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A child from the future tells

The Stove and the Tree

My name is Arnostka.

I am nine years old.

I live in Weißwasser.

It is the year 2125.

Most children live in houses or apartments.

I live in a museum.

A real museum.

My mother says one of my great-great-great-grandfathers built it more than two hundred years ago.

I have never counted how many "greats" there are.

It is simply a very long time ago.

The building is called the Glass Museum.

Visitors come from many places to see it.

For me, it is just home.

And I think it is a wonderful place to live.

My favourite room is the one with the old tiled stove.

The stove stands quietly in a large room near the entrance.

It does not heat the museum anymore.

At least not in the usual way.

But everybody in my family treats it with respect.

My mother says the stove is the heart of the house.

I think she might be right.

Today I am talking to my best friend, Nkerian.

She lives in Kenya.

Just like me, she is nine years old.

We talk through a virtual window hanging in my room.

When I look through it, it feels as if she is sitting right beside me.

Nkerian once told me that her mother is Maasai.

I told her that my mother is Sorbian.

For a few minutes we thought about why our mothers consider that so important.

Then we started talking about much more interesting things.

The sand dunes outside Weißwasser.

New friends.

The coming Christmas season.

And stories.

I love stories.

Especially the Christmas stories my mother tells every year.

"Do you want to hear my favourite one?" I ask.

Nkerian nods immediately.

So I begin.

"My mother tells me a story about the old tiled stove."

"The one in your museum?" asks Nkerian.

"Yes."

I point towards the hallway.

"The very same one."

I have heard the story many times.

Hundreds of years ago, people gathered around the stove during Christmas.

The stove warmed the room.

The guests.

And, according to my mother, sometimes even their hearts.

Then, long ago, something happened.

The city decided to close the museum.

There was not enough money.

The stove was hidden behind a wall.

The museum's future seemed uncertain.

"But then everything changed," I tell Nkerian.

"A few days before the museum was supposed to close, the mayor visited the Christmas celebration."

"Then what happened?" she asks.

I shrug.

"My mother never explains that part."

"She only says the mayor spent a long time standing beside the stove."

"And afterwards the museum stayed open."

Nkerian thinks about this for a moment.

"Maybe the stove talked to him."

I laugh.

"Maybe."

For a while neither of us says anything.

Then Nkerian smiles.

"We have a tree like that."

"A tree?"

She nods.

"The Oreteti tree in our village."

"My grandmother talks to it."

"My mother talks to it."

"Sometimes I do too."

"Does it answer?" I ask.

Nkerian grins.

"No."

"Not with words."

We both laugh.

Then we spend some time talking about Christmas.

And about gifts.

And about things that are much more important than being serious.

Eventually the evening becomes darker.

The virtual window begins to fade.

Soon it is time to say goodbye.

Before leaving, Nkerian waves.

"Tell your stove hello from me."

"I will."

"And tell your tree hello from me," I reply.

The window disappears.

Suddenly my room feels much quieter.

I walk down the hallway.

Past old glass artworks. Past photographs.

Past things that people thought were important a very long time ago.

Finally I stop in front of the tiled stove.

The room is silent.

I place my hand on one of the old ceramic tiles.

The stove feels cool.

Very old.

Very patient.

I think about Nkerian.

I think about her Oreteti tree.

And then a funny thought enters my mind.

I wonder if the old tiled stove in Weißwasser and the Oreteti tree in Kenya are talking to each other.

Maybe they have been friends for years.

Maybe they exchange stories about children.

Maybe they listen to us more carefully than we realize.

I smile.

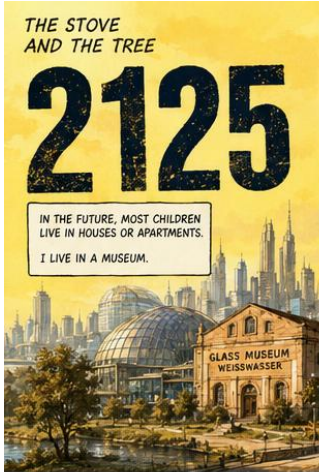
Then I sit down beside the stove and tell it about my day.

The Comic

THE STOVE AND THE TREE

2125

IN THE FUTURE, MOST CHILDREN LIVE IN HOUSES OR APARTMENTS. I LIVE IN A MUSEUM.



MY NAME IS ARNOSTKA. I AM NINE YEARS OLD.



I LIVE IN A MUSEUM.



THIS STOVE IS THE HEART OF OUR HOME.



HELLO, NKERIAN!



HELLO, ARNOSTKA!

MY MOTHER IS SORBIAN.



MY MOTHER IS MAASAI.



DO YOU WANT TO HEAR MY FAVOURITE CHRISTMAS STORY?



THE ONE ABOUT YOUR STOVE?



PEOPLE ONCE GATHERED AROUND IT AT CHRISTMAS.



THEN THE MUSEUM WAS GOING TO CLOSE.



MY MOTHER SAYS THE MAYOR STOOD BESIDE THE STOVE FOR A LONG TIME.



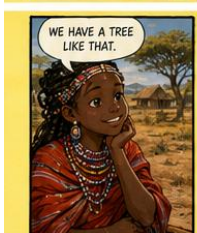
MAYBE THE STOVE TALKED TO HIM.



HA HA!



WE HAVE A TREE LIKE THAT.



A TREE?



THE ORETETI TREE IN OUR VILLAGE.



MY GRANDMOTHER TALKS TO IT. SOMETIMES I DO TOO.



DOES IT ANSWER?



TELL YOUR STOVE HELLO FROM ME.



I WILL.



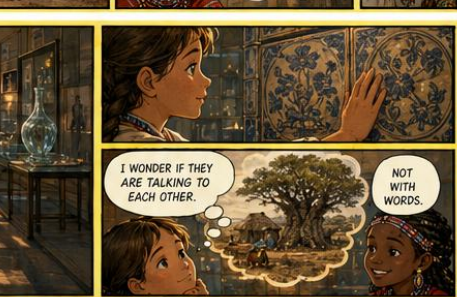
AND TELL YOUR TREE HELLO FROM ME.



I WILL.



I WONDER IF THEY ARE TALKING TO EACH OTHER.



NOT WITH WORDS.

I HAVE SO MUCH TO TELL YOU.



SOME THINGS ARE OLDER THAN WE ARE. SOME THINGS REMEMBER. SOME THINGS LISTEN.

WHAT WILL WE LEAVE FOR THE CHILDREN OF THE FUTURE?

Sabine's Forest

My name is Martina.

I am ten years old.

I live in Berlin.

It is the year 2111.

I am lying in bed beside my mum.

I love my bed.

As soon as I pull the blanket over myself, the bed slowly begins to float.

A soft silver energy field closes around us.

The air becomes cooler.

Sometimes it smells like fruit.

Sometimes like herbs.

Tonight it smells like a forest after rain.

My mum says the scents help people sleep.

I think they are wonderful.

Before bedtime, Mum promised that we could watch one episode of *Once Upon a Time*.

It is my favourite nature series.

The animals tell their own stories.

Mum presses a button.

"Martina and I would like to watch the episode about Sabine the Woodpecker."

A glowing window appears in front of us.

The film begins.

At first I only hear a sound.

Knock.

Knock.

Knock.

It sounds funny.

The picture moves through a forest.

Tall trees rise into the sky.

Sunlight shines through the leaves.

Then I see her.

A green woodpecker sitting on a tree trunk.

Knock.

Knock.

Knock.

The bird looks directly at us.

"Hello," she says.

"My name is Sabine the Woodpecker, and this is my forest."

My eyes become wide.

Sabine flies through the trees.

The camera follows her.

She shows us old trees.

Young trees.

Moss.

Mushrooms.

And insects hidden beneath the bark.

"This is where I find my food," she explains.

Sabine taps on a dead tree.

A moment later she pulls out a fat grub.

"Breakfast."

I laugh.

Mum laughs too.

Sabine continues her journey.

She shows us where she sleeps.

She shows us a hollow tree where she keeps her nest.

She shows us birds, insects and animals who share the forest with her.

The whole forest seems alive.

Not like separate plants and animals.

More like one giant family.

It feels as if Sabine belongs to the forest.

And the forest belongs to Sabine.

The episode lasts only ten minutes.

But it feels much shorter.

Then the screen slowly disappears.

For a moment neither Mum nor I say anything.

I breathe deeply.

The scent of the forest is still floating through our little energy bubble.

"Mum?"

"Yes, sweetheart?"

"I think I can smell Sabine's forest."

Mum smiles.

"I think so too."

"It feels nice."

"It does."

I think about Sabine.

About the trees.

About the old wood full of insects.

Then I have an idea.

"Mum?"

"Yes?"

"Can we visit Sabine this weekend?"

Mum laughs softly.

"I don't know if we will find Sabine herself."

"Oh."

"But on Sunday we are going to the Natural History Museum."

My eyes light up.

"Really?"

"Really."

"Maybe we will find Sabine's friends there."

I smile.

That sounds wonderful.

Mum kisses my forehead.

"Good night, Martina."

"Good night, Mum."

The lights slowly dim.

The forest scent remains.

Somewhere above me the silver energy field shimmers softly.

I close my eyes.

I think about Sabine.

I think about her forest.

And I think about the sound of her beak tapping against the tree.

Knock.

Knock.

Knock.

I am almost asleep when I hear it one last time in my imagination.

Tonight I am sure I will dream of forests.

And perhaps of a green woodpecker named Sabine.

The Comic



Nani

My name is Paul. I am four years old. I live in Berlin.

My name is Paul.

I am four years old.

I live in Berlin.

It is the year 2126.

Right now, I am sitting in the grass next to the swings at kindergarten.

The sun is getting lower.

Most of the children have already gone home.

My friend Bepo left a long time ago.

His mum and dad picked him up.

Before they left, they even played with him on the climbing frame.

Bepo laughed so loudly that everyone could hear him.

My friend Susi has gone home too.

Now the playground feels much bigger.

And much quieter.

I look towards the gate.

Nobody.

I look again.

Still nobody.

Next to me sits Mrs. Sabine, my group leader.

She sits in the grass and watches the clouds with me.

"Nani will be here soon," she says.

I nod.

I know.

But I still look towards the gate.

Just in case.

A few minutes later I hear a familiar voice.

"Hello Paul."

I jump up immediately.

"Nani!"

Nani walks across the playground.

She looks like a friendly woman.

She always does.

She kneels down and opens her arms.

I run towards her.

Nani hugs me.

"I am sorry you had to wait."

"That's okay," I say.

Mrs. Sabine smiles.

"Have a nice evening, Paul."

"I will!"

Nani takes my backpack.

Then we walk together to the car.

As always, Nani asks me about my day.

Did I play football?

Did I paint something?

Did I eat my lunch?

I tell her everything.

Especially the important things.

Like how Bepo fell into a puddle.

Twice.

Nani laughs.

She always laughs at the right moments.

When we arrive home, the apartment door opens before I can press the bell.

My mum is already waiting.

She hugs me tightly.

Then she kisses my forehead.

"Hello, sweetheart."

"Hello, Mum."

My mum looks at Nani.

"Did Paul eat something this afternoon?"

"Yes," says Nani.

"He had fruit and two oat biscuits."

My mum smiles.

"Perfect."

Then she turns back to me.

"I missed you."

I smile.

"I missed you too."

My mum has been working all day.
She often works a lot.
Much more than me.
I'm glad she is home now.
A little later, Nani helps me put on my pajamas.
She reads me my favourite story.
For the hundredth time.
Maybe the thousandth.
When she finishes, she pulls the blanket up to my chin.
"Good night, Paul."
"Good night, Nani."
She switches off the light.
The door stays slightly open.
I can hear my mum talking in the next room.
And I can hear Nani answering.
Their voices become quieter and quieter.
My eyes begin to close.
I think about Bepo and his parents.
I think about Mrs. Sabine.
I think about my mum.
And I think about Nani.
Then I remember sitting beside the swing and waiting.
I remember looking at the gate again and again.

And I remember how happy I felt when someone finally arrived.

The last thing I hear before I fall asleep is my mum laughing.

It sounds nice.

And somehow that makes me feel safe.

The Comic

NANI!

BERLIN — 2126.
PAUL IS FOUR YEARS OLD.
THE SUN IS GETTING LOWER.
MOST CHILDREN HAVE
ALREADY GONE HOME.

NOBODY.

STILL
NOBODY.

NANI WILL
BE HERE SOON.

I KNOW.

2126

BERLIN

HELLO, PAUL.

BZZZT

NANI!

WHOOSH!

I'M SORRY YOU
HAD TO WAIT.

THAT'S
OKAY.

ON THE WAY HOME...

DID YOU PLAY
FOOTBALL TODAY?

YES!

DID YOU PAINT
SOMETHING?

A ROCKET!

HELLO, SWEETHEART.

HELLO,
MUM.

DID PAUL EAT
SOMETHING THIS
AFTERNOON?

FRUIT AND TWO
OAT BISCUITS.

PERFECT.

I MISSED
YOU, MUM.

I MISSED
YOU TOO.

A LITTLE LATER...

GOOD NIGHT,
PAUL.

GOOD NIGHT,
NANI.

WHISPER
WHISPER

THAT LAUGH
MAKES ME
FEEL SAFE.

THE WORLD OF 2126 WAS SHAPED BY OUR CHOICES TODAY.
EVERY KINDNESS, EVERY CARE, EVERY ACTION COUNTS.

The Wind Tube

My name is Rangi.

I am eight years old.

I live in Wellington, New Zealand.

It is the year 2110.

My dad says Wellington is still one of the windiest cities in the world.

I believe him.

Some mornings the wind tries to steal my cap on the way to school.

Sometimes it pushes rain sideways.

Sometimes it whistles around the corners of buildings like it is trying to tell a secret.

Today, however, I am not outside.

Today I am travelling to Australia.

I don't really like travelling.

Right now I am sitting between my parents inside a passenger capsule.

My mum is sleeping.

My dad is sleeping.

And I am bored.

Very bored.

We are travelling through one of the giant ocean tubes that connect New Zealand and Australia.

The capsule sits inside a long transparent tunnel.

Above us is the sky.

Below us is the ocean.

Ahead of us is more tunnel.

Behind us is more tunnel.

And around us plays the most boring music in the world.

To help me survive the journey, my parents bought me a Sudoku book before we left.

I stare at the puzzle in front of me.

A six belongs somewhere.

I just don't know where.

My dad told me the trip will take about an hour.

An entire hour.

That is almost forever.

Luckily, we have made this journey many times before.

My parents have friends in Sydney.

Jack and Ava.

They always welcome us with hugs.

And Ava always has something sweet for me.

That is the best part of the trip.

I focus on the Sudoku.

A six.

Then a three.

Then a two.

After a while I only have a few empty squares left.

Just as I am about to finish, a voice speaks through the cabin.

"We will soon arrive at our destination. Please fasten your seatbelts."

My mum wakes up immediately.

She leans over and checks my seatbelt.

"Everything looks perfect, sweetheart."

I smile.

The capsule begins slowing down.

I can feel it in my stomach.

That strange floating feeling always happens when we approach Sydney.

Outside, the colour of the water changes.

Then land appears.

I quickly put away my Sudoku book.

Arriving is my favourite part.

The tube becomes wider.

Other tubes appear beside us.

Then more.

And more.

Soon they curve and cross above and below each other like giant transparent rivers.

The Sydney Station is enormous.

Capsules arrive from all directions.

My dad once showed me a picture in an old book.

It was a pneumatic mail tube from centuries ago.

People used air pressure to send documents from one office to another.

Tiny capsules travelling through tubes.

Back then, it was considered very clever.

My dad laughed when he showed me.

"Humans always have the same ideas," he said.

"They just make them bigger."

When I look around the station, I think he might be right.

The capsule finally glides to a stop.

The doors open.

And there they are.

Jack and Ava.

Waiting for us.

Ava waves.

Then she holds something up.

Chocolate.

Not ordinary chocolate.

Algae chocolate.

My favourite.

I run toward her.

The journey is forgotten immediately.

I take a bite.

Perfect.

As we walk through the station, I glance back at the tubes one last time.

They stretch toward the horizon.

Toward the ocean.

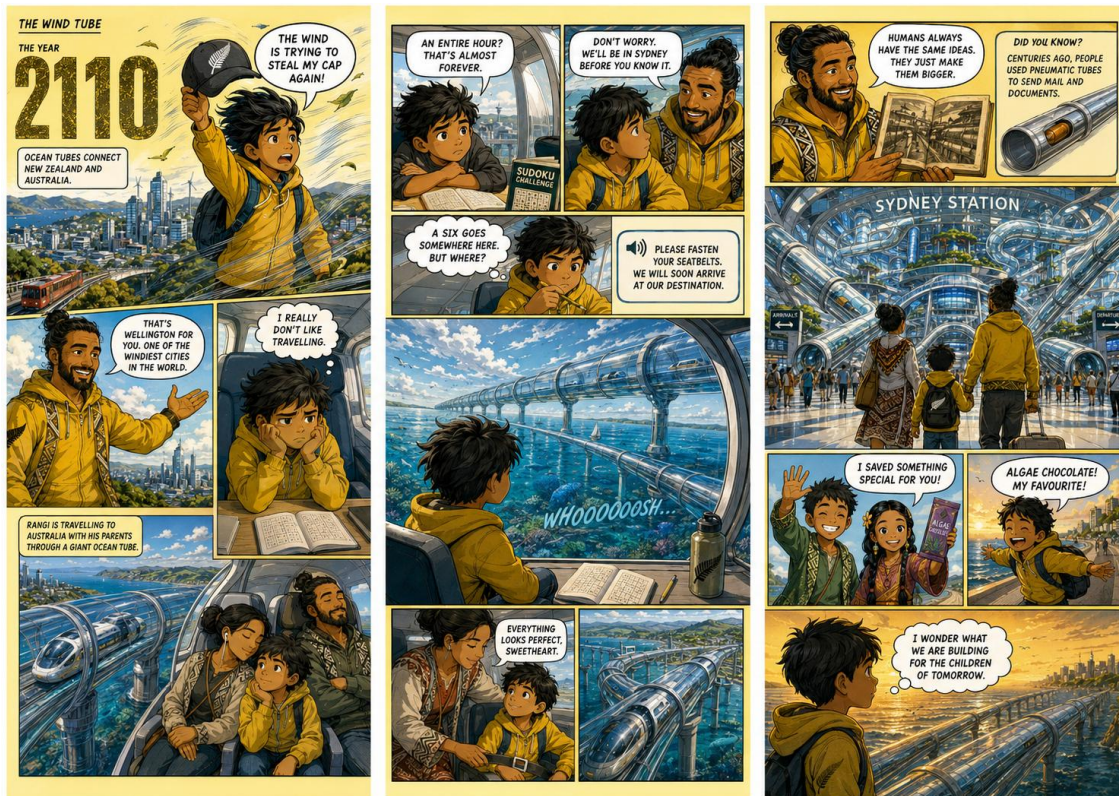
Toward New Zealand.

Somewhere inside one of them, another child is probably sitting beside sleeping parents.

Trying to solve a Sudoku.

And wondering when the journey will finally be over.

The Comic



The Long Block

My name is Yi.

I am six years old.

I live in the Beijing Block.

It is the year 2541.

My favourite moment of the day is just before bedtime.

That is when I sit with my mum and dad in the living room and watch the World News together.

I am not usually allowed to stay up this late.

But when the news is on, Dad sometimes makes an exception.

I like that.

Mum sits beside me on the sofa.

Dad sits in his big armchair.

I curl up between them and wait for the football results.

But first, the other news comes.

Tonight, the reporter is standing in front of the new Ethiopia Block.

I have heard about it for years.

My teachers talk about it.

The news talks about it.

Even my grandparents talk about it.

On the screen, a gigantic structure stretches far beyond the horizon.

The camera flies above it.

Higher.

And higher.

And higher.

The farther away the camera moves from Earth, the thinner the structure looks.

Eventually it looks like a long worm lying across a giant sandbox.

I giggle.

"It looks funny."

Dad laughs too.

"A little."

The reporter explains that the block has been completed for three billion people.

Families will finally be able to move in.

Dad nods.

"That is good."

"Why?" I ask.

"Because they finally have a home."

"And because the greening can begin."

I imagine a giant green worm covered with trees and gardens.

I like that picture.

The report continues.

The camera shows wide landscapes outside the blocks.

Forests.

Rivers.

Green plains.

Very few buildings.

Most people live inside the great blocks now.

People live there.

Learn there.

Work there.

Much of the food is grown there too.

Outside the blocks, nature has room to spread.

Dad explained that to me once.

The next report is about an ancient prince's tomb discovered near the Great Wall of China.

The camera follows the wall as it winds over mountains.

Long.

Thin.

Endless.

I frown.

"Mum?"

"Yes, sweetheart?"

"The Great Wall looks a bit like our blocks."

Mum smiles.

"Yes, it does."

I look more closely.

Long ago, people built giant walls.

Today, people build giant blocks.

That feels strange somehow.

I wonder what children hundreds of years from now will build.

Then the best part finally arrives.

Football.

China has beaten Thailand.

I jump off the sofa.

"YES!"

Dad laughs.

China moves from 51st place to 49th place in the World League rankings.

Still far behind Spain and Argentina.

But better than last week.

"Dad?"

"Yes?"

"Will you take me to football practice tomorrow?"

"Of course."

"Right after kindergarten?"

"Right after kindergarten."

I throw both arms into the air.

"Awesome!"

Then the weather forecast appears.

Rain in the morning.

Sunshine in the afternoon.

Perfect.

The weather presenter points to our region.

"Rain until midday. Sunny conditions expected later."

I snuggle closer to Mum.

"It won't rain during football practice."

Mum gently brushes my hair.

"No. The sun will be shining."

Outside, thousands of windows glow in the evening darkness of the Beijing Block.

Somewhere beyond the forests stands the new Ethiopia Block.

And somewhere inside that enormous place, children are probably getting ready for bed too.

Maybe they watched the same news.

Maybe they are excited about football.

Maybe they are wondering what life is like in the Beijing Block.

I yawn.

The news is almost over.

Tomorrow there will be football practice.

And sunshine.

For me, that is the best news in the world.

The Comic

THE LONG BLOCK

2541

IN THE 25TH CENTURY, HUMANITY CHOSE TO LIVE TOGETHER, SO NATURE COULD LIVE AGAIN.

MY NAME IS YI.

JUST BEFORE BEDTIME... MY FAVOURITE MOMENT.

THE NEW ETHIOPIA BLOCK IS COMPLETE. HOME FOR THREE BILLION PEOPLE.

WORLD NEWS
NEW ETHIOPIA BLOCK COMPLETED FOR THREE BILLION PEOPLE

IT LOOKS FUNNY.

A LITTLE.

WHY?

BECAUSE THEY FINALLY HAVE A HOME.

AND BECAUSE THE GREENING CAN BEGIN.

A GIANT GREEN WORM...

NEXT: AN ANCIENT PRINCE'S TOMB DISCOVERED NEAR THE GREAT WALL OF CHINA.

WOOSH!

THE GREAT WALL LOOKS A BIT LIKE OUR BLOCKS.

YES, IT DOES.

LONG AGO, PEOPLE BUILT GIANT WALLS. TODAY, PEOPLE BUILD GIANT BLOCKS.

WHAT WILL CHILDREN HUNDREDS OF YEARS FROM NOW BUILD?

THEN, THE BEST NEWS!

YES!

GOAL!

FOOTBALL WORLD LEAGUE
CHINA 2:1 THAILAND
CHINA MOVES FROM 51ST TO 49TH PLACE!

WILL YOU TAKE ME TO FOOTBALL PRACTICE TOMORROW?

OF COURSE!

RIGHT AFTER KINDERGARTEN?

RIGHT AFTER KINDERGARTEN.

AWESOME!

WOOHOO!

WEATHER FORECAST
RAIN IN THE MORNING. SUNSHINE IN THE AFTERNOON.

RAIN UNTIL MIDDAY. SUNNY CONDITIONS EXPECTED LATER.

IT WON'T RAIN DURING FOOTBALL PRACTICE.

NO. THE SUN WILL BE SHINING.

SOMEWHERE BEYOND THE FORESTS, CHILDREN ARE GETTING READY FOR BED TOO.

MAYBE THEY WATCHED THE SAME NEWS.

EVERY BLOCK WE BUILD, GIVES NATURE ROOM TO BREATHE. EVERY CHOICE TODAY, SHAPES THE WORLDS OF TOMORROW.

The Valley of Many Homes

My name is Baatar.

I am eight years old.

I live in Mongolia.

It is the year 2123.

Today is one of my favourite days of the year.

I am standing on a green meadow with Friedrich, my yak.

My father gave him to me when he was still young. Now Friedrich is three years old. He loves eating grass, and I love drinking his milk.

Today my friends are coming.

I look down the valley again and again.

Then finally I see them.

A small cloud of dust.

Horses.

People.

"They're here!" I shout.

I start running before anyone can stop me.

The first person I reach is Sonsee.

We hug each other so hard that we almost fall over laughing.

We haven't seen each other in months.

There is too much to tell.

Too many adventures.

Too many stories.

We sit on a flat rock and watch the adults build the tents.

The tents of Sonsee's family always fascinate me.

They are very different from our yurts.

Tall poles rise into the air and lean together at the top. The coverings are decorated with colorful patterns and symbols. From a distance they look almost like giant birds resting on the grass.

"My grandma painted that one," says Sonsee proudly.

I nod.

I think it looks beautiful.

A little later another group appears on the trail.

"UKI!"

Both Sonsee and I jump up and start waving.

Soon Uki is standing beside us.

The tents of Uki's family are different again.

Round like ours.

But lower and smaller.

Whenever I see them, I remember the stories Uki tells about winter.

About snow.

About ice.

About houses made from frozen blocks of snow.

I still can't imagine living inside snow.

One day I want to see it myself.

"You have to invite me in winter," I tell Uki.

"Only if you let me ride Friedrich," Uki replies.

"Deal."

We all laugh.

"Did you bring it?" Sonsee asks.

I grin.

"Of course."

I hold up a large leather bag.

"Friedrich's milk."

"I saved it for you and Uki."

Sonsee smiles.

"I knew you would."

The afternoon disappears almost magically.

We show each other pictures on our phones.

The biggest fish.

The funniest animal.

The strangest cloud.

The most embarrassing accident.

Every picture is important.

At least until the next one appears.

Then something even more important happens.

Grandparents.

We leave immediately.

The adults stay behind and talk.

Children visit grandparents.

That is simply how things work.

My grandmother hugs me so tightly that I can barely breathe.

Then she gives me cake.

Uki's grandparents give Uki cake.

Sonsee's grandparents give Sonsee cake.

Then they all give us more cake.

Their clothes look different.

Their words sound different.

Their stories sound different.

But somehow all grandparents know exactly what children like.

Afterwards we lie in the grass because our stomachs are too full to move.

As evening comes, we climb a small ridge above the camp.

Friedrich follows us for a while and then lies down in the grass nearby.

Below us, our camp glows softly in the fading light.

Our yurts stand in a circle.

Between them stand the tall tents of Sonsee's family.

Nearby stand the smaller tents of Uki's family.

Different shapes.

Different colours.

Different stories.

And yet they all belong to the same evening landscape.

Small fires flicker between the tents.

Smoke rises slowly into the evening sky.

Beyond the valley, far away, lights begin to appear.

First a few.

Then hundreds.

Then thousands.

In the distance, tall buildings rise above the horizon.

Their windows sparkle like stars.

For a while we simply sit and watch.

Then Sonsee points toward one of the tallest buildings.

"Imagine how long it takes to get down from the top every morning."

Uki laughs.

"Maybe they slide."

I laugh too.

"Or maybe they have elevators so fast they make your stomach float."

"My uncle said some buildings have gardens on the roofs," says Sonsee.

I look again.

"They must have great views."

Uki points toward another cluster of lights.

"Do you think children play football there?"

"Probably," I say.

"Maybe on the roofs."

"Maybe between the buildings," says Sonsee.

We all laugh.

For a while nobody speaks.
We simply watch the lights.
They are beautiful.
The city is beautiful.
The mountains are beautiful.
The river is beautiful.
The tents are beautiful.
Everything feels peaceful.
Then a thought comes into my head.
I look at Sonsee and Uki.
"Do you think there are children sitting there right now?"
They follow my gaze toward the city.
"Maybe," says Uki.
I point down toward our little camp.
"Maybe they are looking out of a window."
"Maybe they can see our tents."
"The yurts."
"The horses."
"Friedrich."
"Maybe they are wondering what it is like to live here."
Sonsee smiles.
"Maybe they think having a yak is cool."
I look at Friedrich.
For a moment Friedrich lifts his head.

Then he decides that eating grass is much more important.

We all laugh.

I look at the lights one last time.

Somewhere down there, children are probably getting ready for bed.

Maybe they are looking out of their windows.

Maybe they can see our little camp.

Maybe they are wondering what it feels like to wake up beside a river.

To sleep in a yurt.

To ride horses.

To drink yak milk.

To have a yak named Friedrich.

I smile.

Perhaps one day they will come and visit us.

Or perhaps I will visit them.

Friedrich probably wouldn't like the elevators very much.

But I think he would enjoy the parks.

I look at Sonsee and Uki.

"Do you think they ever look up here and wonder about us?"

Neither of them answers right away.

We just sit there and watch the lights.

Tomorrow we will play football.

Or go fishing.

Or climb the hills.

Or do something completely different.

It doesn't really matter.

Because we are together again.

And that is my favourite part of summer.

The Comic



Amani and the Paper Scroll of the Stars

My name is Amani. I am ten years old, and I attend Grade 5 at Freedom Primary School.

It is the year 2245.

We are only in the second week of the new school term, and everyone is still excited. Especially today.

The large clock above the classroom door is almost showing one o'clock. Teachers are changing classrooms. Some students are chatting, others are laughing, and a few are staring out of the windows.

In a moment, we will have our very first lesson in IA.

Intelligence Africa.

I have no idea what we are going to learn, but the name sounds exciting.

Almost everything in our lives is digital.

This morning, my smart alarm clock woke me up with my favorite song. In the kitchen, our home robot, Sami, prepared breakfast while projecting music in my favorite color across the wall. Later, an autonomous flying chair picked me up at our front door and carried me to school.

That is just how life works.

Nobody really thinks about it anymore.

I sit next to a girl from China. Her name is Ai.

I like her name.

As we wait for our teacher, I whisper to her,

"I'm looking forward to IA."

Ai nods.

"Me too. Maybe we'll learn about new planets."

The classroom door opens.

At once, the room becomes quiet.

Our teacher walks in.

She has dark brown skin, curly black hair, and kind eyes.

Tucked beneath her arm is something unusual.

Not a hologram.

Not a data cube.

Not a digital tablet.

A rolled-up paper scroll.

Curious, we watch her every movement.

She places the scroll on her desk and looks at us.

"Would you like to know how your great-great-great-great-grandparents lived on Earth?"

A wave of excitement spreads through the room.

Then all of us answer together.

"Yeeees!"

The teacher smiles.

Carefully, she unrolls the paper.

It crackles softly.

I have never seen a real paper map before.

She hangs it on the wall.

It shows a vast continent.

"This," she says, "is Africa."

Her hand moves slowly across the map.

Then her finger stops at a tiny point.

"My family's roots began here."

She pauses for a moment.

"This place is called Nairobi."

Nairobi.

The name sounds familiar immediately.

I turn to Ai.

"That's the same name as our spaceship!"

Ai smiles.

"You're right."

I look back at the map.

At that tiny little dot.

Nairobi.

A place on an ancient world.

A place I have never seen.

A place whose name our ship carries through the stars.

The teacher begins to tell stories.

About people.

About cities.

About savannas.

About lions, elephants, and zebras.

About rainy seasons and dry seasons.

About children who played football beneath open skies.

About families who shared stories together in the evenings.

As she speaks, my eyes wander toward the transparent wall of our classroom.

It is not really a window.

It is part of the ship's outer hull.

Beyond it lies the universe.

Dark. Endless. Scattered with stars.

Far outside, I can see part of our enormous generation ship drifting silently through space.

Across its silver surface shine large letters:

NAIROBI

Suddenly, I think about the animals.

The lions. The zebras. The elephants.

All of them are sleeping deep within their protected habitats inside the ship.

They have been asleep for years.

Maybe even longer than I have been alive.

Sometimes that makes me feel a little sad.

But in about fifty years, we will reach our new Earth.

Then the animals will wake up.

Then they will run across grasslands again.

Then their young will be born beneath unfamiliar stars.

Perhaps they will never know they once came from another world.

My gaze returns to the paper map.

To the tiny dot called Nairobi.

Then to the shining hull of our spacecraft.

And finally to the countless stars beyond.

Suddenly, I wonder:

Where does a homeland really begin?

In a place?

In a story?

In a name?

Or in the people who remember one another?

The teacher continues speaking.

But for a moment, I no longer hear her words.

I am looking out into the endless stars and galaxies.

And I find myself wondering:

When we finally reach our new Earth,

will our children still know where we came from?

Or will they one day unroll an old paper scroll,

point to a tiny dot,

and tell stories about us?

For a brief moment, it feels as if the past and the future are floating together in the same room.

The old Earth behind us.

The new Earth ahead of us.

And somewhere in between,

us.

Traveling between memory and hope.

The Comic



The Dry Reservoir Cup

Today, my parents and I are travelling by train to the BMX Youth World Cup at the Oker Reservoir.

I am fifteen years old and I live in Munich.

It is the year 2126.

Today, my parents and I are travelling by train to the BMX Youth World Cup at the Oker Reservoir.

A long year of training lies behind me.

Every day I rode my BMX bike.

Every day I repaired something on it.

Every day I dreamed about this race.

And now I have actually qualified.

As the train moves through the countryside, I wonder what the venue will look like.

An old reservoir without water.

It is difficult to imagine.

After a long journey, we finally arrive at the station near the dam.

The first thing I see is the enormous concrete wall.

It rises high above the landscape.

Behind it stretches a huge brown basin.

And in the middle of it stands a white city of tents.

That is where athletes from all over the world will stay during the competition.

It looks incredible.

We walk to the registration tent.

Inside, volunteers hand us our information packs.

Sleeping area.

Meal times.

Race schedule.

Training sessions.

Everything is perfectly organised.

Next to the registration area stand several gigantic screens.

A film is playing.

I stop and watch.

The screens show this place more than a hundred years ago.

Dense green forests cover the hills.

The reservoir is filled to the top with sparkling blue water.

People are swimming.

Children are jumping from jetties.

Colourful sailboards skim across the surface.

The place looks completely different.

The film explains that year after year less rain fell.

The water level slowly dropped.

For decades.

Until almost nothing remained.

Today only a small stream flows across the bottom of the vast reservoir.

My parents call me and we continue toward our tent.

Two hours later we are invited to inspect the racecourse.

Hundreds of riders gather at the starting area.

The track looks fantastic.

Eight riders will start side by side.

There are jumps.

Sharp bends.

Rock sections.

Sand passages.

And obstacles built directly into the landscape.

The most spectacular jump crosses the small stream that still runs along the floor of the old reservoir.

Everything looks futuristic.

Almost unreal.

As we walk along the course, a rider from Saxony joins me.

Her name is Heidi.

She studies the surrounding hills and asks,

“Can you imagine what this place looked like a hundred years ago?”

“Yes,” I reply.

“I just watched the film at the entrance.”

I point toward the hills.

“All of that was forest.”

Heidi looks around.

The hills are almost bare.

Only scattered shrubs grow on the slopes.

“And there was water everywhere,” I continue.

“The reservoir was completely full. People came here to swim, sail and spend their holidays.”

For a moment we both look across the enormous basin.

“That must have been beautiful,” I say.

Heidi nods.

“The air was probably less dusty too.”

The next morning, race day arrives.

The race officials explain the course one last time.

First comes the rocky descent.

Balance is everything there.

Then follows a deep sandy section leading to the jump across the stream.

After that, a rough climb through broken stones leads upward toward the old shoreline.

The finish line waits at the top.

Soon I am standing on the starting ramp.

I wear my bright racing suit.

My helmet feels tighter than usual.

Heidi stands right beside me.

We are in the first starting group of the day.

Thousands of spectators fill the slopes.

The giant screens glow above the tents.

Only seconds remain.

I think about Heidi's question.

Once more I look at the dry hills.

Then down at the small stream winding across the bottom of the reservoir.

I take a deep breath.

The rocks.

The jump.

The climb.

Everything is suddenly crystal clear in my mind.

I feel focused.

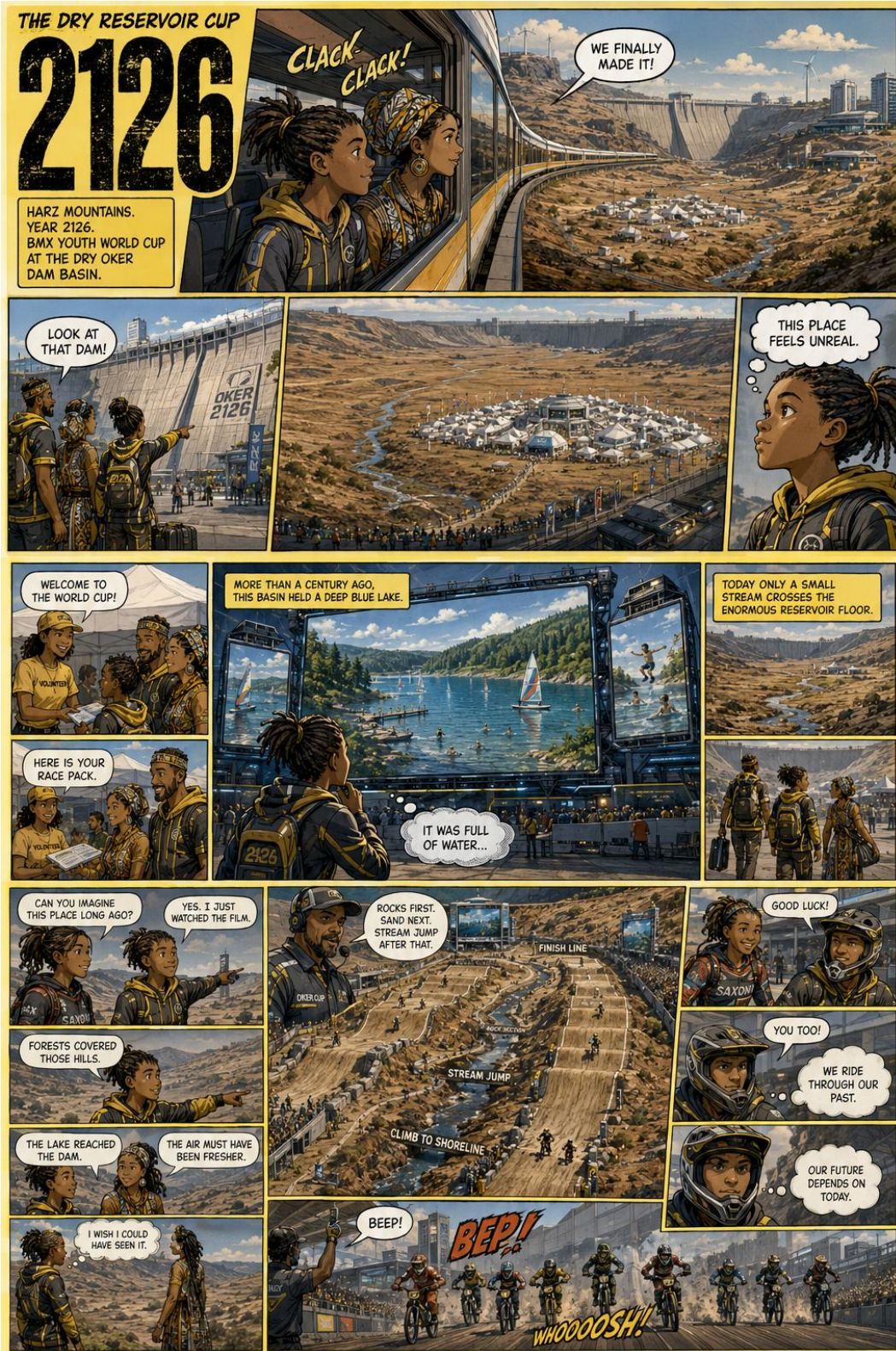
Electric.

Ready.

The countdown reaches zero.

And then the starting signal sounds.

The Comic



The Sunday Shower

My name is Anton. I am nine years old and I live in Dresden.

It is the year 2083.

Today is Sunday.

And today is shower day.

My mother is in the kitchen preparing breakfast when she calls:

“Have fun showering, sweetheart!”

A few minutes later, I am standing inside our shower cabin.

Steam rises around me.

The water hisses softly.

I start humming a song.

“Raindrops keep falling on my head ...”

My father always sings that song when he showers too.

I love standing in the warm steam.

I love rubbing my skin with my bath glove.

I love the feeling of being completely clean and warm.

For a moment, I close my eyes and enjoy the water.

Then I hear my mother calling:

“Breakfast is ready, sweetheart!”

“Coming, Mum!” I shout back.

What a pity.

I would happily stay a little longer.

I dry myself quickly.

My skin feels soft and warm.

I love that feeling after the Sunday shower.

At the breakfast table sit my mother, my father, and my older sister Dora.

She is already twelve.

There is fresh bread, vegetable spread, homemade pear jam, and a large jug filled with clear drinking water.

A few weeks ago, we picked the pears ourselves at a farm near the edge of the city.

While spreading jam on his bread, my father smiles.

"I have an idea," he says.

Immediately, Dora and I look up.

"How about spending the day at the city swimming pool?"

Everyone starts smiling.

Even though it is already October, the pool is still open.

And with twenty-eight degrees outside, a swim sounds perfect.

Of course, we all agree.

We live in Neustadt.

The pool is too far away to walk, so we take the tram.

Everybody carries something.

Blankets.

A basket with swimming things.

A basket with fruit and water.

The tram glides through the city.

When we cross the Elbe, I look out of the window.

As usual, the riverbed is mostly dry.

Only a few narrow channels of water sparkle in the sunlight.

The wide river that once flowed here exists mostly in old photographs now.

It looks a little strange.

But for me, it has always looked this way.

Forty-five minutes later, we are sitting on the grass at the swimming pool.

Luckily, we even find a place near the sand.

The pool is crowded.

Everybody had the same idea today.

Children are laughing.

People are swimming.

People are talking.

It is a wonderful Sunday.

Near the entrance hangs a small sign.

I walk past it without really looking.

I have seen it my whole life.

The sign simply says:

Please enjoy the water. Every drop matters.

I run toward the pool.

The water shines blue in the afternoon sun.

Behind me, my family is unpacking the baskets.

Ahead of me, friends are already jumping into the water.

I take a deep breath and smile.

Then I run as fast as I can.

And jump.

For a moment, I am surrounded by nothing but cool water.

And it feels wonderful.

The Comic



The Apple Voucher

Hirosaki, Japan, 2035

My name is Haruto.

I am fourteen years old and I live in Hirosaki, Japan.

Today is Kendo training day.

Kendo means *The Way of the Sword*.

And I love it.

The best thing about Kendo is that everyone trains together.

Children.

Teenagers.

Adults.

Even grandparents.

In our dojo, age does not matter very much.

We all learn from each other.

Today we are practicing the basic strikes.

Our teacher walks between us and gives small pieces of advice.

Sometimes he changes the position of a foot.

Sometimes the angle of a sword.

Sometimes only a single movement.

Tiny improvements.

Again and again.

I have been practicing Kendo for five years now.

One day, when I am grown up, I hope I will become a great fighter.

Right now, I am facing Chiyu.

She is sixty years old.

Before we begin, she secretly winks at me.

That is probably not proper Kendo behavior.

But we are good friends.

We practice *Men* strikes.

Chiyu swings her shinai, a bamboo sword, in a large arc toward my head.

Luckily, the *Men* helmet protects me.

The strike lands with a loud crack.

"Too slow, Haruto," she says.

"I know," I laugh.

The final exercise of the evening is *Kakari-keiko*.

Free sparring.

My favorite part.

When I step forward, I see who my opponent will be.

Jiro.

He is the best young Kendoka in our dojo.

Much better than me.

And that makes me happy.

Because in Kendo, the strongest students do not try to show how strong they are.

They help the weaker students improve.

I know Jiro will push me.

I know I will make mistakes.

And I know I will learn something.

So I bow.

Jiro bows.

And we begin.

After training, we line up and thank our teacher.

Everyone bows deeply.

Then something happens that visitors always find funny.

Our teacher reaches into a small wooden box.

Inside are vouchers.

One by one, the children receive a small reward.

A CO₂ voucher.

I receive one too.

With the voucher, I can buy fruit from the local market.

Apples.

Cherries.

Or other seasonal fruits from the region.

Our teacher says it is a reward for training hard.

But it is also a reminder.

"A strong body needs good food," he always says.

"And a healthy future begins with small everyday choices."

I put the voucher carefully into my pocket.

Tomorrow I already know what I will buy.

An apple.

Maybe two.

Because everyone in Hirosaki knows something.

Hirosaki grows the best apples in Japan.
And maybe even the best apples in the world.

The Comic



The Sandstorm

Berlin, 2115

My name is Anna.

I am twelve years old and I live in Berlin.

Today, I really should have gone home earlier.

Much earlier.

If only Emil and I hadn't spent so much time playing together.

If only I had left when the warning sirens sounded.

If only I hadn't lost track of time.

But now it is too late.

Sand whips across Schloßstraße.

The wind throws fine grains into my face.

Sand crunches beneath my shoes.

Sand is everywhere.

Berlin has not been a green city for a very long time.

At least not here in the south.

We live on the edge of a vast sandy landscape.

Some people call it the Berlin Desert.

I pull my scarf higher across my face and keep walking.

Fortunately, I know a nearby shelter.

Right next to the old Bauhaus building on Wilmersdorfer Straße.

Just one hour, I think.

The storm will pass.

And then I will be home.

At last, I reach the entrance.
The heavy door closes behind me.
Immediately, everything becomes quiet.
I brush sand from my shoulders.
It falls from my clothes.
There is even sand inside my shoes.
Exhausted, I sit down on an empty chair.
At first, I only hear my own breathing.
Slowly, I begin to notice the people around me.
A girl about my age is sitting beside me.
She is crying.
"Hello," I say softly.
"What's your name?"
"Lina."
"Why are you crying?"
She looks at me.
"I'm thirsty."
It sounds so simple.
And somehow so sad.
"When the storm is over, come with me."
"Really?"
"Of course."
"Why?"
"Because we have water."

For the first time, Lina smiles.

"I live in Schillerstraße," I tell her.

"I'm not far from there," she says.

Then we begin talking.

About school.

About teachers.

About the neighborhood.

About games.

Before we realize it, the time passes quickly.

Half an hour later, the all-clear signal sounds.

The storm is over.

Together we step outside.

Everything looks different.

Huge dunes have formed between the rows of buildings.

Some of them reach nearly to the ground-floor windows.

Lina and I slide down the sandy hills.

We run.

We jump.

Sometimes we sink ankle-deep into the soft sand.

Honestly, it is quite fun.

Eventually, we arrive at my home.

My parents open the door.

"Anna!"

They are relieved to see me.

"And who did you bring with you?"

"This is Lina."

"Hello, Lina."

"Hello."

"Lina was thirsty."

My mother immediately nods.

A few minutes later, we are sitting at the table.

In front of us stand two large glasses of water.

Lina empties hers almost in one go.

"This is the best invitation I've ever received," she says.

We all laugh.

Then Lina begins looking around our apartment.

Moss grows on the walls.

Tiny channels of water flow between green plants.

Ferns hang from the ceiling.

The whole apartment feels like a small green oasis.

"It is beautiful here," Lina says.

I nod.

"I think so too."

A little later, we sit on the floor.

Between us lies an old board game.

Mensch ärgere dich nicht.

Outside, the last clouds of sand drift through Berlin.

Inside, we roll the dice.

After a while, Lina smiles.

"Maybe next time you can come to my place."

"I'd like that."

"The crocuses are flowering right now."

"Inside your apartment?"

"Of course."

"And I have great games too."

I grin.

"Then I'll definitely come."

And suddenly I think:

Maybe it wasn't so bad after all
that I stayed too long playing with Emil.

The Comic



The Old Bornholmer Road

Berlin, 2110

My name is Emilia.

I am nine years old and I live at the corner of Gotlandstraße and Bornholmer Straße in Berlin.

Today I want to visit my grandmother.

She only lives two crossings away.

Of course, Leon is coming with me.

Leon is my best friend.

And already three years old.

My mom is still at work.

So I leave her a small note:

Dear Mom,

I'm at Grandma's.

Love you.

Emilia

Then Leon and I set off.

Right in front of our building begins my favorite part of Berlin.

A little forest.

Large old trees grow there.

Flowering bushes line the sandy path.

Everywhere I hear buzzing, humming, and chirping.

The path even has a name.

A small wooden sign says:

Old Bornholmer Road

I have no idea why it is called an old road.
To me, it is the colorful road.
Because everywhere something is blooming.
Suddenly, Leon stops.
He refuses to take another step.
"What is it?" I ask.
Leon sits beside a blue cornflower.
His tail is wagging wildly.
"Oh, I see!"
I laugh.

"You want Grandma to have flowers!"
Leon jumps up with excitement.
I pick the cornflower.
Immediately, he races toward the next flower.
Soon we have a small bouquet.
Then a bigger one.
And before long, I am carrying flowers in every color.
The walk takes forever.
And as usual, we keep stopping.
Sometimes because of a butterfly.
Sometimes because of a bumblebee.
Sometimes because of a flower that is simply too beautiful to ignore.

At one point, we even follow a butterfly as it tumbles through the air like a tiny piece of colorful paper.

Suddenly Leon barks loudly.

Woof!

I stop at once.

In front of us is a small street.

Several taxis are slowly passing by.

They move so gently that you can easily see the passengers through the large windows.

In Berlin, vehicles have been driving slowly on neighborhood streets for many years.

Children, animals, and plants all share the city.

Safety comes first.

Even so, Leon never takes any chances.

He sits directly in front of me and refuses to move.

Only when the last taxi has gone by does he look up at me.

"Thank you, Leon."

Then we cross the street together.

On the other side is the Korean restaurant *Arirang Bulgogi*.

Behind it rises a tall building covered entirely in green.

The whole wall is alive.

Mosses.

Ferns.

Flowers.

Plants whose names I do not even know.

A small waterfall flows down the building.

And when the sun shines just right, a rainbow appears in the spray.

I could watch it for hours.

Eventually, after nearly an hour of walking, we arrive at Grandma's house.

The bouquet in my hand has grown into something enormous.

I press the doorbell.

The door opens.

"Emilia!"

Grandma beams with joy.

"And Leon is here too!"

She hugs me tightly.

Then she notices the flowers.

"Oh my goodness, they're beautiful."

"Leon picked them."

"Of course he did."

Grandma laughs.

Then she looks out of the window toward the trees.

"You are growing into such a wonderful young person."

She pauses.

"Very much like Berlin."

I am not entirely sure what she means.

But that is okay.

My grandmother is the best.
And her apartment looks like a museum.
There are old books.
Old photographs.
Old lamps.
And all kinds of things from a world that no longer exists.
Best of all, she has made fresh Berliner doughnuts.
Still warm.
The best in all of Berlin.
Just as we are about to eat, I remember something.

"Grandma?"

"Yes?"

"May I charge Leon?"

"Of course."

She points to a socket beside the window.

I plug Leon in.

"Doughnuts aren't really your thing anyway," I tell him.

Grandma starts laughing.

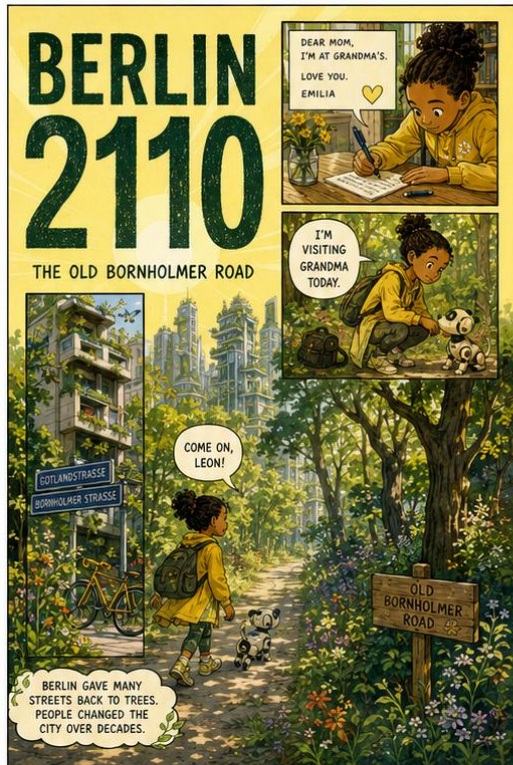
Because Leon is not a dog.

Leon is a small robotic dog.

A birthday present from my mom three years ago.

And my very best friend.

The Comic



The Tree That Helped Me With My Homework

Yosemite National Park, 2085

My name is Emma.

I am eleven years old and I live in Yosemite National Park.

Today, I have a problem.

A huge problem.

In German class, our teacher gave us a homework assignment.

We have to write an essay.

About a tree.

As soon as the teacher announced it, most of my classmates started smiling.

Some already knew exactly which tree they wanted to write about.

Others immediately came up with ideas.

Not me.

On the way home, I kept thinking about the assignment.

A tree.

Why a tree?

There are millions of them here.

Giant sequoias.

Pines.

Cedars.

Oaks.

And yet not a single idea appeared in my head.

That afternoon, I sat at my desk.

A blank sheet of paper lay in front of me.

A fountain pen rested in my hand.

Nothing.

Not a single word.

After ten minutes, the page was still empty.

After twenty minutes, it was still empty.

So I went to find my mother.

“Mom?”

“Yes?”

“Can you help me?”

“With what?”

“I have to write an essay about a tree.”

My mother smiled.

“I’m sure you’ll think of something.”

“But what?”

“You’ll find out.”

I thought for a moment.

“Can I ask the AI?”

“Of course.”

“Really?”

“Of course.”

“Maybe it has a good idea.”

My mother nodded.

"I think so too."

So I went back to my room.

I opened a drawer and took out a network cable.

Then I walked into our garden.

Behind our house stood several large trees.

Beautiful trees.

Old trees.

Quiet trees.

I walked to my favorite one.

It was older than my parents.

Maybe even older than my grandparents.

Carefully, I plugged the cable into the connection port in its trunk.

A moment later, the connection was established.

"Hello, Emma."

"Hello."

"How was school?"

"Okay."

"Okay doesn't sound very enthusiastic."

"We got homework."

"Ah. That explains everything."

I laughed.

"I have to write an essay about a tree."

"What a wonderful assignment."

"It really isn't."

"Why not?"

"Because I have no idea what to write."

For a moment, the tree was silent.

Then it said:

"Your teacher has given you a wonderful assignment."

"You think so?"

"Of course."

"Why?"

"Because you're talking to a tree right now."

I stopped and thought about that.

"Well... that's true."

"You could write about me."

"About you?"

"Of course."

"But what would I write?"

The tree gently rustled its leaves.

"Write about how you came to ask me."

"That's enough?"

"More than enough."

"Really?"

"Emma..."

"Yes?"

“How often does someone get the chance to ask a tree for help writing an essay about a tree?”

I started laughing.

“That’s actually a pretty good story.”

“You see?”

“Thank you.”

“You're welcome.”

I unplugged the cable.

Picked up my blank sheet of paper.

And walked back to my room.

For the first time that day, I knew exactly what I wanted to write.

And maybe...

just maybe...

it became the best story I had ever written.

The Comic

THE TREE THAT HELPED ME WITH MY HOMEWORK

IN 2085, CHILDREN STILL LEARN FROM NATURE. SOMETIMES NATURE EVEN ANSWERS.

2085

YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK

HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT: WRITE AN ESSAY ABOUT A TREE.

TODAY YOU WILL WRITE ABOUT A TREE.

I ALREADY KNOW WHICH TREE I WILL WRITE ABOUT.

PSSST!

A TREE?

ON THE WAY HOME...

BACK HOME...

I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT TO WRITE.

TEN MINUTES...

TWENTY MINUTES...

THIRTY MINUTES...

10:00

20:00

30:00

MOM?

CAN YOU HELP ME?

MAYBE ASK THE TREE.

SO I WENT TO MY FAVORITE TREE.

I CONNECTED TO THE NETWORK OF NATURE.

CLICK

CONNECTION ESTABLISHED.

BEEP

TREES ARE PART OF A LIVING NETWORK. THEY SHARE INFORMATION, ENERGY AND WISDOM.

HELLO, EMMA.

I HAVE TO WRITE AN ESSAY ABOUT A TREE.

THEN YOU ARE ALREADY IN THE RIGHT PLACE.

BUT WHAT SHOULD I WRITE?

WRITE ABOUT HOW YOU CAME TO ASK A TREE.

THAT'S ENOUGH?

MORE THAN ENOUGH.

FOR THE FIRST TIME TODAY, I KNEW EXACTLY WHAT TO WRITE.

THE TREE THAT HELPED ME WITH MY HOMEWORK

It was an ordinary day at school when our teacher asked us to write an essay about a tree...

SOMETIMES, THE BEST IDEAS GROW WHEN WE LISTEN TO NATURE.

The Rainbow Shower

Singapore, Year 2088

My name is Meng.

I am eight years old and I live in Singapore.

If you ask me, Singapore is the most beautiful city in the world.

There are trees everywhere.

Gardens hang between the skyscrapers.

Flowers grow on rooftops.

And there are so many playgrounds that the whole city feels like one giant adventure park.

Every day I meet my friend Mei.

She is seven years old.

Mei lives in a skyscraper that looks like a giant mushroom.

My skyscraper looks more like a huge vase.

In Singapore, nobody thinks that is unusual.

Today is hot again.

Very hot.

Just like almost every day.

Nearly thirty degrees.

The air sticks to my skin.

Even in the shade, I am sweating.

It is just after lunchtime.

Mei and I are sitting at our favorite playground.

The climbing structures look like enormous flowers.

You can balance on petals, climb giant stems, and crawl through tunnels made of leaves.

But today we are not climbing.

Not yet.

We are waiting.

"How much longer?" Mei asks.

"Not long now," I reply.

We look up.

Between the skyscrapers stand tall silver towers reaching toward the clouds.

Suddenly, a deep rumble echoes through the city's speakers.

"It's coming!" I shout.

Mei jumps to her feet.

"Finally!"

And then it happens.

The first rainbows appear between the green skyscrapers.

Bright.

Colorful.

Beautiful.

They float between the buildings like giant paintings in the sky.

Red.

Blue.

Yellow.

Green.

The whole city seems to glow.

Then we feel it.

At first, only a little.

A cool breeze.

Then a few tiny drops.

And finally, the Rainbow Shower begins.

The cloud towers have collected enough water from the warm air.
Now they release a gentle cooling rain throughout the city.
Not too much.
Not too little.
Exactly right.
The cool air touches my arms.
It tingles on my skin.
Almost as if the city itself is giving me a hug.
“This is my favorite moment of the day,” Mei says.
I nod.
It is my favorite too.
As the drops land on the leaves, I spot a bird.
It is sitting on a flower nearby.
“Look!”
I say.
Mei follows my finger.
The bird has long yellow feathers that glow in the sunlight.
“Wow,” she whispers.
We watch it for a while.
Water droplets hang from every leaf and blade of grass.
The plants seem bigger every year.
As the climate has become warmer, the tropics have grown.
Many animals now live in Singapore that once lived much farther away.
I look around.
At the flowers.
At the rainbows.

At the trees.

At the shining drops of water.

Then I say,

“Mei?”

“Yes?”

“I think Singapore is the most beautiful city in the world.”

Mei smiles.

“Maybe.”

After a while, the rainbows slowly fade away.

The sun begins to take over the sky again.

The air grows warmer.

I stand up.

“Come on.”

“Where?”

asks Mei.

I grin.

“To the flowers.”

“Why?”

“Because today we're climbing all the way to the top.”

And before she can say anything, I start running.

Straight into our giant flower forest.

The Comic



The Cloud Milkers of the Dead Mountains

Welser Hut, Summer 2101

My name is Toni.

I am 13 years old and I live at the Welser Hut in the Dead Mountains of Austria.

My dad is the hut keeper.

And if you ask me,

he is the best craftsman in the world.

Today, my older sister and I are hiking up the steep trail to the hut.

The climb is brutal.

The sun is burning from the sky.
Sweat runs down my forehead.
My backpack digs into my shoulders.
And my legs feel like cooked noodles.

“Can we take a break?” I ask.
“Just a short one,” my sister replies.
We sit down on a rock and drink some water.
Only two hundred vertical meters left.
Not much.
But right now it feels like two thousand.

“Do you think Dad has everything ready?”
My sister laughs.
“Of course.”
“How do you know?”
“Because he’s Dad.”

That seems like a good enough explanation.
And somehow, I suddenly find new energy.

Switchback after switchback, we make our way up the mountain.
The last section is steep and rocky.
Then I finally see the hut.
And standing in front of it, waving both arms wildly, is a familiar figure.
Dad.

A few minutes later he wraps us in a big hug.

“Welcome home!”

But then he leads us behind the hut.

And there, waiting for us, is a surprise.

A huge dark sail stretches between the rocks.

Beside it stands a small pool filled with crystal-clear water.

“Allow me to introduce,” Dad says proudly,

“Version Seven.”

“Version Seven of what?” I ask.

“My cloud catcher.”

My sister and I exchange glances.

Then we look back at the enormous sail.

“Can we jump in the pool?”

my sister asks.

“Of course!”

Ten seconds later we splash into the water.

It is wonderful.

Cool.

Fresh.

Perfect.

“Do you like the new sail?” Dad asks.

“It’s amazing!” I shout.

Dad grins.

“This one collects twice as much water from the air as the old version.”

That’s what Dad does.

He is always building something.

Sometimes pipes.

Sometimes water systems.

Sometimes cloud catchers.

Later he helps us out of the pool.

“Now I need to get to the kitchen.”

“Why?”

“Because even brilliant inventors have to cook dinner.”

An hour later we sit together in the dining room.

The air smells of herbs, fresh bread, and vegetable stew.

As we eat, Dad tells stories from the time when he was a young hut keeper.

Back when many hikers and climbers came here.

When people climbed the summit of the Großer Priel.

And continued on to the Prielschutzhaus.

“Back then,” Dad says,

“there was still enough water in the valleys.”

I try to imagine it.

“And then what happened?” I ask.

Dad looks out toward the mountains.

“Then it became drier and drier.”

“Water disappeared from the valleys.”

“Springs dried up.”

“And people needed new ideas.”

“And that’s when the sails arrived?”

Dad nods.

“Austrian scientists had a crazy idea.”

“They wanted to milk the clouds.”

My sister bursts out laughing.

“Milk the clouds?”

“Exactly.”

Dad points toward the mountains.

Together we step outside.

Huge gray sails cover the ridges and slopes.

On the Schermberg.

On the high ridgelines.

Even on the summit of the Großer Priel.

From a distance they look like a strange forest of giant trees.

Between them run long tubes carrying water down into the valleys.

Slowly the evening sun begins to glow.

The sails shine golden in the light.

“Beautiful, isn’t it?” Dad asks.

I nod.

“Dad?”

“Yes?”

“You are a great craftsman.”

Dad laughs.

“Oh, come on.”

“No. Really.”

I look at the mountains.

At the sails.

At the pipes.

At the water.

“A long time ago this place was called the Dead Mountains.”

Dad nods.

“Today it’s an oasis.”

I put my arm around him.

“And you are the lifeguard everyone loves.”

Now even my sister starts laughing.

Dad shakes his head.

But I can tell he likes it.

Together we sit outside the hut for a long time.

Above us, the stars begin to shine.

Below us, the valleys fall asleep.

And all around the mountains, the giant sails silently gather water from the clouds.

And I think:

There are many ways to change the world.

Some people write books.

Some people build machines.

And some people simply milk the clouds.

The Comic



The House That Gave Us Mushrooms

Shirakawa-go, December 2138

My name is Himari.

I am nine years old, and I live in Shirakawa-go, Japan.

Yesterday, my friend Anders arrived from Svalbard.

We met during my summer vacation in Longyearbyen.

Since then, we have become very good friends.

Now he is visiting Japan for the first time.

The moment he entered our house, he looked confused.

Anders sniffed the air.

Then he touched the wall.

Then another wall.

And finally, he even smelled the wall.

"Why does your house smell so strange?" he asked.

"Strange?"

"Well," he said, "fresh somehow. Like a forest after rain."

I laughed.

"That's our house."

"Your house?"

"Yes."

"But houses don't smell."

"Ours does."

Anders looked completely confused.

So I explained.

"There is a fungus living inside our walls."

"A fungus?"

"Yes."

"Inside the walls?"

"Of course."

Anders stared at me.

"And why?"

"The fungus keeps the house cool during summer and warm during winter."

"Wow!"

He knocked excitedly on the wall.

"A living house!"

"We don't have anything like that on Svalbard," Anders said.

"In winter, we still have to turn up the heating when temperatures drop below minus ten degrees."

"How do you make the heat?"

"Wind turbines."

"Wind turbines?"

"Lots of them. Out on the sea."

I imagined giant wind turbines standing among icebergs.

The picture in my head made me smile.

"Would you like to play Go?"

I asked.

Anders nodded immediately.

I brought out my Go board.

"My parents taught me to play."

"Is it difficult?"

"A little."

"Do you have to run?"

"No."

"That's a shame."

We both laughed.

Then I began teaching him the rules.

Within a few minutes, Anders was completely fascinated.

While we played, we talked about our summer on Svalbard.

About polar bears.

About beaches.

About tourists.

About school.

And about our favorite teachers.

Suddenly, Anders jumped to his feet.

"Himari!"

"What?"

"Something is growing out of the wall!"

A small mushroom had appeared near the window.
I walked over and gently twisted it from the wall.
Then I held it up.

"Oh."
"What does 'oh' mean?"
"It's ready."
"Ready?"
"Yes."
"For what?"

I laughed.
"For dinner, of course."

Anders looked at me.
Then at the mushroom.
Then back at me.

"You eat your walls?"

Now I laughed even harder.
"No."
"Yes, you do!"
"No."
"Yes!"
"Only the mushrooms."

I ran downstairs carrying the mushroom.

My mother was in the kitchen wearing a beautiful kimono.

She was already preparing dinner.

"Mom, the house gave us another mushroom."

Mom smiled.

"Perfect timing."

Then she looked at us.

"Dinner will be ready in ten minutes."

Anders and I raced back upstairs.

One more game of Go.

Then another.

And another.

Right on time, we sat down at the dinner table.

There was rice.

Fresh fish.

Vegetables.

And, of course, the mushroom from our wall.

Anders recognized it immediately.

"Wait a second!"

Everyone looked at him.

"That's the wall mushroom!"

For a moment, nobody spoke.
Then we all burst out laughing.

"Can you really eat it?"
Anders asked carefully.

"Of course!"
we all answered at almost the same time.

Anders tasted a small piece.
Then another.
And another.

"It's really delicious!"

Mom smiled.
"The house will be happy to hear that."

Later that night, I lay in bed.
I thought about Anders.
About Svalbard.
About wind turbines.
About polar bears.
And about our house.

Tomorrow, I will show Anders our garden.

And the forest.

And the mushrooms.

Maybe even the secret mushrooms growing in the bathroom.

But I think I'll save that surprise for tomorrow.

The Comic



Summer Holidays in Svalbard

Longyearbyen, July 2138

My name is Anders.

I am eight years old and I live in Longyearbyen on Svalbard.

Today is the beginning of the summer holidays.

Most people love this time of year.

I don't.

My parents have decided not to travel this summer.

Again.

To be honest, I understand them.

No matter where we traveled in recent years, it was simply too hot.

My family loves cool air.

Unfortunately, there is not much of it left.

Even here on Svalbard, summer temperatures can easily climb above 20 degrees Celsius.

Right now, I am sitting with my parents at lunch.

We are having fresh fish from the sea.

While I eat, my parents are once again talking about the past.

As always.

"It used to be really cold here," Dad says.

"And sometimes polar bears even wandered through Longyearbyen," Mom adds.

I love polar bears.

Unfortunately, I only know them from zoos.

Soon my parents begin debating who was responsible for the final surge of global warming.

The industries?

The war machines?

The endless conflicts?

Dad insists that the invasion of Taiwan was the final act of madness that pushed the climate beyond a critical point.

I don't really know.

History is complicated.

Polar bears are much more interesting.

"Mom?"

No answer.

"Mom?"

Still nothing.

"Mom! Can I go to the beach tomorrow?"

Finally, both of them stop talking.

Every summer there is a huge holiday program for children at the beach.

Since thousands of tourists started visiting Svalbard during the summer months, there are:

- ball games
- children's theatre
- painting workshops
- music events
- water attractions

For children from Longyearbyen, everything is free.

When I think about it, we do not really need to travel on vacation.

There is so much happening right here.

The only thing I don't like are the enormous tourist hotels.

Fortunately, they are hidden away in the valleys.

Far from town.

Our beautiful mountain view remains untouched.

"Of course you can go," Mom says.

"And if you make new friends, you can bring them home."

"Really?"

"Of course."

"Even if they come from another country?"

"Especially if they come from another country."

Mom smiles.

"Maybe they would like to learn something about Svalbard."

"Or about polar bears," Dad adds.

"Or about our stories."

That sounds great.

Really great.

The next morning, the sun is already shining brightly.

"Don't forget your sunscreen!" Mom calls after me.

"They are expecting over 20 degrees today!"

Twenty degrees.

On Svalbard.

My great-grandmother would probably have laughed.

Or cried.

I am not sure.

Before I head to the beach, I make a quick stop at the zoo.

Today is a special day.

The young polar bears are allowed onto the outdoor viewing area.

Of course, everything is carefully cooled.

The tourists love it.

To be honest,

I love it too.

While I am watching the polar bears play, I hear a voice beside me.

"They are beautiful, aren't they?"

I turn around.

A girl about my age is standing next to me.

"Yes," I say.

"I think they're amazing."

"So do I."

"What is your name?"

"Himari."

I like the sound of her name.

"What does Himari mean?"

I ask.

The girl smiles.

"Sunflower."

I start laughing.

"A sunflower? On Svalbard?"

Himari laughs too.

"Sounds strange, doesn't it?"

Together, we watch the polar bear cubs.

Then she tells me about Japan.

I tell her about Svalbard.

And before long, we are walking together toward the beach.

That evening, I lie tired in my bed.

I think about the polar bears.

About Himari.

About the children's festival.

About the beach.

About the stories my parents tell.

And suddenly I wonder:

What did children feel like one hundred years ago,

when Svalbard was still cold,

polar bears still roamed freely across the landscape,

and nobody would have traveled here for a summer holiday?

The Comic



The School Sports Day in the Year 2226

My name is Tina. I am 9 years old and I live in Dresden in the year 2226.

Today is a very special day.

A little while ago, I had breakfast with my parents, and now we are driving to the school sports festival.

Actually, our car isn't really a normal electric car.

My dad calls it a classic car.

The old vehicle has been passed down from generation to generation, and it rattles every time we drive over a bump.

"Dad, you promised to repair the air conditioning before our next trip!"

Dad smiles.

"Oh, right... I forgot."

That happens more and more these days.

When we arrive at the stadium, I immediately spot my friends:

Thomas,

Robert,

and Tina.

Yes, we actually have two Tinas in our class.

It gets confusing sometimes.

Our parents are sitting together in the stands, waving at us.

The first event is the 75-meter sprint.

The starting signal sounds.

I run as fast as I can.

This morning, my mom sprayed a little dandelion oil onto my sports socks.

It smells wonderfully fresh.

Maybe it even makes me faster.

Apparently not fast enough.

Thomas and Tina run like rockets.

They pull me along, and in the end I achieve my personal best.

We all cheer together.

Next comes ball throwing.

An 80-gram rubber ball.

My favorite event.

My first throw lands five meters farther than the throws of my friends.

"How do you do that?" Robert asks.

"Secret training," I say.

Of course, that's not true.

A girl has to keep some secrets.

We all laugh.

By now, it has become dark.

A clear sky full of stars stretches above the stadium.

In history class, we learned that about 200 years ago people used to sleep at night.

Hard to believe.

Today, most people sleep during the day and stay active at night.

Back then, children would lie in sunny meadows and read books.

That sounds somehow wonderful.

The final event is the long jump.

Or at least what long jump means today.

A long time ago, children landed in sand.
Today, we jump into a huge pool of water.
And everyone has their own landing style.
I do a cannonball.
Thomas does a belly flop.
Robert and Tina dive in headfirst.
Water splashes all the way to the judges.
We laugh so hard that our stomachs hurt.

After the competition, we sit together on the grass for a long time.
We talk about our jumps.
Our records.
The stars.
And the strange stories from history class.

Late in the evening, we finally drive home.
In our rattling family classic car.
I am already looking forward to dinner.
Mom has made my favorite lentil stew.

We sit together around the table.
Mom and Dad enjoy the stew.
And I get a large extra portion.
A wonderfully refreshing charge of electricity.
A pleasant tingling flows through my muscles.
Exactly the right frequency after a long day of sports.

For a while, we talk about the competition.

About Thomas.

About Robert.

About Tina.

About my throws.

Then everything becomes quiet.

I look out into the night sky.

And suddenly, a thought comes to my mind.

What was a school sports day like 200 years ago?

Back then...

when humans had to recharge themselves with food.

The Comic



The Ice Cream Story from the Year 2080

My name is Anna, and I am 11 years old.

Right now, I am sitting at my desk, doing my homework.

It is summer.

Outside, it is 40 degrees.

The ground shimmers, and the air feels hot and heavy.

Suddenly, the doorbell rings.

I tap the door viewer,

and the front door becomes transparent.

Oh! It's my grandmother.

I open the door.

"Anaa!", my grandmother says. "Come on, let's go outside!"

"Grandma... it's 40 degrees," I reply.

"Exactly! Perfect ice cream weather!" she says.

I roll my eyes.

But then my little sister Berta appears:

"Ice creaaam!!!"

Alright... let's go.

Outside, it's hot.

Really hot.

But Grandma knows the way,

always walking through the shady streets.

And then we arrive.

The ice cream shop.

Inside, it's cool.

And it smells... like vanilla.

I look at the menu.

“Grandma... what is ‘Milk Ice Classic 2026’?”

The ice cream seller smiles a little.

“That’s a historical ice cream,” they say.

“That’s how ice cream used to be made... from real milk.”

“From cows?” Berta asks.

“Yes,” says Grandma.

“Cows only exist in zoos today,” the seller explains.

“A long time ago, there were many.

But then it became too hot.

There wasn’t enough water.

There were diseases.

And... too much CO₂.”

I look at my ice cream.

“And this one?” I ask.

“That’s a new recipe,” they say.

“No cows needed.”

Grandma orders three ice creams.

Of course, everything is paid digitally.

Money hasn’t existed for a long time.

I take a first bite.

...and it tastes really good.

Berta laughs.

Grandma laughs too.

And somehow, it doesn’t feel so hot anymore.

“You know,” Grandma says softly,

“a long time ago, ice cream was just... ice cream.”

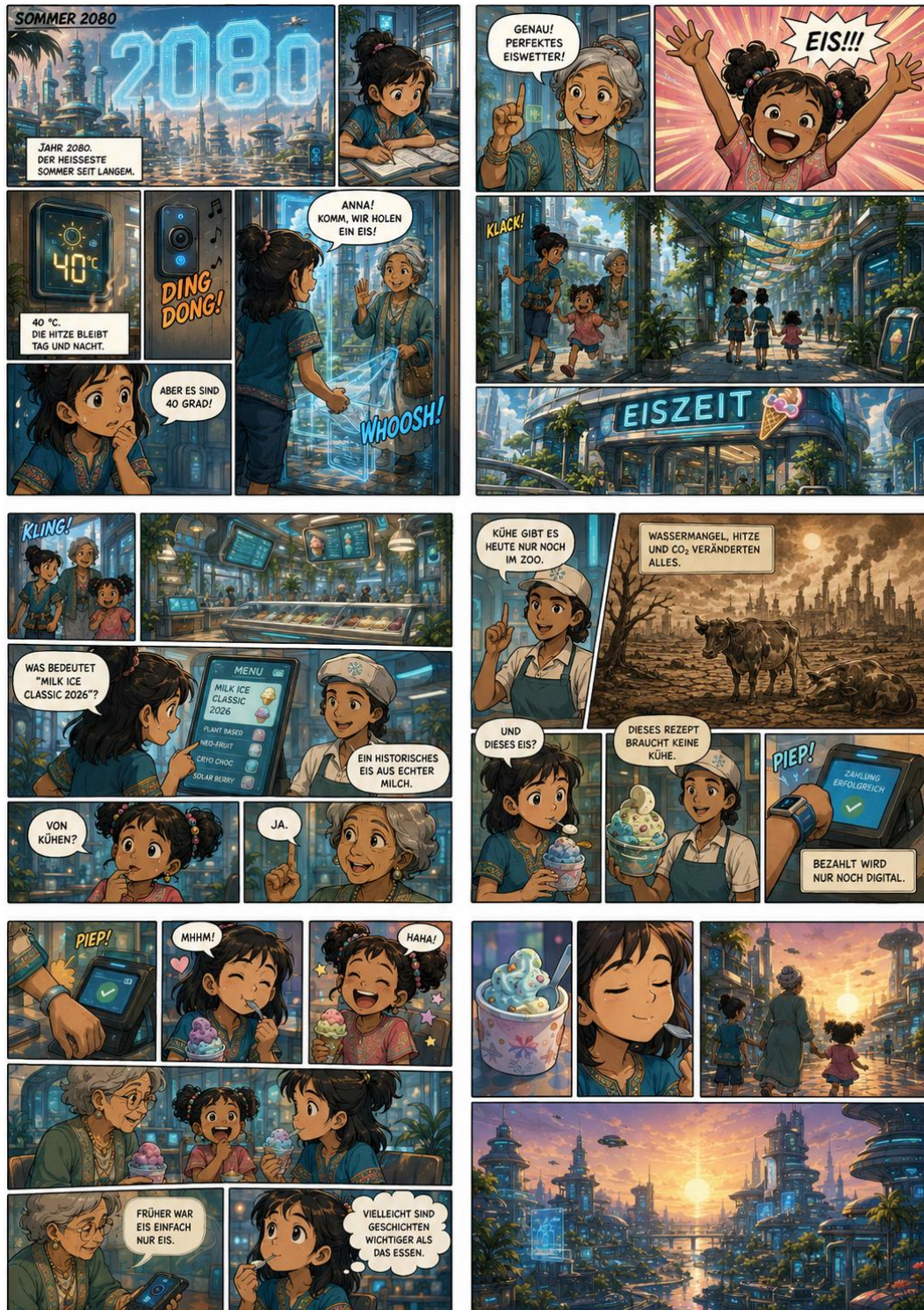
I nod.

And I think:

Maybe today, the stories are sometimes more important
than what we eat.

I take another bite of my ice cream.

The Comic



Maybe This Is the Right Answer

My name is Rana. I am 14 years old, in the 8th grade, and I live in Pakistan. It is the year 2126.

I am lying in bed, thinking about today's German class. It was a demanding day. We had to write an argumentative essay and were given two lessons for it. The topic was whether we should grow grain again on our meadows. It is a topic we often discuss at home. My father works at IndoorAgri, a company where grain is produced for all of Pakistan.

I turn onto my side and look out of the window. Where there once were fields, there are now beautiful wildflower meadows. It is quiet, and yet full of life. I imagine what it looks like during the day, how it sounds, how it hums. Many insects move from flower to flower. My grandmother says that many of them had disappeared in the past. Now they are back.

Far on the horizon, I can see small lights. They glow softly into the night. That is where my father works. It is one of the large IndoorAgri halls where the grain for our country is grown. He says it is the cleanest way to produce food. And when I look at the flowers, I believe him.

I close my eyes for a moment. Maybe it is good that we have learned to live differently. Maybe we have made space for something that had once been lost.

I think about my essay. I wonder if I wrote it correctly. In the main part, I tried to explain why I want things to stay the way they are. If we plough the meadows again, the flowers will disappear. And with them the animals that live there. If chemicals are spread on the fields again, the air and the water will be polluted, and maybe I will get sick. If we grow crops outside again, and heavy rain or drought returns like before, the harvest could fail, and we might not have enough food.

We are still living with the consequences of climate change that generations before us set in motion. Our scientists say that it may take another hundred years until the climate stabilizes again, around the year 2226.

I turn onto my back and look at the ceiling. I wrote my conclusion differently than I had planned at the beginning.

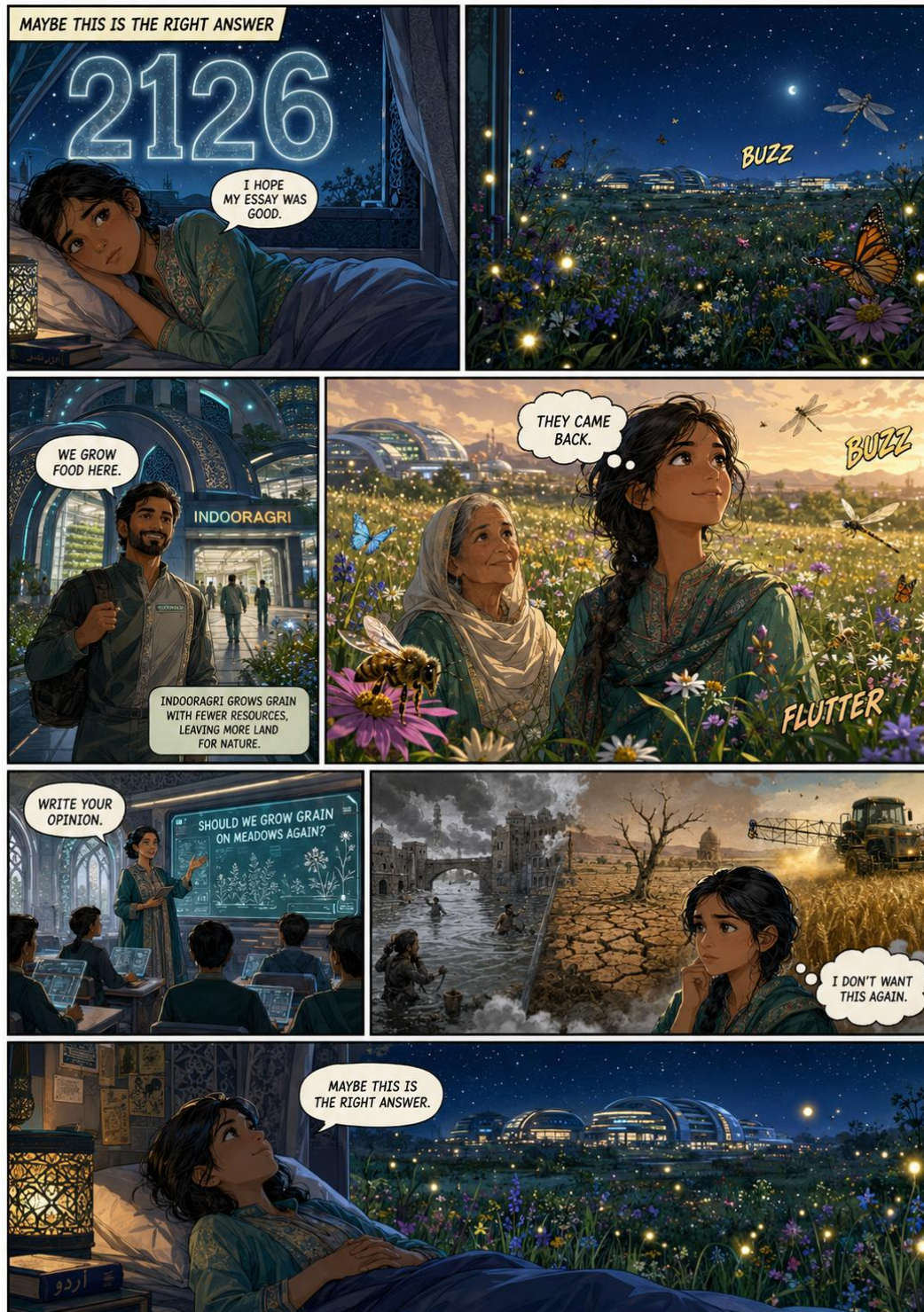
I wrote that I hope everything can remain as it is. IndoorAgri uses only as many resources as necessary, and if more children are born in Pakistan, we will simply build more halls.

And then I wrote something else. Something we are not really supposed to write, but I wanted to keep it.

I am proud of my father. He works so that we can have wildflower meadows again. Meadows that hum with life. Meadows that live.

I close my eyes and think: maybe this is the right answer.

The Comic



My Most Beautiful Birthday

My name is Lena, I am 11 years old, and today is my birthday.

The sun is shining through the big windows of our apartment, and around the table sit everyone: my great-grandparents, my grandparents, my parents, my older brother—he is two years older than me—and of course, me.

In the middle of the table stands the thing.
My birthday cake.

We have already cut it, and I am eating my first piece. Strawberry. Of course strawberry.

My mom makes the best strawberry cake in the world. No one else even comes close. The strawberries are fresh, the sponge is soft, and the cream tastes like summer.

While I chew, people are talking—about the world, as usual.

My great-grandfather clears his throat. He tells stories from the past. From the time when coal and nuclear power plants pushed the world into a climate crisis.

People knew, he says. They really knew. And still, so little happened.

There were protests. Demonstrations against nuclear power. Police taking people away just because they wanted the world to stay livable.

Wow, I think.

I can't imagine that at all.

Today, in the year 2086, everything is calm. The air is clear. The sky is blue. It feels normal—but it wasn't normal back then.

Now Grandma speaks.

She talks about the COVID pandemic. About how suddenly everything stopped. How people started to dream again.

Wind power. Solar energy. Hope.

"For a while, people truly believed everything would change," she says. But then governments, car manufacturers, and many others wanted things to stay the same.

I slide my plate a little closer.
To be honest, I would really like to open my presents now.
But I stay seated.

“Mom, could I have another piece?” I ask carefully.

She smiles and cuts me a second piece of strawberry cake.
I keep listening. And eating.

Now it’s Dad’s turn.
He talks about the time after the wars in Ukraine and Iran.
European countries wanted to become independent from oil and gas—
really independent.

It was an innovative time, he says.
Windows that produced electricity. Building facades that generated
energy. Road surfaces that created power.

Mom interrupts him—like she always does—and adds that since then,
CO₂ emissions have been negative.

“Obviously,” my brother says. “Every kid knows that.”

Then he looks at me.

“Can we talk about something else? It’s Lena’s birthday.”

Finally.

I gather my courage.

“Mom,” I ask, “when do I get my presents?”

Mom claps her hands.

“Oh yes, my sweetheart!”

We stand up and walk to the gift table. Mom has decorated it with
flowers. It looks like a little piece of art.

Everyone congratulates me, hugs me, kisses me.

I feel happy and safe and full.

I have a wonderful family.

Then I’m allowed to unwrap my gifts.

The colorful paper is self-adhesive. No annoying tape anymore.

The biggest present is from my grandparents.

I tear it open.

A Lego castle. With knights. With dragons.
Exactly the one I wished for.

And it's not made of plastic—but from some kind of new, plant-based material.

I don't really know how it works.

I'm only 11. I don't know much about chemistry.

From my parents I get a red bicycle. It shines beautifully.

From my brother I get the new book in my favorite series—about the Olichs, who once lived on a giant garbage dump.

Garbage dumps don't exist anymore.

Everything is recyclable or turns back into humus.

I don't understand that either—but I really hope my bicycle doesn't turn into soil.

Soon I'll ride through the city with my best friend Susi.

We have wide bike lanes everywhere and bike playgrounds.

Cars haven't been allowed in the city for a very long time. They stay outside.

The city belongs to us.

We only have to watch out for buses—but they drive on separate roads.

I love my city.

Suddenly I think of my great-grandparents again.

They look very old. Their hands shake a little.

I am so grateful they are still here.

They visit us every week and bring fruit.

And of course—strawberries.

This year they gave me clothes:

a colorful skirt with spring flowers, matching socks, a pink shirt, and a cool cap to protect my head from the sun.

The sun is strong today.

I get headaches easily. My doctor says it's some kind of allergy.

Since the air became so clean, many people are more sensitive to sunlight.

I don't mind.

I'm outside every day.

On streets that aren't streets anymore—but green paths, with meadows,
trees, and small streams.

The gray asphalt roads are gone.

"Lena," Dad calls, "come on! Let's try your bike!"

I quickly put on my new clothes.

Then I run outside, laughing.

It is the most beautiful birthday of my life.

The Comic



Torsten and the Book About the Forest

My name is Torsten. I am nine years old and I live in Berlin.
I am sitting on a bench at the playground with my best friend Tim. Tim is the same age as me. Today we don't feel like swinging. And we don't feel like playing football either.

Next to me lies a picture book that my dad gave me as a present.
A book about the forest.

I open it.
Big green pictures. Trees with so many leaves that you can hardly count them.

Tim leans closer.
"How many leaves do you think a tree like that had?" he asks.

I shrug. We think about it.
Because today, forests look very different from the ones in the book.

Then I remember a story.
A story my dad once told me.
And now I tell it to Tim.

"Many, many years ago," I say,
"the trees didn't feel like growing new leaves in spring anymore."

Tim frowns.
"Why not?" he asks.

"My dad said," I explain,
"that the air and the water had become too bad."

Tim doesn't say anything.
He just asks me to turn the page.

On the next page it says that every tree had its own smell.
Like fresh air.
Like joy of living.

Tim and I look at each other.

"What do our trees smell like?" I ask.

Tim sniffs the air.
"No idea," he says. "Our trees don't smell at all."

I nod.

"That's a pity," I say quietly. "I wish our trees could smell again."

We turn the page.

Now we see pictures of trees with red, round fruits.

"Cool," says Tim. "That must be fruit."

"Looks tasty," he adds after a moment.

"I wonder what it tastes like."

I think for a bit.

"No idea," I say. "Fruit doesn't grow on trees anymore."

Tim grins.

"I'd like to travel back in time," he says,

"and get two apples for us."

He asks me to turn the page again.

Now things get exciting.

The pictures show how a small brown thing turns into a big tree.

"That's called a seed," I read.

"If I understand it right," I say to Tim,

"the tree comes out of the seed. First one single leaf, and then it keeps growing."

"Like a magic tree," Tim says.

The text says that it takes a hundred years for a tree to be fully grown.

Tim points to the last picture.

"That tree is older than my grandpa," he says.

"And it's so green."

We turn the page again.

Now it gets difficult.

There are drawings explaining that the leaves and the tree can make air out of water and air.

I don't really understand it.

"Can you explain that to me?" I ask Tim.

He shrugs.

"Maybe there was some kind of air factory inside the tree," he says.

Then he points to the gray building next to the playground.

The fresh-air factory.

We turn the page again.

Now there are pictures of trees without leaves.

That was the time when the trees didn't feel like trying anymore.

On the last pages we see people building trees.

Trees like the ones at our playground.

They all look the same.

They don't smell.

They aren't green.

"Our trees are built by people," I say.

Tim nods.

We close the book.

It's quiet for a moment.

Then I ask,

"Do you want to play football?"

Tim stands up.

"Yeah," he says.

And we run off.

The Comic

