

JAPANESE FAIRY TALE

THE FOUNTAIN
OF YOUTH

Rendered into English
by Lafcadio Hearn

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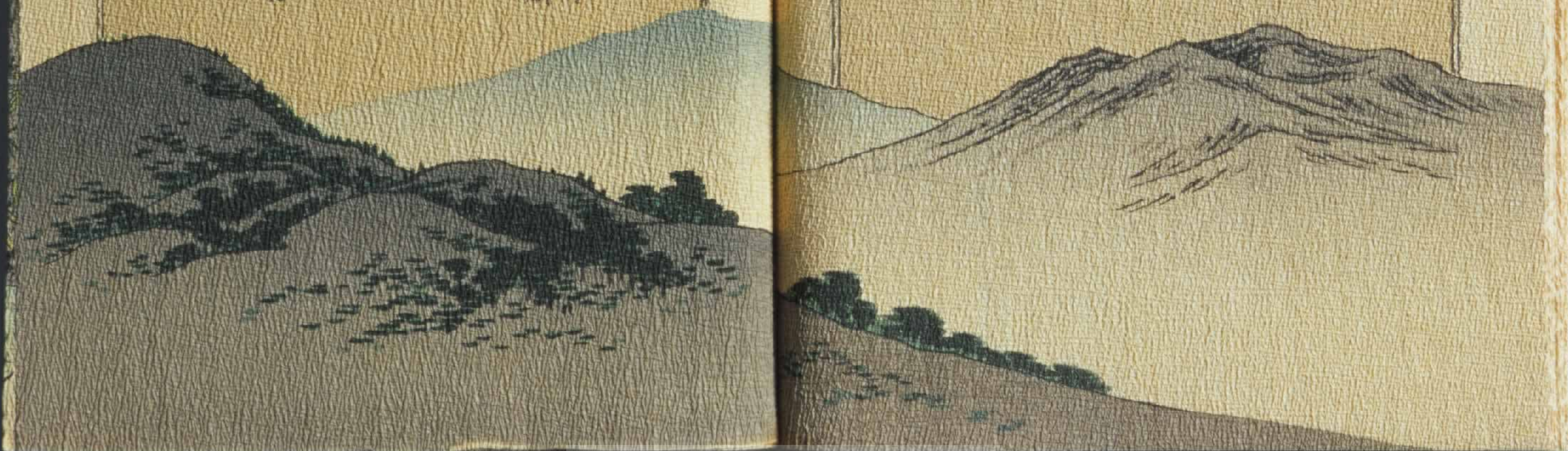
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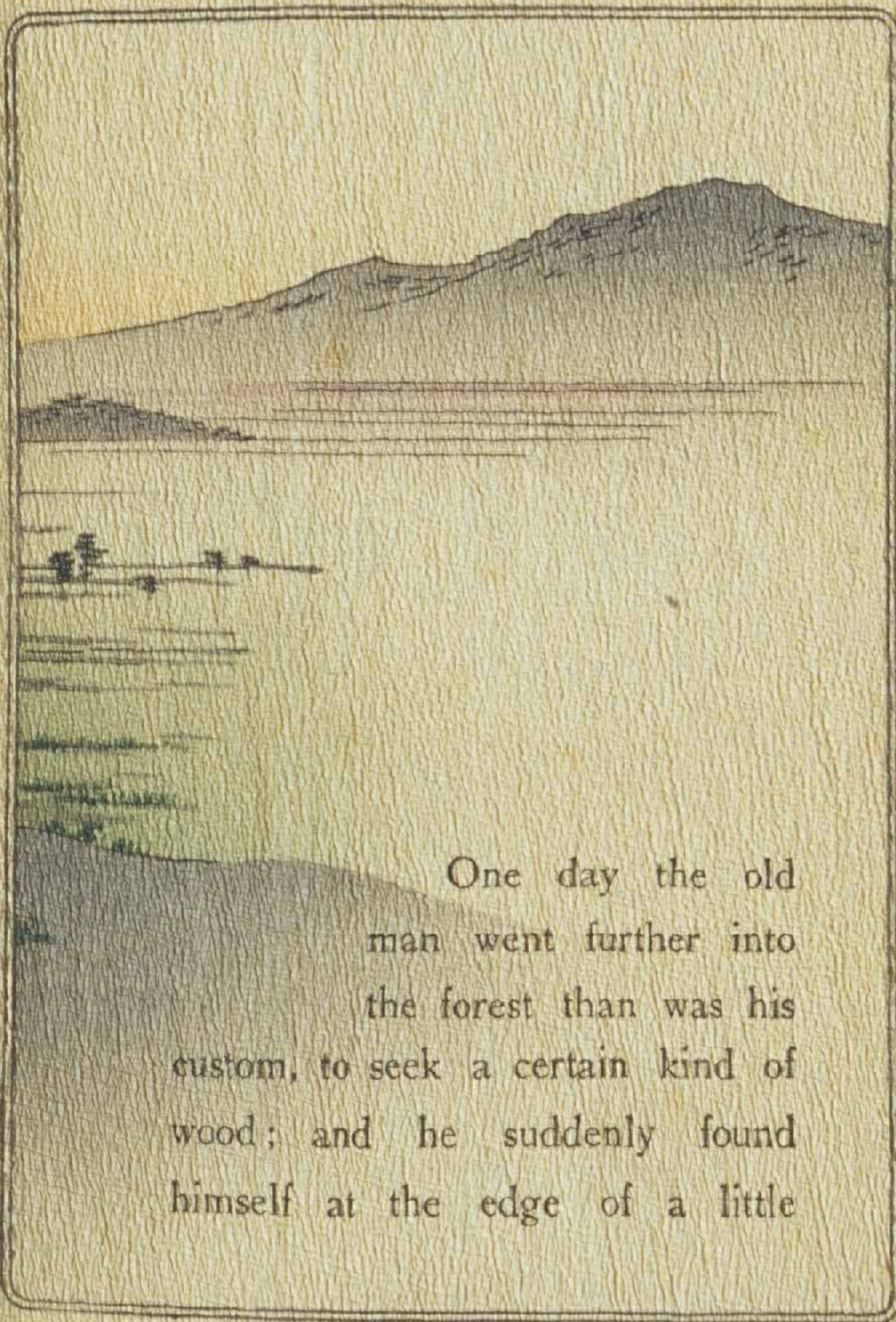
LONG, long ago there lived some-
where among the mountains of
Japan a poor woodcutter and his
wife. They were very old, and had
no children. Every day the husband



went alone to the forest to cut wood,
while the wife sat weaving
at home.



One day the old
man went further into
the forest than was his
custom, to seek a certain kind of
wood; and he suddenly found
himself at the edge of a little



spring he had never seen before. The water was strangely clear and cold, and he was thirsty; for the day was hot, and he had been working hard.

So he doffed his huge straw-hat, knelt down, and took a long drink.

That water seemed to refresh him in a most extraordinary way.



Then he caught sight of his own face in the spring, and started back. It was certainly his own face, but not at all as he was accustomed to see it in the bronze mirror at home. It was the face of a very young man! He could not believe his eyes. He put up both hands to his head which had been quite bald only a moment before, when he had wiped it with the little blue towel he always carried with him. But now it was covered with thick black hair. And his face had become smooth as a boy's: every wrinkle was gone. At the same moment he discovered himself full of new strength. He stared in astonishment at the limbs that had been so

long withered by age: they were now shapely and hard with dense young muscle. Unknowingly he had drunk of the Fountain of Youth; and that draught had transformed him.



First he leaped high and shouted for joy;—then he ran home faster than he had ever run before in his life. When he entered his house his wife was frightened;—because she took him for a stranger; and when he told her the wonder, she could not at once believe him. But after a long time he was able to convince her that the young man she now saw before her was really her husband; and he told her where the spring was, and asked her to go there with him.

Then she said:—“You have become so handsome and so young that you cannot continue to love an old woman;—so I must drink

some of that water immediately. But it will never do for both of us to be away



from the house at the same time.
Do you wait here,
while I go."

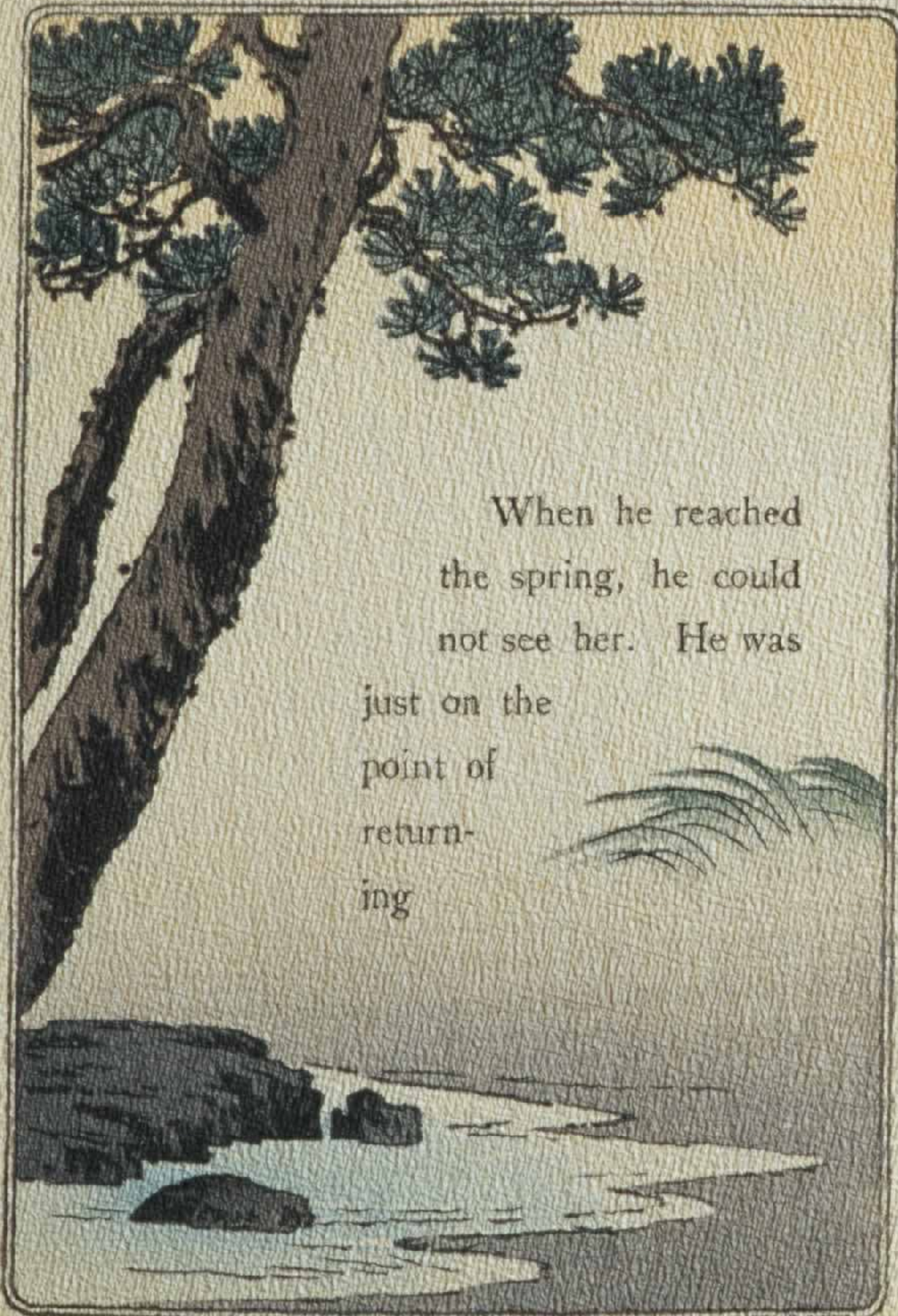
And she ran
to the woods
all by
herself.

She found
the spring and
knelt down,
and began
to drink.



Oh! how cool and sweet that water
was! She drank and drank and
drank, and stopped for breath only to
begin again.

Her husband waited for her impa-
tiently;—he expected to see her come
back changed into a pretty slender
girl. But she did not come back at
all. He got anxious, shut up the
house, and went to look for her.



When he reached
the spring, he could
not see her. He was
just on the
point of
return-
ing

when he heard a little wail in the
high grass near the spring. He
searched there and discovered his
wife's clothes and a baby,—a very
small baby, perhaps six months old.



For the old woman had drunk too deeply of the magical water; she had drunk herself far back beyond the time of youth into the period of speechless infancy.

He took up the child in his arms. It looked at him in a sad wondering way. He carried it home, — murmuring to it, — thinking strange melancholy thoughts.



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