

Artist Statement

My name is Kate Meighen and I am an illustrator that specializes in book covers and children's picture book illustrations. I mainly produce my work digitally, but often incorporate traditionally made assets using mediums such as watercolor, sumi ink, and various pencils. Adding these textures brings much needed depth to my work as I often feel that digital illustration can very easily fall into the 'play-dough' category if left alone.

As my practice developed over my time at PNCA, I started to notice recurring themes of death, grief, and general sadness often combined with fantasy or folk-like stories. As much as I enjoy creating things that are a bit creepy and dark, I think that the best way I can describe my art is that everything is drenched in some varying degree of melancholy. I have the tendency to incorporate that odd comforting sadness into even the smallest of my works; from foxes chasing rabbits to a woman made of smoke reaching for the moon. A little bit of weird and a little bit of grief find their way into each piece, sometimes even without doing it intentionally.

My picture book, "Folke the Kyrkogrim" was born of these same themes. Exploring death and the afterlife in ways that are not prejudiced, harmful, or stereotyped. There is no religion, no gods, and no good or bad place— just a graveyard where everyone meets their guardian, Folke. It was important to me to keep everything as ambiguous as possible in order not to alienate anyone from enjoying and learning from the story.

A kyrkogrim comes from Scandinavian folklore. As legend says, it is the spirit of an animal that was buried in a new graveyard, often before anyone else, in order to take up the job as its eternal guardian. This myth has been explored in various ways throughout multiple cultures, but never in an endearing or respectful way. I wanted to pay homage to these creatures and showcase the work they did for us in life and in death. They deserve to be honored, and their stories deserve to be shared.

Proposal Speech

Good morning, and thank you for attending my proposal presentation,

For those of you who don't know me, my name is Kate and I'm a second year transfer student in PNCA's illustration department.

I'd like to start by sharing with you the story of how I lost my Grandpa John. When I was a Senior in high school he started having major health complications and spent many months in a stale, white walled hospital room. He worked for the Keep Oregon Green Association for 21 years, so I had painted the Three Sisters Mountains for him with a promise that he would never have a room without a view again. He passed away in February of 2017, with my painting hung on the wall across from him.

His death was not the first one I had experienced, in fact I had already lost two other family members within the previous six months, but something about his passing hit me harder. Maybe it was the fact that I had dealt with so much pain in a short period of time, perhaps it was because I knew he wouldn't see me graduate. Even to this day, I could not accurately tell you why, but all of my ambition was swallowed by that grief. I quit my extracurriculars, I did not apply to colleges, and I did not paint again for four years. Despite all that, I am here with you today. It took many years to reach this point, fueled by the support of my family and friends, many amazing instructors, and an outrageous number of monster energy drinks.

My hope is to take my experience with grief and turn it into something beautiful. I will be creating a picture book to open discussion about death, the afterlife, and grief for children who may not have the resources they need in times of mourning. In order to achieve this I have adopted the Scandinavian folk tale, the Kyrkogrim, which is basically a cemetery guard dog. The story will be slightly modernized, and will explore the dog's perspective as we witness his transition from life into the afterlife, showcasing his deeds to the living, as well as the dead. The story aims to provide peace around loss by showing kids how the Kyrkogrim comforts and assists people with 'moving on'; therefore, creates an easier experience when facing the unknown.

I have always found comfort in creating. I spent a majority of my childhood drawing in my room and even sometimes ignored my meal at restaurants in favor of finishing the coloring page the waitress had brought me. I think it is safe to say that I am no longer creating the same way I did as a child.

I did not receive help for dealing with loss as a child, perhaps because I presented strongly to my family, but I probably really needed therapy. The only consolation I had was the shared grief between my family and I which only made it feel that much deeper and inescapable. This experience led me to grow up in a constant melancholic state, where I now seem to find comfort. I find more often than not, I am using it in my art and creating moodier, darker things unintentionally. But now, I think I have hit the point where I want to be more intentional. To be able to help people who are going through their own struggle with grief.

Folklore has been a huge part of my practice for a long time. I enjoy a Greek myth as much as a Grimm fairytale. Spookier themes also just generally interest me more and fit better into the type of work I like to produce. Most folk tales and legends are also not particularly happy, which works out in my favor.

I am deeply interested in my family tree and where I come from. I know that I am primarily German, Irish, and English, but I do not have access to much information beyond what my parents' "Ancestry.com" results said. In recent years, I have felt much more drawn to Scandinavian culture. Though a very small percentage of my total heritage, I have gained a lot of love and interest in its history through pop culture, Scandinavian artists, and my fiance's family.

Scandinavian legends have been the bones of incredible stories told for many generations. It is not only where Norse mythology originated, but also where we see the first accounts of creatures like trolls and giants, made popular by works such as “Lord of the Rings”. The Kyrkogrim is beloved but also relatively unknown, due to its more popular English interpretation called the ‘church grim”. Even though I may be more closely related to my English heritage, I also understand the English and their ‘iffy-at-best’ history. A church grim is viewed as a negative spirit, and is believed to be a harbinger of death, a far cry from the dutiful watch dogs they were meant to be. Writing a story based only on folklore provided by twisting other cultures’ ideologies and traditions was not appealing, so I went to the source instead.

The folklore behind the Kyrkogrim comes from the belief that whoever is the first buried in a new graveyard is trapped there for eternity to guard it from evil. Of course no human wanted that, they wanted to go to their afterlife and party it up in Valhalla or be reborn again, but you couldn’t do that if you were bound to a cemetery. So the Kyrkogrim was created in man’s stead, and it is said that they guarded the boundaries as ferociously in death as they did in life. But not all Kyrkogrimms were made equally, legends vary by locality and through time.

Variations I found include but are not limited to the following:

- Some communities did not use Kyrkogrimms because they believed no one person was bound to be a protector forever, but that it was a duty passed onto the next person buried.
- Dogs were most often buried alive under the foundation of the church, but some sources say that the animals were sacrificed ritualistically
- Grimms were not always dogs, sometimes they were valuable livestock, horses, or wild animals.
- They appear as black dogs and seeing one could be a sign that someone or something unwanted is nearby.
- It is also said that if a grim appears at a funeral that could be taken as an interpretation of where the deceased was headed (if you know what I mean).

In favor of creating a child friendly story, I have omitted some of these darker aspects, while also doing my best to keep the original folklore intact. The narrative will be focused on creating a positive spin on the Kyrkogrim, where the dog doesn’t necessarily know what is going on, but is set on doing his job to the best of his ability - protecting and comforting his many visitors.

“Good Guard Dog” will be an 8x10”, 32 page, separate ended, youth picture book. Included in the production of the book will be an original story, cover illustrations, at least two completed interior spreads, illustrated end pages, and a section at the end for historical context behind the Kyrkogrim. My target audience will be primarily children ages 5-12, but I believe it is a story that anyone of any age will love and find comfort in.

The story came easy, development of our main character was most difficult. I weighed multiple breeds against each other based on my initial sketches, taking not only their guard dog status into consideration, but also their distinguishing features and historical significance. My final three were the Anatolian Shepherd, Broholmer, and Great Pyrenees, all of which are highly regarded working dogs for security and livestock guardianship, but ultimately I moved forward with the Anatolian for its iconic facial markings and curly tail.

The overall mood is best described as melancholic. It is a story where the reader knows more than the dog, meaning we understand the situation he is in and he doesn't. It is inherently a sad story, but the audience can also find happiness by way of the pride the dog has in his work. I want to keep this book somewhat vague. Specifically, my plan is not to give anyone faces, dead or alive, perhaps not even the dog. I believe that this way children can insert their loved ones into the story, allowing them to form a deeper connection.

I am currently creating a book dummy in Advanced Picture Book with David Hohn, which I will use to move forward. My goal is to come out the other side of this with something that has been elevated from its original concept, into something that better reflects the project I have now built around the story.

After focus week, I will meet with my mentor and discuss changes for the current dummy. This will involve moving things around, changing the layout, redoing sketches, and potentially rewriting parts of the story. I will also begin a period of exploration with new techniques, materials, and styles.

Over summer I will be working on the changes agreed on in phase 1 while having at least one meeting a month to go over adjustments made and revise earlier decisions to make sure I am on track and that the dummy is coming along as planned. When I come back to PNCA for Fall 2025, I will have a nearly completely revised dummy, with which my mentor and I can begin selecting pages and spreads to take to final illustration.

By week 10 I will have the dummy completed to a satisfactory level, and I will begin the process of test printing and researching companies to manufacture copies. I would, ideally, like to learn to bind my own hardcover books if time permits.

At my defense presentation, I will have at least two copies of the book dummy available for viewing. I will also hang original inked pages, textural assets, and large scale prints of all the completed full art pages in the room.

The main piece of inspiration for my story was a comic about Laika by Isabelle Melançon. It reads, "In English and Nordic Folklore, it was believed that the first person buried in a new churchyard had to guard it against all ills, from graverobbing vandals to the devil himself. To prevent a human soul from having to perform such a duty, a black dog was buried as a substitute. The church grim. Custodian and protector of the consecrated ground. Often, I think about Laika. She was the first to exit Earth's

atmosphere, and died in orbit within hours. 'After placing Laika in the container (...), we kissed her nose, and wished her bon voyage, knowing that she would not survive the flight.' Often, I think about Laika. Sent first, she became the church grim of our orbit. Dutifully watching over the departed."

I want to capture the same feeling that Melançon so excellently showcases with Laika's story. There is an overwhelming sadness and guilt that plagues Laika's story, but when she is framed in this light, we find pride in her, not only for her sacrifice, but for the work she must still be carrying out among the stars.

Also influencing this project is the children's picture book, "Life Is Beautiful" by Winsome Bingham, Illustrated by my mentor, Molly Mendoza. "Life is Beautiful" details a young girl's experience of watching her grandmother get sick and pass away. The story shows how life after loss can be a hard adjustment, not only for children, but also for adults. Ideas also explored are centered on honoring your loved one through continuing to enjoy activities once shared together.

This semester, I was also introduced to "Ida, Always" by Caron Levis and Illustrated by Charles Santoso. It tells the story of two polar bear friends who must face the inevitability of death together when one of them becomes terminally ill. The surviving bear learns to find solace in their shared history, memories, and favorite spots.

Stylistically, I have found Finnish Illustrator Ulla Thynell to be an extremely useful reference. I have found that she captures not only the beauty, but also the mystery of Scandinavian folklore through her use of color, pattern, and texture. I will be studying her work over the summer, as I work on furthering my thesis development, in hopes of being able to learn a few of her tricks. I am specifically interested in how she works with opacities, as I wish to achieve similar effects for the guard dog and his departed friends. I have also been referencing traditional Scandinavian folk art as I intend to incorporate a few of the iconic designs into decorative borders which will feature throughout the book. I found myself being drawn to these motifs because I felt that a certain level of authenticity was removed from the Kyrkogrim after I modified it for a younger audience. I believe that reintroducing a traditional artform will help to keep the Scandinavian origins flowing through the story.

As I stated previously, my work tends to take on spookier and more somber themes, but my style is also colorful and full of hand drawn textures. I have made major efforts recently to incorporate more traditional textures into my pieces such as ink washes and brush marks. I'm sure you could tell by the pieces selected from my childhood that I have always had a drive to not only create, but to understand form, color, and light. I carried these values with me through my whole education, which often led me to creating very literal pieces. I have always had a love for illustrating animals and people. I still struggle to take liberties with color and composition, but Zach Meyer has been working really hard to beat that out of me. My time at PNCA, though shorter

than I would've preferred, has taught me to be much more conceptual with my work and I hope to be able to showcase that growth for you in this book.

My hope is that I can use my experiences to help others suffering with grief. My original story provides an alternative point of view, where anyone can learn an incredible piece of folklore while also finding peace in knowing that someone will be on the other side, looking out for you. Whether a child is being prepped for a loss soon to come, or processing a recent one, this story will hopefully relieve some of the anxiety and fear that comes with it. I understand how hard it is to move on after death, and how tightly it clings to your heart. It's difficult to find true comfort in times like those, but I for one, can think of nothing more comforting than a dog greeting me in the afterlife.

To end, I wanted to share with you a quote from Donald Gustafson from his 1989 essay, Grief, "... It is not surprising that love and grief are closely connected emotions. Grief is the emotional response appropriate to the irrevocable loss of the object of love. There is, too, a deeper connection in the fact that love, like grief, is for and over an individual... Thereby the object of love is irreplaceable, and grief in face of the loss of the irreplaceable is appropriate."

Abstract

My project, titled "Folke the Kyrkogrim", is a 32 page, 8x10", separate ended picture book meant for children ages 4-8 years old. Our main character is a guard dog named Folke, who through his own death, becomes the legendary folk character; the kyrkogrim. The book is written in a memoir style, telling the story of Folke's life and death from his own perspective. I felt this was important in order to make the story more intimate, like you are sitting down to listen to an old man tell his tales. The intimate nature of the book aims to provide a bit of comfort and aid in minimizing children's fears of the unknown; helping to answer the age-old question, "What happens when we die?"

I have provided for you today, three original inked pieces that I created for my book dummy- each one accompanied by their digitally altered version. I felt it was important to give you all a glimpse into how I created these spreads and all that went into them. In addition to my inks, there are three full color, printed and bound dummies, two paper backs and one hard cover with a dust jacket. Each dummy contains those three completed interior spreads, end pages, and a front and back cover. Also, hanging on the wall beside me is each spread in order, so that even if you cannot get your hands on one of the dummies while you are here today, you may still get a close up look at what I've made for you. Of course, I would recommend reading through the book if you can because as David Hohn always says, 'half the experience of reading is flipping the page'. Lastly, I have included a video recording of "Folke the Kyrkogrim", courtesy of my best friend and her 2nd grade class (ages 7-8).

While I will not be focusing as heavily on my own grief today, this project has still very much been a labor of love for my family, but also for my practice as an artist. I've stepped out of my comfort zone, learned new techniques, and devoted more time to learning how to format a book in indesign than I ever thought possible. I hope you enjoy, and thank you so much for joining my panel.

Oral Defense Speech

Hello everyone, happy focus week! Thank you so much for coming to my defense presentation today. For those of you who might not know me, my name is Kate Meighen and I am enrolled at PNCA as part of their illustration program. I was born and raised here in Portland and I often feel like growing up in the pacific northwest had perhaps the greatest effect on my artistic process. From attending rose city comic con to hiking through the gorge- I learned that magic is all around us, no matter if it's man made or of the natural world. Because of this, my work typically centers around themes relating to fantasy, folk lore, or myths. I enjoy exploring where they originated from and discovering their underlying connections to the macabre.

I love making art. Always have, always will. My parents used to have to pry me away from my desk and I'd have to say that over the years it's really only gotten worse. The only real change has come from how I make my work. If you told middle school Kate that she'd be a "digital artist" one day, she would've laughed in your face and said, "That's not real art". But the truth is that I am, and about 90% of my work, both in school and in my personal practice, is digital. Since coming to PNCA, I have learned to incorporate traditional media into my practice again. I found that I really enjoyed working with brushes and looser mediums, such as sumi ink and watercolors. It didn't take much experimentation with creating various washes and textural assets to know that these tools would become part of my practice for the foreseeable future.

As you can see, I brought that ideology with me to Thesis. I have provided for you all today, three original inked pieces that I created for my book dummy- each one accompanied by their digitally altered version. I felt it was important to give you all a glimpse into how I created these spreads and all that went into them. In addition to my inks, there are three full color, printed and bound dummies, two paper backs and one hard cover with a dust jacket. Each dummy contains those three completed interior spreads, end pages, and a front and back cover. Also, hanging on the wall beside me is each spread in order, so that even if you cannot get your hands on one of the dummies while you are here today, you may still get a close up look at what I've made for you. Of course, I would recommend reading through the book if you can because as David Hohn always says, 'half the experience of reading is flipping the page'.

Lastly, I have included a video recording of “Folke the Kyrkogrim”, courtesy of my best friend and her 2nd grade class. But! Before we get into the video, because it will act as some much needed comedic relief, I wanted to discuss with you where this project came from and why it is so important to me.

A word of warning before we begin: that while my Thesis project is a picture book meant for children, I will be discussing death and its relation to the concept and development of my project. This includes topics such as familial and pet death as well as the after life. If these subjects become too much for you, please take care of yourself and exit the room at any time.

My project, titled “Folke the Kyrkogrim”, is a 32 page, 8x10”, separate ended picture book meant for children ages 4-8 years old. Our main character, Folke, is a guard dog, who through his own death, becomes the legendary folk character; the kyrkogrim. The book is written in a memoir style, telling the story of Folke’s life and death from his own perspective. I felt this was important in order to make the story more intimate, like you are sitting down to listen to an old man tell his tales. The intimate nature of the book aims to provide a bit of comfort and aid in minimizing children’s fears of the unknown; helping to answer the age-old question, “What happens when we die?”

I have been deeply affected by grief my whole life, even if I didn’t quite know what it was. I still remember the day I first learned that my great grandpa Clyde had passed away. I couldn’t have been older than three or four, but I remember my older brother sobbing beside me in the backseat of my mom’s car, and though I didn’t understand what it meant to die, I knew that it hurt people. My great grandma Sally passed away when I was around eight; old enough to grieve, but still too young to be able to understand what I felt. Then in high school, my world came crashing down as I lost my Uncle Ron, Grandma Mildred, and Grandpa John all within six months of each other. At eighteen years old, I fully understood what death was, what it meant, and how it changes your life. But as all of us know, death stops for no one and waits for nothing. In the following years, and I would continue to lose those I loved; my cousin Caleb, family of my closest friends who over the years had also become my own, and beloved pets who were just as important to us as anyone else.

I used to think that as we got older and moved farther away from those miserable memories, that our grief would shrink down until it became just a tiny dark spec on an otherwise bright and beautiful life. But I know now that that is not the case. We live with our grief, always present, always hurting. Grief will not shrink down and disappear, we merely grow around it. Continuously encasing it with love and memory; and absorbing it, allowing it to shape us into who we are.

The kyrkogrim is close to my heart, not just because it’s a really cool myth, but because of what it means to me personally. Although I no longer consider myself to be religious, I grew up in a family composed of traditional catholics and moderate christians, and that, combined with my early education at a private christian school led

to many conversations about death, most of the time pertaining to pets. I will always remember how striking it was that we could watch movies titled “All Dogs Go to Heaven” in our afterschool program only to be told immediately after, that dogs didn’t have souls and; therefore, would not actually go to heaven. I think that anyone who has ever owned a dog, or any pet for that matter, knows that that’s not true though.

I have never met an animal with more soul than Cody. He set his own bed times, selected favorite family members, and hated baths with every ounce of his being. By the end, our house was run entirely by a crotchety old man who just wanted to eat toilet paper tubes and stare out the window. When we finally made the call to put him down a few years ago, he was 14 and had been a part of my life longer than he hadn’t. I grew up with him and to suddenly be without him was just as devastating as any other loss I had experienced before. I had never wanted to believe more in my life that dogs had souls.

In the year following Cody’s death, a short comic by Isabelle Melançon came out, honoring the legacy of Laika the Russian space dog, comparing her to the kyrkogrim or “church grim” as the English called it. It was her work that inspired this picture book and ultimately led me to drafting the first version of the story for advanced picture book last spring. This comic reinforced my connection to the myth, showcasing that I was not the only person to feel this way about the death of an animal. I had found something to hold on to, something that gave me hope- That our pets could be immortalized in myth and take up the role of a Kyrkogrim if we believed it hard enough.

My hope for this project has always been to take my experience with grief and turn it into something beautiful. Something that brings comfort and hope to others. I think it is important to open discussion about death, the afterlife, and grief in an easily digestible format for children, especially for those who may not have access to the resources they need in times of mourning. It’s hard to figure out what it all means at such a young age, and I believe that Folke can help ease some of that pressure.

When I first reached out to my friend Caeley if I could potentially come in and read to her class to record a video for my thesis presentation, she said yes with no hesitation. She let me know that two kids in her class were actively dealing with losses in their families. It felt like the stars had aligned, a perfect chance for Folke to do his job. In the video, we’ll listen to the reading as well as a short discussion they had afterward about the book.

I wanted to keep their discussion in the video mostly because I found it funny, but also because it helped to provide a lot of insight regarding changes that needed to be made to further connect to my target audience. At first, I was nervous because they were so quiet while she was reading, but Caeley assured me that it was because they were engrossed in the story, listening carefully and paying very close attention to the pictures. It made my heart jump to see so many hands raising to ask questions, even more so to learn that one of the children dealing with their own grief was participating.

As Caeley's students figured out, a kyrkogrim is the soul of a dog that was bound by death to their final resting place and tasked with protecting it, and all who enter, from harm. Traditionally, the dog would've been buried first, before any other body was laid to rest as it was believed that whoever was the first would be tasked with guarding the land forever. It's both bewildering and disheartening to know that man chose our own best friend to take our place like that. And even worse, the original folklore states that the dog was supposed to be buried *alive* beneath the foundation of the church. Now I don't claim to be an expert, but I didn't think that was super kid friendly so I definitely had to find a work around.

Anyone who has ever had experience with a working dog knows that they will work until their dying breath, and I figured Folke would be no different. He takes his job seriously, trains his replacement, and moves on. So effectively, in my version, instead of becoming a sacrifice, his death comes peacefully, quietly, quickly. You'd hardly even notice if you aren't paying attention. So think of it less as death and more like retirement, and that becoming a kyrkogrim is just his retirement gig.

Folke, obviously, is our protagonist. The story is his to tell and everything is written from his perspective. It also gives a small glimpse into my interpretation of what the afterlife could be— A shared, purgatory-like space that filters through the people who come and sends them to where they need to go. Folke protects his visitors while they are with him and often keeps them company. He never knows what happens to them or where they go, only that he is being a good guard dog.

The foxes, shown both in life and the afterlife, act as our main antagonists. Just as Folke's job on the farm was to keep out strangers and protect the livestock from predators, so is a kyrkogrim's job to do the same for the cemetery. The natural way to show this similarity was through the repeated offender, the fox. Being that foxes are naturally cunning, sly and often tied to mischievous acts- I felt that they were the natural choice as a counter to Folke, both in their roles and in their designs. Whereas Folke is soft and depicted in bright colors, the foxes are sharper and darker, often blending into their home in the border, hiding away and waiting for the opportunity to strike.

There is a third character present as well, one that you may not have noticed. It's not the puppy that replaces Folke, or the visitors he meets throughout the story, but is instead the disembodied, mystical force that travels through the pages of the book. A force that Molly and I have lovingly begun to refer to as "the wind". The wind is there from beginning to end, constantly weaving in and out of the borders and interacting with the spiritual world around it. As such, the wind is used to signal beginnings and ends. When we first see it appear on the bottom of the first spread, it is because Folke is speaking about the past, but more specifically about the end of his life. As the story progresses, we see the wind building up like water in a tank before it sweeps upward, whisking him away from real life and into the afterlife. Into the role of a kyrkogrim. From

then on the wind is used as a tool to bring his visitors to him, but also to take them away once they are ready to move on to whatever comes next.

Within the wind are motifs of leaves, flowers, and a few other pieces of simple iconography that have long been associated with traditional Scandinavian folk art like hearts, dot patterns, and filigree. I made the decision to incorporate this artform not only to honor the roots of the myth, but also to connect the spiritual elements more to nature, insinuating that they are in fact natural to this world.

If you want to get real technical about it, the tree in the graveyard is also a character. Not in the sense that it does anything to help the story along, but in how it serves almost as a diary page, documenting those who were here and growing a flower in their memory once they leave. Trees have always had significance to humans, showcased especially well by mythology from around the world. Take Yggdrasil of Norse mythology, the gateway that connects the nine realms; or the faerie trees of Celtic Ireland that sweep damsels away to distant lands. But even if you can't relate to these ancient stories, surely you once had a favorite tree to climb or at least burnt logs on a fire. To me, the repetition of the tree and leaves throughout acts a reminder that we are from the earth, and to the earth we will return.

While I had already selected a few existing picture books as comparables during my proposal, my continued research and development told me that I needed to reconsider. Thanks to my Midterm review panelists, Faith Capalia and Lauren Rille, I found that none related more closely or resembled Folke's story more than "Kafka and the Doll" and "The Immortal Jellyfish".

"Kafka and the Doll" by Larissa Theule and illustrated by Rebecca Green is based on a true story from Franz Kafka, a notable Jewish-Czech author from Germany. The book takes place around the 1920's and details an experience where he stumbles upon a young girl who has lost her doll. She is distraught over the loss of her most beloved companion and Kafka, with his quick thinking, explains to the girl that her doll is not lost, but merely away on a grand adventure. He begins to send letters to the girl from her doll, sharing stories of where they've been in order to comfort her. I feel like "Kafka and the Doll" relates to Folke because of their shared intentions, bringing peace of mind to their audiences. While the story is focused on a girl and her doll, it is easy to see that this is also an analogy for the death of a loved one; not knowing where they've gone or what they're doing. In a way, what Kafka does for the little girl is what the belief of afterlife does for the rest of us, providing an ulterior perspective on a sad moment by replacing it with more pleasant thoughts.

"The Immortal Jellyfish" comes from Chinese Author/Illustrator Sang Mioa, and tells the story of a young boy experiencing grief for the first time when his grandfather passes away unexpectedly. Mioa does not shy away from showing the boy's sadness and confusion as he navigates life without his grandfather, creating a deeply emotional and distressing link to the character. But one night his grandfather comes to him in a

dream and takes him to a place called Transfer City, where he shows his grandson how loved ones live on, effectively treating the concept of death as the start of a whole new life. Mioa uses the jellyfish as the main metaphorical element, showcasing how they never seem to die, constantly regenerating themselves. Never quite the same as they once were, but able to live on eternally, just like memories of our loved ones. What spoke to me most about “The Immortal Jellyfish” was the setting of Transfer City and how closely I felt it related to Folke’s graveyard. Mioa sets up Transfer City as the place where people go to spend eternity, but there still remains the mystery of how they get there. I believe that Folke actually helps bridge that little gap, offering an in-between moment of sorts that provides a bit of clarity.

My illustrative inspiration came to me in odd ways. I cannot clearly define what inspiration came from as I was taking in mass amounts of media throughout this process. My search for inspiration felt endless, as I felt like I was constantly trying to find illustrations, photos, paintings, and prints that fit the vision I had. I found a lot of inspiration in singular pieces from various artists, but three who I referenced repeatedly were Ulla Thynell, Maria Grin, and Ande Wittenmeier. Thynell’s work played a big role in inspiring me to work with inks and vivid colors. Grin’s angular, shape based illustrations helped me specifically to design the foxes. And Wittenmeier’s looseness kept me on track, reminding me to let my mediums flow and not worry too much about controlling them.

Controlling my work is very important to me, and when I felt that the story had turned into something I didn’t want it to be, I knew that regaining that control as quickly as possible would make or break my project’s final result. I went back to the drawing board over summer break and ended up re-thumbnailing about 85% of the original dummy that I had put together last semester. Reworking multiple sections of the story to better fit a younger audience. This mainly included simplifying illustrations, sometimes having to take them down from a full spread to just a few spots so that the page could breathe, and other times pulling back to show more of the world and less of the dog. As you can see, many images were moved or tweaked, and only two of the original spreads survived the transition.

Probably the biggest change to come out of my revisions was the decision to add borders in the first place. As I was first beginning to develop Folke’s story, I had the honor to be in a combined class with two previous thesis students, Robin Winwood and Audrey Shuman. Their picture books heavily inspired me to add borders in order to take advantage of the ability to tell secondary narratives.

The side panels of my borders are purely decorative, and they allowed me to explore more ways to incorporate some Scandinavian folk art and botanical inspired illustrations. The upper panel gives hints as to what will happen on the next page while the bottom panel shows the foxes’ reactions to what’s happening on the current page, but only if they are meant to be present for it. If not, they are usually replaced by the

wind, working in the background to keep the afterlife moving in some way or another. The corner panels for the most part are left intentionally blank to act as a bit of a resting point for the eyes as they travel around the spreads. Sometimes the wind uses the corners to enter or exit the scenes, but other times the foxes are inside them, peaking onto the next or previous pages and communicating to their pack about what's happening.

As much as I enjoyed the addition of the page borders, I think that there was much more opportunity to use them more effectively. I had lots of ideas that I was not able to fully develop in the time that I had and this is something I would like to keep refining outside of school.

During my midterm review, we mainly discussed where my book would fit on a shelf. It felt too mature at the time to be considered appropriate for little kids, but also wasn't mature enough for tweens. Molly and I decided that we needed to skew a bit younger in order to fit into that 4-8 year old age bracket I mentioned earlier.

Originally, one of my biggest desires for this book was to keep it as ambiguous as possible. For those of you who attended my proposal in the spring, you'll know that I struggled with deciding where to draw the line on that, but as the story developed it became clear to me that all the characters needed to be represented specifically to help ground the story. Because of this, Folke's design went through quite a few iterations, from really basic and shape based to more realistic and detailed, it took a long time to solidify his design without losing sight of how I wanted him to be perceived, gentle yet strong. From the start, I wanted him to be an Anatolian Shepherd as they are very common livestock guardian dogs that fit the role of a guard dog well, but finding the balance between keeping him recognizable and stylized proved to be difficult. This is best shown by the last spread of the book, which was based on a test illustration for Zach Meyer's class earlier this semester. I felt that in this illustration he looked a little too "play-doughy" which prompted me to go for something with more texture and depth.

Ultimately, we ended up with a shape based character design that maintained the most iconic elements of the breed while effectively making him rounder, softer and cuter, and; therefore, more appealing. I think this is especially true in that while Folke is protective, he is not scary or offputting which makes him more approachable by both the characters in the story and by a younger audience.

Aging the story down also meant that he needed a name, as children need to be able to put a name to a face in order to properly connect with characters. After ten exhausting minutes of googling "Scandinavian boy names", I found it. Folke (or Folk), meaning "People's Guardian" originated from Old Norse, and has ties to Danish, Swedish and Norwegian names still used today. I'll admit, I could've spent more time researching other names that meant other things and tried to find some other

meaningful way to make it matter, but why bother when I had already stumbled across the only right choice.

Ideally, my next step would be to add the dummy to my website, and begin the process of querying Folke's story among traditional publishers while continuing to work on it. I'd love to see this book on shelves and know that somewhere he's helping a child who's having a hard time. I know, however, that the world of publishing can be brutal. I fully expect that if my story gets picked up, I may be asked to change pieces of it that I hold near and dear to my heart. A dog's name may change and a spread might get cut, but at the end of the day those aren't what's most important. I believe the strength of my story lies in its nature; to bring comfort to children who need it. I'm not trying to push any specific ideology or religious view onto the reader. There is no agenda, only a dog and his life's story.

As both author and illustrator, I take a great amount of pride in this work. I believe I accomplished every goal I set out for myself, and for Folke. Bringing him and his story to life has healed me in so many ways, many of which I don't fully understand, but in facing these challenges I have found a deeper understanding of not only how I process my own emotions, but how I can pull from them to create beautiful, meaningful, and impactful narratives such as this.

"Folke the Kyrkogrim" is a love letter from me to everyone I've ever lost and to you, but it can also be from you to anyone you hold close to your heart as well. I cannot tell you what happens when we die, but I'd like to think that after today I have convinced you that maybe, just maybe, there will be a fluffy, pink dog waiting for us on the other side.

I wanted to end by thanking those who have aided, encouraged, and inspired me throughout my educational journey.

- First and foremost, I wanted to thank my grandparents, Vern and Phyllis, who afforded me the opportunity to pursue this degree. Without them, I would not have been able to achieve my dream of attending PNCA or have discovered the world of illustration.
- To my parents, thank you for accepting me, my skills, and my desire to put them to use. Thank you for always hanging my art on the fridge and in your offices at work, and for showing off my website to anyone who will listen. I promise that I will work my ass off to make sure you guys always have something cool to show to your friends.
- To Caeley and Libbie, my best friends of over 20 years. Thank you, not only for your physical labor in helping me make this presentation happen but for your unwavering support. You guys have been fueling the fire in my heart for so long now I don't think I know how to live without it. The two of you have kept me going on days when I thought I had nothing else to give and I'll never be able to properly repay you for that.

- Ryan, thank you for sticking by me through all the hell I've put you through. Nothing I could say right now would be able to accurately reflect the amount of comfort, support, and love that you have continuously poured into me since I decided to go back to school. I couldn't have gotten this far without you and I wouldn't have wanted to. Thank you for always being my number one fan.
- And finally, I wanted to thank my mentor Molly Mendoza, for literally everything. Thank you for accepting me as your mentee and fitting me into your crazy intense schedule this year. Because of you, Folke was brought to life in a way that I could not have done on my own and I owe every ounce of my success to your guidance, critique, and friendship.

Thank you all for coming to see my defense of "Folke the Kyrkogrim". I can't wait to see where we go from here.

Creative Brief

Folke is a guard dog that is nearing the end of his life, though he doesn't know it. He tells us all about his job, defending his home from intruders and keeping the things that belong there inside. We even meet the puppy that will inevitably replace him once the time comes. When he is taken to the graveyard, he just thinks he's taking on a new job as the guardian of the property, but nothing seems to happen that warrants his being there, but throughout the story he meets a few 'visitors'. Each person he meets is a soul buried in his graveyard, seeking to passage into the 'hereafter' and Folke learns quickly to keep his visitors safe from the intruders, who seek to take the souls from him. Luckily for them, Folke is a good guard dog.

- I created Folke for my younger self as much as he is for any other child dealing with grief, and wrote the story from his perspective to make him feel more real.
- Provides comfort to children who may be scared about what happens when we die.
- Brings peace of mind that our loved ones are being cared for and protected.
- Shines light on a beautiful piece of folklore that deserves more attention
- Purposefully keeps religion and afterlife unspecific in order to appeal to more people

Project Outline

1. Project Vision
 - a. To create a children's picture book that opens discussion about death and the afterlife while also aiding in minimizing some of the fear associated with them.
 - b. Folke's job is to be a comforting character for those he meets in the book, but also to his audience.
2. Audience
 - a. My audience is kids, approximately ages 4-8 (but can still be useful for older children as well)
 - b. Children who have already experienced grief or are being prepped to experience it for the first time.
3. Methods & Materials
 - a. Picture book
 - i. A picture book format is familiar and approachable for young children and is already seen as a form of comfort and entertainment
 - b. Color Palette
 - i. The palette is very bright, utilizing pinks, oranges, blues, and greens as the four main colors present throughout.
 - ii. A bright palette is attractive to children and makes the whole story theme feel much lighter and not so sad. Folke is a hero after all.
 - c. Construction
 - i. The book was composed digitally using Procreate, Photoshop, and InDesign.
 - ii. The cover and three interior spreads were inked on paper and scanned in order to achieve specific textures using brush strokes and washes. These act as finalized art showcasing what the book would look like in the style of completed illustrations.
 - iii. For my Defense, I printed two regular book dummies that were folded, stapled, and trimmed in the 406 production room. But more importantly, I took extra time and hand crafted a hardcover book dummy complete with a dust jacket.
4. Comparative Media
 - a. "Kafka and the Doll" by Larissa Theule
 - b. "The Immortal Jellyfish" by Sang Miao
5. Marketplace Application

- a. Ideally, “Folke the Kyrkogrim” will be used as an accessible and comforting tool to aid children who are learning about or dealing with grief.
- b. It is unlike any other story on the market currently as it does not shy away from showing death and the afterlife but also does not specifically state what happened, to either the dog or his visitors.
- c. As proof of concept, the story was read aloud to my friend’s 2nd grade class (ages 7-8) and the children engaged with the book, drawn in by the illustrations but still able to put the story together themselves and figure out what was happening to the characters.

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* Print Puppy for Oct 3rd



Mid term Presentation

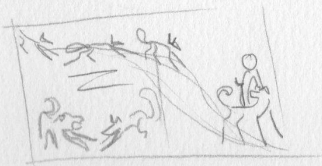
~ 5 mins

- past work
- inspo images/books
- 3 questions per panel
- include full pdf link
- typeface options?

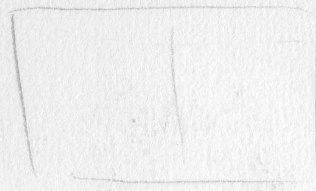
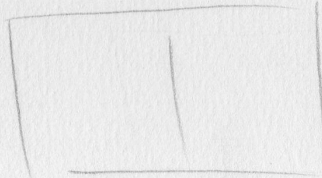
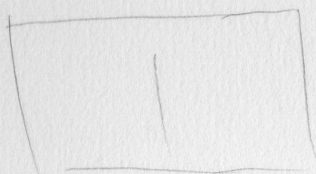
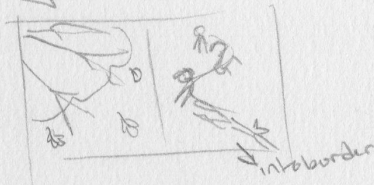
To Do

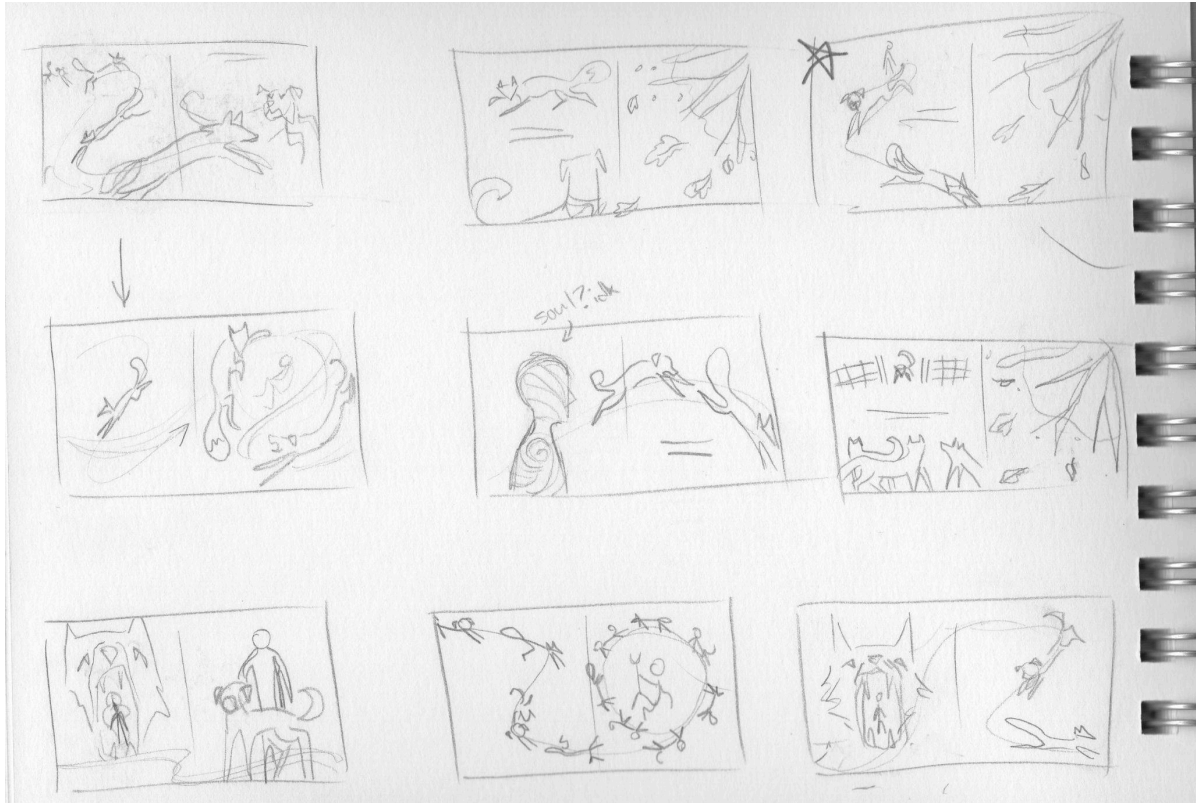
- * work on borders
- * test type layout w/ images
 - ↳ fix tangents/spacing
 - ↳ look at other picture books
- * take a look @ 30/31
 - ↳ if add extra pgs consider wishy/water pg 1. Cream
- * Rework palette w/ orange/black

* Corner Thumbnails?



Sweep





Kyrtogrom Notes w/ Molly 4/12 meeting @ Twenty-six one

* title page image / title rework

* close up of kyrtogrom inkwork first page repeat throughout

* allow negative space

* rework pgs 8-9 (text)

* nail text positioning

* pg. 24 (not needed, takes away from main)

↳ add to text about demons/sickly man (keeping him up, etc.)

* tree placement

* mix ~~15/17~~ 16/17

* 8-9 changes / expansion to 2 spreads!

* people need solid designs

* 30-31 go more conceptual

* Go hard on patterns/swirls

* Reconsider compositions

* Dog chapter size = more fun

you have permission to be weird.

* End needs to wrap up story and also speak to my own feelings about grief

* inks/paintings for dog/folk art

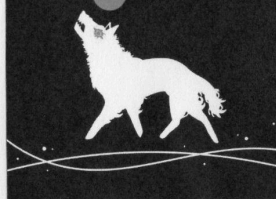
* Focus on setting yourself up for success in Fall

* Practice on one or two small illustrations

Hot Press Paper

In English and Nordic folklore, it was believed that the first person buried in a new churchyard had to guard it against all ills, from graverobbing vandals to the Devil himself.

To prevent a human soul from having to perform such a duty, a black dog was buried as a substitute.



The Church Grim.



Custodian and protector of the consecrated ground.

Often, I think about Laika.

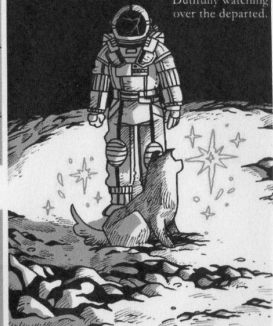


She was the first to exit the Earth's atmosphere, and died in orbit within hours.

"After placing Laika in the container (...), we kissed her nose and wished her bon voyage, knowing that she would not survive the flight."

Often, I think about Laika.

Sent first, she became the Church Grim of our orbit.

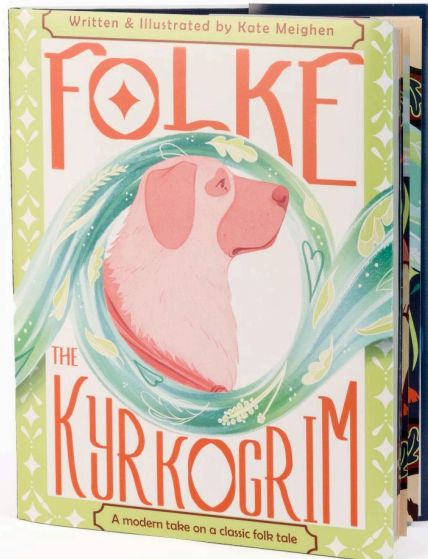
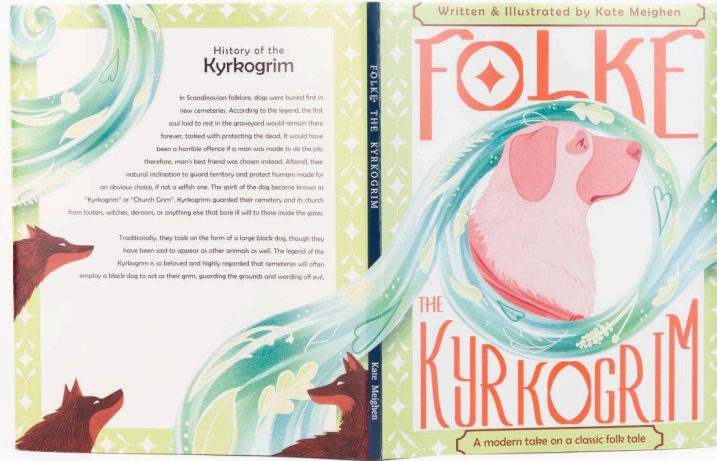


Dutifully watching over the departed.









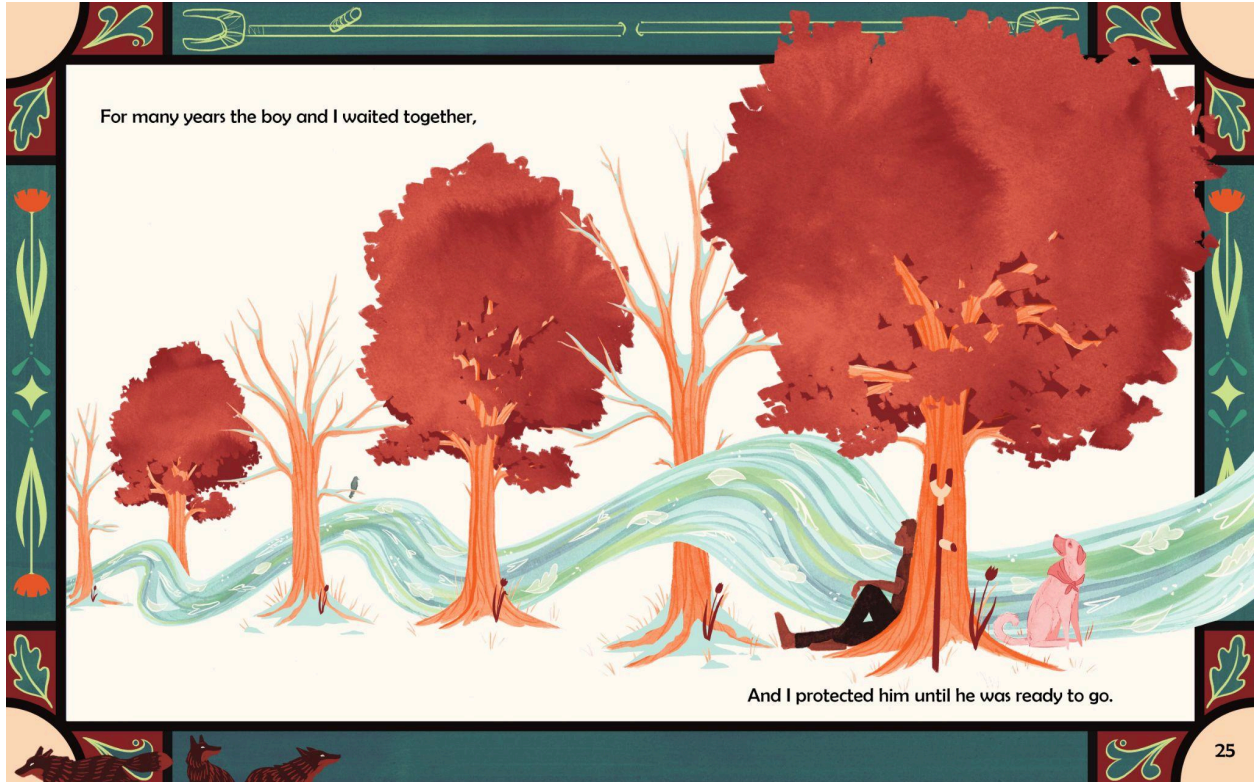
Written & Illustrated by Kate Meighen

FOLKE



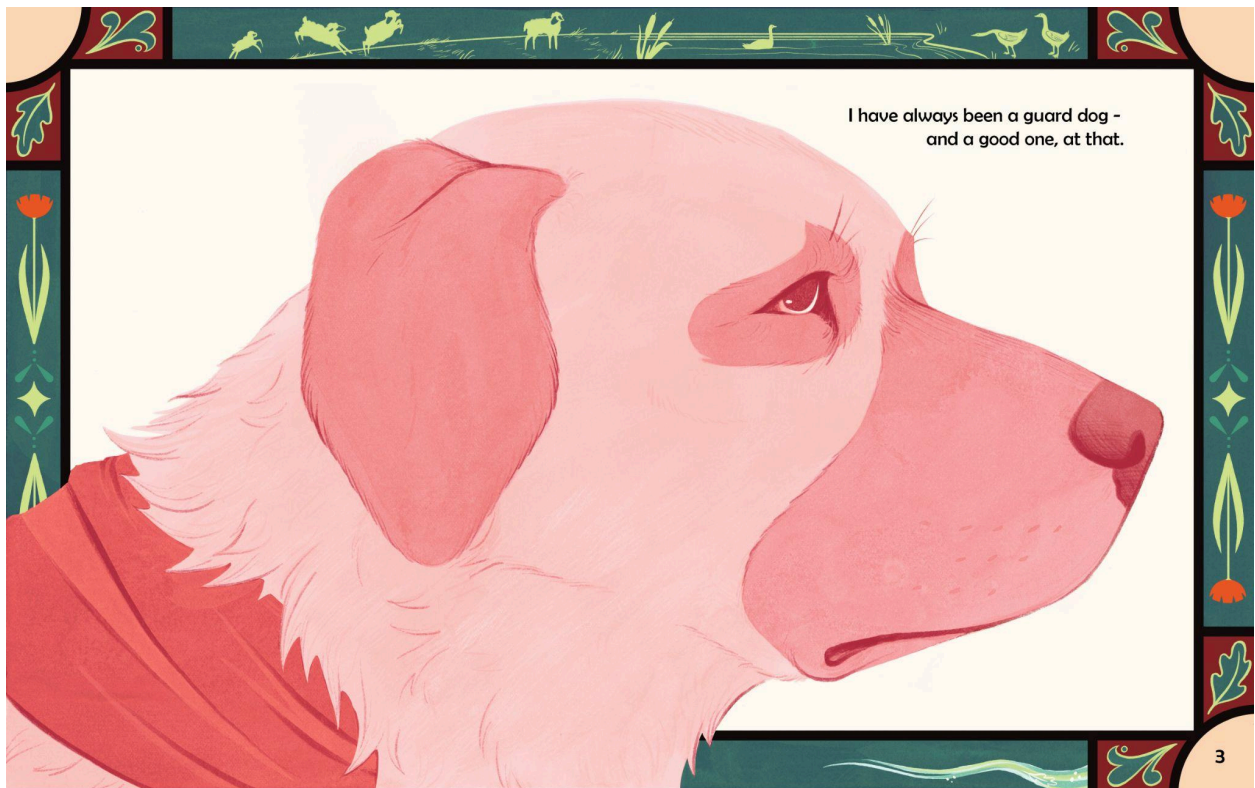
THE
KURKOGRIM

A modern take on a classic folk tale

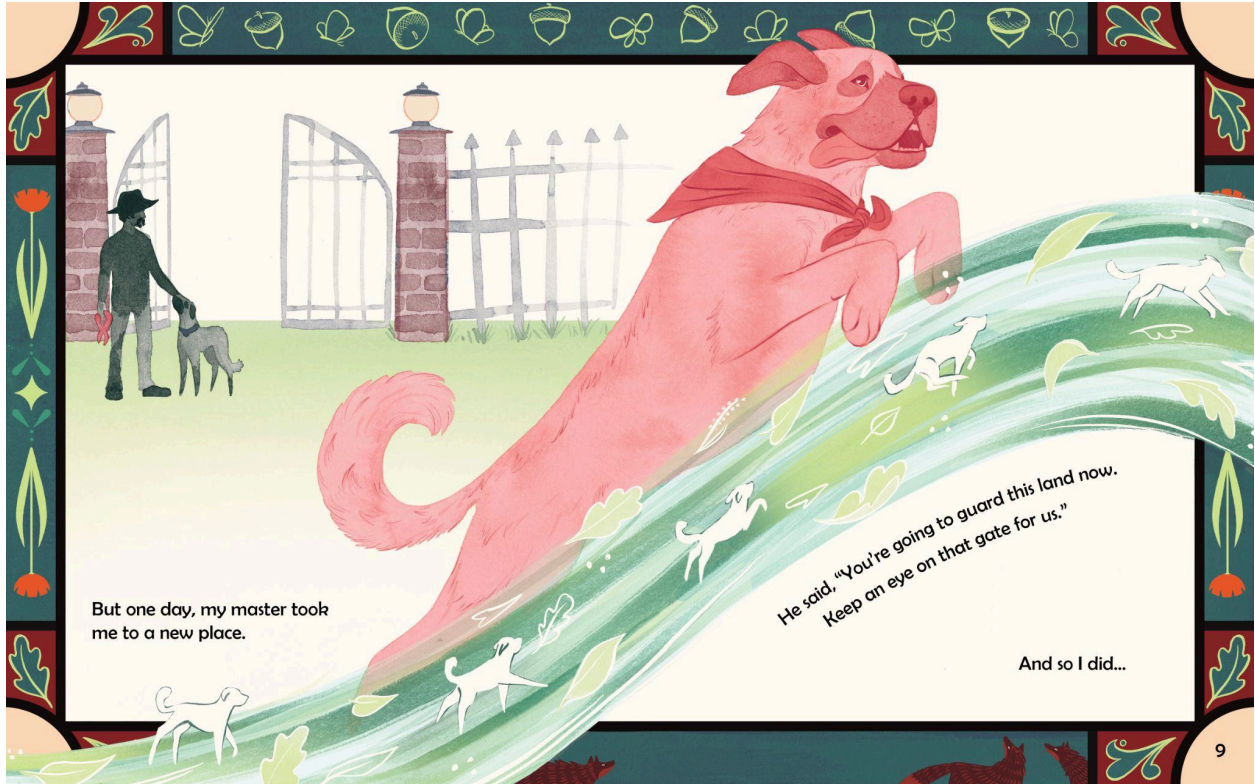


For many years the boy and I waited together,

And I protected him until he was ready to go.



I have always been a guard dog -
and a good one, at that.



But one day, my master took me to a new place.

He said, "You're going to guard this land now.
Keep an eye on that gate for us."

And so I did...