

DOWN THE MANHOLE: AN APPLICATION OF
DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY FOR ALL

by

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A THESIS

Presented to the Department of Psychology
and the Robert D. Clark Honors College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Arts

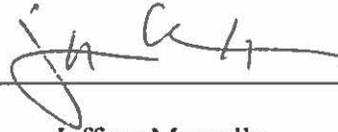
June, 2016

An Abstract of the Thesis of

Cesare Bisbocci for the degree of Bachelor of Arts
in the Department of Psychology to be taken June, 2016

Title: *Down The Manhole: An Application of Developmental Psychology for All*

Approved: _____



Jeffrey Measelle

At its essence *Down The Manhole* is the story about a mother, Beatrix, and her son Enzo as they find their way in the world together. Given their dysfunctional beginnings this story is not uncommon, but what is remarkable is its ability to break barriers. As it currently stands the majority of academic knowledge is allocated to a state of privileged seclusion, and the findings that come out of research in the field of child psychology are no exception. *Down The Manhole* is a manifesto which declares accessibility of knowledge to be a basic human right. It accomplishes this goal by making research and theories about child development accessible, and comprehensible to the layperson. The novel is informed by a combination of symbols of mindfulness, and motifs of developmental theory in order to weave engaging characters, and a compelling plot, that serves to educate the reader about developmental theory. Throughout the narrative a large emphasis is placed on the restorative properties of mindfulness as a path to greater health and well-being.

Acknowledgements

I am immensely grateful to Professor Jeff Measelle for guiding me as I explored developmental theories, as well as for assisting in the creative process for *Down The Manhole*. To Jenn Grunigen for the numerous writing tools which she has given me, as well as for all of our roliga Swedish conversations. Thanks go out to Professor Helen Southworth for her unwavering faith in the project, and guidance. A heartfelt thank you goes out to Mina for inspiring daily. Dear reader, as you read this acknowledgements page, you can be assured that Mina is most likely inspiring others at this very moment. Finally I give my immeasurably gratitude to Louis Cicalese for sharing the burden of this project, and for taking me on as a friend.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Procedure	2
Inspiration	2
Reading Level	3
Illustration Process	4
Key Concepts	5
Mindfulness	5
Taoism	5
Buddhism	6
Mindfulness and Well-Being	7
Biological Sensitivity to Context	8
Gene-Environment Correlations	10
Passive gene-environment correlations	10
Evocative gene-environment correlations	10
Active gene-environment correlations	11
Mindsets	13
Imposter syndrome	15
Attachment	15
The Strange Situation	16
The Adult Attachment Interview	20
Parenting Typology	22
DOWN THE MANHOLE	30

List of Figures

Figure 1: The two models of gene-environment reactions.	9
Figure 2: The prevalence of gene-environment interactions across stages of growth and development. (Deater-Deckard, & Mayr, 2005)	11
Figure 3: Parenting typologies as developed by Baumrind (Charles Stangor Source, 2012)	24
Figure 4: The table from Enzo's dream, where the representatives of authoritarian, authoritative, permissive, and neglecting parenting styles sit.	25

Introduction

The goal of this project is to inform the individual on principles concerning developmental psychology. The majority of developmental research is inaccessible to the majority of the population. The ideas contained within a vast and intimidating body of literature often require specialized training in order to find and comprehend the material. Entire institutions are built around the process of creating, editing, and disseminating research. However, unless one has a college education and a good librarian, the benefits of research will elude the common audience. What is more, accessibility to these resources is an additional barrier. Oftentimes one must first subscribe to a scholarly journal or be part of a research or educational institution in order to access the boons of academia. Sadly the majority of the population does not possess this capacity for access. My goal is to create an easily accessible book that can inform the common, and curious reader about fundamental topics of developmental psychology that they would not have access to otherwise.

Procedure

In order to create an informative narrative I weave developmental psychology themes into my characters and plotline. By doing so I raise thematic questions in the minds of the audience such as the roles that mindfulness, and secure-attachment can play in improving our general well-being. By incorporating developmental principles with high generalizing validity, I create a story that is comprehensive and far-reaching.

Inspiration

I was inspired to write *Down The Manhole* after I heard about the death of Dr. Oliver Sacks over the summer. His passing alerted me to how influential he was as a scientist and an author. I set off to create a fictional case study model in the spirit of the late Oliver Sacks. Sacks was the master of the scientific novel as well as one of the largest proponents of the case study. Michael Nyman emphasizes the importance of his qualitative research saying that, “It is important to study the case. Without ‘the who’ ‘the what’ is just a disease and can be reduced to a clinical definition. A lack of ability without a human face” (Nyman, 1968). Because of their ease of accessibility, Sacks' publications were far-reaching in their scope. *The Man Who Mistook His Wife For a Hat* quickly captured the attention and hearts of many. The legacy of Oliver Sacks aligns closely with what I hope to achieve in *Down The Manhole*. I endeavor to create the face that will make the findings in developmental psychology more relatable to the casual reader. I also draw a significant amount of inspiration from *Le Petit Prince*, *The Phantom Tollbooth*, *The Divine Comedy*.in addition to my own life experiences.

Reading Level

Down The Manhole was written with the intention of being an easily understood story, with appeal to both children and adults. This duality of attractiveness is achieved through engaging characters, and a compelling plot. However the complexity of the ideas which underlie the surface appearances of the novel, are what make the story interesting to the discerning reader. Those who seek to understand the theory that drives the fiction will find this thesis an immense help.

I recommend *Down The Manhole* to readers as young as late primary school-to-early middle school and onward. I base this recommendation off of Jeanne Chall's research on reading development. Chall describes 5 disparate stages of reading development, which include:

Stage 0 (Birth to 6 years)-- during this period, also known as 'prereading', children are learning to acquire phonemic awareness, that is, knowledge of the individual sounds that constitute words, and are becoming familiar with their alphabet. Both of which are prerequisites for learning to read.

Stage 1 (6-7 years)-- Children begin to develop their phonological recoding skills, or the ability to start sounding out words, by translating letters into there established sounds.

Stage 2 (7-8 years) Children begin to master reading simple texts.

Stage 3-- (9-14 years) At this stage children begin to make the transition from learning to read, to reading in order to learn. This is because it is during this period that children begin to learn new information from written language.

Stage 4 (14-18)-- Individuals gain the ability to begin to understand multiple perspectives within a text. This also marks the point in an individual's reading development when they begin to understand material that may contain more complex viewpoints, or subtle themes that they would not have recognized earlier in their development.

Chall's model as applied to *Down The Manhole* implicates that audiences of different ages will take different messages away from the text. One could read this text as early as stage 3 in order to gain a basic understanding of overarching surface ideas. Though a high school student (and onward) would be able to pick up the more subtle motifs of mindfulness, and developmental theory which percolates throughout the text.

Illustration Process

Illustrations for *Down The Manhole* were created through a concerted joint-effort. As I wrote the story, I sketched what I imagined the characters, and their environments would look like. I would then give these rough sketches to Louis Cicalese. From my drafts Cicalese would draw his own sketches, and then final drafts.

Key Concepts

Mindfulness

Down The Manhole focuses largely on the benefits of mindfulness in the child-caregiver dyad. It does so by discussing different theories of child development. By creating a novel that incorporates themes of development, I create a space for a dialogue to open up about these ideas, and provoke the reader to think about how these theories apply to their own relationships. The way in which these theories affect Enzo and Beatrix, the main child-caregiver dyad in the novel, provides a provocative example of the ways in which these theories may play out.

In order to heighten the sense of mindfulness in the narrative, I chose symbols and incorporate imagery that is integral to traditional lineages of mindfulness. To this end I borrow quite a bit of symbolism from Taoism, and Buddhism, two world religions that emphasize the benefits of being mindful.

Taoism

Tao in Chinese is a word which translates to "way." It is for this reason that Taoism as a philosophy endeavors to teach 'the way'. Given that this is a hard concept to reify, the river is often used as a metaphor to understand the way. The nature of the river is celebrated for its ability to flow over any of life's difficulties. The river flows wherever it is directed and without objection. It is in this calm acceptance for the journey that the river finds peace. By parallel Taoism also finds peace in the acceptance of life's journey (Hoff & Shepard, 2003).

I have intentionally inserted Taoist imagery and rhetoric throughout *Down The Manhole*. Of these the Wayward River is an image directly derived from traditional Taoist teaching. Enzo and Beatrix attempt to follow the river in order to find the way back home, because the way has already been lost to them. Once placed in an entirely alien context the necessity of finding their way becomes clear in a way that was not apparent when they lived above the manhole. After falling down the manhole, Enzo, and Beatrix realize that they do not know *the way*, and symbolically do not know inner-peace. This is supported by Enzo's feelings of inner-turmoil, as well as Beatrix's permissive parenting, and general dissatisfaction at the start of book.

Buddhism

The tradition of mindfulness is celebrated in Buddhism. One of the major tenants of Buddhism is remaining grounded in the present (Sarbacker, 2012). I explore the idea of remaining in the present in the chapter "Lost in the Currant." The currant fields are an allegory for the current moment. Once inside, Enzo finds himself bewildered at the beauty and the peace he finds in the present moment. This scene is contrasted by the following chapter "The Fields of Forthcoming." One of the classic temporal foils to living in the present, is living in the future. When Enzo arrives in the Fields Of Forthcoming he finds himself lost in a desolate land, shrouded in fog, where the fields lie fallow, and relics of yesterday litter ground. There is a certain anxiety that is inherent to the Fields of Forthcoming that sets Enzo to uneasiness. Over the course of this chapter it becomes clear to the reader that living in the present moment is preferable to trying to live in the future.

Mindfulness and Well-Being

In addition to empowering readers by introducing developmental theory by the aqueduct of mindfulness, mindfulness itself is a means to its own end. In the *Mindful Brain* (2007) Dan Siegel writes about the numerous benefits of practicing mindfulness in our daily lives citing that it improves physiological processes, as well as cognitive, and emotional functioning. It is important to note that when Siegel speaks about mindfulness he is speaking about a type of intentional awareness that is characterized by Curiosity, Openness, Acceptance, and Love (COAL). Much of Siegel's research focuses on the intersection of the benefits of COAL and interpersonal relationships.

The Mindful Brain emphasizes the benefits of being in sync with social others, which is known as "attunement." (Siegal, 2007). While attunement is vital for creating and maintaining healthy interpersonal relationships, Siegel stresses that in order to achieve attunement it is essential to first become attuned with oneself. This process is accomplished through the act of becoming mindfully aware of one's thoughts, feelings, physiological processes, and the interactions between these factors in order to improve well-being. In order to communicate how effective this model of well-being is he compares the benefits of COAL to the benefits which parents can extend to their children through secure attachment. All of these examples serve as reasons, which reinforce the relevance that mindfulness can play in the well-being of our relationships with others, as well as ourselves.

I incorporate Siegel's model of mindfulness in relation to well-being in *Down The Manhole* as a empirically-supported method to guide Enzo and Beatrix's journey to well-being. During their journeys under the manhole, Enzo and Beatrix adopt an

attitude towards life which embraces the themes of curiosity, openness, acceptance, and love. The adoption of which creates a greater sense of health in each of their subjective well-beings, and extends outwardly into their child-caregiver relationship, as well as their other interpersonal relationships.

Biological Sensitivity to Context

Reactivity is the extent to which the behavior of an individual is dictated by a multitude of factors. Reactivity is a complex process made up of many related but disparate interactions. Biological factors integrate with developmental experiences in order to culminate into an aggregate reactivity level that influences the behavior of an individual. Two factors that are of particular interest are the developmental experiences specific to individuals and polygenic variations that differ across the individuals of a population. Certain polygenic variations are more vulnerable than others and lend themselves to shaping an individual who reacts poorly when exposed to negative developmental experiences. Children with these alleles who experience maltreatment, malnourishment, or neglect are more vulnerable to experiencing stunted development than those with the more standard alleles. Traditionally these gene variations were only viewed as a liability, however this paradigm fails to explain how these seemingly maladaptive polygenic variations have yet to be bred out of the human gene pool over the span of human evolution. To this end a new theory has emerged to address the evolutionary relevance of these supposedly disadvantageous alleles. There is now evidence that the same polygenic variations that lead to negative outcomes for children that are raised in under-stimulating or abusive environments, also have the potential to

lead to tremendously positive individual outcomes when they are raised in stimulation and nourishing environments (Boyce et al., 2005).

Conversely the theory also states that these risk-augmenting alleles have been found to be reward-augmenting depending on the quality of the context in which the individual is raised. This theory is commonly referred to as the Dandelion-Orchid Hypothesis, and it explains why these genes have been preserved over the course of human evolution. The Dandelion-Orchid hypothesis is an allegory used to describe two types of genotypes found within individuals: those with the high risk/high reward alleles, orchids, and those who have a more alleles which produce a more centred individual known as dandelions (See Figure 1). We now realize that these polygenic variations are not maladaptive, in fact they are an adaptive evolutionary gamble to create progeny with great positive outcomes.

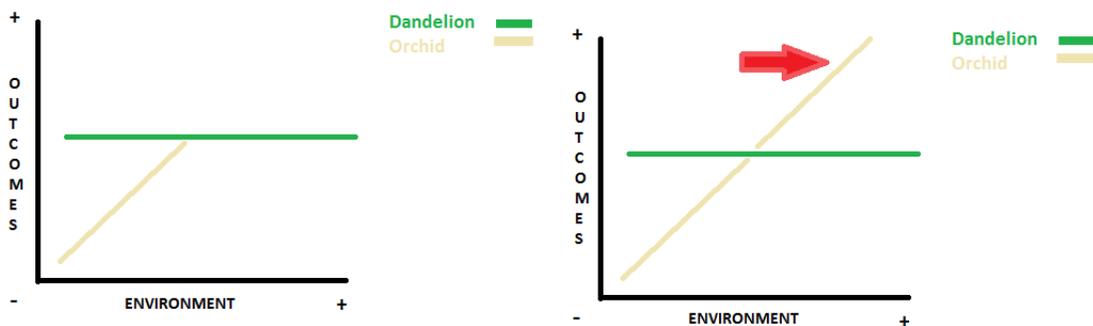


Figure 1: The two models of gene-environment reactions.

On the left is the traditional model of viewing individuals with polygenic variations, whereas the right graph demonstrates the true potential of individuals who possess these traits.

Gene-Environment Correlations

There are three main correlational interactions that are used to characterize the relationships between the genotype of the individual and their corresponding environment. These are known as Passive, Evocative and Active correlational interactions. These effects are often bidirectional in nature and as a consequence causality is often unclear (Dilia et al., 1990).

Passive gene-environment correlations

Passive gene-environment correlations are associations that pertain to how the inherited genotypes of an individual are affected by the environment in which the individual is placed into by their primary caregivers. Most instances of this occur in the early stages of life (figure 2). It is well known that children raised by parents who are prone to anti-social behavior are at a greater risk of experiencing abuse over the course of their development, as opposed to those with caregivers who do not have histories of anti-social behavior. Additionally it has been well documented that anti-social behavior is a moderately heritable trait. However, a child's conduct issues cannot be ascribed to the effects that the environment has on genes, rather it is more accurate to conclude that maltreatment is more likely an early marker that the offspring may have been the recipient of genotypic risks from the parent (Jaffe and Price, 2008).

Evocative gene-environment correlations

These are associations between an individual's behavior and the reactions that their behavior evokes in social others. Again the link between genes and behavior is ambiguous and inextricable. For example those who often argue with a life mate may

feel depressed afterwards. However those who are depressed are more likely to quarrel with their life mate in the first place (Jaffe and Price, 2008).

Active gene-environment correlations

This association refers to the way in which an individual will insert themselves into an environmental niche given their biological propensities. One example of this is evidenced in the fact that "individuals who are characteristically extroverted may seek out very different social environments than those who are shy and withdrawn" (Jaffe and Price, 2008).

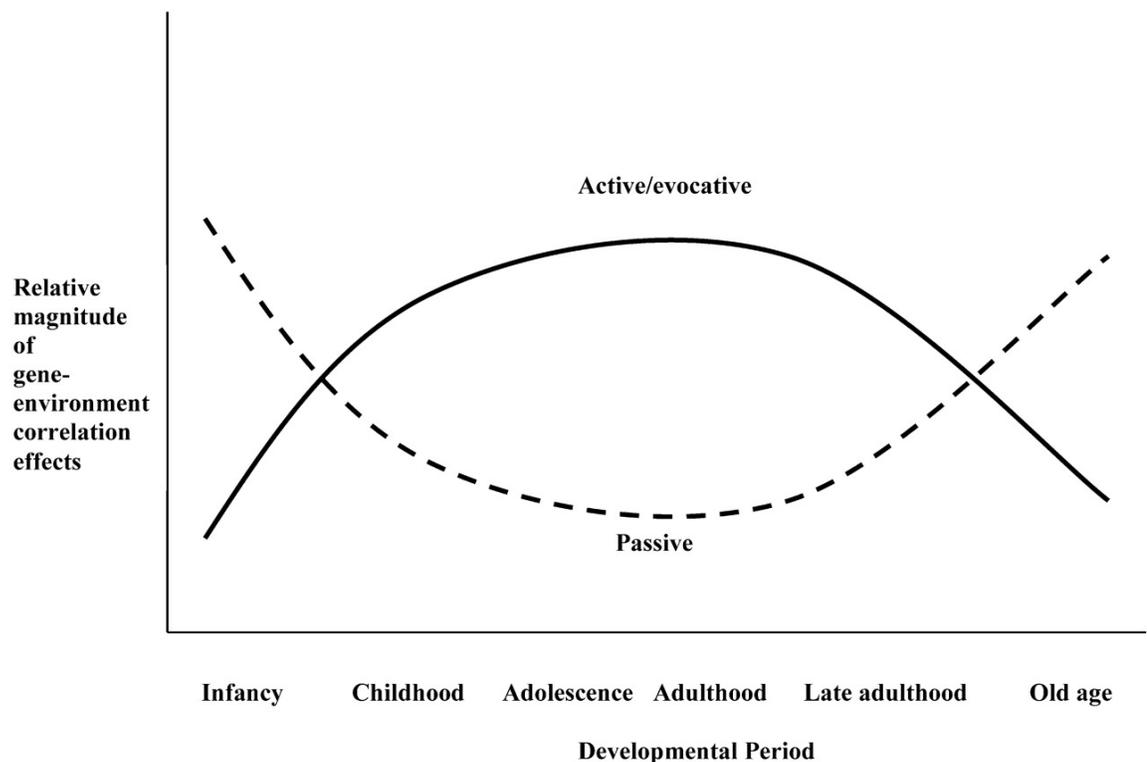


Figure 2: The prevalence of gene-environment interactions across stages of growth and development. (Deater-Deckard, & Mayr, 2005)

All of these relations comprise a complex web of interactions and correlations where heritability and behavior affect one another. I use this model to inform the way I wrote interactions between characters by considering the reciprocal relations between environmental exposures and the behavior of individuals. This model of understanding interaction informs the way in which Enzo realizes his desire to become a masseuse. Since Enzo is a child the majority of his gene-environments interactions over the course of the narrative fall into the passive category. These passive interactions occur throughout the novel. One of the most notable instances of this when Enzo's new friend, Makura Mirror, recruits Enzo to help him reclaim his lost homeland (*On a Glade Dimly Lit*, 36). Additionally the money lender offers the Enzo a job as his secretary immediately after he meets him. Since Enzo does not have any other direction in the new environment of the city he passively accepts the money lender's proposition (*The Busway*, 65). However we see a shift in this trend in the chapter "The Fields of Forthcoming." Enzo attempts to escape the Fields of Forthcoming with his new friend Haus, however in order to do so he must first realize his own ambitions. This is difficult for him to initially do so because he is so used to passively interacting with others, but he eventually is able to realize the decisions, which he wants to make.

Enzo reached deep inside of himself, and pulled out some not yet realized dreams.

"I want to be the world's best massager! I want eat bananas all day long with no one to tell me to stop!"

"That's it! You're getting with it!" The mouse's voice was fading fast overhead.

"I don't know you, but I want to--"

Enzo's sentence was punctuated by another howl, but this time from the sky. Was the mouse alright?

"I want to be your friend!"

And with that Enzo become unhinged from the ground, and slowly followed after his floating friend. Together they escaped from the shallow fields of fallow, a hunt of howls hot on their trail. (The Fields of Forthcoming, 60)

In order to escape imminent danger Enzo must take an active stance on his position relative to his environment. In order to transcend the reality that he has been placed into in the fields he must make active decisions. The only way for him to do so is to realize the activities which he would like to do. Though their relationship is a odd one, Enzo and Haus Mouse's friendship the first one in the story that Enzo seeks out.

Mindsets

Different mindsets can lead to different states of well-being, and attitudes regarding our sense of self. Carol Dweck has conducted over a decade of research in order to ascertain the properties inherent to such mindsets (Dweck, 2006) In her book *Mindset* Dweck describes the difference between an incremental mindset, and a fixed mindset. Fixed mindsets are characterized by a mental attitude where the wearer of the attitude feels as if intelligence is a fixed stat. They wish to participate in the culture of genius that they observe others partake in and do not understand that talent is a virtue that is incrementally increased. Understanding this principle is characteristic of those with a more incremental mindset. These individuals learn that with practice and perseverance they can accomplish their goals. The individual with an incremental mindset is resilient, and unafraid to fail the first time, whereas the individual with the fixed mindset fears failure.

Dweck has found that one of the primary reasons for this distinction of mindsets is the culture that one is brought up in, and the expectations placed on the individual

therein. She says that one way in which children grow to acquire a fixed mindset is when they are given compliments concerning their identity (Dweck, 2006). Individuals internalize these labels about themselves, and feel distressed when they cannot fulfill the labels that they have been given. One such example is when a caregiver is impressed by their child's actions, and commends them by telling them that they are smart. However when the child cannot perform their role as being a smart child, they feel distressed. If the child experiences such distress often enough, on a long-term basis, they begin to shy away from tasks, and activities that would otherwise challenge their self-image of being smart.

Dweck writes that the best way to combat to this labeling of the individual to comment on the behavior of the individual, rather than the individual themselves. Promoting a culture that distinguishes the value of our actions from an individual's sense of self-worth promotes a better attitude towards attempting challenging tasks, and a mindset of incremental growth (Dweck, 2010).

Down The Manhole illustrates this model in the chapter "The Wayward River" when Enzo is challenged to his race by his peer Morning. In this chapter we learn that Enzo is stuck with a fixed mindset concerning his understanding of his own abilities. Uncle Sundello, who has observed the way in which mindsets can drastically impact a child's development seeks to share his knowledge with Beatrix.

Telling a child that they are good assigns them a label, a prescription, which they feel the obligated to fulfill. Whereas commenting on their behavior makes it less about the child, and more about their actions, and leaves room for a mindset of incremental growth! (The Wayward River, 25)

This scene illustrates the impact that one can have by being mindful in our interactions with one another.

Imposter syndrome

Imposter syndrome is a pattern of behavior that frequently manifests in individuals who come from low socioeconomic status backgrounds, and gain higher status as they advance in life. These individuals are typically very bright, and excel at what they do. It is this ability to excel which leads to their success (Brems et al., 1994). The money lender has a history that parallels the rags-to-riches narrative, that is predictive of one who has imposter syndrome. The money lender also expresses feelings of ineptitude and incompetence to Enzo and Beatrix in the chapter "Up The Greenhouse" The money lender confesses to Beatrix,

I just remember growing up without much money. My family moved around a lot, but we mostly stayed within borough 44. That's all in the past though, and now I am rich. Though sometimes when I sit in my office I just cannot shake the feeling that I don't deserve any of my accomplishments. (Up The Greenhouse, 73)

Beatrix mindfully hears the money lender out, and feels sympathy for him, and in the process she gains a new understanding for the money lender. This scene illustrates that although one may be in an elevated position of status it does not necessarily mean that they have managed to resolve their past. In a way Beatrix helps the money lender to feel better about his history by being mindful and sympathetic listener.

Attachment

Attachment is a concept concerning the degree to which an individual requires others for personal well-being, and the quality of those relationships

Early attachment relationships, particular those of children in relations to their primary caregiver(s) are especially important because they are often formative of an individual's personality and help the individual to navigate and understand future attachment relationships. These early relationships also play a critical component in the development of a child's socioemotional and cognitive abilities (Ainsworth, 1979). Several measures have been designed in order to assess attachment in different populations. I incorporate two such procedures in *Down The Manhole* in order to fully understand the attachment of the characters in the story, primarily Enzo. These two procedures are known as the Strange Situation, and the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI).

The Strange Situation

The Strange Situation seeks to understand the attachment relationship of between two members of a dyad by observing how the members of the dyad react to a separation from the other. The Strange Situation is commonly used when one is interested in assessing the attachment of infants to their caregivers. This is because it is often difficult to measure given that infants are pre-verbal and unable to self-report. Even children at varying stages of verbal mastery are typically unable to communicate more complex emotions, so often researchers must use observational methods in order to study these populations. The Strange Situation is a laboratory procedure that was developed by the attachment researcher Mary Ainsworth in order to address this issue (McLeod, 2014). The Strange Situation is a laboratory procedure where the caregiver is asked to play with their infant, and leave the room at specific intervals, during which time a person unfamiliar to the infant may be introduced. The

experiment is done twice, and the infant's behavior is recorded in order to understand what kind of attachment relationship they maintain with the caregiver (Ainsworth et al., 1978). The experiment is broken down into eight individual episodes, each usually lasting around three minutes (McLeod, 2014). The episodes in order are as follows:

1. Infant, caregiver, and researcher are together (pre-experiment).
2. Caregiver, and infant are alone.
3. A stranger joins the caregiver and infant.
4. The caregiver exits the room leaving the infant alone with the stranger.
5. The caregiver returns and the stranger leaves.
6. The caregiver leaves, and the infant is completely alone.
7. The stranger returns.
8. The caregiver returns and the stranger leaves.

Over the course of the procedure the researcher scores the infant's attachment relationship to the caregiver, based on their observations of the infant's behavior in reunion episodes 5 and 8. The infant's behavior is scored on whether they sought contact and comfort from their primary caregiver upon reunion or if they avoided, or resisted contact with the caregiver.

Through the use of this procedure Ainsworth observed three separate categories of attachment. These categories include Secure Attachment (Type B), Insecure Avoidant (Type A), and Insecure Resistant (Type C) (Ainsworth & Bell, 1970; Main,

1995). Infants who are securely attached use the primary caregiver as a secure base as they explore their environment they also express anxiety when separated from their caregiver, and when the stranger is introduced. Those that fall into the insecure avoidant category act independently of their caregiver, and are not bothered by the introduction of the stranger. In fact they tend to play normally when the stranger is introduced. The behavior of individuals in the insecure resistant category is categorized as meeting their caregiver with ambivalence. They demonstrate a need to be comforted but resist their caregiver when they try to soothe the child (Ainsworth, 1970).

Much of the early plot in Verses I and II of *Down The Manhole* were modeled after the strange situation. This was intentionally done to illustrate the attachment relationship Enzo maintains to Beatrix early on in the novel. Though Enzo is not a preverbal infant, this measure stills holds validity in that Enzo's actions during his reunions with Beatrix are indicative issues which underlie their relationship. Given the way in which Enzo frequently avoids contact with Beatrix early on in the novel Enzo's attachment type in relation to Beatrix is best described as avoidant. Below is a list of the episodes of the Strange Situation as they correlate to chapters, and events in *Down The Manhole*.

1. Dyad is together—Enzo and Beatrix are together in "The Beginning"
2. Introduce stranger— Enzo and Beatrix meet Tenza in "Down The Manhole", The Swamp Marshall in "Milkshake Marsh", and Makura Mirror in "On a Glade Dimly Lit".

3. Separation of caregiver from child— Enzo is separated from Beatrix in "On a Glade Dimly Lit"
4. The caregiver returns and the stranger leaves-- Beatrix returns in "On a Glad Dimly Lit" and Makura exits in "Around a Cottage Fire Pit".
5. The caregiver leaves, and the infant is completely alone—Enzo is separated from Beatrix during a forest fire in "Around a Cottage Fire Pit".
6. A stranger is introduced—Enzo meets Haus Mouse in "The Fields of Forthcoming", and meets the money lender in "The City of Lofty Ambitions".
7. The caregiver returns—Beatrix and Enzo's final reunion occurs outside of the National Mint in "Up the Greenhouse".

Over the course of their journey together, and apart, Enzo's and Beatrix undergo individual transformations which manifest in their personalities and consequently Enzo's attachment relationship to Beatrix. This shift in attachment can be seen in Beatrix and Enzo's third reunion outside of the National Mint Orchard, "Once outside Enzo saw Beatrix waiting outside on the curb, and ran straight to her arms, and the money lender melted aside" (Up The Greenhouse, 72).

The development of Enzo and Beatrix's attachment relationship is representative of the fact that attachment functions as a working model. This is to say that attachment relationships are fluid, and subject to change. This is because "the child constructs a model of the world and the self through repeated and ongoing interactions with caregivers, a model which serves as an appraisal system and guide to behavior" (Crowell & Treboux, 1995). Through interactions with others prompted by their

journey under the manhole, Enzo reevaluates his relationship to Beatrix and social others.

The Adult Attachment Interview

The Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) is a laboratory procedure that makes use of behavioral observation in order to assess attachment relationships of adults. The interview consists of 20 questions which an interviewer asks the participant (See Appendix for full questions list). Each of the questions is focused around the relationship between the individual and their primary caregivers between the ages of 5-12 years. The interview is then transcribed, and scored. The participants responses are scored on the quality of their discourse, with special attention to coherence, and content. According to the AAI there are four distinct statuses of adult attachment these are as follows: Autonomous— fluid discourse, and balanced internal representations of attachment; Dismissing—Discourse is defensive, and they are dismissive of how influential their attachment relationships were; Preoccupied— Unresolved/Disorganized— participants who are classified as disorganized typically experienced trauma in childhood that remains unresolved.

Though the AAI is a formalized laboratory interview, I adapt it into *Down The Manhole* by virtue of the fact that the questions in the interview are not exclusive to a lab environment, rather they are questions that could very well arise in a conversation with a close friend, or confidant. As Pietro and Enzo are getting to know each other, Pietro asks Enzo about his relationship with his father. Though Pietro does not administer a formal Adult Attachment Interview, the questions he asks are taken directly from the AAI interview, and are written to feel natural in conversation.

"Though Pietro was a good friend, he was also an inquiring mind. He trusted Enzo's words, but wanted to know more about his home life.

"Which parent did you feel closer to growing up?" [AAI Question 5]

"Well it wasn't much of a competition really, my mom for sure. Since, I-I've always been separated from my dad."

"When's the first time you remember feeling separated from your dad?" Asked Pietro. [AAI Question 7]

"Um The first time I remember feeling separated from him, was when he left me and Beatrix."

"Mmhm, how do you think that your dad felt about the separation?" [AAI Question 7A]

"Um, I-I've never really thought about it. I imagine that he probably didn't want to go. He, left, the day after my brother dropped some carrot stew on himself. We were playing in the kitchen together, though Beatrix had told us not to, but we still played anyway.

"I don't really remember what happened right before he grabbed the boiling pot, but he did and then Beatrix was there, and soon after Dad had come home, and he took Almo, my brother, to the hospital. I heard him- he- well he came home later that night, and I thought everything was going to be alright, but he had just come back to get his things."

"Have seen him or your brother since?" Asked Pietro the candle now so close to his chest it threatened to singe his cloak.

"No, that was the last time," said Enzo "And I know that it wasn't Beatrix's fault, that we were messing around in the kitchen, she's, always be- been really good at watching us. She just isn't always really firm about what she says, and--"

"Do you wish that she was more firm with you?"

". . . . Um, I don't know. It probably wouldn't make that big of deal either way." (A Light That Never Goes Out, 51)

Here, Enzo's responses are then written in a way that parallels the choppy discourse of an individual with a Dismissive attachment status. This is also reflected in the sentiment that Enzo expresses to Pietro in his closing remark.

Beatrix has a similar moment in the chapter "Ozwaldo Grand." While Enzo and Haus visit Ozwaldo Grand, Beatrix and the moneylender speak about the duties of a

being a parent. Then the money lender asks a question similar the questions that appear on the AAI.

"Hmmm . . . do you feel like the way that your parents raised you influences the way that you raise Enzo?" asked the Wallace.

After this Beatrix paused for a long time, and then answered, "No-Well—Not really.. I mean they had, their ideas and I have my own . . . While I'm sure that- that they did influence me in some ways, I know that a lot of my parenting style has also been formed in opposition to theirs. Maybe that is why I've been so lax with him." After this thought, Beatrix turned into herself and began to reevaluate her childhood. (Ozwaldo Grand, 93)

In this example we see that Beatrix also demonstrates a lack of fluidity in her discourse, which is initially dismissive in nature, until she turns inward, and introspectively evaluates how her childhood affects her current approach to parenting.

Beatrix, and Enzo have similar patterns of attachment. This serves to highlight the theory of the intergenerational transmission of internal working models. This theory explains how attachment styles can be transmitted between generations. Because the attachment relationships that one creates when they children are so formative, they come to (Bretherton, 1990).

Parenting Typology

As a child develops, their interactions with their caregiver are influence by their interactions with their caregiver's approach to parenting. Diana Baumrind's seminal work regarding parenting styles examines differences between parenting styles and found four different archetypes of parenting styles. The criteria for these four parenting styles stem from measures of a caregiver's responsiveness to the child, as well as their

demandingness of the child. Depending on how the caregiver balances these two traits in their interactions with the child, they can be categorized as follows: authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglecting.

An authoritative parenting style is characterized by behavior that is high on responsiveness, and high demandingness. These caregivers set clear standards and boundaries which they hold the child to, and consider, and respect their child's concerns.

An authoritarian parenting style maintains a high level of demandingness, in tandem with a low amount of responsiveness. These caregivers engage in discipline oriented parenting, and do not consider the needs or concerns of the child as much as authoritative parents.

Permissive parenting consists of a style that is high on responsiveness, but low on demandingness. This type of parent rarely makes demands of the child, and does not expect them to practice to self-regulation.

Neglecting is a parenting style that is characterized by an absence of both responsiveness to the child's needs and concerns, and demandingness on the child. This usually manifest in the form of neglect, rejection or just an overall lack of support for the child (Siegler et al., 2003).

Baumrind advocates for the authoritative parenting style, over the other three stating that authoritative parenting offers a wide array of social, emotional, and cognitive advantages, including better performance in school, and increased social maturity (Baumrind, 1996). While some studies have demonstrated cross-cultural differences which argue an authoritarian approach to parenting can be just as effective

as authoritative parenting, there is no dispute that permissive and neglecting parenting styles are disadvantageous to a child’s development (Baumrind, 1996).

		Demandingness	
		High	Low
Responsiveness	High	Authoritative parenting	Permissive parenting
	Low	Authoritarian parenting	Rejecting-neglecting parenting

Figure 3: Parenting typologies as developed by Baumrind (Charles Stangor Source, 2012)

Caregivers who are high in responsiveness are either Authoritative or permissive, depending on their demandingness measure, whereas caregivers who are low on responsiveness are either authoritarian or neglecting, depending on their demandingness measures.

I explore Baumrind’s parenting typologies in *Down The Manhole*. One night Enzo has a vision of a table which has been divided into four quadrants, and has the words “LOVE” and “DISCIPLINE” carved into it. This dream table parallels Baumrind’s parenting archetypes. Each archetype is represented as being part of the

table (see figure 4). The dream table is a direct adaption of Baumrind's parenting typologies into the story of *Down The Manhole*

DISH ++	LOVE + -
PARENT - +	--

Figure 4: The table from Enzo's dream, where the representatives of authoritarian, authoritative, permissive, and neglecting parenting styles sit.

I adapt the table in order to highlight different styles of authority, and parenting. As the narrative progresses Enzo's meets many more figures of authority other than Beatrix. I indicate the parenting typology that each figure most closely embodies by classifying them. I do so by indicating whether or not the character is high (+) or low (-), on both discipline and love. Below is a list of characters categorized by Baumrind's model.

- Beatrix: Permissive (-,+)
- Tenza: Authoritative (+,+)
- The Swamp Marshall: Authoritarian (+,-)
- Uncle Sundello: Authoritative (+,+)
- Allen's Mom: Authoritative (+,+)

- The Sammersons' mother: Authoritative (+,+)

I believe that it is valuable to incorporate parenting typologies into the narrative in order to develop the character of characters within *Down The Manhole*, as well as to expose the reader about this theory. Baumfield's parenting typologies have been largely influential within the field of developmental psychology, and they provide potential audience members are parents with a structure and a space to think introspectively about their unique parenting style, and how it fits into this overarching model.

Over the course of the novel Beatrix has experiences, as well as moments of reflection that shape the way that she approaches her role as a parent to Enzo. Beatrix starts out with a more permissive approach to parenting, which is evidenced by the fact that Enzo, and his brother Almo do not listen to her. The reason for this being that Beatrix remembers her parents as being overly strict growing up, and vows to never make that mistake with her children, however, like her parents, Beatrix lacks the ability to balance demandingness, because she avoids it altogether. By the end of the novel she has reflected on her relationship with Enzo and has grown to assume an approach to parenting which is more authoritative in nature.

Appendix

Note to transcribers: The following questions are the stem questions to the Adult Attachment Interview. Please note that these questions are to assist you in your transcription by helping you to decipher the intent of the question. The interviewer may change the wording of the question slightly. Transcribe the interviewers' wording of the question verbatim, do not rely on the item stem only. Also know that to probe a participant, at times an interviewer will ask additional questions. Again, transcribe the interview verbatim (both interviewer and interviewee).

ADULT ATTACHMENT INTERVIEW George, Kaplan, & Main (1996)

I'm going to interview you about your early family situation, and what you think about the way it may have affected you and your adult personality. We will focus mainly on your childhood, but later on we'll also talk about what is going on right now. The entire interview should take about an hour, but it could go anywhere from 45 minutes to an hour and a half.

1. I'd like to start by asking you to help me get oriented to your early family situation, like where you were born, who was in your family, what your parents did for a living
2. Please describe your relationship with your parents as a young child, starting from as far back as you can remember?
3. Now I'd like you to think of 5 words or adjectives that you feel reflect your early childhood relationship with your mother. I will write each one down as you say it, and after, I will ask you chose them.
 - A. You used the word _____ (for each word) to describe part of your relationship with your mother. Can you tell me about a specific memory or a specific incident that comes to mind to illustrate why you chose that word?
4. Now I'd like you to do the same thing with respect to your father. Think of 5 words or adjectives that you feel reflect your childhood relationship with your father. Again I'll write them down as you give them to me and then after that I'll ask you why you chose each one.
5. To which parent did you feel closest and why?
6. When you were upset as a child, what did you do?
 - A. When you were emotionally upset as a child, what did you do?
 - B. Do you remember what would happen when you were physically hurt, like falling off a bike or scraping your knee or something?
 - C. And how about when you were ill, what would happen then?
7. What is the first time you remember being separated from your parents?
 - A. How did you or your parents respond?
 - B. Are there any separations from your parents that particularly stand out?

8. Do you remember ever feeling rejected as a young child? I mean looking back now you may realize that it wasn't really rejection after all, but what I'm trying to get at is if you ever remember having felt rejected as a child?
- 8a. Were you ever frightened or worried as a child?
9. Were your parents ever threatening with you in any way, either for discipline or jokingly?
 - A. Some people have memories of some kind of behavior that is abusive in the family. Did anything that like that ever happen to you or to anybody else in your family?
 - B. (If so) Do you feel that these experiences have affected your adult personality?
 - C. Do you think these experiences would affect your approach to your own child?
10. How do you think your overall experiences with your parents have affected your adult personality?
 - A. Do you feel that there were any aspects to your early development that were setbacks to your development?
11. Why do you think your parents behaved as they did during your childhood?
12. Were there any adults other than your parents to whom you were close like parents, as a child?
 - A. Were there any other especially important adults even if not parental?
13. Did you experience the loss of a loved one when you were a child?
 - A. (If So) What were the circumstances of the death?; Was it sudden?; Can you recall your feelings at the time?; How did you respond?; Have your feelings changed much over time?; Do you feel as though the loss of _____ has affected your adult personality?; Do you feel as though the loss of _____ will affect the way you approach parenting your own child?
 - B. (If loss was a grandparent, or someone especially close to one of interviewees parents) How did you parent respond at the time?; Did your parents response change much over time?
- 13b. Did you experience any losses in your adulthood?
 - A. (If so, same probes as above)
14. Have there been many changes in your relationship with your parents from childhood to the present, I'm focusing on the time between childhood and adulthood?
15. What is your relationship with your parents like for you now as an adult?
16. During this interview, we've been focusing on your childhood and your relationship with your parents. I'd like to end with a different sort of question. I'd like you to imagine that the child you are expecting is now a one-year-old child. How do you think you would feel if you were to separate from your child?
17. If you could have 3 wishes for your child 20 years from now, what would they be? I guess I'm thinking of the kind of future you'd like to see for your child.
18. Is there any particular thing that you learned above all from your own childhood experience?

A. What would you hope your child will have learned from his or her experience of being parented by you?

DOWN THE MANHOLE

Words: Cesare Bisbocci
Pictures: Louis Cicalese

"When setting water to boil, when going for a walk, in everything you do, take great care as if handling a baby"

--Zen Master Tenza

Table of Contents

VERSE I

The Beginning
Down The Manhole
Milkshake Marsh
The Wayward River
The Haiku Gumshoe

VERSE II

On a Glade Dimly Lit
Around a Cottage Fire Pit
Tom The Property Elf
A Light That Never Goes Out
The Vixen Trapper
Lost In The Currant
The Fields Of Forthcoming

VERSE III

The City Of Lofty Ambitions
The Busway
Up The Greenhouse
Borough 575
Ozwaldo Grand

VERSE I

The Beginning

The story I tell
Is actually my own, though
I do not know it

Enzo dreamed. In his dream he awoke to the smell of a bold fragrance. Carrot stew! The smells of little green spices peppered throughout his room, the way his mother use to arrange them. Rosemary, oregano, tarragon, and thyme filled the interior of his nostrils. Enzo sat up in bed, and rose into a new layer of smells in the atmosphere. Ginger, clove, and white pepper lay scattered across the cloud cover, and Enzo began to feel dizzy from the sudden increase in elevation. Standing up only made it worse as an ascent of toasted anise seeds blasted him in waves.

When finally Enzo managed to open the door to his room the layers of the scentmosphere collided and folded into one another producing an aroma of nausea that threw him headfirst towards the ground. However right before Enzo hit the ground he woke up.

Enzo woke up in an upright position. Trapped in a history he did not understand, he could not remember how the sweat got on his hands, or why there were tears in his glands. He could feel them there, on the cusp where eyelid meets eyeball. An unruly mob, each drop jostled for position, threatening to burst.

"You were dreaming again," said sleepy Beatrix.

Beatrix's tone was tired. Groggy Enzo did not know what was going on at first. After taking a few moments to wake up, he started telling Beatrix all about the dream he had. Annoyed, Beatrix laid back down, and pretended to fall asleep. Enzo always felt bad about kicking Beatrix awake, so he stopped talking.

Enzo laid his head back down on the pillow. Though the collision of his head with the pillow was soft, it rattled his head.

In the morning Enzo to the same tedium as mornings before. Breakfast waxed dull like a cheap Swiss army knife. Enzo was sick of dandelion roots, bitter as they are cheap. How he longed to wake up to a pile of fresh cowslip buds, or a steamed carrot. As young as he was Enzo still preferred the old ways.

Often Enzo would excuse himself early from the dusty oak table Beatrix served breakfast in the morning. That way he could get to school early. Though it did not have to be, school was often boring as well, but Enzo remained hopeful. He knew that he could have a great time at school, mostly because he had seen people in pictures having good a time at school. But his life was no photo shoot. If it was a photo shoot, he wondered how expensive it would be to buy some nice lighting in order to illuminate the runway to school. These are the kinds of things which he thought about as he walked up the school steps, to his homeroom, over the threshold, and down into his chair.

Now Ms. Conduct was reading to the class. Enzo really liked Ms. Conduct, probably more than any other student in the class, but they had a complicated relationship. Enzo could not help but jitter and fidget in class, and talk to his neighbor, and sometimes Ms. Conduct would grow cross with him. She would ask Enzo to not be disruptive in class, and occasions when he did not listen, tell him to just sit out in the hall so that he could be alone with his thoughts. It did not help that all Enzo's peers

would make fun of him too. Though Enzo did not mind that as much, well except for when they spoke in rumors about the reasons why Enzo's dad had left. Though rumors, as speculation often does, know logical end, and the children's stories often extended into the present wondering where his dad was today.

Dinner was brackish, peppered only with the small talk of Beatrix asking him how his day went, Enzo went out to meet the other bucks for a game of catch-a-cannon down by the old ship-shack. Enzo left the table unexcused and ran down the street to meet the others. Enzo came to a stop with a spurt in the middle of the street, no one was there.

Shaken, Enzo went back home, and crawled into bed without saying a word of his outing to Beatrix. Beatrix finished cleaning the dishes from supper and sat down on the house log to read the news of the day. Being poor folk Beatrix's log was of a smaller than usual size, but still comfortable none the less. It is on this log that Beatrix would sit reading, until midnight brought sleep to her once more.

Dawn broke like a bull through the gates and Beatrix awoke to find that Enzo had already left the house. In fact it was the sound of the door slamming shut behind him that had woken Beatrix up in the first place.

Enzo thought it silly to dilly around the apartment in the morning, especially when there were more worthwhile things to do, like goat hunting!

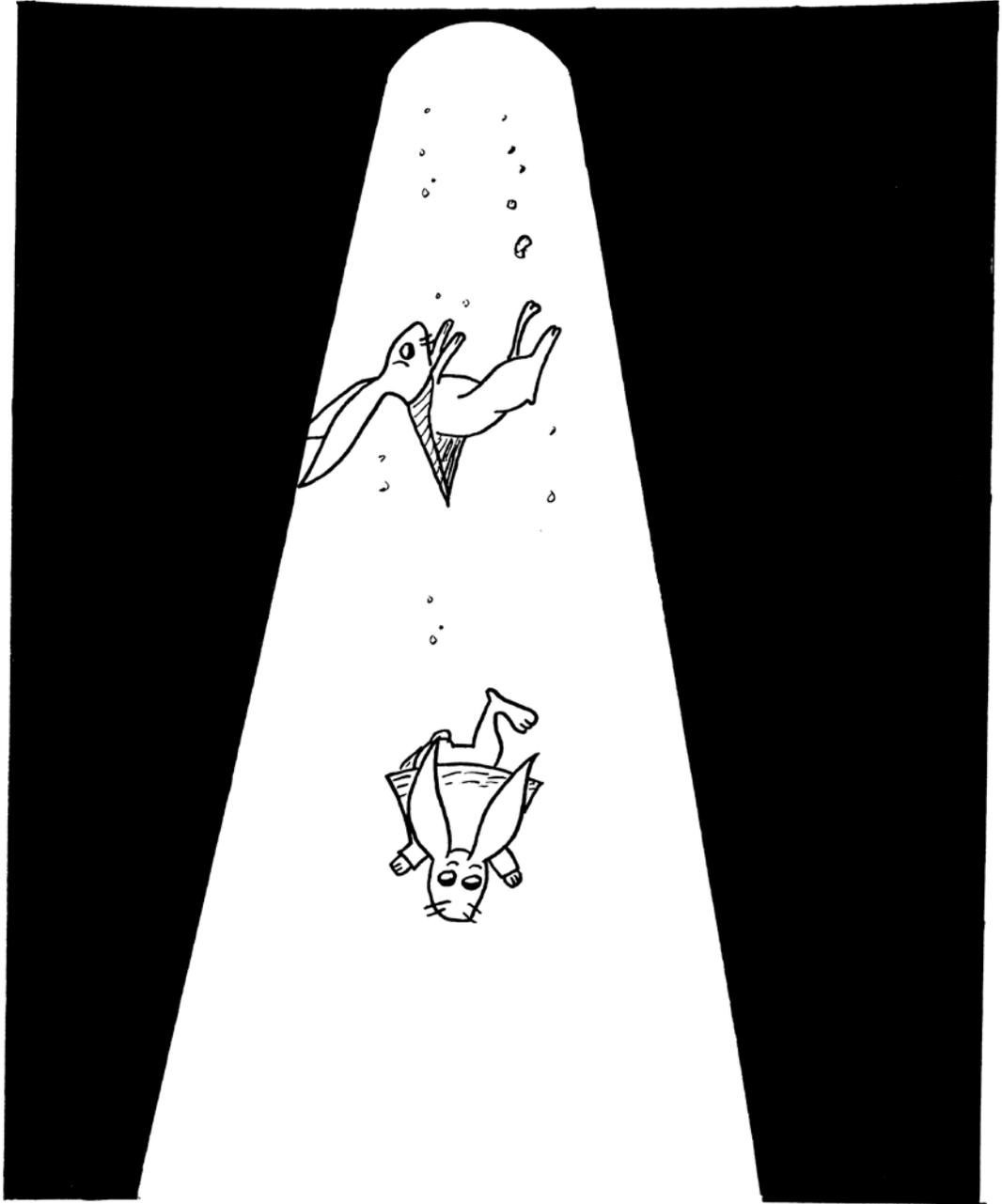
Enzo had heard at school that if you woke up early enough you would meet the old goat who lives on the edge of town. Enzo carried a long stick that he had found on the way from his house to the street, and ran to conquer the goat, though the weapon in his hand did not weigh as heavily as the fear in his heart. Enzo ran to meet the monster, with its twisted horn, and matted coat. Enzo ran all the way down Manchuga street to the old ship-shack, where Beatrix was waiting for him. "How many times do I have to tell you not to play with sticks!"

Enzo ran right past this familiar sight, and Beatrix gave chase.

As he ran along Enzo wondered, as he often does, why his legs were so slow. Often he would wonder how he was supposed to answer the many calls of life with these four irredeemably thin legs. In his mind, legs like cannonball cannons with wings wrapped around the back would be preferable.

Eventually Enzo's thoughts were drowned out by the noise of his flight. The wings on his feet flapped faster, and faster. He could hear them beating as he flew along the empty street, the wind beneath him. Beatrix trailed behind Enzo, the wind having been knocked out of her long ago. Beatrix was worried that Enzo would get caught in the early morning traffic. "You come back right now Enzo!" but Enzo did not listen, and hurtled even faster across the Sunday morning sidewalk.

Enzo ran so far and so fast down Manchuga, that when he came across a manhole in the street he was at a loss for what to do. Enzo tried to stop, swerve his momentum, anything! But the wind knows no braking, and with that it carried Enzo all the way down to the edge of the manhole. On the cusp of hollow ground, Enzo looked down the manhole as he teetered in the face of the void, trembling at the sight of it. And it was this terrible trembling that sent Enzo to tumbling. Tumbling down the manhole.



Down The Manhole

Masters of others
Possess strength. But to master
Oneself reflects true power

For the first time in his life Enzo awoke. Much to his dismay he woke up only to find that he had hurt his head in the tumble. Additionally Enzo could no longer tell where he was or where to go to get to where he used to be, for the straightforward path had been lost. Enzo hoped that he would regain his senses when his head stopped pounding. It was at this time that he noticed that on the ground next to him lay a human. This person, who Enzo would later learn was Beatrix, appeared to be between states of consciousness at the moment.

It was at that moment that them, the duo, was approached by a man of advancing age and receding features. The duo would soon discover that this man's name was Tenza. What they would not realize about this man until the end of their journey is that was to become their best friend.

“Hello,” said the elderly fellow. Enzo managed a weak “hey.”

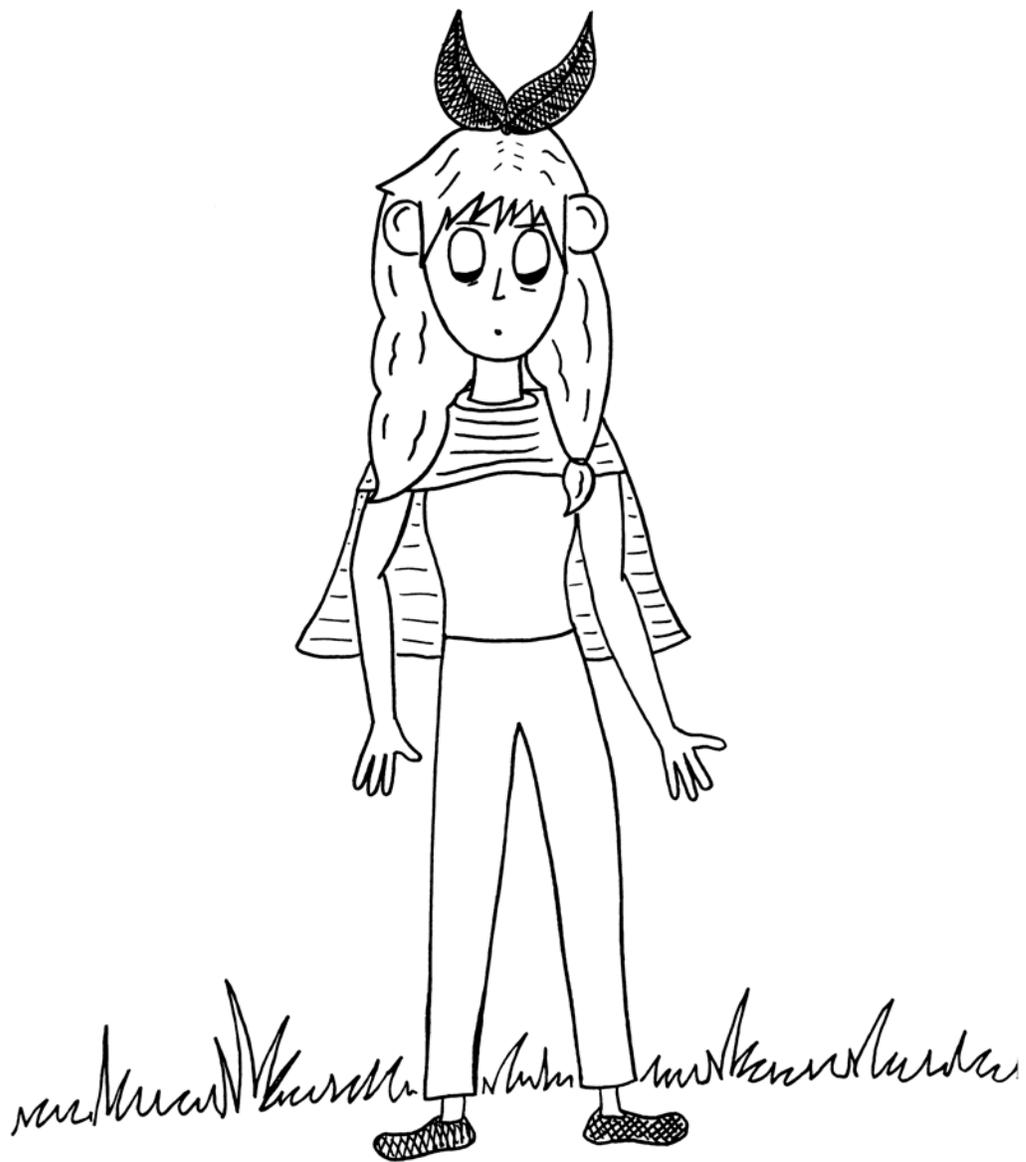
“It looks like you had quite the fall there,” said the person with a knowing chuckle, as if he had made the same journey a thousand times before.

“Yeah, it still hurts,” Enzo said looking around. “Who are you anyway? And *who* is this?” Enzo asked pointing at the human on the ground.

Tenza gave another smile, and said, “My name is Tenza, and that person is named Beatrix.” Enzo felt steam escaping from somewhere. “How could that be Beatrix??? We’re both rabbits!”

“Really?” asked Tenza, “Because you both look like humans to me” Tenza punctuated his sentence by loosely waving one arm at a stream about 24 paces off. Enzo rushed to the stream to check his reflection in the water. Even before Enzo made it to the stream he could see that his sweet fur had turned to flesh. Where had once been his paws now grew a pair of human hands! In 4.2 seconds time Enzo arrived at the stream, and it was at this juncture that Enzo let out a horrified cry. Though he could not clearly see his features in the waters ebb, it was obvious to him that he no longer what he once was.

Enzo felt close to passing out. Whenever he did not want to deal with something he had a tendency to just pass out of consciousness. Enzo remembered how whenever he would wake up, Beatrix would call him a nun. Enzo remembered his shame, and caught himself before he fainted.





As Enzo was fought to stay awake, Beatrix had woken up herself. Tenza began to calmly assist her with a barrage of questions similar to one that he just assisted Enzo with. In less than a moment, Beatrix had run over to the same creek that Enzo was crying into, his tears now fodder for the stream, soon began to weep herself.

“To find yourself, I would suggest that you follow the path within.” said Tenza with a smile.

However this explanation did satisfy Beatrice or Enzo. Their home and all others things meaningful to them had been lost. Deeply shaken, the duo scrambled for a sense of the concrete in an unanchored world.

Tenza sensed this, and tried to comfort Enzo, and Beatrix. “When you look into the stream, you can easily see yourself. If you follow your reflection in the stream to the Ocean, you will realize each of your paths.”

Though they listened, Enzo, and Beatrix still did not understand what Tenza meant.

“From here, follow this creaking creek until the gully widens and it becomes a babbling brook. Then continue alongside that babbling brook until it grows into a seamless stream. The stream will grow within you and become a roaring river. In order to find your way home you must follow that river until it grows old, and quiet, and submits to the Ocean. That is the way of the Wayward River. This ancient water path has helped millions of people find--

Beatrix had stopped listening. She heard what she needed to hear, and was not really interested in the history of a river. It was at that moment that Beatrix felt a touch of loneliness. Somewhere far away Beatrix felt a pair of sad eyes watching her. This was one of many moments when she had felt the gaze of a stranger.

“And then will we be able to get back to the way we used to be?” asked eager Beatrix.

Tenza moved his lips in the same way that snails smile. You know, the kind of smile that creeps across your face on a Sunday afternoon. “You will have the choice to do so, but I doubt you will,” said Tenza. Enzo felt the warmth of his words, but was still worried about their journey though Beatrix thought the journey already over, “Simple enough. Just follow this stream, and then we’ll be rabbits again!”

“Yes, but do not deviate from it, even when you must cross Sammerson swamp.”

“Ueah?” said Enzo.

“No worries,” said Beatrix with quiet confidence, “We’ll get to the swamp, and then walk straight on through to the river, and then to the ocean, and then be home! C’mon Enzo!” Beatrix in a voice, sweet like vanilla, “Let’s go home.” Enzo heard her, and then ran ahead of Beatrix, careful not to stray from the river’s path.

And so the duo set out on their journey, and Tenza smiled warmly after.

Milkshake Marsh

Huddling close and
Then it rains, silence. The world
Shudders within me.

Enzo, and Beatrix followed the creaking creek until it took a turn for the larger brook. The duo followed every turn in the crooking brook, and watched it grow until it became the seamless stream that Tenza had so described to them.

As they walked Enzo expressed his fear of swamps, and Beatrix assured him that there was nothing to worry about, "It's just an large area of wet ground."

"Yeah, but what if there are dangerous animals lurking..."

"The home that I grew up in shared a border with some wetlands! The scariest thing in a swamp are crayfish, and those make for some tasty dinner." Beatrix did not know why she had said that, nor did Enzo. He had never heard of another rabbit who could appreciate the taste of crayfish before. "Anyway the sooner, we can get back to being bunnies, the better." Enzo could agree with that, and they continued on, always following the stream.

While Beatrix was indeed familiar with swamps, bogs, fens, marshland, mudlands and all other sorts of wet, soggy ground, she would find that the path that lay ahead was unlike any else she had ever crossed.

Before they reached the swamp Beatrix was pelted in the face by a warm rain drop raised her head. Enzo followed Beatrix's lead and looked up too. Up above black clouds circled the perimeter of the swamp, and down rained down hot, sticky milk. Suddenly they, the duo, heard a rustling coming from the bristling bush. They froze in their tracks, and intently watched the bush. In a moment's heartbeat a plain goat had jumped out of the bush, gazed fixed on them, the duo.

Though it stood unmoving the goat, pierced Enzo with its steely eyes. For 10 seconds Enzo stood paralyzed

After this interval, the goat jumped back into the mess of armnog trees. Enzo and Beatrix knew about as little about these strange trees as they knew about the stranger goat.

"Are you alright?" asked Beatrix.

"Yes." said Enzo wanting to be held.

"Do you think that is who has been watching us?"

This was news to Enzo. He had not noticed that they were being watched the whole time. "No, but I can sense it now." Maybe he could feel it now, but it was more likely that he only imagined feeling watched now that Beatrix had mentioned it.

Beatrix herself was not entirely sure, but she could still feel pair of lonely eyes set upon her. "I don't think that the deer was the one who has been watching us. I think that someone else is following us. Have you noticed anything?"

Beatrix always asks so many questions. "I don't know!" And with that Enzo ran ahead into the armnog trees, and Beatrix ran after him.

. . .

Enzo ran into the swamp, not paying attention to his surroundings, or the thoughts in his head. Enzo ran, and ran until he ran into a man standing at the second densest part of the swamp. Enzo was able to stop in time, and skittered to a slow before he bumped into the man. "Sit, down!" said the man with a great deal of force, an air of authority hanging around his words as they floated through the dense swamp air. Enzo found this to be an easy request to obey, and stared in awe at the man's impressive utility belt. "Now what do you think you're doing plum-running around Milkshake Marsh like a macaque on a mango farm?"

Enzo did not know how to answer the man's fruity question, nor that the swamp was called Milkshake Marsh. Truth be told he was not thinking anything that he could remember. "I'm sorry sir, I didn't mean to cause any harm--

"Well you did, I know because I'm the Swamp Marshall (+,-). Just look at the trail of beetle-lilies you high-tailed through!"

Enzo took a sulking glance behind him, and saw a trail of deep fuchsia flowers that had felt the crush of feet, and stained the earth a milky pink. The flowers were so fluorescent in color that he was amazed that he had not seen them before. What was even more amazing was the stink that the beetle-lillies emitted. It was enough to make Enzo wish that he had not run off. At the end of the trail Beatrix could be seen as she climbed over a cumbersome bush of Clamberson nettles. Beatrix followed the deep pink that flowed in the ground straight to Enzo and the Marshall, and began to apologize. The Marshall listened, and Enzo felt a zoo of insecurities well up from within himself.



Nobody hears me. No one can hear me. As I creep so soft.

"It's quite alright, I am the Swamp Marshall around here and I guard the estate for the SAMMERSON family. In fact my family has been guarding the estate of the SAMMERSON family for roughly 94--

While the Marshall entertained Beatrix with a lengthy description of the duties of an esteemed swamp expert, the dangerous tiger lily crept closer.

No one can hear me! No one can hear me! As I creep so soft!

The tiger lily was so impressed with their own stealthy prowess. They felt themselves on the verge of hysteria, as they crept ever closer to the unsuspecting trio.

"Few people actually know that the true title of a bona fide swamp expert is a swampert!" said the Marshall. He continued to prattle on much in this way while danger crept ever closer.

12 feet away now and closing in

Nobody suspects!

10 feet away, and unraveling in their own guile

No One Can Hear Me, Still! No One Can Hear Me!

7 feet away now, behind a Clamberson, waiting for the perfect

!

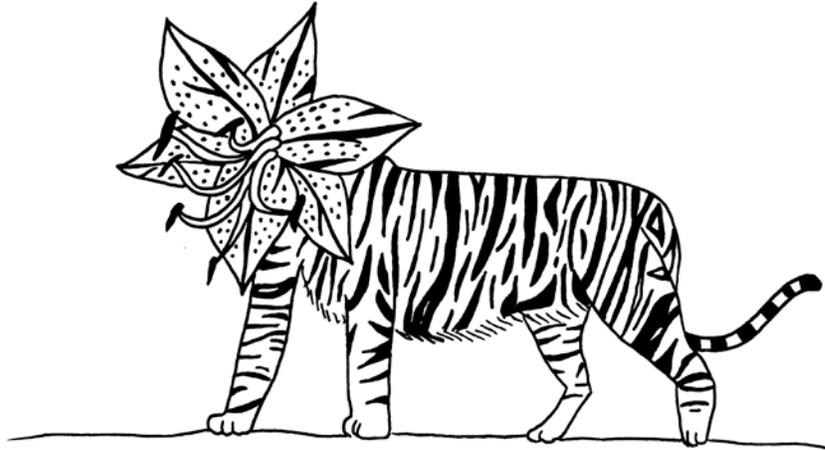
That was Enzo. No longer could he stand listening to Beatrix, and the Swamp Marshall draggle on. He took to running through the bogged down wetlands and Beatrix chased after him.

The tiger lily, not wanting to lose their hunt, immediately followed after, running past the startled Swamp Marshall.

As Enzo ran through the swamp he felt his thoughts which weighed on him so, fall away. But they were not gone. In fact they were right behind him, in hot pursuit. And no matter how hard he ran, they were always right behind him, just as they had always been. After a piece, Enzo had finally reached the center of the swamp. He looked up and into the densely knitted tangle of armnog trees, and wondered why he even tried. Completely lost Enzo sat down amongst the armnogs, and cried.

It was not long before Beatrix came crashing along after Enzo. And it was even less time before the tiger Lily came crashing after her with the Swamp Marshall in tow.

Enzo was slow to respond, and when he did he was not too quick on his feet. Days of chronically running had left him drained, and unprepared for a tiger attack. Enzo ran across the swamp with Beatrix, with the tiger lily in hot pursuit



Then they ran into a maze of Stickleberry bushes. The thorns of the Stickleberry are toxic to the touch and often prove to be deadly. If you get sticked by the Stickleberry, the thorns will get stuck in your skin and tickle you as you run along. And when you try to rub them out of your skin, the tickling increases until standing becomes unbearable. Most usually collapse in a nervous heap of hysterics on the ground. But Enzo did not know anything of these deadly plants, and ran straight into them hoping to lose the tiger in the cover of the Stickleberry. This however failed to dissuade the tiger lily in the least. Beatrix on the other hand was much more easily discouraged. She cautiously crept around the Stickleberries and sought a new path. It was at this point that Beatrix, and Enzo were separated. Enzo was okay with being separated from Beatrix, he just wished that he could also be separated from this tiger too. And then WHAM! Enzo realized that while he was running without thinking, he had led himself, and the tiger lily in the densest part of the swamp.

The armnog trees were so thick that Enzo felt like they were choking off the air around him. The tiger lily had cornered Enzo in. The beast upon him, Enzo felt himself near passing out, as the zoo within him came crashing down.



Just as Enzo was about to white-out, The tiger lily lay down on the milk-moist ground and began to purr. They swayed their headpetals from side-to-side, almost invitingly. This way and that, as if wanting to pet. Enzo cautiously approached, and after much hesitation began to stroke the tiger lily's long, flowing petals. Silky black, and orange the tiger's petals quivered as they shivered with delight.

As Enzo became more familiar with the tiger he began to gently arrange the flowers on the tiger lily's back, which they seemed to really enjoy.

In the interim Beatrix had realized that Enzo was missing. She and the Marshall ran all throughout the marshlands, fearing the worst.

Meanwhile in the densest part of the swamp Enzo was really getting into petting the tiger lily. "Maybe I could grow up to become a world-recognized massager." Thought Enzo. And the tiger lily was really enjoying being pet. Tiger lilies build quite a bit tension in their daily lives. Stalking around the marshlands all day is no simple task.

As Enzo began to working on a knot that he found in the tiger lily's right shoulder, the tiger lily began rasping, and gasping for air. Enzo stood up in alarm, and feared for his new friend. The tiger lily sputtered, and pattered until they coughed up an entire black froglette.

It was not before long that Beatrix, and the Marshall found Enzo again. The tiger lily thanked Enzo for his kindness, and got up as if to leave. The Marshall seeing the tiger quickly chased them off with his spray gun, and then led Enzo and Beatrix out of the marsh.

"This is about as far as I can go, but you two should be safe now," said the Marshall when they reached the swamp coastline, where the swampland met the earthland. Beatrix wanted to express how thankful she was to the Marshall for saving them from the tiger back in the marsh, but could not think of a way in which to do so. Enzo would have preferred if he had not have been saved from the tiger, but kept quiet all the same. They thanked the Marshall, and continued on their way. "Now where's that pesky river?"



The Wayward River

This world of gray makes
Cathartic feelings give way
So time seems not so fast

Beatrix stopped. She thought she heard somebody. It was almost as if the wind was blowing its own sad lament. She and Enzo were horribly lost.

As the duo traveled across the plain in search of that pesky river, it began to rain. Real rain. None of that perplexing milky stuff back at the swamp.

They had faithfully traversed the swamp, however the tiger chase had led the duo askew and now the river was nowhere to be found. Though it was not her fault, Beatrix would soon start blaming herself for their bad fortune. However If Beatrix could read minds she would have known that Enzo was also quite worried, and felt that it was his fault for always running away that got them lost. I don't know why Beatrix did not just read his mind, that would have saved the duo some stress between them.

Enzo and Beatrix walked through the landscape for a while, their silence only punctuated by the whistling of the wind as blew through the grass below their feet. Enzo and Beatrix continued walking away from the swamp and into the grasslands hoping that the Wayward River would soon come into view. While their view of the swamp slowly diminished behind them, the river never came into view. They, the duo, walked in this direction for the better portion of an hour, until they could no longer tell where they were.

With the swamp behind them, there were no other landmarks to indicate a sense of position to Enzo and Beatrix. Without direction, or a sense of distance they walked on silence. The whistling of the wind has ceased some time ago, and with it came the end of any noise for miles around. If Enzo did not look down at the ground he would not have known that he was still moving. It was as he was walking while suspended in an infinite vacuum. Where the grass neither sprouted nor decayed. Fatigue set in faster than it does when one is anchored in the way of time. Groundless, they walked across the grass, not knowing how long they had been at it, or how much longer they would have to keep on. Their original goal of the river was now a distant memory that died with the wind.



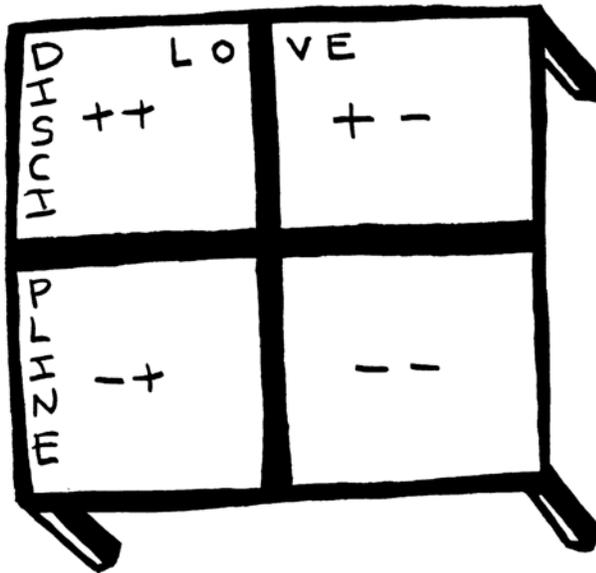
It was in the middle of this green expanse that Enzo's mind began to wander, and on its journey it saw many things. Thousands of transient nodes of thought threw Enzo into a daydream. In the dream he stood in the corner a sprawling underground chamber, and at the center of the chamber stood a large square, table carved from a dusky stock of old flame oak. On the serving side of the tabletop two words ran alongside the opposing edges of the corner which pointed to Enzo. "LOVE" and "DISCIPLINE" had been burned into the table in large block letters many years before Enzo had been born. These words served as axes which split the table into four distinct sections, each marked with a pair of pluses and minuses. Dustier than the ancient table was the conversation of the four who sat at it, each one of them unique, though labeled by the pair of pluses and minuses that sat in front of them. Of the four Enzo only recognized his mother who sat at the -,+ quadrant of the table, and Tenza (+,+). Beatrix wore a sash that shone a warm green color, and invited him to drink from the smelly pot of stew that stood at the center of the table. Enzo cringed at the thought of drinking soupy perfume. He began to refuse her offer but could not protest before a stranger at the head of the table demanded that Enzo listen to his mother. The stranger (+,-) wore an ashen sash, and an unyielding attitude, his only goal to discipline Enzo.

"Maybe he's not hungry," said Tenza with measured breath, trying to understand the will of the child. "Why don't you go to the next room and babysit Almo, while we talk?"

Enzo nodded three times and looked around the table for the approval of the others, when his gaze came to fall upon the fourth rabbit who had not yet spoken (-,-). He sat, head bent, busying himself with counting the lines on the table, the lines between those lines, as well as the lines that were created at the intersection between lines. Never once did he raise his head to acknowledge Enzo's presence.

All of this happened in an instant, and by the next Enzo had leapt to the oak door on the other side of the room. Though Enzo thought it strange that he would have to look after Beatrix, and not the other way around, he was glad to leave. And the adults glad to resume their conversation.

Enzo, stepped from the courtroom and back into the grassy plain, and his eyes opened just in to time see a figure in the distance into focus. Of course it was only a pemela tree, but Enzo could not see fully from so far away, and perhaps it could be another person! Enzo took off running, as Beatrix squinted into the distance after the figure. Enzo ran and ran until the image slowly came into focus. Though he now had a landmark, he still felt as if he was slowly going nowhere, unable to judge the progress he had made towards the figure.



As Enzo began to come into range of the figure, it began to take on new definition. The first aspect that Enzo could discern was the color the figure. It was as green as the grass he had treaded across so many steps before, and as he advanced further the shape of the image came into focus. It stood tall, and bowed at the top, like an open umbrella expecting rain. It was not long before Enzo realized it was only tree, and slowed to a walk. The lone pemela stood atop a slight hill bathed in the silent ocean of grass, and nothing could be seen beyond the grassy expanse that spread in all directions.

Beatrix came up fast from behind, quickly overtook Enzo and yelled "PEOPLE!"

Enzo looked at the tree again and sure enough, under the pemela tree sat a large Sun Dish. Suddenly a small pewter spoon jumped from behind the tree, and playfully shoved the Sun Dish. In reaction to this assault the Sun Dish began chasing the spoon around the pemela tree trunk. There the pair laughed in the shade as they played together. It was at this moment that Enzo and Beatrix approached the gleeful duo, anxious to learn what they were doing.

As they approached Beatrix took another look around and wondered how they had managed to wander out this far, while Enzo marveled at how small he felt amongst the rolling waves of green.

Beatrix looked at the sun's position to gain some sense of the time of day, however she was unable to tell if it was rising or if it was setting without first having an idea of direction. Beatrix decided to guess, "Good morning," she said trying to sound energetic, quietly hoping that the pair could give them directions to the Ocean. However much to Beatrix's dismay, the Sun Dish responded, "Please do not call Morning good."

"Huh?"

"My niece, her name is Morning, please do not label her character with the word 'good'."

That last word dangled off of the Sun Dish's tongue as he uttered it. Beatrix was less annoyed than frustrated by this response. Enzo introduced himself to Morning.

"Okay, would you happen to know where we could find the Ocean?" Beatrix asked the Sun Dish.

"The Ocean?"

"Yes," said Beatrix, "The Ocean of Compassion."

"What would you do once you got to 'The Ocean of Compassion'?"

"Swim in it of course!"

"But why?"

Morning was chasing Enzo around the trunk of the pemela now.

"Just to dip our feet in it a little, maybe get a little wet--" Beatrix looked up to meet the incredulous eyes of the Sun Dish, "It's suppose to help us find our way home."

"Hmmm.. I don't know about that."

"Don't know about what??" Asked Beatrix.

"While it is true that the Ocean could help you find your home, there are those who cannot swim in The Ocean. Others still, can swim in the Ocean of Compassion all day, and never get wet."

Beatrix did not understand what the Sun Dish was saying but she did not like his tone. Meanwhile Enzo and Morning ironed out the remaining details for their proposed race to the top of the pemela.

"Loads of people can't swim!" Said Beatrix

"But we are talking about a very different kind of swimming."

"We'll you are going to have to be more specific when you say things like--"

"Uncle Sundello!" The children had run up to the Sun Dish, "We are going to race to top of the tree!" Enzo nodded in agreement.

"Well alright," chuckled Sundello (+,+), "Let's see what you two can do. You know I use to be a competitive tree climber!" Said the Uncle Sundello.

The conversation was paused by the brakes of disbelief, and Enzo quietly wondered what the future held for him. If he could choose he would like to one day become a professional massager. There was something in soothing others that Enzo found very calming for himself. He thought back to tiger lily from the Milkshake Marsh, and how good he felt about being able to help them out.

By the time Enzo had woken up from his daydream he was already standing at the base of the pemela tree. Morning stood against the other side of the tree as Beatrix and Uncle Sundello counted the moments until the race was to begin, "10 . . . 9 . . . 8 . . ."

The tree was so thick around, that Enzo could barely see Morning's fingers clutching to the other side of the tree.

"5 . . . 4 . . . 3 . . ."

Grass pollen dotted the breeze, and made the air smell warm. Enzo felt at ease.

"GO!"

The race was on! Morning and Enzo began to scramble up the tree. The tree was too wide across for either runner to get a good grip, so they, the duo, remained grounded, each one struggling to find footing under the shady pemela.



After several minutes had passed both of the children began to feel their energy drain as the task before them began to seem impossible. Sundello saw this, and warmly reminded Morning that regardless of the result her effort was not in vain, "You're such a hard worker, just keep at it, and you'll be up the tree in no time." In all of his interactions with Morning Sundello to avoid judging her identity, and took the greatest of cares to only encourage her behavior. This was because Sundello knew the importance of speaking to children in a way that always allowed room for growth.

On the other side of the tree, Beatrix continued to encourage Enzo, "I know you, you are so talented, you've got this Enzo."

However Beatrix's words only put Enzo at unease, what if he couldn't figure out to how to climb the tree, would that mean that he was not actually talented?

Though Enzo could only see the pewter tips of her fingers it was clear that Morning had figured out how to climb the tree. Still right behind Enzo, Beatrix saw this too wanting to help him, but could only cheer him on with her words. "C'mon! You're such a smart boy! You can figure this out!"

Again telling Enzo how great he was only worked to his detriment. Enzo now felt the pressure more than ever to prove that he was clever, but try as he might he could not. Enzo took one last look at Morning as she reached the branch that lay closest to the green earth below. It was in that moment that he decided that the race was already over. Enzo walked away from the tree, sat down in the grass, and wrapped his arms around his knees, while Sundello called Morning down from her pemela perch.

Uncle Sundello decided to commemorate the Morning's victory of the tree with a celebratory meal, of course Enzo and Beatrix were invited to join. There the two duos sat united as four in the shade of the pemela.

After the meal Uncle Sundello and Beatrix took a walk together leaving Enzo and Morning to play together in the sun. Sundello did not consider himself to be an authority by any way of the word, but he firmly believed that it was his duty to share with others information which they could benefit from. It is for this reason that he shared his theory with Beatrix. Though she did not understand at first. He plan to broach the topic by reminding Beatrix of the splendid race, and how some types of cheering are more effective than others, however it was a difficult conversation to have, even if one is fully prepared to do so.

"But he is smart!" Said Beatrix, feeling herself grow defensive.

"Yes, but telling Enzo that he is places an undue expectation on him."

"Then what am I supposed to call him?"

"Don't call him anything! The best way to give a child feedback is to comment on their *behavior*, see?"

Beatrix didn't see, "Why?"

"Well it puts them into different mindsets. Telling a child that they are good assigns them a label, a prescription, which they feel the pressure to fulfill. Whereas commenting on their behavior makes it less about the child, and more about their actions, and leaves room for a mindset of incremental growth!"

Beatrix wanted to cry out. She felt blinded by the light of this revelation! What Sundello was said seemed logical enough, and she wondered why she had not figured this out before. However, in order to cast new light over old darkness, one must also create new shadows, and Beatrix was not without doubt. "Always?"

"It's a helpful tool to have."

"Yeah, but it seems like a lot of work to always remember to address a person that way."

"It is hard to transition to at first but if you practice it enough, speaking intentionally with Enzo will come naturally." Uncle Sundello smiled. The kind of smile that reminded Beatrix of the way that Tenza smiled.

Later that afternoon Enzo and Beatrix thanked Sundello and Morning again for their hospitality, the duo left the shade of the pemela together in silence. Occasionally Beatrix would turn back to look at the tree for reference, to make sure that she had not dreamed up the whole ordeal. After they had walked a sufficient distance away, Beatrix turned back to the hill once more, and it was gone.

Beatrix began to doubt herself, maybe she had not actually turned around completely but had forgot to turn around. Even after completing a full 360-degree turnaround she still could not believe that the tree was gone. Gone like the fading dream of yesterday, now a world away. After a little more searching Beatrix resigned to the uncertainty of the world, and turned back to keep moving forward, but when she did she saw the old hill directly in their path. However the hill was now without its pemela, and covered in balding patches of grass. The joyful screams of the Sun Dish and Spoon now long gone, along with Beatrix memory of their names.

In their place Beatrix could now feel the same forlorn gaze from before upon her. She stopped walking, motioned Enzo to hush, and stared into small hill from which she felt the gaze.

Without words or signals Beatrix ran at the hill at a blaze's pace. Her only thought to finally unmask their pursuer. It was behind this hill that Beatrix would catch the Haiku Gumshoe, completely off-guard.

The Haiku Gumshoe

Wrath's wind blows this way
Heavy like the dusking day
Time for me to nap.

Beatrix careened her way over to where the stranger remained fixed to the ground, huffing the whole way. The stranger lay unmoving on the grass, hoping that Beatrix would go away. Much to his dismay, she did not. Instead Beatrix took note of a notebook that lay on the nearby ground, and began to read the contents of the notebook aloud over the stranger's frozen body.

Sometimes I lay in
~~the garden and pretend that~~
I am a carrot.

Sometimes I hang in
A tree and pretend that I'm
an avocado.

Beatrix's voice fell a half-step as she became increasingly disinterested with these briefly arranged words.

Sometimes I clang in
The kitchen and pretend that
I am pots and pans

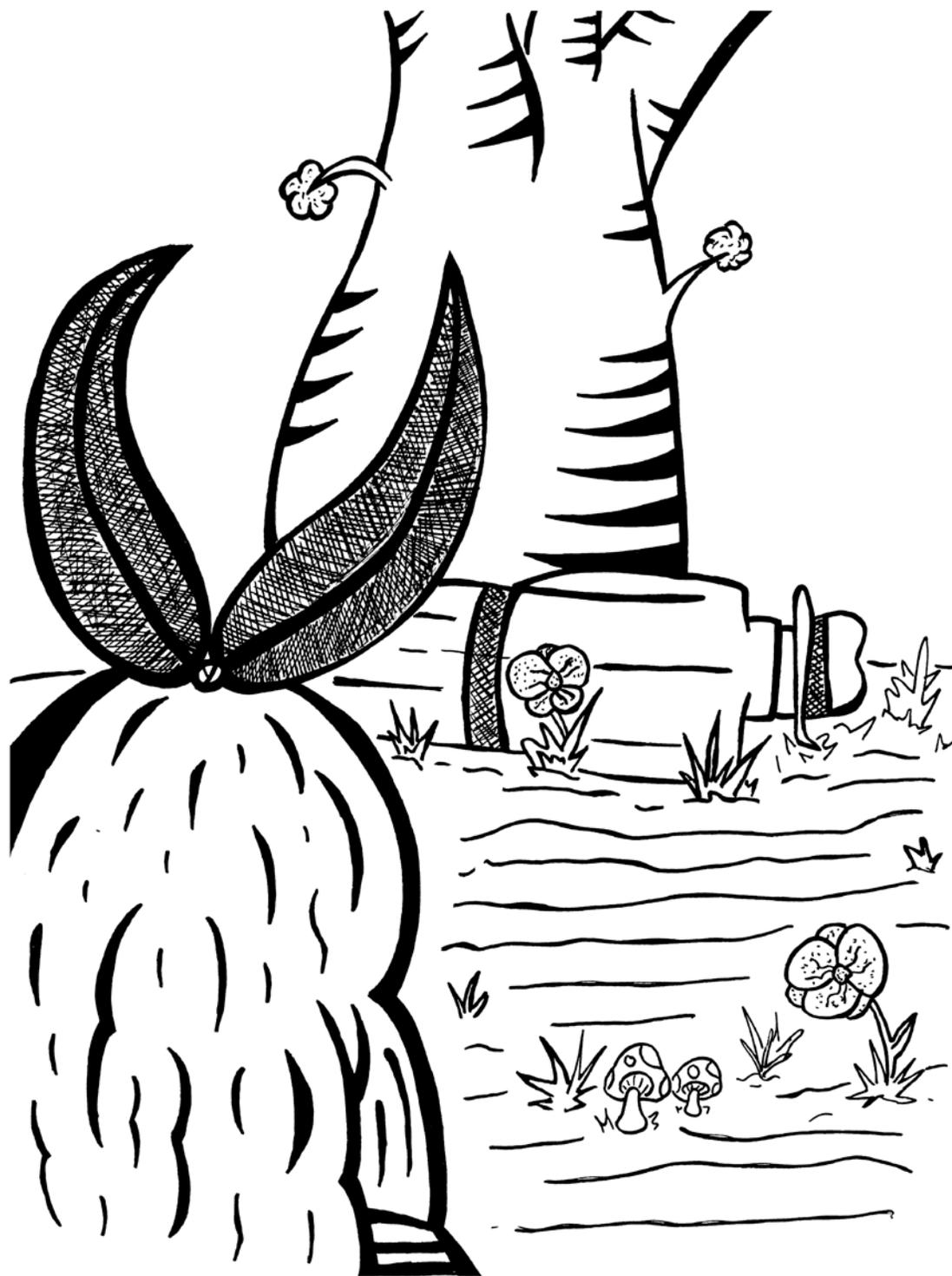
By the time that Enzo finally caught up to Beatrix the irritation in her voice had grown unmistakably apparent. She flipped to a new page.

Shaker's of the earth
Move huddled masses across
Their sorrowed shoulders

With great force Beatrix flipped to the back of the book, and read the poem inscribed on the cardboard cover.

I seek somebody
To eat the apple core part
Of my inmost heart

Somebody that will
Accept the pieces of me
That others discard





The Haiku Gumshoe cherished this arrangement of words above all others, however Beatrix did not share this feeling. Perhaps because she had not yet heard his story.

After these last words had been read, Beatrix threw the notebook onto the brown of the stranger's trench coat, hitting him squarely in the back.

"We're lost! And we don't need you following us around! And unless you have a haiku map that can show us how to get to the Ocean of Compassion, then you better get lost yourself!" Said Beatrix quite uncompassionately.

And with that the stranger vanished much in the same way that a cloud that you were intently watching slides out of view. One moment he was there, a wispy cirrus heralding some upper air disturbance in the atmosphere, and the next he had faded back into the background of all the other lonely clouds. Where the cloud used to stand, there now lay a green apple beginning to badly bruise. Enzo walked up to the damaged fruit and halfheartedly reached for it. He felt that much like the pools of water vapor on the horizon, it would elude his grasp. Enzo was shocked to find that the apple was in fact real, and that it was in fact in his hand, now in his pocket. He spent zero thoughts thinking about it. The process of slipping the tenderly abandoned fruit inside his inner shirt pocket was automatic.

That night Enzo dreamt again. Images of broken light spilled across the darkened kitchen when Enzo opened the door. Upon crossing the tiny plastic threshold Enzo found himself in a tiny kitchen. He flipped the light on in the room and saw Beatrix sitting on the Formica countertop. But the form sitting on the counter, edging towards the stove was a much younger version of Beatrix that Enzo never knew. In fact Beatrix was so small that she looked not to be even a year old. He now understood that he had to keep her safe. Most kits do not make it past their first year of life, but once they pass the yearling threshold they can be expected to live another two-to-seven years depending on environmental conditions, and the availability of nutrition.

Before long Enzo realized that he had drifted off again, and snapped back to the moment at hand. Beatrix was moving closer still to the stovetop, and Enzo shouted at her to stop but she did not seem to hear. Without giving a moment to hesitation Enzo reached up to grab her away from the burner. Enzo's paws came to grasp Beatrix, and whisked her away from the burner to the safety of his embrace. But as he pulled Beatrix close to him he felt her grow lighter, until it felt as if he was holding nothing but the smoke from the stove, taking on new definition in the fading light. In Beatrix's place now lay empty space. This space was soon replaced by a cauldron of carrot stew. Enzo felt his arms collapse under this new weight, and he fell on the floor along with the steaming stew.

Enzo woke up in an upright position. Trapped in a history he did not understand, and could not remember how all this sweat got on his hands, or why there were tears in his glands. He could feel them there, on the cusp where eyelid meets eyeball. An unruly mob of tears, each drop jostled for position, each one threatening to burst.

Enzo laid his head back down on the pillow. Even though the collision of his head with the grassy earth was soft, the impact rattled his head, causing one slippery tear to spill over the levy.

Enzo knew that he had not been dreaming. Everything that he had seen, he had seen while fully awake. However he did still feel a sense that he had been disconnected from reality as he watched the events unfold. Enzo did not have a word for this feeling that hung in the space between dreaming and reality, and had no way of describing it.

Enzo was not alone in his struggle to understand this feeling. In fact everybody experiences this to some degree. A person who has ever felt the liberty of a wandering mind is already good friends with the daydream. Anybody who has ever walked home in the afternoon, but cannot remember how they got there by the evening knows what it is like to unconsciously disconnect from reality.

When first confronted with this idea even psychologists of the day had a hard time fully understanding what it meant. Daydreaming was fine in its own right, but there was great difficulty in understanding such a disconnection from reality when presented in more severe cases. The psychologists would sit in their polyester chairs and corduroy pants and scratch their heads over self-report surveys until the wispy hours of the morning. Until one day it was decided that a name be given to this unnamable sense of disconnection. "Disassociation" was the word which they used to breathe new life into this old feeling.

Though Enzo could not name what was happening to him, he still knew that he was not dreaming. This was because his dreams had a habit of fading away after they happened, as if they never were. This contrasted with his memories which were vivid in nature, and lingered with him, well into the morning's light.



VERSE II

On A Glade Dimly Lit

Enzo had grown bored of walking long ago, and increasingly had to find new ways to entertain himself as he and Beatrix wandered. Enzo decided to practice whistling. He had learned how to do so from the kids in the schoolyard the week prior to his falling down the manhole, and had yet to master the skill. As he practiced, Enzo tried to remember the way that John Wiggington had pursed his lips to whistle on the schoolyard.

Enzo gave a little whistle. It wasn't a big whistle, or anything spectacular or novel, it was just a little whistle. Enzo was then startled to hear another little whistle, just as humble, and just as real as his own little whistle, but this whistle was not his own! Enzo turned to see if Beatrix had made the low sound, but she a bit further back. This was because Beatrix had stopped a while back to admire a black froglette, but still within the range of sight. Enzo swerved to see that behind him was another form who looked quite strange. In fact the being was so strange that Enzo jumped backwards from the surprise of it. After having had stepped backwards Enzo saw that the stranger was in fact encased within an ever larger stranger. This stranger was in fact a Mirror Man. "Who are you, and who *are youu*?" Enzo asked of both of the figures. "I am a Mirror Man," said the Mirror Man. "But who is that trapped within you?" repeated Enzo. "Hoooha! No one is trapped within me! The image which you see is a reflection of the image that you cast." Enzo did not understand at first glance, nor after a second glance, but after the third a stream of realization came cascading down his brain sockets and he realized the creature inside was his own reflection.

This was Enzo's first time seeing himself as a human. He looked long and gangly. Or at least longer and ganglier than he used to be when he was a rabbit. His soft white body hair had given way to reveal a lighter shade of skin. He looked a young bird, featherless, and naked. Enzo was displeased with his appearance. The Mirror Man sensed this, and sat down to hide his reflective qualities. Though clearly perturbed Enzo did not want to look away just yet, so he sat down next to the Mirror Man hoping to catch a glimpse of himself again, but his watchful eye was met only with questions. The Mirror Man's curiosity was as apparent as the rustling bull rush that reflected from his belly as they sat together on the glade. Enzo told the Mirror Man of Beatrix and the shiny black frogs and the manhole that marred him so. Enzo's tale excited the Mirror Man so that he would occasionally sway back and forth, thither and further, so that the bull rush he reflected would give way to a view of the pampas grass on the neighboring knoll. Enzo asked the Mirror Man of his experiences, and he sat deeper into the grass and thought about his answer for a while. And then he spoke. The Mirror Man spoke to Enzo of the stories of his home life before he was set to wandering the great expanse of the world. Before his banishment he worked as a blacksmith for the Kingdom's Mirrormidon army. Enzo turned over a stone by his feet, and examined the crushed grass tucked between it and the soft earth below, "Why were you banished?" He asked, soft like the pale grass he had uncovered.

The Mirror Man launched into his tale, and spared no detail. It had started out a normal day, though near the end of it ravenous clouds threatened to blot out the sun on the





horizons of the kingdom, "After lunch I came back to my work to temper a mirror-shield which I had been working, though I immediately noticed that something had gone wrong in my absence. The reflective qualities of the mirror had darkened, producing a black mirror."

"What's it like to look into a black mirror?" Asked Enzo, now sitting upright.

"It was like nothing which I have ever seen. When I first looked into the mirror I could clearly see shadows of my past take on shape in the mirror. I spent a long time looking gazing into an abyss which reflected my image. After I had imagined I spent a about an hour looking into it, I was torn away by a knock at the door of my work. It was my brother Mirrchael wondering why I had not come home to dinner that evening. I told him that there was no way that I was going to miss dinner in three hours, but when I looked at the clock I saw that dinner had in fact occurred three hours prior to Mirrchael's visit! What a shock it was to learn that I had spent seven hours gazing into the black mirror.

"No one I knew had ever seen a black mirror before so I sought out advice about what do with it. I had learned that the mirror preys on the ugliest parts of ourselves, casting our insides into the horror, so I knew that it would be unwise to show it to just anyone, let alone my inquiring brother. Who would surely be overcome by the same dread that seized my soul, when I first gazed into the pit. After several days I decided to seek the counsel of Manza Rex, the wise ruler of our kingdom. Before setting out I took great care to wrap the face of the mirror in burlap cloth so to be sure that no one would accidentally fall under its power.

"In three days time, I made it to the center of the city and acquired the proper certifications to meet with Manza Rex. Once inside his chamber he invited me to sit with him a large lace pillow, and it was then that I showed him the mirror. Given Manza Rex's rank among the Mirror People, I imagined that if any one person were to be immune to the gaze of the mirror, it would have been him. However my reasoning was inverted! Though I did not know it at the time, I would learn later that day that we cannot escape ourselves. As it turned out Manza Rex had experienced a great deal more of unresolved tragedy in his past than I had ever imagined, and when he looked upon the mirror he became seduced by it! Consumed by its properties, he refused to returned the black mirror back to me. When I attempted to pry the mirror from his hands, I was banished to the outlands. The clouds rained their sorrows down on me, and soaked the earth."

The Mirror Man paused from his history to look Enzo dead in the eyes, as if preparing to make a request of him, "Please help me regain my country."

Now it was Enzo's turn to pause, staring outwardly into the landscape. Enzo did not have the slightest idea of how one was supposed to get to the Mirror Kingdom, let alone lay siege to it, but there was something earnest in the Mirror Man's request, like a younger sister begging you to play baseball with her. How could he say no?

Meanwhile, Beatrix had come hopping along the skirt of the knoll, in hot pursuit of the black froglette. But when she saw the Mirror Man Beatrix stopped right in her hoppity tracks. She too was entranced by the intent gaze of the Mirror Man's reflected human. Beatrix remained fixated at the bottom of the knoll. In the interim Enzo had spotted Beatrix hopping around, and excitedly told the Mirror Man about her. Enzo, and the Mirror Man rushed down the knoll in less than 42 seconds, and met

Beatrix with warm demeanor. Beatrix stood motionless as if stargazing while introductions were made. "And Beatrix this is-- umm, what is your name?" asked Enzo quite off-guard that he could talk so freely with someone who never had told him their name.

"At home I am called Makura Mirror." Said Makura.

"Well it's great to meet you Makura!"

Makura and his intimate knowledge of the geography of the world under the manhole made an excellent addition to their party, and he regaled the duo as he led the way to the Kingdom of Mirrors.

As they walked Enzo debated when he should tell Beatrix of the promise he made and Makura spoke more about the culture of his people. Makura was one of a



deeply introspective race of Mirror People. But they were not always this way, for a long while the Mirror People sought to find truth and meaning (in addition to true meaning), by exploring the natural world. However this practice was often more unrewarding than it was rewarding, but that never dissuaded the Mirror People from their curious search for meaning. One day, the light of the last star within the known universe had been documented by one the Mirror People's finest and most specialized astronomers. The final star was documented by a person named Mirroridith

Felonious, and subsequently the star was named Mirroridith

$2^{57,885,161}-1$ in their honor. After the last known phenomenon of the

natural world had been documented, the people were stranded without an idea of what to look to for truths and guidance.

It was at about the same time that new movement began to take hold of the Mirror People. Several individuals reasoned that because it was now not possible to search any further for outward meaning, then they must redirect their search inward. As the mirror people began to find their own self-truths, they began to create the fulfillment that they had sought after for so long. Many great revelations came out of this period of accelerated personal growth.

For a long time the mirror people had divided themselves by mirror men and mirror women. Mirror men were characterized by their reflective torsos and small heads, whereas women are were known by their larger reflective heads. However, as there is in any distribution, there are those who do not necessarily fit into either of these two categories. Some individuals have both a reflective chest and mirror, some possessed reflective limbs, while others felt that their mirrors did not reflect the way in which they identified. However the old understanding of gender did not allow for a way of understanding how to characterize these individuals and often people were assumed to belong to one of the two genders based on how they looked. This however was an unaccommodating solution because some mirror people did not feel like they fit into either of already established categories."

Beatrix also did not understand what more there could be done outside of the two genders, in her mind the labels of



men and women seemed to cover all options, and she did not see the mirror people's dilemma.

"In response to the growing cultural unrest at that time, a new model of understanding gender called the Infinite Gender Spectrum was proposed. The Spectrum took its inspiration from the way in which mirrors can reflect each other infinitely, a well known fact in home country, and improved upon the old model by elaborating the space between genders. Man and woman were now seen as two ends of the same scale, with an infinite amount of gender identities in between. Though there were those who initially took issue with this idea, it generally became accepted as a culturally truth for the people of my country."

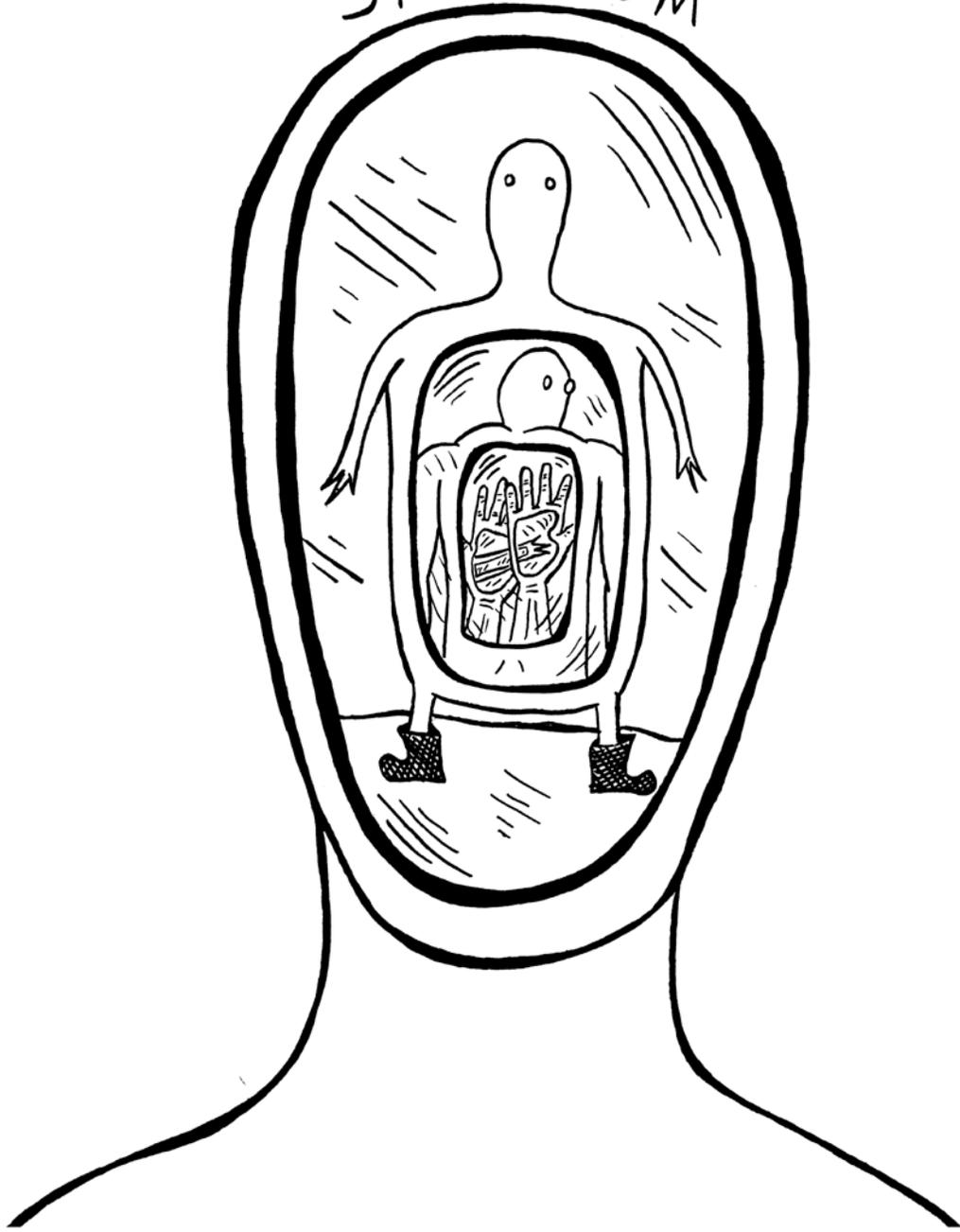
Enzo pondered the idea of an infinite gender spectrum for a while, he liked it. It was not long before his thoughts then turned to Makura. Enzo thought him quite good at being mindful, and kind of reminded him of Tenza a lot like Tenza. Though Makura was a thoughtful mirror, he still would never be half as reflective as Tenza was.

So they sat with the Mirror Man and pondered all night, until finally it dawned on Beatrix. The rising sun struck Makura first with its radiant brilliance, and tiny refracted messengers bounced against his chest in order to announce the arrival of the rosy-fingered dawn. The reflected light made it appear as if the morning bull rush was within the Mirror Man himself, and he felt a sliver of joy tingle down his glass spine. The incipient sun also cast particles of light over Enzo, and although they did not reflect off of him, he still felt illuminated for it.

In this moment there were no words. Communal language would only have impeded their individual understandings. For just as some words do not have ideas, some ideas do not have words. It was in this moment of golden illumination, Enzo and Beatrix began to learn being comfortable with silence.

Without a word they stood up and quietly left the glade for the Mirror Municipality. Though they would never reach their destination, it would prove to be an exercise in acceptance for Enzo, Beatrix, and Makura

∞
INFINITE
GENDER
SPECTRUM



Around A Cottage Fire Pit

The next day the sun shone merrily as the trio strode across glade. A grove could be seen up ahead in the distance. As they made their progressed closer to the glade they could see a large figure standing in the distance. As they drew closer, it became apparent that the figure was at least 6 feet tall! When the group was no more than 52 paces away they could see that the figure wore a grey-cloak in the warm sun that hid their features. When the group was 24 paces away they could plainly see that the figure was just a large statue carved from local stone. Enzo wondered what the monolith stood for, but the group did not stop to inspect the hooded figure's hidden features. Beatrix gave no reaction, and Makura regarded the statue with wary eyes. The stone behemoth stood quietly, as if rooted to the earth beneath it. The group moved past it, and entered the woods.

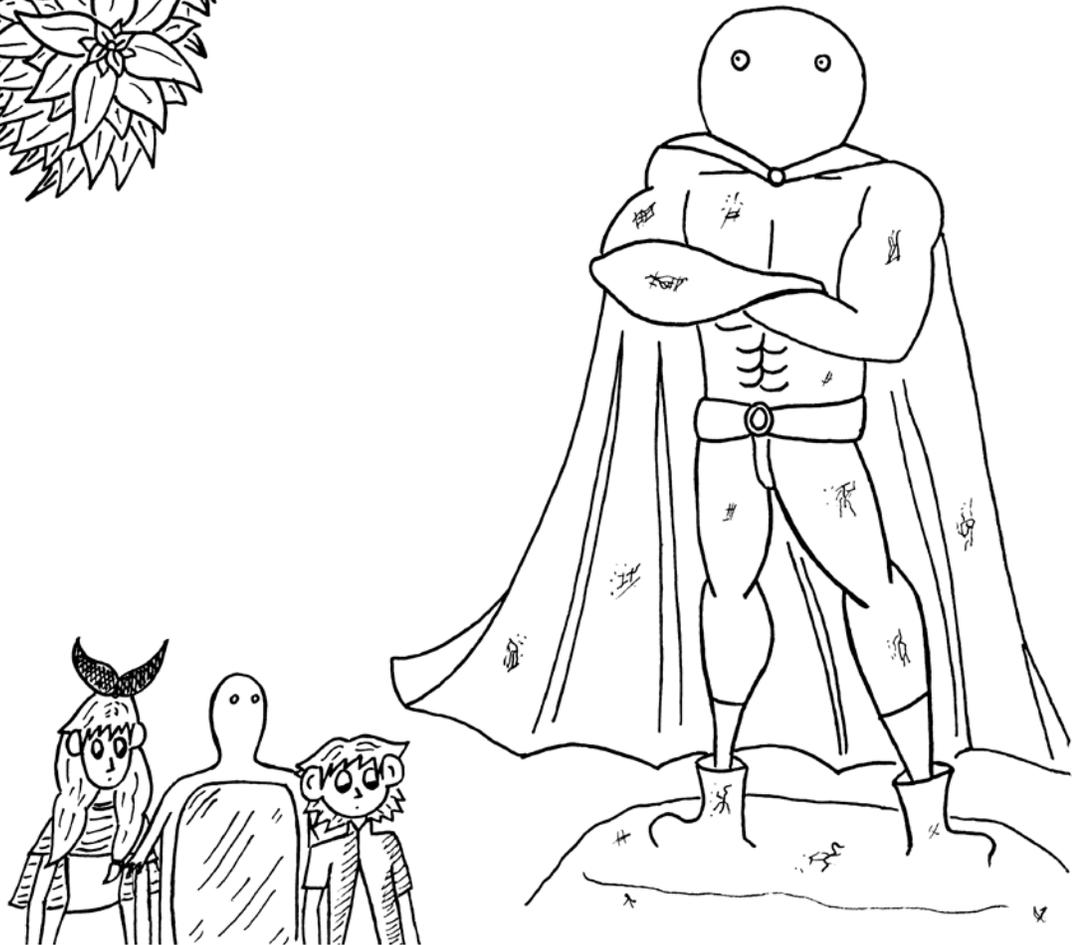
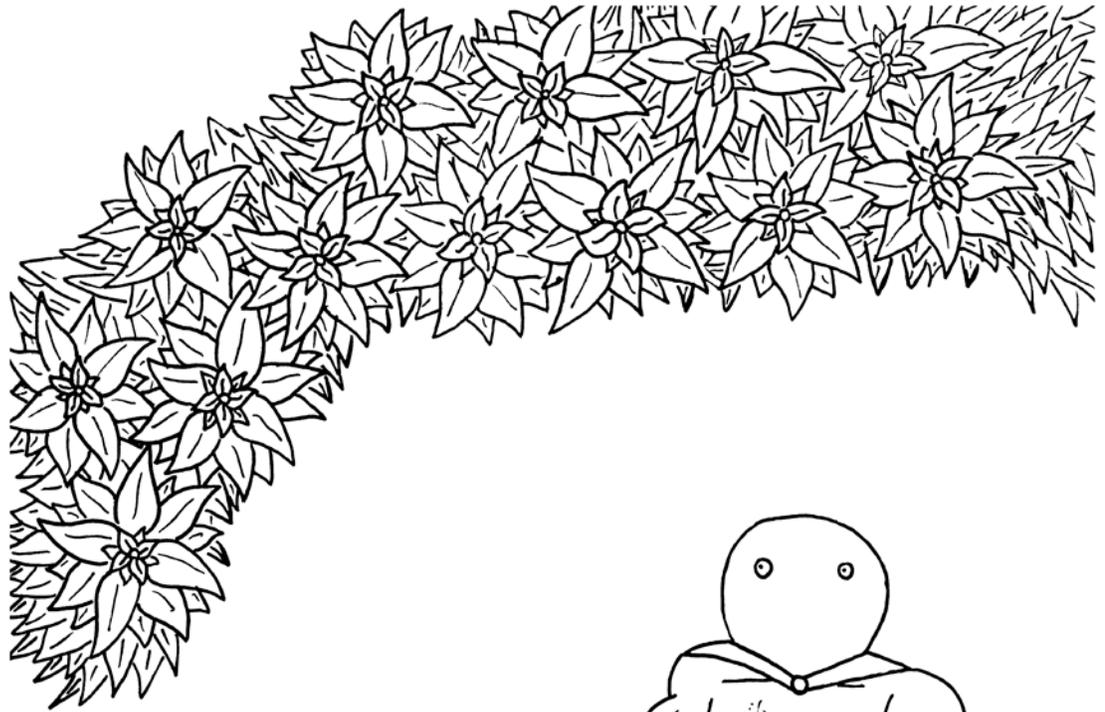
The trio trudged the groove for the better portion of time before deciding to take a break. This grove was proving to be more of a forest. Now that they were in the thick of it, there was no way obvious to Enzo to know if the way they were going was the right way. But Makura seemed to be sure of where they were going, and this gave comfort to Enzo. They rested on a decaying branch that fell from the biggest tree that Enzo had ever seen. As they rested Enzo asked Makura about the statue that they saw at the forest entrance. Makura gave a solemn look, and spoke, "Don't know," And then he gave a low whistle, and Enzo whistled back. "I imagine that placed their to serve as a trail marker, and if we are going the right way we should see another one soon." Makura's tone was worried. Enzo understand why, they had been walking for the better half of an hour without seeing any other giant stone statues. During their break Beatrix had taken to busying herself with another black froglette.



When the time came to resume their hike, Beatrix insisted that go on without her. Enzo, and Makura felt uneasy about this, but Beatrix assured them that it was alright, "Go on ahead, and I'll catch up with you! Worst case scenario I'll meet up with at the next big statue." With this Enzo, and Makura took their leave of their giant branch chairs, and set out again.

Enzo felt boredom from walking so much creeping up on him, but he, and Makura found ways to have fun to pass the time by.

They played by weaving in, and out of the trees in sync as if acting out some greenwood ballet. It was great fun, but sometimes Enzo would look away, and look back, and find that he had lost track of Makura. This was because Makura's belly reflected back the images of the interweaving trees, and it was easy to mistake his appearance for a tangle of greenery. But dancing through the trees was much too fun, and Enzo eventually stopped worrying. They went on like this for another portion of time, until Enzo lost sight of Makura again. However this time when Enzo called his name, he did not jump out from a cluster of trees, and gleefully exclaim "Do not worry, here I am!" In fact there was no response at all, and this worried Enzo greatly.



Enzo became so worried in fact that he began to run. Running was what Enzo had always done when he felt uncomfortable, and it is what he was doing now. Enzo ran, and ran as if he was running down a staircase made of crumbling sand. He ran so fast that the interspersed trees blurred together to form a dense, towering wall. This scared Enzo even more, and propelled himself even faster. He kept at this until he reached a clearing in the woods.

Hands on his knees, Enzo panted, and looked down at the ground. When he finally looked up he looked across the grass, and saw where the forest began again. As he gazed into the bottomless trees across the clearing, he felt as if he was being watched back. Enzo scanned the skyline again, and saw a grey figure in the distance. At the sight of this Enzo burst into another sprint. Seeing another giant statue meant that he was on the right track. Makura, and Beatrix were certain to find him there. Once again he had found the straightforward path!

When Enzo was within 42 strides of the statue he could see it's familiar stone-grey cloak. However when Enzo when was only 25 strides away from the statue he could see that the statue was not made of the same material of the first one that he saw. This

For a moment in time everything stood still as Enzo watched the statue. Even Enzo's breath had frozen. It was in the split in time, when everything was still, that the statue made his move.

Without warning the statue figure rubbed its nose. Enzo jumped back from the sheer surprise of the sudden movement! Scared, and startled Enzo cried out, "W-h-hoo are you???"

The statue stepped forward, and replied, "I am Pietro Swoleman, son of Petracha Swoleman, the renegade bandit stone-carver!" said Pietro. What Pietro should have said was "I am Pietro Swoleman, and after we get to know each other a bit more we are going to establish a healing friendship!"

However Pietro could not have said these words because he did not know that that would in fact happen, let alone did he know that he was in need of a good friend. Enzo would have never dreamed of being friends with such an intimidating person. Pietro's strength was obvious, even underneath his cloak. When Pietro walked his arms were held taut at his side. They did not dangle loose, or soft at his side, the way that Enzo's own arms did. This frightened Enzo, but he decided he must inquire after Beatrix, and Makura, "I am looking for my friends, have you seen anyone come past here?"

"Yes. A woman, who paid me no attention, passed here 30 minutes ago." His words fell heavy, as if he had personally cleaved each one out of heavy stone.

Enzo felt relief for second, "What about a round fellow who looks like a mirror?" asked Enzo.

"No," came Pietro's granite reply.

"Then I must go now to find Beatrix." As Enzo moved forward, one heavy arm extended from underneath his cloak, effectively blocking Enzo's path.

"For almost three years now I have walked these woods felling those who cross my path. All of this to fulfill my father's final request of me," said Pietro. "Before he passed he told me that in order to one day be as great as he was I must first prove my honor. In order to do this I must defeat 100 opponents in battle, and collect their staffs

as proof. Over the last several years I have collected 99, and today," said Pietro with an eager step forward, "will be the day that I finally prove my worth!"

"But I'm in a hurry," Said Enzo.

"Before you can pass you must first surpasss me in a competition of sticks," said Pietro concretely. And no sooner had he spoke these words then had he flung off his cloak to reveal his stony body, and wooden staff that he always carried with him. This display paralyzed Enzo, and he felt his inward heart cleave in two when he saw Pietro's muscles.

Years of stone cutting had hardened Pietro's body to the toughness of the diamond which he cut. However his heart remained as soft as the day he was born. Pietro had no intention to fight this child, but merely to scare him away. Pietro preferred to hone his skills in the quietude of the woods. Pietro was greatly surprised when Enzo did not back down, but defiantly shouted, "I will fight!"

"Or I would fight you," said Enzo, watching the steam escape his quickly deflating words, "but I don't have a staff like you do. If I had a stick I would have knocked you down straight off. Which is why I haven't already," said Enzo hoping that this would dissuade Pietro from fighting. However these fighting words only excited Pietro, and he threw his own finely polished stave to



Enzo, and Enzo caught it, barely. He was surprised by the weight of the narrow woodcut. Pietro looked around for another piece of wood for himself, but found none. So he settled on a sapling pemela tree which he promptly uprooted it from the cool earth. The ground beneath the tree gave way with a sigh, as if to signify the ungrounding of all that was constant, and Enzo fell from reason. After watching this display he had never not wanted to fight with sticks more in his life.

Without anymore formalities, the fight was on! Pietro ran at Enzo, and Enzo ran away. As Pietro ran he shook the dirty roots of his scrawny tree at Enzo, hitting him with the wads of dirt that had clung to the tree for so long. Truly an inconvenience. Enzo continued to run toward the tree line. In the shelter of the forest the closely planted trees made it hard to swing staffs at one another, and Enzo had an easier time of



avoiding blows this way. This process of ducking, and running went on for about an hour. During which time Pietro chased Enzo, and Enzo ran deeper into the woods.

Near the close of the hour long fight had come across a small cottage, which happened to be Pietro's home. It was at this point that Pietro became acutely aware of a great thirst. "I'm thirsty," said Pietro, "want to come inside for a drink of water?" Enzo regarded Pietro with wary eyes. "We can finish our fight later," Pietro added, with a smile. Over the course of their time together Pietro decided that he really liked something about Enzo. With no intention to actually finish their fight Enzo accepted his offer, they walked together into the cottage.

The wooden shack was tiny-cozy. Inside the cottage Enzo and Pietro found that the fire had already been lit, and that a small person had already made themselves at home in the stranger's house.

Tom the Property Elf

Inner strength is good
But sometimes help from a friend
Can be a blessing

Thinking that the figure might be Beatrix, Enzo's heart jumped over the threshold, and into the cabin. The person turned around when Pietro, and Enzo entered inside, and Enzo saw their snowy beard spill over the edge of couch. The person was no more than three feet tall, and in less than 3 seconds they had disappeared into the newly lit flames of the hearth. "Who was that?" hurriedly asked Enzo, as Pietro poured two cups of water. "Oh, that was Tom! He's a property elf," said Pietro with happy sound and a sip.

Enzo had never heard of property elves before. Though disappointed he did not get to talk to Tom, he was curious to hear more about them. "Well, they wander about your house, usually beneath the floorboards. And if you treat them well, they do nice things for you! Bring you things, light your fire when you come home, stuff like that."

"But what happens if you don't treat them well?" asked Enzo.

Pietro shivered a little bit, and thought of how best to explain the nature of property elves. He thought an analogy would work best, "How do your friends respond when you aren't nice to them?"

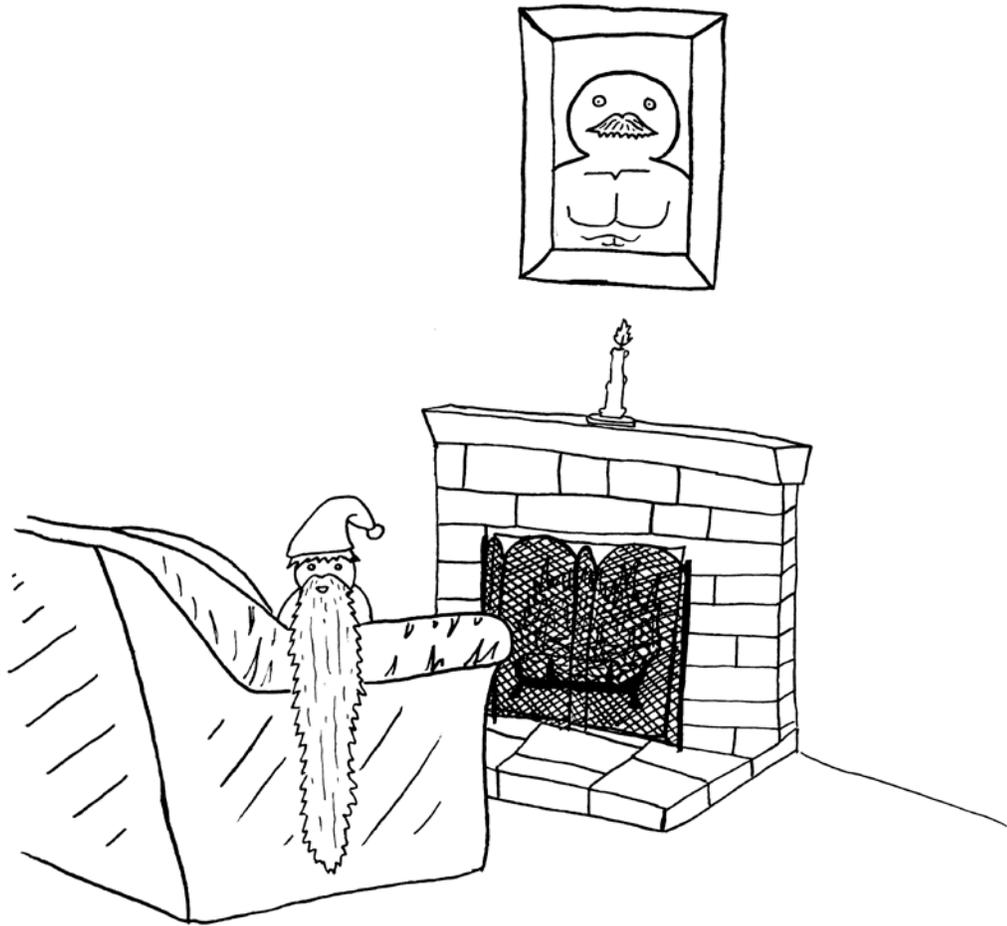
Enzo had to think for a little bit, "They would be mad at me?" Enzo was not really sure.

"Exactly!" enthused Pietro, "A property elf would get angry too, but by a lot more. Though they have small bodies, but they have giant strength, and larger emotions!"

"Amazing!" marveled Enzo, "no way they're stronger than you though."

Pietro smiled at the compliment, and shrugged unknowingly, "Enzo, I wouldn't squeeze too many mind grapes trying to figure that out if I were you." Enzo finished his glass, hehe, mind grapes! Enzo like the notion of thinking of his mind as a bowl of fruit, but his thoughts soon turned back to Makura. Pietro assured him that he would both turn up at some point, "Until then, why don't we hit the hay for the night? We can go looking for your friend in the morning." And with that Enzo, and Pietro retired for the evening.

There were no beds in the cottage, but Pietro made up for it by providing Enzo with a generous amount of hay to lie on. As Enzo tried to fall asleep on the pokey grass, he couldn't help but think about how kind Pietro was being.



The light of a lone candle cast Pietro's blue shadow on the wall as he dressed for bed. Enzo had never before felt like he had a best friend, so he really enjoyed being around Pietro.

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It was not long after waking up that Enzo was eager to find his friends, however Pietro took his time getting ready to face the day. After their morning glass of water, Pietro began packing all of his supplies. Enzo sat on his bed of hay, and quietly watched him. After Pietro finally pulled on his socks Enzo eagerly asked, "Ready to go???"

"Yes, I just need to grab something first." With that Pietro grabbed the candle which had been alight all night, and they set off.

A Light That Never Goes Out

Some light is snuffed out
From the start, while others still
Live on in our hearts

Enzo and Pietro walked about the woods laughing at what each other had to say. Their personalities complemented each other's in a way that neither of them had ever thought could happen.

As they walked along Pietro pointed out the different types of trees to which the forest was home to, and told Enzo about each of their unique qualities. "And that's a wild wawlnut! They're well known for the cologne-like smell that they produce, however farmers have been getting better at breeding trees that lack the characteristic smell. So it has become a rare treat to smell a wawlnut like this!"

Enzo hung on to every word about the trees, and sought to find his own way to contribute to the conversation. "Have you ever been to Milkshake Marsh?"

"Once."

"They have incredible trees there."

"Yeah, but I've always wondered why the place is so milkshakey.."

That was another word of Pietro's that Enzo really liked. Milkshakey. The back and forth between the two was so engaging that they soon forgot what they had set out to accomplish that afternoon. It was not until Pietro asked Enzo to describe his friends that he remembered the mission. "Well- Makura looks like a giant mirror, but with legs"

"A Mirror Person???" Asked Pietro, "I've always wanted to go to the Mirror Kingdom!"

"Well we can go there together after we find him!" Said Enzo.

"Good deal! Now tell me more about your friend Beatrix."

"Well, Beatrix is a good friend, she's also my mom too."

Pietro stuttered his step, if only because he had never heard of someone refer to a parent as primarily being a friend before, "Is Makura your father?" Asked Pietro holding his candle close to his heart.

"Haha no silly! My dad's a rabbit!" Enzo quickly recognized that Pietro did not get the joke, "I use to be a rabbit too, but then I changed to look like this when I fell."

Though Pietro was a good friend, he was also an inquiring mind. He trusted Enzo's words, but wanted to know more about his home life. "Which parent did you feel closer to growing up?"

"Well it wasn't much of a competition really, my mom for sure. Since, I-I've always been separated from my dad."

"When's the first time you remember feeling separated from your dad?" Asked Pietro.

"Um The first time I remember feeling separated from him, was when he left me and Beatrix."

"Mmhm, how do you think that your dad felt about the separation?"

"Um, I-I've never really thought about it. I imagine that he probably didn't want to go. He, left, the day after my brother dropped some carrot stew on himself. We were

playing in the kitchen together, though Beatrix had told us not to, but we still played anyway.

"I don't really remember what happened right before he grabbed the boiling pot, but he did and then Beatrix was there, and soon after Dad had come home, and he took Almo, my brother, to the hospital. I heard him- he- well he came home later that night, and I thought everything was going to be alright, but he had just come back to get his things."

"Have seen him or your brother since?" Asked Pietro the candle now so close to his chest it threatened to singe his cloak.

"No, that was the last time," said Enzo "And I know that it wasn't Beatrix's fault, that we were messing around in the kitchen, she's, always been really good at watching us. She just isn't always really firm about what she says, and--"

"Do you wish that she was more firm with you?"

". . . Um, I don't know. It probably wouldn't make that big of deal either way."

"That's rough. I can't imagine what it would like to experience that."

"Yeah, well I know that you've had a rough time at home too."

"Yeah, there's something universal in each of our individual challenges."

Enzo did not know what Pietro meant by that, but was fine to let the conversation drop for a while.

The Vixen Trapper

Sometimes I don't know
How to make ends meet, sometimes
I just get lucky

"Sweet candle!" said Enzo. He did not have to compliment Pietro's unnecessary lighting, but he did all the same. Just to fight off the buzzing silence of the woods.

"Thank you," said Pietro.

After a while they, the duo, came across another duo in the woods. In the densest part of the forest, there stood a laughing fox next to a tree from which a man was hanging upside down by one of his legs. At this point a woman's voice called out deep from the underwood, "ENZO!"

It was Beatrix! Her excitement ignited upon catching sight of Enzo, and the stranger who accompanied him. She burst forth out of the brush from which she had been camping in. Enzo saw, and heard Beatrix, but ran over to the man who knelt down in the ground instead. "Sir, what happened to you?" The fox who stood a few steps back howled with laughter.

"I was chasing after this fox." Said the trapper angrily pointing at the fox, who gave another quick giggle in her moment of triumph,

"Ambitions so thick they cloud your head, that the trap you set for me caught your leg instead!"

Meanwhile Beatrix had scrambled over, and leapt to give Enzo a large hug, and Pietro stepped aside.

"Enzo!--" but Beatrix rethought her words remembering Sundello, and spoke intentionally to Enzo, "Do not run away like that anymore! I was worried that I would not find you again."

Enzo felt bad about making Beatrix worry. "I'm sorry ma-- I won't do it again," Enzo hastily added.

After this introductions were made all around, and everybody met everybody. Enzo, Beatrix, and Pietro even got to know the Vixen Trapper before they set out upon their way to look for Makura, though no one felt much empathy for him. Given the trapper's crooked ways it was agreed that the trapper deserved to dangle from the tree a while longer. Though they refused to help the trapper, the trio maintained absoluteness politeness the whole time. After a short while they, the trio, set off together in Makura.

"And best of luck with the foxing business!"

"He's gonna need it." Said the fox eyeing down the trapped trapper.

With a final laugh they, the trio, bade the trapper and the fox farewell, and continued on their way. However, as soon as they lost sight of the vixen and the trapper obscured by the shades of the forest, they heard a scream so horrific that sounded neither human, nor animal in origin. Enzo strained his eyes to see through the forest branches innumerable in number, and he felt Pietro take hold of his hand. "Things are rarely as they seem."

A long time elapsed, during which time no words passed between the three adventurers. It was after this great silence that Pietro spoke.

"I keep this candle for my father."

"Hein-- why?"

"His spirit lives on in the flame."

" . . I don't understand at all." Said Enzo.

"That's alright, it's a hard to explain. Though his light was put out some time ago, his spirit still burns brightly on, fed by the wicker of the last candle he gave me. "

This explanation raised so many questions in Enzo, and well as Beatrix who had just met the fair stranger, not half an hour ago. How did his dad's spirit get in the candle in the first place? Can he spread his spirit to other candles, much in the same way that fire spreads? How could he be sure if any of this was real?

"My father lit this flame on a small candle before he left on the night he disappeared. Though the search parties had long given up, his flame never went out. I soon realized what had happened and began taking care of the flame. Feeding it with a little wax every night, and tending to it these past three years.

"I remember staring into the flame for hours on end, and sometimes I could see my father's form in it! On some late nights the way the flame danced would remind me of the way dad use to chisel granite, one graceful stroke after another, each fluid motion blending into the next. Creating the illusion that the stream of individual motions were in actuality apart of a single chiseling routine."

Enzo decided that there was no way that Pietro's father's spirit was actually in the candle, and that Pietro's faith in the candle was symptomatic of his inability to accept his father's death. Pietro needs to accept, he needs to move on.

Though Enzo's line of reasoning may very well have been correct, it did not excuse him from the crime of trying to snuff out Pietro's candle.

His mind made up, Enzo reached for the candle and Pietro stopped. For the last three years he had been able to keep moving *because* of his faith in the flame, propelled by the belief that his father was still with him, keeping the flame alive all that time, and now that was threatened. Much to Pietro's horror he was unable to react before Enzo knocked the candle off its tray and onto the ground below. This of course was an accident, Enzo had intended to snuff the flame between his fingers but the flame was much too small, and he missed.

Now the grass surrounding the fallen candle shared its glow, and blackened as the flame advanced further. If Pietro had wanted to, he could have stopped the forest fire from happening, however he did not want to offend the honor of his father by stomping out the flame, and in his hesitation Pietro as well as the forest was lost. Though the sun was setting, the forest had become lit anew. Now each one of the trees became a candle themselves and proudly declared the spirit of the man who walked these woods so long ago. It was beautiful.

Pietro however was unable to see beauty, he only saw rage, and in his rage chased Enzo throughout the woods, as the world burned to the ground.

And so the duo's life-long friendship ended exactly as it had begun.

Lost In The Currant

Geraniums bloom
But the prettiest flower
Is inside of you

In the aftermath of the forest fire Enzo found himself in a part of the forest that had escaped the great inferno he had unleashed upon the woods. This was indeed a strange part of the forest. Here nothing grew wild. All of the plants were well cared-for, this was reflected in their timeless beauty. It was here in the Garden of Time that Enzo would meet Tenza once more.

Enzo decided that the place he had come to a garden of great magnificence. Unlike any other gardens that Enzo had previously seen, the garden of time exist outside of the confines of the natural world. Here there were no artificial lights, or chemical fertilizers. The loamy soil beneath his feet smelled strongly of earth, and natural light filtered in from all around Enzo.

In this garden stood fruit bearing trees from every epoch, and era. It was as if Enzo had just stepped into a museum exhibit wherein every berry from every history had been carefully curated. Curiouser was the fact that all of the plants could be seen in all stages of their life. Newly mature blueberry bushes were just beginning to boast their own immature green berries, while the småkberries trees were lamenting the loss of their neighbors in a recent storm. Enzo swam amid the current of their sad dialogue and stumbled about until he fell upon the most glorious part of the garden, the currant field. The aroma of the field was so calming that Enzo felt as if he could drift indefinitely amidst the currants.

There in the mist Enzo spotted a familiar figure, and he ran up to and sure enough it was Tenza! Enzo rejoiced to see him once more, and Tenza greeted him with arms open wide. There, in the recesses of the garden, Enzo and Tenza spoke quietly of their adventures. Enzo told Tenza about everything that had happened since they had met in the beginning, and Tenza smiled to see how Enzo had grown. They, the duo, walked as they spoke stumbling ever deeper into time.

After a while they, the duo, had come to the edge of the garden, a row of Jupiter plants demarcated the end of the garden, and separated it from the outside. "This is a sacred place Enzo," Tenza said, "And we have come to the edge of it. We now stand on the precipice of the present. Beyond the tree line lie the future's fields of fallow." Enzo did not understand at all. He looked out upon the tree line that Tenza spoke of and saw the earth churning beneath them. The soil beneath them spilled into the trees and rejoined the earth as it spilled into the garden. Much as a waterfall casts careening water to be stilled in placid pools below, so did the fields of fallow send time to rest in the garden.

The Fields of Forthcoming

Waterfalls cast their lot
To the placid pools below
Stilled by silence

Just beyond the marvelous currants lay a far off field where uncertainty dwelled. Enzo saw this field of dusk in the distance, and upon seeing it grew anxious to know what it held. For this end Enzo left the peace of the currant orchards and wondered into the fields of forthcoming. Enzo wished that Tenza had accompanied him, however he refused. He told Enzo that he had already spent to much of his life searching the fields, and that he much preferred to meditate in the garden. That being said he encouraged Enzo to learn what the fields held, and wished him well on his journey.

Enzo was alone. Again. And as he approached the fields of forthcoming, he began to wonder if loneliness was a fundamental part of life, or maybe just his life.

On walking into the looming gloom of the fields that will always lay fallow, Enzo saw many things. In the field he saw faces, places, and spaces all of which he had never seen before. They all flashed before his eyes in a way that reminded Enzo of the way that train cars ran by on the track. Each one a fleeting vehicle that carried unfamiliar feelings in bulk. Enzo felt himself rattle inside, and his breath stopped. The world turned pale, even more so than before, and Enzo begin to fade from consciousness.

Then a soft but intense voice called to him from the ground, "KEEP BREATHING!" Enzo looked down, and all around for the owner of the tiny voice but could only see the foggy shroud which clouds the fields of forthcoming.

"Move! I gotta get!" Enzo had no way of knowing that the voice was talking to him, but was determined to find the owner. Finally Enzo bent down over backwards, and poked his head through the clouds shrouding the ground. Beneath the shroud was a tiny mouse pushing at Enzo's feet. "MESS MOVE," screeched the beastly creature.

"What's all this mess about mouse?" asked Enzo.

"I'm trying to move this bunk past you mess to get to my house!" Creeched the beastly screecher as he pointed to an industrial cog on the ground.

"Well where's your home?" Questioned Enzo as he regained his senses.

"Well where are your manners?" Breached the mouselly preacher.

This last bit hurt Enzo's feelings and he decided it would be more worthwhile to try and find Pietro and Beatrix. Enzo began to walk away.

"Wait!" Said the mouse, "Don't go! It's costly-dangerous out there!" This made Enzo stop in his tracks, and look back under the cloud cover to where the mouse stood. "The black carriage lurks between the fogs of these fallow fields, felling all who cross it."

Enzo did not know what it meant to be felled, let alone what was real anymore.

Then them, the duo, heard a ghostly howl in the distance. "T-those are the 4 pale wolves who draw the carriage! Quick, let us leave!"

"How? Where???"

The mouse began to float in the air, "WE'LL escape to the city of lofty ambitions!"

"Ueah? How are you doing that???"

"All you need is lofty ambitions! The sky's the limit!" Said the mouse who was now floating by Enzo's head.

"But how? I've never aspired to much."

"Put your hands in the air and yell out all of your lofty ambitions, and you'll become airborne!"

Enzo did not really know if he would be good at any of this ambition business. "I don't want to die at the paws of wolves!"

"Weak sauce chubs! If you want to survive you must think beyond survival," The mouse's words seemed to float in the air, as if not grounded by context. He had no idea what they meant. Enzo reached deep inside of himself, and pulled out some not yet realized dreams.

"I want to be the world's best massager! I want eat bananas all day long with no one to tell me to stop!"

"That's it! You're getting with it!" The mouse's voice was fading fast overhead.

"I don't know you, but I want to--"

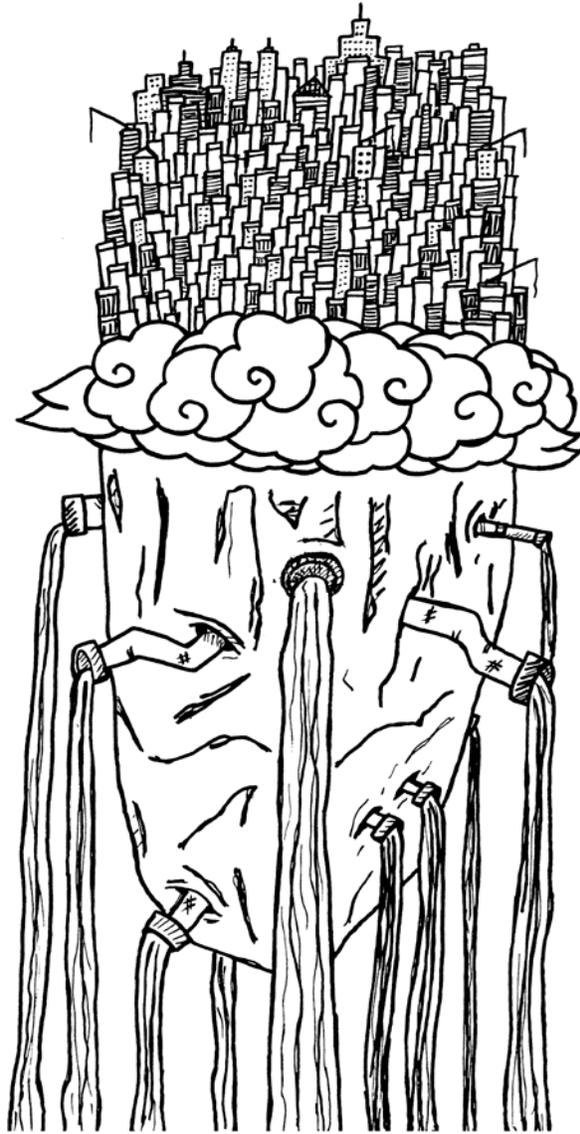
Enzo's sentence was punctuated by another howl, but this time from the sky. Was the mouse alright?

"I want to be your friend!"

And with that Enzo become unhinged from the ground, and slowly followed after his floating friend. Together they escaped from the shallow fields of fallow, a hunt of howls hot on their trail.



VERSE III



The City of Lofty Ambitions

Copper-plated hands
Spin the new world upon the
Cog of destiny

Now alight Enzo and the mouse whizzed through the air, slicing through the cloud cover as they went. The sky-clouds were fluffy, unlike the ground-clouds from the field below. Their water vapor was warm, and cheerful, and made Enzo smile.

After they had passed through 421 sky-clouds, the city began to come into view.

Below the city, Enzo could clearly see the milky white fluid which flowed out of the city through large pipes, that seems to haphazardly stick out of the city. The runoff fell from the city and drizzled down onto the earth below, onto the Milkshake Marsh. Well that explains why the whole place is so milkshakey all the time, thought Enzo.

Enzo, and the mouse drifted towards one of the many exhaust pipes that protruded from the floating city. As they did so, Enzo became acutely aware of how much his separation from Beatrix had begun to bother him.

After landing Enzo thanked his tiny guide for the ride, though there was much more about the fields of fallow that Enzo wanted to know. Unfortunately Enzo's questions only struck terror into the already quivering mouse. "I've been down there too much!" Screamed the mouse, before he scurried off into the dark of the exhaust tunnel. Enzo alone had a long walk ahead of him.

After jogging through the run-off that flowed through the tunnel for nearly 28 minutes Enzo finally came to a place where light filtered down through the roof of the tunnel. Surely these were not cracks in the road, no it was a manhole cover! Enzo was overjoyed! At last he had come back to where he had begun! He could finally go home, and start going back to school. Oh how much school Enzo missed! Ms. Conduct would surely scold him for his absentee streak, but it would not matter, he would be so glad to see her on—Enzo paused for moment as he tried to remember which day of the week it was. Up to this point Enzo had made no effort to count the days which had gone by since he first fell down the manhole. It was almost as if time did not exist down here.

Enzo groped around in the dark looking for a ladder, as he continued to ponder the timelessness of this world. Enzo guessed that he had been gone for a period of eight days, at most. Without thinking it his hands had caught hold of something cold, by the time Enzo had realized it, he was already halfway up out of the tunnel climbing rung by rung. The first he was going to do when he got home was to tell Beatrix how much he missed her!

Enzo's head softly thudded against the manhole cover, and with his left hand he grabbed his throbbing head to sooth it. That's odd, I still have human hair. Enzo wondered if he would one day return to how he once was. But just as Tenza had told him in the beginning, the choice would be his.

Enzo mounted a double-pronged attack on the manhole cover as he tried to lift it with both of his hands. At the same time Enzo was careful to use the pressure he was exerting to stay wedged between the ladder rung, and the manhole so as not fall off.

After much effort, the manhole cover began to budge. A little at first, but as Enzo became increasingly encouraged by his progress, he began to strain even harder.

He worked in this way and made incremental progress to slide the cover off, never knowing that someone on the surface had spotted the nudging cover, and also began to move it. With one last mighty heave Enzo finally threw the cover from its covering! Enzo thought himself quite strong, until a hand appeared from the sky and grabbed him by his shoulders. The hand which grabbed Enzo was one of a pair of hands which belonged to the money lender. In the next moment the money lender took his two hands and began to pat Enzo down, shaking the dirt from his clothes. "How did you fall down into the sewers?"

The Busway

Foggy days lament
Scattered leaves in wet cement
Autumn falls quiet.

Enzo began by explaining what had happened to him, and what he had seen, however his initial explanations were beyond explanation. In an effort to remedy this he launched into more explanations for his first explanations. After much explaining the money lender still did not really understand what had happened but decided to take pity on Enzo all the same. And soon he began to entertain the idea of taking Enzo on as an apprentice. Yes! The money lender liked the idea of an apprentice! He knew in his heart of hearts that Enzo would never find his mother, lost in the expanse of the city, and with someone around the office he would not feel so lonely at work anymore. "You're hired!" Said the money lender, seemingly out of nowhere. "There's so much for you to learn! First you need to educate yourself on the nation's currency! We'll go to the National Mint first!"

And with that the money lender led Enzo deep into the heart of the city.

It was not long before they arrived at the bus station. As they sat and waited for the bus that would take them to the national minting orchard, Enzo asked the money lender about the different kinds of buses parked in the depot. "Well each bus is specifically engineered to take people to different places. For example the Elsewhere Bus is pretty much a standard, typical run-of-the-mill bus. It takes people to places other than where they currently are. Then there's the Anywhere Bus, this service is perfect for those who do not really care where they end up," said the money lender.

"Well what about that bus?" asked Enzo pointing to a formidably sleek, black bus, the ominous glow of which dwarfed the others at the station."

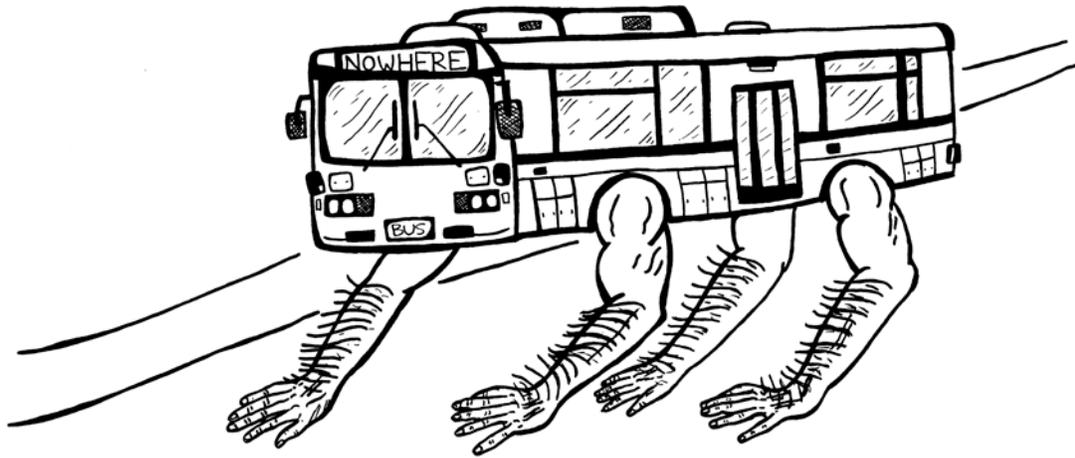
"Oh that's the Nowhere line, ideal for those who don't want to go anywhere."

The Nowhere Bus made Enzo feel very tiny, "That doesn't really seem like a useful sort of bus to have." Said earnest Enzo.

"You would be surprised at how many people spend their lives traveling the road Nowhere." Said a stranger who sat next to Enzo on the bus bench. The stranger was old, and carried a bouquet of stickleberry bramble in one hand, and a ticket for the Nowhere Bus in the other. Enzo turned to meet her gaze, and felt his lifetime pass by in the blink of her eye. Enzo wanted to ask her where the Nowhere Bus lead to, but before he could summon the words, the stranger's bus pulled into the depot from out of nowhere, and she got up to board it.

Enzo spent the next few minutes in silence until the 7:15 Elsewhere pulled into the depot, and carried them, the duo, deep into west downtown.

The bus sputtered and pattered as it lurched along, and if you were ride inside of it you would feel as if you had just stepped down the gullet of an industrial slug. At least this is how Enzo felt as he rode along inside the cavernous hull, his stomach lurching and churning in time with the leviathan. It was at this moment that Enzo turned his thoughts to the lurk-warm summer day when he and his mother played in the dirt together planting vermicelli, just for fun.



Beatrix, who coincidentally was sitting at the back of the same bus, had also set her mind to wandering as the steely beast limped along, shaking her thoughts. Passengers boarded the bus at each new station, however when they reached the third bus stop the bus departed before a man who had been running to the station could get on. After seeing this Beatrix was reminded of the unfeeling nature of the bus. In that moment she realized then that the way of the bus goes on with or without passengers, and cares not for those who are late. It was also then that Beatrix realized that she did not want to ever be like the bus. She wanted to feel love, and be surrounded by others who care about her.

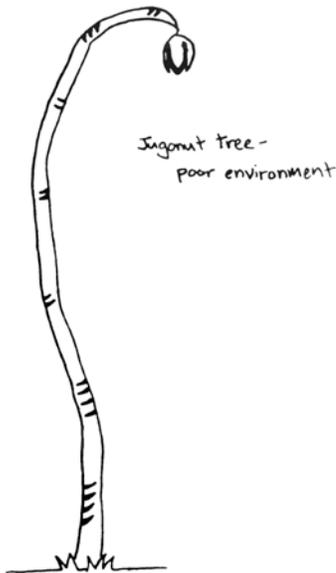
While Beatrix quietly pondered her reflection, Enzo and the money lender got off at Centennial Way. It was not until the bus was in motion again that she was able to look through her reflection, and at the duo as made their way across the street. "STOP THE BUS! PLEASE!"

It was then that Beatrix was reminded of the unyielding nature of the bus.

Up The Greenhouse

The money lender led Enzo across Centennial Way and into a looming emerald building. Large viridian pillars supported the taxing weight of the marble-verde roof. There emblazoned across the façade of the structure were the words "NATIONAL MINT ORCHARD."

Just outside the structure several sad trees dotted the perimeter of the monolith. Each tree leafless and naked. Enzo concluded that they either had never had leaves or that they had been all but stripped away by some tragedy in their early development. Enzo would later learn that these lonely trees were in fact jugonuts that had never received proper care or nourishment.



Upon entering the building, Enzo was greeted by the splendor of the different types of nut trees housed within the orchard. The money lender began to explain their purpose as Enzo marveled at their number, "The National Mint Orchard contains many currencies of nuts. Different trees produce different nuts, which in turn have different values. Most of the nuts of value are derived from members of the awlnut family. This includes the crawlnuts, wawlnuts, tawlnuts, smawlnuts, brawlnuts, mawlnuts, and others. You wouldn't be able to tell from the looks of this place now, but when this Orchard was first established it no more than a small field of woody stems. The grove struggled as it was susceptible to drought, and other severe weather conditions that made currency cultivations unstable. But as the grove grew over time the curators of the orchard learned how to domesticate it. The founders built an enclosure around it. That same enclosure is the same building that we now know as the National Greenhouse--"

The money lender was often lent to spending lots of time giving stretched explanations. This was especially true when it came to the matters which he valued most, such as the matter of money. Today proved to be no exception.

As the money lender wordily twirled about the orchard weaving the history of the Greenhouse tight around the trees themselves, Enzo stopped by a line of wawlnuts to study them. The money lender saw this and explained to Enzo, "Much like any other variety of awlnut, wawlnuts grow in neatly sectioned beds and rows. But the wawlnut is a very special nut. One wawlnut is equal in value to 2.5 tawlnuts, and holds the same value as 5 bralwnuts. 1 bralwnut alone is equivalent to having 100 mawlnuts! The wawlnut is a convenient currency because it is not as large as the crawlnut, which are twice as valuable as the wawlnut, but need to be broken down for smaller purchases. However not all nuts are awlnuts!"

Enzo's head was beginning to spin, and he had to grab hold of it as the money lender continued to rattle off the facts of fiat currency. "-- of course not everyone can be a money lender like myself. Most nuts are used for money spending. However, there are those who send money out of the state for bending--"

"Why would one bend money?" asked Enzo.

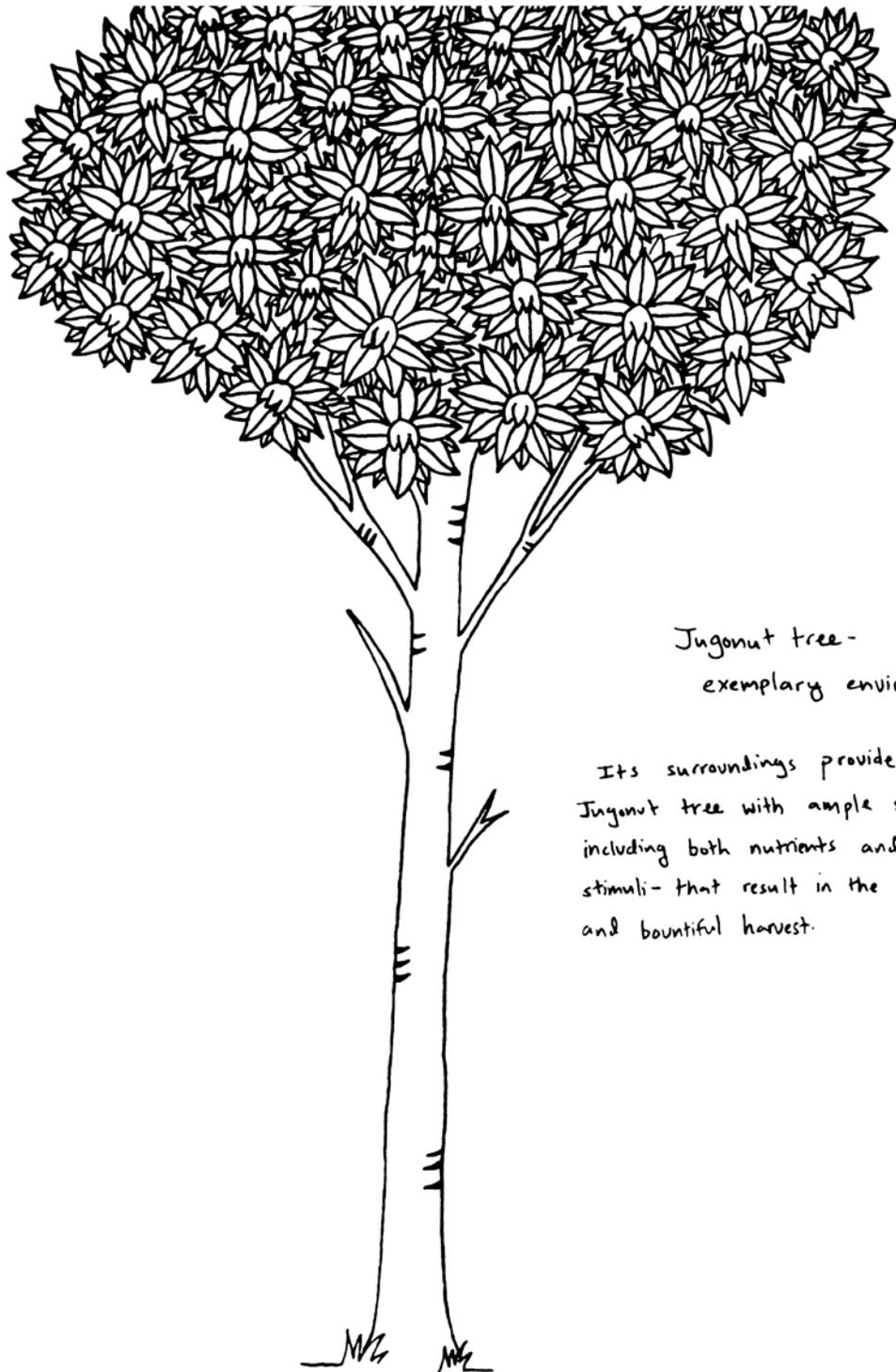
"It is quite simple. After all the nuts have been spent, and all the loans been leant, there are still nuts to be bent, and stretched to increase their value!"

Enzo did not understand at all what could be gained from bending nuts. However he also did not understand most of the information that the money lender was sending his way. All of these words kept ending with the same ending. There seemed to be no end to what can be done with money. Enzo finally let go, and his head careened headlong into transient nodes of thought.

In a sudden flash of lucidity Enzo asked, "Can you 'end' money?" .

The money lender halted his speech. His face had screwed up real tight almost as if to reflect reality. Then just as quickly as the money lender had become so repulsed, he became calmed by sight of rational thought. "Come now, we still have much more of the Greenhouse to explore," said the money lender, ignoring Enzo's question.

Then the money lender led them into a grassy glass gas-operated elevator that carried them up to the next floor. The leafy lift was old and slow. Riding in it felt like standing on the cusp of a sprouting tulip. The duo rode in the box-petal until it arrived at the elevation floor, and walked down the narrow corridor, and opened a normal looking door. Inside was a room that contained a single, healthy jugonut tree. The room seemed to be lit by the radiating glow of the tree. The jugonut's crispy leaves of green were gold with bliss, and the nuts were arranged in a magnificent cavalcade poised to cascade down at any moment.

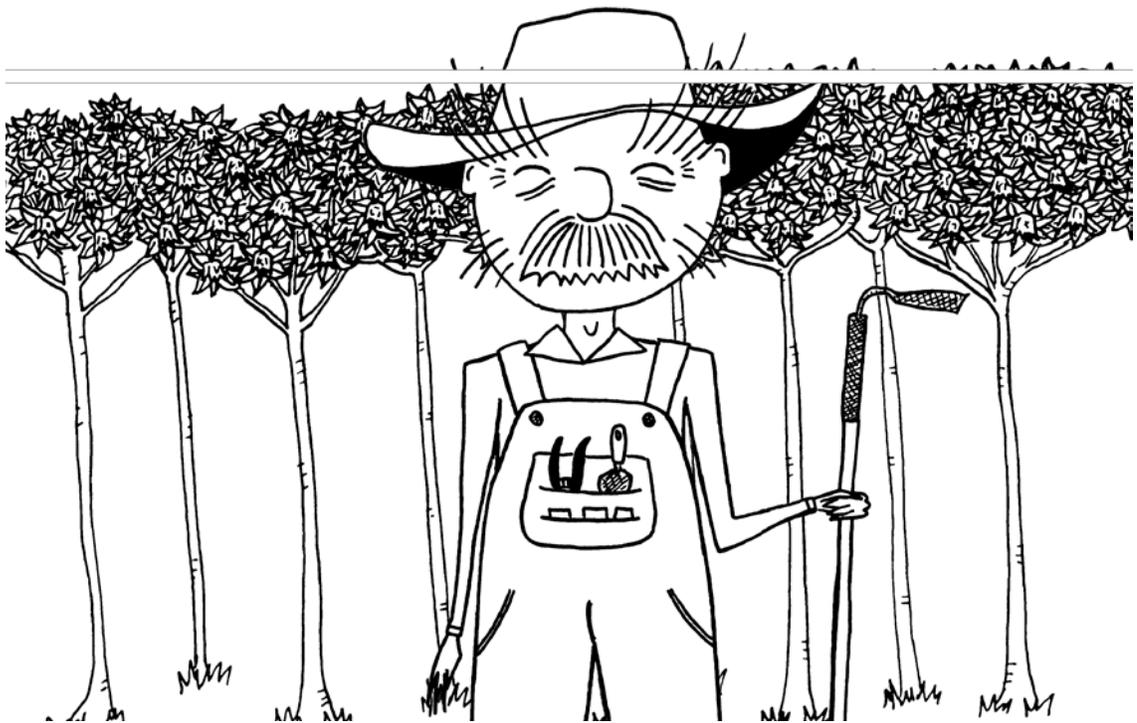


Jugonut tree -
exemplary environment

Its surroundings provide the
Jugonut tree with ample sustenance -
including both nutrients and intellectual
stimuli - that result in the tree's growth
and bountiful harvest.

In the midst of the clamorous beauty of the jugonut, a single leaf fell from the tree. Enzo saw the beauty in the descent of this single leaf. The leaf turned as it fell, exposing both faces as it did. The little cared not which side of itself it revealed to the world as it fell. Side-turn-side-turn-side. It was a courageous display, and as Enzo watched, he wished that one day he may be as carefree as the little jugonut leaf.

A gardener who had been with the tree since the day it first sprouted walked over to the jugonut and asked them how they were feeling today. The jugonut swayed their leaves as if to sign its curiosity for the current state of affairs, and another leaf gracefully fell to the sweet earth below it. The gardener engaged the jugonut in conversation, and watered it as they casually discussed the sincerity of dogs.



Enzo and the money lender watched in silence, and left the room when they were done. "I hold tremendous respect for the gardener who attends the jugonut." Said the money lender, "it's just impracticality of it. It's much easier to raise awlnuts instead! Come now we'll catch the 9:45 to my office!" So the duo made their way from the Mint and into the evening's embrace.

However once outside Enzo saw Beatrix waiting outside on the curb, and ran straight to her arms, and the money lender melted aside. Introductions were made, but

tux hung from the wall, a private stash of walnuts grew on the windowsill, and much to the horror of Enzo, a stuffed tiger lily's pelt lay on floor.

The money lender pulled Beatrix aside to a corner of the spacious room, and showed her his nut collection. "This is my complete collection of mawlnuts. Several years after my mother passed away the government began releasing mawlnuts from each of the 585 boroughs within the city. They released 13 different mawlnuts per year, every year, and now 45 years later I have finally managed to collect every single one!" The money lender's gleeful words ended on a wistful. "I don't deserve any of it."

Beatrix perked up at this remark. "What makes you say that?"

"I don't really know. I just remember growing up without much money. My family moved around a lot, but we mostly stayed within borough 44.

"That's all in the past though, and now that I am rich. Though sometimes when I sit in my office I just can't shake the feeling that I don't deserve any of my accomplishments."

Beatrix was silent, she did not know how to respond to the money lender opening up to her like this. This was the best thing that Beatrix could have done though. The money lender was not looking for any advice, or consultation, he just wanted to be heard.

Enzo was lying on a gold-encrusted floor tile, next to the tiger lily pelt stroking it, as he once stroked the tiger lily back at the Milkshake Swamp. "How are you old friend?"

What struck Enzo most about the decoration of the floor was not the gold tiling or the silver lining between the tiles, but the space where the space between. The silver and the gold did not intersect perfectly, and there lay an emptiness between. While not immediately noticeable to the average observer the space between cried out for his attention. This narrow line in the floor must seem like an impassable abyss to the passing ant.

--thank you for listening to me," said the money lender.

"Anytime sir."

"It's fake! It's fake! It's all false!" Enzo burst out! "Look! There's a tag! It was made in Bottsylvania! 50% Polysachirithene, and 49% Crayeon!"

"What's the 1%?"

"It doesn't matter! It's all fake!"

Enzo's outburst punctuated the silence in the room at a good time. The money lender silently thanked Enzo for the distraction as he began to cry.

"Sorry that my rug gave you such a scare there Enzo."

"It's quite alright now!" Enzo said with a chirping sound.

"I don't even know why I have that rug, it doesn't really fit with the theme of my office anymore." The money lender paused. "My mother always told me not to drink the water at the beach. She said that the saltwater would only make me thirstier. I realize now that the same is true of money."

Sounds like you could use a change of scene sir. Why don't you come with us to the Ocean of Compassion?"

"Wha- No- There's no way!" said the money lender "How do y- I wouldn't even know the first thing about how to swim there."

"It's never too late to learn!" Said Enzo with another little chirp!

The money lender was silent, experiencing the same perplexment that Beatrix had felt several moments earlier. Why would this child care so much about me? Thought the money lender. He decided that it did not matter, for the first time in a while he felt loved.

While all of this was nice, them, the trio had no idea how to get to the Ocean, let alone where it was. But this did not discourage them in the least. In fact it only strengthened their resolve. The money lender promised to ask around about how they may arrange to leave the city.

In payment for the kindness they had shown, the money lender offered to let Enzo and Beatrix stay at his apartment until they found their way home, or other suitable lodgings in town. Though Enzo and Beatrix did not expect anything in return for their friendship, they agreed to stay with the money lender for the time being. In the morning Beatrix, and Enzo, and the money lender would practice strokes of kindness in anticipation of swimming in the Ocean of Compassion.

Borough 575

The following day Enzo woke up in a cold sweat. He had just had strangest dream. Actually, now that he thought about it was not quite the strangest dream he had ever had, but it came close. In his dream a man who looked like Tenza sat next to him and Beatrix at the movies as they watched a film that was a nature documentary on the life of Pietro Swoleman.

At that exact moment Pietro Swoleman also woke up from a dream on the other side of the city. Though his dream was about vanilla, and Pietro thought it was a pleasant dream. After lying bed for several minutes Pietro reached for the cool glass of water that he had set by his bedside the night before. Condensation still clung to the glass much as a baby chimpanzee holds on tight to his mother's back for the first two-three years of his life. Sitting upright in bed Pietro supped the heavy water, and set it back on the nightstand next to his extinguished candle. Though its light had burned out a while ago, it remained Pietro's most sentimental possession. Which was not saying very much since Pietro had given up most of his possessions when he moved to the city in search of new digs in the wake of the destruction of his old home. It was on mornings such as this that Pietro would contemplate where his childhood friends had fled to in the aftermath of the fire as he drank the stale city water. Maybe the birds had flown away in search of a new branch, and the badgers, moles, and other such burrowing creatures escaped nature's wrath in an underground bunker. I wonder how Tom is doing now. I wonder if he'll ever forgive me, thought Pietro as he put threw the sheets off from his legs.

Pietro then stood up, and was surprised when a piece of paper dropped from its hiding place in the great tumult of his movement.

Looking for a friend?
Then Bonnaroo Avenue
Is the place for you

This style of writing greatly confused Pietro. Why use trite bits of poetry to communicate ideas when you can just say it! Wondered Pietro. He then remembered that Enzo had liked to write haiku too. Old wounds fell open, and in his anger Pietro tore up the tiny slip of paper. After this outburst Pietro immediately felt sorry. The note probably was not from Enzo, he could not imagine what Enzo would be doing running around the City, when he was looking for the Ocean. but since he had moved to the city all that he could do was think about finding some friends. It was with that that Pietro gathered up his candle, and 99 staves, and set off for Bonnaroo avenue.

Pietro walked the many blocks from his apartment to Bonnaroo Avenue with great care. He kept alert, so as to avoid trouble, all the while looking for anyone who might be carrying a staff that he may challenge. You never know, today could very well be the day that quest finally arrives at its end! Pietro's feet soared at the thought of this. With brisk spirits Pietro walked all the way to the corner of and Gemini and Wawl Street, there Pietro saw an elderly stranger walking with a wooden cane. Pietro jumped at the sight of the stranger, and was greatly excited by this prospect, until he realized the age of his adversary. Pietro knew that to challenge a knight of such an advanced age

would not prove to be a fair contest. So he continued down Gemini Way, looking at the ground, feeling a little bit less chipper now.

Pietro walked in much the same manner for a while, not paying much attention to his surroundings. He walked past several stores they began to open for business, their keepers caught off guard by the early morning light. As Pietro continued walking he passed by shoppes, saloons, and parlors of every sort, in addition to many seedy restaurants. One nameless restaurant lay totally eclipsed in the shadow of a black alleyway, welcoming those also besmirched by darkness. The waiters of the establishment wore uniforms the color of their hearts, and served shade on black plastic trays. Truly there was great beauty in the grotesque shape that the restaurant took on. But Pietro just walked on by, not ever noticing, and he would have walked right past Bonnaroo Avenue in the same way, had not been for the Haiku Gumshoe.

With a large pencil, and his favorite notebook in hand the Haiku Gumshoe sat at the entrance to Borough 575 all morning hoping that he would see Pietro on his way to respond to his message. As he waited the Haiku Gumshoe scribbled details of the city sidewalks in his notebook, and practiced making his introduction.

"Hello! I'm the Haiku Gumshoe, I'm so glad that you got my note!

"Ahu-hem, hi. I'm the Haiku Gumshoe.

"Excuse me sir, you seem to be looking for a Haiku master. . . Well you just so happen to be in luck!

It was at this moment that the Haiku Gumshoe saw Pietro walk by, just as he had many times before, but this time he needed to get his attention. The Haiku Gumshoe ran after Pietro and threw his hand on his shoulder, in response Pietro immediately drop-stepped backwards, and turned to face the Haiku Gumshoe.

"Hello. . Hi-- my name is Allen!" This last string of words broke out of Allen's mouth like a band of thieves from a vault newly robbed of its meaning.

"My name is Pietro, did you leave this note in my room while I slept this morning?" Asked Pietro holding up the tiny shreds of paper for Allen to see.

Allen did not like the look of this, and attempted to explain his position. However before he could even attempt to do so, Pietro's eyes caught hold of the large wooden pencil which Allen held in his left hand.

It was at this moment that Pietro realized his destiny. My journey ends here, thought Pietro as he challenged Allen to a duel for his pencil. Allen reacted much in the same way that anyone else would, and ran towards his house, and so Pietro chased him ever deeper into the heart of Borough 575.

Evening fell fast, and found Pietro resting on a playground swing by Allen's house, resting from his long day of chasing Allen around the suburbs. Allen was there too, sitting on his own swing, still panting from the day's excitement. Gradually they, the duo, began to talk to one another, and Allen told Pietro about how he got into the business of being a human statue.

"As you may have already gathered, I'm a terribly shy person, but I love hanging out with other people"

"Yeah?"

"Yes, a lot actually. Then one day in the plaza in the middle of our district, I saw a statue move! The movement was ever so slight, but I knew it for what it was! The carving was clearly eavesdropping on the conversation on the couple sitting on the marble bench beneath the fountain!"

Though thoroughly exhausted Pietro's logic had not yet left him, and he resisted to believe Allen's story. He had spent his entire life working with stone, and had spent plenty of time around statues, and never once did he see one move.

"Well you're right! Most statues can't move and the few extraordinary ones that can move are exceptionally crafty! The day that I caught one of these crafty creatures, I knew that I had stumbled onto something big, and from that day forward I knew that I wanted to become a human statue!

"Everyday I went to the plaza to practice my art. After a couple of weeks of doing so I had improved to the point where people would not notice me for a several seconds but only if I held my breath, and the game was over as soon as I exhaled. I could also manage to disappear in a similar way but again I was limited by the need to breathe. So I began working on my breathing and progressively got better at not being noticed by others over the years.

Pietro muttered his disbelief to no one in particular and looked around, and found that he was quite by himself. Maybe Allen had never actually existed, and he had just spent the afternoon chasing some ghost around the borough. Maybe Allen was an imaginary representation of Pietro's own hidden desire to completely disappear--

"Yeah, it's pretty hard to believe, given how great eyes are in terms of their ability to perceive moment," Allen said. "But just like everything else has its own limit. A threshold under which not moving, and moving only a tiny bit become indistinguishable. The trick is to control your body so as to make every movement imperceptible to the human eye. "

"Geez! When was the last time someone spotted you?" Asked Pietro after he had regained his calm.

. . .

Supper time was fast approaching, and Allen's Mother began to wonder where he had gotten off to for the day. "Allen, are you home? Alleen?? Alleen???" Called Allen's mother throughout the house. It was not uncommon for Allen's mother to be unsure of whether or not he was around the home. If only for his incredible statue powers, and not because she did not keep tabs on him.

"I'M OUTSIDE MA, BE THERE IN A SEC!

"Want to come over for dinner?" Pietro gladly accepted and they walked home together.

Allen's mom (+,+) greeted the duo as they entered the house, and was glad to meet to Pietro after hearing so much about him from Allen. Afterwards Pietro thanked Ms. Gumshoe for the pleasant dinner and followed Allen back to his room.

Allen's room was decorated in precisely the way that one would have imagined it to be decorated. Posters of poets were plastered across all four walls of the room, and in the center stood a small four-poster bed. On each of the corners of the bed stood a small carving of a poet, or an author, or some figure from literature. The only one that Pietro recognized was the bust of Pallas on one of the rear pillars of the bed.

Pietro's eye was immediately drawn to one of the posters on the wall. The poster was long and white, covered by the image of a pink tree against the sunset. Along the edges of the tree's trunk someone had carved a poem. Pietro read the poem, and liked it so much that he read it again aloud.

A small maple leaf
Falls flipping from side to side
Both faces in free fall

What transparency
It proves in its audacious
Descending display

How I wish to one
Day learn the courage of the
Little maple leaf

"That's one of my favorite ones by Master Tenza."

The name struck Pietro down ill, and he had to take a seat on the bed. Enzo had once told him about a person beyond wisdom named Tenza, and the memory of Enzo made him wretch.

Allen was greatly confused by this, and did not understand how anyone could ever be so disgusted by the name of the greatest poet and philosopher of their time! He asked Pietro if he was alright. It was a silly question given that Pietro was clearly not alright, but Allen wanted to show that he cared in some way.

"It's- the poem reminded me of the person who destroyed my home, and took away my hope."

"Oh, that's terrible," said Allen, "I'm so sorry for having made you remember them."

"It's alright, I know I need to get over at some point, there's no changing the past."

"Would you like to talk about it?"

Pietro did want to talk about it, and so they did. Pietro told Allen all about how he first met Enzo, and how they soon became friends. Then Pietro spoke about Enzo's ultimate betrayal, after he had confided the secret of his candle to him.

Allen sat on the bed next to Pietro leaning forward, and listening to Pietro's story with every ounce of his being. Though he had been there, and saw Enzo try to snuff out

Pietro's candle, he never tried to interject his opinion and listened fully until Pietro finished his story.

"Yeah, and I'm still pretty angry about it. Though not having to take care of the candle everyday has been really liberating. I walk around freely now, without worrying about being a fire hazard anymore . . . You're a really good listener Allen." Said Pietro upon realizing that he been talking a lot, "Thank you."

"It was so little! Good listening comprises fifty percent of a good conversation!"

"I agree with you there, but sometimes I find it hard to be patient enough to attentively listen to others all the time."

"Yeah, it's easier for me to be patient about these kinds of things since I spend so much of my time pretending to be completely still," said Allen with a laugh, "Haha! Though, I would recommend practicing breathing even to those who are not in the business of becoming statues."

"Really?"

"Yes!" Said Allen, becoming quite excited now. "You see I used to have some anxiety issues. Whenever I would have some big event come up, like a school exam, or a conflict between friends, I would fixate on the issue, until it would be all that I could think about. Which as you can imagine caused me a lot of stress. It was not until I started my statue training, that I found that focusing on measuring my breath really helped calm me down."

"Hm, any idea why that works for you?"

"Well sometimes it's a really good way to clear the mind of distractions, and at other times it provides a space where I can be alone with my thoughts, and reflect on them."

Pietro really liked the idea of practicing breathing regularly, so he and Allen practiced a breathing exercise together, counting to 10 in their heads while inhaling, and then counting to 10 as they exhaled, careful to always breath at a slow constant rate.

Pietro did find this calming but was easily distracted from it as well. After several minutes of deep breathing he spotted a poster of a young boy holding his hands together as if he were praying. The poster read as follows:

Two hands familiar
Clap together merrily
In their shared delight

But how does one clap?
What's that sound like? I confess
I haven't a clue

--Simon Wisondorf

Pietro liked the poem, but for some reason the name Simon Wisondorf struck Pietro as being severely out of place given the context of the poem, but he was not about to say anything mean about a person that Allen admired. What really bothered Pietro is that this poem also reminded him of Enzo, though he had no idea why.

Pietro realized that he had been holding breath for a while now, and he returned the exercise and reflected on his thoughts of Enzo.

Inside the ancient arena of Pietro's thoughts there stood a lone gladiator in the center. As the throngs of people in the stands booed and jeered him in their tattered sarongs, one voice in the crowd rang out clear, "Forgive your friend."

Ozwaldo Grand

Sometimes the best way
To solve your problems is to
Help someone else first

Today Enzo, and Beatrix traveled to the Western Observatory. It would be at the observatory that they would discover the whereabouts of the Ocean of Compassion. This would indeed prove to be one exciting outing. Though Enzo's attitude did not reflect one of excitement that morning.

Enzo emerged from the money lender's apartment, a weight of hopelessness on his shoulders. He spent the day talking to others he met in the street, asking if they knew the way out of the city, however no one had much help. Though most of the people were also seeking a way out, no one had any solutions. Enzo also met several slumbums on his journey around town. Every now and then he would stop and speak with them, despite the money lender's warnings. He found that the slumbums also had no idea

It was not long before the city was cloaked in evening again. In the dark of the dusk it was hard to see anything or anyway that you might be hoping to travel. As Enzo's eyes adjusted to the lighting he bumped into others who stood waiting in line outside of a large building. The sign affixed the building proudly proclaimed the building as " THE WESTERN OBSERVATORY" in loud, flashing letters. Enzo did not understand what it was about this building that made it so attractive to him, or why hundreds of others would stand in line to get inside, but he found he himself thoroughly seduced by the allure of the production.

As he waited, Enzo asked around to see why people were so eager to get into the observatory. Enzo heard many different reasons, in response to his singular question, some were waiting to see Ozwaldo Grand so that they may learn of their future, while others were looking to make a deal. Regardless of the reason, everyone was in line to see Ozwaldo Grand. It was not long before Enzo felt himself become possessed by the notion of getting to see Ozwaldo Grand. He was going to stay in line until it was his turn to meet the man himself! Though this became harder to achieve as darkness fell deeper, and ambition waned.

It was not long before Enzo grew tired, and as he moved up the line he began to stumble, and amble. As Enzo ambled about in the darkness he accidentally stepped on top of Greese the carpenter's poor foot. In response to which Greese gave a terrible yell which startled Enzo so that he fell down, and into the line of persons waiting to see Ozwaldo.

"MOVE YOUR MESS!" Screamed a tiny voice!

Enzo would recognize that voice saying those words anywhere! "Mouse? Mouse? Where are you mouse?" Enzo asked the darkness.

"Right here," said the mouse from within Enzo's shirt pocket, "my name isn't mouse. It's Haus. People call me the Haus mouse." Said Haus.

Enzo was happy to be near a familiar again, and two caught up, as they waited in line together.

Like Enzo, Haus did not know why he was in line. Apparently he too had stumbled into the line, and decided to see where it went. The line was moving slow, but the duo were almost inside the observatory now.

After several more hours of waiting, the line had progressed to an impressive stairway carved from the greystone that ran deep beneath the observatory. At the entrance of the formidable staircase stood a modest sign.

Give freely the things that you most cherish
And you will be granted that which you desire
Though take care not to deceive me or you will perish
By the love of that which you require

Enzo saw this sign, and thought it nice, "Maybe Ozwaldo is a poet!"

Enzo had no idea whether or not this was true, but he wanted to keep the conversation going.

"And a good one at that!" Chimed in Haus, "Jist look at that rhyme scheme! A,B,A,B! I'm a writer too, and I know a good poem when I see one!"

Enzo and Haus would soon find out that in addition to being a nice poem, the sign was also a very sincere and binding promise.

They continued down the stairwell, descending ever deeper in the pit of the observatory. After another sizable chunk of time Enzo noticed that no one had passed by him on their way out. Which was odd because though there had been many people in front them, Enzo could not remember seeing a single soul come back up the stairway. Enzo told Haus of his observation. Haus reasoned with Enzo that this was most likely due to the existence of a separate 'exit only' stairwell, which people would use to exit out the back of the building. Enzo agreed that it would only make sense for that to be case, since he could not really imagine what kind of architect would design a building with no exit.

As the spiral staircase descend even further into the earth the temperature dropped accordingly, and Enzo and Haus shivered as they waited in line. Still advancing ever slowly toward Ozwaldo Grand. Though their snail's journey to the bottom of the stairwell would occupy them through the night, and well into the next day. During this time Enzo definitely fell asleep in line on multiple occasions.

By noon of the next day they, the duo, found themselves at the bottom of the stairway just outside of the archway of a large double-doorway, covered by a royal, purple curtain, and through the heavy veil, a song could be heard coming from inside. It was a chilling tune if the duo had ever heard one, and the frosty air stairwell air

seemed warm when compared to the song being played on the other side of the curtain. From inside Enzo could also laughter erupting from a hazel baritone. That must be Ozwaldo! thought Enzo, and with that he furtively peeked through the curtain.

Books, recipes, a piano, wallet-sized pictures of parents, and all other manners of things lined the walls of the underground chamber. Enzo even spotted a black mirror in the frenzy of objects that cluttered the room. In the center of the room stood large oak table and behind it stood an enormous man. And behind the enormous man stood stupendous piles of cash. Mawlnuts, brawlnuts, crawlnuts, and walwnuts! All kinds of awlnuts lay heaped upon the floor, as well as a few of the money trees like the ones that Enzo had seen at the Mint. Clearly the enormous man was a fellow of tremendous wealth.

This man was Ozwaldo Grand, and before him bowed the three who had stood in front of Enzo and Haus in line for the last day and a half. Though they were dwarfed in the presence of Ozwaldo Grand.

In the background of the room sat a skeleton man, who looked more skeleton than man. There he sat upon a liar's chair and as he sat he played another rattling melody upon a dusty piano. It was a little ditty in the skeleton's key, a minor scale remembered only by wayward souls wander through the dark. As he wove his song of sorrow little tiny, wets teardrops fell on his fake book, the leather binding long worn from its covering.

"I will gladly restore your land to you Sammerson siblings three, but first you give to me that which you cherish most."

"Of course!" Chorused the siblings in unison, and without further ado they presented a cast-iron hammer to Ozwaldo Grand.

"This was the hammer which our mother (+,+) used to build the Swamp Preservation Foundation. She single-handedly fought against the destruction of the swampland, marshes, fens, and other wet areas, before she passed her legacy on to us. This hammer held immeasurable sentimental value for her, as it now does for us."

After the siblings had given their well-rehearsed speech they were silent. Ozwaldo Grand heaved a heavy sighed, and the air in the room tightened around the three.

"I would like to take a moment to remind you that I have been to the Fields of Forthcoming, and that I have already seen all. I have seen your mother's life, and I know that the words you speak are untrue.



"And I would like to take this moment to remind you of our agreement. Those who try to deceive me will receive their just rewards."

As Ozwaldo spoke each of the Sammersons felt a dark weight begin to crush them, and before they could protest his judgement, they were each turned into a pile of mawlnuts.

Enzo was astonished by this atrocity, and would never have believed such a thing were possible had he not just witnessed it. Though Enzo's surprise was eclipsed by his anger against Ozwaldo. Though he had no way of knowing whether or not the Sammersons had been lying, he did know that Ozwaldo had been lying about the Fields of Forthcoming. In his anger Enzo burst through the veil and into the room yelling while Ozwaldo was bent over collecting the still rocking mawlnuts from the floor.

"If anyone is lying, you're the one who is lying!" Ozwaldo stood up, and stared Enzo down, not at all surprised by his intrusion.

"I *have* been to the fields and if you have been then you would know that it is a terrible place. A barren landscape decorated only by the bones of birds and other travelers who sought what could not be found!"

Haus had also entered room behind Enzo, and though he did not know what was going on, he supported Enzo.

"What you say is impressive child," said Ozwaldo in an attempt to pacify Enzo's pure rage, "for not many gaze upon the fields, and live to speak of it."

Enzo saw through Ozwaldo's agreeable façade, and it only angered him more deeply. He then began to shout Ozwaldo down once more calling him a liar, and a fraud, and demanding the safe return of the Sammerson siblings.

Enzo's harsh words fueled Ozwaldo, and he responded in kind with his personal brand of twisted philosophy, "I believe that people rarely see the world for what it is. Instead they see the world as a reflection of themselves. A parent who steps out in the world sees everyone else as being a sons and daughters of others. Whereas a criminal finds himself surrounded by murderers, pickpockets, and potential victims wherever he goes.

"Before you call me a liar, I would suggest that you reflect on the ways your view of the world shapes your reality. Here, this might be of use to you" said Ozwaldo as he held the black mirror up.

Enzo swatted the mirror from his face, and it fell to the ground. Though it did not shatter as one would expect a mirror to do so.

"I think it is time that you'd be leaving," said Ozwaldo.

Enzo, though frustrated, and Haus, though scared witless, were happy to oblige Ozwaldo's request. They left the underground room, and climbed back up the frozen stairwell, and returned to the afternoon's sweaty embrace.

• • •

After quitting the twilight observatory, they, the duo, made their way for Haus' home.

"It's not much of a house really," said Haus, "It's more a hole in the wall really, with just me and my two other roommates."

Enzo didn't really care anymore, he was just happy to see Haus again! "So how do you like your roommates?"

"They're alright, really. Mostly keep to themselves so we rarely do anything together."

"How did you meet?" Enzo faltered at the end of his question, he realized that he may come off as nosy.

Haus did not seem to notice, "Well I've known Haus since college, and we've kind of stuck together ever since, and we recently met Recluse earlier this year."

"Recluse?" Asked Enzo.

"Yeah, he's a mongoose.

"A recluse mongoose," Enzo softly wondered.

"The Recluse Mongoose, said Haus.

Then they, the duo, walked a little further in silence. The silent part of their walk was not bad, or inherently uncomfortable. In fact Enzo found that practicing being comfortable with silence to be a calming exercise. During their walk together Enzo realized for himself that like talking, being silent is the other equally important half of any good conversation.

However the silence bothered Haus greatly. "We should be getting there any moment now."

Enzo was now beginning to understand what Tenza meant about enjoying the journey, he just wished that he could share this feeling with Haus.

"Well here it is! Hole sweet hole!" Haus was not joking when he said that he lived in a crack in the wall. On a slumbum littered street Enzo and Haus entered his home through a crevice in the bricks.

When Enzo entered the house he was shocked to find that the interior of the rather inauspicious shelter to be quite nice. Haus was a hidden boss of interior decoration.

In one corner of the house there stood high stacks of ramshackled papers that had been modified into a writer's desk. Redactions of prospectuses and theses, mixed

with drafts of half-written dreams, as well as the occasional book had been brought together in order to form the wobbly desk in the corner. And atop of this literary ledge stood a glorious typewriter. Though in the corner of the house, the typewriter immediately drew in the wayward eye for it was the only thing that looked new in the house.

Enzo could not help but walk toward it. Haus was excited to see that Enzo took interest in his magnificent type writer and his life's work strained underneath the weight of the typewriter.

"Hey want to see the story that I am currently working on?"

"Yus!"

Haus smiled, "Well, it's not much as of yet. I mean-- I haven't finished it just yet. But at its essence it is a story about two sisters. BUT the sisters have suffered a lot of abuse, or neglect by their parents. It's a work in progress "

"Go on." Said Enzo conscious of his tone. He really wanted to like this story.

"So the two sisters are traveling, because they are lost. Otherwise they would never be traveling in the first place. But while they travel on their journey, they discovers *themselves*. Isn't that a brilliant plot device? Finding oneself in the midst of being lost? I think it's a choice way to start a story!"

Enzo smiled uncomfortably, he was all too familiar with how it feels to be lost, "So what are their names, the two sisters I mean."

"Well they're pretty choice names, I chose them myself. After a while I settled on the names Esther and Bernadine.

Enzo felt his ribs rattle.

"Yeah there they meet a lot of really cool characters, and they learn something important from each of them! For example, there is a Samurai Diver who teaches them the value of tradition. However her fixation on tradition and general inability to accept new kinds of thought lead to her inevitable downfall."

Haus flipped to the page with the illustration of the Samurai Diver, "Isn't that just tops?"



Enzo agreed it was pretty cool. But wanted to know more about the story.

"Well, they make a lot of friends, but then get separated from those friends, and even each other at some points, because that's just how things work out. But it's okay in the long-run because their only real goal is to find the Lake of Love so that they can find their way back home."

"The LAKE OF LOVE?" Asked Enzo.

"Yeah, I know. Not that great of a name, I'm still trying to figure out something better. Something that has a certain majesty to it--"

"Like the Ocean of Compassion???"

"Now I LIKE the sound of that!" said Haus as he scribbled a note down on the desk, "Say, how did you come up with such a great name?"

Enzo was startled that Haus had never heard of the Ocean before, but wanted to know more about Haus' book.

"How does it end???" Asked Enzo. A natural question for anyone who feels like their life is being acted out in words.

"Well I haven't finished it yet, but I really like writing tragedies so I'll probably kill one or more of the really important characters" said Haus.

"Noooooooooooo! That's a really bad idea!" Said Enzo.

"Why's that? I'm really good at writing tragedies! Check it out!" said Haus as he pointed to several essays in his desk. Enzo took a look at the desk and saw many morose titles such as *Is This It?*, and *Inform, The Next Of Sin*, and *Ask Yourself Why You Haven't Done Anything Useful Today*. There was even an autobiography titled *Haus: My Short Life In Monochrome*.

Enzo felt disparaged, and sought out hope. Any hope. Which he thought he had found when he picked up a promising volume of *Why Hope?*, and read the back of the cover.

Existence by its very nature is inherently and unequivocally short and painful. The sickness that rattles every being born into the world of space and time is eclipsed only by the anguish created by the limitations of one's own corporal being. Throughout the course of this modest proposal Haus creates a persuasive case to abandon hope in our daily lives.

Enzo felt a black hole open up in his stomach. Clearly Haus has seen a lot of pain, thought Enzo. "This book looks interesting," said Enzo. Haus was on his toes, "But I feel like you've got yourself in a rut! If you only think these negative thoughts about the world, then of course all of your stories will be tragedies! Why not try something new?"

Hus had never been asked this kind of question before. And he began to wonder what kind of direction his career would take if he tried writing genres other than

tragedy. Sadness was easy to write about. It was the emotion that he was most familiar with, and a commonly shared experience amongst others, which was integral to the reason his books sold at all.

"Want to eat bananas?" Asked Haus, trying to distract himself from the question.
"YUS!" Said Enzo

Though Haus still contemplated Enzo's question as they ate bananas together, and continued to think about it even after Enzo had left to go back to the money lender's apartment for the evening.

. . .

Meanwhile Beatrix, and the money lender had also been investigating the way out of the City. The money lender had spent much of the day calling all of his contacts hoping that someone would have an idea of how to leave the City. Schoolmates, colleagues, wives and husbands of clients, anybody. Anybody who had some idea of how to leave the City. Nobody had ever heard of another soul being able to leave, and everybody wanted to know why he was asking now.

While the money lender exhausted his work connections, Beatrix travelled to the City Library to check out if the city's historical records could offer any clues. Beatrix pored over microfilms of old newspapers for several hours. At the end of which time Beatrix was successful in that she learned all about the history of the City, however she still was no closer to learning how to escape the City.

Beatrix, and the money lender meet back at the apartment, and told each other about their days. Beatrix was disappointed that neither of them had been able to turn up any leads, but she was also secretly glad that they had both performed equally poorly. After dinner, the money lender pulled an old jigsaw puzzle out of the closet to help pass the time until Enzo came home. The money lender was a puzzle enthusiast of sorts. The halls of his apartment were covered in past jigsaws that he had completed, glued together and framed on the wall.

This one was a tropical scene. Workers on a banana plantation harvesting a bumper crop for the season. Though there was something strange about the image that irked Beatrix. The plantation worker's heads were bent, intent on their work, but Beatrix understood that if the picture on the puzzle's box would let them, the workers would run right off the cardboard box, and escape home to their families. As individual puzzle pieces the workers were free, though if the puzzle were to be solved the workers would again become trapped within the confines of the farm. Maybe that was just the price of belonging to the larger picture. Beatrix thought about all of this, and at the same time she wondered when Enzo would be getting back. As the night wore on she and the money lender puzzled over the picture on the box together, connecting pieces, then connecting communities of pieces, all of this leading up to the eventual oppression of the plantation workers. Beatrix needed to stop thinking about this, and she turned to conversation as her tool of escape, "So is 'the money lender' your full name?"

"Well no, my given name is Wallace . . . it actually sounds really weird to say my name out loud like that. Wall-ace."

"Why's that."

"I guess that it's just a side effect of being on my own so long. The only people I ever see are clients, and the employees at the Mint, and they only need my title to know who I am Waalleesss"

"Well it's nice to meet you Wallace," said Beatrix shaking his hand.

"The pleasure is all mine Beatrix!"

The evening continued on quite merrily. Beatrix, and Wallace regaled each other with stories of their past. Wallace spoke to Beatrix all about his clients. It seemed odd to Wallace that the majority of them were well-to-do couples in the process of starting their own families. He found it especially difficult to work with these types of people without first being consumed by envy for their lifestyle.

"Is that because you wish that had children, or a child?" asked Beatrix.

"Yes, well, it's complicated. Being a parent seems like it would be rewarding endeavor. Though sometimes a parent will come into my office with a screaming child always easy."

"You're right on both parts," said Beatrix, "My dad use to say that being a parent was a tremendous joy and duty, and that everyone should experience it. I don't think, he was necessarily, right about that last part, but I agree that it is the most valuable experience I have had so far."

"Hmmm . . . do you feel like the way that your parents raised you influences the way that you raised Enzo?" asked the Wallace.

After this Beatrix paused for a long time, and then answered, "No- Well—Not really.. I mean they had, their ideas and I have my own . . . While I'm sure that- that they did influence me in some ways, I know that a lot of my parenting style has also been formed in opposition to theirs. Maybe that is why I've been so lax with him." After this thought, Beatrix turned into herself and began to reevaluate her childhood.

"Maybe being a firm parent is necessary to being a good parent."

Wallace did not know how to respond to Beatrix's statement, but he was sure that what she had discovered was meaningful to her.

The hour had grown late and Beatrix, and Wallace agreed it would be best to finish the puzzle tomorrow. The workers only half oppressed, Beatrix and Wallace retired for the evening.

The events of the following day were much the same. After another morning of searching in vain at the DownTown Library Beatrix began to feel downhearted. She felt this way until she remembered the jigsaw puzzle from the day before! She took the 3:15 Elsewhere back to the apartment, and immediately began to work on the puzzle once more. Wallace arrived at the apartment shortly after he finished work for the day, and was surprised to see Beatrix attacking the puzzle with such zeal. He joined in and they, the duo, passed the afternoon in this way.

The puzzle had taken on new meaning for Beatrix, a meaningless meaning in fact. She realized that she had been overanalyzing the scene last night. Now the puzzle was just a mindless task And it was in this meaninglessness that Beatrix found true meaning. The half-formed puzzle had taken on new beauty, that the original individual puzzle pieces could never have achieved. Thin the picture looked so fresh, that Beatrix had half a mind to reach out and take one for herself. And they only become fresher as they, the duo, continued to assemble the puzzle. Bananas connected to other bananas,

and become bunches. Then the bunches would connect to other bunches, and form the tiers of each banana heart.

As the puzzle neared completion, the allure of the bananas grew ever stronger, and the bananas ever fresher-looking. So fresh that Beatrix could begin to smell them.

It was at this moment that Enzo burst into the apartment. "Hey folks! How's the search been going?"

Beatrix rushed to the door, and question Enzo his whereabouts the night before, and Enzo apologized to Beatrix, "I'm sorry about that I didn't expect to be gone so long." Enzo then proceeded to relate everything that he had seen in the observatory to Beatrix, and Wallace.

"What a terrible person!" Said Wallace, "I should call the authorities to alert them to the presence of this character!"

"I'm sure that the authorities are well aware of Ozwaldo." Said Beatrix "Besides, this guy just might be our ticket out of this city!"

Beatrix shared her plan with Enzo and Wallace. Enzo loved it, but Wallace had his reservations. Beatrix reasoned that even if her idea was flawed, they, the trio, would have plenty of time to figure out an alternative as they waited in line at the observatory. With that the trio packed provisions for their trip. Uncertain of whether or not he would ever return, Wallace said good-bye to his home, before they disembarked.

"C'mon Wallace, we want to beat the afternoon rush!" said Beatrix.

"I'm coming!" Said Wallace.

"Since when is your name Wallace?" Asked Enzo.

"Since when are you the only one who gets to have a proper name?" Said Wallace. The three laughed at the joke, and headed on their way. Wallace's sassy retort reminded Enzo of the first time that he met Haus. He hoped that he doing was alright.

. . .

Team Enzo arrived at the observatory well before the afternoon crowd, though Enzo guessed that there was still about a half-a-day wait before they could see Ozwaldo. When they arrived in the inner hall of the observatory the trio set-up their chairs, and a small, folding table. They were quite prepared for the lengthy wait ahead of them. Wallace had brought the banana puzzle so that they could finish it together, as well as two others to help pass the time. As the line advanced so did the trio, scooting their chairs, and folding table ever closer to Oswald, and their freedom.

After the passage of several hours they had managed to scoot their way into the greystone stairwell, and Enzo felt his memories of the place come flooding back. It was another several hours of scooting down the large stone steps of the stairwell before Enzo could hear the faint melody of the skeleton's song echoing up from the pitless abyss. "That it's! That's the skeleton's song! We must be getting close!"

Though Enzo had forgot that it was this was the longest leg of the journey. Another hour passed before Beatrix or Wallace could clearly hear the melody. They continued their descent into the darkness, following those who stood in front of them. No one spoke to any strangers the entire time they had been waiting, and the line was very quiet. Only the frigid notes of the eternal lullaby broke the silence, as they descended into the valley below.

Suddenly the music stopped, and the air was still for a while. Then a piercing scream sliced through the stale cavern air. Now it was quiet again. A surge of whispers streamed through the line, as people wondered at what the scream could have signified. The crowd was clearly shaken, yet no one gave up their spot in line. Waiting for such a long time can do strange things to a person.

Enzo began to wonder about what kind of people were the strangers in front of him. Were they also on their way to trick Ozwaldo? If so they were probably in bad shape, since Ozwaldo had a habit of knowing when people were trying to trick him. But what was it about these strangers that made them any worse off than himself? For he was also on his way to trick Ozwaldo. Beatrix had a plan though, and Enzo fully believed in her it, and that is what made their team better off than the others who lined up to meet their end. Or so Enzo hoped.

Though trapped in his thoughts about the future Enzo had continued to move in line with Beatrix, and Wallace, unaware of the progress that they had made. After a while Enzo recognized this, and remembering his trip to the fields, tried his best to remain in the present. When he opened his eyes he was surprised to see that they were already outside of the purple curtain!

Enzo was thrown headfirst back into his anxiety. His stream of consciousness was stripped of its fluidity, and his eyes shuttered. Each moment separate from the next. Disjointed by from the others by the imperceptible space between. In one moment Enzo was standing outside the curtain, and in the next he was inside Ozwaldo's home, bowing with Beatrix and Wallace. Ozwaldo was smiling and saying something about how glad he was that Enzo had come back with his friends, and Enzo could no longer hear the skeleton's lament. All that he could think of was the line that Beatrix had asked him to deliver.

"Now what is it that you most desire?"

But Enzo knew Ozwaldo's crooked deal, and when he heard it he repaid him with a leveled smile, and said, "I desire your well-being."

Ozwaldo was stunned, in his entire career nobody had ever had the presence of mind to consider his needs over their own. But the exchange was still missing a payment, and Ozwaldo was quite sure that no one would sacrifice their most prized possession for his own well-being. "And what will you give me in payment for my well-being?"

The music in the room stopped. Enzo who had been concentrating hard on breathing steadily, found himself holding his breath. Only after regaining his breathing did he answer Ozwaldo Grand. "I give you your well-being."

Enzo turned to Beatrix to look for approval, and then turned back to Ozwaldo whose face had turned pasty with rage. Ozwaldo knew he had been beat, what was worse was that he had to oblige a child, before he could get well.

Enzo was right about his health, in fact Ozwaldo had not been well for a while. He definitely had not been well ever since he began his little business in the basement of the observatory. At first he had hoped to help others by performing a simple service

for the public however the prospect of tripling his earnings had consumed Ozwaldo, just as those who have experienced loss are consumed by the promise that they might one day regain it all.

Ozwaldo fell back behind his desk, and collapsed in his chair, absolutely destroyed.

Ozwaldo wondered what his life would be like if he renewed his dedication to his own well-being. After having pondered this for several moments, Ozwaldo came to a decision! He placed his arm beneath his desk, and groped along the underside of it, fumbling for a secret lever.

In the next moment, the entire room fell apart, and everyone in it plummeted to the waters below.

Reunion

Like sand on the beach
The Ocean's weary finds peace
In community

The ocean heaved a salty sigh, as Enzo, Beatrix, Wallace, Ozwaldo, and the skeleton man, who now looked to be more man than skeleton, bobbed in the sway of the waves. Enzo felt refreshed the gentle rock of the Ocean. At long last he had found something familiar.

Meanwhile hundreds of people waved to Enzo from the shoreline. Though distant at first their faces become clear as he swam towards the Ocean's edge. There upon the sun-kissed dunes stood all of the friends that Enzo and Beatrix had made on their journey.

Makura waited by the sea and pulled Enzo, Beatrix, and Wallace up from the froth. Sitting on the sand, waiting to greet Enzo, sat Pietro Swoleman and Allen Gumshoe. The Vixen Trapper lay down to rest with the deer, and the fox. The Swamp Marshall danced about the sand with the Sammersons, and Haus Mouse met several fans of his latest book, *We Cheerful Few*.

Allen, and his mother later met Simon Wisondorf, and they began writing poetry in the sand together. Several others gathered to read the words, and to contribute their own. After an hour or so the wind had all but blown the poems away, claiming their meaning for itself. It was then that the group decided to build a bonfire where the words once stood.

Meanwhile, Ozwaldo floundered about the Ocean, struggling to thread water. Then the man who had been playing piano in Ozwaldo's room about half an hour ago, swam up to him and pulled Ozwaldo ashore. "Thank you Thomas," said Ozwaldo.

"Don't mention it, wanna go home?"

Ozwaldo did not return the question, but made an effort to stand. Thomas helped him get up. Together they walked out across the beach, Ozwaldo leaning on Thomas as they did. This scene concluded without notice from the others, who continued to be merry together well until the sun had set that day.

After much rejoicing the moment had finally come for Enzo, and Beatrix to say all of their goodbyes. It was with a heavy heart that Beatrix said good-bye to their friends. Her heart leaned heaviest when saying good-bye to Wallace, her newfound friend. However when Beatrix said good-bye to Tenza, she saw a look in Tenza's eyes that calmed her. To Beatrix his look meant to say that good-bye is never really good-bye. Sometimes Beatrix remembers that look, and she feels so good that her face melts into a Tenza smile.

Tenza gave Enzo the same look when they said good-bye, and Enzo smiled. Tenza's look made him realize the ridiculousness of trying to say good-bye. All of Enzo's friends had become a part of his identity through the impressions that they had left on him. Trying to say good-bye to these friends, would be like trying to say good-bye to himself. He knew that they would always be with him.

Enzo, and Beatrix returned to the water's edge, and saw themselves reflected once more in the waters below. In one moment they stood mere reflections of themselves, and in the next the Ocean had taken them again into its frothy embrace.

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