

Everyone has somewhere they belong.

Some belong in busy cities.

Some in quiet neighborhoods.

Some are far from where they thought they'd be.

And some belong in places you'd never think to look.

-The Human Monster Exchange Program-

Emily walked through the hall of her new school, her shiny black shoes clacking with each step against the tiled floor. The corridors seemed too short, with turns too often. The red lockers were beaten down, and the doorways to each classroom all looked identical, as if she were walking in circles, though she knew she was not.

Emily was an exchange student, and she had arrived for her first day in the middle of class in the middle of the semester. Opening the door didn't draw the attention of any students, nor the teacher who continued droning on in muffled words she couldn't make out from the back. Her classmates, however, held the fascination of Emily, for she was not an ordinary exchange student but was an exchange student from the world of humans. And this was her first time setting eyes on monsters.

A unicorn with a mane like colorful yarn. A mass of bubbles in humanoid form. A room full of creatures and each one unique. Emily took her seat and began taking notes, careful not to stare at her peers around her.

By lunch, rumors had already begun to spread. According to any monster you could apparently ask, the new exchange student already had a boyfriend. Emily, of course, was not informed of the rumors being spread about her and went about eating her sandwich obliviously.

She had befriended a monster named Amber, who could be mistaken for a human in a felt suit of a monkey, if not for the dexterous facial expressions that looked so uncanny. Amber asked about the human world, and Emily asked about the monster world, and each shared the information casually.

"Well I think it's a lot more colorful here," Emily said with practiced prose. "And the smell is wonderful, like being in a forest and an antique shop both at once."

"So it stinks in the human world? HA!" Amber had a blunt and brass voice.

"Sometimes"

Emily, back in class, took note of the teacher in the front. He had on a wrinkled button-up shirt like all the other teachers and a much too large head with a mouth and eyes that never moved. His nose stuck straight out, sharp and pointed a foot or more from his face. Emily wondered why all the teachers looked the same when the students were all so unique.

Her curiosities were quickly taken aside when she heard what the students beside her were whispering.

"Yeah, she's already got a boyfriend. And he's that total jerk."

From their glances she could tell they were talking about her, and Emily found this perturbing. Just who was this monster she was supposedly dating? And was he really a jerk? She didn't quite like jerks.

As the day went on, the stories of Emily and her boyfriend had ascended from whispered rumor to solidified fact to be stated directly to her face. She simply nodded slowly, unsure of what to do when this happened. Things seemed to move quite quickly in the world of monsters, something she had hoped was different from how things were back home.

Emily took a moment to herself alone in the back of class between periods. She sat looking at the class pet, a paper-thin creature in black and white, with a tail made of curls, and six or sometimes more legs that didn't seem to operate by any logic. Comparing it to creatures Emily knew, it seemed closest to a goat and a fox, though at the same time entirely unlike them. The teacher had explained during class that this was a wild animal from the second dimension, theorized to come from the other side of the universe.

"How unfair it is to keep you in a cage like this," Emily said to the beast, mimicking the type of monologue she had watched in old movies in her younger years. "You're just a monster too, no different from the rest of them..."

She lifted the hatch, and the creature walked out of its cage.

One moment, the students were chattering and walking through the halls, and the next, total chaos erupted as the door to one specific classroom came blowing off the hinges. The two-dimensional beast went charging through the halls, knocking over students and running up the walls.

"SOMEBODY CATCH IT" a staff member yelled.

Students began jumping and charging at the beast as it effortlessly dodged their attempts at capture. One student crashed clear through a wall headfirst. And one other student, who was of pitch-black nature, seemed to be jumping and running along with the beast rather than trying to catch it.

Eventually, the class pet returned to its cage on its own and used its nose to latch itself back in.

Emily was mortified at what she had caused, though it wasn't all bad, as nobody mentioned her mysterious boyfriend again. The class pet had made enough of a disruption to the day that people seemed to forget who Emily was entirely, and Emily was quite comfortable with that.

Oh and she met that monster who was supposedly a total jerk. He was normal.

Emily the Observer

Emily walked across the stiff and short green grass, letting the clippings get caught between her shoes and socks. Roundish bushes with big red berries were spaced evenly along the hillside, in a strangely perfect way. A black and grey road split the hills, and across from the road were copy and pasted pastel houses of all sorts of colors.

Today a subtle difference could be heard in the air of her walk to school. Footsteps stomping heavily echoed off the walls of houses, leaving Emily unsure of what direction they were originating from. She guessed somewhere behind her.

The footsteps grew louder and closer, the echoes closing in from all sides as she continued her walk. And then she saw them, large yellow rubber suits resembling that of firefighters she was familiar with from her world, though only so much more menacing. They hulked through the streets with a certain lumbered coordination and though they had arms, legs and a head placed like a humanoid, their size was too large, even for the bulkiest of monsters.

Emily almost spoke, but instead kept silent, almost as if she were hiding from them. Of course she was not, standing **clear** in their view, but it still made her feel safer.

They continued to stomp heavily, indifferent to Emily's presence, eventually passing her and making their way into the tree covered hills. They simply continued marching, into the cover of leaves and tree bark. And soon, from over the horizon, smoke began to rise into the sky with its warm smell. Emily knew the smoke had something to do with the yellow beasts she had just seen a moment ago, but exactly what they were doing remained a mystery. She figured she could take a short detour and still make it to school on time.

Into the woods she headed, following the sight of smoke in the sky, and the smell of burning wood when the sky was covered by leaves. Eventually she made it to a clearing. Burning grass spread outward from a central point where several objects had been charred beyond recognition. The hulking things looked like firefighters to Emily, but they certainly didn't do a very good job of putting this fire out. In fact, with the timing of them entering the woods and when the smoke rose into the sky, she was more inclined to believe they were the ones who started it. She couldn't know for sure, as those mysterious rubber creatures were nowhere to be seen.

"How curious" she said to herself.

Something caught her eye in the middle of the rubble. Something clean, and silver, and sparkingly shiny. She walked over to it, unbothered by the hot coals warming her rubber soles.

A pocket watch in perfect condition sat in the middle of the wreckage. Emily picked it up by the chain with a twig, and slipped it into her dress pocket.

Emily was pushing her luck arriving to school on time, so she hurried back from where she came. In the street were now the parents of a number of monsters she went to school with, bickering with each other about something in the way adults do. She could make out some words, like "firemen" and "necessary" and "government division" but what the sentences they strung together into went in one ear and came out the other.

No matter, she needed to hurry to first period anyway. The detour had taken more time than expected.

Dave's Legendarium #1

"The Bureaucrats are godlike beings who rule over all of reality. They decide what goes where and what does not. Filing and organizing every combination of every construct right in its place. Though as a consequence inevitable of hardening and crystallizing the infinite mushy block into what we know as reality, fissures begin to form. And to cauterize these breaks back into dust from which order can reform, the Firemen exist. Dutiful for so long to the Bureaucrats that their will has become eroded into the laws of nature. Ever burning. Ever reforming"

Introducing Slippy to the Show

Slippy was hucking apples and oranges and various other fruits and vegetables at her teacher for no reason other than that she had had a sudden burst of energy and thought the idea immensely silly. Of course the teacher did not take kindly to Slippy's idea of fun and kicked her out of class with much shouting and held back obscenities.

Slippy was a monster with a menacing look. She wore black sweatpants and black t-shirts. And she never went out without her black fisherman's coat, hood up and all. What little skin was showing was blacker than her clothes, appearing more as an absence of an image than a dark color. This meant there was no face to be seen on her, though nonetheless, from the top of her head protruded two longish ears like a fox, with short dark fur to match on the back and friendly white fluff on the front.

Being sent out the door, Slippy had a short bout of self-hatred to punish herself for her own impulsiveness before quickly moving on to wandering the halls. After a bit of walking she came across something unusual. A small creature no bigger than her palm sat with a peaceful look of rest in a dirty corner. It had two funny round ears and a furry round body, and out from its body stuck long slender legs and a tail. She examined its tiny fingers for a moment before delicately poking it with a pencil. Dead.

Slippy remembered something else unusual she had seen lying about. An empty shoebox hidden behind a door eternally propped open halfway across campus. She hoped it was still there as she journeyed to the shoebox. When she found it just as she had last seen it, she then began to hope the dead creature would not be removed from its place during her travels back.

Luckily, nothing had happened during her trek, and the rodent remained exactly perfectly in place, still as can be.

"What are you doing?" an inquisitive voice asked.

A short boy dressed in multiple layers of weathered orange and brown coats stood behind Slippy. He had on an ordinary school backpack, adorned with a comical amount of large scrolls tied on with very old string. Slippy thought he looked more like an out-of-place tortoise than a student at this school.

"I found this dead thing, and I was gonna make it a grave," replied Slippy.

"It's a mouse from the human world! Very elegant creatures!" The boy jumped at the opportunity to share this fact. "What do you think it's doing way out here?"

"I don't know," replied Slippy again. "I was gonna bury it with stuff like a nest to remind it of home, but what does something from the human world think of as cozy?"

"I know! Follow me!" The boy seemed to like shouting everything he said unnecessarily loud.

He led Slippy through long corridors and courtyards that bubbled up among the sea of walls until they reached a place in the school Slippy was sure she'd never been.

He had led her to a door that looked like any other door, tall and red, in a dusty hallway that seemed not often used. Though this door had some sort of magic to it, for when they stepped through, they suddenly found themselves in the hot sun, beside a busy highway overpass that smelled of gasoline. Behind them was an empty doorframe, and Slippy was now very far from where she had ever been before.

They foraged for interesting leaves and rocks together as the boy went on about what these bits of nature might have been through to wind up as they did. And when the box was sufficiently scattered with items, they went on a trek to a nearby river to leave the box in a green patch under the shade of bunched trees. Though they hadn't paid much attention to where they left the doorway, they eventually found their way back through remembered landmarks and directions. They never asked each other's names before parting, but this was the first of many adventures Slippy would have with Dave the explorer.

Crack in the Walls

Sometimes Slippy wondered why the leaves of trees in Somnolent, Somewhere looked like peeling paint, or why the rocks seemed to be made of carved foam. One time, she even

swears she saw Dave disappear between the cracks in the walls, though when questioned about this, Dave simply told stories of his adventures with no mention of what Slippy thought she had seen. Slippy didn't mind, though, as Dave's passion made any tale worth hearing.

Fitting In

Emily was in class again. To her right was one of the many monsters that resembled a living animal costume, and to her left was that most peculiar monster who wore all black and whose face was always hidden in shadows. At this moment she was digging her black claws into her desk and making annoying noises.

Emily figured this wasn't the type of monster to be bothered with a discussion during a lecture.

"Do you know why all the teachers look like that? It's kind of scary I think"

This was the first thing Emily would say to her newfound friend Slippy.

"Umm, I don't know," Slippy replied.

Emily thought she would ask. She needed to get used to being a member of the classroom anyways instead of always sitting around quietly in the back. She raised her hand.

"Why do all the teachers look like that? Like paper mache with big fish eyes and pointy noses?"

The room went dead silent. Some students snickered amongst themselves.

"Emily come see me after class"

Emily sat frozen red.

After class, just as the last of the other students were walking out the door, Emily weaved between desks to the front of the classroom. The teacher sat at their desk filling out paperwork while Emily stopped waiting.

"Emily I'm sure you're aware how incredibly rude that comment you made was."

"Oh" said Emily.

"I understand you want to make an impression on your fellow students but this rejection of authority for the sake of being 'cool' is not in your best interest. I promise you."

“Oh” said Emily again. She couldn’t help but feel this was just like the boyfriend incident all over again. People assuming Emily’s actions without her having any idea what they were talking about. Perhaps this time she should speak up.

“I wasn’t trying to be disrespectful i was just-” The teacher cut emily off before she could finish.

“Making excuses? Talking back? I’m surprised you were selected for the exchange program. This behavior is unacceptable. I’m making a note on your profile and I want you out of my classroom. Now.”

Emily quickly left.

She found Slippy had been just outside the door this whole time, listening in. This was quite unusual but Slippy often did unusual things.

“Hey just so you know I was listening in on your conversation with the teacher. I would’ve started yelling at her if she spoke to me that way.” Slippy’s arms were held straight down tight by her side, and her hands were clenched. Emily just stared back into Slippy’s dark face.

“You’re right. It doesn’t make any sense that the teachers all look alike. But I think I know someone we can ask who will know the answer. Follow me!”

Slippy began to walk at an unusually brisk pace that Emily found hard to keep up with. They went through the cafeteria, then down a flight of stairs to the ground floor, even though Emily was pretty sure the cafeteria was already on the ground floor. Then they went through one of the many courtyards sprinkled throughout the school and eventually they found themselves way in the back of campus. Where old machines of unknown use sat covered in rust, and broken fences made arbitrary seeming walls.

There sat Dave the Explorer on the concrete ground, going over scrolls.

“Dave! This girl has a question for you!” Slippy shouted. “Whats your name? Sorry im not good about asking.”

“Emily”

“Dave Emily wants to know why all the teachers look like that”

“Like what”

Slippy and Dave both looked at Emily.

“Oh, I was wondering why their heads are so big with long pointy noses and round unmoving eyes.”

“I don’t know, why don’t you just ask?” said Dave.

“Well I did, but they thought I was only asking to get a rise out of them and didn’t answer the question. Overall they were very rude about it.” Emily answered.

Dave pulled out a scrolled and looked over it. “In room B-1014 there is a teacher who is said to be the most friendly in the whole school. You should ask them. They’ll be your best bet at getting your question answered.”

Emily thought it funny the confidence this young boy spoke about such things. He had a certain gravitas about him.

“Okay thanks!” Slippy suddenly blurted, and she took Emily by the hand and led her back through the winding corridors of the school to room B-1014. The door looked just like all the others.

“Hello we’re here to ask why all the teachers look like that” Slippy shouted as they ran into the room.

“Like what” the teacher said.

Slippy looked at Emily.

“Um, like big paper mache potato heads with fisheyes and a nose that looks like a sword” Emily was beginning to see how her own words might sound rude.

“It’s just the professional standard,” replied the teacher as he leaned back in his chair. “You have to be well groomed”

“It’s not grooming though it’s your entire genus or something!” Slippy couldn’t help herself but blurt things out today. Slippy herself was even beginning to notice it.

“Look, I’ll let you in on something. But you can’t tell anybody” The teacher reached for the bottom of their neck, and pulled up. A mask was pulled up, revealing the bottom of an orange fluffy face underneath. “A lot of us just have to put on a mask to meet the standard.”

“Why?” asked Emily.

“Because it’s just what looks good. Don’t want to be unprofessional”

Emily hoped Slippy would object to this, as this seemed to be the type of thing Slippy lacked restraint in, but she seemed to accept the answer as it was stated.

"Well, okay," said Emily. "I guess we'll go now."

"Wait!" Slippy shouted her body language lighting up. "Why don't you just show everybody what your face really is? You're one of the favorite teachers in the whole school right? They'll have to see there's no reason to only hire teachers who look like that!"

"Enough!" the teacher was now raising his voice. "These questions are impolite. Now look I'm all for questioning, that's how you learn, but some things just must be understood. It's just what makes sense. You cannot go around talking down on authority like this."

Emily wanted to respond raising her voice herself, but Slippy began to panic and grabbed her by the arm again. They ran out the classroom. Down a flight of stairs, then up a flight, then past a room covered wall to wall in drinking fountains. And back out to the concrete slab where Dave still sat.

"Haha that was fun!" Slippy was jumping up and down.

"Did you learn anything?" asked Dave.

"Not really" said Emily.

"Oh, well shoot. Here, Slippy come look at this." Dave opened another scroll. "Emily you can look too, or you can not if you don't want to"

They looked at Emily.

"I think I will"

and they sat in the hot sun, on the scalding concrete reading scrolls and legends Dave had been mapping since however long he had been at the school. Emily was beginning to find her place.

Acquired Tastes

Slippy sat at her desk thinking about the peculiarities of the worlds. Ever since she was little, she had seen those older than herself drinking liquid asthma, and now that she was growing herself, those around her had begun drinking it too. It always seemed so terrible, inducing a coughing fit like no other, but when questioned, everybody always had the same answer.

"Well it's an acquired taste." They'd all say in the same voice, shrugging it off as if that's what one is supposed to do.

Subtly, but with enough of a bump to notice, the teacher's culinary lecture was interrupted.

"That's not true," said Emily from across the room and behind. "Output isn't the only metric which matters in food. You have taste and texture and all manner of other things."

"Yes, but quantity is most important. With a big enough output, you could feed every starving person in the world."

"Sure, but it still has to be edible," replied Emily sheepishly.

The willingness of Emily to so directly call out something she thought didn't make sense made Slippy realize something. She realized she had been far too accepting of the world drinking something like liquid asthma. The idea is absolutely ludicrous. A bitter drink that throws you into a coughing fit—why would anyone ever want to acquire such a taste?

And with the sight that on the teacher's desk was a bottle of liquid asthma too, Slippy came up with the funniest, most brilliant idea she had ever thought.

The next day Slippy returned to culinary class with a backpack full of liquid asthma. If the culinary teacher wanted output, she was going to provide output. She used huge quantities of flour and eggs to bake 2 giant, 3-foot-tall cupcakes filled to the brim with liquid asthma. She could already see the teacher was proud of her approach, but the real gem would come later when it was graded.

During grading the teacher sat and tasted each dish. Some students got F's and some got A's, and most fell in between. When it finally came time for Slippy, anticipation lingered in the air. The teacher took a bite.

After a brief pause where the tension snapped, coughs filled the room so loud that the walls shook. The teacher banged their hand on the table and spun around for what felt like far longer than it probably was and, when it was all over, stood silently for a moment.

"A perfect 100! For daring quantity and uniqueness," announced the teacher boldly, with a strong, steady voice. "The rest of you could learn a thing or two."

Upon hearing her grade, Slippy alone laughed and laughed, much to the confusion of students around her. They gave her odd looks, which would ordinarily be found upsetting, but Slippy did not care, for she had just witnessed the funniest thing she could possibly imagine. Plus, it felt kind of nice to get a good grade for once.

Are Constellations Really There?

Emily, Slippy and Dave all lay on a grassy hill one night staring up at the stars. The wall of trees behind them was windswept in a way that made them look as though they'd hit an invisible ceiling and were pushed to the side. Notable to people new to town like Emily, but totally ordinary to all its inhabitants.

On this night below the trees, Emily recounts the constellations made up back home in the world of humans while Dave frantically takes notes and converses with her about the mythology of the stars. Slippy somehow keeps pulling the conversation towards the direction of supernovae and black holes, though not in a wholly unwelcome way.

Class President Election

On the walls were colorful pink and yellow posters contrasting the tan walls, with peeling corners announcing in bold handwritten letters the candidates for class president. Most read either "Vote Kennedy," on the yellow ones, or "Vote DokDok," on the pink ones. Kennedy was an elegant minotaur with rough yet fluffy fur. Her hooves were always shined, and one of her horns was cut at the tip, as is so fashionable with the kids these days. DokDok was a strange blue thing with a weird blue mouth and a weird blue ear.

On this day, Slippy sat at their desk so fascinated by all the wallpaper of posters and their colors and details that she not only missed 40 minutes of class, but she also missed the bell and all the students leaving for lunch. When she finally came to, she noted the unusual feeling of excitement that came with being alone in a classroom usually packed with monsters. Though Slippy wasn't alone really. A hammer slammed against a wall, and Slippy jumped so suddenly her chair scooted back a foot or so on two legs.

Behind where her head was facing was DokDok in his too-big blue suit. His smooth blue hands were nailing a large piece of construction paper to the wall. It read "Vote DokDok" just like all the others.

DokDok then spoke out of his smooth blue head. "It's not about popularity. That's what everyone gets wrong. It's about controlling perception."

"Okay," Slippy blurted out. "Are you talking to me, or like..."

DokDok didn't respond. Instead, he nailed the other side of the poster. Slippy's mind began to reflect on that feeling that filled the room before she became aware of DokDok's presence. She tried to fall back into that headspace as she was quite enjoying it. What would she have done if she hadn't been interrupted...

Slippy climbed atop a desk far from hers but not too far and began to remove a ceiling tile. It was much bigger than expected, and she found it quite exciting imagining walking brazenly through the halls holding it, with the type of confidence that seemed to make people not question things.

Behind her, DokDok stood for a moment.

"And that," he said in a smooth breathy voice, "is exactly the kind of thing I'm talking about."

Slippy looked down at him, still holding the tile half out of the ceiling.

"Taking the tile above Kennedy's seat," DokDok continued. "It creates an incident. People notice. They talk."

A small pause.

"...Not in her favor."

The next day students certainly noticed the missing ceiling tile, though nobody seemed to correlate it to Kennedy and certainly not in a negative light. Slippy didn't find this all that surprising.

After class, DokDok pulled Slippy aside. "Look, I've got an idea, but it's all or nothing. And I need you to be all in. I've had a lot of loss lately. Right now I really need a win."

"Oh, sorry," said Slippy.

"It's okay." DokDok quickly moved on. "Tomorrow during class I need you to crawl into the ceiling through the orifice in the janitor's closet, otherwise known as Lost and Found."

Slippy thought this an odd way to phrase that sentence, although her mind moved on as DokDok continued.

"You'll then follow my map, to the step EXACTLY," DokDok paused and looked Slippy in the eye. "Then when you arrive at the missing ceiling panel, you will drop the watermelon on Kennedy's head, winning me the election."

"Okay" Slippy said without giving it a second thought.

DokDok spent the rest of lunch crawling around on his hands and knees mapping the paces from the janitor's closet to the hole in the ceiling. Contrary to what he had hoped, he was at one point questioned on what he was doing.

"Measuring coordinates," he hissed through clenched teeth. DokDok held his jaw closed tight the rest of the night, thinking of how they had smirked at his answer. He'd show all those popular kids who's right tomorrow when he won the election.

Another day came and went, though on this particular day Slippy found herself crouched in the ceiling with a map in one hand and a watermelon under her shirt. She followed the map, one step at a time, careful to stay only above the beams so as to not fall through the ceiling. Making this even more difficult was the only source of light being bright white stripes coming up from through the cracks in the ceiling tiles. Eventually though, she rounded a corner, and the bright shining rectangle of the open ceiling tile glowed ahead of her.

There was only one problem. The hole in the ceiling was above Kennedy's desk, and Kennedy was not at her desk but at the front of the class speaking. Slippy had to improvise. She peered through the hole again and again from various angles until she felt somewhat confident she had estimated her target's position. She carefully tip-toed along a wooden beam to the tile she thought was correct. She squatted and very carefully began to use her black claws to pull the tile up.

From below, the teacher stared wide-eyed up at the ceiling as a tile began to slide out of place. Then, out of the darkness quickly faded a watermelon, falling too fast to keep up with. Slippy had a moment of regret watching the watermelon fall towards Kennedy, but quickly got swept up in the pandemonium as it splattered and shattered into a million pieces atop Kennedy's horned head. The class erupted into laughter immediately. DokDok's eyes lit up at the essence of his plan coming to life, though his heart would soon turn to panic. The class wasn't just laughing; they were chanting Kennedy's name! DokDok could not believe it. Somehow he never had even one single win. The kids who were too busy worrying about being cool to actually have any fun had gotten their way once again.

"Okay. What... the freak." Kennedy said as she raised her arms and spun around.

Though nobody had noticed, Slippy had quickly dropped down from the ceiling in the hall and joined in with the jumping and chanting.

"KENNEDY! KENNEDY! KENNEDY!"

Maybe It Depends Who You Ask

One day, while the teacher sat asleep at their desk, an announcement came over the loudspeaker. A garbled mess of reports and numbers that was barely intelligible had leaked through from the communications channels of the bureaucrats. Despite the lack of context, everyone seemed to know what it meant.

This was debate club, so everyone formed a group. Many arguments were made, but only two outlasted the rest, one of which was headed by Emily. She argued that since they couldn't make out what they were supposed to do, they should just stay put. The other group argued that they should report to the gymnasium for an assembly, like they often do when there's an announcement. And when they couldn't reach an agreement, the teams split. One staying put, and one heading out.

The teacher did not wake up.

For a while when the two leaders split, nothing happened. Dave was wandering the empty halls during this time and stumbled across two tall men in striped suits. They had long leather shoes with pointed tips, and silver watches hanging from their breast pocket. He drew them in one of his scrolls, and wrote theories about who they might be.

But then another announcement came over the speakers.

"Thank you for your cooperation."

Emily and her group took this as a surefire sign that she had made the correct choice in staying behind, and the other group took it as a surefire sign that they had made the correct choice in heading to the gym.

Neither group ever confronted the other about it again.

There's More to Explore Here

Emily, Slippy and Dave were in the school library. It was a small library with only two rooms and the three of them sat crowded in the back, each competing to get a hand on a keyboard of the computer that usually sat unused.

All that week everyone had been whispering to each other about a specific brand of chewing gum, available at the local gas station, that allowed you to see into the world of computers. Supposedly it was a magical thing, where you could edit whatever you like, and Emily, though hesitant, was too curious not to try.

She had gathered her friends to come with her for a particular idea she had planned in this world. Slippy provided the chewing gum, and though Emily wanted to question exactly how it worked, didn't want to stall the moment and put a piece in her mouth.

At first, nothing happened as they chewed.

Then, slowly, the feeling of the keyboard, the chair, even the room itself all seemed distant, like she was remembering it instead of sitting in it.

She looked at what was now occupying her hands instead of a computer... a yellow sheet of paper. Lines of text described a girl and her friends sitting at a computer in a small library, hands on the keyboard, trying to focus.

Emily now found herself in a dim office building, with green carpet and tan walls. Tubes delivering documents lined the ceiling and faded green filing cabinets were organized in rows. The only sources of light were the dim yellow bulbs hanging from the ceiling, and the blinking white screens from the old box computers which Emily figured became obsolete decades ago.

Slippy was already running the halls.

"Come on, let's go!"

The name of the game they were there to play was hide and seek tag, and with the endless corridors and abundance of clutter, the world of computers was the perfect setting.

First up was Emily as the seeker. While she counted to one minute, Dave and Slippy ran off into the halls. When one minute passed Emily took her hands from over her eyes and began to run herself.

Slippy's hiding spot became quickly apparent, as she was only halfway into position. Her legs hung out of the open ceiling tile and when Emily's footsteps approached Slippy dropped and ran.

Slippy bolted through the halls, and was much faster than Emily, and quickly went out of sight. Emily kept jogging for a bit, but then stopped when it became clear she had no idea where she was going and was completely alone.

A thunk beside Emily made her jump. A vacuum tube had delivered a piece of paper to a computer, but before the whirring gears could pull it in Emily ripped the document from its clutches.

Black pen wrote out a story in crude handwriting about monsters studiously taking notes in class, then spending the night studying. Underneath the pen markings however she could make out the original printed text. A teacher spends a day rambling on about the Old War instead of teaching math, and a student then spent that night out with friends instead of learning the material that should have been covered in class. Emily remembered the teacher who always talked about the Old War instead of teaching.

She didn't have long to think about that teacher though, as Slippy came suddenly crashing through the ceiling. Her body landed with a puff of dust in front of Emily.

Emily jumped forward to tag Slippy.

"Got you!"

"What the heck was that?" Dave said as he appeared from around a corner.

"Slippy fell out of the ceiling."

The three of them then wandered the corridors, watching with wonder the papers fly through tubes and reading miscellaneous documents. Quite often Emily found that documents pertaining to students' grades and how they had spent the night before tests were edited with pens of various color. The edits seemed to be making Dave uneasy.

Eventually they found their way to a door with a glowing red exit sign above it. They walked through, and found themselves back in the library, hands crowded around a keyboard. It was fun just that once but Emily wasn't sure she wanted to try it again, unlike Slippy who never seemed to get tired of it.

Once logging off the computer they then checked out their books, and sat in the grass reading. This would be a day worth remembering.

Dave's Legendarium #2

"By chewing the gum and sitting at a computer with any sort of means to interact, you become so attuned with the rules set by the wires, cables, numbers, and switches that you see yourself as the computer sees the world. You can change anything you like through physical means in this world, things that would take a hacker of significant skill to edit through ordinary means. But what they do not know is that what the computer sees is just as real as what you and I might see, for they are knowing too, if only of numbers and calculations. Whatever reality exists for them must have some sort of cause in the real world, and so by changing the world of the computers they have also changed the worlds of monsters and humans. Naive students who use this power beyond their understanding have effectively shattered what is, to make it so they have studied and succeeded on their tests. Though in the reflection of broken glass you can still see that they did not. And it is exactly this incongruity that attracts the firemen, coming to burn all that is broken and more."

A Pocket of Stolen Time

There were only a few minutes left of detention before school was out.

The room was small and square. Large windows stretched halfway across the room, with thick bars preventing anyone from escaping. The clock on the wall ticked with a steady, unbothered rhythm. Slippy sat tilted back in her chair, balancing it on two legs. Dave was fiddling with the clock. Emily sat upright, hands folded loosely in her lap. When it seemed those minutes had passed and the bell had still not rung, Slippy went out the door. When

she did not return, Dave followed, and finally, when he did not return either, Emily walked through the door too.

She assumed the bell hadn't rung in their room for the end of the day, though when she stepped through the door expecting to see empty halls, she instead bumped into Slippy and Dave, standing right outside the door.

"Just a few more minutes until class is out," said the guard, and he sent them back in.

They waited and waited. They waited for far longer than they should have before finally exiting again, this time all at once.

"I said a few more minutes." The guard was clearly frustrated and sent them back in.

"I'm confused," proclaimed Dave. "We waited for ages. And when we first came in here, the clock was five behind. When we left the room, it was 5 ahead. And now that we're back again, it's skipped to be 10 ahead. Isn't that strange?"

"How curious..." said Emily, checking the pocket watch she kept in her dress to see if it was running amuck as well. It wasn't.

They waited some more. Emily twiddled her feet the way she imagined someone like herself would do while waiting, while Slippy and Dave stared out the window.

Slippy had noticed something strange, as she always seemed to do. There was no wind outside, when there always was a strong breeze or more in Somnolent, Somewhere. Instead, the clouds and trees remained perfectly still. She pointed this out to Emily and Dave, and they too sat and watched for a while. It was a strange sight, having no wind in their town. It looked almost as if everything were frozen in time.

Dave made a loud and confident proclamation all of the sudden.

"I think we're frozen in time. Watch, when we try to leave, the guard will say it's only been a second, even though the bell should have rung half an hour ago."

And exactly that happened. The guard sent them back in, with growing frustration that, from his perspective, was completely reasonable. They sat again and stared at the frozen landscape for a while.

"I've been thinking," Slippy now made an announcement, though she spoke in a neutral tone.

She looked at Dave. "You said the clock jumped forward when we left one at a time, right?"

"Yes," said Dave.

Slippy looked at Emily. "Did you wait in here after Dave left, or did you leave immediately after?"

"I waited a few minutes."

"Okay, cause to me, you came out right after Dave. Like immediately. So this must mean that time is only frozen inside this room. The only way for this detention to end is for us to stay outside the room!"

Dave paused to think, but Emily jumped in right away.

"A pocket of stolen time!"

"Sure Emily. I propose a plan." Slippy paused for dramatic effect. "We have to run out this room, and we have to outrun security until the bell rings and the gates open."

A pause.

"Not much of a plan," said Dave with a snort.

Slippy continued. Here's where the plan comes in. We run back into this room to catch our breath after being chased a while. The guard is frozen in time while we're in here, and so to him it'll be a constant chase while we have time to recover. Then we rinse and repeat until we can leave!"

"Genius! Let's get to it," said Emily.

Though Slippy thought nothing of it, Dave looked at her for a moment, surprised at her eagerness to jump on board. Emily was a good student, always so composed. He had a hard time picturing her getting chased by security through campus.

Emily noticed and added on, "Well, duh... we don't wanna die of old age in here."

The plan was in action. Slippy stole a nearly empty jug from atop a water cooler when the opportunity presented itself during the chase, but other than that everything went exactly as predicted, and they wound up back in the room with the guard just behind them frozen.

"Okay everyone, refresh!" Slippy shouted in that mocking, authoritative tone that high schoolers often do.

And they did. Everyone drank and rested and caught their breath. Then they went out the door, and the chase began again. Through halls, up and down stairs. Slippy even went through an open window once, which made Emily laugh. They were careful to avoid the gate so as not to get the guard who opens it involved.

Soon they were back in the room. The second guard stood stuck halfway done unlocking the gate for when the bell rang, and after taking a moment to wriggle out their nerves and excitement, they made a mad dash out the door.

Straight down the hall. Straight through the main courtyard. The bell rang right as the gate opened, and as they approached the exit, sprinting faster than they thought they could manage, Emily, in a split second, noticed the guard still standing with his big body in the way of their escape. She made an impromptu decision. Jumping in the air with one leg out, she karate kicked the guard to the ground. They both were stunned for a moment, the guard now lying on the ground. Emily huffed for a moment, then let out a shriek of pure energy, running away from campus and into the streets with her friends. It was the last time a student or teacher would ever see them on those grounds.

Under The Origami Tree

“Slippy! I have made a new discovery!” Dave came running over with a jiggle and animated bounce to his gait. “There are living paper creatures walking the neighborhood. I saw one by a fire hydrant, and i saw one come unfolded near the north storm drain. I dont understand how they work. It must be something of the bureaucrats work, throwing something that doesnt fit their files into hidden places.”

“No” Slippy casually corrected Dave. “actually my old friend makes them. Shes been staying under the old tree on central. I’ll show you.”

“Oh,” said Dave, as he scribbled out something on one of his scrolls.

They began to walk. Dave excitedly chattered about things that didnt need to be said during this time.

“Thats the fire hydrant i was talking about. The paper creature isnt there anymore. And if we keep going we’ll end up by the storm drain where i found the other one.”

“I know” said Slippy.

They arrived at the old tree and crawled into a mangled hole between its roots.

"Hey JuneBug, its me, Slippy. I brought a friend. I hope thats okay."

JuneBug jumped up in excitement. "Oh my god Slippy I haven't seen you in so long. How have you been?"

JuneBug was egregiously friendly. Slippy had been nervous to waltz into her place unannounced with a guest but was comforted to know her fears were completely unfounded.

"Um, its been alright, I dont know."

"Not so good?" Junebug responded empatheticly. "No same for me. Life sucks and everything just keeps getting worse. HAHAHA"

"yeah"

Dave looked unhappy with where the conversation was going. "We came to ask about the paper creatures. I'm curious how they work."

"Oh it's not much. Look, each fold in the paper holds tension. As you fold it into its shape you also consider how it will animate as it unfolds. Thats what makes them alive. See, it's pretty simple"

"Doesn't seem so simple to me" said Dave.

She shrugged "Well, I guess you have to have a sense for it"

Slippy found this charming.

JuneBugs mind wasn't keen on talking about the origami creatures, even as her hands continued to manufacture them.

"Do you remember when we used to make wizard hats? With all the glitter spells and mass hysteria potions?"

She was hyperactive as a child and hadn't changed one bit since then as far as Slippy could tell.

"Yeah"

"Do you remember Grumpy? How he always wore pink socks. He was pretty popular in elementary school so I kinda hated him."

"Um, no not really. What happened to you? We havent really talked since we were kids"

“Oh yeah, my parents kicked me out when i was 14 so I've been moving from place to place. I keep coming back to this old hole in the ground though. Id be kinda homeless without it”

Slippy felt like this was kind of terrible. The place was a wreck, even if you tried to ignore that the floor was made of dirt and the walls of bark.

“Hey watch this! I just folded this raccoon and this is gonna be so funny”

She threw the raccoon out the hole it began to scurry towards someone sitting on a park bench across the grass. Slippy, Dave, and JuneBug all watched from the shadows of the hole.

The raccoon jumped up and began scratching the persons face. They wrestled to get it off, but it easily crawled across their body and down their back. It reached into their pocket, took their wallet, and then before the person knew which way to look began to scurry back towards the tree.

JuneBug was laughing and snorting maniacly. “I don't think they even realized it was supposed to be a raccoon!” she shouted.

Dave cautiously took notes, and Slippy continued to try to catch up with her, though she mostly only spoke about the things they both remembered from early childhood. Was there really nothing new?

Eventually long into the night, Slippy and Dave headed out.

“Nice seeing you” said Slippy

“Nice seeing you too. We gotta hang out more. We gotta get the gang back together. Apples and Moth and you and me. We gotta get everything back to how it used to be.”

“That would be really nice actually” said Slippy, I'll try to make plans.

And so their night came to an end. Dave had learned the story of the origami creatures and though he was disappointed by the lack of grandiosity involved in their story was still somewhat happy to know the truth. Slippy didn't talk much on the way home, and they soon parted ways.

Universal Constant

On a little blue planet in outer space, in a painterly town hidden just behind the horizon, three teens sit reading impossible maps of an impossible school. They draw fingers along hallways that are much too long, and rooms that are much too small. Dave had meticulously

mapped the school for as long as he was there and still only barely scratched the surface of the corridors and doorways. And unfortunately for him, he would never finish his endeavor, for closing in on the school's location were the firemen. Their heavy steps echoing as their bodies hulked through the streets, their flamethrowers brandished.

That day they would burn the school to ashes as the town watched.

Sleepwalking

Dave, Slippy, and Emily had once again found themselves together at school, in Somnolent, Somewhere. Only this time they were alone, and the school was nothing but charred frames and beams sticking out of still-warm ground. The firemen had arrived and burnt a source of chaos as they often do, coming and going without comment. Their flames had burned white like lightning earlier that day and, in contrast, left behind nothing but black soot and smoke in the evening.

Slippy held a bit of splintered wood and poked the remains of a wall behind her head as the trio told memories to each other in the twilight.

"I once found a cheap camcorder in the janitor's closet with a note 'Founding Lost and Found' stuck to its top," said Dave. "On it were recordings of a dozen or so students I believe I remember seeing at this school long ago. They wandered through an endless closet filled with lost lunches and missing lamps and all types of other things. Each tape, I watched as they built forts from scavenged items labeled with the names of those they once belonged to. Built makeshift beds from yoga mats and cushions. And everything else you need to live comfortably. I watched as a small community formed, with hunter-gatherers sent out to scavenge for food each morning and feasts organized in the town center each night. I watched as the boy who had naturally risen to power and self-appointed chief was overthrown by majority vote and replaced with an intelligent peer. Then expeditions began to find an exit, and when a door was found, leading out into glowing white light, the camera was left behind, recording for me to find. I never did find those endless hallways leading to that town, only the small closet we know as the lost and found, but I'm glad to know they made it out of the school before it burned. Though I can't say where they ended up, probably some place far stranger than the worlds of both humans and monsters combined"

"Perhaps it led to a place near the world of computers. That place always seemed outside of reality. One time I spent all night working on a project for math class. I colored in the lines and showed all my work. But the teacher assumed since I never did my work before that I must have cheated, and I got a score of negative five for a grade. The one time I actually try, I'm punished for it. I considered chewing the gum and fudging the numbers to change

the records and give myself an A. I decided against it, but it didn't matter in the end, since all the records and everything related ended up destroyed by the firemen."

Emily jumped in.

"Where do the firemen come from anyway? In our world they're a part of the government. And they aren't bad guys who start fires; they're good guys who put them out. What on earth is the deal with them here?"

Dave answered with all that he knew.

"Well, people here say that they're part of the government too, but they never felt that way to me. They felt like something mythical, beyond good guys and bad guys. To be honest, I don't think anyone knows."

"Probably not. I was never able to find anything about them that made any sense in my hours of browsing files in the computer world," added Slippy.

Emily had one final story to tell before the sun fully departed.

"During spring break, when I brought the class pet home to the human world in order to care for it, I got in a fight with my parents. They didn't like the way I was dressing myself in the world of monsters. They said I was supposed to represent human culture and that I should dress like everybody else. They even said I'd never get a boyfriend if I kept up with my 'antiquated' style. I let them know that actually I did get a boyfriend even though that's not totally true, and who even cares anyways. I was so mad. I ran out of the house and sat in the park with the class pet. I just sat there all day with him silently, watching everybody else run around with frisbees and stuff."

Emily began to cry, and Dave comforted her while Slippy lay tense and unsure what to do.

Eventually, after more hours passed and it was fully dark in those woods surrounding the school, the three of them fell asleep together on the warm ground for the night, dreaming stories of constellations.