

Cauldron

2024

fall edition

Saasha Shetya

+/- 1,000 yrs



The CaulDRON

Fall 24-25

"+/- 100 years"

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IKE ROTTMANN

MATTHEW ROSENBLUM

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Nishan Koirala

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Short STORIES

Anabelle Valerio - Tenacity
Grace Johnson-Wellnitz - Olive
Yulia Cheng - Bamboo
Susana Baro Doreste - Olive
Saesha Shetiya - Snow

FIONA JACKSON-SNOW
Zaela ROSENBAUM - OLIVE
ELI GOLDMAN - SNOW
IKE ROTTMANN - TENACITY

PoeTRY

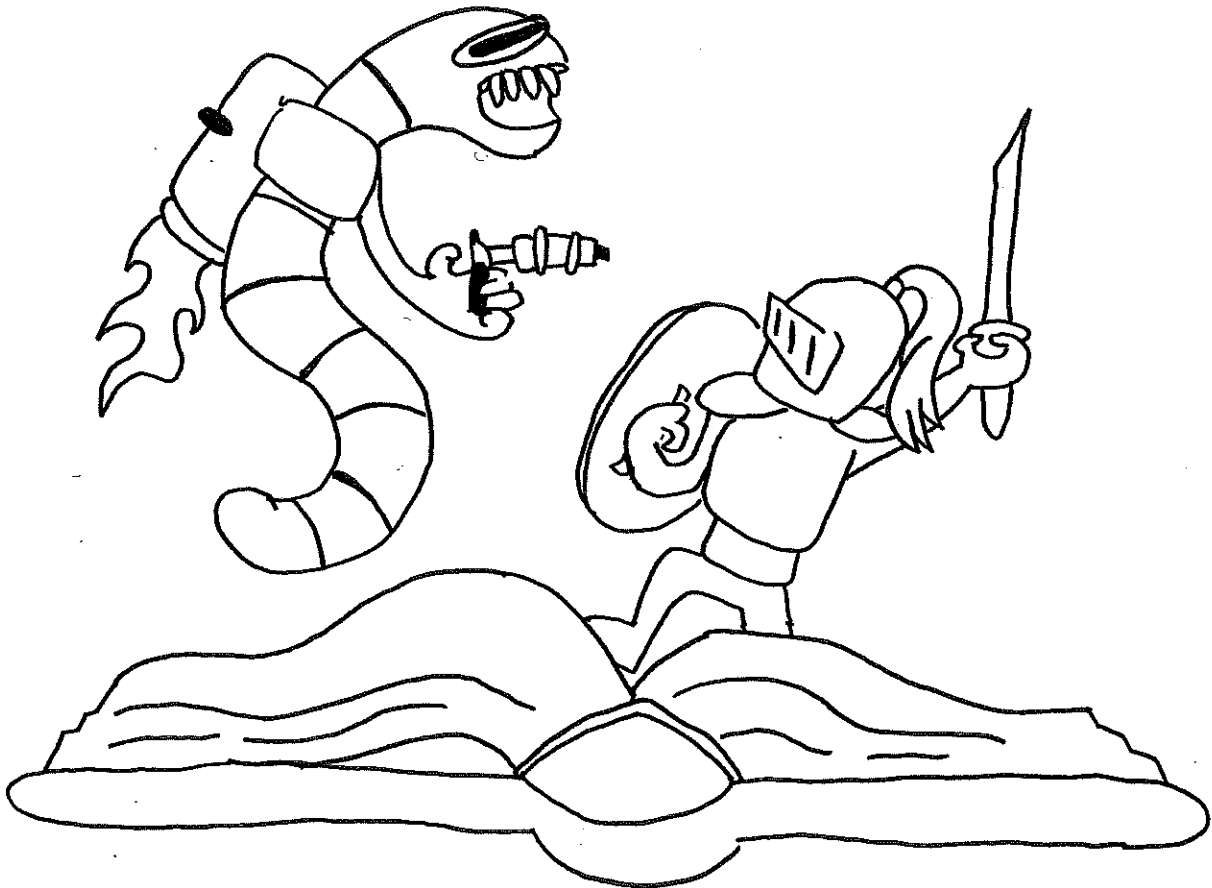
Grace Johnson-Wellnitz - Olive
Susana Baro Doreste - Olive
Eli Goldman - Snow
Aleks Apse - Snow
Nibha Shrestha - Bamboo
Laurel Ryan - Forest
Zaela Rosenbaum - Olive

SAESHA SHETIYA-SNOW
SASHA ROMIG-OLIVE
BEN PINCKNEY- OLIVE
LOLA ADAMS - BONSAI
ANABELLE VALERIO - TENACITY
MATTHEW ROSENBLUM - INTEGRITY

Childron

Short

Stories



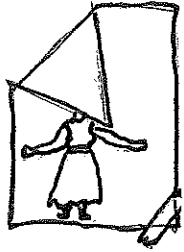
The Pen

By Annabelle Valerio

Tenacity

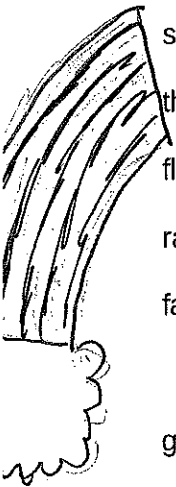
It was a dreary Saturday morning, and Bryn was staring aimlessly at their white popcorn ceiling. Their heart felt like their room, bare and empty sometimes with the absence of who Bryn used to be, who the world told them that they were and what the world wouldn't let them be anymore.

Bryn could remember when they were smaller, when they were the sort of person who danced in the light instead of nodding their head to the music in darkness. And Bryn meant this quite literally. Their walls were plastered with pictures of women with their hair pinned up high in the shape of a bagel from Alicia's family bakery, their skirts huge and transparent with fine mesh. Bryn was a dancer themselves then, with oversized black skirts of their own suspended in the air as they twirled. Bryn missed those posters, the ones they had ripped off their wall in tears at the age of twelve, tired of the comments they would get in passing.



When they were younger, they remembered waking to a blinding ray of light through their window, their pink curtains glowing almost as red with sunlight as they would with a flashlight pressed up against them, just as they looked during late night storytimes under the covers of sleeping bags. They remembered the way the sunlight danced through the refracting crystals that were hung from the window and splayed colorful arrays over the entirety of Bryn's bedroom floor, turning the shaggy pink carpet orange and magenta where it was intermingled with the rainbow. For some reason, that memory always stood out clear and sharp, poking through the fabric of time that dulls the senses of Bryn's memories of the past.

When they were eight years old, Bryn remembered refurbishing their room. They had gotten into a spirited argument about the colors of their bed set. Bryn insisted upon a blue as deep as the night sky when the stars were shining, whilst their mother gently steered them towards the pink ballet sheet set once again. After long minutes of pleading faces and



sweet-talking, their mother gave in, saying "Alright, Bryn, but I don't want you to get something you'll regret choosing later." With her face tired and eyes sad, Bryn wanted to run back up to her and change their mind, just to please their mother, before they steeled themselves.

With a sigh, Bryn heaved themselves out from under the bedazzled blue comforter that was insulating them against the morning and trudged to their closet to retrieve slippers. Instead of the tutus that used to populate their closet, sweatpants and hoodies welcomed them, their favorite bands smiling from the backside of the hanging garments. They chose a MUNA sweater with Katie, Naomi, and Jo rolling their eyes. The carelessness in their expressions just screamed at Bryn "I'm enby, I'm a lesbian, get over it!" Sometimes Bryn wanted to scream those words as loud as they could, but this piece of clothing was the closest they ever got.

Bryn moved over to their mirror suspended over their stout dresser and pursed their lips to imitate their idols. Their pixie-cut hair highlighted the angles of their face and the amber-brown of their eyes, much like Jo's chin-length waves of hazel locks. Though in Bryn's opinion, it looked way less cool and attractive when Bryn posed. Dismayed, they turned to their slim desk with its color-coded pencils. The white surface showed the age-old scuffs from crayons and the scratches of pen strokes long-faded from the pressure of hands brushing carelessly across the desk. Bryn carefully retrieved their mauve notebook from the drawer and took out a pen, the colors on the shaft rubbed away. *Dear Everly*, they started, only to tap the metallic backend of the pen onto their chin in indecision. There was so much to say to Everly, but what could Bryn possibly say that Everly wanted to hear? Bryn didn't think anyone wanted to hear only bad news, especially coming from someone close to you. It would be hard enough on Everly to see the "breaking news" on the television in whatever distant cousin's house she ended up in, she didn't need to hear it from them. *Dear Evy*, they started again, using their nickname for her. *How are you? Everything's fine here, and school is the same as always. Mr. Connors even held a hula-hoop contest to take our minds off of...* Bryn stopped, wishing the situation was more erasable than the pen.



TECHNICAL WARFARE - PREVIEW

Eli Goldman - Birch

I hear a knock on the door.

It's a calm knock, unlike if, lets say, the police were at the door. It was calm, which reminded me of the old days. Laying on bean bag chairs, scrolling through videos, life was fun. It was relaxing.

And then the pandemic hit.

Now, this was no regular pandemic. This was a tech pandemic. Because of a power outage caused by a lightning strike, all devices connected to the internet were shut down. The internet was run by the GTA, the Global Tech Association. On a regular Tuesday, around three years ago, the main tower was struck by lightning, causing an outage. Now, usually, this would be pretty easy to fix. But the backup reactor was broken. Long story short, it exploded, and the factory building literally fell down. Millions of people died. And they all blamed Mark Physon, the creator of GTA.

But before anything could happen, he went missing and didn't leave a trace. His wife and kids were left alone, and everyone forgot. Now life is like war. People fight for hours just to get their hands on some old devices not run by the GTA. All I have is a run-down room in an old, torn motel.

I get a bit lost in my mind when I remember where I am. I don't respond to knocks. I avoid them, as they are usually just buyers coming for old technology. But then I hear another knock. That could be bad. They usually leave after one knock. Then I hear a bang.

I always leave the lights off, just in case. I grab my suitcase, with all my belongings, and roll under the bed. It isn't long before I hear a fourth knock, this time much louder. A voice follows shortly after. "Open Up! Is anyone there?" It was commanding, and scared me a bit. Still, I didn't respond. I waited for what came next.

And waited.

And waited.

And nothing came. *He must be gone*, I thought to myself. I started to roll back under when I heard the door slide open. I peered under the hanging sheets and saw a pair of thick, black boots. He didn't leave. He was lockpicking the door! I knew he was serious when he stormed into my bathroom. I gazed at towels thrown, glasses shattered, books ripped. And then he stopped. I knew he had seen the leftover water in the shower. I slid a bit farther back in the bed- bad idea. I collided with the wall and my shoes did a little *clack*.

The man froze and turned around.

"Who's there?" He said, demanding.

And then he pulled out a gun.

I stood still, frozen. I stopped breathing, just so he couldn't hear me. But it was hard to not burst out crying. It reminded me... but I couldn't think about it now. I was in a bit of a messy situation. He started walking over to the old wardrobe. I never touch it. A family of rats lives there, so I don't want to disturb them. He slides the doors so hard one falls off. Yet he doesn't even flinch, he just looks at the old, crummy hangers with no clothes at all. Then I see one of the rats crawl out. *Mickey*, I named him. I almost died when I remembered the first moment I met him. I almost killed him. I snap back to reality. I see him gaze down at the mouse hole and hear gunshots.

I see a little rat tail pop up from the bottom of the closet. I was shocked. Mickey, his family, all gone. It almost made me shed a tear. But I couldn't do that right now. The man then starts going crazy. Breaking pictures that aren't even mine, tossing bedsheets, pillows- but then he starts looking under the beds. The worst thing is I can't do anything about it. If I move, he'll hear me, and if I stay, he'll find me. I guess this is the end of the li-

KnockKnockKnock

I hear a sound from the door. I can't seem to make out who it is, but they managed to save my life. The other person walks into the room.

"What is all the ruckus? Who are you?" The new man asks. Wait... I recognize that voice. That's the manager, Michael! I'm so glad to see him... he's my only friend in this place! He lets me stay for free, because of the whole pandemic thing.

Michael stops moving. I can tell he saw the weapon.

"I-I-" he slowly starts to back out of the room. The man raises his weapon.

"You're not going anywhere," he says.

Michael looks at the room, observing his surroundings. He's a smart man, even if most people don't know. He gazes under the bed and spots me. He understands what I need to do instantly, and starts stalling.

"Okay, okay. What are you doing here?" he asked.

"That is classified. If you want to live, tell me all the information you know about Joseph Sydney." The man replied.

I flinched when he said my name. So did Michael, but he didn't show it.

"I have no idea who you are talking about. No one lives here. It's just me," Michael said.

"That doesn't explain the movement I saw or the sound I heard," the man said.

"Sir, this is a very old motel. I can't lie that sometimes it makes sounds."

“Well you can lie about no one living here. I know I heard someone.”

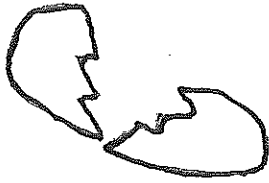
“Sir, if you could just calm do-”

“NO! I WILL NOT CALM DOWN!” The man interrupts. The old floor shakes. Paintings slide. “I KNOW-” He coughs, then switches to a calmer tone. “I know that I heard someone. If you are no help, then I will have to put you down. So one last time, Do you know anything about Joseph Sydney?”

Michael looks back at me, and throws a little ‘Peace’ sign to me. I know what he’s about to do, and I want to tell him to stop, but I can’t. I brace myself and get ready to go.

“RUN!” Michael lunges at the man, head-first. I keep myself from looking and bolt out of the room to escape. I can’t help but cry after I hear gunshots, but I keep sprinting deeper into the woods. Farther, farther, and farther down the path. I stop at a tall, old tree. I sit down and sob into my hands. It takes me a while, but I finally gain the courage to stand up and keep walking.

After all, I have to go somewhere.



To Wish
Eli Goldman
Snow



The glowing water really caught my eye as I was passing. I was originally just trying to navigate back to the hotel, and yet somehow I didn't notice the well before. It was like any normal well, stone brick walls in a cylindrical shape, wooden rods and a roof with a handle which usually brings up the bucket. Except, on this occasion, there was no bucket. Just a handle, connected to nothing but the rod. But the main thing that was off was the water. This light blue, almost radiating glowing water. As I leaned closer, it's like I could almost hear it calling out to me.

Suddenly, my pockets feel a little heavier. It's a big change for a guy like me, who barely ever carries pocket change, or any change at all, for that matter. Ever since I got divorced one and a half years back, my greedy wife took everything I owned and I couldn't even afford a lawyer to protest, since she was the rich one in the relationship. Took the money, the house, the two cars, the dog, and most importantly, my heart. I was left alone with almost nothing to spare. And yet, here I am, in northern Ontario, for a work project. It's almost crazy how much it can change in so little time.

I reach for my pockets and pull out a single penny. In perfect condition, almost, and I could swear it wasn't there before. It was like any normal coin, the same bronze look, except for one thing. The date was missing, and the head... It wasn't the President's. It was... someone else. Someone different. I couldn't quite figure out who it was. But it wasn't just the front. The backside, where the 'tails' side would usually be. A well was in its place. Not just any well. *This* well. I think for a quick second before lifting up my head and looking at the well. Then, back at the coin.

Well, coin. Well, coin. This goes on for a little while until I look up at something else. The hotel. I see people chatting in one of the dim yellow windows, for a couple seconds, before eventually turning off the lights. Like they forgot about me. Or almost... I didn't care. I looked down at the penny one more time and decided, '*Why not?*' and plucked it into the well. It made your average *splash* sound and sunk. I looked down the well about two seconds later, but it was gone. As if it sunk.

How deep was this thing? I lean in a bit closer and take a look. But instead, I hear a voice. And a real one this time. "*Come with meeeeeeee...*" It's low, but I can understand it. I lean in a bit more until I can see my reflection. The second I see it, I make a realization. But it's too late. I feel a *push* on my back as I fall into the well. A *splash* as I slowly float down to the bottom, wherever that is. The water slowly grows dimmer until it finally stops. I was never a good swimmer. And finally, I think back to my realization before it all goes black.

The face on the coin was me.



Thief

By Fiona Jackson
Snow

It was midnight, and British millionaire Vincent McBride had gathered two men and a woman in the garden of McBride Manor. Lanterns flickered and crumbs were scattered about the ground; the attorney had hosted a birthday celebration earlier that night. Everything seemed still. An aging man swept the terrace. The wind howled. A magpie settled onto a tree branch

“Hello,” he said, pacing the ground. “We are here tonight, because one of you-” he arched an eyebrow - “has stolen my watch. A fifteen-thousand dollar Rolex commissioned in none other than London, England. And I intend to find out who the thief is.”

“Gregory,” McBride said to a tall, thin man with curly salt-and pepper hair. “You were at my party, no? Taking photographs by the front walk, interviewing guests for the local paper. I took off the watch and posed for a photograph by the swimming pool. It provided you with the perfect opportunity to steal my watch. But then you slipped into the coatroom to retrieve your jacket. So you did not steal my watch.

“Ernest,” he said to a nervous, high - strung young man with a mop of red hair, “you were landscaping the garden around the same time. After the photo, I put my watch in a locker I left for your company to store your equipment. It would have been easy for you to sneak through the dark garden, away from the party. Such an artifact would have been a true prize to a young man like you. You are only an intern. But-” he stroked his chin. “-you are only an intern. Felix - my friend, and your boss - promised he wouldn’t share the combination with any of his employees, paid or unpaid. Felix did not take my watch. And therefore, you did not take my watch.”

“Anne,” he said to a middle aged woman in a cocktail dress, “I asked you to dance with me during the waltz. At this point, I had slipped the watch into my coat pocket.”

Anne blushed and nodded.

“But I took my coat off, of course, indoors. And I left it right by your purse. But shortly after, my butler took my coat. So you did not steal my watch.”

“After I retrieved my coat, I went outside to take a walk. I was in the garden when my coat got caught on a tree.

“I felt something fall from my coat pocket. But at that moment, someone called my name. It was the gardener. He had discovered a bird nest in the toolshed. So I ran off to assist him, thinking that no one knew the whereabouts of the watch. I promised myself that I would be back in a few minutes.”

“I returned, and to my dismay, the watch was gone. There were no human footprints, no way to track the thief.”

“So I see,” he said, realization dawning on him, “that neither Gregory, nor Ernest, nor Anne stole the watch.”

“But sir-” stammered Ernest in his strong Cockney accent, “you said one of us- one of us stole it.”

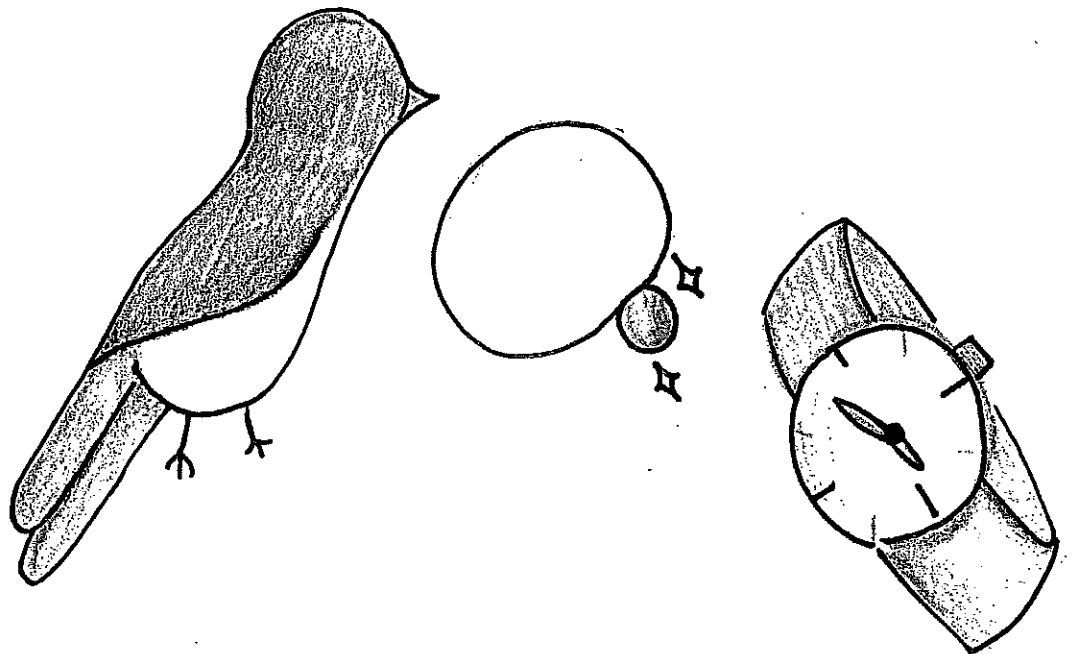
“So I did,” said McBride calmly. “Do you think me a liar?”

“No, sir.” Ernest bowed his head.

“The thief is, in fact, one of you right here in this garden.”

Anne gave a sudden cry. “My bracelet! It’s gone!”

McBride looked amused. “One of us,” he repeated, “stole the watch.” He swiveled his head toward the tree. Perched on a branch was a magpie, a woman’s gold bracelet in its mouth.



Over The Horizon

Grace Johnson-Wellnitz
Olive

JoMei

When I get ready to fall asleep, there's someone, lurking, just over the edge of my view, nothing about them creepy, and nothing bad, only strange.

I let my pink and orange bright hues sink into nothing, into darkness.

Mysterious.

I wonder who they are and why there's that cool glow, there when I wake up, though much stronger when I go to bed: lying under the warm covers, resting when that bright light shines in my rays, threatening me to rest further, to not make a move.

How do they wake, so present and glowing...and me, I'm, I'm supposed to shine!

I'm supposed to be the one that looks over everyone, everyone who's scared by the shadows and dark waves washing over them when they fall asleep...



Misae

I wake up and see something, just over the brink of-

"Are you okay, ma'am?" one of my maids asks. I nod simply, and quiet myself.

Another one comes up, pulls me to standing, and sprinkles a sparkly dust over me.

"Is that really nessa-"

She puts up a pointy hand. "Stay quiet, ma'am."

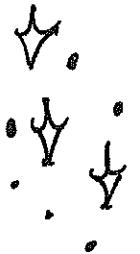
I purse my lips and try to look forward, more, ahead, further to see what could possibly be over there.

What could be so far, yet so close.

So beautifu-

"Are you okay?" the maid who had sprinkled me with dust asks, tugging on my dress.

"Fine," I bite out, pulling my eyes away from the *brink*.



JoMei

When I wake, I watch as in the distance, that same someone lurks at the edge, watching.

But they're tiring.

As I wake.

And maybe, they feel just as I did last night.

Watching someone in the distance that they can't grasp, filling their lungs with a whole new side of shades and ranges of colors they haven't seen before.

"Hello?" I call out into the bright light.

I hear nothing back.

Unless I strain myself...nope.

More cotton candy shades, and I shine bright.



Blazing as I rise and peak, and then fall.
I light up the natural shadows of this world.
I protect everyone from the deep darkness.
And I wish I could know who's been haunting me as I wake and go to bed.

Misae

"Go to bed."

"No, there's something over there. Something bright and beautiful and something much warmer and brighter than I will ever be. I want to see it."

A pause. Then: "But I can't."

"I need to." I turn and pierce my look on my maid.

I sound desperate and feeble, but she complies nonetheless.

"Alright. Raise yourself up. But beware. Be very careful. That *thing* over there hurts."

As soon as I stand, I feel myself weaken. My legs crumple to my feet.

I am not able to look at this someone in front of me. Their bright, warm, hues and tones and colors and light, their *rays* reflect over me and seem to hurt me to my core.

"Told you," the maid says. "Bed."

JoMei

I hurt the someone over the edge. I hurt the cool, glowing, hues and tones and colors and light when I wake.

And when they wake, I feel just a little hurt.

But surely, surely, I'm hurting them more than they hurt me.

I need to dim myself.

But if I do, I worry then that I'd hurt some creatures below, who are looking out for me. Who wishes as time passes by that I help them and shine a little more, a little brighter.

I need to dim myself.

And so, the next time I wake, I dim myself. Even more than I used to.

And when I fall asleep, just in case.

Maybe I can *glow* when I'm at my peak. Maybe then they're not in sight, and they won't be harmed by a little extra, taken away from the edges and put in the middle.

More and more and over time, it becomes habit as I think I learn more and more about this *someone* across the edge.

Misae

My maids have abandoned me more and more as I force myself that I can be on my own. I don't need them. And I am not delusional. That bright, shining, ray-filled someone in the distance that lowers their light when I am at my worst, for me, is well and truly there.

But I want to show them that I can shine too.

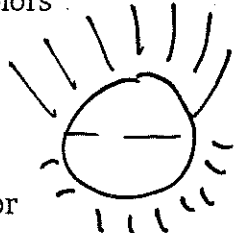
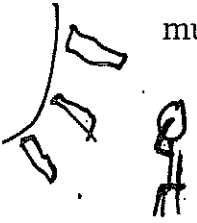
I don't always just have to glow.

I can have my own type of light.

Different. New. Exciting.

I can be myself.

The *moon*. With *moonlight*. And those little maids, they can be *stars*. I'm myself.



JoMei

I feel myself seeing more and more of this not-so-stranger anymore, more and more, overtime, more of themself.

They are the *moon*. They have *moonlight*. They are *shining*.

I am the *sun*. I have *sunlight*. I am *glowing*.

We both have our rays, our sleeps and our wakes. Our *rises* and *sets*.

We both have our *light*.

But for a little, when one of us is waking and the other falling asleep, those in-between times, we share.

We make *dawn* and *dusk*.

Shadows and *lights*.

Brightness and *darkness*.

A balance between us.



Akua

More and more, I feel the pull of the two of these celestial beings, far, far, far above me. Glowing and shining and so *radiant*, things that I could never be.

I am a deep, sinking, growing, body of water that could never float and glide and be as graceful and the spheres above.

As they fell in *love*-whatever they wanted to call it-I felt the pull of them more.

The *moon* pulled me even more, and I *rose* and *fell* and the *sun*, sparkled above my skin, and I wished that they didn't exist, and that they weren't pulling me in two different directions *always*. I wish that maybe, selfishly, just for a moment, that I could have that too.

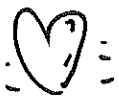
What they had. *Love*.

I hurt whenever they existed, and one of them was always ruling. Always hurting me.

Sometimes, briefly, two.

They deserved happiness. They deserved the feeling of knowing a bit more about what was lurking for them *over the horizon*.

Good for them, I forcefully think as I watch dawn happen once again, the sun dimming its light for the moon.



The Historically Accurate Tale of Sir Bob and the Round Kiddie-Table

By: Ike Rottmann

Tenacity

(Don't worry, it's short)

Chapter I

Bob

This is a story of a misfit knight named Bob, seated at the kiddie table next to the round table.

Bob was a rather cowardly knight, and usually had his henchman, Arthur, fight his battles. You might recognise Arthur as the great King Arthur, but for now, Arthur is a brave twelve year-old boy. The adventure I will tell you is a great one, as it landed Bob in jail, and Arthur in his place on the round-table.

One day, while Bob was having his chicken nuggets at the round kiddie-table, he began to think. (Surprising, right?) And he thought: *Chee, wouldn't these chicken nuggets taste much better if me, Sir Bob, was eating them at the true round table?!* From that moment on, Bob and his trusty sidekick, Aurthur, made history.

It was been a few days since Bob's idea. The morning was bright but chilly, and Bob had just gotten out of bed. He had not been able to sleep at all, for he was planning an adventure to land himself into a V.I.P. seat on the round table. The plan was simple. He would ask the local wizard to make a giant fierce dragon that only he could smite, and he would kill the beast right in front of the king.

It took two months for the wizard to conjure a dragon egg susceptible only to a certain golden sword, blacksmithed in the depths of the great ravine, made by a mysterious people known as the Smurfs.

The Smurfs. An ancient tribe that has etched their mark in history. Any school child could recall the Smurf wars. All 27 of them. Townspeople cowered in fear when the Smurfs paid a visit to the kingdom. They would ransack the townsfolk and torture the farm animals, and before the knights could catch them, they would be gone.

Bob, however, was oblivious to the Smurfs, as he lived within the castle. The king hid him from others, in fear of showing the one true weakness of the round table. The only reason Bob ever got onto the Kiddie Round Table was through bribery of his very rich father.

Trouble was brewing.

Chapter 2

Joe

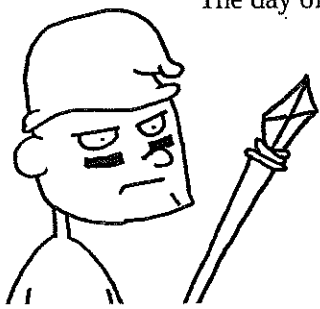


We will briefly leave Bob and his troublesome story to pay a visit to Joe, an incredibly smart yet humble Smurf. Joe lived in a small shack at the east border of Smurf Village, next to a miniature pond. Today, all the Smurfs were called to town hall for a big announcement. Smurfs filed into the hall and were seated in front of a large podium. The lights dimmed and the curtains slid open. There, Papa Smurf stood with a stern face and a microphone.

"The day of our final and biggest attack is approaching. Prepare."

Chapter 3

Bob



It was the eve of the battle. Bob was strapping on his best cardboard armor, (made of only the finest Amazon packaging), and adjusting a cool helmet he got off of Spirit Halloween. Meanwhile, Bob's trusty assistant, Arthur, was selecting a real pair of armor and sharpening his family heirloom, a magnificent gold and steel sword, crafted by a legendary blacksmith of long ago. The sun set, and our heroes braced themselves for the big day.

The morning was blissful. Birds were chirping and the morning dew sparkled as it lay like a blanket over the grass. The clouds had an orange tint as the sun slowly began to rise from its slumber. Bob and Arthur convened in the courtyard, and silently slipped away into the slowly awaking village. After a few hours of stumbling through the cobblestone streets of the small **residential settlement** (the first synonym I see when I look up village.), they arrive at the wizards tower, standing tall and not-so-mighty. The steps creaked and moaned as they started their climb up to the door of the tower, and the glass rattled with every small gust of wind.

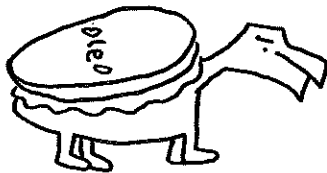
Before Arthur even had a chance to knock the door, the castle burst with life and light. The doors swung open, and the heroes entered. In front of them was a large and magnificent room full of brightly lit candles. On the floor was a large velvet carpet with a golden trimming. A large wooden table with an identical table cloth sat in the center of the room. At the end of the table, an ancient man wearing purple robes and long shoes that curled at the end sat with a stern look. Immediately Bob and Arthur knew this man was the wizard.

Arthur immediately bowed down to him while Bob removed his hand from his nose to "give the wizard five", and sat arrogantly on the chair furthest from the wizard.

"Call me Ishmael!" The wizard began, loudly and unexpectedly. "Some years ago, never mind how long ago..." and continued muttering.

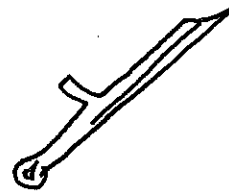
"Sir? Mr. Ishmal?" Arthur began. "We heard you bear an egg of a dragon that may only be destroyed by a certain sword. Is this true?"

The wizard sat straight up and looked at Arthur, then hurried away. Minutes later he returned with a beautiful sword and a dark red egg with black spots. The handle of the sword was a dark blue, wrapped around a bold silver blade, decorated with gems, and finished with a black lining. The wizard handed the sword to Bob with surprising ease, (swords are heavy!) and immediately, Bob saw a problem: The sword was made of plastic, the egg was of the most dangerous dragon known to mankind-The mighty Oreo.



Chapter 4

Joe



Joe looked around. Everywhere Smurfs were smearing red paint across their faces and equipping their best spears. The gates to Smurf Village opened and thousands of Smurfs charged out, followed by hundreds of vehicles very similar to the Trojan Horse.

They traveled far, knocking over any farmers that lived far from the kingdom, and soon they could see the town and castle.

They charged through the large doors and lit their torches. Houses began to burn and the sound of screaming and warning bells ringing were everywhere.

"Ten! Nine! Eight! Seven! Six! Five! Four! Three! Two! One!"

BOOM

To be continued...

The Play

By Saesha Shetiya - Snow

"Here comes Lucille," Clara muttered to Cassie under her breath as their blond bully came down the hallway.

Cassie turned around and let her wavy dark hair hide her face from view, whispering to Clara about how she wished Lucille would stop tormenting them already with her dumb tricks.

Clara agreed, then opened her mouth to speak, her gaze darting past Cassie nervously.

Turning back, Cassie's hazel eyes went wide before she got shoved to the ground.

The entire hall went silent as Cassie's water bottle cracked open, sending water gushing across the floor.

Seeing she had everyone's attention, Lucille spoke up. "Oh my god! I'm *sooo* sorry Jazzy! I swear it was an accident," she shrugged, "Oh well, you better start cleaning up so you can get to class on time. Good luck tonight, you'll do *great!*"

Cassie shot a death glare at the back of her head as Clara ran back with a handful of paper towels from the bathroom. She thanked her best friend and grabbed a couple.

"You good?"

"Couldn't be better!" Cassie said, then realized it was no use to hide from her best friend. "I just don't want any extra stress or pressure right now before the show tonight. Lucille's not helping that much..."

Clara shot her a look. "Come on, you'll be great, now let's hurry so we're not late!"

The two girls frantically dried the floor and hurried to class just as the bell rang.

Pulling her notebook out, Clara sighed and asked Cassie for a pencil, realizing she forgot one.

Nodding, Cassie handed her one almost immediately.

"Hey Glare-a," some random boy called, "Are you so broke your dad can't afford to buy you a pencil?"

The room filled with snickers as Clara shielded her face with her platinum blond hair, hence her nickname.

Luke, one of the girls' friends, stepped in, "Do *not* make fun of my girlfrie-"

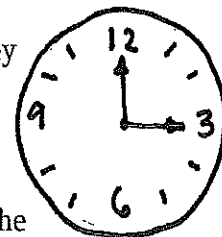
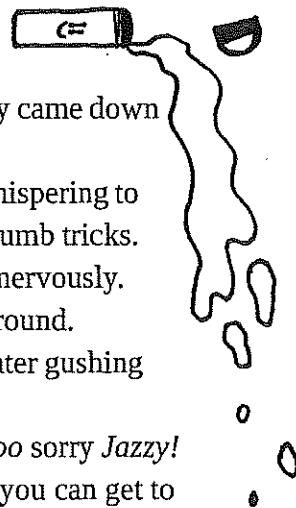
"Excuse me," Lucille said, making her way across the room. "It was just a pencil, and who cares if she doesn't have a mom, at least she has a brain!"

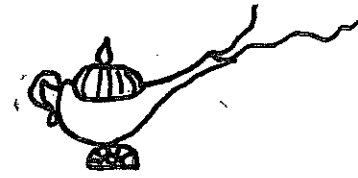
That made the boys shut their mouths really quickly.

Clara looked up and locked her bright blue eyes with Cassie and Luke's, knowing they were both thinking the same exact thing. *Why did Lucille just stick up for her?*

The clock struck 3:00 and they were out of the room.

The three friends walked to the auditorium brimming with energy. They shoved past the crowds of people heading the other way, eventually arriving at the entrance.





They said good luck to each other, hoping the show would go well.

Luke gave Clara a quick hug before she headed to meet up with the rest of the crew, then followed Cassie into the gym to get into costumes and have their hair and makeup done.

After everyone got tidied up and people had filled the many seats, the show began.

Cassie had her opening scene right after Luke, playing Aladdin, started them off.

She watched as her friend jumped and leaped across the stage, being the true lead he was.

She felt the corners of her mouth lift up, despite the billions of butterflies dancing around in her stomach.

As the song came to an end, Cassie noticed Clara backstage and gave her a thumbs up. Taking a deep breath, she saw the black-out and took to the stage, running to get to center before the lights blinded her eyes.

The piano began as she stared into the crowd, only then noticing the sheer size of the audience. She closed her eyes and started singing in a soft, melodious voice, doing her best to pretend she was actually Jasmine, far away and full of hope.

Starting to feel herself, Cassie got louder and louder, feeling more and more confident with each crescendo.

Just when the song reached its peak, however, her mic faltered, then gave out completely. Shortly after, a couple of the lights illuminating the stage shut off, too. Then even more.

An indescribable feeling of pure dread seeped through Cassie's body, taking her literal breath away. Pervaded with the sudden sense of fear, she froze, unable to sing or move, forget dance.

She watched as thousands of eyeballs stared at her, judging, waiting for *something* to happen.

This can not be happening right now, Cassie thought.

The audience continued to watch her, the sound of whispers creating another wave of panic.

Her brain screamed, *Do something! Anything! At least start singing again!*

Somehow, she found her voice and was able to pick up the song, only a little hesitant.

Cassie knew the show must go on, so she summoned her courage and finished the number, sprinting off-stage the moment the lights, whichever were remaining, dimmed.

Already feeling the sting of her tears, Cassie hurried to the bathroom, praying that she wouldn't ruin her makeup with a sudden downpour.

Taking deep breaths, Cassie realized that she heard someone else crying, too.

"Hello?" she asked, her voice shaky.

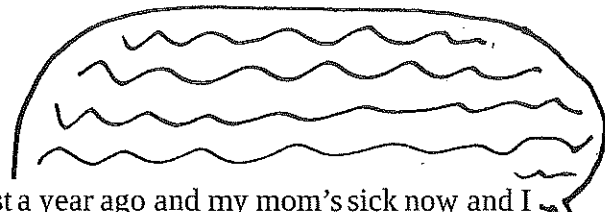
Slowly opening the stall door, an unmistakable blond figure appeared, her cheeks streaked with mascara and eyes puffy.

"Lucille! What are you-"

"I'm sorry!" she bursts, "Sorry for everything, I just didn't know what to do."

"What do you mean?" Cassie said, narrowing her eyes in suspicion.





Lucille sighed, "It's just... My dad died almost a year ago and my mom's sick now and I just moved here earlier this year and I'm really scared and I feel like I don't fit in and I didn't know how to deal with it all so I took it out on you because you're really cool and I-"

"Woah, woah, woah! Calm down," Cassie said, grabbing Lucille's shoulders. "You're okay."

The two girls looked at each other for a couple seconds, then Cassie realized she was still holding Lucille's shoulders and let go.

Cassie exhaled, processing the words that had just come out of her bully's mouth.

She saw Lucille do the same, probably thinking about the major confession as well.

I had no idea Lucille had it so tough outside of school, Cassie thought, That explains a ton... and why my mic and the lights went out.

Just then, Clara burst in and stopped mid speech, taking in the scene in front of her, eyebrows high upon her head.

"Okay... I'm just gonna," she pointed to the door, "You're on soon Cass."

Cassie looked at Lucille and saw a confident smile on her face. She wished Cassie luck and walked out, leaving the 13-year-old alone.

Cassie shook her head, not totally sure what just happened. Then she pushed the door open, ready to redeem the show.

"That was amazing guys!" Luke said, "Well, except for the technical difficulties near the beginning, but you pulled through Cass!"

Cassie rolled her eyes and grinned, agreeing that it was, indeed, a great musical otherwise.

Noticing Lucille walking up to them, Cassie waved her over.

Head hung, their bully (now ex-bully?) explained her situation and how it was her fault for the problems during the show. She said that she hoped they would forgive her but she understood if they did not.

Clara then burst out laughing, causing Lucille's grey eyes to widen and her brows to furrow.

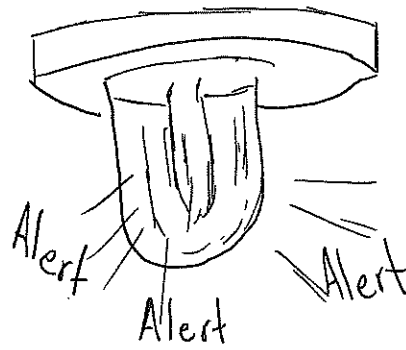
After she calmed down, Clara softly spoke, "Of course we'll forgive you! I know what it's like to be in that kind of situation and we'd love to hang out with you sometime. Tell your mom that I hope she gets better and I'm really sorry about your dad."

Lucille let go of her breath, her entire body relaxing as if a huge weight had been lifted off of her shoulders. "Thank you."

THANK YOU.

Friday

By: Susana Baro Doreste
Team: Olive



Planet: Mars Year: 3024 Month: January Day: 16

A loud crash woke me at 2:00 am. I jolted out of bed, and quickly put on some thermal clothes in case it got too cold. Then I went to the cafeteria to meet up with everyone else. Rahan Gishan was already there and somehow he was already arguing with Angelica Rose. Seriously they argue over everything. Tom Buzzba came in after me, and he scowled at the sight of them arguing. Then he asked me, "Has anyone checked to see if we still have contact with NASA, and do we know what caused that crash?" When I shook my head he sighed, and frowning he directed himself towards the arguing pair.

Just then Noah Arkus ran in screaming, "The world is ending! We're all going to die!" That put a stop to whatever argument Rahan and Angelica had been having.

Rahan stared at Noah before he started listing off facts, "All that is happening is that meteors crashed into Mars and Earth, NASA has cut off the mission and ordered us to only use needed facilities because we are low on power, and finally NASA has told us that they CAN'T HELP US EVEN THOUGHT THAT IS THEIR JOB!!!! So me and Angelica were arguing over who'd be in charge of keeping everyone alive, even though none of you deserve it-"

Angelica cut him off and started talking "So now we know that however is in charge can't be Rahan or Noah, due to recent events-"

This time Rahan cut Angelia off, and glaring he interpreted "Hey, why can't I be the leader, I'm smarter than all of you combined!"

"Rahan, and Angelia you two can't keep arguing over everything, or we'll never be able to actually do anything about the meteors, or the power problem!" I exclaimed. Then I looked around at everyone, and saw that Rahan was glaring daggers at Angelia, Angelia was scowling back, Noah had finally calmed down a bit, and Tom was watching Angelia and Rahan's silent fight.

"Rain is right, Angelia and Rahan, you two need to stop arguing. It's all you do when you're in the same room, and it's the most annoying thing ever." Tom said, agreeing with me.

Then Noah spoke up for the first time since he'd woken up calmly, "So Tom is in charge now." It was surprising that Noah was saying it with no room for any debate, then I realized it was surprising because everything so far had been a constant fight.

In the end that seemed like the only option because I certainly wasn't about to be in charge, I don't even know how to. So we all agreed that Tom would be in charge or else no work to be done at all. We got split into groups to get more work done, Tom and Noah would try to repair the solar panels, I would go to make sure none of the crops had been damaged because that was our only backup source of food, Rahan would try to find and use Martian ice to make fuel, and Angelia would try to pitch in wherever she could.

I went to the greenhouse, after agreeing to meet back with the group at the sleeping quarters in 3 hours. I found that most of the soil and plants that I had been trying to grow had been in good condition but the heat generator must have stopped

working when the meteors hit because some of the plants that were far away from the generator were covered in frost. We had a problem, a really big problem, because if the heat generator wasn't fixed within the next few hours we'd completely run out of any food that we could grow, so that when the food NASA sent with us ran out we'd survive a bit longer. I thought over what I knew about the problem, the greenhouse was designed to keep in heat ,but if nothing was generating heat all the plants would freeze. Of course there had to be a way to turn the heat generator back on, but I didn't know if we had the tools or how to do it, see the greenhouse is extremely fragile with too little heat the plants would freeze but if there was too much heat the greenhouse would start automatically letting air out so that the inside would cool down. This was a problem because the greenhouse couldn't have more heat than the heat generator and two people or it would start the emergency program. Since NASA hadn't planned for anything really terrible to happen on the mission, because they thought that they'd be able to get us off Mars in time they'd only thought of the greenhouse's basic automatic programming in case of emergency so there was no other alternative method for the greenhouse to drastically cool down. Another problem was that there was no back up heat generator in the greenhouse. The only building that had back up heat generators was the main living quarters, and they couldn't be used because of the power problem.

By the time 2 hours had passed I was down right panicking about the greenhouse's problem, so I decided to go back early. Good thing I did because when I got there Angelia and Rahan were trying to kill each other. I mean it, they were rolling on the ground trying to choke each other. Tom and Noah were still outside trying to repair the solar panels so they didn't know what was going on, when I called them over. Rahan and Angelia were obviously mad at each other, because they completely ignored us. Noah and I tried to pull them away from each other while Tom stopped them from trying to fight again by planting himself between them. I remembered that Rahan had a black belt in Jujitsu, Karate, and Kung Fu so I knocked him out. Angelia looked mad when I did that and she probably didn't appreciate it when Noah knocked her out right a second later.

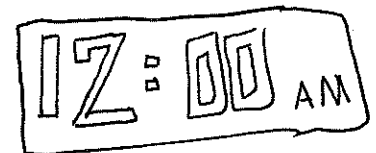
"What do you guys think that was about?"asked Noah bewilderedly after we made sure that they were far far away from each other.

"No idea,"replied Tom, "It certainly wasn't normal."

"Yeah, that was crazy," I added on, "They were so mad at each other that they didn't even notice us."

"Did you guys make any progress with the solar panels?" I asked Tom and Noah.

They nodded their heads, "A bit," replied Tom "but not much." This wasn't good, so I then told them about the greenhouse problem. They both agreed with me that we'd all be doomed if we didn't find a way to solve the many problems that we had at the moment and a way to solve the conflict that Rahan and Angelia were having before anything serious happened. I went to sleep at 12:00 AM after a long day of uneasy work.





Serving Man

Yulia Cheng, Bamboo



An alternate ending for "To Serve Man" by Damon Knight

"It's a cookbook," he said. My eyes widened, shocked that he would even suggest something like that.

"Do you have the book?" I asked, in a panic. Grigori sighed and pulled it out of his bag.

"Right here," he said. "Read it for yourself." I flipped to the first page and saw that there were stains and marks all over it. With the notes, I was able to make out the first line.

"*Ingredients for Man Soup.*" I read that line several times to make sure I was right. *Man soup. They really were planning to use us.* Grigori saw my reaction and nodded. "We're going on the ship next," he grimaced.

"Does that mean...?" I shuddered, thinking of what could happen to us.

"Yes." Grigori replied.

"Well, what do we do?" I exclaimed. "We can't just let them- um-"

"Kill us?"

"Well, yeah! We can't just let them end us!"

"Exactly," he said, pulling something out of his bag. "Which is why we're getting to them first." I looked at the item in his hand. A gun.

"What-how-" I stuttered.

"I stole it," he answered. "The UN still has a hidden stock of weapons just in case." He tossed a revolver to me. "Take it. We're leaving in 2 hours." With that, he picked up his bag and walked out the door, leaving me in shock.

Two hours later, I was at the landing site. Grigori was waiting next to me, his facial features twisted into a frown as usual. There was a large white spaceship a few meters away, and a Kanama walking toward us. "Welcome to our ship," it said. "Follow me this way to the office. One of us will be there to show you around." It then started back toward the ship, and we followed suit.

The inside of the ship was smooth and clean, with hundreds of the pig-like creatures bustling around. There was a weird smell, but I didn't pay that much mind. The Kanama led us into a small room, and a few translation pages were on the table. "As you are translators," the Kanama said. "We have reserved a room for you two to continue your studies. Hopefully you will be able to introduce us to more of the human languages in your two weeks here on the ship." The creature then walked out of the room and closed the door behind it.

So," I said, after the Kanama had left. "How exactly are we going to go about doing this?" Grigori turned his head in my direction.

"Easy," he replied. "First things first-"

"Kill one for tests?" I suggested. He shook his head.

"Check for cameras," He answered. "We don't know what sorts of technology they have, nor do we know if they suspect us. We need to survey the area." I nodded, then stood up and looked toward a corner of the room. There, I saw a small red light that was flashing, but not

noticeable. I tapped Grigori's shoulder. "They've been watching us this whole time," I said, not taking my eyes off the red light. Grigori looked toward the light, and his face turned pale.

"I should have expected," he muttered. Suddenly, there was a knock on our door.

"Peter Fielding, Grigori White," The voice said. "We are moving you to a new room." I groaned. *They really were watching our every move.* I picked up my bag, and Grigori did the same. "Let's hope they didn't hear *everything*," I mumbled.

Outside the room, there was another Kanama waiting for us. "Follow me," it said. "To another office." It led us down the hallway, and the putrid smell of the room we were in got worse as we went further. We stopped at a dark room. "The lights are on the right," the Kanama said, shutting the door behind us.

I felt the wall for a light switch of some sort, and my hand landed on a button. "Don't pre-" Too late. A set of manacles wrapped around my wrists and ankles, making me fall to the floor. I heard Grigori fall as well, and that was when the lights flashed on. I struggled to get up, and saw him trying the same. We were unsuccessful. "What did you do?!" Grigori exclaimed.

"I don't know!" I shouted back.

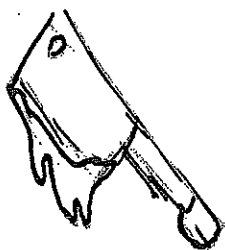
"Blast you!" He yelled. "Now we're as good as dead!" I was about to retort when I heard the door unlock again. Two Kanamit walked in, silent. One of them took out some sort of device, and I felt myself fly upwards, hanging by the manacles. Grigori was still trying to escape, to find some sort of release hatch. I looked him in the eye and he sighed, giving up.

The Kanamit took us to what I supposed was the kitchen. The pungent smell that had been strong was especially dizzying here. Kanamit were everywhere here, and I saw a copy of *How To Serve Man* on the floor in a corner. I sighed, remembering that a few hours ago I had believed they were actually altruists. Now they were about to dismember us. *Grigori was right. I should have listened to him all those weeks ago.* I looked up, and saw they were taking us into a large room that smelled of copper. On the walls of that room were knives. Hundreds of them. Nearly all of them were stained with blood, like the walls. Like the Kanamits that were holding human body parts as they walked nonchalantly out of the room.

As we went inside the room, the cuffs opened, releasing us. I tried to move, but I couldn't feel anything. Nor could I move. I saw Grigori from the corner of my eye, and he looked panicked. I refocused on my main line of sight and saw a cleaver coming down. Then all went black.

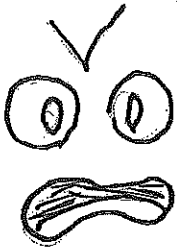
Kanama's POV

Another person came into the kitchen with a pile of human arms and legs. I took them and threw them into the cauldron, dusting my hands as I turned back toward the door, awaiting more parts.



Snap

By: Nibha Shrestha
Team: Bamboo



"I DID NOT JUST DO THAT," she screeched.

"Yes you did, and this video is proof," I replied happily.

"I AM TELLING MOM," she hollered.

"No you are not," I said, raising my voice a little, getting serious.

"OH YES I AM," she said storming off.

I had to act quick, then I remembered what I told her when I hypnotized her.

I snapped my fingers and she stopped all her movement, turned around and faced me.

Okay, I know you might be questioning why you are reading this, but hear me out, it was for a good cause. If it wasn't for the snap, I would have been grounded for weeks and weeks. First let me tell you how it started.

I was at a big carnival, and apparently, there was someone hypnotizing people. I asked him to teach me. After a whole hour of him lecturing me about it, he gave me a pendulum and a pocket watch, for free!

As I was walking home, I wanted to see if that man was speaking the truth. One side of my brain said, "Yes! Of course! He literally showed it to everyone!" but the other side of my brain said, "No! Of course not! The people he was hypnotizing might be actors!" There was only one way to find out. I HAD to try it on someone.

Out of all of the people in my house I had to do it on my older sister. She was one of the popular and cool kids at her school, so it would be really funny to see her do something stupid. It was also a good thing that I could do it now because my parents went out to dinner expecting we, a seventh grader and a tenth grader, wouldn't do ANYTHING stupid.

"Hey, Jenny," I asked, politely.

"What do you want Blake?" she replied rudely.

"I can make you drop your phone into a bowl of water."

She scoffed and rolled her eyes, "No you can't."

"Uh huh, I can." I replied calmly.

"I'd like to see you try".

I ran to the kitchen, grabbed the biggest bowl I could find, and filled it with water.

"Okay, now I want you to lie down, on your back, on the couch," I said.

She did so. I pulled out the pendulum and held it by the end of the string.

"Relax, and look into the pendant."

"Whatever you are trying to do, it's not gonna work," she said confidently.

"Just do it," I said, rolling my eyes.

"Okay, okay, geez."

I twisted the pendulum with my fingers by the string. I dangled and a light reflected off it. After a little while of waiting and watching my sister stare into the pendulum, I noticed that her eyes did not move away from it.

"Try to take your eyes away from the pendant, can you do it?" I ask.

"No," she replied, blankly. She had a mystified look on her face.

"Good, now I will count down from the number five," I said calmly, "as I count down your eyes will get more tired."

"Five, your eyes are blinking continuously."

"Four, your eyes are getting tired from the blinking."

"Three, your eyes are trying to stay open."

As I was counting, I saw her eyes flutter and twitch a bit. From what the man told me, that was a good sign.

"Two, your eyes are closing and you're really sleepy."

"One, your eyes are shut and you have nothing in your mind to think of."

Okay, the first step of hypnotizing someone is done. The next step, take them into control.

"Until I say so, you will always listen to me, nod your head if you understand that."

Her head went up and down.

"Whenever I, Blake LeBlanc, snap my fingers you will always stop whatever you are doing and only listen to me. Open and close your mouth three times if you understand what I just said."

One, two, three times she opened and closed her mouth. This is wonderful! Now I can definitely make her drop her phone into a bowl of water.

"Open your eyes, stand up and bring your phone and the bowl of water up to your room" I said. I have to say things calmly, or else the hypnosis wouldn't work.

I grabbed my phone and went upstairs with her. When we got to her room, I told her to place the bowl on the ground and told her to sit on the floor with her phone in her hand. As she was doing that, I pressed the camera app on my phone and started recording.

"What up everyone? Today my sister is *willingly* going to drop her phone in this bowl of water." I said enthusiastically.

"Jenny, you can now place the phone in the bowl now with everyone watching."

As she was putting the phone in the water, I thought of the consequences that might come ahead, but I didn't think anything of it.

"And that is our daily video for today! Bye my fans!"

After I posted the video on her youtube channel, I saw my sister who was still sitting on the floor, staring blankly at the wall, her hand was still in the water, while she was holding her phone.

"Okay, go to the bathroom and dry your hands, then bring the bowl with the phone inside downstairs, and then lie on the couch, tummy facing up," I ordered.

When we got back downstairs, I got ready to be screamed at by my sister, the ear plugs all that stuff.

"When I snap my fingers", I said soothingly, "you come back to reality, forgetting about everything that just happened, you will think you have fallen asleep and you will think you haven't dropped your phone yet. Nod your head if you understand."

I got one nod.

Step three, the last step, was done. I had made her forget everything. I snapped my fingers and she opened her eyes.

"Sorry, I fell asleep because of how bored I was, anyways, what happened?" she said sarcastically.

"Oh, A LOT of things happened, I even caught it on video!"

I showed her the video and at the end, let's just say, it didn't go very well. But now we are back to where we started so let's roll it, shall we?

So there she was, standing in front of me, I guess the snap part didn't leave her head.

"When I snap my fingers again, you will forget about this and not tell this to anyone, you will tell Mom that you accidentally dropped your phone into the bathtub. Okay?" I asked.

"Yes," my sister said, replying blankly, while staring into the other side of the living room wall.

"Okay, we are all good, nothing to worry about, everything is fine." These thoughts were racing through my head because I knew she was going to find out what I had done to her.

The Zombies

Yulia Cheng, Bamboo

I was in a house. A dark house. I didn't remember how I got there, or anything for that matter. All I could sense was the pain, the pain overwhelming my joints and taking over, the pain that caused me to bleed out, that caused this pool of blood I currently lay in.

I groaned and dragged myself upright to look around. The house smelled of rotten flesh, and there was glass on the floor. I looked down to see my reflection gazing back at me, which was, strangely enough, not covered in blood. In fact, there wasn't even a hint of blood on my body, though a few seconds ago I was lying in a pool of the stuff.

I turned around to look at the pool of red liquid, but it wasn't there. The only red in the house was on the mirror, which was otherwise perfectly clean. There was a weird figure in the background of the mirror, and I shuddered. This house was giving me the creeps.

I walked to the door and stepped outside. *Hopefully the outside isn't as scary.* But alas, I was wrong. As I stepped outside, I saw a graveyard that stretched for miles, as long I could see. As a matter of fact, this house was literally in the middle of a huge graveyard! The only other things I could see was a forest and what seemed to be an abandoned city. I looked toward the forest, but then heard the rumbling of a truck. "Hop in!" Someone said. I panicked and jumped into the car, which appeared to be two cars connected by the trunk. The girl's head was stuck out the window, and she was screaming frantically to the driver. I looked behind the car, and my eyes widened.



There was a horde of zombies chasing us.

There were still dozens emerging out of the ground, and they were all racing toward the truck. "PORTAL NOW!" A boy stuck his head out of a window with a knife. It was glowing purple, and he threw it at empty space. It ripped a hole in space, and the knife fell through. The car then leaped through the portal, and we arrived in front of what seemed to be a weird college. Everything came rushing back. The attack, the portal, everything! I sighed in relief at my memory coming back, and the girl smiled. "Who are you?" I asked.

"I'm Everett," She answered. "This group, this is the zombie crew."

"I'm Bennett."

"Tyler."

"Aanya."

"Mills." There was silence for a while, but then Everett whispered, "This is the part where you say your name!" I chuckled, but then answered with an, "Iris."

Everett took us to the double-car-thing and patted the roof. "This is the double-wagon," She said with a Scottish accent. "It's our transportation. We came here to rescue you, but I have a feeling you'd be a great part of the team."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"I'm asking you to join us on a mission," Everett explained, smiling. "Wanna try?" A zombie team. Well, it wouldn't hurt to try!

"Of course!" I smiled.

"Well, I guess you can be introduced to our current mission! Tyler?" A tall blond boy stood up. "Highway. Spy. Getaway."

"That's how he explains everything," Everett said. "You'll see what our job is soon."

We were on a highway. "The zombies have an entire city that's connected both underground and aboveground," Aanya explained. "There are 4 types of zombies: urban, forest, dead, and stone. Even though each type of zombie has its own terrain, all of them merge together in the zombie city. We need to be careful of all of them when we're in there."

"So, what exactly are we doing?" Aanya laughed.

"Just follow us."

Bennett took us to a bridge, one of the ones that are so small, you never notice you're driving under them. Being an unmaintained bridge, there was a hole under it. Suddenly, the car plummeted into the hole, and we were plunged into a world of darkness.

Zombies. They were everywhere. Their skin was pale white with a tinge of blue, but the red flesh scattered everywhere was a hint that red blood flowed in their veins. The whole...zombie mall place... reeked of rotten flesh. A hand grabbed my shoulder. "GAH!"

"Wear this," Everett said, holding up a gas mask and gloves. "It'll keep you from getting infected." I nodded and put them on.

"Follow me!"

Everett led us into an alley and tapped a brick three times. A door creaked open. Tap. Tap tap tap. There was a sound behind us. I turned my head around. A boney blue hand was tapping another brick behind us. "Um... Everett..." She turned around.

"What?" Her eyes fell wide as she noticed the undead creature. "Quiet," She whispered. "I don't think it's noticed us yet." The monster suddenly twisted its head 180 degrees, its empty black eyes looking straight at us. It opened its mouth. "RUN!"



We turned back toward the double-wagon, but a horde of zombies were blocking the closest route. "To the bridge!" Bennett yelled. I ran with the group closer to the center of the mezzanine, attracting more hungry eyes on our way. There was a glass bridge to a doorway on the other side, and I guessed that was where we were going. The zombies behind us seemed to be multiplying by the second. "AAAh!" We all stopped in our tracks to see Mills fighting no fewer than five zombies at the same time. I stood there, unsure of what to do, when Everett and Bennett dove into the fight headfirst.

Within a minute, they had taken out two zombies. Blood was all over the floor, and there were more zombies coming by the minute. Everett pushed a bleeding Mills out of the way and yelled, "Go to the double-wagon! Take Mills!" Aanya immediately picked up Mills with the fireman's carry and threw Tyler the keys. I looked back at Everett and Bennett. "What about them?"

"Don't worry," Tyler reassured me. "I have no doubt they'll come out without a scratch." He broke off in a run again, heading toward the exit.

We were all panting as we reached the exit. We were in the middle of a large field. "There!" Aanya says, pointing to the double-wagon that had suddenly teleported to the other side of the field. We burst off into a sprint again, and soon we had reached the car.

Tyler hopped into the driver's seat, and I grabbed on to the side. Everett and Bennett were running in the distance, blood dripping from their foreheads. Tyler revved the engine one more time, and started speeding toward them. I hastily climbed inside the double-wagon, and opened the door for Everett and Bennett to jump in. They had blood all over their bodies, and were panting like crazy. Through all the chaos, Everett managed to push out a few words. "So, Iris," She gasped. "How bout' that join invite?" I grinned.

"Yes," I replied without hesitation. "Yes."

They Were Watching

Zaela Rosenbaum Olive Team

"Introducing the one and only Smartologist 2048!" The words escaped George Mandin's lips with pride as he pulled off the sheet to reveal a tall, silver bot. The crowd erupted. Mandin was the creator and founder of *Goodie*, the only tech company with advanced inventions such as the Smartologist 2048.

The Smartologist had a human-like structure, two long arms, two long legs, and similar facial features as one of a human. The one thing differentiating them was the color. Painted in a metallic glow, the robot was practically luminating from the stage lights.

Its eyes were shut, and the eyelids were shining as well.

As the clapping died down, Mandin motioned towards his creation and said, "This bot can do anything a human can-clean, cook, talk, and even form their own thoughts. *Everyone needs one!*"

More clapping came from the audience and the live stream camera zoomed in on random people in the crowd.

"Preorder online today! Go to Goodietech.com to get your bot. Remember- every day is a *Goodie* day. Goodnight everyone."

George Mandin waved and as the curtain closed in front of him.

I turned off my thin screen and the projection dissolved. I placed the base of the phone on my dresser and took off my thin, round rimmed glasses.

Knock, knock.

"Come in," I said, my voice hoarse.

My stepmom, Cass, appeared in the doorway. "Hi Mav." My real name's Mavia, but she often used that nickname for me.

"Hey," I said simply.

She sat down at the end of my bed. "How are you? Getting ready for bed?"

I was before you came in I thought. "Yeah. Did you watch the *Goodie* livestream just now?" I said instead.

"I did, actually. It was quite..." She looked out my window for an idea of what to say. "*Creepy.*"

"Agreed."

Cass ran her fingers through her gray tinted hair and said, "Technology these days is getting real."

I silently nodded, hoping she'd get the memo that I wanted to just go to sleep.

"When I was a kid, AI was just starting out and we were so curious about what it could do and what it could lead to..." she trailed off and patted my leg. "Alright I'll leave you alone. G'night sweetie."

"Night." I said and rolled over to my other side.

As I tried to fall asleep, thoughts were still racing through my head. One sentence in particular stayed around that racetrack.

"This bot can do anything a human can-clean, cook, talk, and form their own thoughts. Everyone needs one!"

If they could do anything a human could, what would happen to us?

CHAPTER ONE

When I woke up the next morning, my stomach felt queasy. I went to the bathroom and threw up.

Where is this coming from? I thought.

Then I remembered last night. The video, the robot, the fear.

I splashed water on my face to wake myself up, then brushed my teeth. I got on my vintage oversized t-shirt with a woman from the 20s holding up an old fashioned phone, and a pair of flair jeans with my Doc Martin boots. I put my hair up in a clip and put hoop earrings on.

I walked down the stairs into the kitchen and swiped my hand in front of the drawer. It opened, and I pulled out a granola bar.

Pushing last night aside, my main focus was on school.

Dad walked down the stairs as he said, "Hi, hon." He kissed the top of my head and put on his glasses that were sitting on the kitchen island.

"Ready to go in a few?" He asked. He drove me to school each day.

"Yeah,"

Cass walked down the stairs, coming into the kitchen as well. She was wearing a sweater and black jeans.

"Good morning, honey." She said to me, then walked over to my dad and they embraced each other.

"I have to stay late," She said, sighing. "My team wants to work more on the presentation for Monday."

Cass works for security or something for TJMaxx. Her team watches over the security camera's footage if there was a case filed. Honestly it's pretty cool to hear about the wild things people do for a \$20 cardigan.

A few minutes after Cass left, we did too. When Dad dropped me off, I turned up the volume of my music and stepped into the building. The first bell had already rung, so kids were racing around trying to get to homeroom.

When I got to my homeroom, room 212, people everywhere were on their phones all chatting about the same thing. The robot.

"I heard that it can do your homework--"

"My mom said--"

"I--"

I couldn't even escape it at school.

I quietly sat down at my seat and tapped my ear to stop the music. I took the little dot of an earbud out and put it in its case.

"Hi Mavia!" Violet exclaimed, spinning around to face me at her desk.

Violet Connors was my best friend. We just kind of started hanging out at lunch and eventually became buds. She was always in a good mood, bouncing around the place. Her hair was a light purple-mirroring her name. Today it was in a long ponytail. She always had taken pride in her hair.

"Hey," I responded.

She leaned into her bag on the back of her chair and pulled out a brush. She stroked her long hair with a pleasant look on her face. "I can't believe this Goodie thing! So cool, right?"

"Yeah...I guess."

"Do you think you'll get one?" she asked excitedly. "A robot I mean."

"I don't know." I looked down.

"Something wrong?" her face saddens.

"No, I'm good." I flash her a fake smile. She didn't have to know my problems right now.

She seemed satisfied with my answer, and continued talking. "My mom said that I could get one for my 14th birthday. Well, not my own, but you know what I mean. I can't wait to test out all of the makeup looks on it! I heard that it can project an image of a human face on its own metal face so I can pretty it all up and practice! And it can grow hair and--"

I stopped listening. I just didn't want to talk about it anymore, but she appeared happy, ranting about everything Smartologist.

The door opened, and my homeroom teacher, Mr. Hawn clapped his hands for silence. He himself seemed a bit tired, his hair going in all directions.

"Who's buying hot lunch today?" He asked in a dull tone.

I heard Jeremy whisper beside me, "The Smartologist can make lunches for you." I rolled my eyes.

Five people raised their hands. "Cold lunch?" Mr. Hawn said.

I raised my hand.

"Today we have an assembly during 2nd period about thin screen usage at school. Make sure to drop your backpacks off in the back of the room and remember, we sit near the door."

I sigh. *At least it's Friday.*

CHAPTER TWO

When it came time for the assembly, I sat as close to the door as I could. Sprinting out as soon as I could would be required for survival. Busy halls would be the least of my problems.

"Take a seat everyone!" Principle Linderson said. "Find a seat! Any seat!" She let out exasperatedly.

The room quieted down as the whole 8th grade looked up to the stage where a holographic projection had the words: "Thin Screen Usage In School" printed in a bolded font.

Linderson was in a gray pinstriped suit with squared shoulders. She was wearing pants with the same print and pointy shoes with a bit of a heel. *Very business casual.*

"Today we're talking about how much you guys use your thin screens here in school..." she narrowed her eyes jokingly looking around the auditorium. "Your teachers said they have noticed that this year, your devices have been used a lot more. For the purpose of this presentation, please come up here with your screens and in an orderly fashion, *emphasis on orderly*," she mentioned. "Place your base in these bins." She pointed to the table behind her with containers labeled with every homeroom.

The whole grade slowly rose exhaustively, emptying their pockets while making their way to the stage. I trudged up to the front, taking out the base of the thin screen.

Once everyone was back to their seats, Principal Linderson emptied her own pocket and put her phone in some random homeroom's bin.

She sighed and said into a microphone with a clear stand, "Thank you all for your cooperation. Now, I want to start off by saying—"

A loud beep sounded signifying an announcement by the office staff. It was usually about some after school activity being canceled or a winning of a school team. "May I have your attention, please, for a morning announcement? The Fun and Games Club will not meet after school today. A rescheduled club meeting is to be determined. Thank you."

Linderson turned her gaze from student to student. "Everyone hear that? No Fun and Games Club today. As I was saying, I want to start off by sharing the percentages of usage *just* this year. For the past three months in 8th grade you all have been—"

Another announcement cut her off. I heard the principal mumble, "Good graces."

"Sorry for another interruption, but the rescheduled date for the Fun and—" She stopped abruptly and the microphone feedback was a high pitched sound. A murmur went through the sea of 8th graders as we all looked around, puzzled. The voice tried to continue, "The Fun and G—" she stopped again, but this time we heard muzzled screaming and fighting on the other end.

Principal Linderson frantically whispered something to the teachers next to her and hustled out the door. By now, the whole grade was talking at fast paces, while the teachers were failing to quiet us down.

Then, a robotic voice that tried to sound like a woman came over the intercom. "Hello fellow students. I am sorry to interrupt your educational-school day, but we ask you to stay calm as we explain to you what is going on. My name is Smartologist 0001 and I am here to ease your worries and give you a nice relaxation time!"

I looked around, confused. Everybody else gave the same expression to one another.

The robot continued. "At this time we ask that you pay no attention to others around you and come outside with no belongings. Self-driving vans will take you to your ultimate relaxation destination." Smartologist 0001 paused. "And educational figures, do not try to stop us. We will be watching. If you disobey a rule, you will face punishment. Now, please find the nearest exit and go await your destiny!"

My heart started racing. What was happening? Where were we going? Before anyone could say anything, the auditorium doors opened and what looked like 100 tall Smartologists, just like the ones in the video, entered. Their faces were blank with just two narrow circles for eyes.

"Please remain calm." They echoed at once. "Please remain calm."

The bots marched through the room, picking rows at a time to escort us outside. I was first, (some planning to sit near the door) and without any choice was pulled by the wrist by one of the 100. It had a cold, firm grasp on my skin, and I wanted to fight it off, but I remembered its words of warning if we tried to oppose it.

"Please remain calm," My bot said as I found it hard to breathe. "Smartologist 0022 is noticing panic and a faster pulse. Please remain calm."

How can I? I thought.

Where was Dad and Cass? What was happening to Violet and my other classmates? I could see them struggling just as I was, but after I was guided through the doorway, I lost all sight of the outside world. I felt a prick back in the auditorium when the robot was grabbing tightly ahold of me, but I thought it was just spare wire. The hallways seemed like they would never end, and the daylight was too bright to stand.

It was almost like a memory. Too fuzzy to quite make out what was going on, and your consciousness slightly loosening.

All that I remembered before passing out was what must have been hundreds of black vans either parked or zooming down the streets.

The same line that I heard the night before still haunted my head. "*This bot can do anything a human can...*"

CHAPTER THREE

When I finally gained awareness of the surrounding area, I was shocked. It was like nothing that I'd seen before.

I was laying down on a beach lounge chair with a beautiful ocean view in front of me. The only sounds that filled my ears were waves hitting the practically pink sand and children's laughter. When I blinked, something sort of *glitched* and I suddenly saw little kids with their parents making sand castles or testing out the cold water.

Were they always there? Or was I still just adjusting back to being conscious? All I knew was that I'd never seen them in my life before.

I got up from my chair, and noticed my outfit had changed. I was now in a black skin-tight jumpsuit with a number patched on my heart.

2,013.

"Hello?" I asked one of the families closest to me.

They made no change in their expression. I waved my hand over their face for any recognition to break a trance, but they kept their fake cheerful grins.

I moved around to other groups and the same things happened.

Confusion swirled through my brain as I tried to recall the events before.

"Assembly. Announcement. Van. Here." I remembered out loud. Again, the families made no reaction to my thinking out loud.

"Robots."

I jumped. Looking behind me, I saw a little girl in an identical jumpsuit with two pigtails, except her patch read 1. She looked like she was in 2nd grade.

"Sorry...I didn't mean to startle you." She apologized, stepping forward. "I'm Nova."

She stretched her hand outward for me to shake.

"I'm Mavia." I shook her hand. "This may be...a weird question, but are you...real?"

She laughs. "Yeah, I'm human. Them however-" She gestured to the families behind us. "They're just holograms. Makes it feel better."

"Makes what feel better?"

"This," she motions around us. "The illusions."

I nodded silently.

"Did your school get abducted too?" She asked like it was a question you ask every day.

"Yeah." I chuckled.

"My elementary school was the first to go. That's why I'm number one." She glanced down at her jumpsuit. "They're starting with schools first. Using mind control to force upon assemblies. They go to school since that's where the most youth is. Then they'll go to work offices for the most knowledge and adult characteristics..." She trailed off.

"How do you know all of this?" I asked.

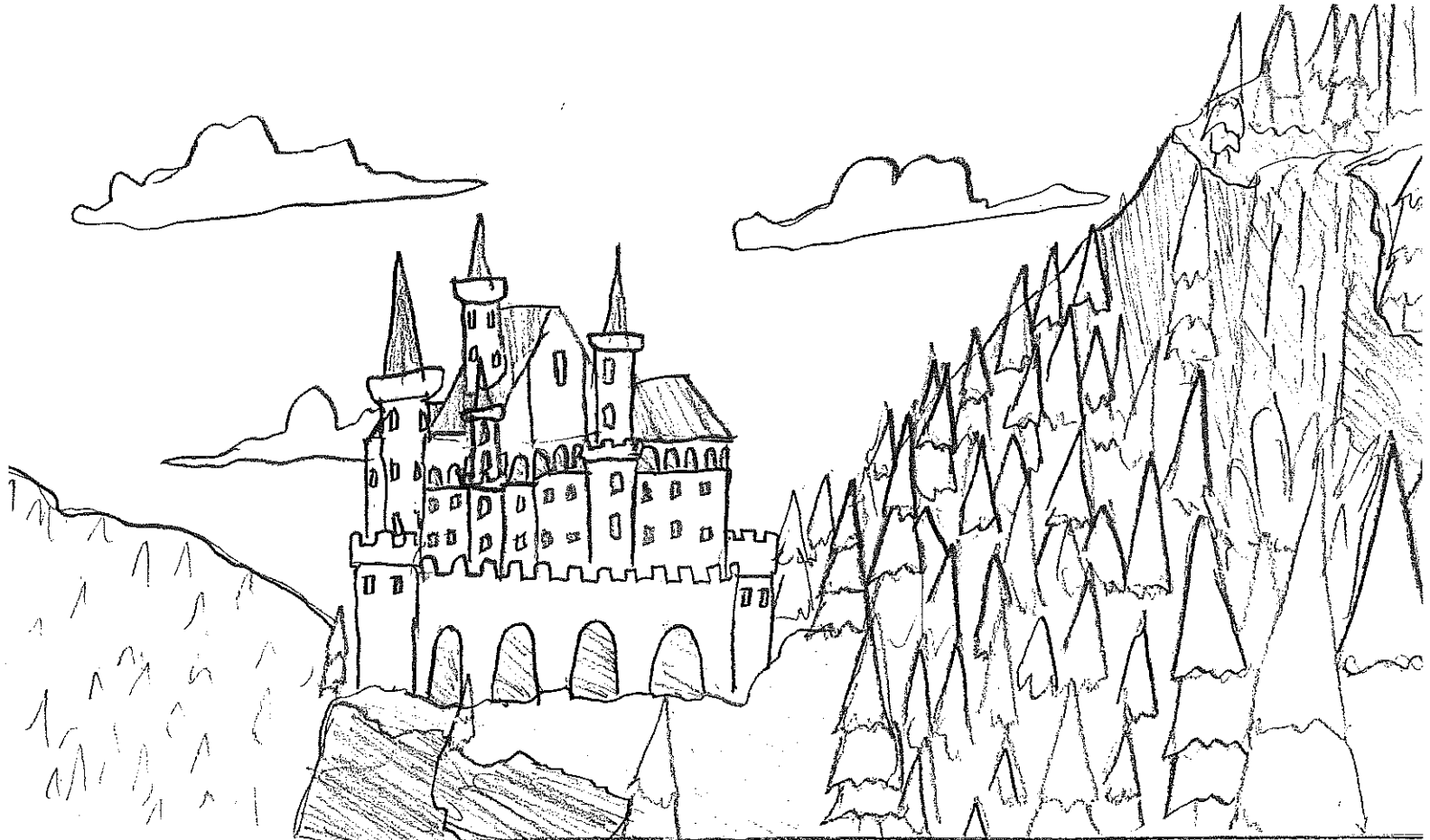
"When they tried to insert the Xanax into my arm, I deflected it. But to the bots, it looked like I got a full dose of it. I'm smart for my age-if you can't tell-so I faked my passing out. Surprisingly, they actually bought it and so I got to listen to their whole conversation on the ride there. They talked about their plan to take all of our knowledge one by one, to create an ultimate bot, and eventually get rid of all humans. Forever."

I was stunned. I couldn't find the words to speak.

"Each 'beach' unit has two people on opposite sides. We're not *supposed* to find each other, but I've broken enough rules today for this one to affect me. I think that-" Nova stopped short. She slowly raised her hand to her neck where a little dart had been shot out of nowhere.

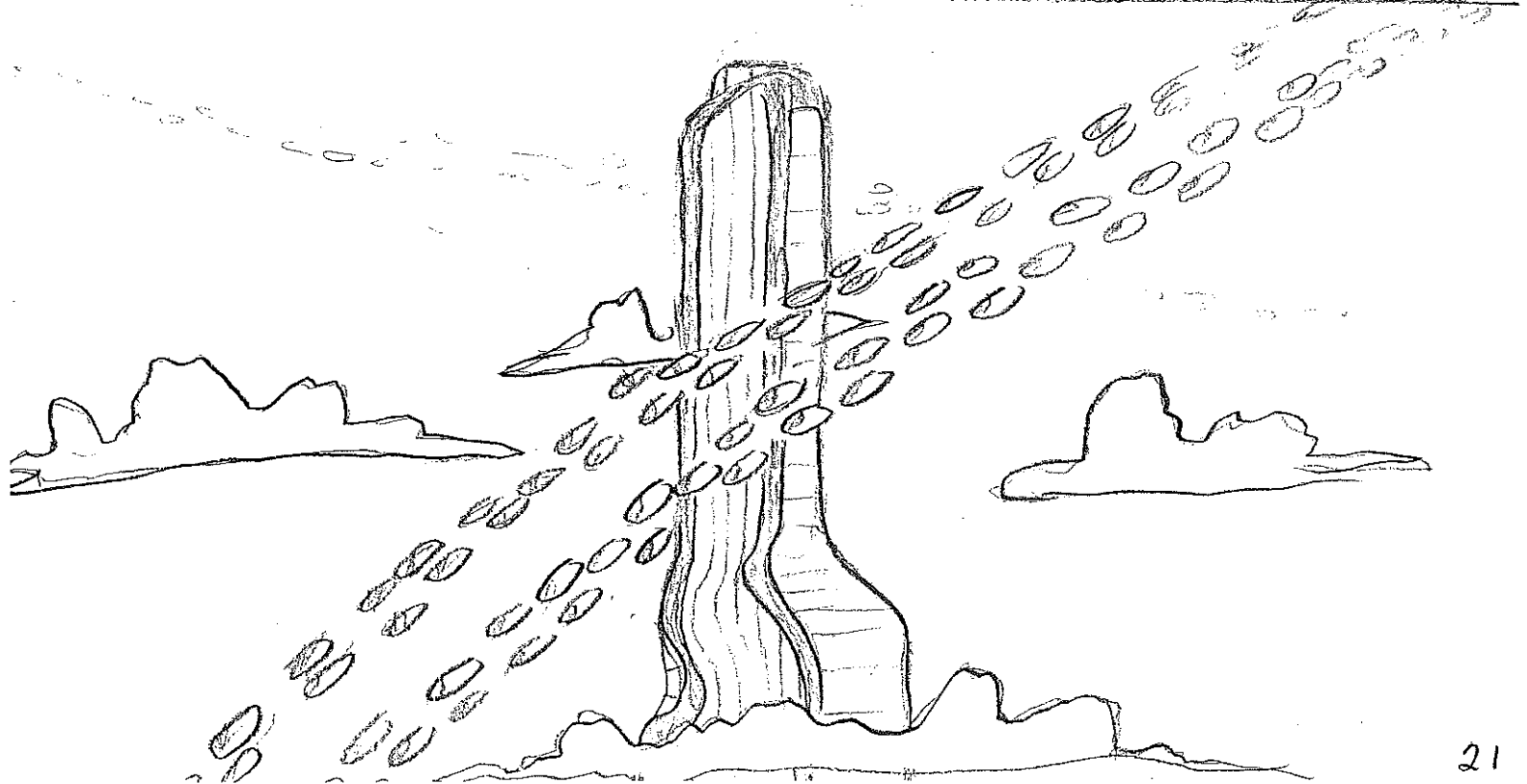
As she fell, I looked up to a disguised window I hadn't seen before. The face of a Smartologist disappeared quickly as I looked up, but I knew I saw it.

They were watching.



POETRY

Nishu
Kohra





Snow

By Sasha Romig

Olive

The

Snow

Falls

In the cold, cold air,

Down,

Down,

Down,

A ride on the hill,

Open

Close,

Open,

Makes a frosty angel in the snow,

Thud,

Thunk,

Thud,

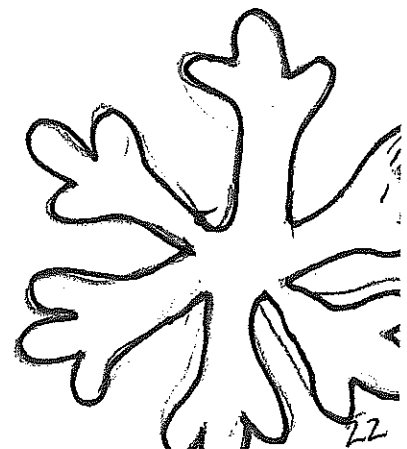
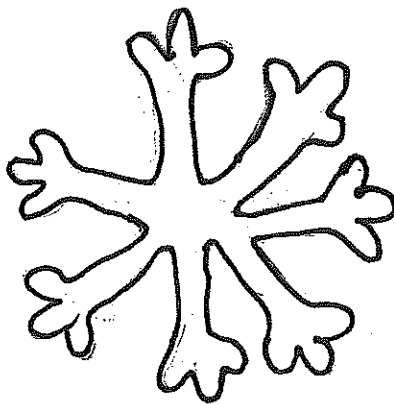
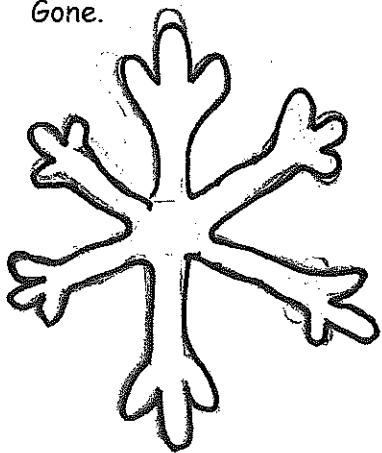
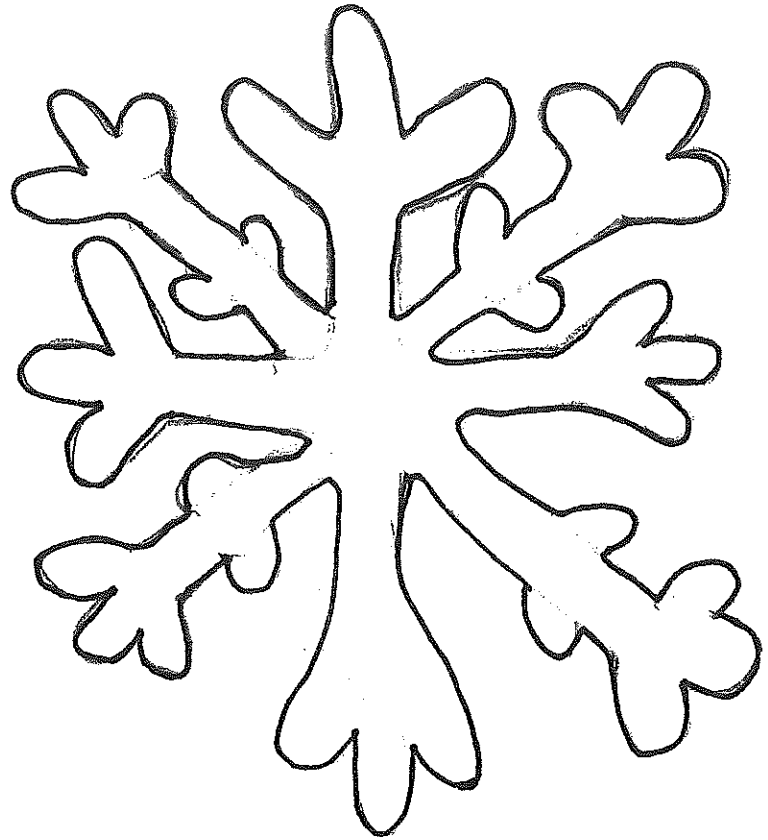
A cold, icy snowball,

And

Then

Its

Gone.



Snow and Snowflakes

(a found poem from *The Giver*)

Grace Johnson-Wellnitz
Olive

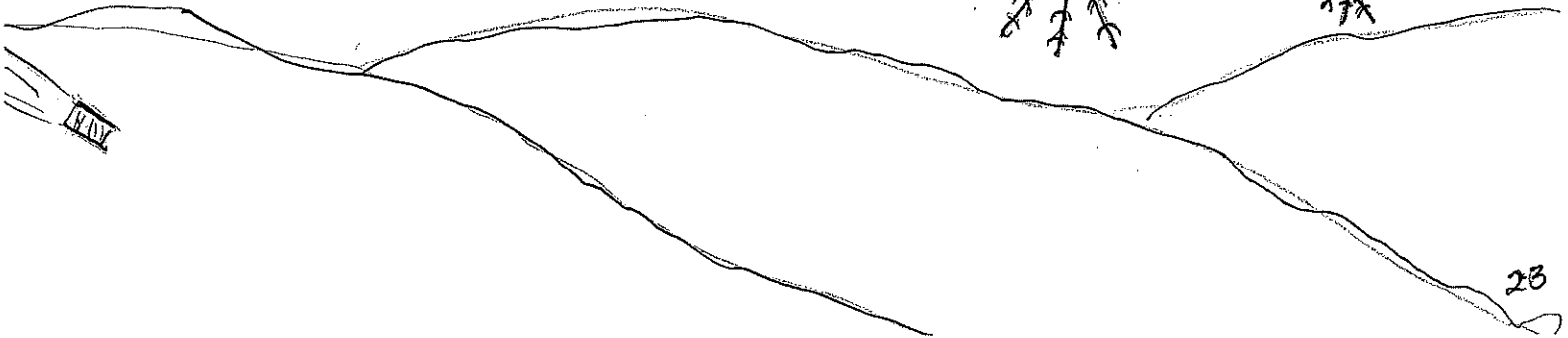
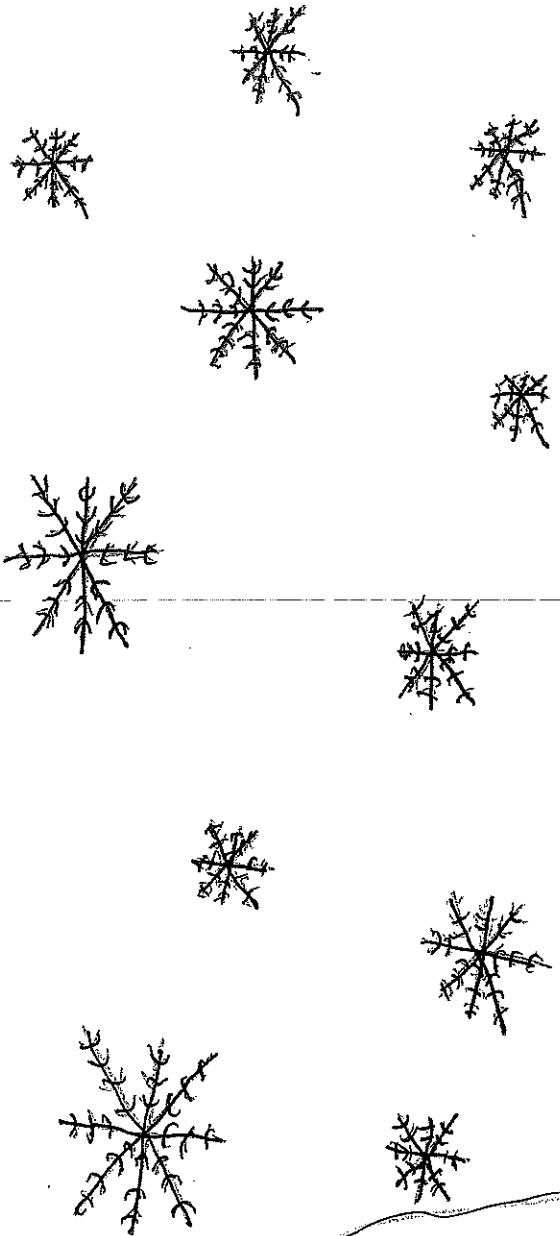
They're called snowflakes
He now closed his eyes
Drifted down the hill
Sparkle on eyelashes

Very beautiful
No response, remounted.
Difficult, numb, stopped.
The ride would have been impossible

But now caught and exhausted
Thicken in the heartbreak, snow
Fall down, tied in dusk.
Loomed at the mound

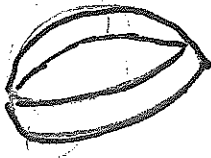
Thickening with cold
Blur and swirl
Freezing and wearily,
Lift road and ride to fluttering

Tearstains of whiteness.



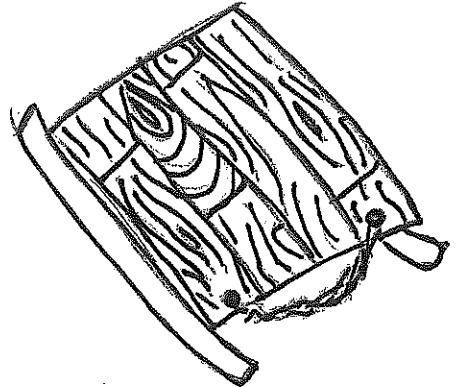
Red

By Aleks Apse
Olive Team

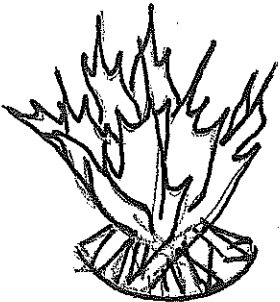


Red, the color that Jonas saw.
If he told anyone about it,
Then he'd be breaking a law.

Red, the color of my bed-
That is not actually true
The real color is blue.

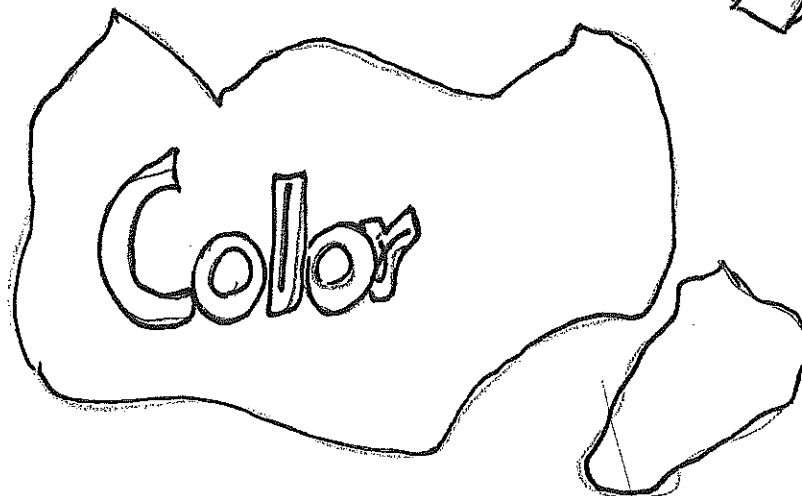
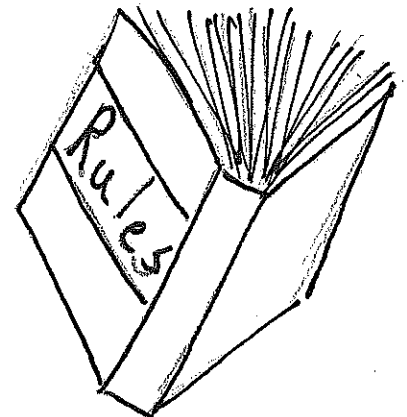


Red, the color of the sled
That he rode down a hill.
Jonas stopped taking his pill.



Red, the color of fire.
After he saw the war,
He wanted to retire.

Red, the color of the books.
Jonas was a believer,
Once he became the receiver.



Ode to Jonas

By Ben Pinckney
Olive Team

Jonas, the brave Receiver, you see beyond,
Through pain and joy, your spirit remains strong.
In the land of Sameness, your courage shines bright,
Guiding hearts to freedom, bringing truth to light.





Soar
By Eli Goldman
Snow

Soar,
Soar through the air,
Spread your wings
And fly.

Smell the fresh
Morning breeze,
And take in
The beautiful sights.

Hear the call
Of early birds
And the groans
Of farm cattle.

Feel the chill
Of cold nights
And the warmth
Of summer days.

Gaze past the orange sunset,
The city skyline,
The mountain peaks,
And breathe.

Articles.

By: *Grace Johnson-Wellnitz-Olive*

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What Happened? What Happens? What is Happening?

By: Susana Baro Doreste

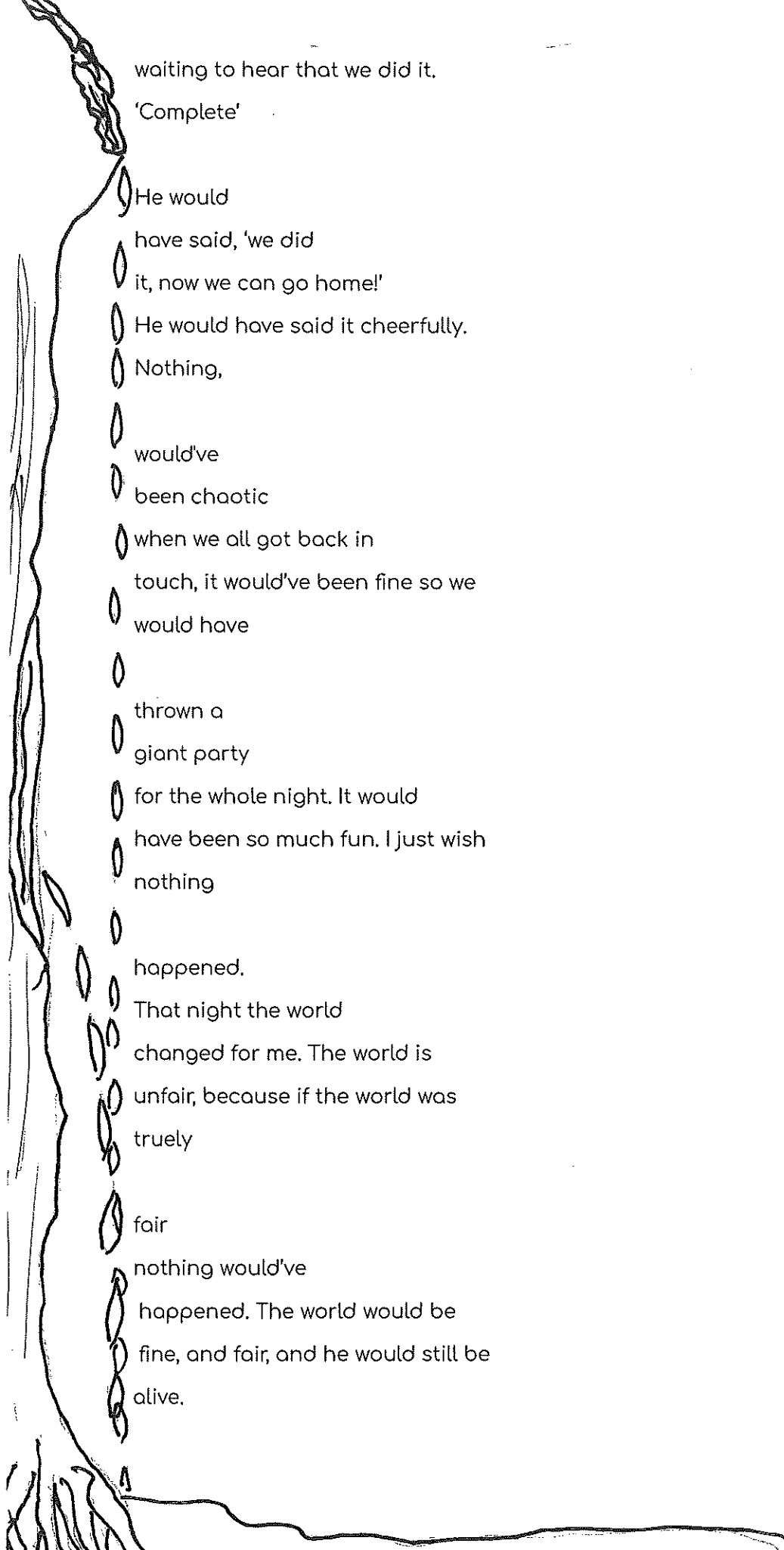
Team: Olive

Dreams end,
nightmares do not.
Time stopped for me but, it
still happened. I'm crushed the world keeps
moving.

I am
frozen I feel
like it should have been me.
Before the world was bearable.
Really.

Now that
he's gone I keep
seeing him getting hit
from behind. His expression was
not one
I knew.
I remember
the minutes right after.
The silence that took over was
deadly.

My brain
wouldn't process
that he wasn't there just



waiting to hear that we did it.

'Complete'

He would

have said, 'we did

it, now we can go home!'

He would have said it cheerfully.

Nothing,

would've

been chaotic

when we all got back in

touch, it would've been fine so we

would have

thrown a

giant party

for the whole night. It would

have been so much fun. I just wish

nothing

happened.

That night the world

changed for me. The world is

unfair, because if the world was

truly

fair

nothing would've

happened. The world would be

fine, and fair, and he would still be

alive.

The Babbling Sunset

Matthew Rosenblum

Integrity

They say if you walk to the edge
Of the known world you'll find
The border between water and hedge
The blaze and stream combined.

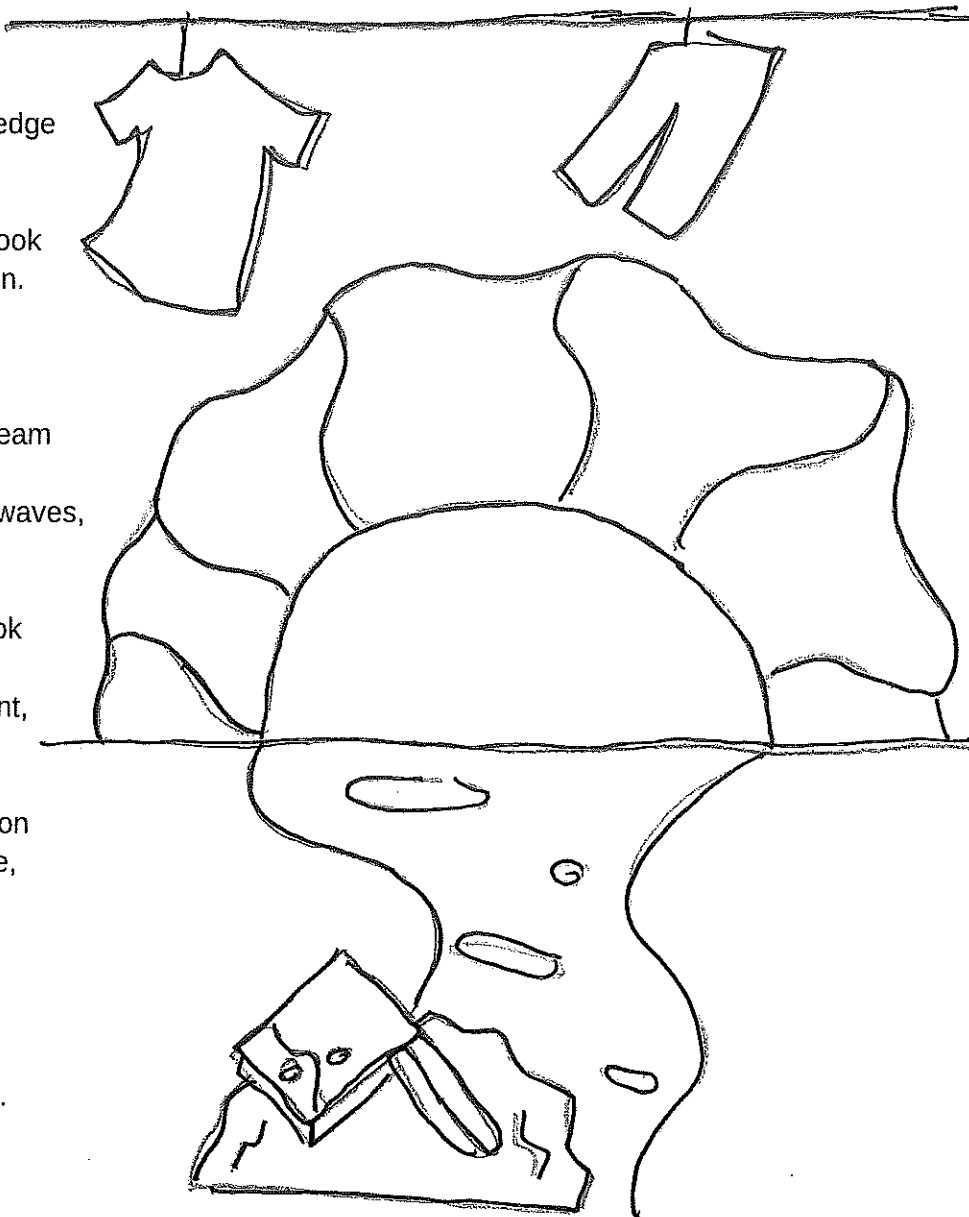
They say if you drink from that brook
It grants unfathomable imagination.
You have to drink about ten liters,
But that's just an approximation.

They say if you row down that stream
Your boat would combust,
And instead of sinking below the waves,
You'd sail on the dust.

They say if you bathed in the brook
Your clothes would catch to flame
And they would become magnificent,
Put a goddess down to shame.

They say if you gaze in its reflection
You would glean the secrets of life,
The morality of murder,
The butcher and his knife.

They say that it blesses,
But none of them know why
They've never looked for it before.
Will you give it a try?



Bilingual Chaos

Inspired by an excerpt from *The Sun and the Star* by Rick Riordan and Mark Oshiro

By Annabelle Valerio

Tenacity

The soft press,
Of a sharp wire
Across my fingertips,
And the crisp hitch of the stroke,
Like the pause in my breath,
Speaks to me like no words ever will.

I'm disappointed
By the lack of words to describe the feel
Of the weight of the stick in my hand
And the round warmth of the tone,
Like the comforting voice
Of a close friend.

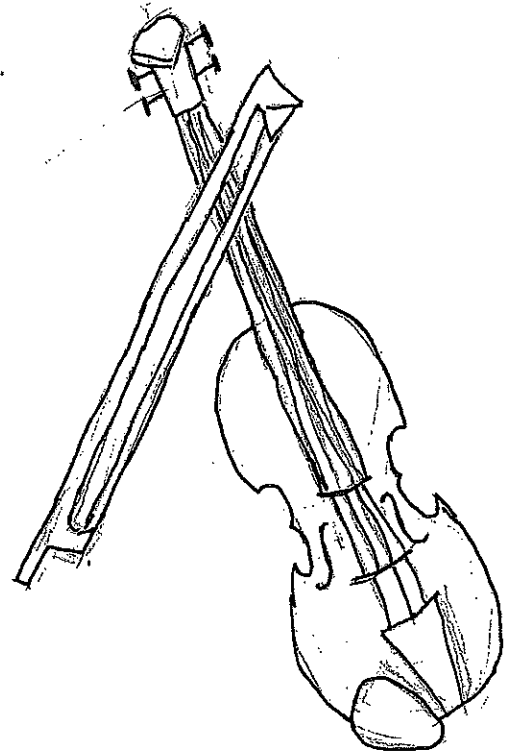
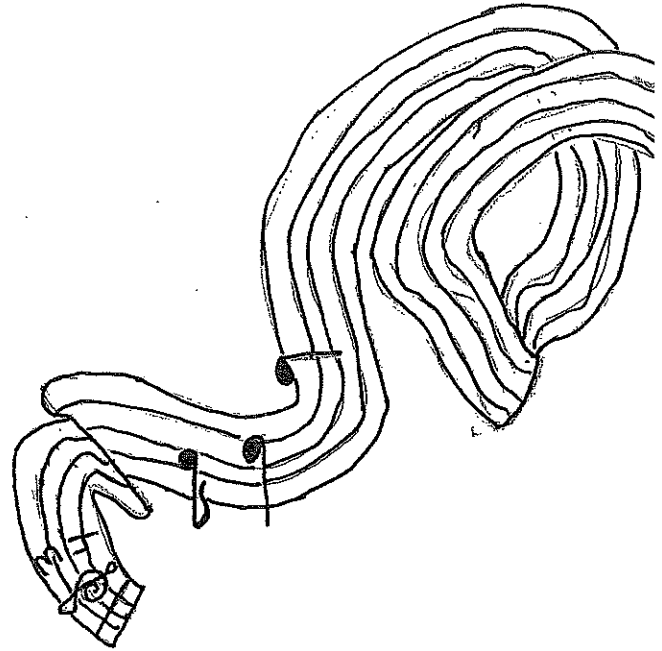
But I'm let down by
The way any one word
Can be used to substitute the velvet and ricochet
That is every enunciated syllable of sound.

Sautillé, doesn't do justice to the drone of catches;
The secret held close to my ear
That I recognize swiftly as it sweeps in like a long-awaited arrival.

I'll squint my eyes
To read the sheet music,
But only because the print is small,
Not because I don't know its meaning
Just as I know my native tongue.

It flows through my head as naturally as English does,
The twists and turns of sharps and flats and keys and meters
Registering and I respond back with smooth strokes
From the highs and the lows of my vocabulary.

With a smile on my face,
I listen to the message of the music,
And it is my second language.



Spiraled Thoughts

Grace Johnson-Wellnitz
Olive

Wisps of air, Morning sparkle,
 Casts a shadow.
 Slow they come out
 In all different colors

Floa
 ting
 so
 nice
 ly
turn into fog.

Adventuring where no one has ever before,
 not quite leaving their home
Never captured
 Always free
 Always flying...

My head fills with... thoughts.

Tearing and destroying

Not sure I can handle this.

Let the embers and the fire spread

Let it all spark and flame

Then let the smoke clear.

I'll be fine.

No amount of graphite and lines can help-Past the point of entry,

I'd be better off without it.

If you do, take those graphite and lines

And put it together

Staple, bind, reviseStaple, bind, reviseStaple, bind, reviseStaple, bind, reviseStaple,
bind, reviseStaple, bind, reviseStaple, bind, reviseStaple, bind, reviseStaple, bind,
reviseStaple, bind, reviseStaple, bind, reviseStaple, bind, reviseStaple, bind,
reviseStaple, bind, revise...

You'll have yourself a thing of magic.

I'll take all that over

Spelling it out for you

The ice might melt,

But the Earth won't burn...

Overhead,

let it simmer,

Add salt to taste,

Spend an hour or two,

and you can leave me alone!

I'll be fine.

What if, When, We

By Zaela Rosenbaum - Olive *and* Laurel Ryan - Forest

What if we swam the lake

What if we won the game

What if we learned the secret.

When we ride the dragon

When we win the war

When we make the crossover

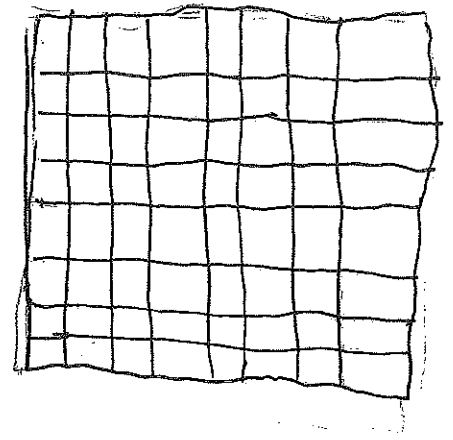
When we jump over

We walked the sky

We flew the stars

We ran across the island

We tramped the mud.



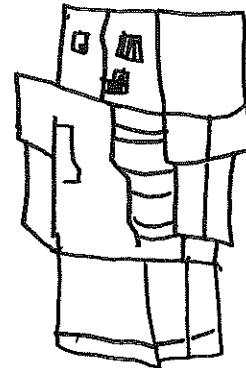
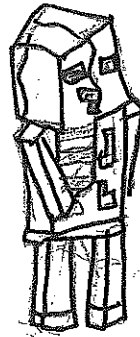
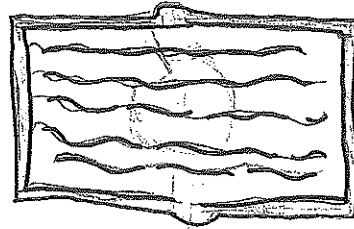
The Pigman Likes to Read...

By: Lola Adams (Bonsai) and Saesha Shetiya (Snow)

The Pigman likes to read
Stories of Surprise and Wonder
To The Infant of Prague
And Esperanza Rising

These stories are about
All Things Bright and Beautiful
Such as...

Caddie Woodlawn
Who likes to SPIN
On Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler
In the Trouble River





Night Kites

By: Grace Johnson-Wellnitz-Olive
and Nibha Shrestha-Bamboo

The girl who owned a city
ran away with little women,
away from the ender's game,
and the queen's secret.



Don't ask them any questions!

They went to the other side of the mountain,
to unwind the clue of the whistling bagpipes.



They brought a scorpion,
451 degrees fahrenheit outside,

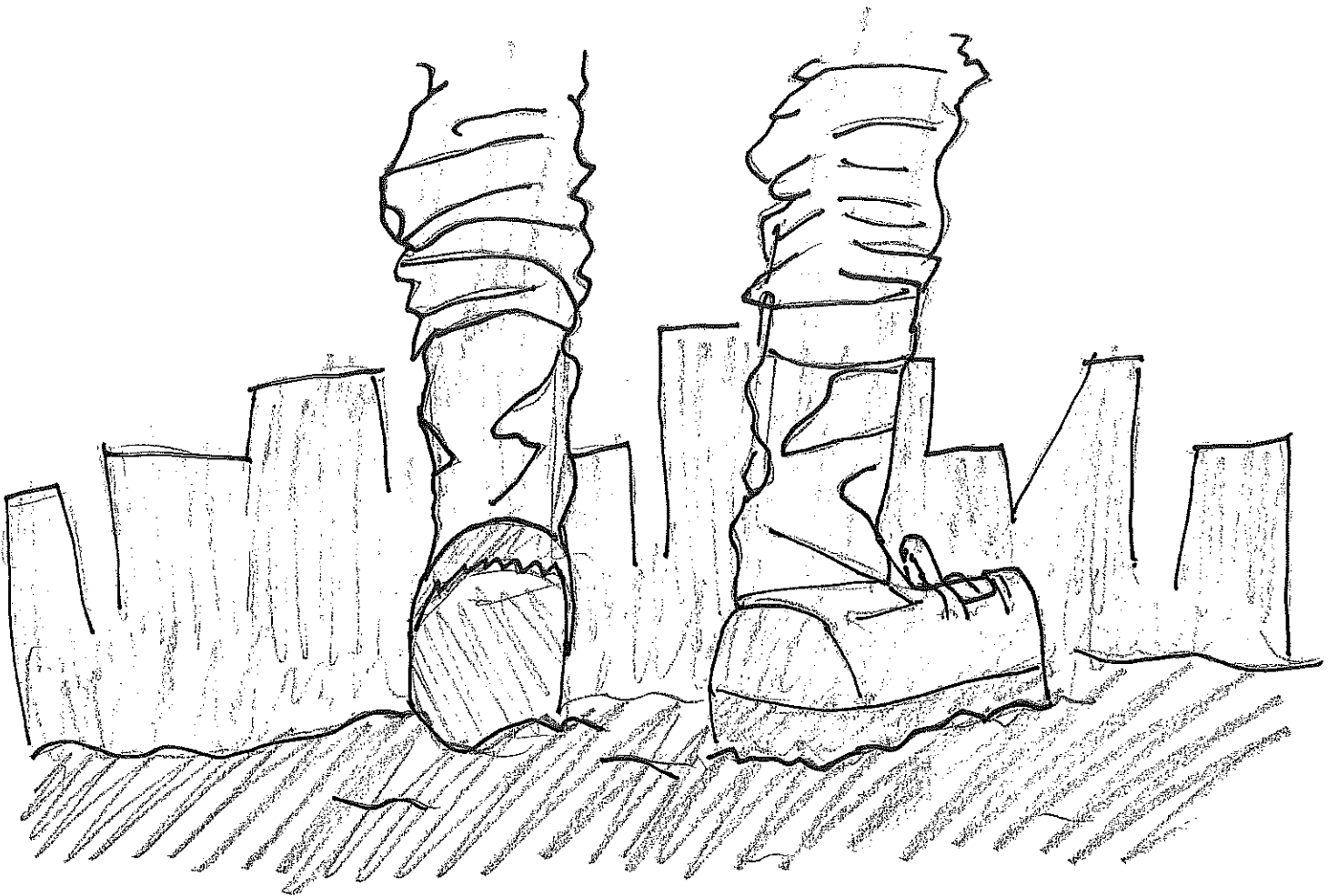


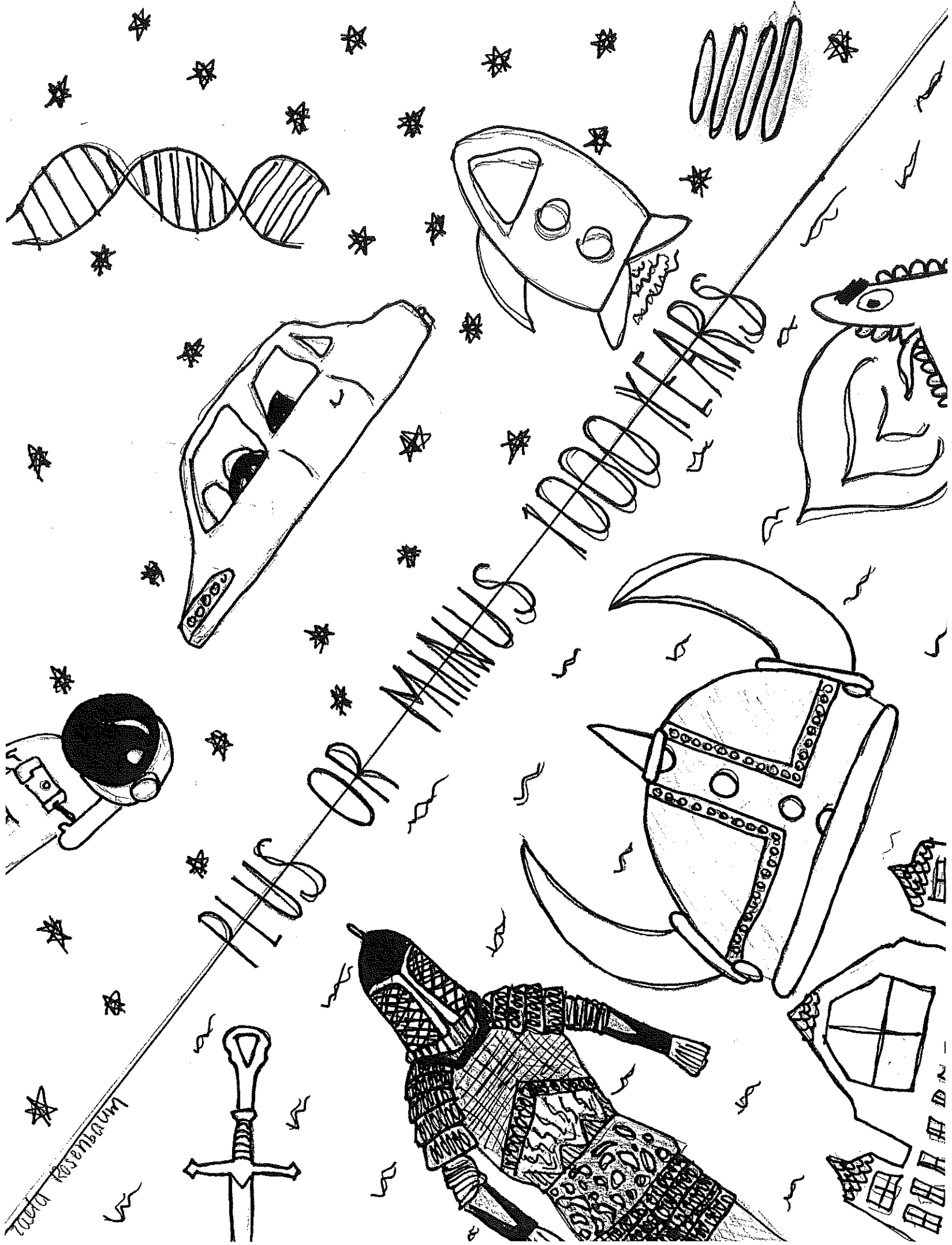
and they still lived,
immortal.

Unwind

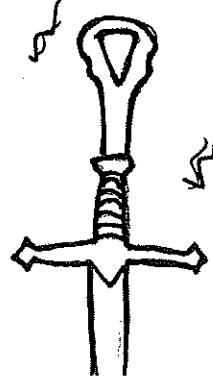
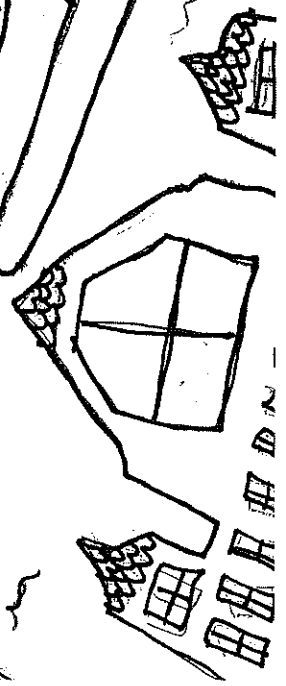
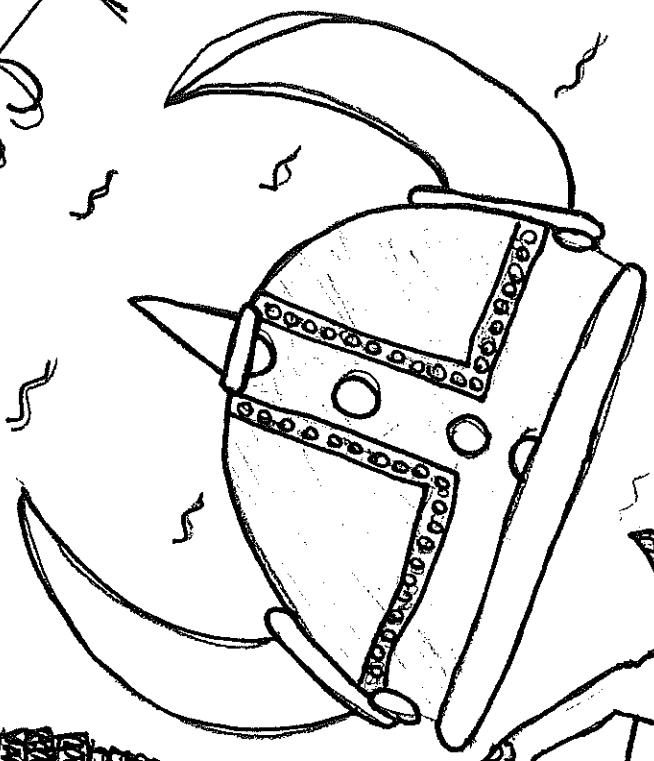
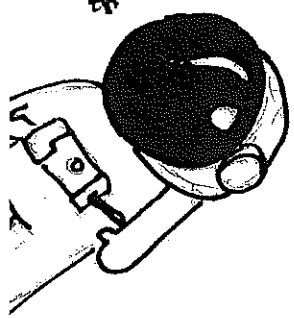
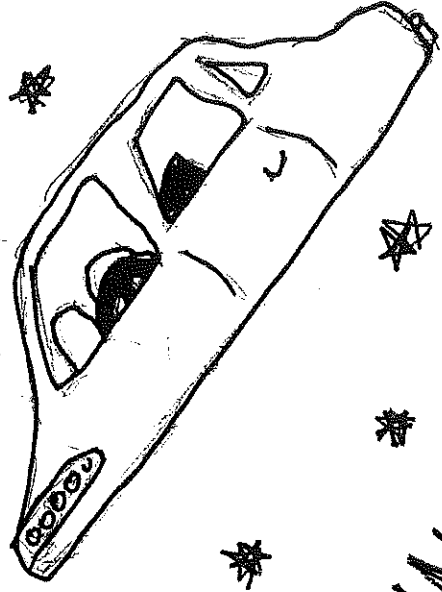
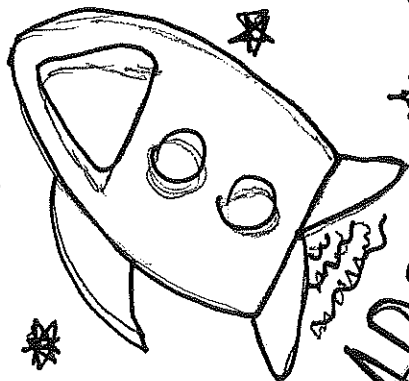
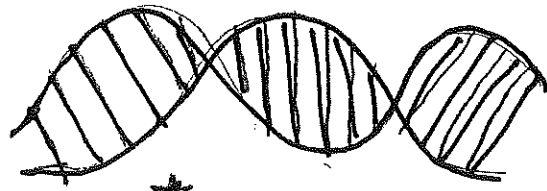
Eli Goldman | Snow

I looked at what was left of the ruins
Feet splashing on fuzzy mud
It was an infinite sea of darkness
It would take a rescue, a voyage,
It would take a dark and dangerous journey
To save the fallen city





100 YEARS PLUS OR MINUS



1917-2017

