

MAI K. NGUYEN

PILU

of the

WOODS





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AN ONI PRESS PUBLICATION

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PILU of the WOODS

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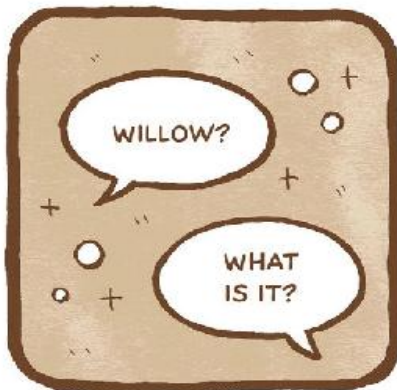
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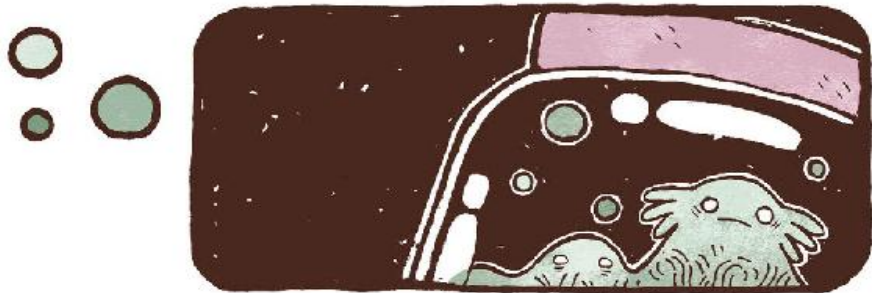
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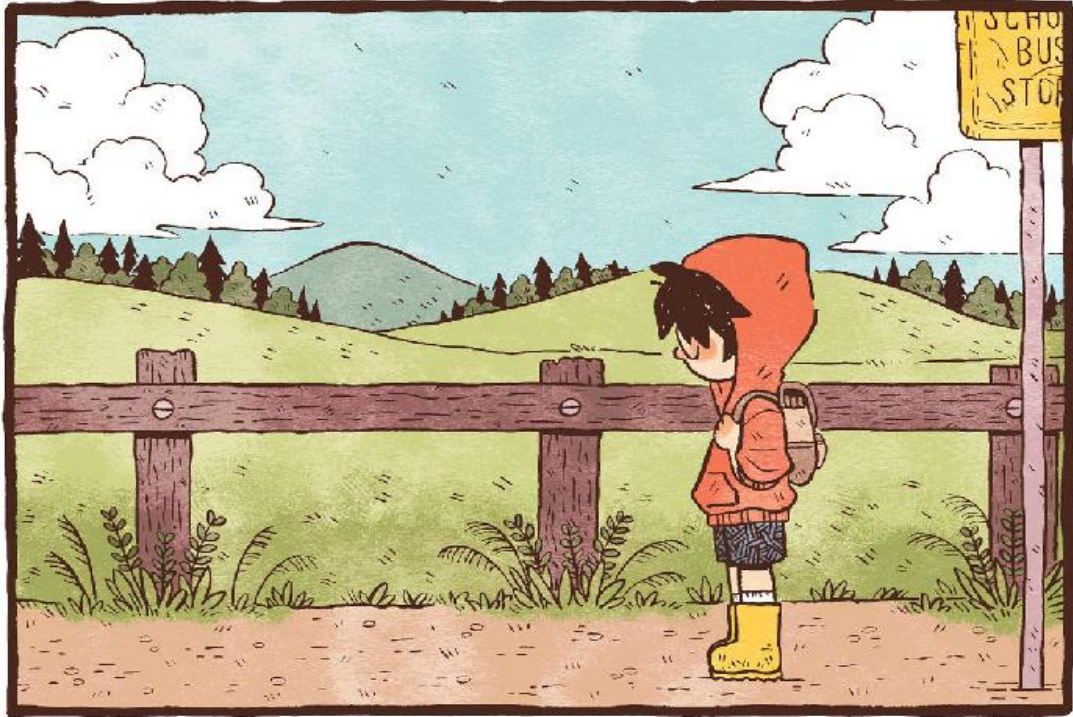
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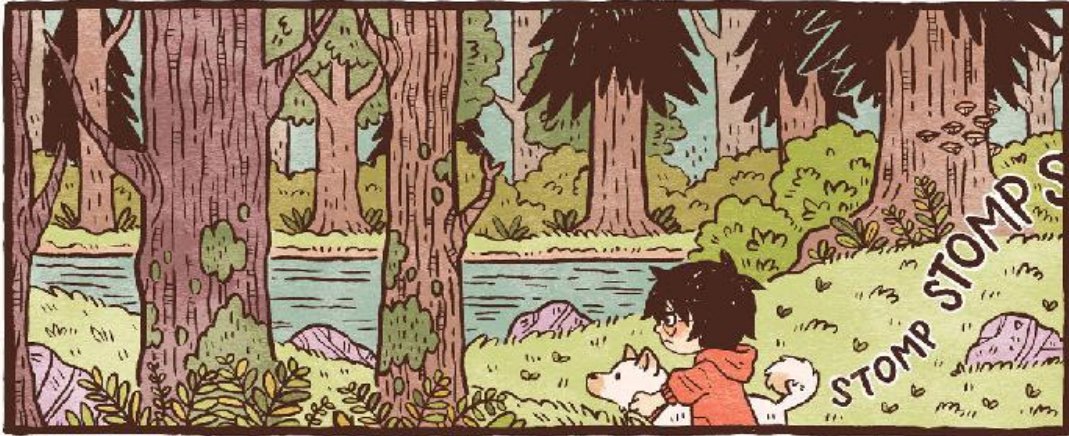
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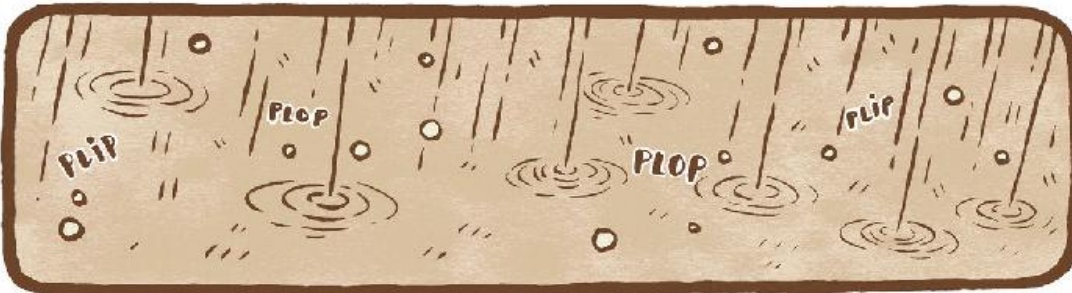
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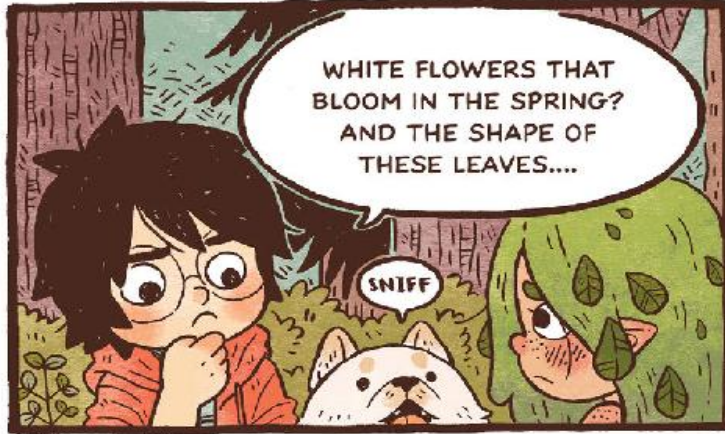
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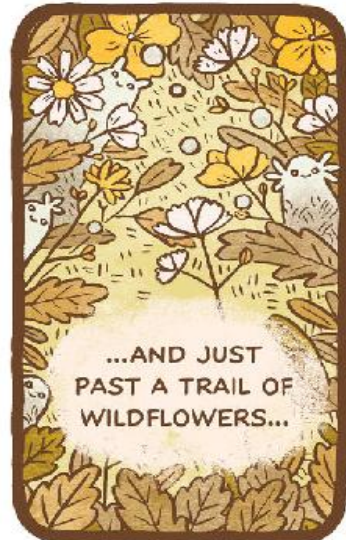
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...WE'LL FIND
A GROVE OF
MAGNOLIA TREES!

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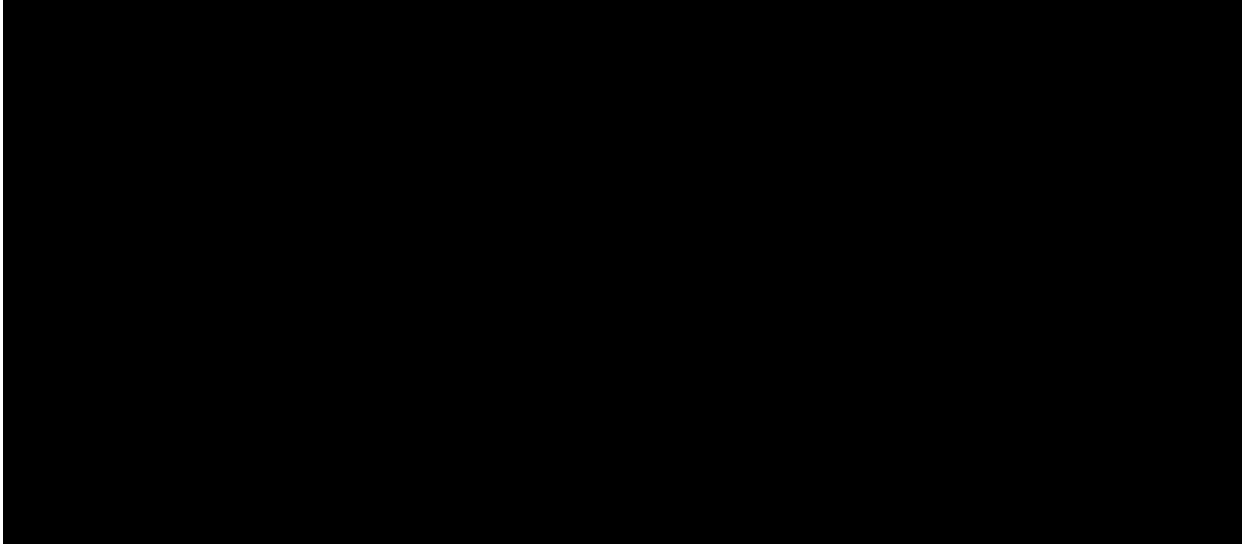
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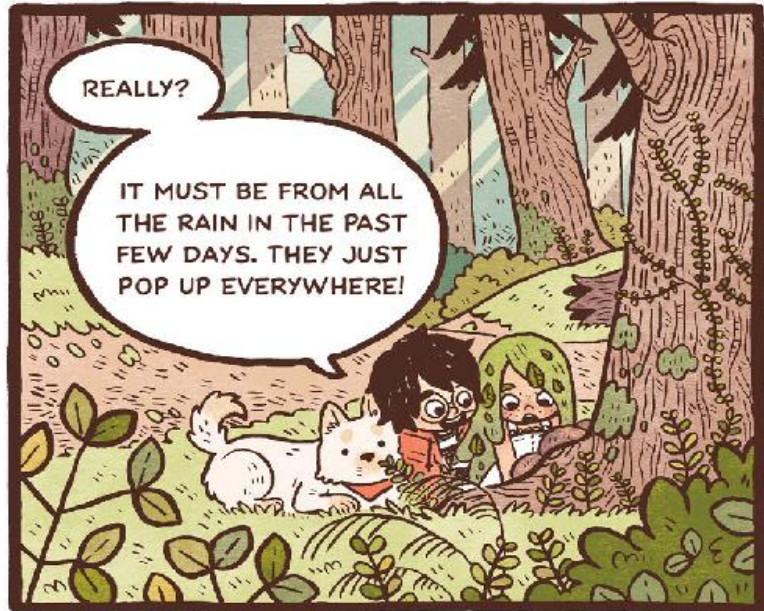
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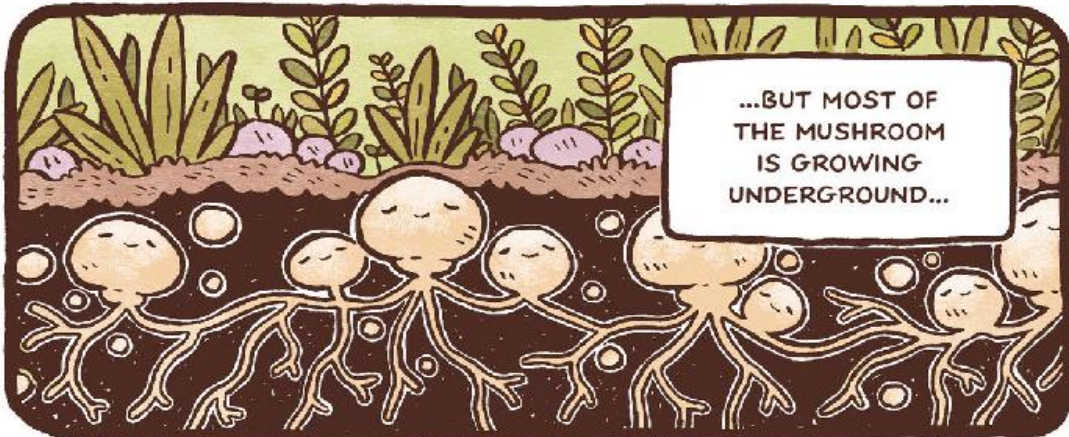
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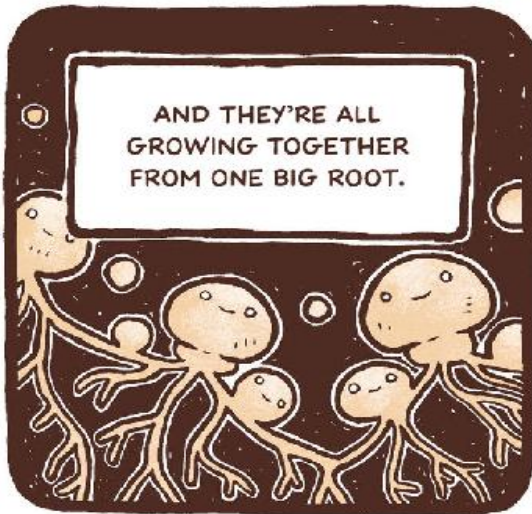
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...BUT MOST OF
THE MUSHROOM
IS GROWING
UNDERGROUND...



...WHERE WE
CAN'T SEE THEM.



AND THEY'RE ALL
GROWING TOGETHER
FROM ONE BIG ROOT.

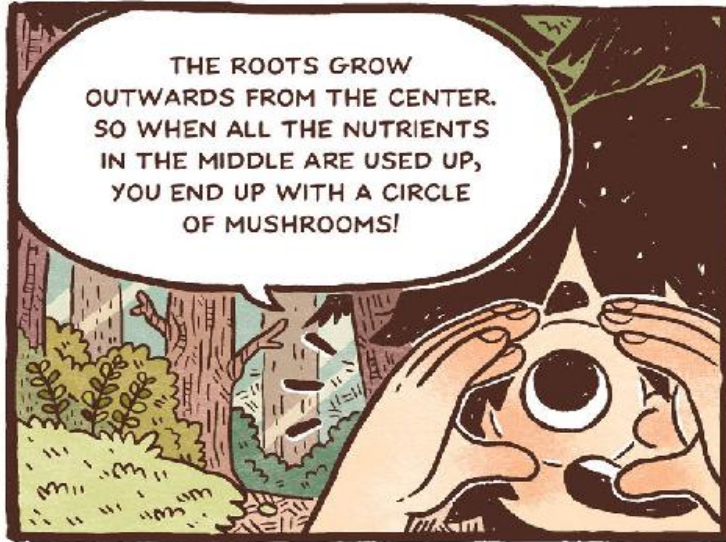


SO ONCE IT RAINS,
THEY ALL JUST
BURST OUT FROM
THE GROUND!

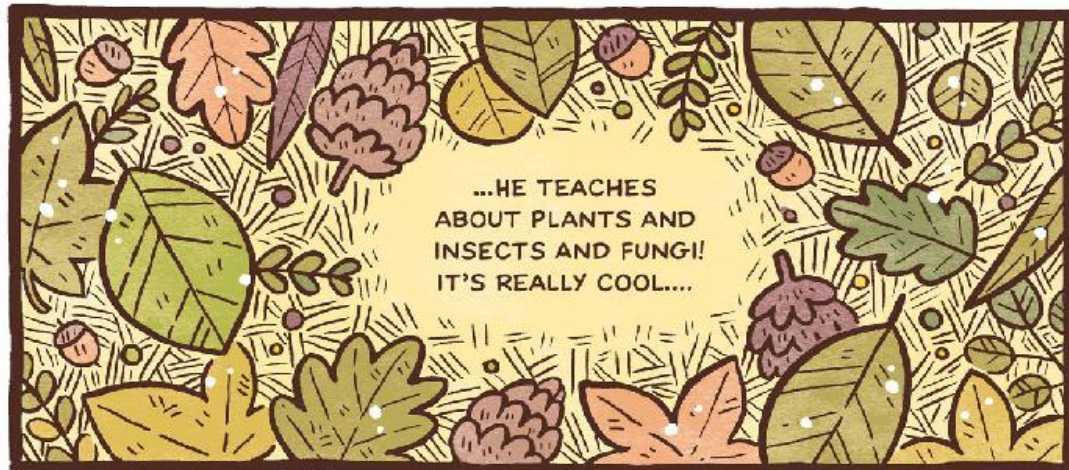
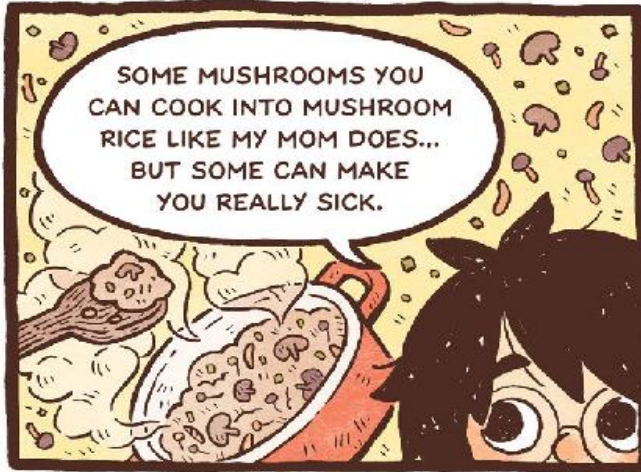


AND SOMETIMES
THEY DISAPPEAR
JUST AS QUICKLY AS
THEY APPEARED!

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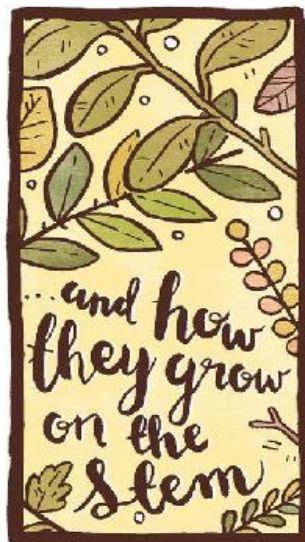
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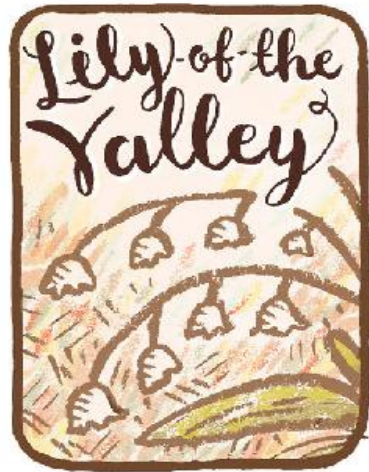
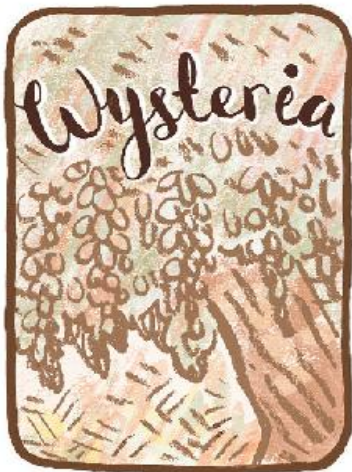
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LINNEA'S MY ONLY SISTER AND I THOUGHT THAT WAS BAD!

YES, I HAVE TO SHARE EVERYTHING WITH EVERYONE ALL THE TIME—EVEN WHEN WE GO BERRY-PICKING!

SPLISH
SPLASH



BUT THE BERRIES THAT GROW NEAR THE GROVE ARE SO SWEET AND JUICY, I WISH I COULD EAT THEM ALL BY MYSELF!

YUM!



A BIG FAMILY SOUNDS LIKE FUN! YOU'RE NEVER REALLY ALONE.



IT'S... OKAY.

SOMETIMES WHEN THERE ARE SO MANY OF US, IT CAN FEEL EVEN LONELIER...

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JUST 'CAUSE YOU CAN'T
SEE IT, DOESN'T MEAN IT'S
NOT IMPORTANT... DOESN'T
MEAN IT'S GONE.



THAT'S HOW IT IS
IN NATURE.



DAD ALWAYS
SAYS YOU GOTTA
BE GENTLE TO
THE WOODS.



IT'S SO EASY
TO STEP ON A
SAPLING.



OR RUIN AN ANIMAL'S
HOME WITHOUT
REALIZING IT.



AND OUR LITTLE
ACTIONS CAN ECHO
SO FAR BEYOND
THESE TREES.



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WHAT IS THAT...?



A PEANUT BUTTER AND JELLY SANDWICH!

HAVE YOU EVER HAD ONE? I SHOVED THIS IN MY POCKET ON MY WAY OUT....

PEANUT BUTTER...?



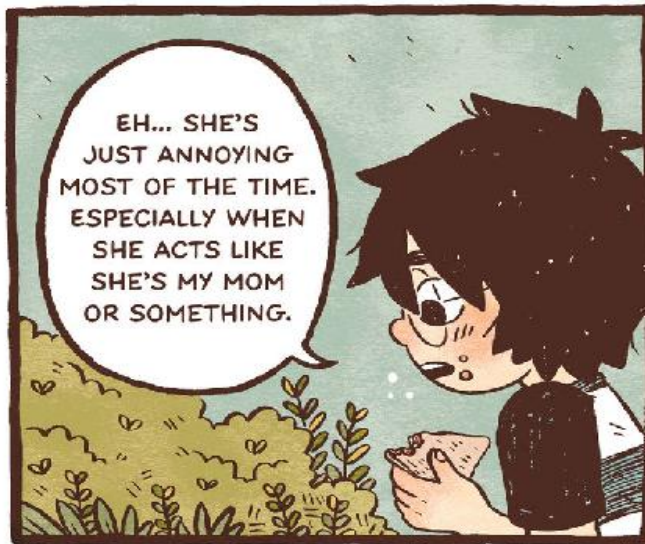
HERE, TRY SOME!

...

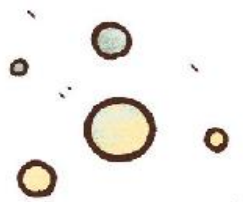
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...IF SHE'S IN A GOOD MOOD, SHE'LL ADD APPLE SLICES, TOO!



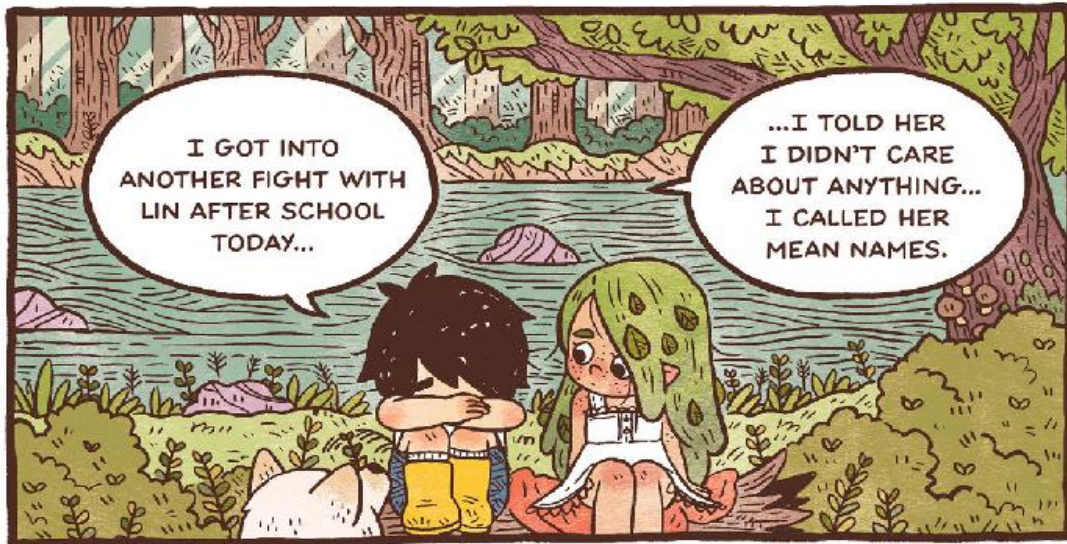
SHE NEVER FORGETS TO CUT THE CRUST OFF FOR ME AND MY DAD.



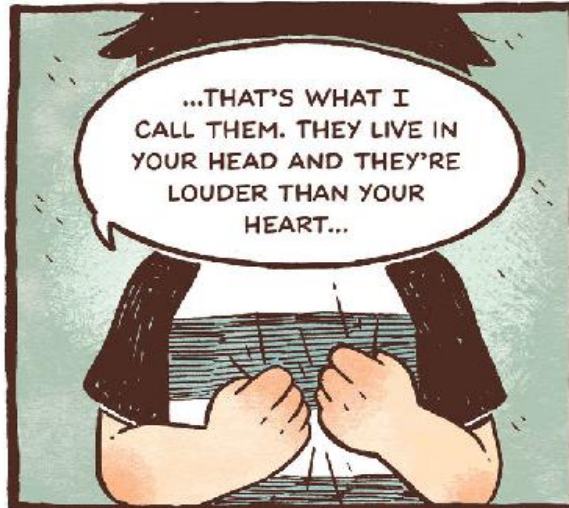
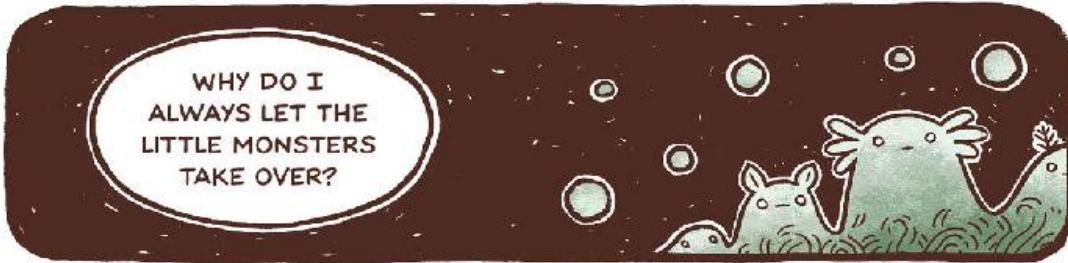
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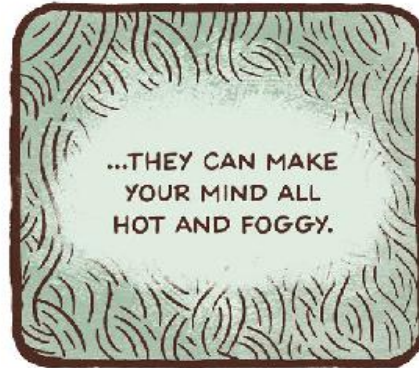
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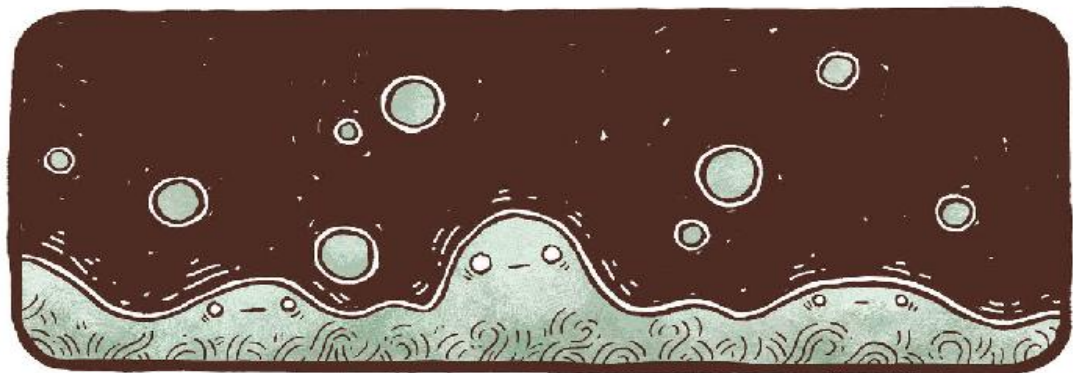
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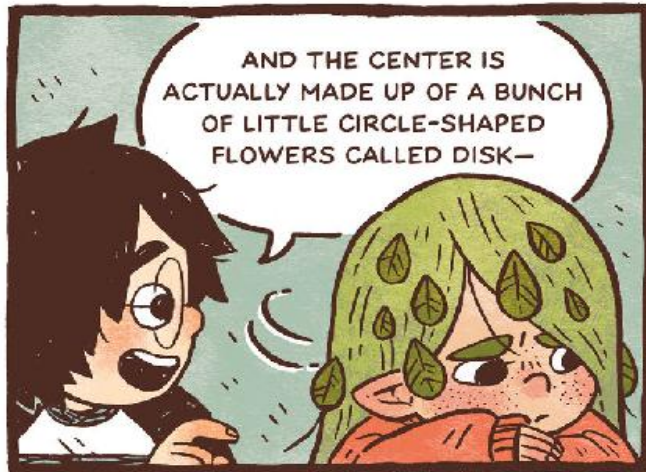
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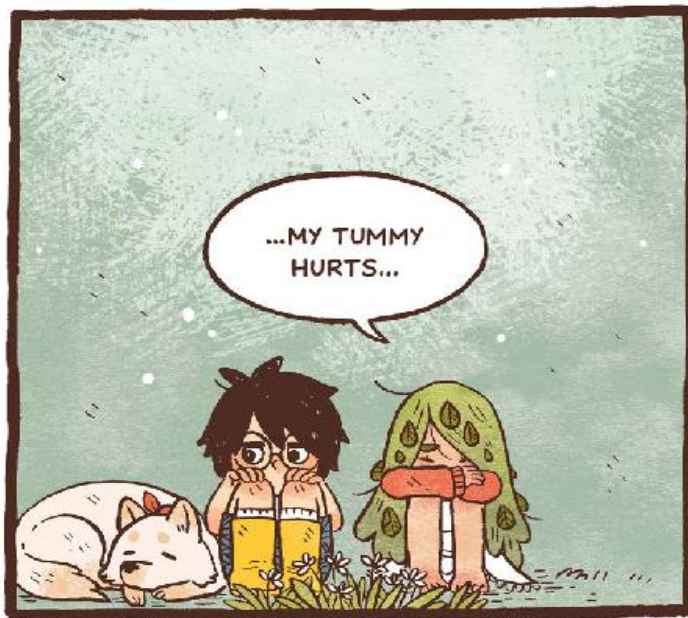
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...AND I WANTED TO TRY
ON MY NEW RAIN BOOTS.



BUT IT WAS STARTING
TO RAIN REALLY HARD THAT DAY.



AND MY MOM STILL HAD
TO GO INTO TOWN FOR
SOME GROCERIES.



I KNEW THE WOODS SO WELL.
BUT SHE SAID IT WAS TOO
DANGEROUS TO GO BY MYSELF.



AND IT JUST MADE
ME SO UPSET...



...WHAT A DUMB THING TO
GET SO MAD ABOUT...



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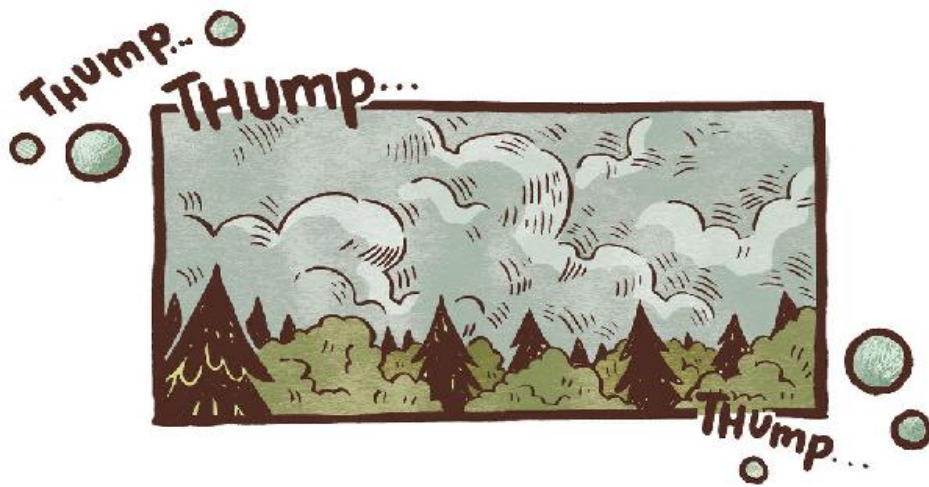
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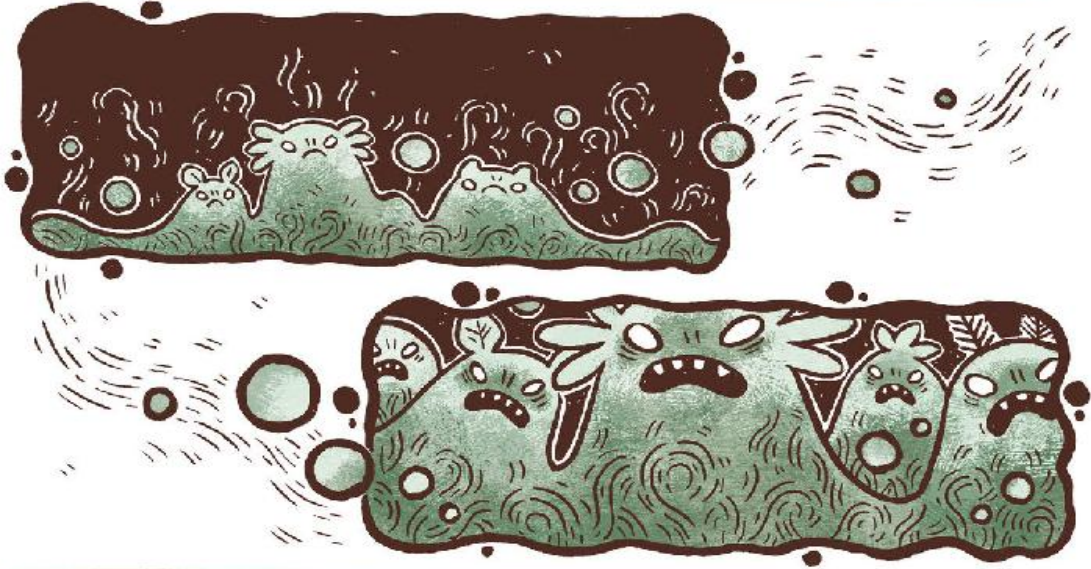
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YOU'RE ONLY HERE
BECAUSE YOU THINK
YOUR MOM'LL ALWAYS
BE HOME! YOU THINK
THE MONSTERS WON'T
EVER HURT HER!



BUT THE
MONSTERS DON'T JUST
DISAPPEAR WHEN YOU
LOOK AWAY!



THEY JUST GET THAT
MUCH MEANER AND
THAT MUCH BIGGER!

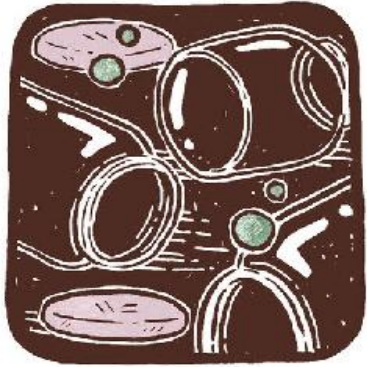


THAT'S WHY
WE HAVE TO
SHUT THEM
AWAY!

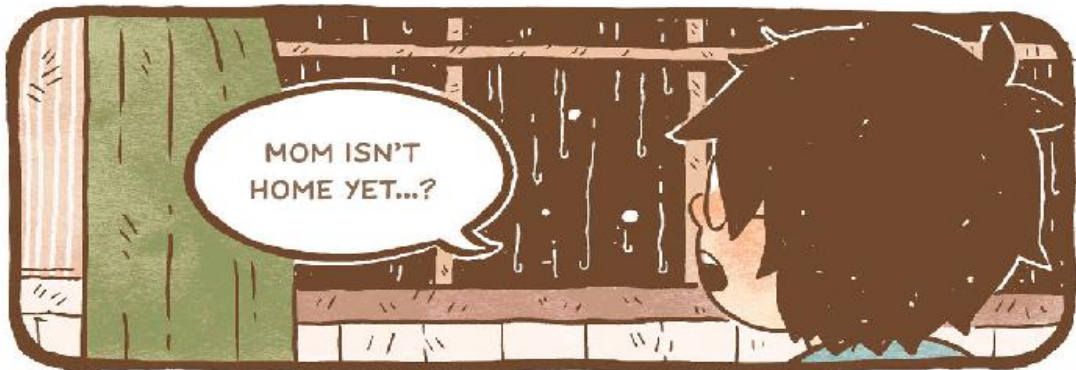
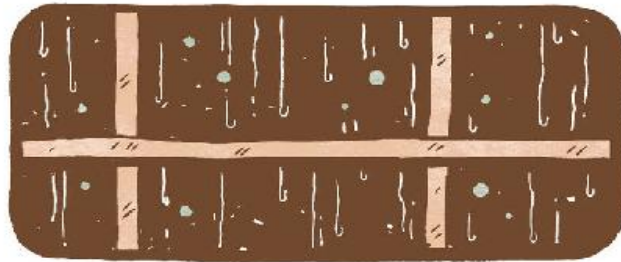


I HAVE TO
STOP THEM FROM
GROWING AND
SPREADING!

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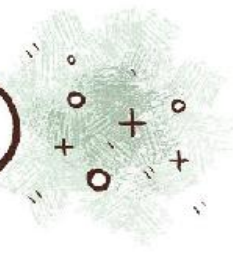
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I HAVE TO KEEP MY PROMISE!



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I WAS NEVER KINDER OR STRONGER WITHOUT YOU.



I WAS ALL ALONE...



...AND YOU WERE ALL ALONE...

...BUT I DON'T WANT TO HURT YOU OR ME OR ANYONE ANYMORE!



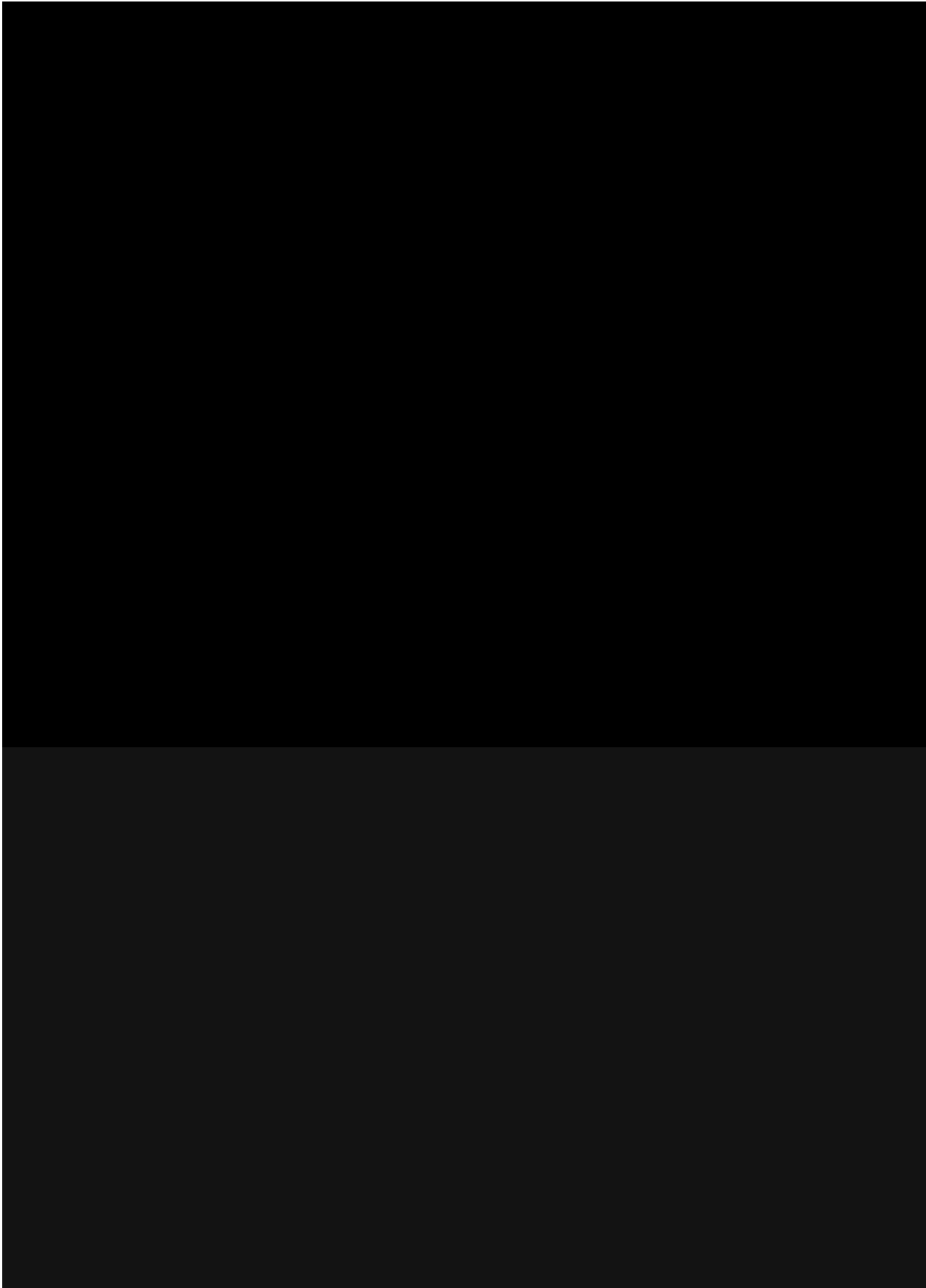
I PROMISE TO ALWAYS BE HERE FOR YOU... SO PLEASE, PLEASE COME HOME WITH ME!



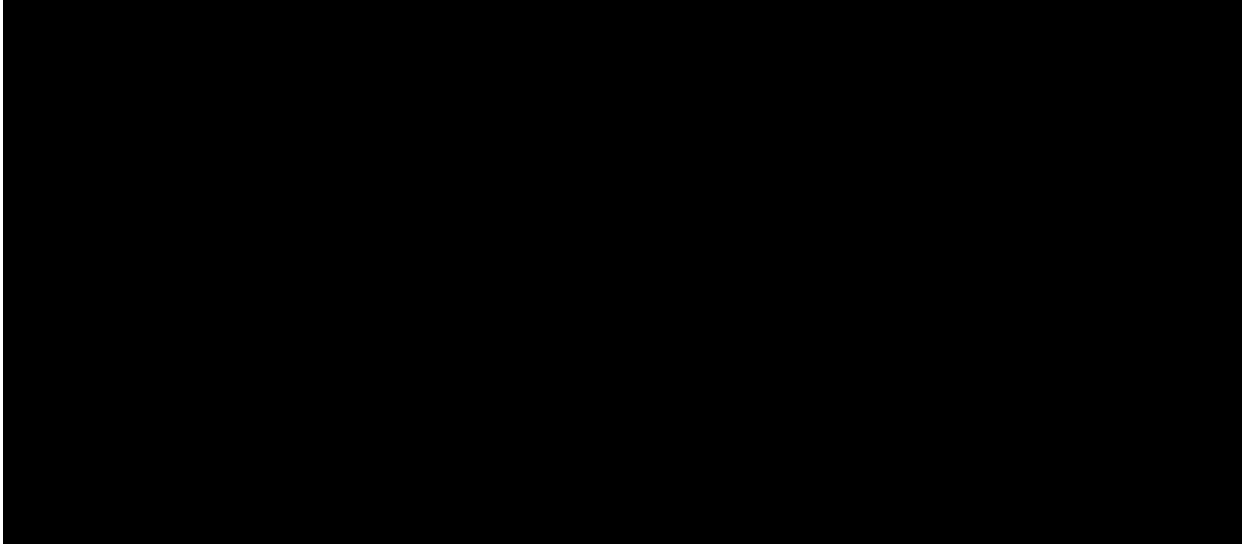
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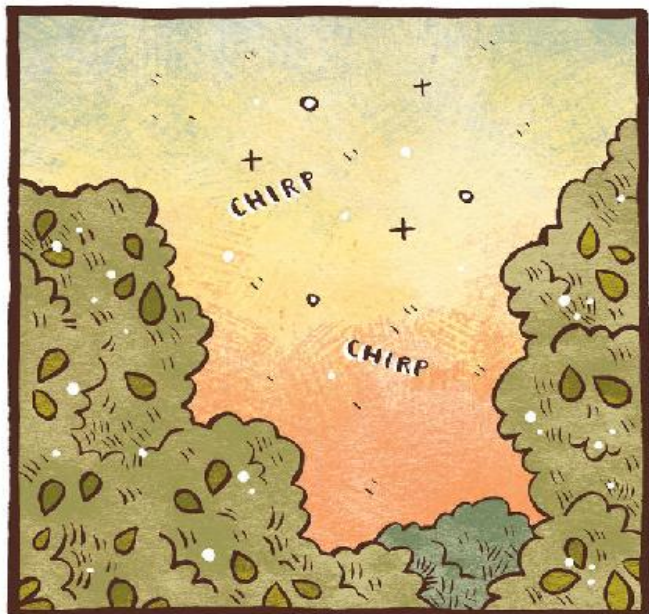
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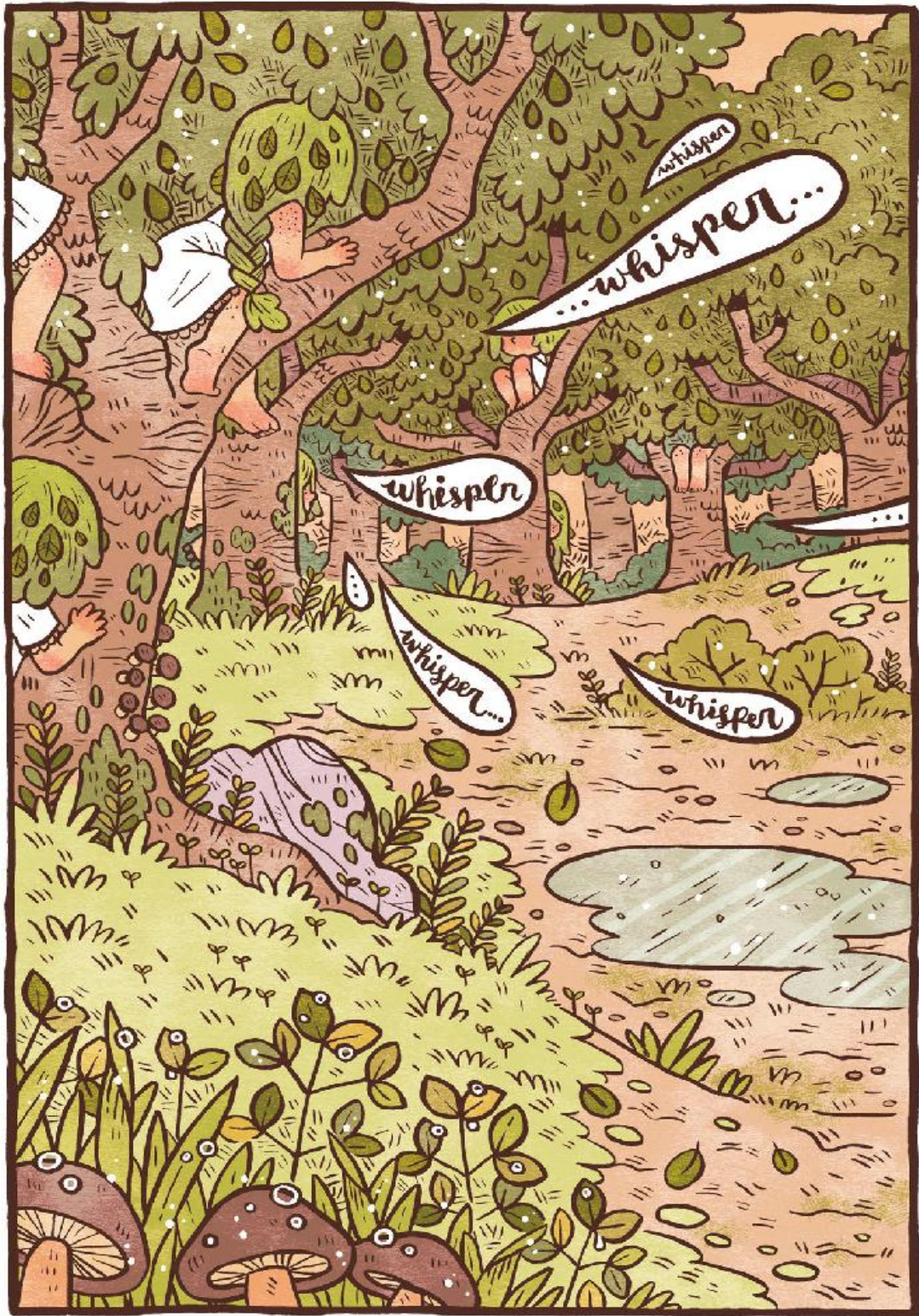
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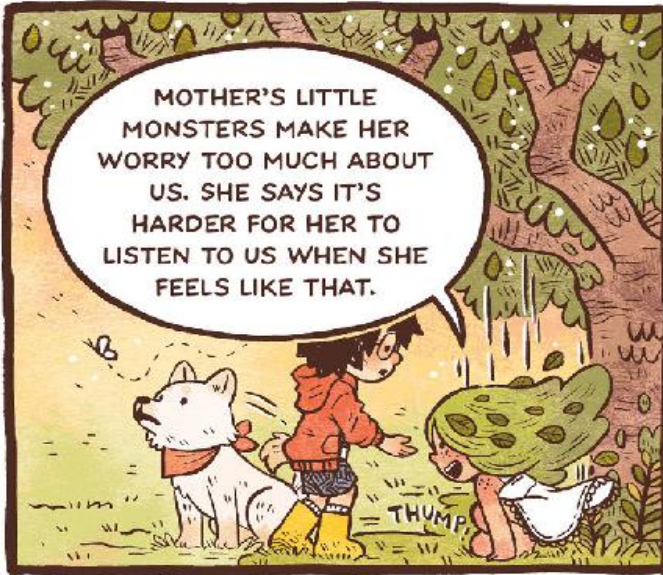
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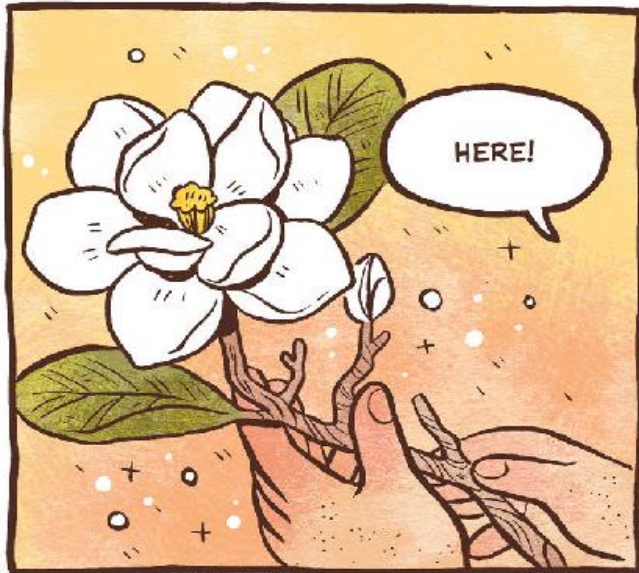
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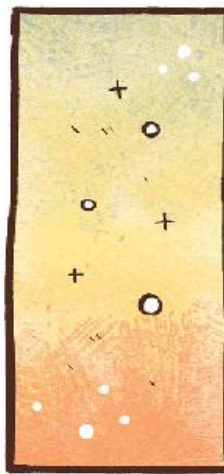
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Sss shh hi tuh hhhhh...



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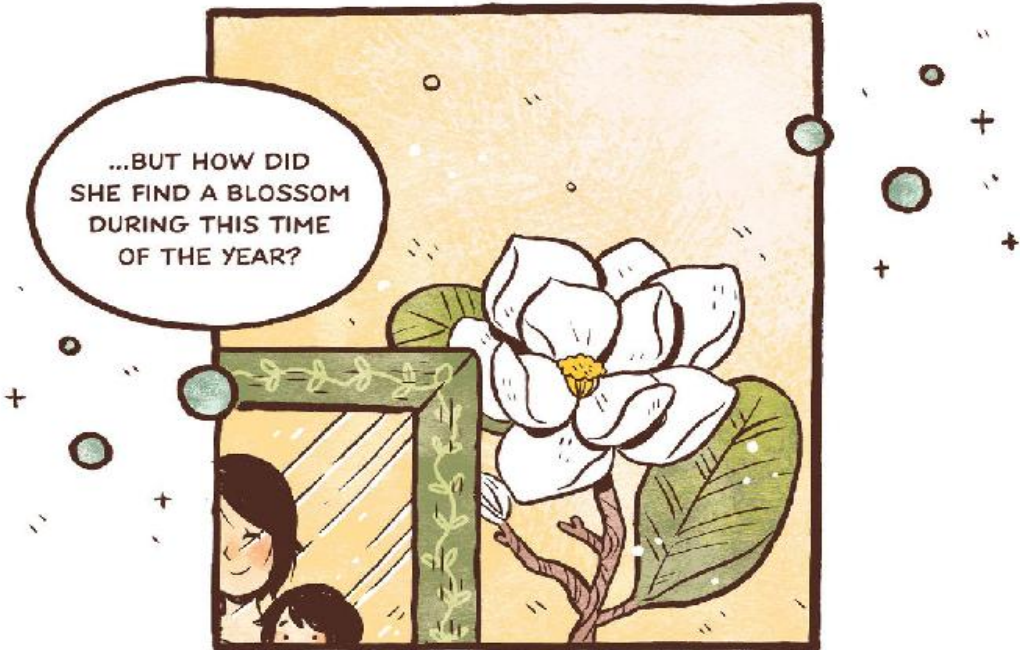
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...IT'S AS IF THE
WHOLE FOREST IS
HER FRIEND...



...DON'T YOU
THINK?



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≡ MOM'S ≡ MUSHROOM RICE (KINOKO GOHAN)

2 CUPS OF RICE

250 G OF ENOKI AND SHITAKE MUSHROOMS

150 G OF SKINLESS CHICKEN THIGHS, CUT INTO BITE-SIZED PIECES

1/4 CARROT, SHREDDED OR DICED

1.5 CUPS OF BROTH, PLUS MORE

1 TBSP EACH OF SOY SAUCE AND COOKING SAKE

2 TBSP EACH OF SOY SAUCE, COOKING SAKE, AND MIRIN

1/2 TSP EACH OF SALT AND SUGAR

1 TBSP OF BUTTER

CHOPPED GREEN ONIONS



In a small bowl toss the chicken in 1 tbsp of soy sauce and 1 tbsp of cooking sake. Set aside.

Rinse 2 cups of rice until the water runs clear. Let it soak for 30 minutes (letting it soak will give you fluffier rice!). To ensure your rice is dry, put it in a sieve and let it drain for at least 15 minutes.



In a small pot, combine the chicken and carrots. Add 1.5 cups of broth (or enough to cover the chicken and carrots) and bring it to a boil. Lower the heat and let it simmer for about 10 minutes, skimming any foam.



Use a sieve to separate the chicken and carrots from the broth. Don't throw out the broth—we'll use it to cook the rice in!

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In a heavy bottomed pot, combine the rice and 2 cups of chicken broth— use the broth in step 3 and add regular chicken broth to make 2 cups.

Add 2 tbsp of cooking sake, 2 tbsp of mirin, 2 tbsp of soy sauce, 1/2 tsp of salt, and 1/2 tsp of sugar.

Add the mushrooms, chicken, carrots, and 1 tbsp of butter. Don't mix it! Let everything sit on the rice.

Cover the pot and bring to a boil over high heat. It's best to not lift the lid, so try and listen for the clattering of boiling water. Reduce the heat to low and let the rice cook for about 12-13 minutes, or until the water has been absorbed (it's okay to take quick peeks).



Remove the pot from the heat with the lid, and let it steam for about 10 more minutes. Lift the lid and fluff the rice, making sure everything is evenly mixed.

Finally, add some of the chopped green onions and enjoy your mushroom rice!



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MAI K. NGUYEN is a comics maker, illustrator, and ice-cream enthusiast living in Northern California. She has previously self-published two short stories, *Coral and the King* and *Little Ghost*. When she's not doodling, she's hustling as a visual designer in San Francisco, watching too many true-crime documentaries, or dreaming about all the other comics she wants to make. Not unlike Willow, she loves feeling small amongst redwood trees and inhaling the salty-grassy smell of coastal bluffs.

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ILA, who has been my favorite artist ever since I was little. This book wouldn't exist, like really really wouldn't exist, if it weren't for you pushing me to share my work with a bigger audience and to take my passion more seriously. Thank you for always finding time to look over my pitch, my script, my thumbnails, my sketches, and everything in between countless times.

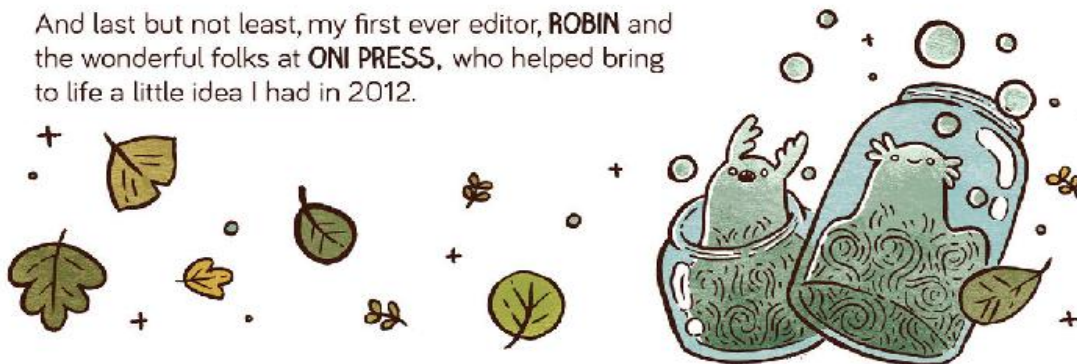
AKSHAYA, for two years of dragging me to coffee shops every Thursday night to work on our books. You've been my accountability buddy, my tomato buddy, my compassion buddy, my wisdom buddy, and every other type of buddy. Thank you for reminding me every day of the importance of pursuing what you love with all your heart.

IAN, for always, always cheering me on. This book is better because you gave me honest and actionable feedback, helped me letter pages during crunch time, and scooped me up whenever I wallowed in too much self-doubt. Thank you for being the absolute best.

SHIRO, who kept me company during late night drawing sessions for most of the creation of this book, and who looks suspiciously like Chicory (or Chicory like Shiro?). I miss swiveling around in my chair to find you snoozing away.

MOCHA, because I learned to love drawing comics in middle school based on your angsty Fictionpress stories. At age 13, I thought, "When I publish my first real comic book, I'm gonna put Mocha's name in it somewhere." So here it is.

And last but not least, my first ever editor, **ROBIN** and the wonderful folks at **ONI PRESS**, who helped bring to life a little idea I had in 2012.



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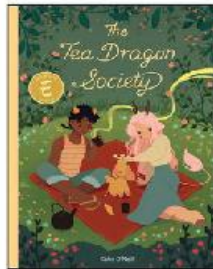
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THE TEA DRAGON SOCIETY

BY KATIE O'NEILL

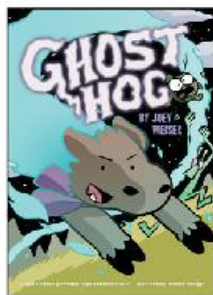
When Greta finds a lost creature in the market, she learns about the nearly-forgotten art of Tea Dragon caretaking.



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BY YEHUDI MERCADO

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WILLOW LOVES THE WOODS NEAR HER HOUSE. They're calm and quiet, so different from her own turbulent emotions, which she keeps locked away. When her emotions get the better of her one day, she decides to run away into the woods.

There, she meets Pilu, a lost tree spirit who can't find her way back home—which turns out to be the magnolia grove Willow's mom used to take her to. Willow offers to help Pilu, and the two quickly become friends.

But the journey is long, and Pilu isn't sure she's ready to return home yet—which infuriates Willow, who's determined to make up for her own mistakes by getting Pilu back safely. As a storm rages and Willow's emotions bubble to the surface, they suddenly take on a physical form, putting both girls in danger... and forcing Willow to confront her inner feelings once and for all.



"AN INCREDIBLE AND IMAGINATIVE STORY OF LIFE AND LOSS. READERS WILL MISS PILU WHEN THE STORY ENDS, BUT SHE WILL RESONATE LONG AFTER."

—ERIN ENTRADA KELLY,
NEWBERY AWARD-WINNING
AUTHOR OF *HELLO, UNIVERSE*



"PILU OF THE WOODS IS A HEARTWARMING TALE FULL OF NATURAL WONDER, WITH WISE AND LOVELY MESSAGES ABOUT COPING WITH GRIEF, FACING YOUR FEELINGS, AND LEARNING TO FORGIVE YOURSELF."

—KATIE O'NEILL,
EISNER AWARD-WINNING CREATOR
OF *THE TEA DRAGON SOCIETY*



"MAI K. NGUYEN'S STUNNING VISUALS BRING AN EMOTIONAL NARRATIVE TO LIFE. PICK IT UP FOR THE BEAUTY, STAY FOR THE FEELS!"

—GLORIA CHAO,
AUTHOR OF *AMERICAN PANDA*

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