

THE SOUNDS OF SILENCE

by
Heiki Vilep



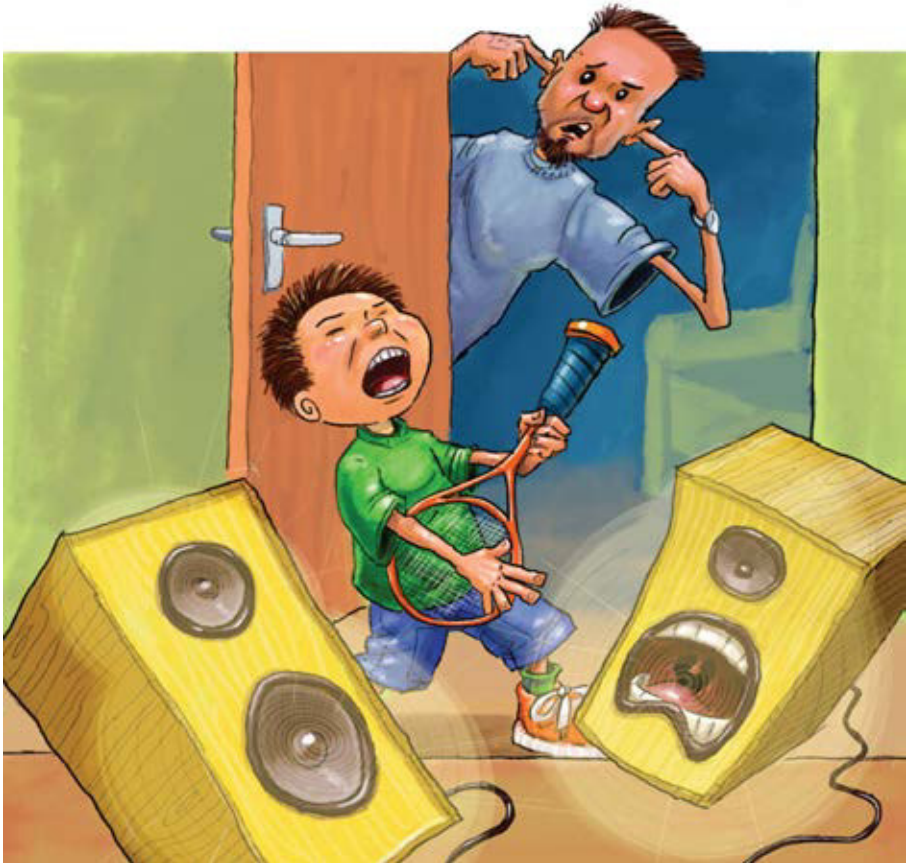
Michael had always been a city boy. His day started noisily and ended noisily. Even though Michael didn't have any brothers or sisters, he almost never got bored.

In the daytime he went to school, in the evening he played in the yard with the boys and sometimes he sat behind his computer.



He had many computer games. When he got bored of playing the games, he watched TV. When he got bored of that too, he turned on his radio and

sang along at the top of his voice.



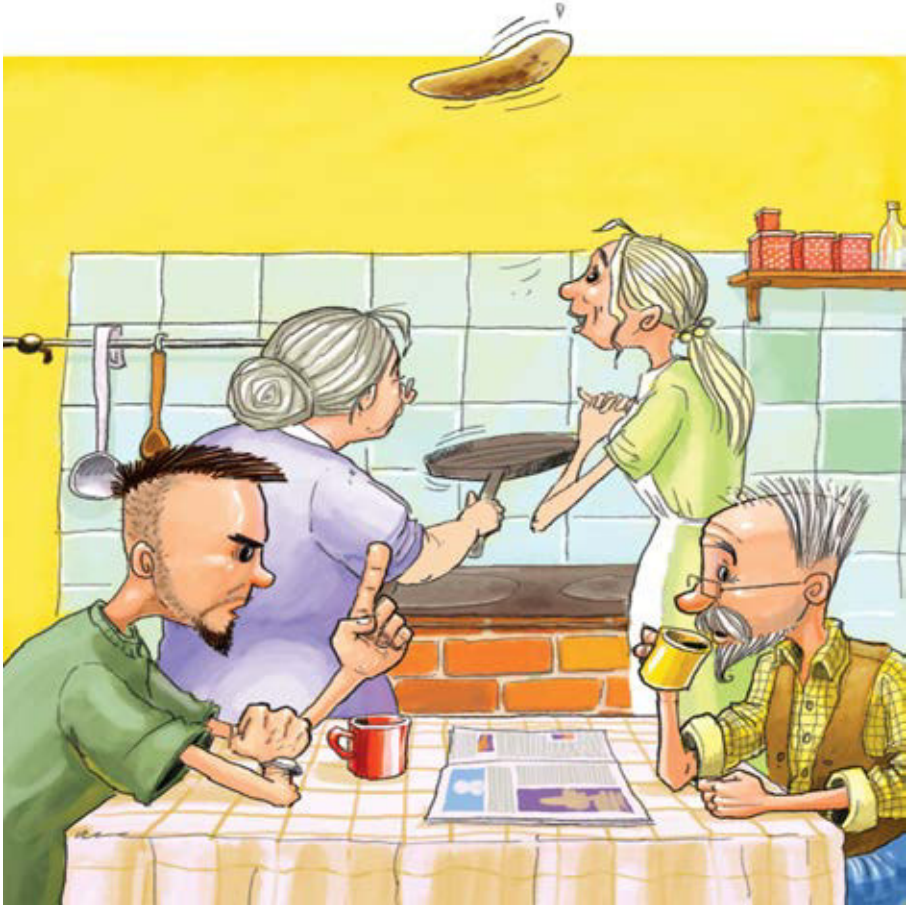
The only bad thing was that Michael engaged in all his favorite activities terribly noisily – he listened to the radio as loud as he could, when playing computer games he also turned the volume way up, and mother and father constantly had to turn down the volume button of the TV.

„Michael, please turn down the volume, we can't even talk to each other anymore,“ was a commonly heard sentence that had stuck in Michael's mind for

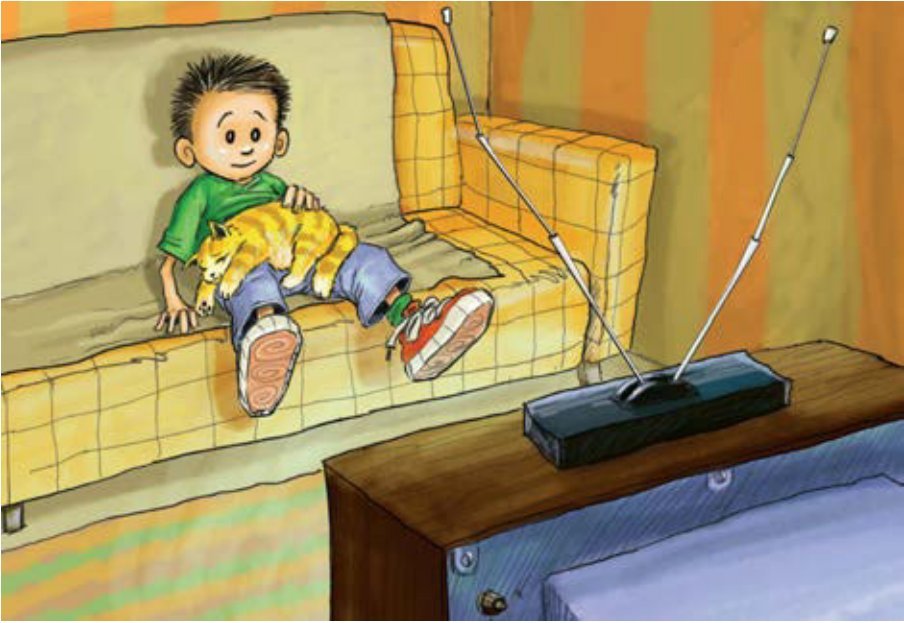
a long time and yet, he often tended to forget it.

Time passed as usual until one weekend they went to visit granny and grandpa in the country with the whole family.

At first, everything went its usual way – granny made pancakes, mother fussed around her and grandpa together with father were discussing the most important things in the world.



Michael was watching a cartoon on TV and the fat yellow cat purred in his lap pleasantly.



Strange things started to happen when suddenly, the electricity went off. It went and stayed off for two days. As granny's and grandpa's house was far away from big roads, in the middle of the woods, terrible silence arose.



Now Michael didn't have his computer, the TV

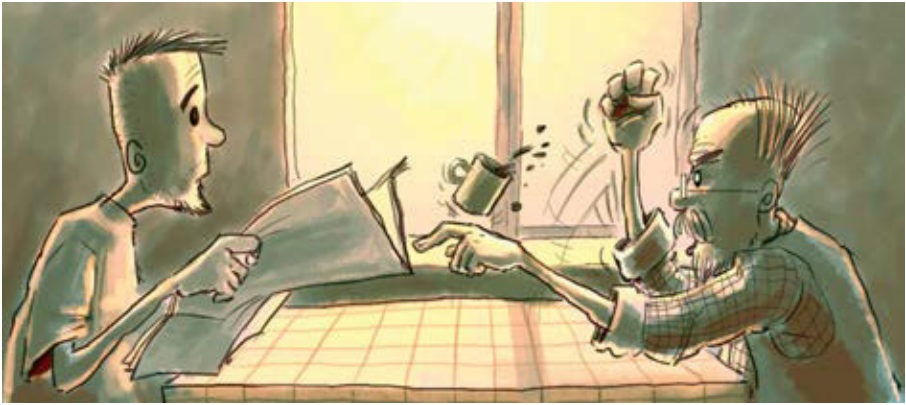
or the radio. He sat on the side of the bed and was more bored than ever before. Even the sounds of the highway couldn't be heard here, deep into the woods and soon it started ringing in his ears from this unbearable silence.



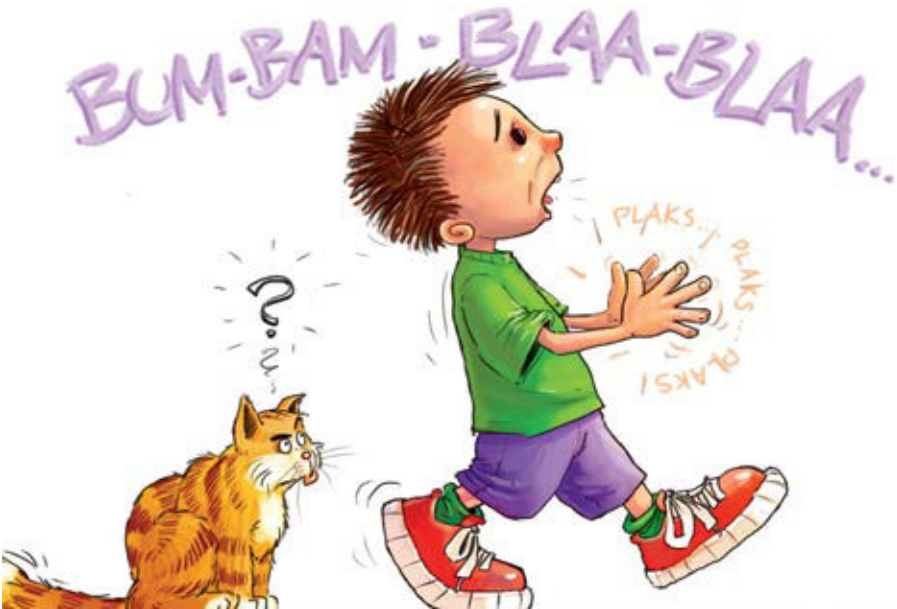
Everybody seemed satisfied with the silence that had arose – granny and mother kept themselves busy in front of the stove.



Father and grandpa kept on debating over the most important topics in the world.



Only Michael couldn't put up with it in any way. He walked in the room back and forth, made all sorts of sounds and, from time to time, clapped his hands loudly.



Michael listened and indeed – the different ticking of the clocks struck loudly all over the house. When he made an even greater effort, he could hear how some bug was rattling somewhere on the floor.



Then he heard the nightingale’s hoot sounding from the forest and some other unfamiliar sounds.

“The forest is shouting!” he said to grandpa.

He thought to himself: “What if I go to the forest and listen to the sounds there. There are much more of them than inside. at least I won’t get bored.”



As a city boy, Michael had never been to the forest alone before. He quietly sneaked out of the room

because he thought his parents would never let him go to the forest alone.



Having carefully opened the front door, he slipped across the corridor on his toes and dropped himself outside from between a heavy outer door.

The sun had set quite low already and it was beginning to get a little dark outside. Luckily it was summer and it was a long time until it would get pitch-dark.

Walking on a forest path in the evening twilight,

Michael came to a small clearing. Here he cowered down for a short time and heard how his own heart was beating inside his chest.

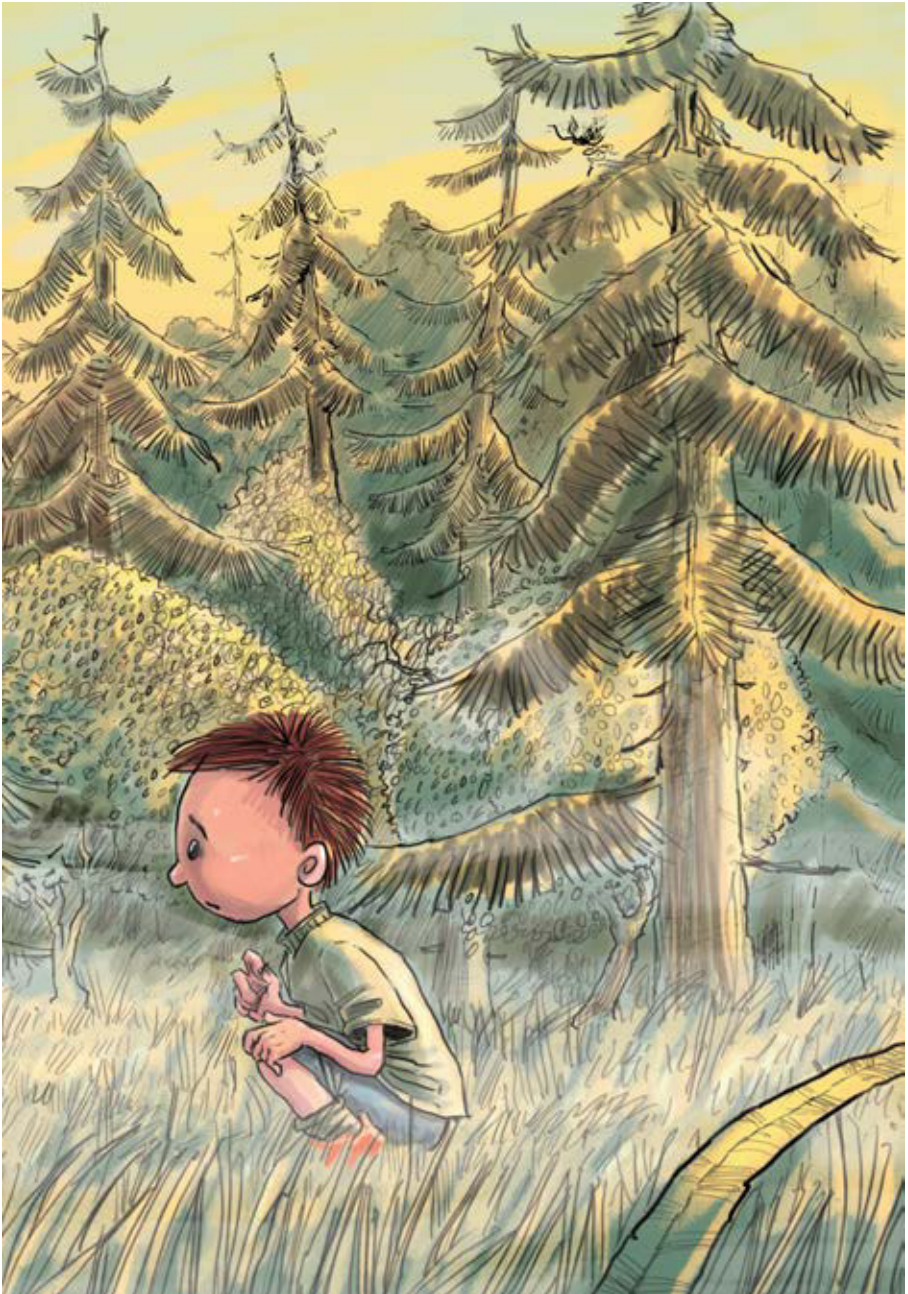


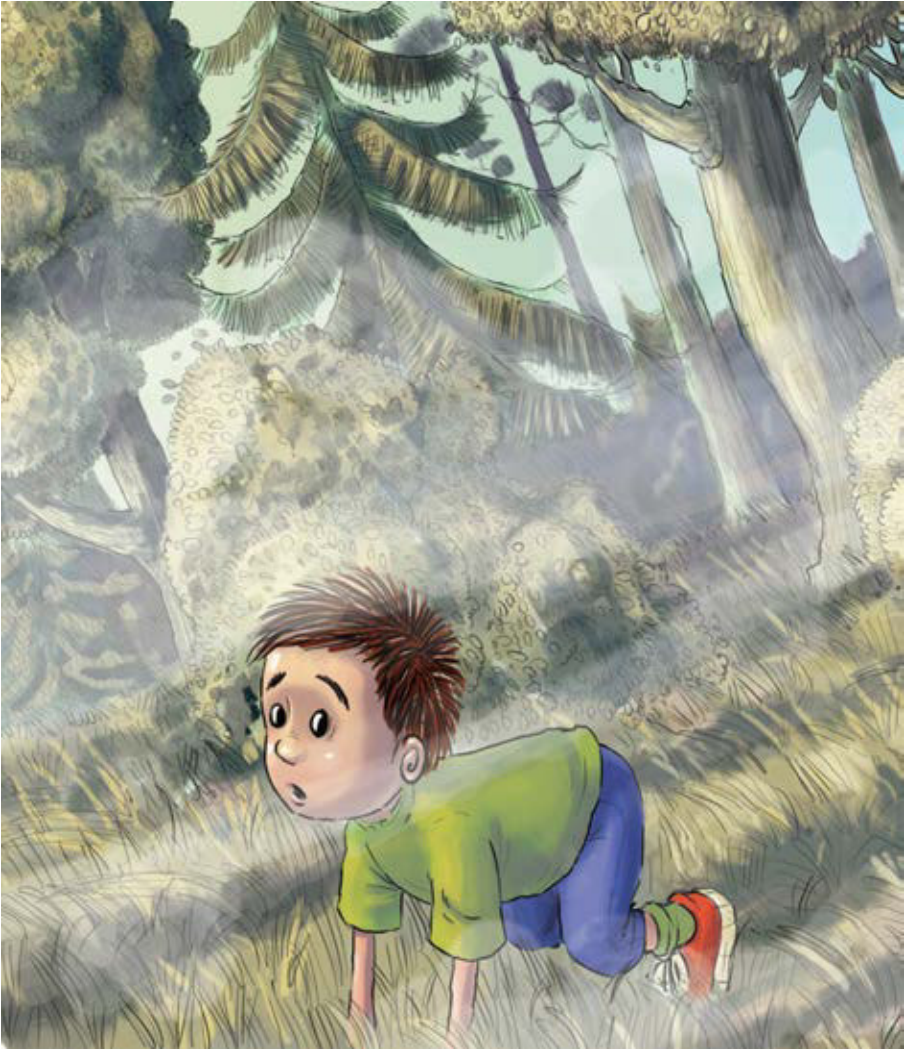
Silence was broken by single sounds of birds and distant mysterious crackles. Michael felt a little uneasy.

He cowered there and was completely silent.

Suddenly, watching how the fog was rising up from the ground, he felt like he heard something unusual. It reminded him of huffing and puffing a little. He remembered that he had made this sound himself at school when the last push-ups didn't want

to come out right in the gym class. But who was huffing and puffing here, in the forest?





Michael stood up and looked around. nobody seemed to be in the vicinity. Then he cowered down and went hiding under the rising shroud of fog.

“Puff-puff, huh, mmm...” sounded quite clearly above his head.

“Impossible!” said Michael audibly.

“Fog doesn’t talk!”



“Why doesn’t it?” asked somebody above his head. “I’m just not always heard. If you only knew how hard it is to rise from the ground! The Earth keeps pulling you back towards it and you have to keep pushing and pushing because you want to be hovering high above the trees by the morning, in order to fall down as raindrops one day, feeling an indescribable satisfaction from this intoxicating fall.”



Michael still couldn't believe his ears and kept looking for somebody that could have said those words.

“Imagine that you are fog! lie down, close your eyes and try to lever yourself off the ground. Think that you are as light as fog and you can easily do it.”



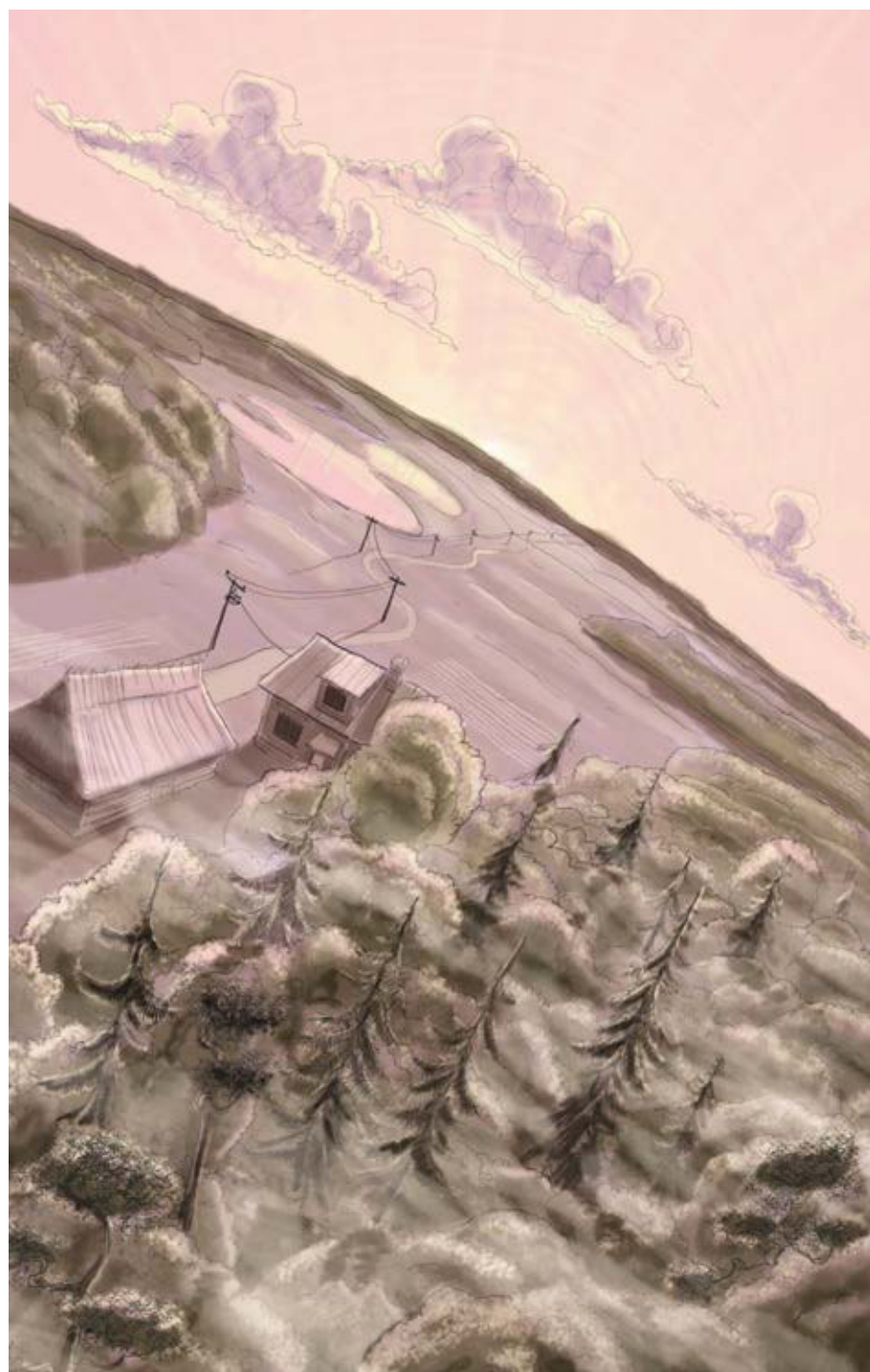
Michael did as he was told - he lay down, closed his eyes and imagined he was as light as fog. Now something strange happened.

He did start rising from the ground little by little. The sighs of the fog lessened and turned into peaceful breathing and soon Michael was hovering above

the treetops with the fog. He had never seen so many treetops from above and it was an indescribably beautiful view.



At the same time, the fog kept on chattering about its adventures with the wind and about how he can show the rainbow when the sun is shining by becoming rain. Michael didn't have time to listen to its chatter because he had so much to see. The highway was winding in the distance before him and soon he recognized the roof of granny's and grandpa's farmhouse.





“How do I get down?” Michael asked from the fog.

“Imagine that you have become a teeny-tiny rain-drop and you will fall on the leaf that the wind has blown loose from the birch top. You will softly hover down with the leaf by making circles and when reaching the ground you will roll plump into the grass.



Michael really did turn into a raindrop and dropped on the falling birch leaf. It circled for quite a long time before it reached the ground.

Michael rolled into the high grass as a drop and discovered himself as a boy again cowering on the

clearing. He looked up and waved a long goodbye to the fog.

“Come and visit me again some other time,” called out the fog in a soft-spoken voice, “we’ll look at treetops and talk!”

“I’m sure nobody will believe this,” Michael reasoned while walking forward on the forest path.

In this way, thinking his thoughts quietly, he reached a small hillock.

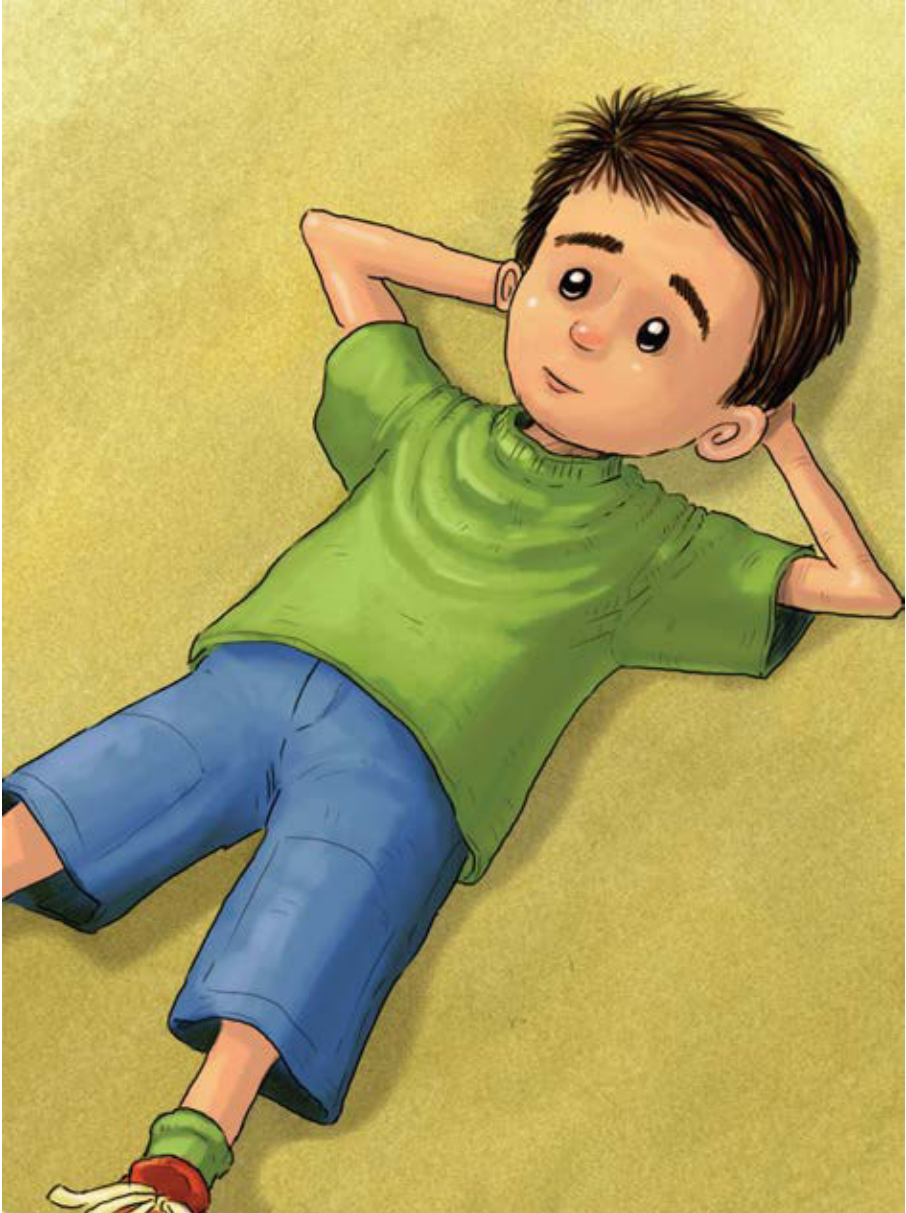


The sides of the hillock had crumbled a little and were sandy. The dry sand crunched under his sandals when he tried to climb up to reach the top.

Then his foot became stuck behind a protruding tree root and Michael fell flat on his stomach in the sand.

As he was quite tired already, he didn’t hurry to get up but turned on his back, put his hands behind

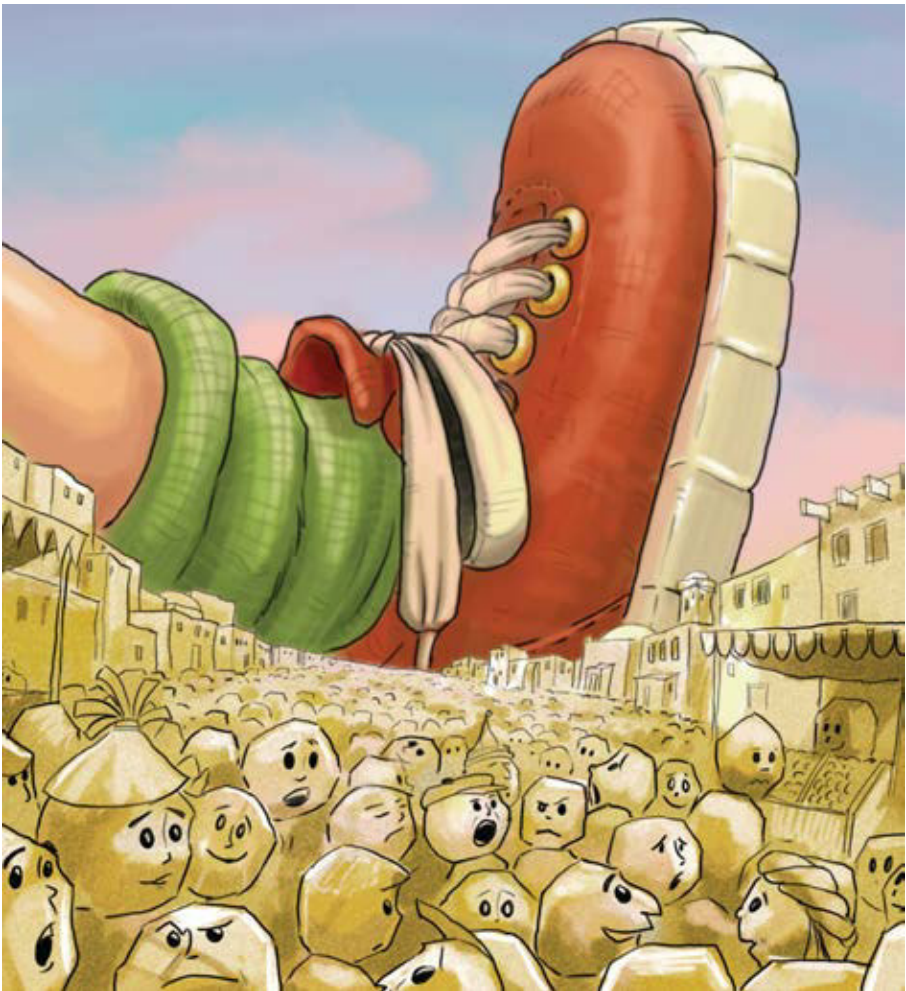
his neck and was left aimlessly staring at the sky.



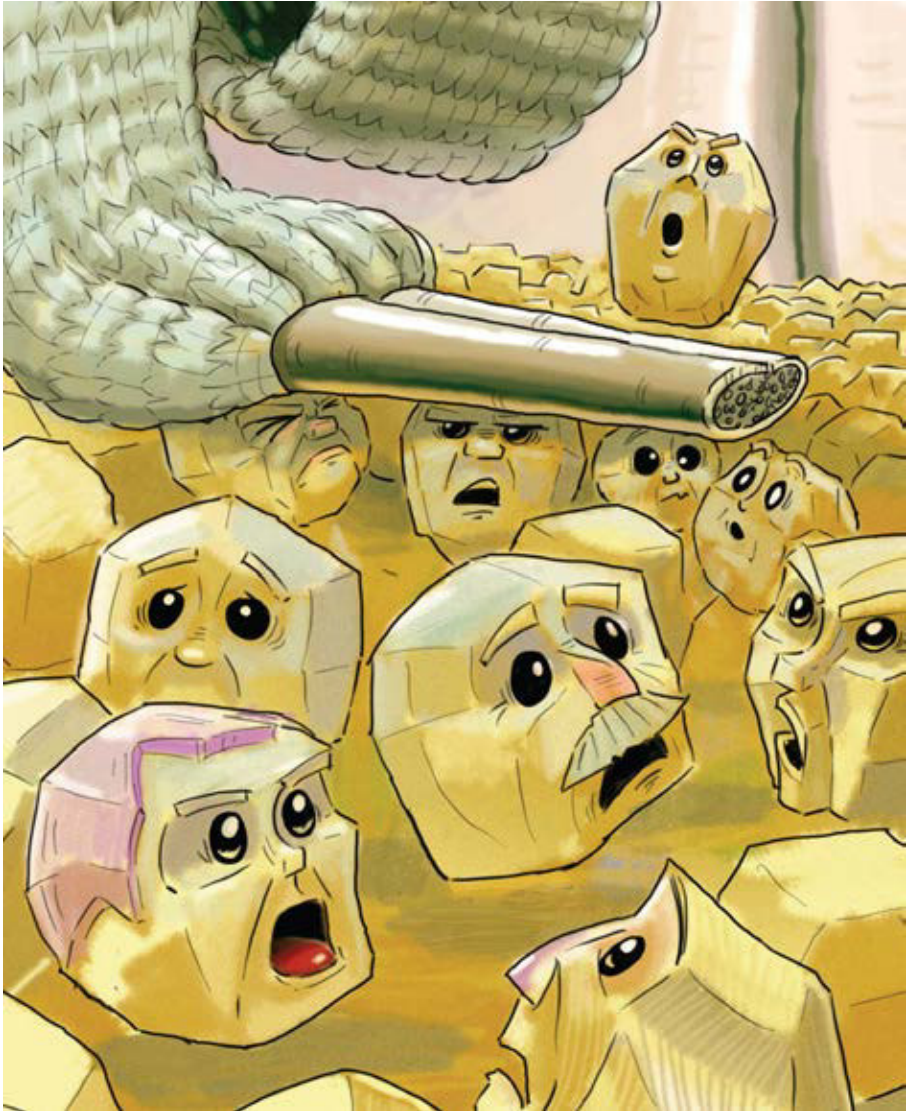
As if coming from somewhere far, he started to hear some murmur. the murmur reminded him of the

chatter of thousands of tiny people.

“Just like in a big market square,” Michael tried to find a comparison. It seemed as if he was a giant lying in the middle of the market square of tiny people, and the usual turbulent trading and bustling was going on around him. Somebody was arguing with somebody else about the selling place and somebody shouted that he has been stolen blind.



Then he started hearing more clearly. From his right side, an extremely thin voice shrieked:
“Lying here as if he were in his own home!”

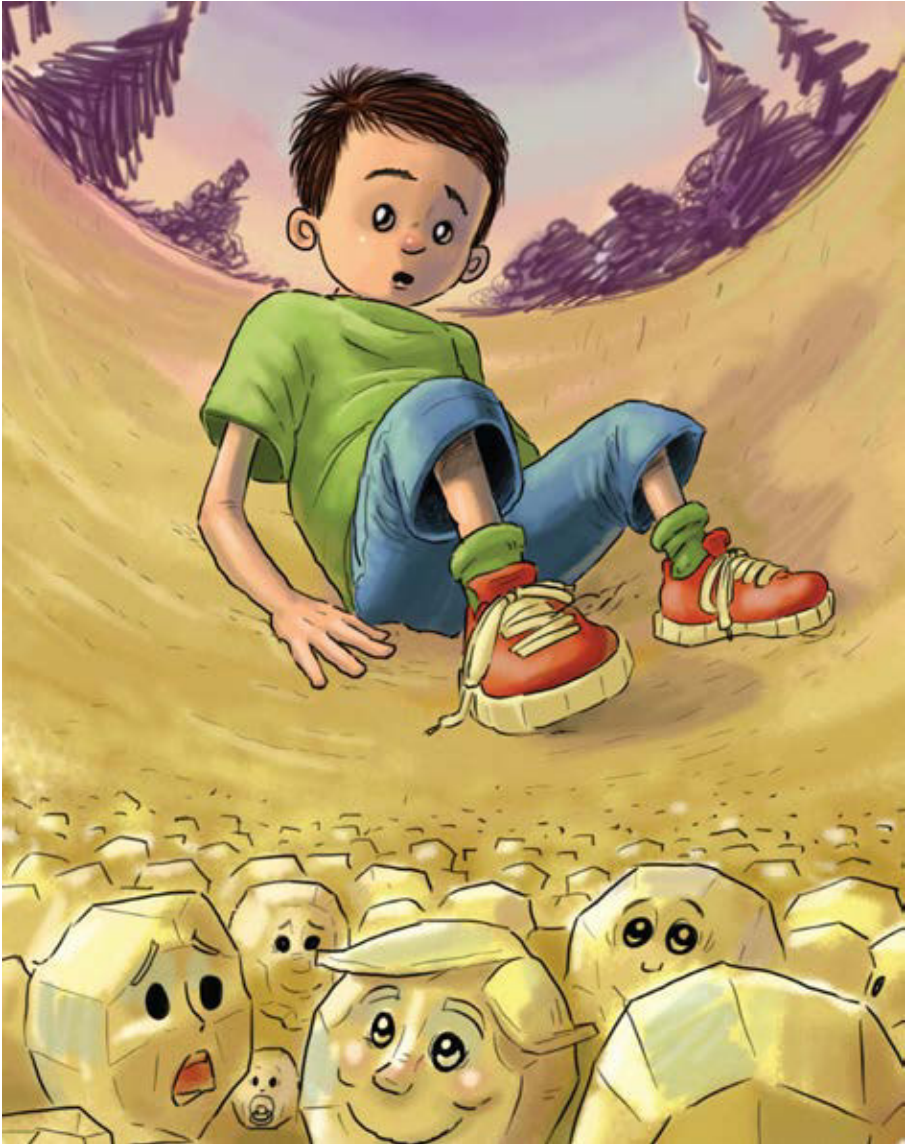


“He thinks it’s easy for me to be stuck here under him!” sounded from somewhere below him.

“Such an oaf!” was shouted from his left.

“What is going on now?” Michael wondered and rose to his elbows.

“Finally! he’s getting going!” sounded from around him much more cheerfully.



“Is it really the sand?” he started getting the picture and rose to a sitting position.

“Only the grains of sand could make such thin noise...”

He took a little sand in his hand and raised it really close to his eyes to see it as well as possible.



“Well, what are you staring at? Haven’t you seen sand before?” The grain of sand beeped trying to stand out among others by hopping up and down.

“Mhm... not a talking one,” Michael stuttered.



“Hasn’t sand ever crunched under your teeth before?” another grain hopped next to it. Michael strained his eyes and it seemed to him that he had seen barely noticeable black eyes flashing on the tiny grain of sand.

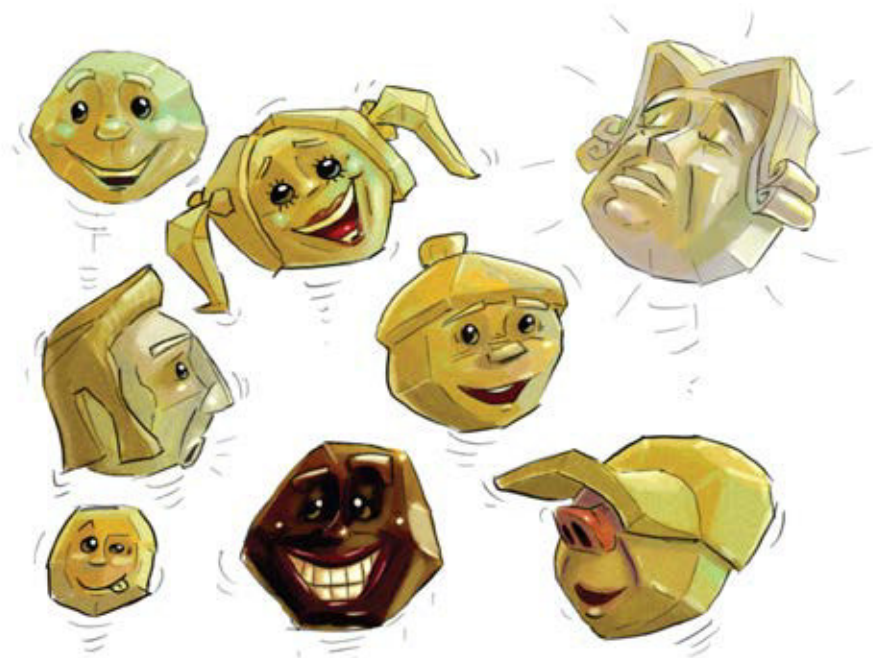
“Mhm...it has crunched, but not talked.”



“You just haven’t listened!” beeped a third little grain and hopped higher than the others. Soon the whole handful was hopping and shouting all sorts of things simultaneously. One grain boasted that he had traveled the longest journey with the wind from this pile and another bragged that he was such clean breed that he could easily be made into sheet glass. Michael knew that glass was made of sand and that good glass can’t be made of just any kind of sand.

“Come and we’ll show you our people!” invited the grains of sand.

“But how?” asked Michael.



“Close your eyes, crunch your teeth and imagine that you’re a grain of sand. It is as easy as that!”

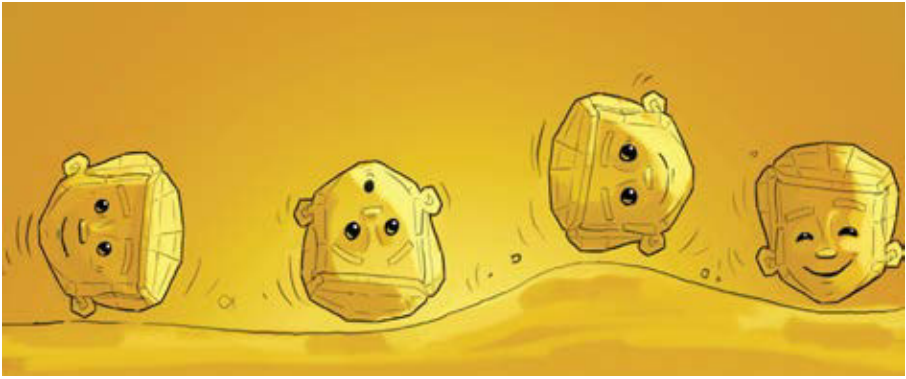


Michael did as he was told and suddenly he felt tiny and strong.

When he opened his eyes, he saw square-sized half-transparent creatures all around him who didn't have hands or feet, but on the smooth front side of whom black eyes and a small mouth flashed.



Because he was the same himself, he had to roll to move on.

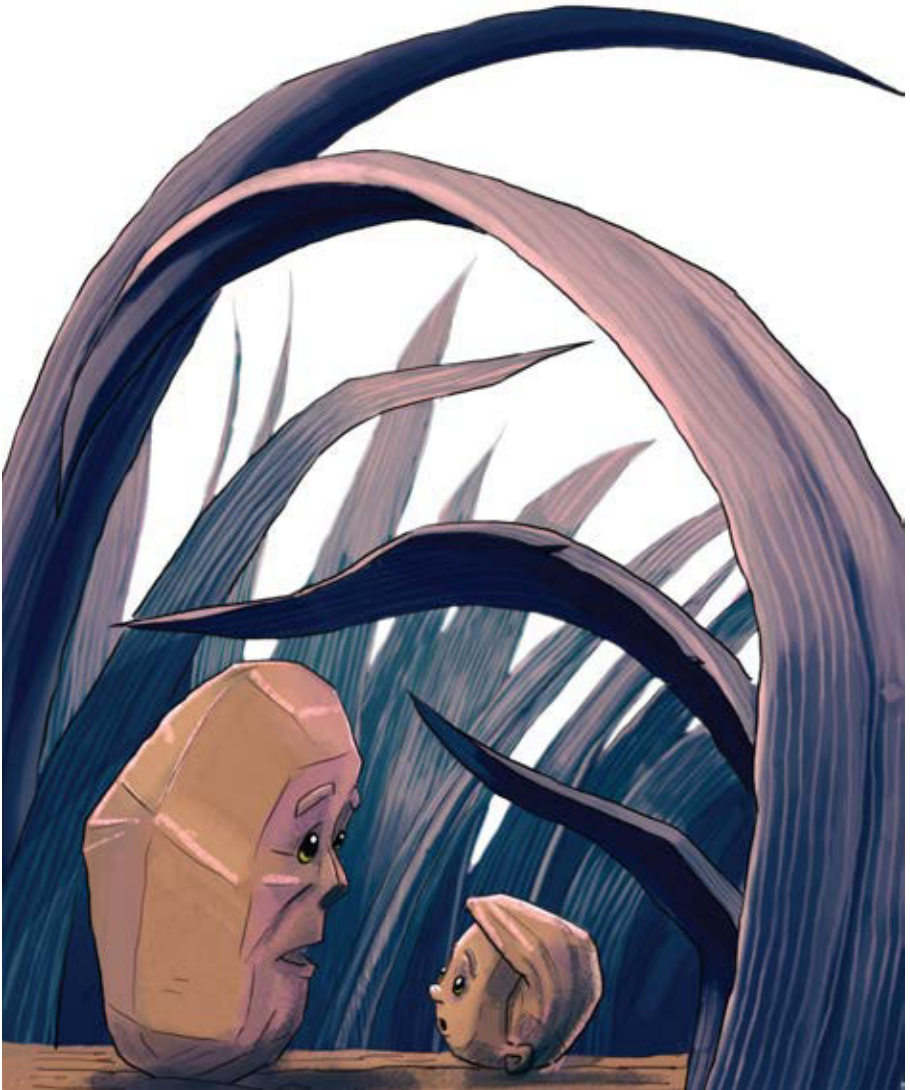


The grains of sand rolled him around among others of their kind and introduced him to their parents. Michael couldn't remember the long and complicated names at all. Besides, all the grains of sand looked the same.



“How do you tell the difference between one another?” he asked in a short while.

“Just like you,” a grain of sand explained that was a little bigger than the others. “For example, we don’t understand at all how people differentiate between one another.”



When Michael had rolled around in the sand for quite a long time already and listened to many stories about traveling around with the wind and the rainwater, he finally thought that it was time to go home. As soon as he thought of that, he felt like a boy again and the sand became sand again, as usual.



On the way to granny's and grandpa's house he wasn't at all surprised when he heard the chatter of trees in the plaintive squeaking and cracking of tree trunks. For instance, one pine complained to another in a loud crunching voice:



“My back is aching! Radiculitis again!”
Another pine trunk answered with a crackle:
“Pooh! It’s about time... how old are you?”

“A hundred soooooooon,” answered the first tree and both were quiet again.

It had almost turned dark already and when Michael arrived in the farmyard, there was candle-light in the windows.

“Where on earth were you?” everybody rushed to meet him.



“I flew with the fog above the forest for a while and had a talk with the sand.” The parents gave

Michael a very strange glance. Only grandpa was laughing up his sleeve quietly as if he had remembered something familiar.



When Michael lay down on his bed, he listened for a long time before falling asleep how two bugs in the corner under the bed didn't want to give way to each other and how the curtains dreamt in the gentle breeze coming from the slightly open window:

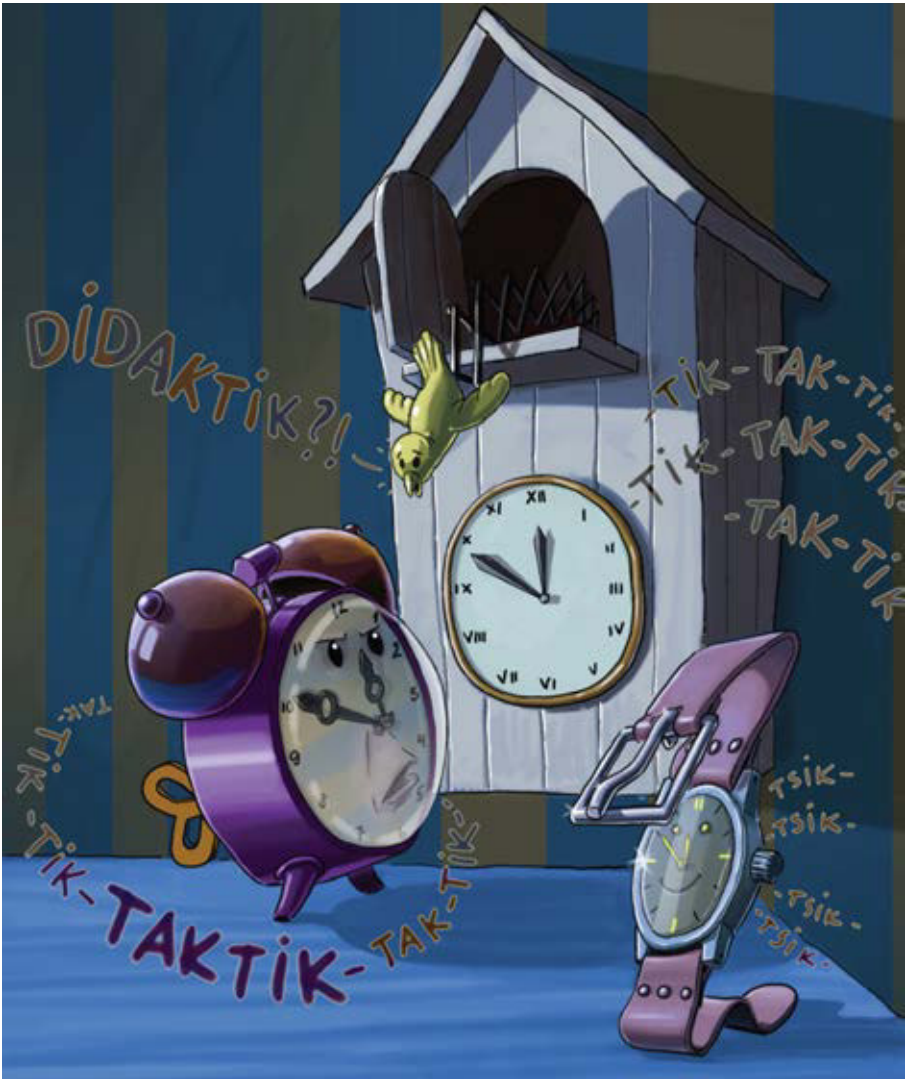
“If only we could get off these hooks... how we would fly in the wind under the sky...”

“Actually, I would have liked to be a bridal veil,” added another.



And the clocks, they were fighting their endless battle over which one is more correct and which one is more important.

The next evening, mother, father and Michael had to drive back to the city again because the parents had to go back to work.



When arriving in his city home, Michael didn't at all turn on the TV or the radio right away but just sat under the window for a while. He watched how the gentle shroud of fog started to rise off the ground in the evening twilight and he touched the window pane with his finger – maybe the grains of sand put

in the glass were just exchanging their long travel impressions about where they had once been with the wind?



Be as it may, but from now on Michael never turned the TV, the computer games or the radio on so loud that mother and father would have had to come and say:

“Michael, please turn it down, we can’t even talk to each other anymore!”



The End