

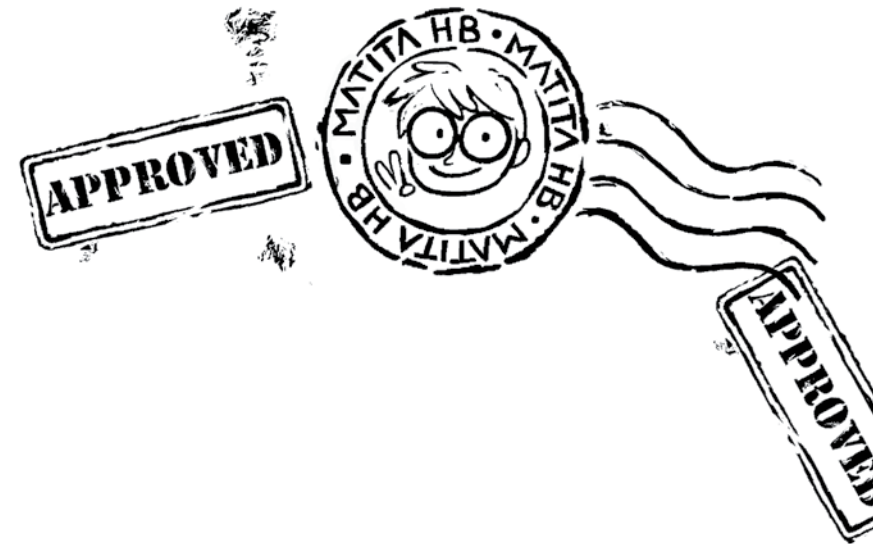
SUSANNA
MATTIANGELI

ILLUSTRATIONS BY RITA
PETRUCCIOLI

NOTES, PRIVATE THINGS,
REAL AND INVENTED STORIES BY

HB PENCIL

(THAT'S ME!)



HB Pencil

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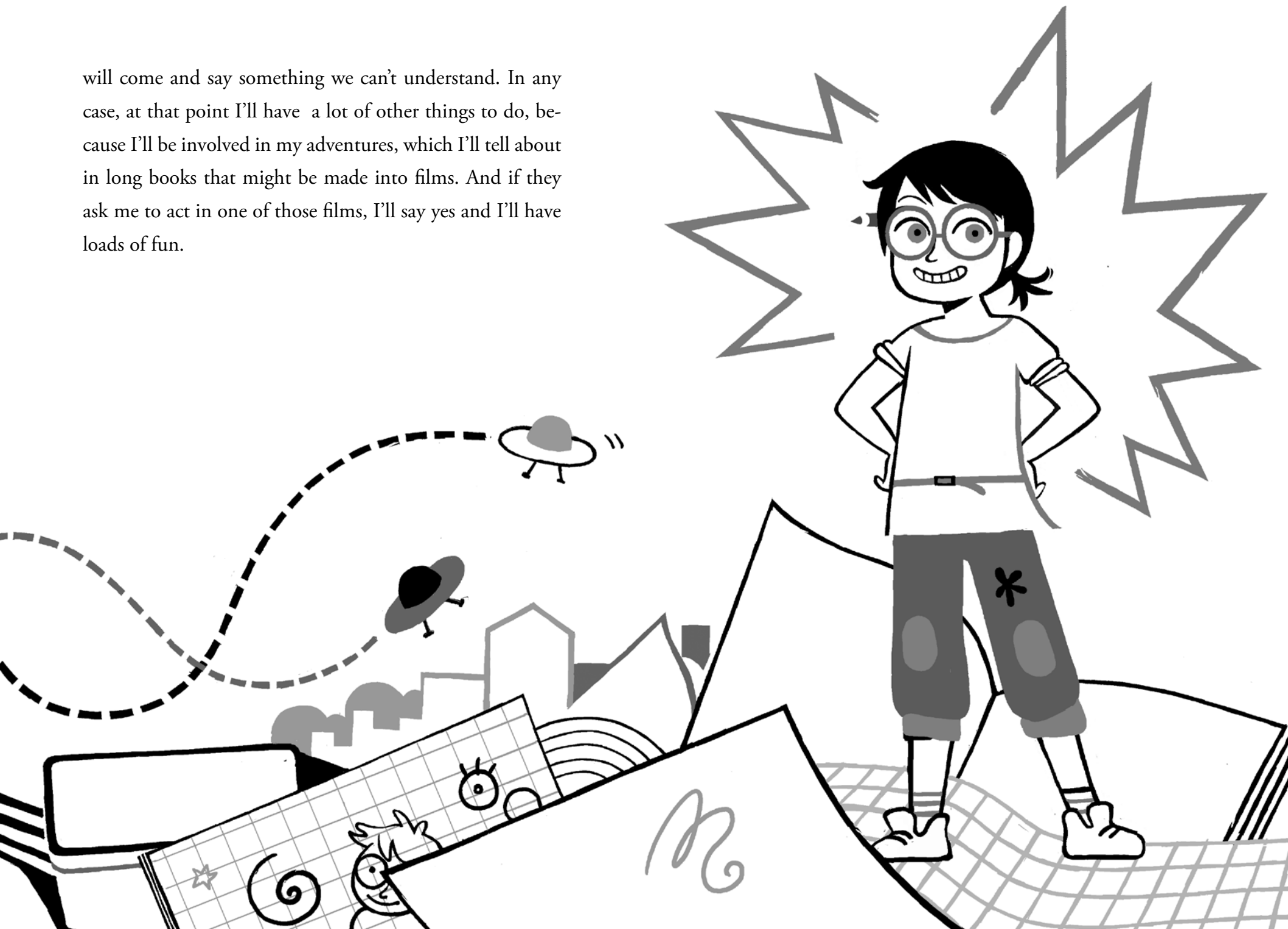


LET ME INTRODUCE MYSELF

I am HB Pencil, which in pencil language means Hard Black, in other words a bit hard and a bit black. My real name is different, but here in my notebook I'm Pencil. Sil for short. It's a nickname, a pen-name, like Lewis Carroll or Lady Gaga. About myself I can mainly say that I have lots of hair, which is also black. Under my hair is my head with ideas inside, and under that I have all the other pieces of a little girl. What sort of girl? The sort that goes to school and plays. But the only thing I like about school is recess in the garden, swapping notes with my friend Nora and the smile of ... skip it, of no one. What else can I say? I like apples. Tomatoes, not really. Everyone says, "What, you don't like tomatoes!?" No, I don't, not at all.

One day when I'm grown up, I'll open a box and I'll find this notebook. Then I'll say, "Gosh, look at the things I wrote when I was little!" Or else it won't be me that opens the box, someone else will come and say, "Goodness, look at the things this HB Pencil wrote!" Or maybe the aliens

will come and say something we can't understand. In any case, at that point I'll have a lot of other things to do, because I'll be involved in my adventures, which I'll tell about in long books that might be made into films. And if they ask me to act in one of those films, I'll say yes and I'll have loads of fun.



STORY TO START THE DAY

That morning Laura woke up in her bed...



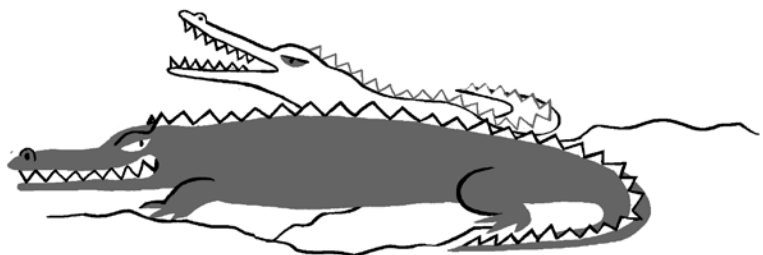
No, she needs a more adventurous name.

That morning Rowena woke up in her bed...



Hmm, not great. But it doesn't really matter, let's get right into the action.

That morning Rowena was on her way to school, when she saw some crocodiles coming towards her...



Yes, that's almost right, but it still needs more movement.

Splash! Rowena dove into the water. Prince Akar was in danger - two crocodiles were swimming towards him and he hadn't noticed.



"Sil! Wake up!"

No, not right now. Close your eyes. Dead man's posture. So, as I was saying..., Rowena reached Akar with a few strong strokes and...



"Come on Sil! Get up! I know you heard me!"

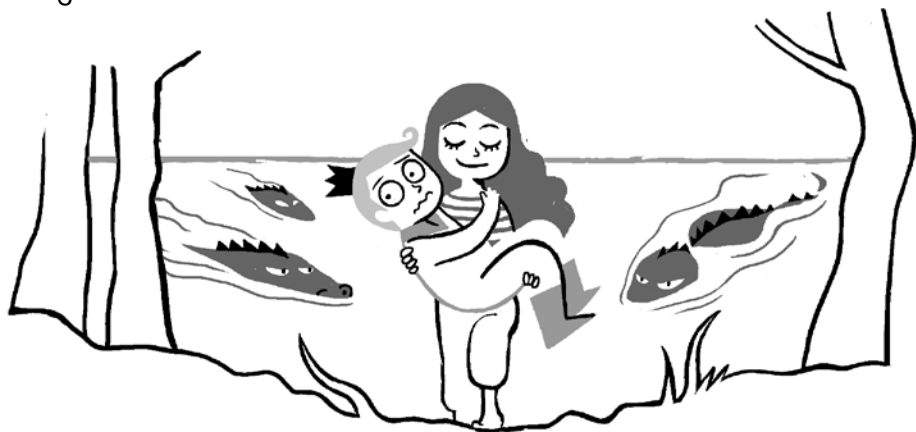
...and she pulled him out of the range of the beasts. She swam so fast that...



Mum is shaking me and I'm starting to get confused.
...that Akar didn't understand what was happening.
"Princess Rowena! I don't understand what's going on!"
Ugh! That won't do.



"Sil, breakfast is ready. There's some cake."
...Rowena carried Akar to shore, while the crocodiles
glared at her.



I'm up and am dunking the cake into the tea. My little
brother is jumping around and singing, with mum running
behind him with his clothes.

Akar said, "You saved my life! Kiss me!" and she replied,
"No, that's disgusting - give me that nice woven bracelet
instead!" He looked at her and said, "Hmm, I don't know,
I'll have to think about it."



"Sil, get a move on!! Stop day-dreaming and get dressed!"
"Ok, I'll be quick."

As she ran to school, Rowena admired the bracelet
on her arm. The crocodiles greeted her with a satisfied
smirk, then they stretched out in the sun to digest their
breakfast.



"Sil! Have you got everything?"
"Sure, I'm ready, we can go."

A SAD STORY

I had a story, I swear. It put it right here, on the desk. But I had to go out, so I told it – wait for me, I'll be back soon. When I got back it wasn't there anymore. I looked all over my room for it, but there was nothing. I asked mum, "Do you know where my story is?"

"Don't ask me! It'll be where you put it!"

"But I put it on my desk. I'm sure. And it's not there now."

«Sweetie, you're the one who has to know where your stories get to!"

I looked everywhere, until finally I looked out the window and ... horror! My story was lying in the middle of the drive. It had been run over by a car. I ran outside to witness a terrible sight – the beginning was bent back and there was a lot of blood in the middle. The ending...well, it's impossible to describe the ending, it was just too gruesome.

I went back to my room in a state of shock.

"I'm sorry," said mum. "I hope this will teach you to be

more careful with your stories. If you want, I'll put on my gloves and help you pick it up."

"What will I do with such a horrible story?"

At that very moment my brother ran by with two monsters at his heels.

"You can give it to him, maybe he can use it."

We brought it into the house. Leo was really happy. He took all the pieces and made it work again, even if it is a bit shaky and makes a devilish noise. I think mum regrets the idea. I'll have to tell Leo to hide it in a secret place when he goes out – that story risks ending up in a trash bin.

12 WHITEPAPER STREET

What I love in my house is the refrigerator. I can stand in front of the open door for hours, rearranging things – I take the dried-up carrots out of the bottom of the vegetable drawer and put them to sleep on the lettuce, then I check to see if the cheese is comfortable and cover it well. If I see that the butter is unhappy, I stand it on its feet and scratch a big smile on its face with a toothpick. If there are any tomatoes, I always crush them and they die. What a shame! The eggs in their little round chairs remind me of old women sitting on their balcony. I stand beside them, and together we watch the cold cuts at rest. After a while my lips turn blue and someone comes to take me away.

The rest of the house isn't bad, though I'd like to have a secret door somewhere, the kind that lets you into a fantasy



land, but I haven't found one yet. But there is a special wardrobe in the bedroom, where I go with my little brother Leo. We make room among the clothes and bring in the stereo and listen to Mozart's Magic Flute, snuggling between coats and jackets, because in the other rooms our parents are busy and we mustn't make noise. Along with the fridge, it's my favourite place. It's also perfect for reading comics and dedicating myself to my notebook for important things, like what I'm doing now. Tomorrow there's school, so we have to go to bed early, but first I have to write an urgent letter.



Letter to Myself I (not to be read by anyone else but me)

Dear Sil ten years from now,

I beg you to read this letter when you are nineteen and no sooner. By now you should have finished your A-levels. Are you tall? I imagine you with long hair and rings in your ears. And a small shoulder-bag that swings when you walk. But even if you're not tall, don't worry, you'll be fine anyway.

I've decided to write you a letter to say hello and tell you about myself.

This summer I spent lots of time in the city while mum and dad worked at their computers and weren't aware of anything. Luckily, Nora was in town, but then she left and I was bored - I survived only because I read stacks of Powercat comic books. Thank goodness for those books, who knows if you still remember them.

So I read a lot, and then in mid-July we went to the

seaside, too, to stay with my grandparents. I'd like to know how you're doing. Have you written any adventure stories? Do you still get a lot of homework? Who knows if Leo is studying singing. Maybe he doesn't remember any more, but tell him that when he was four he already knew the whole first act of The Magic Flute by heart, and in German. And you, what do you like doing? I hope you like going to the cinema, drawing animals and going down the high slide at the pool. Have you learned to do head-first dives? I haven't, yet.

Here it's starting to rain and school has begun. I'm writing to you because there are some important things you mustn't forget:

First thing. Seppia Catarroni kicks me. I do, too, but she's the one that starts. Remember this always. Maybe you'll meet her, she'll have changed and you'll think, o.k., she's not so bad after all, but no, you must never forget that in this letter I declare that I hate her for eternity.

Second thing. I love Jacopo Donati but he doesn't. At least I don't think so.

Third thing. I've left a box for you in the attic. It's green with the drawing of a train on top - inside I've put the medal I won in the swimming race, Jacopo Donati's

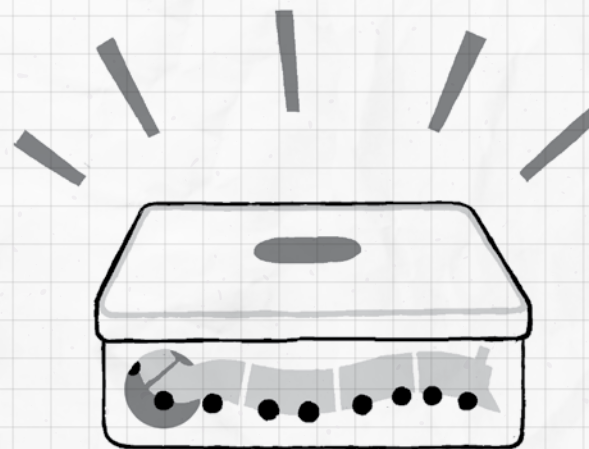
absence book, Nora's notes to me and a bracelet I wove. There are also some biscuits I made. Now I'll say good-bye, and I hope you've already visited some countries with monkeys.

Very best wishes,

Pencil

P.S. When you see Nora, say hi for me.

P.P.S. If you see Jacopo Donati, don't tell him anything, please!





CHRONICLE OF A DIVISION

The spectators are all seated. Miss Amanita is standing, chalk in hand. The clock on the wall is ticking.

Everyone is watching Nora at the blackboard.

Nora is in top form, she spent the whole summer doing divisions. She divided out crisps, shells and ice-pop sticks with her brothers on the beach. The room she stayed in was divided between her and her cousins. She divided the pages of the summer study book into the number of days

that were left. She divided pizzas into four parts, and sometimes even into eight.

The teacher hands her the chalk and whistles for the division to begin:

$$672 : 32$$

Nora warms her fingers. The spectators are tense. She starts out well and brings down the 67 right away. 3 goes into 6 twice, but 2 into 7 starts to make trouble. Nora pushes forward, but there's a problem: the de-





fence interposes the remainder. Nora advances towards the remainder, but it dribbles, so Nora feigns, makes a surprise attack and scores a goal: a remainder of 3! The fans let out a loud cheer and the match continues. 2 comes into play and with the 3 of the remainder makes a 32. Nora almost has the match in hand, and the fans are all on their feet cheering. Miss Amanita warns her and Nora concentrates. The tension is sky-high. Nora makes her move and... goal! 32 goes

straight into 32! Nora scores again and brings home a fantastic 21! Brilliant result! With the right training and determination, thirty-two can go twenty-one times into six hundred and seventy-two with no remainder, and Nora has proved it for us again today, folks!

The fans are going wild, triumphant choruses and banners accompany Nora as she goes back to her desk in a sweat. I pass her a towel and together we discuss the strategy to use for the following days of the championship.



MY OWN STYLE

It was a rainy day. Leo and I were shut up in our special wardrobe. He was listening to opera while I read Powercat, my favourite comic. Powercat is a cat-woman super heroine who travels in time through gaps in space-time that open up on certain occasions. Her whiskers receive signals and she can materialize at any time and place she chooses. I was reading an important episode, in which Powercat finds herself in the year 1455 and saves the city of Mainz from an attack of Plutonians, just in time to save Mr Gutenberg, who was about to invent printing. Thanks to her there are comic books now. If she hadn't arrived in time I'd be sitting here in the wardrobe and staring at my hands. What I like about Powercat is that she does these things, and even if no one is aware of what she does or thanks her, she goes right ahead all the same, like a real heroine.

But it was raining hard outside and Leo was nervous.



He climbed out of the wardrobe and started running up and down the hallway, singing Papageno's aria and making an unbearable racket. So from her desk mum said, "Sil, why don't you prepare a snack for you and Leo?" I looked in the cupboard and found some chocolate biscuits. But their colour made me suspicious. I looked at them in the light and I smelled them. There was something funny about them. So I took the leap and tasted one. It tasted of chocolate, crisp outside and soft inside. But I wasn't fooled. No doubt a mad scientist had come into the house and injected some poison into the biscuits as an experiment. Sacrificing myself, I ate another one. It tasted very good and I wasn't dead yet. It must contain a dose of poison that's too small for me. By now I had to forge ahead, so I braced myself and ate three more. These scientists sure do invent delicious poisons. I took another one, for the whole family's sake. I called Leo, who meanwhile had climbed up on the sofa and was singing the Queen of the Night's aria.

"What's for tea?" he asked.

"Tea with crackers," I said. "And a chocolate biscuit."

"Just one?"

"Yes, there was only this one." Only one biscuit for forty pounds of child couldn't hurt him. My little brother was safe. I know, I took a tremendous risk, but I didn't say anything to anyone. I'm not looking for thanks. That's the real Powercat style.



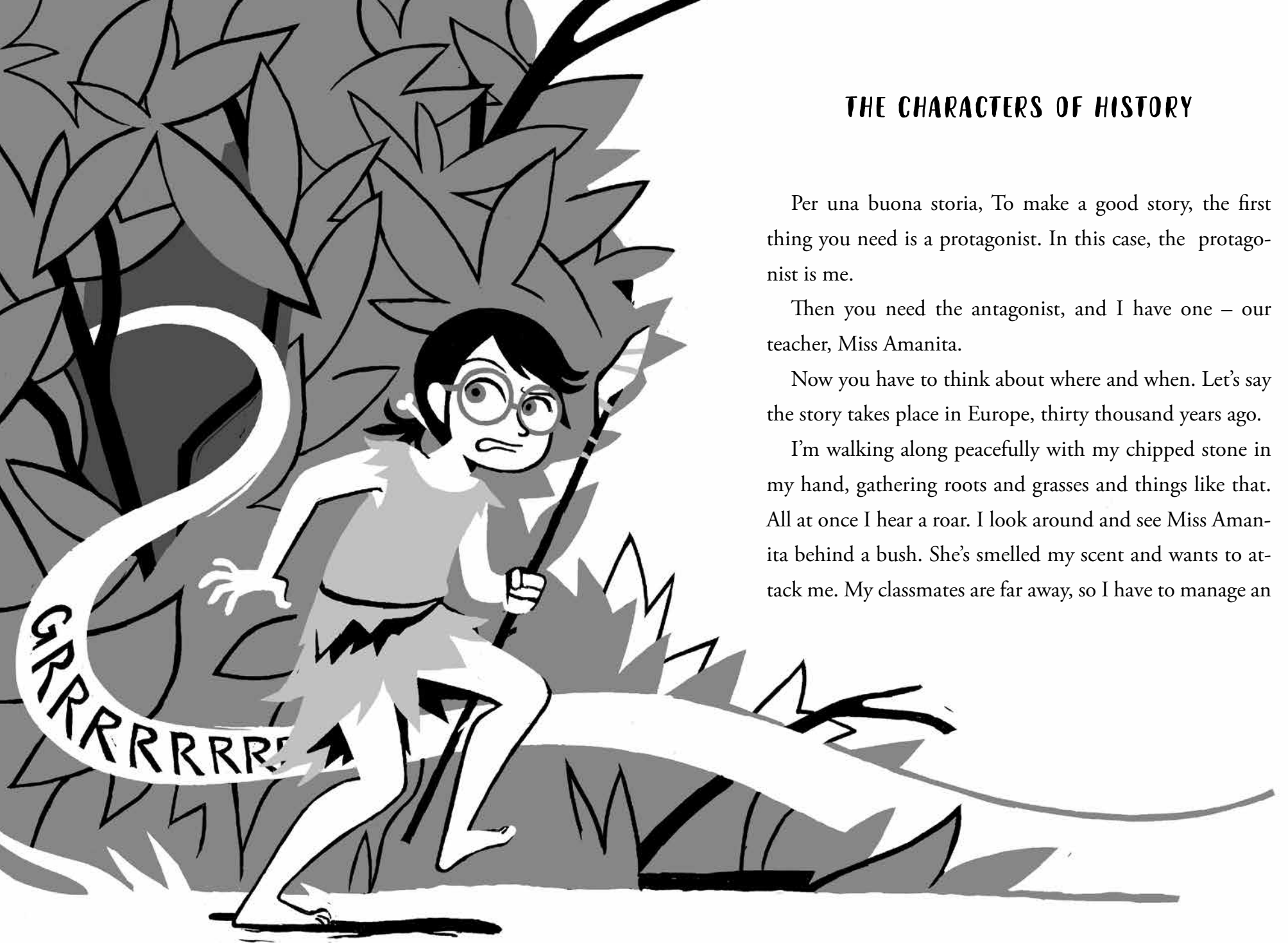
THE CHARACTERS OF HISTORY

Per una buona storia, To make a good story, the first thing you need is a protagonist. In this case, the protagonist is me.

Then you need the antagonist, and I have one – our teacher, Miss Amanita.

Now you have to think about where and when. Let's say the story takes place in Europe, thirty thousand years ago.

I'm walking along peacefully with my chipped stone in my hand, gathering roots and grasses and things like that. All at once I hear a roar. I look around and see Miss Amanita behind a bush. She's smelled my scent and wants to attack me. My classmates are far away, so I have to manage an



escape on my own. I hold my stone tight and grab a stick with my other hand. I back off, trying at least to reach a tree to hide behind.

Miss Amanita jumps out from behind the bush and opens her jaws wide:

“WHAT EPOCH ARE WE IN?”

I’m caught, I have to fight to defend myself. I think.

“We’re in the Pleistocene?” I manage to take a few steps backwards. I can feel the roots of the tree.

“Hmm. Yes. Period?”

I stall for time, cough, and take some more steps backwards.

“Neo...” I’m confused.

“Pss...no! Not yet!” My mates have joined me, they’re behind the bushes and are mouthing some words.

“Uh, no, Palaeo... Palaeolithic?”

Miss Amanita has stopped and turned around, she sniffs, but my mates are hiding.

“RUN!”, I shout and throw the stick to distract her attention.

She turns towards me, but I’m in time to shinny up a tree.

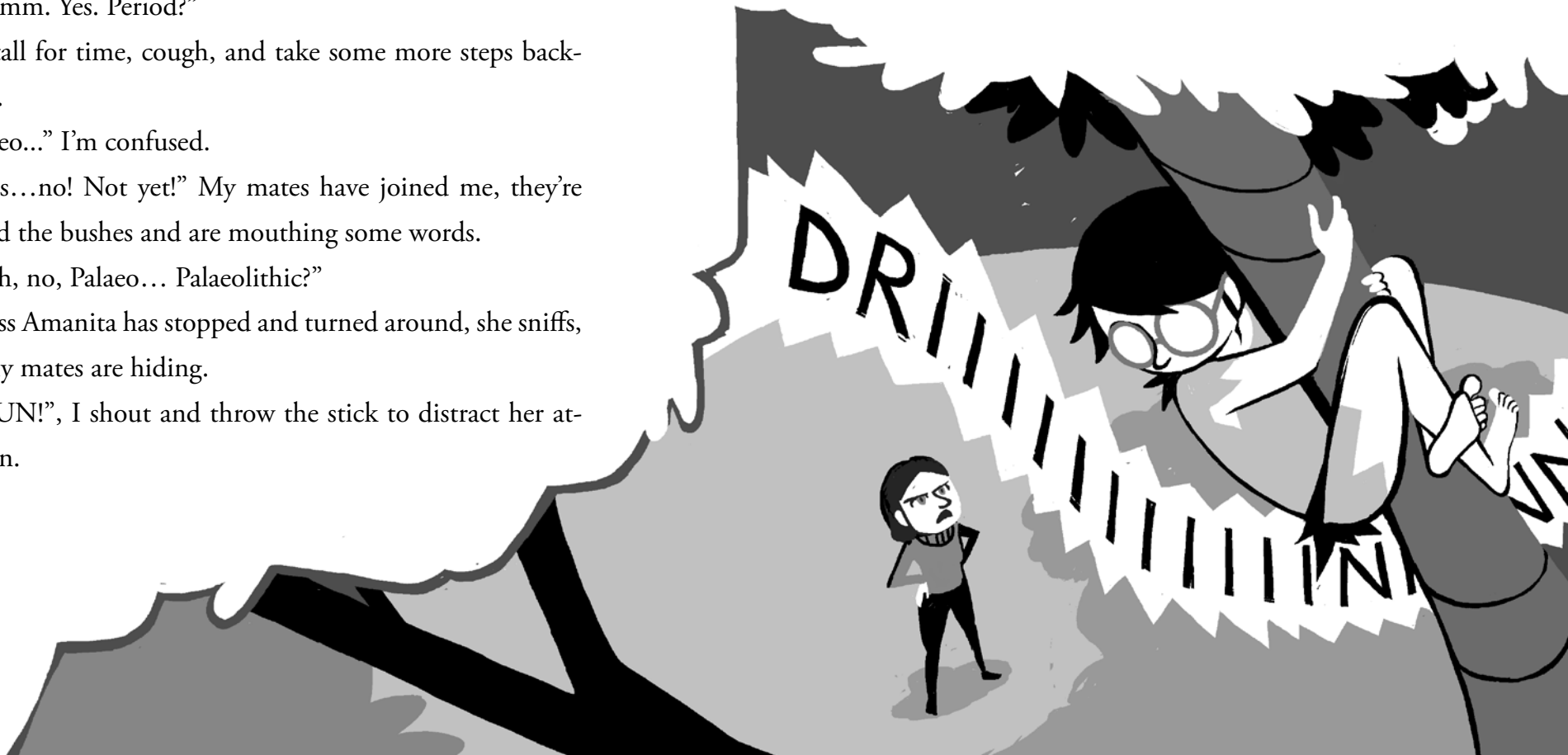
The bell rings. I’m gripping the back of the chair.

“Sit up properly!”, snarls Miss Amanita.

I sit straight up at once.

“Well, for today you’ve managed to get by, but I’ll have to test you again.”

My mates signal me that the danger is past. For the next history lesson, I have to remember to sharpen my spear.



STANTASTIC FORY

We were at home relaxing, watching TV, when the door to the storage closet burst open. The broom, the mop, the hoover and the dust-pan came into the room and tied us up with rags.

“We’ve had enough!”, they cried, “after centuries of exploitation, we’ve decided that it’s time to take power. From this very moment, we are free!”.

So they took over – they started sleeping in our beds and sitting on the sofa. We lived shut up in the storage closet and every day, in shifts, we were used head-down to clean the floors or do the dusting. They dipped us into the detergent and used us to mop the floor.

One day the broom said, conceitedly,

“When one of you gets used up, we’ll put a sock on his head and make him into a hobby horse!”

He was laughing mockingly, but my little brother started to sob,

“I don’t want to be a broom’s hobby horse.”

It was too much. So I gathered up some dirt and threw it at the smaller vacuum cleaner, which couldn’t resist the

temptation: while it was eating greedily, I grabbed it by the tube and shouted,

«Don’t make a move! Get back into the closet or I’ll be forced to harm someone!” Broom and mop advanced towards me with a growl, but I kept on squeezing the little vacuum cleaner’s neck. I know, it was a mean thing to do, but I had no choice. At that point, mum and Leo grabbed them from behind, and with a quick move we blocked them.

A few minutes later ten or so flying brooms landed in the garden.

“Good work!”, the largest one congratulated me. “Every time we get near Halloween this sort of thing happens. You know, the house-brooms see us flying about and they start getting strange ideas in their heads.”

They took them all, even the vacuum cleaner, and let them have a short ride in the neighbourhood clouds. Fresh air does miracles: when they got back, they were their normal selves again. “You have nothing to worry about any more,” said the flying brooms as they left. “They’ve forgotten everything!”

But ever since then we keep the storage closet locked.



HUNTING FOR INSPIRATION

We had a class test, but I was hungry. I said,

“Teacher, can I go and get a biscuit?”

“What can you be thinking, Sil, morning break is over, concentrate on the test!”

The test was:

COMPLETE THE TEXT BELOW ACCORDING TO THE INSTRUCTIONS GIVEN IN BRACKETS.

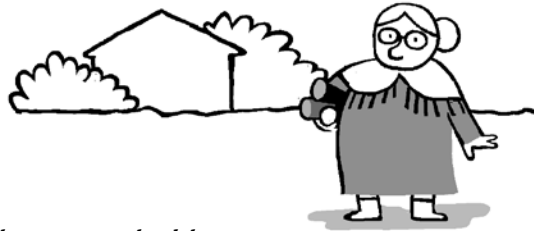
There was no getting out of it. So I tried to concentrate as hard as I could.

Many years ago, little Eric lived on a farm with his family. One day Eric wandered off into the woods. After walking a long time he realized he was lost. (describe Eric's thoughts)

Eric thought about the crackers in his cupboard, the biscuits in the jar on the table, the pies waiting for him in the pantry, and he felt very lonely.

All at once Eric spied a little house in the bushes. In front of the house, an old woman was gathering firewood. (describe the old woman)

The old woman was short but very, very fat.



Then he approached her ...

(describe their encounter)

... he took a pan, some oil, a piece of garlic and some potatoes and fried them all together.



A little while later, a boy peeked out of the bushes. (describe the boy and imagine Eric's thoughts)

The boy was very fat, too, and Eric thought, "I'll need a big pan!"

So then Eric...

(tell what Eric did next)

Eric prepared a big roast and ate a huge portion, and then he wiped the plate clean with a piece of bread.



From that day Eric...

(tell how Eric's days have changed)

... never forgets to have a snack during morning break, and never again is he hungry during an English composition test.



VOICES OFF-SCREEN

I was at home finishing my homework. I had to write an adventure story.

I'd pulled out my notebook and pencil case, when from outside I heard a woman's voice crying,

"...Help!"

I ran into the street. It came from the Panzadoros' garden. I called out, loudly, "Hey! What's going on?" But there was no answer.

Maybe it was a burglary and the thieves had covered the woman's mouth. I would have to go in from the back yard without making any noise, climb in through the window, taking them by surprise, and hit them with a vase of cyclamens. But how many of them were there?

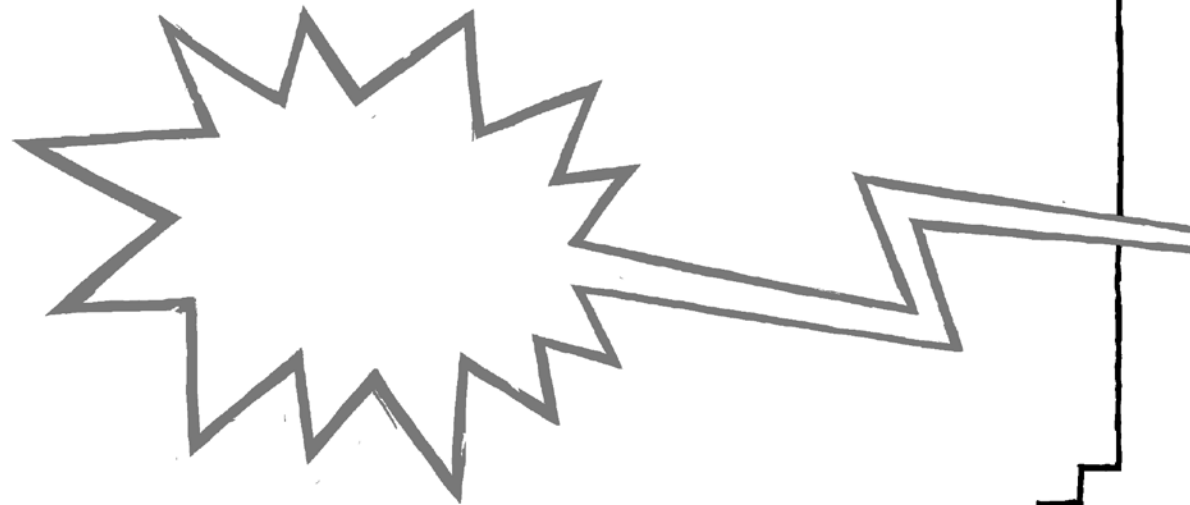
They might have a gun. I'd have to get them all with a single hit of the vase, like in bowling.

Then a man's voice was heard,

"Hold on! I'm coming!"

No, it wasn't a burglary. Undoubtedly a room had caught fire and the woman was trapped inside. The man was trying to break down the door, and there wasn't much time before the woman died of suffocation. But I'd read that letting air into a place on fire could cause an explosion. I had to run to help the man, and above all tell the woman to stay on one side of the door with her face covered. I was just about to start running when I heard,

"I can't! I'm slipping!"





So the scene was completely different: a huge chasm hundreds of feet deep had opened in the floor, and that woman was falling in. If I didn't hurry she'd be swallowed into the belly of the earth. We needed a rope. Fortune had it that my jump-rope was in the basket of my bike. I put the rope on my shoulder, jumped over the garden wall and went in through the French window. There I found Mrs. Panzadoro with her husband and children, sitting on the sofa and watching a film on TV.

"Hold on! Swing towards me!" they were saying on the screen.

The woman in the film was hanging out of the bad guy's helicopter, holding on by one hand. The man had come close to her in an airplane and was trying save her, while the bad guy was smashing her hand with a shoe. The woman jumped, the man caught her, and they flew away. They were safe.

"Come and sit down, dear," Mrs. Panzadoro said to me. I settled down on the sofa. They offered me a tangerine.

"I see you've brought your jump-rope. You can play with Nico and Maria as soon as the film is over, but then they have to do their homework."

Oh yes, homework. I'd forgotten all about it -- I absolutely had to find an idea for a story.

