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That time when humans were frozen and the planet was burning

*An army of superheroes - A group of children
saves the planet*

Illustration:
Alexandra Christodoulou



This book is based on work from Cost Action ENEC – European Network for Environmental Citizenship (CA16229) supported by COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology).

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Funded by the Horizon 2020
Framework Programme
of the European Union



**European Network for
Environmental Citizenship**
Cost Action CA16229

Grant Holder Institution:



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Typeset: Pericles Timotheou

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Teleia Publishers (2021)

ISBN 978-9925-551-46-0

Teleia Publishers

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Nicosia, Cyprus.

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CHAPTER 1

The shoe thief strikes

It was an ordinary day like any other. The heat once again rose to an all-time high. The atmosphere was oppressive. The odor from all the garbage slithered in through the open windows. The piles of trash were so big that they had become one with the landscape. None of the methods of waste management seemed to be able to keep up with the speed with which people overconsumed. Rubbish kept multiplying; we lived in the era of the pandemic of waste, of overconsumption, of global warming... Sounds like a nightmare? Perhaps. But there is still hope. Or at least that's what I, and many others like me, think. You will learn about my and the others' identities when the time comes. Not a moment earlier, nor a minute later.

"I don't want to go to school today".

"Me neither".

"I'm so bored!"

"Just stop your whining. The school bus will be here in 5 minutes and you're still talking about it. It's Monday. A

school day. Go on your way now!” Grandad paused for a moment and then, while rubbing his hands together in satisfaction, added, “In fact, since you’ re so late, you’ll do so without breakfast”.

“And what about all these pancakes grandma made?”, yelled Alex, who loved the sweetest, most unhealthy stuff that existed in foods, while at the same time trying to stuff 2 crispy, syrupy pancakes into his mouth, and with his long curly hair ruffled from the sleep-storm of his dreams. That was because Alex, maybe even due to all the sweets he consumed, could never sleep peacefully. He fought against a myriad of waves, monsters, villains, and even heroes occasionally, since in his agitated sleep he sometimes confused them all.

“I will eat them all!” grandad replied with satisfaction and, of course, smiling like the Cheshire cat!

“I can’t find my shoes”, whined Jill. “Last night, I left them right here.” She turned a menacing look over to George, shaking her finger at him, “I hope you didn’t get up to anything, you little monster. You know very well that I need to wear them to the climate change protest march this afternoon. The planet is burning with fever. The icebergs are melting, and I don’t have any shoes to wear to participate in the protest. ***Without participation and action, there is no change.*** As you

can see, I already came up with my own slogan and it's awesome. So little brat, confess now, or you're in for it".

"I'm not in for anything", declared George, who always took everything literally. "Where are my shoes? I can't find them either", he added.

"But where have my football shoes gone?" Alex, too, screeched with his mouth full. "I hope those didn't go for reuse as well, Jill! You've overdone it with your whole "save the planet" attitude".

"They couldn't have gone anywhere. They are shoes. They can't go anywhere by themselves. They need feet to go somewhere. But for now, there are no shoes to be found, so we are not going to school today. I'm not sorry about that at all. But there goes the march, too. I am sorry about that. For two reasons: first, because the situation with climate change on the planet has taken a downhill, while temperatures are going uphill, and only if we act we will change things. I was considering covering the story in our town's newspaper, too. But unfortunately, someone kidnapped our shoes. And as far as I can see, they took every pair; the shoe rack is completely empty. The kidnapper hasn't left even a single shoe in sight", said George, only to add right after with great enthusiasm for solving the mystery, "And as you can imagine, without shoes there is no action, and

with no action, life will be difficult. I'm thinking whether someone wants to destroy the march, Jill..."

"Yeah, right, as if! Let's see what else you will come up with for you to avoid going to school! As for the march, don't even think about it; we are going even if we do it barefoot. You know as well as I do that we must fight for what we love. ***Each of us individually as well as collectively.*** The rulers of our city are at the city hall. They will see that we care about our city, we care about our planet...The nearby woods that burned down in the summer from the huge fires need to turn green again! Not become residential plots and malls... The trees help to control the increase of the earth's temperature... This is how the endangered species will be saved... The polar bears, our own animals living in the woods, in the mountains, in the lakes, in the sea... All the officials will be gathered at the town hall, and we cannot let them wipe out our last remaining forest to build, as they say, shops and cafés. Overconsumption is at an all-time high, and we think that we can help save the polar bears with a few donations".

Ah, yes, bears were grandpa's weakness, especially the polar ones.

He then began feverishly searching every corner of the children's bedroom. After thoroughly investigating,

he moved on to the living room...and the kitchen... the hallway...and the balcony. He didn't manage to find even one shoe. Even his gardening boots were missing. Grandma's flip-flops. Mum's – who was away on a business trip for weeks now to the other side of the Atlantic – high heels. Grandpa and Jill, the “green team” of the family, kept saying that with such a long-distance plane trip, mum was contributing to the planet's overheating. When she returns, she would need to travel by bicycle, on foot, and the subway for at least a year! To decrease her carbon footprint. Dad's shoes were long gone anyway. They had all “gone” with dad that night when it rained tears and thundered hurtful words.

They went out on the balcony. Utter desolation. Besides shoes, people had disappeared now, too. Surely just from the neighborhood. From the city? From the country? The planet? Just another problem for the planet. As if all the rubbish filling the planet, the air pollution that is suffocating it, and the biodiversity that is becoming extinct weren't enough, now shoes and people had gone missing so that the few that are left (five in total based on our data so far) can neither take action, nor properly live? Was it a global conspiracy, perhaps? To shut us all in our homes and not care about anything other than household matters? To stop meeting up with people?

Not rally together? Not protest? Something stinks around here. A lot!

They got on the internet. Panic. All the shoes were gone! But all? Everything! From everywhere? Everywhere! Forever? We do not know that. All we know for certain is that, at that moment, George closed his eyes stubbornly and promised himself that he would find the shoe thief and would make him pay. He would make him wash them. Polish them. Sing them to sleep. Soothe them. The poor things must have been so worried. And then? Then, he would return the shoes to their owners to continue living, participating and acting!

For now, they all decided to eat their pancakes and then come up with a plan. Because only with having a well-thought plan can someone detect a shoe thief, take his life back, and save the burning planet. As we've said, we had a protest march to organize and a planet to save.

CHAPTER 2

A thief of ideas strikes

“I wanted to do something, but what?”

“I was thinking about cooking lunch, but...”

“I’d draw, but all the colors and images have disappeared from my mind”.

“I say...”

A big pause. The three children looked at one another perplexed. Dad kept looking back and forth between them and the vegetables laid on the kitchen counter with his mouth wide open.

“I have no idea what I wanted to say”, said Tina.

“My idea for lunch just slipped my mind! I have here all the ingredients but no idea what I can make with them. Tomatoes, potatoes, minced meat, eggs. Nothing. “Nil”, cried Dad desperately. And he wasn’t just any dad. He was a great super chef. He was someone who could make the most wonderful, most stunning dishes, almost out of nothing. Now, he had at his disposal 4 fantastic ingredients, and he was staring at them as if he had never seen them before in his life.





He was gazing at them while mumbling under his breath and scratching his head, “Things aren’t going too well, not well at all”.

Now Tina, there was nothing for us to worry about her. Half the time she would come up and say that there was something she needed to do but could not remember what exactly. Because Tina, like all teenagers, was the most super careless and lazy teenager in the world. She would always wander around with those earbuds in her ears, doing nothing. She didn’t care about anything. The planet was burning, and she was still none the wiser. No thoughts about organization and participation. Only shopping and merriment.

Most concerning yet, even more so than the matter with Dad, was Costas. The only thing Costas ever did was draw. He would draw picture-perfect images with wonderful colors in no time at all. Images that no one had ever made before him. And he would paint them with colors that have never been seen before. Too far-fetched? Think again! Everything I say is completely true. Little aliens with earthly underwear. Dinosaurs that just got out of the hair salon. Fairies with blue hair and yellow eyes playing football on a bright red football field. Fish building castles on the pale blue sand and golden waves crushing them. A green planet, without any threat

to its existence and no extreme weather conditions. Like I said, totally fantastical concepts.

So, Costas saying that all the images have vanished from his mind was extremely outrageous. Entirely unacceptable. Completely impossible and definitely concerning. Without ideas, pictures, colours, you can't do anything. You can't change anything!

"Hello? An ambulance for three people, please. Yes, it's quite urgent. At 28, Charles Darwin Street. The house with the green door. Yes, the one with the red dots, the green garden, and the large bougainvillea. I'm telling you, it's an emergency. Nothing could be more urgent than this. Oh, you had other calls, too? Some people lost their shoes, and there are bloody tracks on the road because they were walking barefoot and stepped on thorns? How can this even compare, madam? I will tell you right away what makes our own incident so extremely urgent. Tina, okay; she just has no clue what she wanted to say. I find that relatively manageable. With an x-ray exam to rule out the possibility of a brain injury from the deafening music she listens, we will handle it. This does not worry me because even if she knew what she wanted to say, she would not say so, or if she did, it wouldn't be anything worthwhile.

What does worry me is Dad. A great cook: when you

try his handmade yiouvarlakia, a traditional Greek dish of meatball soup with rice, meat-stuffed vine leaves, and meatballs, you'll be licking your fingers for at least a week just from the memory of its taste. So, what's the matter? He has no idea what to cook and keeps staring bewildered at the ingredients on the kitchen counter. He may need to be intubated. Yes, it's that serious. But the worst yet case is Costas. He lost all images and all colours. I truly believe that Costas, with his pictures and colours, would one day save the planet, even from climate change. Because he has imagination and is a problem-solver. An absolute catastrophe, yes, I agree. Come on. Come quickly. Me? Oh, I'm fine. I wanted to do something. But I have no idea what. Don't worry about me. I can hold out until you arrive. My name? Robin. Surname? Hood. Yes, like the Robin Hood. My mission? To save my woodland and all the woods that were burned from the huge fires in the summer!"

He hung up the phone and sat on a chair. He deeply loved his woodland. It was so close to the city. He spent all his free time there. The weekends, the summer holidays... He listened to the birds singing, laid down on the ground and stared at the trees, observed the ants, the spiders as they wove their web... So many extraordinary things, so close to the city... He was trying to think what

he meant to do. An idea had been floating around in his mind. It was a brilliant idea, but now it was all gone. He was so sad. Thoroughly in despair. If only someone would remind him that the idea he had forgotten was about going to the afternoon protest march dressed in his Robin-Hood costume and speaking passionately with well-supported arguments for his beloved woods.

In the end, the ambulance arrived, and they all ended up in the hospital. All four of them in one room. Oh, joy! They kept looking at the walls and then at one another without talking. It was as if they had also lost the words; those, too, became extinct species.

Suddenly, five other people came into the room. Without shoes. With bare feet. They left bloody footprints everywhere. Yes, you got it right; they were the ones who had been walking barefoot on thorns.

Those five had ideas, but they had no shoes. The other four had shoes, but they had no ideas. Should they combine their strengths together?

CHAPTER 3

A thief of dreams strikes

He had no idea what was going on. He woke up startlingly. His heart was broken. For no reason at all. He put on his floral shirt. His favourite. The one that after multiple washings and dryings had lost its bright colour. The light blue one, like the colour of a cloudless spring sky. With little bright red smiling hearts on it.

Childish? Maybe so for a man of his age: over eighty. But with a child's heart, his mother always used to say. He lost her a decade ago. It seems like longevity was in their genes. Just before she passed away, they looked to be the same age. She at ninety and him at seventy.

She closed her eyes as he was reading to her the last line of the fairytale, the "they lived happily ever after". She did not open them again the next morning. The mouth that once had told him thousands of sweet words throughout his life, had then been etched with a permanent and warm smile.

"Goodbye, mum", he told her and mourned her. Along

with Plato and Blackie: his beloved dog-philosopher and her darling female black cat. He was wearing his favourite shirt on that day, too. She had bought it for him on his birthday. His 60th.

“Isn’t it a bit youthful, mum?” he told her just so he could get the validation he sought since he had already loved the shirt.

“Son, there are some people are youthful even as grownups, and some others who are born old! When I saw this, I said to myself: this is for Theodore! I knew you were going to love it!”

Since then, he wore it every time he felt like his heart was broken. Which was very rare. Today was one such day. He didn’t know why. A bad feeling was hovering over him. A feeling that became a lot heavier when he called Blackie and she didn’t respond with her usual melodious meow. That feeling then became a certainty thing when Plato didn’t race over to devour in a heartbeat his delicious, canned food from the plate he had prepared for him.

He opened the door that led out into the back yard and began searching for them.

“Blackie... Blackie... Where are you, my little Blackie... Blackie? Don’t you hear me calling you, my pretty. Come on, my girl. Come and I have prepared for you your

favourite treats for breakfast. Herring and black olives. The herring is for you and the olives for me. Blackie? Blackie? Where in the world have you disappeared to? Bloody hell! Don't scare me, I have a heart condition!"

Nothing. Nil. No response from Blackie. And Theodore's heart felt like it dropped from the base floor down to the second basement.

So, he started yelling for Plato. The goodhearted Labrador that guarded them, or so to speak, from any threat. From any invasion of their personal space. Theodore had also put up a sign at the entrance of the old house that said: "Beware of dog!" Bad choice of words. Both the "beware" and the "dog". Plato looked more like a cuddly kitten since he always begged the rare visitors for petting.

But Plato was missing as well.

Where had the both of them gone. "Something is going on," he thought, with his heart now fallen in despair. That bad feeling had become a certainty. That day did not bode well.

He found them in the end. Curled up and whimpering inside the big, old olive tree's hollow.

"What's wrong, my Blackie? Why are you crying, my Plato? My heart is down in the dumps today too and I don't know why. Make some room for me to hide in the

tree's hollow as well. I feel my heart being sorrowful and frozen. Something is missing. I can't smile. Your eyes have lost their sparkle, too. What's happened here?"

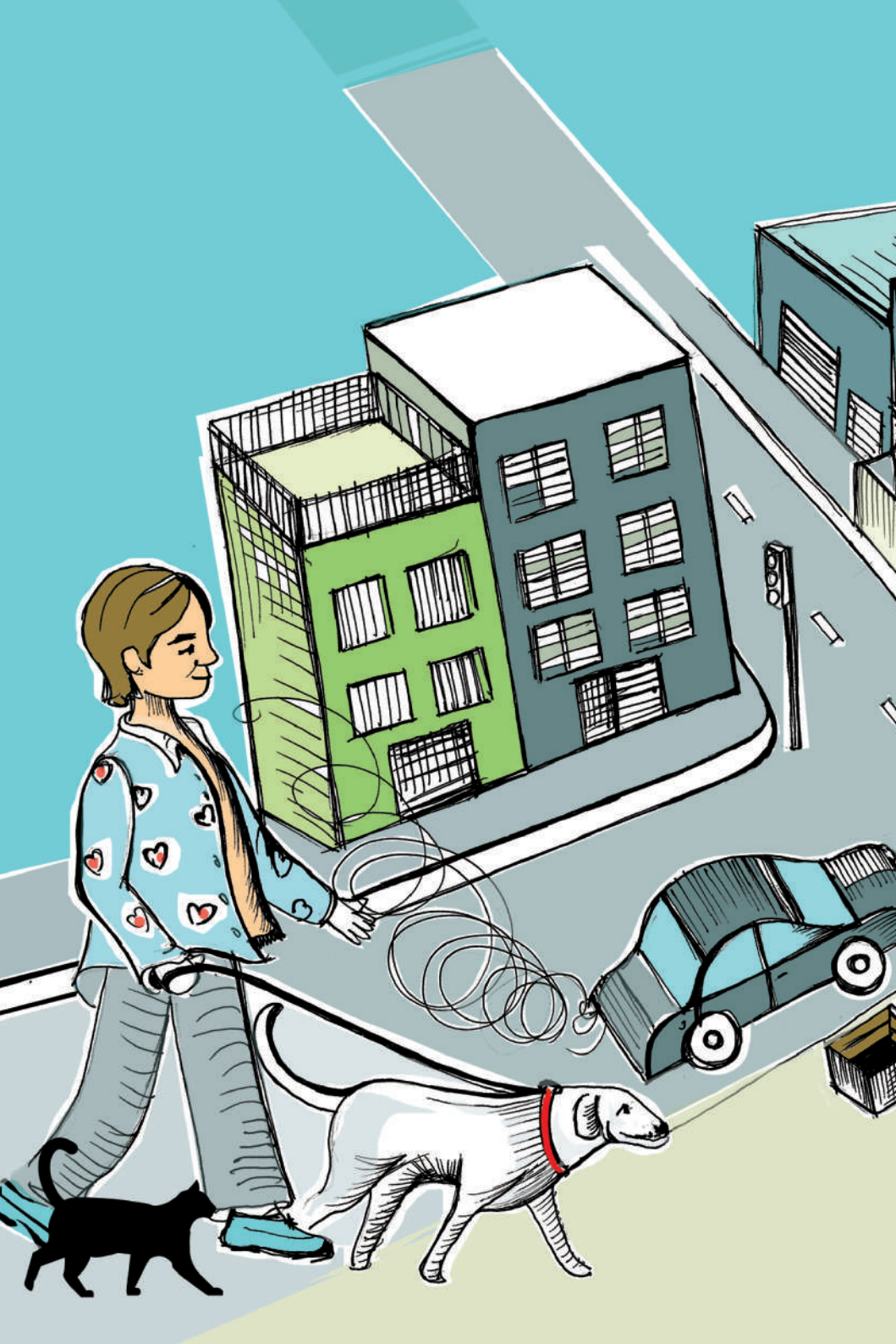
He squeezed inside the hollow of the tree and hugged them, taking comfort from the steady beat of their hearts. They slept and then woke up. No change. They fell asleep and woke up again. Nothing. On the third time round of coming in and out of sleep, they got it. And they realized it all three of them at the same time:

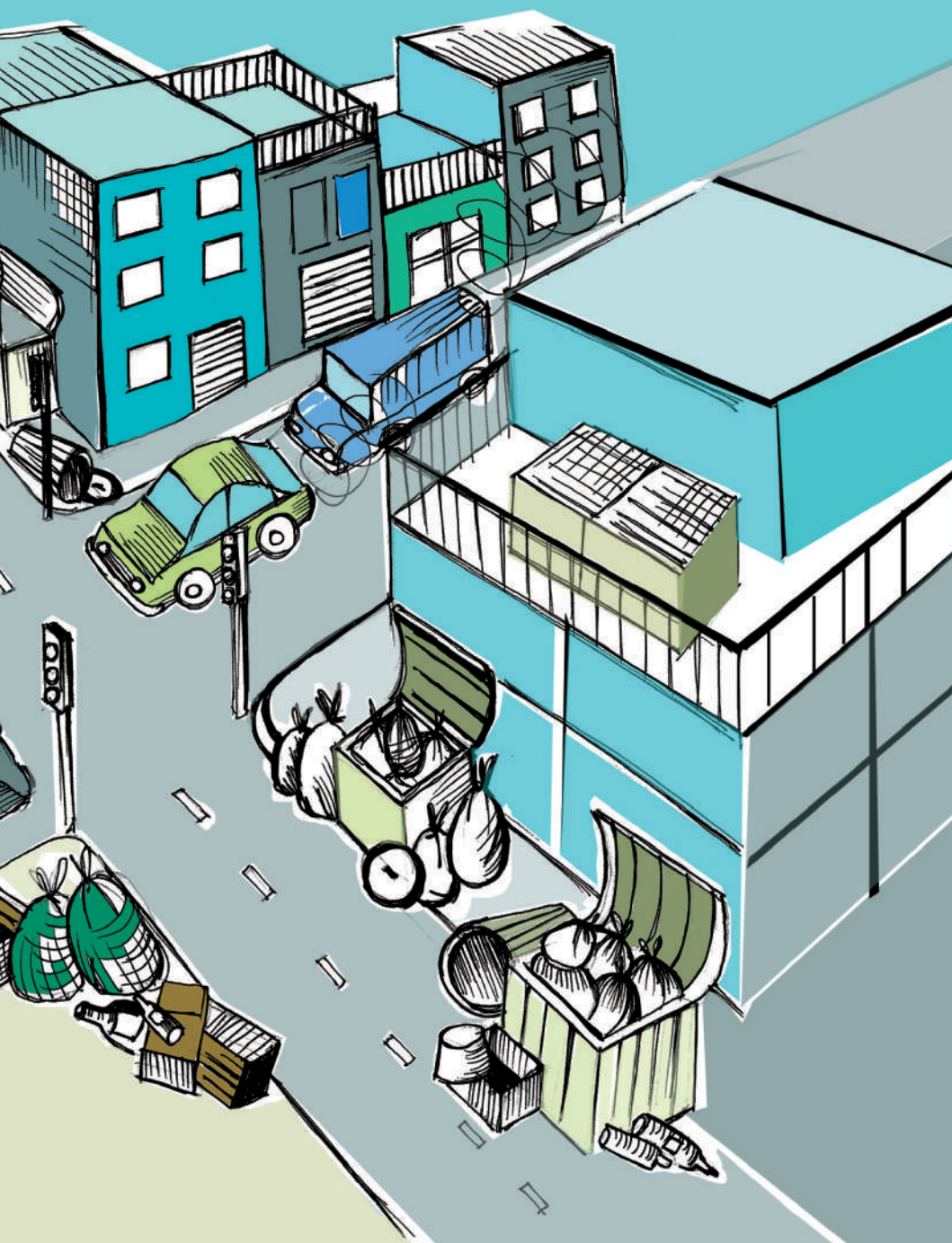
"Meow, meow, meooww" cried Blackie.

"Woouoooofff" howled angrily Plato.

"I can't dream! Someone stole my dreams!" yelled Theodore.

Horried, they ran in the streets trying to find their dreams. Those that were stolen from them. They couldn't find them anywhere. The streets were empty. Not a single soul was around. All the garbage was having a party. The concrete had suffocated every trace of green. The burned forest on the edge of the city was protesting, but without any people, that it wanted to live so that it could keep giving life. There were only cars, their engines running and unmoving in endless lines emitting black smoke and oppressing, even more, the atmosphere. Maybe their dreams had hidden behind the fumes. Those same fumes that darkened the planet's dreams of better





days to come. Days without melting icebergs and rising sea levels. Without desperate environmental refugees chased by climate change, seeking new homelands in a world that is burning. Theodore is left without dreams, as is Blackie and Plato, and our planet is left without even a single dream alive.

They, too, ended up in the hospital. You see, it was the only building with light inside the darkness of the air pollution and the feeling of despair that was suffocating them. Ten people and two animals were the total count. On a hospital's fifth floor. In an empty state. With three thieves going around freely. A shoe thief... an ideas thief...and a dreams thief. A strange gang. People were missing, and the ones left were didn't have the resources. They needed to do something. But what could they do without shoes, dreams, and ideas? How could they think, how could they dream, how could they act? Nothing can be changed without thought, dreams, and action. **Individual and collective action.** Any ideas?

CHAPTER 4

Where did everyone go?

The question that was running through the minds of all ten was the same one. Where did everyone go? The streets were empty. The planet was burning. It was as if someone had triggered the climate change and it was accelerating faster than anticipated. The temperature was rising. At the poles, the icebergs were melting more and more rapidly; they could almost hear the sea level rising. The air pollution was stretching its tentacles everywhere. And here, there was drought, fires, and light drizzle. At the equator, the complete opposite of that: extreme weather conditions with hurricanes, storms, and devastating floods. The scene looked like out of a horror movie. How they knew. Google Earth and its satellite pictures left no doubt of the situation's severity.

The dawn found them in an empty hospital. No doctors. No nurses. The ambulance was left without its driver.

The five of them without shoes, the four without ideas, and the one (plus two) without dreams decided

to unite their powers. Those who had no shoes had dreams and ideas, those with no ideas had dreams and shoes, and the one with no dreams had ideas and shoes! They would complete one another. They would combine their strengths and come up with solutions. They had to recover all the people, the shoes, the ideas, and dreams, and along with all these, they might also manage to save planet earth from climate change.

They took to the streets searching for their neighbors, friends, teachers, policemen, bank clerks, the baker Mr. Andrew, the pharmacist Mr. John, Mary the hairstylist, Georgia who had the flower shop around the corner...

“Nobody” and “nowhere” were the answers they gave each other when they met up again at noon under the clock in the church’s courtyard:

“Everyone is missing,” said together Grandpa and Grandma. They hadn’t split up. Their feet were bloody. They went to the nursing home on the other side of the city. All their friends were gone. The television was on. The music was blaring. The ingredients for their meal were on the kitchen counter. The coffee maker was filled with steaming hot coffee and the tea that had already been served in the dining room had gone cold for a while now. A game of backgammon was spread on the table half-finished...

“Daniel would never leave unfinished a game of

backgammon. Especially if he was winning. And he was! Something serious is going on. I am really worried now,” said Grandpa with fear in his eyes.

“Alexandra would never leave her knitting on the rocking chair in the garden. Something certainly happened. Something strange”, said Grandma, without restraining her sobs.

“I passed by my favourite confectionary shop. Where people lined down the street [to get inside]. The most excellent, wonderful, fantastic sweets. Nobody! The only good thing was that I gorged myself”, said Alex. His T-shirt was stained with strawberry ice cream. His bare feet carried traces of chocolate.

“I was with him”, said Costas. “I didn’t detect anything either. Peaked into the store of paints and colours. Everyone was gone. I have to say that I took a painting pad and a box of crayons. I left a note, Dad, that we would pay the first chance we got. I can’t draw but I’m hoping that I will soon get back the ideas I have lost!”

They decided together to move in pairs. Better safe than sorry.

The next dyad consisted of Jill and Tina. The duo of disaster, I’d say. Two teenagers, each living in their own world, was a recipe for disaster; if they figure it out, I’ll eat my hat...

“We passed by the new department store with the

clothes and music albums. All the shoes were missing. As for customers, not a single soul or fly on the wall. The personnel was gone too. I mean, things were out of hand. There weren't any dogs there either. If things go on like this, they will close down all the shops. But not even a single pair of shoes in sight?" whined Tina because the pedicure she had done on her feet last week had been destroyed, too.

"I'd like to say something now, but I have no idea what. However, I definitely confirm what Jill said. We did not see even a soul. I had an idea on the way back about where everyone could have gone, but when I tried to form my thought into words, I forgot it", said Tina and turned her music back on. Jill reminded her how to do this again. Thankfully, otherwise, she would have gone mad if, besides her ideas, she had lost her music too.

"We passed through all the parks. Through every gym. We went inside all the indoor playgrounds. We investigated all the schools. No child. No adult. No teacher. No principle. At first, I had no idea where to search. George gave me this idea, but I must say that, afterward, we didn't really manage to communicate very well. I was telling him to search up above, meaning the top floor, and he was looking up at the sky! I told him, "You'll eat dirt, since you're not doing much", and he told

me that he never eats dirt. I asked him to lend me a hand in the search and he replied that he had no extra hands to spare, only one right and one left hand. My ears are bleeding from listening to you, I told him desperately, and he suggested I visit Dr. Paul the otolaryngologist.

We did pass by, but he was missing, too. In the beginning, I got frustrated with him, but later I enjoyed myself. We became best friends, attached at the hip! He's a cool type. Alright, alright, we aren't really attached at the hip. Don't worry, and yes, I know, you're far from a mathematical type!" said Robin and burst out laughing. George was looking at him puzzled, as he had no idea what he was saying.

"I did not see, hear, or touch anyone. It seems like everyone is gone," said George.

"He's right, everyone is missing from everywhere", added Robin.

"They aren't gone from everywhere. They are gone from the gyms, the parks, the schools, and the playgrounds. We didn't go everywhere. We don't know if they are gone from everywhere", George squealed in distress.

They all turned hopefully toward the last two-legged pair. Chef-dad and Theodore. They passed by every restaurant, every library. They searched in





every bookshop. They found books. They found well-done dishes that had gone cold waiting to be eaten and delicious salads that had lost their freshness. No customer was eating at the restaurants. No cook was cooking. No librarian was lending books. No bookworm was reading. The idea was Theodore's, of course, since Chef-dad had been left with no ideas. The only good thing that had come out of their search?

"A stolen book of recipes. I know it wasn't right, but I'll return it as soon as I remember my own ideas. I promise!" said Chef-dad, flushed in shame.

"And a chest full of books for me! I need them for the nights. Now that I've lost my dreams, the only thing left for me is the dreams hidden away inside books!" said Theodore, and his face glowed with enthusiasm and his eyes were full of relief.

"So, no results then?" asked Robin, only to be interrupted by barking and whimpers of protest from Blackie and Plato.

"What is it they want to tell us now?" wondered Robin.

"I have an idea!" said Theodore.

"Well, it's fortunate you have an idea because we are all out!" Costas said in frustration.

"I have here a dictionary for cats and dogs and a

method of learning pets' language without any teaching assistance! Give me some time and by early evening I'll have a translation ready."

They gave him as much time as he wanted. They had no other choice anyway. So, they waited until nightfall. Then, just as the moon came out for its night-time walk, out came a white smoke, as well, from the church's chimney, inside which they had been shut so that Blackie, Plato, and Theodore wouldn't be bothered.

"Meow, meow, meow, woof, woof, meow. Meow! Woof!"

Translation: "We found tracks and scents. Follow us and we'll lead you to the lost people!" said Theodore and added, "Along with the people that were lost we will also find the solution for the Earth that is on fire!"

"Tomorrow morning then, at dawn", said Grandpa and Grandma, not taking no for an answer.

They put everyone to sleep with the story Theodore read them, a story full of dreams and ideas. His story was about someone, somewhere, some time, who wanted to change the world. Apparently, he melted seven pairs of shoes. He walked uphill and arduous roads, but he made it...

CHAPTER 5

Shall we go for a walk to where everyone has gone?

They woke up at daybreak. The first rays of sunlight, scalding, almost unbearable – like we said, the planet was burning – woke up one after the other.

The first ones awake were the team of *Barefoot*. Probably because their feet were cold!

Next in line was the team that had their dreams stolen from them, the *Bereft* (of dreams), this is how we'll call them from today on, since whoever doesn't dream, they don't really want sleep either, and...

Last woke up the *Clueless* team (the ones without even a single idea) since, when you have no ideas, you sleep all constantly. Even standing up!

And the mission began. Blackie and Plato took the lead, of course. They went up hills and came down hillsides. They walked alongside rivers and crossed bridges. They spied the sea from a distance and waved to boats that were travelling without boatmen towards the unknown on a wing and a prayer. They passed through vast

rubbish dumps. Burnt out woods from fires and forests that looked damaged from acid rain. They saw animals and birds abandoning their natural habitats. Dried fields from the drought. They saw the desertification with their own eyes. The charred ground from all the fires. The erosion that dug deep creases on the face of the earth. They were breathing harder and harder because of the air pollution, and they felt the rivers of sweat sliding down their bodies, the temperature rising more and more. It was as if climate change was determined to turn things upside down in the blink of an eye. They had to stop climate change and find the “lost” people.

All of a sudden, they came up a stone wall. A huge mountain. From its top came out...smoke?

“Is that smoke?” asked Robin who was the last of the procession to arrive.

“Definitely smoke” said Grandpa, employing his eagle eye and excellent sense of smell which could detect the most cleverly hidden and prohibited, always by Grandma who was supposedly looking after his health, sweets in the cellar.

“What is that smoke doing on top of the largest mountain?” asked Tina, who, of course, had no idea what that smoke was doing on top of the mountain.

“It’s smoke, it doesn’t do anything!” replied George





with his mathematical logic and the fixation he had from birth with being literal.

The Bereft (of dreams) and with footwear (shoes), Theodore, replied simultaneously with Blackie, who meowed, and Plato, who barked the answer.

“Smoke signifies people who are trying to warm up.”

“We are burning up and they are trying to get warm. Something is not right. It seems like we’ve found the **lost ones**,” said Robin.

“Well, we can’t say we found them exactly because we are at least 200, almost sheer, metres of hard and slippery rock from whatever it is that lit up the fire,” said George.

Jill smiled at him, not only to put him at ease as she was familiar with literalism, but also because she liked George. Grandma saw the smile and her doughy heart filled with nostalgia. She remembered her first meeting with Grandpa and blushed. Grandpa, who as we’ve said nothing escapes his eagle eye, saw her and pinched her cheek, giving her a kiss on the forehead to make her blush even more.

Costas saw the redness and remembered it.

“Red for love,” he thought, “Red for shame,” “Red for blood and destruction,” and because, as we’ve said, he drew colours that did not exist on unique pictures, he

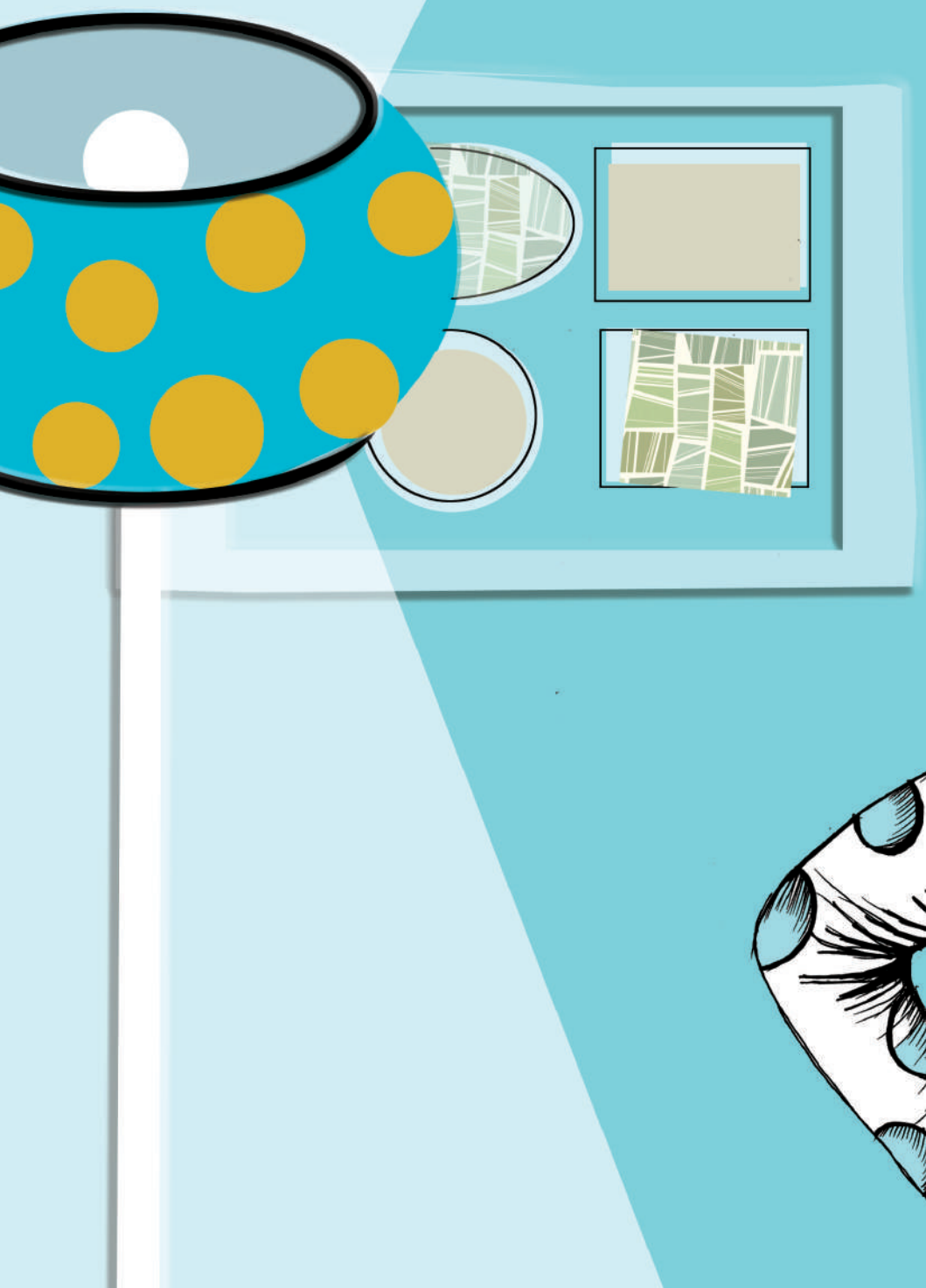
sat down on the nearest rock and took out his painting pad from his backpack, and, with his crayons, he drew in a flash a bright red sea. A sea that was on fire. Exactly like how the planet was literally being burned. He smiled in satisfaction, and he gave his drawing to George, who of course was infuriated since nothing literal was portrayed, though out of courtesy he told him:

“Bravo! Outstanding!” He took it with the tips of his fingers as if he was afraid of getting infected from the burst of imagination and metaphor hidden in Costas’ drawing.

Plato and Blackie took to climbing the rocky wall, their barks and meows giving the starting signal for the difficult and strenuous ascent that was awaiting them.

The barefooted were in the worst situation. Without shoes. On the rocks and thorns. So, Robin found an idea from the quiver of a few ideas that he had left. “Solidarity,” he thought and took off his shoes. He lent them to Jill. They would share them and help each other on the climb. Costas, who paired up with George, followed his example. The ultimate representation of Imagination was walking hand in hand with the ultimate obsession with Literalism. Where this would lead, no one could predict.

Tina finally took out her earbuds from her ears and





called to Alex. She gave him her white fabric shoes no matter that his bare feet were bloody from the thorns. He was so doughy and sweet, like all the sweets he devoured, that she wanted to help him.

Chef-dad, as a true knight, with a slight bow handed over his shoes to Grandma. He would stay barefoot he said. He and Grandpa were men and would endure it. Grandma, in order to return the favour, walked for hours beside them, whispering old recipes in their ears. She was attempting to stir a memory and give him back the cooking ideas he had lost.

They climbed and talked. They talked and climbed.

The night arrived. The summit was nearby. But they decided to wait for the morning. Theodore read them from the volume of 100 classic tales the 63rd. The one about the sleeping beauty. Sleepy goodnights were heard mixed with purring, barking, yawns and Grandpa's snoring, who had been the first to fall asleep. "Leave the important things for tomorrow", thought Theodore and closed his eyes.

CHAPTER 6

So, this is where everyone has gone!

And the new day dawned. Once again, the Barefoot woke up first. Then the Bereft... and last, the Clueless. However, they hadn't slept like the previous night, neatly arranged in their groups. Jill's bare feet had tangled with Robin's idea-less brain and George's unbearable literalism with Costas' vivid imagination. Tina was holding tightly onto Alex's plump little hand, which was sticky from all the sweets he wolfed down at regular intervals. Yes, even in his sleep. Grandpa with his eagle eye and Grandma with her doughy heart had, once more, fallen asleep holding each other, while Chef-dad ended up face-down inside Theodore's books. Theodore? He woke up before anyone else. He got his dose of the morning fairytale, which that particular morning was especially eye-opening and hopeful, and moved on to tracing the surrounding area. He tracked absolutely nothing. He only saw the deforestation from a bird's eye view. Greenery now could be seen only in dribs and drabs. It was decreasing

day by day, or worse, hour by hour. The destruction was continuing, and they had to do something to stop it.

Not much in the mood and almost with no talking, they set out. Blackie and Plato were showing them the way. They followed silently. Something was telling them that it was vital not to make any noise at all.

Plato with his faultless sense of smell, located the entrance of a cave that Grandpa's eagle eye couldn't pinpoint as much as he tried.

Theodore let Blackie enter first. Her feline gait would not give her away and they would be able to gather some clues before the whole group dared to enter the cave.

She did not return. The five minutes passed one after another, but Blackie was vanished. Plato's anxiety was mounting since Blackie was the cat of his heart. He was ready for a clamoring charge when Theodore gave the signal to enter.

They went inside. They looked and...“froze”. Metaphorically. Because others were literally frozen. Despite the large fire at the centre of the cave, hence the smoke the frozen ones had seen, they remained frozen. Literally and metaphorically. Unmoving and mute. With eyes staring into space.

“It can't be, I'm dreaming!” said Grandad and pinched himself.

“Everyone is here!” said Costas.

“We don’t know yet! We didn’t count them,” George corrected.

“I’m seeing everyone!” said Grandma, “the neighbors, the friends, the teachers, the policemen, the bank clerks, the baker Mr. Andrew, the pharmacist Mr. John, Mary the hairstylist, Giorgia who has the flower shop around the corner...”.

“There’s Daniel! There, in the corner”, yelled Grandpa. “Daniel! Hey, Daniel!” called. He approached him and nudged him. Gently because he seemed to be covered in a thin layer of ice. As if he was put inside the freezer and Grandpa was worried that he would crack and shatter into pieces any minute now.

“Alexandra? Is that you?” said Grandma to her friend only for her not receive any reply either.

They hugged each other and started crying. Gradually, everyone was moved to tears. No one knew what to say, nor what to do. They walked among the Frozen Ones with their hearts full of pain and apprehension. They were alive. They could almost see their hearts beating and their eyes seeing. But they did not react to anything. They talked to them. They screamed at them. They pleaded with them. They threatened them. NOTHING.

Desperate, they sat in the centre of the cave. They





didn't speak, they were thinking. Well, at least everyone besides the Clueless. They were trying to figure things out. Night came upon them and then the morning.

Nothing.

It got dark and then light again.

Again nothing.

On the third morning, they got up and decided to take action. They knew that they had to find the edge of the thread to unravel the mystery.

"I totally have an idea for the who or better yet whos!" proclaimed with confidence Jill.

"I agree with Jill", Robin rushed to declare.

"She didn't make her point yet, how can you agree?" asked George who could see that something was going on between them and was jealous.

He was certain, he felt it deep in his heart in a strange way every time they would look at each other. Up until a few days ago, Jill looked at only him, with her eyes radiating sparks that were trapped in her dimples. Naturally, he didn't think this description in such a way either. I put it there, so you'd have a better understanding. George was jealous. Period. And he was right. I, the all-knowing narrator, confirm it.

"We've already discussed it and I know", Robin rushed to explain himself, with his face flushed from shame.

Costas nudged George and showed him what he had drawn on his pad! A Robin looking like the Robin Hood – without the woods and tights, he had kept only the cap. He looked exactly like him but older, more glowing, stronger... and red-faced, in the exact same colour his face was right at that moment. And a Jill holding him by the hand looking him in the eyes. All around there were blue butterflies and green poppies. Jill eyes were red as well, and her hair were purple with lime green highlights. But it was still them! Obviously. He would give it to them, as a gift, he whispered to him, to put it above their bed when they got married!

Right away, George like a bull in a china shop, popped up and left yelling that he would not allow this wedding!

“This wedding will never happen. Not today, not tomorrow, not the day after tomorrow, and since today is Monday, not Thursday, not Friday and no need to go farther, not even in 10 years!”

“Who’s getting married with whom?” asked Grandpa.

Grandma with her doughy heart started daydreaming of wedding receptions already, and Alex gazed sweetly at Tina. She might be 8 years apart, because she was 16 and he was 8 years old, but what’s 8 years compared to an eternity. Tina looked at him questioningly and thought that the fluttering of his eyelashes and the wink he gave

her was a signal for one more treat and she gave him a lollypop right away. Naturally, for Alex this was the fulfillment of his dreams.

“The who is definitely the Shoe Thief, the Dreams Thief, and the Ideas Thief!”, Jill continued from where she had left off since, while attempting to organize her thoughts, she hadn’t realized what transpired around her.

“They are trying to stop us from thinking, they stole our ideas. They’re trying to stop us from dreaming. Without dreams we can’t change things. Without dreams that become plans the world doesn’t change, and gradually the hope gets extinguished, and you give up, and then? Then there will be no salvation coming either for the planet, or for humans. Climate change will become a torrent and nothing and no one will be stopping it. They have also stolen our shoes to stop us from walking, from taking action, from protesting.”

“That is why they froze. They don’t think. They don’t dream. They don’t go forward. Frozen and unmoving. They aren’t active citizens anymore. They aren’t **Environmental Citizens**. They don’t think critically. They don’t plan. They don’t act. They can’t do anything with their lives and the planet. They have been turned into pawns in the three thieves’ hands!” Robin continued Jill’s thought.

Fortunately, they each had only one of the three disorders and even more fortunate was that they had all met and could complete each other.

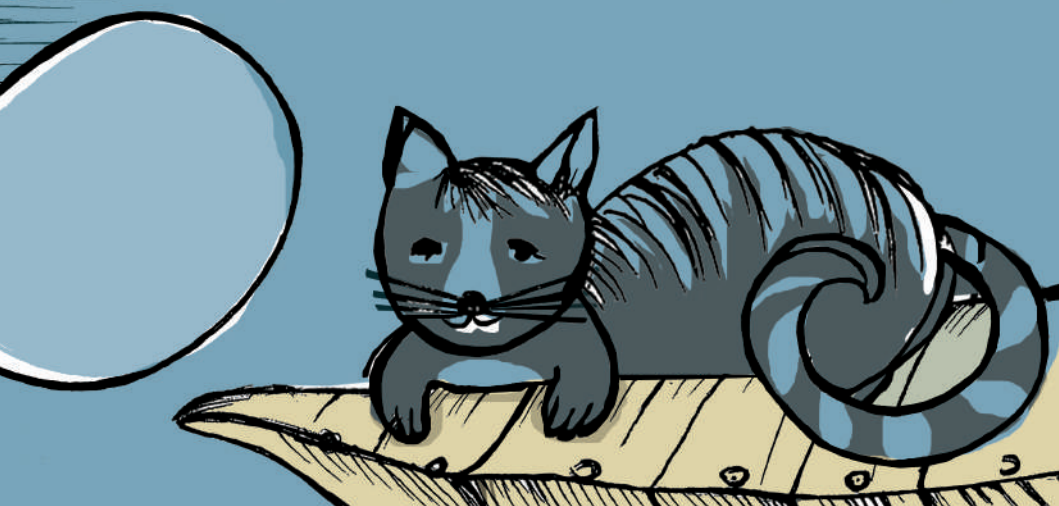
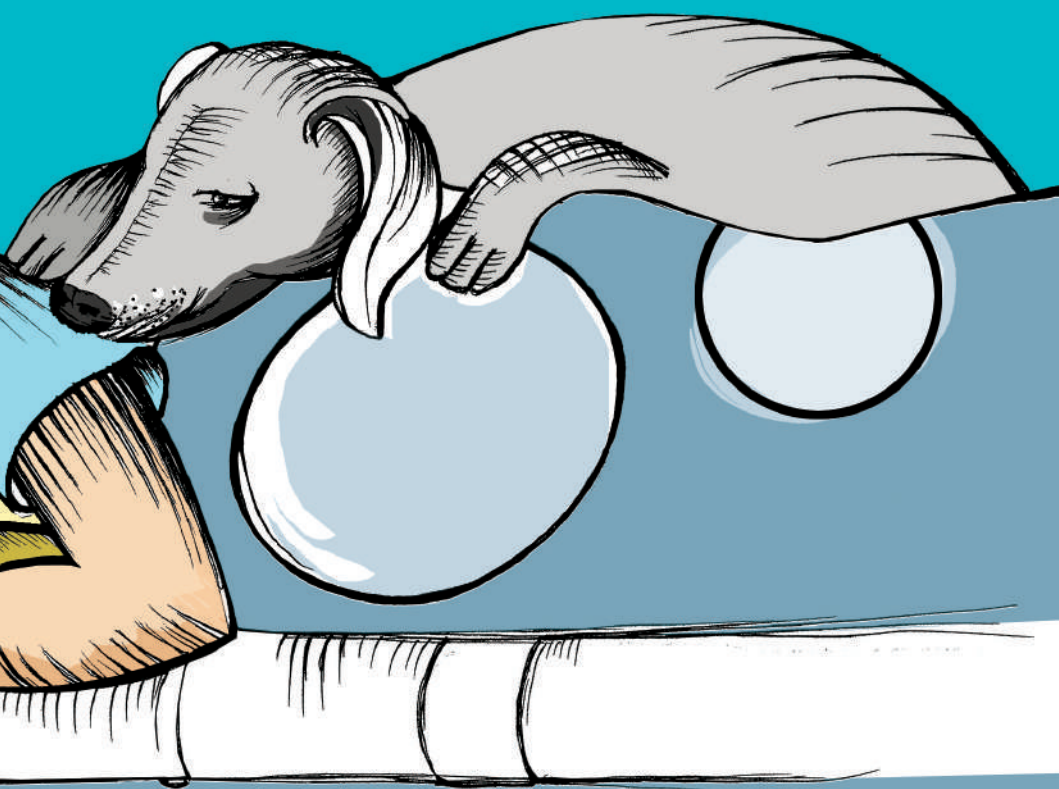
They were missing the **“Why?”** and the **“And now what?”** to solve the mystery. But they were exhausted, not only from thinking but also from sorrow.

They ate. They listened to Theodore’s story and fell asleep. Some with dreams – lucky! – and some without!

Tomorrow would bring a new day. And every new day carries a sense of unpredictability. Days, you see, are particularly unstable. They don’t decide how to behave. They are trying to discover themselves. It’s because they don’t live long. Just when they realise who they really are, they end and then it’s back to square one all over again. Though, perhaps this is their charm, too. They keep surprising us on a regular basis.

Therefore, they waited to see what new surprise the upcoming day had in store for them!





CHAPTER 7

Will we discover the Why,
I wonder? Or are we going
to freeze as well?

“To discover the **“Why?”** and be able to move on to the **“And now what?”** we will have to be very careful, observant and operate as secret agent!” said Theodore and continued, leaving everyone speechless:

“There is one and only solution. We will freeze as well!”

“Excuse me?” said panicked George, “I don’t want to freeze. The Frozen Ones look so scary!”

“Oh honey, he just means that we will pretend to be like the Frozen Ones”, said Jill and hugged him to soothe him, without letting go of Robin’s hand which had by then become an extension of her own arm.

“We will pretend to be frozen. We’ll get mixed in with the rest of the Frozen Ones and wait. Well, the three Thieves will appear and then we’ll discover the **“Why?”**. And if we learn the **“Why?”** then we might be able to find out the **“And now what?”**

They applauded him. And with hurried arrangements they blended in with the Frozen Ones.

The started copying their immobility.

The lack of feelings on their faces.

The lack of a sparkle in their eyes.

It wasn't easy at all. But they made it. They did it so well that for a moment they, too, believed that they had frozen. Only their hearts, that had not been frozen, had not been broken, that galloped inside their chests to the beat of their fears, bared testament to the fact that they weren't Frozen. The only thing needed now was PATIENCE.

And they waited...

Waited...

Waited...

And suddenly!

Suddenly, out of nowhere, appeared the three cavaliers. Without horses and sombreros. They looked like the heroes from the western movie "The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly". The Bad one could be anyone of the three. Certainly, one of them was obviously the Ugly (we didn't yet know which one of the three it was). At any rate, we needed to detect the Good immediately in order to begin through him to overthrow their plan, which was yet unknown to us.





Yes, you got it right, I, the narrator, am part of the team of the supposed Frozen, right. I couldn't possibly leave them alone now that the hard part is coming.

Everyone of us, the supposed Frozen among the Frozen Ones, observed and kept track in case we come to a conclusion!

They were walking among the frozen-Frozen Ones and us the supposed-Frozen. They were taking their temperature with a forehead thermometer and nodding their heads, satisfied.

Thankfully, the odds were on our side. They didn't take any of our temperatures.

We could trick the Thieves by acting, but tell me, who could ever trick a thermometer?

"It's going well!" said one of them. The Ugly – that's for sure – because he is and looks it.

"It's going extremely well. Better than I had expected," said a second one. The Good or the Bad, I wonder?

"I, on the other hand, am having second thought. Is what we are about to do the right thing?" That's definitely the Good! So, the second one was the Bad.

They struck him down, almost literally with their menacing glares and he cowered.

The Ugly one, in my humble opinion, is the Shoe Thief. How did I figure it out? Because it's so easy to see. As

easy as his ugly looks. He had about ten shoes tied around his neck.

I would bet, without putting my head on the line, that the Bad is the Ideas Thief and the Good the Dreams Thief. On what do I base this? Call it a hasty conclusion, a generalization or even an oversimplification, but there are both good and bad ideas. You think of ideas in your mind and there are some sick minds. But dreams? Dreams belong to the soul. And souls are beautiful. They might lose their way sometimes, but they're made from love.

We won't make rushed decisions. I know. It's too early. But I wanted it be written down in the proceedings of the conversation and I will return to it at the end of this adventure. When I have more evidence.

"It's going extremely well," the Bad repeated. "Their temperature is dropping daily about 0,5 degrees. We are at 28 degrees Celsius. With this body temperature they can't move. They can't think. They can't dream. They can't prevent us from realizing our plan. As soon as we reach the 26 degrees. So, in 3-4 days, we'll be ready for the last hit!"

"Okay", said obediently the Ugly and sat on a rock to change the shoes he was wearing.

"Are you sure they are still going to be alive at 26

degrees? We agreed to do what we are doing, but I would never want to have so much death on my conscience. I won't be able to sleep at night and you know how important this is to me! Without sleep, I won't be able to use the dreams I've stolen".

"Most of them will make it. We'll certainly have some collateral damage but c' est la vie. That's life. We are in the middle of a war if you haven't realized it yet. And in a war, there are always victims", the Bad added, leaving all of us the supposed frozen gaping in horror and astonishment.

"Shall we go?" asked the Ugly, who wore his fourth pair of shoes and was apparently in a hurry to leave.

"Let's go..." said the Good as well and turned around to leave with his head bowed down.

We were just in time to arrange to follow after them, with hurried motions and exchange of glances. Each team would follow their own thief. That's what everyone of us thought would be best.

The Barefoot followed the "Ugly". The Shoe thief.

The Bereft, the "Good". The Dreams thief.

And the Clueless, the "Bad". The Ideas thief.

I know, I know, this last one was the most dangerous. But I believed in Robin and his quiver of ideas in time of need! Their surveillance lasted for many days until they

found the “Why”. And when they found the “Why”, the “And now what” was clear to see! Back to our story then. You will see, hear, and smell. You will live the story with all your senses and then you’ll understand!

CHAPTER 8

The “Frozen Ones”

The first ones to return were the Clueless. They didn't manage even to get near the Ideas Thief. His lair was an impregnable fort. Though, Robin managed to penetrate it acting as a traitor. He would convince him, he said, that he had changed sides and would put himself at his service. He would declare that he, too, wanted to destroy the planet and freeze the people. That this had been his dream from as early as he can remember himself. As expected, the others were out of their mind with worry. They had no idea how he fared.

Everything was as they had left it. Only slightly more chilly. They took the Frozen Ones temperature and saw that it had dropped. It was at 26.5 degrees. They had 0.5 degrees-time left. So, a day more or less, if their calculations were correct.

“We need to do something!” said desperately Chef-dad.

“We need to do something!” Tina repeated, frightened.

“We need to do something!” yelled excitedly Costas, looking behind their backs.

They turned around to see what he was looking at. They gawked.

At the entrance of the cave, in procession and lined up in all pomp and circumstance, stood the Barefoot. And what is more, they were wearing their shoes! What happened? How did they find them? I know, of course, but I’m not telling!

And next to them were the Bereft. Smiling. Plato and Blackie were dragging along on a platform-wheeled a treasure chest. A huge treasure chest!

And nearby were the two thieves.

“What’s going on?” asked with a dazed face Chef-dad, only to receive an excited...

“High-five!” from Grandpa and a...

“So cool!” from Grandma.

And promptly began a medley of confusing, rushed and enthusiastic discussions:

“They regretted!”, “We explained to them that if the planet is destroyed then they will get wiped out alongside it”.

“We talked to them about climate change”.

“We convinced them to help us”.

“They know that if we work together, organized we will make it”.

“All together we will defrost the people and stop the destruction of the planet”.

“The Shoe Thief told us that he stole shoes because he was jealous. He was born alone. He grew up alone. Always alone. With no one to love him. With no one for him to love. He envied love. He envied other’s love-filled lives. He became a Shoe Thief and stole lives along with shoes. With every pair he stole and wore, he became what the shoes’ owner was. He lived their adventures, walked their path, gave their battles. He didn’t know what would happen to the people without their shoes. He couldn’t have imagined that they wouldn’t live, wouldn’t fight, wouldn’t take action. He had no idea that without shoes, in reality, they would be passive and weak. That they wouldn’t be able to respond. That they would be frosted over”, said Grandpa and the Shoe Thief lowered his eyes down to his bare feet in shame.

“The Dreams Thief confessed to us that he didn’t have any childhood dreams. He grew up without love. Without words and lyrics and stories. He grew up all alone. He didn’t meet his parents. They had both passed away in a war for a country that he had never seen. He had only

met loneliness and pain and death. The first time he stole a dream, a small one, from a little child playing in the park and was dreaming of strawberry ice cream, he experienced such joy that it made him realize that what he was missing all these years were dreams. He did not know how to dream, though. So, he decided to steal them. It was the only way he could meet happiness, love, a smile, hope. The Ideas Thief, the head bandit had him convinced that he could have all the dreams of the world as his own and he believed him. He didn't know about the people who would freeze or the planet that would be destroyed", said Theodore and the Dreams Thief smiled shyly, verifying his words.

"The treasure chest has a code!", said and winked at Theodore. "But it doesn't contain money. It has the most valuable of all things. Your stolen dreams. I'm returning them to you, and I thank you because you taught me how to dream. I'll give you back interest, too. With every dream I've stolen, I'll give you..." said the Dreams Thief, only for Theodore to cut him off to add...

"A storybook! If you put it under your pillow, you'll get an extra night-time, wonderful, soothing dream as a gift!"

Blackie and Plato started a crazy dance with purring

and barks to declare their approval of Theodore's declaration.

This joyous atmosphere was interrupted by a sudden question:

"Where is Robin?" asked Jill, full of distress. She did not receive a reply. The Clueless lowered their gaze and didn't speak.

"Where is Robin?" Jill repeated.

"He was taken captive by the Ideas Thief or better yet, he captured himself," whispered Chef-dad with tears in his eyes and explained the situation.

"And we obviously have no idea what to do. We were waiting for you! Thank God, you're here!" said Tina and then burst into tears, only for Alex to comfort her with another piece of baclava.

"He has a plan. I'm sure he has a plan. He's using an idea from his quiver. And I have a feeling that everything will be all right!" said Costas.

"For now, we need to see what we are going to do with the Frozen Ones before they freeze to death! We only have 0,5 degrees left!" said the Shoe Thief.

"In other words, we only have a day left. During this one day, we must stop the drop of the temperature at any cost, and even start raising it! Or else it's going to

be too late for all of us. For the Frozen Ones. For you. For us. For the planet”, said the Dreams Thief.

He wasn’t counting me in for now. You see, I’m part of the group but I’m invisible and non-existent for everyone else except you, my dear readers! That’s it, I am everywhere and nowhere. You’ll understand why soon.

“Let’s put their shoes on them!” yelled Jill. “They will certainly help. They helped me, anyway. They gave me my life back and made me feel more myself again. This will definitely stop the freezing, or at least it will slow it down. Right?” wondered and looked at the former Show Thief.

“I hope so”, he replied, and everyone began hastily trying to untangle the shoes from the massive pile they had brought in. And then put the right pair of shoes on the right owner, otherwise...

“The car mechanic might end up wanting to become a ballerina”, Jill said giggling.

“And the ballerina might end up miserable and want to give up her career to become a farmer, since she will be wearing a farmer’s work boots!” said Grandpa and smiled mischievously.

“Then again, the policeman might wear the doctor’s shoes and since he is used to screaming, “Hands up,





you're under arrest", will still yell that every chance he gets at the germs and the diseases!" Costas said and then started drawing the scene.

"Whatever you do, don't make any mistakes with Mr. Michael's shoes, for the love of God; he's the best baker in the city, I won't be able to handle it if he can't make my favourite éclair. Forget it, I'm not risking it. I'll take care of it myself! Oh there, they're these ones, I'm putting them on him right away!" said Alex.

"What would you say though, if we make a small exception to save someone?" asked Grandma with her doughy heart. "I'm thinking of putting the heels belonging to the wealthy miss that lives in the big manor on the other side of the city, on Zoe. The young orphan who cleans the stairs of the apartment building around the corner. There, next to the school. She told me that she always wanted to travel. Well! With the heels, if she gets in with the rich circles then she might meet a pilot who will take her with him in his travels".

"I say, to be absolutely sure it will work, we dress her directly with the pilot's shoes and then she will be make, herself, the trip she always dreamt of!" said Tina, excited with her idea!

"We don't have the right! We can't play little gods and

make a mess of people's lives. I did that and I realized my mistake. Everyone must find their pace in life all on their own. They need to discover themselves first and then walk on the path toward realizing their dreams step by step. No matter how hard it is," said former, we underline this, Shoe Thief.

So, they got serious and began working. The task was tough, time-consuming, and strenuous. Every pair of shoes, you see, had its own story to tell. Some were light and funny, other were heavy from all the pain they carried. Their souls filled up with stories. They felt as if they were peeking inside the Frozen Ones lives. The made a promise that, whatever they learned in that cave, it would always remain within them, and no one would ever tell anything to anyone. At most, they would write it in a book years later, along with that note all the writers make to trick us: "Any resemblance to actual persons and events are purely and completely coincidental!" Yeah, right! We totally believe them. As if we don't know that each and every book is drawn from life.

By the time they were finished, night had fallen. They were exhausted both physically and mentally. The Frozen Ones temperature had not fallen any further. It had become stable. They had gained some more time,

equal to 0.5 degrees. In other words, they had one more day. But the fact that, they had stabilized them was not enough. They had to restore their temperature to normal levels. They had to defrost them. Thankfully, they had the treasure chest of dreams and the bonus extra storybook dreams that they would distribute the next day. And they also needed to figure out what they were going to do with Robin...and the Ideas Thief...things were still pretty bleak.

They laid down on the cave's floor. They became a huge hug. They covered up with anything they could find and started whispering forgotten lullabies from their childhoods. They soon fell asleep. One after the other.

No one, besides me, heard the sound of the ice cracking.

No one, besides me, saw the Frozen Ones' cheeks starting to get a little more colour.

No one, besides me, heard the indiscernible sighs of relief coming out of the mouths of the Frozen Ones with every lullaby they heard.

No one besides me.

And who am I to share this with anyone else besides you...

Goodnight. A bright new day dawns tomorrow...

CHAPTER 9

“Robin” and the Ideas Thief

Let's go back 24 hours to then, the exact moment when the Ideas Thief captured Robin as he was trying to climb the cypress tree in the yard and then jump on the second-story balcony, hoping there would be a half-open window there. He tied him up. He gagged him. He bid him goodnight with the threat that Robin was weak under his control, and he would destroy the world as we and Robin knew it, and that there was nothing he could do to stop him.

The Ideas Thief slept. He fell into a deep and dreamless sleep. But Robin did not sleep a wink. He was preparing for the role of the villain he would act the next day.

“Morning,” called the Bad.

“Morning,” replied Robin in a similar manner. He saw that he was surprised and turned around to look at him strangely, but ignored it and continued acting indifferent...

“Did you have a nice sleep?” asked sarcastically the Bad.

"I've had a dirty and rotten one," said Robin, only to receive a second questioning look from the Bad.

"Do you want some breakfast?" the Bad asked and Robin agreed.

"I'm starving!" exclaimed as he devoured an omelet.

It seems like all this impressed the Bad and so, he started chatting with him. Robin gave one-word answers. He knew very well, you see, what he was doing.

"Are you worried about your family, then?"

"Nope".

"Well! I imagine you love them, though".

"Nope".

"But, why? You should. Do they not treat you right?"

"They do".

"Then why don't you like them?"

"I don't like anyone".

"But why is that? Do they hit you? Ground you? Do they not give you money? Make you do all the chores around the house and then sleep on the ashes, like Cinderella?" asked and burst out laughing at his own brilliant, according to him, joke.

"I don't like good guys".

He fell for it, line, hook, and sinker. He had said the magic words. The "I don't like good guys" was a sign for the Bad to think that was dealing with a like-minded

person. You see, the Bad, the Ideas Thief, did not like good guys either. He thought of them as boring. Stupid. Romantic. Tasteless. Weak. Predictable. Tedious. Ready to take action to change the world and stop climate change.

“But, why?” he insisted, wanting to make sure that these weren’t just words, but that Robin meant it.

“Because they are boring. Stupid. Romantic. Tasteless. Weak. Predictable. Tedious. And are always ready to supposedly change the world and stop climate change”.

The thief got so excited, and showed it with his glowing smile. “So, you’re not a good guy then?” he asked him.

“Nope.”

“Not at all?”

“Not at all”.

“Could you become a villain then, and destroy together with me the world?” asked, desperately because, between you and me, he didn’t trust the Shoe Thief and the Dreams Thief at all. He knew that they weren’t actually bad, but nice guys who got hurt, and that with the first chance they got they would give up the plan half-finished.

“No”.

“What do you mean? You couldn’t become bad?”





“No”.

Too bad, thought the Bad, just as I had thought that I found the perfect partner!

“I cannot become bad. I am already bad. Can’t get more villain than this!” said Robin with the meanest look he could muster.

“Excellent! Come on, let me untie your legs and let’s go destroy the world. My plan is brilliant. Tomorrow the world as you know it will disappear forever. I can do it by myself, but an extra hand is always useful”.

“If it’s to destroy this bloody world then I’ll give you both my hands,” he said, and the thief untied him. And explained his plan in full detail.

He talked to him about his dreams. He wanted to become a world leader on a planet with weak-willed people. Powerless. Without critical thinking. He wanted obedient subjects. Pawns on his chessboard. And a plastic environment. Sterile. With no silly species and biodiversity. He would choose which animals and plants he would have in his yard, on his planet. So, he would destroy it and rebuild it from scratch. He would burn it down with climate change and the extreme weather conditions. He would keep only three kinds of animals; he hadn’t decided which yet. Probably a lion, a tiger, and

an eagle. As for the plants, he was thinking only the most impressive ones. Maybe an evergreen conifer tree, a fruit-bearing tree, and a deciduous tree. Three and three. Just great! He didn't need any more.

He became the Ideas Thief. Because when people don't have ideas, they can't find solutions and they can't solve a problem, and certainly not a complex environmental problem. They can't do anything. And he shut all the ideas inside the cloud. Yes, he just uploaded them on the cloud! Genius? Genius! No idea was lost. They were all stored inside a cloud. He even told him the password. Complicated. Letters, symbols, numbers...He wrote it down. In his mind. He was repeating it constantly. He made up songs with it to not forget it.

He made him repeat his plan over and over again. With every detail. He recorded it on his mind. He was flattering him. He was congratulating him again and again. He was calling him a genius. At the end of the day, he knew everything. The Bad even entrusted him with the flash drive with all the ideas that he had stolen and uploaded on the cloud. It was a backup in case something went wrong. He told him to guard it with his heart. He told him he trusted him. And then he went to sleep.

Robin stayed up late again. He thought about it, and

then thought it some more, until he found the way. He knew how he could sabotage him. It wasn't easy. It wasn't foolproof. It was risky. But he had no other choice.

He worked on the computer and the cloud. He made all the necessary changes. The dawn found him all set and exhausted. He fell asleep on the couch.

The countdown had begun...

CHAPTER 10

Just before the end

“THEY ARE COMING!!!” yelled Jill suddenly. Everybody at your positions.

“1-2-3. Freeze” yelled Grandpa and...
...everyone froze!

And the show has begun.

Yes, you got it right, the Frozen Ones had now been defrosted for good. They had their shoes and their dreams. They were only missing ideas. They were waiting anxiously for the final confrontation. The return of the worst of all villains. They would give the fight of all fights. For humanity and the planet. They were ready. They were all together. Therefore, they would act as a team and with a plan.

Everyone froze. The Frozen Ones and the Barefoot and the Clueless and the Bereft. The ones who had to give the most difficult performance of their lives were the Shoe Thief and the Dreams Thief. So, let’s watch what occurs on stage. Hold your breath.

“Come on, let’s go finish what we’ve started”, said coolly the Ideas Thief.

“Who is this?” asked the Dreamer (former Dreams Thief), who was in his own little world, on a little pink cloud that is, and he didn’t have time to process mentally his image and identify it with Robin. That Robin who everyone had been waiting for and kept saying that the Ideas Thief had him captive.

“This is Robin. Our new partner. We’ve become four now. He will help us destroy the world and the planet and rebuild it again from scratch,” said the Ideas Thief.

“Are you sure we can trust him?” asked the Dreamer who had finally caught on.

“Absolutely”, he declared and added, “Stop all the talking now. Let’s begin. There is no reason to dally. For some strange reason, I have got a bad feeling. Something is not right. Have you checked their temperatures?”

“26 degrees! We arrived just on time!” said the Cobbler (former Shoe Thief).

The Ideas Thief moved to the far end of the cave. He moved a boulder to reveal a hyper-computer of enormous proportions. At the same time, his face glowed. His hair got electrified and stood up in the air. With a hand signal he gave direction to Robin to sit behind the hyper-computer. He also gave him a flash drive and told him:

“Begin”.

“What exactly is he going to begin?” asked the Dreamer.

The Ideas Thief took a deep breath, patted down his hair, and took a step forward. As if he was standing in front of an invisible podium.

“The time has come, dear Frozen Ones, esteemed Shoe Thief, and honorable Dreams Thief, to reveal to you the most wonderful, most excellent plan that has ever been devised to change the world! I know that up until now, no one had any idea of what I was planning to do. The only thing I had asked of you was to follow my orders to the letter. We had to steal from the people all their shoes, all their dreams, and all their ideas. Only then, and after transferring them to this specially arranged cave, could we have frozen them. And so it was. With absolute success. Body temperature had to drop to 26 degrees for us to move on to the second, and more essential, part of my brilliant plan.

And what is this second part of my sinister plan? Simple! The implantation of a microchip there, in the broken heart. Why broken? What frozen heart, without dreams and ideas, without journeys and courses can it endure without breaking. Yes, frozen ladies and gentlemen. Your heart is broken. Permanently and irreparably. With the microchip’s installation, we will

be able to control journeys and trajectories – which is why we stole from you, dears, the shoes. And well done thanks to the Shoe Thief. You see, he was the one to give me this amazing idea, without him knowing, when he talked to me about his own broken heart, for the lives he dreamed of having but didn't.

We will also be able to record and alter dreams and feelings, thanks to the Dreams Thief for his substantial contribution.

Of course, the most significant, most affecting thing we have deprived you of are your ideas and thoughts. This part, the most difficult one, as you well know, I've carried out myself. You see, I wouldn't allow any mistake to occur during this part.

My ultimate goal? To create an army of submissive tools. Frozen people who will follow orders. My orders. An army of obedient subjects who, without any critical thinking, will follow their leader while at the same time believing that they live freely. They will relentlessly buy new products that they think they need, they will burn and destroy ecosystems and forests to build hotels, skyscrapers, casinos, and department stores. They will have no connection with nature, which they will regard as alienated and repulsing, full of dust, dirt, and annoying

bugs and insects. They won't care at all about **future generations** and what kind of planet they will leave to them. Everything will be for us and only us. As for environmental justice, that's small print. That's how life is, unfair. Countries and citizens of the South and other non-privileged people, you're out of luck. You were born in the wrong place and in the wrong era.

I imagine it is absolutely clear to all who's the Leader here. Is there any doubt, maybe? If anyone has any objections speak now or forever hold your peace!"

He said resonantly and burst out laughing, since he knew they were lost for words. He didn't know why either, but it served him well. They wouldn't just obey him, they would do so in complete silence, without pestering him with silly questions. In a contrived happiness.

"The only thing left to do now is the microchip implantation. With a simple click on the chest over the heart's spot, the microchip will be planted on its crack. It will mend it shut and, at the same time, will make you permanently and irrevocably mine. Loyal to my every command. Together we will create a world where everything will work like a well-oiled machine. Without any surprises. No disappointment. Nothing unpredictable. No crises. No discords. No rebellions.





Like a finely tuned train that will never be derailed from its tracks. And my gains will be increasing.

I know that, inside your frozen hearts, there are still shreds of objection. Why? Because you still have a rudimentary memory of your dreams, your ideas, the journeys you had and of the ones you'd wished you had. All these will soon be a distant and forgotten past.

With a frozen heart, my dear ladies and gentlemen, you are not in danger of getting hurt. You will never be heartbroken again. You will never feel any rejection. Any disappointment.

Very soon you will thank me and my colleagues!

I'm not expecting your applause yet. You will do so very soon, and your applause will be in perfect sync with the beat I'll be giving you from the stand!"

Meanwhile, Robin did not resemble the good, old Robin at all. He looked totally in sync, in harmony with, and relating to the Ideas Thief. In the movements. The demeanor. He kind of looked like him, too. He must have done something to him. They thought. He was so evil that it must have been easy to change him, control him, turn him first before anyone else into a docile tool.

The Shoe Thief and the Dreams Thief, ordered by the real head of Thieves, the one of Ideas, started to plant the microchips. They had no choice. He was watching them unwaveringly. They were comforted by the fact

that they didn't look like it hurt them. Their worry was about what would happen when they'd have to plant the microchips inside the supposed frozen ones.

No matter how long they dragged it out, the moment had arrived. They started from Grandpa and Grandma. They looked them in the eye as if apologizing. And they, with their calm look, soothed them. They took a deep breath and let out a sigh, like the rest of the Frozen Ones had done. It didn't hurt. They were just worried about the consequences. Deep inside, they trusted Robin. He must have come up with something. It couldn't be. In every story, the good guys always win. That would also happen in their story. He was too villainous to win. The good guys were too many for them to lose.

One by one, the rest took in the microchip in a similar manner. The countdown had begun.

"Activate the microchips!", the Ideas Thief told Robin, and, with no hesitation, he pressed the "enter" key on the keyboard.

"It will take about half an hour for the control mechanism to be activated. In half an hour, all of them will be you obedient subjects, chief. You can rest. I'll take care of it".

And so, he decided to rest. He had complete faith in Robin. He laid down and soon fell asleep.

The clueless were holding their breaths and saying

silently every prayer they knew. They even tried the ones they didn't know. They only had half an hour and they had to save the world. They had to save the planet. To ***solve its numerous environmental problems*** and ***hinder the creation of new ones***. To achieve ***sustainability*** and a ***healthy relationship with nature***. And all these in just half an hour.

CHAPTER 11

Zero hour

Robin only had half an hour at his disposal to put his plan into motion. Completely focused on the hyper-computer, he didn't give any attention to what was happening around him. He had to make sure that the flash drive would do its job as it should. You see, he had re-programmed it. Its main function, which was the deprivation of freedom, freedom of thought, freedom of will, he had replaced with a procedure which, through the inducement of electrochemical reactions in the frozen heart and brain, would help each frozen one to come in touch with their secret weapon. Their superpower. That individual characteristic that makes them truly different and special from the rest.

You see, one of the ideas that the Ideas Thief had not managed to steal from him, probably because it was so special that it didn't seem like an idea, but more of a plan, a secret mission, a dream, therefore the Ideas Thief and his program did not recognize it, was the following strange one: To turn people into an army of Superheroes.

Who have with them a bag of their secret weapons and carry in their hearts and minds their superpower. Small or big, real or imaginary, serious or funny, it would not matter at all. All of them together, united for a common purpose, would change the world and save the planet.

So, the night before, he reprogrammed the flash drive and embedded a huge, weird catalogue of superpowers. Each superpower would be integrated within the next half an hour, if all went well, with the individual frozen that would either suit it, or needed it, or just dreamed of it. How? No superpower would be accepted in the microchip without the heart's consent. A quick scan of the catalogue and the heart would find the one that suited it best and would send an automatic message to the brain. Surreal? Scientific fiction? Don't be so sure! That's what people always think with the too edgy ideas. You'll see for yourselves in a while and will not believe it!

And the superpowers were all there! For the frozen ones' hearts to choose. Which one is your superpower, then?

- To always smile
- To push sorrow away
- To care about the environment and nature
- To think critically
- To give the tightest hugs, not only to people but

also to animals and the whole nature (for Plato and Blackie)

- To always speak the truth
- To cooperate with others in one's place and in one's country and in the whole world
- To organize individual and collective actions
- To research and seek for reliable information
- To spread love for people and the environment
- To guard the 3 fundamentals: Democracy, Justice, and Rights
- To fight for environmental justice within and among the generations
- To run like the wind
- To participate in society and be involved in policy making
- To guard sustainability
- To become invisible
- To "see" in the future
- To plant at least one tree every year
- To narrate the best stories
- To believe in lost miracles
- To be an environmental citizen for the whole planet
- To do magic tricks
- To draw with completely new colors the most amazing pictures that no one has ever seen (For Costas, please)

- To exercise one’s environmental rights and duties
- To cook the most delicious foods (A superpower for Chef-dad)
- To spread light like the sun
- To take care of one’s grandchildren (my Grandma with the doughy heart!)
- To be an agent of change, always seeking environmental and social change
- To be an incurable bookworm (for the awesome Theodore)
- To always find my bone wherever they are hidden (yes, that’s right, a “tailor-made” superpower for Plato!)
- To care about the next generations
- To climb on the tile roof (most definitely for Blackie)
- To participate in local, national, and global networks
- To eat as many sweets as I want and not get fat, and without my teeth getting bad either (Alex!)
- To love for ever and always love me back, too (yes, this was for Jill!)
- To search for the hidden causes of the environmental crisis and climate change
- To always have the greatest vegetable garden in the neighborhood (for Grandpa!)

- To be able to understand all the metaphors, too (George, yay!)
- To sing the most modern songs in rock style (Tina?)
- To dream my own dreams and not steal them (Dreamer)
- To organize and participate in democratic actions of environmental activism
- To walk with my own steps in life and not steal other's lives (Cobbler)
- To try and understand the values underlying some people's position regarding the environment
- To find the most ideal ideas and write them in a book... (especially made for Robin)

Yes, you got it right! It would be utter chaos! If the program worked. If the Ideas Thief did not figure out in time. If he managed to also download the ideas from the cloud. Because no superpower would work if people could not think. If they did not have any ideas. So, he had to give them back their ideas as well.

Only, for absolute security, the Ideas Thief had been uploaded on the cloud and there was a password he needed to pass to get to that strange cloud of ideas, and no matter how much Robin tried, he could not break it.

22*12100 234!1000-2W
3232 31A100XX23





Dedicated to his task to break the code, he hadn't seen Jill, who carefully drifted like a ghost and was already standing over his shoulder.

"Careful! The other two thieves will see you!" he warned her in a panic when he heard her whispering to him that he had to think of the code in another way. That they needed to think differently, outside of the box, to try and find the code.

"Don't worry about the thieves! The Dreamer and the Cobbler are on our side! Tina and I gave them intensive acting sessions and they seem to have worked, since they convinced even you!"

And continued, "So, forget the numbers and symbols. If it's this type of code then we won't be able to figure it out even in a thousand years, much less in...15 minutes that we now have left. Probably words. He must have put in a text. With which he will give its target. His identity."

And they pondered. Their minds were on fire. And yes, the universe conspired, and they found the code. They found it? Well, you figured it out, I whispered it to them. I always had it with me in my backpack, along with the other treasures I carried. Yes, me. The narrator.

They typed: "EVIL". Which, of course, if the Ideas

Thief had foreseen it, he would never put that as a code. Because, if read backwards like a palindrome, it would become “LIVE!”

It was, indeed, the correct code. And the download began. I mean, the download of ideas from the cloud!

The activation of the microchip was accomplished. The superpowers were there now, and the army of superheroes was ready to advance.

And the Ideas Thief. As if he had an internal alarm clock in his brain, he opened his eyes. And all hell broke loose!

The Thief opened his eyes. He looked around him. He glanced at the screen and figured out everything. He shoved away Robin and tried to stop the download of ideas from the cloud. It was already on 92%. You see, the hyper-computer was indeed hyper-fast. There was no turning back. Furius, he tried to unplug it from the electricity supply system, forgetting that it was working with solar energy.

It was too late. He looked at Robin angrily and started approaching him threateningly.

“4-5-6!” Grandpa yelled the signal that the game was over, and the Frozen Ones could “unfreeze”.

The chief stilled when he saw them moving, making gestures, hugging, laughing in joy. The only thing they didn't yet have were words and ideas.

A peculiar light had spread around. The day was drawing to an end. The sun had set but there was a strange glow coming from the sky. They all looked upwards enchanted. An unusual rain started falling. A rain that was hugging them warmly. It was so light you could hardly see it. It was the kind of rain that slipped inside the eyes, the head, the skin, their hands, everywhere. They absorbed this strange rain. Nothing was falling on the ground. The same was happening with the Thief as well. He could feel it getting inside him and suddenly, he understood. His mind unblocked. It filled up with ideas. His own ideas. Yes, it was a rain of ideas, an ideas rain.

The ideas came down, they were downloaded from the cloud that is, in the most magical, most moving way. And all of them found their owner.

You see, ideas are like dogs. Entirely faithful to the mind that had brought them to life. This wasn't known to the Thief. He didn't know that you can't steal ideas, he didn't know that they would never be truly his.

Some ideas that were orphaned or new – because as you know, ideas bring forth other ideas – had snuck

inside the heads that needed them. This is why the Ideas Thief was suddenly more clear-headed! He finally had his very own ideas. Ideas that he would never lose. Ideas that would be completely loyal to him. Ideas that if he “fed” them would produce more ideas. And yes, for the first time in his life, he had bright ideas! And that was a relief. Because as long as there are bright ideas, there is hope!

The rain of ideas stopped as abruptly as it started, and it was as if it had never happened.

A real rain started falling right after. A rainfall that cooled the earth. It relieved the burning planet. It revived animals and plants. It made the mountain green. Along with the people, the planet was saved, too; or was it that along with the planet, the people were saved as well? Who can really tell? It’s like the question with the chicken and the egg. People cannot exist without the planet.

They ate their dinner, they heard Theodore’s story, fell asleep.

The was near. They only had two big issues to solve: they needed to see what they were going to do with the Ideas Thief. And, of course, they needed to discover where the words had gone.

CHAPTER 12

The End?

And now what?

That's what everyone kept thinking as soon as they woke up. So did the ex-Frozen Ones, and the Barefoot, and the Clueless, and the Bereft, and the three Thieves.

Really, now what?

No one could answer.

Fine. They all got their ideas, their dreams, and their shoes back. The latter weren't exactly as they had left them since they had been worn and walked, but the rest were unscathed just like they had been before.

They had also discovered their superpower. Therefore, they had learned through this bizarre adventure exactly who they were. They had found themselves, and thus they now knew how to handle their inner self. And when you know how to handle your inner self, handling your outer self is a piece of cake. Now then, that they knew how to exist, they could learn much easier to coexist

among themselves and nature and the environment.

“Now that we know how to exist, we’ll also learn to coexist. All our superpowers together will make the world a better place for everyone to live in. Seeing as we became better people, then the world is going to become a better place!” said Grandpa.

When Grandma looked at him weirdly, he rushed to answer her as if she posed a question out loud.

“I read it last night, in Theodore’s books. I couldn’t sleep and because I know that all the answers are hidden in the books, I had a reading marathon, until suddenly, my mind lit up, and it was as if...as is I always knew that that’s how it is!”

Grandpa’s words were nice, and everyone was left contemplating them deeply and for a long, long time.

What, in my opinion, they needed most to think over and find a solution for, was what they were going to do with the Ideas Thief.

“We should prosecute him! And sentence him!” said Robin, who just had another brilliant, ingenious idea!

So, they made up a rushed courthouse. The indictment was read by George.

“You are accused of attempting to destroy the world.

To deprive the people of their shoes, dreams, and ideas. You wanted to divest them of freedom of thought, and you stole their ideas, their free marches, which is why you took away their shoes and their free will as well, hence you stripped them of dreams. Your plans did not succeed, but this does not make you innocent”.

“Do you have anything to say to defend yourself?” asked Robin, who took the role of the judge by his own volition.

The Ideas Thief confessed to his crime. “You should find me guilty and sentence me to the most severe punishment. I was at fault and need to pay”.

And the most severe punishment was announced:

“You will assume the duties of an **Environmental Citizen**. You will begin a journey to the place, the country, and around the world to change it. You will speak, march, research, plant trees, restore ecosystems, try to reduce the pollution and overconsumption, you will fight for justice in this current generation as well as among the next generations, you will act individually and collectively, you exercise your environmental rights and duties. You will organize, argue, convince the officials as well as the ones with no official capacity to see the

underlying causes of the environmental crisis, and with the same exact way you froze up the people, you will begin to lower the earth's temperature. Our mission, because we'll be with you as well, with shoes, ideas, dreams, and now with superpowers too, will be to invert climate change. To save our planet. Just like you froze people, now you'll break the earth's fever! You will fight for sustainability and a healthy relationship with nature”.

They shook hands and... at this point I think we've reached the ending.

Oops! Yes, you're right. We forgot the words the Frozen Ones had lost. And yes, I also need to introduce myself:

“I am a hunter of words. I am a poet. In my poetic backpack I've collected all the words in the world. Because words are valuable and I wouldn't want them to get lost along with the shoes, the dreams, and the ideas. I've been carrying them with me all this time. But I've already started returning them to you. After one more lunch, and surely one more dinner, I will be able to return all of them. I know. You are starved for words. And the hunger for words is never satiated. Now, yes, you've realized that the tomatoes and eggs you'd eaten

yesterday evening, the yellow and red, were made of words. Yellow words like the light and red words like love. Hopeful and eye-opening words”.

The End? Or Have a Good Start!

Epilogue...A new beginning

And afterwards? Afterwards, everyone...But everyone? All right, almost everyone! They became more aware. They also had ideas, and dreams, and shoes. So that they could march forth and act. After they had contemplated and found ideas with their critical thinking to turn their dreams into plans. So, they took action and changed the world!

The former Clueless, Bereft, and Barefoot managed to spearhead the army of Superheroes and change the world. The “I” became “We”. They saw, searched, pondered, visualized, planned... They talked and argued. They found the officials. They knocked on doors. They organized into groups, unions, movements for the blue planet. They became agents of change. They believed in it and made all the others believe it, too. They talked

to everyone about sustainability. For the ones who were wronged and this generations' rights. For the rights of the next generations. And the generations became brave. They confronted them with the destroyed ecosystems. They showed them the burned forests, the icebergs that were melting day by day, hour by hour. They talked to them about the value of every form of life. They heard they wind blowing through the leaves of the burned woods. They exercised their environmental rights and their duties. They believed in the lost miracles. With their simple powers, each one became a superhero. They became better and changed the world.

They planted trees, recycled, composted, became ethical consumers, restored ecosystems, decreased their carbon footprints, used the great gifts for energy: the sun, the wind, the water. They believed they could make the change and they did. They changed laws, procedures, and systems, they changed people that betrayed them. They became environmental citizens. They thought critically. They found their connection with nature again, with themselves, and with others. They realized that their actions start first in their home, their neighborhood, and their school, and then they move on

to their city, their country, and spread all over the planet. Our big home. Everyone's superpower, after all, was to think, to dream, to act. The time when the planet was burning, and the people frozen was now a thing of the past. And through the poetic backpack and the words, this story you're reading was written. So that no one will ever forget it...



An army of superheroes – A group of children, takes actions and saves our planet. A wonderful story of a group of children that act as environmental citizens to save our unique blue planet from climate change. A group of children that implicate grandfathers and grandmothers and dogs and cats... And in the end? In the end, they make the change! A story that will excite, inspire, mobilize children. A story that you will never forget!

