

# After Winter, Into Spring

a fairy tale for the 21st century



story and art by a. twu

## After Winter, Into Spring

*a fairytale for the 21st century*



This charming story explores the dark scary parts of global industrial civilization with a whimsical journey through underwater cities, icy oceans, towering palaces, rainbow-colored skies, and ordinary neighborhoods. Along the way, learning, cooperation, and liberation are found.



*"It is said that the Winter Fairy kills off old ways and things so that new beginnings may grow from the land with the coming of the spring."*





After Winter, Into Spring  
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Story and art by A. Twu  
mail@firstcultural.com  
Berkeley, California

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Once upon a time in a place not far from here, there lived a young person by the name of Alex.

Years ago, Alex's family found itself short on money after a period of sickness, and had to borrow to get by. They were poor, so the bank charged them a lot of interest.

Now, every month they spend most of what little they made paying interest. There was little left for food. To help make ends meet, Alex cared for a neighbor and knitted arm cozies.



This year though things got a little harder. The neighbor Alex cared for ran out of money and could no longer afford to pay someone to help cook, get dressed, or find one's way around the city.

The price of yarn had also gone up and it now cost almost as much to make a cozie as one sold for. Alex tried raising the price, but only ended up selling less.


Hearing of Alex's troubles, Ms Q, Alex's downstairs neighbor, looked up from the purple potatoes in the garden and waved to Alex.

"Perhaps I can ask the Winter Fairy to help you out. The Fairy's an old friend of mine and is good at these kind of troubleish things."

"The Winter Fairy?" asked Alex. "Who do you mean by that?"







“There is a fairy for each season that brings about the changes of the seasons,” said Ms Q.

“The Winter Fairy kills off old ways and things so that new beginnings may grow from the land with the coming of the spring.”





“That’s quite intense!” Alex was a bit stunned. “All I need is some help finding a job to make a little money!”

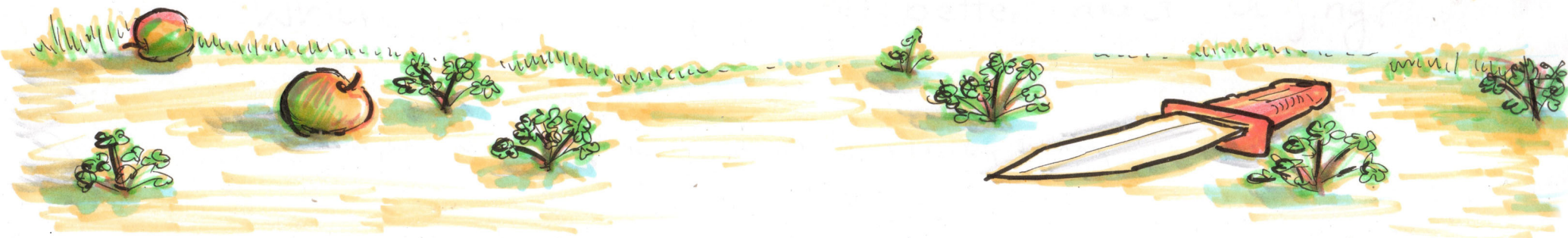
“Well,” replied Ms Q, “It does no good to plant beans if the dirt won’t grow them. You’re hardly the only one having trouble finding work these days. Perhaps it will take more than just searching.”

Ms Q then made one of those trust-me-on-this-one smiles.

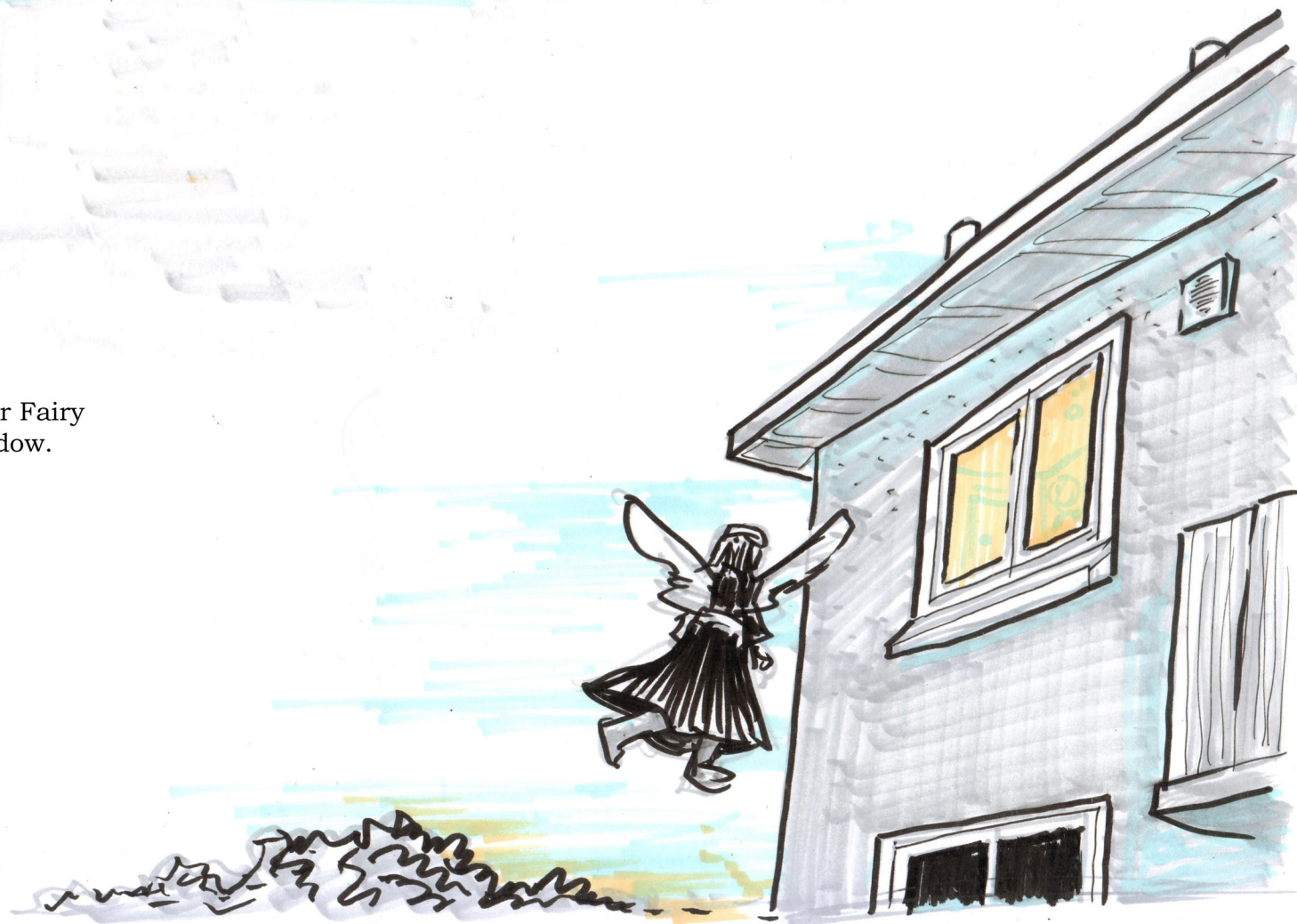
Alex thought about it. Ms Q was right most of the time on most things and Ms Q’s friends, though a bit on the odd side, had been helpful in the past.

Grinning like a cat, Ms Q put down a few tools and asked, “Can you meet tonight?”

Alex paused for a moment, gazed at a dancing cloud, and nodded.



That night, the Winter Fairy  
came to Alex's window.





The Winter Fairy tapped Alex's window and smiled. "Hi there - it's me!"

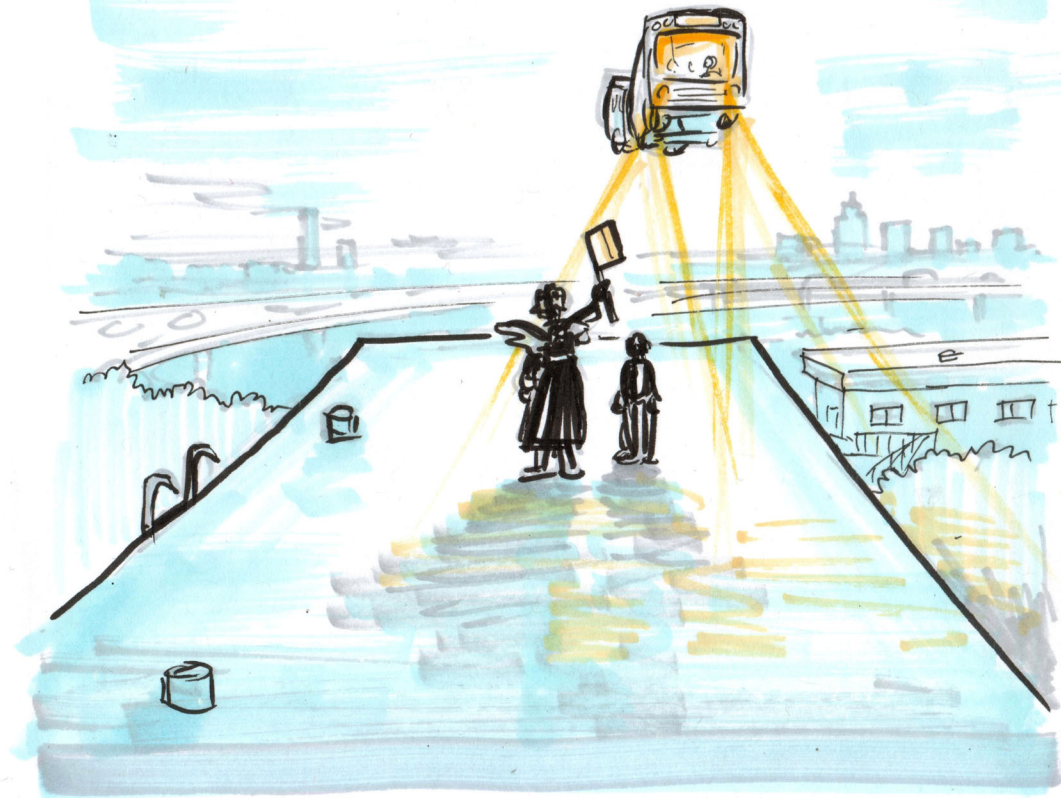
"Are you the Winter Fairy?" asked Alex.

"Ah, that's an old name from old times. These days most folks just call me Juniper."



"I heard from Ms Q you were looking to earn some money, maybe find a job. No use looking around here. Might as well grow rice in a desert. Are you ready for a journey?"

Juniper led Alex to the roof and pulled out a tiny bus stop sign which they twirled in the air. "Now count with me to twenty ten and five sixes, and listen for the beep of the big bendy bus."





They rode for hours past lonely stops with no name,

past farms where the weeds grew wild,

past dead forests and black oceans.

Alex looked out the window  
for jobs but couldn't find any.



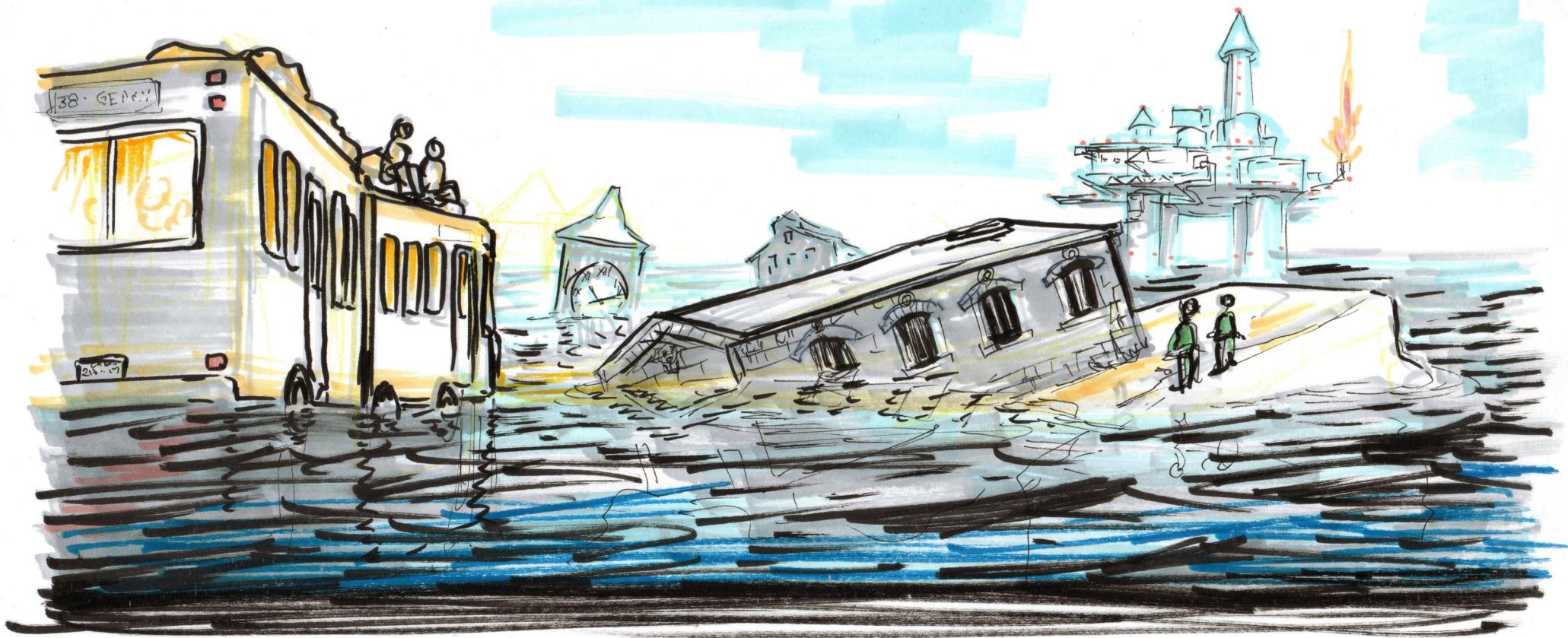


Finally the bus neared the North Pole.


The riders got excited as they had heard in many an old tale that there were jobs here.

But were there still?

Old factories and workshops, long since closed, lay on their side, slowly sinking beneath the waves. Two sad looking folks sat in a daze on the ice.





A sketch-style illustration of two children, a girl and a boy, standing in a doorway. The girl is on the left, wearing a green vest over a brown shirt and a headband. The boy is on the right, wearing a green shirt. They are looking out at a cityscape with buildings and a bridge. Above the doorway, a sign reads "PLEASE MOVE BACK" in English and Korean. The scene is drawn with loose, expressive lines and some color washes.

There haven't  
been any jobs  
here for years, at  
least not for us,  
said the two.

Once upon a time we made toys, lots of toys,  
toys out of wood. Remember those?

More and more places were celebrating the  
holidays and they needed more toys.

The work was hard but we had to do it, and  
so we fought for more pay so that at least our  
children too could enjoy holiday mornings  
with brand-new presents.

But then one day, we cut down the last tree  
and the North Pole was out of wood.

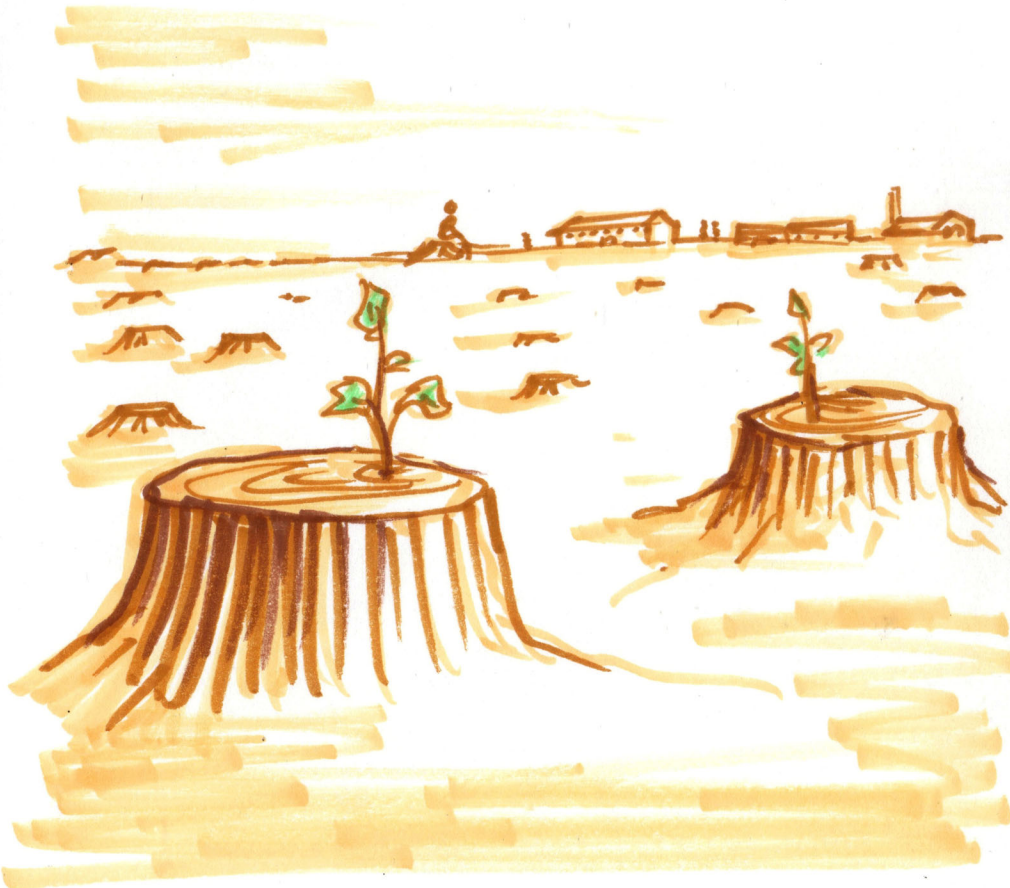




Some folks suggested we cut back the holidays to every other year to give the trees a chance to grow back. But we hadn't been paid enough to save up any money for the coming winter. We couldn't just tell our families to skip eating next year.

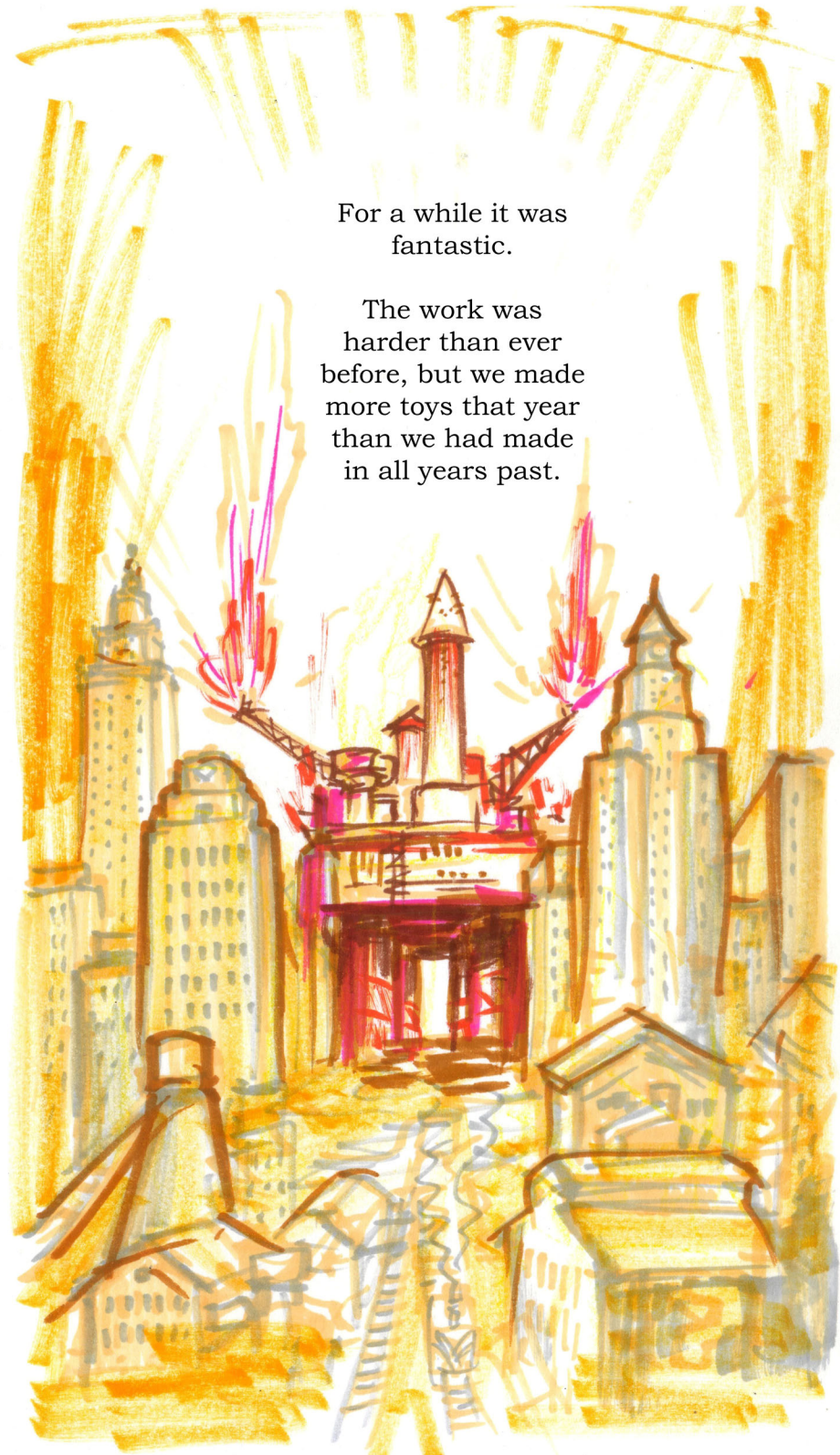
Some prayed. Some got mad at the boss. Some tried to swim the icy waves to other lands.

Then along came visitors who told us there was oil under the North Pole and we could make toys out of oil instead of wood.



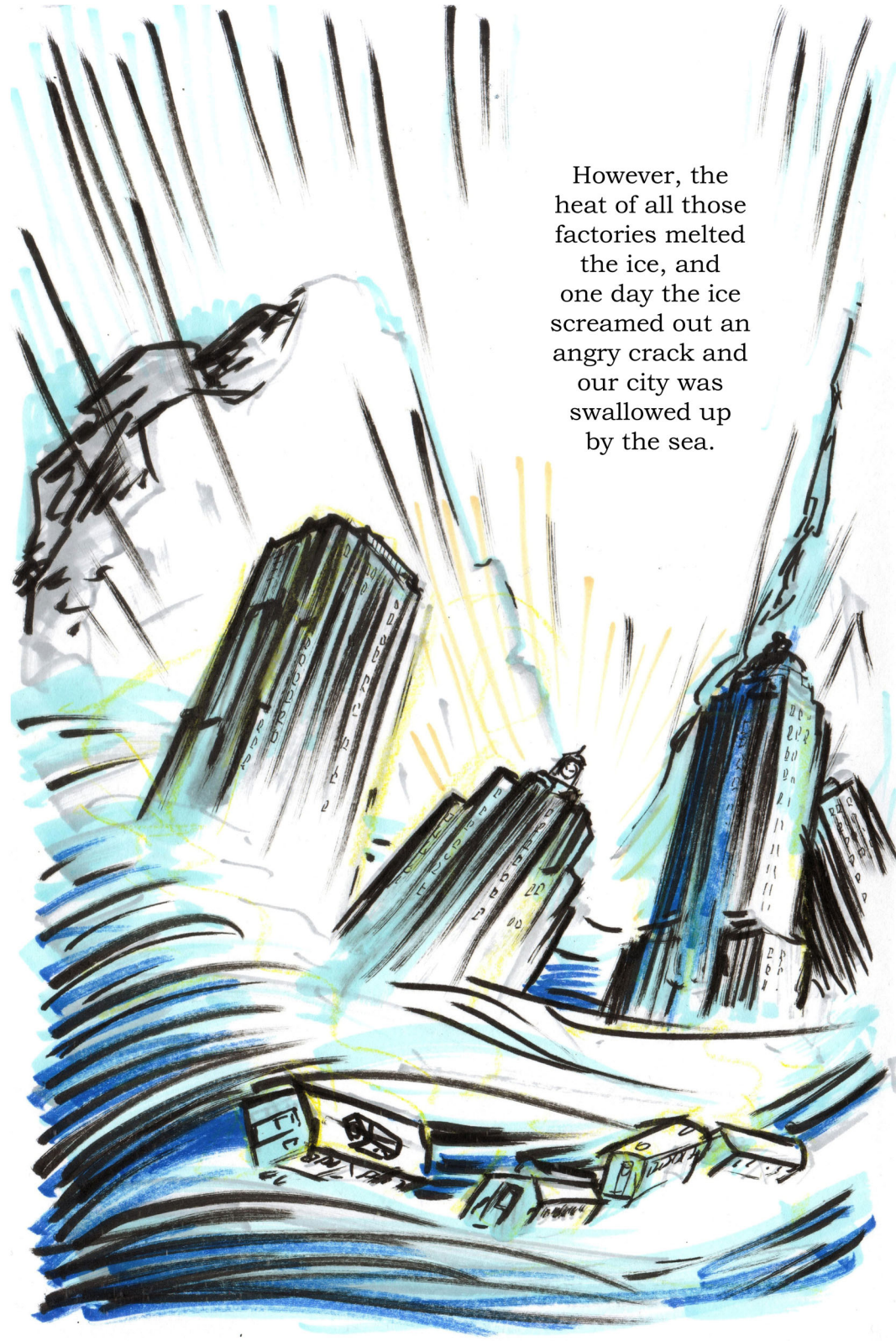
For a while it was fantastic.

The work was harder than ever before, but we made more toys that year than we had made in all years past.



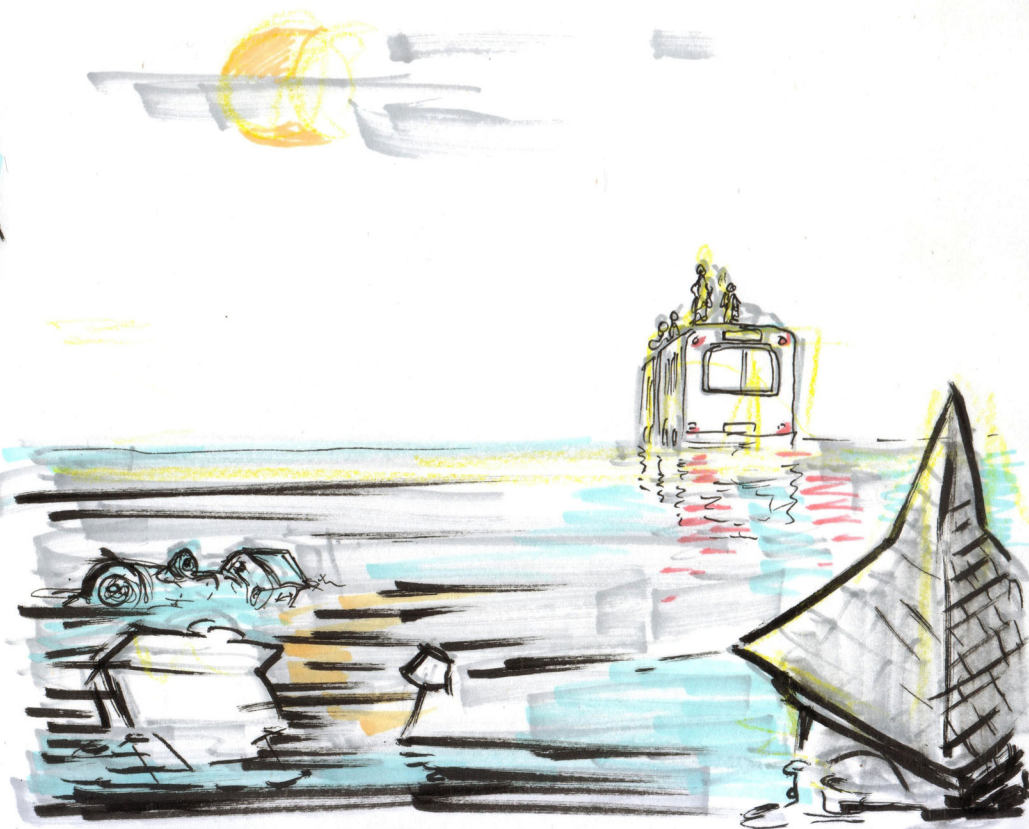


However, the  
heat of all those  
factories melted  
the ice, and  
one day the ice  
screamed out an  
angry crack and  
our city was  
swallowed up  
by the sea.



By now everyone who  
was left has left, and  
we're leaving too.

With that, the two  
climbed on top of the  
bus as it drove away.

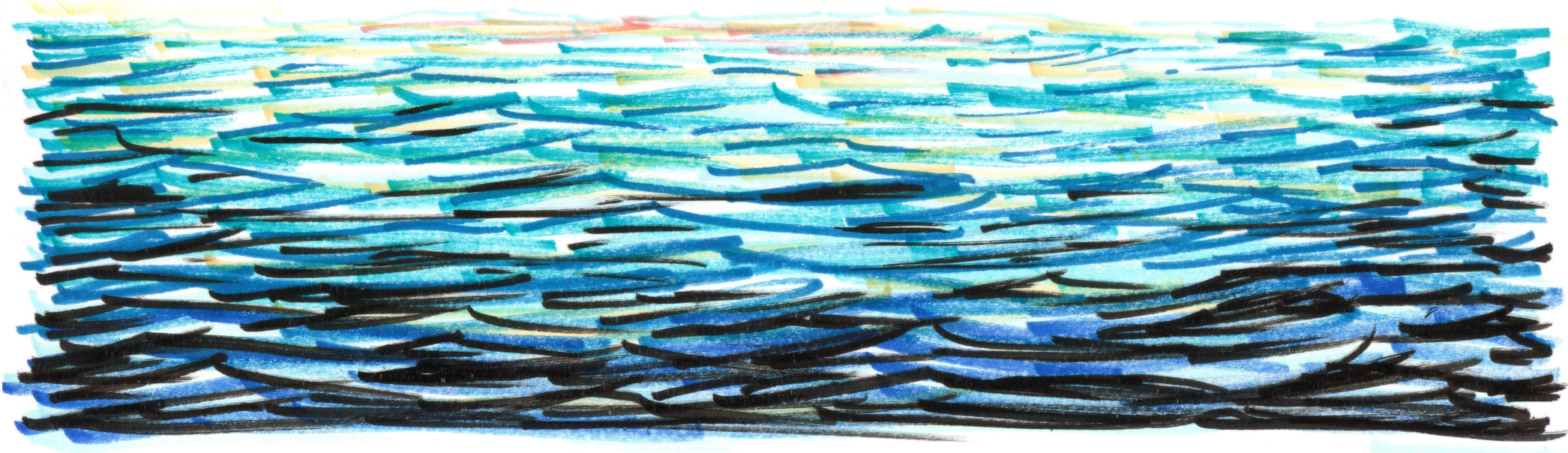






As the bus crossed the ocean, the riders talked about where to go. "Walnut Haven would be nice," said one, but I've heard they've built a big wall topped with sharp things and guns that shoot fire. The Polka Dot Kingdom is still at war. Bubbleland is simply too far."

A few began to sing.  
"One day we'll no longer be wandering the sea,  
One day we'll buy us some new land with trees.  
But now until then, till that moment when,  
It's off we all go to the great Pearl City!"





Pearl City was the other  
big city in their country.

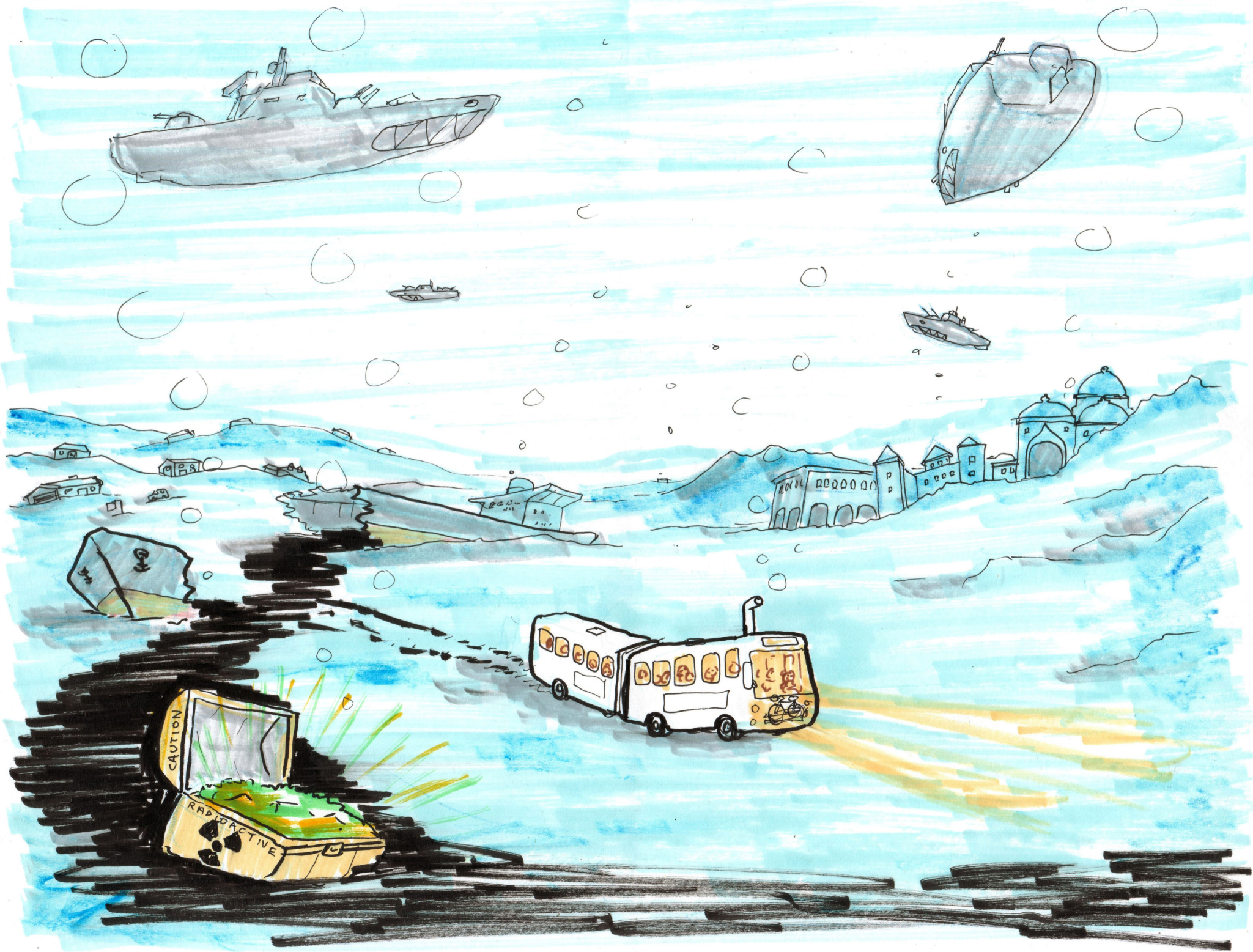
Big buildings lined the  
shores, crowned by a  
shining castle on the hill  
rising a hundred stories  
into the rainbow skies.

Up close though, the shiny  
colors in the water turned out to  
be a nasty mix of bubble bath  
acid and dinosaur blood.

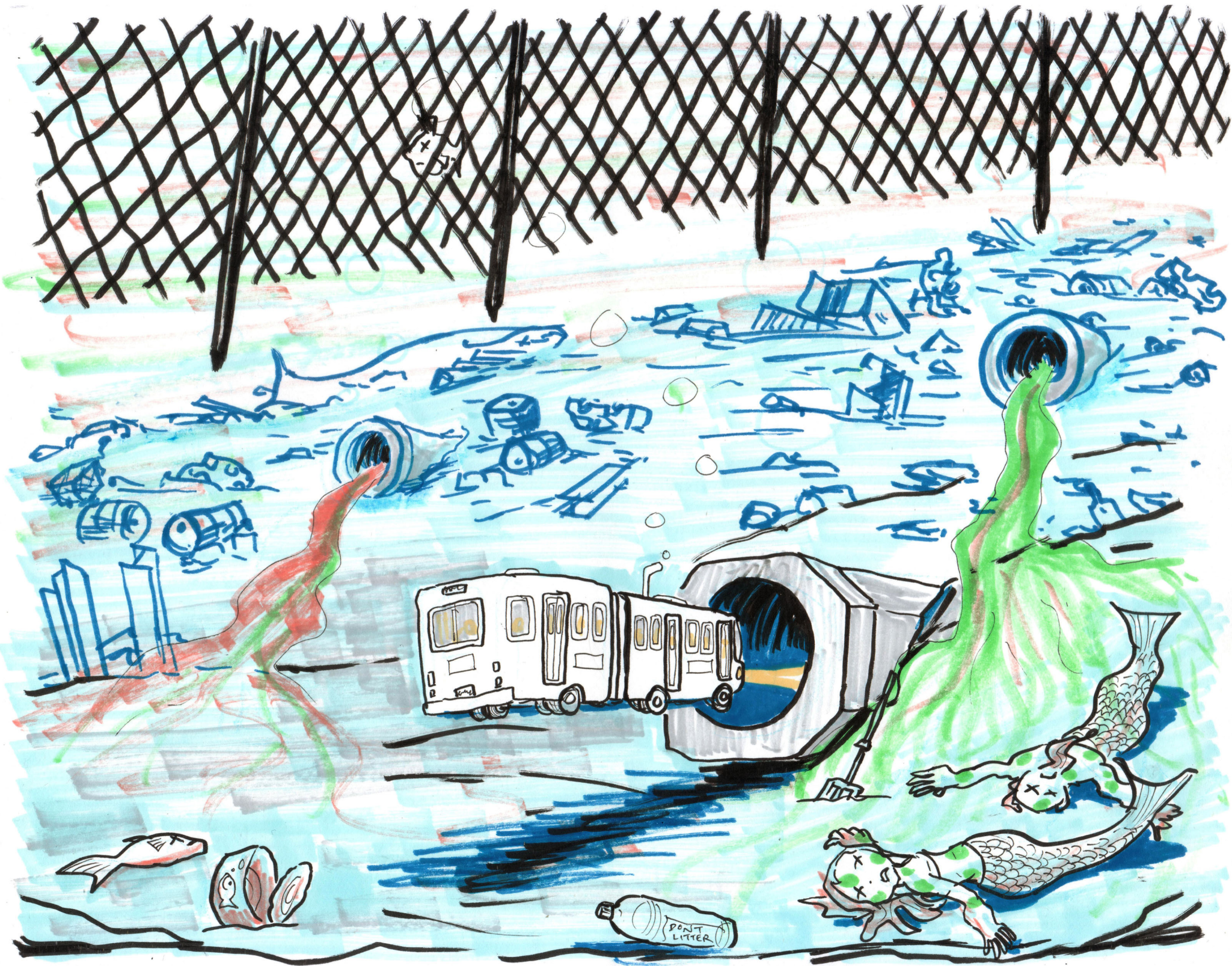
"Hold your noses," said the  
driver, "we're going underwater."













In the work zone deep beneath Pearl City, the hallways were hot and dark and rumbled with the shouts of sparks and the grinding of gears.

The scent of burnt metal and plastic filled the tunnels. Alex tried to wave it away, while nearby, another person took a deep breath and grinned. "Ah, the smell of jobs!"

Alex looked at the long line of people waiting for jobs and grew worried. Would there be enough?

Fortunately, Juniper knew people in all sorts of places, who knew all sorts of useful things. A floor mopper down the hall turned out to be an old friend. Ed saw Alex and Juniper and called them over.

"If you just wait in line you'll be waiting for weeks - why not join our cooperative and create some work for yourself!" Alex, having made and sold things back home, thought this to be a good idea and followed Ed to the cooperative's headquarters.







"I used to just mop floors and fix broken pipes for the company that owned the building," began Ed.

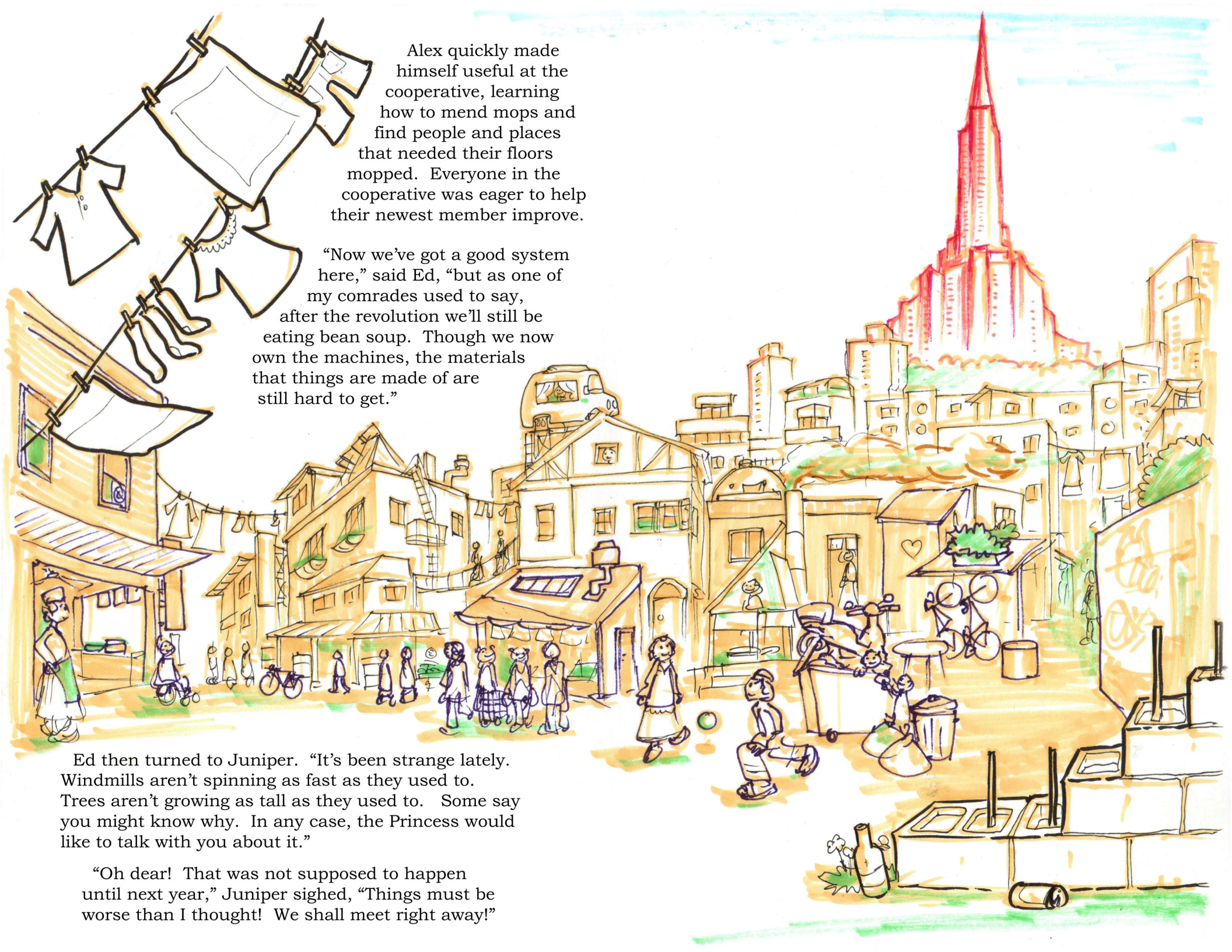
"But one day we showed up to work and the bosses told us that everyone was getting fired since the company wasn't making money. Well, almost everyone. The bosses took off to Bubbleland to open a new business over there. That's when someone pointed out that if we didn't have to pay the bosses, the company would still make money.

Everyone takes part in running the cooperative - some money is set aside each year to send folks to school. We've been doing pretty well. Once the old bosses found out though, they tried to take our place back.

We had to fight them for years and it was hard, since the bosses more or less owned the country back then.

But a funny thing happened. A country doesn't make money when its people don't play nice, and before long the bosses had abandoned it as well and we got one of our folks made the new Princess of Pearl City."





Alex quickly made himself useful at the cooperative, learning how to mend mops and find people and places that needed their floors mopped. Everyone in the cooperative was eager to help their newest member improve.

“Now we’ve got a good system here,” said Ed, “but as one of my comrades used to say, after the revolution we’ll still be eating bean soup. Though we now own the machines, the materials that things are made of are still hard to get.”

Ed then turned to Juniper. “It’s been strange lately. Windmills aren’t spinning as fast as they used to. Trees aren’t growing as tall as they used to. Some say you might know why. In any case, the Princess would like to talk with you about it.”

“Oh dear! That was not supposed to happen until next year,” Juniper sighed, “Things must be worse than I thought! We shall meet right away!”



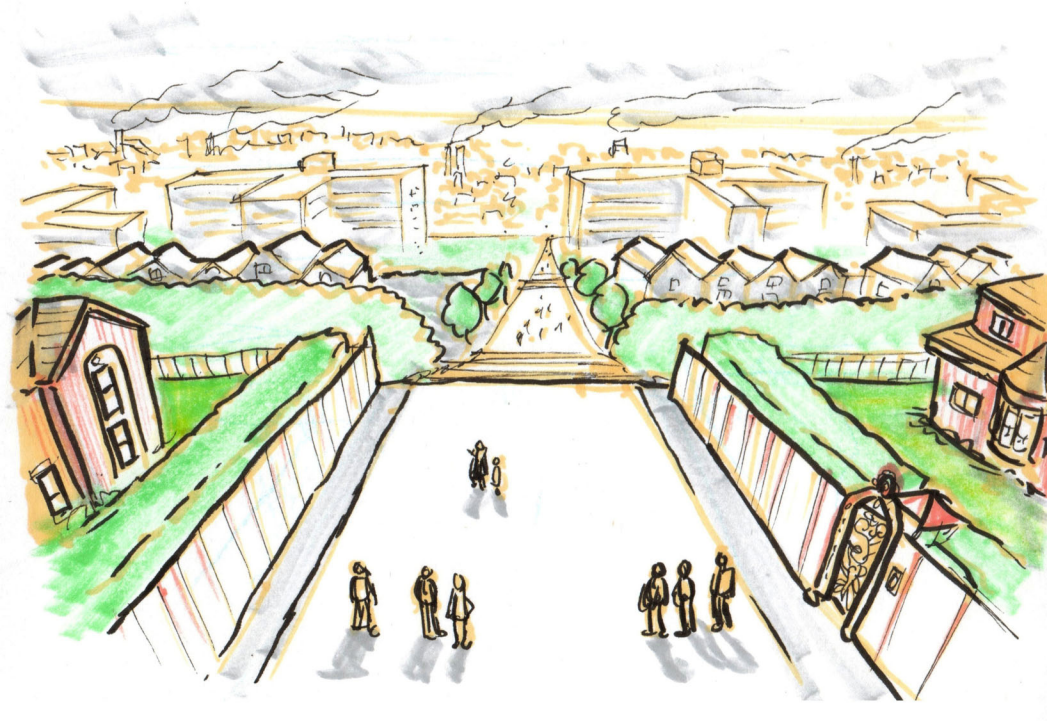
At the castle gates a few bored guards walked about. "Juniper!" shouted one, "What brings you back here? You're not working for the bank now, are you?"

"Not anymore. Not after what happened there last year. Saw some things that would keep even a demon up at night."

"I thought they paid pretty well."

"What good is money if the world ends?"

"I wish I had the money to worry about those kind of things. But right now I'm just trying to get by to next week."



"It's gotten worse in the years since you've been away, Juniper. Pearl City owes so much to the bank that we could sell off the dirt beneath our feet and the air above our heads and still be in debt several times over. I sure hope the stories about you having a way to fix things are true."

"You mean those Juniper the Great tales of raining lightning bolts and white chocolate chips down from a clear blue sky? Oh, if it were that easy I would have done it by now! I'm no superhero- I'm just a plain old facilitator that brings folks together and lets things go as they may."

That said, there are some workers down at the College of the Clouds who might know a thing or two about lightning and chocolate chips."





“Where do all these stories come from?” asked Alex.

“Until recently, this land has been ruled by princes and princesses, who sang tales of heroes slaying the dragons and living happily afterwards in the castle. The end.

Of course, everyone else still lived in the slums.



Now a modern country can't grow and prosper on the work of just an elite few. Everyone only does better when everyone does better.

But folks still dream in the old ways. I don't blame them, I do the same - when one wakes up and the sky is blue one day and brown the next, it's nice to have a few things look the same. So we dress up the new with the hats of the old, and a floor mopper becomes a alchemist magician, a president becomes a princess, and a level two assistant minister of economics becomes the Winter Fairy.

It's strange, but better to have things change and look the same, than the other way around.”

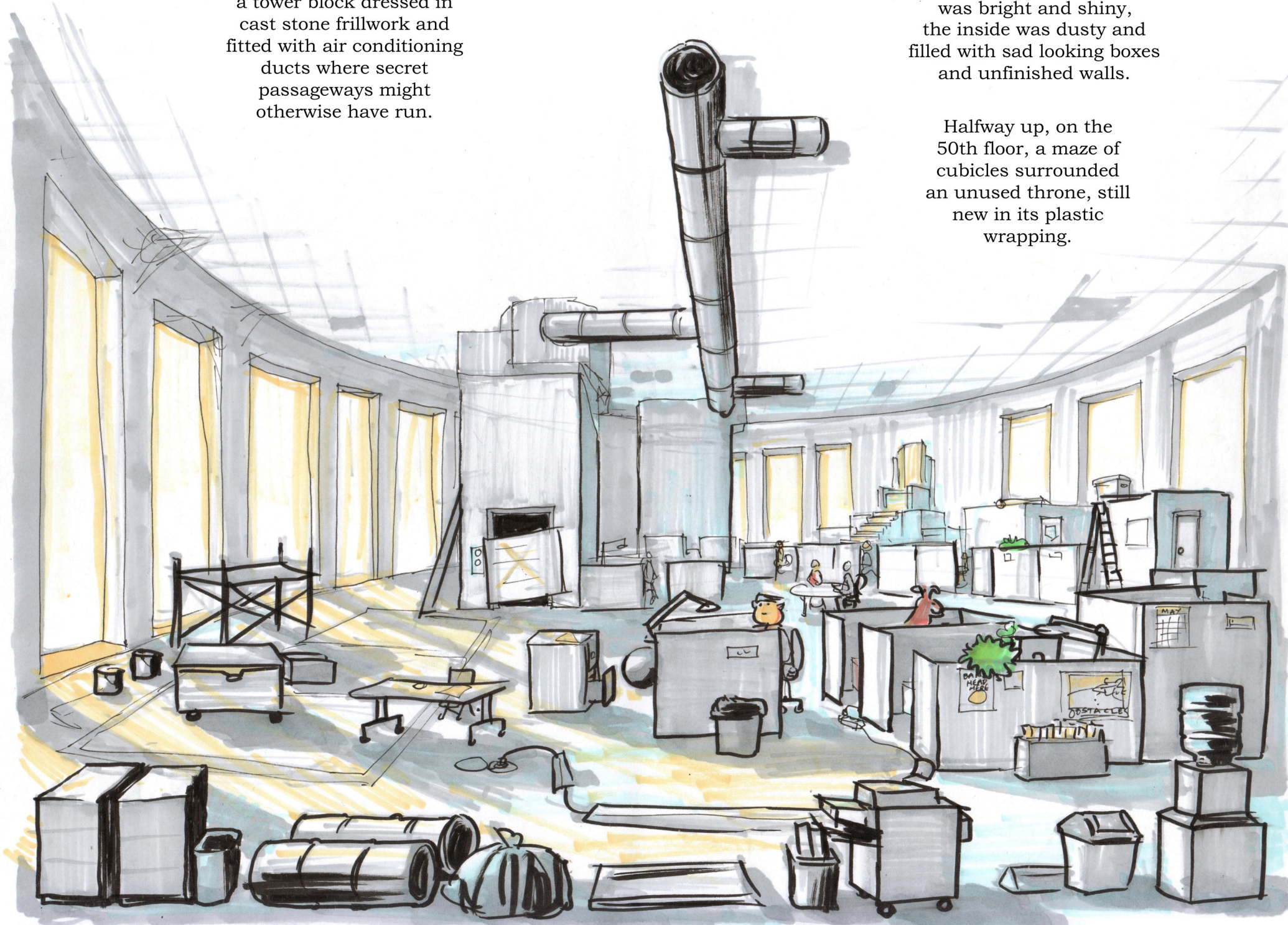




Indeed, the castle was just a tower block dressed in cast stone frillwork and fitted with air conditioning ducts where secret passageways might otherwise have run.

While the outside was bright and shiny, the inside was dusty and filled with sad looking boxes and unfinished walls.

Halfway up, on the 50th floor, a maze of cubicles surrounded an unused throne, still new in its plastic wrapping.





Alex and Juniper made  
their way through  
the labyrinth,  
past pen pushers,  
candy chewers, and  
four-faced file flippers  
to a door with the royal  
shield of Pearl City.



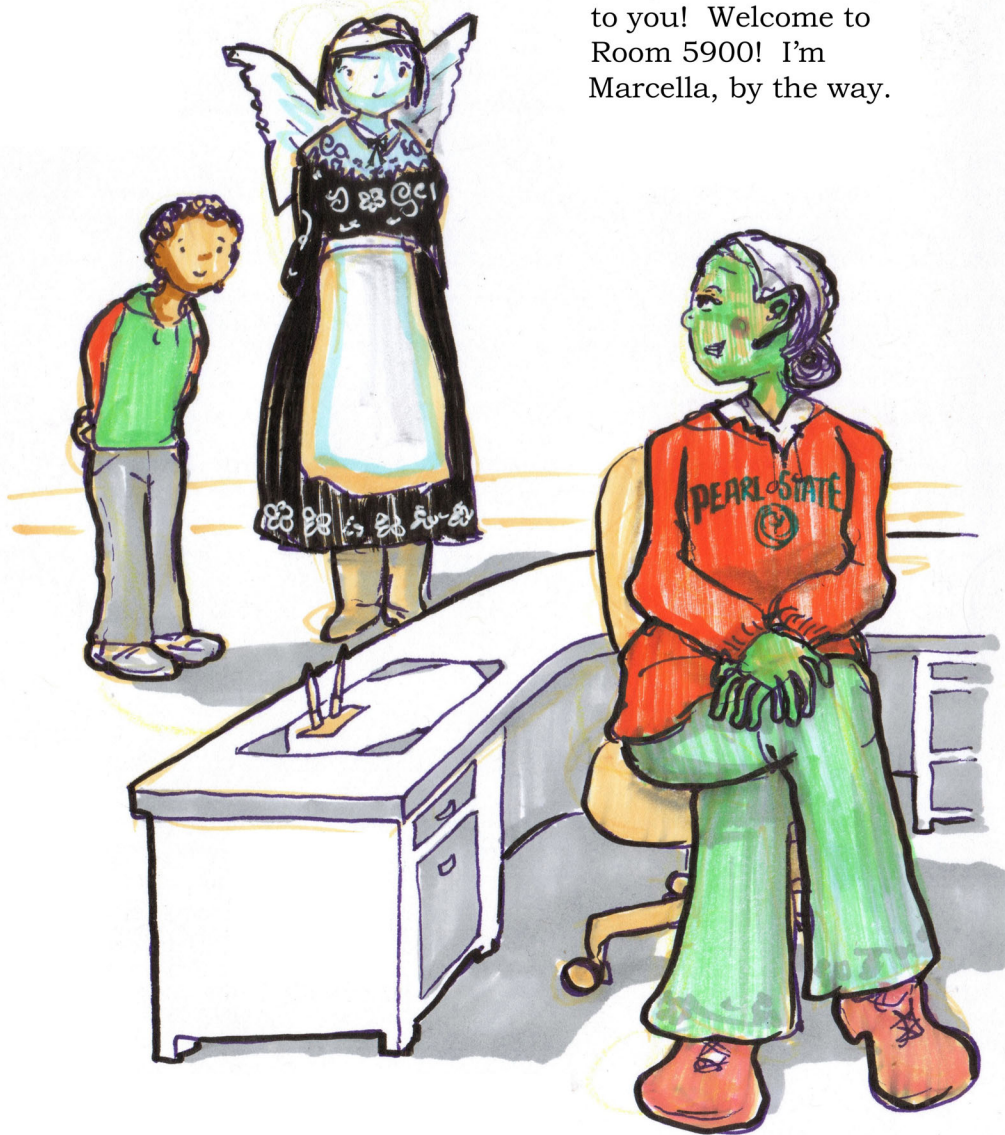
Sitting behind a desk of steel  
and particle board, the Princess  
wore a tired face with yesterday's  
clothes, and looked far older than  
the calendar claimed.





"Good day, your majesty,"  
laughed Juniper, with a  
slight nod.

"Oh cut it out,  
Juniper! You used  
to work for the bank,  
I ought to be bowing  
to you! Welcome to  
Room 5900! I'm  
Marcella, by the way.



So we're stuck between a rock and a hot place. While the  
cooperatives have done a fine job, we started with a lousy hand.  
All our best soil and oil had been used up back in the boss era,  
and we just had the scraps to build from.

History taught us not to borrow from the bank, so we  
borrowed from the land, so to say. Want to hunt baby  
seals? For the right price, go ahead! Dump toxic waste?  
Sure, what could possibly go wrong?

However, after the north flooded there started  
to be second thoughts about looting  
the future and making  
it up later."

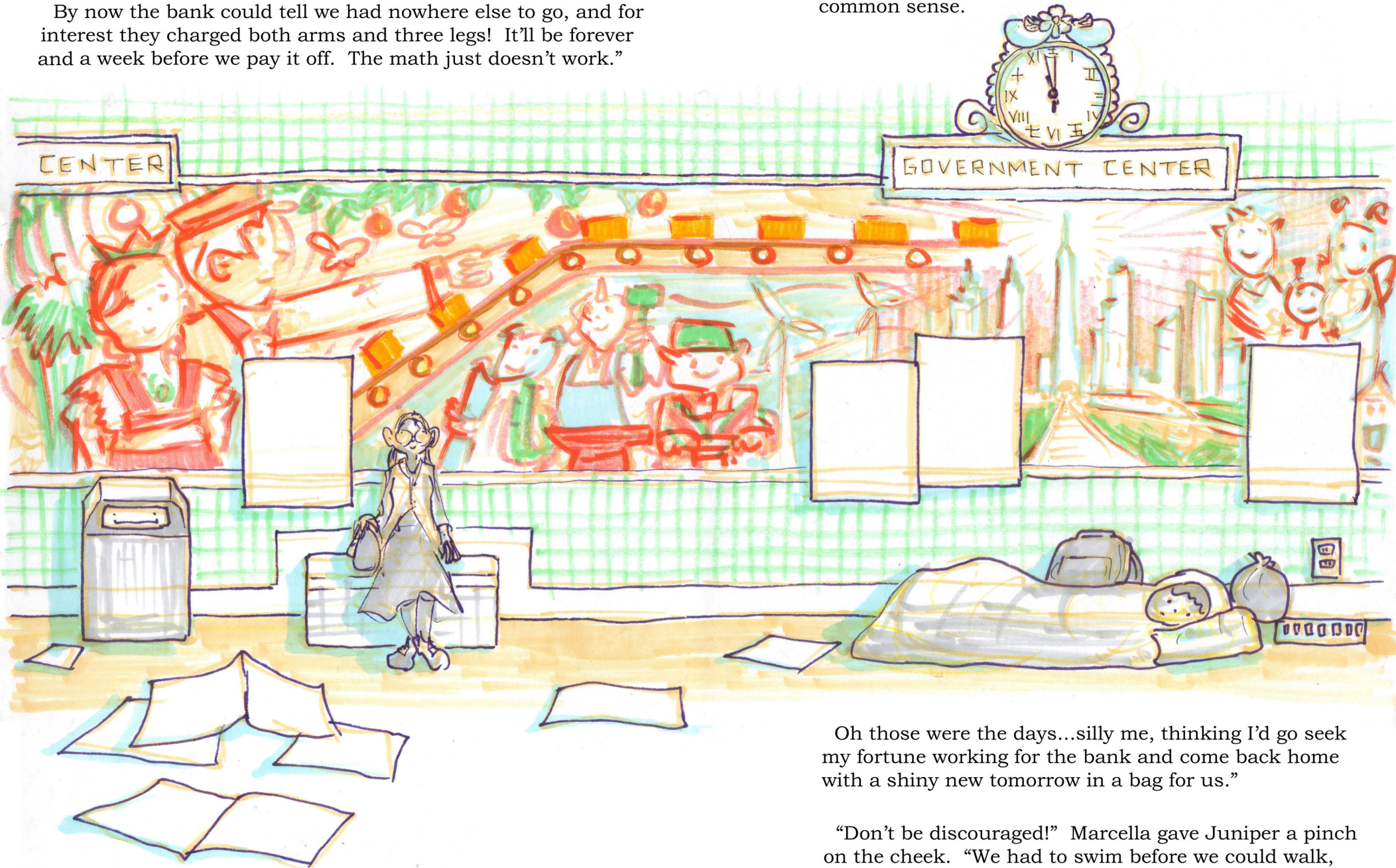




Marcella sighed. "So I went back to the bank. Borrowing money that should of been ours in the first place - those families who own the bank first got rich looting our country back in the bad old days.

By now the bank could tell we had nowhere else to go, and for interest they charged both arms and three legs! It'll be forever and a week before we pay it off. The math just doesn't work."

"Oh believe me I know," replied Juniper. "Those loans smelled like dead rat from day one, and we shoved them out the door fast. Put some lipstick on it and sold it to folks with too much faith in the system and not enough common sense.



Oh those were the days...silly me, thinking I'd go seek my fortune working for the bank and come back home with a shiny new tomorrow in a bag for us."

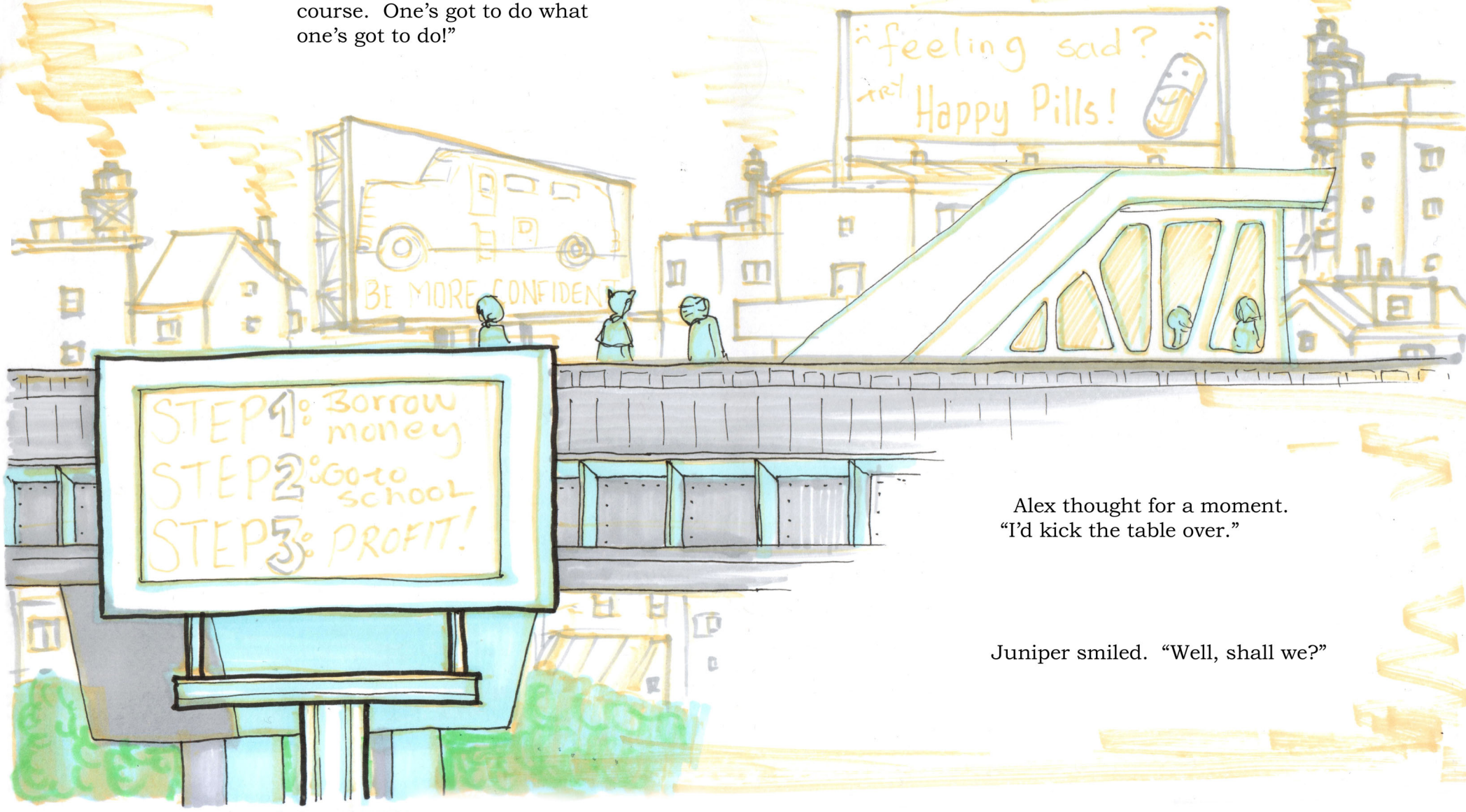
"Don't be discouraged!" Marcella gave Juniper a pinch on the cheek. "We had to swim before we could walk, and we'll have to skip before we can soar. This game we're stuck in is rigged, but there's got to be a way."



Juniper turned and gave a sly look.  
“Marcella, don’t you remember what  
you used to do when you knew the  
rules of the game weren’t fair, but if  
you didn’t win you’d starve?”

“Oh that’s not a fair question!”  
they laughed. “I’d cheat, of  
course. One’s got to do what  
one’s got to do!”

Next Juniper turned to Alex.  
“How about you? What would  
you do if you knew that the rules  
of the game weren’t fair?”



Alex thought for a moment.  
“I’d kick the table over.”

Juniper smiled. “Well, shall we?”



Laughing, Juniper added, "Banklanders like to say,  
When you owe the bank a thousand dollars and can't pay,  
you have a problem. But when you owe the bank a billion  
dollars and can't pay, the bank has a problem.

Now you and I might owe a few thousand here and a few  
thousand there, and Pearl City may be a small country, but  
are we the only ones?

There are the Lees, who owe three thousand on their house.

Sam, whose whole village owes nine million and ten.

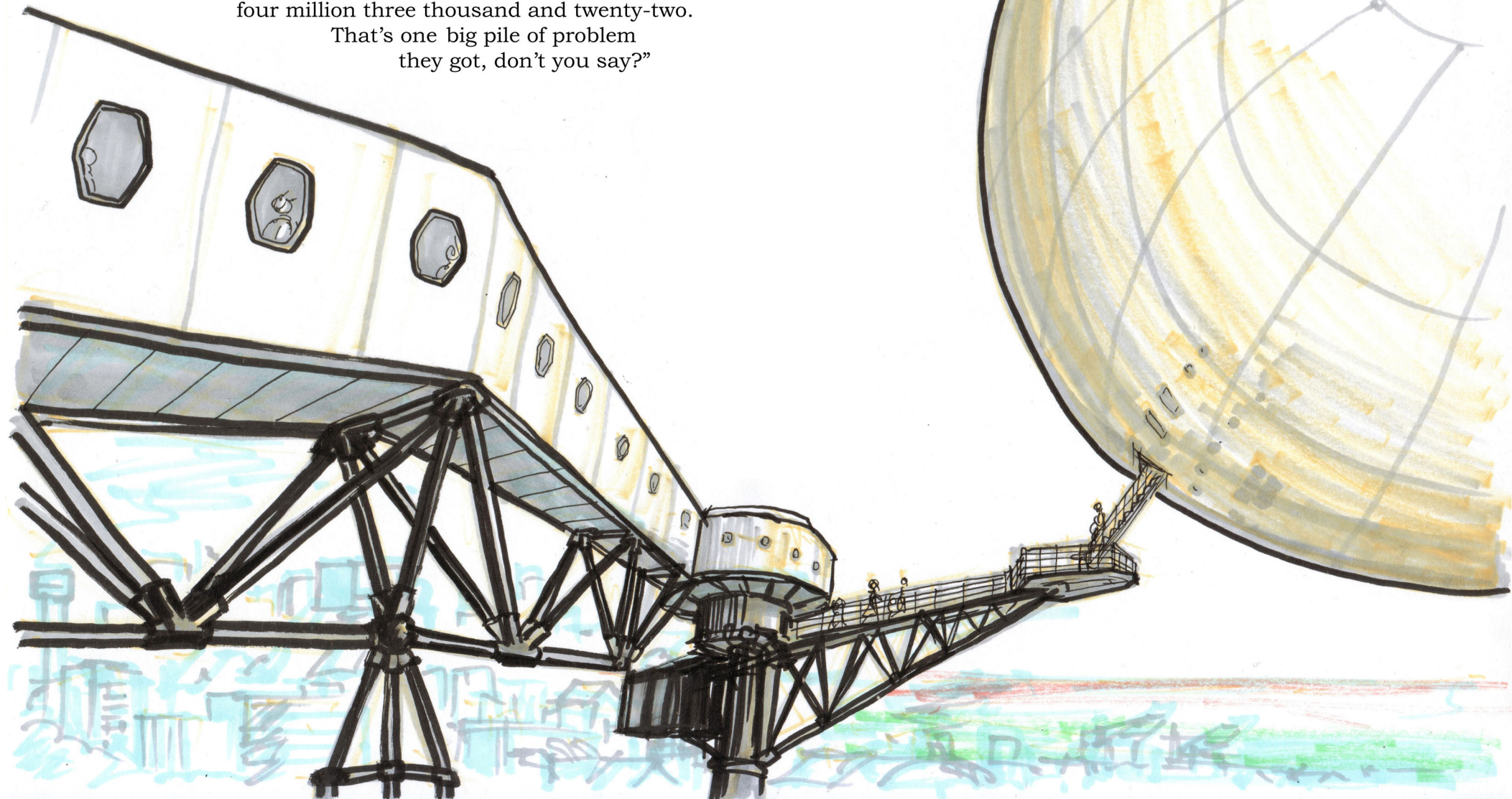
Flower City, five billion in the hole... Tulipland...

All together now, we owe... six trillion five billion


four million three thousand and twenty-two.

That's one big pile of problem

they got, don't you say?"







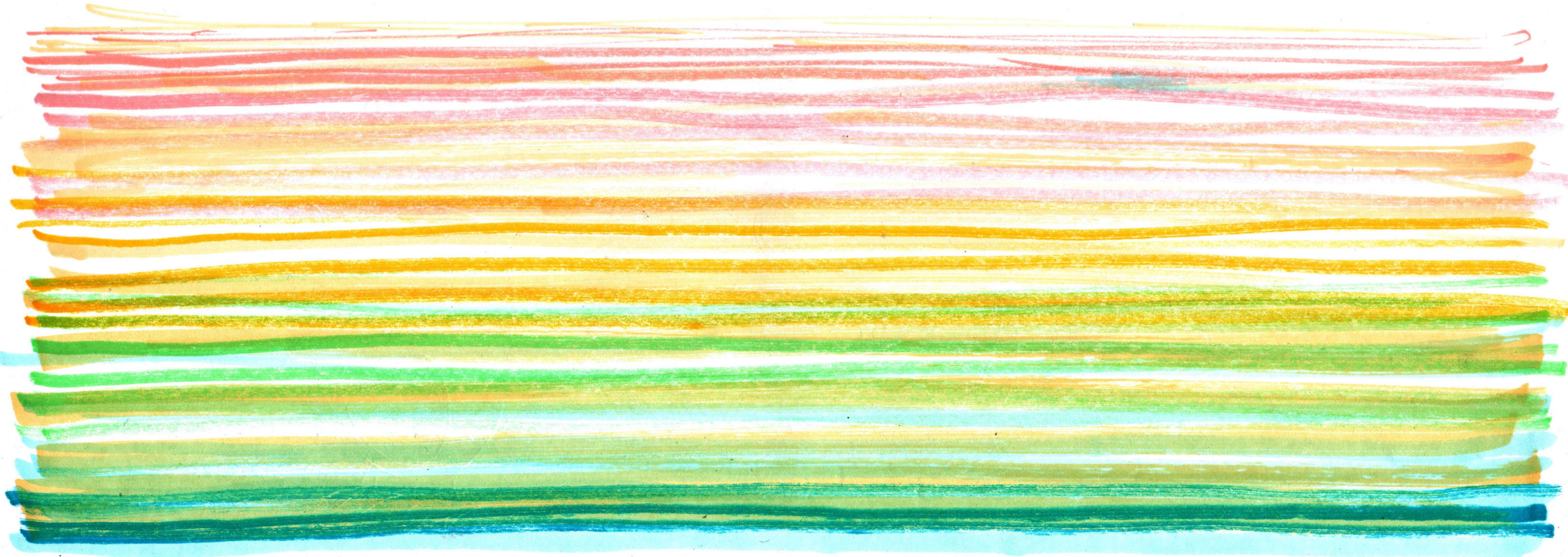
“So how do we make it happen?” asked Alex.

Juniper smiled. “It’s just a matter of time before any runaway train finds a cliff. We just need to nudge it a little now so it falls off somewhere we can still catch it. Best to also start knitting some big fluffy safety nets.”



Gazing back at the shores of the city on the journey home, Alex heard a few of the North Pole folks singing,

“One day we’ll pay back the birds and the bees,  
One day we’ll replant the forest with trees,  
Want to learn how? Come see it right now!  
As we get ready for life after victory!”







Juniper dropped Alex off back on the roof, and handed over a bag of seeds. These are for you and Ms Q and all your friends too. To get you through life's little problems while working on its big ones.

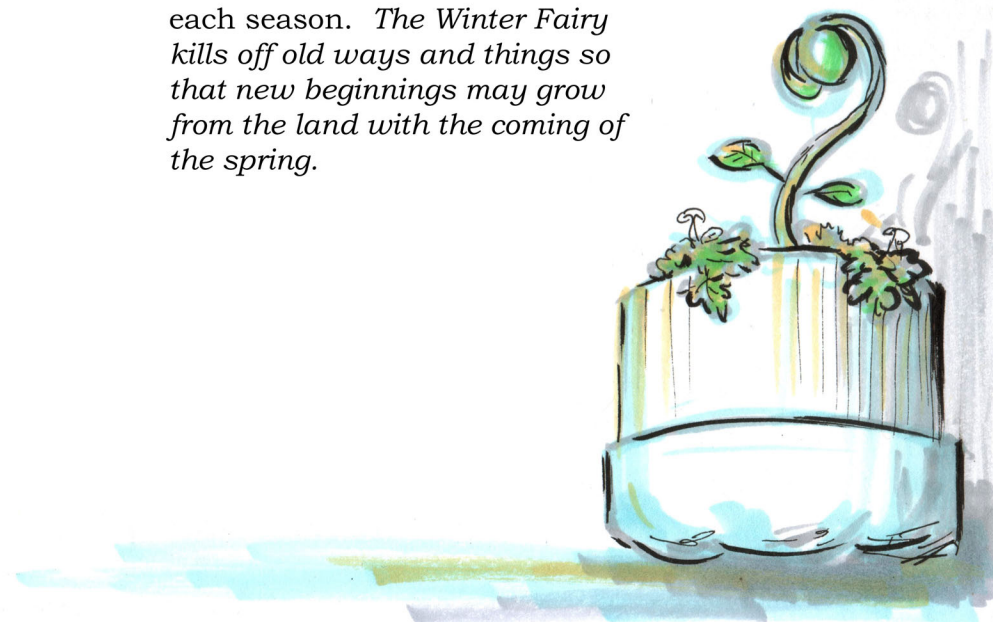
There were seeds for growing food. Seeds that cured diseases. Seeds for houses and couches and cozies with lace edges.

Seeds for things that go kaboom and kabump in the night. Seeds for trees that would grow to the greatest of heights. Seeds of justice and wisdom and freedoms and rights.

Juniper waved goodbye. "I've got more places to be but I trust you know where to start. Keep learning and loving and follow your heart.

If the going gets tough, keep trying and remember, you'll meet the Spring Fairy quite soon enough.

Alex recalled what Ms Q had said about the different fairies of each season. *The Winter Fairy kills off old ways and things so that new beginnings may grow from the land with the coming of the spring.*



















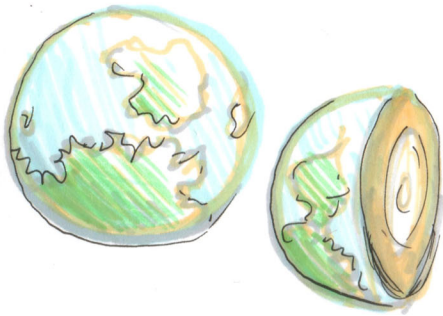




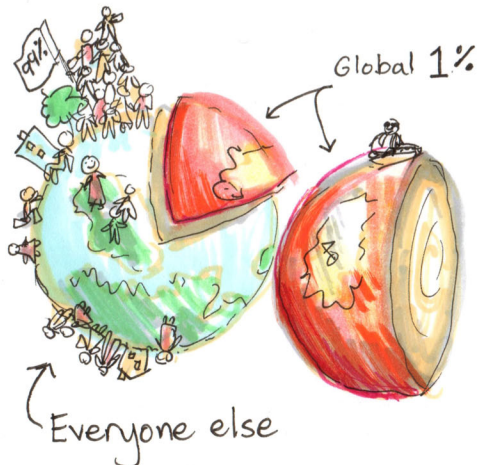


## Ecological Footprint

is a measure of how much of the world is being exploited. Currently, the global ecological footprint is around 1.5 Earths - in other words, we are using the natural resources of one and a half planets.

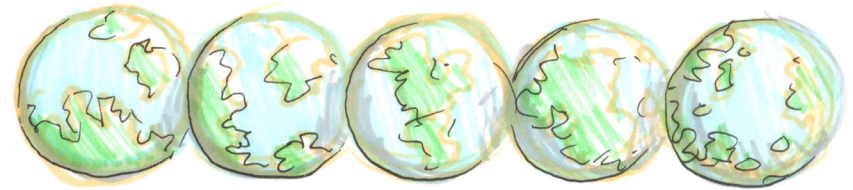


Of course, we only have one planet, so effectively we are using up resources like fresh water and forests faster than nature can remake them. This, one might say, is a problem. However, almost half the using is done by just 1% of the people! The other 99% gets by with less than one planet's worth.



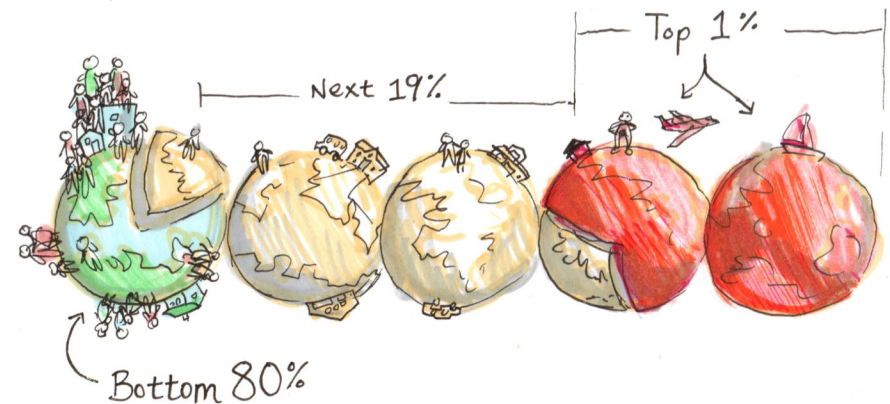
**we  
can  
*all*  
be  
middle  
class.**

If all the people in the world were to live like people in the United States, it would require the resources of five Earths.



However, what does it mean to live like people in the United States?

There's a great deal of inequality of wealth in the U.S. The top 1% owns over a third of all the land, resources, buildings, cash, and businesses. The next 19% owns another half. The bottom 80% has just 15%.



If everyone in the world - including those who are currently rich - lived like middle-class Americans, we'll probably do fine and still have a planet to live on in the future.

So, if you're an average lower or middle class American, you can either cut back your lifestyle 80% or convince the rich folks to share. Which one is going to be easier?



## ideas for further study...

**Environmental inequality** is the problem where certain groups, often the poor, suffer from pollution they are not responsible for, or lack access to resources. Environmental justice seeks to address this issue.

**Gini coefficients** are a measure of economic inequality. A measure of 0 means everyone is equal, while a measure of 1 means that one person has everything.

**Natural capital** are ecosystems that provide useful resources or services, such as clean air, trees, or fresh water.

**Peak oil** is the point of maximum global oil production. After the peak, oil prices go up as all easily accessible resources have been used first, and the remainder is expensive to extract. This concept can also be applied to other nonrenewable resources.

**Phytoremediation** is the use of plants to clean up polluted soil. Plants either break down the pollutants into harmless materials, or absorb them out of the soil.

a **Steady state economy** is an economic system designed to function well without exponential growth. In contrast, present day economies require constant growth to avoid high unemployment.

the **Transition town movement** is an international movement to prepare communities for a transition from high dependence on fossil fuels and long supply chains to a sustainable lifestyle. Local self-reliance often plays a significant role.

the **Triple bottom line** is a performance metric. Whereas some companies only look at financial performance (the bottom line), the triple bottom line provides a way to evaluate economic growth, environmental impact, and contribution to society.

**Wealth concentration** is the economic phenomenon where new wealth tends to go to those who are already wealthy. Also known as “the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.”

**Wealth taxes** are taxes based on how much one owns, as opposed to how much one makes each year. Property taxes are an example of a wealth tax.

**Worker cooperatives** are businesses where the people who work there own the business. Typically, worker cooperatives either elect their managers or make major business decisions together, with each member having one vote.



*Some say equality of opportunity is more important than equality of outcome.*

*They must be true collectivists as the only way to have equality of opportunity without equality of outcome is a society where children aren't raised by their families.*

A. Twu  
Berkeley, California  
June 2012





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