





Communicating Biodiversity
An initiative of National Biodiversity Authority, Chennai

The Land Where The Sticker Tree Grows

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Author: Malvika Tewari

Illustrator: Malvika Tewari

Edited by: Debjani Banerjee and Deepta Sateesh

Designed and housed at: Law+Environment+Design Laboratory
at Srishti School of Art, Design and Technology



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ABOUT THE BOOK

With growing urbanization, we continue to construct new environments every day, sometimes at a pace too rapid for other species to cope. It is important for us to remember that mankind cannot survive in isolation. We are fortunate to live in a planet that is benevolent and sustains life in countless forms, allowing some to develop and others to slip into non-existence, embedding new lessons in the fabric of life everyday. Change is as certain as the fruit after the withering flower.

As humans, we have held on to our place in this complex web. We have survived and embraced nature's diverse ecosystems, responding to them with dexterity while giving birth to various cultures. Biological diversity shapes the world's cultural diversity and the farther we move away from it, the closer we come to living in monocultures, devoid of the palette that nature has to offer.

The "Land Where The Sticker Tree Grows" offers a simple glance at urban and peri-urban environments to capture the conflict between biodiversity and urbanization, by creating empathy for species that we share these spaces with.

Take, for instance, the story of the pigeon nesting in our ventilator window, the Non Resident Avian, adapting to the change in his natural habitat. Or the story of the shopping bag, observing changes in what we consume from day to day.

Through these stories built around such indicators, this storybook observes change in biodiversity through multiple perspectives. This change is prevalent in our daily lives and the stories are plenty. They lurk in our own city, our markets and our homes.

This one however, begins in a landfill...



IN SEARCH OF THE STICKER TREE





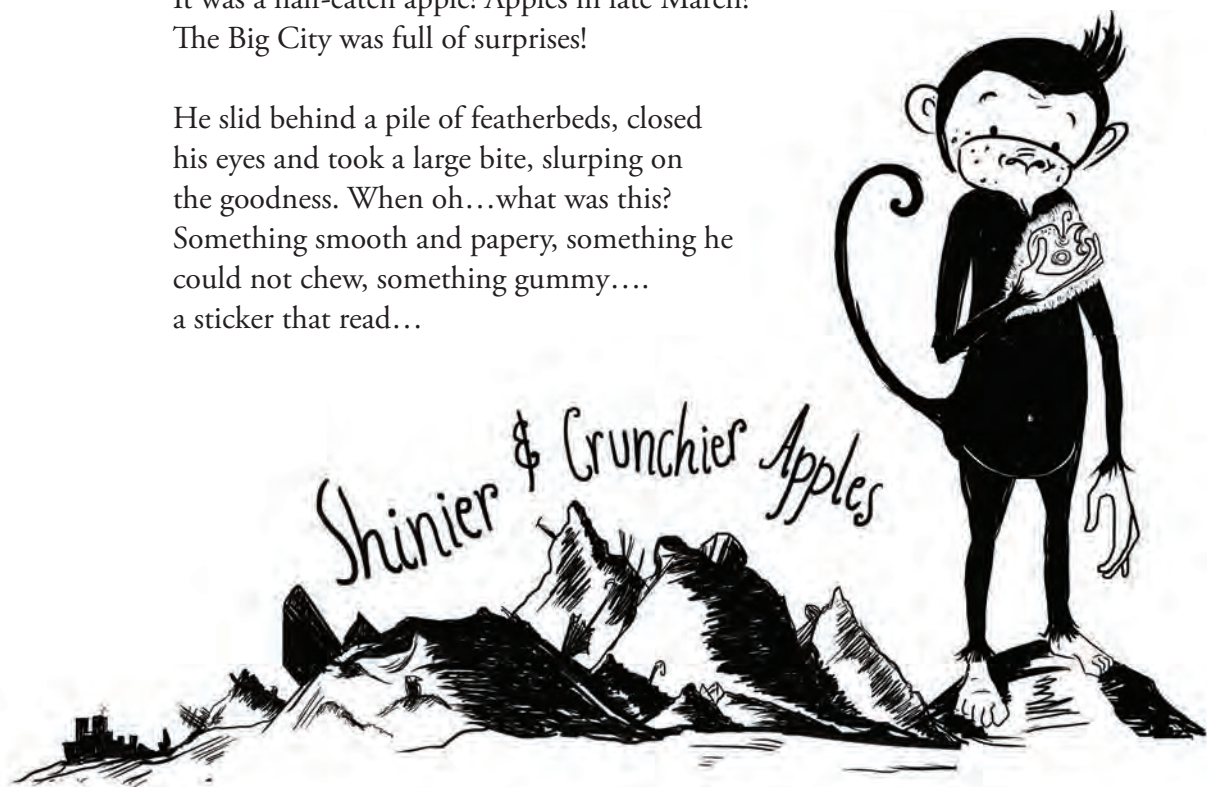


Every day a troop of monkeys visited the landfill near The Big City. They rummaged through torn dolls, broken toasters, batteries smoking in the hot sun, looking for something to munch on.

Long Fingers, the monkey with the deftest fingers, poked around in a pile of trash, puzzled by the oddities he had to encounter.

He felt his hand close upon something round.
It was a half-eaten apple! Apples in late March?
The Big City was full of surprises!

He slid behind a pile of featherbeds, closed his eyes and took a large bite, slurping on the goodness. When oh...what was this? Something smooth and papery, something he could not chew, something gummy.... a sticker that read...





Shinier?
Crunchier? This
apple was a Godsend!
It was the best apple he
had laid his hands upon!
And it came with A STICKER!

Long Fingers stuck the sticker behind his ear. He was going to find the tree that grew these stickers. Maybe the wise, old monkey could help him.

“Look what I found, Grandfather Monkey! An apple with a sticker! A gift from the city!” Long Fingers exclaimed.

“Apples don’t come from the city, you fool,” said the Grandfather. “They come from orchards. Just like monkeys don’t live in landfills, they live on trees. And stickers? What would you do with them? You can’t eat a sticker!”

“Yes, but it looks wonderful! The city folk put it on their apples to make them crunchier!”

“The minds of these city folk work in ways we do not understand, child,” the Grandfather sighed. “Go, discover the city if you must. But stay awhile and listen to my story. When I was a young monkey, a little girl fed me grapes and I spat the seeds around this tree.

And a beautiful grape vine flourished around me, with fresh grapes every winter. Then, the people from her city razed down our tree and instead dug this landfill. More than anything, I am furious because we can't plant any more grape vines!"

"Why is that, Grandfather Monkey?" Long Fingers asked.

"The people who love pasting stickers on their apples, have now planted seedless grapes."

"Seedless grapes!" wondered the monkey as he bid his grandfather goodbye, "Sounds ingenious!"

Long fingers leapt from one garbage heap to another, elated, in search of a tree like no other. With the sticker behind his ear and his tail wound around the apple, he set on the trail to the city.




If a sticker could make the fruit so round and crunchy, the tree itself must be phenomenal! It must be a gigantic, dense wonder that grazed the sky! And what else must the city have? How would he ever find the sticker tree among all the magical trees in the city?



THE OUTLAW
OF THE
HIGH RISE







“Get the fruits for Amma’s fast, Shibu,” yelled the lady on the fourth floor to the servant boy. “And shut the balcony door, the pigeons are at it again!”

That was our cue. Before Shibu could bat us away with a broomstick, we took off, leaving a goodbye message on the clothes rack. We have a bad reputation around here.



Pigeons, the filthy outlaws of the high-rise apartments.



My flock circles the balconies, day after day, looking for a handle to roost, spilt grain to nibble or somewhere to nest. The bare necessities.

I'm a second generation apartment dweller. My great aunt was an esteemed architect, an expert in nest-building. Trust me when I say that there is no spot cosier than the ventilator window.




Trees? Who needs them anymore?

Since my ancestral tree was felled, my flock has lost the art of tree-nesting. And that is perfectly alright, as my great aunt said, we must move ahead with the times. Which is why it was nice of the humans to build us a sturdy new building, even though we were given no prior notice.

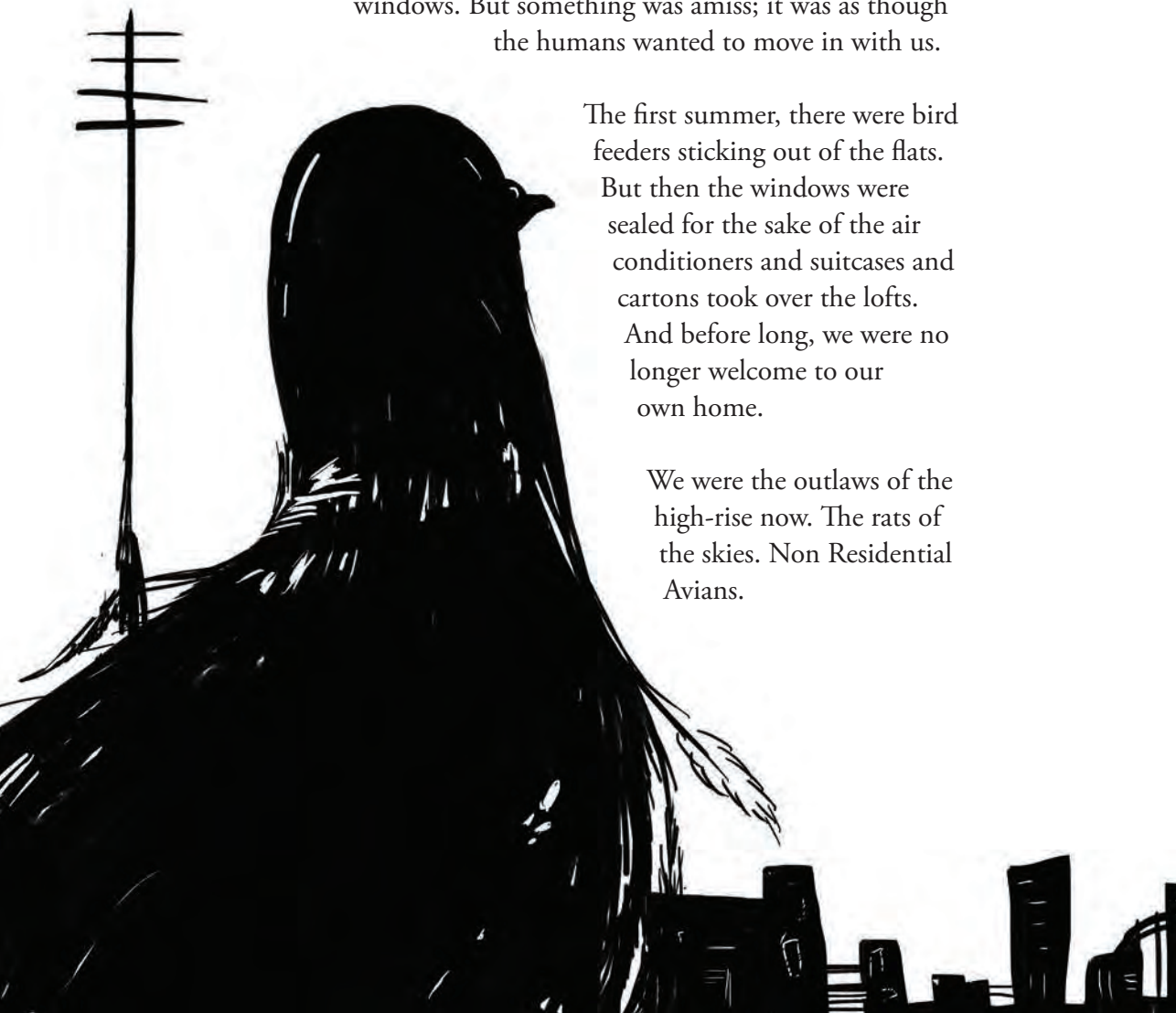
The day the men arrived with their chain saws, all the tree dwellers raised an alarm. We looked on as the mice, the millipedes, the sparrows and the geckos scurried away.





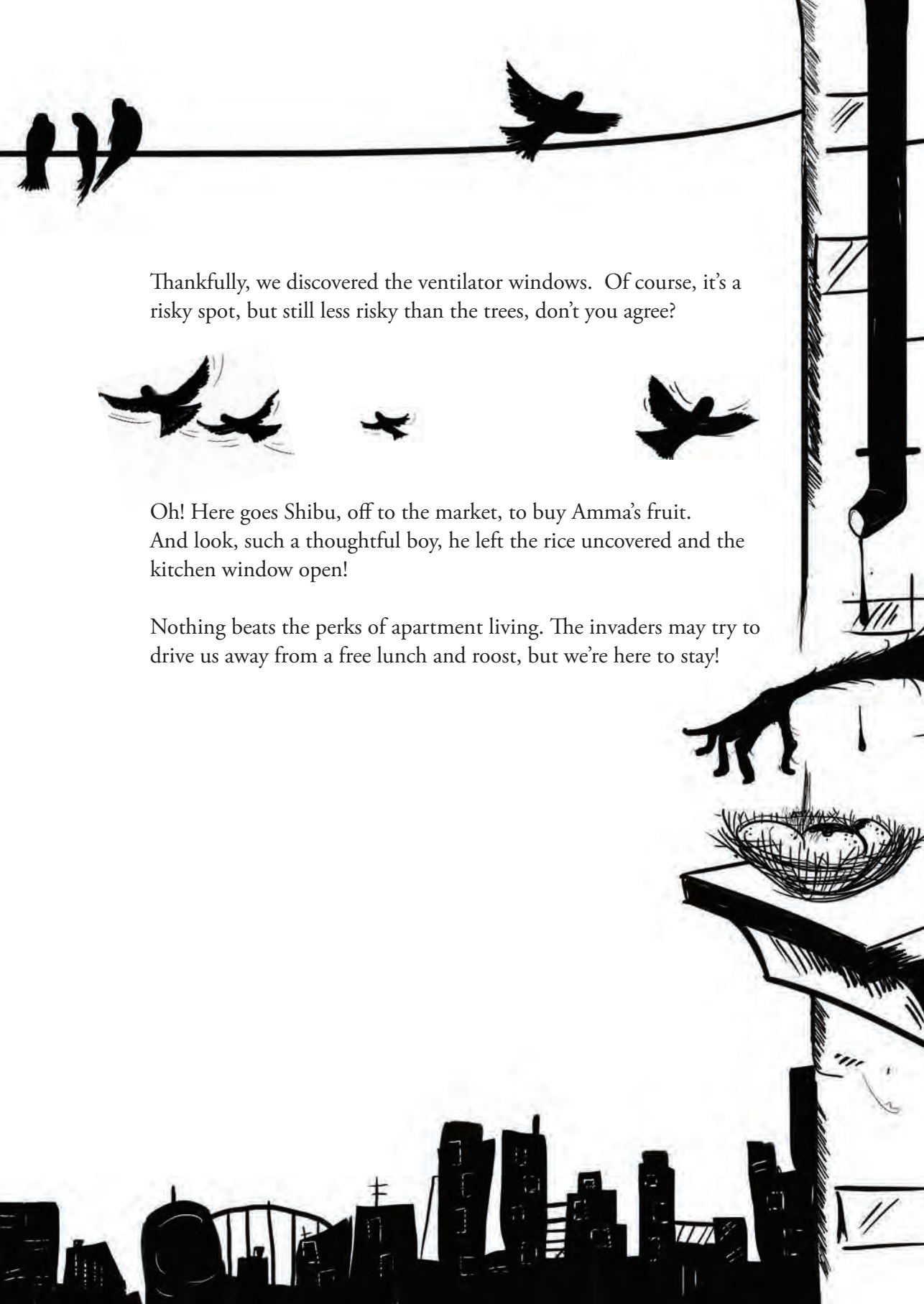
Before the men could touch the trunk my mother, who was expecting me, fled to a tall post nearby. And there she raised me to be a survivor. My great aunt, ever the optimist, perished with the tree but she'd have been proud to see the new high-rise apartments that stand in its place.

For two years we hung around watching them construct one floor after another. Until it was so high it even made the pigeons dizzy. We toiled with the humans, building nests in small openings and windows. But something was amiss; it was as though the humans wanted to move in with us.



The first summer, there were bird feeders sticking out of the flats. But then the windows were sealed for the sake of the air conditioners and suitcases and cartons took over the lofts. And before long, we were no longer welcome to our own home.

We were the outlaws of the high-rise now. The rats of the skies. Non Residential Avians.



Thankfully, we discovered the ventilator windows. Of course, it's a risky spot, but still less risky than the trees, don't you agree?

Oh! Here goes Shibu, off to the market, to buy Amma's fruit. And look, such a thoughtful boy, he left the rice uncovered and the kitchen window open!

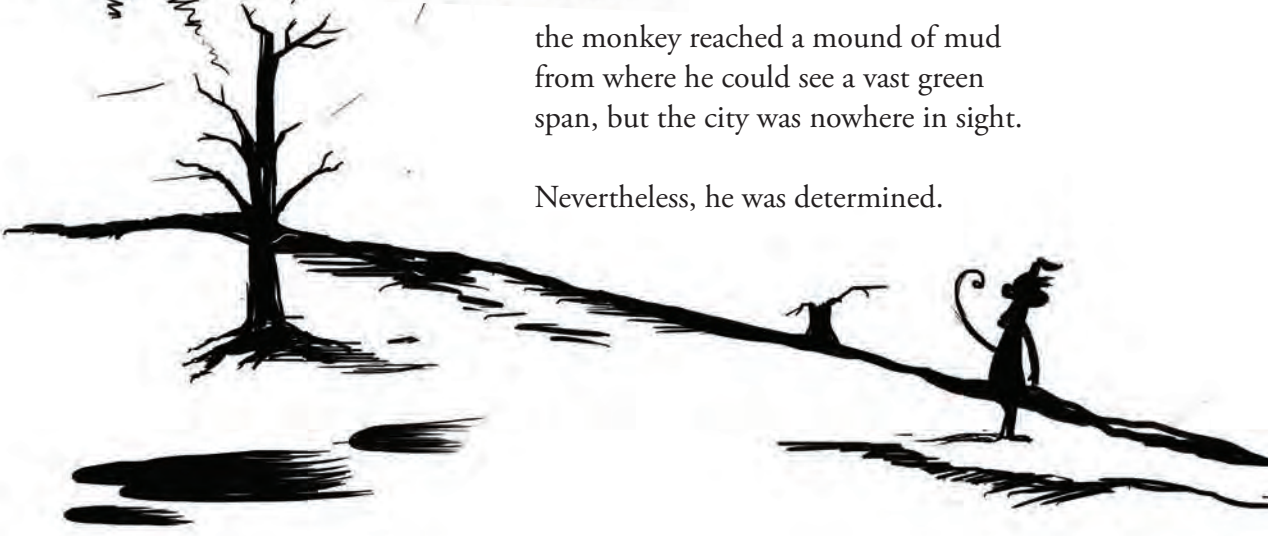
Nothing beats the perks of apartment living. The invaders may try to drive us away from a free lunch and roost, but we're here to stay!



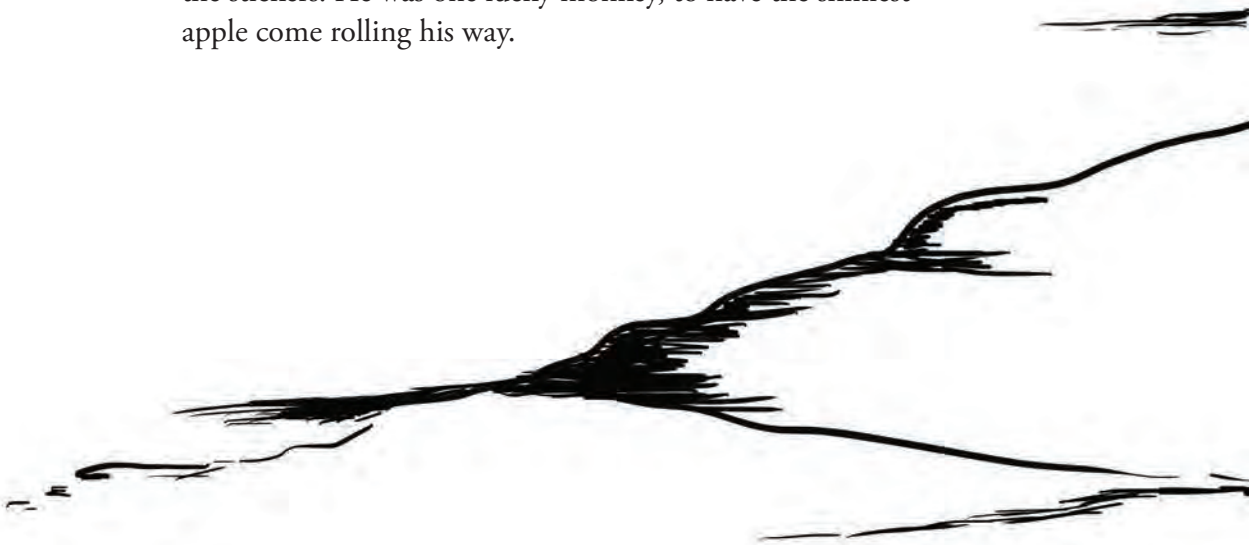
Meanwhile,

the monkey reached a mound of mud from where he could see a vast green span, but the city was nowhere in sight.

Nevertheless, he was determined.



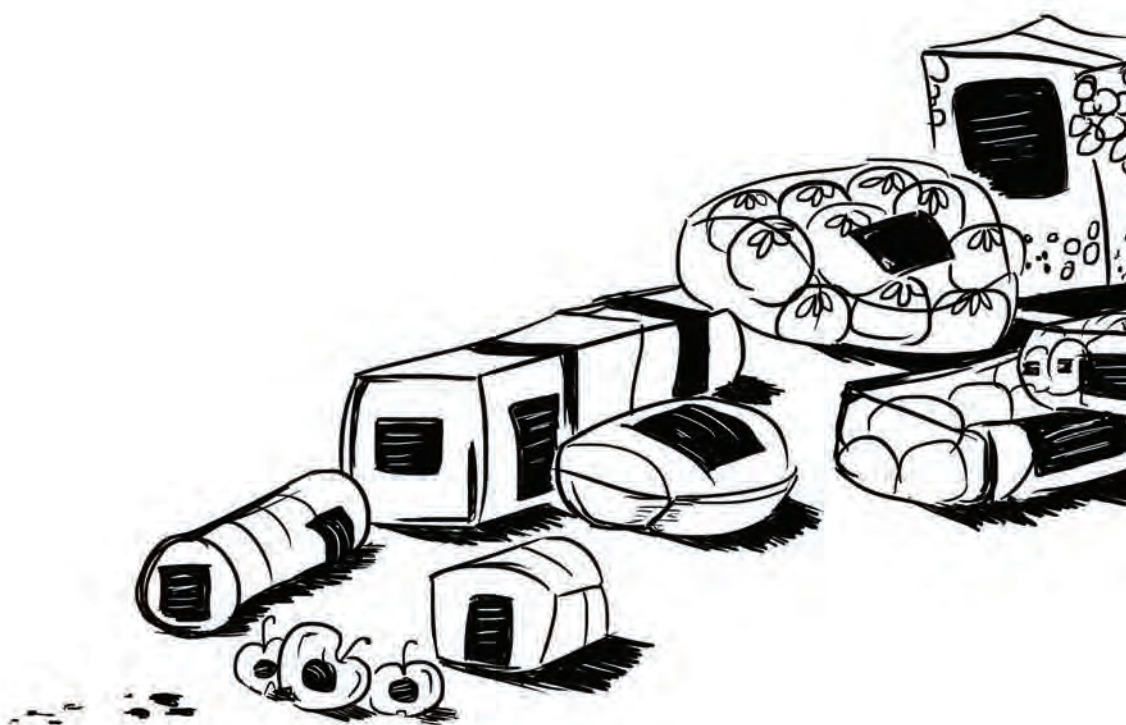
The remarkable sticker stuck fast behind his ear would give him the strength to walk through the fields, all the way to the city. He couldn't wait to climb the blessed tree, and cover himself in the stickers! He was one lucky monkey, to have the shiniest apple come rolling his way.





"Everyone can use
more stickers."

said he, shuffling onward.

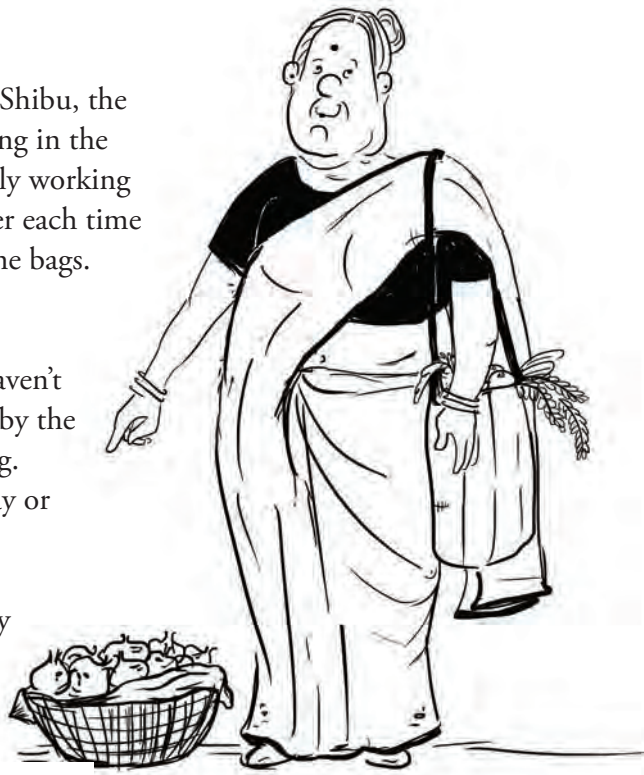




AN UNFAIR
BARGAIN

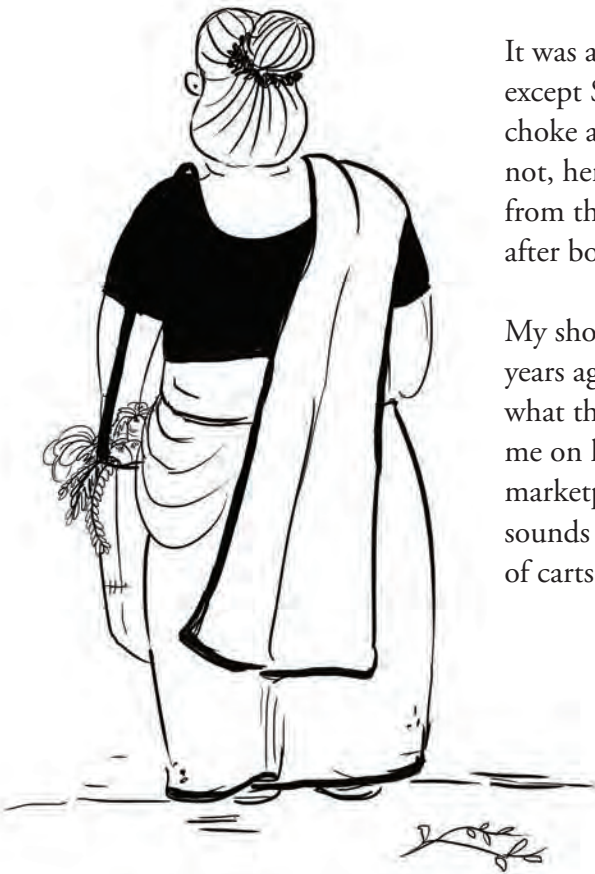
On his way to the super market, Shibu, the servant boy, dodged the cow sitting in the middle of the road who was slowly working its jaws on a plastic bag. I shudder each time I think of the fate of the polythene bags. Pitiful creatures.

I'm such a sturdy one myself, I haven't been abandoned for fifteen years by the family I live with. I'm the jute bag. You won't find me cast off in a day or two, I'll be your loyal shopping companion for years. Never prey to a hungry stray. I was bought by Amma, the grandmother, who insisted on carrying a jhola to the market.



It was a habit that amused everyone except Shibu, who had seen plastic bags choke a lake near his village. Popular or not, here I am, faithfully bearing gifts from the market to the house, season after bountiful season.

My shopping trips with Amma, ten years ago, were very different from what they are today. She would hoist me on her shoulder, tottering on to the marketplace with its mingling sights, sounds and smells, its boisterous din of carts.



The hailing grocers drew us towards the waiting treasure – fruits, vegetables, flowers, pulses, freshly pressed oil and flour. By the time we reached the end of the lane, I was a colourful, brimming exhibit. Rows of farmers would bicker over whose cart displayed the best produce of the wonderful varieties from the fields around the city.

Amma's experience and her keen senses, as she weighed melons in her hands and tapped them one by one, served as our quality check. What I looked forward to the most was the bargain! How I was pulled to and fro between Amma and the grocer, through the familiar tiff over ten rupees. I felt so important, being fought over like that!

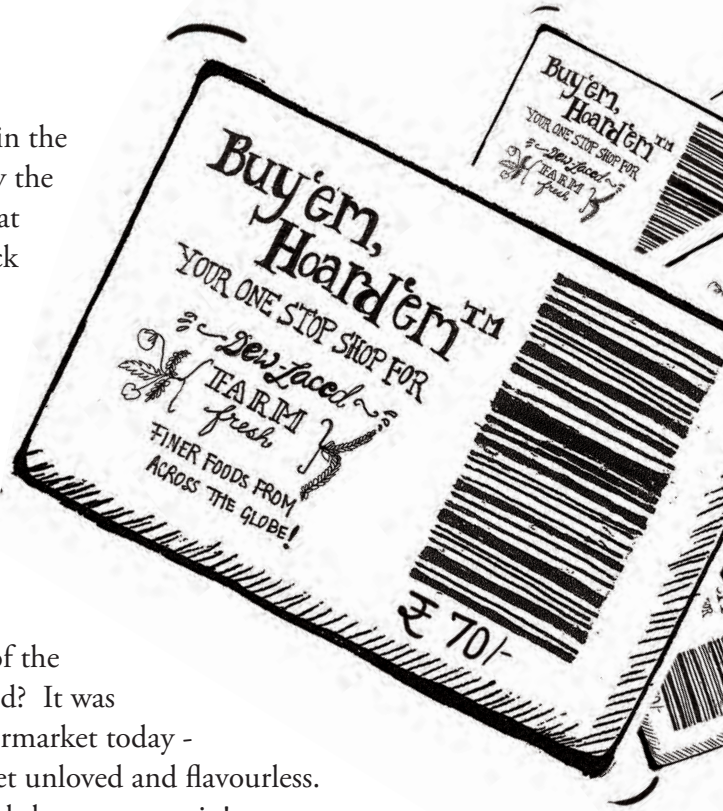
Now that Amma is too old to run errands, Shibu and I walk down the many aisles of the supermarket, surveying instant meals, packaged desserts, and unblemished fruit from all around the world. They're all wrapped in clinging plastic, my defeated distant cousin, who'll end up in the trash no sooner than he touches the kitchen counter.



The prices are not hollered in the air anymore, but decided by the supermarket, printed on neat yellow stickers, that are stuck on everything. Even onto the difficult contours of the jackfruit, the label finds its way. The market that used to be one long, rich tapestry is now a slippery, tiled expanse, with yellow stickers everywhere!

Remember when the fruit of the season was anxiously awaited? It was unlike the fruits in the supermarket today - available around the year, yet unloved and flavourless. And I, the shopping bag had the most to gain!

Even after the last mango was eaten, everyone would slyly steal a whiff of the aroma that lingered on me. These days the fragrances are vacuum sealed, all the ladies' fingers equal in length and the tomatoes the same tint of red.





Shibu and I are leaving the supermarket now, with the added weight of a cash receipt but a much lighter wallet. Before we enter the apartments, Shibu draws out a shiny apple. It has been months since he could afford one for himself. City life is hard on us all, especially for Shibu in the slum.

He takes one large bite... when he sees Amma rush into the balcony, shooing the pigeons off her white saree. Shibu hastily tosses the bitten apple onto a pile of trash, where it will begin its journey to the landfill, hidden under innumerable plastic bags and no one at the apartment will ever be able to trace it. He goes back to his mundane schedule in the kitchen, face red with guilt.

I'm his loyal companion now and this can be our little secret. Someday, he'll save enough to buy apples for himself. And I hope, for Shibu's sake, that the friendly haggle over ten rupees can be brought back to the market.



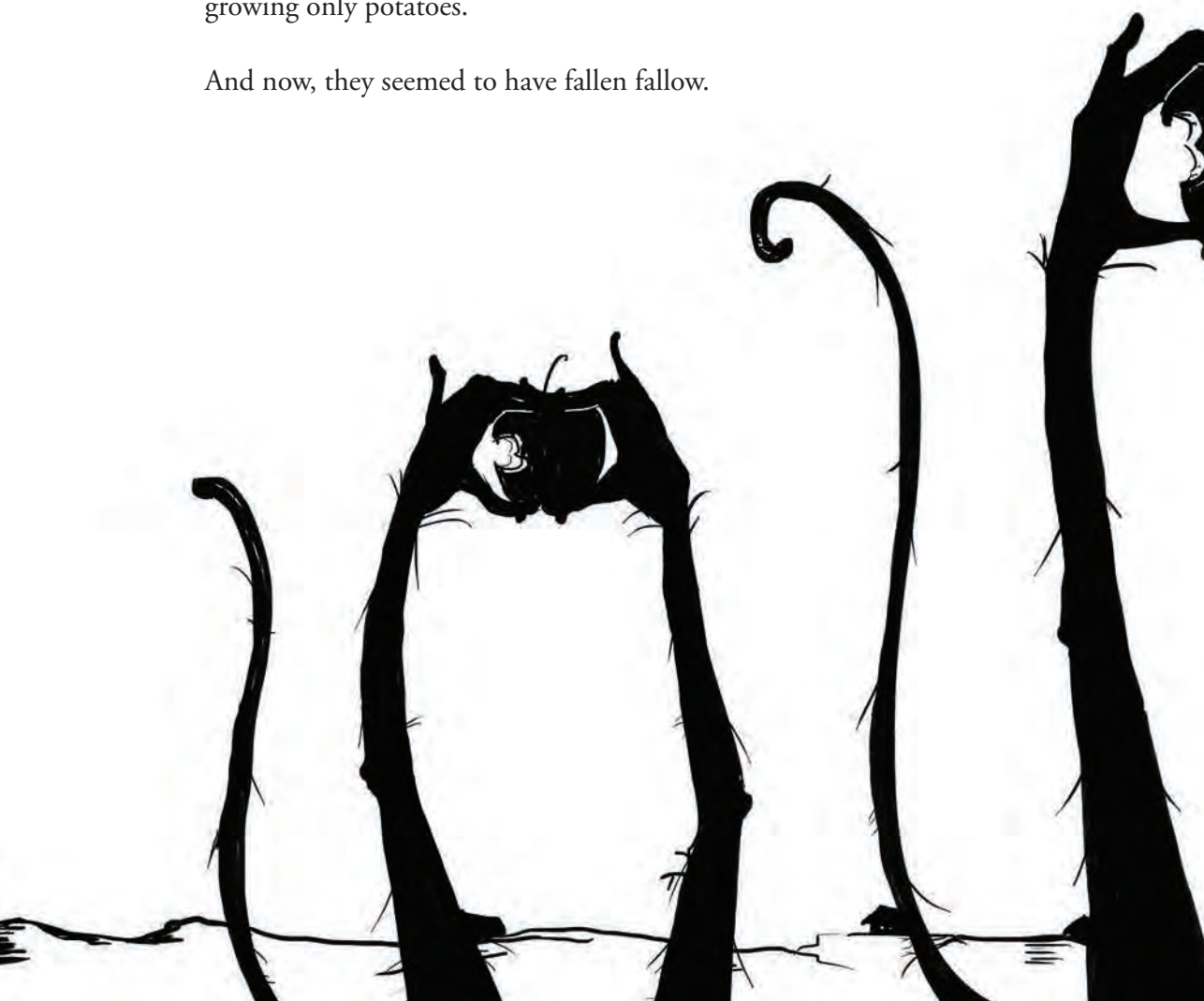
By noon

the sun was at its peak and the monkey only halfway through the farmland. The glue on his sticker had started to come loose as he began to sweat. This wouldn't do at all! He had to cool off.

Grandfather Monkey used to say, "On a hot day the paddy patch is your friend. The crop is always moist, the soil always cool."

The monkey swept his gaze over the fields looking for a tall patch of paddy. But something was very odd about these fields. They looked exactly the same. It seemed as though all these fields had been growing only potatoes.

And now, they seemed to have fallen fallow.







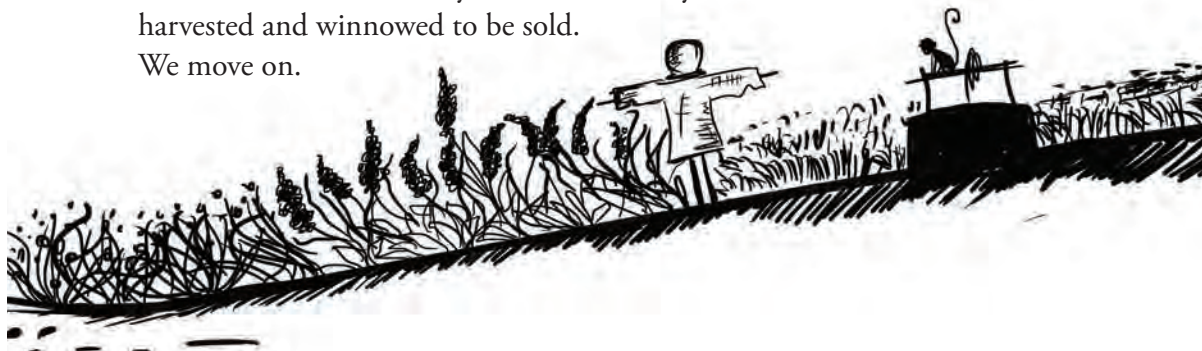
ONCE UPON A FARM




The morning sun has become harsher and the earth is harder.
So I coax it, with a little prodding. The farmer hauls me high
over his head and tills his farm. One row... two rows... three
rows of millets. Three long rows which will thrive even in the
harsh sun, with no protest for water, before they
ripen, golden, for the farmer's own meal.
We move on to the next patch.



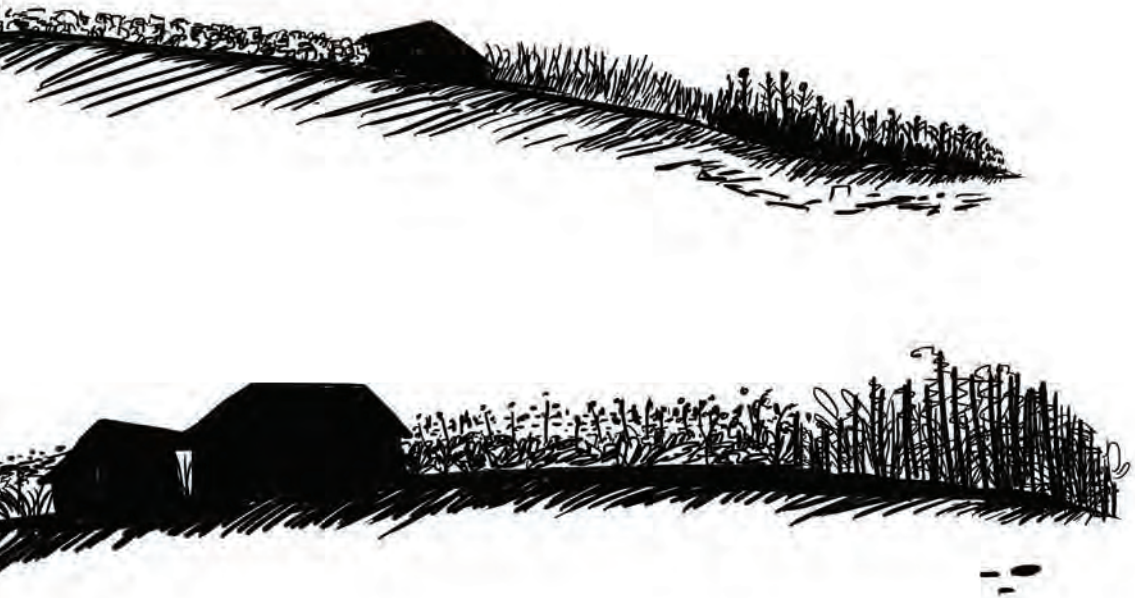
Near the well, the land is flooded three inches above the ankle.
The earthworms, beetles and caterpillars pop up their heads from the
soil to greet me. At once I sink deep, my weight too much for the
farmer to carry. He calls his son and together, they drag me across
the mud. One row... five rows... ten rows of rice. Ten long
rows that must be carefully raised before they are
harvested and winnowed to be sold.
We move on.



On the higher end of his farm, the farmer has sown different pulses. One row... two rows... four rows of pulses in small colourful patches on the farm, signifying the sacred ritual of thanking the Earth for her generosity. We move on.



And in this manner, we till more and more for the vegetables, the spices and a small rose bed, that his daughter waters each day. And with the setting of the sun, we rest.



The farmer goes into his hut for a good wash, placing me against the trunk of the fruit trees. From here I can get a good view of the day's work - the crisscrossing masterpiece that we have tilled on the farm together. Of course, it is a muddy affair, but I know that after getting coated in the slushy paddy, I will shed the rich, dark earth over the coarse millets.



After dinner, the farmer sits with his son who helps him read the notice that has come from the Big City. "The Food Industry in the city proposes to buy all our produce!" says Shibu, the farmer's son, "Provided that we grow **ONLY POTATOES**. They will buy them at a great price!"

"Only potatoes?" The farmer is puzzled. "But we can't feed everyone simply potatoes! They need something other than that!"

The next morning all the farmers meet to discuss this with the Assistant to the Manager of the Food Industrialist's Personal Secretary, to find out about The Big City that will eat only potatoes. It is the strangest thing they have heard.

"Oh but they won't!" says the Assistant to the Manager. "They get their rice from a land far, far away. Their wheat comes from a village on the other side of the river. And the oil comes from many different places. Sometimes even Italy." The farmers have never been to Italy. But they have to feed the city to run their farms. The problem is that they have never grown **ONLY POTATOES**.

The Assistant to the Manager insists on bigger, stronger potatoes, as many as the village could yield. So the farmers set to work. The millets, the pulses, the rice and the vegetables give way to a large expanse of potatoes. The farm needs a lot more water and large cans of fertilizers and colourful, oily pesticides. We tire sooner. And each time I am dragged through the potato field, the farmer and I are perplexed - as we tend to the farm, we can watch the entire crop fall victim to a disease that they cannot resist. So we add more pesticide.

But the custom of growing ONLY POTATOES is new to our soil and the creatures that live on it.

All the potatoes have the same chink in their armours and together all the farmers who had decided to grow ONLY POTATOES are left with a fallen harvest! The farmers are distraught and confused.

How can the thriving life of their farms fail them like this? This has never happened before!



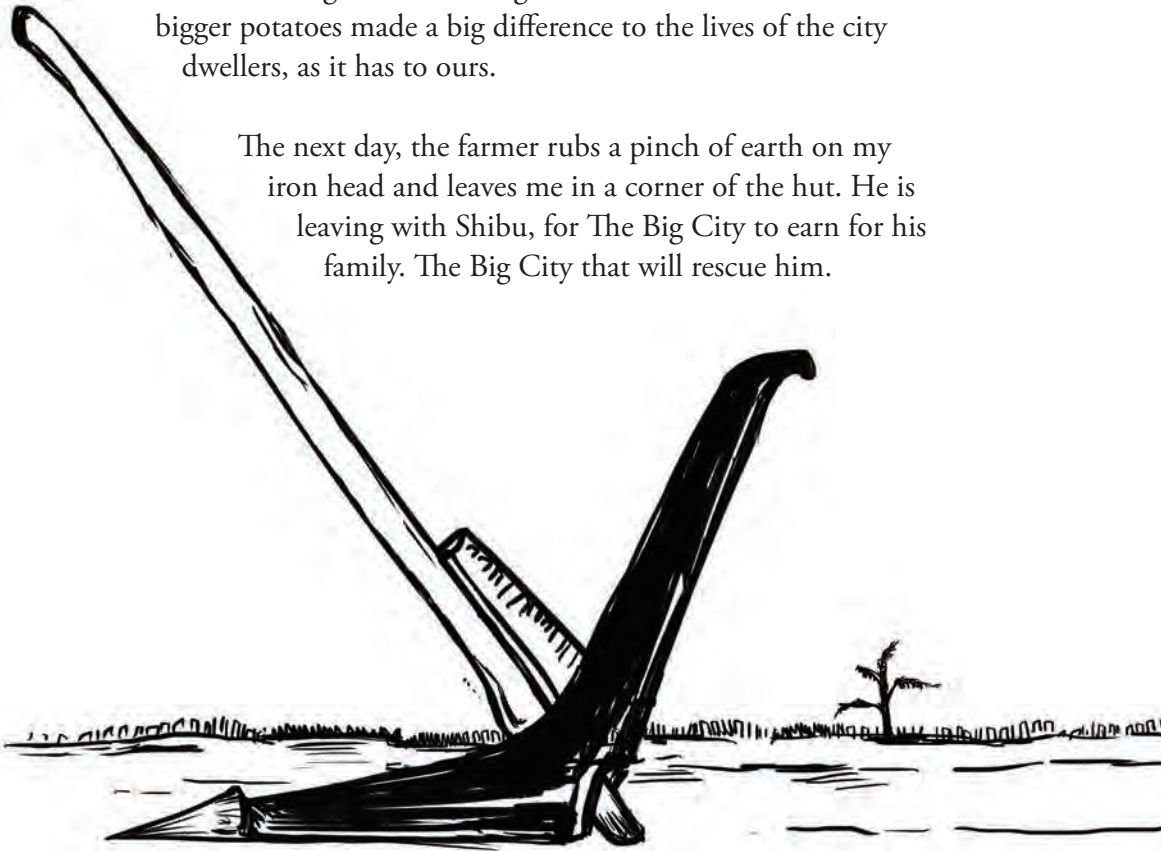
“My father’s potato crop would yield ten bad potatoes, at most twenty. But this is outrageous! Whose bad potato has spread this disease?” asks one farmer. “Who can say whose crop is to blame, they’ve all fallen at the same time!” says another.

“We’re doomed!” they all say together.

They have nothing else to eat. Nor can they visit the village that grew rice or write to Italy for some oil. The Assistant to the Manager of the Food Industrialist’s Personal Secretary has no answers for them and before long, his phone has switched off to the confused calls from the village.

The farmer looks at one row... five rows... twenty rows... many long rows of ruined farmland and the trickle of the colourful, oily water in his daughter’s withering rose bed. He wonders if the bigger potatoes made a big difference to the lives of the city dwellers, as it has to ours.

The next day, the farmer rubs a pinch of earth on my iron head and leaves me in a corner of the hut. He is leaving with Shibu, for The Big City to earn for his family. The Big City that will rescue him.



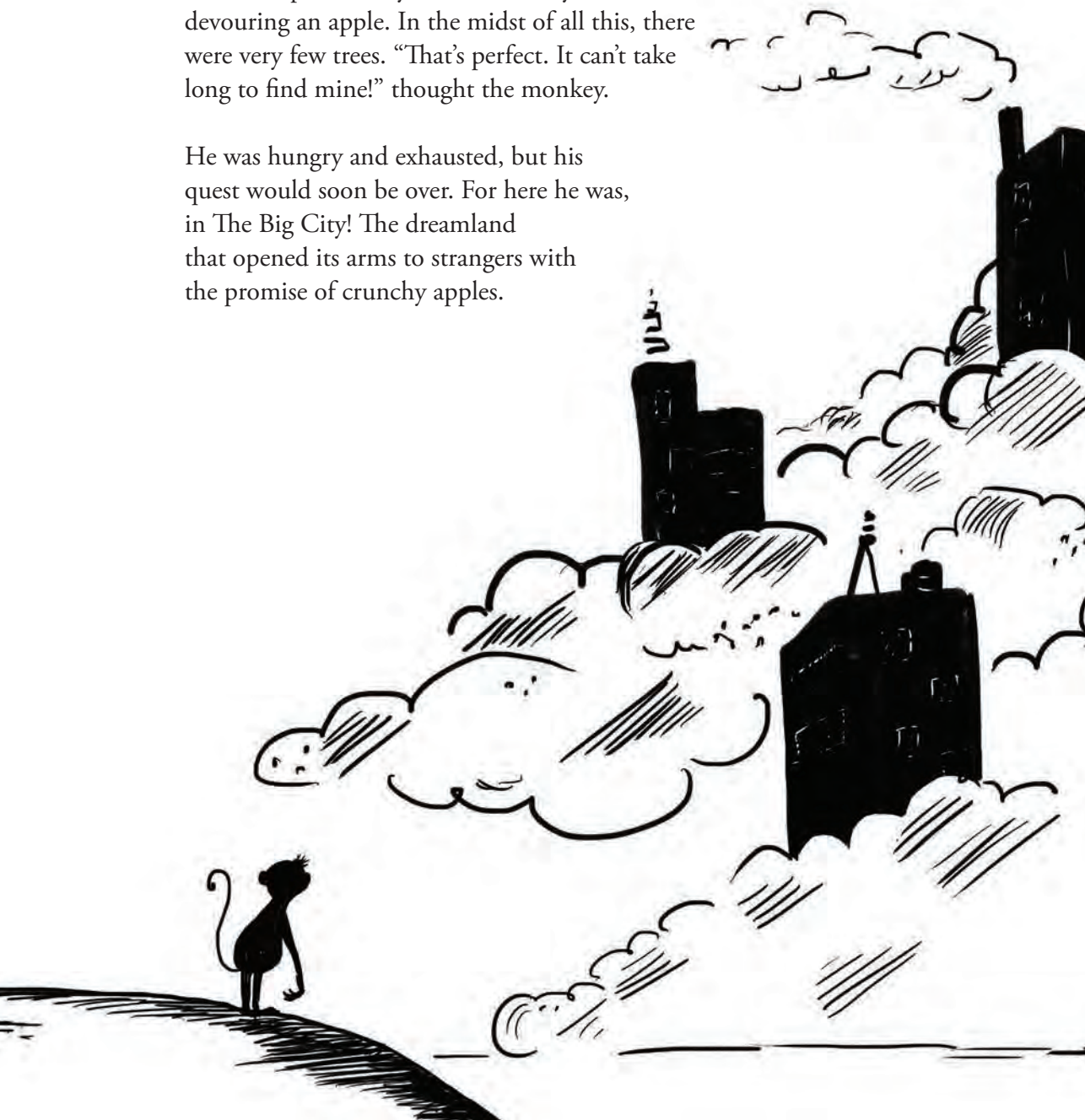


The Big City

loomed over Long Fingers like an enormous grey storm cloud. The closer he moved towards the dense, dusty mass, the more thunderous it seemed to get.

Cars scampered everywhere, restlessly, like ants devouring an apple. In the midst of all this, there were very few trees. "That's perfect. It can't take long to find mine!" thought the monkey.

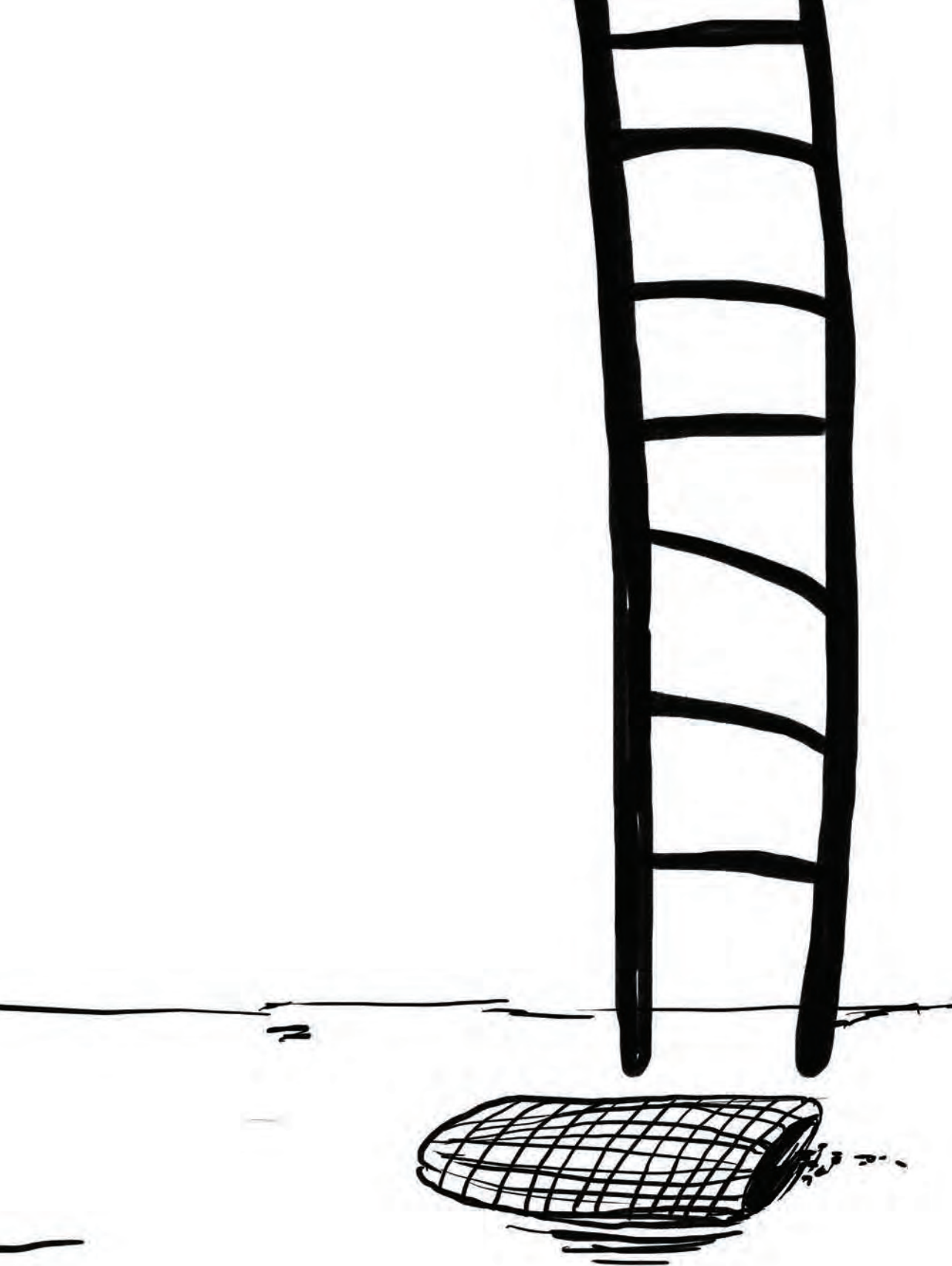
He was hungry and exhausted, but his quest would soon be over. For here he was, in The Big City! The dreamland that opened its arms to strangers with the promise of crunchy apples.





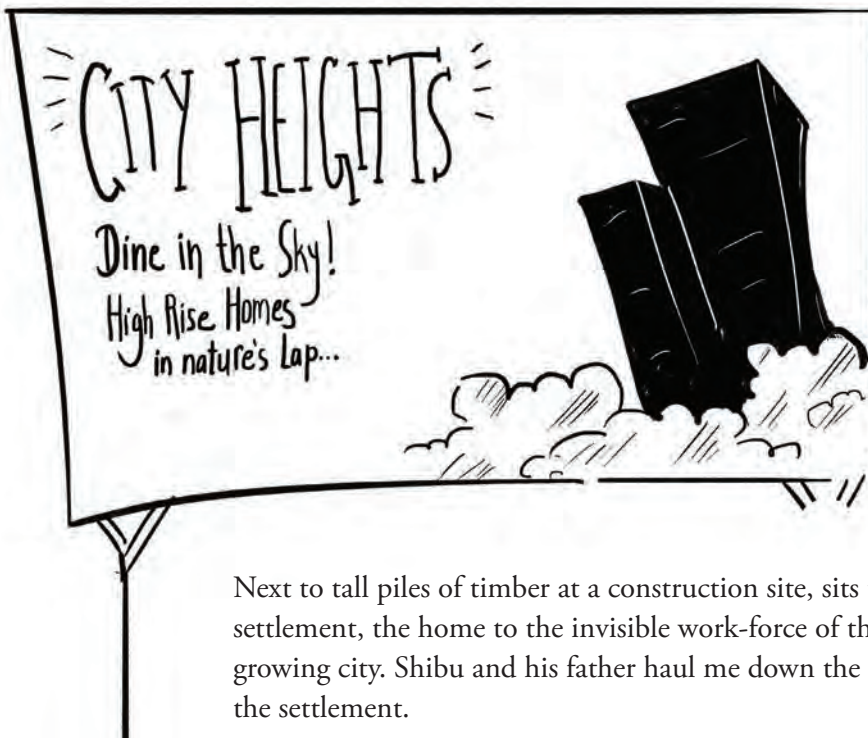
THE LAST OF THE TREASURE





Everything has transformed since we arrived in the city. The farmer works his spade on mounds of cement, at a construction site. His son cooks and cleans in the high-rise apartments. And in the very centre of their hut in the worker's settlement, I am the trunk that holds the keepsakes from the village.

When we first arrive, Shibu's eyes widen at the incredible sights of the city. The massive structures that sprout along the frantic roads astound him. The billboards spread across the skyline keep his eyes busy.



Next to tall piles of timber at a construction site, sits their settlement, the home to the invisible work-force of the growing city. Shibu and his father haul me down the lanes of the settlement.

The boy starts to sweat and heave. "Why must we carry this heavy, iron trunk everywhere? It's tiresome, rusty and old!" he complains to his father.

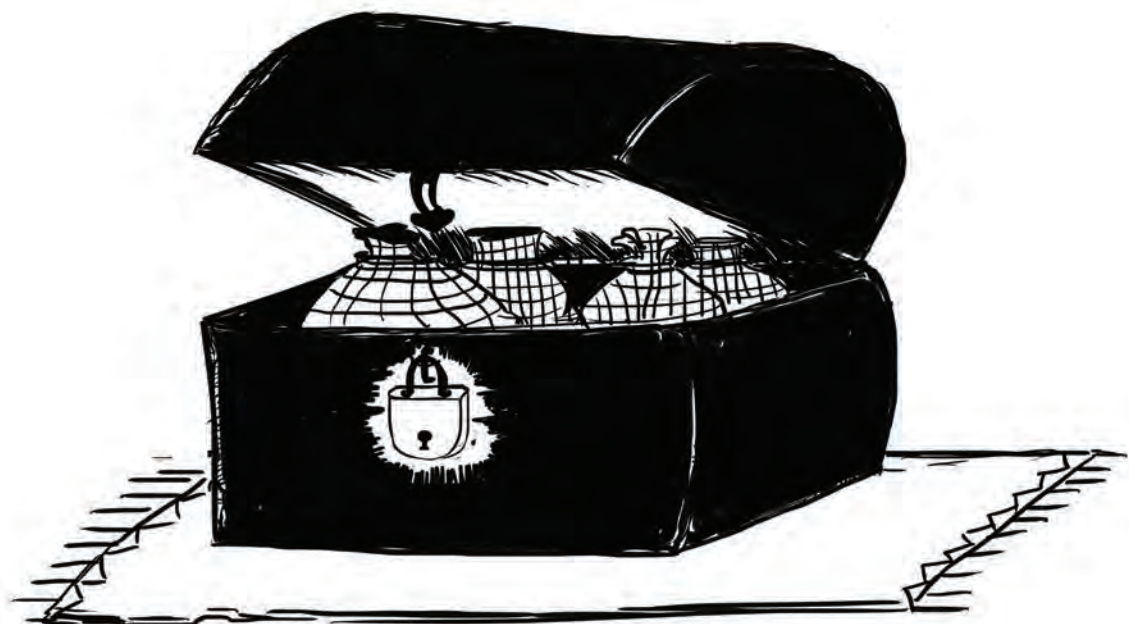
“Of course it’s old! Your great grandfather bought it many, many years ago, and it cost him half his harvest!” says the farmer, watching his son catch his breath.

“Of all things, he spent so much on a trunk?” Shibu shakes his head.

“Yes, a sturdy, iron trunk that would last till his curious great grandson gathers treasures to fill it with. Stronger than any bag you’ll find in the market today. He must’ve thought of you when he bought it!” says his father as they set me down outside their hut.

If you have the key to the heavy lock that guards me, you may find four bags of seeds. A bag of jowar, one of ragi, one containing bajra. The last one holds a kind of dal that grows only in Shibu’s village, something his mother cooks on a full moon. It will be six long months before he can relish it.

We have brought these seeds for the dealers in the city. If they like them, we will go back to tend the farm. These seeds are precious. They are the heirlooms of their soil and a reminder of the village that we’ve come from.



During our first week in the city, the farmer brings home sacks of rice and wheat from the ration store. He has spent the entire day waiting for his turn in a rampagous mob, pressed against the belly of the huge barber who lives next door. Shibu cooks the rice and rotis, the way his mother has taught him.

In the apartment, he boils spaghetti, learns the names of many sauces, and whips cream from milk that comes in a pouch. On days when the grandmother, isn't home, nobody wants a typical meal. All he has to do is heat silver pouches in the microwave. He has so much to learn! And so many new flavours to try. He tells his father all about it over dinner in their hut.



“Father, where are the vegetables?”

“There are no vegetables at the ration store, and they are very expensive at the market today.”

“What if you tell the grocer that you used to grow them?”

“Don’t be silly, Shibu.” His father seems upset.

“What about jowar? Jowar is cheap!”

“The ration store only had rice and wheat by the time I reached its doors. It took me hours! Now can you please eat in silence?”

The next day Shibu’s father takes the heavy lock off and shows the seeds to a dealer. He proudly announces that he was one of the last farmers to grow that rare, wholesome dal. He rattles off some recipes. But the dealer shakes his head. He says no one likes peasant food in the city. Can his father grow **ONLY SUNFLOWERS?** Father shows the dealer the way out.

The following month, Shibu heads to the ration store.

“Don’t you want to sell any jowar ? Any bajra?” Shibu asks the shop keeper, who was bent over a newspaper.

“No. Only rice, wheat, sugar, kerosene.”

“Any other millets ? Don’t you get bored of rice?”

The man lowers his glasses and looks at him.

“Those who depend on the ration store can’t afford to get bored, kid. If you have so many complaints, grow your own food.”

“I did sir, before you city folk decided to eat **ONLY POTATOES.**”

“What a strange boy!” says the shop keeper and goes back to his newspaper.

.



Shibu runs around the extraordinary supermarket with a long list, to buy provisions for the apartment. Most of the food in the supermarket needs no cooking at all and is still cheaper than the fruits and vegetables. He spots entire meals compressed into pocket sized products, for the busy Big City adults who have too little time to sit down for their meals – Breakfast-in-a-Cup, Snack Bars, Coffee Lozenges, Dinner-Shakes.

On the other hand there were bags of crisps and candy for the children the size of the entire kitchen cabinet! Shibu gaped at the food of The Big City, wondering what might end up on the supermarket shelf next. Would their dal ever make it?

On the days that the kids at the apartment refuse to eat their fruit Shibu is pleased to take it back to the hut. When the cabbage seems to wilt, Amma asks him to take it along. But Shibu and his father crave the fresh vegetables and tastes of their village.

The following day is a full moon. Amma is fasting for the good fortune of her family and there is little to cook at the apartment today. Shibu is sent home early, but there is nothing to cook at the hut either. He waits for his father to return from the ration store but his eyes keep turning towards me. He turns the heavy lock and pulls out the bag of dal, the last of his father's harvest.

“What's for dinner today, Shibu?” his father asks when he returns.

“It's our dal”, Shibu replies quietly.

“I thought so. I could smell it from the end of the lane.”

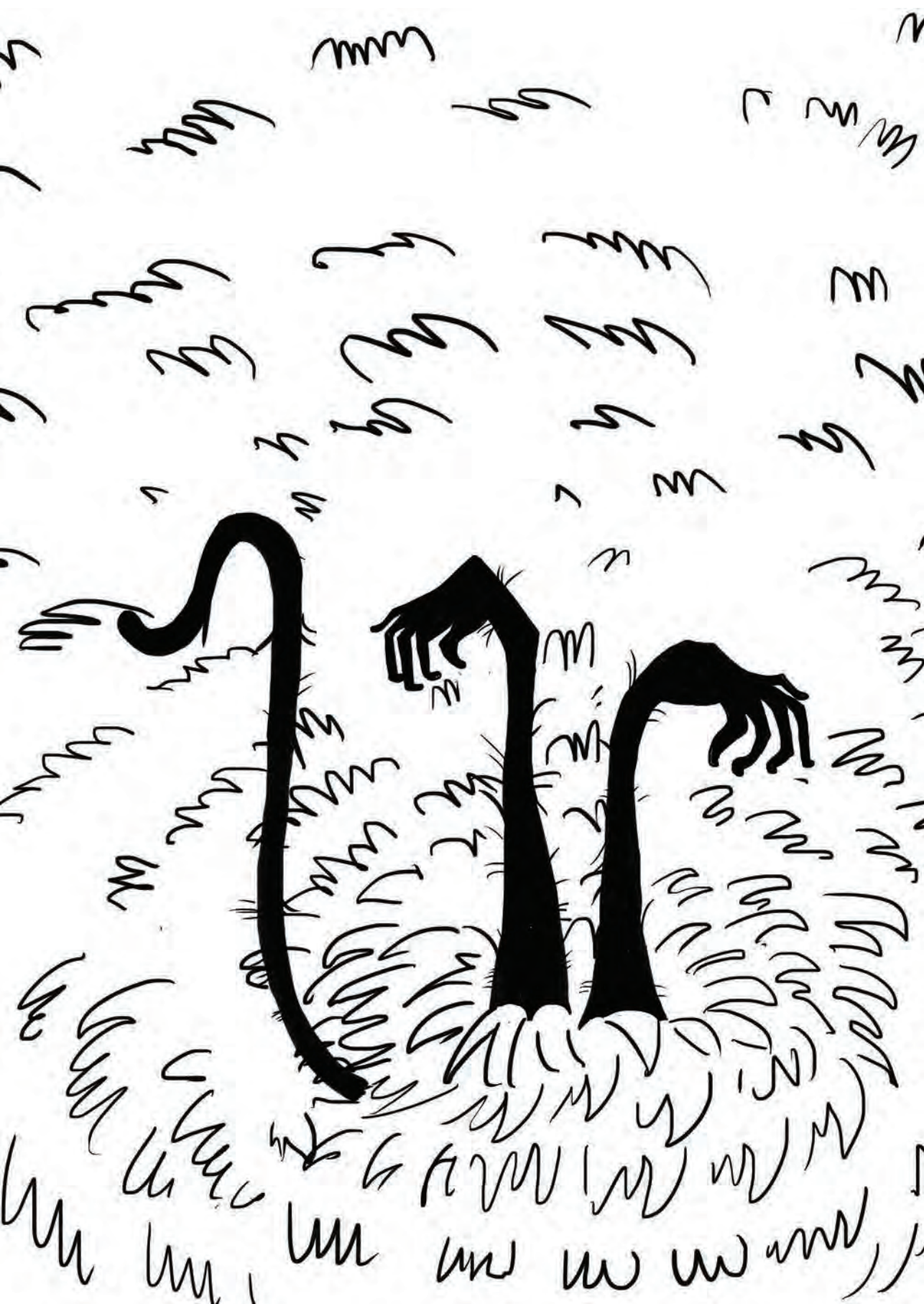
Shibu is surprised. He thought his father would be furious at him. The only thing that would have led them back to the farm was now sitting at the bottom of the cooking pot. But his father has tried long enough. There will be no more dealers to humiliate them.

“Father, please don’t be angry. I stole an apple the other day, one of the expensive ones, with a sticker on it, from the shopping bag at the apartment.”

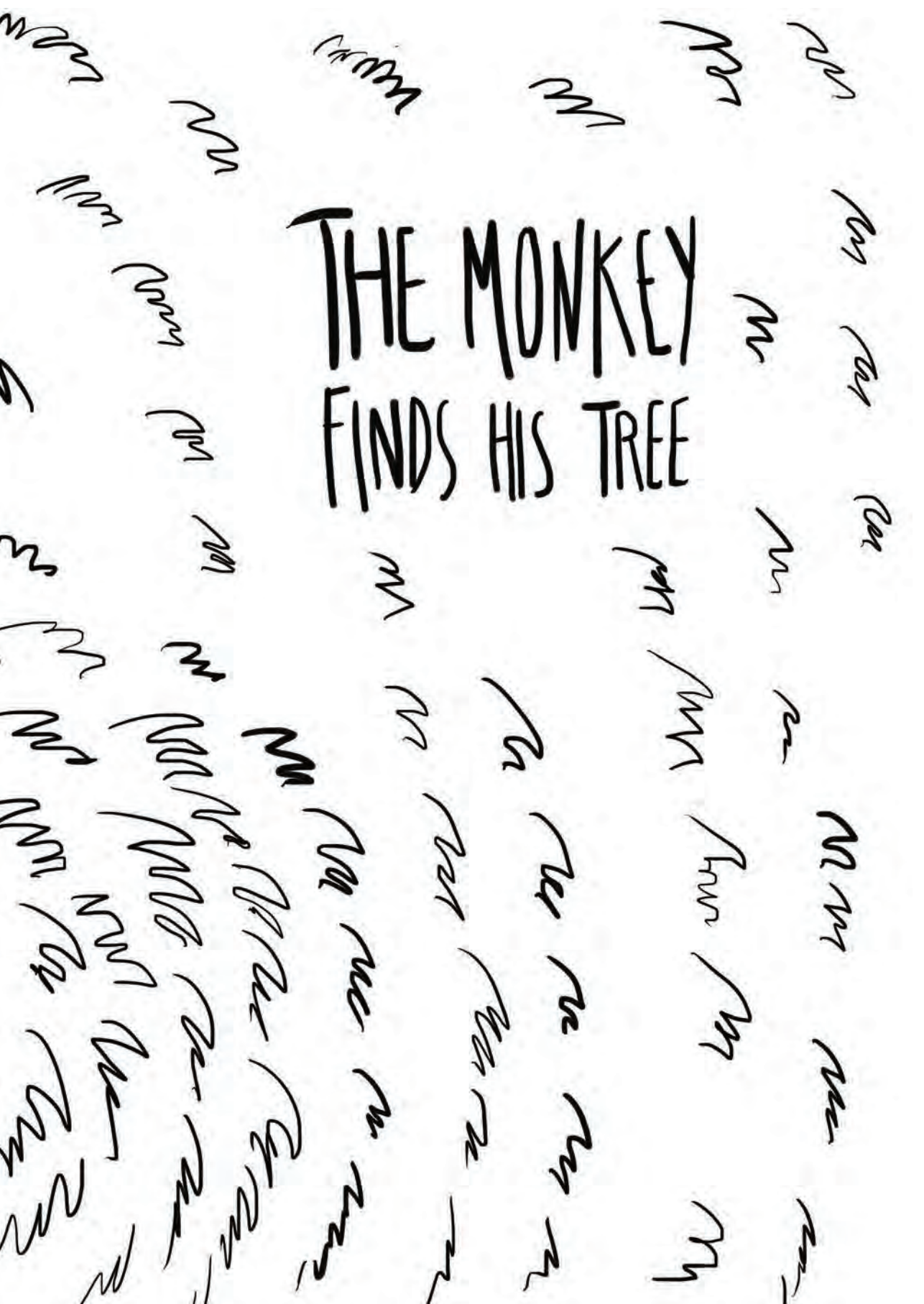
“And did you eat it?” Father looks straight into his eyes and understands that Shibu knows better. “Here, take this money and replace it.”

When times are difficult in the city, Shibu and his father will grind all the bags of grain. But I don’t sit empty or idle. Sometimes I become a ludo table, a place to spread the papers on, an arm wrestling arena. I’m packed with the riches of the city that they will take to the village – warm clothes, utensils, new toys, a film poster. But they don’t guard me with the heavy lock anymore.





THE MONKEY FINDS HIS TREE



It was mid-afternoon when the monkey reached the city. There were cows, lounging leisurely, pigeons fluttering in narrow alleys, a bored man selling guavas, waving flies off his cart.

Long Fingers could find very few, feeble trees, but didn't see even a shadow of the stickers on their branches. His strength had started to fail. Likewise, the sticker from the apple was hanging by a thin thread of glue behind his ear.

Was the sticker tree hidden away, only accessible to some secret force? The same people who guarded the knowledge of growing grapes without seeds? That must be it! The monkey stood rapt in this thought, when he heard a deafening clang!



He saw a giant truck speeding right towards him! His heart leapt in fear, the last of his precious apple rolled away, but with a mighty jump, he avoided the dreadful collision that could've been.

Startled out of his wits, he saw the truck come to a stop near a monstrous, glass building. And what did he see through the great doors of the building, but crates and crates of the shiniest, crunchiest apples in the world! Each red, firm, round sphere of perfection sealed with a sticker!

What a fateful turn of events. A second ago he was almost a dead monkey. But now he stood before the shrine of the sticker tree! With every crate that was unloaded from the truck, he felt a surge of delirious hope. He entered the building through a back gate, pushing past a door that read :

Buy'em,
Hoard'em™
! SUPERMARKET CELLAR
ENTRY RESTRICTED

Long Fingers stood in an endless room. There was more food here than he had ever deemed possible. He was baffled by the sight of all this ripe fruit from around the year, just sitting there.

Untouched, with no one to eat it. His stomach was rumbling, his heart ached for a bite. For a moment, he forgot all about the sticker tree as his head reeled in hunger and fatigue.



Meanwhile, the door swung open noiselessly and a young boy crept into the cellar. It was Shibu, gingerly approaching an apple crate, to replace the one he had stolen from the apartment. He had no money to buy the pack of four that the supermarket sold, instead he decided to take one from the cellar and leave the money in the crate.

As he grabbed an apple, he felt his hand close upon a soft paw. It was the same crunchy apple that Long Fingers was reaching out for. Both were startled at discovering the other, too stunned to let go of the apple first. They felt their hands grow cold, and searched each other's eyes cautiously. But their attention broke, as the door to the cellar opened with a loud screech and two men rambled in.

“What is this? You boy, where did you come from?” said one grabbing Shibu by the collar.



“And look he brought along a partner in crime! You creatures are such a nuisance. If this monkey is seen by any customers, they won’t touch the fruits. It’ll be a terrible waste!” snarled the other.

“Leave us alone! I’m not here to steal! I don’t need your apples, I’m a farmer’s son! Here, take this money!” Shibu protested, dangling helplessly by the collar.

“We don’t care whose son you are, you pest”, said the bigger of the two men, pocketing his money. “If you had any shame you’d be buying the apples respectfully. Not swindling them from the cellar. Wait till we call the police.”

They turned towards Long Fingers, who was yelping, cornered against the tall piles of apple crates.

“Look at this monkey’s long and meddlesome fingers,” said the smaller one, “And what’s that behind his ear? It’s a sticker from the fruits. He’s been stealing! Call pest control, this one needs to be caged before he brings his entire troop. Let’s teach them a lesson,” the men looked very menacing indeed.

Long Fingers was petrified! This sticker wasn’t stolen, it came to him.
It belonged to the landfill and that’s where he hoped he was,
this very moment. He stripped it off his ear at once.





Before the men laid a finger on him, Long Fingers lunged forward, leaping from one crate to another, pelting them with fruit, slipping on the polished white floor. The cellar was a complete mess!

Shibu made the most of the chaos and shoved the men against the crates, running towards the door. The monkey and the boy seemed too fast for the two burly men.

The men skated on berries and banana peels, their curses echoing in the cellar, unheard by the busy supermarket overhead. A couple of times, they skimmed Shibu's collar and the monkey's tail but all in vain.



Shibu and Long Fingers reached the door and flung it open, escaping to the road outside. Each fled towards his home, without as much as a backwards glance. The last they saw of the cellar was the sign on the door, lettered perilously in red, no different from the sticker that had led to no good.

“So you’re back. What came of your visit to the city?” Grandfather Monkey sized him under his heavy-lidded gaze, the next morning.

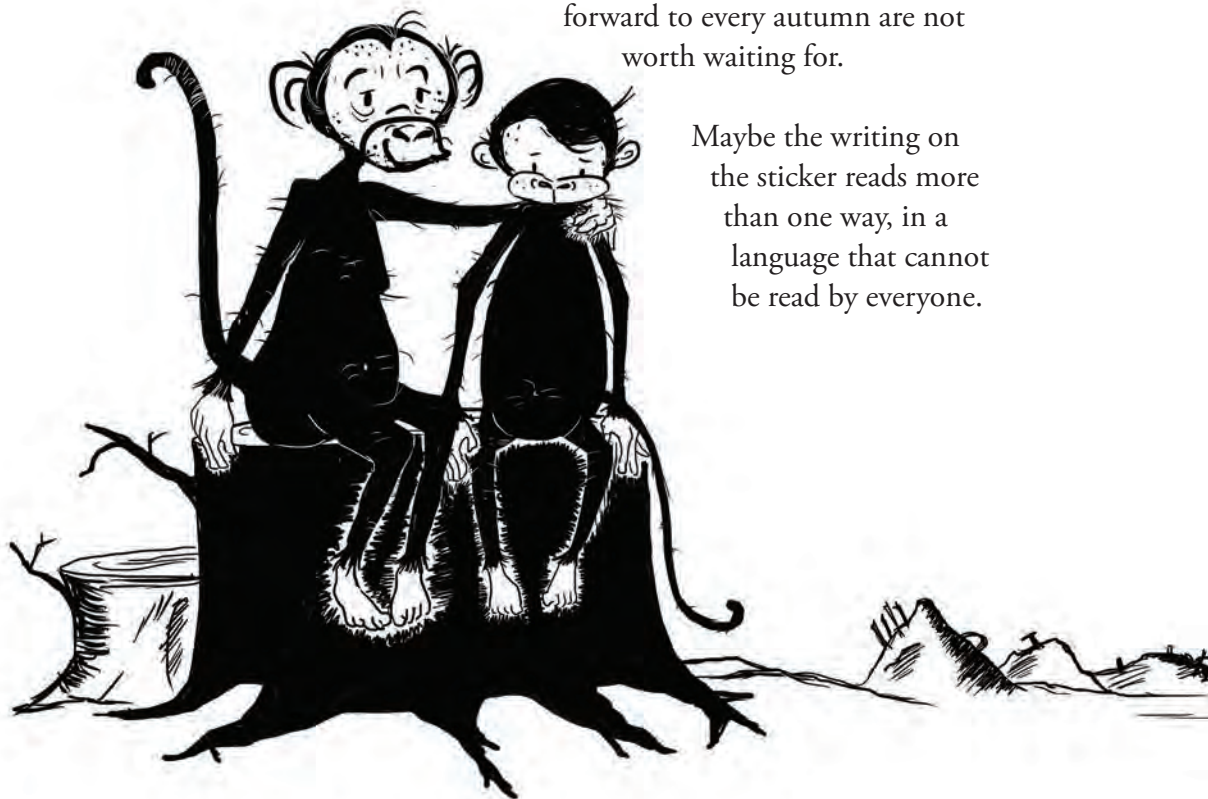
“I must be looking in all the wrong places. I couldn’t find the tree.” said Long Fingers. Grandfather Monkey drew the sad young monkey close to him.

“A sticker is a powerful thing, is it not? Look at what it’s done to you. It made you think that no other apple is good enough. It drove you so far from home in search of a strange tree, when the trees around you are reduced to stumps themselves. Maybe, the quest wasn’t about the sticker tree”.

“Then what was it about, Grandfather?”

“It was about what you really wanted from your apples and if it was the sticker that made them shiny and crunchy; if the ordinary, sticker less apples that we look forward to every autumn are not worth waiting for.

Maybe the writing on the sticker reads more than one way, in a language that cannot be read by everyone.



But know this, my child. Apples are for everyone. No one remembers who sows the apple tree or who eats the fruit. And no one can put a sticker on an apple and make you believe that it is worth getting trapped in a cage for.

We can't always grow our food, we're at the mercy of those who send it our way. But we can tell food from junk, even sitting here in our landfill. Unless we know what it really says, the sticker is junk on our food, not treasure! And, if what it reads can lead to so much trouble, even the shiniest, crunchiest apple may not be as special as it seems."

"Maybe it wasn't such a great adventure after all." said Long Fingers after a long silence.

"I'm glad you saw the world outside. This landfill isn't the best place to grow up in, but it's all we have. You're back in good time. Look."

Grandfather Monkey pointed towards an edge of the tree stump. Long Fingers sat enraptured, watching a tiny green shoot sprout on the tree stump that he had thought long dead.

"What tree is this, Grandfather?"

"What do you think?" his Grandfather, smiling wisely,
"It's an apple tree!"



Long Fingers rubbed off the last of the glue from behind his ear, glad that he had finally found his tree. He wasn't sure if he wanted the stickers anymore. They seemed packed with more than what meets the eye. But the apple tree held no secrets, only a slow unravelling of the beauty of creation. It would open its arms to any creature that sought respite. It would bear apples, some big, some small, some shiny, some not. Some would reach the supermarket and others the landfill, no doubt.

He couldn't stop the world from turning. It was changing, creeping into the landfill, spewing out something new every day. But to keep up with it, he didn't have to go very far from home. All he needed was a lesson or two from Grandfather Monkey, about what can be valued in the landfill we live in, while there are still hidden treasures in it for us to discover. And that most precious gifts need no sticker to appraise them.

And what about the sticker tree? Each day, it grows a little taller. Its stickers fall on everything they can find, but the branches that bear them have grown impossibly high and out of reach. It is so dense with stickers, markers and labels that the birds find it impossible to nest in.

So, can safe tree nesting ever come back in fashion? Only the next generation of the Non Residential Avians can tell.

Will the price on the supermarket label reach as high as the sticker tree's branches? Or will the grocer be back with fresh local produce with a bargain in tow? Ask Amma's shopping bag.

Will the plough etch his way through a colourful patchwork in the field or loom over another fallen crop of ONLY SUNFLOWERS? We will know once the farmer comes back home from the city.

And will Shibu be able to
enjoy bowl upon bowl of his
favourite dal, every full moon?
The trunk sure hopes the
farmer's son never has to steal
an apple again.

For the shiny, crunchy, sticker
clad apple had travelled very far
indeed, crossing paths with many
others. It travelled all the way to the
landfill where many curious monkeys
live, amused anew with the many
untold tales of The Big City.

All in the land where the sticker tree grows.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Communicating for Biodiversity with Innovative Communication Tools project has taken shape with the combined effort of many individuals. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to Dr. Balakrishna Pisupati, Chairman of the National Biodiversity Authority of India (NBA), not only for providing the opportunity for this book to be created but also for his guidance and willingness to explore creative ways of communication, his encouragement to take these ideas to newer possibilities by allowing for creative freedom and expression. We are grateful for the valuable contribution of Mr. Ishwar Poojar, Project Manager of the Strengthening The Implementation Of The Biological Diversity Act And Rules With Focus On Its Access And Benefit Sharing Provisions Project and the project team at the NBA for their support.

The constant, unshakable force behind this project is that of Deepta Sateesh, Director, and Arpitha Kodiveri, Director – Research, of the Law+Environment+Design Laboratory at Srishti School of Art, Design and Technology (Srishti), who have nurtured this project, challenged it and stood by it as it struggled to push its boundaries. They have made the subject of biodiversity come alive in new dimensions and with their experience and knowledge, made this a valuable journey for me, from understanding the subject to adding empathy and meaning to it.





The book stands on a foundation that was enriched by many faculty members at Srishti including - Dr. Geetha Narayanan, Jackson Poretta, Mary Jacob, Ravindranath Gutta, Llyod Roberts, Pooja Pottenkulum, Priya K. Iyer, Debjani Banerjee, Evan Hastings, Arzu Mistry, Alison Byrnes and Vandana Goswami.

A warm thanks to Mr. Sunil Kumar Tewari and Mrs. Meenu Tewari for their undying support and concern throughout this project. In addition, the work environment was kept alive and buzzing by the team at Srishti: Harshvardhan Gantha, Bidisha Das, Revati Pandya, Stella James and Vaneesha Jain and the team at home: Abhishek Choudhury, Kanika Kaul, Hari Kumar Nair, Aman Randhawa, Revati Anand, Mihika Shaunik, Mitwa A.V., Jonhathan Wilson, Rohan Gupta, Kartik Srinivasan, Java and all others who have lent it their attention, feedback and compassion.

ABOUT N.B.A.

The National Biodiversity Authority (NBA) was established in 2003 to implement India's Biological Diversity Act (2002). The NBA is a Statutory, Autonomous body and it performs facilitative, regulatory and advisory functions for Government of India on issues of conservation, sustainable use of biological resources and fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising out of the use of biological resources.

The Biological Diversity Act (2002) mandates implementation through a decentralized approach with the NBA focusing on advising the Central Government on matters relating to the conservation of biodiversity, sustainable use of its components and equitable sharing of benefits arising out of the utilization of biological resources; and advising the State Governments in the selection of areas of biodiversity importance to be notified under Sub-Section (1) of Section 37 as heritage sites and measures for the management of such heritage sites besides supporting conservations and sustainable management of biodiversity.

The State Biodiversity Boards (SBBs) focus on advising the State Governments, subject to any guidelines issued by the Central Government, on matters relating to the conservation of biodiversity, sustainable use of its components and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of biological resources. The State Biodiversity Boards (SBBs) also regulate, by granting of approvals or otherwise requests for commercial utilization or bio-survey and bio-utilization of any biological resource for commercial utilization by Indians.

The local level Biodiversity Management Committees (BMCs) are responsible for promoting conservation, sustainable use and documentation of biological diversity including preservation of habitats, conservation of land races, folk varieties and cultivars, domesticated stocks and breeds of animals and microorganisms and chronicling of knowledge relating to biological diversity.

The NBA with its headquarters in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, delivers its mandate through a structure that comprises of the Authority, Secretariat, SBBs, BMCs and Expert Committees.

Since its establishment, NBA has supported creation of SBBs in 28 States and facilitated establishment of around 32,221 BMCs at local level.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Objective of the UNEP – GEF–MoEF project on ABS is to increase the institutional, individual and systemic capacities of stakeholders to effectively implement the Biological Diversity Act, 2002 and the Rules 2004 to achieve biodiversity conservation through implementing Access and Benefit Sharing Agreements in India.

This project is implemented in the 5 states of India namely Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, West Bengal, Himachal Pradesh and Sikkim. The executing organisation includes NBA in collaboration with 5 SBBs, Botanical Survey of India (BSI), Zoological Survey of India (ZSI), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Environment Programme - Division of Environmental Law and Conventions (UNEP/DELIC), United Nations University – Institute of Advanced studies (UNU-IAS) and Global Environment Facility. The main components of the project are:

- Identification of biodiversity with potential for ABS and their valuation in selected ecosystems such as forest, agriculture and wetlands.
- Development of tools, methodologies, guidelines, frameworks for implementing ABS provisions of the Biological Diversity Act.
- Piloting agreements on ABS.
- Implementation of policy and regulatory frameworks relating to ABS provisions at national level and thereby contribute to international ABS policy issues.
- Capacity building for strengthening implementation of the ABS provisions of the BD Act.
- Increase public awareness and education programmes.

This storybook is part of the Communicating for Biodiversity with Innovative Communication Tools initiative of the project, in order to communicate the importance of biological diversity to urban India. The book was designed by the Law+Environment+Design Laboratory (LEDLaboratory) at Srishti School of Art, Design and Technology. Set up in 2012, the LEDLaboratory is a collaborative lab that challenges existing legal, environmental, social, economic and cultural frameworks through interdisciplinary thinking and creativity, to catalyze social change towards greater socio-ecological resilience.



The Land Where The Sticker Tree Grows offers a simple glance at urban and peri-urban environments to capture the conflict between biodiversity and modernization.

Take for instance the story of the pigeon nesting in our ventilator window, the Non Residential Avian, adapting to the change in his natural habitat. Else the story of the plough that observes a monoculture plantation replacing the vibrant array of the farmer's harvest. Through stories built around such indicators, this storybook observes change in biodiversity through multiple perspectives. This change is prevalent in our daily lives and the stories are plenty. They lurk in our own city, our markets and our homes.

Here's urging you to take a closer look.

