BY JESSI BLACKHAM

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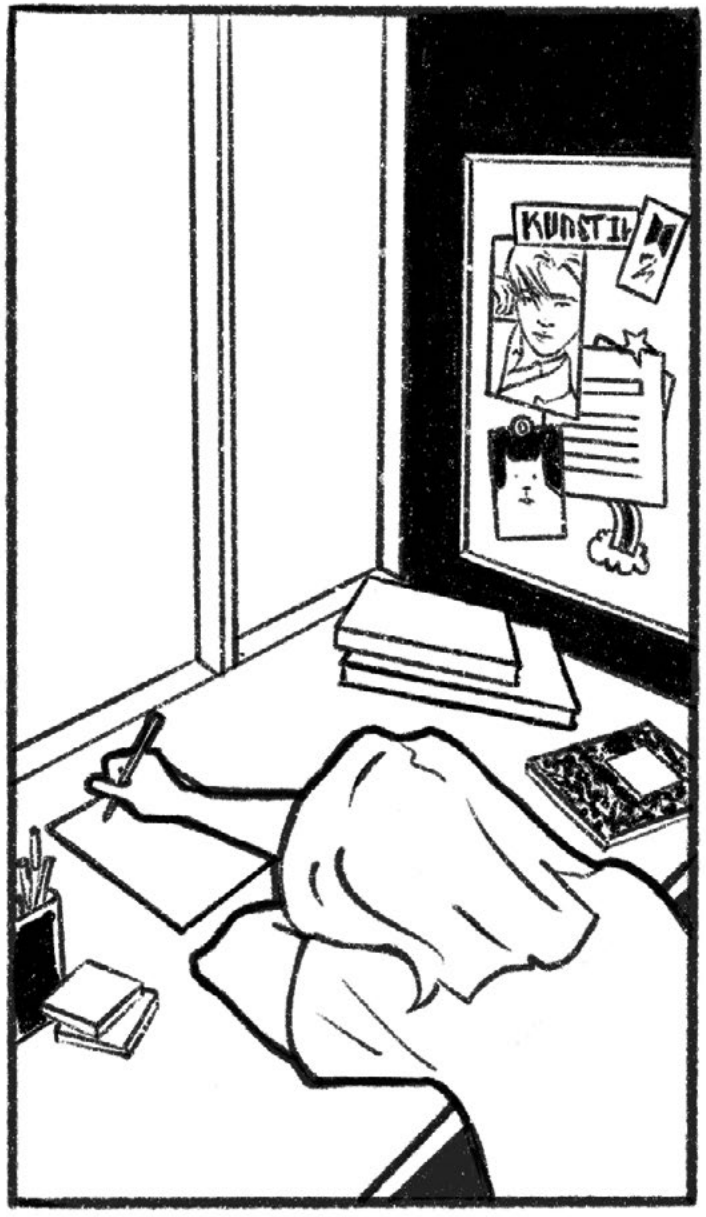
MOTHER OF CHAOS



SHE WAS LIVING SOMEWHERE THAT WAS NOT THE CITY, BUT NOT QUITE THE COUNTRY EITHER. THERE REALLY WASN'T MUCH EXCEPTIONAL ABOUT HER EXCEPT ONE THING; HER OVERWHELMING **FEAR OF THE OUTDOORS.** SHE MUCH PREFERRED TO STAY INSIDE HER HOME WITH FAMILIAR AND PREDICTABLE THINGS.

AT POINTS THOUGH, THIS BORED HER, SO SHE DEVELOPED A VIVID INNER WORLD. SHE HAD INCREDIBLE ADVENTURES WITHOUT EVER ACTUALLY

SETTING FOOT OUTSIDE HER ROOM. THIS SHE DECIDED, WAS PREFERABLE TO REAL ADVENTURES. REAL ADVENTURES CONTAINED ALL KINDS OF TERRIFYING UNKNOWNS.

THIS PLAN SEEMED TO WORK UNTIL THE DAY THE RABBIT APPEARED.

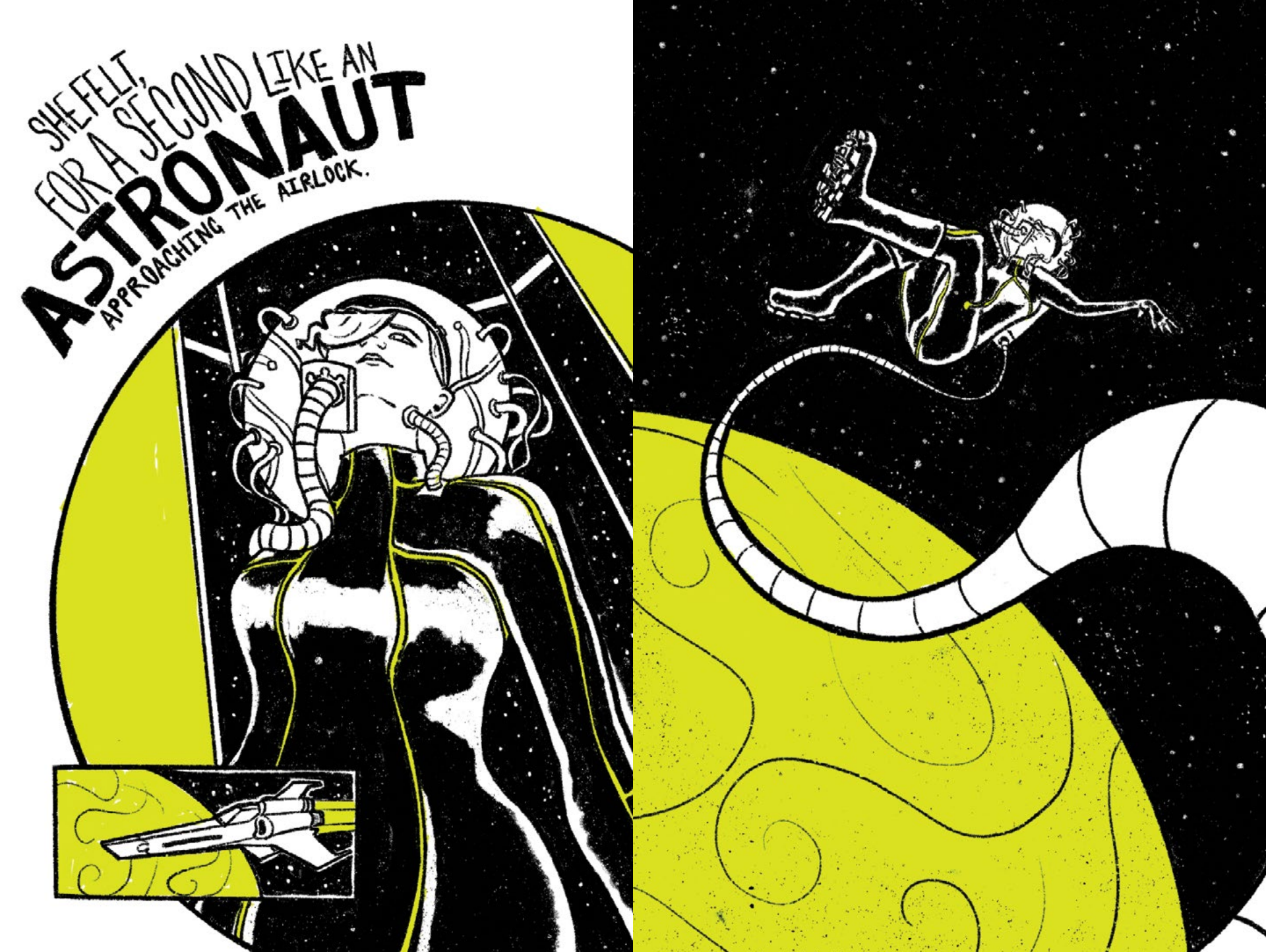
THE GIRL NOTICED HIM SITTING IN THE SUN OUTSIDE HER WINDOW. HE LOOKED SO GENTLE AND COZY THAT SHE FELT HERSELF PULLED TO THE DOORWAY BY THE SUDDEN, ALL CONSUMING NEED TO REACH OUT AND PET HIM.

SHE WALKED TO HER DOOR BUT HESITATED FOR A MOMENT BEFORE OPENING IT. SHE COULD SEE THE RABBIT SITTING THERE,

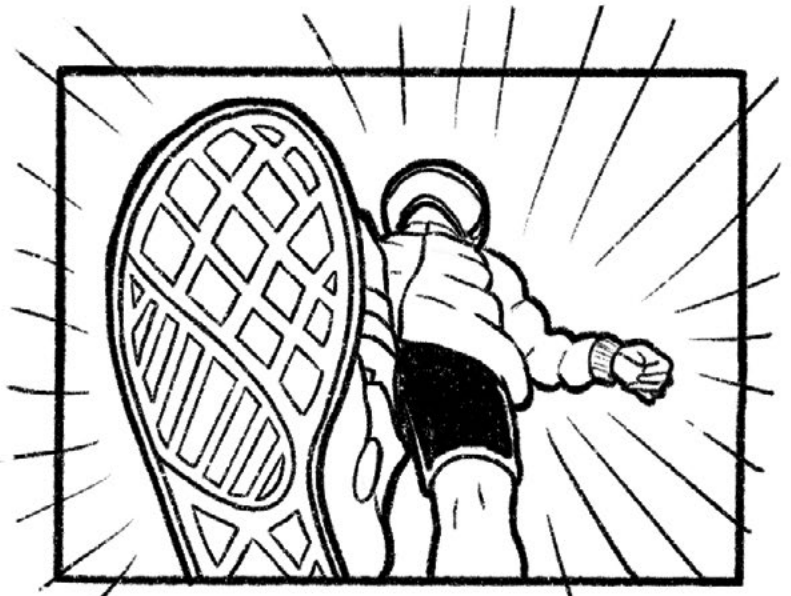
HIS PINK NOSE WIGGLING. SHE COULDN'T SHAKE THE DESIRE TO GO OUT, BUT SHE COULDN'T JUST WALK INTO THE UNKNOWN WITHOUT SOME KIND OF PROTECTION, RIGHT?

SO, LIKE THE HEROES IN HER STORIES, SHE SUITED UP.

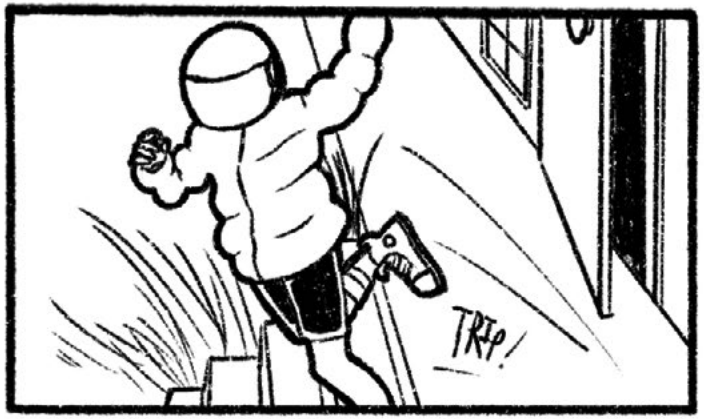
WHEN SHE WAS DONE IT FELT ALMOST AS SAFE AS BEING IN-DOORS. AS SHE REACHED FOR THE DOOR HANDLE

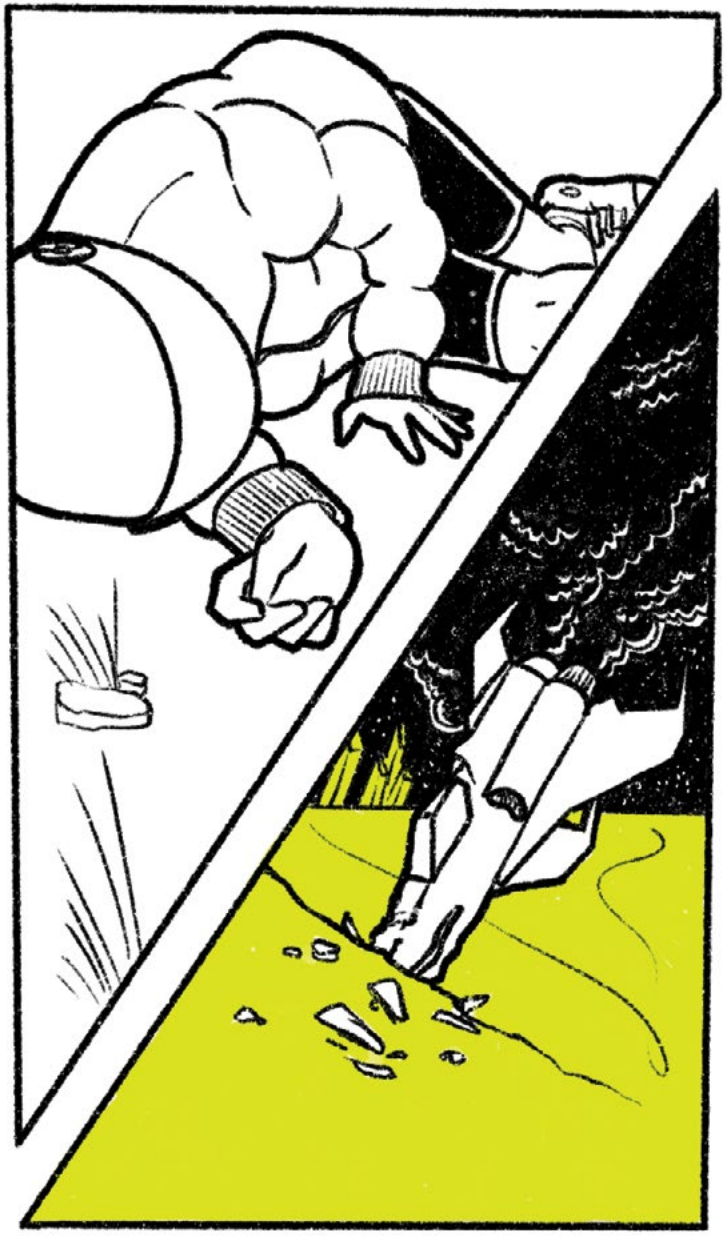

SHE FELT, FOR A SECOND LIKE AN ASTRONAUT
APPROACHING THE AIRLOCK.

LEAVING HER FRONT DOOR HAD THE QUALITY OF BEING SUDDENLY THRUST OUT INTO THE EXPANSE OF SPACE; EXHILAR- -ATING AND DISORIEN -TING ALL AT ONCE. EVERYTHING WAS VERY LARGE AND OPEN AND SHE HESITATED, NOT QUITE SURE WHERE TO GO AT FIRST— FORWARD SEEMED LIKE A GOOD IDEA.



AS SHE STEPPED OFF THE PORCH, HER FOOT MISSED THE TOP STEP DUE TO POOR HELMET VISIBILITY

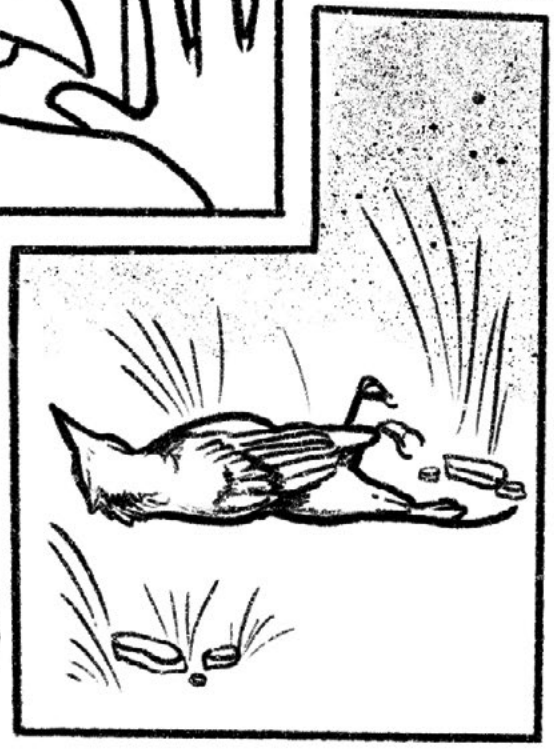




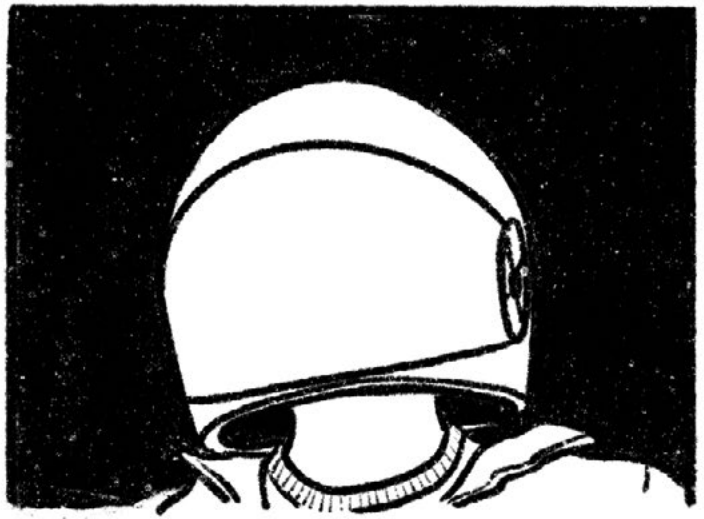
THE ENSUING
WINDMILL
OF ARMS FOLLOWED
BY
A **FACE PLANT**
STARTLED THE RABBIT
AND THE GIRL BOTH.
THE FORMER TOOK OFF
INTO THE SHRUBBERY
WHILE THE LATTER
REGRETTED THIS ENTIRE
ESCAPADE
AND BOLTED BACK
THROUGH HER DOOR.

IT WAS SEVERAL WEEKS BEFORE THE TEMPTATION TO FACE THE OUTSIDE STRUCK AGAIN.

SHE PEERED OUT AND COULD SEE THE STUNNED FORM OF A BIRD ON THE GROUND. HIS TINY HEART

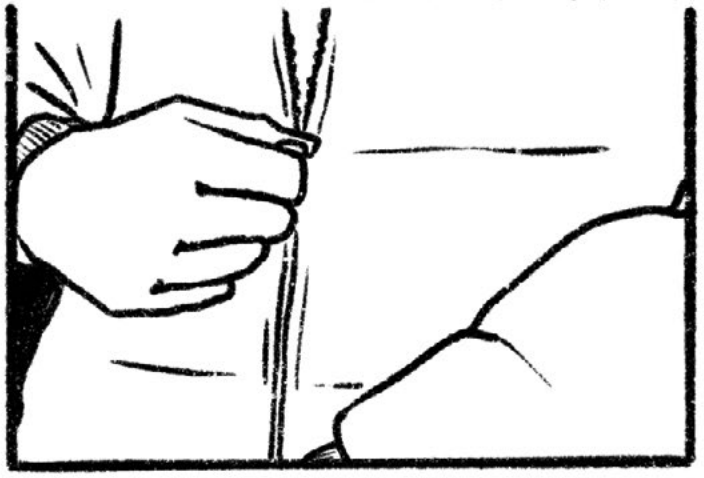


LOOKED LIKE IT WAS GOING TO BEAT OUT OF HIS CHEST



REGARDLESS OF WHAT HAPPENED LAST TIME SHE JUST COULDN'T LEAVE HIM LYING THERE,

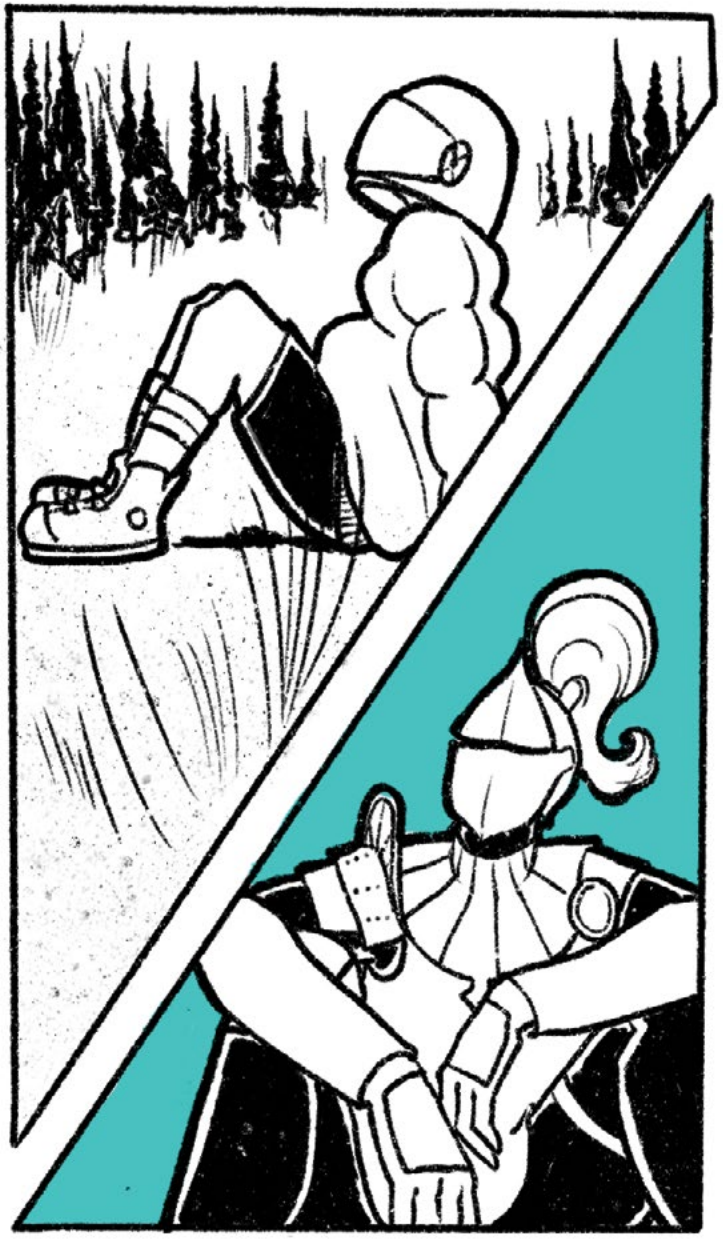
SO SHE SUITED UP AGAIN.

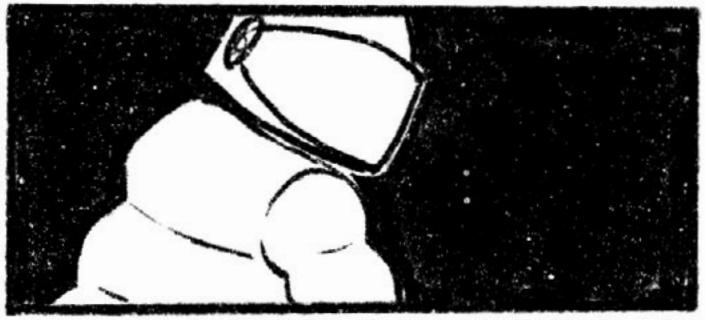


HERSELF AS A KNIGHT
COMING TO THE
RESCUE

THIS TIME SHE MADE IT SUCCESSFULLY DOWN THE STEPS PEERING CAREFULLY THROUGH HER VISOR.

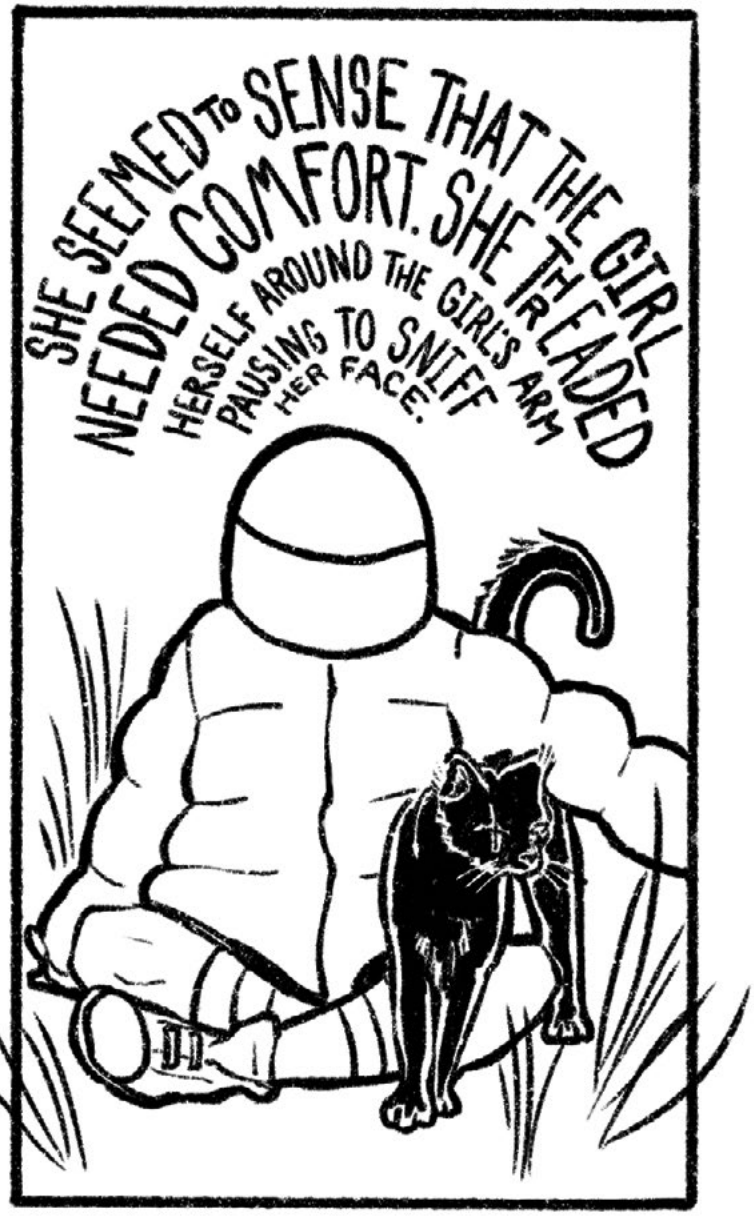
BUT WHEN SHE ARRIVED OUTSIDE THE WINDOW, THE BIRD WAS **GONE.**





LOOKING AROUND, SHE DISCOVERED A SINGLE YELLOW EYE PEERING AT HER FROM THE LONG GRASS. SHE WAS

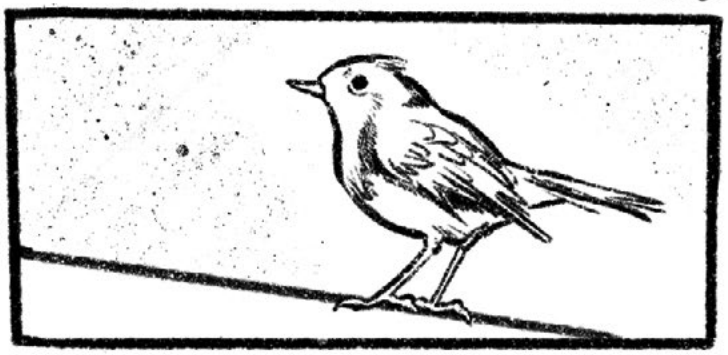
MISSING AN EYE AND THIS USUALLY MADE HER GRUMPY.


SHE SEEMED TO SENSE THAT THE GIRL NEEDED COMFORT. SHE TREADED HERSELF AROUND THE GIRL'S ARM PAUSING TO SNIFF HER FACE.

JUST WHEN THE GIRL WAS ABOUT TO REACH OUT AND TOUCH THE CAT'S EARS, SHE TURNED & RAN OFF INTO THE WOODS
THE WIND
PICKED UP AS
THE GIRL'S EYES FOLLOWED HER.

THE SUN WAS SETTING AND THE TREES BEGAN TO FEEL TALL AND OMINOUS —THOUGH THE TINT OF HER VISOR PROBABLY MADE IT SEEM DARKER THAN IT ACTUALLY WAS. BY THE TIME THE GIRL MADE IT BACK TO THE HOUSE SHE WAS THOROUGHLY SPOOKED.

SOME DAYS LATER

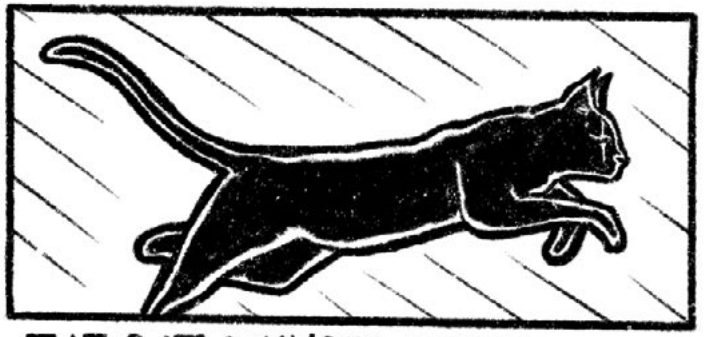


THE SAME BIRD SUPRISED HER BY LANDING ON HER WINDOW LEDGE. SOME OF HIS FEATHERS STUCK OUT ODDLY BUT HE SEEMED FINE OTHERWISE.

SHE NOTICED A FAMILIAR SINGLE EYE

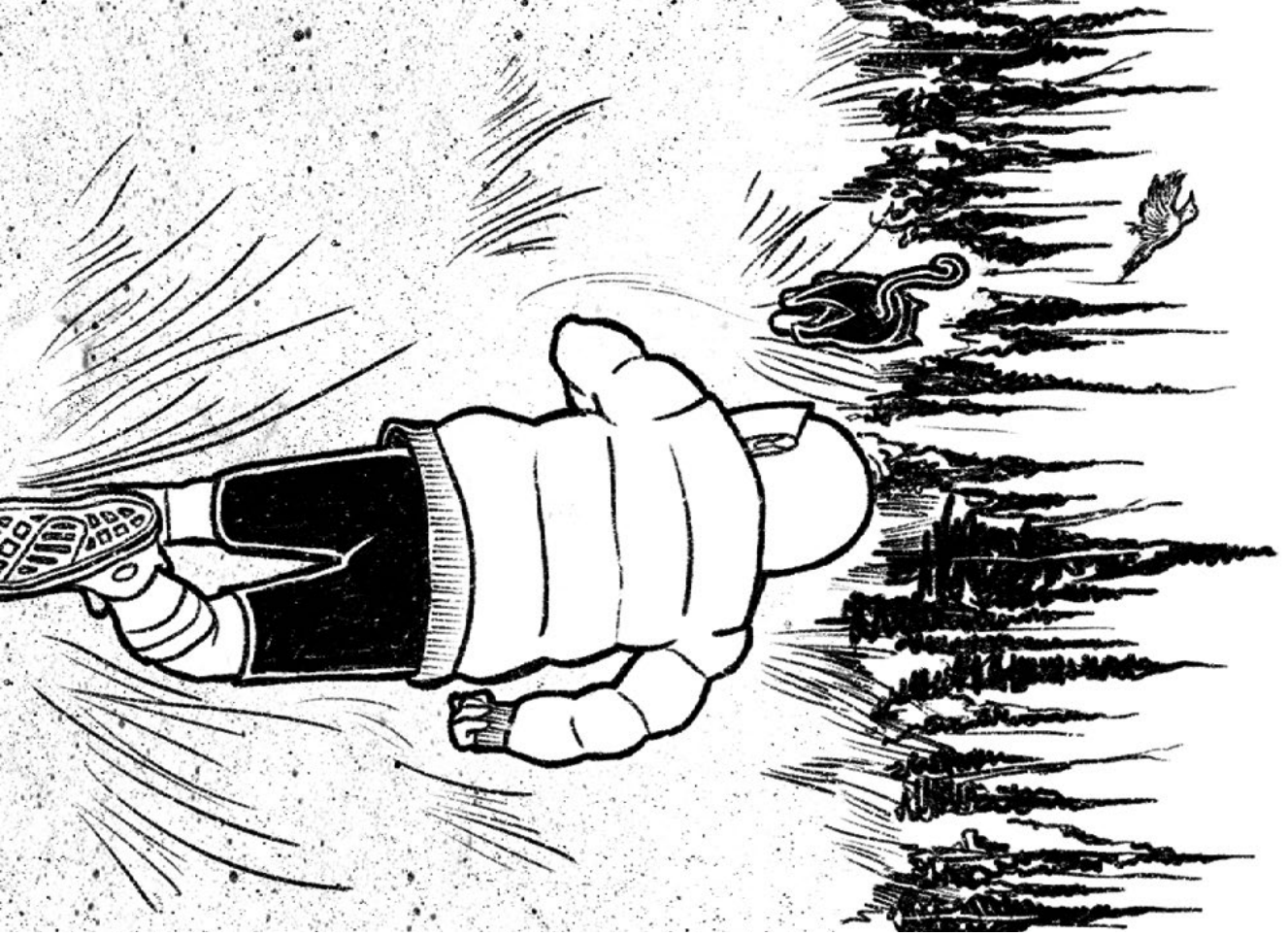
THE GIRL REALIZED IN HORROR THAT THE CAT WAS
STALKING THE UNLUCKY BIRD

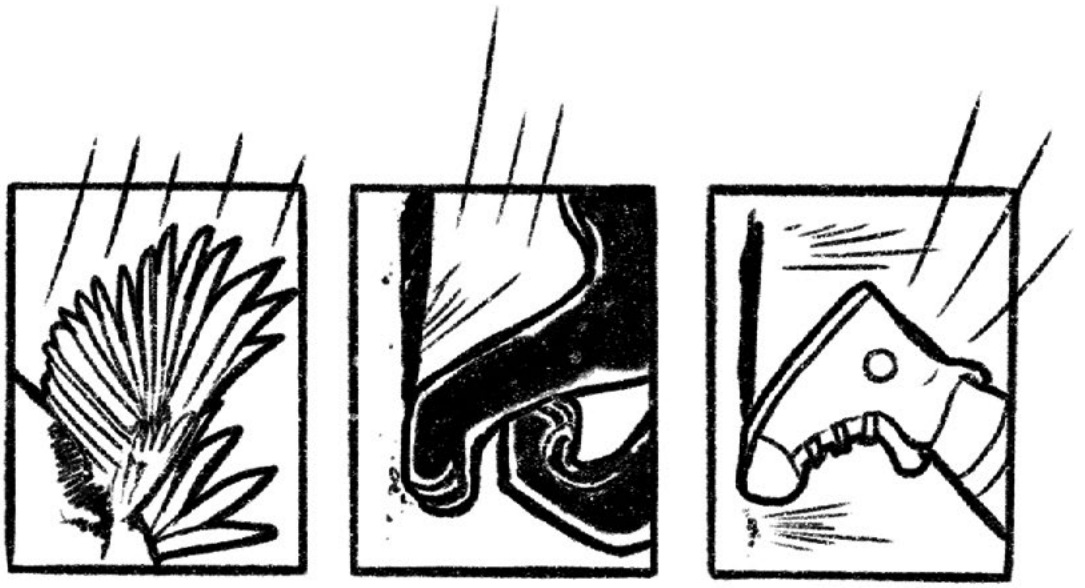
HA



THE CAT POUNCED BEFORE THE GIRL COULD REACH HER BUT THE BIRD SLIPPED THROUGH HER PAWS AND FLITTED AWAY.

THE CAT PURSUED FOLLOWED BY THE GIRL.

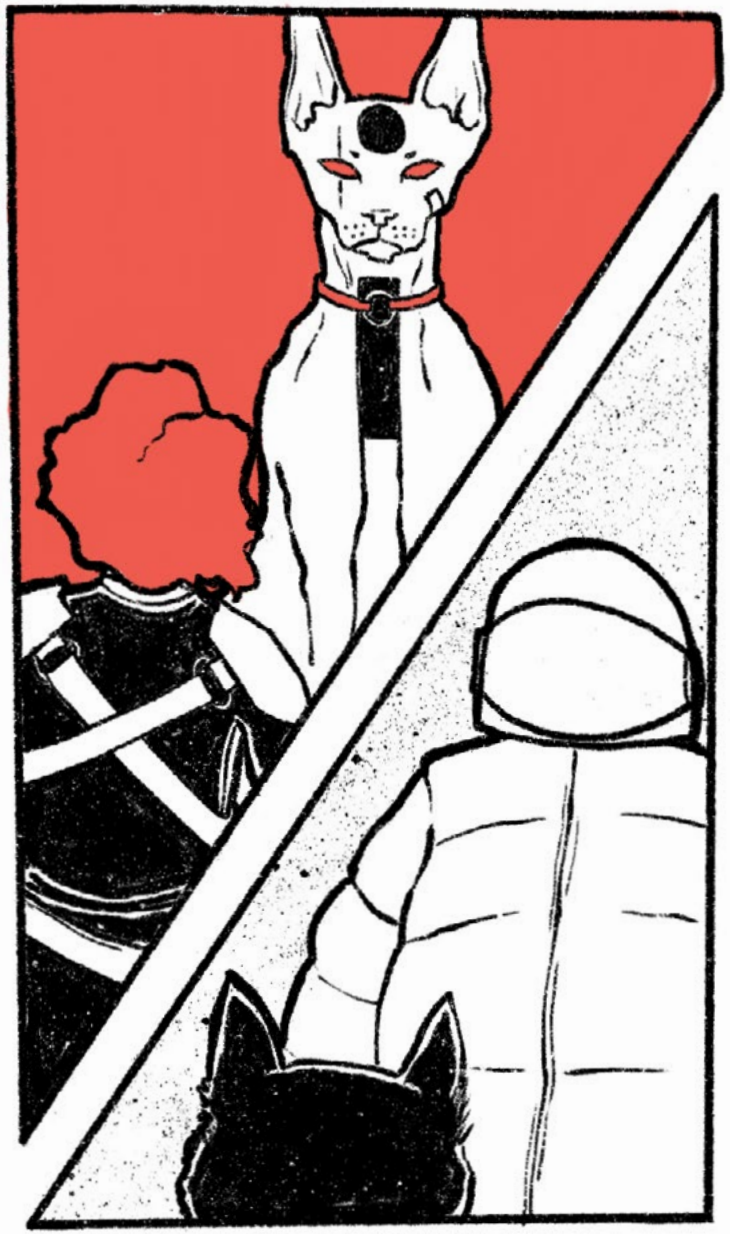




SHE FOLLOWED THEM INTO THE FOREST WITHOUT NOTICING. THIS REALIZATION STOPPED HER SHORT.

A FEELING OF PANIC ROSE IN HER CHEST. HER COURAGE STARTED TO EVAPORATE AS SHE REALIZED SHE COULDN'T SEE THE HOUSE THROUGH THE TREES. THE HELMET MADE FOR BAD PERIPHERAL VISION. AS SHE WHIPPED AROUND LOOKING FOR THE HOUSE.

THAT SAME PRICKLE AT THE BACK OF HER NECK RETURNED. THE CAT WAS STANDING RIGHT BEHIND HER WATCHING HER GROWING PANIC WITH A STEADY GAZE. HER CALM INTENSITY MADE THE GIRL PAUSE HER PANICKING.



YOU ARE TIRED
BECAUSE OF THE
WEIGHT YOU CARRY.
THOSE THINGS YOU THINK
PROTECT ONLY
HOLD YOU BACK.

FIND THE COURAGE TO LET THEM GO AND YOU WILL FIND FREEDOM.

THE GIRL HADN'T SEEN THE BEAR APPROACH. HER HELMET HAD MUFFLED HIS HEAVY FOOT FALLS UNTIL HE WAS RIGHT BEHIND HER.

THE BEAR'S HOT BREATH FOGGED UP HER VISOR AS SHE STOOD THERE FROZEN. SHE REMEMBERED HEARING SOMEWHERE THAT YOU SHOULD **PLAY DEAD** AROUND BEARS MAYBE IF SHE DIDN'T MOVE, HE WOULD GO AWAY.

THIS DIDN'T SEEM TO WORK

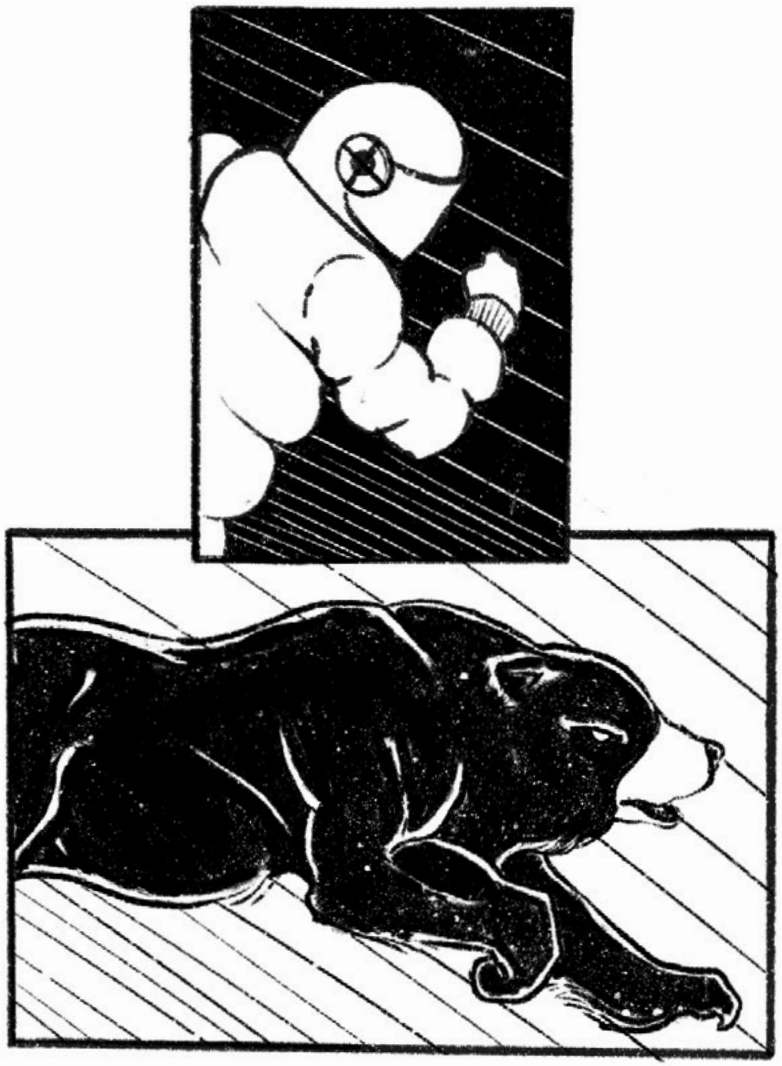
AT THIS POINT SEVERAL THINGS HAPPENED

WHoomp

RUSTLE

ROAR!!!

RUSTLE



THE HELMET FELL TO THE GROUND AS SHE TORE THROUG THE TREES. IT WAS A RELIEF TO FINALLY SEE THE GROUND IN FRONT OF HER FEET. SHE PICKED UP SPEED FOLLOWING THE CAT WHO LEAD THE WAY DOWN A NARROW PATH THAT FOLLOWED A RAVINE.

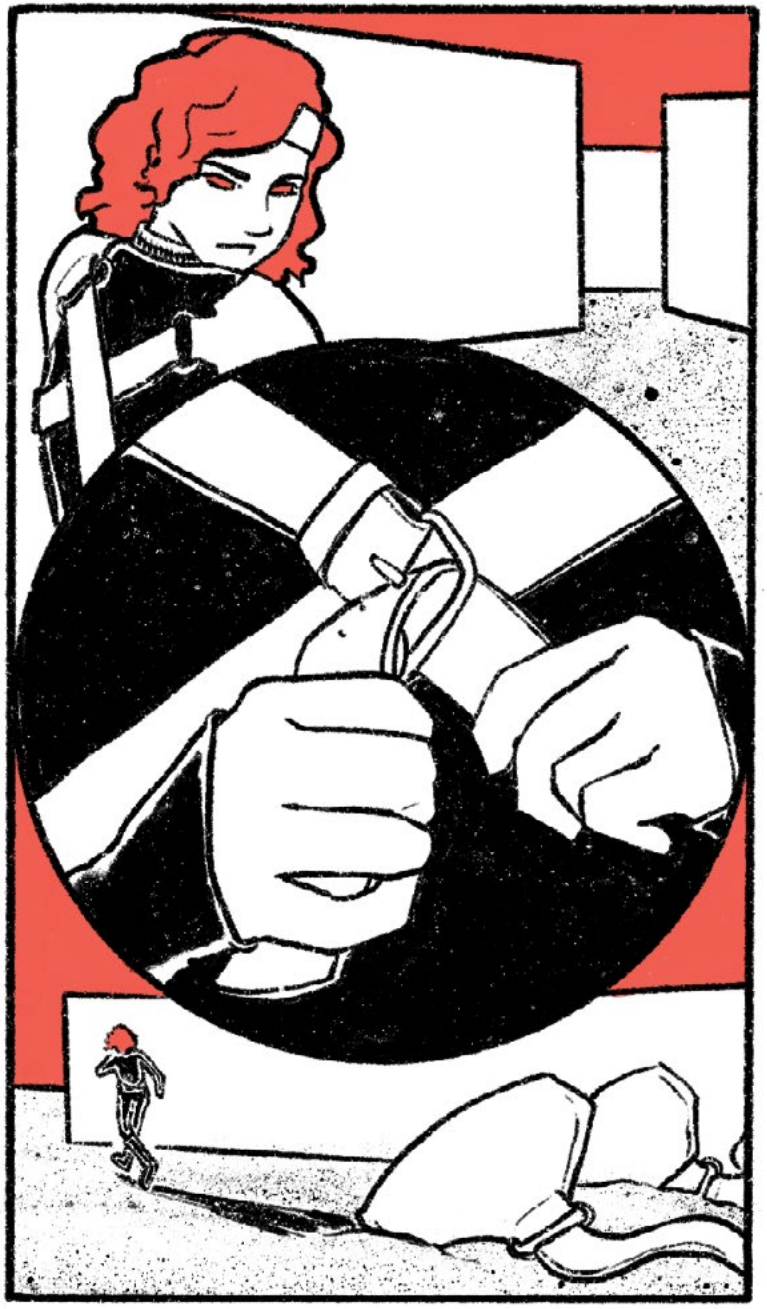
AND BRANCHES KEPT

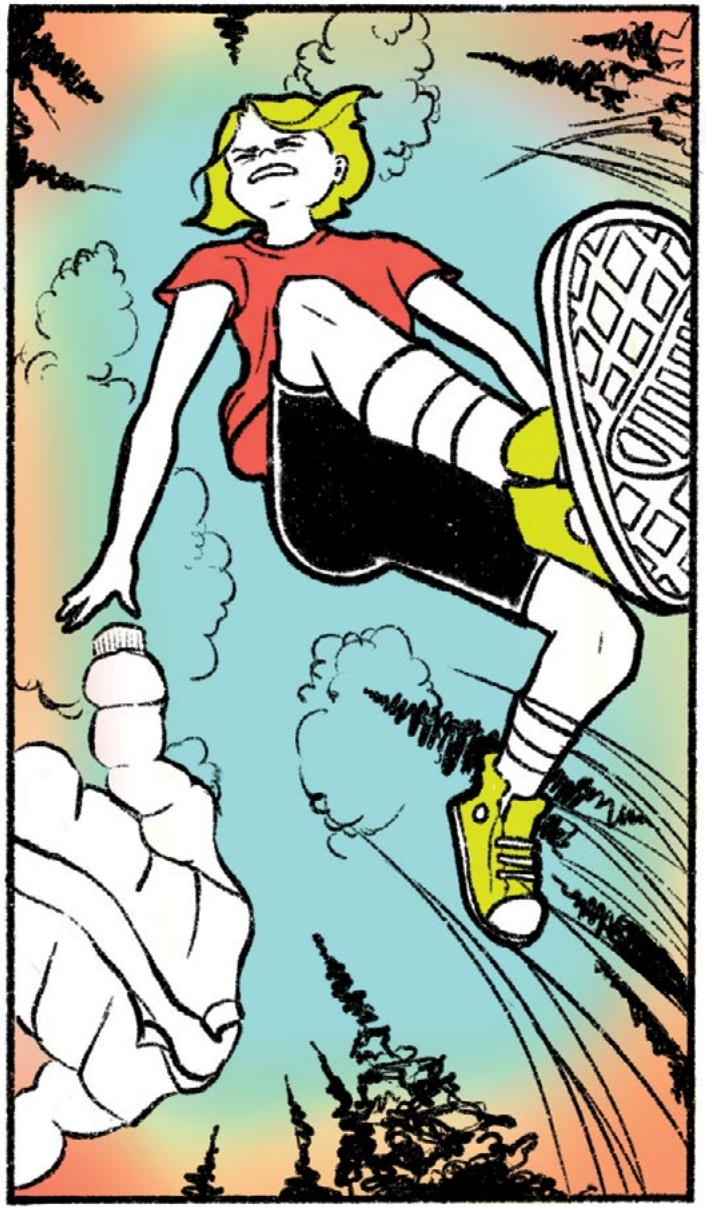
SNAGGING

ON HER COAT & TRIPPING HER UP. SHE REACHED FOR THE ZIPPER, & HESITATED FOR A MOMENT. THE COAT STILL FELT LIKE A SECURITY BLANKET.

IT WAS HARD TO LET GO

THE BEAR WAS
SHOWING NO
SIGN OF SLOWING





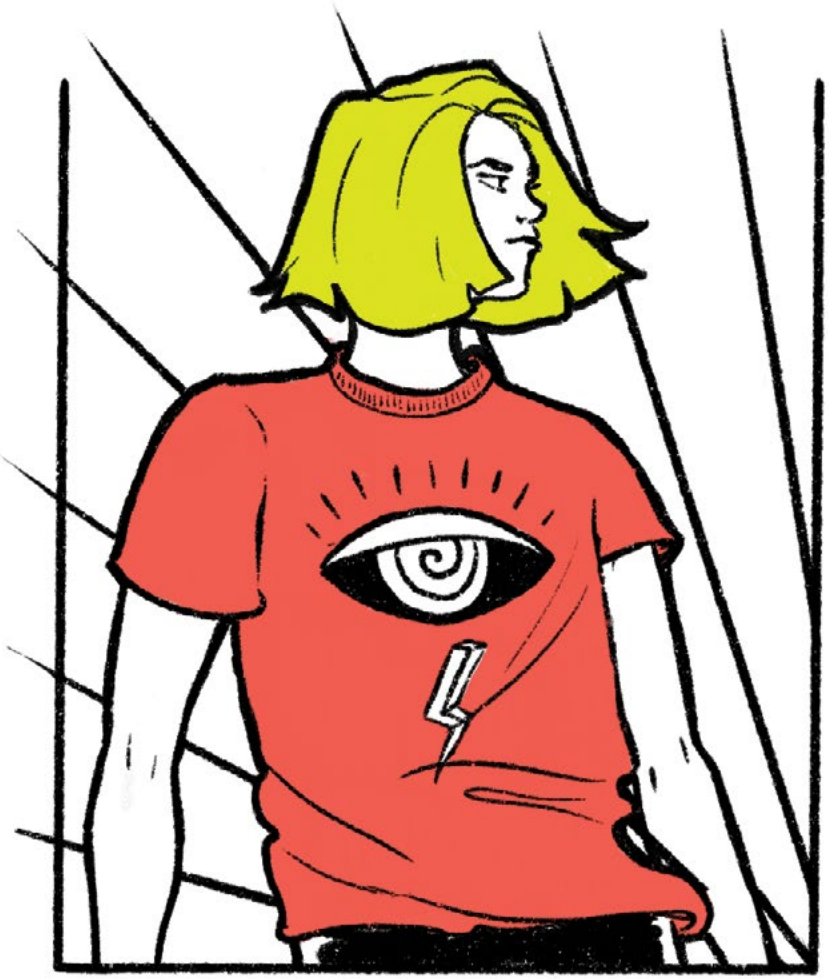
THE GIRL RAN
AS FAST AS SHE
COULD

THE COAT FLUTTERED TO THE GROUND, LANDING IN THE PATH BEHIND HER.

THE GREAT MASS OF BEAR CONTINUED TO BARREL FORWARD—

UNABLE TO STOP HIS MOMENTUM

A SECOND LATER HE FOUND HIS FEET TANGLED IN THE SLIPPERY FABRIC

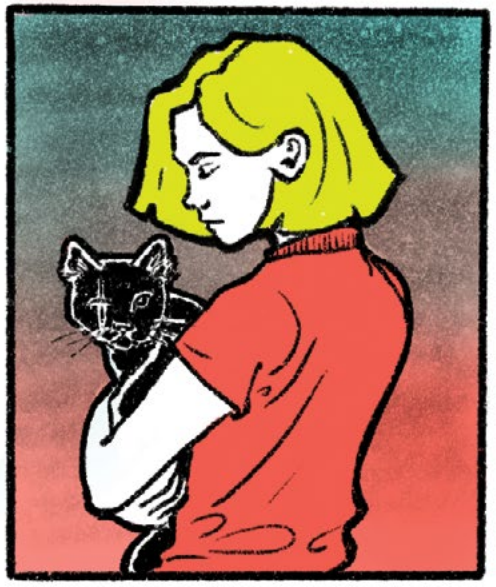


THE GIRL GLANCED BACK JUST IN TIME TO SEE HIM LOOSE HIS FOOTING, AND THEN HIS BALANCE, FINALLY TUMBLING DOWN THE RAVINE.

SHE DIDN'T SLOW AT THIS BUT GAVE A CHEER

EVERYTHING SEEMED LIGHTER. AS THE HOUSE REAPPEARED BEYOND THE TREES, THE LAST RAYS OF THE SETTING SUN BROKE THROUGH THE CLOUDS AND THE GIRL STRETCHED OUT HER ARMS TO CATCH THEM

SHE GRINNED,
FEELING THE WIND
ON HER FACE
AND FINALLY HEARING
THE SOUNDS
OF THE
WORLD AROUND HER.
THE SPHINX WAS RIGHT
LETTING GO WAS
FREEDOM.



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