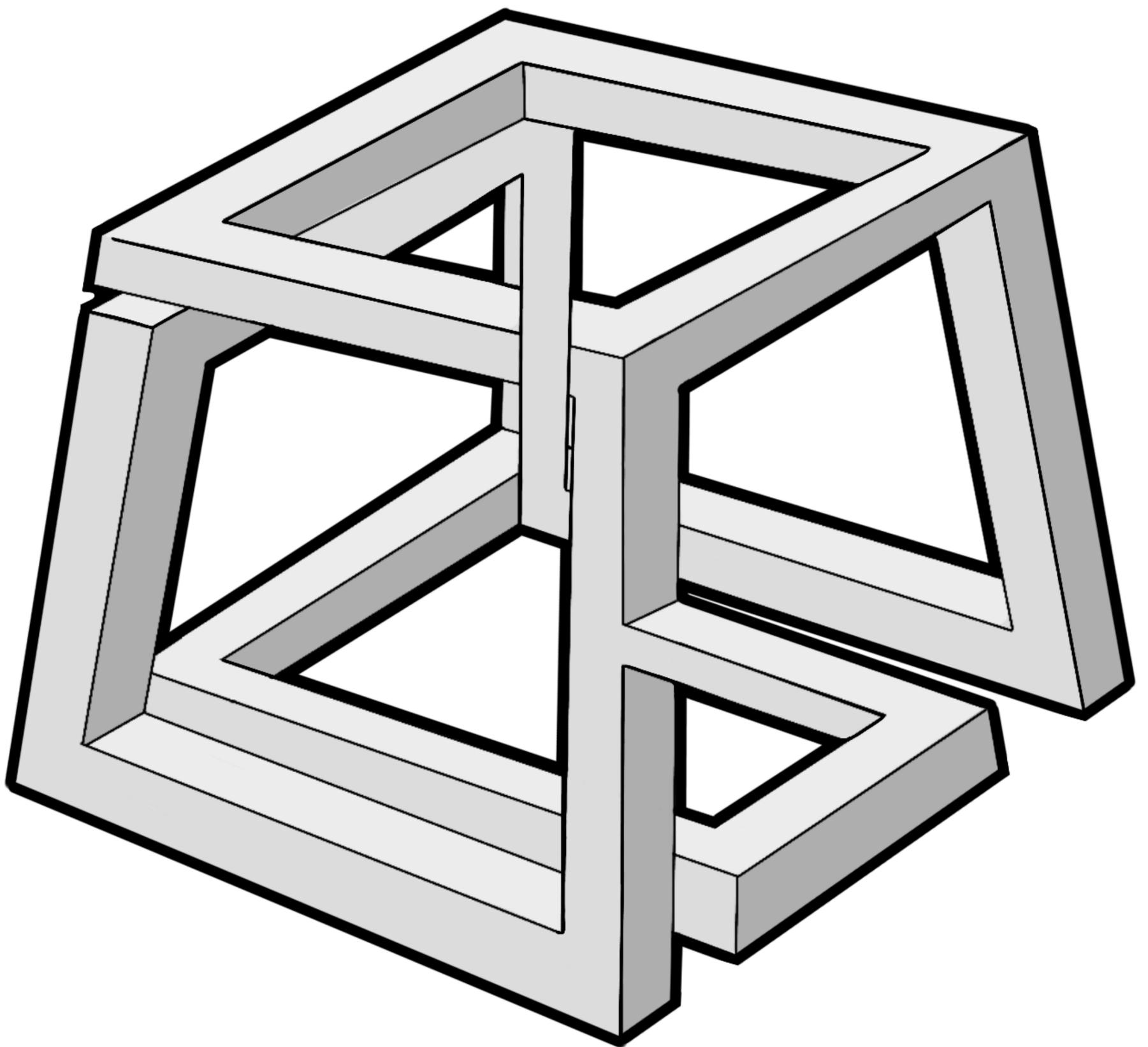


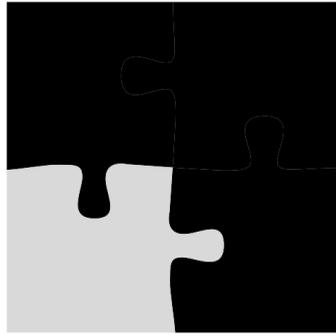
INSIDE THE DREAM



RAQUEL REINAGEL

ILLUSTRATED BY PATRICK CULLEN

INSIDE THE DREAM



LEVEL 4

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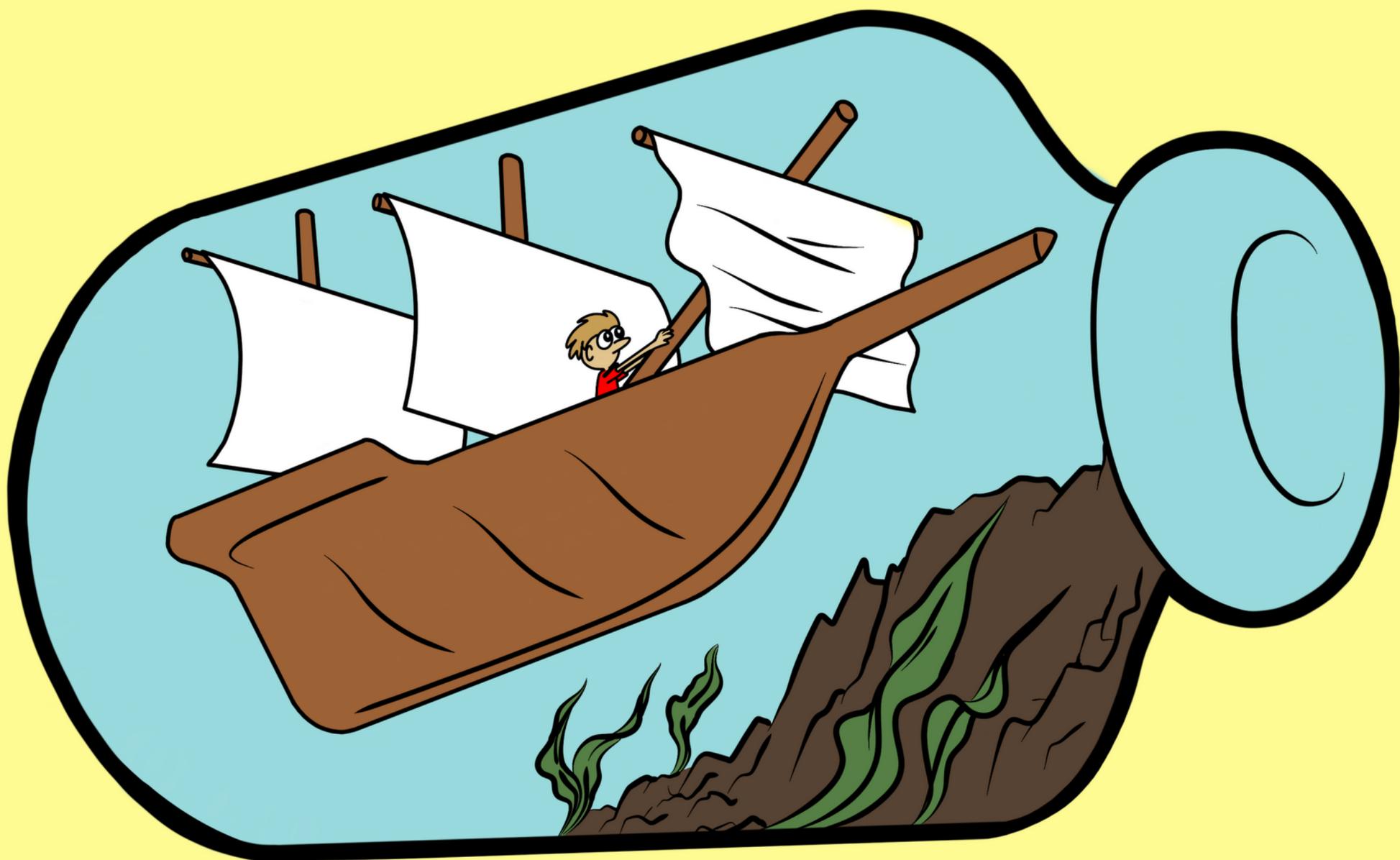
AN ALLEANDE.COM GRADED READER

It could be said that Fred Marshall was not the adventurous type. That was, until he became stuck in a dream.

It happened one night, a night which was preceded by a very uninteresting day. After coming home from classes that day, Fred went to work on completing his latest 5,000 piece puzzle. The puzzle's image was a ship inside of a glass bottle. After setting the last puzzle piece into place, he turned in for the night and quickly fell into a dream.

In the dream, he was on that ship within the glass. Like all of the dreams in his whole life, he knew the dream would be over once he solved the mystery of the dream. Quickly, he realized that the goal of the dream was to get the ship out of the bottle.

He immediately began to work on figuring out just how to get the huge ship out of the bottle's tiny hole. The solution was quite simple. All he had to do was push all of the ship's parts flat. This was the reverse of how those tiny ships get put in bottles in real life. After everything was laid flat, he pushed the ship out of the bottle with the massive strength he only had in dreams.



However, something strange happened; the dream did not end. Instead, after leaving the bottle, the boat began to sail onwards. Fred quickly got on the boat before it left him, and without his help, the boat continued into the wide sea.

For what felt like days, the boat sailed in the never ending blue ocean and Fred had no puzzle to solve. The boat seemed to have a determined course. That is, until the ship sailed straight into a storm. Fred believed his new puzzle was to sail the ship out of the storm. Surely sailing the ship to a place with clear skies would mean this very long dream would end.

Fred took to the ship's steering wheel and tried to turn it, but even with all of his superhuman dream strength he could not move it. Next he moved to the sails and tried to push them into a different direction, but those would not move either. Suddenly lightening hit a large wooden post and the ship caught on fire. The fire was quickly engulfing the whole ship and Fred had no choice but to jump into the deep, dark water. However, something was pulling him down. He could not stay on top of the water.

Down, down, down Fred sunk into the water. Again, it felt like days before he reached the bottom of what was a surprisingly well-lit ocean floor. He was also able to breathe underwater. Looking around, Fred saw that the plant life around him was huge, almost four times bigger than himself. Fred decided to swim forward towards a large brown cave. If the plants were huge, he knew the fish would be giant, too. He wanted to find a hiding spot from the huge fish, just in case the fish wanted Fred as their next meal.

A dark shadow passed above him, and he swam faster. The cave was closer when he saw a dark shape move within the cave.

“Stop!” he heard a girl’s voice scream, but it was too late. Out of the cave swam a giant eel. His large yellow eye was looking right at Fred as his mouth opened.

Moments before the eel snapped Fred up, a girl took his arm and pulled him away.

“Swim as fast as you can and follow me,” the girl said, but her mouth was not moving. Instead her hands moved.

Without thinking, Fred followed the girl around the rock cave and away from the yellow-eyed eel.



The girl swam around a corner, and when Fred followed her he saw she was entering another cave. Fred swam into the cave and saw the girl who saved him moving her hands in front of another girl who was hugging her knees at the back of the cave. Fred slowly swam towards the two girls and as he got closer he slowly began to hear what the girl who was moving her hand was saying. Still, he looked at her mouth, and it did not move.

“Hey,” Fred said, “How come I can hear you, but you aren’t talking?”

The girl who was moving her hands looked at Fred. When she moved her hands, Fred could hear what she was saying.

“I’m deaf,” the girl said. “I don’t know why, but in this dream everyone can understand me, even if you don’t know sign language. And I can understand you, too. My name’s Leeseul Park, but just call me Leeseul. This is Lucy Suzuki,” Leeseul signed, pointing to the girl who was sitting in the corner.

“This is one crazy dream,” Fred said.

“This is a nightmare!” Lucy said, looking at Fred.

A nightmare? Fred had not had a nightmare in a long time. Although he was almost eaten, this dream did not seem like a nightmare.

“Are you afraid of fish?” Fred asked. Lucy shook her head no.

“Are you afraid of deep water?” Lucy shook her head no again and began to cry.

“Don’t cry!” Leeseul said as she sat down next to Lucy, “We’ll figure this out.”

Fred remembered that every dream he ever had was a puzzle. This dream was no different. He just had to figure out what problem Lucy had. If this was a nightmare, it meant that he had to find out what Lucy or Leeseul feared. Her fear was not fish nor deep water, but what was it?

“Leeseul, what happened before you saved me?” Fred asked.

Leeseul explained that she had originally been in a different dream. In the other dream she was having fun at a party when she fell into the pool. The water in the pool pulled her down, just like Fred.

When she got to the bottom, she saw Lucy crying and took her to the empty cave. When she saw a dark shadow outside of the cave, Leeseul swam out and saw Fred with the eel.

Fred realized that this was not Leeseul's dream, so it was not her fear. He turned to Lucy.

“What made you scared when you started the dream?” Fred asked, sitting next to Lucy.

Lucy stopped crying and said, “I don't know. When I woke up in the water I was just swimming. I saw a shadow pass over me and then heard someone laughing, but it sounded like they were laughing from another room. You know how that sounds? Like there's something between me and them. That's when I got scared.”

Fred remembered the shadow that passed over him when he was first in the water. This fear had something to do with that shadow, but what about the laughing? Lucy said it sounded like it was in another room, but how could there be rooms in an ocean? Fred looked out of the cave and into the clear, open water. He expected to see the blue water continue forever, but in the distance, it looked like there were large movements.

The movements did not look like fish. Something seemed familiar about it.

“We need to swim out there,” Fred said to the girls while pointing to the shapes in the distance, “I think our answer is out there.”

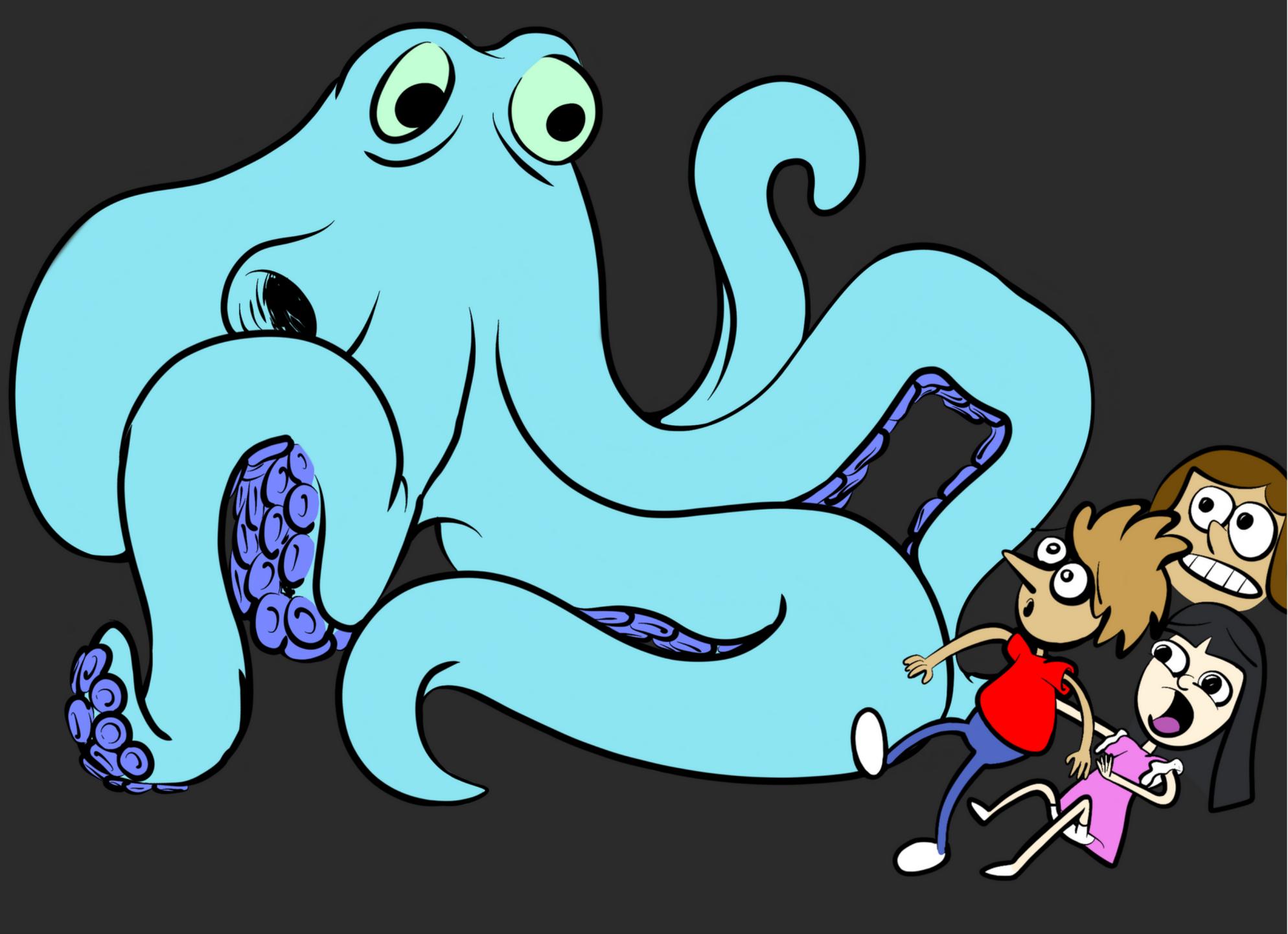
“I can help you,” a deep voice said from above.

Instinctively Fred screamed and grabbed Lucy. They all looked up and saw the top of the cave begin to move and change color. The rock turned from brown with white spots to a bright, light blue.

“I’ve been listening to your story, and it just so happens I am trying to leave, too,” the blue figure said.

As it moved down the wall, Fred, Lucy, and Leeseul noticed seven long, flexible body parts with thousands of round shapes underneath coming out of the figure. It was an octopus with seven tentacles.

It moved closer to them and Leeseul, Lucy, and Fred hugged each other, frozen in their spot. There was no escape. The octopus could eat them just like the eel had tried to do.



As if reading their thoughts, he spoke. “Don’t worry, I won’t eat you. If I wanted to eat you all, I would have done it when you first came in, but you see I didn’t. Now that I’ve heard your story, I want to help. That darn eel ate one of my arms, so I know how you feel boy. I’m ready to leave this place and if y’all are going somewhere, I might as well join,” the octopus said. His seven tentacles were dancing freely in the water.

“Something is familiar about you,” Leeseul signed and went towards the octopus. “My grandpa was missing a leg, and you two seem very similar.” Leeseul turned to the others. “I trust this octopus.”

We might as well go with him, because we'll definitely be eaten out in the ocean if we go alone," Leeseul signed.

Although Fred was reluctant, he also agreed that the octopus was their best protection until they got to the real problem. Fred and Leeseul stood up and swam toward the octopus, but when Lucy did not follow they turned and looked at her.

"Look, this is your dream. You have to come with us, or you'll be stuck in this cave forever," Leeseul signed and held out her hand to Lucy.

Lucy paused, but then stood up. She tried to swim to the group, but she was a terrible swimmer. The octopus laughed.

"Don't judge me!" Lucy said before beginning to cry.

"Hey, hey, it's okay if you can't swim well. No one's judging you," Leeseul said and then looked back at the chuckling octopus. The octopus stopped laughing.

"That's right, no one's judging you," the octopus said before adding,

“Your swimming just reminded me of when my kids were first born. They were just like you when they were learning how to swim.”

Lucy stopped crying and Leeseul helped her swim over to the octopus. When all three humans were gathered together the octopus took them in one of his tentacles and swam out into the open water. Swimming across the sand, the octopus changed colors to match the bottom of the ocean. Huge green and blue fish swam overhead, but no one stopped the octopus. Passing by some plants, a few smaller fish even hid when they saw the octopus. Fred realized the octopus was a piece of the puzzle after all. The octopus would be able to get them across safely.

Soon the moving figures that Fred had seen above him before came into clearer view. However, for an unknown reason, it was still were not clear enough. Suddenly the octopus smashed into something. The three dreamers hit their heads, too.

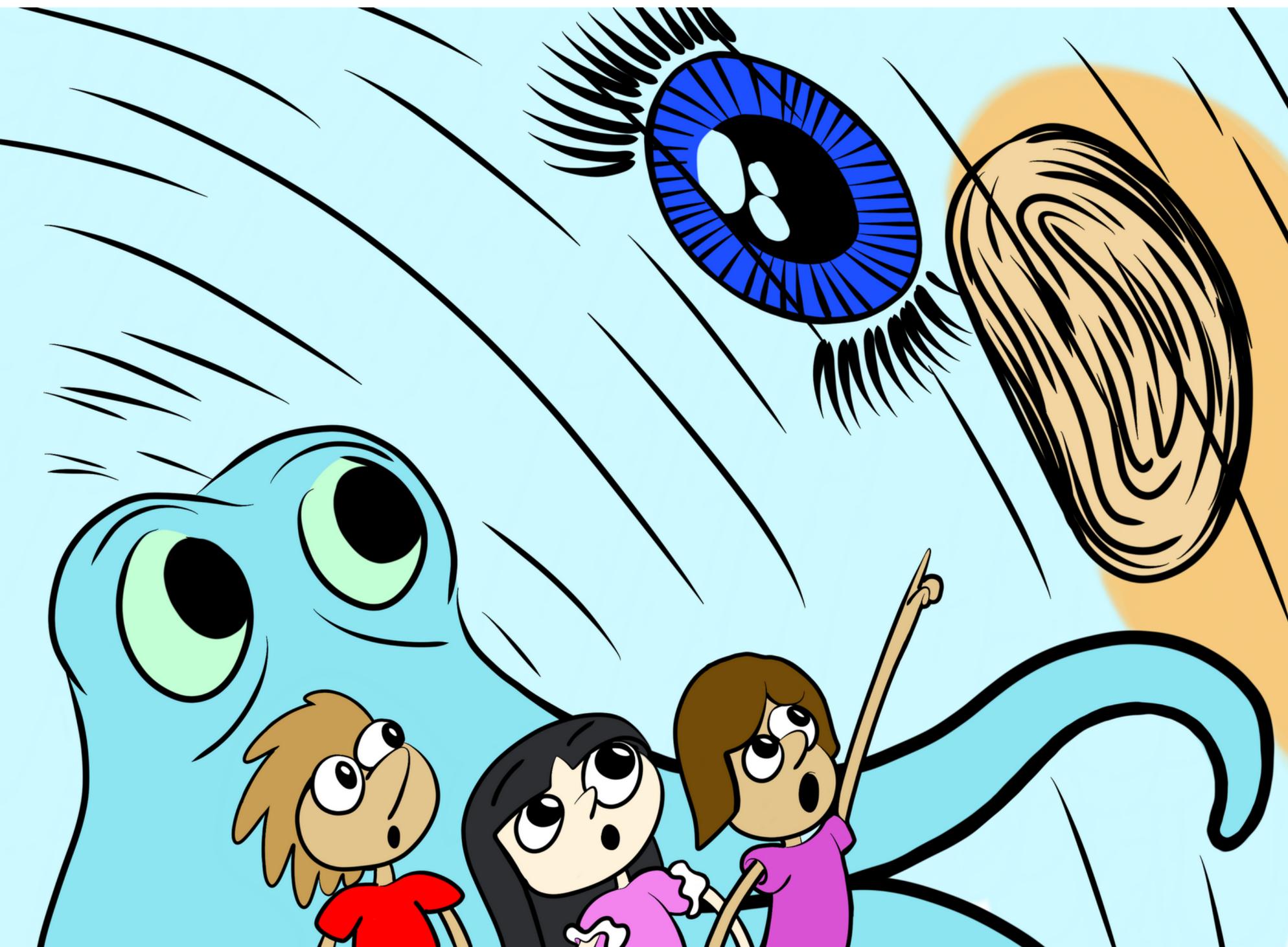
“What is this?” Fred said while rubbing his head.

The octopus reached his tentacles out and felt a large, clear wall.

“It feels like sea glass,” the octopus said, “but it’s so smooth and large. I don’t feel the top or sides.”

Fred reached out his hand to touch the thing they had bumped their heads on. Past his hand he saw a huge tan thing press against the other side. The octopus pushed away, and the tan thing moved away from the glass. They heard the same laugh Lucy had heard earlier and then a very large eye appeared, blinked, and moved away. Fred saw that the tan thing had left tiny marks on the clear substance.

“That’s a fingerprint! That tan thing was a finger! Outside there are huge people,” Fred exclaimed.



He swam up to the clear substance and tapped it. "This isn't just sea glass. We're in a fish bowl!" Fred said excitedly as he turned to his newly made friends.

Fred told the others that the goal of this dream was to get out of the fish bowl. Agreeing, the octopus took all of the humans into his tentacle and began using his other tentacles to climb up the glass bowl's wall. As they were going up, Fred began to talk.

"I think I know what your fear is, Lucy. You're afraid of the judgement of others. That's why we're in a fish bowl. In a fish bowl, everyone can see what you're doing and can judge you. Earlier you said, 'Don't judge me,' when you were swimming, and that's why you didn't like the octopus laughing at you. Those shadows and the laughing are those humans on the outside of the fish tank. You thought they were judging you," Fred stated in plain words.

"I guess you're right," Lucy said. She looked away embarrassed. "In the real world I'm so quiet and shy. I don't want anyone to see me say or do something strange and then laugh at me."

"You shouldn't be worried about what others think so much, Lucy."

All my life I've had people watching me because I am different, but a long time ago I decided not to care. I've been so much happier since then," Leeseul signed.

"Look! I see the top of the water!" the octopus said and swam faster.

With a last push the octopus, Fred, Leeseul, and Lucy popped out of the fish bowl. A sudden bright light blinded them all.

. . .

The next moment Lucy, Leeseul, and Fred were standing in a group of people all wearing black. They were walking in a graveyard towards a wooden box.

"I think we're at a funeral," said Lucy.

Fred wondered what this new dream's solution was. Was the solution to bury the body? Was it to make the dead person live again? He was not sure, so he encouraged the group to follow the crowd.

As they were walking, Leeseul's hands began to move, "I remember this. This is my reoccurring dream. Look up at the front. I'm leading the group."

Fred and Lucy looked to where Leeseul was pointing and saw another Leeseul crying and slowly walking towards the wooden box. When the group got to the wooden box, the three saw that the octopus was inside, dead.

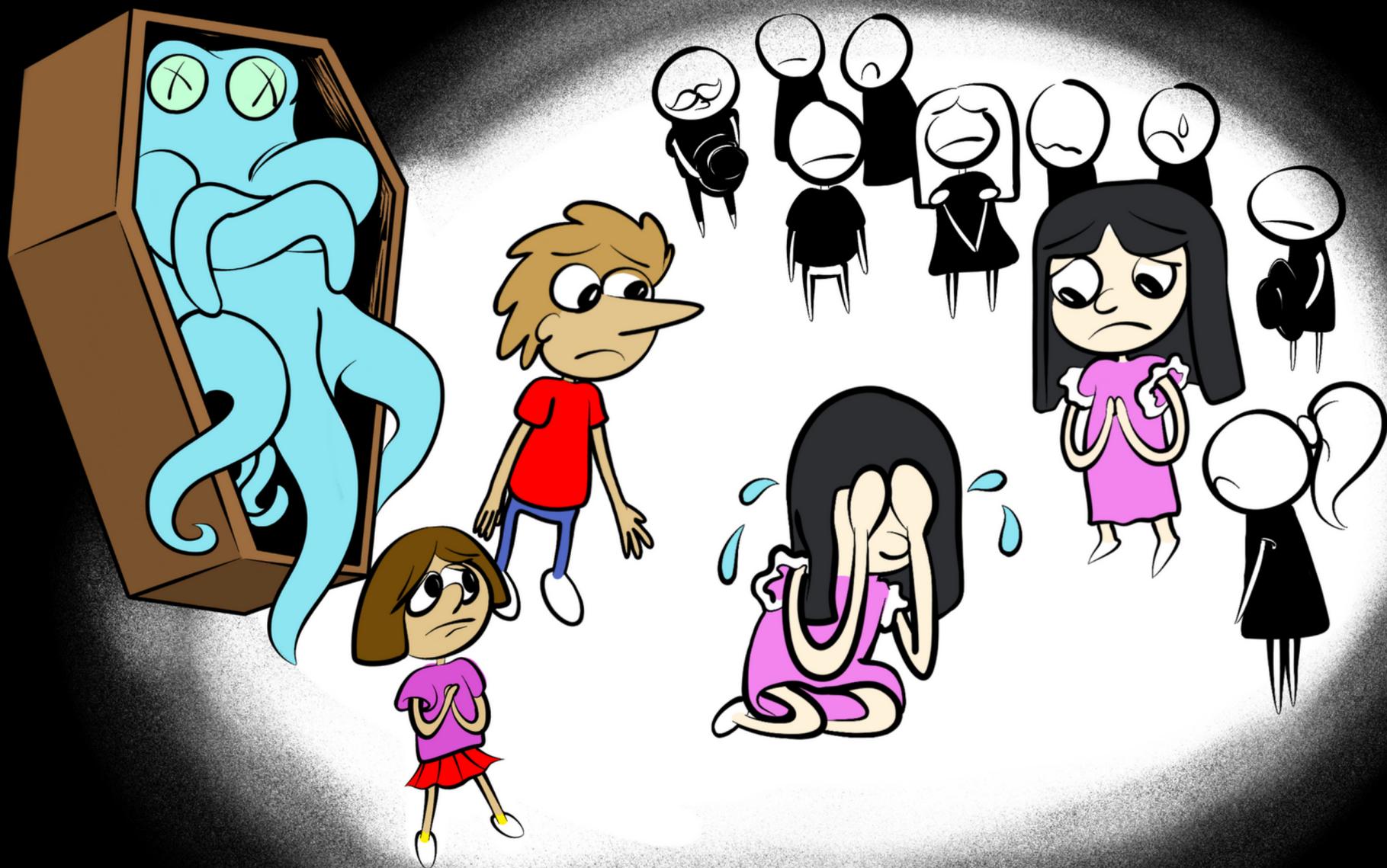
“Every time I have this dream, the person inside the box is different. Sometimes it’s me, sometimes it’s an old pet, sometimes it’s my grandpa,” Leeseul signed slowly.

“Are you afraid of dying?” Fred asked, wondering if this was another fear dream.

Leeseul shook her head no. Fred looked at her face and saw her staring at the other crying Leeseul. “In this dream I always feel so sad.”

Suddenly the rest of the crowd began to cry. Leeseul began running up to different people trying to stop them from crying. “Don’t cry, don’t cry! If you all cry, I’ll be sad, too.”

She moved her hands quickly, but no one stopped crying. Soon Leeseul stood in front of the dream Leeseul. Both Leeseuls began to cry, and the real Leeseul fell to the ground.



Lucy ran over to the sitting Leeseul and crouched down beside her. “It’s okay to be sad sometimes. It’s okay for people to cry at a funeral. No one will judge you for crying at a funeral,” Lucy said, patting Leeseul’s shaking back.

“I’m not afraid of other people judging me for crying. I just don’t want to be sad. I don’t want to be sad. If I’m sad, I’ll get depressed, and then I’ll never be okay again.” Leeseul said, still crying.

Fred walked over to the two girls. “You’re afraid of sadness,” he said, continuing, “You’re afraid that if you are sad, you’ll be sad forever.”

"That's not true. Just like Lucy said, it's natural to be sad sometimes. It doesn't mean you'll be sad forever. Even if someone is depressed, they can still get better. Sadness doesn't have to be for forever," Fred said.

Slowly the people in the crowd stopped crying. Leeseul looked up and saw her other self still crying. The people in the crowd one-by-one came up to the dream Leeseul and hugged her.

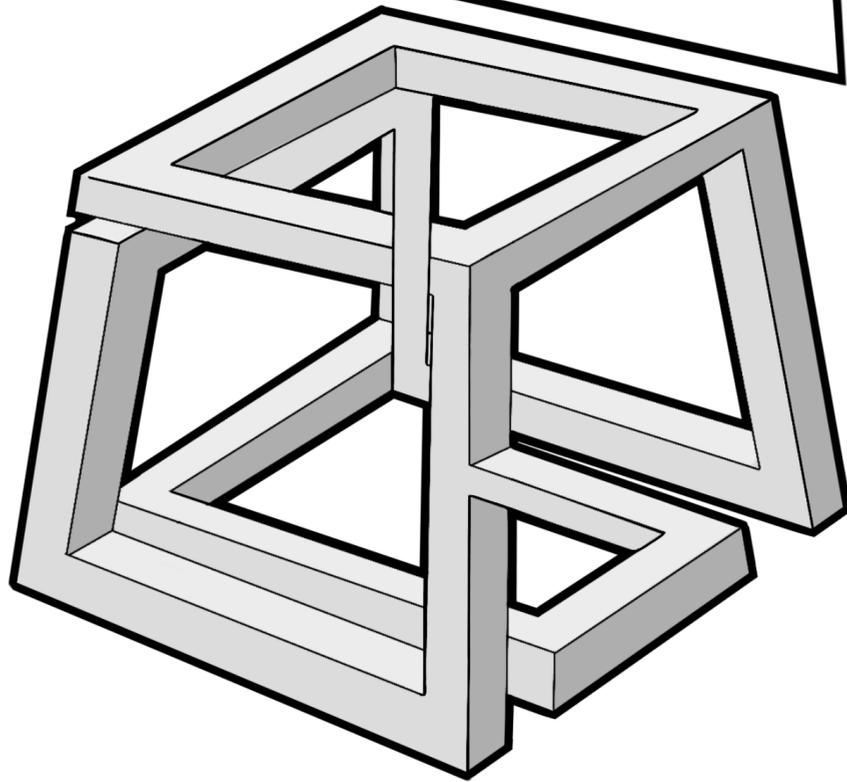
"Hey, I think we should all hug her, too," Fred suggested. He knew hugging the other Leeseul would be the solution to this dream.

Lucy helped Leeseul stand up, and together they hugged the other Leeseul. A bright, white light surrounded the group and once again they were in a new location.

...

It was an endless white space with only a silver block and a sign in the middle of the room. The block was made up of metal rods that seemed to fit perfectly together. When there was an empty space in the block, with further examination there was another rod with no ending but a clear beginning.

Find the
beginning and
ending of each
rod.



The sign above the block said: 'Find the beginning and ending of each rod.'

Silently, Fred approached the block and began examining it. He picked up the block and turned it in his hands. Lucy and Leeseul approached him. They took turns holding the block. One person counted the ends, one person counted the beginnings, and the last person held the block. They tried looking at it from many different directions, but each time there were some endings of the rods that seemed to melt into the block. Frustrated, Fred tried to break the block open. The block would not break.

"This is impossible!" Leeseul threw her hands into the air.

Lucy studied the sign, then looked over at the block. “Fred, in my dream and in Leeseul’s dream, you were always talking about a puzzle to solve. This block is clearly a puzzle, but I think it’s an optical illusion.”

“An optical illusion?” Fred said, not understanding what she meant.

“An optical illusion is an eye trick. The way you see the object depends on how you look at it. In an optical illusion, there is no right answer. The problem has no solution,” Lucy said.

“That’s impossible. Every problem has a solution. Every dream I have ever had I ended by fixing something,” Fred said, picking up the block and staring at it again.

“Fred, you’re afraid of the unsolvable situation. In Lucy’s dream she had a fear. Once we figured out her fear, we went to my dream. When we figured out my fear, we came to this dream. That means this dream must be about your fear. If this stupid block is an optical illusion, it means that there’s no right answer. Since you can’t admit there is no right answer, it means your fear is about things that can’t be solved,” Leeseul said, trying to convince Fred.

Fred stopped moving the block and stared at it. No matter how he looked at the block, he couldn't count all of the beginnings and endings. Fred sighed, "I don't want to admit it, but you're right."

A loud sound of thunder shook the white space.

"I think this is the end of the dream," Leeseul said.

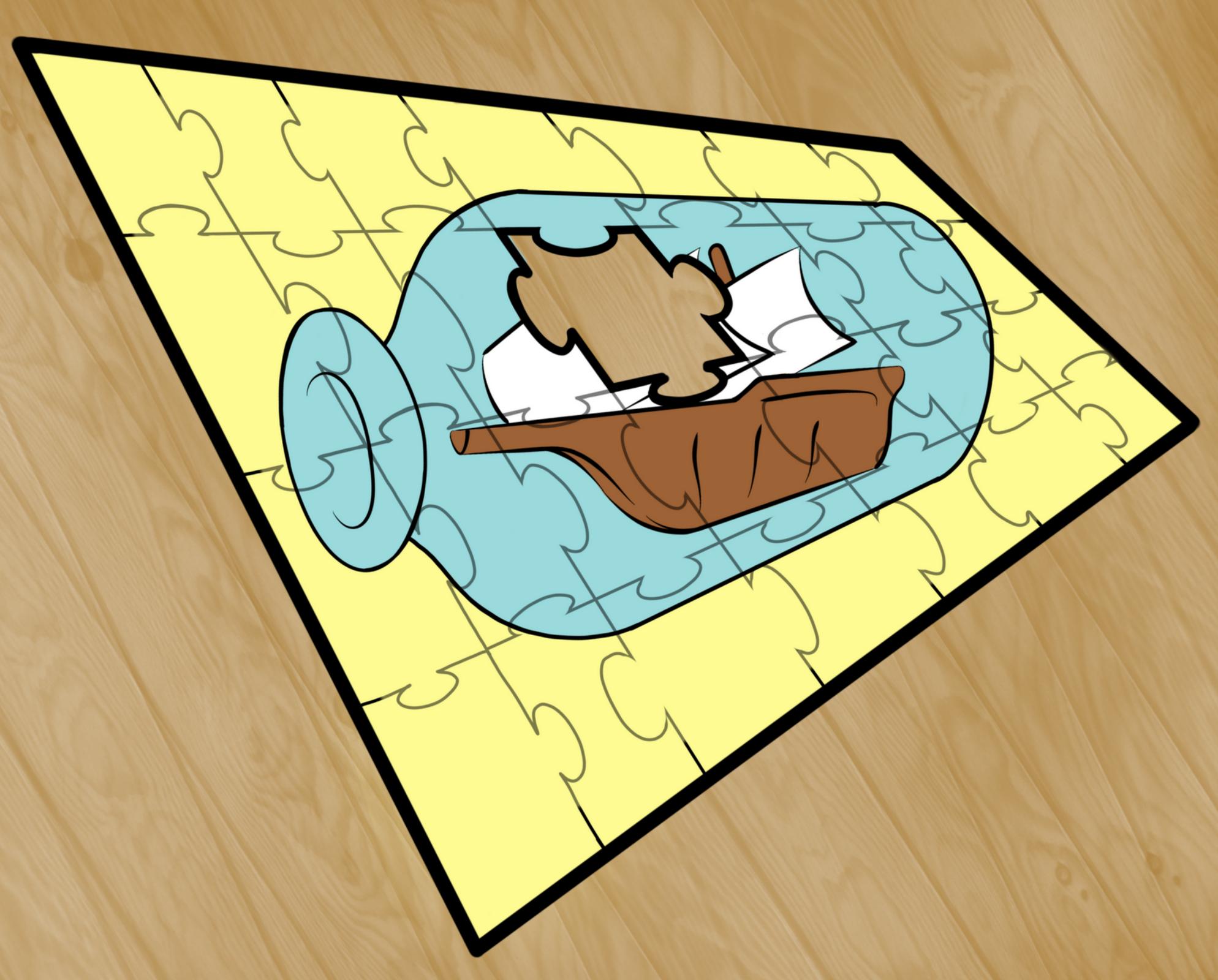
The silver block and the sign began to disappear.

"My feet! My feet are disappearing!" Lucy shouted. They looked at each other and realized they were all disappearing.

"This really is the end," Leeseul signed with see-through hands. "Don't forget us!"

...

Fred woke up in his room with the light of the sun shining onto his bed. He rubbed his eyes and sat up. He vaguely remembered a dream with two girls.



He got out of bed and walked over to the puzzle he worked on the night before. There was a piece of the puzzle missing. For the first time in his life, Fred did not care if the puzzle was incomplete.

THE END



All Eyes and Ears

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