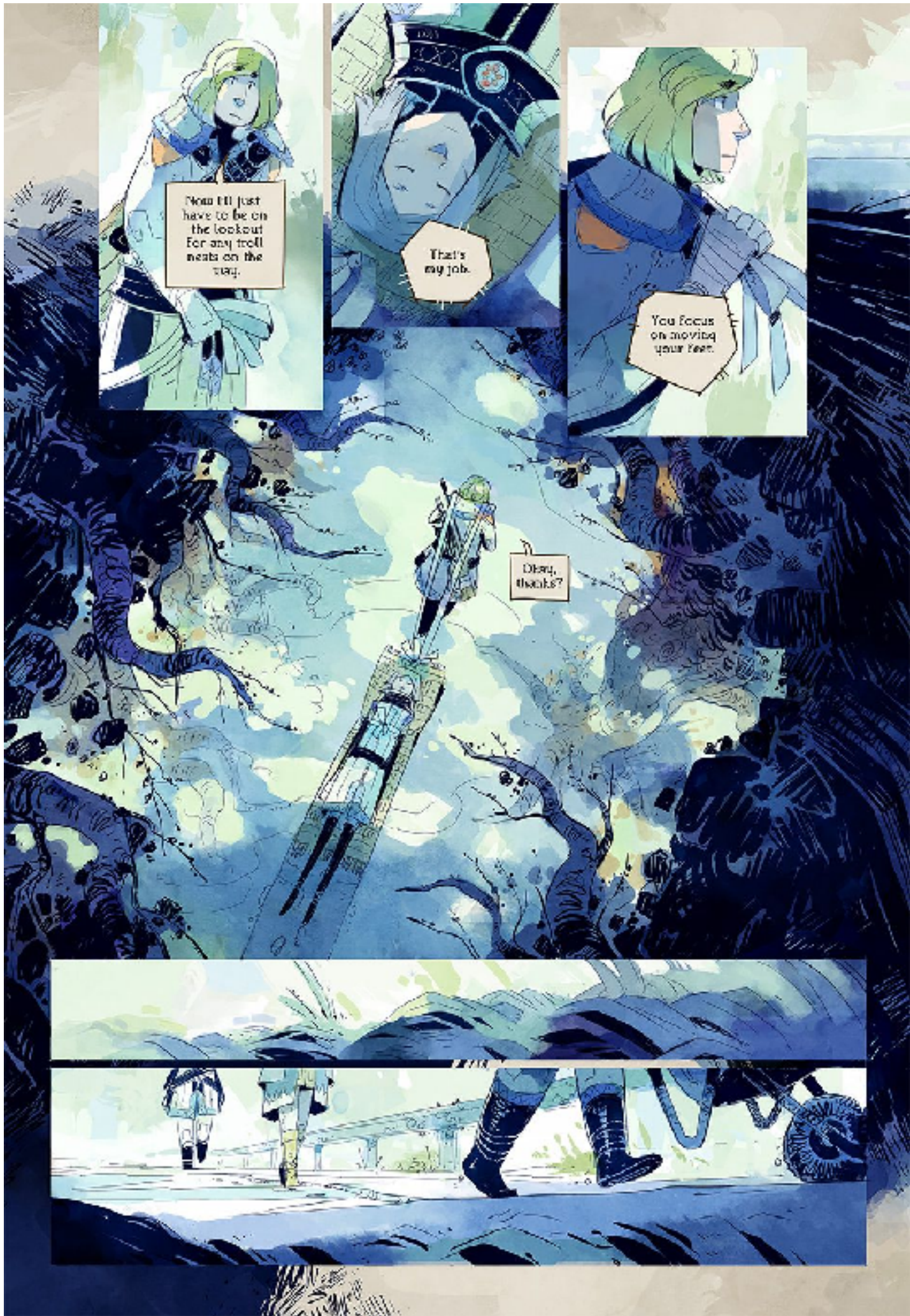
Sean Murphy's Zorro: Man of the Dead with you!



Lienna Sterte



Goseki Kojima.

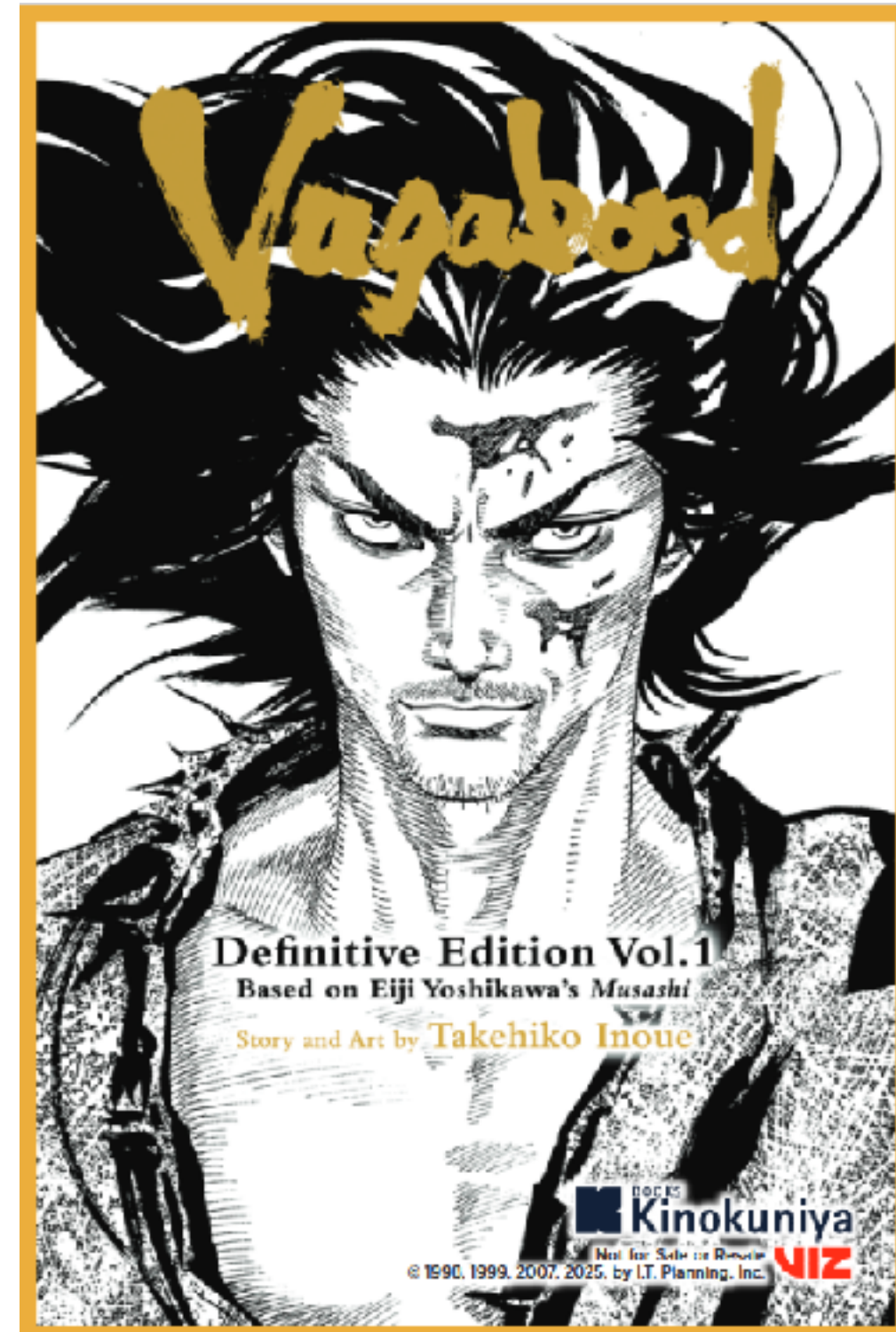


Stand Still. Stay Silent - webcomic

Style Inspiration



Chang Sheng



takehiko inoue



Akira Yamaguchi



Lienna Sterte

Examples of My Work



Week 2

Script Outline

Title: Behind the Curtain

Subtitle: The story of Murasaki Shikibu, author of the first ever novel

Byline: Written and Illustrated by Leah Bloss

Back of Novel

The Heian Era in Japan saw the rise in uniquely Japanese culture. The writing systems Hiragana and Katakana emerged in this time, and Japan began to move away from the Chinese influence. Due to these new writing systems, there was a rise in Japanese literature, One of the first being written by Murasaki Shikibu, a woman born into aristocracy whose experience led her to write the first ever novel *The Tale of Genji*.

Spread 1 - left side

(Narration opening the scene) A long time ago in Kyoto Japan in the Heian Era a girl was born into an aristocratic family. Her name was Murasaki Shikibu. She was raised like any other noble woman, but Shikibu was special. She was gifted in literature. She surpassed the expectations of a noble woman and learned how to read and write in Chinese as well, a skill only men were supposed to have.

Murasaki's Father: "Its a shame you weren't born a boy"(kinda jokingly)

Murasaki: **Looking sad and forlorn*

Narrator: Murasaki grew up into a lovely young woman, and like all other noble women, she was married to a family friend. A man much older than her named Fujiwara no Nobutaka, governor of Yamashiro. The two had a happy marriage and the two had a daughter, Kenshi (Kataiko)

Spread 1 - Right side

Two years into their marriage Nobutaka died during the cholera epidemic. Murasaki was left widowed with her daughter. She fell into a depressed state after his death.

Murasaki inner monologue: "I felt depressed and confused. For some years I had existed from day to day in listless fashion ... doing little more than registering the passage of time ... The thought of my continuing loneliness was quite unbearable"

Spread 2 - Left Side

Depictions of Murasaki and her daughter navigating life without Nobutaka.

Murasaki to her father: *"I've decided to travel to Ishiyama-dera to clear my head" "I'm just so heartbroken and I need a change of scenery."*

Father: *"I understand"*

They travel to Lake Biwa. Murasaki is alone one night admiring the scenery and taking time to herself. She looks at the moon and feels inspired to start writing *The Tale of Genji*. She begins to write.

Spread 2 - Right Side

With her writing finished she gives some copies to her friends, who then make their own copies and start to pass those along. During this time she began to exchange poetry with a man named Michinaga. Michinaga invites her to the court as a lady in waiting and also to educate his son.

Michinaga: *"Your writing is impressive and I want you to come with me to the court and be my daughter's tutor?"*

Spread 3 - Left Side

Murasaki moves back home to Tokyo and begins her life as a lady-in-waiting. She meets Shoshi who is 19 at the time as well as the other women at the court. This is also where she meets Shōnagon, another author and Murasaki's rival, who was very different. Shoshi and Murasaki begin to meet in secret where the Chinese language lessons are held.

Spread 3 - Right Side

The other women in the court begin to pick on Murasaki for knowing Chinese and accuse her of flaunting her knowledge in the court, calling her names like "The Lady of the Chronicles". Murasaki is hurt by this because she would never do such a thing, she doesn't like to share that she knows Chinese. Murasaki was unhappy in the court, and spent her time alone avoiding the other women and Michinaga's advances.

She eventually retires from the court and lives the rest of her life dedicated to her art. Her legacy is remembered and honored by many statues, one of which is in Uji, Kyoto, Japan.

Pinterest Research Started

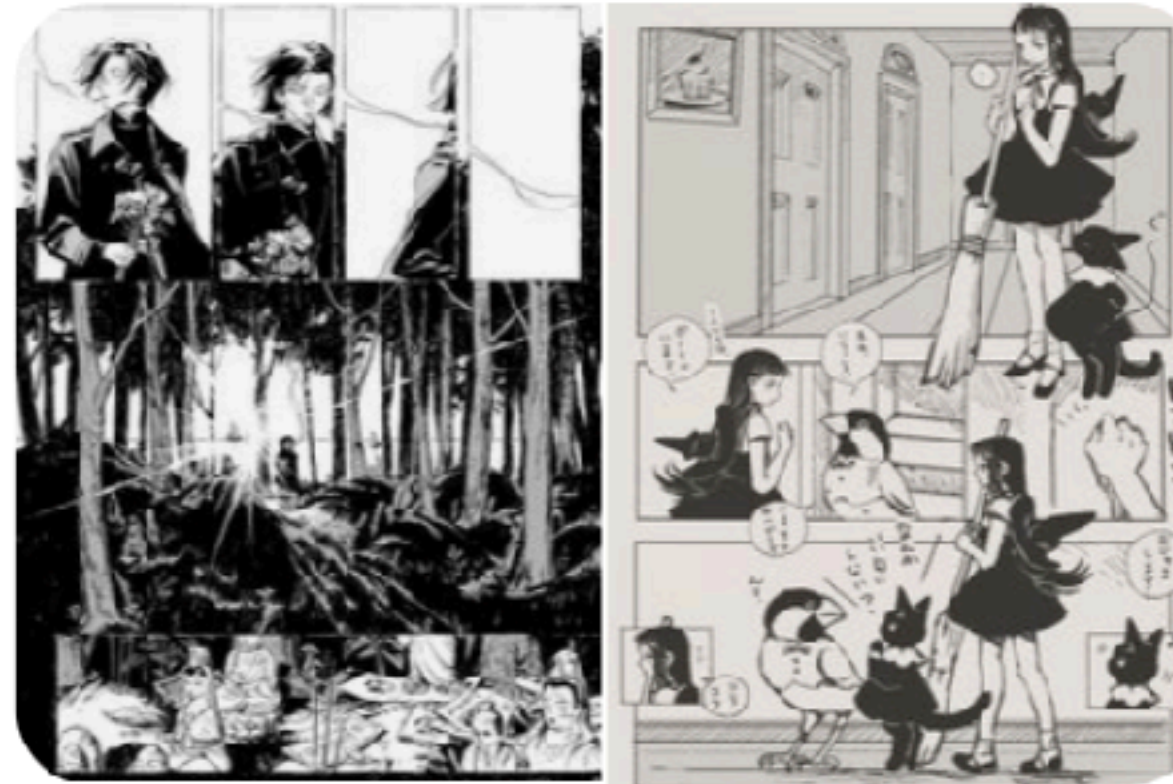
Graphic Novel

52 Pins · 3 Sections



**Photographic drawing
reference**

11 Pins



Graphic Novel Work

16 Pins

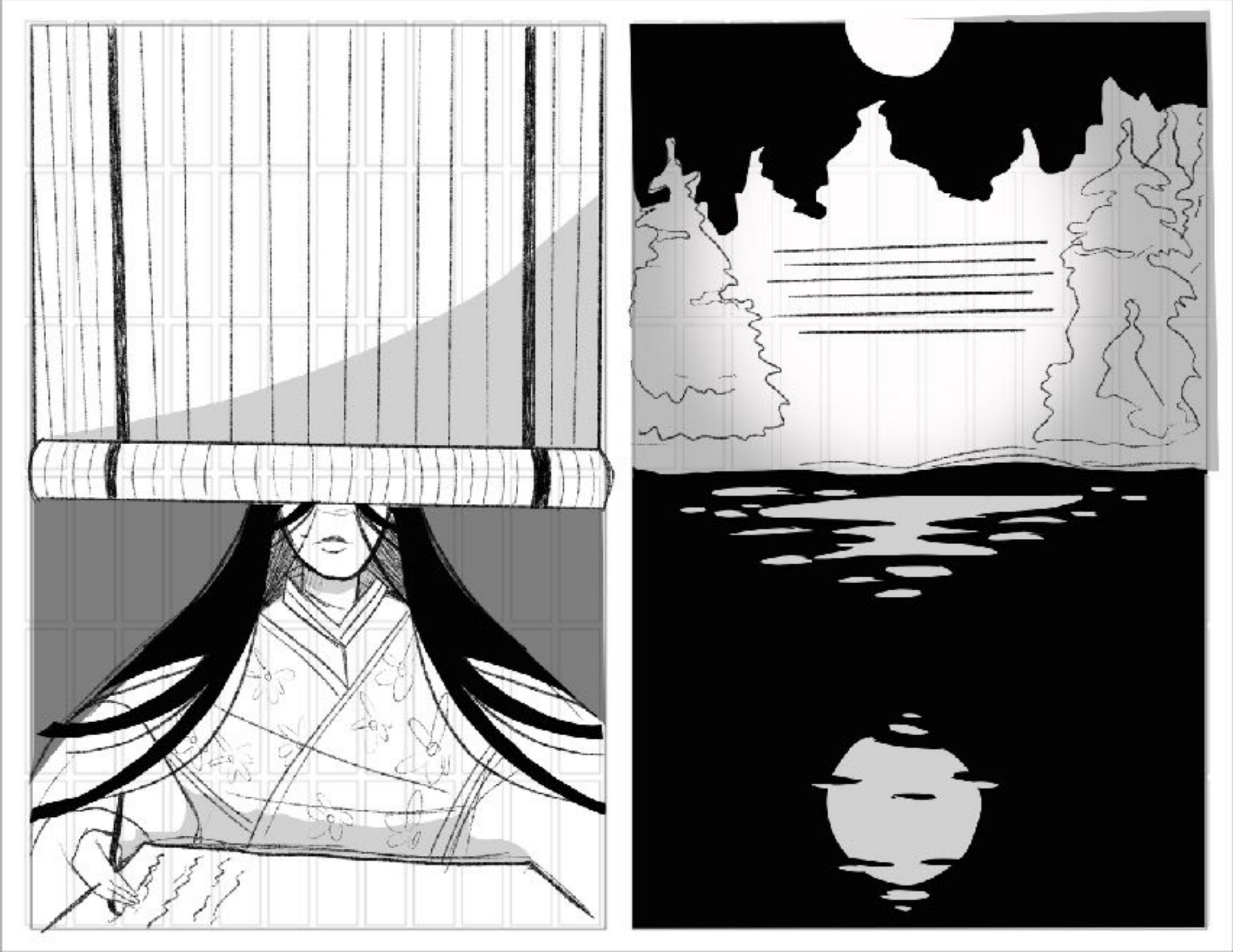


Topic Research (Heian Era)

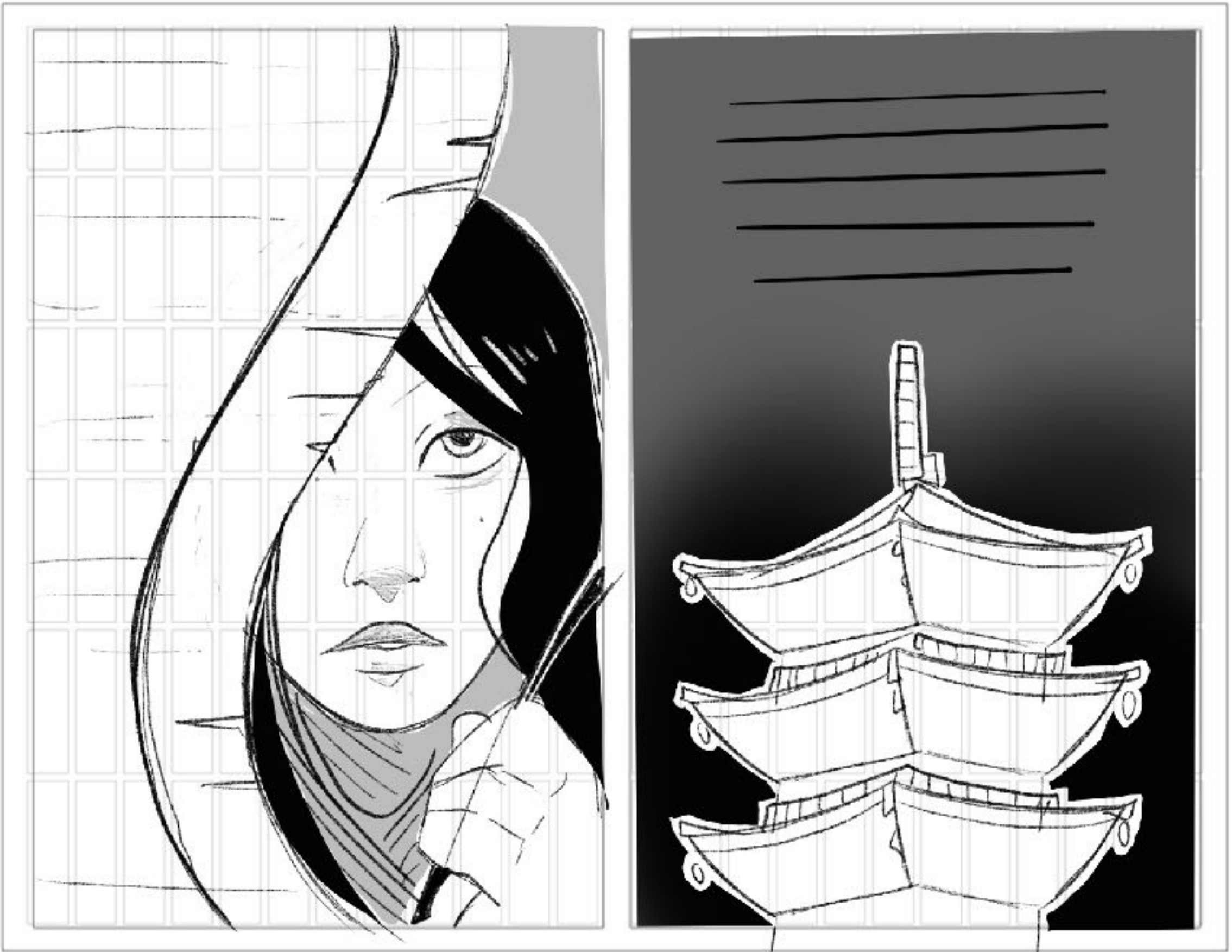
25 Pins

Thumbnails / Cover

Version 1



Version 2

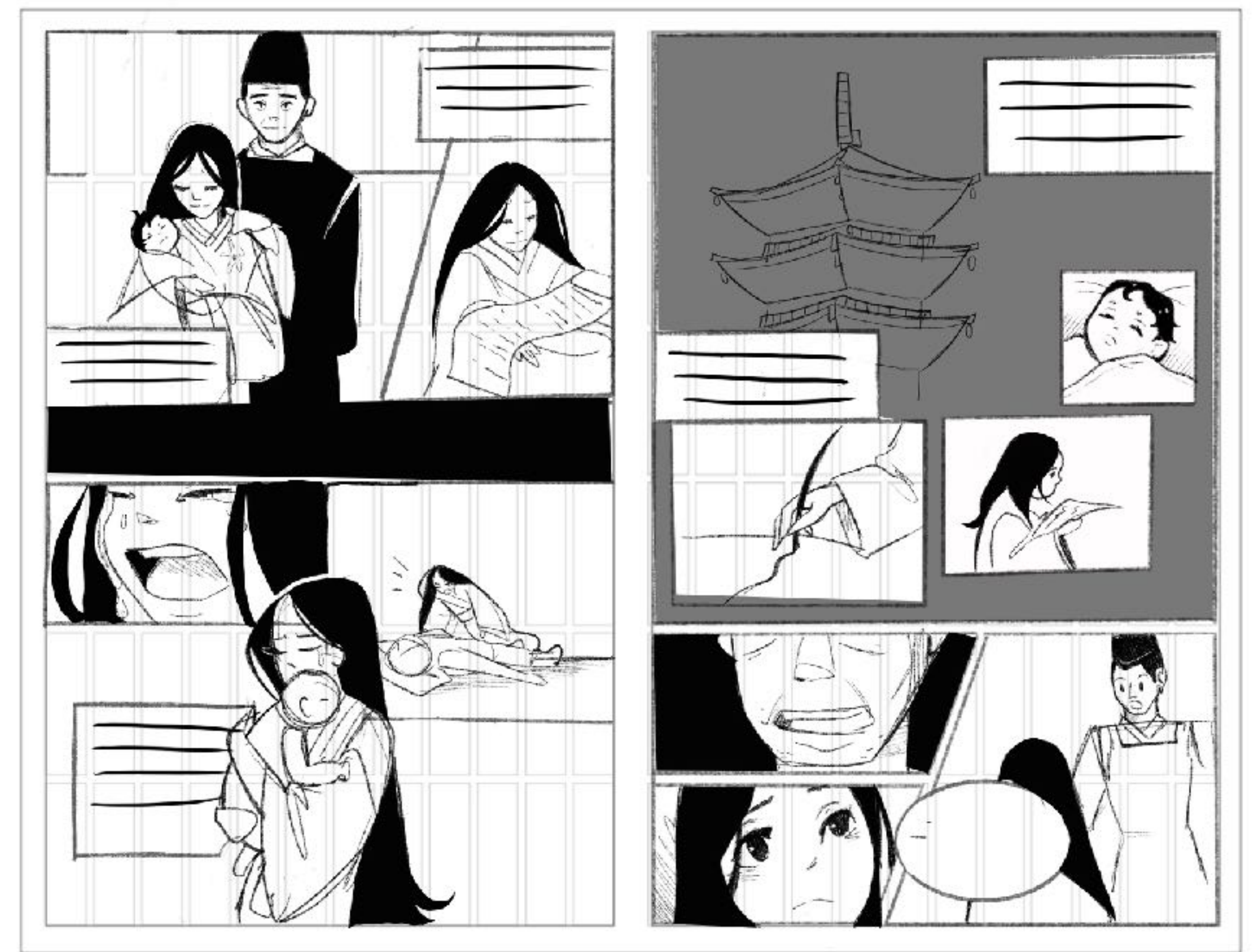


Thumbnails / Spread 1

Version 1



Version 2



Thumbnails / Spread 2

Version 1



Version 2



Thumbnails / Spread 3

Version 1

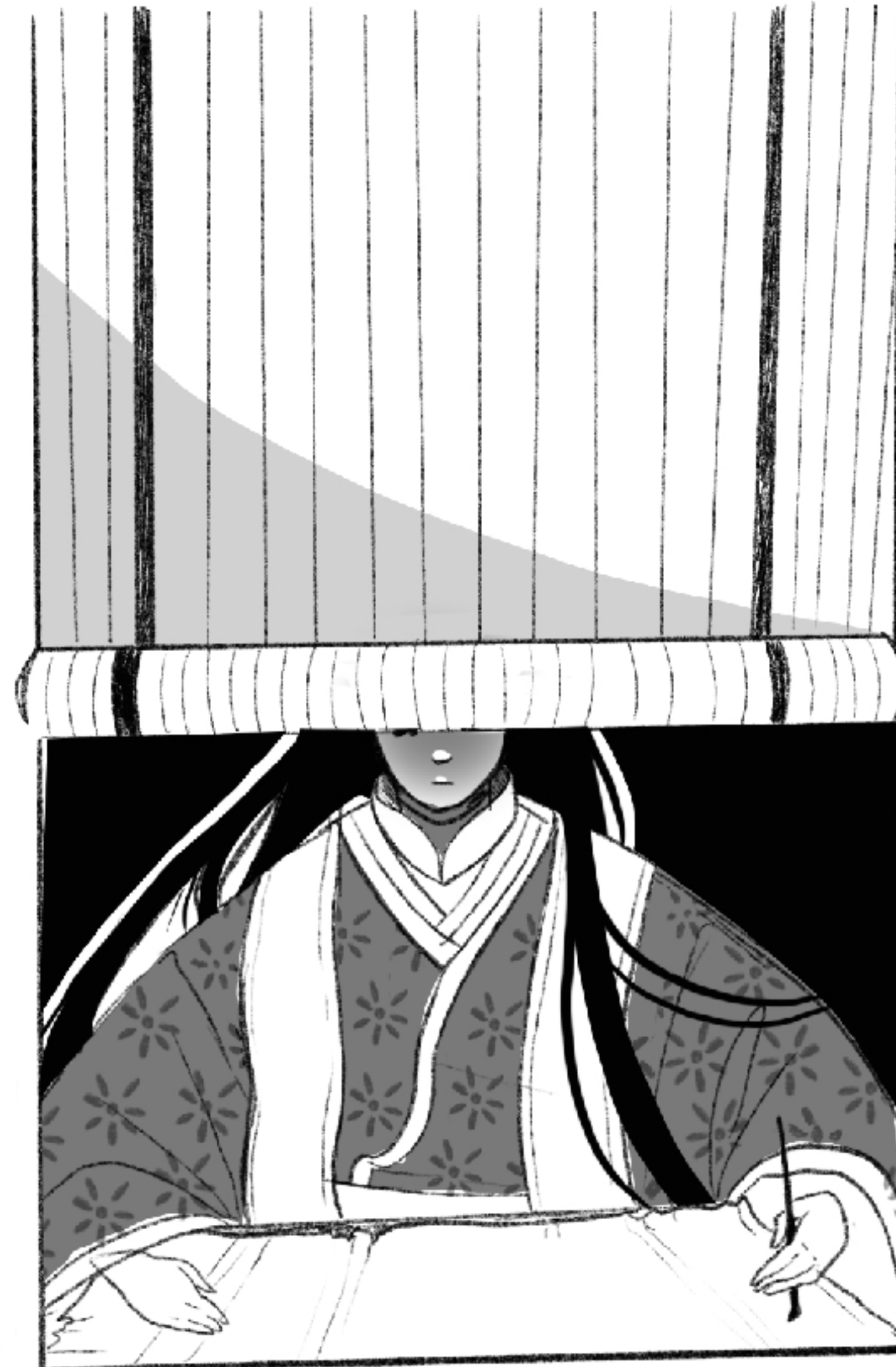
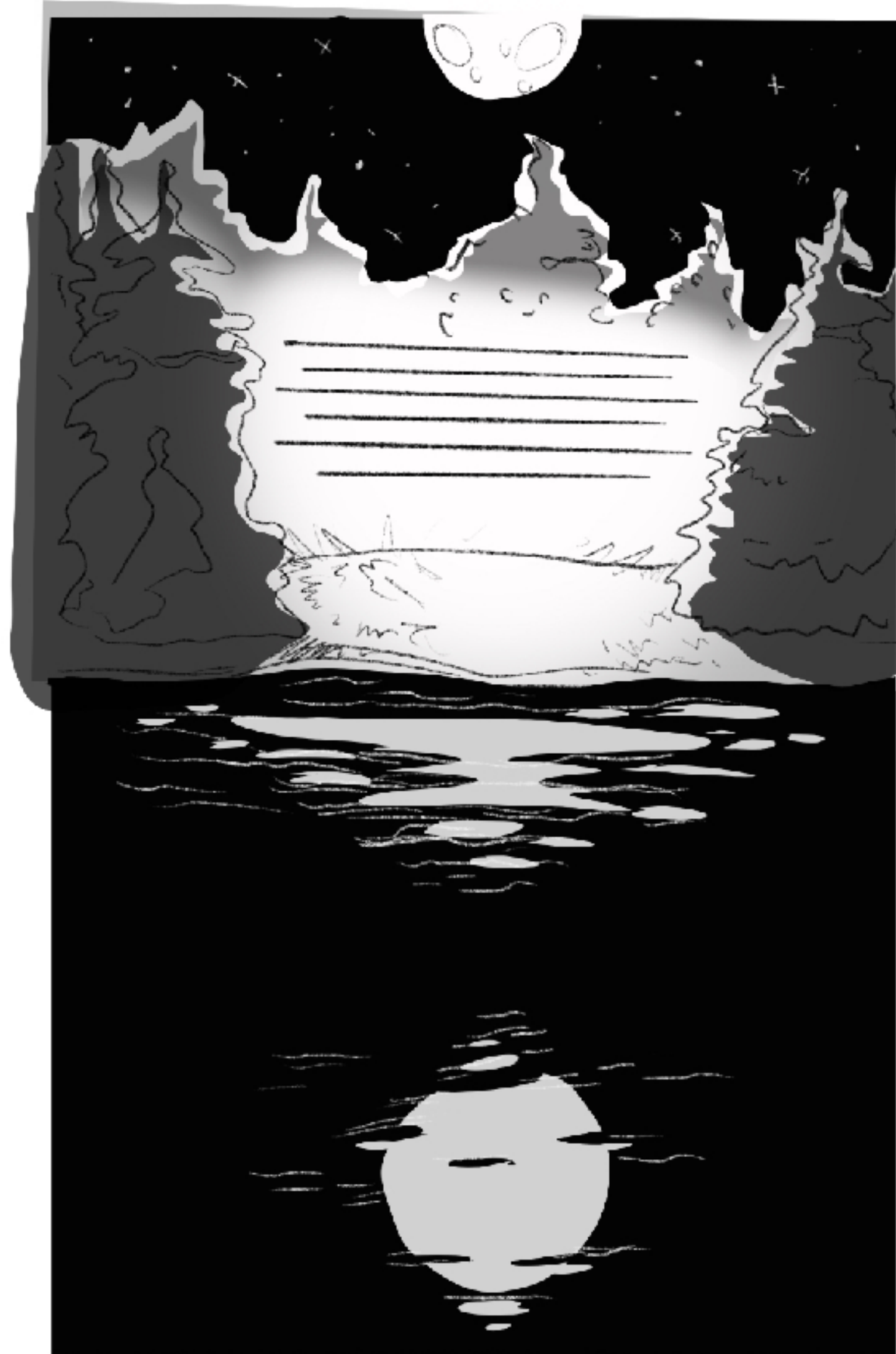


Version 2



Week 3

Revised Thumbnails / Front & Back



Revised Thumbnails / Spread 1



Revised Thumbnails / Spread 2



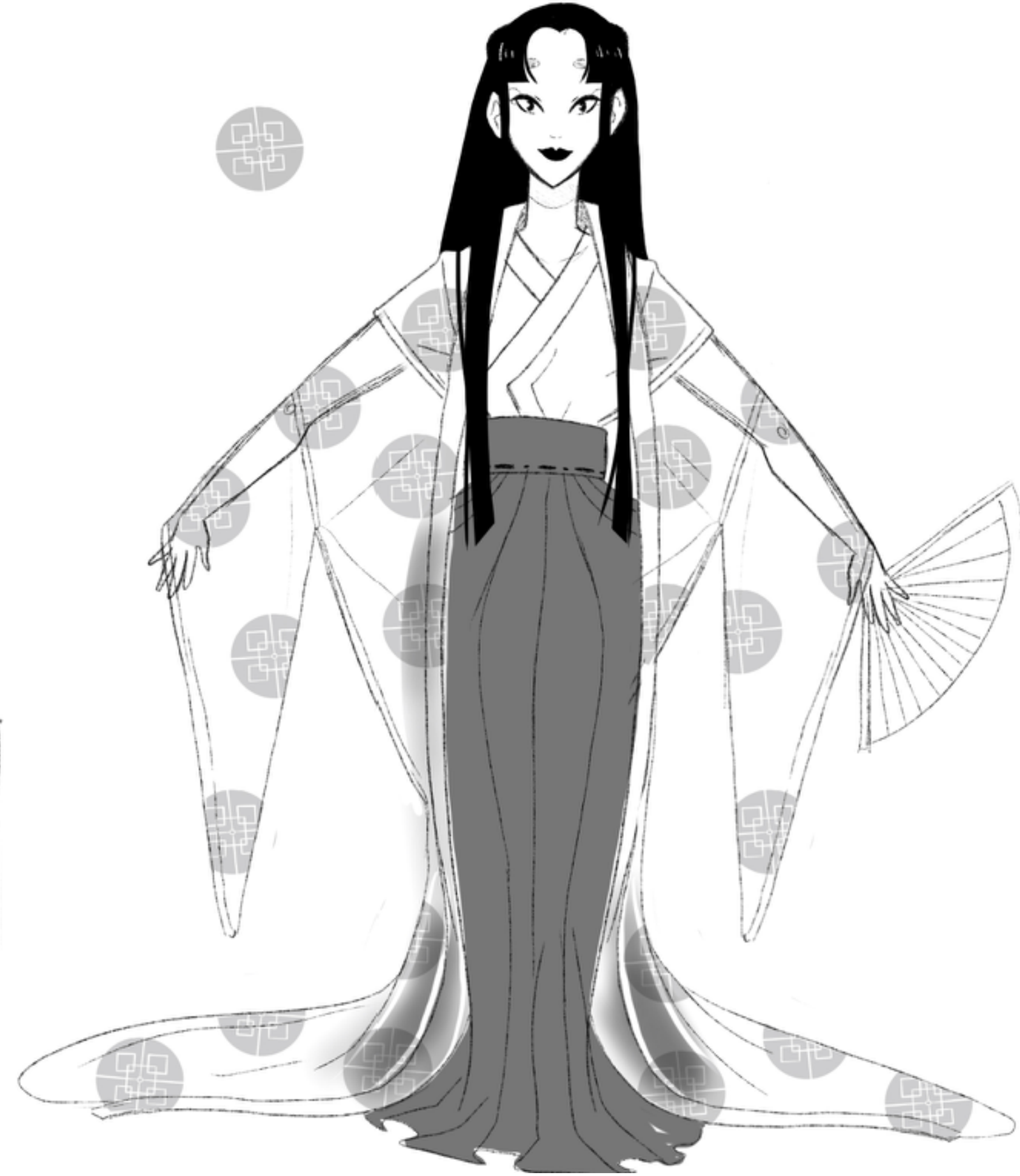
Revised Thumbnails / Spread 2



Style Tests



Style Tests



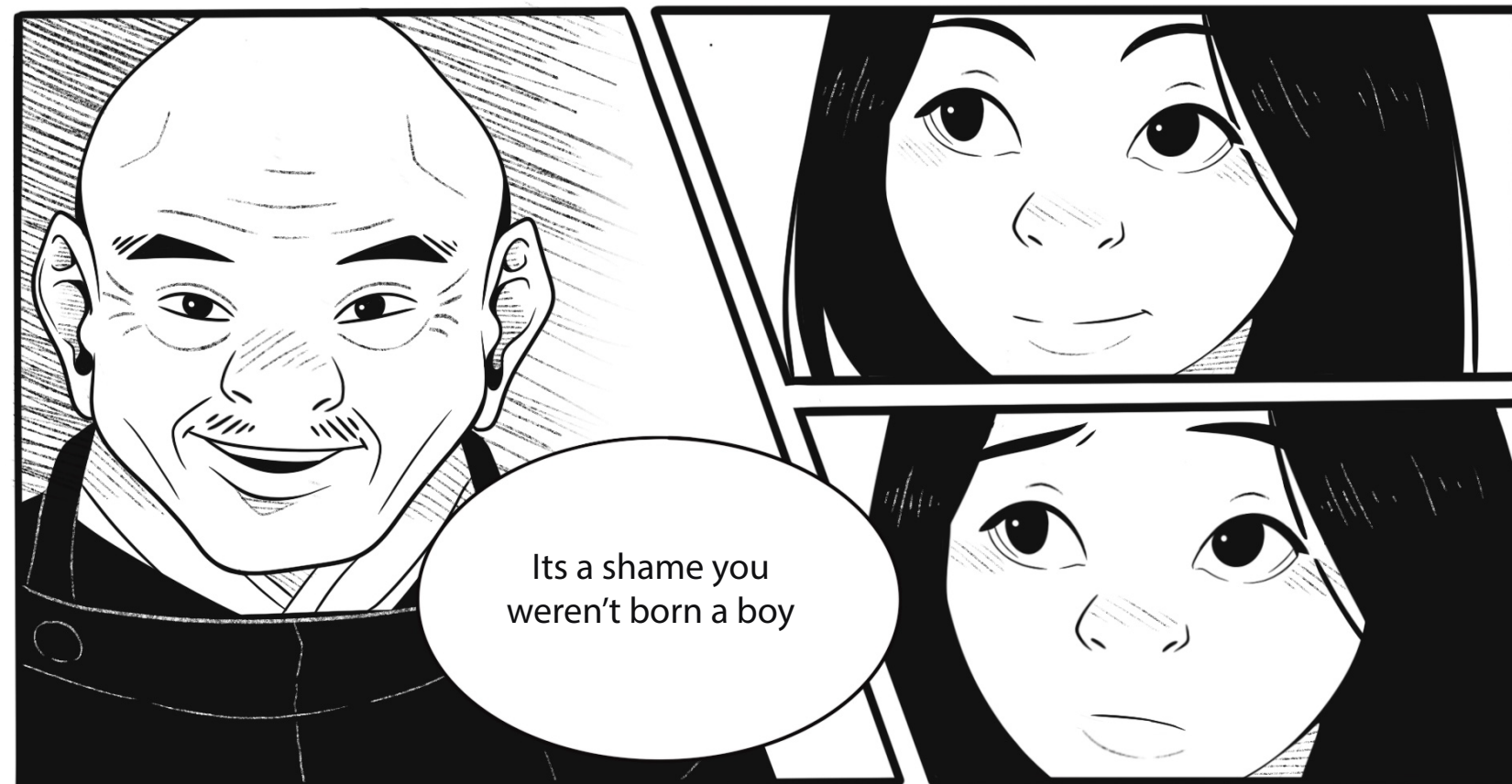
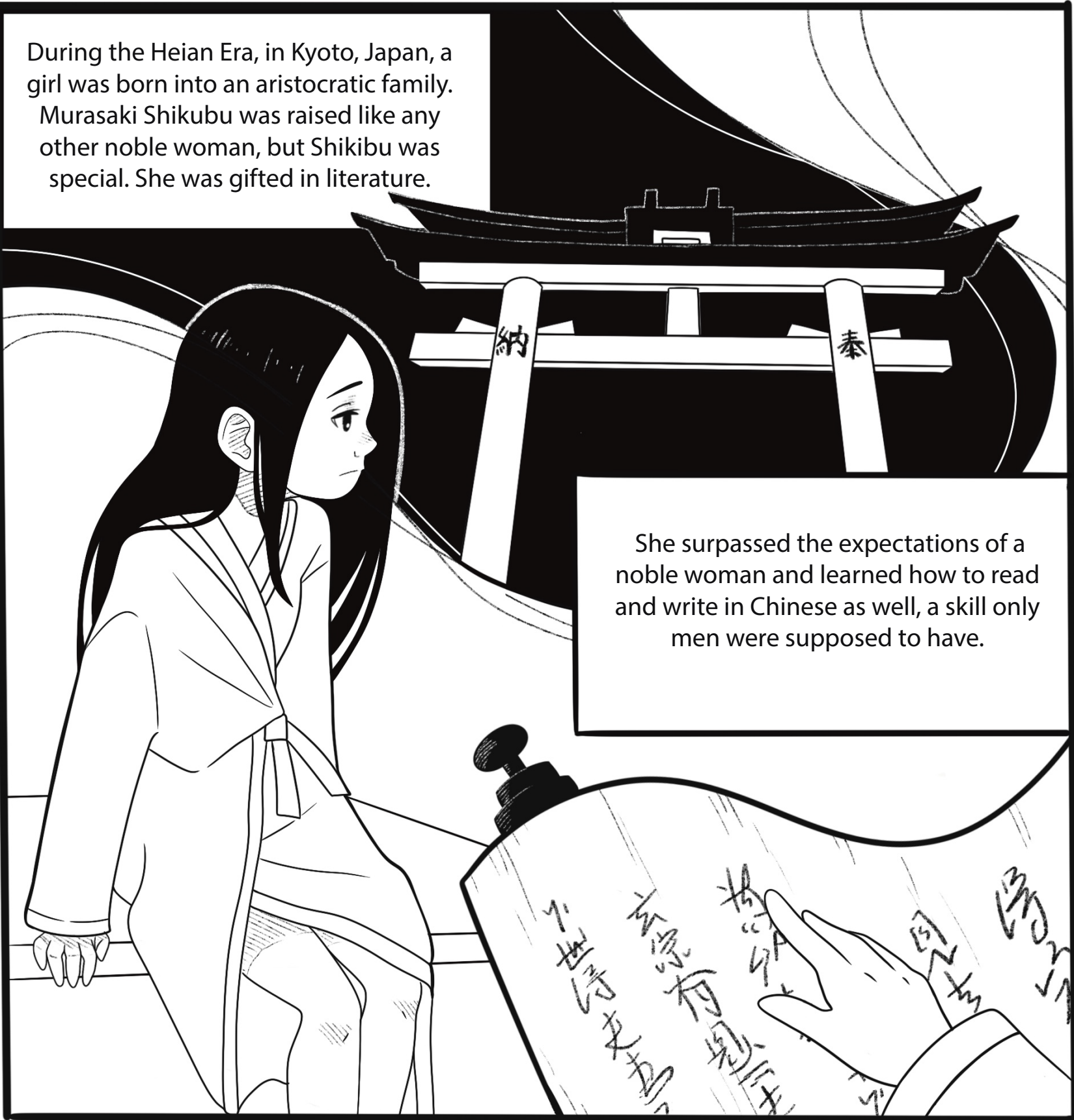
Reflection

After speaking with my group, the things I need to work on for my next set of drawings is:

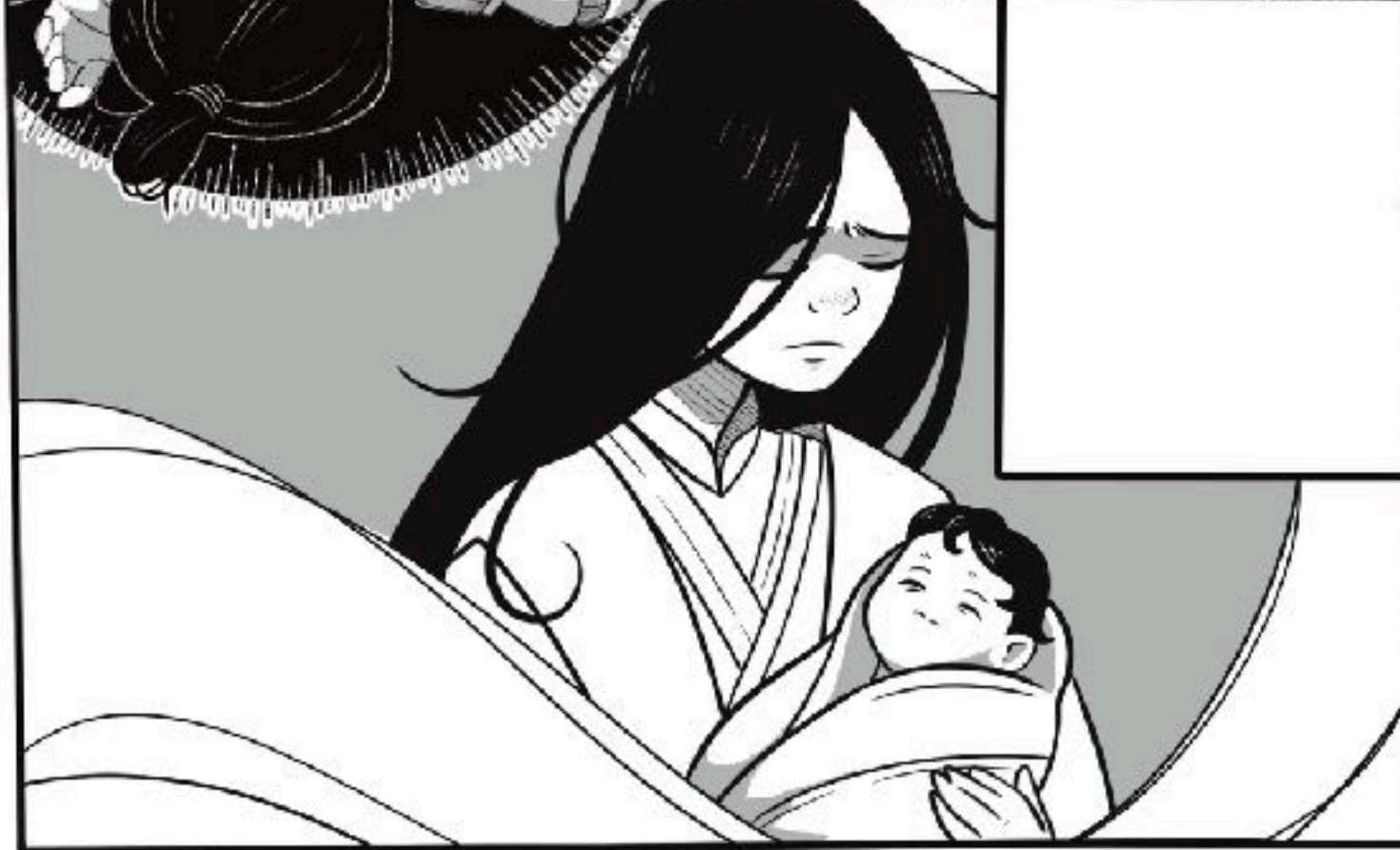
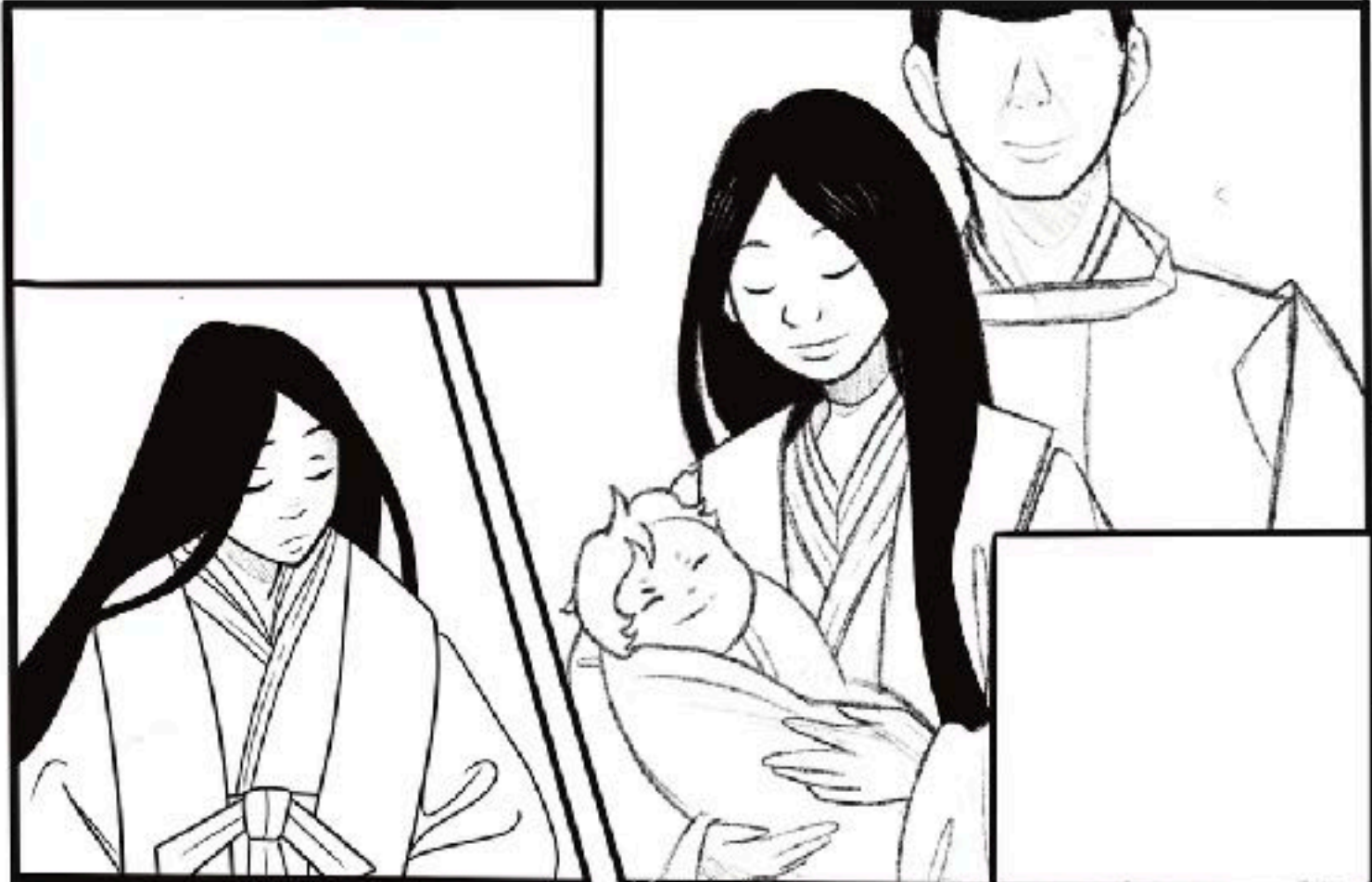
- Make the panel of Murasaki looking at the moon more clear and readable
- Start to refine my thumbnails now that I have a set layout
- Implement my chosen style onto all my panels
- Draw parts of the background in some panels
- Experiment with type to use for the title
- I want to put more effort into the individual panels now that my thumbnails are set
- Start to use a fine line brush instead of a sketchy pencil brush
- Get an idea of what all the characters look like before working on the panels
- Capture emotions while also keeping the style consistent

Week 4

Progress day 1



Progress day 2

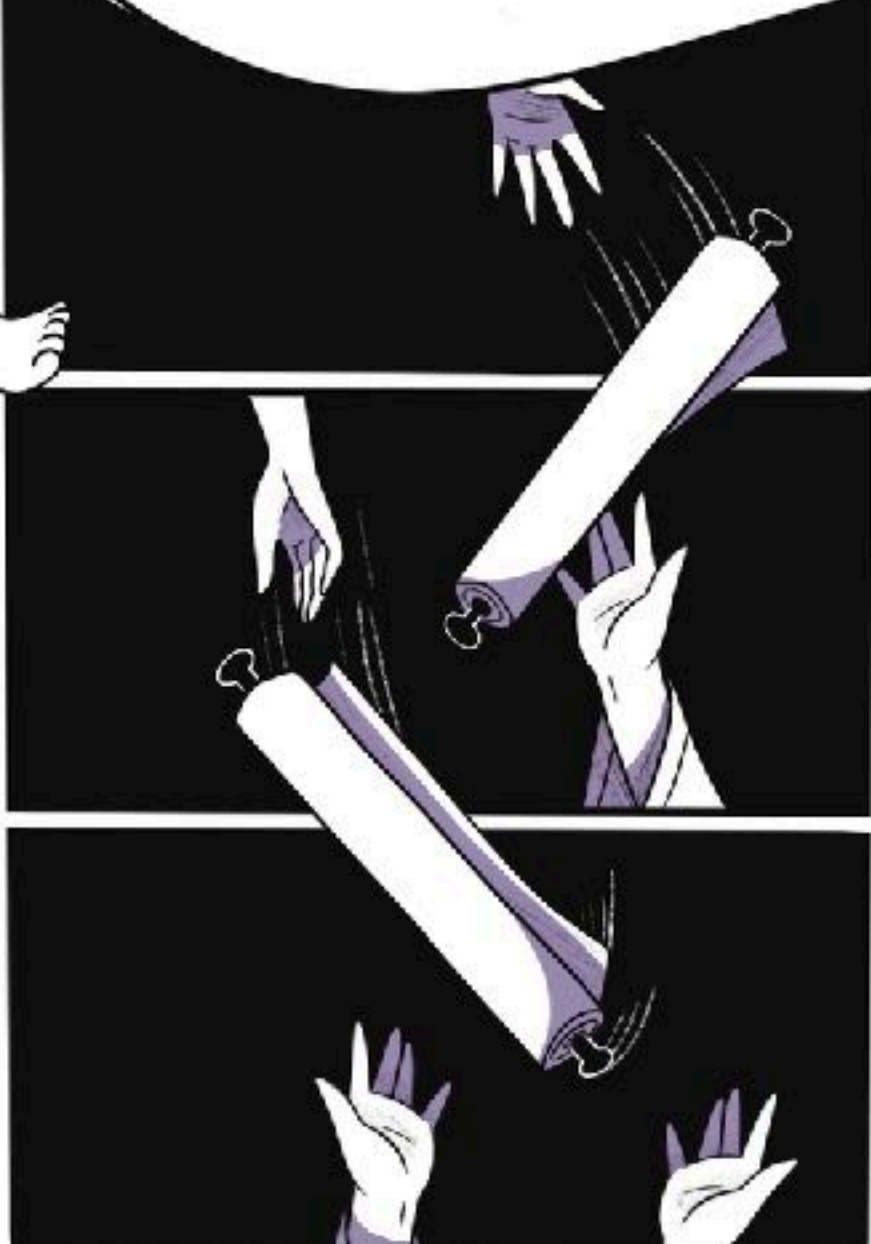
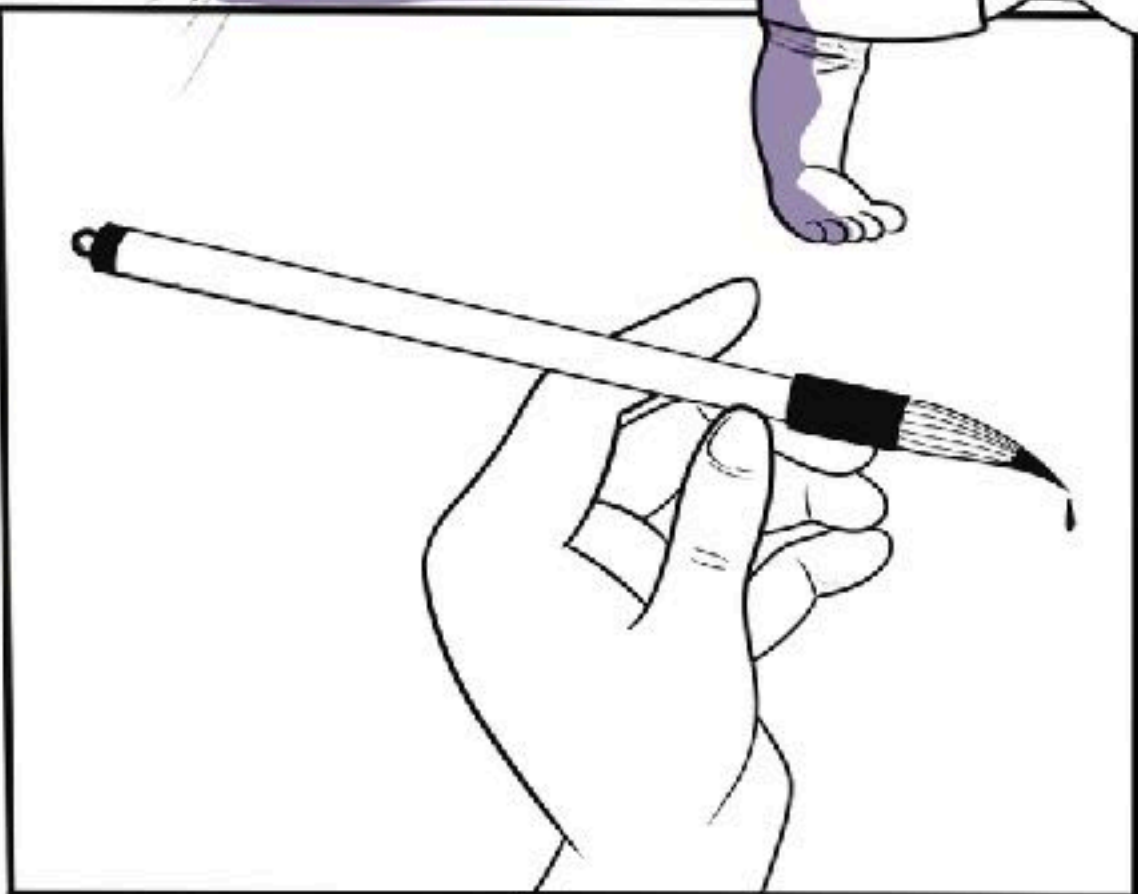
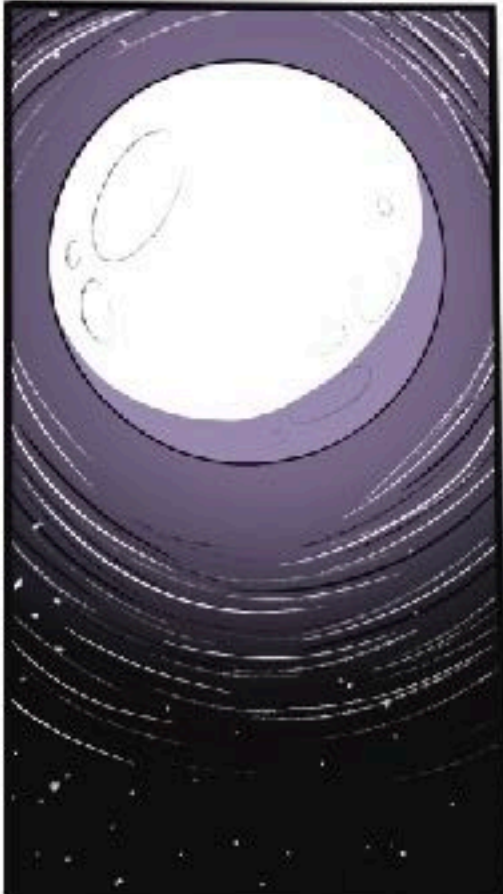


Color Test

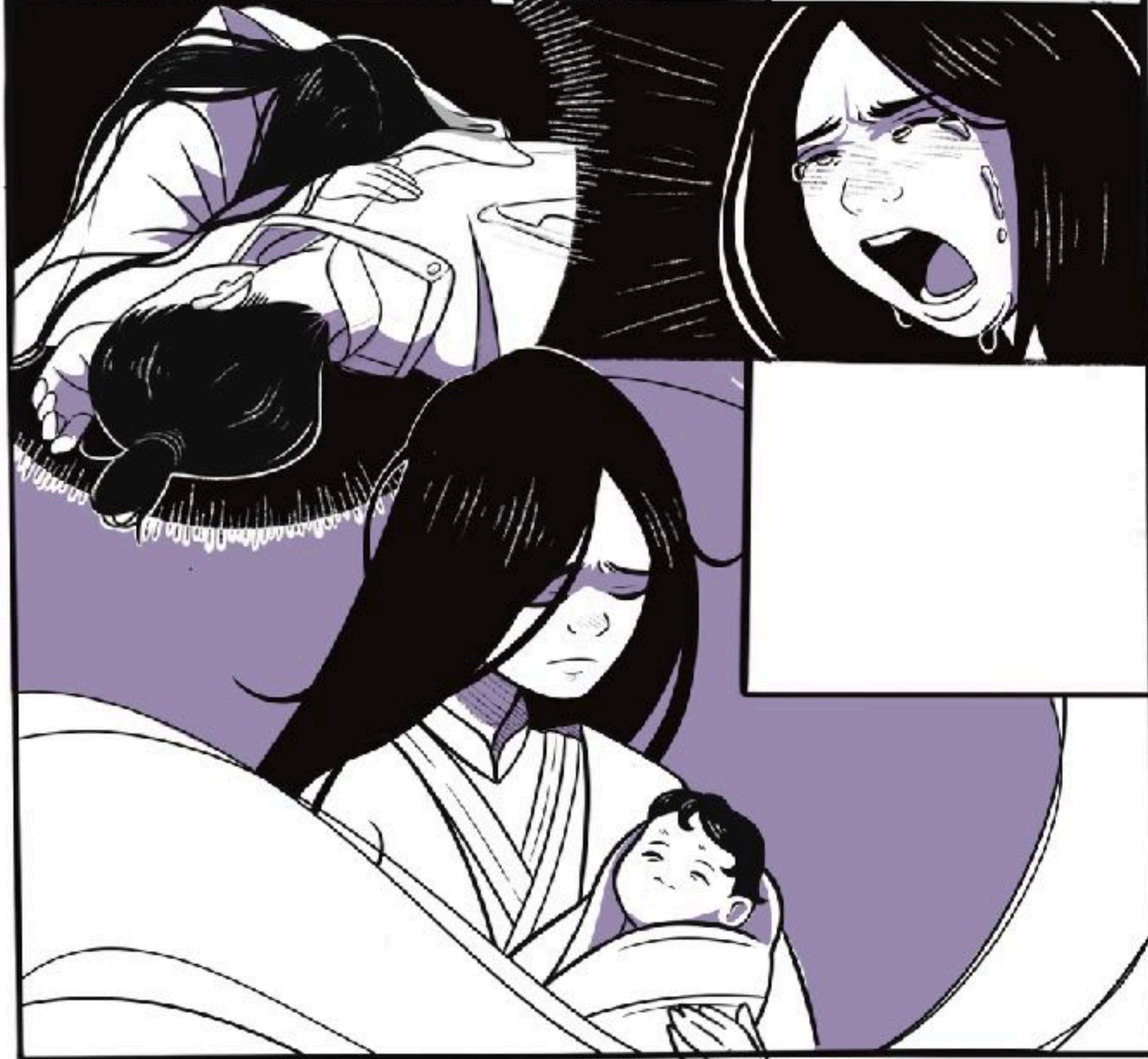
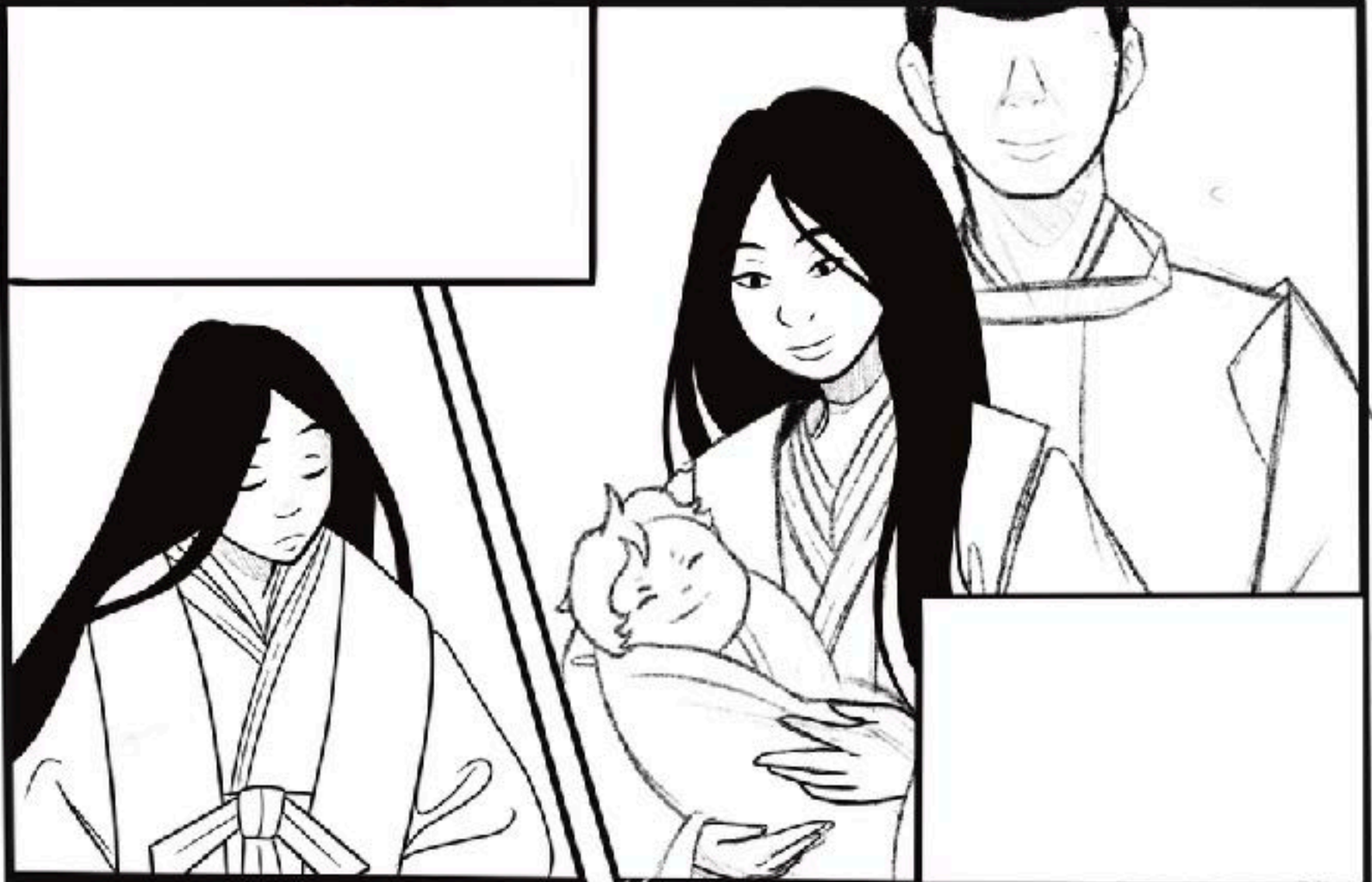
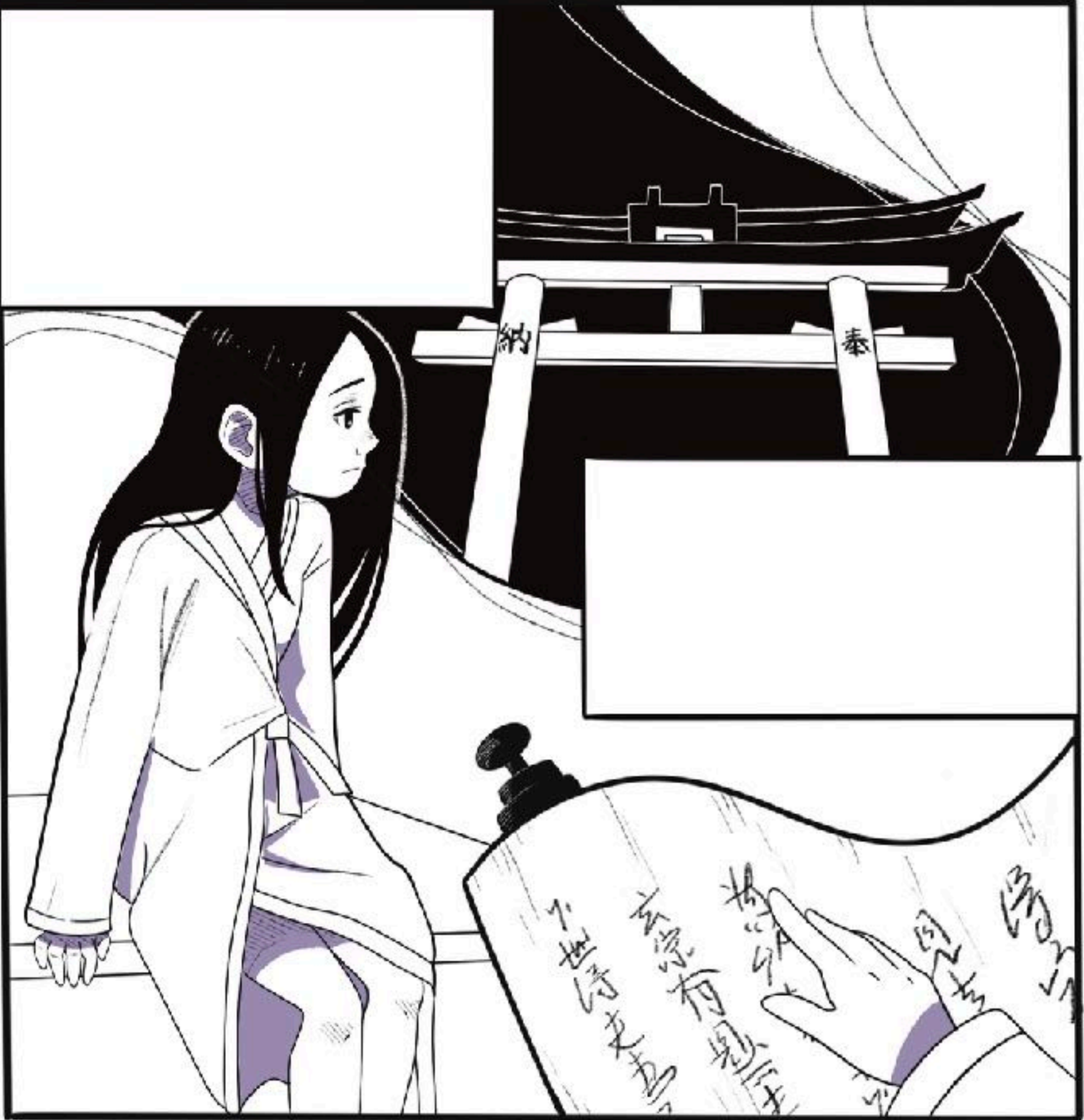


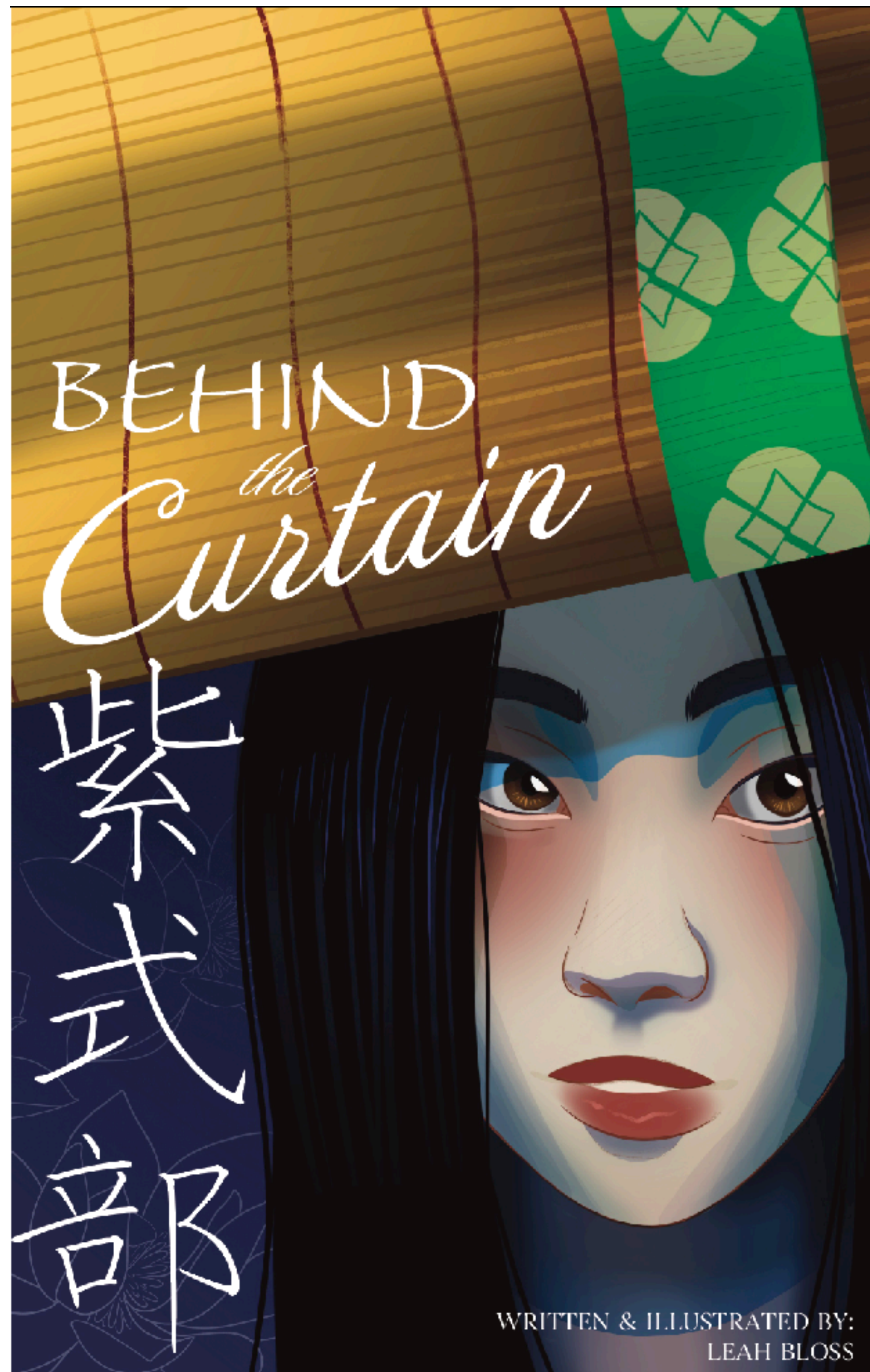
Week 5

Progress Day 1



Progress Day 1



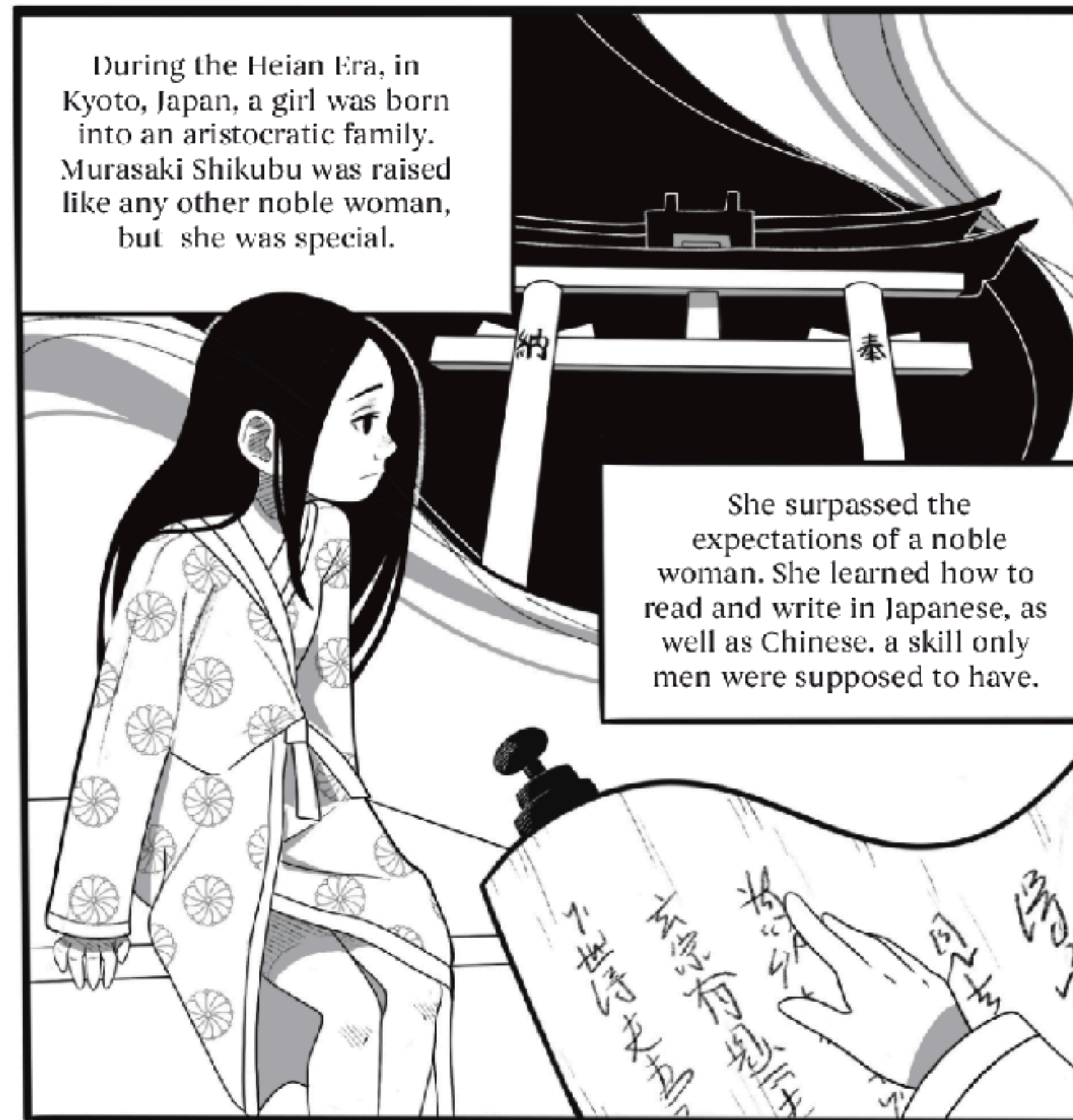


Progress Day 2

Cover & title

Progress Day 2

Spread 1 inked & grayscale
Chosen type

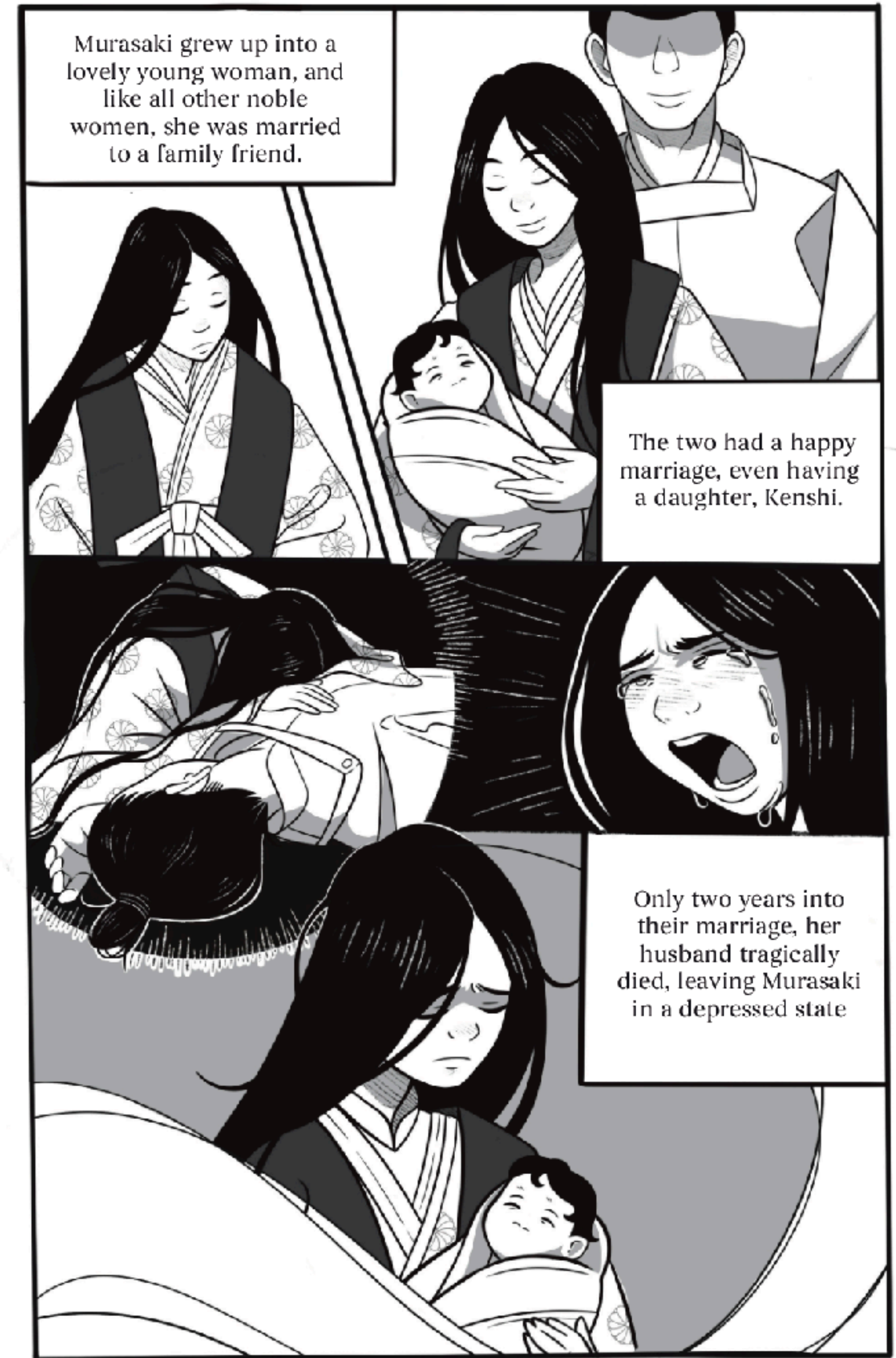


During the Heian Era, in Kyoto, Japan, a girl was born into an aristocratic family. Murasaki Shikibu was raised like any other noble woman, but she was special.

She surpassed the expectations of a noble woman. She learned how to read and write in Japanese, as well as Chinese, a skill only men were supposed to have.



It's a shame you weren't born a boy



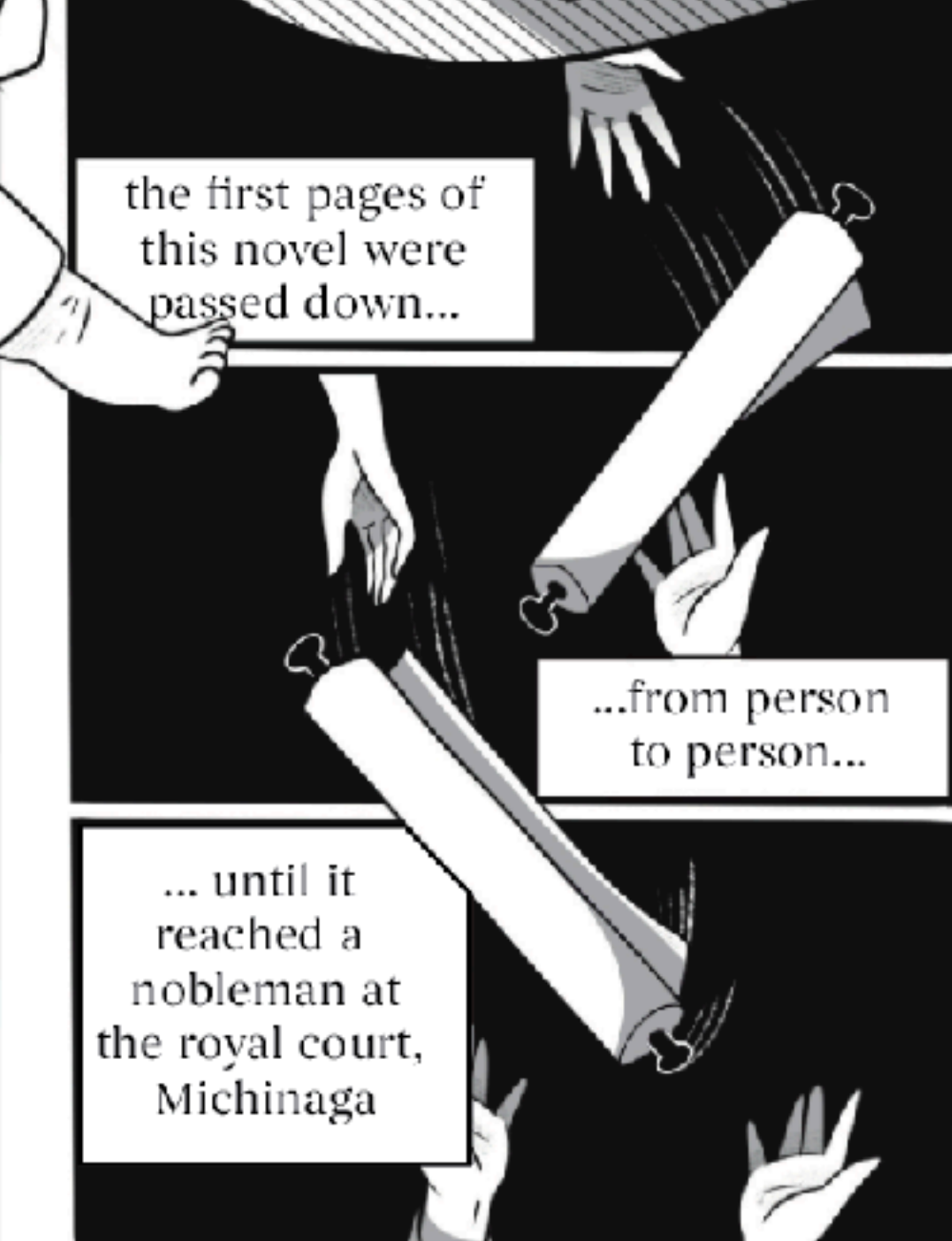
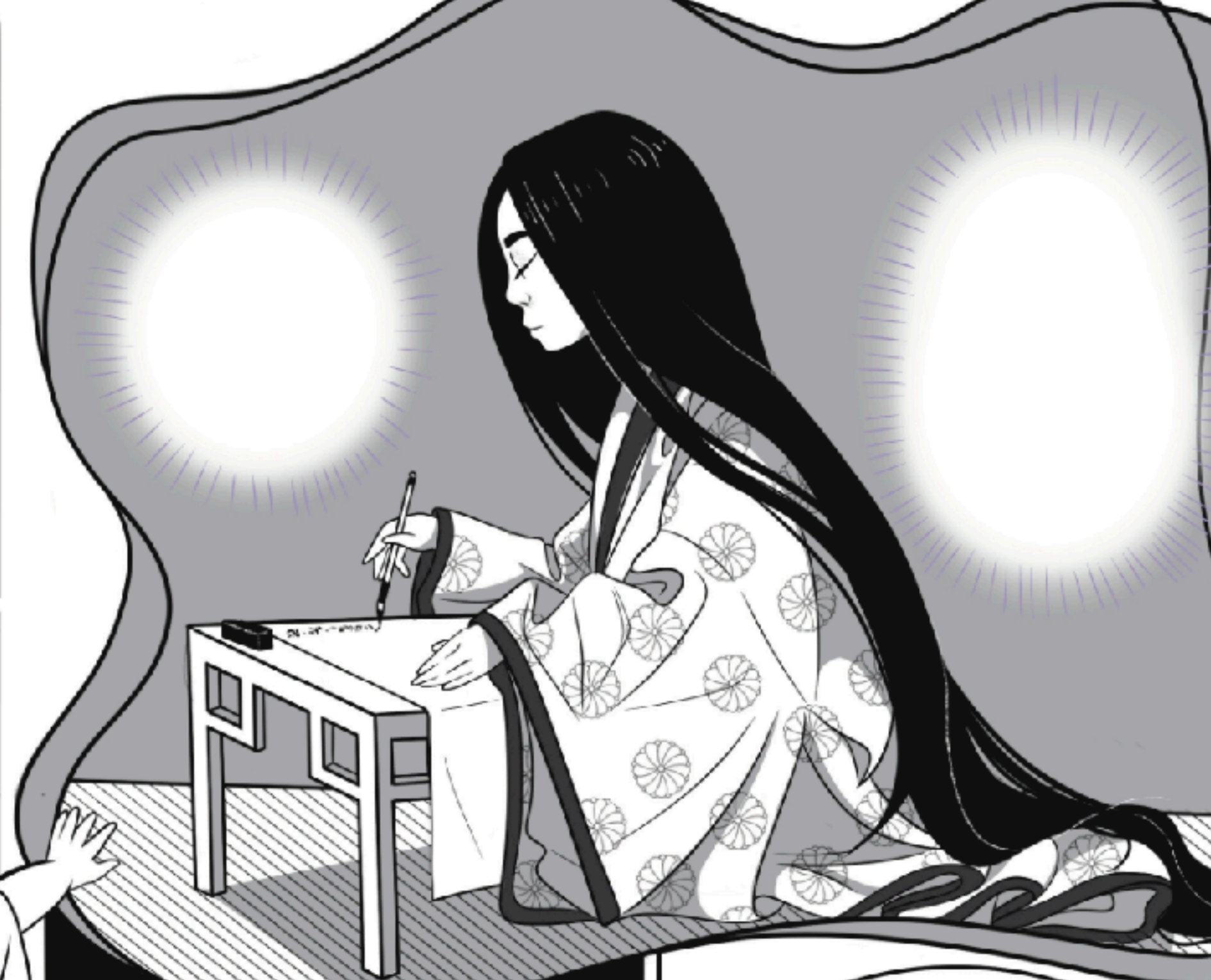
Murasaki grew up into a lovely young woman, and like all other noble women, she was married to a family friend.

The two had a happy marriage, even having a daughter, Kenshi.

Only two years into their marriage, her husband tragically died, leaving Murasaki in a depressed state

Progress Day 2

Spread 2 inked & grayscale
Chosen type



Week 6

Progress Day 1

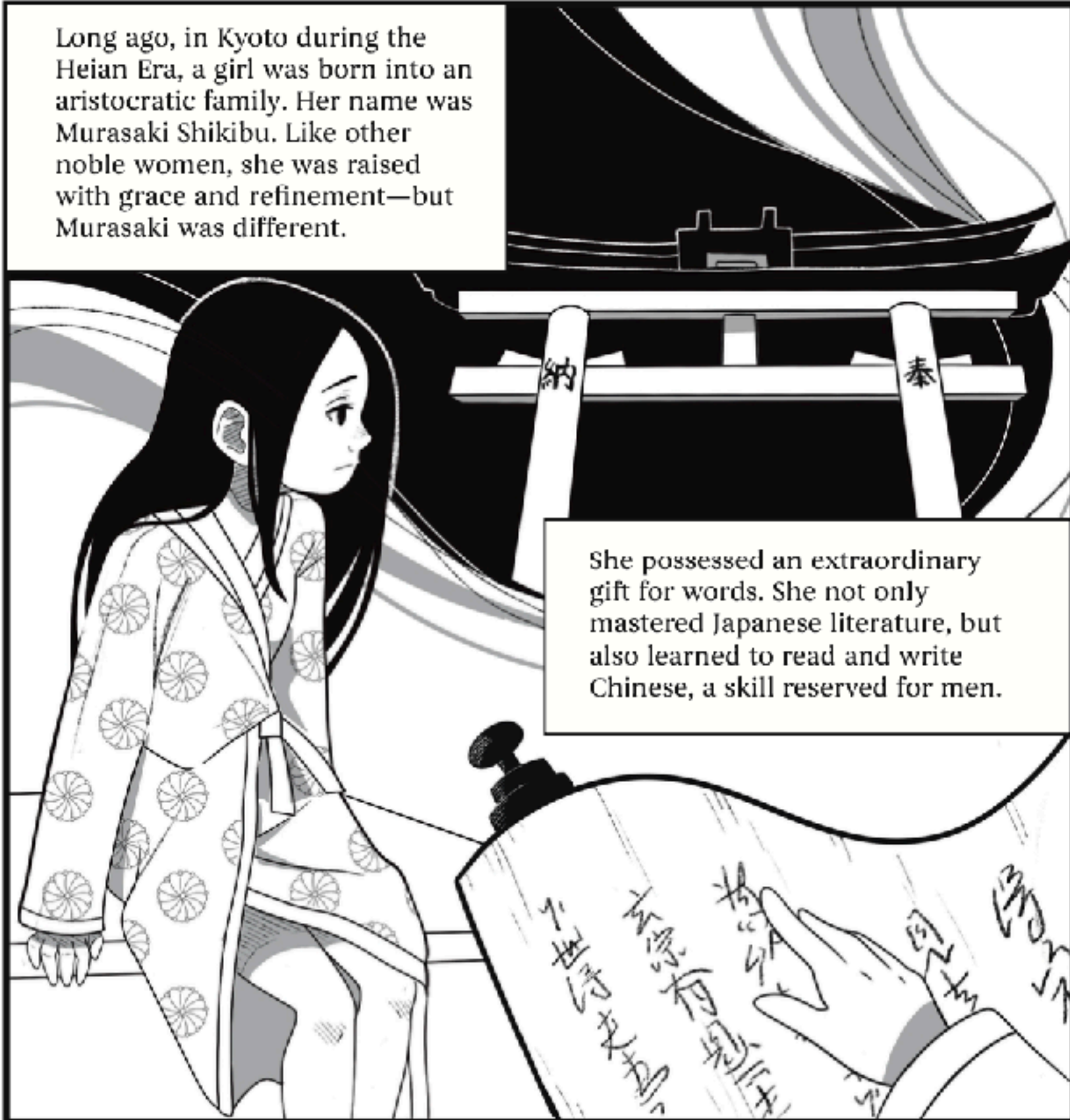
Front and back cover
Print out



Born into the glittering yet confined world of the Heian court, Murasaki Shikibu knew both privilege and sorrow. Widowed young, she turned to writing for solace and rebellion. From nights beneath the moon at Lake Biwa came *The Tale of Genji*—a work that reshaped literature. Though faced with rivalries and loneliness at court, her voice endured. Murasaki's legacy is not only as the world's first novelist, but as a woman who turned grief into timeless art.

WRITTEN & ILLUSTRATED BY:
LEAH BLOSS

Long ago, in Kyoto during the Heian Era, a girl was born into an aristocratic family. Her name was Murasaki Shikibu. Like other noble women, she was raised with grace and refinement—but Murasaki was different.

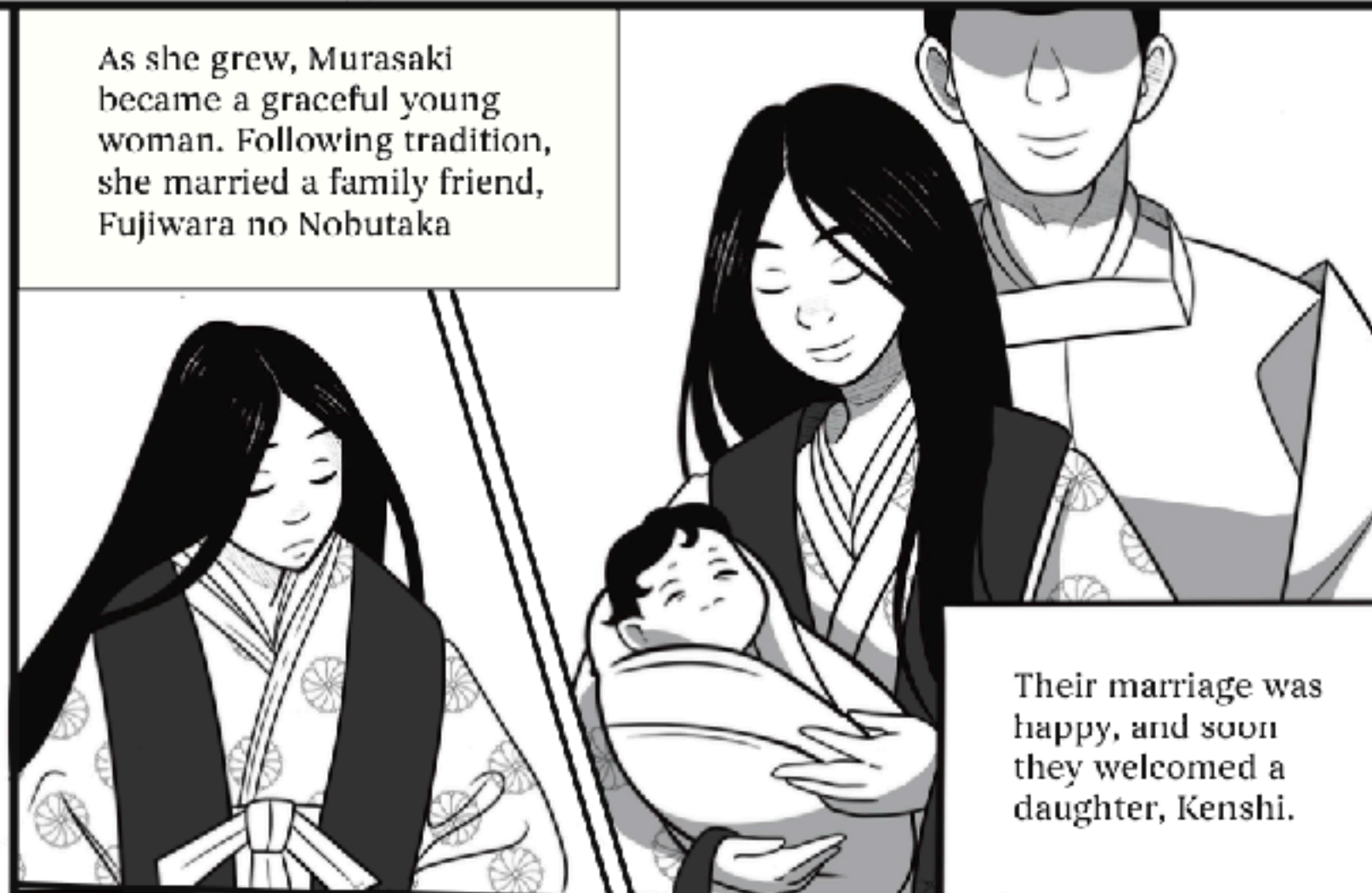


She possessed an extraordinary gift for words. She not only mastered Japanese literature, but also learned to read and write Chinese, a skill reserved for men.



What a shame you weren't born a boy.

As she grew, Murasaki became a graceful young woman. Following tradition, she married a family friend, Fujiwara no Nobutaka



Their marriage was happy, and soon they welcomed a daughter, Kenshi.



Only two years into their marriage, Nobutaka fell victim to a cholera epidemic. Murasaki was left a widow with her young daughter, her world upended.

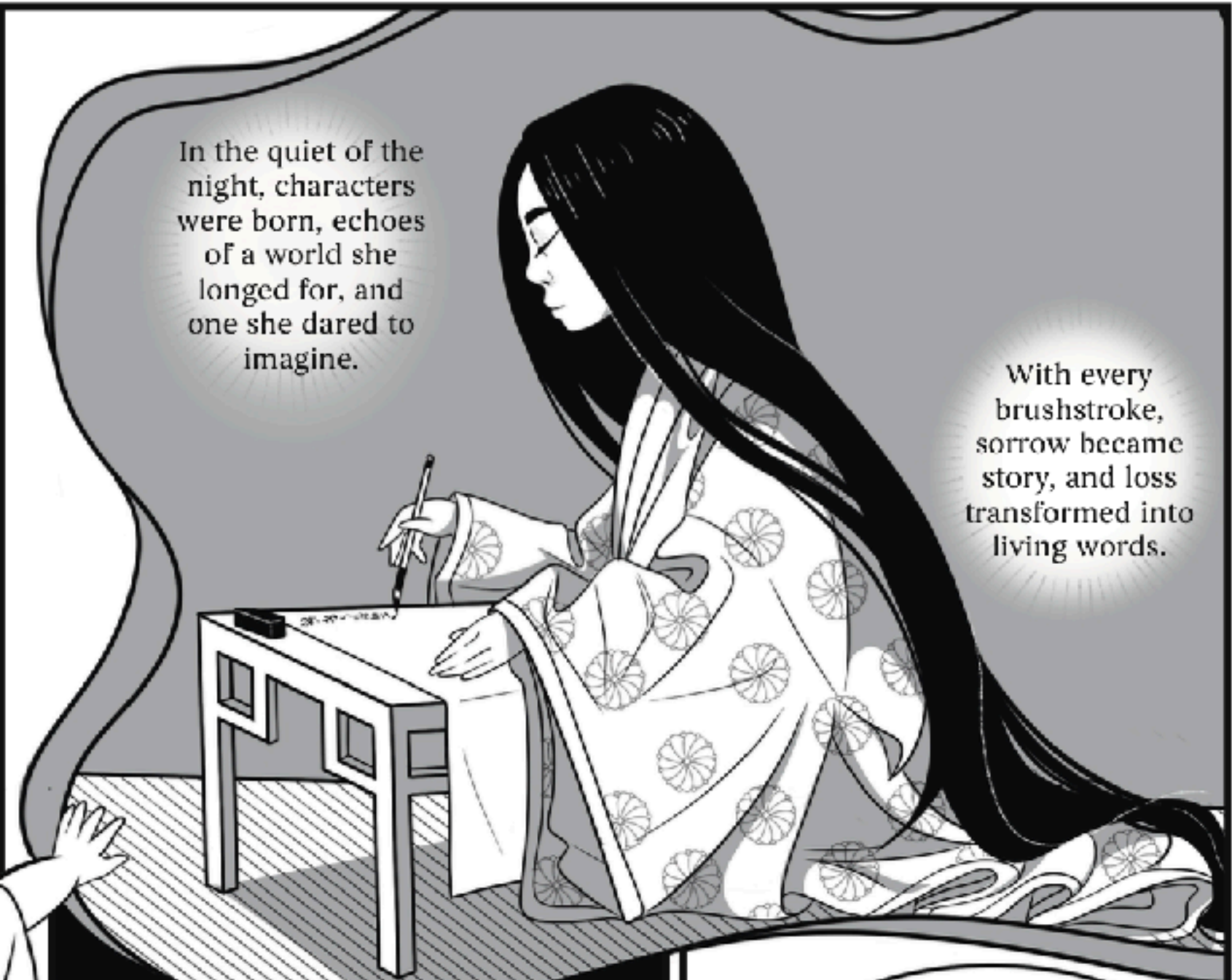
Overcome with sadness, Murasaki decided she needed to get away from the bustle of the city and traveled to Ishiyama-dera.



I can't take it anymore! I need to leave!

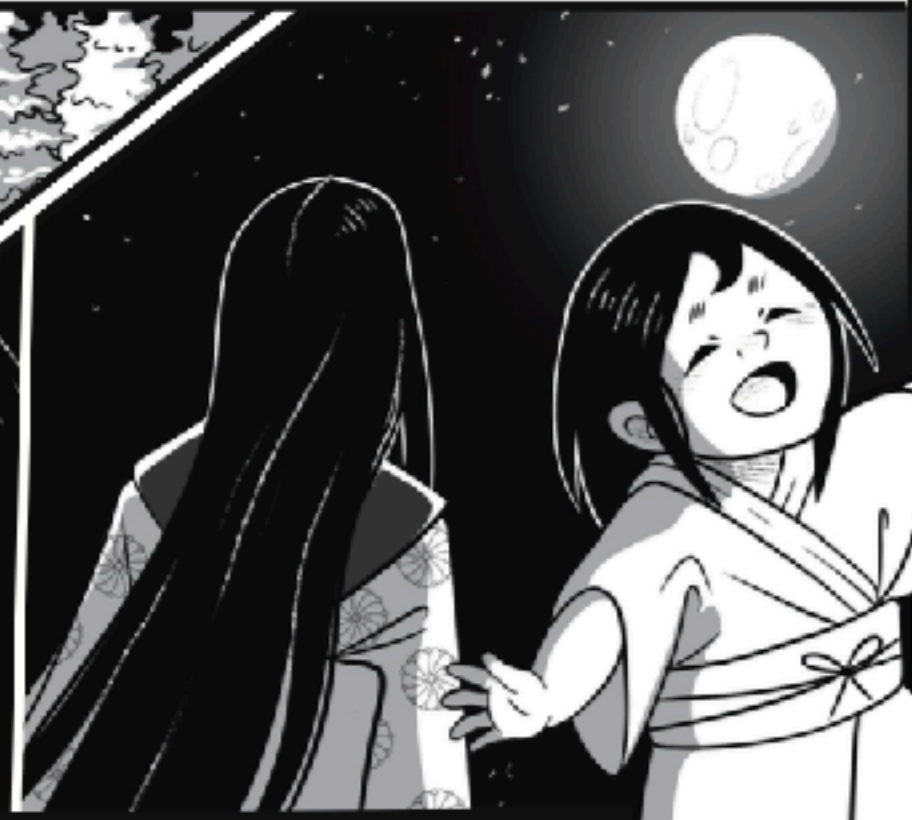


I understand

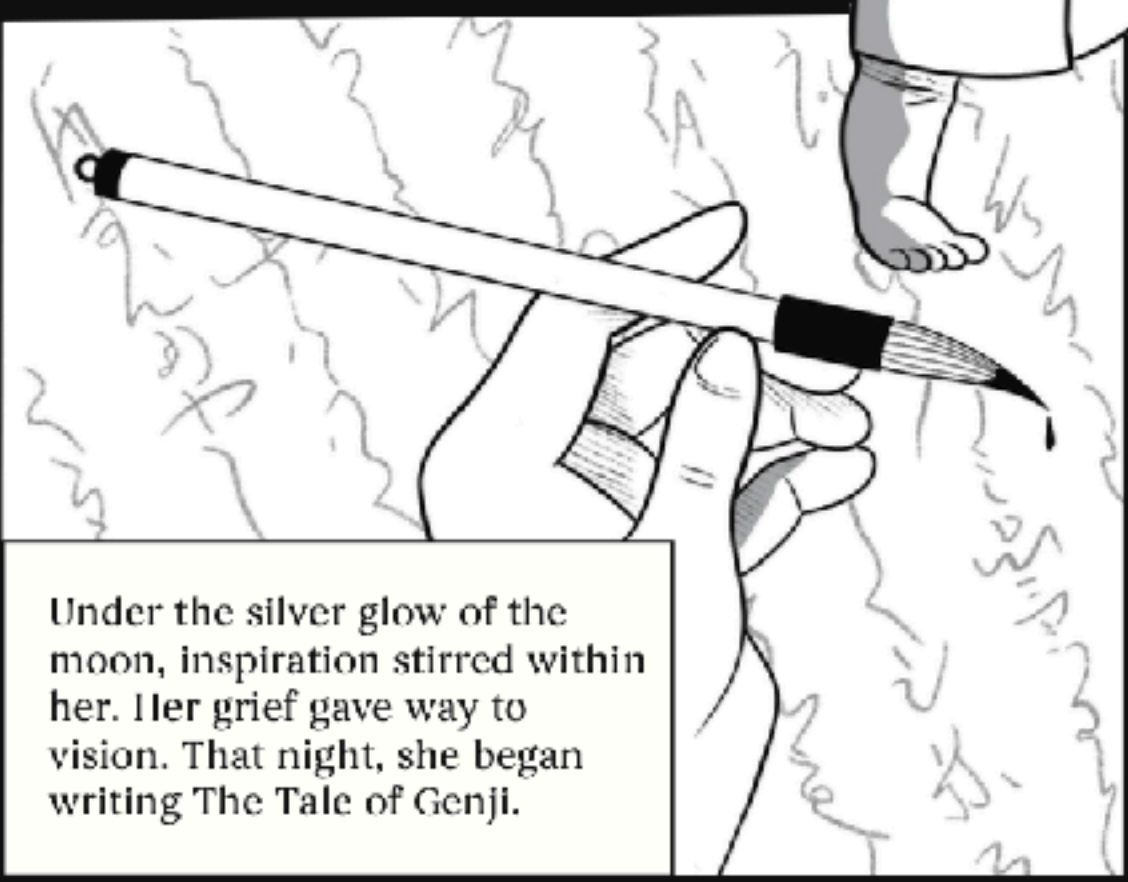
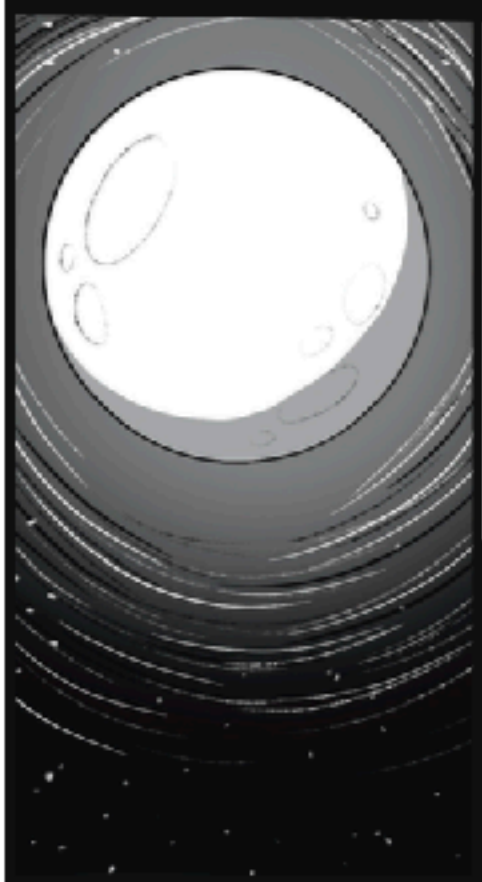


In the quiet of the night, characters were born, echoes of a world she longed for, and one she dared to imagine.

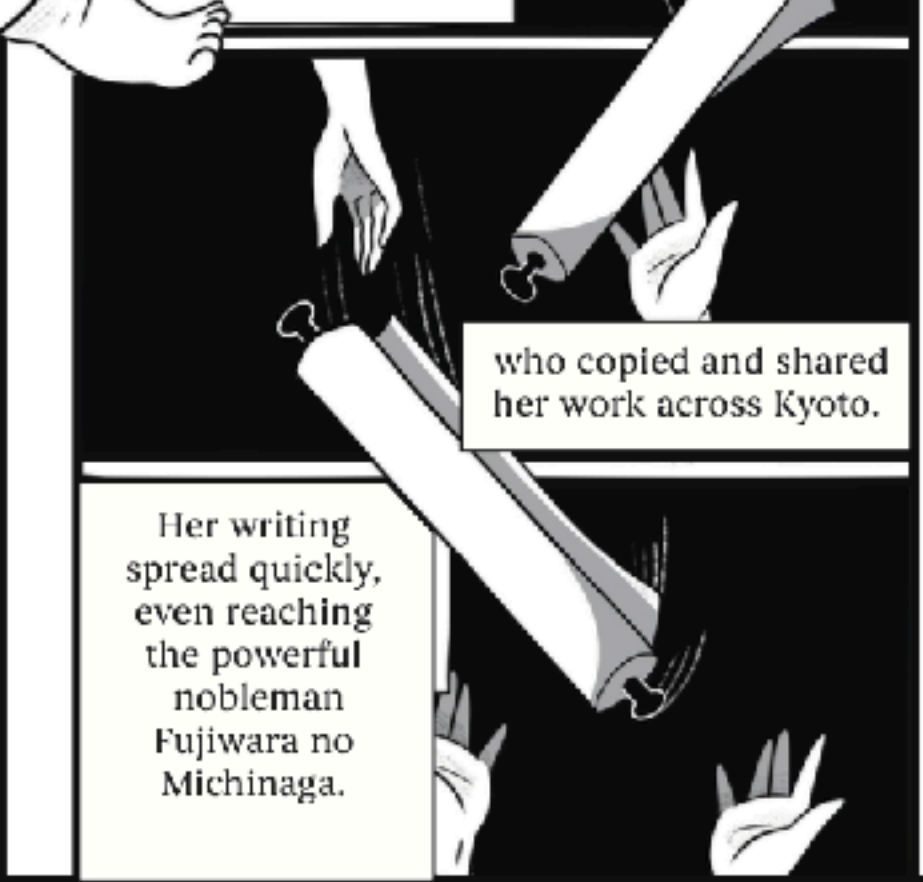
With every brushstroke, sorrow became story, and loss transformed into living words.



What began as private writings soon spread among her friends,



Under the silver glow of the moon, inspiration stirred within her. Her grief gave way to vision. That night, she began writing *The Tale of Genji*.

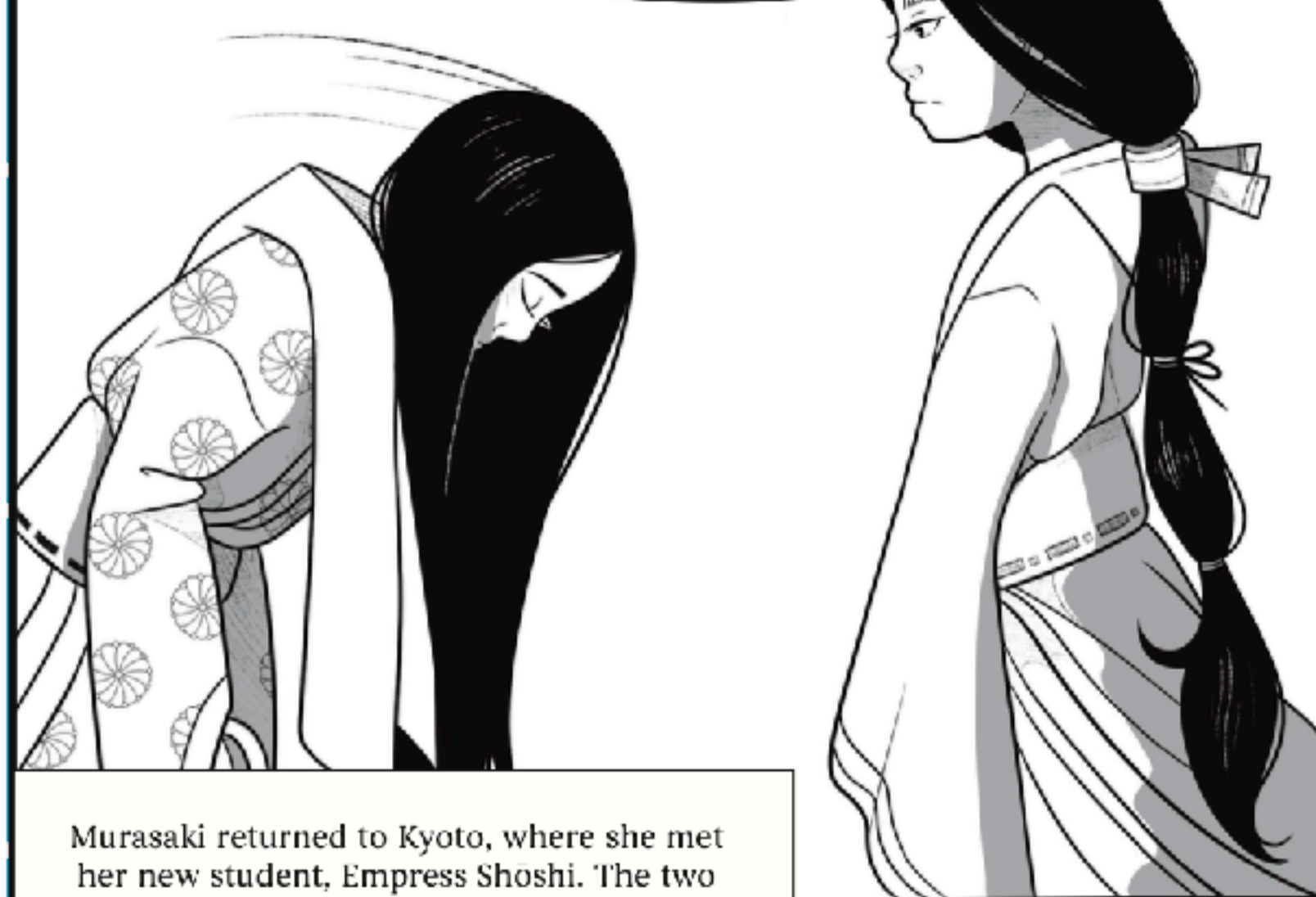
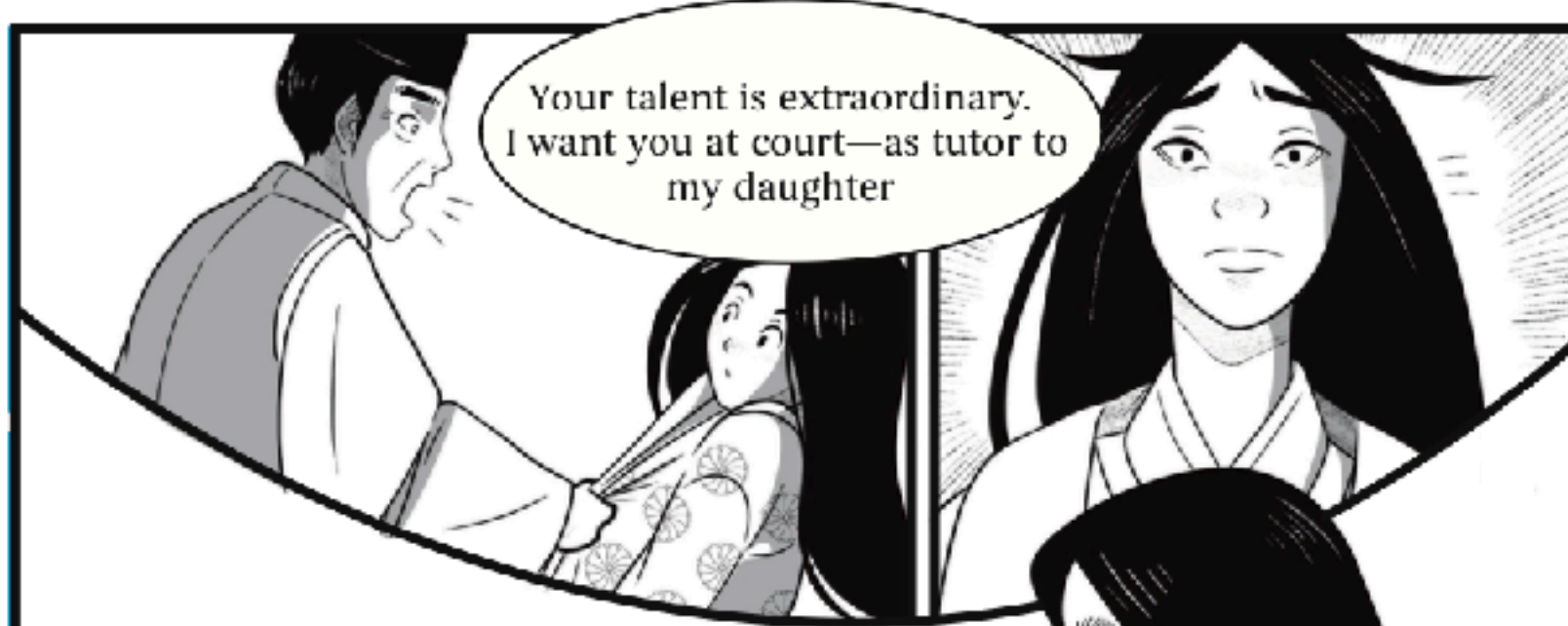


who copied and shared her work across Kyoto.

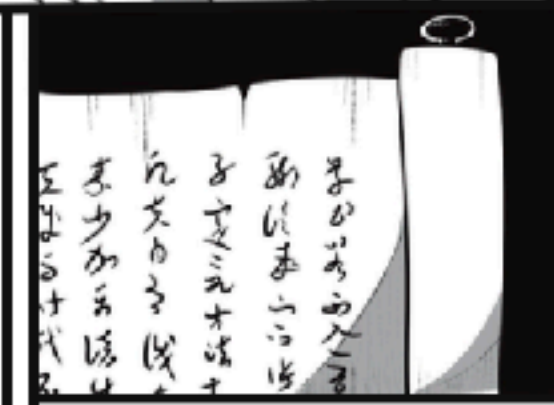
Her writing spread quickly, even reaching the powerful nobleman Fujiwara no Michinaga.



This is excellent! I have to find who wrote this!



Murasaki returned to Kyoto, where she met her new student, Empress Shoshi. The two soon became close, and Murasaki even began teaching Shōshi to read Chinese in secret.

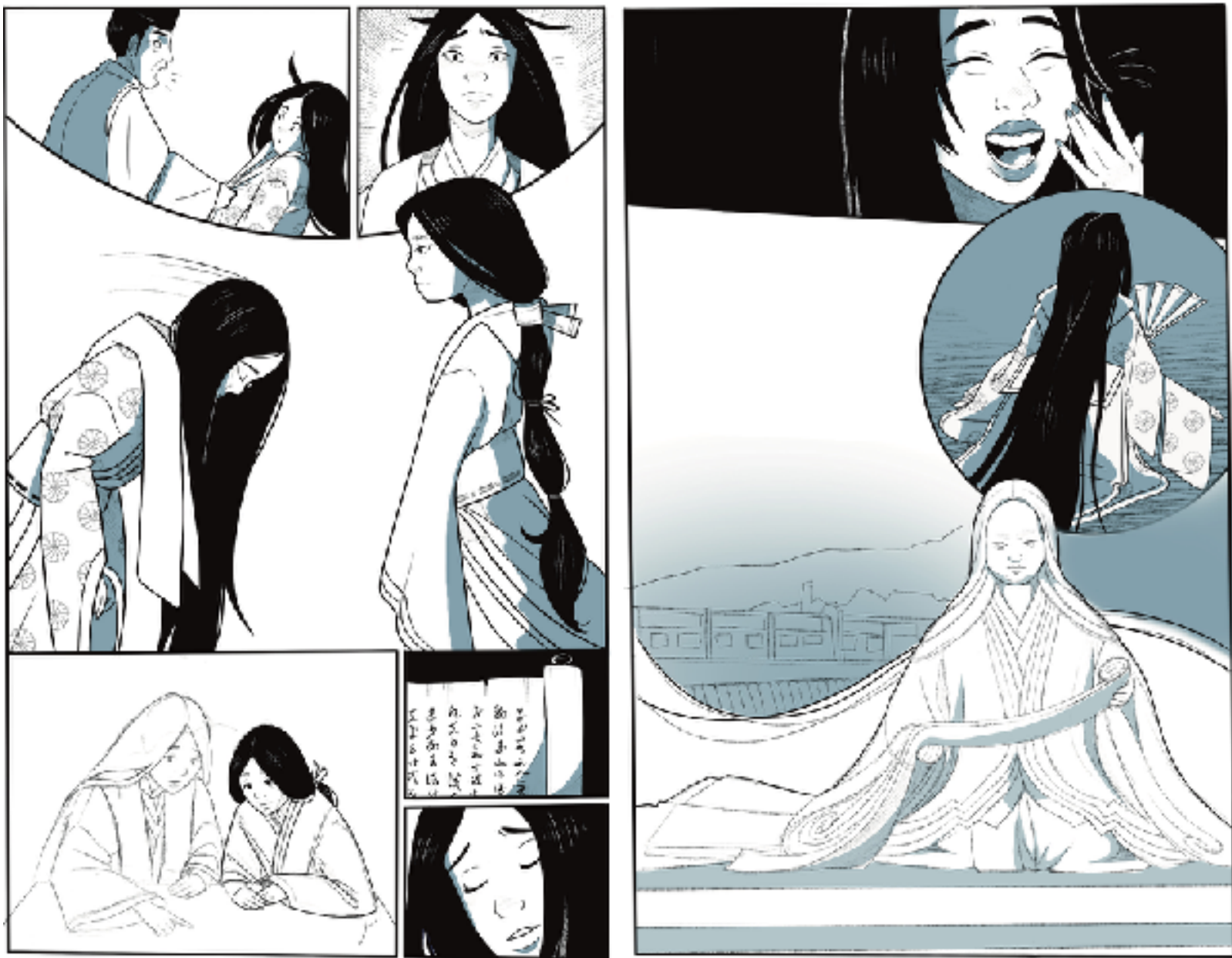
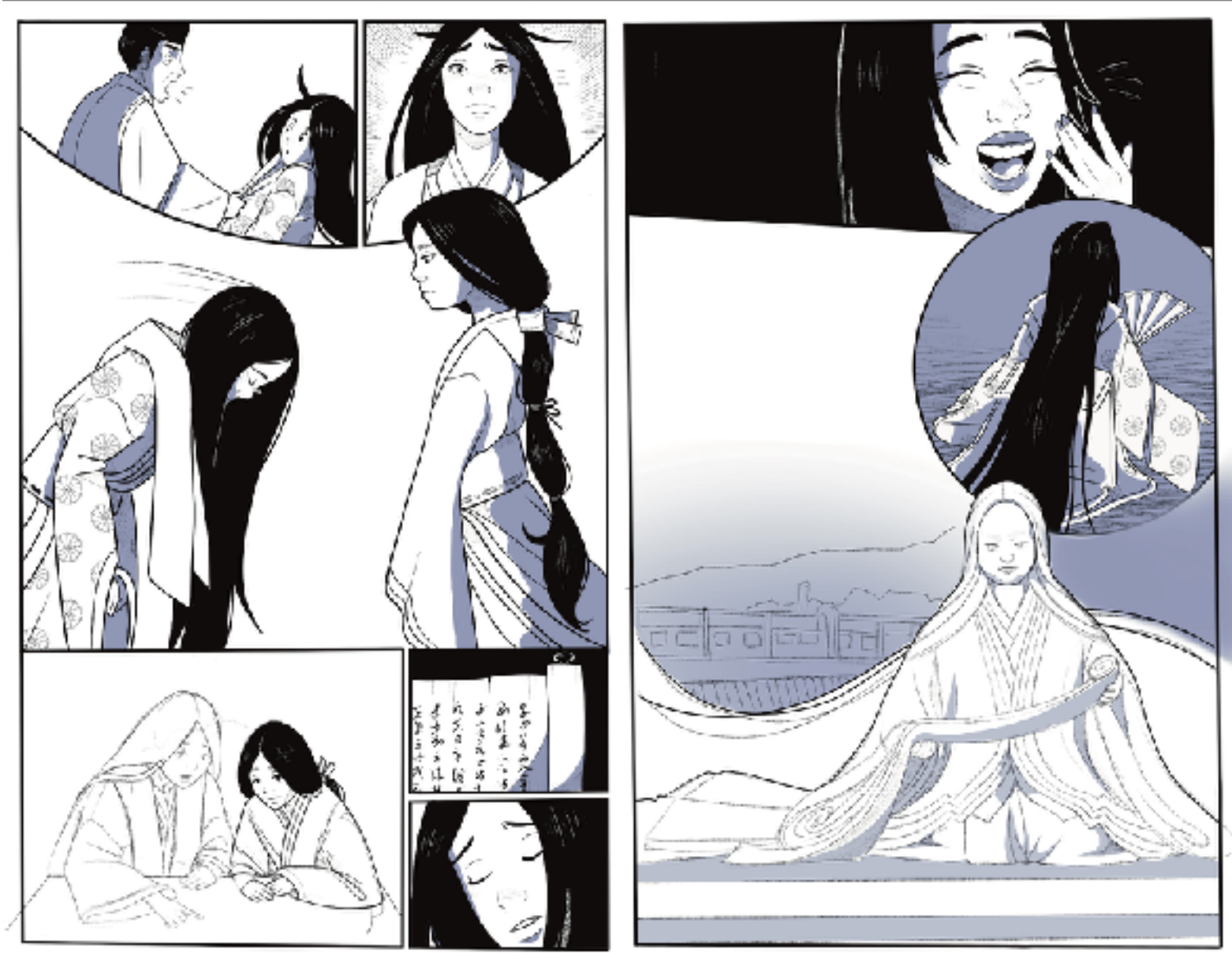


Not everyone welcomed her. Some women mocked her, sneering that she was 'The Lady of the Chronicles', a jab at her rare knowledge of Chinese. Murasaki had never boasted of her learning, yet the cruel words cut deep.

Isolated and unhappy, she eventually withdrew from court life, devoting herself fully to her writing.

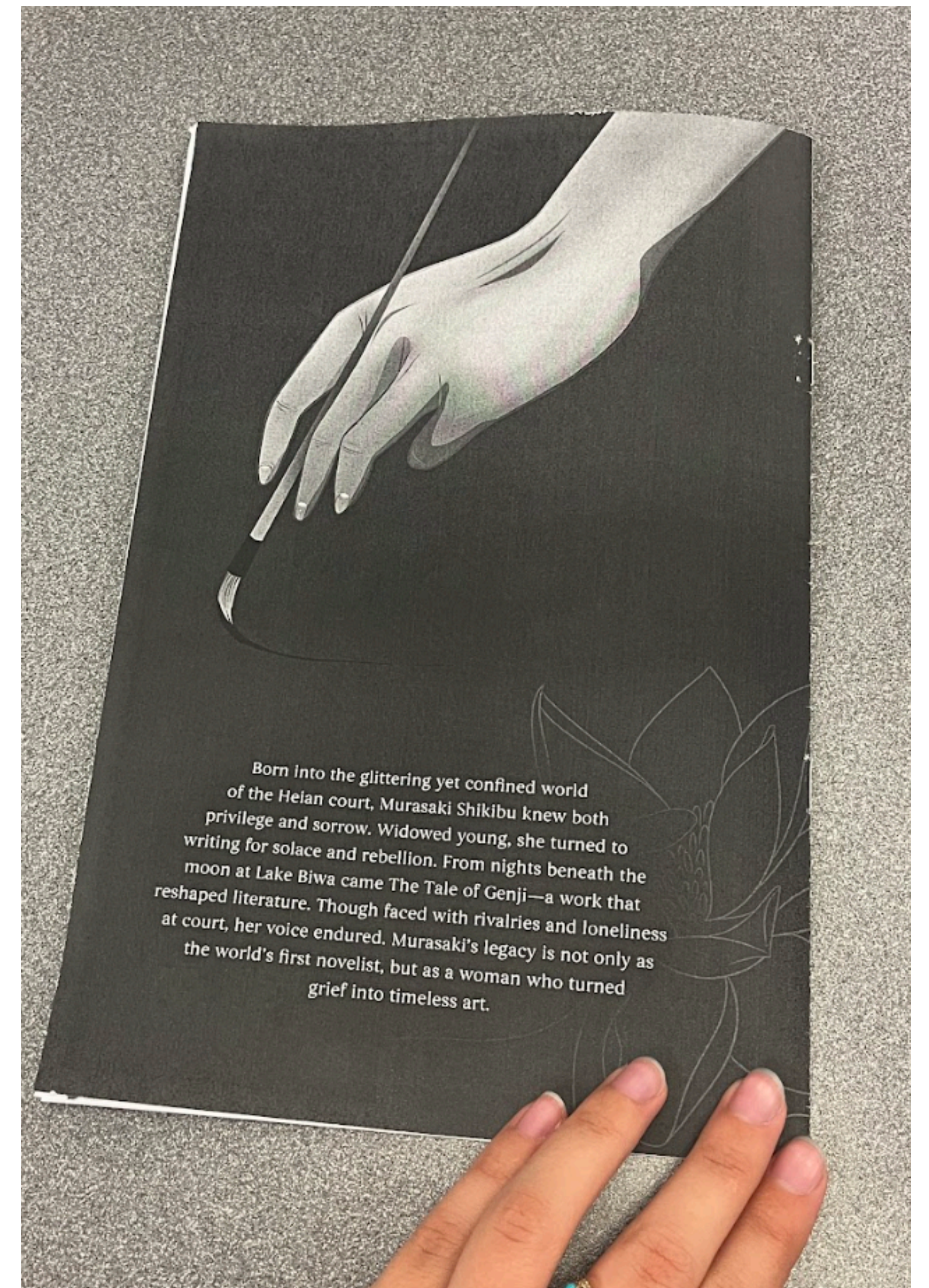
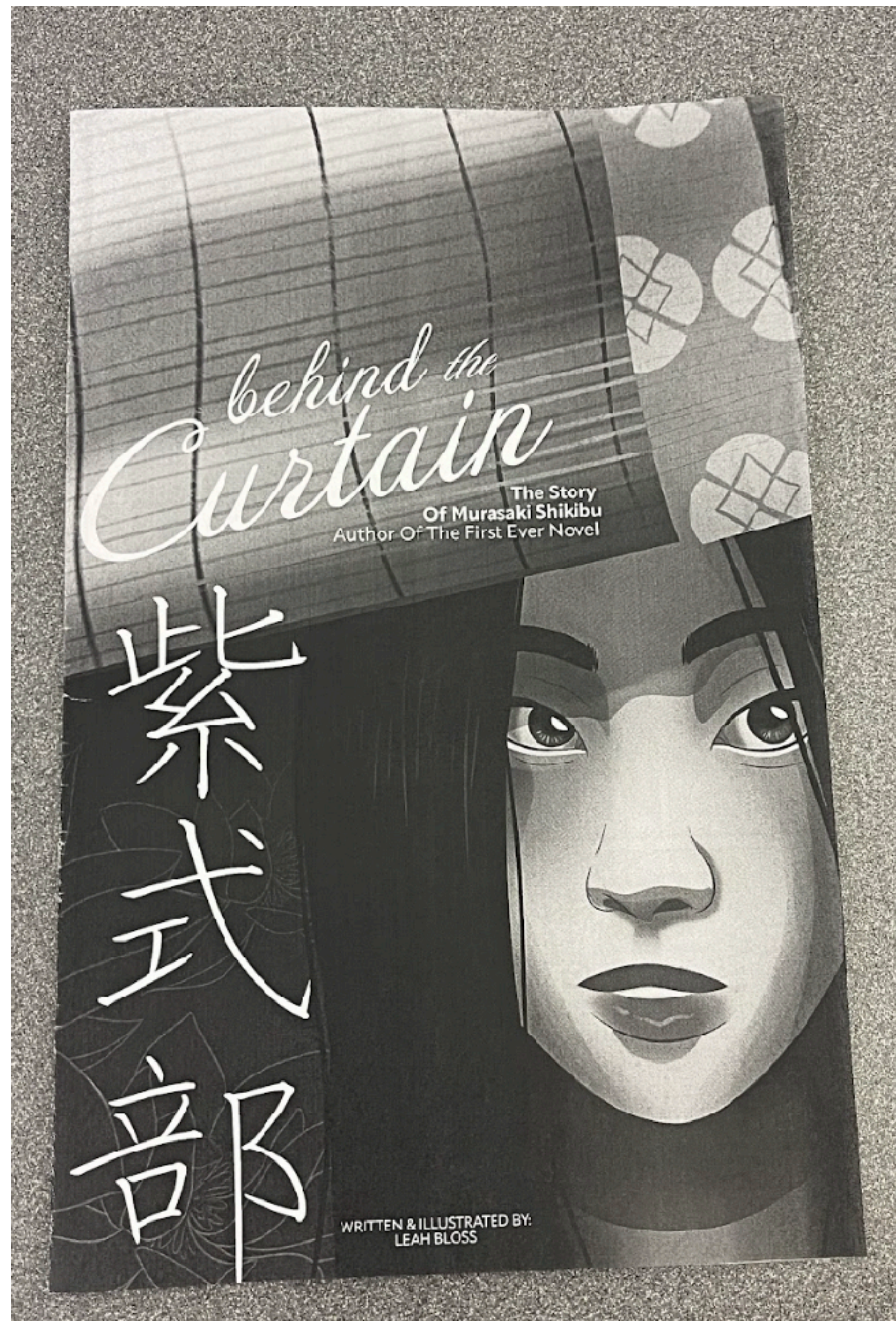
Though centuries have passed, her legacy endures. Murasaki Shikibu—widow, poet, and the world's first novelist—left behind a voice that time could never silence.





Progress Day 2

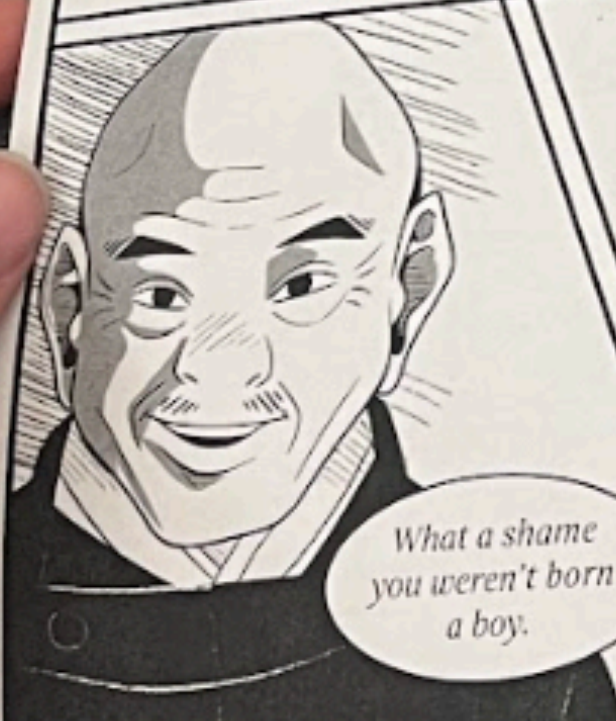
Black and white test print book



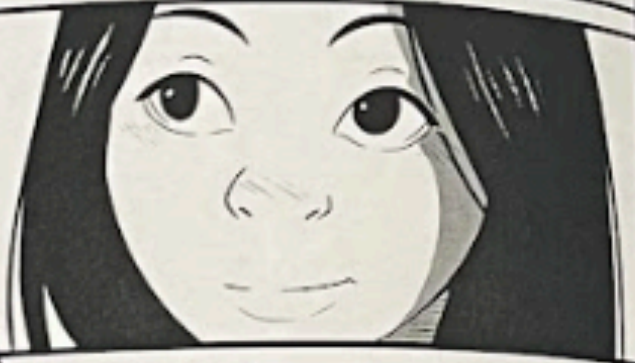
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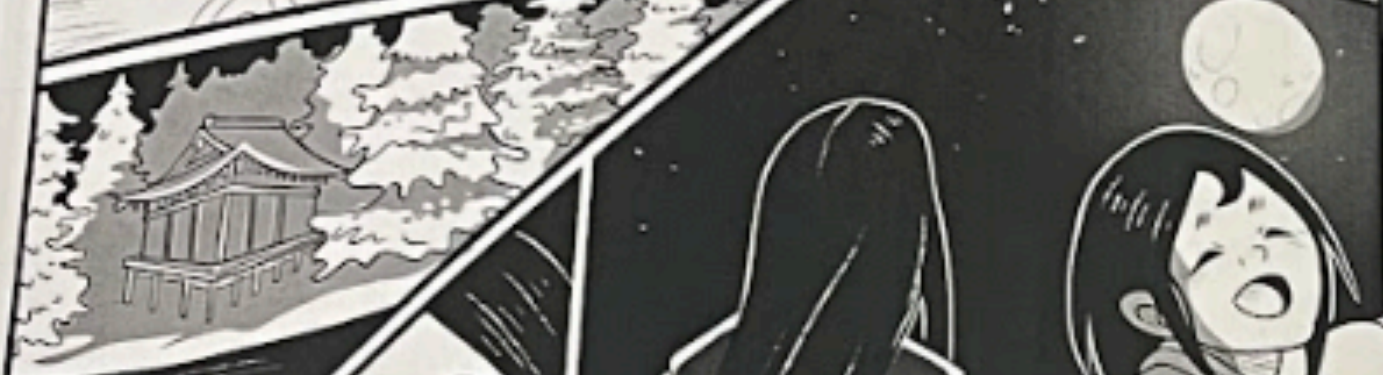
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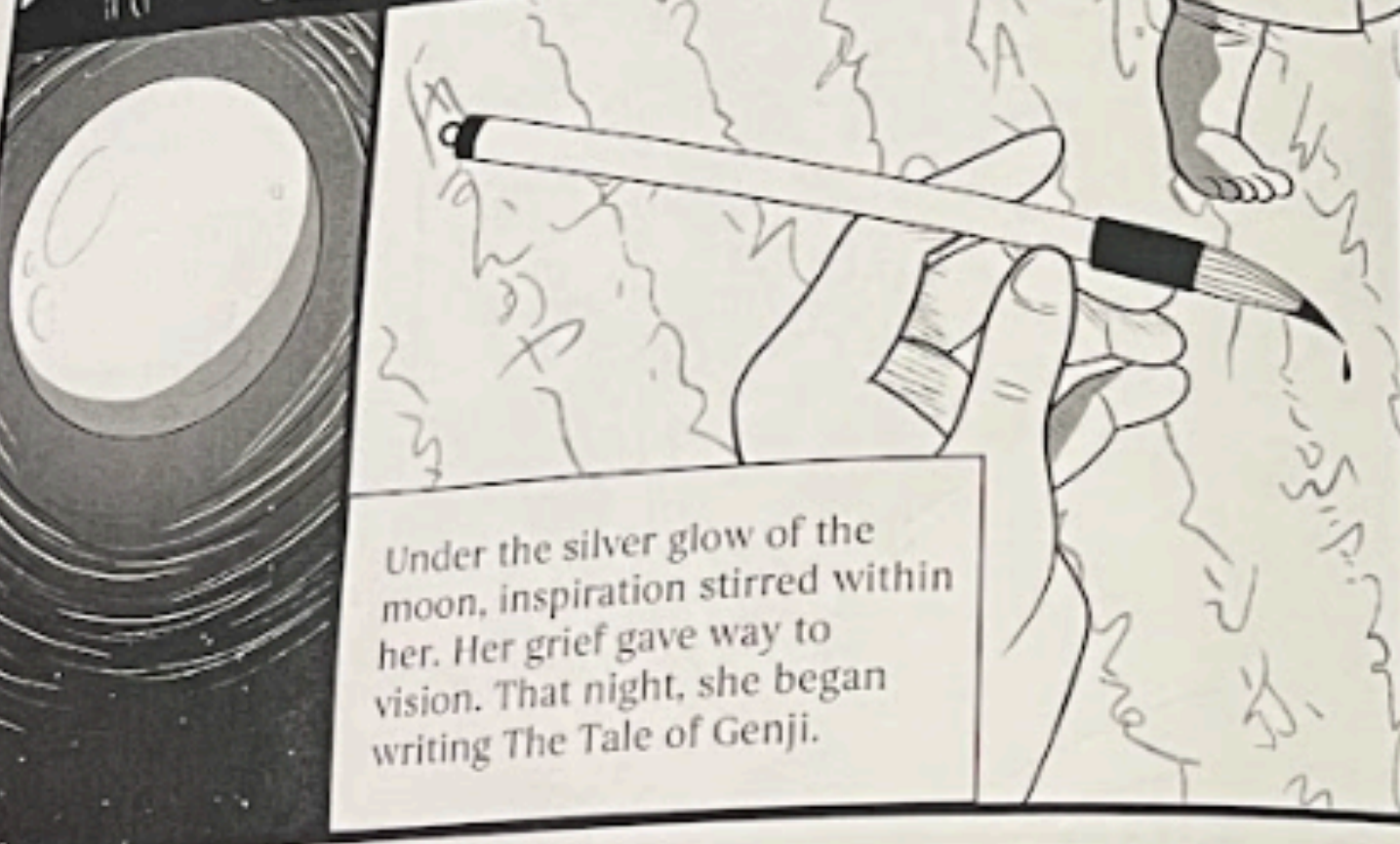
I understand



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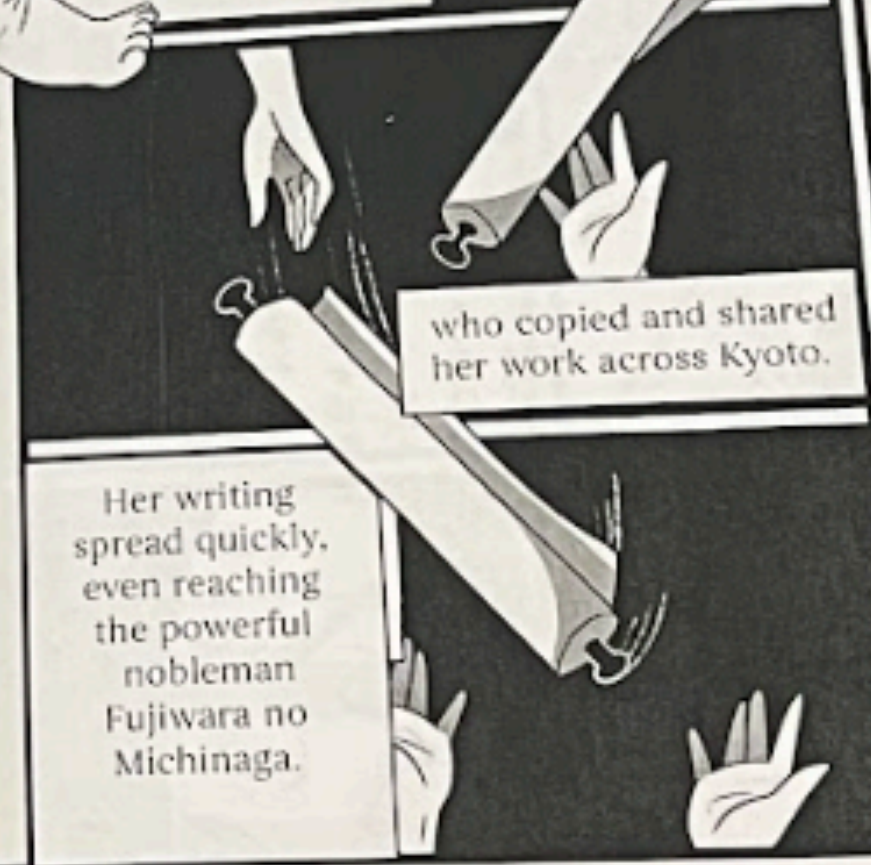


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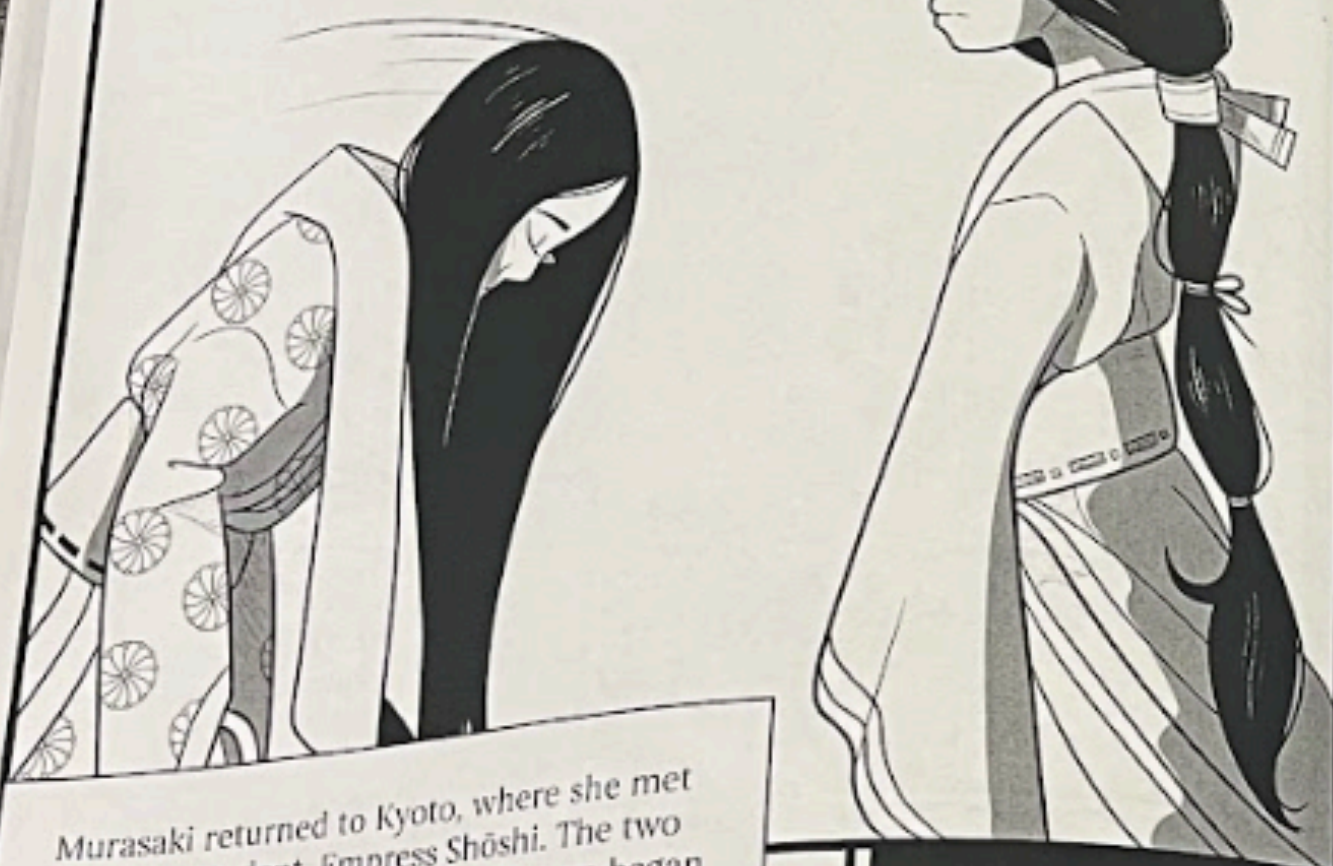
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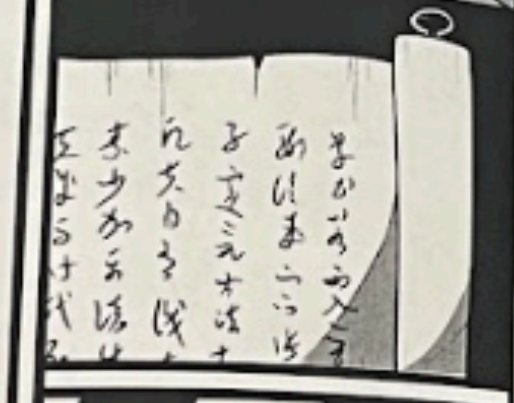


This is excellent! I have to find who wrote this!

Your talent is extraordinary.
I want you at court—as tutor to
my daughter



Murasaki returned to Kyoto, where she met
her new student, Empress Shōshi. The two
soon became close, and Murasaki even began
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Not everyone welcomed her.
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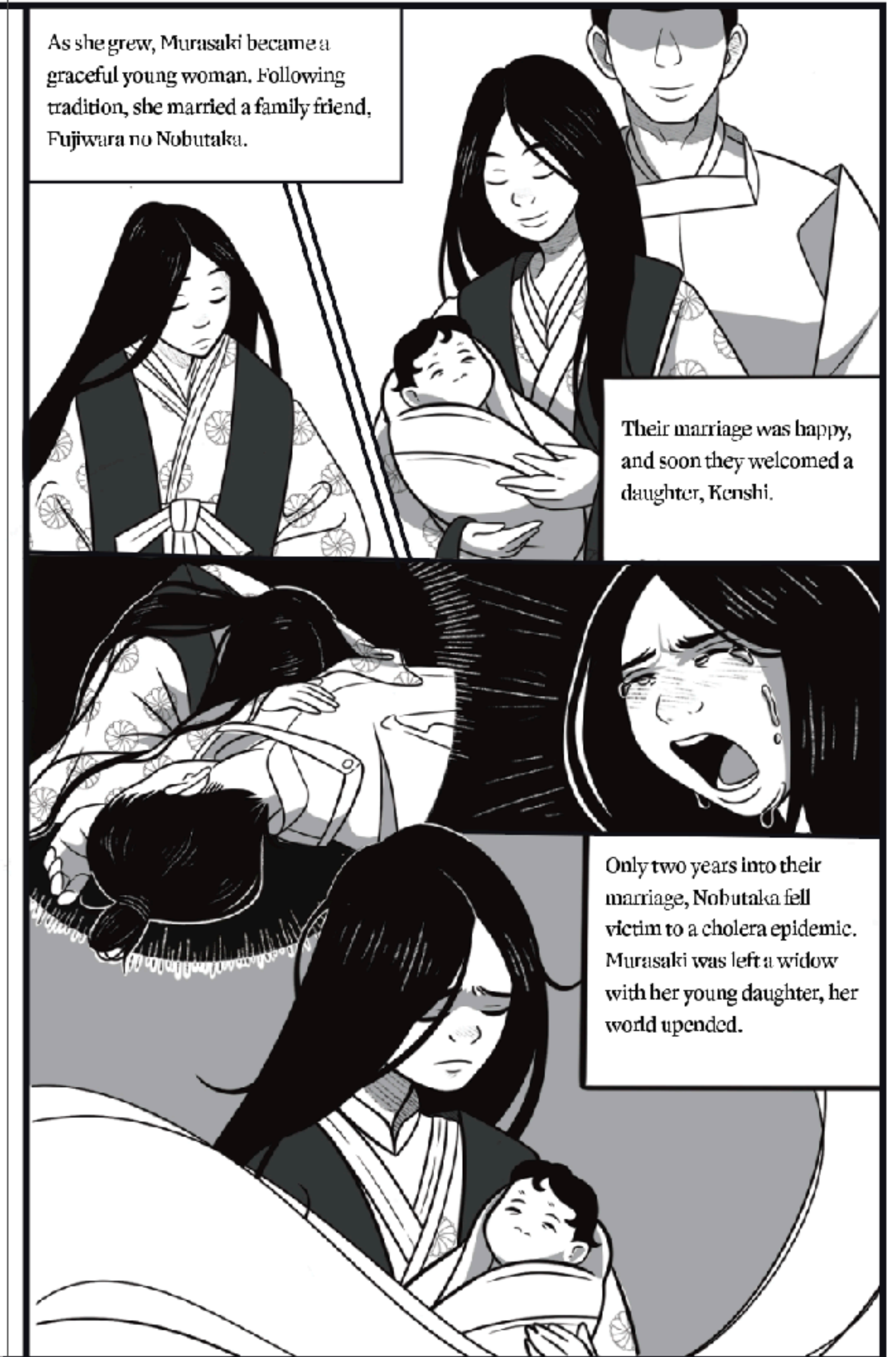
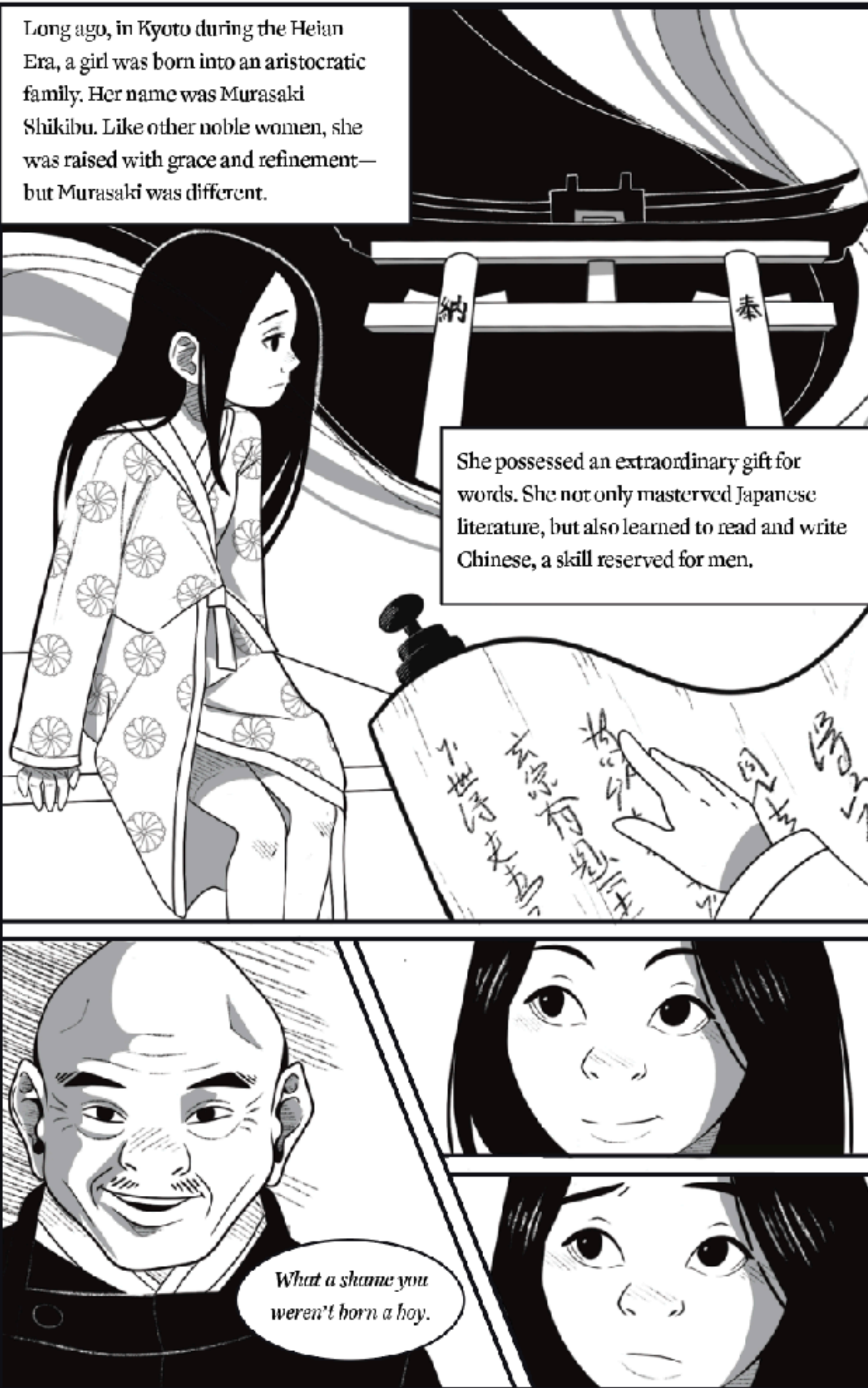
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Progress Day 2

Chosen font in Indesign



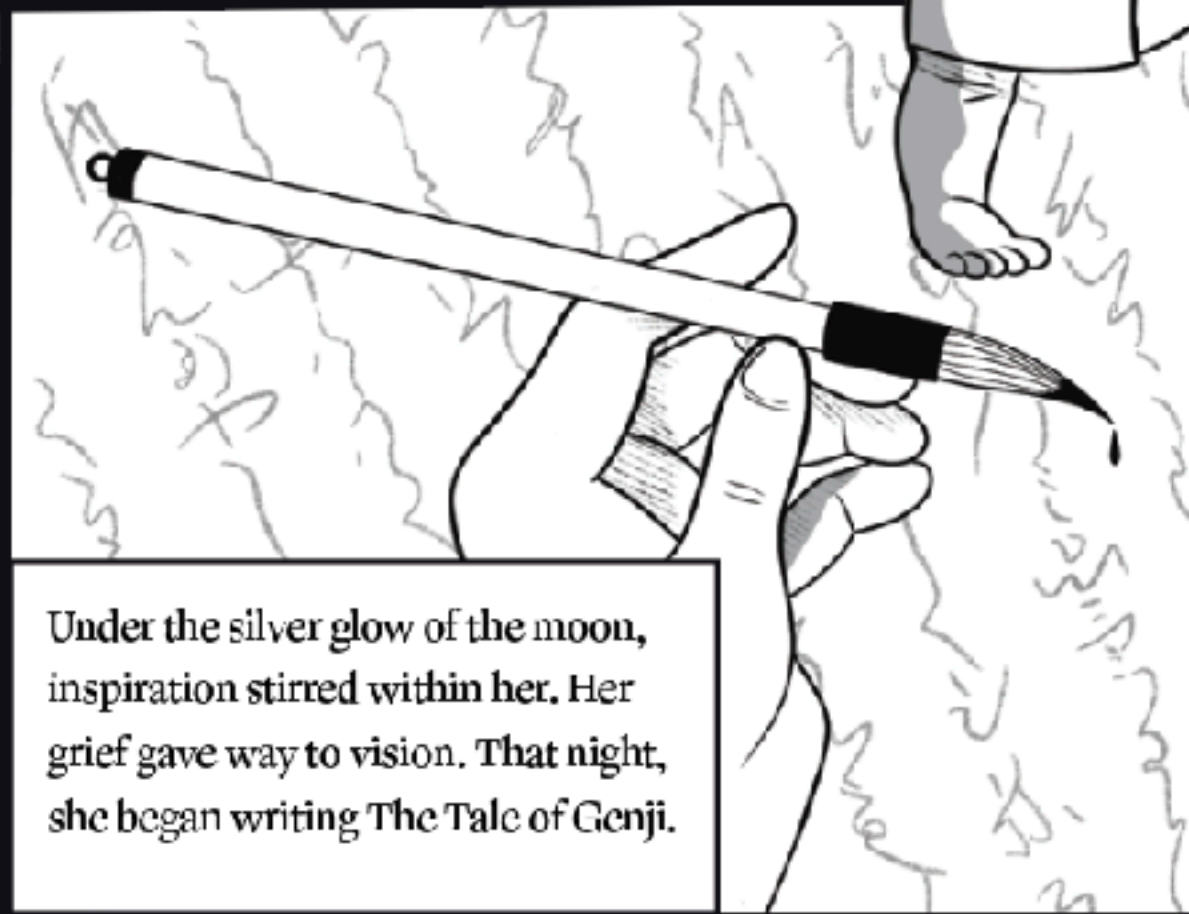
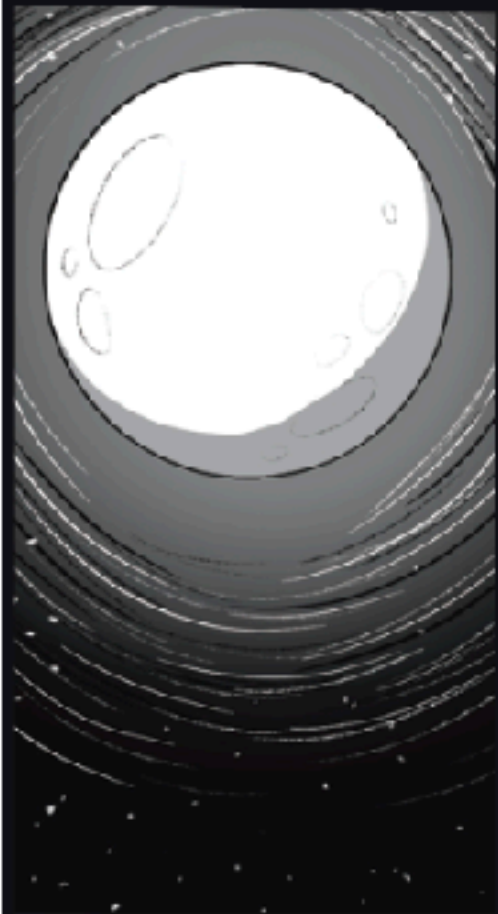
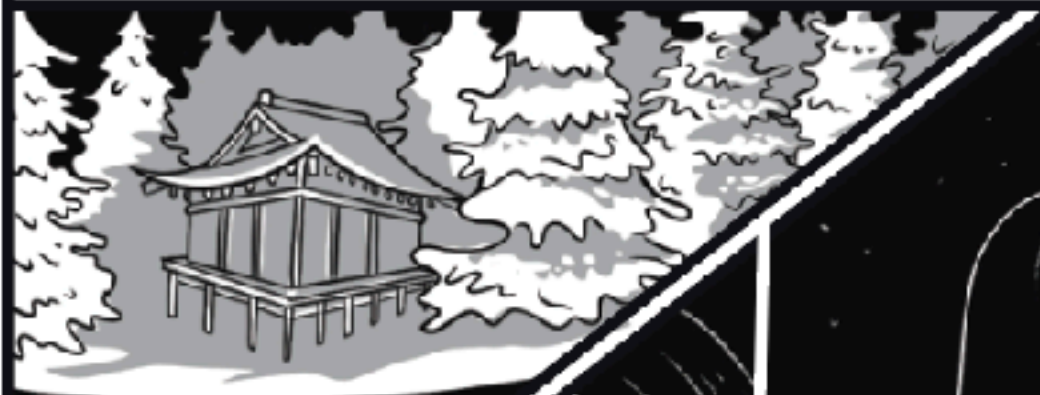
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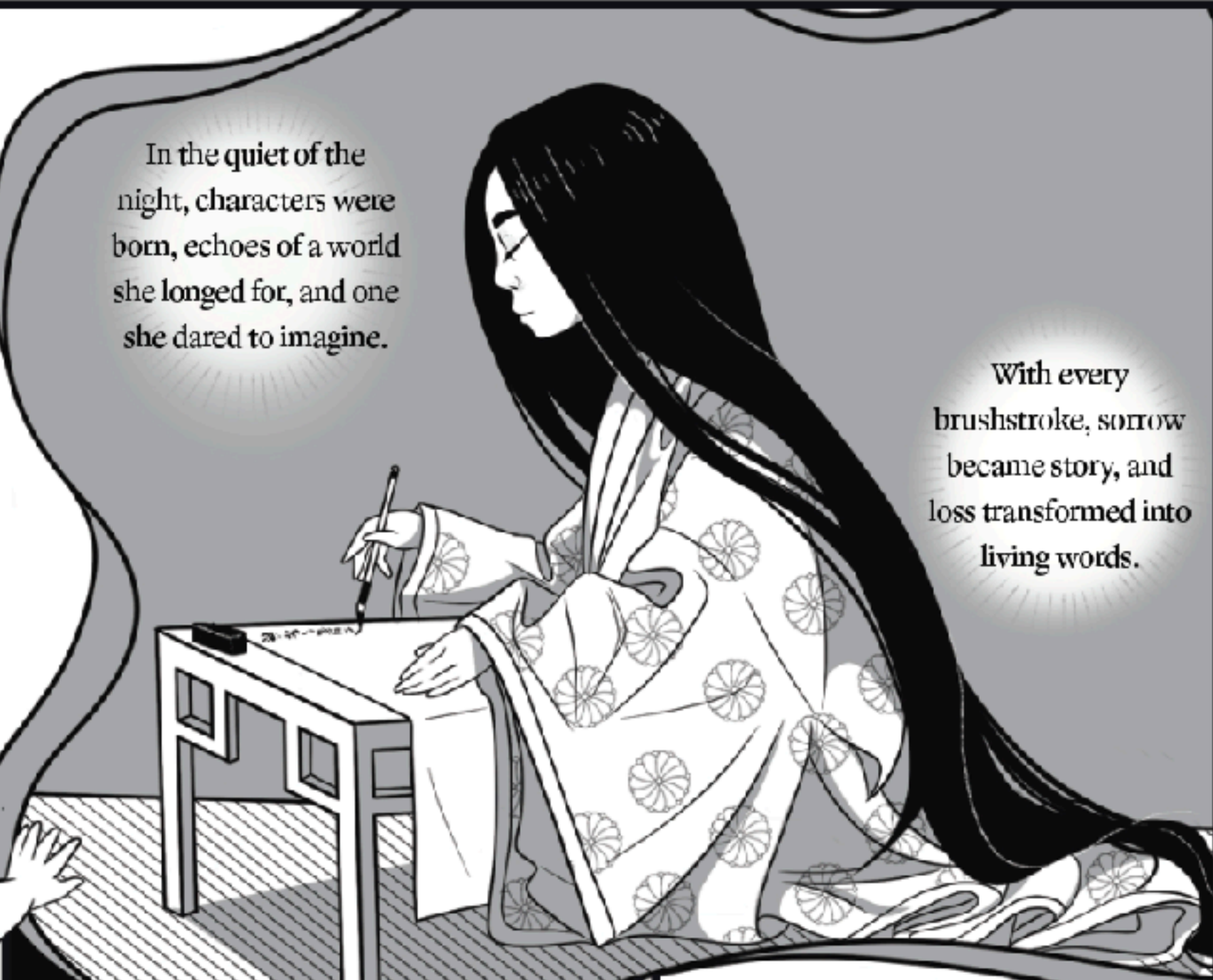
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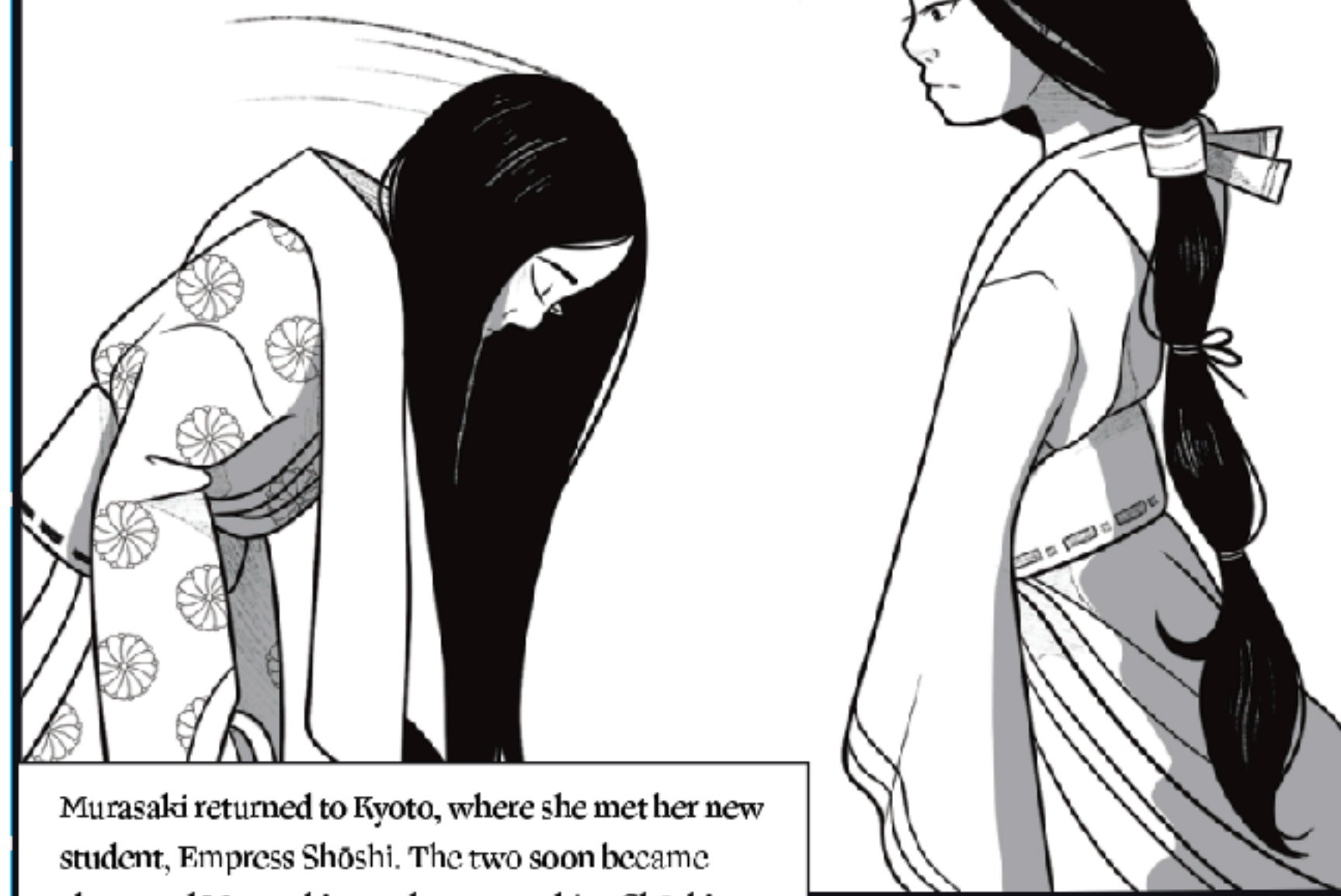
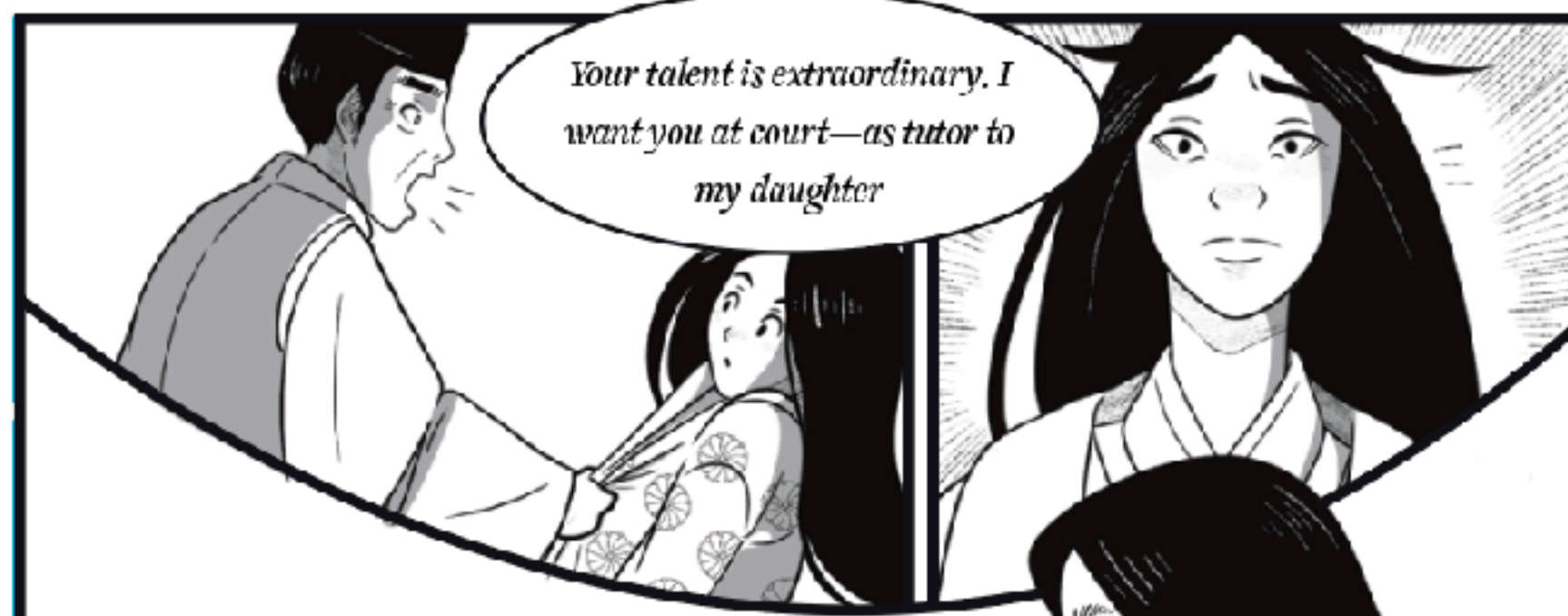


who copied and shared her work across Kyoto.

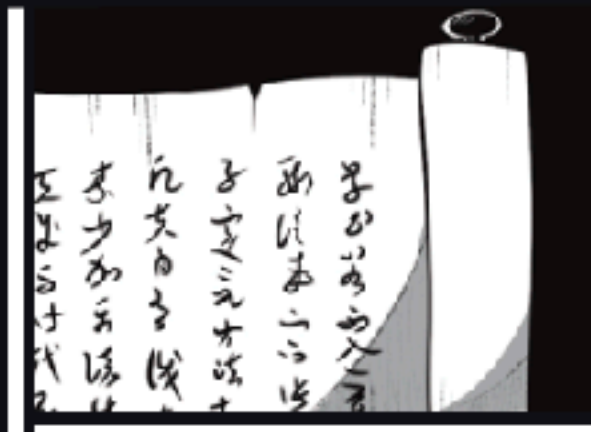
Her writing spread quickly, even reaching the powerful nobleman Fujiwara no Michinaga.



This is excellent! I have to find who wrote this!



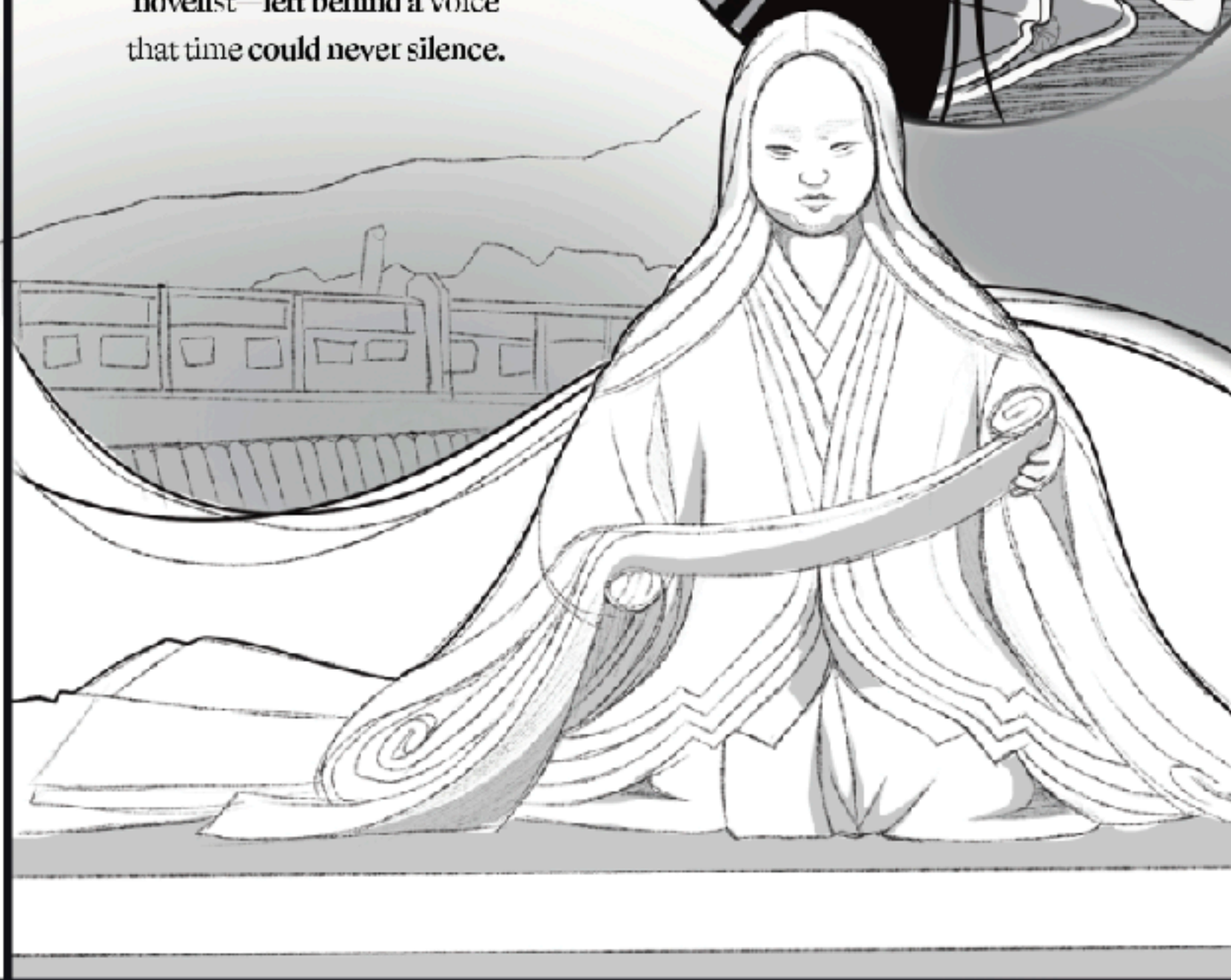
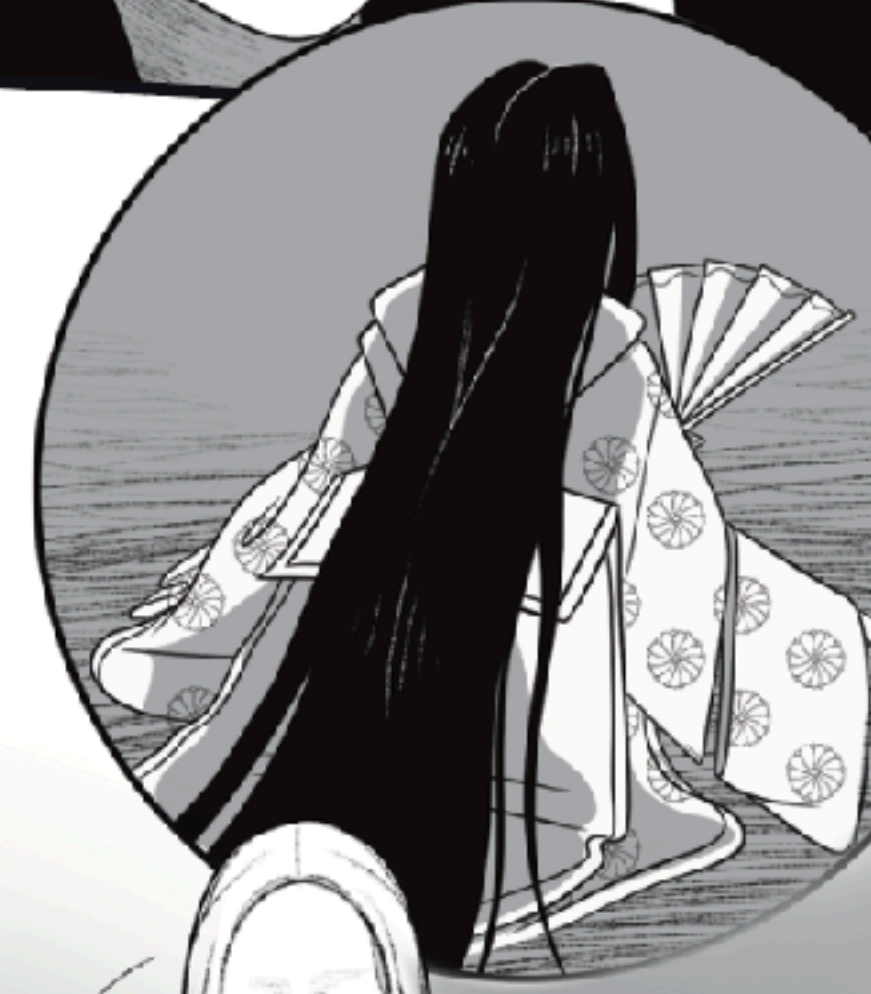
Murasaki returned to Kyoto, where she met her new student, Empress Shōshi. The two soon became close, and Murasaki even began teaching Shōshi to read Chinese in secret.



Not everyone welcomed her. Some women mocked her, sneering that she was 'The Lady of the Chronicles', a jab at her rare knowledge of Chinese. Murasaki had never boasted of her learning, yet the cruel words cut deep.

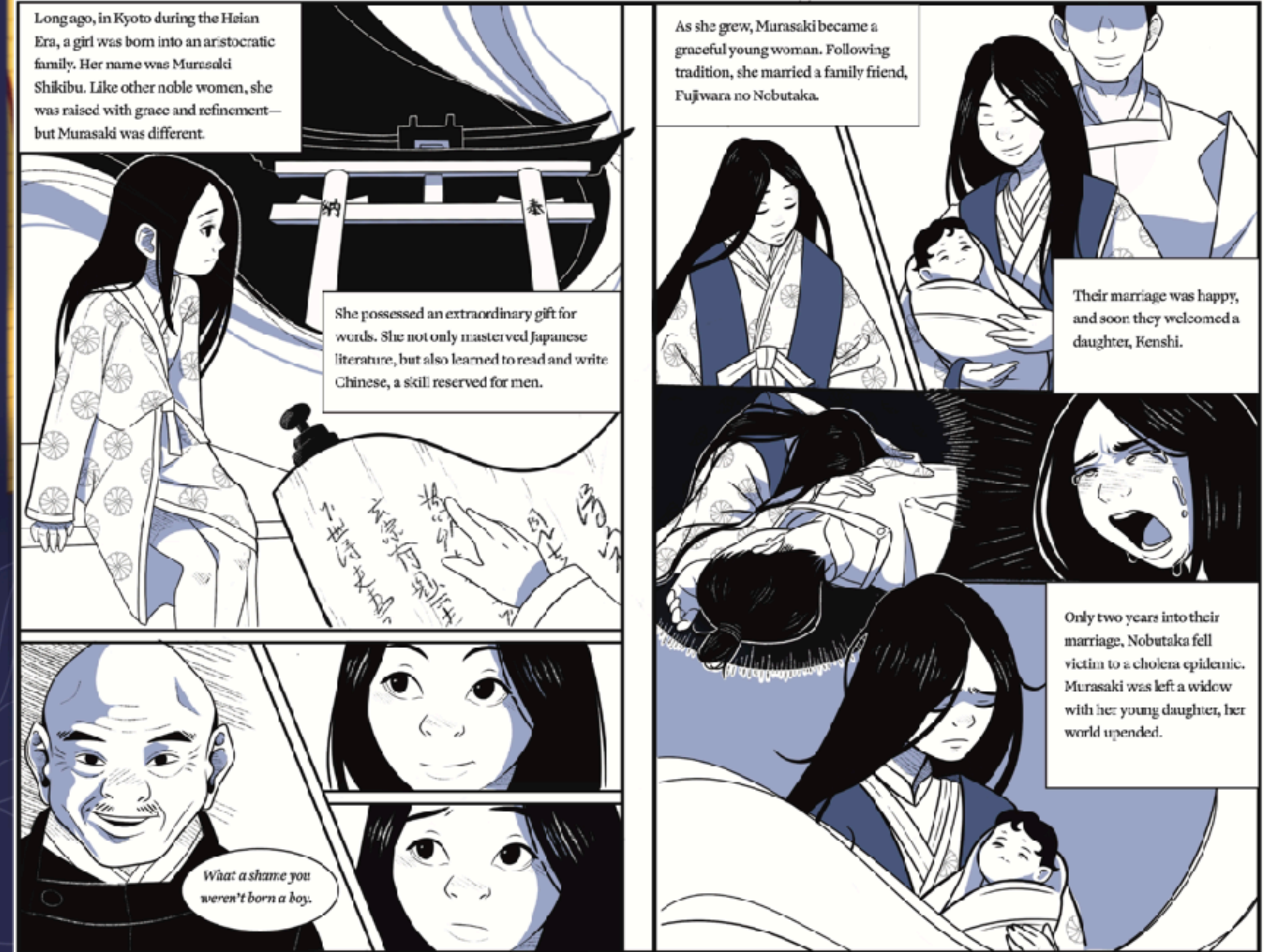
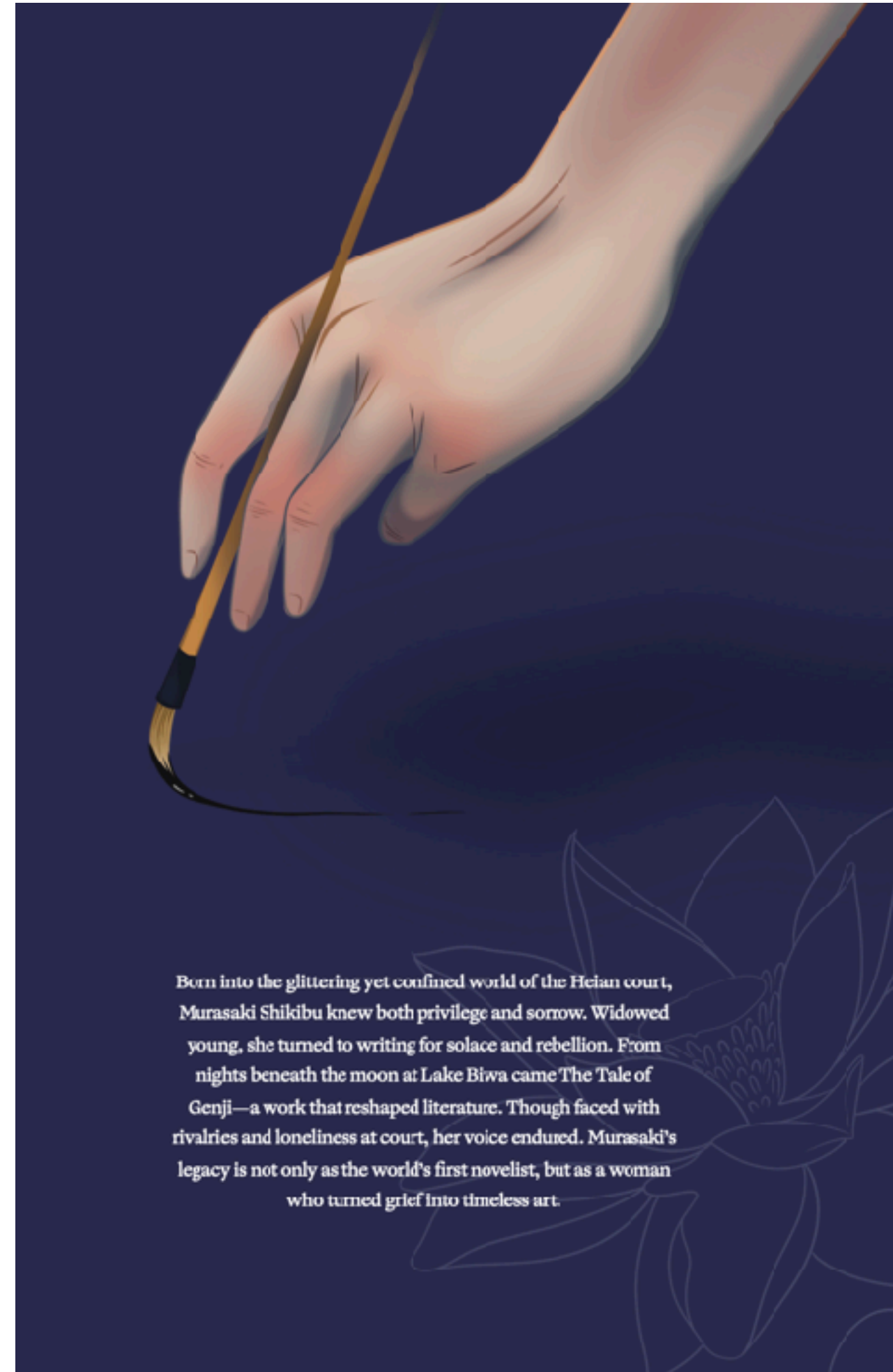
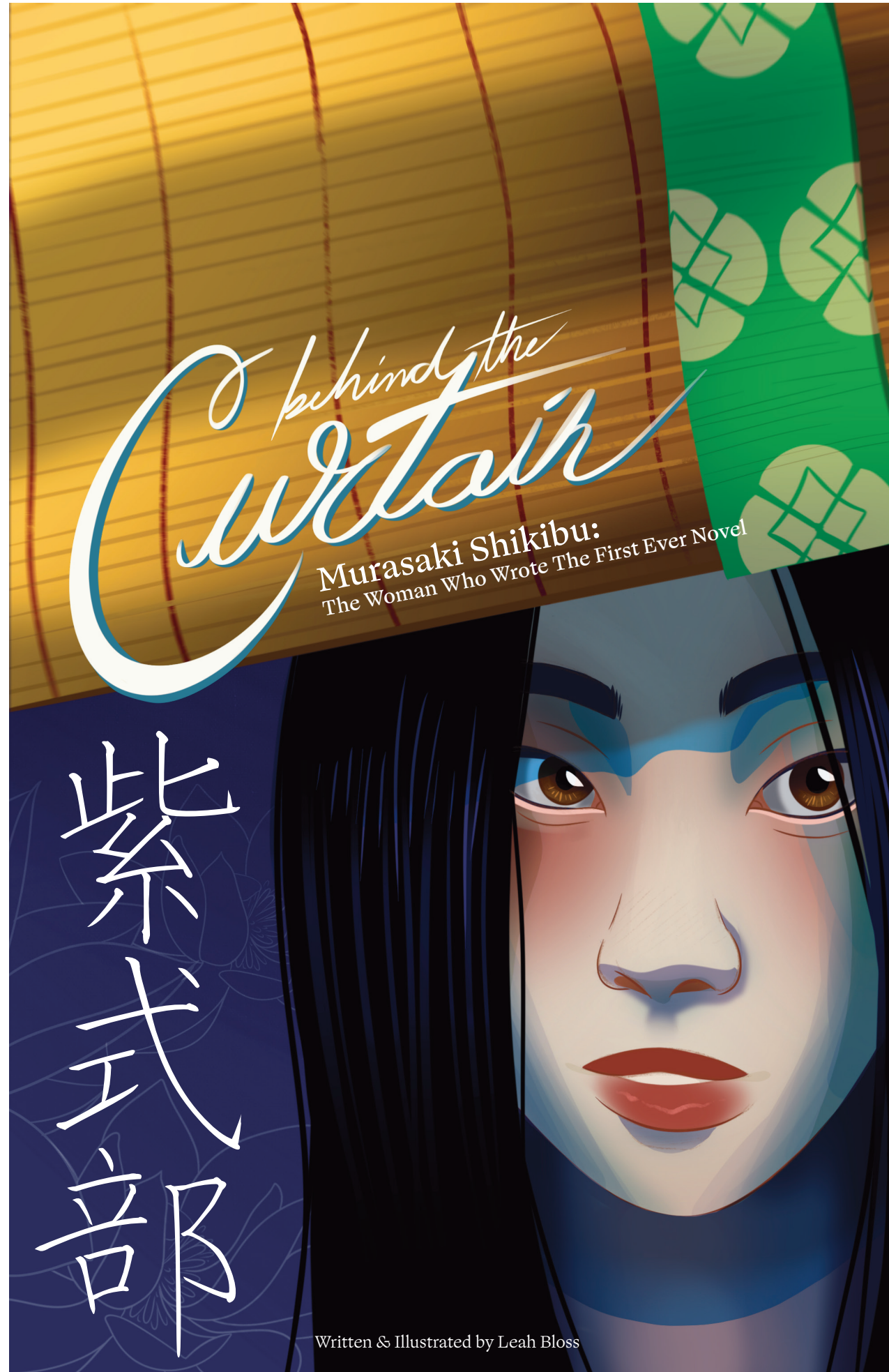
Isolated and unhappy, she eventually withdrew from court life, devoting herself fully to her writing.

Though centuries have passed, her legacy endures. Murasaki Shikibu—widow, poet, and the world's first novelist—left behind a voice that time could never silence.



Week 7

Progress Day 1



Overcome with sadness, Murasaki decided she needed to get away from the bustle of the city and traveled to Ishiyama-dera.

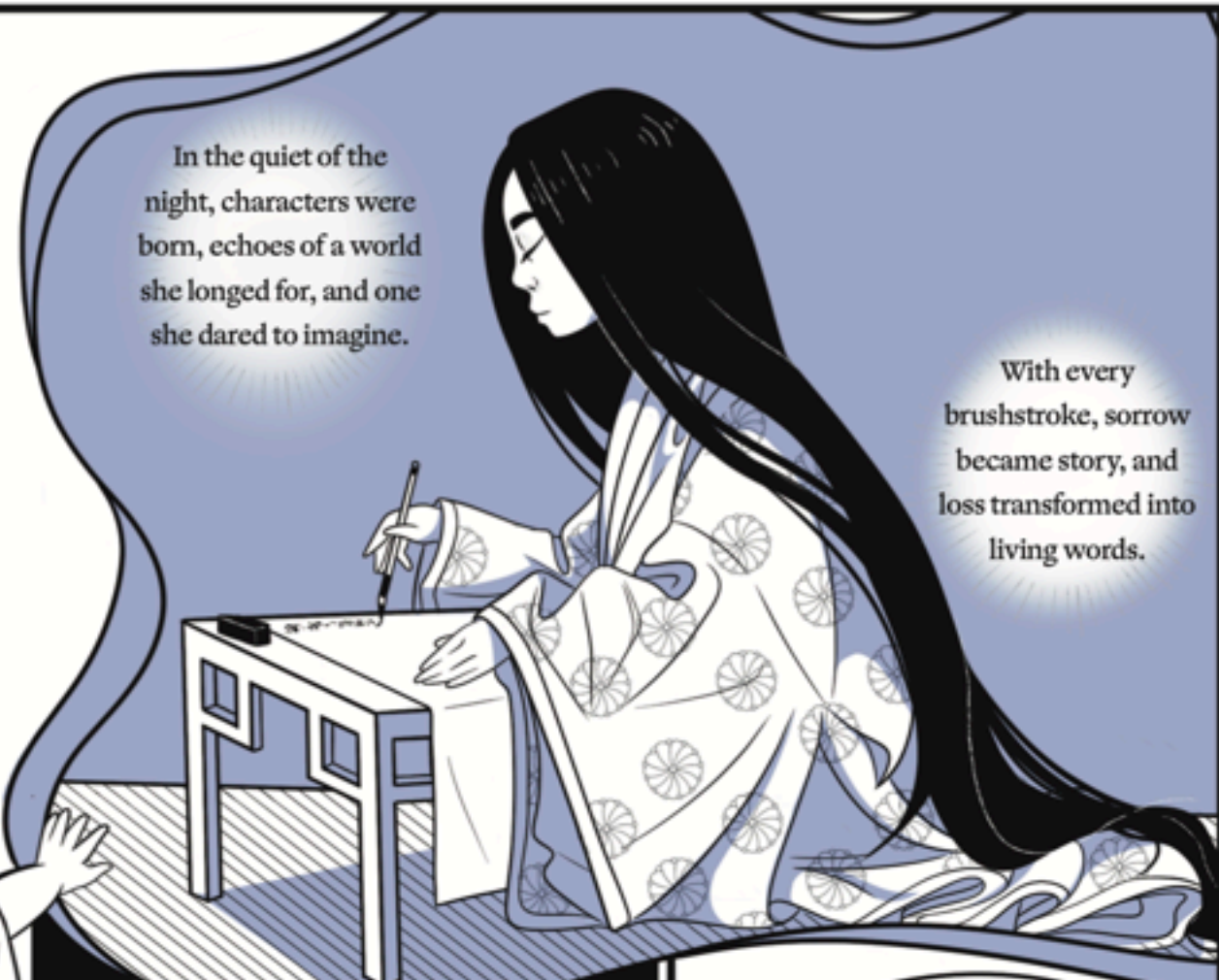


I can't take it anymore! I need to leave!



I understand

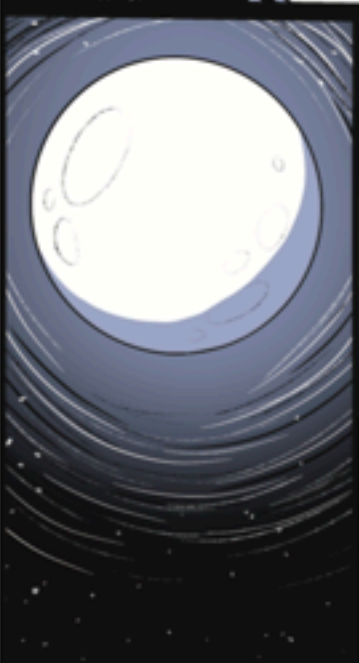
In the quiet of the night, characters were born, echoes of a world she longed for, and one she dared to imagine.



With every brushstroke, sorrow became story, and loss transformed into living words.



What began as private writings soon spread among her friends,



Under the silver glow of the moon, inspiration stirred within her. Her grief gave way to vision. That night, she began writing The Tale of Genji.

Her writing spread quickly, even reaching the powerful nobleman Fujiwara no Michinaga.

Who copied and shared her work across Kyoto.



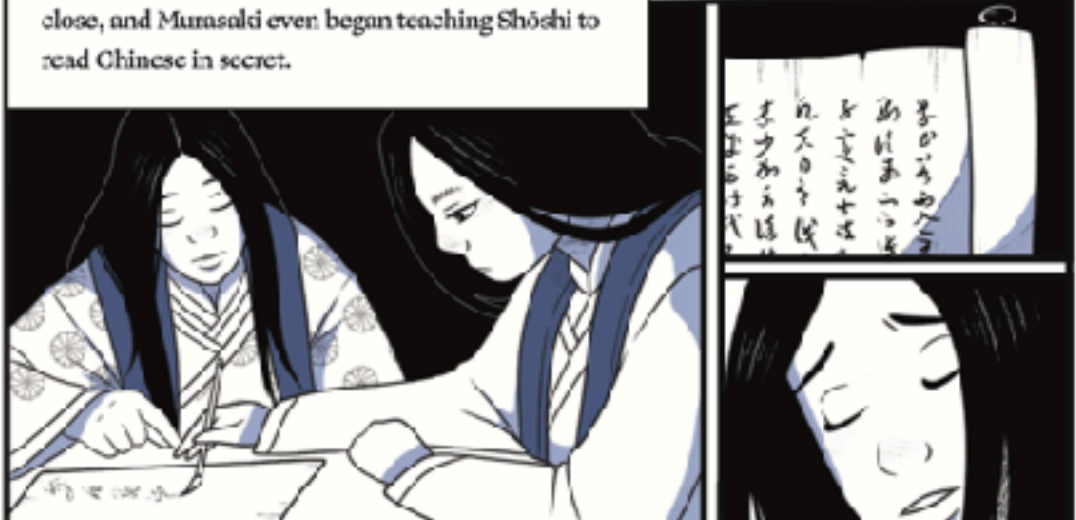
This is excellent! I have to find who wrote this!



Your talent is extraordinary. I want you at court—as tutor to my daughter



Murasaki returned to Kyoto, where she met her new student, Empress Shōshi. The two soon became close, and Murasaki even began teaching Shōshi to read Chinese in secret.

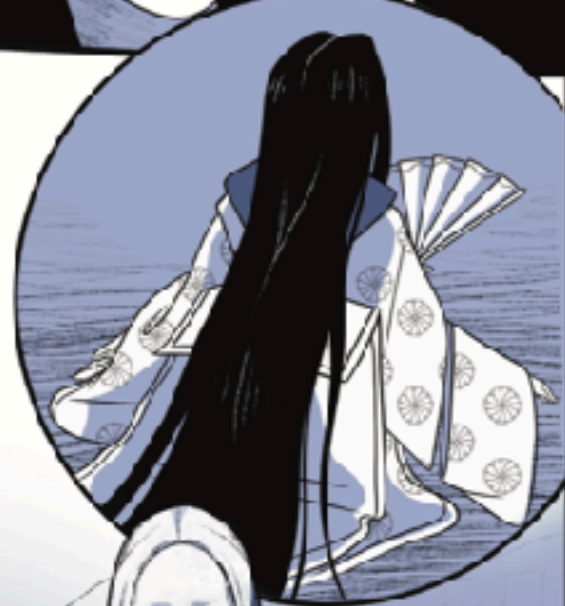


Not everyone welcomed her. Some women mocked her, sneering that she was 'The Lady of the Chronicles', a jab at her rare knowledge of Chinese. Murasaki had never boasted of her learning, yet the cruel words cut deep.

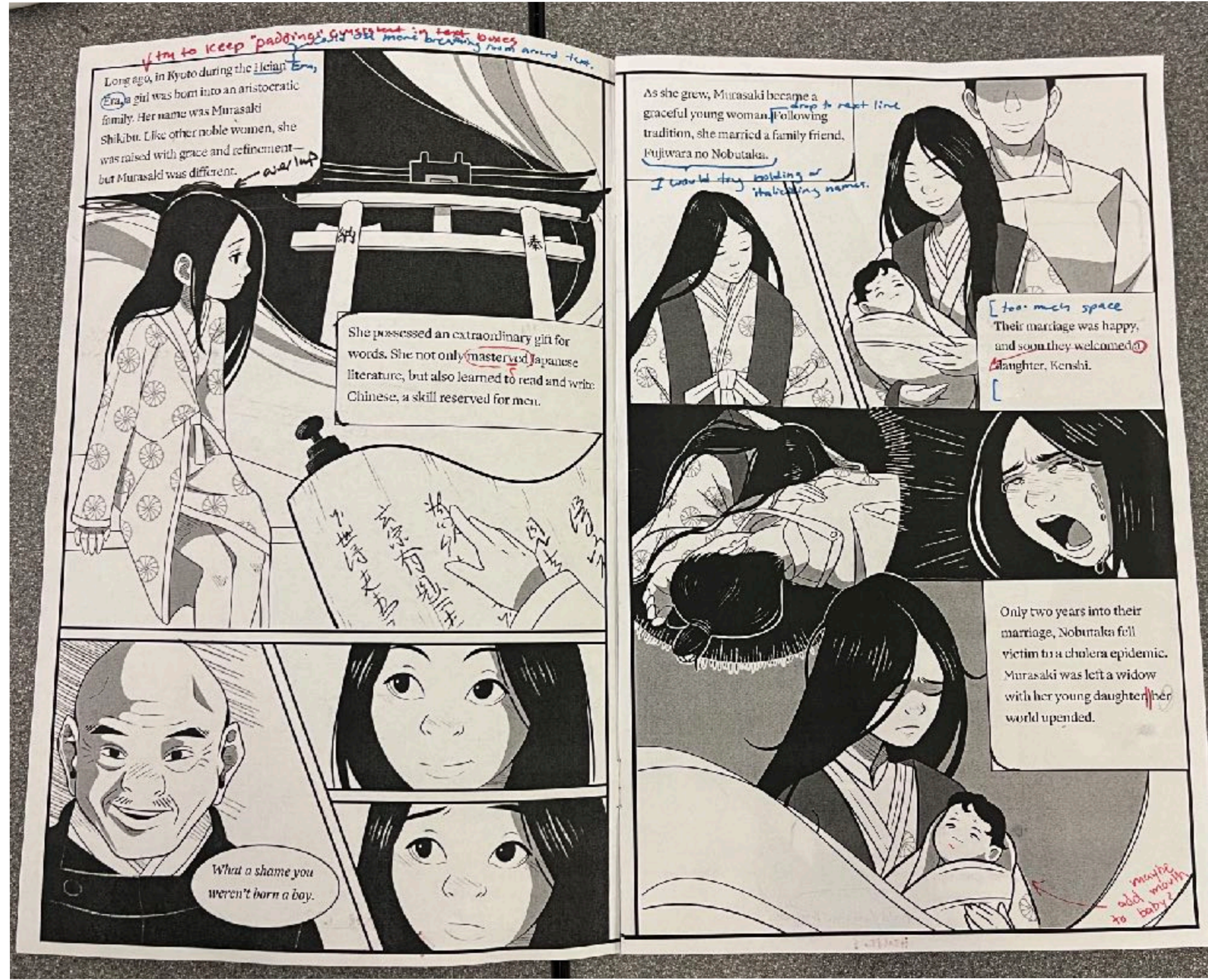
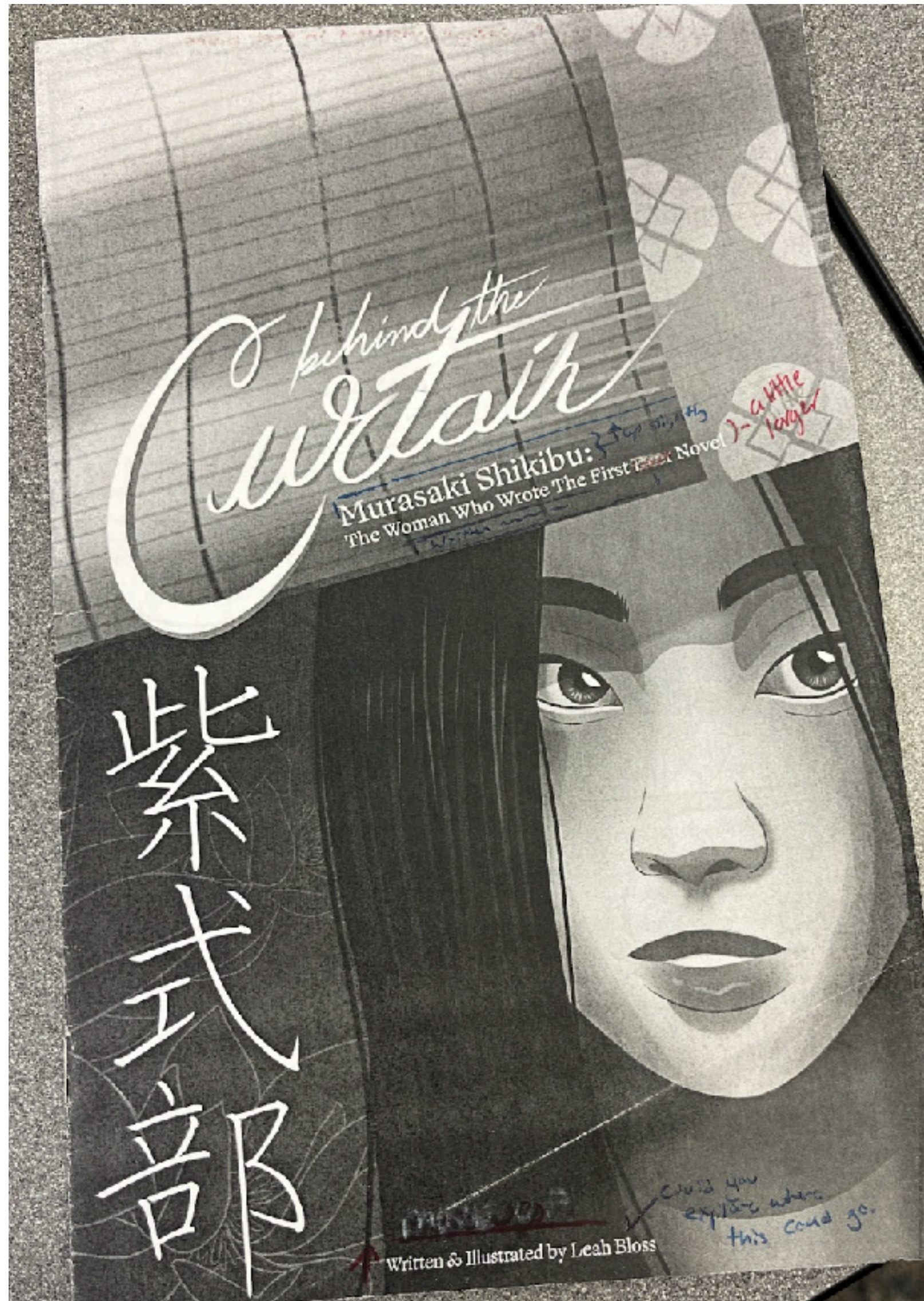


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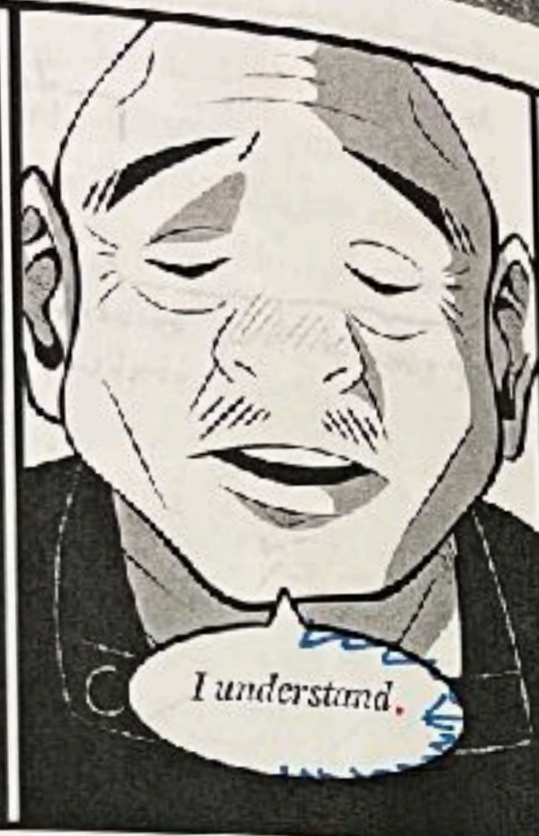
Day 1 Proof



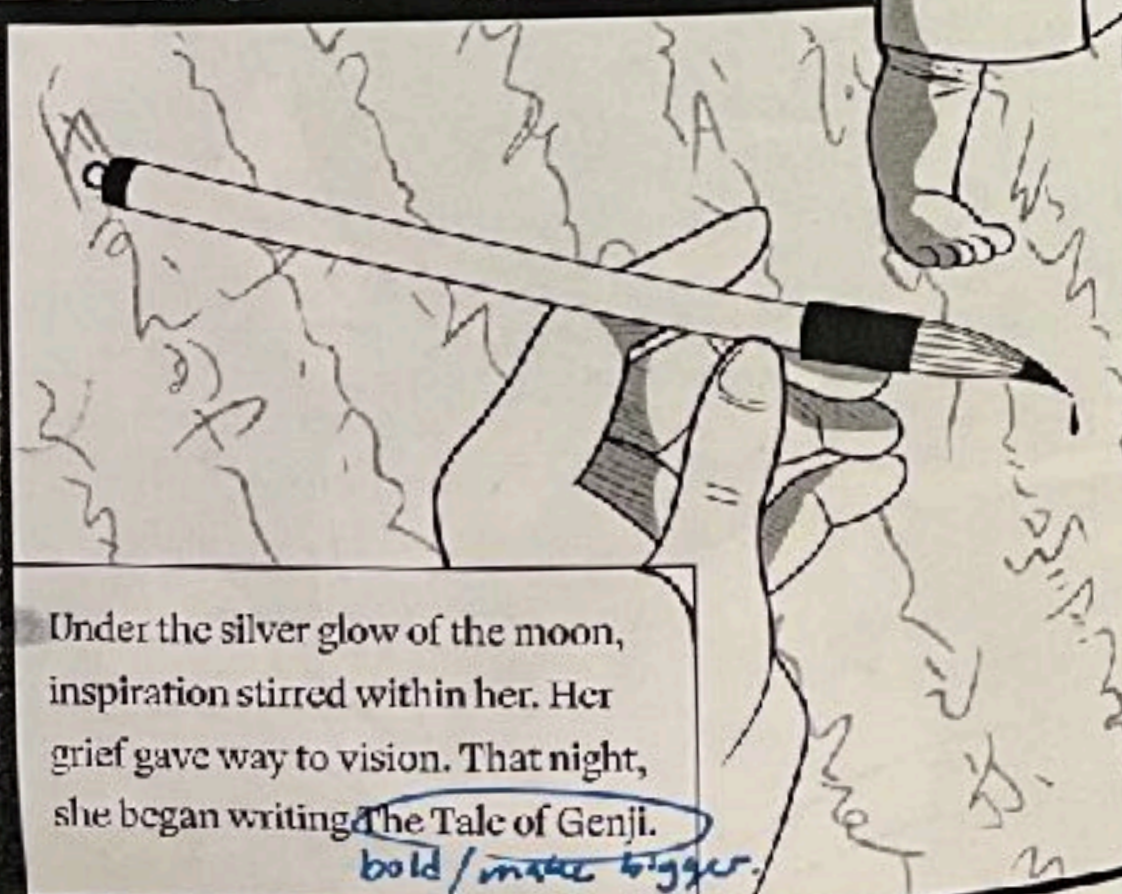
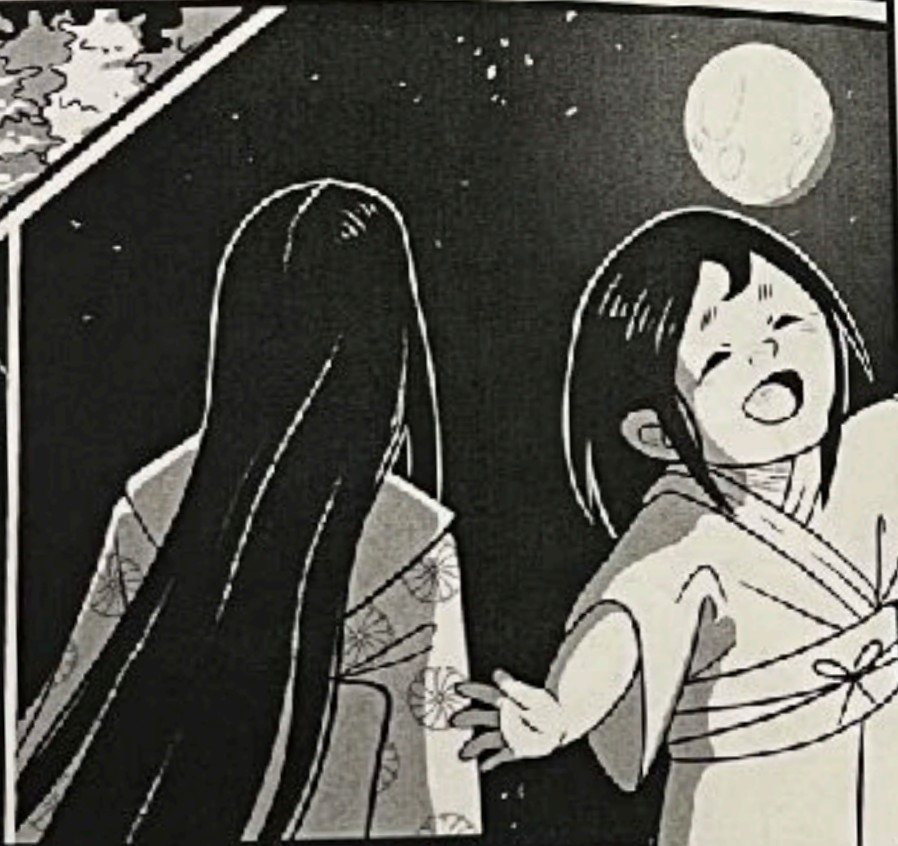
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I can't take it anymore! I need to leave!



I understand.



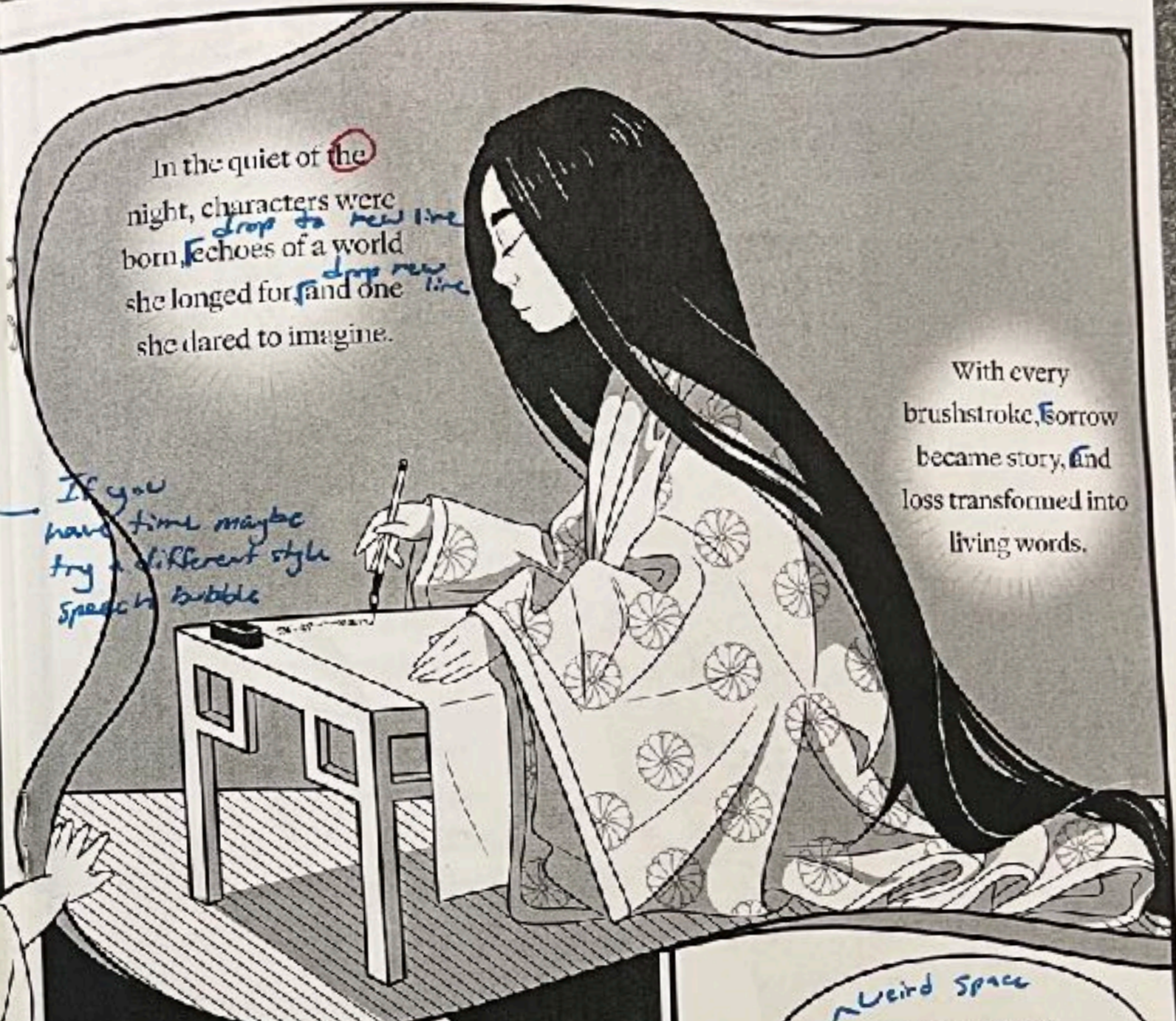
Under the silver glow of the moon, inspiration stirred within her. Her grief gave way to vision. That night, she began writing the Tale of Genji.

bold / make bigger

italic?

In the quiet of the night, characters were born. Echoes of a world she longed for, and one she dared to imagine.

If you have time maybe try a different style speech bubble



With every brushstroke, sorrow became story, and loss transformed into living words.

What began as private writings soon spread among her friends,

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make box wider

who copied and shared her work across Kyoto.

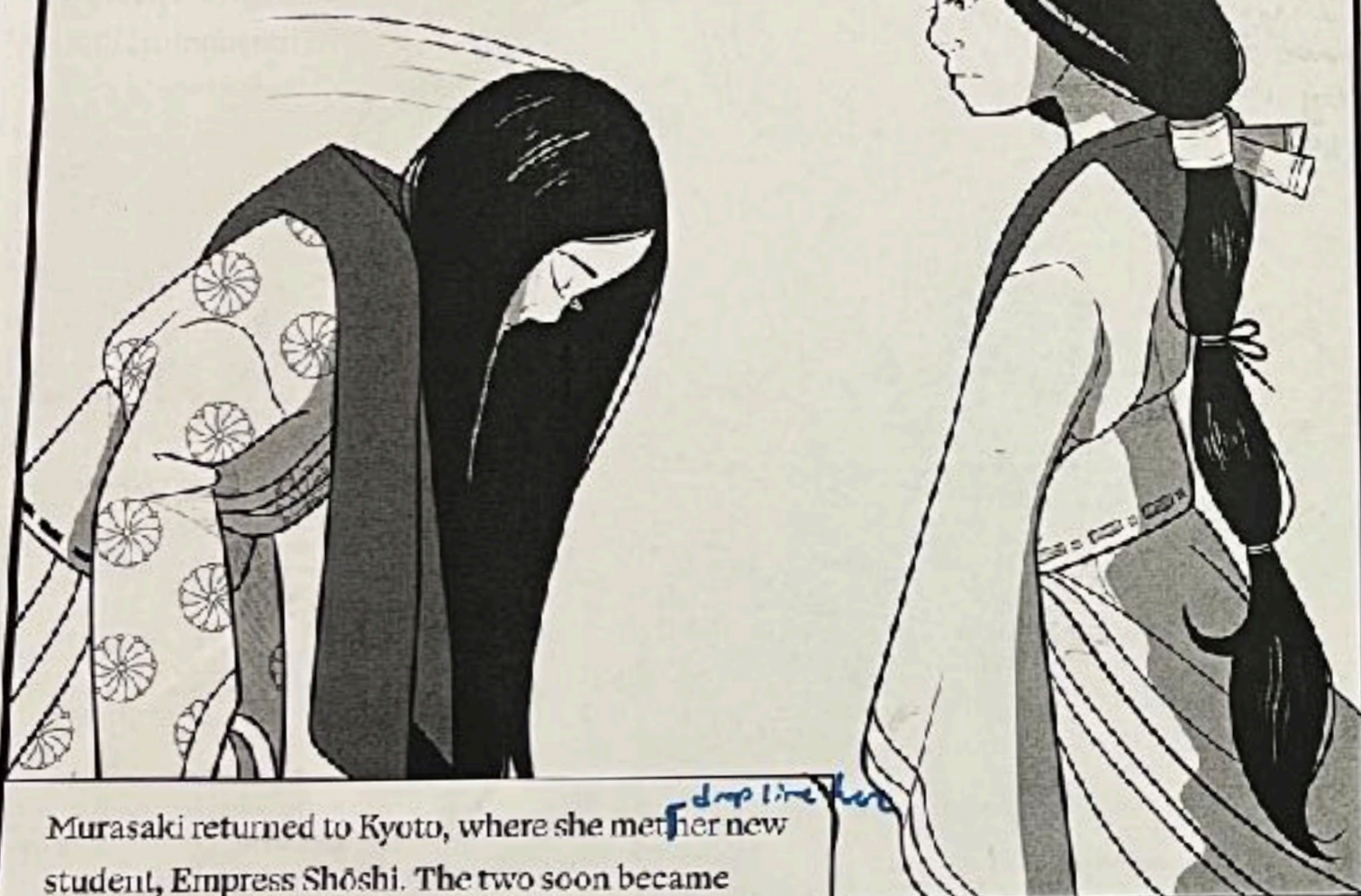
Weird Space
This is excellent!
I have to find who wrote this!



fix spacing



too close to top
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to my daughter.



drop line here
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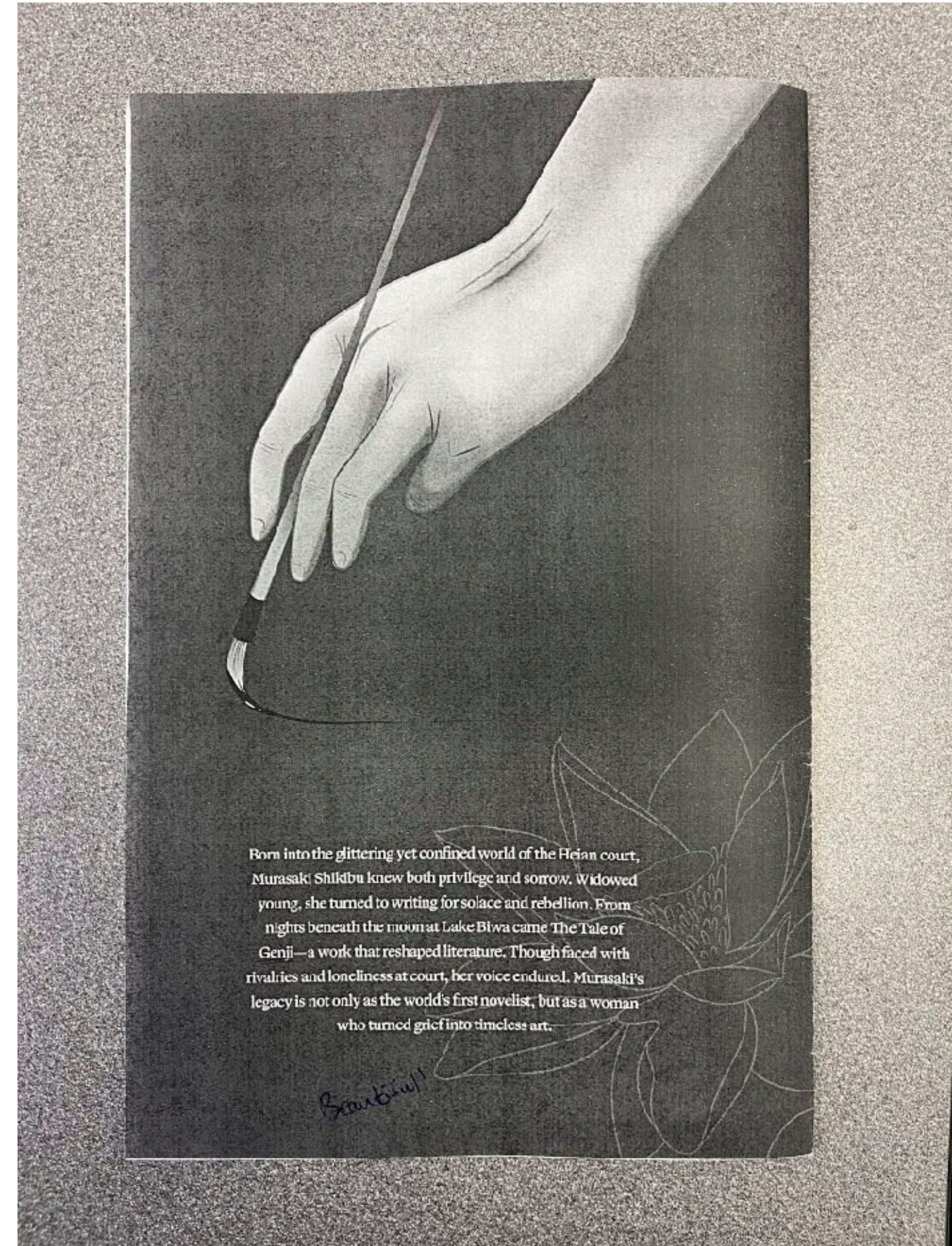
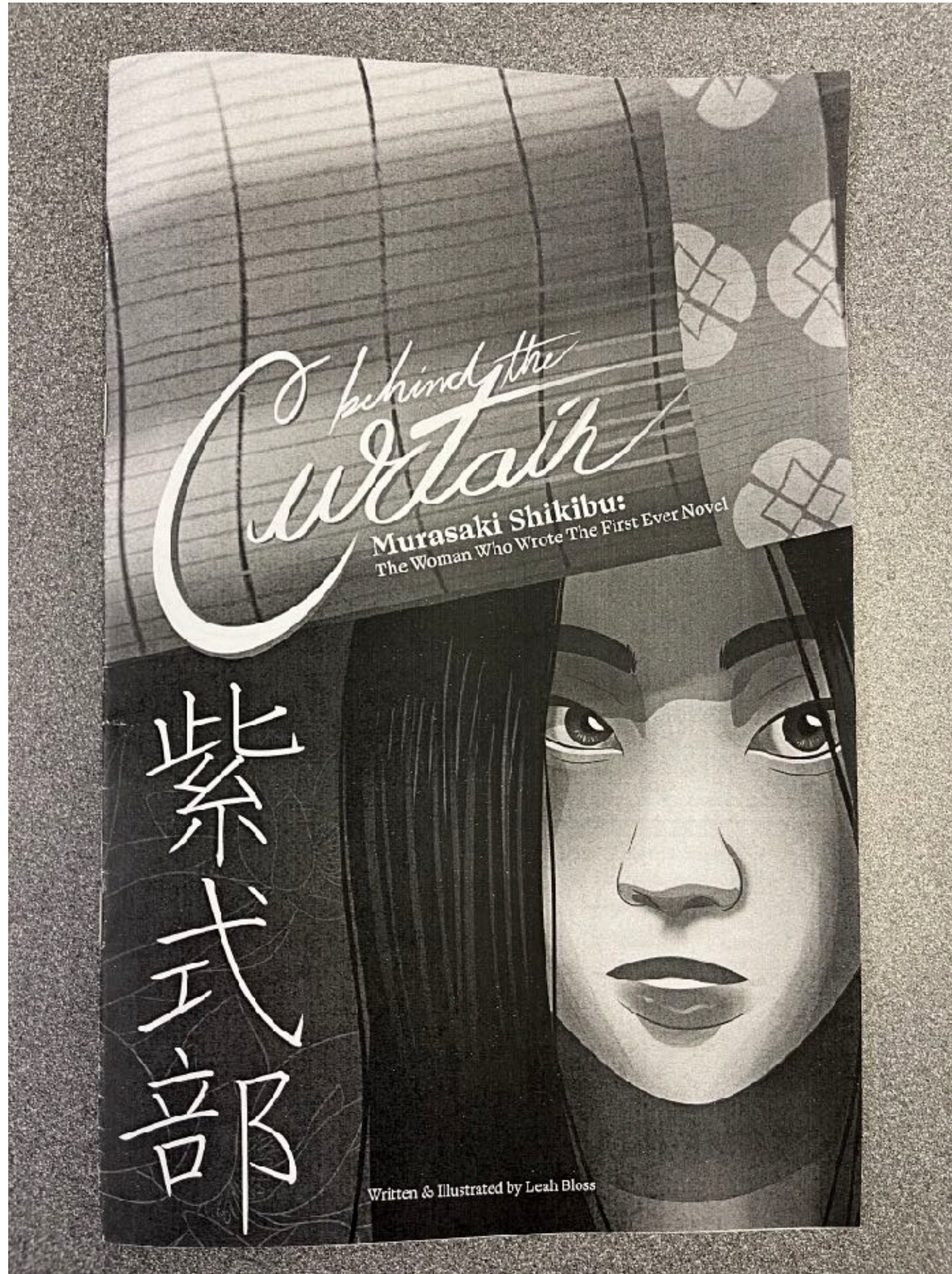
This feels too long
Isolated and unhappy, she eventually withdrew from court life, devoting herself fully to her writing.



Though centuries have passed, her legacy endures. Murasaki Shikibu—widow, poet, and the world's first novelist—left behind a voice that time could never silence.



Day 2 Proof



Born into the glittering yet confined world of the Heian court, Murasaki Shikibu knew both privilege and sorrow. Widowed young, she turned to writing for solace and rebellion. From nights beneath the moon at Lake Biwa came *The Tale of Genji*—a work that reshaped literature. Though faced with rivalries and loneliness at court, her voice endured. Murasaki's legacy is not only as the world's first novelist, but as a woman who turned grief into timeless art.

Bloss

Long ago, in Kyoto during the Heian Era, a girl was born into an aristocratic family. Her name was Murasaki Shikibu. Like other noble women, she was raised with grace and refinement—but Murasaki was different.



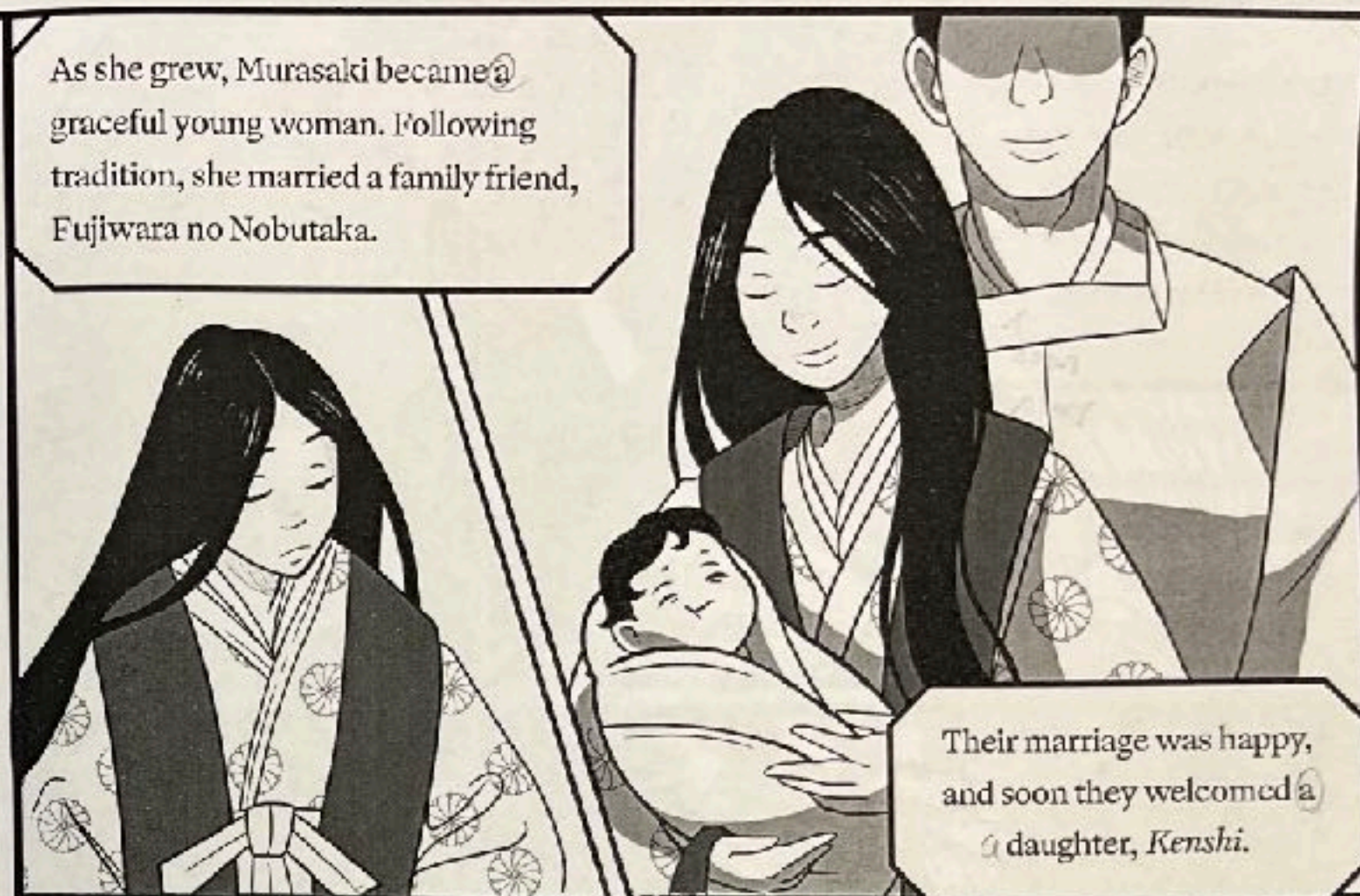
She possessed an extraordinary gift for words. She not only mastered Japanese literature, but also learned to read and write Chinese, a skill reserved for men.



What a shame you weren't born a boy.



As she grew, Murasaki became a graceful young woman. Following tradition, she married a family friend, Fujiwara no Nobutaka.

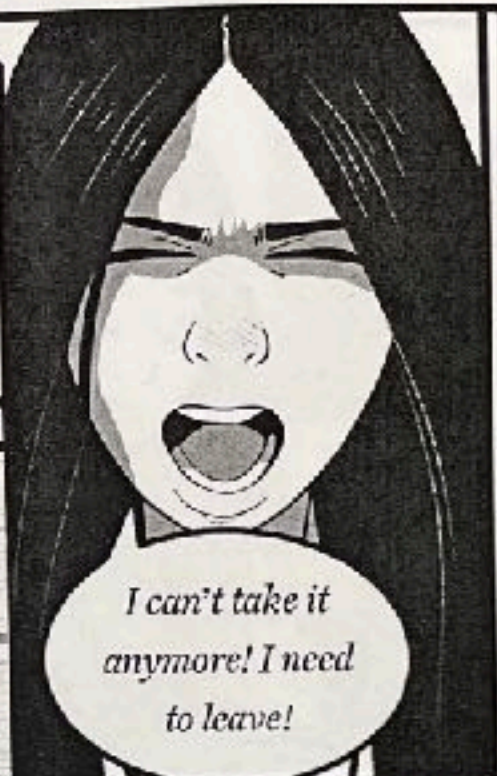
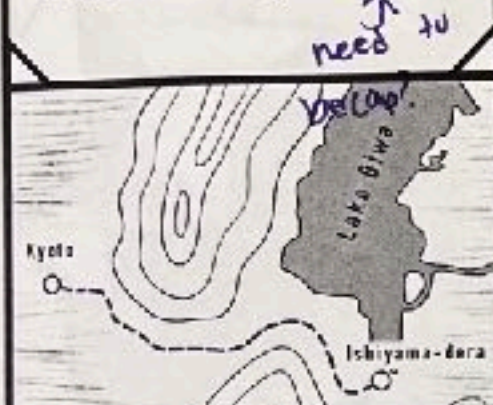


Their marriage was happy, and soon they welcomed a daughter, *Kenshi*.



Only two years into their marriage, Nobutaka fell victim to a cholera epidemic. Murasaki was left a widow with her young daughter, her world upended.

Overcome with sadness, Murasaki decided she needed to get away from the bustle of the city and traveled to Ishiyama-dera.

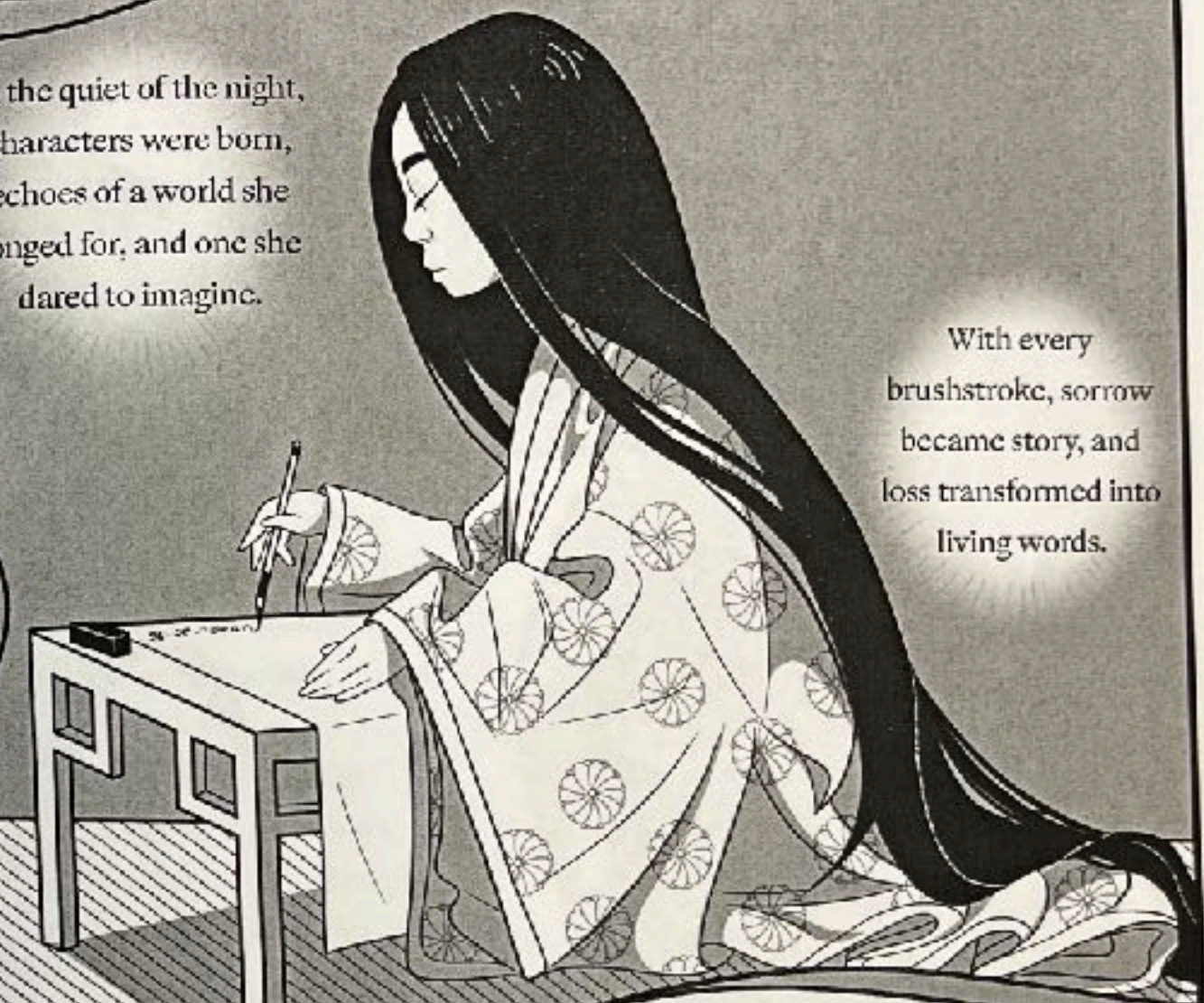


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I understand.

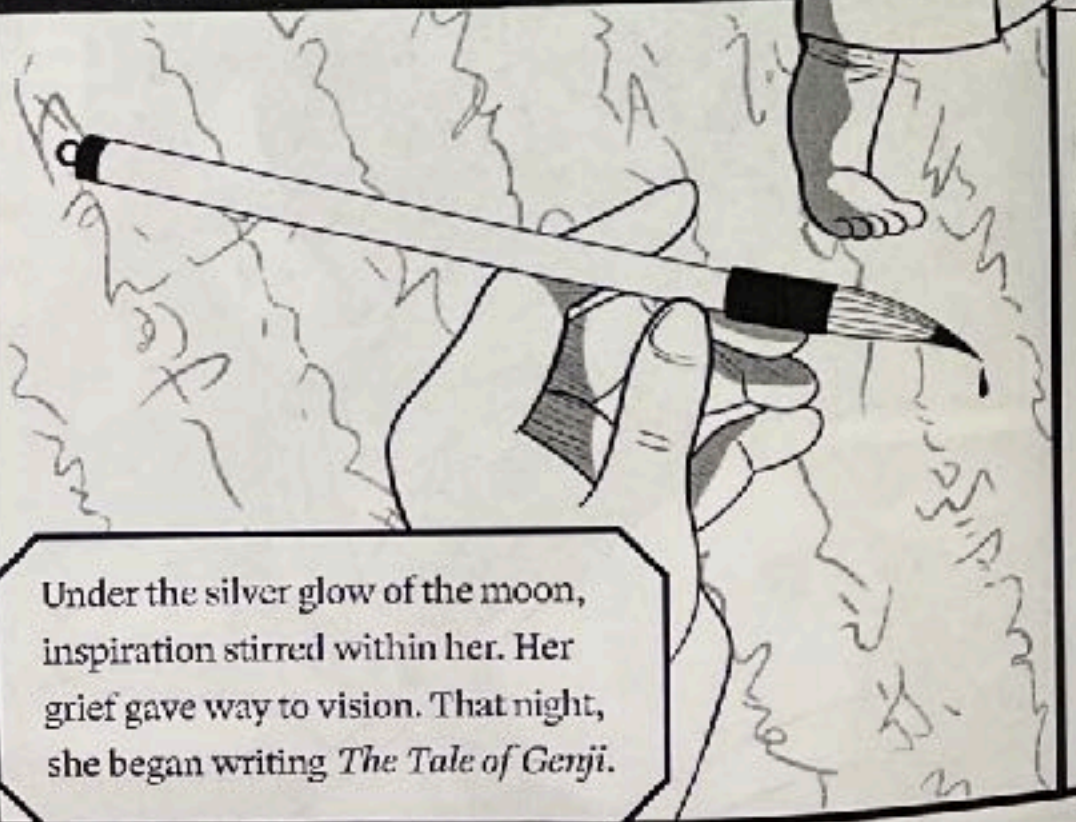
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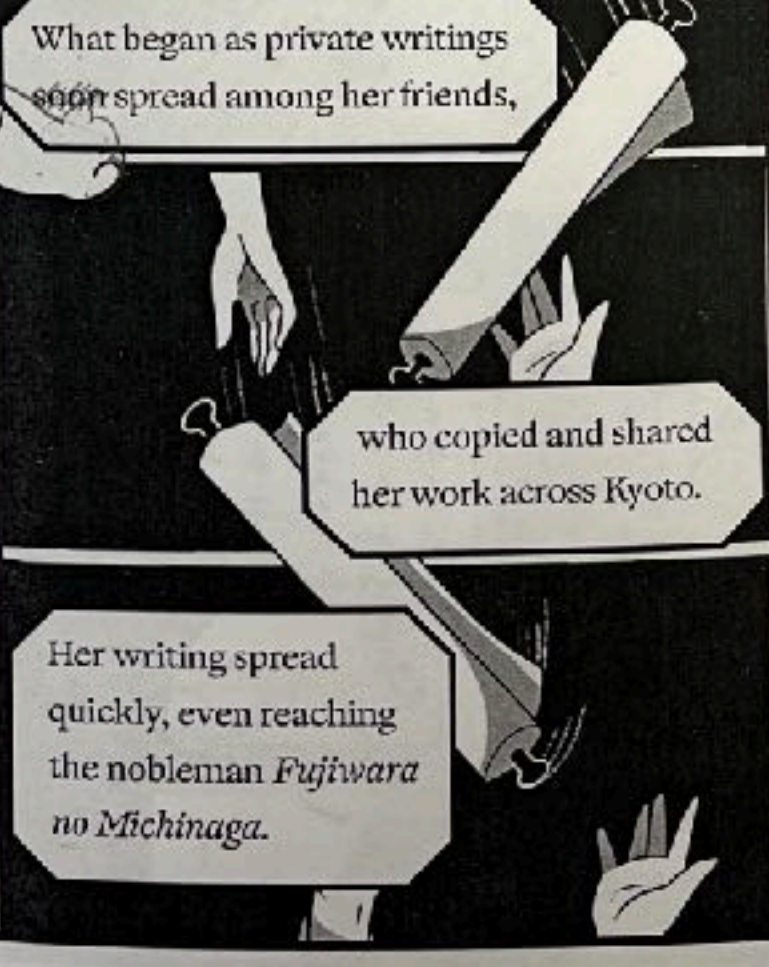
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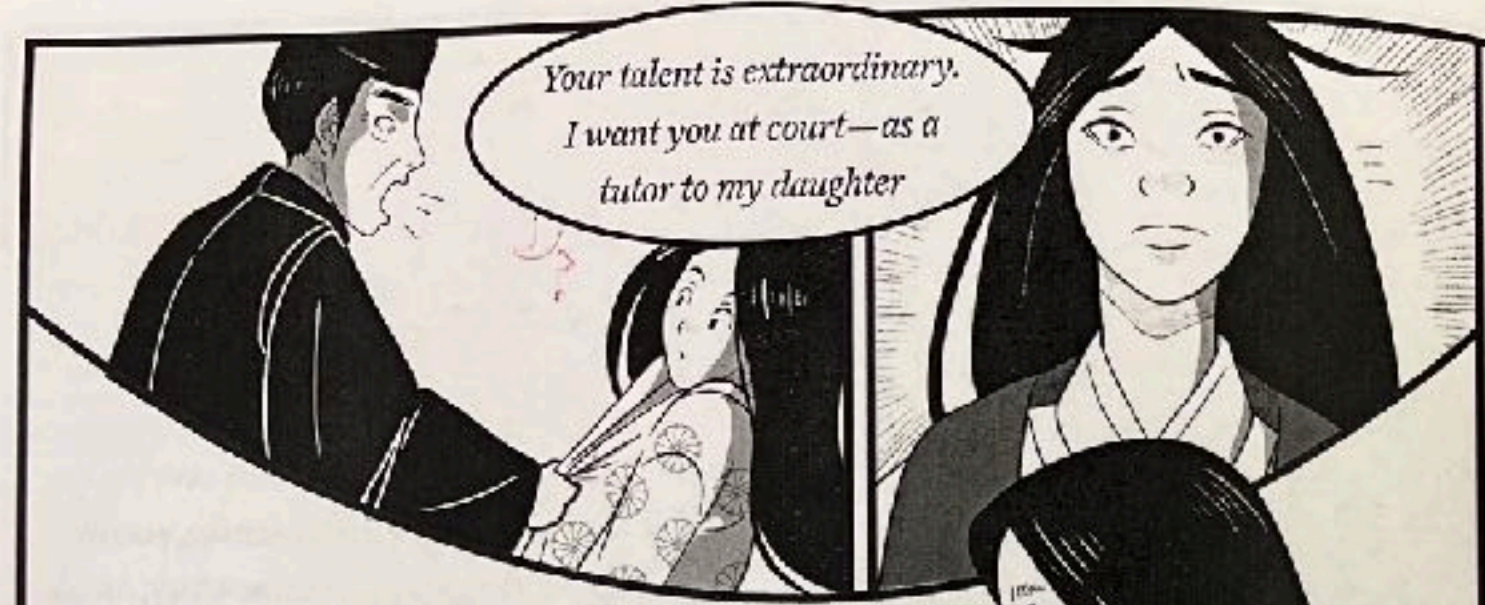


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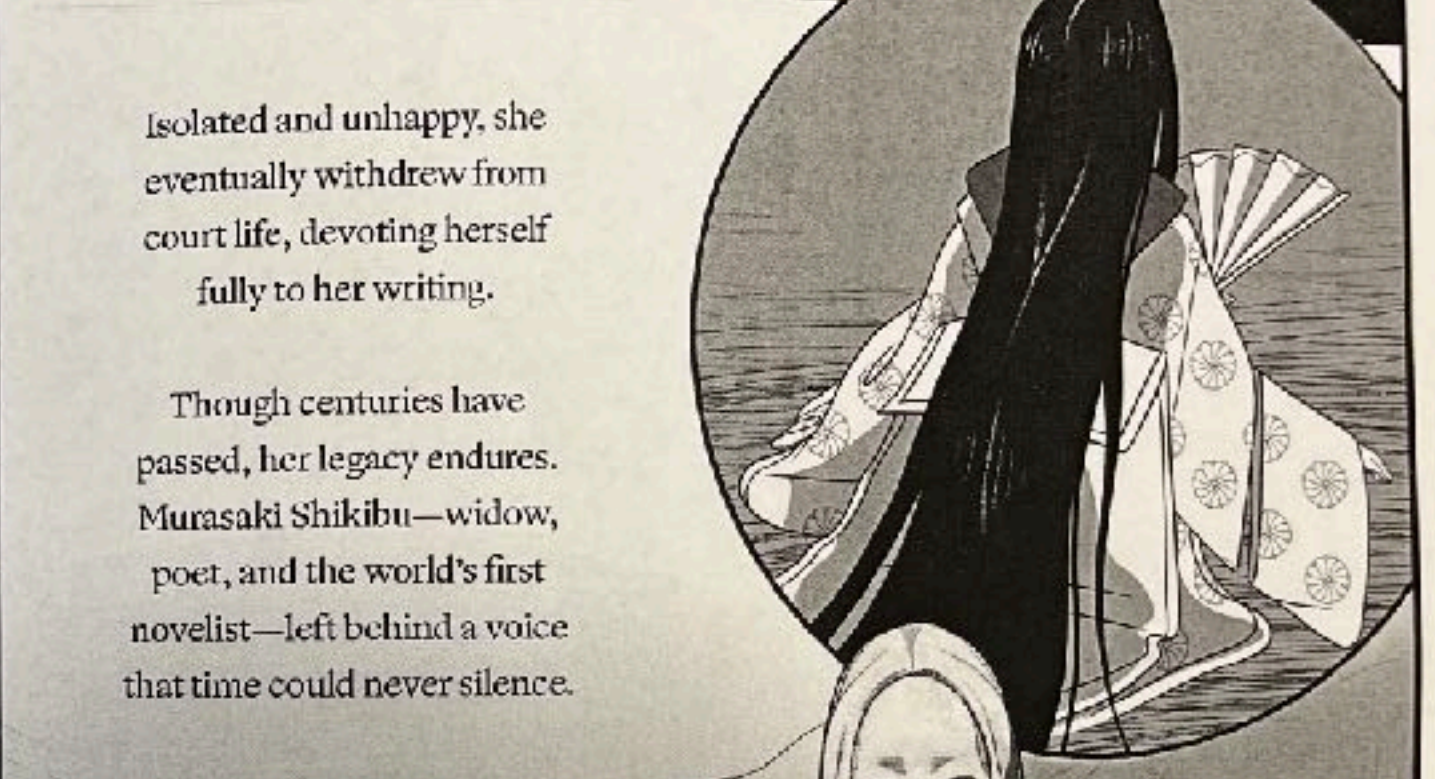
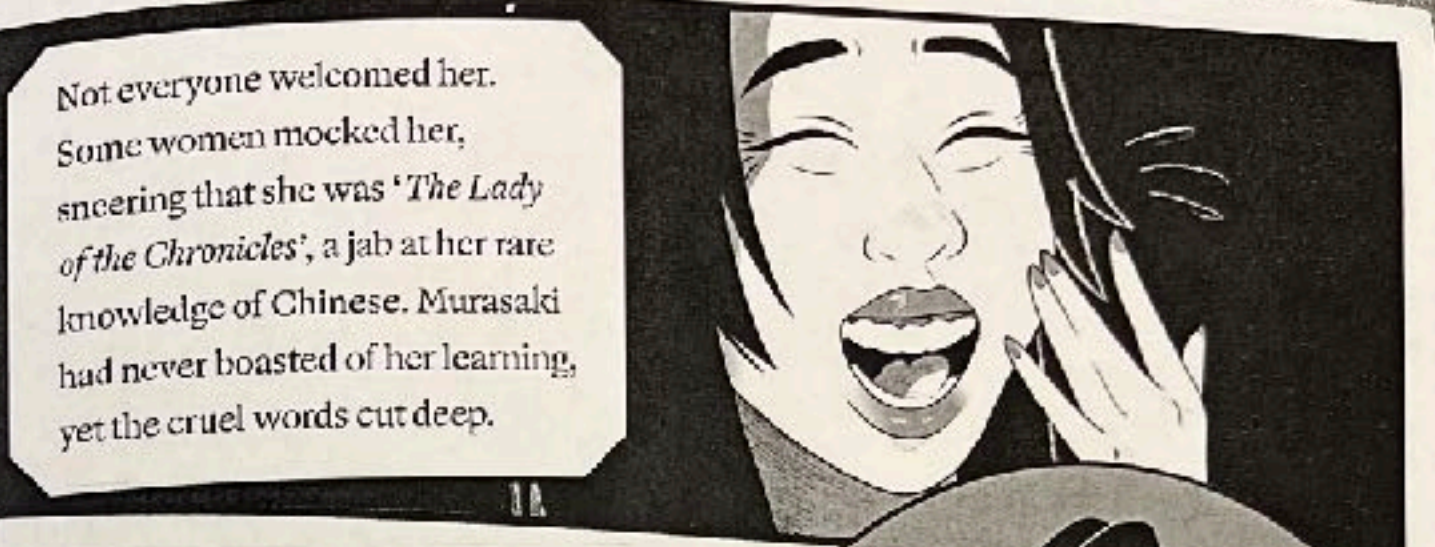
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