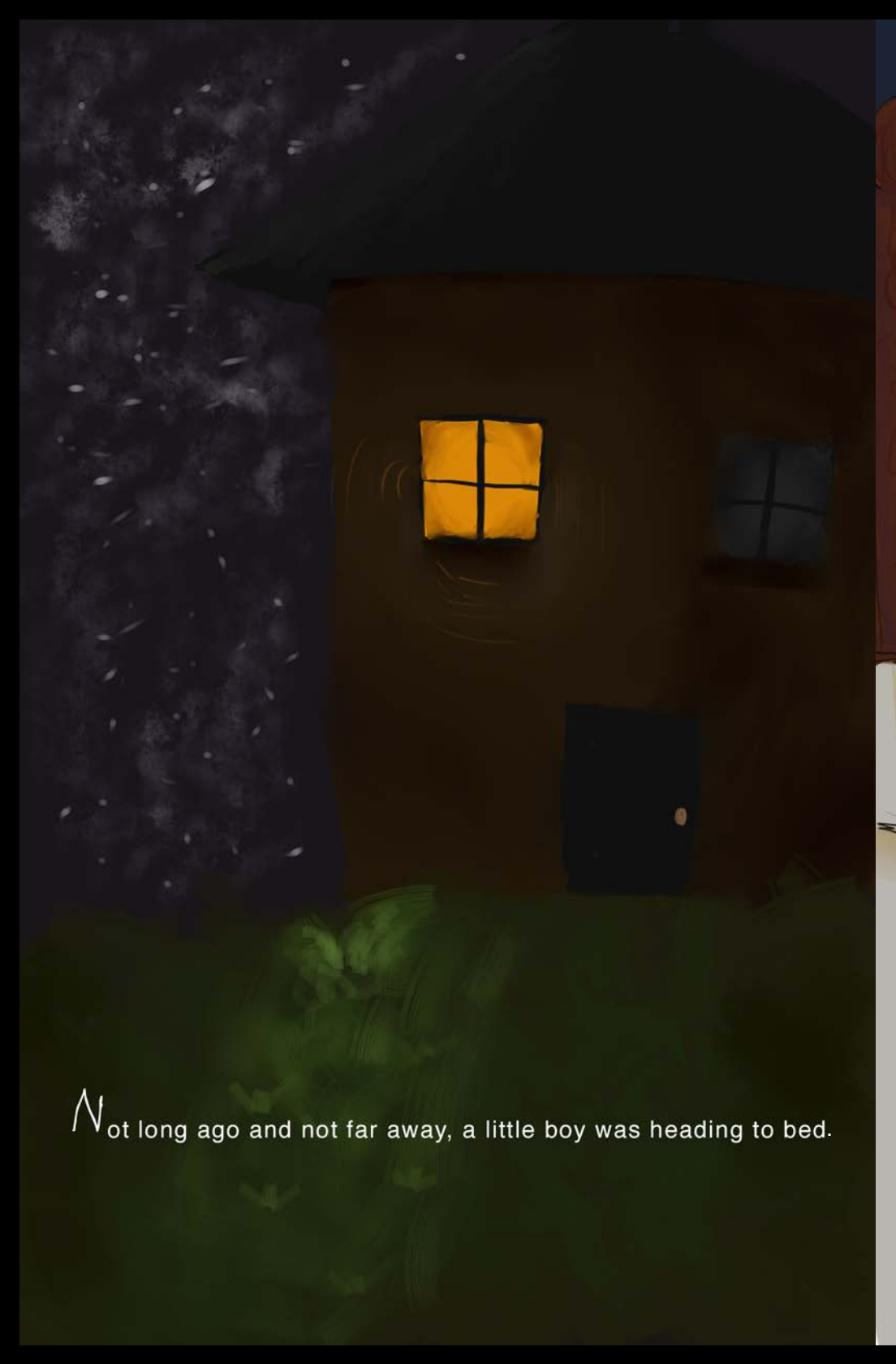


# OLI AND THE DARK

ILLUSTRATED AND WRITTEN BY  
ANNA SHOBE & CORINE SHANNON





Not long ago and not far away, a little boy was heading to bed.



Mama tucked him in, gave him a kiss, and was heading off to bed, too. “Mama,” the little boy whispered, peeking above the blanket. “Could you please, please leave the lights on?”



Mama stopped at the door, and smiled. "There's nothing to be afraid of, Eli," she said, and turned out the lights.



*H*is room was dark, and scary, the only light coming from the string of nightlights above his bed, and Eli looked up, down, left, right, back and forth, side to side. He clutched his Wooly to his chest, and tried to close his eyes.



He opened his eyes, and it was still dark, very dark, and Wooly was gone. In fact, his entire bed was gone! His heart started to beat fast, but suddenly he saw a string of lights leading off into the distance.



He grabbed them, and started to walk. Where was mom? he wondered. Where was Wooly?



“You should turn back,” someone whispered. Eli stopped, his heart beating very fast again. “Who’s there?” he called, looking all around him, but all he could see was darkness.





"My name is Cryptic," the voice said. "It's not safe, you should turn back." Eli shook his head, he didn't trust this voice. He kept walking, and said "I don't want to."  
"Eli, don't you know how unsafe it is? You can't see anything." Cryptic insisted, and Eli paused, unsure.



He ran forward, pulling himself along the rope of night lights,  
but then it was gone. Eli fell, into the darkness, and landed  
on his hands and knees.




All of a sudden, stars came out above him, a million of them, more than Eli had ever seen. He gasped, as the night sky lit up, the stars spanning as far as he could see. They twinkled down at him, as if they were smiling, and Eli grinned back.



“Mom was right,” he whispered, staring up at the sky,  
there really is nothing to be afraid of.”



*H*e closed his eyes, opened them,  
and he was in his room.



Wooly was there, still clutched in his hand, and his night lights too, hanging above his head, clinking together as he sat up. He stared out the window, at the night sky, and the stars winked at him.



He reached up, turned his nightlights off,  
and went back to sleep.

The image features a repeating pattern of stylized flowers. Each flower is composed of a central white circle with several smaller black circles of varying sizes arranged around it, resembling a cluster of buds or petals. The flowers are scattered across a solid blue background. The pattern is consistent and repeats across the entire page.

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