

BLANK.

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editorial

To whom it may concern

*Ground Control to Major Tom
Commencing countdown, engines on
Check ignition and may God's love be with you...*

Dear Reader, I wish you a happy albeit somewhat belated new year. After the tumultuous events of 2015, I think that most of you would agree that we were looking forward to a more relaxed start to 2016; alas, no such luck. The events which took place in Cologne during New Year's Eve in particular disappointed many expectations, while also drawing attention to a pressing need for the promotion of peaceful intercultural co-existence.

Additionally, more bad news was on the way, as the news reported on January 11th that the great artist and musician David Bowie had lost his bout with cancer. Given that his death coincides with the quadricentennial anniversary of England's greatest bard, we decided to do something special for the cover of this issue, which I take you have already seen and appreciated.

With that out of the way, let me briefly introduce you to the contributors and the contents of this issue. I think you will find that we have managed to put together a magazine which combines the old and the new, and with this I would like to say welcome to Elisa Haas, Victoria Koberstein, Brian Koch, Melanie Mendetzki, Sabrina Steinhage and Inga Zekl. We are glad to have you on board and are particularly excited at having gained so many female contributors!

This issue features a variety of text types: inside you will find poetry, amusing non-fiction, short stories, a graphic novel, an obituary for Mr. Bowie as well as two interviews. The first one features Sprachpraxis teacher Christopher

Forlini, who talks about what it was like growing up in New York as well as the challenges he faces as a teacher here and how he braves them, and a second interview I want to draw particular attention to: Pieter Coetzee interviewed fellow student Johanna Jensen, who took upon herself the danger of traveling to Kobanê (Syria) and helped to rebuild the city as well as provide aid and be involved in the community on location.

Speaking of Pieter Coetzee: As you may or may not know, this will be his last semester as a teacher of English Sprachpraxis at the University of Kassel, and I would like to use this venue not just to say goodbye, but most of all to say thank you. Back when I was a lowly second semester student, Blank had just been founded; this was in 2008. But I still remember, clear as day, the warm afternoon on which Pieter approached me on campus, just in front of the library, and asked me whether I would like to write for this newly founded magazine. In the eight years that happened between then and now, Blank went through various ups and downs, but Pieter was a constant, always pushing for resources, asking students to contribute and, most important of all, helping them to improve their writing. I guess that is what we are all thankful for the most: that you helped to make us better writers.

To close, I would like to extend special thanks to our sponsors Kasseler Sparkasse and Hanseatische Coffeebar as well as to IFAA for making the publication of this magazine possible.

This one's for you, Pieter.

Enjoy the issue,

Murat Sezi ■

ground control to major tom

by Daniel Krooß & Franz Mutschler



He was not the first of the great ones to go and will in all likelihood not be the last, but it was a punch in the gut when we, dreary-eyed and still sleepy, received the news that David Bowie had died. He was one of our fathers' heroes, his greatest achievements long done before we even set foot on this earth, and yet he instilled a sense of inspiration and mutability in our generation as well.

Who were you, chameleon? We can only judge by what we could hear from his music, by the glimpses we caught from his silver screen appearances. Bowie never spent much time in an artistic comfort zone. In truth, he was not one man, but many. A lion, an androgynous figurehead, a thundering low voice and an ear-piercing falsetto, Nicolas Tesla and Ziggy Stardust, husband of models, disco connoisseur and impish gentleman. In the end, he was a musician who continues to defy categorization, a composer who did not shy away from introducing strange and ugly sounds to his music, while at the same time producing poppy, groovy, danceable rock music. Until his very end

he seemed to have an endless need to explore new musical terrain.

We don't like every song he ever wrote, not even every second album of his discography which spans five decades, and at times we go months without ever putting on a Bowie record. Nevertheless, he was an artist who followed the at times absurd visions in his head, who reinvented his musical persona time and time again, who at least attempted to remain innovative, even if the outcome wasn't always all that impressive and who ventured beyond the established structures and sounds of his times. He taught us to be bold. And he taught us how to bounce back from bad criticism — to simply start something new. For that, he deserves our attention and our respect.

In the end, even his death seemed like a piece of art. His last record, released only two days before his struggle with cancer came to a close, was, of course, a new enterprise: a jazzy exploration of dying and death itself. Lift off, Major Tom. The stars sure look very different today. ■

ask an editor: interview with christopher forlini

by Denise Breidenbach

As our tried-and-tested chief editor and coordinator Pieter Coetzee takes his leave, Blank sat down with his successor Christopher Forlini for a cup of coffee and some real talk about life in big cities, Martin Luther, and what it means to be a hacker.

Blank: Just for the readers of *Blank* who do not know you yet, could you introduce yourself and let us know about your life and what you are doing here in Kassel?

Christopher Forlini: My name is Christopher Forlini. I was born in Brooklyn, New York. I was raised in New York City, between three boroughs: Brooklyn, Manhattan and the Bronx. I come from an Italian-American family. My family is very stereotypical, almost like in a Scorsese movie – that is kind of who and what we are. I came to Germany in 1999 to study and I have been living here ever since. I studied classics – Ancient Greek and Latin – and philosophy at the University of Marburg, and taught there for a while. Then I went to the University of Bonn and was a lecturer there. Then I went to the Freie Universität Berlin for six years, and there I worked for the Department of Greek and Latin in various roles. I started in Kassel in October 2014 and I have been here ever since – or about a year.

Blank: What was it that brought you to Kassel?

Christopher Forlini: I wanted a change, something different. I wanted a different kind of job. My wife actually saw a job advertisement on a website that said they were looking for someone to do a paternity cover for six months, and I thought okay, six months, I could do that, and started as a paternity cover for Matt Stevens. Then I got the position

that I have now and I will be here until the end of 2016.

Blank: What duties does your current position at the University of Kassel consist of?

Christopher Forlini: Well, I started doing the full range of courses as a paternity cover for Matt, so I did English 1, English 2 and English 3. But now I am doing English 1 and Remedial English. The goal of Remedial English is to help students preparing for a re-sit of one of their exams, or those who are in danger of not passing one of their exams. So it is a course where I make the students aware of their grammar and vocab problems, and we work on those.

Blank: This reminds me of your new online course...

Christopher Forlini: Yes, the online course is called *Hack your English*. Obviously, the word ‘hack’ can have two meanings: on the one hand, it can mean ‘to cope with something’ or ‘to manage something’. On the other hand, ‘hack’ as used in ‘hacker’ is different. When you hack somebody’s phone or computer, you just don’t go through the front door, but rather you find some sort of dirty trick to get in through the back door. This is what I am teaching here: Giving students these kinds of down and dirty tricks to get in through the back door – or rather, shortcuts and tricks to pass their exams. That is why it is called *Hack your English*.

Blank: So, we have the Sprachpraxis courses, the Hack your English tutorials, and rumor has it you are also hosting a film club on campus?

Christopher Forlini: Yes, I do a film club this semester. I started it last semester. I had a film club at the University of Bonn, and we had a private film club in Berlin where we would meet in weird places throughout the city. Sometimes you would have as little as five or six people, sometimes you would have as many as twenty or thirty people. Here, I started the film club because I wanted to pique students’ interest. I think it is a really good idea to watch movies – you know, the sort of movies that are not Hollywood blockbusters, but not these full-on art-house movies either. They are rather classics of American cinema, and the topic is ‘American directors and American style’, so this semester we watched *Raging Bull* by Martin Scorsese, and we watched Jim Jarmusch’s first feature film, *Permanent Vacation*. I definitely want to explore this concept of style, as it is not something you can really define, but you know it when you see it. You simply know a Scorsese film when you see it, and you know a Jarmusch film when you see it. Essentially, we watch the movie and then go for a drink and some chit-chat afterwards, so it is really nothing formal.

Blank: Blank is the next project you are going to get involved in – what will be your tasks there?

Christopher Forlini: Well, essentially I will be taking over Pieter’s tasks, who – as far as I understood it – was there to correct the students’ English, so that is pretty much it. You have a winning formula, and it is a student-run initiative, so I do not wish to take the lead but just help out where I can – if it is correcting English or anything else you need. I think at university, the goal is to make people autonomous, and this is a way for students to get actively engaged – not just with the community, not just with the university, but with each other – and that is where you just need to let students be instead of micromanaging things. I mean, you guys have a winning formula, you recently won a prize – so if you have a formula that works, why change it?

Blank: What about reading and writing in your private life? Do you do a lot of reading, or even creative writing?

Christopher Forlini: Well, I do a lot of reading. I always re-read several books each year, and one of my favorites is *Mann ohne Eigenschaften* by Robert Musil. I read it about once a year. One of the things I do love about this job is

that you can take a day or two off and say I am not going to do anything but read. So sometimes when I wake up in the morning, I decide that I am just going to have a reading day. As I studied Ancient Greek and Latin, I read a lot of classical literature. I do need to keep up my Greek and Latin, so I do about an hour of Greek and an hour of Latin a day. But I think maybe the next book I want to tackle is going to be something more philosophical. I started to do a little bit of work on the Reformation. I went to the Cranach exhibition at Schloss Wilhelmshöhe, and that was absolutely fantastic. I started reading some of Luther’s writings, and after reading a little bit more about his Rechtfertigungslehre and Gnadenteologie, I want to go back to the exhibition and take a look at it again.

Blank: That sounds like Kassel is in a way an inspiring place for you.

Christopher Forlini: Yes. On the one hand, you can relax here. On the other hand, I periodically need to get out of Kassel for the weekend or for a few days in order to think again. If you come from a big city, you really appreciate the energy that a big city has. I mean, New York is a city where you have this immense amount of energy just walking down the street, and input which is just constantly coming at you. On the one hand, this can be very scary, but on the other hand, it is what you need, it is food. You have that constant input just because of the amount of people who are there. And that is the energy and the input that I need. When I come back to Kassel, I like to relax and focus and take that food and turn it into a product.

Blank: What kind of creative products arise from that kind of input?

Christopher Forlini: I actually have tons of ideas about creative activities. I collaborated with one a student initiative at the art school called *Labor für Ess- und Tischkultur*. We did a food tasting workshop together where they prepared a four course meal, and then my students had to do different language tasks to describe that meal. They had to use different grammatical structures and vocab. That was a lot of fun. But when teaching here, there is a limit to the creativity because you need to coach students through an exam.

Blank: Any interesting hobbies worth mentioning?

Christopher Forlini: Oh, if you are looking for another boring hobby, I love running and anything to do with cooking and food. ■

a bombed existence – how a student went to help the people of kobanê

by Pieter Coetzee

Johanna Jensen spent some time in Syria helping the people of Kobanê, one of the most bombed cities, to rebuild the country. This short interview tells us something about her experiences there.



Johanna Jensen

Pieter: The Syrian conflict has captured the attention of the world. It seems to be a conflict fought on many levels - religious, political, social, humanitarian, and even environmental. Tell us something about your involvement in this conflict. We don't know where you come from, metaphorically speaking, and so do not understand why you have become entangled in something as huge as a civil war in a foreign country.

Johanna: One big answer to your request might prove to be difficult. I'd like to break this up into smaller bits and let my story speak for itself. People interest me. That is one reason why I am currently studying to become a teacher in the vocational schools in Germany. Technical things interest me too. That is why I am studying metal technology as well as non-technical subjects like English.

Pieter: Now that is really interesting. You are clearly not the 'run-of-the-mill' Uni-Kassel student.

Johanna: Perhaps not. Some things really get me going - politics, environmental activism and working with children and youth. I had better add that I am an affiliate member of Solidarität International e.V., ICOR. In plain English: International Coordination of Revolutionary Parties and Organizations.

Pieter: Before continuing, please give us a brief sketch of Kobanê.

Johanna: First, about 80% of Kobanê has been destroyed. The devastation is enormous! Nonetheless, there are parts of the city which have not suffered so much from NATO bombing. Second, Kobanê is located in the very north of Syria and lies directly on the Turkish border. The Turkish government aggravates the efforts to rebuild Kobanê and had of late even boycotted the import of concrete. Up to this day Turkey has refused to open its border to Kobanê for humanitarian aid and has even tightened its border controls. This is a very serious problem; there are a lot of civilians and children in Kobanê who urgently need help. Third, the struggle of the people in Kobanê is hard and complex; geographically it is surrounded by enemies and the situation has become more complicated now that Russia and several European countries have entered the war in Syria. But the people have great faith in themselves. They are well organized politically. The leading political party of Rojava is the PYD (Party of Democratic Union) but there are many smaller parties and organizations in Kobanê as well. The people of Kobanê form the basis of a self-governing system; they gather in regular meetings to decide on issues like the ones I have mentioned.

Pieter: I take it that your sympathy with ICOR is the vehicle which transported you to Syria.

Johanna: Dead right. I was in Kobanê for very specific reasons. When IS troops advanced towards Kobanê in October 2014, a great wave of solidarity emerged all over the

world in sympathy with this city and its people. Since 2012 they have successfully built up a self-governing canton with democratic structures and far-reaching rights for women, as well as religious and ethnic minorities, and have done much for the environment. The canton Kobanê is part of the autonomous region called Rojava in Northern Syria. Its population is mainly Kurdish and the developments there towards building a democratic state is inextricably connected with the Kurdish liberation struggle. I participated in several demonstrations, joined solidarity committees and actively raised funds for Rojava, for medicine and other humanitarian supplies. In January 2015 Kobanê was liberated from the fascists by the combined force of YPG/YPJ units (Kurdish self-defence units), Peshmerga units and US airstrikes after a heroic fight lasting 134 days. ICOR provided significant moral support for this victory.

Pieter: I detect existentialist principles in what you are telling us.

Johanna: You do? It was about then that I heard about the ICOR-solidarity brigades. People were encouraged to enrol for a four weeks stay in the city of Kobanê to build a health care and social centre together with native workers. I was very enthusiastic about this because the struggle for Kobanê and its victory were important events in our attempt to show the world that IS was not unbeatable. But in order to secure this victory the des-

troyed city had to be rebuilt. I wanted to be a part of that process.

Pieter: You have, to borrow something from the title of one of the books of a famous existentialist, Albert Camus, iron in your soul. Your presence in Kobanê was then indirectly linked to the Syrian refugee crisis. Is that right?

Johanna: The overwhelming majority of refugees coming to Europe have fled from the war in Syria either because of Assad's bombs or ISIS terrorism, but many have fled from Kobanê because their homes were destroyed. On our way to Kobanê we stayed in a refugee camp in Turkey/Suruc and learned that most of the people wanted to return to their homes. Europe was not an option for them. Since Kobanê has been liberated up to 160,000 people have returned to the canton. Our work there contributed to the fight against one of the causes of flight, not only practically by helping to rebuild the city, but also morally. Many people told us that our presence there gave them hope and courage. This was very encouraging indeed.

Pieter: Let us focus for a minute or two on what you actually did in Kobanê. What kind of work lay in store for you when you arrived there?

Johanna: The main task was to erect a ca. 600 square metre large one-storey building with rooms for small operations, an apothecary and a gynaecological ward. This was



an enormous task undertaken under extreme conditions – a destroyed infrastructure without a fully working electricity and limited water supply. We had enormous difficulties obtaining heavy machinery in order to cast concrete. It was hard physical work but this enabled us to bond even more with the native population.

Pieter: Did you have any special tasks?

Johanna: My practical job was to produce so called *calpice*-bricks which are made out of clay and straw, materials which are traditionally used for building houses in that area. These bricks have the advantage that they offer good protection against extreme heat and cold, but they also function as a protection against bullet-fire in case of an attack. I also helped with cutting and wiring the iron reinforcements in the building and with the plastering.

Pieter: You seem to have built up a sense of solidarity with the natives.

Johanna: Yes, that was important. The fact that we were seen as belonging there enabled us to make excursions to visit the refugee camp and other important sites in or around the city. One of these was the graveyard where over 200 casualties of a massacre lie. This massacre took place in Kobanê in June 2015 after IS-fascists had infiltrated the city. We were also enabled to interact with people in the neighbourhood and celebrated with them on several oc-

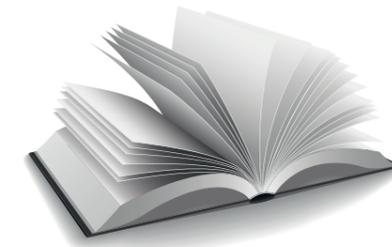
casions. For instance, we danced *Halay* on the roof top of the building we were constructing after we had finished with casting the roof. We did this to remind ourselves of a tradition in Germany which is celebrated when the roof of a building had been completed - the so-called *Richtfest*. In the immediate neighbourhood there was a wedding going on and people were dancing in the streets. As you can see, the spirit of victory in Kobanê is unbreakable!

Pieter: What will the future bring for Kobanê?

Johanna: In November the health care centre had officially been handed over to the officials of Kobanê. Some brigades will be going next year in order to work on the finishing touches of the building such as the installation of a solar panel and a water cistern. At the moment the tightened controls at the Turkish border and the overall highly complicated political situation in Syria have made things harder for the people there. I do not believe that the intervention of Europe, the US and Russia will solve Kobanê's problems; on the contrary! I am convinced that the struggle of the freedom and peace-loving people living in Rojava will go on. I am looking forward to going back to see the progress. All participants of the solidarity brigades have officially been made honorary citizens of Kobanê by the municipality. There will also be a documentary about the project coming up for release soon. ■

review: ti-jean and his brothers (1958) by derek walcott

by Henry Lyonga



Derek Walcott's *Ti-Jean and his Brothers* is a beautifully written equivocal play argued by critics to be not exactly realism or fantasy because it touches on the metaphysical and spiritual realm and explores how they are intertwined with nature. It discusses the fine lines between good, evil, spirituality and political adversity in the West Indies, thus allowing his audience the possibility to interpret the play in several different ways.

Its message, however, is straightforward and direct, namely that having the shrewd resourcefulness needed to survive any harrowing circumstance has nothing to do with physical force and/or learned intelligence. When you are stuck in the trenches fighting your way out of a horrible situation, all you really need is "common sense".

Walcott's play mirrors the biblical temptation of Jesus in the Wilderness, which the Book of Matthew 4:1-11 elaborates on. The West Indian fable presents the three brothers Ti-Jean, Gros-Jean and Mi-Jean, who leave their mother behind and embark on a deadly mission to be tested by the devil. The stakes are high for all three brothers because he who fails to pass the devil's test will be sent to an early grave.

The protagonist Ti-Jean is the only one who survives while his bothers Mi-Jean, the "intellectually gifted," and Gros-Jean, the "strong and vivaciously driven and fiery",

all meet their Waterloo.

As gut-wrenching as the story may sound, it is in fact a very colourfully written story. Walcott sizzles by utilizing a straightforward and simplistic structure. He employs many metaphors and personifications, e.g. by bestowing on the devil the ability to take diverse shapes and forms of mere mortals.

Even though the play is written in Pidgin English, Walcott succeeds in combining elements of tragedy and comedy and making them flow. Its effortless fluidity and simplicity creates a balance between its content and its structure.

In my opinion, *Ti-Jean and his Brothers* is a thought-provoking play for anyone who is insightful enough to understand the delicate nature of symbolism and interested in ethnic and diaspora literature. It is a multifaceted representation of life and its hurdles. Not only does it explore humanity and the problems of the simple unenlightened man, it also shows how the devil (in this case: British colonizers) controls his captives (the three brothers), whom he treats like slaves.

If you ever wondered and wanted to know how to trick the devil into acquiescing to your wants, then you should read Walcott's *Ti-Jean and his Brothers*. "Ti-Jean the hunter ... he beat the devil". ■

the ambiguous fun of going out to have dinner

by Inga Zekl

First of all, let me assure you: I love children! But do you know that weird feeling – sometimes impossible to suppress – that sometimes children should really only be seen and not heard? Before you get your knickers in a twist, I'll be happy to elaborate.

One Sunday in September, my family and I were in Gladbeck, an incredibly important, sorry, rather insignificant and godforsaken town in the vicinity of Bottrop in the vicinity of Düsseldorf in the vicinity of, well everybody knows Düsseldorf - it's not as if I'm talking about Bielefeld...

A birthday present, a well-intended gift brought us to this exclusive, rather secluded part of Germany: in Bottrop children and adults can fly! A nice and cozy facility makes this possible for everyone. Of course, you may neither be too young nor too fat in order to have a notion of what it might be like to fly. A gigantic ventilator, four of them to be precise, creates a wind that allows you to hover and - if you get the gist of it - to fly upwards and downwards, to circle.

A quite expensive experience, but you have to entertain your kids... and quite frankly, this seemed a better present than the next mobile phone or Ipad.

Since we were here anyway, it seemed only logical to have a nice meal before the trip back, a two-hour ride on Germany's autobahns, depending on the number of cars with yellow license plates – no, this is not discriminatory, just an observation as I grew up near Willingen, the first ski resort for Dutchmen who ultimately and utterly fail to grasp the concept of appropriate tires for winter weather...

So we googled and found a nice Mongolian restaurant with an all-you-can-eat offer at a reasonable prize, something very useful when you have to feed three kids

between the ages twelve and sixteen, the little omnivores they are.

So we arrived at the correct address – thank you navigational aid – and sat down ready to enjoy ourselves. A buffet is something very nice and the Mongolian way – at least we are regularly made to believe that this is a Mongolian tradition – to prepare a decent meal is something that can really be thoroughly enjoyed.

Just one small thing is necessary: silence and not too much hustle and bustle.

We were shown to our table, ordered our drinks and set off to fill our plates with delicious looking food that smelled incredibly appetizing.

The most difficult thing when you are having a Mongolian barbecue – as you, dear reader, might know – is not to eat too much and too fast because when you arrive on the premises you are so hungry you could eat a bear all by yourself, but if you indulge yourself in the amusement too fast, it will end just as quickly.

Well, let me assure you that we are quite versed in the art of eating Mongolian food. First, you go to the things which are to be fried and give your plate to the nice man behind the hot stove, then you take your time to pick something nice as amuse-bouche, something really Mongolian, like sushi perhaps, or, if you are rather the soupy kind of person, you opt for the soup of the day. If your timing is good and there are not too many customers there with you – mind you that this is because of the right time you chose to arrive and not because the food is inedible and everybody else has chosen to dodge this facility – then your first grilled plate should arrive just as you are nibbling at the last bites of your petite but not at all frugal entree.

A charming lady comes to your table and utters these

wonderful combinations of letters and numbers like 56 B or 27 C and you, not at all hesitantly, lift your finger and proudly announce: "Yes, that's me!"

The five minutes that follow are between you and your well-chosen and well-grilled food.

Theoretically.

In reality, a lot can happen to keep you from enjoying your scrumptious meal. Let us not discuss the possibility that you chose wrongly, that the sauce does not at all go with the meat or the fish, let us assume that everything is grilled to perfection.

Simply picture the arrival of new guests, of hungry looking guests, right at the table next to you. With a slight panic, you look up and register that it is a family, but on second glance you exhale slightly, relieved that they, too, do not have small kids but, like yourself, a bunch of hungry looking teenagers.

Fine. That should not be a problem. Everybody has to pay attention to not awkwardly bump into each other on the way to the buffet, but that seems doable.

So you continue to relish the wonderful food and then the inevitable happens: the arrival of a group of people that 100 percent assures that your meal is not going to be a quiet, relaxed one, but that there is going to be too much noise and too frequent coming and going as well as a lot of crying and hushing and shushing to seriously relax or even eat in peace. A young family enters with a toddler, a toddler who would be happy to stay in his familiar place, to play and to mumble and to fumble and all of this not in a restaurant where the adults are always taking so long to eat. Disgusting, from the point of view of a toddler...

Imagine these five or rather four and a half persons being led to a table not adjacent but right around the corner of yours. You still keep up your hope: maybe the toddler is already used to going out to eat, used to being put in a chair that is not his own, eating stuff that has not been prepared by Mommy or Daddy, stuff that tastes unfamiliar and which arrives on an unfamiliar plate. Maybe it is one of these poor little creatures who do not know where home is because they are always taken everywhere their parents go but who – on the bright side – have learned to adjust to new situations.

The waiter politely offers to go and fetch the parents a highchair and that is the moment when the decision is made. If the parents say yes, the possibility at least still exists that everybody in the vicinity of this family might be able to finish their meal in peace. But if they say no, all hope is lost.

And the inevitable does happen: the parents decline the offer of the highchair and assure the waiter that their toddler will be much happier if seated next to his parents on a normal chair. The waiter steps back and allows the family to settle in. Mommy sits down, kiddy sits down or rather mommy and daddy and grams and pops would like him so sit down on his chair but no, he insists on sitting down on mommy's lap, and quite vociferously. Everybody but the immediate family winces awkwardly and silently wishes that the powers that be intervene on behalf of those whose nerves are rattled. Unfortunately, even those powers take a day off from time to time...

The adults yield and sit down themselves with an empty chair between mommy and daddy. When they have finally settled, an innocent observer of this little scene cannot help but further study the motions and notions at this

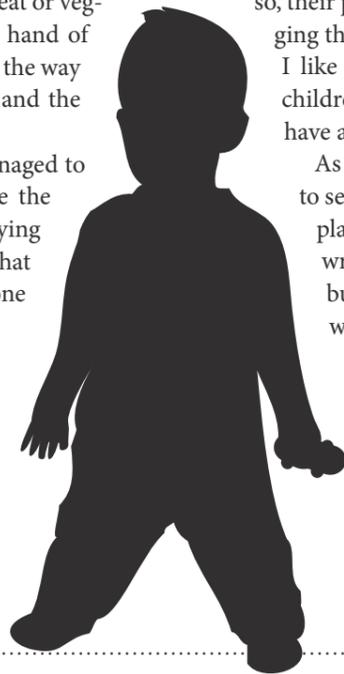


table and as an innocent bystander, or perhaps “bysitter,” you can do little but overhear the entire conversation.

They order something to drink, the men beer, the women coke and the little one? Guess what, no, not water, or perhaps a juice, a sprite at two and a half years! I suppose the origin of obesity and tooth decay is no longer a secret. For the next few minutes everything is fine. Daddy, grams and pops go and fill their plates, daddy brings something for his little tyke and mommy thinks she can leave herself to go to the buffet now. But guess what? She is so very wrong! The little buggler just will not let her leave the table. So she gives in once again and the toddler accompanies her to the buffet. Yeah, excellent idea!

Buffet, restaurant, Sunday, high noon, the place is crowded with people and you take your two-year old with you to fill your plate, to choose what to grill and which sauce to take and all this while paying diligent attention to your child? Ever tried to reach the last bowl, the third one in a row and to put some pieces of meat or vegetables on your plate while holding the hand of your kid so that he does not get lost or in the way of others? Great idea! Really great idea and the kid thinks so, too...

To cut a long story short, we still managed to not leave the restaurant hungry, despite the fact that several toy cars had been sent flying a mere three meters from our table and that four adults had not been able to control one teeny tiny toddler.



This brings me back to my first lines:

I really do like children, I have two of my own, as well as six nieces and two nephews. I love children, hell, I even like to teach them. But if you like children, you should really know that they are not a handbag that can go with any outfit that can be taken to a restaurant and be expected to sit quietly and wait until the end of a prolonged meal.

Children, especially those under, let's say the age of six, are not meant to be taken out to dinner or any meal at all. They should be fed at home in their familiar surroundings, where they can get up from the table and run and shout and even send their toys flying without annoying other people.

When you go out to have a fancy meal in a restaurant, you do not only pay for the food but also for the ambience, for the feeling, for the small vacation from your daily routine.

Little tykes can ruin that vacation time and, even more so, their parents and grandparents can do so by dragging the kids along with them everywhere they go. I like children but they have the right to be in children's places and not grownup locations, they have a right to lead a life for children.

As for the parents of these kids I completely fail to see the point why they go out to eat in the first place: they must feel as if they were at home wrestling their kid into a chair doing anything but relaxing and keeping others from their well-earned relaxation. ■

aftershock

by Brian Koch

Queen of night falls down again onto the crimson veils
Far, inhuman voices upon dark, deserted fields
The blood of fallen nations touches bleak and wasted ground
Following the path of an evil unbound

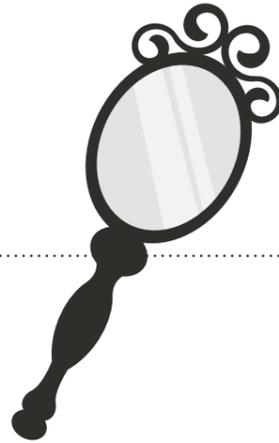
So vicious is the circle of the innocent victims
Damnation angel choirs chanting in the distance
The webs of lies and greed lead to sinister fate
Souls seeking solace in noisy paroles of hate

Haunting ghosts of doom behind the shadow of the wind
In the playlet of life nobody cares about its end
Phantoms of our fathers paving ways to shallow graves
Beauty turned to dust under the cold and hateful waves

Dreams this life once was about are now like broken glass
We killed them ourselves with the sins of the past ■

who am i?

by Sabrina Steinhage



A shadow of who I long to be.
An endless circle of pleasing society.
A lonely tragedy, in urgent need of healing remedy.
Who am I?
Looking in the mirror,
feeling like a massive error.

Society has expectations,
I have revelations.
Not at ease, I'm not here to please.
Who am I?
I'm starting a war,
always ready to roar.

Speaking my mind, nothing to rewind.
I'm not here to do what you want,
you're just a petty ant.
Who am I?
Here to take a stand,
this is not what I planned.

Standing out from the crowd, finally screaming out loud:
I'll be who I want to be,
but you'll see who you want to see.
Who am I?
Being a reckless human,
bringing a happy omen. ■

fear

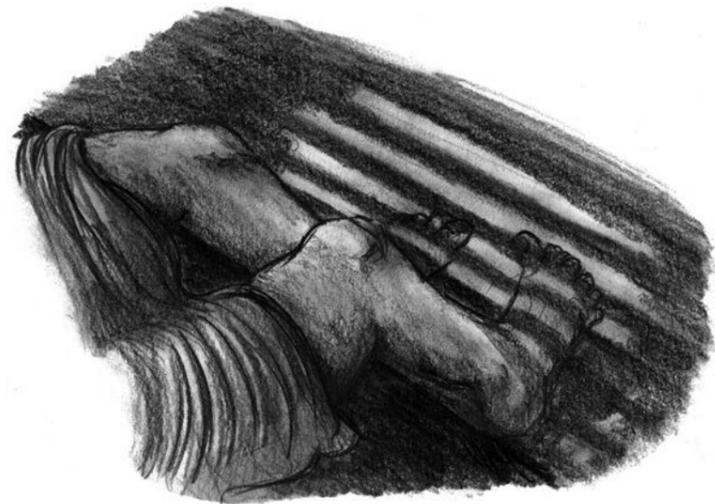
by Henry Lyonga

Fear is inevitable.
It cripples and makes us helpless,
It smacks us in the gut and leaves us shaken, damaged and
broken.
It lets us know that we are not in our comfort zone.
It takes us on a journey from everyday normality into the
twilight zones,
The grey areas of life,
That are inexplicable to the conventional human mind.
Areas that evoke terror and discomfort.
Areas that feel weirdly frenzied and almost electric.
It tells us, we dare not thus,
We believe,
So we let it hinder us from becoming our best selves and
from using our potentials to the fullest.
Not me,
Not anymore.
I am done running away from fear.
I am done, letting fear define my trajectory in life.
Enough with it.
Wallowing in fear only means wallowing in mediocrity.
And I will be damned if my fear is to overcome me.
Courage and resilience is all we truly really need to forge
ahead.
Dear Mr. Fear, I shall not acquiesce or yield to your wants.
Therefore, be gone.
You own no place in my heart.
I choose to be great and I shall conquer. ■

the trench

by *Melanie Mendetzi*,
illustration by *Melanie Mendetzi*

Step by step she said to herself
as she tried to follow the
alleged road. The destination was bound to
come closer anyway and nobody
could stop her from reaching it.
But then came the trench.
She had to open her eyes and her
feet had to remain still. But
everything stayed dark nevertheless.
Only a few bright spots tried to guide
her the way. Her feet were cold, her
skin felt like woodchip paper.
She opened the blinds with a smile. ■



hello little bird

by *Kristina Weissbecker*,
illustration by *Lille Haase*

Hello little bird,
you are beautiful
Beside my window you sit.
Your feathers are fine,
Your flying divine,
Closer I come, bit by bit.

In front of the pane
I stand and I watch
You're hopping there on my sill.
You've black beads for eyes
Though of a small size
your wings stand for freedom and will

Oh little bird,
you must've flown far
What wonders your eyes must've seen
From Paris and Rome
to Shanghai and back home
To thousands of places you've been.

Every morning I come
to the sill to see you
and start my day with a smile.
I watch you and dream
And everything seems
possible when flying miles.

And you, little bird,
could fly off and leave,
But still you return every day.
When your gaze meets mine
We're one of a kind
We're birds of a feather, I say.

So accustomed I grew,
such a habit it was,
that to grasp it took me so long
Just a feather there lay
And from this very day
would I nevermore hear my friend's song.

"I made him promise he'd never shoot a lapwing after
that, and he didn't. Yes, here are more! Did he shoot my
lapwings, Nelly?" – Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* ■



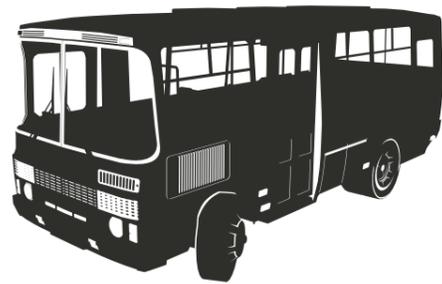
IV, V, VII, XIII

by Jan Rölleke

IV.

6.3. N.Y.-D.C.

On the southbound bus, the skyline fading behind me,
with almost physical pain I am slowly torn from the city.
Kicking and screaming I try to keep hold
of the last threads binding me to it, though eventually,
all that remains is an empty hole
in my chest that even the thrill
of approaching reunion with old friends cannot fill.
Energetic brooks along the highway try to console me,
having only just freed themselves from winter's ice.
Graciously showing her face today, the sun
dispels all clouds from its turquoise realm.
High in the wide blue sky,
airplanes, the white doves of freedom,
waggle their wings to wave me farewell.



V.

7.3. Fairfax

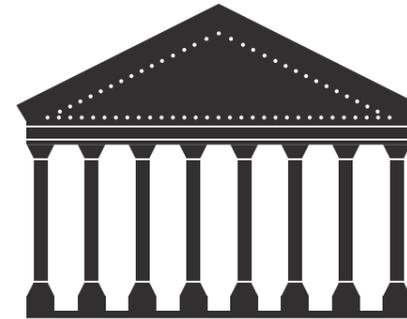
Places change and stay the same.
Maybe it is I who changed?
Who, looking at them now again,
became the one estranged.
Familiar figures from the past
arise and form their face anew,
as the years between us melt away at last,
just like the winter's snow.
And while the streets emerge,
followed by forgotten memories,
for days gone by I search,
retracing the footsteps of my journeys.
Since the further from home I wander
the closer I get to the other.



VII.

9.3. Smithsonian

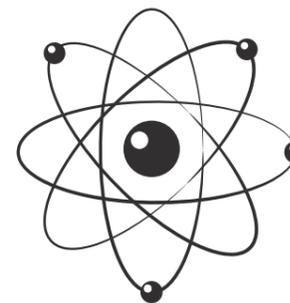
Busy streets and busy lives
filled with strangers rushing by,
in between the monuments
and places to preserve
what rests on pedestals, resisting the curse
of time and precipitous existence.
The exhibits of our history,
seeking to explain the mystery
of our transient earthly empire.
Elderly eyes, veiled in remembrance,
beside their marveling descendants,
passing on the fire,
so that likewise, they may hasten through the ages
and onto them bequeath their traces.



XIII.

14.3. Arlington

That thing which binds us,
like the strongest of forces the atoms, together
and guides the direction of our paths,
never too far from one another.
Though years may pass and we may change
we'll never grow apart,
for it will eternally retain
each other in our hearts.
That thing attunes the frequencies
of the hum inside our souls
to create marvelous harmonies.
And through the highs and lows,
our melody, it will maintain
its strength until we meet again. ■



a song from the end of the road

by Daniel Krooß,
illustrations by Melanie Mendetzki

Spring

*Two boys kicking cans.
An imaginary audience cheering.*

All the dreams we used to live,
we were pirates or knights, astronauts or legends of the
martial art.
Heck, at times we were all of those things.
There was nothing in the world that could tame us!
So many worlds to discover and conquer
in our very own backyards.
And at the end of the day, we'd rest under our favorite
tree,
sharing a cigarette I'd snatched from mother's purse.
Gasping at the swarm of fireflies dancing,
painting us all the wisdom we could possibly seek.
In a world at peace,
we would fall asleep.



Summer

*A guitar out of tune.
Two boys that sing from their hearts in sorrow.*

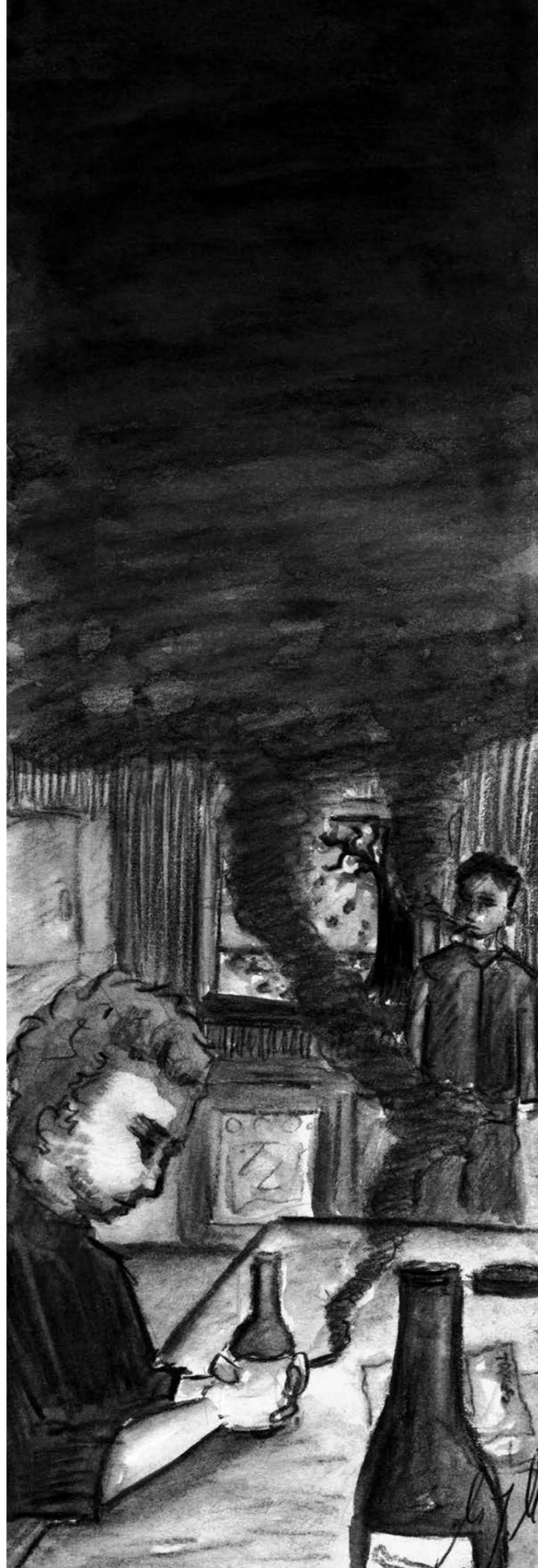
Oh remember all those songs we used to sing!
Reciting lines in the hope to capture,
to win back. Or at times,
to simply forget. God!
The beauty of mending broken hearts!
Two boys falling in love
with girls that they were never meant to be with.
Those were the days when nothing could shake us;
we had so much strength!
And while sharing our first beers, we made a promise,
to never bow to anyone, to do everything
to make our dreams come true.
And we really meant it.



Fall

*The days become colder.
Two boys watching the trees grow pale.*

But on unlucky roads we started to doubt.
And on unhappy roads we learned to adjust.
With disbelieving smirks on our faces
we looked back to those boys from the old days.
Entwined together in a world
that had changed us,
long before we could finish our ludicrous plans of rebellion.
Drunk, in a room blasting with smoke,
we trashed our old notebooks
filled with so many thoughts,
of so many hopes and so many shattered dreams,
they got us nowhere.



Winter

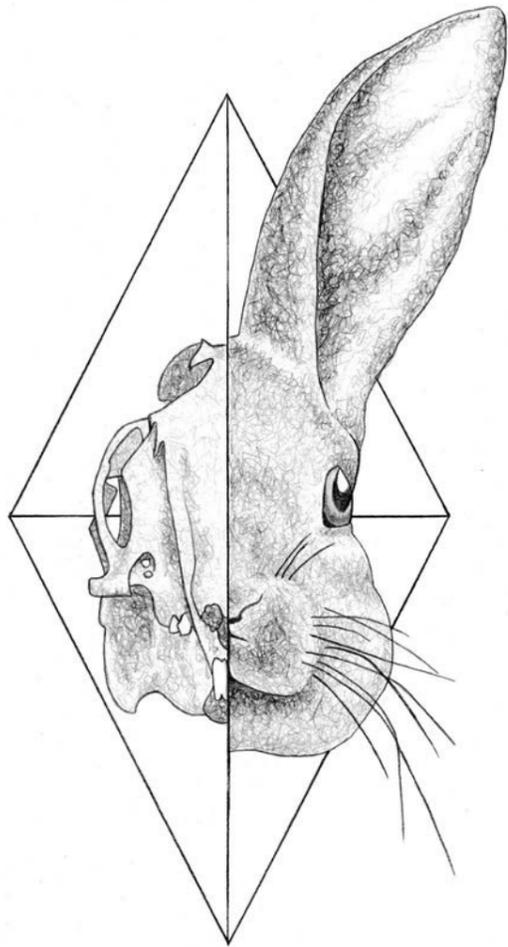
*Young men. Tired. And Numb.
Soundlessly singing;
a song from the end of the road.*

...and here we sit again,
giving way to that fatal combination,
the heavy liquor, the sadness, the utmost longing.
Just to give us some sense!
And as the extension our fingers
carry the ashes of that painful silence,
we try to deaden that question,
hammering on the door of our consciousness:
Have we lost ourselves,
or is this really what we were meant to be all
along? ■



depth

by Maria Messer,
illustration by Maria Messer



Down, down the rabbit hole.
As I look about, only darkness welcomes me.
Drowning in obscurity,
No one else for company, but my thoughts.
Hatless madness befriending me.

Down, down the rabbit hole.
Hands begin to crawl up my spine.
First gently placing themselves on my shoulders.
Then crawling up, around my neck, choking me.

Down, down the rabbit hole.
It seems the fall will never end.
Afraid? I'm not afraid of falling.
What awaits me when I reach the ground? ■

on a train

by Christian Weiß

Father and son have departed, lifting their small and young
and tall, omniscient bodies from the velvet morning seats.
The sun is rising, burning in the east, slowly climbing
sleepily over the hillside to the east. It is a winter day.
The train rolls south. No steam. The seats look light and impersonal
like a specimen from a distant past in a railroad museum.

Their chattering falls heavy on the wooden planks of memory's dusty attic.
Incessant, the son, and turning, changing topic, turning
a goldfish in a garden pond. Ever the benign guardian, the father
interested, calm, assertive and alert. Words spoken young
will return as news to you when grown.

Dew steams over the morning lake, the lake heated
by the gold red burning ball. Another stop is served,
new passengers arrive. They sit down on the velvet voices
opposite each other, talk of classes and vacation. The sun
is rising gold and blinding. Black, a tunnel gulps the world. ■

driftwood

by Christian Weiß

Incomprehensible peace assumes the river settlement,
drifts upstream like a quiet steamer and brings relief to
parks and streets and public places in the sun, where
sitting here among the tunes of Charlie's kind accordion,
immeasurably, you feel at ease.

Slowness shyly gains control over the spread-out sentiments
lying peacefully on the blanket covering the August afternoon,
and like an undisturbed mosquito firmly circles round
its prey and enters through the very way the last remains
of motion have just left. Feeling bereft you fade,

Then you awake, the state of haze having escaped
through shuttered lids – and yearning now for song and cheers
the city fever pushes and shoves, escaping from the hidden cells
of consciousness (for which we lost the keys) and drives us
down the stairs, out in the streets, into the arms of mad elation.

A silent moon falling apart, a bric-a-brac stream raining down,
enchanted all those roaming minds and feeds them
destination, is polished by insistent teeth, demands
appreciation, then floats on through excited veins, converted
into breath and glance. This is a chance to be,

There's turbulence down in streets, a tale of hundred differences,
a mad melange of alien trifles and olden purging with a stone,
amazed they hum the tune of escalation and sense some life
and misery among the fading gold facades; rambling, tossing, vigorous;
like an ever-surging sea to distant silent lakes.

Far-off sounds of ball and wall, dogs in heat, mosquito bites,
but razor-sharp and heedful ears and eyes connecting
with the sound and sight of wind and cars and grasshoppers,
the last of strength thus spent to reach a place to rest,
surreal blues of the metropolis, caught in worn-out whispers.

White tombstones grow, grey elephants, beneath a pale blue sky,
around the restless travellers' aching feet, that overwhelming silence
in the streets, where bars are closing over the last round and
the tottering of insufficiently fuddled hounds, on their way to
find a way out of the night. The darkness cracks,

The shadows sprout, the hotspur morning floods the earth.
Light awakes in drowsy streets – and motion. Movement
fills the emptiness. A hot infusion down a croaky throat.
Voices ring out, engines combust. The last remembrance
of this day will be their glorious dust. ■

broken warrior

by Elisa Haas

1

There I was, sipping gasoline... oh I'm sorry, of course I meant whiskey, which apparently people here see as the same, at a bar in Durango, Mexico, when this guy with a death wish came up behind me and said:

"Hello ma'am, what are you doing in this crappy part of the world?"

My hand went straight to the gun holstered on my right. I only had one round of bullets left. I paused, because after living through years of misery, running and hiding from my husband and people I thought were friends I figured this guy was probably not worth causing a scene like this, in a part of the city that has had enough of scenes and bodies to deal with anyway. So I stopped before doing something stupid again and grabbed my drink instead, giving him enough time to stand next to me and stare at me like an idiot. As if he knew me.

At the thought of that, chills were running down my spine. Every sense in my body was alert, every muscle ready and I was looking for a way out while I tried to keep a poker-face. Instead of shooting a hole right between his muddy dark brown eyes I turned my head to look directly into them:

"Fuck off", I said, thinking he probably gets that a lot and started thinking it was a compliment, since he didn't even blink once or made the slightest attempt to leave me alone.

Instead, he started smiling, no, grinning like a retard from one ear to the other and I thought about slitting his throat the same way:

"Can't a woman just sit in a bar and not be bothered for a second?" Contrary to what you might think of me now, I was still a lady, so I made a subtle attempt at hiding

the blood stain on my shirt with my jacket, not my blood, of course.

Then one half of his mouth dropped like he forgot about the other and just kept looking at me, slightly shifting his head to one side like he expected me to go on insulting him, which I was more than happy to do but I kept my mouth shut, waiting for his next move. I let him do that for just one more second, then rolled my eyes and turned away from the bar. I just knew I had to get out before I really did kill this guy and every drunk sucker in this bar, considering they were witnesses. And I also developed a bad temper. No, let me rephrase that: I have a quick reaction to bullshit. Same difference.

As I was about to walk away, he grabbed my arm and made the biggest mistake of his life. I turned around on my heels, ripping his arm away from me so I could grab the hunting knife from the inside of my black leather jacket and slammed it into the table purposely missing his fingers. The bartender looked at me grimly and kept wiping the beer glass in his hands while he nodded to some others in the bar who vanished into the cold fall night. The far sound of police sirens came through the door. A sound that didn't necessarily make me feel safe. The cops in this town weren't exactly known to be very protective of good citizens. Granted, I was technically a stealing, drug-abusing serial killer, but hey, it's self defense right? Then the sirens were cut off by the closing door and I turned back to the bartender who already backed away into a room behind the bar.

So now me and the guy were alone in the room and I looked at him again pulling my knife away saying: "Next time I won't miss."

And there was the grin again.



"You bet' cha" he said.

"What the fuck is so funny about this?"

"It's funny because they told me you might not trust me at first but I'm sure you'll grow to like me." He paused to light a cigarette.

"Why should I grow to anything? I told you to leave me alone."

Then his face got serious all of a sudden and with a worried look he said:

"Are you done? Because we should talk later. Let's get out of here now. John knows where you are and he's sent people to get you dead or alive. I'll explain the rest later and you can still kill me after I've made sure you're safe again."

By the sound of John's name my jaw dropped. A million questions popped into my mind but I couldn't grasp any of them. I felt my inner shield of confidence shatter like a mirror. Even if I wasn't superstitious, I was sure that the 7 years of bad luck would include metaphorical mirrors.

I tried to pull myself or rather glue the shards back together when my head cleared enough to ask "Who sent you" with a shaky voice.

"It doesn't matter but I'm honestly your only friend right now, trust me. And if it helps, I'm a private investigator. Listen, we don't have time for this. They'll be here any second."

"How do I know John didn't send you?"

"You don't, but you don't have a choice, Amanda."

2

I haven't heard my real name out loud for a really long time. I had to change it to Demi Masters after I ran from John three years ago. I felt hot tears burning up in my eyes, when the feelings I kept burying with denial came back in intense flashes. How I lost everything and everyone I ever loved because of this monster of a man.

I heard a loud bang and someone was screaming. After

a few seconds I realized it was me and someone had kicked the entrance door in. A bunch of men burst through wearing cameo-outfits and heavy boots and assault rifles were pointed at me. One of them spoke into his headset:

"We found her. Go..."

He started to run towards us, when he suddenly sank to the ground and it was only when he landed in front of my feet that I saw my knife sticking in his chest. I couldn't remember throwing it at him so I looked at the PI beside me who must have taken the knife from my hands and threw it at the guy. All of this happened so quickly that the whole scenery was a blur and I didn't feel the searing pain in my right shoulder at first.

He threw me over his shoulders, jumped over the bar and ran through the door that the bartender went through before. I heard the far sound of boots on the ground behind us when I was about to pass out. They sounded as if my head were underwater and their voices were turned into deep sounds so bizarre, they didn't resemble any living creature.

He held me with one hand and pushed a shelf in the direction of our followers. It hit three of them but the other two were able to dodge it and were joined by four new ones coming through the back entrance that we were headed to. I heard the swoosh of a gun that has a silencer attached to it, like he is some kind of a friggin' assassin, and the men fell to the ground like wet bags of sand. One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Well, he did carry 120 lbs on his shoulder, so that one missed shot was forgiven.

But I would never miss an opportunity to tease him with it in years to come. He hit all of them with fatal shots. If I hadn't been in so much pain I'd be pretty jealous. When he stepped over the bodies, the cool night air hit my face and we were out of the bar already. He ran straight to a black Mercedes parked in the alley.

My body was placed on the passenger seat and then everything went black for real. I felt honored to be allowed to bleed on such first class upholstery. I hadn't touched a car like this for a very long time, but then again, I had also not been sober for years. ■

three generations overcoming

by Henry Lyonga,
illustrations by Saguario Duda

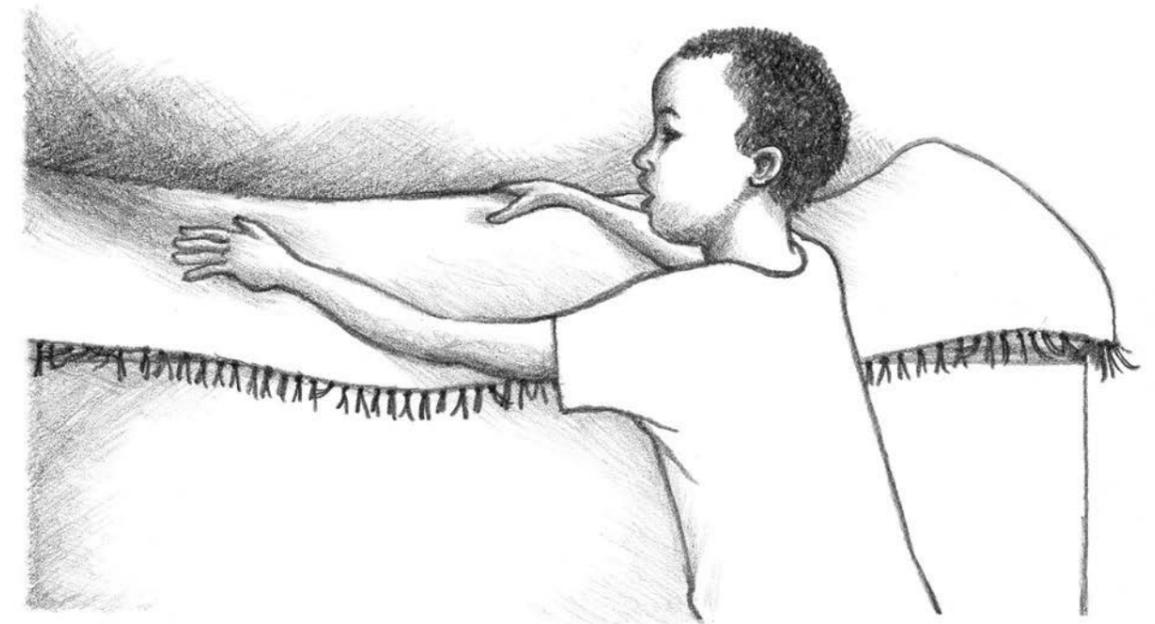
Granny's "Love is fundamental, fear hinders success, tragedy is part of life and every trajectory must come to an infinite end" is a phrase I never truly understood until that bizarre September Tuesday morning twelve years ago, which left me in total awe and disbelief of life and its inconsistencies.

Coming to terms with the pain of losing a dearly beloved granny was eventually going to change things for all of us. That was a fact. I worried ... I worried greatly.

Up till that very moment, I had lived the trouble-free life of a child who had little to nothing to worry about except food, clothes, playing with friends and school chores. I had everything I needed. Mom and Dad made sure of that by working nine-to-five jobs to sustain our standard of living in a huge metropolitan city, where life was extremely expensive. Vacations and changes of scenery after every school term had become the order of the day. Jumping between living in a big city and a small rural village which doesn't even appear on the Cameroonian map was something I had become accustomed to. I, a self-proclaimed "citizen of the world," was thought by many to be a spoiled and conceited brat. I was only a child. A child who was rather fortunate enough to have been out of the country, travelling through Germany, Belgium, France and several other European countries, all of which were the perks of being an only child and dad's dearest. Oblivious as I was to the terrors and realities of life and protected by all for being an innocent child, I could always count on Granny for literally anything. She was that one person I

depended upon to breathe wisdom into me, and that she did to the best of her ability. She, an older wiser insightful woman who had lived life to the fullest, was literally a history custodian who witnessed the time shift from African traditionalism to semi-modernity and then to full-blown globalisation. Of course she had to become my beacon of hope and source of inspiration. Not only was she all of the aforementioned peculiarities, but she was also my grandmother ... my very own "Nana C" as I recall calling her. ranny Celina told tales of strong and courageous women and men who defied fear and became masters of their own lives and destinies. She made it her duty to educate me on life, making me understand that fear is part of life, but not giving in to it bestows upon us the power to fight and conquer. She always did say, "Do not be afraid of the dungeons and dragons in your life, not even of the daemons, the naysayers and the uncertainty of the unknown. In the darkest of moments, the one true thing you must have is fearlessness, because darkness only rides on the waves of fear!" Very deep, right? I know. Crazy enough, though, that is the last meaningful thing I remember hearing her say, on Monday evening, as we sat by the fire, eating roasted cocoyams, dried smoked fish and palm oil, while the evening breeze blew across our peaceful faces.

The day after was a cold and terrifying day in Ndoji, a village situated far, far underneath the mountains of West Africa. Ndoji was a somewhat modern but very traditional village, which clearly had been at odds with the white man's nature of wanting them to assimilate his culture



and discard theirs. Ndoji was no friend to rash civilization. While houses in the city of Buea were lit by electricity, people in Ndoji resorted to using lamps and their very own traditional Tulugang light, which bears some resemblance with the torch light to illuminate their compounds and huts at nights.

Life in the countryside of Ndoji was utterly joyous. Its population was that of simple men who fished and hunted to feed their families, and it was headed by their local chief Njidio, a very prominent and beloved leader, who in his youth had rescued Ndoji from captivity at the hands of Ndike, chief of the neighbouring Eyele village. Ndoji was a really small village with no electricity and water system. The Chakuve River, which separated Ndoji from Eyele, was the only source of drinking water for both villages. Granny once told me an old tale about the Chakuve River which, as she explained, was inhabited at the beginning of time by a very pretty water goddess who was said to be the mother of generosity and creator of all that is beautiful in the world. People still lived in small reddish-orange coloured huts built from mud, clay, bamboo and straw. Ndoji's indigenes lived at the periphery of life, but they seemed very content and satisfied.

We lived in the township, Mom and Dad and I ... in a beautifully furnished black mahogany four-room apart-

ment Mom was proud of because she and Dad had just finished payment on the property. To them, all those years of working crappy nine-to-five jobs have finally paid off. "We made it" is a line which had become synonymous with "let's say grace," a constant topic of discussion at the dinner table. We were comfortable and Mom wanted Granny to move in with us, but persuading Granny to move was going to be harder than getting a camel through the eye of a needle. I remember countless occasions when Mom tried to convince her to come reside with us in the township and enjoy the luxuries of city life, to which Granny always said: "Ah my child, I was at the township once, the worst two days of my life. Never again!" She visited her elder sister, who had been married off to a merchant in town, and didn't like what she saw. She always recounted that the houses were much bigger, colourless and incongruous than what she was accustomed to in Ndoji.

Things took a sour turn after she took it upon herself to do the groceries one morning and failed terribly, because she found herself stuck in the hectic streets for hours, not knowing exactly which direction to take or go. She didn't know how to get to the other side of the street. Do not laugh, believe me, Ndoji is way more up her ally than Buea and she is not the type that talks to strangers. Let's just say it is a result of her shy disposition. It's not in her nature to

ask for help. Anyways, when she finally returned home to her sister's place, that was it. All she wanted was to go back to her comfort zone.

She dreaded the fast-paced nature and intensity of life and thus swore never to leave the comfort and tranquillity of Ndoji. She ran off, got married to Granddad and never looked back. She also said that living in Ndoji was symbolic to her because it was the resting place of her forefathers and now her husband, by whom she wished to lie when her days on earth were over.

Granny Celina was a leggy coco-brown beauty, who in her prime, as she told us on countless occasions, was so beautiful that men came scampering for her hand in marriage. At one time, her father had to let the dogs on men who wanted her at all costs.

Men didn't stop coming, not even years after she had long been married to Granddad with children. A very wealthy man named Mau tried to convince my late grandfather, who at the time was twenty-seven, to trade his wife for one thousand acres of land and money and was gracefully turned down and told to shove his money up his you know what... Grandpa knew what he had in her and no wealth in the world could cause him to cast aside his lovely wife. Theirs was a love that was resilient. It was their forever-on-earth and thy-kingdom-come opium and reason to live and breathe, which they did together for fifty years. Granny, like every woman in Ndoji, owned a hut which she used as a storage house and semi-kitchen after Mom and Dad built her a more modern house to live in. Her living standard had been elevated but still her hut remained her sanctuary. She called it her safe haven, her only contact with tradition and the memories of the past. Who could blame her? That very hut was handed down to her by her father as a wedding gift and in it they lived and bore six children who, all except for one, my Mom, died in their infancy.

Earlier that Tuesday, it had been business as usual in Ndoji. Women were going to their farms to harvest and

plant crops, carrying children on their back tied with Lankis, a traditional loin cloth to stabilize and protect the babies from falling off their mother's backs, while the men in the community had been summoned by chief Njidio for their weekly Feru meeting, where village governance and protection strategies were discussed. I was on vacation visiting Granny. She didn't allow me to do much around the compound. Visiting her was usually the only time I was allowed to be lazy and not do anything around the house like washing dishes, going shopping, all of which my own mother subjected me to on a daily basis. I really enjoyed it. It was a time in my life where I didn't really think much and worry about growing older and being responsible for so many things. It was a carefree and playful moment I enjoyed to the maximum.

Since visiting Ndoji had become some sort of a tradition for me during summer holidays, I had a solid circle of friends. John was fourteen, Peter ten, Caro was eleven and Doreen was my age ... at thirteen, we were quite some monsters. While everyone was going about their business that Tuesday, we sang, jumped rope and danced the traditional "Tabala," a famous bird dance which is a hip dance. We danced and while doing so lost touch of time. We were only interrupted when the 3 o'clock parish gong sounded. All the kids with whom I had been jumping rope and dancing started departing and running towards the direction of their respective homes.

I was hungry, which was expected after such a long and energetic dance with my friends.

I danced my hardest and I was all sweat but she didn't show face. Granny was inside throughout our dance. That was odd.

Anyone who knows my granny knew she wouldn't miss me shaking my little tiny body and stamping my feet on the ground to traditional Malee music for the world.

That was not usual of her. She loved to watch me dance and even thought of me as "the rising sun, the dance goddess, and the light of the family." She told me stories of how

even before I could speak, I had proven myself as a great dancer at the village square at only age two. She would never miss a dance for the world. Not when I, her dancing queen, was to take the floor ... something was not right. My gut told me to hurry into the house and check on her. I did. I ran into the kitchen first, then the hut, but Granny wasn't in there. I went into the new house and straight to her room. There she was, lying in bed and taking what at first glance seemed like a nap. It was bizarre. I had watched her sleeping a trillion times, but this moment was nothing like any of the others. There was a strong eerie presence in the room. The atmosphere was calm but there was a weird frenzy. The energy in the room seemed peacefully electric. I could feel it. It was almost like there had been a battle between light and darkness and one didn't want to other to win. I walked closer and closer towards her bed, a walk which frankly felt like I was at one end of an endless tunnel trying to get to the other end, while I called out her name. I got nothing ... no response ... not a single sign of utterance was made by her. I walked even closer, reached for her hand and touched it and felt nothing. No warmth, no sense of motion and colour. Her hue had changed from coco-brown to pale blue and then I realized she was no longer with us.

She had been snatched by death. She was gone. Gone.

The once beautifully vivacious woman she was had been transformed into a hollow vessel with no warmth and life. I gave out a screaming "no ... no ... no, what is this? ..." as I felt my knees weakening. I sank to the ground and poured out a river of tears.

Granny was gone. Dead. Silenced.

And then it dawned on me that I had never seen a dead person in my life before, let alone stand just inches next to one in the same room and it had to be my very beloved granny.

I needed to tell someone what had just happened. Chief Njidio was the only man in Ndoji who owned a phone. In confusion, I ran out of the compound down the

grassy paths to the chief's palace. People tried to stop me but I paid them no mind ... I had an urgent matter which needed to be reported. Mom had to be told.

On arriving in the vicinity of the palace, a big brown hut the size of a pyramid (in my mind's eye) stood right before me, with seven huge straw-masked men standing like pillars of salt in front of the palace, holding nothing but oversized spears as they looked out for any palace intruders.

They tried to stop me but a heavy voice from inside said "lif the pikin ... come to me child ..." in a Pidgin English mix.

In I walked at the speed of light, for I had no time to waste. Not caring for anyone who was in the palace I fell to the chief's feet and said "something terrible has happened, sir ... my granny is dead ... she is dead and I need someone to get to my mother with news of her mother's death.

"Celina is dead?" he asked in a rather faint voice and I in reply only gave him a straight gaze as though I was being told the sad news for the very first time. Quickly the chief's wife rallied together a group of women, some of which were Granny's friends, and marched with them to our compound. Elder Lyonga, a somewhat flamboyant rich trustworthy friend to the chief of about sixty, was sent to town to bring the sad news to Mom and Dad.

Tuesdays were usually never easy on my parents because it was all about business. Mom worked as a civil litigator at Dad's law firm Hardeson and Associates. I kept thinking about how bad the news was going to hit her. I wished I could have been the one to tell her. Anyways, after elder Lyonga's departure, six elders and a host of some of the village inhabitants and I walked to our compound. On arriving at the obscure scene, the women of Ndoji, led by Ne-Njidio, the chief's wife, had set up something which had a semblance to a canopy shaded with palm tree leaves. People I had never seen before were present. Some were crying heavily while others just sat there exuding sadness. We walked right through the canopy into the living room

which quickly led us to Granny's room. There she was, lying pale in her bed, dead. Our traditional village doctor was one of the elders with us. He was the go-to guy for tragedies like this. He and the chief said something in our traditional dialect which was essentially a farewell to their dear friend.

There was a whole lot going on that I did not understand at the time. As people were entering Granny's room to pay their respects and say their goodbyes, I heard voices singing outside the house. Soon after, Mom and Dad arrived. Apparently, elder Lyonga had lured them to the village under false pretences by telling them that the chief needed to talk to them about an urgent matter when in reality there was really nothing to talk about. Still standing in Granny's room with the chief and his fellow elders, I heard a loud cry ... "it had to be Mom ... she knows" I thought to myself. Indeed, it was her. She stormed into Granny's room and threw herself to the floor. I ran to her with the news but all I could come up with was, "she died Mom ... she just died and I did not know what to do." "You did well baby ... you did," she offered. Dad tried to console her but she wasn't having it. It is a major life changing moment for all of us but most importantly for her. Her mother had just died ... her last remaining connection to her childhood and heritage is gone, snatched away by death.

She has been made an orphan, a mother- and fatherless child. "Mom take heart," I whispered into her ear. She looked up to me and said she was sorry I had to witness this all by myself. "I am ok ... Mom," I assured her even though I felt out of place with everything that was happening. The thought "from now on, I have to be strong" kept floating in my mind. We were standing right next to

Granny's bed. I sat next to her and held her hand. I did not want her to be alone. As I was holding her right hand, I remembered what I was lucky enough to share with her from the past. Mom's voice and her gentle hand on my right shoulder was the only thing that brought me back into the sad reality that granny was gone and gone forever as we stood there watching Granny in her cradle, as we let the enormity of what had just happened sink in.

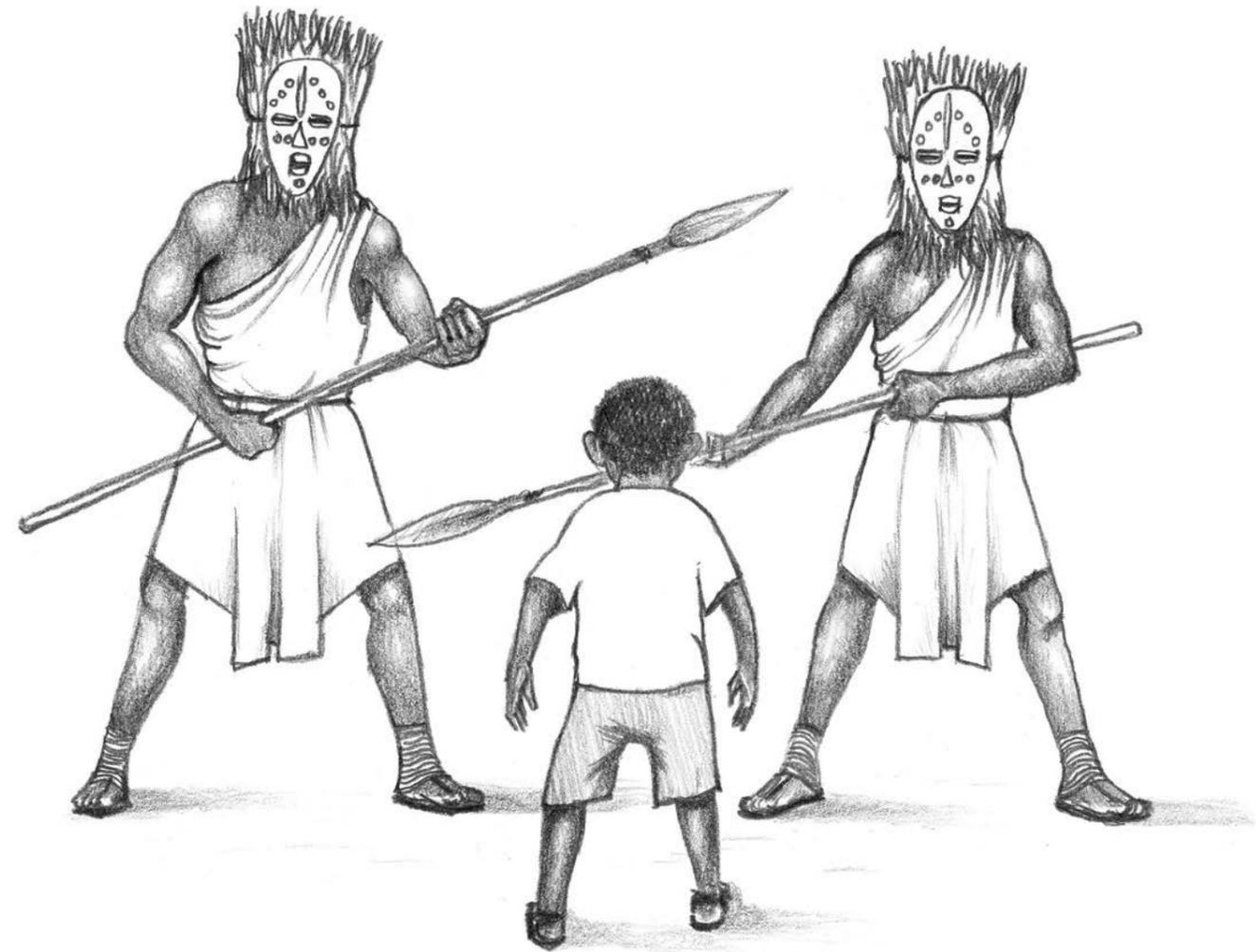
An era had come to an end for one of the three vivacious Hans family women. What was once three has now become two, with one woman shifting away and clearing a path for the other to ride on and all we had left were memories and handed down traditions we will never forget.

We all stood there in Granny's room and recited the lines "Understanding tradition and roots is understanding life and life must come to an end." A phrase which to us has become synonymous with prayer that now my own mother still uses on me at any given occasion.

Now that I am twenty, I can fully comprehend the essence of that line. The distance I once felt is all gone. Knowing now that life indeed must come to an end, Granny's signature phrase has become a phrase as close to my heart as a good friend can ever be to a person. I didn't know what I had then and now that I am clinging and holding on to dusty old memories I can see that Granny is still alive.

She is in us. Engraved in our hearts.

When I am all alone by myself, I swear I still occasionally hear her speaking to me, saying "life comes with irregularities ... therefore, there is no such thing as perfection. Love is central, tragedy is part of life and every trajectory must come to an infinite end." ■



i love you

by Victoria Koberstein

I exactly remember our kitchen even though we moved out of the apartment I grew up in about a decade ago. It was a small, cramped room, cupboards on every wall, dark brown wood and eggshell white fronts, a mid-size window with my mom's collection of little plastic frogs on the window sill. I don't know why she collected them, she doesn't even particularly like frogs. I remember the birch wood table in the middle of the room, surrounded by three chairs and one bench my sister and I would sit on. I told my mom on a daily basis how ugly I thought the table was, covered in stains and marks from tea cups that were way too hot and left the wood one shade lighter right where they had sat. And she replied the same way every day:

"One day you'll leave this place, you'll have your own first apartment and you'll be young and broke because that's just the way it is with us, and you'll wish you had a table like this to put in your tiny little kitchen in your tiny little apartment that you'll probably share with four other people, since rent is high in the city."

Today, being the young adult she talked about, I guess she was right.

For dinner we usually had a platter of cheese and sausages, some cut up cucumber, pepper and tomato, spiced sour cream to dip it in and half a loaf of dark brown, crusty, whole grain bread. Not the soft, white kind. My mom had always been careful with nutritional things. She actually planted her own fennel, dried and pressed it by hand to make tea out of it for my sister and me to drink. The tea pot was the kind that was way too hot and left marks on the table, a new mark every day.

My dad stumbled in just past 7 pm, always a few minutes late. My sister and I already had our sticky hands all over the table, our little stomachs growling from playing outside for hours and hours because that's the way it was when I was a kid. And he didn't smile, didn't even give us a look, didn't say a word. He just sat down and groaned, one big groan expressing all his frustration about his 12-hour day and his stupid bosses and his stupid colleagues and pretty much everyone else.

He sat down that way every night and my sister and I would not say another word over dinner.

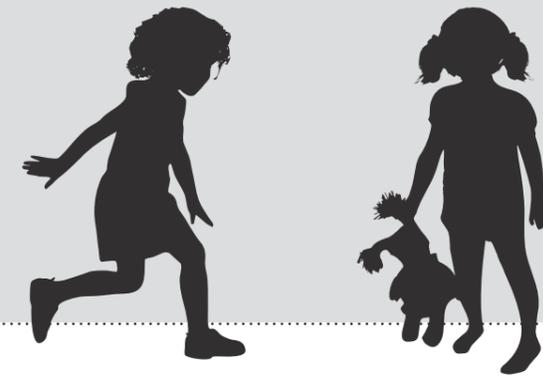
My sister had, and still has, her own way of placing her legs on the bench, feet right next to her bum, bent in an uncomfortable looking angle, knees almost under her chin. She sat like that for every meal, it was her "eating-position" and she would not like it any other way. Unlike my dad.

"Put your damn legs under the table where they belong unless you wanna go to bed hungry." Usually the first thing I heard him say every day.

My sister has had the courage to talk back to him twice as far as I remember.

"But, Papa, I just like sitting this way..." and that's how far she had gotten before I could hear that familiar slapping sound, skin on skin, my father's flat hand on my sister's pink cheeks. I heard that sound quite a lot and I knew how it felt, too.

"Why didn't you put your clothes in the hamper?!" Slap. "Stop picking your nails!!" Slap. "Listen to your mother!!" Slap. "You left your gym shoes at school?!" Slap. "Stop teasing your sister!!" Slap.



The second time she talked back to him all she had said was "Please, Papa..." and all he did was raise his hand and my sister ducked away, her hands trying to cover her head. I closed my eyes, reflex, but heard no slapping sound. She got off lightly that time. Must've been one of the better days at work. My mom usually gave him a look, not too disapproving. More of a "don't think this was really necessary but I understand you" and then she'd pick another carrot stick, dip it in her sour cream and say: "You know, she's got it from me, I used to sit like that when I was a kid."

But all my dad would do is ignore it, spread some more cumin cheese on his slice of bread and chew, his eyes darting out the window; at nothing in particular; just an empty look of exhaustion, his jaw moving rhythmically.

My sister and I didn't get up before we were told to, helped clean up the table and got ready for bed. We went to the bathroom together, privacy issues or locking doors never existed in our household.

"This is how God made you and there's absolutely nothing to hide about it," I heard my parents say countless times.

Our bathroom was tiny and sometimes you could find all four of us in there at the same time, showering, brushing, peeing, cleaning. The tiles had always reminded me of vomit, dark orange with a little khaki-green mixed in and some sort of 3D texture. Like someone took my mom's spew, shock-frosted it and put it on the wall. I liked it, though. It was a warm bathroom.

My sister and I sat in the bathtub together, I was on the good side, she was on the side with the plug. We played in

the water, then rubbed each other's back with a washcloth until our skin turned red from the friction. We got out of the tub and brushed our teeth side by side in our matching pajamas.

I remember one night it didn't go that well. We argued about something most likely irrelevant and I, using all my energy, pushed her away from the sink and she tripped over her own feet, stumbling backwards, her arms flailing about, her eyes wide open, and she fell and hit her head on the heating pipes. Hard. I could see her body bouncing back up uncontrollably, stared at her and she stared back. Neither one of us had expected this to happen. She got hurt, badly, and if there's one thing in this world that upsets me, it is my sister being in any sort of pain.

"I'm sorry," I said, "I'm so sorry!"

I wanted to help her up but she didn't let me.

"Please don't tell Mom and Dad, please! I'm sorry!"

I felt tears and desperation coming up, my voice quiet and shaky. I knew exactly what was about to happen. In short, my dad would beat the shit out of me.

My sister didn't look at me. She went back to brushing her teeth, wiped a teardrop off her cheek, her face red with anger, but she never told on me.

After we got ready for bed, we were allowed to be in the family room while the TV was on. A big thing for us, since we were not allowed to watch TV until the age of fourteen, so we enjoyed every minute we'd get with that fascinating glimmering screen of our big, black tube, showing *Who wants to be a Millionaire* on Monday and Friday nights at 8:15 pm. My mom usually ironed my dad's work clothes, my sister was curled up on the armchair in front of her and

my dad let me squeeze in right next to him on the couch, one hand holding a beer, the other one running through my short, boyish hair. And that's about as affectionate as he'd be with anyone that day. Most days. My mom, still ironing, would get a short, dry goodnight kiss before he went to bed around 10. I know this because on some nights my mother's night prayer would leave me thinking, pondering, my little brain working hard on questions I wasn't ready to be confronted with yet, about God and the world and my future and everyone else's future. So I still lay there, listened to my sister breathing deeply in and out in the bunk bed above me, the door slightly ajar, some light falling in and the TV murmuring in what sounded like a foreign language. After 11 pm my mother usually stopped ironing, grabbed a bag of salt and vinegar chips and curled up on the armchair just like my sister had done a couple of hours before. She watched boxing or wrestling or one of the *Die Hard* movies. Whenever I snuck out of my room to go potty one last time, I heard firing machine guns or cracking jaws and the sound of chips crunching in my mom's mouth.

I'd creep back to bed and try to turn my mind off, stopping my thoughts from rushing through my little head. Most nights it didn't work. Still doesn't. When my mom went to bed herself, I would occasionally, if I had the courage, step out of my room again and look at her, eyes wide open, fearing her reaction to the fact that I was still awake. She would either yell at me "Why the hell are you not in

bed?" and grab me, push me back in my room and slam the door. Or she would take my hand and let me snuggle up next to her in my parent's bed, in the middle, under her cold blanket, because it's always been cold in my parent's bedroom, one arm wrapped around me.

That night she let me.

It's always been either one or the other extreme, a carrot or a stick, pure affection or strict disciplining, all or nothing. My whole childhood, my whole life actually, has been like that. No mediocrity. No in-between.

I remember one Christmas back in my grandmother's apartment. My family has always detested Christmas time, especially my dad.

"Making money is all that is about. They start selling their Christmas shit in September and don't stop until January. Do you think any of them knows what we are supposed to celebrate?" and I would nod my head "no" in the backseat of the car on the way to my grandma, "It's about Jesus. And Jesus Christ alone."

I secretly loved Christmas. I would never tell anyone but my eyes shined bright and happy as the first snowflakes fell each year and the supermarket started selling ginger bread. Well, they already sold it in September but my mom wouldn't buy it until December as a matter of principle. Although I now think she would, she just didn't do it to avoid getting my dad upset.

I already bought all my presents in summer, just to be



safe, unlike my sister, who still didn't know what to get my mom till the day of. So I usually ended up sharing all my presents with her, whispering on the way in the back of the car: "You can give Mom the keychain and then I'll give her the scarf and then I got the socks for Dad and you can give him the book."

And I saw the relief in her face, smiled at her and then faced the window again, stuck in holiday traffic in the city, snow-covered cars slowly moving past us as my dad switched from radio station to radio station to find one that didn't play Christmas songs, until he finally turned it off.

As always, we arrived at my grandma's apartment 30 minutes late since my mom had still been bare naked by the time we should have left, waiting for her body lotion to dry before putting on her festive skirt, my dad about to lose it.

The four of us walked up five floors to see my grandma with open arms and her biggest smile and before I knew it I could smell the scent of gravy and biscuits while my face was pressed against her apron.

My grandpa wasn't there that year, I remember, so it must've been past 2004, when he fell asleep. I was too young to go to the funeral, my parents had said.

So it was just my grandma and the four of us in her apartment on Christmas Eve having a poor people's dinner - potato salad and sausages - because "on Christmas Eve we are humble, we think of the night Jesus was born and they had less than nothing in that stable. We have plenty, we have more than a lot of people and we are thankful for it tonight." Amen.

Same speech every year. I knew we'd have a massive dinner one day later at my other grandma's house. Humble for one night, eat yourself into a food coma the night after.

We sat in the living room. There was no dining room in the apartment and the kitchen was too small to even fit a table, so we sat on the couch around the coffee table,

plates on our laps, an old men's choir murmuring "Go, tell it on the mountain" in the background, the old record scuffed. I loved it.

There were no big presents after dinner, no massive boxes or gift bags. My sister and I got a little something, a doll or a book or a cassette, my parents never gave presents to each other anyway and my grandma was more than happy with the collection of artworks she received from her grandchildren and some old people's pharmacy foot cream from my parents.

That year I got a book I asked for and a wall decoration for my room, a little clay angel looking out of a tree stump. At the beginning I didn't know what it was supposed to represent or what its meaning was. I asked my mom later that night in the car, she wasn't surprised since she had noticed my confusion earlier.

"It's a guardian angel, sweetheart."

I remember holding it in my hands on the way back home, the angel staring at me and the more I stared back the more I felt like I didn't need it, like it was an unnecessary present, and noticing my frustration about that, I got even more frustrated with myself and my unthankfulness.

It wasn't until a few months later that I understood the metaphoric meaning of it. I still have it, somewhere in my tiny little apartment with my tiny, ugly kitchen table. My dad by the way still hates Christmas and loves Jesus and my mom is still always thirty minutes late.

I remember things didn't get worse when my sister and I came into our teenage years. My parents always told their friends how good we were, good as kids and good as teenagers and now good as young adults. They never told us but they told other people. It's funny how my parents think I'm good at adulting, while I personally think I absolutely suck at it.

The amount of fighting and arguing and discussing between us didn't increase, it was just the way that had changed. No more "you are stupid" - "no YOU are", but

equally unnecessary arguments from every possible point of view, one's own being the right one after all. Agree to disagree. Most times. There have been exceptions.

We grew up so close and dearly, no one and nothing had ever come between us. We slept in the same room, even though we both had our own. I remember one Christmas break when all that we had done all day was sitting on her bunk bed and playing Monopoly, still in our pajamas at 5 pm, ignoring any life outside the house, ate when we were told to and then went straight back to playing, a mixture of rain and snow drumming against the window, a typical late December day in central Germany. We talked before going to sleep, woke up next to each other again the next morning and picked up where we left off the night before.

We were pretty much the center of each other's universe.

I remember one fight, a big one, a yelling-across-the-hallway kind of fight but I don't remember what it was about. My dad exploded, screaming "you are nothing but jealous" in my sisters face when my mom stepped in, yelling at him "you stop meddling, you've got nothing to do with all this" and my dad turned around to go back to watching soccer, yelling "neither do you" back at her, while he already placed his legs on the coffee table, leaning back again. That was his way of dealing with things later on. He would hear us fight and ignore it for as long as possible, then release one big shout, then go back to whatever it was that he was doing before.

My mom, however, could not ignore us, she would intervene right away and - no matter what - defend my sister. She didn't need to know what the argument was about or listen to any standpoints. It was my fault, I was in the wrong, I had to shut up, I was the second one.

We talked this out a couple of years later and I remember every word she said.

"You will only hear me say this once, so you better listen," she started, "You have always had a strong voice, something I have never had and neither does your sister.

She needs my support, you don't. You have your points, I know that, and that's why I don't discuss with you. It's the only way I win. And I'm supposed to win, I'm your mother, I'm right no matter how wrong I am. Get that in your head."

This fight made no exception, my mother defended my sister and I had to deal with it. She was jealous, she admitted it after all, I don't remember what she was jealous of, but she was.

I didn't care, though. I ignored her for the rest of the day. There's no denying it, I could be a bitch to her from time to time. A sixteen-year-old, self-seeking, wanna-be-mature bitch. Whenever someone wanted to give me advice, I used to raise an eyebrow and say: "So how do you know what's good for me?"

Sometimes I understand why my mom never stuck by my side. I definitely didn't need anyone to defend me.



And now, a couple of years later, I still don't. My sister still is the center of my universe. My parents got divorced, which got us another bit closer, if that's even possible.

My mom still likes to tell me to shut up. In some very rare moments of deep conversation she'd let me know that she thinks I'll go places in life and that she's proud of me for being the first member of our lower middle class family to go to university and then she'd focus back on whatever she did before, usually cleaning, and say: "You're snot-nosed enough already, so forget what I just said."

The relationship with my mom has always been difficult. My sister was her favorite, mainly because she is exactly like my mother, like a copy, a clone, a thirty-years-younger version of herself.

"You're like your dad," Mom said to me once, "you're a self-seeker."

She's always cold-shouldered me, which got me upset countless times, got me crying, sobbing on my knees on the white carpet in my room, leaving little tear drop spots that I would rub away with my sleeves.

When my dad left, I thought we'd get closer. My sister moved out, so it was just Mom and I and she bought a house for the two of us. All my life I lived in cramped, dinky apartments and now my mom had bought an actual house for just me and her to live in. At least that's what I pictured, what I wished for.

The amount of conversation between us was still held to a minimum, though. She worked in shifts and I was always out and about, so I ended up not seeing her for days sometimes.

I remember I came home one night, early morning actually, from a night out with my friends and I hadn't spoken to her in about a week. I was ready to go to bed, my head throbbing already, dizzy, my ears half-deaf, when I saw a spider next to my bedside table. I jumped back up, fear and disgust running through my body like an electric shock. Arachnophobia. I couldn't go to sleep having

it next to me but killing it myself was not an option either. Too scared. My friends drew a spider on my arm with a permanent marker once while I was asleep at a slumber party and when I woke up I cried and desperately tried to peel my skin off.

So I went to the kitchen and checked my mom's schedule. Early shift. Good.

5:16 am, so she'd get up in about half an hour. And I waited, drank a bottle of water to prevent a hangover and sat on the floor in front of her bedroom door.

When she came out, she looked confused.

"Why are you up?" she asked, walking towards the bathroom.

"I just got home," I replied, following her. She laughed. She didn't care.

"Haven't seen you in a while," I said and she just nodded her head and plumped down on the toilet seat. The scene actually amazed me. So much spacial intimacy, so much mental distance.

"Anyway, there's a huge spider in my room and I need you to get rid of it."

And she nodded her head again, mumbling "There's always something you need me to do for you," ignoring the fact that I had actually not spoken to her in about a week, but she killed the spider for me so I could sleep in peace. And that's all I'd ask for that week.

Time passed by. Quite a lot of hours and minutes and seconds ran down the clock. Years. I decided to leave. Like my dad, the self-seeker.

The morning of the day I left, I got up early. 5:16 am, waiting for my mom to get up. Early shift. I followed her into the bathroom and stood there, lost, waiting for her to respond in some way. She did her usual morning routine until I said: "I'm leaving today."

She nodded. Then she turned towards me and hugged me, so tight, her squeezing almost painful, not letting go.

"I love you," she whispered in my hair and squeezed a little harder, "I love you." ■

the taming of the international banking system

by Christian Weiß

Cast in order of appearance: A reckless car driver, a young man named Henry, a lovely old lady with a spitz named Cecile, a streetcar driver (man of some authority), the ragged man (brandisher of bottles and disguised sage)

“What the hell are you doing there?” the car driver shouts with his head out of the car window and red with anger. “Get the hell off my car!”

Meanwhile, on the hood, Henry stood with shaky legs, balancing groceries in his hands.

“Well,” Henry says. “Well, well, well. Are you out of your mind?” He stamps his foot on the metal. “Are you out of your – you nearly smashed me!”

The driver gets out of his car and hastens to the front, his arms swinging. “Now, could you please step off my car? We’ll find a solution for this.”

“I cannot believe this,” Henry says. “Do you know that sign? It means public transport only! Do you follow? Public transport, man! Are you a bus driver?”

He stamps again. This time his foot makes a dent in the hood.

“Oh, do that one more time and I’ll come up and get you down myself, boy!”

“Yes, but first, I’m gonna call the police.”

Just then, a woman with a shopping bag, a leash and a spitz approaches. She scrutinizes both men. “My,” she says. “What is this?”

“Fine, lady, could you please ask this boy to stop demolishing my car?”

“How did he get up there in the first place?”

“See, lady, this is what I’m trying to tell this man the whole time. He simply drove into me. He shouldn’t be driving here anyway. But the police will take care of this.” He dials a number on his phone.

“This is for streetcars, isn’t it?” The spitz gives its short-breathed laughter. “You shouldn’t be parking here, Mister.”

The car driver scratches his head. “I would go on as soon as he comes down. There’s no need to trouble the police with this. No one got hurt.”

“So why don’t you, son?” the lady says. “Come down and we’ll settle this.”

“Don’t you see the point?” Henry asks her patiently. “He almost smashed me!”

“All I see is you standing on the hood of this car, young man. Pull yourself together and stop fooling around.”

Suddenly, a streetcar reaches the disputed ground. Its bell rings out to support its claim. The spitz aligns in eager protestation.

“Boy, come down now! You’re blocking up the way for the streetcar. I have to move my car!” The car driver turns

to the streetcar and an annoyed streetcar driver coming straight toward them.

“Who’s in charge here?” he bellows.

“It’s mine and I meant to drive it away but that boy won’t stop stomping on my car.”

The spitz now charges for the streetcar driver, choking itself on the leash to a series of high-pitched shouts.

“That’s not the point –

“Cecile!”

“Shriek Shriek Shriek”

“He’s alive, isn’t he?”

“It’s not my fault that this guy drove into me!”

“I can testify to that!”

All eyes turn around. A ragged man appears with a husky at his side and a bottle in his hand. “That clown just turned into the lane without looking. He would’ve killed the boy if he hadn’t jumped on the car.” He lifts the bottle as if to prove his point. Henry states the case to the voice on the phone.

“Shriek Shriek”

“Cecile!”

The spitz now turns to the husky, binding the leash around the old lady’s feet and shouts at the other dog,

which does not seem to take notice.

“Well, I don’t care who did what,” the streetcar driver shouts. Passengers are filing out of the streetcar, running across the street and into the traffic. He becomes visibly nervous. “Get that car out of the way so I can get past and nobody will get hurt.”

The car driver nods.

“Shriek Shriek Shriek.”

“And somebody silence that little devil!”

“Cecile! It’s all his fault,” she points at Henry while looking at the driver. “That vagabond was stomping on his car. I can testify to *that!*”

“Then get the hell off that car!”

CURTAIN ■

year's end

by Jan Rölleke

Still awake at an hour too close to daylight to be called late, I found myself marveling at the swelling sound of the wind outside my window. Something was stirring in the now cold winter's air.

I could feel it.

Humming with anticipation I gave up on my feeble attempts of finding some much needed sleep, crawled up to my window and, with a satisfied smile, observed that the earth had started to cover itself in soft, white linen. The snow the world had yearned for -unbeknownst to itself- over the last several weeks, had finally started its journey. Tiny snowflakes found their way from cloudy realms, past treetops and through the cones of street lights, jumbled by the wind's mighty breath until finally settling amongst their brothers and sisters atop the frozen ground.

A tender, silent blanket had been spread over the world to guide its sleep at the end of the year.

Drifting off towards dreamy realms myself, I wondered to what new things we would awake. ■

cabin in the woods

by Jan Rölleke

Tom woke up to the piercing "beep-beep" of his alarm clock. Half past six, the red numbers told him. In one fluid motion, he shoved his blanket aside and got up from the bed, almost jumping and bolted over to the window. Raising the blinds revealed a gray, rainy and rather dreary looking morning. Tom smiled. It was exactly as the weather report had predicted. Exactly as he had wanted it.

He had counted on it being rainy. Rainy days always added a special something to what he was about to do. When last week's forecast had pointed towards a rainy couple of days, the idea had immediately sprung into his head. He had called in sick for work the day before, explaining that he'd probably be out for at least two days. They always believed him.

After finishing his morning routine and an arguably slightly unhealthy breakfast consisting of yesterday's leftover pizza, Tom put on his raincoat and stuffed his favorite beanie hat into one of its big pockets. He made sure his keys were in one of the others -he had forgotten them one too many times- and left the house, closing and locking the door behind him. He never took an umbrella with him, he liked the beat the raindrops created when falling on his coat and head. After taking a deep breath, he stepped off his front porch, out into the light rain, turning right and following the street down towards the city center.

He rushed along the sidewalks, evading the little puddles that had formed during the night. For a second he thought about getting

a drink in one of the many coffee shops that had taken over this part of town but decided against it after seeing the long queues which always formed in the mornings. Due to rush hour he had to wait for the traffic lights to halt the flood of cars that were flocking towards the heart of downtown every time he had to cross a street, which slowed his speed considerably. He was only a few blocks from where the bus he was planning to take would leave, but he wasn't sure if he was going to make it.

Minutes later he found himself still hurrying, now nearly at jogging speed, down an alley lined with big oak trees whose long branches, weighed down by the rain, almost touched the wet asphalt. He had decided to take a shortcut through a pedestrian zone. Usually he tried to avoid the area because of the masses of people that

frequented the shops there, but maybe at this hour it wouldn't be too much trouble to make his way through. He waved at a familiar face that had appeared on the other side of the street but quickly turned right, down a series of stairs, on to an open plaza with a small fountain at its center. He wasn't in the mood for conversation. A few other people were rushing across the square, probably trying to get to work on time.

Suddenly a tall man dressed in running clothes but wearing a big, brown trench coat, ran past him, brushing his shoulder. The man sprinted towards the fountain, jumped on to the little wall that was built around it and which held in the water, and sprinted a few laps around the fountain, waving his arms in all directions. He then stopped, turned around and sprinted another few rounds backwards.

"What a strange guy," Tom thought. From the



faces of the other people passing by he could tell they were thinking the same thing.

Meanwhile the man had hopped off the wall and ran towards one of the nearby buildings. Just before crashing into one of its columns, he jumped at it on one leg and with the other catapulted himself off the pillar, back towards the fountain.

Tom shook his head and turned left towards another series of stairs that would lead him down towards the bus stop, but moments before reaching the first set of steps, the man overtook him once again, dashing towards the stairs himself.

At the top of the steps he stopped. He spread his arms to each side as far as he possibly could and began to let himself fall forwards. Tom was about to grab him by the coat, but at the last second the man recovered and continued to run down the other stairs, each time spreading his arms and dropping. Tom couldn't help but smile. "To each his own..." he mumbled, "honestly, I'm doing nothing different right now."

The man turned left at the end of the pedestrian zone speeding around a corner and out of view. When Tom reached the end a few minutes later, he was gone and Tom turned right in the direction of his stop. Seeing the bus already waiting, he sprinted the last few meters, stepped on the vehicle through the front door, showed the driver his ticket and found a seat in the back of the bus. There were a few other passengers already squatted into their seats, most of them half asleep.

The doors closed and the bus joined the stream of cars crawling from traffic light to traffic light. Tom stared out of the window, where the reflections of the car's headlights on the wet streets mingled with those of the bright neon advertisements.

Tom flinched and opened his eyes. He must have fallen asleep to the monotonous sound of the bus's engine. He looked around, but there was no telling how long he had

slept and where he was exactly because they were now driving through walls and walls of thick, gray fog. He was alone. Apparently all the other passengers had already exited the bus at their stops and just as he started to wonder if he had missed his, a computer-generated female voice announced the next one and with a slight sigh of relief Tom quickly reached out to press the red button beneath the window to his right.

Several minutes later, the bus slowly came to a halt, its doors swinging open with a pneumatic sound and Tom stepped off into the cool misty air. Behind him the doors closed again and the bus accelerated, soon to be swallowed by the dense fog that covered the world out here. He watched the red glimmer of the brake lights fade into the distance and turned around. Silence.

Next to him was a sign with a green silhouette of a bus and the words "Old Forester's Lodge." Tom didn't know if there had ever been a forester's lodge. Maybe in the colonial days a small outpost in the wilderness had existed but had long since burned down. There were no buildings, there was nothing here, but the bus stop had existed as long as he could remember. Here, away from the city, out in the middle of nowhere.

He walked past the sign to make his way down the hill on which the road had been built and started on the little path that would lead him to his destination. Strangers to the area and passersby would not even have recognized it as a path. It was more of a continuous indentation in the grass, but he had walked it dozens of times and would find it in his sleep.

Soon the fog engulfed him and all he could hear were his squishing steps or the occasional sound of a nearby animal such as a frightened bird flapping its wings and although he couldn't see more than a few feet ahead, he continued walking at a fast pace, treading safely on the sodden path. A short while later, the ground began to slope downwards and Tom turned slightly to the east descending the ridge diagonally, crossing and jumping over small brooks that had been created by last night's rain. At the bottom of the hill, the fog was lighter and in the distance

he could already see the beginning of the tree line, which he was heading towards. Picking up the pace, he aimed straight for it and soon could hear the familiar rushing of the small river that meandered its way through the feet of the trees down there.

Crossing a wide open field filled with tree stumps and fallen logs, all of the sudden the fog lifted and he could make out the small cabin, which was built right at the edge of the forest, with a small whisp of smoke emerging from its chimney and a warm, golden glow from its windows. "So," Tom thought with a crooked smile on his face, "I won't be alone."

Tom had found the cabin on one of his hikes through this part of the state almost a decade ago and after some research, found out it was actually for sale. He had called up a group of friends and together they had come up with the money to buy it. Looking back, this probably was one of the best decisions he had ever made in his life. They used it as a base camp for when they went hiking or hunting and it had served for many get-togethers and parties over the years. However, maybe most importantly, literally no one else knew that it even existed, hidden away out here in the valleys and forests.

Tom opened the door and entered the warm interior of the cabin. To his left a fire was crackling in the fireplace. Two chairs, with a green backpack on one of them, were

placed before it. To his right, on a decent sized bed, a middle-aged man lay on his back, studying a map that seemed to show the surrounding hiking trails.

"Hey Jimmy, how are ya?" Tom asked, taking off his shoes. The man closed the map and got up. "Oh hey there Tom. I'm fine, yourself? I was just about to leave, so you'll have the cabin to yourself. Stayed the night, you know. A bit chilly this time of year, but there's nothing better than a bit of refreshing solitude, am I right?"

Tom slowly walked over to the free chair and sat down, "Yeah Jim, you are."

"I really wasn't expecting to see you out here on a day like this."

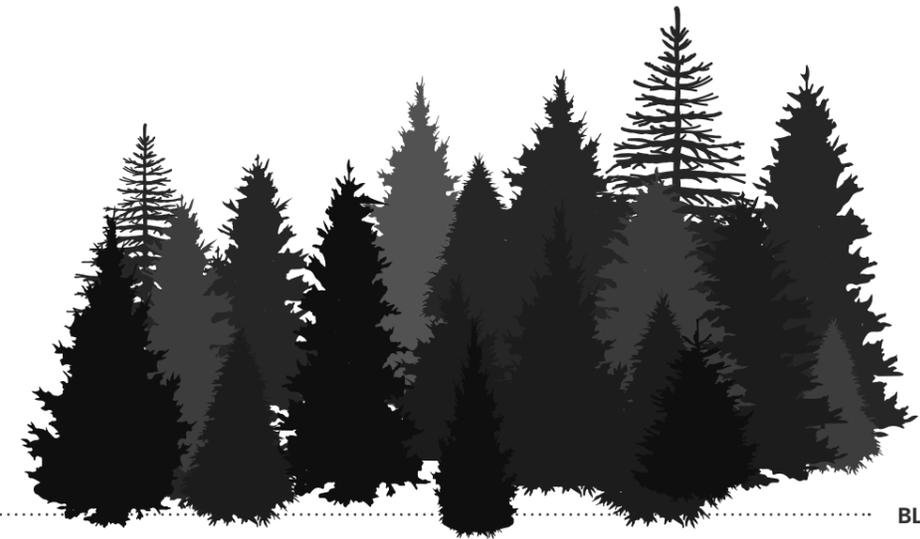
"Why not?" Tom asked staring out the window into the wet, sad looking forest.

"Ah well, you know, the weather being awful and all..." Jim put on his coat and shuffled towards the chairs to grab his backpack. Tom quickly turned his head in order to hide the sarcastic smile that had appeared on his face and answered: "It's not the best, is it?"

Jim strapped on his backpack, gave Tom a pat on the shoulder and opened the door, but just before closing it behind him, he turned around, one eyebrow raised.

"Hey ehm..., don't I remember you telling me that you have a pretty busy and important week at work ahead of yourself. What the hell are you doing out here then?"

Tom shrugged, "I don't know. Spreading my arms, I guess." ■



the boy who lived

by Daniel Krooß

"Fairy tales are more than true: not because they tell us that dragons exist, but because they tell us that dragons can be beaten."

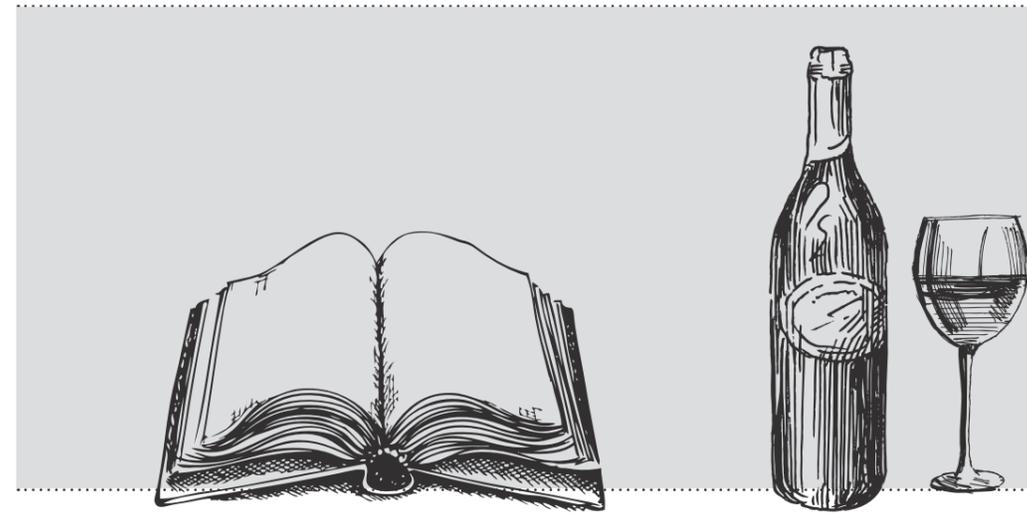
Neil Gaiman

They put me in a corner for everyone to see. The Shaw twins. They really got me this time. "What up, manic Jim, don't you want to call out for your brother?" Denis asks and hits me in the stomach. I gasp. They share a laugh like he has just said the funniest thing in the world.

"Why don't you pick on someone your own size, fuck-face!" I yell out. They are eighth-graders, at least three years older than me, and there is no one in the world they'd rather beat up.

Kevin hits me right in my left eye. The pain runs through my face as I sink to the ground.

I feel like crying, but I don't want to give them the satisfaction. I know brother would finish them in no time. He's as fast as a ninja. He's the strongest person I know. He told me that he once stopped a driving car with his bare hands! But I think that was just a lie he told me to cheer me up. Still, when I'm with brother, I know that nothing can happen to me. He'd do anything for me, he makes me feel safe. But he can't always be with me and at times he



just disappears and I don't know where he is. That's when I feel the loneliest. I know I'm no good at making friends. My classmates think I'm weird. I can't help it. Sometimes I really don't understand what is expected of me. But who needs them? They are all dumb anyway. Brother is all I have and he's the only one that I really want to be with.

"Get up, you nutcase!"

The crowd starts cheering. Here comes the kicking. I don't get what they want from me.

"Why don't you call for mother? She's feeling under the weather again?"

Fucking moron! I start screaming and jump up to tackle Kevin to the ground. But Denis just pulls me off him, and, as he holds me, Kevin punches me as hard as he can. The other eye this time.

'Brother, where are you? You promised...'

Harold had lived most of his life on the premise that nothing out of the ordinary was ever going to happen to him. He'd chosen a simple life with no one to share, working at the factory during the day and spending most of his evenings with a worn out book in one hand and a glass of wine in the other. He had a couple of work acquaintances he'd go out with every now and then, but no one ever really became close to him. He wouldn't let them. Harold did not dream of happiness, nor did he ever really feel particularly sad. There wasn't much he believed in. As a boy, he used to believe in love, but he had found the way people seemed to go about their relationships utterly confusing, starting with his parents. They had split when he was only five. From then on, every time he got to visit his father, he had to adjust to a new girlfriend. Same with his mother, same with most of his friends he would get to meet. People seemed to

change their partners like Harold changed his socks. He was in love once, at the age of eighteen. When after two years they had to agree that it wasn't working out, Harold was fine. These things happen, after all. But when he saw her with someone else just two weeks later, it really crushed him. And that was the way everyone around him seemed to handle their relationships. It completely undermined his idea of love. It seemed so meaningless, like everyone was just constantly waiting for someone better to come around. It made it very difficult for him to trust, so he abandoned the idea. It felt safer, as it was just one of those things where he really didn't know what was expected of him. So Harold found his comfort in the mundane. He simply lived and he liked it that way.

Harold met Mara at the age of twenty-six. She was waiting tables at a small Irish pub a couple of blocks from his apartment. When he first spotted her, he instantaneously felt nervous and helpless. Mara's smile evoked none of the emotions Harold had usually felt. And when he gave her his phone number and their eyes met for one last time that night, Harold thought he'd finally found a place worth remembering.

I cross the schoolyard with my head held down. I can't let the others see me. I know they'll soon hear about it anyway, but I don't want to face their laughter right now. It's too much. I will just skip class, I know Mrs. Brown will start asking questions that I don't want to answer. I don't like her. She is always so prying, but I just want to be left alone.

I can feel their eyes are watching, so I walk faster before the whispering begins. I see brother standing by the swings. We greet each other. Brother smiles, but his eyes widen when he sees my face.

“What happened?” Brother asks.

“I don't want to talk about it,” I say and walk past him.

He grabs my shoulder.

“Fucking Shaw twins?”

“I don't want to-”

“Answer me!”

“Of course, it was them. Where were you?!”

“I'm sorry Jim, I was stuck in class. What was I supposed to do?”

I shake my head.

“I will get them back, Jim. I promise. No one treats my brother like that! You hear me?”

I sigh.

“You said that last time...”

“I promise, Jim,” he says and puts an arm around me.

“I'll get them, okay?”

I nod.

“Come on. Let's get you fixed up. We've got to go meet the witch.”

For two days, Harold waited and wished and dreamt. When the phone finally rang, Harold jumped off his couch like a little boy unleashed in a candy store, throwing his book on the table and spilling his wine all over the floor. He didn't even spend one second thinking about it. It didn't matter.

“Hey,” Mara whispered on the other end of the line.

Harold smiled. Boy or girl. No matter who's in love with whom, the result is always an utmost challenge for human sanity.

They fell madly in love with each other within the fortnight. Some days they talked all night, on others they didn't say much at all. They listened to records by The Smiths, The Beatles, Dylan, Cohen, The Stones. They recited their favorite poems to each other. Bukowski, Frost, some Shakespeare. They stayed up whole nights watching movies and laughed about the concept of love in a society they found entirely unlovable. Harold and Mara had both rejected the idea of a soulmate for most of their lives, and though they were much too proud to ever admit it to each other, they both knew they had just found theirs. All of a sudden, every single minute somehow really seemed worthwhile. It was unlike anything they had ever felt, and at times they didn't really know how to deal with it. It scared and comforted them at the same time. But as confused as they were

during those first weeks, they knew that in a strange way fate had given them a chance to avert their dull, cynical, unemotional trajectory. And to their own astonishment, it really seemed right.

Eventually, the magic wore off as it always does, but there was never a doubt in them that they'd spend the rest of their lives with each other. About a year in, Mara became pregnant. It was the happiest day of their lives.

One of the best things about having an older brother is that he always seems to have so much experience to share. He knows how to calm me down because he's known me for all of his life. He's like an older and wiser version of myself and I understand that he's likely the only one I know who will always be there. Mother has indeed not been feeling well for quite some time now. She sure sleeps a lot. And father, well, he's always working. And when he gets home in the evening he is too tired and wants some quiet time. Sometimes he takes me out for ice cream on the weekend, but father is not a man who talks a lot. He always looks so sad and I don't really know how to change that. Sometimes I just try hugging him, but that only seems to make it worse. Still, I love my parents. I know they try hard. But brother is the only one who is always by my side. I hope he'll never have to leave me because there will never be anyone I'll ever love as much as him.

We are all completely beside ourselves. But we'll go on. Because that's what families do.

They made their vows under first blossom. A small ceremony. A tiny chapel. No family. Few friends. They bought a modest house in a modest neighborhood. Mara would quit waiting tables and Harold would continue his work at the factory. He was a diligent worker who never really asked many questions and he would do anything for his new family. They'd name the boy Gavin, after Mara's father. Mara's need to honor the man who had left her before her birth without ever looking back was beyond Harold, but he never dared to ask her why. It didn't matter.

As soon as they moved in, they started painting the boy's room. Never in his life had Harold laughed as much as in those last couple of weeks of anticipation. He would build the crib himself, Mara would handcraft the mobile - everything was to be perfect.

The day Mara went into labor, Harold felt better



prepared than he'd ever been for anything else in his life. He'd taken the weeks around the predicted birth date off, had determined the perfect route to the hospital, had managed to lay out everything Mara could possibly wish for. And, most importantly, he managed to stay calm.

It was a painful labor that lasted for almost twelve hours. When it was finally over, Mara and Harold just smiled. For years to come, their dreams would be haunted by that surreal murmuring and the dreadful silence that was about to follow. And when the doctor finally announced that Gavin had not survived the birth, everything around them started to blur.

The witch lives only a few houses away from ours. She's an old lady with curly gray hair and crazy eyes. I think she's blind, but she can smell us. We know she wants to eat us, because that's what witches do. But she's got the stuff mother needs and we are here to steal it from her. We tried to get it at a regular store first, but they wouldn't sell it to us and they always look so suspicious. They can sense that we're up to no good. So we're going to have to take it from the witch. We know it's risky, but mother depends on us and good sons take care of their mothers.

We have a routine. The first couple of times I was really nervous, but now I feel like she couldn't possibly stop us. I'm still afraid that one day she'll catch us, but we are brave boys, brother and I. And we're smart. We would face any witch for mother. No matter how powerful she is. And I know, as long as I have brother by my side, we'll beat her.

The witch lives in an old house, almost black, surrounded by the wildest garden you have ever seen. It's kind of scary, but it is also a good hiding place. When you're in there you almost feel invisible, but you never really know who else might be hiding with you. To be honest, I want

to avoid it as much as I can, but brother taught me that sometimes you have to face some fears in order to get what you want. So we sit here on our knees, rocks in our hands, ready to start.

“You're good?” brother asks. I nod, even though I'm really not and I'm not too sure I'll ever be. I really don't want him to know that today I have a really bad feeling about this.

Trying to get on with their lives was tough, but it was the getting to feel at home again that felt like an unbearable burden. Harold and Mara couldn't stand the silence of that empty room. It felt haunted. But they couldn't just throw everything out either. It just didn't seem right. So they kept it, never daring to open the door, scared to unleash feelings they knew they'd never be able to handle.

Within the months to come, not a day went by without Harold blaming himself for what had happened, even though he knew exactly that it wasn't anyone's fault. Unable to face Mara, Harold took a lot of extra shifts, and, unable to deal with his own thoughts, he started drinking more frequently. He was sure he had it under control. They always do. But soon enough he found that he couldn't sleep without it. He simply couldn't think of any other way to stop his thoughts rushing through his mind - a constant pain that made him feel so weak and powerless.

One day, he came home late at night, drunk and barely able to move. When he saw the light in Gavin's empty room, he knew that he could no longer hide his problem. As he entered, Mara was already waiting. Cross-legged on the floor, wrapped around a stuffed seal they had received for the baby shower.

She didn't say a word, just looked at him, sad but

smiling.

Harold sighed.

"I know it has to stop, love," he said. "But I don't know how."

But he would. About a year and a half after that tragic day in the hospital, Mara announced that she was with child again. Not sure of how to react, Harold fell into her arms.

"We'll get it right this time," she whispered. Harold cried.

Brother smiles as he throws the first stone. So do I. Furious, she comes rushing out of the door.

"You little pricks," she shrieks.

We throw another rock, knocking over the cans we have placed in front of her cabin. The distraction works. As she rushes through her garden, we sneak in.

The floors creak as we enter the house. I gulp, but I proceed to follow my brother down the stairs. The place is very dark and smells really old. It kind of creeps me out and I'm really glad brother is with me. We have no time to lose. She could be back any minute. As we reach the basement we head right for the bottles. I'm not too sure what mother needs this stuff for. It looks really disgusting, almost like blood and it smells really bad, too. It seems like she's been needing more and more of it and sometimes I really wonder whether it is really good for her at all. I put three bottles of it in my school bag. I have to carry them myself, so that I can be as strong as brother one day. We won't take more, so that she doesn't become suspicious, though I really feel the witch isn't keeping count. We've been coming here for weeks and there always seems to be more.

"You're packed?" brother asks.

I nod.

"Good. Let's go!"

We run back up the stairs.

"Wait!" brother hisses.

I gasp as I hear the door fall shut.

"Fucking kids!" she swears. "I'll get you one of these days!"

I look at brother in panic, but he just stands there smiling. There is nothing that can ever really bother him!

"What now?" I ask.

"Don't worry about it. I will distract her. When I say now, you'll run right out of the door. You'll wait for me in the garden."

"I can't leave you alone!"

"I will come and get you, I promise."

Before I can complain he just pushes me aside and goes for it.

He walks in the shadows, so silently that even I have a hard time seeing where he is going.

I can still see the witch standing by the door. My heart sinks as he sneaks right past her. She looks around, but she doesn't seem to notice. Then, she just walks away.

"Run!" I hear brother yell. I run as fast as I can towards the door, the floor trembling under my feet.

As I reach it I can see him standing at the end of the floor, with a big smile on his face.

I smile back, but then I see her approaching.

"Watch out, Gavin!"

But he just laughs.

"Just run!"

The day Mara went into early labor, Harold was called from work. He rushed to the hospital, mouthing prayers to a god he had never really sought before. But as he stood in front of those bedeviled doors he just froze. Unable to move and shake off his fear, he found a safe place with the smokers outside the hospital door.

When he entered Mara's room hours after the birth, he saw her smiling at him, holding a healthy seven-pound boy. She did not ask where he had been and she never would. Jim Raven was born on a frosty day on February 6th. And as he held up the boy for the first time and it grabbed his finger, Harold made a promise to himself to never have another drink again.

I run through the garden as fast as I can and throw myself in the bushes. I can see her standing in the doorframe. Confused, she looks right at me. I can't really tell whether or not she can actually see me. Then she steps back in and shuts the door.

My heart pounds really hard and I'm feeling kind of dizzy.

"Gavin..." I whisper. I don't know what to do. I know I can trust brother. If he tells me he'll come back, he will. There is nothing he cannot do. But still, without him by my side I'm very unsure. I feel like I should be in there with him, protecting him the way he always protects me! But I do what he told me. I must. Brother knows what he's doing. He'll come back. He told me he would. Everything will be fine. I close my eyes.

And for hours I sit and wait.

Jim was a cheerful and adventurous child and for a long time they were the happy family that they'd always expected to be. Jim was four when he first started wondering about the empty room next to his.

"Who lives there?" he asked Mara one day when Harold was at work.

"It's your brother Gavin's," Mara said absent-mindedly.

She shook herself, pulled him away and almost forgot about it.

When Harold asked his son about his day that night Jim responded: "I played with my brother Gavin!"

Harold gasped. When he turned to Mara, he already saw the tears running down her cheek. Never before had he seen his wife so vulnerable.

They hoped that Jim would forget about Gavin quickly. But he did not. Every day he would tell them about the adventures he had shared with his beloved brother. Unable to deal with her feelings of guilt, Mara soon started to find some peace in the occasional drink. It started off innocently. It always does. Sometimes she'd take a drink to release some pressure, other times she took one to help her fall asleep. And soon enough she did not know how to live without it. She tried to hide it as best as she could, feeding Harold little white lies. But he soon noticed. Harold tried to stay strong, never forgetting his promise, and never even considering to give up on the woman he loved with all of his heart. But the drinking changed her. She became bitter, impatient, aggressive.

And when he came home one night, and saw his wife in Gavin's room, drunk and barely able to sit, he knew it was time to confront her.

"You've got to stop," he said. She turned to him, sighing. Moments passed without either of them saying a word. Then Mara shook her head and threw her glass at him. Harold's face stung in pain. He could feel the blood running down his face.

"You should leave. Take the boy and just leave!" she said, sobbing. He knew she was right back then, he really did. There wasn't much left of the woman he had fallen in love with. The fire in her eyes had long gone out. And he knew for sure what was going to happen if he stayed. But he was only human after all. He'd try again and again. Desperately holding on to a dream that he knew did him nothing but harm. He'd rather continue the self-destructive dance, then let go of it, afraid that one day he would find himself waking up in another place without ever really knowing whether or not he could have saved her.

"I can't," he whispered.

"Why?" she yelled.

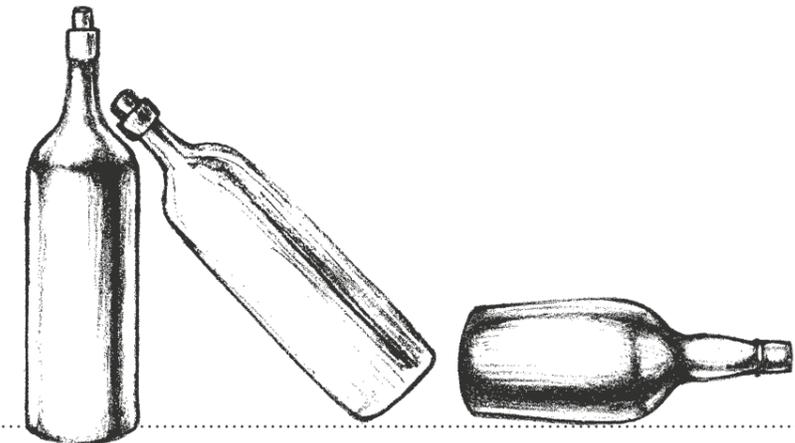
"Because I really don't want to get over you."

But the burden soon became way too much for him to handle and when one day during night shift a colleague offered him a drink, Harold just didn't know any better but to take it. Harold drank to get over his wife's drinking. It was completely irrational. It always is. Within a few months the downward spiral swallowed them both. And when Jim started to go to school at the age of six, they had already forgotten what it meant to be sober.

"Please," I whisper to myself. "Please, Gavin."

I can't remember having ever felt this cold and alone. I'm starting to get really worried. This is not like him. What if something bad has happened? I wonder whether I should go and ask mother for help. No! What good would it do? He'll manage. He always does.

"Jim..." I hear someone calling from behind. As I turn



around he stands there. I gasp. His face is covered in blood and he can hardly stand up straight.

"Gavin!" I yell out and throw myself around him. But he just pushes me away. Even when he's this weak, he's still strong.

"No! Don't touch me," he says, coughing. "She's got me, Jim. She's got me good. You're going to have to leave right away."

I don't believe what I'm hearing.

"What are you talking about? We'll get you fixed up!"

"You don't understand, Jim. She cursed me! It's time to let me go."

"Please Gavin, we can break it!"

"We can't."

"But you're strong, Gavin. We'll get you through it!"

"No, Jim. I'm not. You're so much stronger than I'll ever be. And you must be."

"But Gavin..."

"Let me go."

"Gavin." I'm in tears now.

"Run, Jim. Run home."

"But..."

"Go!" he screams. I panic. He has never yelled at me like this before.

"You have to go!" I shiver as I feel the cold hand on my shoulder. I turn around and there she is. I can see right into her cold blue eyes. I scream and hit her as hard as I can. Surprised, she falls to the ground.

I run to brother and try to pick him up but he doesn't let me.

"Please... Just let go," he says, and pushes me away. "Run!" And I know that I must.

And I run as fast as I can.

The days swept by with little hope of change. Somehow they managed to keep up an appearance and get on with their lives. Mara made sure to put food on the table when Jim got home from school, and slept through most of her afternoons on the couch. The boy never saw much of his father during the week. Harold would mostly work night shifts. Several of his colleagues were drinking too and thus the fragment of adults that came to visit them at home were also drunk. The only sober adult Jim knew was his teacher Mrs. Brown and he hated the woman. He never really asked himself whether or not the drinking was normal. It wasn't like Harold and Mara didn't notice the harm. The adventur-

ous child had become a quiet one. A good son that always took good care of his parents, something a child his age should never have to do. They noticed. They really did. But they just didn't know what to do. They knew their marriage was a failure, and they knew that they had failed the boy as well. But there simply did not seem any way out. They felt helpless. Too young. Too old. Too weak to cast their demons out. And so they kept on. And they shoveled their graves in the grip of sorrow.

But the boy felt fine. He knew things weren't right, but there was not a doubt in his mind that the problems out there couldn't be solved. He was such a confused but strong boy, who, no matter what, was sure that he could always rely on his brother.

People stare in wonder as Jim walks the streets in panic. They shake their heads. The Raven boy, a troubled child. If only they could see through his eyes. Flamed trees lining the streets. The ground shaking. The sky bursting, collapsing fire into earth. The boy runs and runs. Restless. Crying. He knows for sure that he has just lost his brother for good.

Little Jim storms into the living room, trying to shake his mother awake. "Mom!" he shouts, "Mom wake up. You've got to wake up!" Weakly, Mara opens her eyes, staring at her upset little boy.

"What is it dear?"

"It's Gavin!" he yells out crying. "He's gone. He's really gone!"

She gasps as he falls into her arms. Unsure of what to do, they just lie there.

"He's really gone." She sighs as the tears start running down her cheek.

"I know it's got to stop, love, but I don't know how."

Jim had lived most of his life on the premise that people are no good. He was twelve when his parents became sober and he was first confronted with the concept of parents who don't drink. A childhood lost, Jim fell into depression at a very young age. With fourteen his own thoughts became unbearable and he tried to kill himself by swallowing every pain killer and sleeping pill his parents' medicine cabinet had to offer. After six months in a clinic, where he spent most days trying to figure out what had happened around him when he was a little boy, he came back home with an anger in his stomach he had never known before. His parents had to make amends!

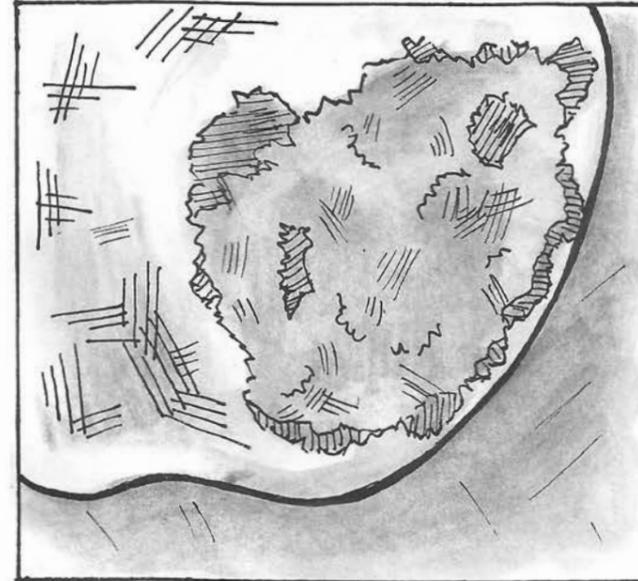
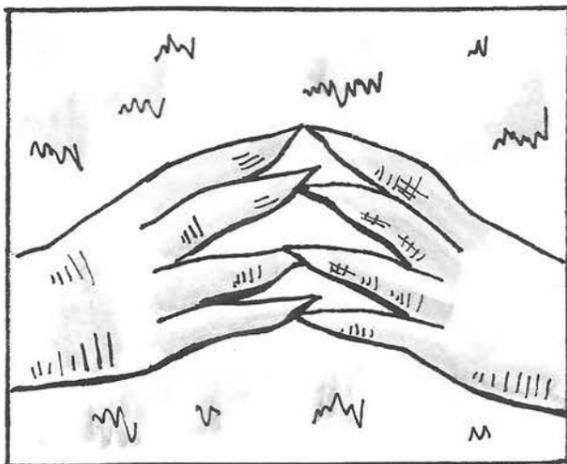
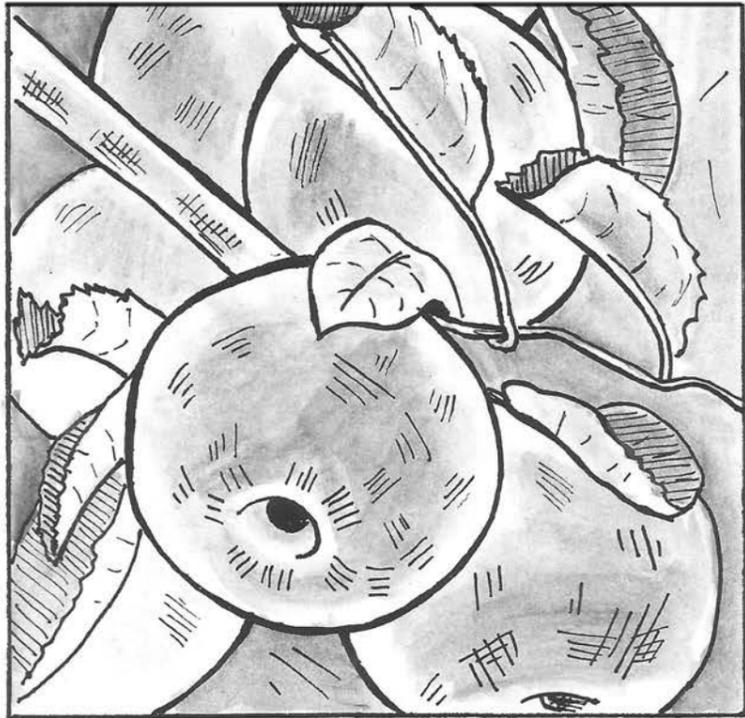
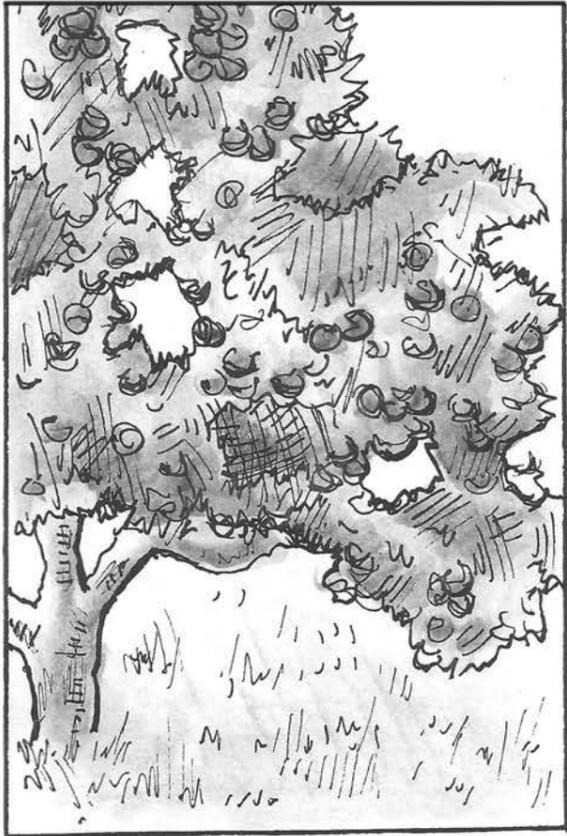
And they wanted to. They really did. But it was a task they couldn't possibly fulfill. Jim wouldn't let them. There simply wasn't any acceptable excuse. They'd try for the rest of their lives. Jim's mother died at the age of forty, only a few days after his eighteenth birthday. The drinking had done too much damage to her body to ever fully recover. After the memorial, Jim decided that it was time to cut the cord and leave. Up to this day, he has no idea whether or not his father is still alive. And he couldn't care less. Only a few memories of his childhood still linger.

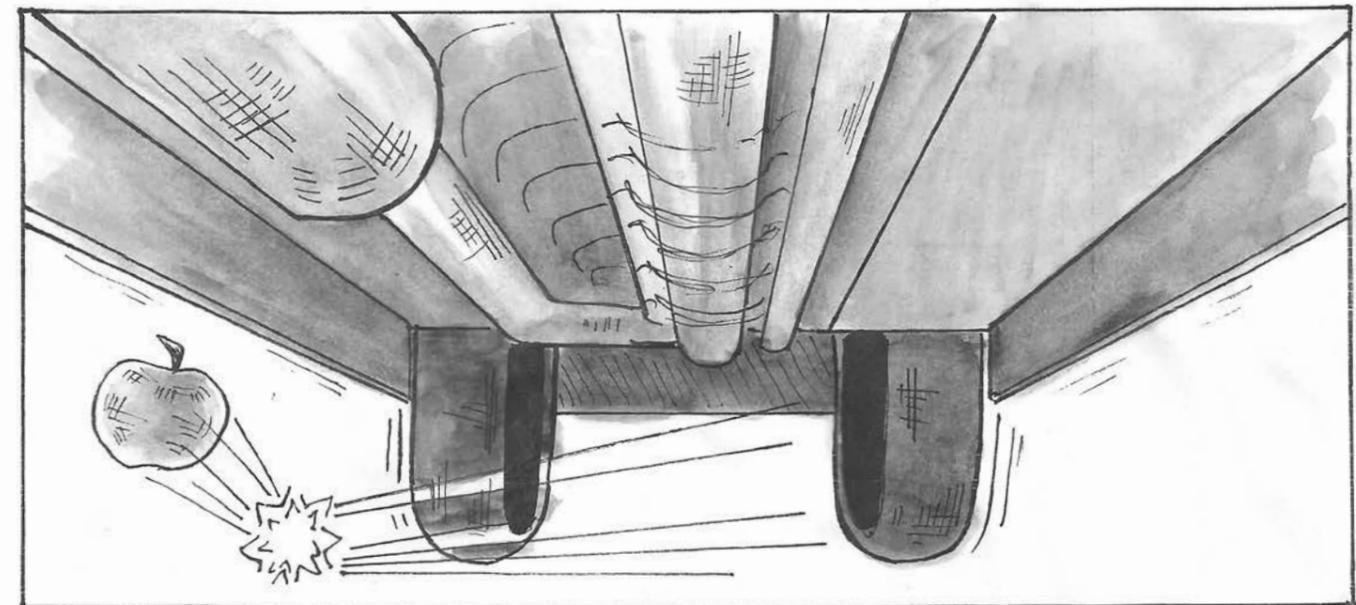
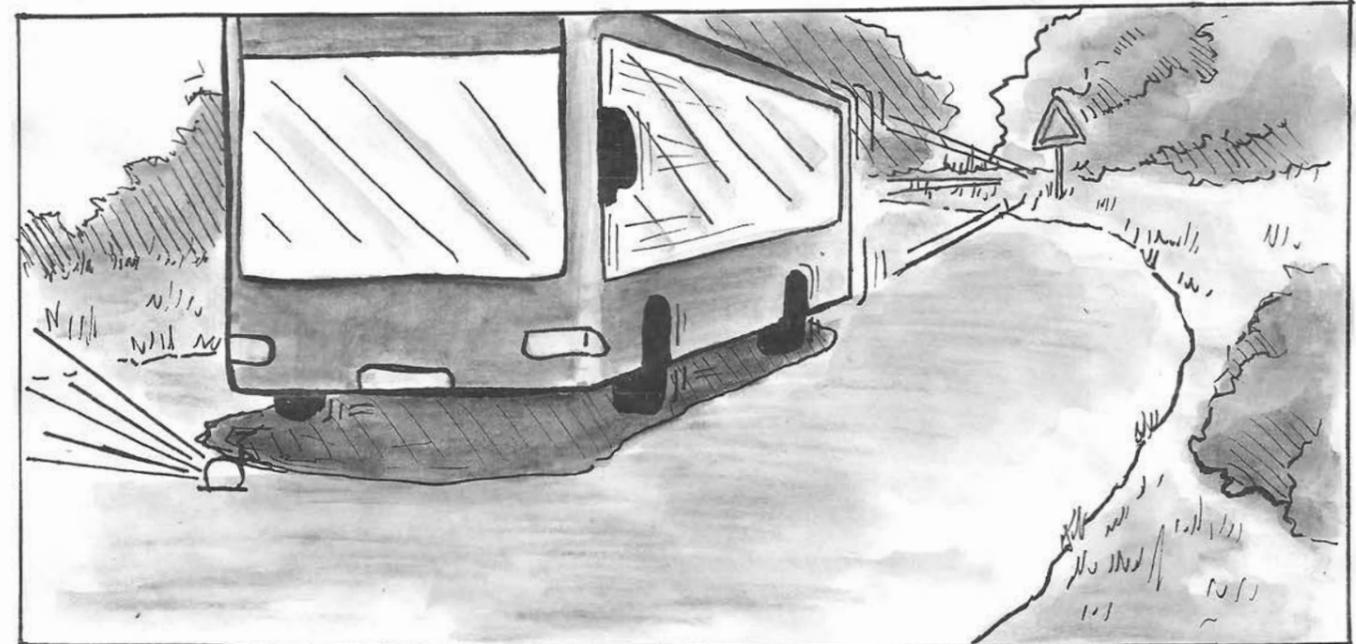
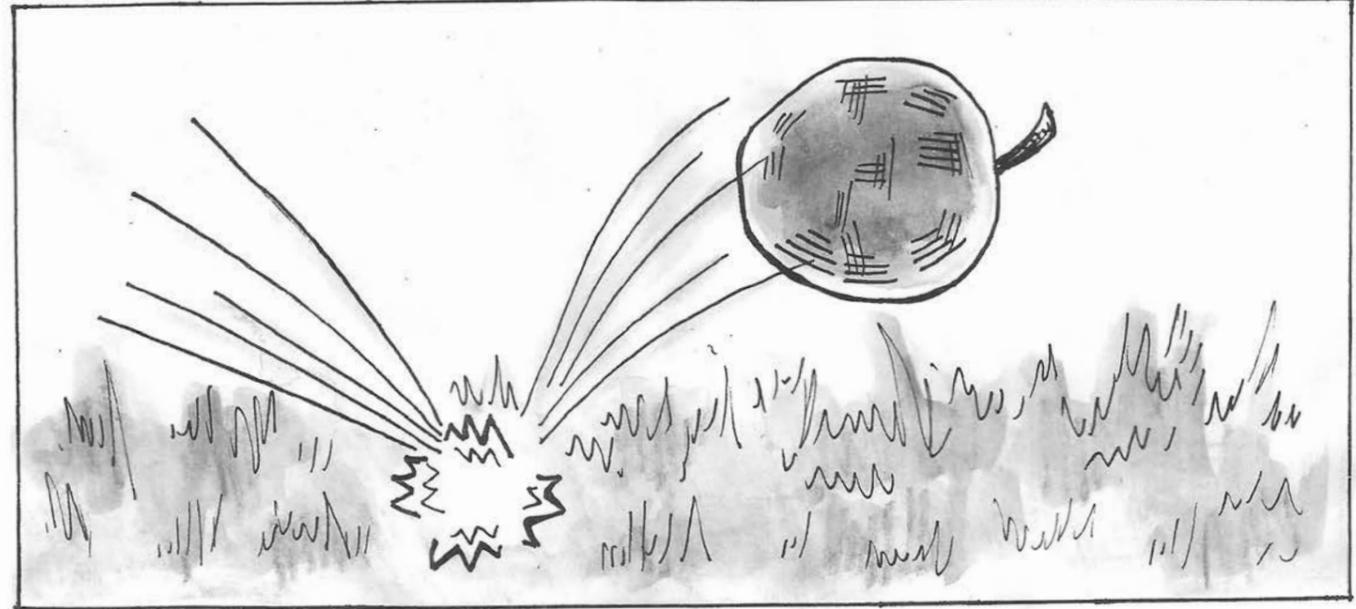
Thus, the angry teenager turned into an introverted young man, one who'd choose his books over human contact as much as he could. Jim started to study literature and philosophy at the age of twenty. He worked in a book store so he could buy himself the basic things he needed and rented the tiniest one bedroom apartment he could find. He did not believe in friendship, let alone love. Letting someone become close only seemed like asking for trouble. It had destroyed everyone around him and he would not let that happen to himself. He laughed at the concept of relationships. They seemed absurd, a useless amusement to distract us from our meaningless existence. He considered himself to be way too intelligent to ever really fall for someone else. He didn't need people and he would find everything he craved for in a well-stocked library, a strong coffee and an occasional cigarette.

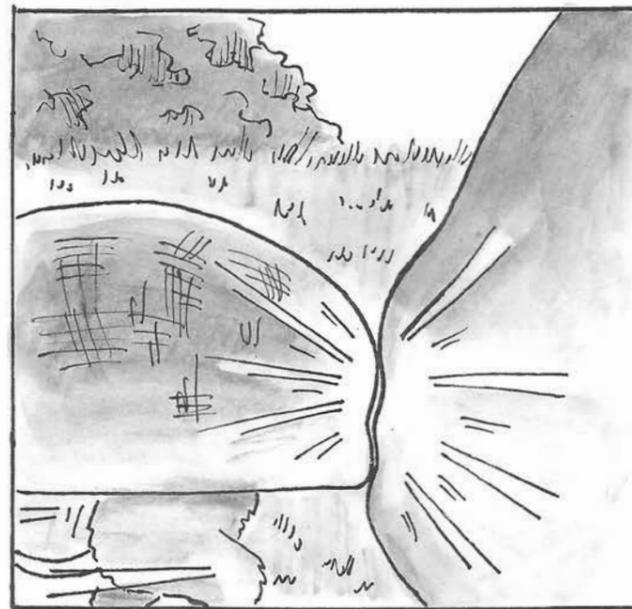
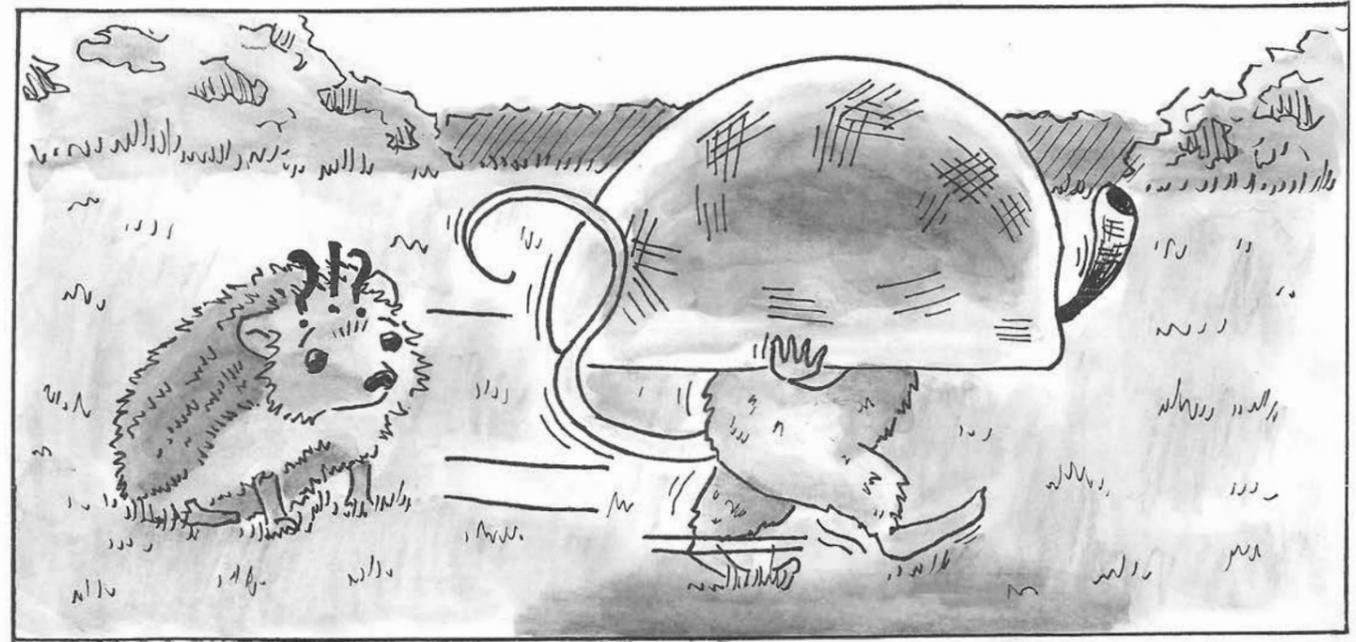
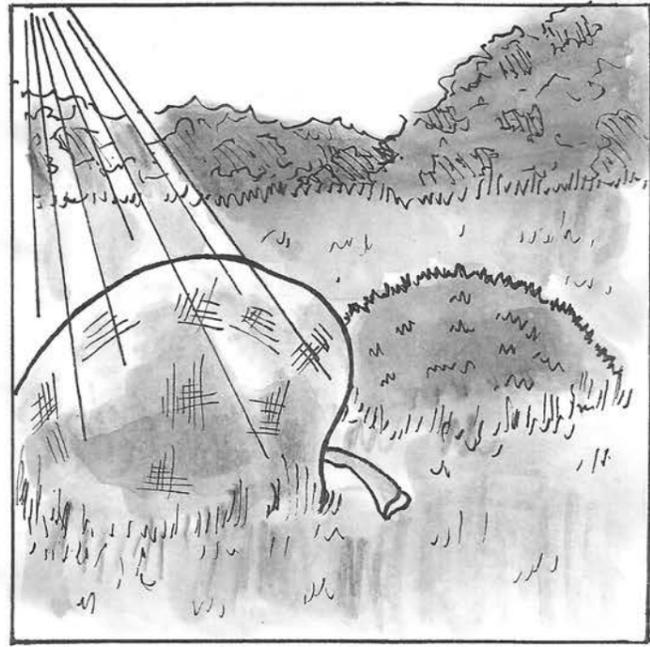
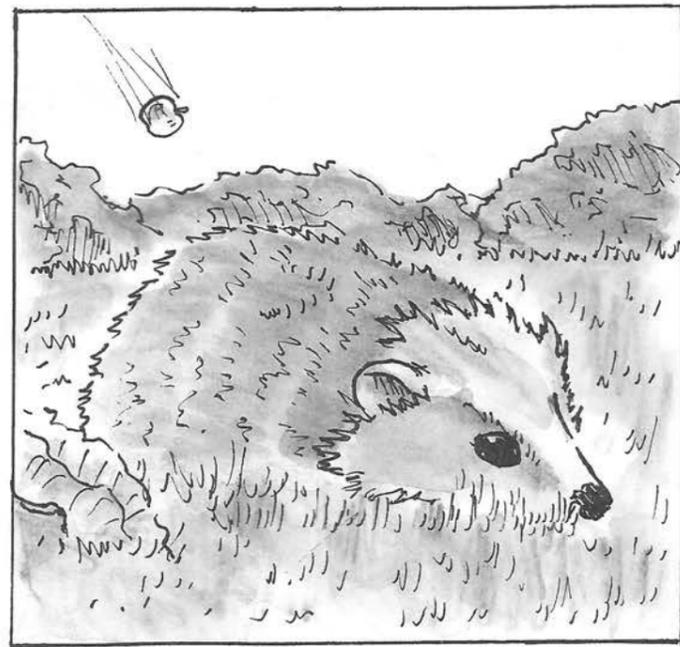
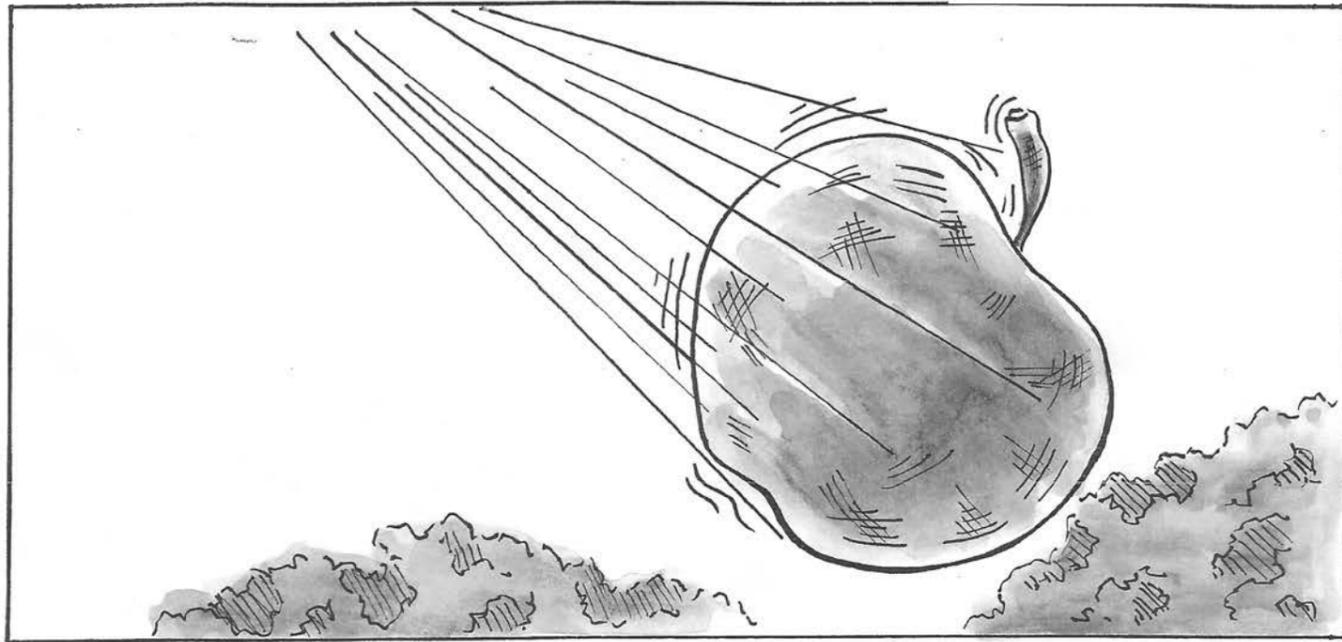
Jim met Evelyne at the age of twenty-four. She was sitting next to him in one of his poetry classes, reading "A Road Not Taken" by Robert Frost. And when their eyes met and they shared their first words, Jim knew right away that none of the beliefs he had so proudly built around himself to protect him from the dangers of getting hurt were true. ■

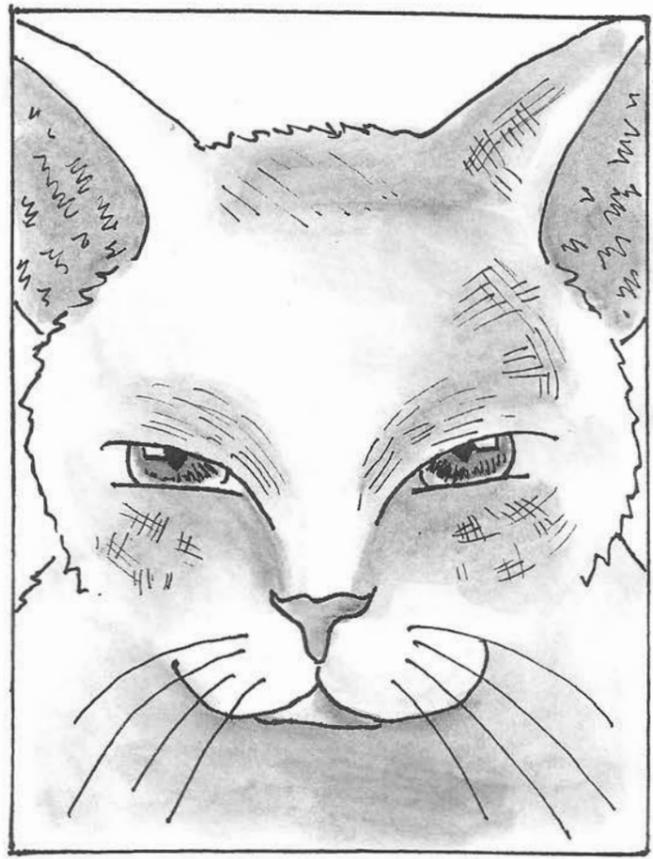
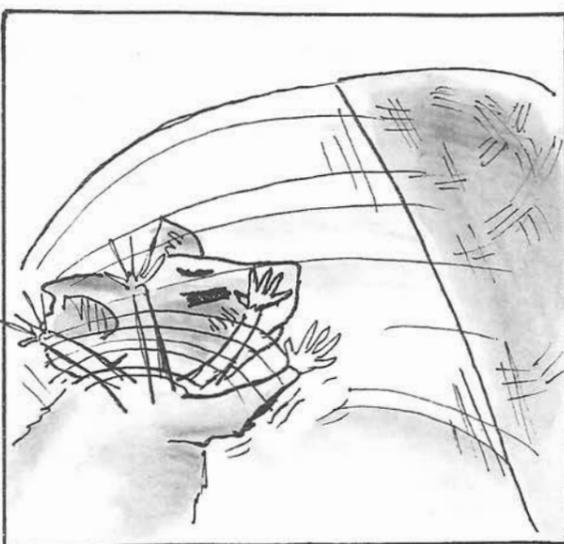
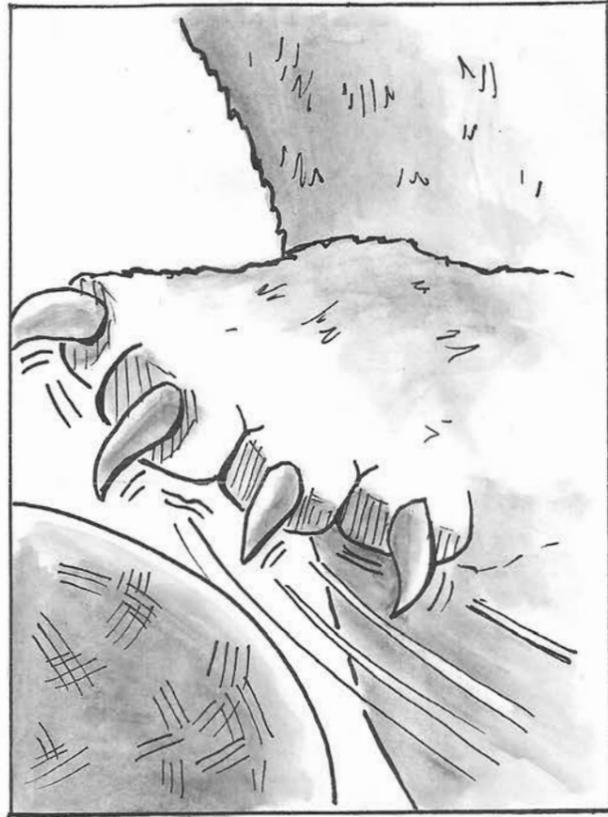
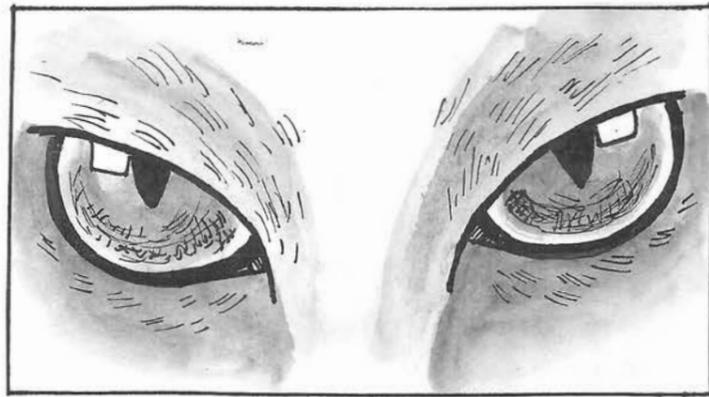
An Apple a Day Keeps the Feline Away

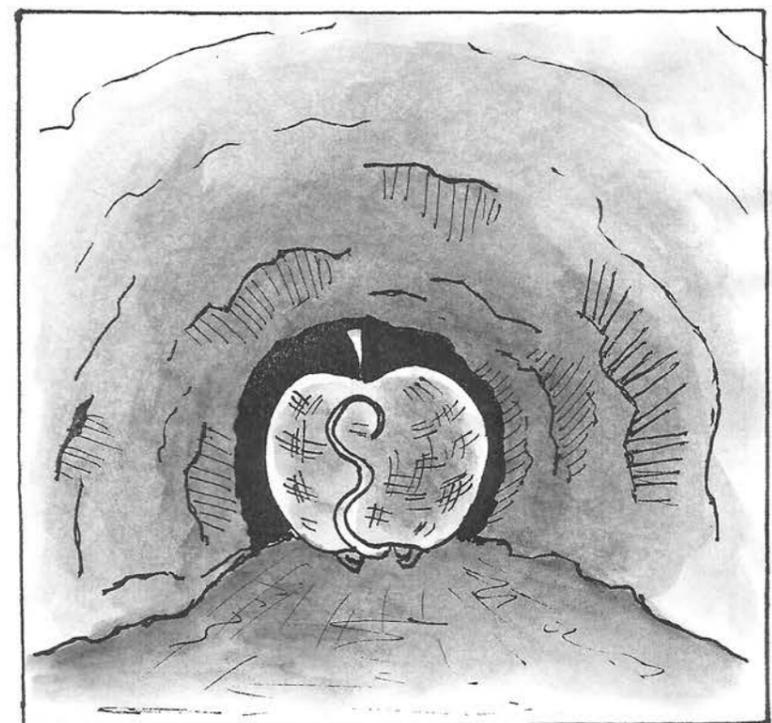
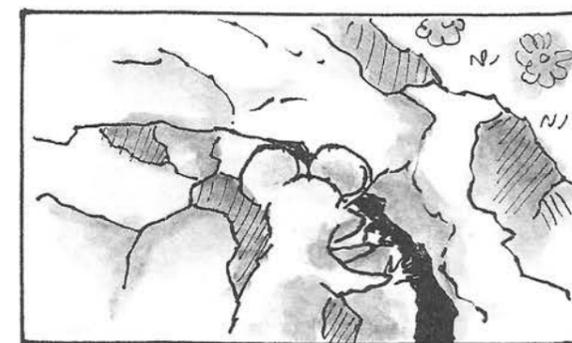
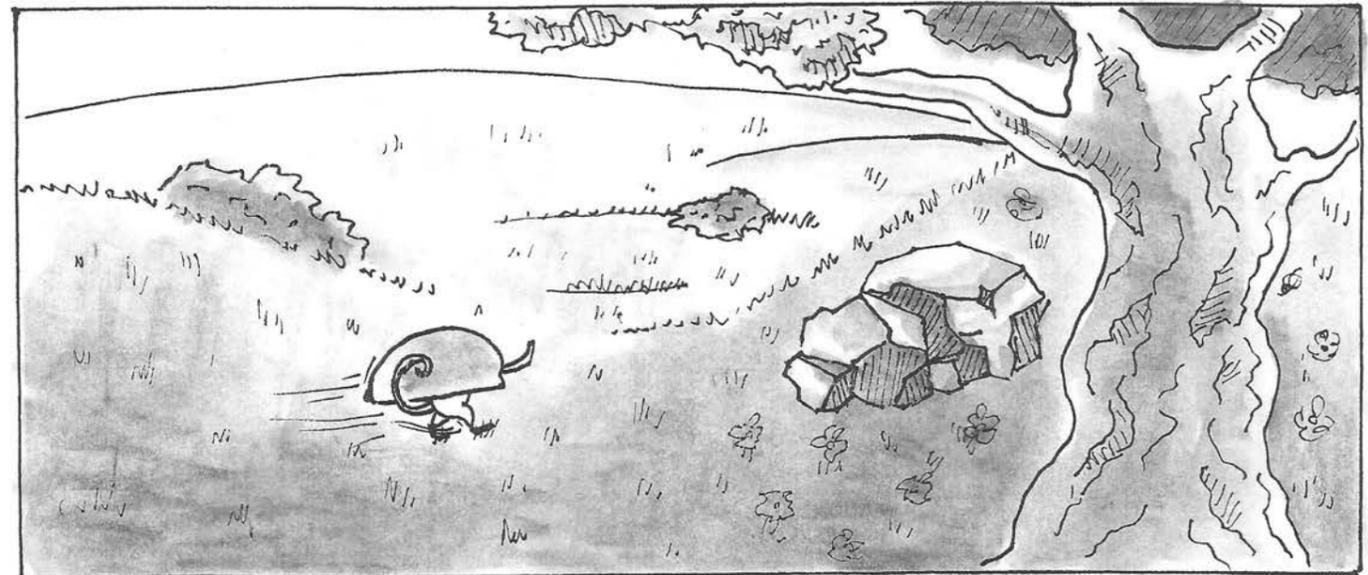
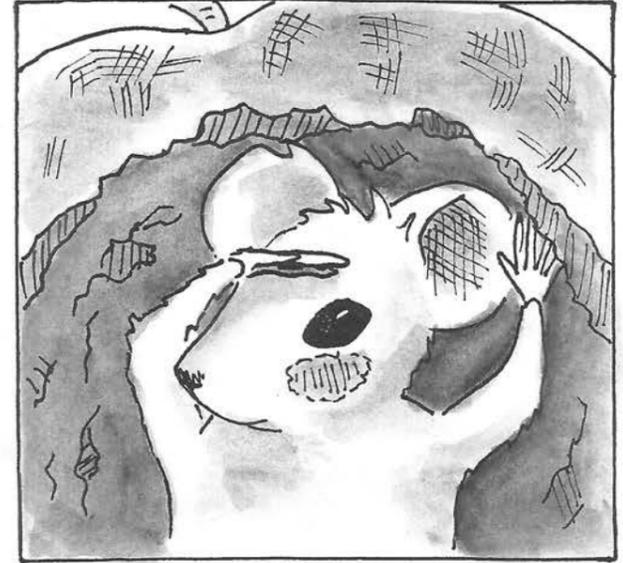
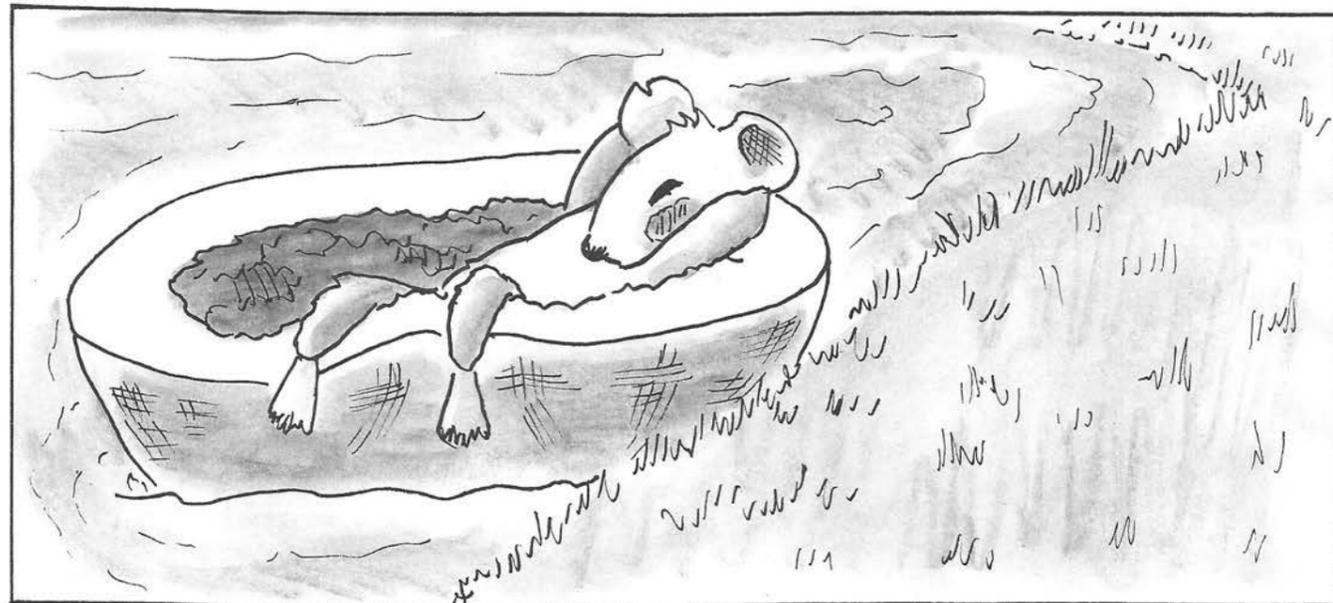
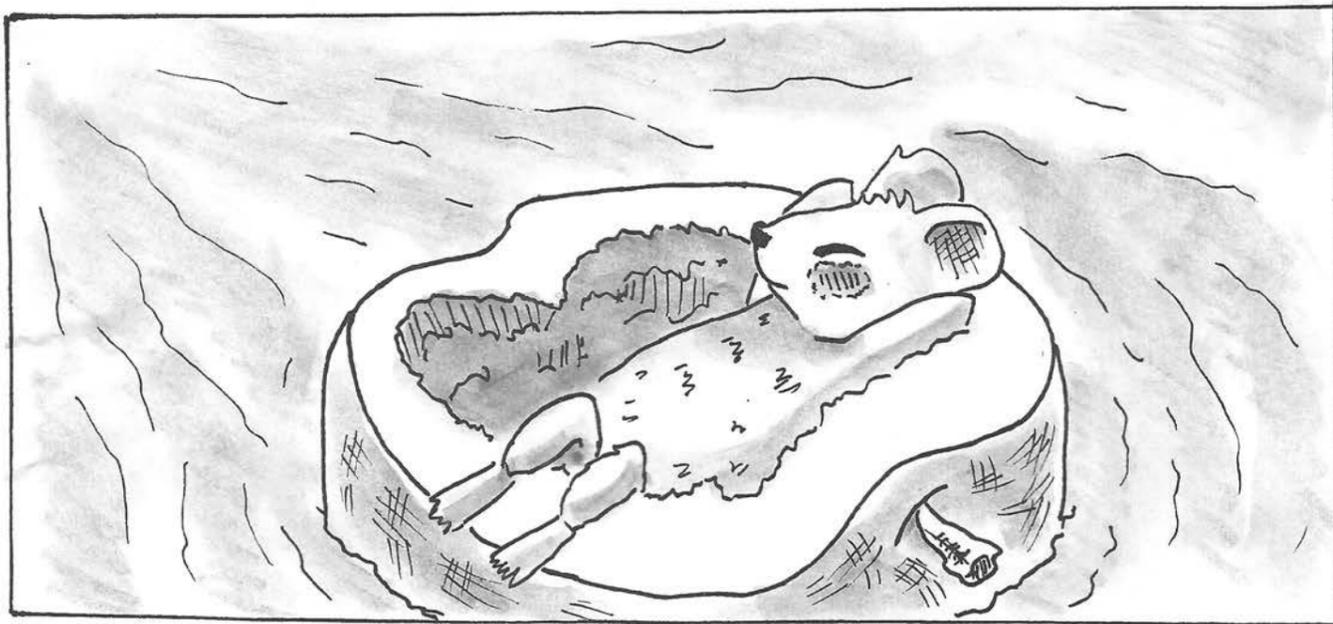
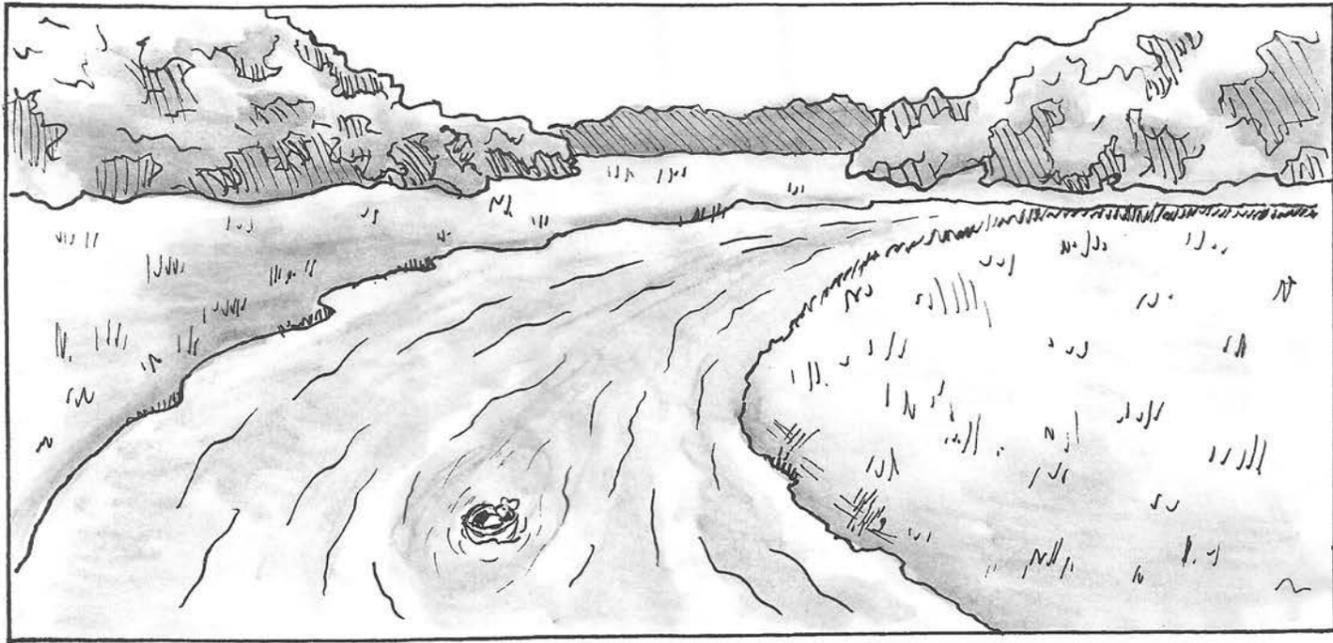
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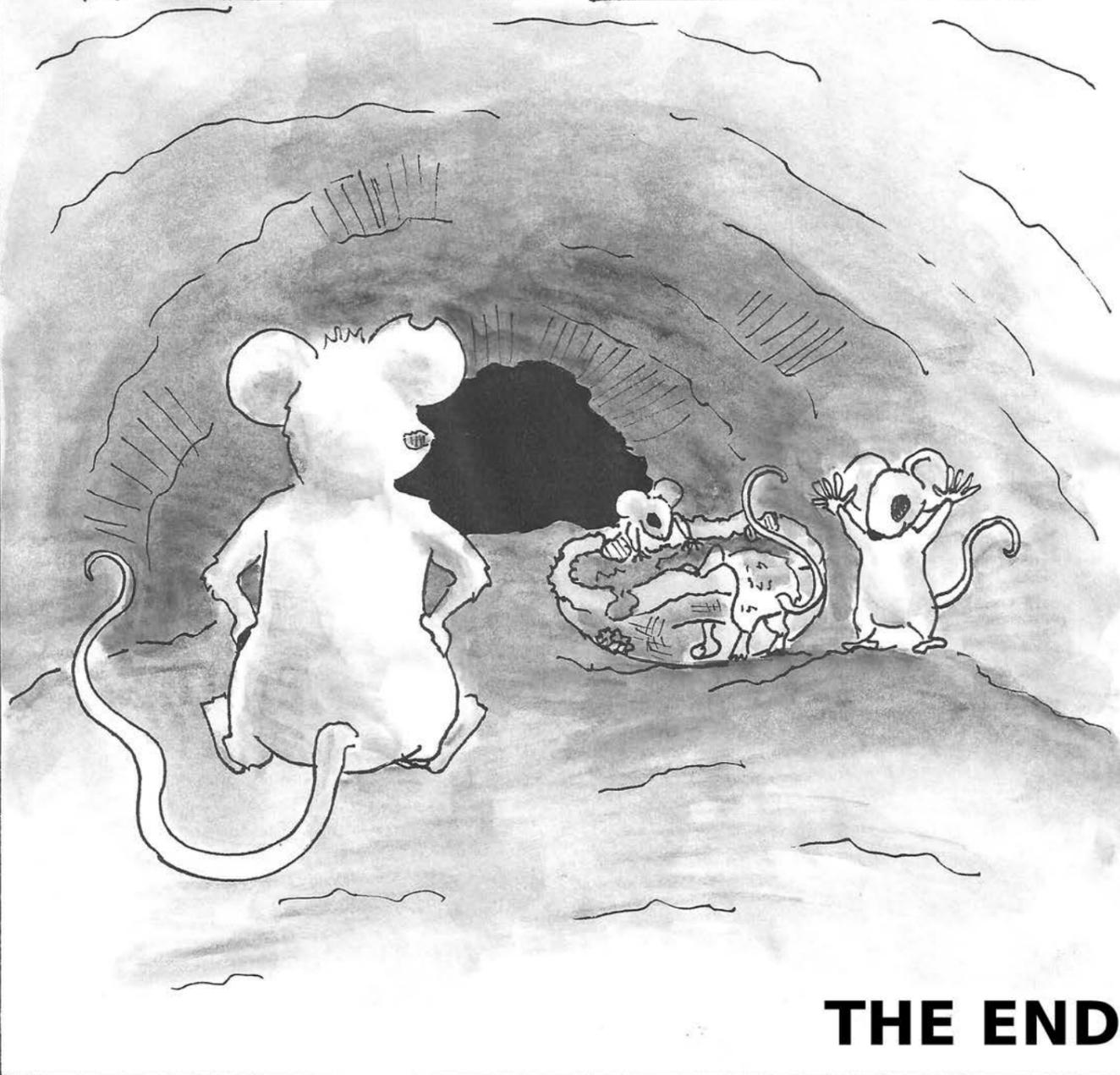
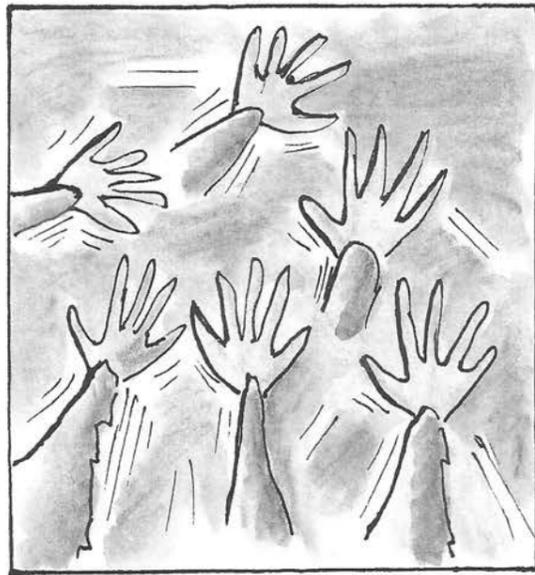
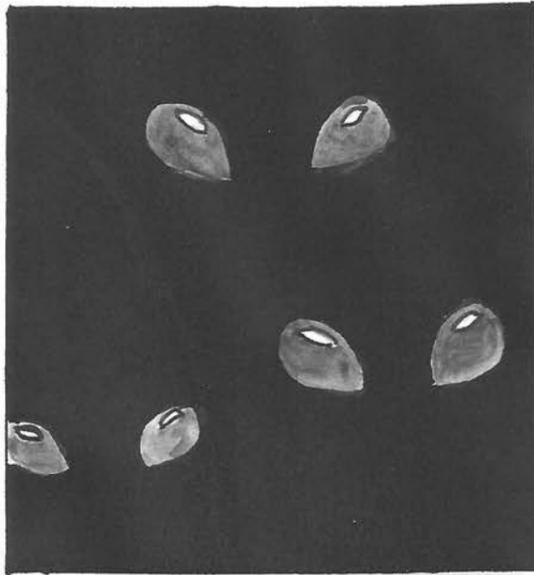












THE END

11

red brick announcement

by Red Brick Company / Lars Heiler

The Red Brick Company presents: *Goodnight Desdemona (Good morning Juliet)*

Marking the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's Death AND the 10th anniversary of the Red Brick Company we return to one of our all-time favourite plays, *Goodnight Desdemona (Good morning Juliet)* by Canadian author Ann-Marie MacDonald. We first produced this comic romance, which re-writes Shakespeare's *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet*, in 2008 to universal acclaim and thought the time was ripe for a re-run.

The life of Constance Ledbelly, assistant professor at Queen's University, is a mess: her unfinished PhD project, in which she argues that Shakespeare's tragedies *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet* must be based on two older, unknown comedies, which she suspects to be encoded in an old manuscript, has earned her a reputation for

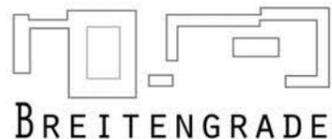
being an academic crackpot. When her incompetent and narcissistic boss Claude Night, whom she secretly loves, disappoints her professionally and emotionally, Constance is on the verge of depression. But by an unexpected supernatural turn, she finds herself in a Shakespearean dreamscape and sets out to save the heroines Desdemona and Juliet from their tragic deaths, thereby re-writing the plots of *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet* and coming to terms with her own life story.

Ann-Marie MacDonald's play is a clever and fast-paced comedy which plunders Shakespeare's works irreverently, mixing romantic love scenes, salacious sword fights and uncanny encounters in graveyards at midnight with ironic attacks on university life. ■



dates & tickets

Premiere: Jan 25
More shows: Jan 26/27/31, Feb 1/3
Venue: K 19 (8 pm)
Tickets at www.redbrickcompany.de



BREITENGRADE - ENTDECKEN, ERFORSCHEN, ERLEBEN.

Unter dem Motto „**Breitengrade**“ findet vom 26. bis 29. Mai 2016 der 90. Kunsthistorische Studierendenkongress, eine Vollversammlung aller deutschsprachigen kunsthistorischen Institute, an der Kunsthochschule Kassel statt.

 Breitengrade – was heißt das?

Künstler, Betrachter, Wissenschaftler und Kunstinstitutionen bilden ein weitverzweigtes Netzwerk das sich in stetigem Wandel befindet. Wie positioniert man sich hier als Teilnehmer in dieser Welt als Kunst? Verweigert man sich den vorherrschenden Mechanismen oder nimmt man diese bewusst aufs Korn? Was heißt das vor allem für unsere Zukunft als Kunsthistoriker*Innen bzw. Kunstwissenschaftler*Innen.

 Wieso ist das interessant, obwohl ich nicht Kunst studiere?

Dir fällt spontan ein spannendes Thema für einen Vortrag, einen wichtigen Ort in der documenta-Stadt Kassel für eine Führung oder eine interessante Aktion für einen Workshop ein – dann schreib uns bis zum **26. 02. 2016**.

Du hast auch als Anglistiker oder Maschinenbau-Student ein künstlerisches Händchen?
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**Obere Königsstr. 30
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Kalina Milcheva,
Studentin der Informatik und
Kundin der Kasseler Sparkasse

Johannes Jacop,
Geschäftsführer der Yatta Solutions GmbH
(Auszeichnung: IKT-Gründung des Jahres 2011)
und Kunde der Kasseler Sparkasse

Für alles, was ist, und für alles, was kommt!

Erfolgreiche Menschen brauchen einen Partner, der mit ihnen mithält. Vor, während und auch nach dem Studium ist die Kasseler Sparkasse der richtige Ansprechpartner für alle Fragen rund um die Finanzplanung. Innovativer Beweis: Johannes Jacop, Geschäftsführer der Yatta Solutions GmbH.

