

The Animals who Found Teamwork



CARA SUTHERLAND

On a sunny Saturday morning on a little island a gigantic zoo was standing with lots of different animals in it.

In a part of the zoo, there was a wolf, a squirrel, a mouse, parrots, a non-magical dragon and a cat. Sometimes they got along together and were friends but sometimes they did not get along. Every few days they go through the tubes to the centre of their part of the zoo and play lots of board games and card games because they are bored.

One sunny morning the dragon wanted to break out of the zoo and the other animals agreed. No one really came to the zoo, so they wanted to escape to the part of the world where they came from. They looked up on the wall on the side of the tubes and checked the map where they lived, but first they had to get out of the enclosure.

The dragon used his fire breath and melted the bars of steel into liquid. He was finally free!

The zookeeper went to the bird's cage and was about to feed them, when the parrots flew out over the zookeeper's head. They had escaped!

The cat got out by digging a hole down under the ground, past the enclosure bars and was finally free when he dug up on the other side.

The mouse and the squirrel got out of the nocturnal house by scraping each other's glass screen until it shattered into tiny pieces with their sharp claws.

When the zookeeper was going to restore the water in the wolf enclosure, the zookeeper accidentally dropped his key. The wolf saw this happen and looked everywhere in his enclosure for the key. At last he found it and opened the door with his mouth clamped to the key.

The animals met in the middle of the zoo like they discussed, where they were hidden by all the plants. They talked a lot and the parrots said "why don't we fly over the other side of the gate and try to unlock the gate with our beaks?"

"No, that won't work" said the wolf. "Why don't I find the key like I did before."

"No, I will try to melt the bars down like I also did before..." said the dragon.

"Why don't we scrape at the bars so they will break like before", said the mouse and the squirrel together because they are the two animals who are always friends.

All of the animals started talking over the top of each other and none of the animals could agree on what to do next.

The cat tried to get them to work together but none of the animals listened because they were too busy arguing. Finally, they decided to do their own thing. Their first job was to get out of the main gate.

The dragon tried to melt the gate down like he did with his enclosure bars, but it didn't work.

The birds tried to use their powerful beaks to open the gate but that didn't work.

The mouse and the squirrel tried to scrape through the bars. They tried and tried but that didn't work either.

The wolf tried to find out where the key was, like he did before, but he couldn't get it because it was in the zookeeper's hut which was locked.

They were all really upset that their plans were not working. Meanwhile the cat was looking on the iPad which he found on the floor close to the zookeeper's hut. He searched, 'what to do when your friends are arguing and not listening to you' and he found out this thing called teamwork. It said, 'Work together and never give up'.

He ran quickly to the other animals who were arguing again! "Now smarten up, you guys!" he said, "We should work together and not do our own thing."

The animals thought and thought. Suddenly, the wolf had an idea. Since he had been in the enclosure next door to the dragon for a long time, he realised that the dragon had wings like the parrots. And if parrots could fly, maybe the dragon could use his wings to fly too!

The wolf said, "Hey Dragon, you have wings that look like the parrots' wings. So maybe you could use them to fly us over the gate!"

"That's a great idea, Wolfie!" shouted all the animals together.

So the dragon started to flap his wings. He'd never flown before, so the parrots gave him tips.

"Flap your wings and do it really fast" said the parrots. "Then, run up really quickly and flap very hard, and you will take off!"

The dragon tried. The other animals cheered him on, but it didn't work. The dragon said in a disappointed voice, "I give up! I can't do it!"

"Yes, you can", said all the animals. "We believe in you. You CAN do it."

So he tried one more time. It worked!

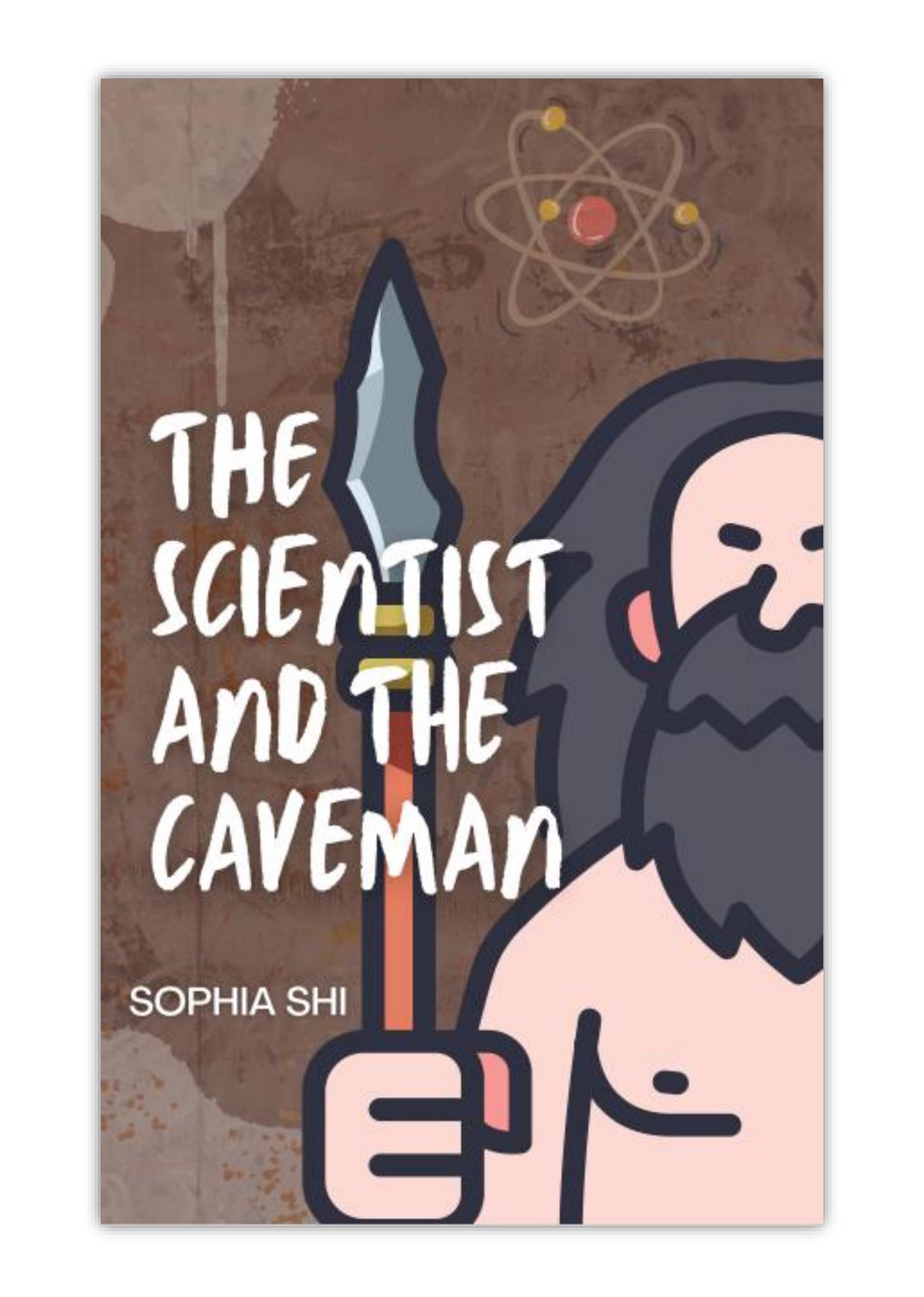
The animals quickly jumped onto the dragon's back and they took off. They flew to the edge of the island, but they had all forgotten where they came from. Luckily, the cat had taken a picture of the map with the camera on the iPad he found earlier!

Happily, the dragon delivered each animal to their own part of the world, where they had come from, and the cat reminded him where to go, each and every time.

Finally, the dragon and the cat, were luckily from the same part of the world, and the dragon flew the cat there. He was very happy but very tired. When he landed, the cat jumped off his back and they both went back to where they had come from in the wild.

The cat and the dragon became very good friends and every night they slept, curled up together.

The end.

The book cover features a brown, textured background. In the upper right, there is a stylized atomic model with a red nucleus and three yellow electrons on grey orbits. A large, stylized illustration of a cavewoman with a grey beard and hair, wearing a pink top, is on the right. A spear with a blue stone tip and a red shaft is positioned vertically in the center. The title 'THE SCIENTIST AND THE CAVEMAN' is written in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters across the middle. The author's name 'SOPHIA SHI' is at the bottom left. The publisher's logo 'EP' is at the bottom center.

THE SCIENTIST AND THE CAVEMAN

SOPHIA SHI

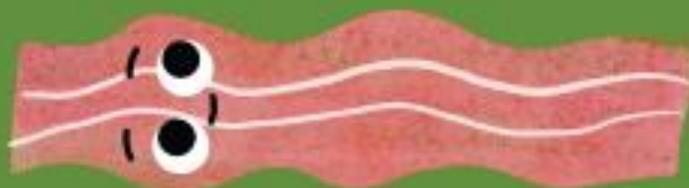
EP

“Can I have the emergency button, please?”, Sophia the Scientist asked Grug, and he nodded. Sophia took the emergency button and pressed the big red button. This time there was slide inside the portal, but she wasn’t alone in the portal. Sophia had sneakily brought the caveman back with her. Will Grug survive?...

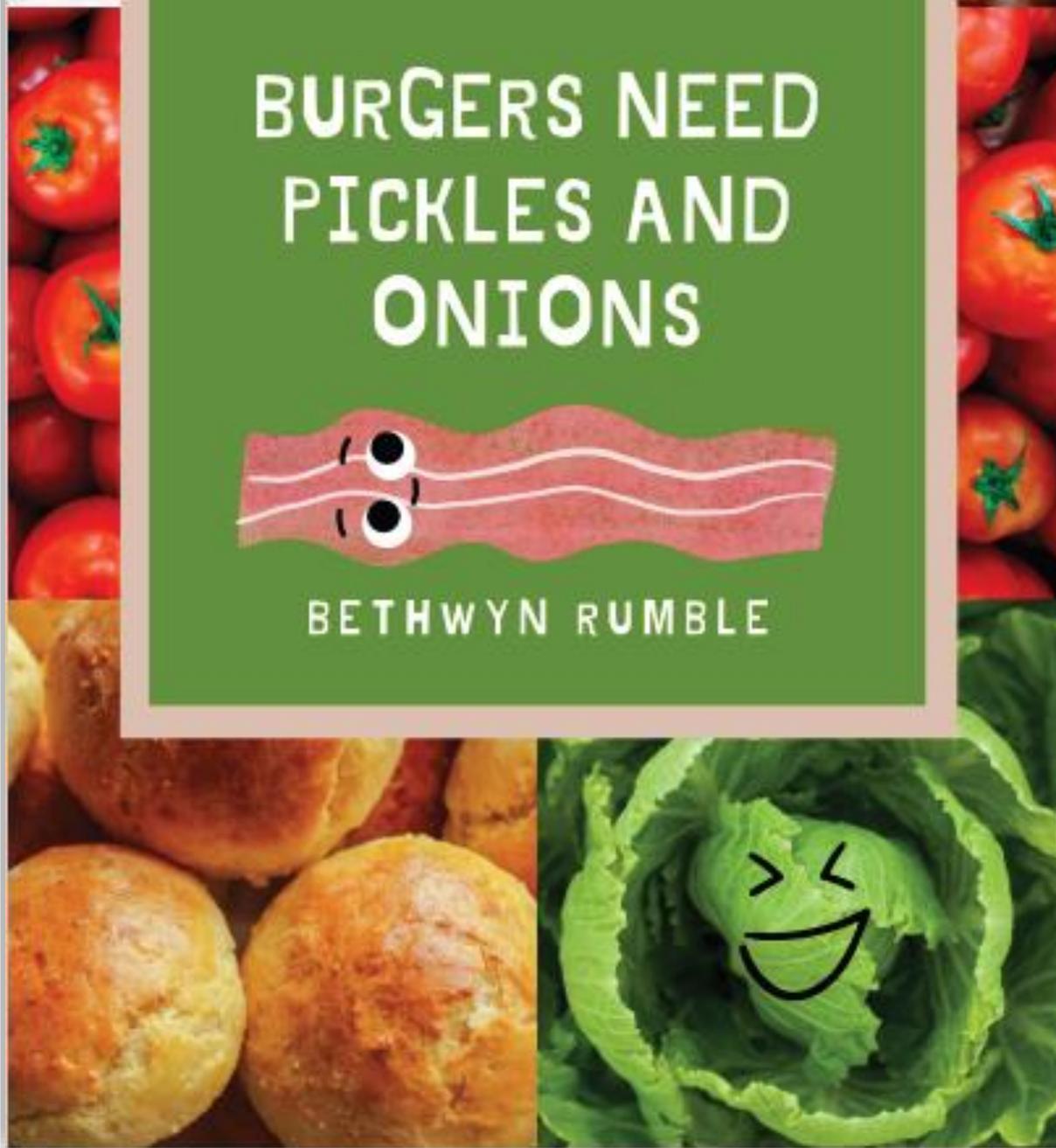
The End



**BURGERS NEED
PICKLES AND
ONIONS**



BETHWYN RUMBLE



Meat the Pickles. Once there was a family of Pickles in Burger Town. Dadda Pickle was a cheesy fellow. He always said 'I love you guys from ma head to-ma-toes'! Mumma Pickle was round and happy, but sometimes a bit sour like mummies can be! Baby pickle was juicy and fresh. Grandma and Grandpa pickle were a bit wrinkly of course. They all loved each other a lot!

Lettuce now hear about the Onion family. They were a very big family and liked watching sad movies on tv squeezed up together, and they cried a lot. They were quiet and kind.

The Beef and Cheese families thought they were the most important families in Burger Town and teased the Pickle and Onion families, saying 'nobody wants you'! This of course made the Onion family cry even more loudly. The Pickles tried to ignore this bullying and stay brave and juicy but they did feel left out.

Miss Bacon wore bright pink and loved helping busily. She liked baking for everyone in town and said 'I am always baking, I bake-on and I bake-off!'

Everyday in Burger Town it rained tomato sauce over everything.

Some Salad families lived at the edge of town and would join in the fun sometimes when they could be bothered.

One day when the Pickle and Onion families were playing around in the town centre they heard the Cheese and Beef families yelling at them 'you're not needed in Burger Town'. The little pickles and onions hid away feeling sour and grumpy. They had been told by their families they were important and yummy! What was wrong with them?

They stopped feeling bad when they suddenly smelled a delicious scent. It was freshly baked buns cooked by Miss Bacon. She was coming into town with a big basket of buns and carried them straight over to the Pickles and Onions because seeing them sad made her heart feel sad too. She wanted to cheer them up.

She said, 'let me help you out of that pickle that you're in!' They were about to eat up all the delicious buns when suddenly baby pickle saw the Cheese and Beef families looking on sadly and hungrily. Baby Pickle said to his family and his friends the Onions, 'STOP! We should share these buns with Beef and Cheese, we can't leave them out - we know what that feels like'! They all agreed and broke their buns in half and shared them all around.

The Beef and Cheese families smiled and said 'thank you, that was very kind... I think we've changed our mind... Burger Town DOES need Pickles and Onions after all... we all need to work

together to make this town delicious!

Miss Bacon giggled and sizzled happily.

The End

A PIGEON SWAP



BY
ELA KARAMAN



Splat! Ali looked down and saw three white blobs of goeey pigeon poo. He wrinkled his nose in disgust and cleaned it up without whining. Every day he made sure that his pigeons had enough food and water to eat and drink. When he ran out of grains he would sneak into the kitchen and make sure that nobody was home. Then he would take the ends of loaves of bread and bring them back to his beloved pigeons. Every time he came into the cage all his pigeons would surround him in a flurry, a storm of feathers swirling through the air.

Ali lived in the tallest apartment building in Eastern Istanbul, each day he would climb the twenty flights of stairs to reach the rooftop where his pigeon cage was kept, just like many other young boys across the city. The pigeons cooed and cawed with excitement as Ali approached. On Saturdays he would choose his best pigeons to sell at the market. Many people did not know that Ali had a sneaky trick up his sleeve. He would pick the smartest and loyalest pigeons he had and sell them at the market for 5 Lira each. The customers always left happy thinking they got a good deal. After the last one was sold he raced home and climbed the twenty flights of stairs to reach his pigeons. By the time he reached them he was puffing and panting with sweaty armpits. He went to the railing and held out his arms, whistling a special tune that only his pigeons knew. With a beating of wings the three pigeons he had sold that day returned, triumphantly perched on his arms, ready to go to the market the following week.

A week later he left for the market and almost got ran over by a group of boys racing on their new shiny bikes. Ali had everything he ever wanted except for one thing. He had always wanted a bike but his parents could never afford to buy him one. Up ahead as he continued along the street he saw a boy stopped on the side standing over a bright red bicycle. "Wow" murmured Ali under his breath. The boy who Ali recognised as Hasan from down the street, noticed Ali staring "What do you want?" He said crossly. "Nothing....I...I just love your bike" Ali stammered, embarrassed. The boy sized him up, staring at the cage of pigeons by Ali's side. "What are those for?" The boy asked. "I'm off to market to sell them". "Hmmm how much can you get for them?" "5 Lira each" The boy looked thoughtful and said "Would you like to swap, the pigeons for my bike?" Ali's face lit up with excitement, "Really?" He said disbelievingly. "Of course, let's do it." Ali's heart was beating fast as he handed over the pigeons and the boy backed away from the bike. Ali took one last look at his beloved pigeons and winked at them. Ali picked up the bike and took off at top speed down the hill.

For over a week Ali had the time of his life with the bike. Everyday after dinner he would grab the bike and go onto the street for a few hours, even though it was his bedtime. Even in the mornings he would get up early to go for a quick ride before school. One Sunday morning he was riding his bike around the park and a man came up and said "Excuse me, but were did you get this bike and is it yours?" "Yes, it is mine" he said proudly, but the man wanted to know were he actually got it.

“Did you buy it from a shop or from somebody” he asked questionably. “Oh, I traded it for my three pigeons” he said. “ Well, I believe this is my sons bike. It’s been stolen three weeks ago and we want to know who took it” he said solemnly. “No, you must be mistaken, this is my bike!” He said. “Well, I’ll have to call the police then” . Ali was very scared but the police came immediately and asked him if it really was his bike. At the same time, the man’s son came and immediately confirmed that it was his bike. “Where did you get it from and who gave it to you?” Asked the police. “ I got it from Hasan, who lives around the corner from me.” Ali replied. “Remember, if you don’t tell the truth you’ll be in big trouble” the officer said warningly. “Come on”. Ali said calmly. They all piled into the police car and Ali directed them to Hasan’s house. They pulled up onto the driveway and rung the doorbell. Hasan’s mum opened the door with Hasan behind her. “We are looking for a boy named Hasan” asked the officer uncertainly. “ Yes, he’s my son, is there a problem?” she replied sweetly. “ Actually, yes. we believe Hasan has taken this little boy’s bike? Is that true?” The officer asked. “ Hasan, did you take this boy’s bike?” His mother asked. “No” he said in a small voice. “Well looks like we’ll have to take you to the station to investigate” said the officer.

Poor Ali was scared because he knew he didn’t do anything wrong and was afraid to tell his parents. They walked inside and went into an investigation room. The police officer explained to Hasan that if he lied about it he would be in big trouble so he asked the question again. “Now, did you sell the bike to Ali, or not ?” He said sternly. “Yes” Hasan said slowly. Suddenly, all his thoughts poured out. “ I found the bike on the verge and thought it didn’t belong to anyone. I got it and then swapped it with Ali for his pigeons. I’m sorry, I didn’t meant steal it.”

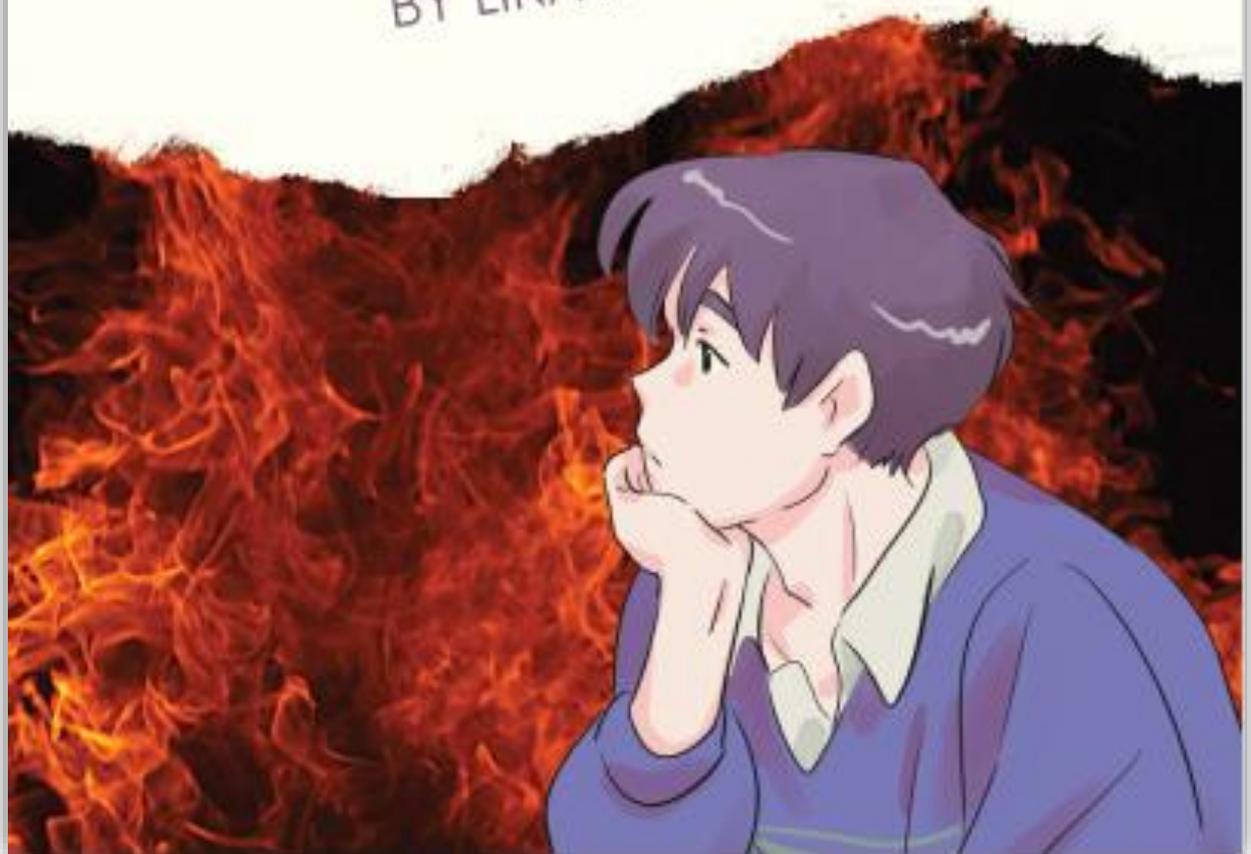
Outside in the waiting room, Ali was waiting to see the officer and was very scared when he finally came out. “You may all go home as Hasan has admitted he did take it, and he is very sorry for what he did. I hope to never see you again in my office for any reason at all, now get lost!” he said as they walked out. Ali was sad to lose his bike but happy to be out of the police station, free at last. Maybe one day, he will earn money and get a bike of his very own from a shop, not Hasan! Ali’s days of pigeon swapping were over and he couldn’t wait to go home and see lovely pigeons.

The End



TWO LANDS

BY LINA MUSETTI



Everybody knows that when someone dies, they go to Heaven or Hell, but is it really like that? Has it been always like that? Well, I'm here to tell you the truth about how everything started. A long time ago there were two lands for the dead and they were called Fairy Floss land and Chilli land.

Fairy Floss land was named because of its fairy floss clouds on the sky. The clouds were so soft, and they smelled so good, that it was the perfect place to be. It was peaceful, beautiful and obviously delicious. On the other hand, Chilli land was buried under the earth, and it was extremely noisy, competitive and full of fire. You probably guessed it by now: Fairy floss was the land where the nice people went after life, and Chilli land was where the nasty people had to spend their time.

To make sure you get the picture, I'll tell you what the people in those lands did all day. In Fairy Floss land they lay on the fairy floss clouds doing all sorts of wonderful things, like playing fun games without ever arguing, going in pools of liquid sugar, reading sweet stories and basically enjoying themselves each day. In Chilli land the afterlife was more complicated. People here were having competitions about who could eat the most quantity of chilli to then spit out the biggest fire ever or wrestling and fighting nonstop. It was exhausting.

Then the human war changed everything. People on earth kept on dying especially the kids because they were less able to protect themselves. When the kids from war came to Fairy Floss land, they felt extremely lucky to be there. They were smelling the fairy floss and dreaming about eating it, after starving for so long during the war. So, they started eating it.

They were so happy and busy that they didn't notice that they were destroying everything: swimming pools, game fields, resting areas. The people of Fairy Floss land without their beautiful clouds to live in started to fall down, down, into Chilli land. The habitants of Chilli land of course got extremely angry to see all those kind people coming into their land. To send them away they did what they used to do with each other: they spat out big flames of fire, by eating all the chilli available. They ate and they spat, they ate and they spat, until the chilli ended.

The architect of those lands was looking at the big mess down below. He was extremely confused about what was happening. He spent so much time building the lands that he couldn't accept the fact that he did something wrong. He kept on thinking and thinking until he finally got it... he wasn't meant to put any foods in the lands because it would make them easy to break. People had spent so much time eating food to even destroy their own lands. So, the architect decided to fix the problem putting the normal clouds made of water that everyone know nowadays. People could still rest and have fun over there without any risk. For the other land, he simply put fire down the earth, after all it was a fair punishment for the bad people. He then called his amazing helpers.

A big bright light shone on top of everyone and the angels came to save the day. They picked up the community of Fairy Floss land and put them back in the sky on top of the brand new normal clouds. The bad people found themselves in the same place but surrounded by flames

Hell, and Haven started that day. None know why they have those peculiar names. The architect picked them but with no sense for me. It is probably still very nice to lay on water clouds but If you want to have a little taste of how it felt to be in Fairy Floss land, take a bath in a bathtub full of fairy floss. Make sure none disturb you. Smell it. Feel it. Eat it.. Be happy and relaxed. You can do it in the comfort of your own house. Ah... I almost forgot I won't recommend experiencing how Chilli Land was.

The end

THE ADVENTURES OF FREDERICK FRILLIAM (THE VERY DAFT PIG)



By Abbie Divola

CHAPTER 1

Once upon a piggy, there lived a daft pig. His name was Frederick Frillam.

Frederick loved having adventures and he believed that the best parts of life were eating and a good night's sleep.

On the day this story begins, Frederick Frillam was having tea. He loved having tea. He really was enjoying the buttered scones and hot chocolate. But suddenly his lovely tea was interrupted by a soft tapping noise.

"Tap, tap."

"Must just be that giant dinosaur I saw earlier!" announced Frederick Frillam.

Yes, I did mention that he was daft.

Anyway, back to the story. It was so late that Frederick had decided to put on his pyjamas. He was in the middle of doing just that when he heard the soft tapping again.

"Tap, tap."

Frederick had no idea where it was coming from.

"Psssst! Over here! Outside the window!"

It took a long time for Frederick to find who belonged to the voice. First he looked behind the door, then the couch, and then in the bath, and finally he realised that the window was the thing that was next to his bed.

"Why, you learn something new every day!" he remarked as he waddled towards the little window. He peered out and there was a cat.

"I was right!" exclaimed Frederick Frillam excitedly. "It's a giant dinosaur!"

"I'm not a giant dinosaur!" said the cat. "I'm a cat called Silver. I'm also your humble boss. And I'm here to help you with your mission."

“What are you talking about, Silky?” asked a very confused Frederick Frillam, getting the cat’s name wrong. “And what’s this about a mitten? I had no idea I was part of a mitten!”

“Oh, how daft you are,” said the cat. “My colleague told me you were daft, but I didn't think you were that daft!”

“Could you please explain that a bit more, Sally?” said Frederick goofily, still not knowing the difference between Silver, Silky or Sally, or mittens and missions.

“Oh, you silly pig,” said the cat. “Just do as I say and come out your window and we'll talk about it on the way to our destination, where our important mission starts. Come on, I don't have all night!”

CHAPTER 2

It took a while to actually get Frederick's round and plump body through the narrow window. First, Silver pulled at Frederick's arms and managed to get him halfway through, but then he got stuck, so Silver had another idea. She squeezed past Frederick and landed inside the house. She then placed her front paws upon the silly pig's bum and pushed as hard as she could...but he just wouldn't budge.

“Huh! Huuh! Huuuh!” she panted and grunted.

This was hard work! She gave one last mighty push and finally Frederick was out, but unfortunately his pyjamas weren't, as they'd come off. As quickly as she could, she handed over the pyjamas through the window and turned her head away to be respectful to poor Frederick. She then waited until all the grunting and groaning was done as he put them back on. Then she gingerly squeezed her fragile body through the little window and jumped down onto the roof. There she saw Frederick having a conversation with the chimney!

She ran over to him and steered him away from the sooty chimney and looked left and right and then she whispered to Frederick. “Don't tell anyone about what you're about to see, okay?”

“Okay, I will!” said silly Frederick.

Then Silver gently pressed her little nose and suddenly, to Frederick's amazement, two giant, silver wings flung out of her back! She smiled and said, “See why I'm called Silver?”

“So, you're a bird?” asked Frederick, who was very confused.

“No, silly, I'm a flying cat!” she explained.

"A flying cat?" said Frederick. "Why haven't you been caught by a human?"

"Good question, but I'll tell you later because we have to focus on getting to the secret headquarters."

"Secret kneehalves?" asked Frederick getting everything wrong, as usual.

"Come on, we don't have much time!" shouted Silver impatiently. "Hop on."

He did as he was told and tumbled onto her back just in time, as she whisked him away.

CHAPTER 3

Frederick gaped at the dramatic, black, night sky and he watched in amazement at the dazzling stars twinkling beautifully in the dark. He also couldn't quite believe he was on the back of a cat that was flying through the air with silver wings.

But he was interrupted from his daydream by Silver saying, "We're almost there!"

They swooped down swiftly to see a little cottage with turquoise bricks, dark blue shutters and a wooden door which looked like the owner of the little cottage had painted it himself with green paint.

"This is the king's house," said Silver.

"Really?" said Frederick. "I never knew that there were real kings around here. I thought they were only in fairytales.

"Well, I guess you learn something new every day, as you said earlier," laughed Silver. "But we have to hurry, because the king can be very impatient."

So Frederick jumped down from Silver's furry back and landed with a thud on his bottom in a soft patch of grass in the king's impressive garden.

"Come on, we have no time to lose and no time to dilly-dally either," said Silver.

Frederick heaved himself up and together they advanced towards the king's elegant cottage and knocked on the green door with the formal looking brass knocker. Immediately, the door flung open and revealed a very little man with big, brown and determined eyes, a long, grey beard and a shimmering blue robe that made him look even more noble than he really was.

“Why, hello there!” exclaimed the wise old king in a deep, rich voice that, swirling his robe theatrically. “Are you ready to hear about your mission, dear Frederick?”

“Oh yes, I would love that!” squealed Frederick eagerly.

CHAPTER 4

“Well, what has happened is that evil goblins are trying to take over the whole of fairyland and...”

“Wait a piggie moment, are we in some sort of fairyland?” asked Frederick.

“Finally, Frederick, you are using your brain!” laughed Silver, rolling her eyes. “But yes, we are in fairyland. The reason why humans don’t catch us is because there is a ‘no humans’ policy here.”

“Anyway, back to me,” said the king, who did seem to like the sound of his own voice. “As I said, the evil goblins are trying to take over the whole of fairyland. But they have made a deal with us. They have hidden a magic gem, and if we find it, they won’t take over the land and leave us in peace. Do you understand?”

“Yes, I’ve got it!” exclaimed Frederick.

“Oh, I almost forgot, the goblins gave us a clue,” said the king, and he fished out a piece of crumpled paper from his cloak, flattened it out and read aloud:

Dear king and associates,

The clue is that the gem makes a sound or noise and that gives you a clue of where it may be.

(eg. splash could be the pond!)

Good luck. You’ll need it!

From Mr Knobble and the citizens of Goblin Towers ☺

CHAPTER 5

So Silver and Frederick said goodbye and the king wished them good luck. Frederick jumped on Silver’s back again and she took off.

Up, up, up they went and soon the king's house was just a tiny, blue dot below.

They flew for some time, and finally Silver started flying back down.

"That's Goblin Towers," she called out to Frederick as they landed neatly in front of a tall castle that had little cottages around it.

Frederick jumped off Silver's back, carefully this time, but still landed with a thud and rolled into a big bush. He really was a very daft pig. He managed to get out with a lot of rustling from the bush and a lot of moaning from Frederick.

They pushed open the castle door and there stood Mr Knobble. He had a long green nose, revolting orange hair sprouting from his ears and great, big knobby knees.

"Come in! Come in!" he barked, pulling them roughly inside. "I know you're here to solve the puzzle. But I don't know why they sent you. You look like a very daft pig."

He smirked and then he disappeared into the hallway.

"Come on Frederick, we need to listen carefully, like the clue told us," said Silver.

"What clue?" asked Frederick.

"Good grief, Frederick," exclaimed Silver. "The clue! Remember. Just listen!"

And they both listened. For a while they heard nothing. But soon enough they heard something.

It was a rustling sound.

"Rustle, rustle, rustle," went the sound.

"I know!" exclaimed Frederick. "I know!"

"Be quiet, Frederick!" said Silver. "We have to listen for a clue."

"But that is the clue!" said Frederick. "The rustling sound. I know that sound. It's the bush in the front garden. The one I rolled into on the way in."

And with that he sprinted out the front door of the cottage and into the garden, rummaged around in the big bush and pulled out the gem.

Frederick held it in the air above his head and shouted with glee.

Mr Knobble re-appeared and he was very angry. But a deal is a deal. True to his word, he didn't take over fairyland.

Silver flew Frederick back to the king to share the good news.

The king was overjoyed and held a big feast for everyone in fairyland. He asked Frederick to make a speech about what he had done.

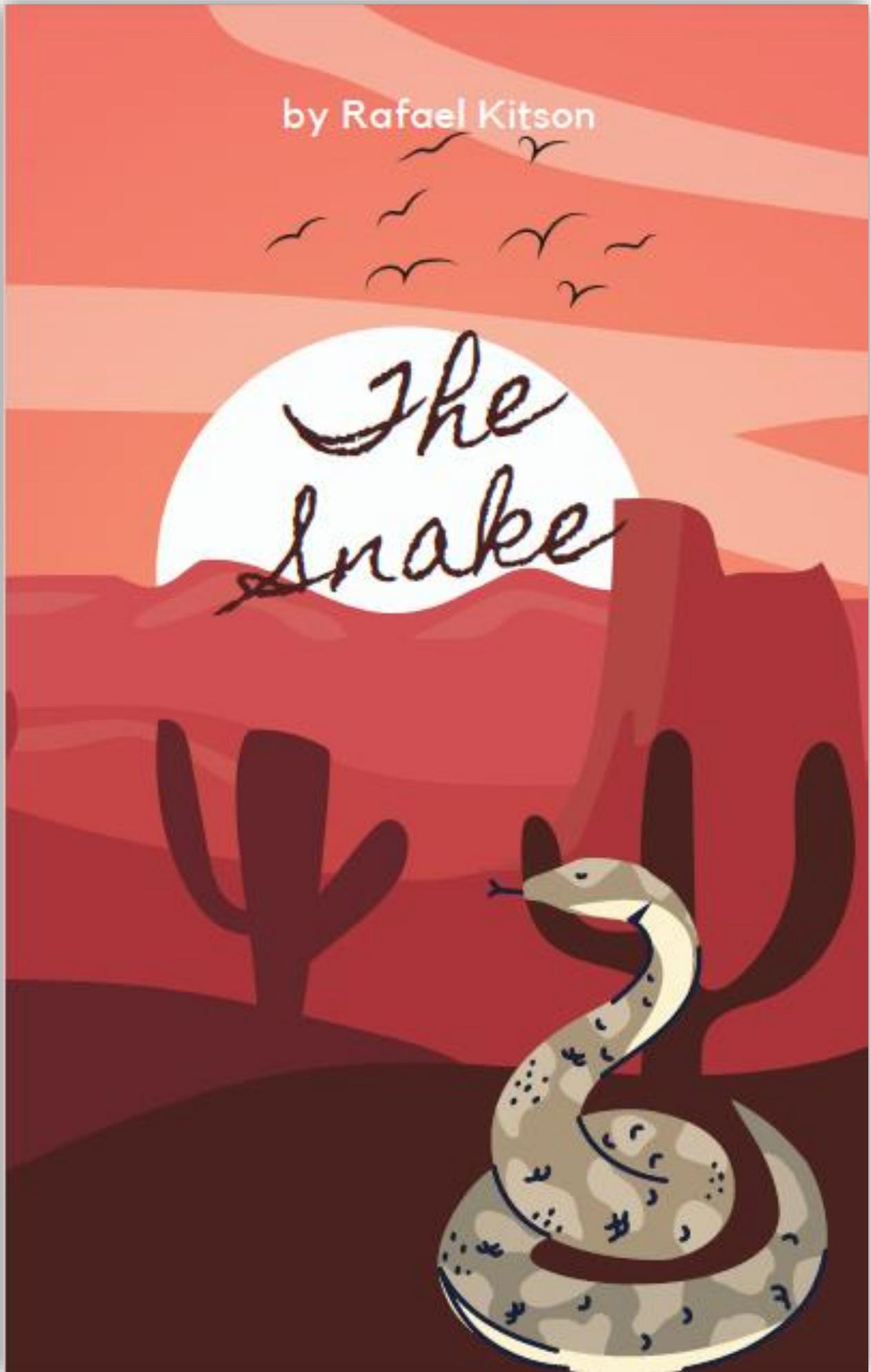
Frederick stood up and said, "What did I do again?"

And the king and Silver and everyone in the kingdom just laughed!

The End

by Rafael Kitson

The Snake



Sssnake Tamer Sssam was what all of the walking ones called him. He made us dance by using a magic pipe. I don't know how, though. He gathered us from everywhere around the world and locked us between sssteel bars when it was dark. I think the walking ones called it "night". I figured out that they only let us out when when other walking ones were watching. It was very scary when he took me out of the bush. I still remember that day like it was yesterday.

Today Sssam took us to a large place and took us out of the cage. There were sssso many walking ones ssstaring at us. A lot of the ssssmall walking ones made high-pitched noises that hurt my ear holes. Sssam ssstarted using the magic pipe and we were controlled. The walking ones ssstarted shouting and cheering and throwing shiny gold, circles in a "hat". After a long and tiring day, Sssam put us back in our cages. It was a cold night and we had to huddle together to ssstay warm. I knew today was going to be harsh and hard to dance because it was so hot and the dance today was going to be tiring.

Woo-hoo! Today Sssam let me and Sssteve back out in to the wild but I kind of felt sssad for Ssseth and Sssimon because they had to ssstay with Sssam. Sssam said he had let me and Sssteve free because we were "not good enough", whatever that means. I was craving sssome juicy meat because I had not had any for sssso long.

I sssaw two mice and I ssslowly and sssilently ssslithered up to them but right before I ssstruck I heard a "screeeeech!" and I looked up just before an eagle grabbed me!

The eagle carried me to a big, old warehouse and I you will never believe who I sssaw watching us... Sssam! I was sssso angry and I writhed and sssquirmed trying to get out of the eagle's grip. The eagle dropped me in Sssam's hands and he shoved me into a cage. Then he ssstarted laughing and prodding me with a ssstick! "Did you think I would actually let you free? I didn't let you and the other sssnake free forever, I let you free so the other two sssnakes would work harder!" Sssam jeered. "But the other sssnakes refused to work so I gave them to the pest control!" If sssnakes could gasp, I definitely would have. Everyone knows that if you get sssent there you will never come back! I was ssstarting to get worried. If I ssscrew up, Sssam might also hand me over to the pest control! I decided that when he let me out of my cage, I would ssspring out and bite him! Later, when he let me out I pretended to be good and then I ssstruck! He dropped me but did not look hurt. I

almost fainted when wires ssstarted popping out of his body! A high-pitched noise ssstarted, and then sparks ssstarted shooting from Sssam's body and he exploded, vaporising everything in the area including me...

The End

The book cover features a warm, orange-brown background. In the upper right corner, there are silhouettes of birds perched on a branch. A large, white, rectangular area in the center contains the title text. Below the title, a silhouette of a young girl with curly hair is shown from the side, looking upwards. She is standing next to several stacks of brown cardboard boxes. The overall composition is simple and evocative, suggesting a theme of hope or aspiration.

FIRST TUESDAY OF THE MONTH

BY LIZETIENNE BURKE-HARDY

Elizabeth's father, David, worked for the council, and on the first Tuesday of every month, he brought some mysterious boxes home, and put them in the shed. That night, she would hear strange noises in her sleep, but she would never be told what went on, or what was in the boxes. So tonight, she was determined to stay awake, and find out what was happening in the garden.

When her Father got home from work Elizabeth saw him take the boxes into the shed as usual, and as usual she asked what was in the boxes. "You don't have to worry about that until you're older, sweetie," he replied, hugging her. *He doesn't know I'm going to find out tonight*, she thought, grinning. That night, Elizabeth excitedly stared out the window to her back garden, hoping she could see what he was doing. Her twinkling green eyes spotted the dark, shadowy figure of her father disappear into the shed, and she saw a crack of light appear around the shed door. She was staring for a really long time, watching, waiting, wondering and trying desperately to keep her eyes open. But it was no use because, finally, drowsiness overtook her.

Elizabeth's mother, Anne, peeked into her room, saw she was asleep and, smiling, crept down into the garden. She opened the shed door and whispered, "She's asleep!" "Great!" David replied. They carried the boxes into the garden, laid them out on the lawn and removed the lids. Inside the boxes were about fifty motionless birds. Anne re-entered the shed to retrieve a cardboard box, while David carefully placed nine magpies, eleven galahs, ten crows, nine willy wagtails, and an assortment of rainbow lorikeets, doves and pigeons on the grass. He stroked their soft feathers and smiled. Anne cast her eyes across the creatures and asked "are these the only ones for this month?" Her husband nodded. She kneeled down, opened the cardboard box and started sorting through the contents. David gestured to the willy wagtails. "They'll need the tiny ones," he said. Then slowly and carefully, one by one, they replaced the batteries in each of the birds so they could fly again tomorrow.

The End

Breath

Desandu Premarathna



I flow through the air of this city, leaving a sorrow trace everywhere I go. I don't intend it to happen, but as I slink through windows and slide underneath door frames, the humans I pass turn around, noticing a newer presence entwined with the chill, until I leave; them becoming indifferent again. Making my way towards my destination, I flew further away from the outer banks of the city. Here the trees grew closer to each other, huddling to block out the loneliness. I notice that as I pass, the flowers lost their vibrancy and the young saplings wilt. Looking behind me I saw the trees had pulled away from the small path I followed. Feeling a pang of sadness come up, I push it down and fly forward, ignoring emotions once more.

I arrived at the cottage. It looked well-worn but in a gentle manner and it seemed as though many fond memories were created within those walls. As I walked through the heavy oak doors, the sweet smell of cinnamon apple scrolls engulfed me. The room was brightly lit by the cackling hearth, casting dancing shadows all around me as I stood in a corner of the room.

The old man was lying down on a sofa, his weathered hands encasing a small photobook. As he turned the page to a new photo, looked up, peering purposefully towards me as if knowing I was there. I stumbled back, surprised, he shouldn't be able to see me – he shouldn't even notice me. However, the old man only calmly looked down again, his face morphing into a grin as he reminisces about the day that this photograph was taken.

It was at the state library in the year 1967. Being a young college student who was new to the city, the boy had been so perplexed by everything he saw. I could see the old man remember how he had gone to the library to borrow a physics book. Having never step foot in a proper library before, the boy had decided to read the book aloud. The librarian's assistant had walked up to him and reminded him to be silent. That was when he saw how beautiful she was – despite her face being morphed by anger. From that day onwards, he had done anything he could to get her attention, and the rest was history.

The old man chuckled as he turned the page. However soon enough he became confused. I drew closer to see the photograph.

Of course, he didn't remember. He looked at the scene from all angles, intent on reminding himself of the story behind the image, yet it did him no help. However, I remembered that day. I remembered it unnaturally clearly, as it was the first time we met.

The boy and his family were at the beach, on a vacation, from the sweltering temperatures of the summer season. The boy's siblings were playing on the warm sand, and his mother was sunbathing whilst reading a book, and so the father took the boy out into the waters, on their small boat, to teach him to fish. Everything was going well to begin with, for the father was a good teacher and the boy was a good listener. Quite unexpectedly, something heavy tugged at the boy's line, taking the

youngster by surprise. The more the boy pulled, the more the creature struggled, threatening to pull the boy in too.

The movements subsided and the boy relaxed, gently reeling the creature in. However, as the creature tugged for the final time, the boy too fell in. I remember watching as the boy let out a gasp as the cold water soaked through his clothes. He was so shocked that despite being a graceful swimmer, he struggled to surface. I curled my fingers around the boy's wrist, but strong arms reached into the waters and grasped the boy's waist – pulling him up.

I had him. I had him in my arms. He was mine. But I let him go. He was too young and had a fruitful life ahead of him.

Now I watched the old man flip the photobook to the final picture. His eyes crinkled with happiness and his smile filled with warmth and delight. It was a picture of their whole family; son, daughters and grandchildren, all surrounding him and his wife. Everyone was pulling faces at the camera. He loved this photo, its delight spreading warmth into his heart every time.

The old man ran his fingers along the spine of the photobook; carefully, it being almost as old as he was. He just finished walking through his entire life, and I watched him as he turned to face me directly, completely calm and completely composed. He knew I was there waiting for him. So, with a smile on his face, he closed his eyes and exhaled.

I took a breath.

All was gone.

The End

IF THESE WALLS COULD TALK



written by

Annabel Lynch

I slowly, agonising step after agonising step, make my way up the abandoned staircase. My bad hip cracks and my knees ache more and more with every step. My gnarled fingers clutch at the worn handrail for support, cobwebs that loop between the handrail and the wall tickle the back of my hand. I am becoming breathless with the exertion of this steep climb. Finally I am able to take a deep breath as I reach the top. The only thing left between me and my favourite place in the world is a set of thick wooden doors. I place my hand over the tarnished brass doorknob and twist it open. I push my thick glasses up the bridge of my nose and everything comes into focus. There it lies before me, the interior of the glorious Ruby Theatre.

I survey my surroundings, taking in the faded and lonely looking seats that sweep down towards the scratched and scraped wooden stage. The thin red curtains droop limply on either side of the stage, their golden tassels frayed and split. The red carpet on the stairs is threadbare, with cold concrete forcing its way through the most damaged sections, looking like puddles of grey in a grubby red landscape. The dusty chandeliers have been stripped of their globes. They hang sadly, no longer shedding any light. But it was not always this way.

I cast my mind back to the first time I stood in this exact spot. I close my eyes and all the memories came flooding back. I remember the excitement of that night. It was in 1945. It was my 10th birthday and my gift was to watch the Opera at the brand new Ruby Theatre. I had worn my best dress. It was sky blue silk with a thick white ribbon around the waist and a hem that brushed my knees as I walked. As my parents led me through the entry doors, I couldn't believe my eyes. The seats were made of plush, red velvet. The kind that is so thick that your hand sinks into it and disappears. The stairs in the theatre were covered in matching red carpet and the curtains were a regal red and gold, hanging proudly from the uppermost ceiling. The stage took my breath away. It was huge. It was gleaming and the wood had been polished so much it was like a mirror. You could practically see your reflection in it. As I sunk into my seat, I stretched my legs out. The bright light from the fancy chandeliers bounced off my shiny black shoes, like stars in the night sky. It was magic!

More than 10 years would pass before I experienced the Ruby Theatre magic again and it was just as amazing the second time around. This time, I went with two of my friends who worked with me as typists in an office in town. One morning, Shirley came rushing into the office, her eyes were shining and even her curly blonde hair was bouncing with the excitement. 'I won!' she cried. 'I won three tickets to the show!' Shirley had entered a script in a play writing competition and the prize was tickets to the opening night of the famous musical "West Side Story" that was coming direct from Broadway. Not just that, she had won three tickets. We could never have afforded to buy our own tickets on our typist wage. We took a taxi together to the theatre that night. The three of us squeezed into the back seat, our skirts pressed

together, giggling the whole way. There was a red carpet leading from the front entrance, up the staircase and to the theatre doors. I wobbled all the way along the carpet, not used to wearing high heels. I felt like a movie star. Being back in the Ruby Theatre was everything I had remembered and more. Everything was sparkling, the light jumping and dancing from the chandeliers and reflecting off the jewels worn by the fancy ladies in the audience. The place smelled of lavender perfume and expensive after shave. I breathed it all in as much as I could.

The sound of the cymbals clashing and clanging bounced off the wooden stage 'boom, boom, boom'. The performance was over and the orchestra took a bow as the heavy red curtain started to fall on the Ruby Theatre stage. The gold tassels swung side to side and slowly came to a stop as the curtain dropped. The audience burst into loud applause and gave a standing ovation as the show ended, my husband and I stood up with them. We had been married the year before and were at the theatre to see the state orchestra play. I looked out across the theatre from our seats at the very top, resting my hand on the soft velvet of the seat in front, moving my fingers back and forward so that the velvet all moved one way and then back the other way. We stood and waited while the rest of the audience moved towards the exit, listening to the low hum of their conversations and the 'swish, swish' of the women's dresses as they moved past. I looked up at the chandeliers that lit the room, a few of the globes had stopped working here and there, but I still felt like I was somewhere very special and glamorous and I wanted to stay here as long as I could.

I remember the feeling of holding her soft hand in mine, walking slowly up the staircase towards the theatre doors one step at a time so that her little legs could keep up. My daughter was almost 6 years old and absolutely loved ballet. We were at the Ruby Theatre to watch her first live ballet performance. As I helped her open the doors to the theatre, I saw on her face the same amazement I felt when I first saw this magical place. If I'm being honest though, it was starting to look a little worn. The red carpet not quite as red and the velvet seats not quite as plush, but it still took my breath away. We spent a lovely evening, watching the dancers float and skip across the stage, I snuck glances at my Lucy's face. She was wide eyed with wonder the whole time and I knew exactly how she felt.

Who would have thought that my next visit would be to see my Lucy on stage herself? My little budding ballerina had grown into an amazing dancer and was performing at The Ruby Theatre in her debut role. As I waited for the show to begin, I took a good look around. I squinted at the seat next to me. It was as if something had been spilled on it, the velvet flattened and sticking together. Some of the golden tassels on the curtains were starting to fray, and the chandeliers looked like they needed a good clean. I felt a tickling on the top of my foot and looked down. There was a strand of red carpet that was fraying and

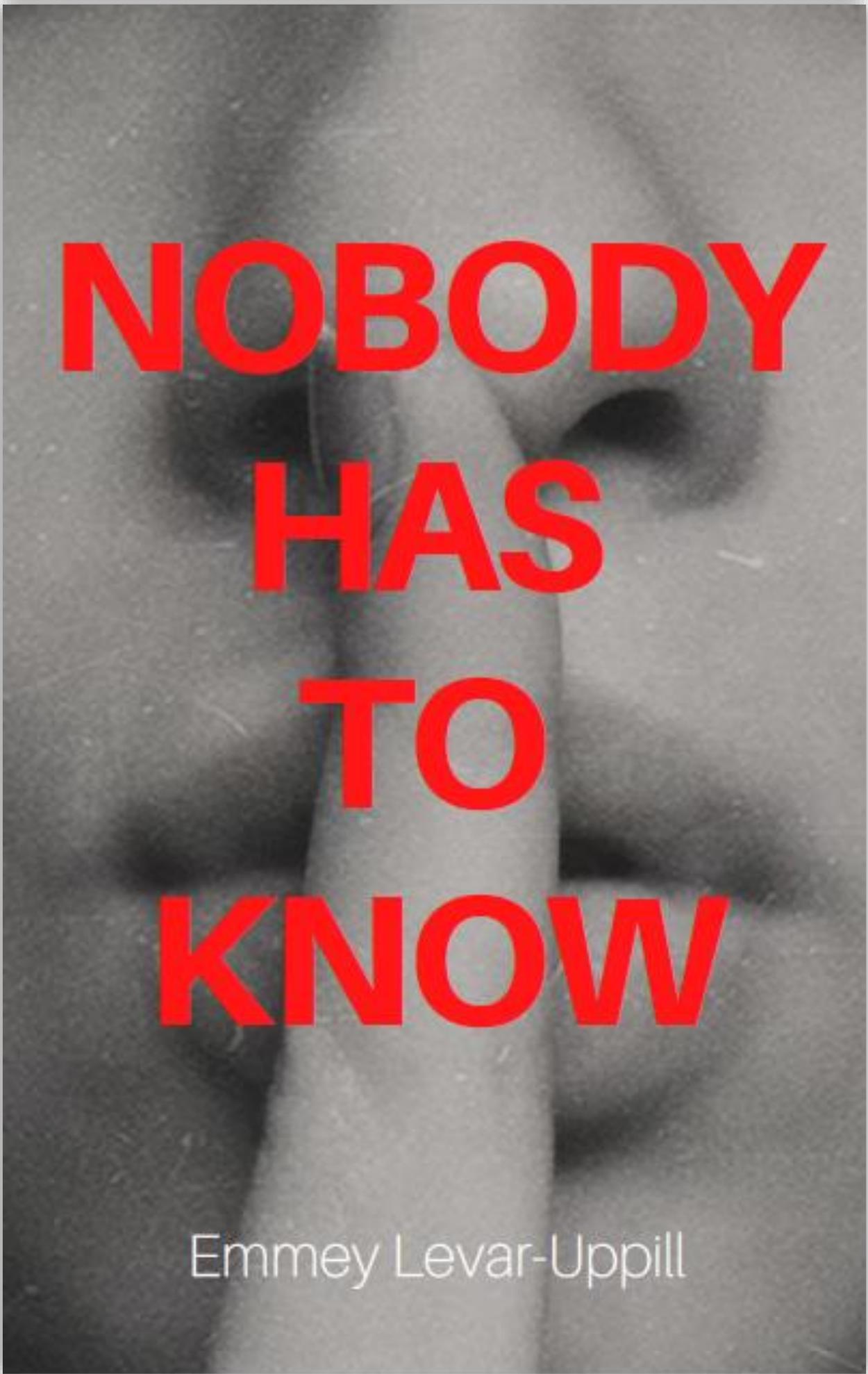
coming loose. Once the show started, the Ruby Theatre came to life. I forgot all about the damaged carpet and I was captivated by the performance.

The crowd laughed loudly and the comedian's sneakers squeaked as he walked the wooden stage. There was a big fluorescent sign behind him that said '2005 Comedy Festival', it lit up the stage with its bright yellow letters. It seemed to outshine everything else in the theatre and even made the light from the chandeliers look dim. The heavy curtains had been pulled to one side and I noticed that some of the silver metal hooks at the top were broken, making it look like the curtain was trying to escape and pull its way down from the ceiling and join the comedian on stage. I felt a spring from inside the seat poke my leg and wriggled a bit to get more comfortable. The red seats looked patchy now where the plush velvet had been worn down. I looked at the people in the crowd, casually dressed in jeans and sneakers. A world away from the elegance of the Opera crowd all those years before. Before I know it, I am chuckling and chortling along with the audience at the comedian's impression of his dog trying to avoid a bath.

I was sitting on my back veranda, having a steaming hot cup of tea and listening to the radio when I heard it on the news. The Ruby Theatre was going to be demolished to make way for new high rise apartments. The same kind of dull grey concrete block structures that had been popping up everywhere the past few years. I couldn't believe that something so grand and beautiful was going to be replaced by something so bland and ordinary. The newsreader explained that the theatre was too expensive to maintain and after the Covid pandemic, the number of people wanting to go to live shows was still very low. I decided then and there that I had to see it one more time. My grandson drove me and the kind young man guarding the entrance agreed to let me in, helping me squeeze through the cold metal fencing that surrounded the entrance. So I find myself standing here at the back of the Ruby Theatre one last time.

If these walls could talk, they could tell you about glamorous people watching the Opera, the ladies clapping politely with their gloved hands. The walls could tell you about the energetic singing and dancing of musical theatre shows, the harmony of the orchestra and the elegance of the ballet. The walls could tell you about laughter and maybe even tears of laughter from people watching comedy shows. Suddenly it occurs to me. It is not the plush red velvet chairs, matching red carpets or the dramatic red and gold curtains. It is not even the glowing chandeliers that are the magic of this place. It is my memories that hold the magic.

The end



**NOBODY
HAS
TO
KNOW**

Emmey Levar-Uppill

I was smart enough to wipe the blood off the kitchen knife before my parents returned home from work—

I shut R.J. Randall's debut and stood at the sound of footsteps echoing along the marble floor.

"Mrs. Clark, I'm so happy you could make it. Thank you once again for taking the job."

I smiled broadly at the short man before me, the spitting image of his father. "It's my pleasure, a dream of mine really; but please, call me Reah."

"Of course. Well, Reah, as you know, my father can't complete his work on his own. He said that he didn't want his career continued should he pass on, but he's paraplegic, not dead, and I'm sure he wouldn't want to disappoint his fans by leaving his series incomplete."

I couldn't help but glance across at the author now, distracted from his son's words by the rasping of the former's breaths, heavier and more pronounced in the silence than they had been just moments before.

I swallowed and turned back. I was nervous, I never thought I'd meet him after all. Acclaimed crime fiction writers like R.J. Randall weren't meant to waste time with nobody aspirers like me. And yet somehow, amongst thousands, my writing had been most similar to his, and so, here I was.

"I'll do my best."

His son and I exchanged goodbyes and I watched the man drive off.

By the time I returned to the hall I was alone, Mr. Randall's maid Margaret – who'd introduced herself to me at the door – nowhere in sight and Mr. Randall himself likely wheeled off elsewhere in what I could only describe as his mansion.

Robert Randall's study was magnificent. Two large arched doors opened to reveal a winding case full of books lining an entire wall, a massive fireplace on the other, two armchairs, a table, and in front of me, a desk.

The last was a mess. Papers were thrown out across it like scraps, books piled high atop the wood, anatomy posters and wrecked paperwork littering every surface.

The wood creaked beneath my feet as I walked across to it, fingers brushing worn paper as I began carefully moving things aside to clear a space for myself. I sat down in a great leather chair; the silence broken by a groan from the floorboards at my weight.

I pulled myself under the desk and flicked open the manuscript closest to me, skimming pages and accidentally knocking others over in the process. The front cover announced it one of six.

I shook my head and began looking for the others, pulling out a stack of notebooks in Randall's drawers to find something glittering beneath. I picked it up, it was a key to something. Eventually I found the 'something' in the form of a filing cabinet opposite his desk.

That must be where he's keeping the rest of his drafts, I figured.

I slipped the key in, listening to the metal grate the rusted insides and I twisted, praying it wouldn't break.

The key held. The lock clicked. The cabinet opened.

The first book inside was stained with something dark and brown. I slowly lifted it out, the book beneath even worse for wear. I couldn't bring myself to touch the second, but I opened the first – *Entry Group One* – about halfway through.

Subject #34's Withdrawal, read the first page.

I discovered test subject Sarah Leeman hunched over like a beggar on the park bench overlooking Henry's River on a rainy day. This was well into the tenth month of the year. I had approached her. When I had asked her why she was sobbing she had retaliated, before confessing to me: her boyfriend had just dumped her. Once her blubbing had ended, she seemed to recognise who I was, and she became more than willing to return home with me once I had offered her a warm beverage and insight into my next project. Margaret, my housemaid, was off sick that day. We were alone. However, Leeman seemed dissatisfied with the form of insight I had offered. Disappointing that she shows no interest in my field of speciality, but she will more than make up for it with the valuable information she will be contributing to my research.

The next section was entitled quite simply: *Case Study.*

Day Twelve: Test subject Sarah Leeman shows no signs of struggling any longer.

Day Fourteen: It's been six days since she last fought back, another three since she has attempted exercising her larynx. Yesterday, I reduced her rations again, increased her dose of alprazolam.

Day Twenty-Two: Leeman no longer flinches when a knife is drawn to her skin, nor when incisions are made. She shows remarkable tolerance, my subjects usually don't last this long.

Day Twenty-Eight: The subject was found dead.

The page was signed in the bottom right corner: *R.J. Randall.*

I slammed the book shut and tossed it away from myself, my heart thumping against the cage of my ribs. The covers of his books flashed in my mind, the reviews specifically: *'Terrifyingly realistic. Randall proves it: good research is everything.' 'A gateway into the mind of a killer.'* *'R.J. Randall's writing is like the real thing ... so morbid ... I cannot look away.'*

I closed my eyes, fighting off the wave of nausea rolling over me. The man who's work I'd idolised since I was a young girl, who'd written with such realism not because he was a good researcher, but because he knew everything from first-hand experience.

I remembered now with sudden clarity having seen the headline on the news: *a young woman has disappeared from a park by Henry's River, there are currently no leads, the woman's parents are distressed, begging for any information on their daughter.*

Now I had that information.

I have to tell someone. I have to do something. I have to go to the police.

Don't I?

I thought of my daughter, asleep in her hospital bed; of my husband and I, both struggling to scrounge together the money required to send her to America for treatment. This had been our miracle, our do-over, our blessing. I knew that this job would earn me money beyond anything else; I might not get another chance like this again, and even if I did, it could be too late for Jude. The thought of my daughter's life gone before mine was too much to bear. As a parent it was always expected that your children would be the ones to watch you pass; I wasn't prepared to see her go.

I couldn't give this job up.

Randall's son was wrong, I decided, recalling what he'd said. *Randall can't speak any more, he can't write, he can't move, he can't kill. He's as good as dead.*

Slowly, I picked the book back up.

Slowly, I placed it in the cabinet again.

Slowly, I locked the cabinet once more.

After all, nobody has to know.

The End

Marigold



LILA DE SENA

The flyscreen door creaks as I push it open and step out onto the back porch. She's sitting on one of the rickety garden chairs, undisturbed and peaceful. I walk over and drape a wool blanket over her legs.

"Morning, Mum," I say and pull up my own chair.

She nods and turns back to the meadow. Her grey-blond hair falls around her face as she stares intently at the bees dancing on the petals of a flower. The backyard meadow has always been a fixation for Mum. Ever since I was little this small patch of flowers and grass has been her pride and joy. I remember walking home from the bus stop to find her knee deep in soil and mulch. I remember hours spent out here playing my made-up games. Mum was fairy queen, and I was her loyal protector.

I look at her now. She doesn't burn as brightly as she used to, but I know she still loves this garden. The garden has seen better days; my dad isn't the kind of caretaker my mother was. Dead buds linger on their stems longer than they should and weeds are left to steal the water from the other plants. But Mum's touch remains in the way the lupine is as abundant as ever and how red clovers stand out amongst the other blooms.

"Hey Mum, why d'you love the garden so much?" I ask.

I've asked the question a million times.

Age 5

I burst through the front door after my first day of pre-primary. Mum's drinking a glass of lemonade and wiping the sweat off her brow. I run to her, and she wraps me in her arms.

"Hello love how was your first day of school?" she asks.

"Good, we read the Three Billy Goats Gruff and I made a sort-of friend," I ramble.

"Oh really? What's a sort-of friend?" Mum chuckles and squeezes me tighter.

"Well, her name's Tiana but because she's my sort-of friend I'm allowed to call her Tia," I smile thinking back to how we played in the sandpit that day.

"She sounds lovely. Now, my little Marigold, come and see what I've been doing in the garden."

Marigold was always her nickname for me. A play on words of my real name, Marion. She grew them in a small, secluded spot of the garden; she grew them just for me.

I accidentally slam the sliding door and wince; Mum turns around and gives me a knowing look. I squat in front of the patch of dark soil and wonder what will become of the little seedlings planted there.

“I’m trying my luck with strawberries, hopefully I’m planting them in the right season,” Mum says beside me, “They’ll be lovely with a scoop of ice-cream, what do you think?”

I smile thinking of strawberries and ice-cream on a hot summer’s day.

“Why do you add new plants all the time?” I ask randomly.

Mum considers my question, “It’s all part of tending to a garden. Sometimes plants die and new ones have to be added. Sometimes you plant new seeds just because...well, because you can.”

She has this wistful look on her face, and I can tell that in this moment that Mum is truly happy.

Age 15

School was rubbish. I jam my set of house keys in the lock and twist them forcefully. They don’t budge and I yank them out. I try again; still locked. I breathe in and out, like Dad says to do, and carefully slide the keys into the lock. The lock clicks and I open the door.

I stalk past the kitchen, not taking notice if Dad or Mum is there because right now, I couldn’t care less. I drop my bag on the floor and flop on my bed. I think back to the group of girls giggling behind me. *‘Marion’, Ugh ew. She’s got dirt under her nails. Oh my God, I bet she doesn’t even wash. Do you think she can hear us?*

My door opens slightly, and Mum pokes her head into the room. I turn to face her. She’s red-faced and smiley; the exact opposite of how I feel. She’s still wearing her gardening gloves and now the doorknob is covered in soil.

“Mum you’re still wearing your gloves,” I sigh.

She raises her eyebrows, “Oh, I didn’t even realise. Give me a minute.”

She puts away the gloves and then sits on the bed beside me.

“How was school?” she asks cheerfully.

“Fine.”

Her hand goes to stroke my head, but I duck. Her eyes are full of hurt as she pulls away. We sit in an awkward silence.

“How is Tiana?” Mum says, sounding strained.

“Fine,” I say with gritted teeth.

She isn’t having my attitude, “Marion, tell me what’s wrong.”

My anger bubbles to the surface; I’m livid. I keep my mouth closed in a tight line. I can’t unleash on Mum; it wouldn’t be fair. But she’s the reason I’m being made fun of. She’s the reason I have this

stupid name. I try to hold back but the lines between rationality have been blurred and I decide I don't care anymore.

"You can tell me anything, Marigold," Mum says. That's when I crack.

I turn to her and say with as much venom as I can, "Don't call me that."

My mistake is that I keep going.

"You want to know what's wrong? No one likes me! Tiana has all these new friends who are really cool, and they talk about movies I haven't seen and clothes I'll never buy. They don't talk to me because I'm just Tiana's weird clingy best friend in their eyes. I knew her before any of them! It's like she looks right through me. I'm not her best friend anymore. I'm a ghost to her."

I'm crying now and the words keep pouring out of me. I'm overflowing like a can of soft drink, and it feels good to get all this off my chest. Mum is silent apart from her hand on my knee.

"They make fun of me because of my name. It's not exactly a name from the 21st Century," She makes a face as if to say something but doesn't, "they say I'm dirty. Because of the soil under my nails and how I smell. I don't *get it*."

Mum pulls me into her arms, and I let her. I'm sniffing and the tears trailing down my cheeks are still hot. I let her shush me and wipe away my tears. We sit on my bed for what feels like ages. I'm slumped over her shoulder, and I feel light. Lighter than yesterday. Lighter than the first day of high school.

"Don't let other people decide who you are. That is up to you," she says, wisdom flowing from her mouth with ease.

"And if you really don't want me to call you Marigold then I won't," Mum whispers.

"Thanks," I say, and we don't speak on the subject anymore.

"Can you show me what you've been doing in the garden?"

Mum lights up and I slowly learn to accept that there will always be dirt under my nails.

Present, Age 40

Mum looks over at me. There is no recognition in her eyes. Everything has been going downhill ever since she was diagnosed with Alzheimer's. She wasn't the same as she was last year. She's not the same as she was yesterday. The disease just takes and takes until all that is left is the shell of a lost woman.

She nervously picks at the lint on her blanket and asks, "Who are you?"

I have lost track of how many times she has asked me that question.

I used to reply with detailed summaries of our adventures together. How we had played, laughed, and cried. All the moments that we spent smiling and getting grubby in the dirt. Now all that is left are the moments that will be lost. Lost in her mind.

“Marigold,” I reply, using my old nickname.

Her eyes soften and she smiles and nods.

I point to a honeyeater sticking its beak into one of the flowers, trying to reach the nectar. Mum laughs and the corners of her eyes crinkle, but it doesn't last. A dark cloud passes over her face, and she is no longer present.

“You always loved this garden,” I say pensively.

She stares out over what was once her kingdom, “Did I?”

I smile and put my arm around her, “Yeah. You did.”

The End



*Two
Seconds
of
Silence*

JOSEPH SCOTT

Dane's nervous. I can already tell. He's paler than a White Walker and looks like his lunch is going to make an appearance soon. His hands are shaking like leaves. As we run through our songs for the night, he looks worse by the minute. I shoot him a look, and he smiles weakly. He strides out of the prep room and looks at the audience from behind the prefab wall. He grins, and I see that annoying-but-love-it Dane Shoemaker smile. He gives me a thumbs up, adjusts his vintage Dropkick Murphy's tee, and it's time to play.

The sky is burning as the summer sun sets. Thousands of bodies sway in the floodlit expanse of Optus Stadium's forward fifty. The opening band holds the last shuddering chord...and the audience goes wild. You never get used to that feeling. The second (or two if you're lucky) that hovers on the edge of unreality, before the cheering and screaming of seventy thousand people thunders back into existence like an auditory hurricane. My guitar is light in my hands as I tune it for a final time, the green glow of the tuner's screen the only thing in the black of backstage. A hand I don't see claps me on the shoulder. "Hey, dreamer. You're on!" The audience grows restless as they wait for us. Lamar, our bassist, and drummer Chaz are already out on the stage, and the crowd wants more. I bump fists with Dane, and we get ready to make some noise. Strumming the opening chord to *Full Moon*, the title track for our new album, the crowd goes mental. I'm in all black tonight, shredded jeans, Docs, and a Killing Heidi t-shirt. No harm in doing a bit of unpaid advertisement, right? Chaz's drums kick in, and Lam's smoky undertone lifts everything up a notch. Striding confidently from the back of the stage, Dane and I sport matching couldn't-give-a-damn-if-we-tried grins. Then the crowd *really* kicks into high gear. They're screaming and howling and the fan club down the front are losing it. They're pressing up against the stage as I step up to the mic and sing.

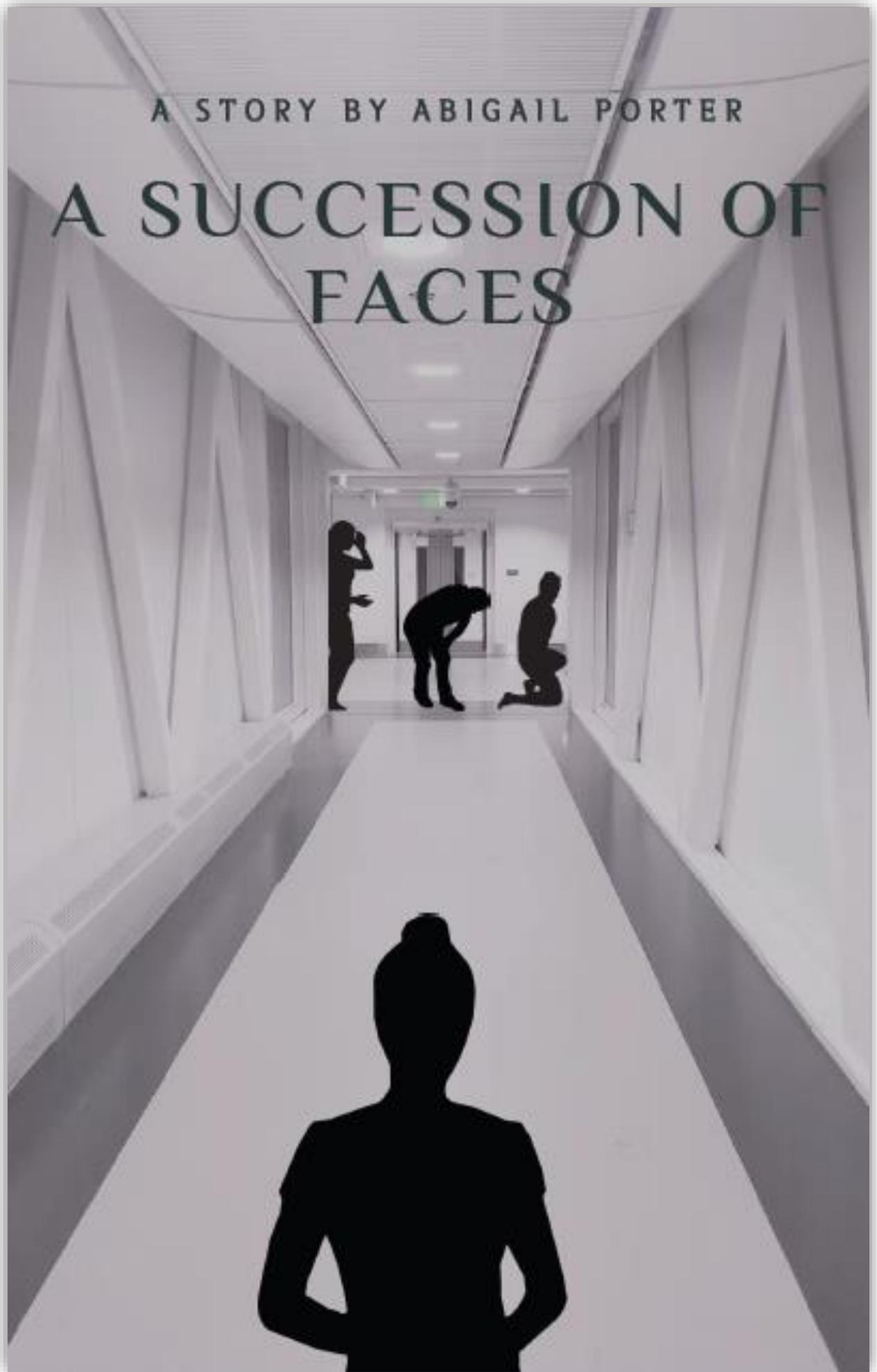
You know how people say everything fades away when they're singing, or painting or whatever? Same here—unless it's a concert. Then I'm right there with them. I see the "teenage girl section," where every punter is twelve-to-fifteen and wearing less clothes than the *David*. I see the girl balanced on her boyfriend's shoulders waving as the floodlights turn everything a clinical shade of white. I play, and I sing, and I watch the world come apart in front of me in a beautiful tableau. When the song ends, the universe hangs, just for a moment, in suspended silence. It's the greatest feeling on earth. People talk about rock stars chasing a high and getting into drugs and booze, but all I need is a riled-up crowd and a guitar. Chaz's drums speed up, faster and faster, and then peel off. I'm all on my own now, and it's time to make something beautiful. My solo cuts through the auditory fog of screaming teenagers, and I'm totally at peace. The crowds, the lights, the burning on the back of my neck from a spotlight, it all fades. I smile, and I play. My fingers move across the fretboard, sure of exactly where they'll be. When the solo finally ends, the perfect *ONE-Mississippi*, *TWO* of silence is all I need.

More songs pass and I'm just floating. High on the moment. Lam and Chaz get their heads down and provide a platform for Dane, the King of Show-offs himself, to showboat around and do a bunch of party tricks with his guitar. As our encore hits the first chorus, my eyes lock onto a face in the crowd. It's a girl, maybe a year either side of me. She's dressed in actual clothes, which was unexpected, a grey minidress that's downright dowdy when compared to the garish sunset palette that seems to be all the rage everywhere else in the stadium. She's not jumping or laughing or cheering or staggering around drunk. She's like a pillar in a storm. And she's staring at me...no. She's looking at my guitar. Watching every move of my fingers on the fretboard. *Is she trying to work out what chords I'm using?* I tear my eyes away from the girl and hammer out the outro to our final song for the night. This one gets the biggest applause yet. We make our bows and get the hell out of Dodge before the fan club, threatening to bust its banks since about the second song, can swarm the stage. As I'm packing up my guitar and leads after the concert, I can't get the girl in the grey dress out of my head. I resolve to try and find her. Then Chaz and Lamar and Dane come whooping in like a gang of rowdy apes. *Maybe after a little partying, though...*

The End

A STORY BY ABIGAIL PORTER

A SUCCESSION OF FACES



My name is Jane. That's what they call me when they don't know my number. Everyone else is Jane, too, but I never get confused. I remember faces, I remember all the faces.

Sometimes I forgot them when they're gone, but when they come back I always recognize them. Maybe they'd be disfigured, mutated, transposed into something ugly or alien, but I always knew which Jane came home that day.

I remember when they brought in the first Johns. They wanted to do a new kind of experiment, a particular test that they couldn't do on any old Jane.

The Johns walked down the hall, and they had their eyes up. They always did when they first arrived, before they were broken in, and no longer noticed any significance in whatever was around them.

I only half saw them, pressing down the hallway, from where I sat on my uniform bed, and I'm not certain how much of it I saw and how much of it was in my mind's eye. That's how life seemed to go by, in a dream-state, with no perception of time or sensation.

I knew it was night when they dimmed the lights, and I knew it was day when they rang a bell and walked down the hallway in a conglomerate of white coats, peering through the small square window to check on all the Janes and Johns.

They would bring us breakfast, but I didn't eat much. I was never hungry.

Then I would sit, and sort numbly through my mind's database of faces.

I was never lonely, because the faces would sit with me, sometimes in my mind, and sometimes in my room.

They would disappear whenever there was a knock at the door, and I would keep my eyes to the ground, disinterested as I was placed into a wheelchair and my ankles and wrists tied.

I didn't have an issue with being strapped down. I had a memory, or perhaps a dream, where I had once screamed and shouted and tried to kick out of that very same chair. But then I would think and realize that it would have to be a dream, because I didn't act that way.

I was good – they told me often enough. They told me every time they put me in the chair and strapped me down, and when they wheeled me along the hallway, and I ignored every scream and every new John or Jane who fought them. I knew to keep my head down, and I didn't want to take note anyway.

They called me a good girl when they lifted me out of the wheelchair and onto another bed, where they strapped down my ankles, wrists, and abdomen. When the doctor was going to be a little

minute, I was a good girl for waiting so patiently, and I was a good girl for staying still when he arrived.

“How are you feeling today, 3-1-1-5?” the doctor would ask, and put on latex gloves.

At first, I wouldn't respond, because I didn't like to talk, but I would eventually find my manners, and reply with;

“Well.”

“Good girl. We're doing the same thing as yesterday; do you remember what that was?”

I dully shook my head. What I remembered from yesterday could have been from years ago, but I didn't even know if I'd been alive for years. Everything faded into a stumbling monotonous void of repetition and disorientation, one day folding into the next and the last until nothing made sense in a timeline of thought.

“That's alright,” the doctor replied, jovially. “I just need you to relax. Remember, everything we do here is very important to the greater good. This is bigger than just you or me, and your home here, and we appreciate everything you've done for us.”

I thought I remembered him saying that before, but it could have just as easily have been someone else, or even a figment of my imagination. But whatever it meant, my sluggish brain could not comprehend his long and rambling spiel of gratitude, and so I just sat and stared at the ceiling.

“Right,” he began, and I heard the snap of latex as he pulled the gloves further up his wrists. “Let's see what's going on today.”

Then whatever my ankles were strapped to was pushed outwards in two different directions, and I willed myself to disappear into my mind as the doctor pulled himself closer and did whatever was so important for the greater good.

~

The afternoons were like the mornings. They would bring me a tray of food that I hardly touched, and then a whitecoat would come and remove it. A drip would be wheeled in, and a long needle stuck into my arm. I had scars in the same spot where they stuck me over and over again. I would be given a small paper cup, with four pills resting in the bottom.

“Can you do it yourself today?” someone would ask, and I would take a moment to process the request, before slowly shaking my head.

They opened my mouth and tipped my head back, taking the pills one by one and wiggling them to the back of my throat, and shoving them down. I gagged slightly but did not complain. I was still a good girl.

Then they let me be with my thoughts, and the faces that floated in and out of my head kept me company, although sometimes I wished they wouldn't. They always became more vibrant, more pronounced, more expressively poignant once they had dulled me. My body was a shell, a vessel for my mind of which I had no control, and to even blink required immense amounts of strength and focus.

Then at some point I would drift into a deep sleep. A deep sleep meant far from peaceful, as my mind wandered a void of voices and faces that I supposed I knew and I supposed I imagined, never escaping from the disassociated loop of time that kept me from understanding what was real and what was a dream. I was forever in a state of mental tempest, but out of my mind I was still a good girl.

I knew there was no point breaching my shell that was my body, as it would surely cause my vessel to sink. I'd seen the other Janes let their mind leach out of their skin, and their insanity caused them to disappear. I didn't want to disappear; I was a good girl.

I lived day after day with the same routine, the same faces floating through my mind, the same journey along the white hallway and the same examinations, day after day. It didn't change, the days and the silence only punctuated by the occasional screams of Janes and Johns as they arrived or expired.

It could have been weeks, months, years. I didn't really understand what the length of any one of those felt like, but I knew they must have passed by. Or perhaps they didn't.

But one day, my cyclical world changed.

There was more distress outside my room than usual. I didn't look up – I wasn't concerned with whatever disruption was happening in the hallway. I was always a good girl like that.

Even when my door was thrown open aggressively, in a manner that was unfamiliar to me, I did not look up.

"Hey, can you hear me, love?"

A voice broke through my consciousness, and a hand was placed under my chin. Compliance was something I was trained in, and so I tipped my head up.

In doing so I saw that the door of my room was left open, and lying, in a disarray of haphazardly thrown bodies, I could see the whitecoats, covered in red.

“Hey, sweetheart, I need you to talk to me.”

Again, the voice spoke to me, but I didn't know the names he was calling me. I wasn't anyone's *sweetheart*. I wasn't *loved*. I was Jane, I was a good girl. And this felt wrong.

“You're safe now, why don't you come with me?”

It wasn't a question, more so a demand, and my eyes met the strangers.

“*I am a good girl*,” I whispered, hardly perceptible in the raucous around us.

“What's that, sweetheart? Speak a little louder for me.”

“*I am a good girl*.”

“Yes, you are, sweetheart,” the stranger replied, but I didn't hear him. He didn't know.

I kept saying it, over and over again, growing in volume and indemnity. I didn't want to go anywhere, I belonged here. I was *good* here; I was helping people.

The stranger tried to reach out and touch me. I screamed and kicked him away.

“I am a good girl!” I yelled at him, and I realized for the first time that I couldn't see his face. He wasn't right, and he wasn't taking me.

“Sweetheart, calm down, I'm just here to help.”

I screamed. I'd lost my mind. Like all the other Janes and Johns before me, whatever had been inside me was externalized.

Another stranger in black came in. They were the wrong colour; they weren't supposed to be here. Then another came, and another.

They pinned my limbs down one by one, and still I was screaming. The faces I had kept in my mind were nowhere to be found, only the faceless figures spinning around me, willing me to believe they were here to help, but I knew they were liars.

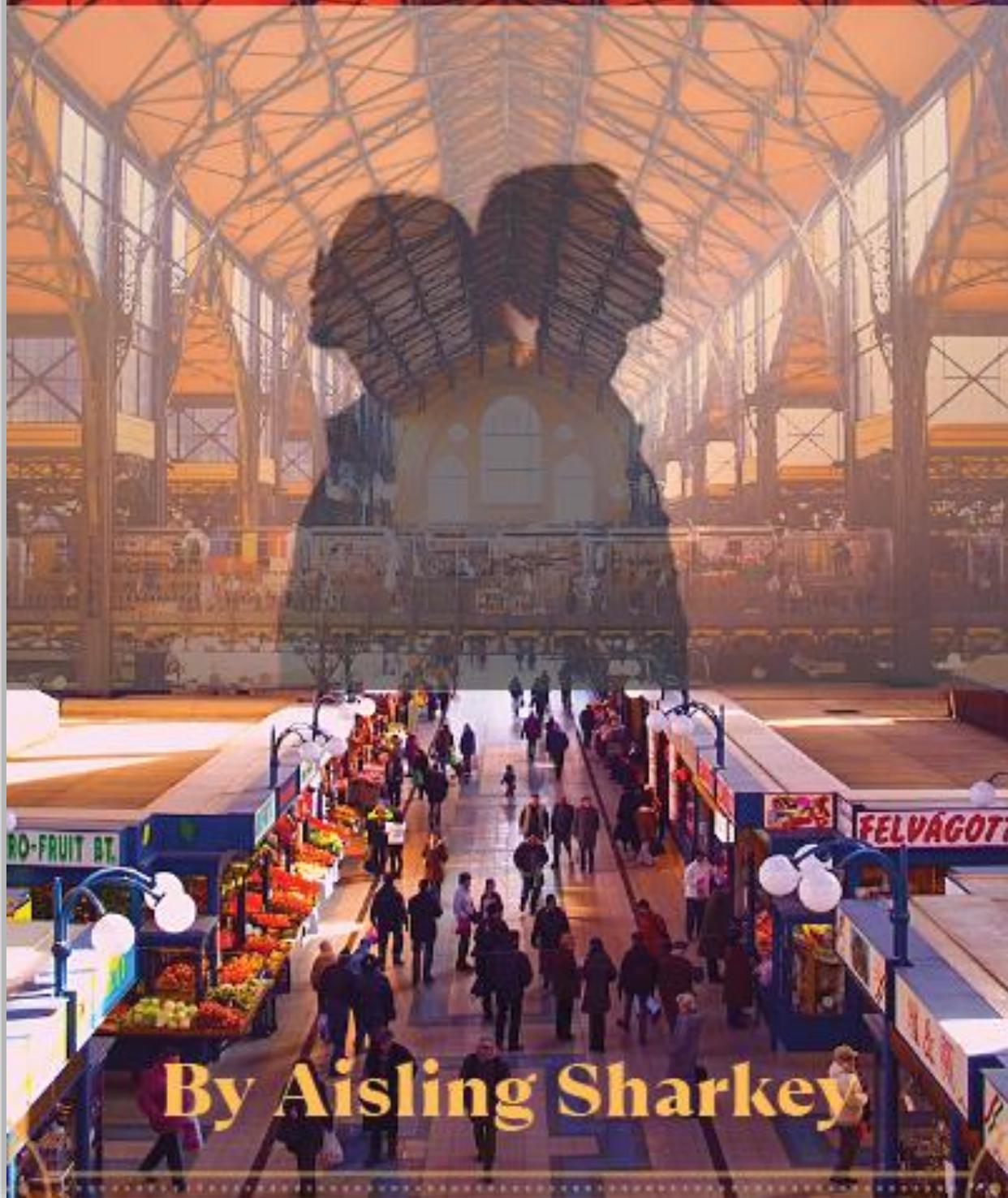
I was a good girl, and they were destroying my home.

I continued to thrash and kick and scream bloody murder, but they didn't care. They didn't let go, and they didn't calm me, and they didn't call me a good girl.

I knew I was good, and I knew they were bad, and I knew in a sense of clarity that I hadn't felt before. The clarity made me fight, and I could see other Janes and Johns, standing perniciously beside the strangers. They weren't good, I was the only one left.

Even as my vision began to dim and my fight became weaker, I knew who I was. I was Jane, and I was good.

The Market



By Aisling Sharkey

There are two people at the market. A woman, in her early forties, with bottle-blonde hair tucked back into a greying ponytail. She is pressed in clean lines of white and blue, with steely blue eyes and a furrowed brow. She smells of smoke and antiseptic.

There is a man, too. He is warm in all the ways the woman is not, with a musical tone and a naïve disposition. He is young and broad-shouldered, draped in red flannel and a stained apron. When he smiles, it is toothy and boyish, rivalled only by the thick wrinkles bordering his eyes. He smells of sandalwood and turpentine.

They are going inside now, and the woman is searching. She is always searching, in a sense. It is the way she was raised, and the way she will continue to survive. She walks curtly, with the gait of a soldier and the rhythmic taps of the indicator in a car. Her eyes shift, booth to booth, as she dismisses the calls of their keepers with a sturdy nod and the *click, click, clicking* of her heels against the garbled wood. She is searching.

There is the man with the warm features and toothy grins. His steps are light, choreographed capering following down the corridor. He takes in the booths, one at a time, with the gentle yet insistent observation he has learnt to perform. His hands, broad and flicked with strokes of paint, caress each novelty with the tenderness one would treat a newborn. He takes in the mechanical grain, the workmanship of each trinket. The shopkeepers smile, and he smiles back.

The woman has paused. Her searching has ceased, and her eyes are locked on the figure playing piano. She does not have time for this, and the *click, click, click* of a golden watch beckons her, but she remains observant. She is enraptured by the way the man's seemingly clumsy hands stretch masterfully across ivory keys, a rhythm so different from her own. Her heart beats a little quicker, unmeasured and disruptive. She shakes her head, digs in her pocket for change, and continues her search.

The man concludes his song with a flourish. He grins at the audience that has gathered around him, children and parents and workers, strangers who have coalesced for the sake of art and art alone. He catches the scent of antiseptic in the air, and his heart beats a little faster.

There is a woman, with gaunt, thinning features and greying hair pulled back into a ponytail. Her eyes are set and cloaked in wrinkles, and her steps are short and measured. She is searching, and she is tired.

There is a man, with thick brown curls and dark skin. His smile is boyish, and he walks like a dance. His heart beats a melody, exuberant and insistent. *Tap, tap, tap*. He feels restless.

The woman is slowing now. She checks her watch, and braces her mind for the clawing panic she has grown accustomed to, but the sound is dim; a cassette underwater. Her eyes catch on a bench- an old, wooden aperture unfit for her pristine, pressed suit. She runs painted fingernails over the armrests, tracing the dancing patterns of lines hidden in the grain. She is wasting time, but the clicking of the clock seems overzealous and unimportant. She leans her head against the oak and sighs.

The man is not laughing anymore. The piano beckons him, with its ivory tiles and worn leather chair, but his eyes dart around panickedly. The novelties, once cradled with such attention, seem gaudy and overcrowded. *Tap, tap, tap*, the people walk, their shoes a cacophony against the mahogany floorboards. *Tap, tap, tap*, their heels go. *Tap, tap, tap*, the clock ticks. *Tap, tap, tap*. He is searching.

She is smiling. It is a soft and gentle thing, like the coaxing of blossoms from the barren winter ground. She listens, and for the first time in a while, hears the sounds of people passing. The laughter of women on a mid-morning escapade. The chatter of children, tugging on their parents' hands who follow along with quiet chastisement. The *tap, tap, tap* of a man who is lost, with artist hands and a stained red flannel tucked around his shoulders. A man with a young smile and thick, curly hair. With a walk like a dance and music running through his veins. She is waiting.

There is a man, who spends his days in love with the world around him. He smells of sandalwood and turpentine, and he is so very restless.

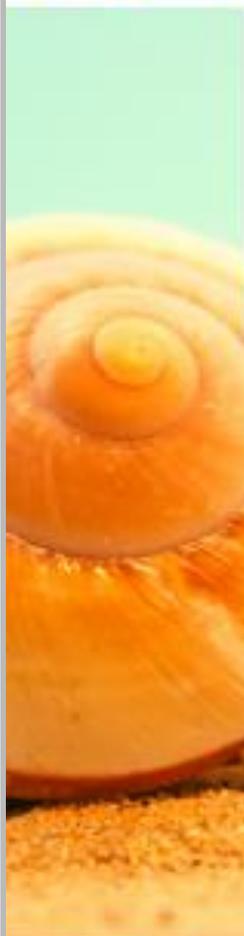
There is a woman, who is cloaked in confidence. Her speech is meticulous, and she does not waste her words. When she writes, it is practised, and when she acts, it is with the confidence of someone with every faith in herself. She is ambitious, and she is searching.

There are two people at the market. They do not know each other, and they likely never will. When they walk, it is a rhythm, and when they speak, it is a song. The bell chimes, and the day continues.

They walk a little faster.



CHASING SUMMER



CHANTEL LAI

Road trip, road train, road stop. A line of cars made their way down the southern nape of the coast to greet the summer.

A child wound down the window, letting the hot stuffiness of the car waft out into the still-cool morning air. The dog moved excitedly towards the opening, creating chaos in its wake. It stepped haphazardly on the child's lap, eliciting a squeal, and knocked down a cooking pot with its wagging tail, disrupting the carefully shoved arrangement of camping gear.

It will be hot soon – the type where you become so drowsy and car sick that all you can do is close your eyes and pray for sleep. But it will be a small cost for the exhilaration of summer.

As they leave Perth, she watches the large cat run alongside the car, racing along fence posts to the blurring bush. It follows her relentlessly, as quick as imagination, until the road signs give way to the country and it slows to a frustrated stop. It is an urban tiger – it cannot protect her in the untamed wilderness.

She woke up in a cold sweat with the terrible knowledge that something important had been lost. It was the absence of a dizzying warmth filled to the brim with laughter and sand - sand in your pockets, sand in your swimsuit, sand in your hair. Ignorance is bliss, and knowing sends her mad.

She follows the sun from dawn to dusk, across the hemispheres of the earth and beyond.

She is a detective, standing amongst a pile of strewn photos and other memorabilia. Summer is missing, perhaps stolen, but she is determined to get it back.

She begins with the most recent trip, and picks up a seashell.

They clambered out of the car and sank their toes into the sand, abandoning their thongs. The children skipped shells across the tiny lapping waves. A fish leapt out of the water in a rainbow arc, disrupting the flatness of the sea.

Someone was fishing off the jetty, intriguing her father. What caught her attention, however, were the seashells littering the shore, deposited at the furthest reaches of the ocean, like offerings from the sea. She wandered from the jetty, following the trail.

She picked up a shell and examined it.

The shell is not perfect. She runs her thumb along the gaping hole in its spiral, but she can hear the sound it carries. She hears: tanned, naked limbs flashing under the sun; the saltiness of the ocean floating on the breeze; the shadows of giant termite mounds looming on either side of the road. She remembers the adrenaline of the surf, the power of the waves carrying her to shore.

And in the still of it, clinging to her surfboard, a weathered turtle made an unexpected entrance, its head slipping out of the waves next to her to say hi.

Exmouth is filled with wonder (other than the mosquitoes which eat you alive). It could not have happened there.

She sorts through the paraphernalia. It's mostly old pieces of scrap paper, crackled leaves, and bingo counters. There is a child's drawing of a dolphin next to a... coconut? Hard to say.

A feather tickles her interest. It gleams in the half light, and shimmers different colours depending on how you look at it.

In some absurdly early part of the morning, light was already filling up the tent. Birds screeched and bickered with each other in the trees, some playing a game of call and response across the tent city, some gnawing on branches to release bombs of gum nuts onto a patio. The nuts made a thunderous sound on the metal as they fell, like balloons exploding.

A parent got up, a pang of concern. There was a small dent on the hood of the car. He sighed.

The birds are true trouble-makers, always determined to wake you up at the crack of dawn. But it wasn't them who took away the magic.

She sighs too. It wasn't in the Stirling Ranges either.

She tries the photos, and while there is no luck, she receives an unexpected smile.

She used to hate it when her mum whipped out her selfie stick and insisted on taking a million photos. You could see it in the photos: her past-self frowning crossly in half of them, the other half a gritted teeth smile. Her parents called it 'hei lian' – black face, an inexplicable, insurmountable feeling of doom and gloom she couldn't hide. A sometimes furious, sometimes equally resentful anger at the state of the world she lived in.

It was her way of punishing her parents for bringing her into the universe.

Her mother's insisted frustrated her, because she had always thought it was all about 'living in the moment'. In the end, it turned out she just had a better memory than most., no one else could remember their time together but her, like she was a rock stuck in the shifting sands of an hourglass long after everyone else had slipped passed. But even then, memories are outgrown, just like hei lian.

She woke up in a pool of blood.

It's hers.

Sometime after the first-time panic subsided, she sat on the hot sand, a black storm cloud brewing as she watched the boys splash in the ocean. It was unfair. It hurt. She hit the ground for emphasis.

She got up suddenly and began vigorously scooping sand, with the intention of digging a hole to China.

Why China? She didn't know. It was just something they said in the playgrounds in primary school.

Soon enough, the others took notice and joined her.

They dug a massive hollow into the ground, big enough for all of them to cram in. Then they made little castles and dug small tunnels through by joining their hands together under the sand. By the end of it, they had a substantially large sand fortress, and she was queen. Her storm cloud lifted away in the sea breeze along with her heart.

Family friends are strange – you see them maybe only once a year but every time you do it's like the distance between you is nothing and you never left at all.

She picks up a very, very battered Uno card. It reads +4. It has been used and abused, dropped in puddles, slapped by screaming children and squashed under a car tyre. The corner of the card is stained with grease. Her mouth quirks up into a smile. It's from afternoon, nightly rounds of card games galore until you get so bored that every little thing becomes incredibly funny and you laugh so hard until your stomach hurts. And interspersed between the cards is camp food – tuna spaghetti, BBQ with rice, burgers. No matter what it is, it is always inhaled with an intense passion. There is no care over diets – you'll burn it off at the beach or on a hike.

No, it could not have happened in Albany either. But a hike?

She drifts back further, to maybe around Year 6. A hike, on a circular track, parents far behind and tiger far out of reach.

A man and his wife going the other way came by and smiled at the kids. They almost passed without incident until the man turned, propping his foot up on a rock.

He squinted at her and scratched at his chin, scrutinising her face. "You know, the true Aussie way would be to ditch the fly net. It's all about flies hanging round your face and swatting them and swallowing one or two...that's what Aussies do." A bubble of protest rose up in her throat, a whingy my-mum-made-me-wear-it kind.

He tugged on the net around her head. "None of this cheating, you know?" He smiled genially, then headed back down the path, the shape of a sweaty back and the redness of his neck growing smaller in the distance. The bubble floated away, carried up by the wind before it could pop.

She tore off the net and stuffed into her backpack, grumbling to other kids about how it was her parent's fault.

At the end of the trail, they waited for their parents in the beating sun. Being little menaces, they slapped at zooming flies and poked twigs into ant nests. They watched as the ants spun themselves into a frenzy, running away with tiny grains of white rice.

They stopped at a petrol station to fill up along the way, and were greeted with a muttered "Why are there so many Asians here?"

Then they went back to where they came from, though it's hard to say where that was when it was right here.

The summer magic dissipated into the heat, along with much more.

Summer ended as quickly as it began. She knew now that it would not come back to her any more than a man could grow backwards, than a fish could forget how to swim, than the freest most unadulterated imagination could return her a tiger.

But still, she hoped.