



Bella the Beaver Saves the Day

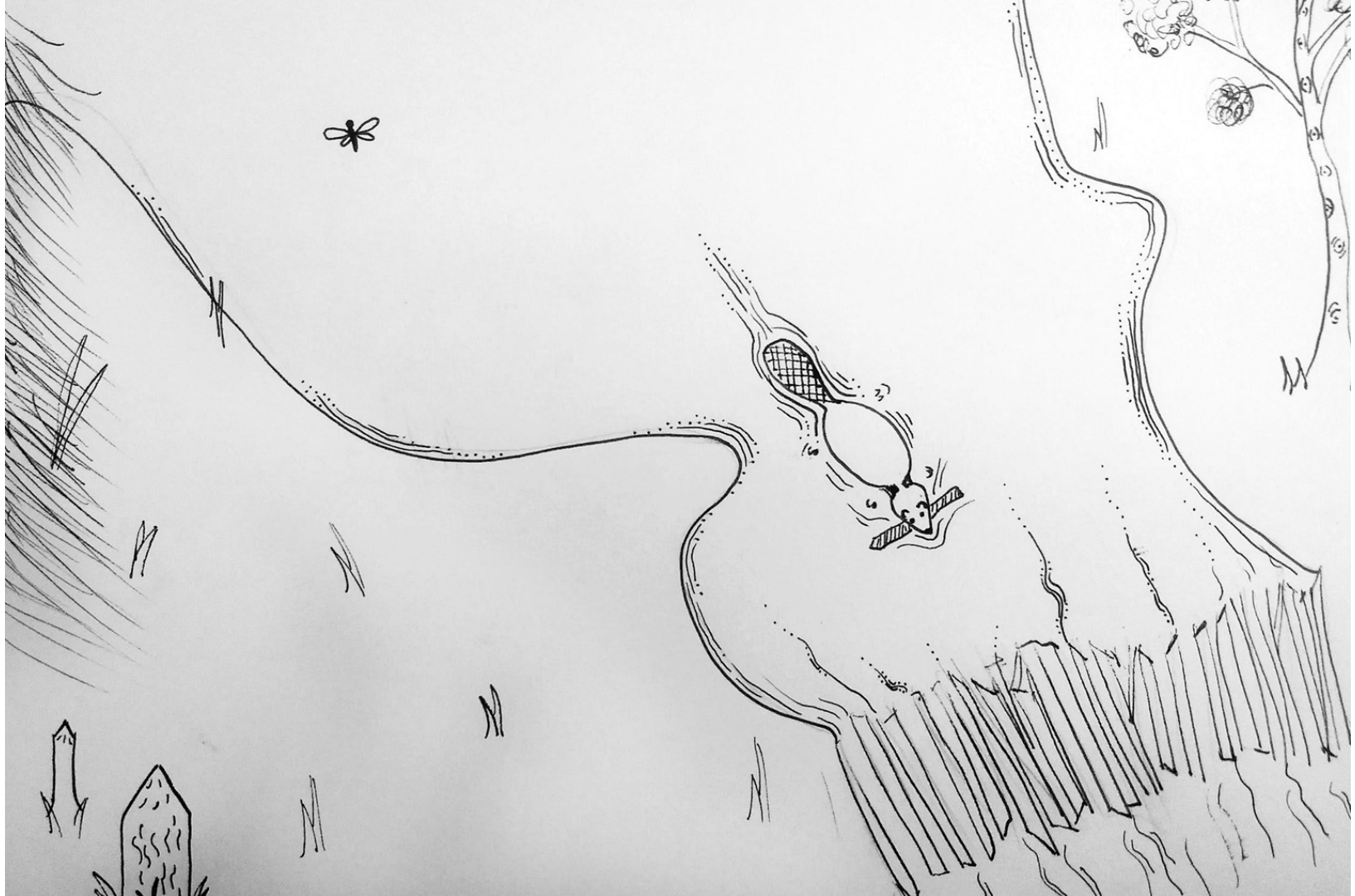
A Children's Story of Wild Connections and
Unexpected Outcomes

Written and Illustrated by Jessica Albery

Bella the Beaver graduated from the Beaver Training Academy, and with a heart full of wanderlust she said her goodbyes and left her childhood lodge to see what the world beyond the ridgeline had to offer. She explored peaks and valleys, meadows and forests, streams, lakes and ponds. Deep in the Sierra Nevada's she found a stream of cold mountain water running through a wide open valley. The water was a bit murky and smelled a bit funny, but she could see the potential. It had plenty of young trees nearby, perfect for building a dam, so Bella decided to make it her new home. She went to work gnawing down trees with her two front teeth that continuously grow. She used these logs to dam her favorite spot on the stream.



Bella's work on the dam took her quite a while. It only took her 20 minutes to gnaw down a tree, but she needed so many trees! She was so tired she slept all day, but as the sun went down she was back to work adding to her dam. This area was much more lonely than where she grew up. At her childhood beaver lodge, she was used to having family members around, but she was also used to seeing tons of other critters. She missed her friends from home. After a hard night's work placing the last of the logs on her dam, she kicked up her feet, and had a celebratory dinner of willows leaves and branches. She knew the work was not done, tomorrow it would be time to build herself a lodge to call home.



The next evening at sunset, Bella emerged to see the fruits of her labor. Her dam was doing its job, blocking the stream, and water had started to spread into the surrounding grasses. Bella smiled to herself, and then went to work gnawing down trees for her lodge. She knew the lodge needed to be in the middle of the pond, to offer her protection from predators like mountain lions and bobcats.

Each night as Bella emerged at sunset she happily noted that her pond was getting bigger and bigger, until it decided it was full enough. Over time she also started to notice other changes around her pond. Grasses were growing more abundantly on the shore, and reeds and cattails were starting to pop up in the water. She noticed more insects. There was more variety in types, as well as an increase in the number of bugs. She liked watching the dragonflies flit across the water with their iridescent wings. Mosquitos loved the quiet waters of the pond, and multiplied quickly.

Beaver Dam on Trout Creek in Truckee, California

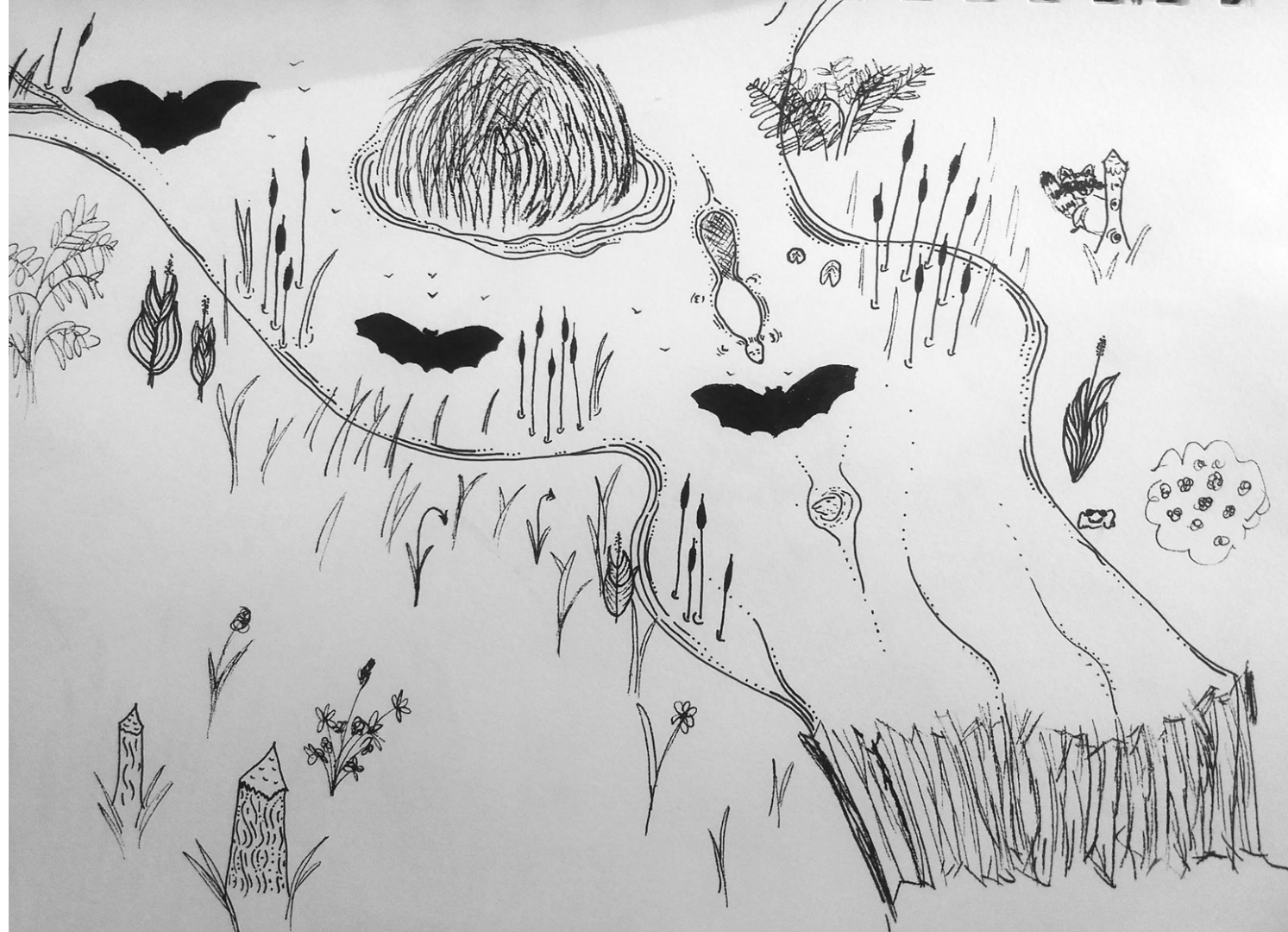


After the bugs increased, Bella started to notice more birds in the area. She quickly made friends with Dan and Donna Duck, who had spent the winter in sunny San Diego, but were happy to be back in the mountains for the summer. On their flight north they noticed Bella's pond, and did not remember it from the year before. They decided to stay, since there was an abundance of grass, tiny fish, and worms.

Bella also noticed an increase in fish swimming in her pond. She noticed trout as well as Kokanee Salmon. They seemed to enjoy the cool, deep waters that gave them protection from predators.



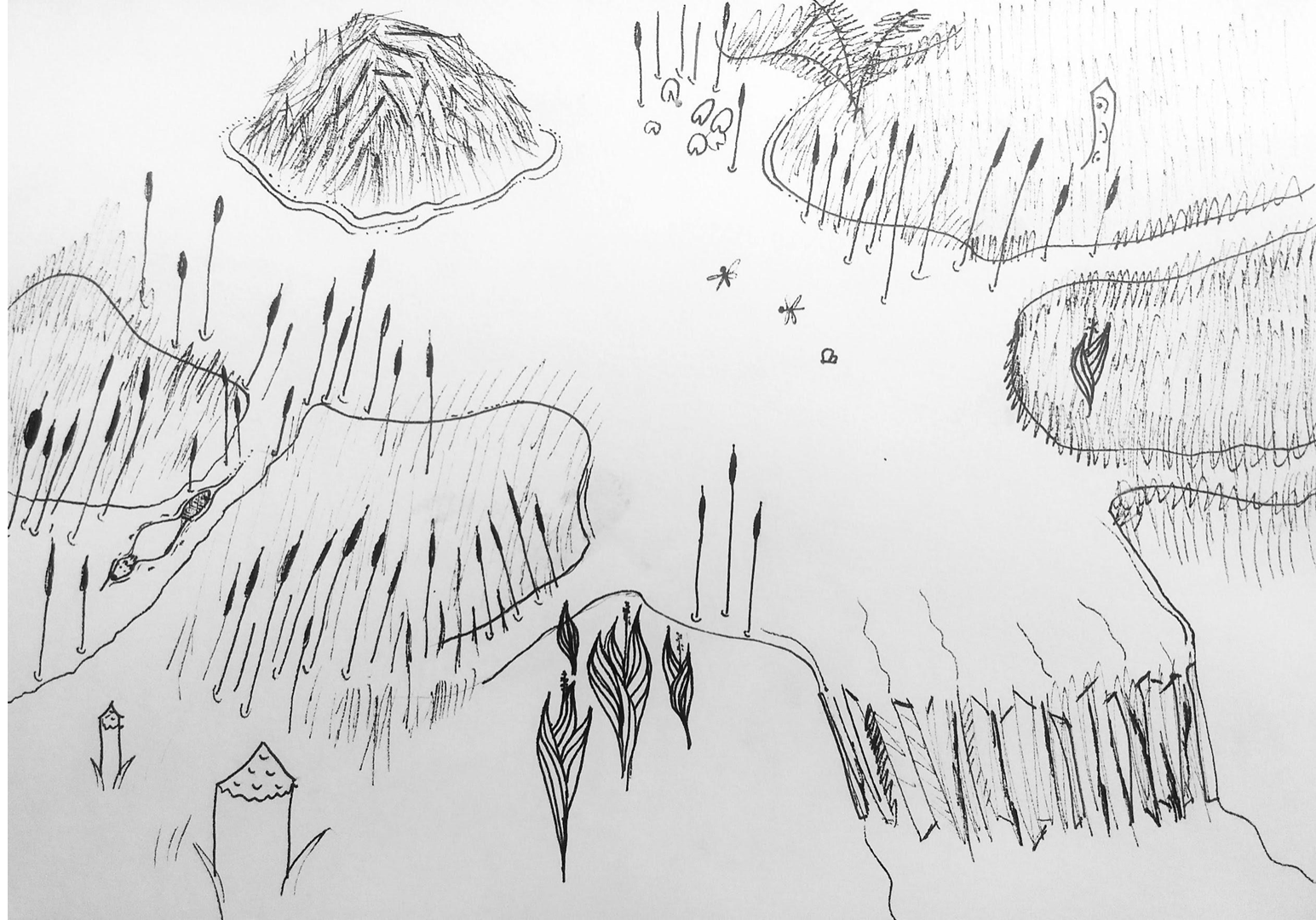
Bella loved looking up as the sky turned violet to try to spot the Little Brown Bats. Most nights Lily, a Little Brown Bat about the same age as Bella, would seek her out, and then fly in close to buzz the top of her head. Lily said their family moved to the area recently, when they were in search of more insects to feast on.



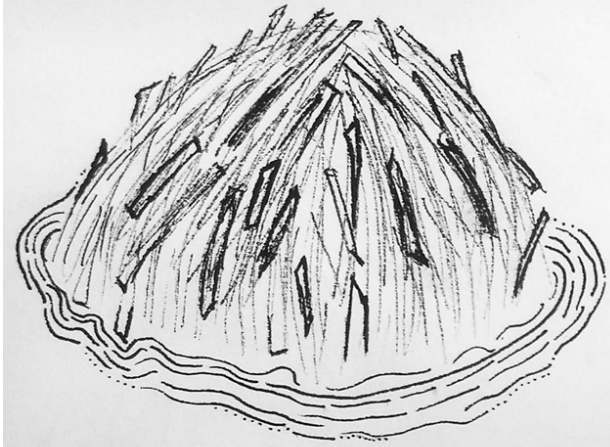
Rick the Raccoon had started making it a nightly habit of stopping by the pond to try to catch an unsuspecting fish. After spotting him from afar once or twice, Bella finally ran into Rick while collecting the last logs for her lodge. She was so startled by him that she dropped her log. After introductions, they had a chat, and Bella found out that Rick had been traveling twice as far to get water and go fishing at another stream before she arrived. He said this stream had been too polluted, so there were never enough fish. Since Bella's dam had been built, Rick said he had noticed that the new wetlands were cleaning pollutants and silt out of the water, creating clear water flowing downstream. This made for better drinking water, and also created better breeding grounds for the fish, which is why he had seen so many more fish recently. Rick thanked Bella for her hard work, and said he appreciated being able to fish and drink from the pond she created so close to his home.



Bella began digging out channels in the dirt surrounding her pond. As she dug, these channels filled with water, creating a network of “highways” that she could use to and from her favorite feeding grounds. She noticed that water loving plants, like Corn Lilies and Horsetails were starting to move into the area surrounding her pond.



One evening as Bella emerged from her lodge, she spotted a black bear fishing for Kokanee Salmon. The red-backed Kokanee had finished spawning, and Bruno the Bear was having a feast in preparation for a winter of hibernation.



Distant thunder woke Bella earlier than usual one afternoon. She poked her head out of her lodge and saw dark clouds and a flash of lightning. Thunder boomed a second later. Bella retreated to her lodge to wait out the storm. Once things quieted down she headed out to collect her dinner. The storm had stopped, but the air was hot and oppressive. She caught a whiff of smoke on the wind. She noticed more and more animals, and many looked distressed. Donna and Dan Duck flew in, and landed in the pond near her. They said lightning had struck nearby, and a forest fire had started and was heading this way. Rick the Raccoon, Bruno the Bear, Claire Coyote, Jason the White-Tailed Jackrabbit and Bobby Bobcat all came running in, trying to escape the fire. Audrey and James, the two tiny Pikas, came into the marshy area for protection. They all watched in fear as the fire came closer and closer. They could feel the heat coming towards them. The flames were fast approaching. They burned up the stumps of the trees Bella had cut down to dam the creek. They burned the grass and the shrubs nearby. The flames lapped at the furthest water channel Bella had dug. The flames did not seem to like the water in Bella's channel, and didn't come any closer. The animals watched in wonder as the wildfire retreated from their wetlands.



Wise old Grandpa Owl flew in and said he had seen the wildfire from the sky, and had seen this happen before. He said that Bella's pond and channels had kept all the plants thoroughly watered, so they were too wet to burn, and that her water channels created a barrier around their wetlands. All the animals cheered and thanked Bella for her hard work, and for saving their homes. That day Bella went to bed happy to have so many new friends, and thankful that all her hard work had paid off.

Beaver Lodge at Schwabacher Landing. Grand Teton National Park



What can you do to show kindness to others, care for your habitat or improve the environment? Use the space below to draw a picture of something, small or large, that you could do to make a difference.