

A vibrant rainbow arches across a blue sky filled with sparkling stars. The rainbow is positioned in the lower half of the image, with its colors transitioning from red on the left to blue on the right. The sky is a deep blue, and the stars are numerous and bright, scattered throughout the scene.

*CHRYS ROMEO*

*THE RAINBOW BRIDGE*

# THE RAINBOW BRIDGE

By Chrys Romeo

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Have you ever witnessed something that absolutely changed your view on the boundaries of reality? You know, something that would just short circuit your thoughts and beliefs, making you reconsider everything - like „WOW”, you know. And then you see it differently and just know better.

Well, it happened to me too. I was so sure there was not much ahead of me on one of those rainy days when you just stay inside and play online games or something. I'm the average teenager, you know, I spend time on the internet, I don't have patience to read books, I get enthusiastic really fast and I have idealistic beliefs about the people I like. I'm willing to find out about the miracles of life, often acting before I think twice and sometimes restlessly addicted to a virtual mirage of technology. Truth is, I'm not supposed to be a teenager anymore, but I still feel like one. I don't use „lol” and „xD” and „idk” and „xoxo” and „omg” or any of the other abbreviations, but I'm still online a lot. The problem is I don't run as much as I used to. Really run. I was such a good runner, but I gave it up. I used to enjoy the rush of the race, the cool flow of speed and the power that felt like flying above the ground. I still dream about it, on many nights. I don't know why I don't go running anymore. It was such a great way to spend my time. It was like going beyond time, to an eternal moment of being alive and powerful. Feeling strong and in shape, owning the paths like a king, going round and round through the parks in any weather, any day, anytime, with the hood on and no worry about anything. I think I don't believe in it as much as I did. So on one of those rainy days, when you only hear the drops of water on your window, it added to the fact that the storm had cut the power off for hours, so I couldn't even get online to play. A wire must have been loose somewhere, a branch of a tree falling – so the entire neighbourhood was left without electricity. The laptop battery went off too. I just stood there, watching the computer screen, as it stared at me in grey silence. And then it happened.

The screen lit up by itself. The power was off, but the light behind the translucent screen blinked alive. I checked the power, in bewilderment. It was still off. The room was half dark and silent. But the laptop screen was on. I touched the keyboards. No effect. But the light was on.

„What’s up with you?” I asked the laptop screen that seemed to stubbornly stay on and light my face in the darkness of that rainy day.

I didn’t expect it to answer. I knew it was just an object that malfunctioned in an unexplained way. You know how sometimes you talk to objects just to reason with your own thoughts. The screen didn’t reply. The only voice that went ahead with its permanent reminder was the soft water on the window, sometimes pleading sweetly, sometimes pouring and raging as if it wanted to get through the glass, throwing angry drops against it.

And then, the light of the screen blinked and fluttered, and I saw letters appearing on it.

„Hi. Hello.”

The words were waiting, before my eyes. I stared at them, not even beginning to believe they were for real. But they were real. And they were waiting for a reply. I couldn’t think of any explanation, so the only thing I could do was try to find out by going along with it, whatever it was that was happening. I touched the keyboards.

„Hi. Are you there?” I typed.

My reply aligned under the question. I didn’t know if anything more would happen.

Then another answer wrote itself on the screen, letter after letter appearing under my question, playfully making sense of the words:

“Yes, I’m here. And you’re there, aren’t you. “

I could almost see the words grin at me.

“Who’s this?” I typed again, expecting it to say something like “the spirit of the laptop”, or a program that had been installed on it and I knew nothing about.

“It’s just me. You can call me A.”

I tried to understand what it meant. I continued the dialogue. It still looked like a program with clever answers, though the fact that it worked without electricity, while the laptop battery had been empty for hours, was a big question mark in my mind.

“What do you mean A.? A. from what? “

“It’s just the first letter of the alphabet.”

“Yes, and there are many others. Why A.?”

“It’s my name, actually.”

“You have a name?”

“Of course. You have a name too, don’t you? What’s your name?”

I hesitated. My own laptop was asking my name. Or was it really someone beyond it? How could it be? Had the storm caused some unexplained phenomenon where I could talk to people on disconnected computers offline and without electricity? Or was it an alien? My mind lit up suddenly.

“Are you an alien? Is A. from Alien? You’re an alien, right?”

I had always wanted to see an alien – possibly meet one. I felt so enthusiastic at the probability ahead of me. There it was, before my eyes: an alien, talking to me...

Letters appeared again on the screen.

“I’m not an alien, I’m a girl.”

I waited. Could it have been just a girl talking to me?

The row of letters continued to expand.

“My name is Ariel. What’s yours?”

I thought for a while. If that was really a girl who had found a connection to my computer offline, it was still an unusual phenomenon. I decided to go on with it. Her question was waiting, in tense silence. I typed slowly.

“My name is Ben.”

And then I waited. She seemed to think. Then, the subtle grin seemed to glow from beyond the screen once again.

“Ben 10 like the cartoon series?”

“No, just Ben.”

I continued:

“I’m not a cartoon. I’m really writing on a laptop now. What about you? The little mermaid? Ariel and other stories?”

“Ha ha, very funny. I’m not a fairy tale either.”

“How old are you, anyway?” it occurred to me to ask, considering the cartoon reference.

“I’m twelve.”

“Oh, great. It figures.”

I smiled. So, a twelve year old had found me on that rainy day, when computers were offline...

“What about you?” she asked me. “How old are you? You’re a teenager, right?”

“I wish I were still a teenager, but I’m more than that now.”

Other letters quickly aligned on the screen:

“And you wish you were still running around the park, right?”

I stared at the words and their mysterious meaning.

“How do you know about that?” I asked her in disbelief.

Something odd and surreal had taken over the conversation again: something unexplained, like the rain and the offline computer that was functioning by itself. Maybe it was still a program that was answering me – but how could it read my mind?

“I know because... I know more than you think.”

“About me?”

“Yes.”

“Are you reading my mind?”

“Not exactly. But the things you wish for are reflected over here so obviously, like a 3 D projection. I can’t explain it to you. You’d have to see it to understand. It’s because we are connected.”

“Are you a program on my computer?”

“I told you I’m a girl. Don’t insult me. My name is Ariel.”

“Ok, fine. You’re Ariel. What about my computer? Why is it working while it’s offline and disconnected from power too?”

“Don’t ask me about that, it’s not my fault. Maybe we got connected by the storm because we have something in common. Maybe it’s because you still feel like a teenager. Or maybe it’s possible to talk just because I’m from another world than you and what you know doesn’t apply here anymore. I don’t know.”

I stared at what she had said, wondering whether to believe it or not. She was twelve anyway; she could have been inventing scenarios.

“What do you mean you’re from another world? What world is that? Where do you live?”

“I’m from another side of the universe, a parallel world that can look into yours. But you can’t see us, unless...”

“Unless what?”

I still didn’t believe her entirely. Another side of the universe? Yeah, right. I had heard the idea with a parallel universe so many times, I had seen science fiction movies about it and I was not excluding the possibility it could be real, but for it to appear on my offline screen, on that rainy day... it was a bit too much at that moment.

“You could see us if you look at the end of the rainbow. It has to be a double rainbow, though. Maybe that’s why we’re meeting now: it’s a rainy day. If you go outside and see a rainbow...”

“It’s too dark for a rainbow now - it’s evening”, I told her. “Besides, what’s this story with the rainbow?”

“We are children of the rainbow. Haven’t you heard of us?”

“Yeah, and there’s a pot of gold and a green elf right there too.”

I smiled.

“Ha ha, no”, she replied. “It’s not like that. But I like you.”

“You like me.”

“Yes, I kind of like you already.”

“What’s that got to do with anything?” I said.

She was silent. I thought for a while. Then I typed again.

“Listen, you’re twelve and I like to play, but this is not a fairy tale and I’m not a kid anymore, so – “

“Nah, you’re still a Peter Pan to me.”

Her reply was just as unexpected as the rest of it. And it had some truth to it.

I decided to just keep talking to her for a while. What was the harm in that anyway? The possibility of something unusual and interesting being there, beyond reality, was taking over my thoughts. I ran my hands on the keyboard again.

“Fine. Tell me more about this world you live in. I might be crazy enough to believe it.”

She didn’t hesitate to reply.

“It’s good to be crazy sometimes, if you get to see so much that others don’t.”

She was direct and fast, but her answers were too elaborate for a computer program – and she had already surprised me with what she knew.

“So how do you see what I wish for anyway?” I asked her.

“I just do, I told you. It appears like a vision in the sky. What about you? Do you see what I wish for?”

I looked out the dark window. I could only see the rain sliding on glass and a shadow of my own reflection.

“No. I only see the rain.”

“Well, you’re right. Guess what I wish for?”

“What?”

“I want to be kissed in the rain.”

I stared at her words. She was bold, for sure. I realized twelve year olds might be like that: ignore consequences, take chances, say what they want and have romantic fantasies about older boys. I figured I shouldn’t say anything to her about that wish. She was twelve. I wasn’t.



“Did you read my message?” she asked me.

“Yes, I did.”

“And?”

“And what? “

“Do you think it’s a mistake? To wish for something like that?”

“It’s your wish, you have a right to it.”

“Well, thank you for understanding...”

I thought about it. A twelve year old confessing her fantasy to me on that rainy summer afternoon was certainly better than nothing. But a question remained on my mind: was she really from another world?

“So how do I get to see this world you live in?” I typed.

She started to write a longer paragraph, glowing in the dark.

“There’s another possibility, besides the rainbow, to see the bridge to my parallel world. But you must be in motion, because your world is too rigid and you can only get beyond its boundaries when you go from one place to another, when you are in transition, passing from a reference point to the next, when you are nowhere exactly and above everything – that’s when you can see the bridge to us - the real picture of what is beyond the surface of what is real.”

“It sounds complicated.”

“It’s not, actually. It’s not as simple as it seems, but it’s not difficult either. It’s not impossible. You just have to be in motion, to keep going. And to keep believing while you do it. That’s the energy of life. Like, for instance, when you’re running.”

“But I don’t run anymore.”

“Try it.”

“No. I can’t.”

“Why not? Is there a problem with your speed? Your breathing? Your bones? What?”

“No, it’s just in my mind. I don’t do that anymore. I don’t see the point.”

The screen went silent for a while. I kept thinking. The room was getting darker. It was already night outside. I stared at the light of the laptop, running through my thoughts. The dialogue was melting away softly, subtly disappearing and leaving the screen empty.

“Are you still there?” I typed when I saw the square light washed out of letters.

“Yes.”

“Are you still Ariel?”

“Yes. And you are still Ben 10. The boy who forgot to run.”

I could see the grinning light again, blinking beyond the disconnected laptop. She was there, for sure...

“Hey, Ariel. How are we going to keep this dialogue going? I’m off on vacation in a few days.”

“How will you travel?”

“By train.”

“The train is in motion, right?”

My eyes lit up suddenly. I typed quickly:

“Is it possible to see you on the train?”

“Yup. That’s one way, it could happen. Look out the window, when you get there. And take your laptop with you.”

“See you there.”

“See you on the other side!”

The light suddenly went off. There was lightning outside, filling the room with electric blue trembling shadows. Then, darkness took over the screen.

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While I was on the train, I stared at the mature and reasonably limited people around me. None of them would have understood I was there looking for a bridge

to a parallel world, while a twelve year old had recently become my virtual best friend, from a disconnected computer. I just stared out the window, with my headphones on and the laptop on my knees. I was waiting for something unusual to happen, but as the train was gaining speed, the view outside just flashed by without any sign that reality was about to change. I was looking at the sky, waiting for a bridge to show up – yet, nothing hurried to appear. Clouds and sunset rays wandered uncertainly above hills and trees. Soon, it was evening again.

The people on the train started falling asleep. The seat in front of me was empty. I kept expecting Ariel to show up there. I opened the laptop and stared at the screen. Still no sign of her.

Closer to midnight, the door of the compartment flipped open and I saw a girl coming in. She was not very tall, she looked like a teenager, but she was certainly more than twelve. She looked at least sixteen or could have been twenty. As she had Asian eyes, her appearance was just ageless. She had a red hood on her head and she sat right in front of me, on the empty seat. She smiled subtly and her chocolate eyes reached me like a mysterious affirmation. I had the feeling she was reading my thoughts, as I was wondering what she was up to. She looked at me as if she had seen me before. She took something out of her bag, delicately unfolding a white metal object.

“Good evening”, she told me in a friendly voice, pleasantly lowering to a whisper, not to awaken the other passengers. “Could I present something to you, maybe you are interested to see our latest gadget.”

She held up the white metal object. Unfolded, it looked like a robot with a round head.

“Is that a robot?” I asked her.

“Yes, it is. But it’s more than that. It has so many functions. It can play music, for instance.”

I placed the laptop aside of me, leaning forward to get a better glimpse at the robot.

“But you see, I told her, I already have an mp3 - I can play my music just fine.”

I showed her my headphones. She smiled and her eyes flickered charmingly with hidden sparks, beyond the red hood.

“Yeah, but this robot is better. It’s automatic.”

She continued, content to see my surprised look:

“And if you want, it can do more than play music. It can guess what you like to hear and choose the songs for you.”

“This sounds like very advanced technology”.

“It is. It’s a Tokyo brand. It’s top secret right now.”

“And you’re presenting it to me on the train...”

She glanced at me sideways, as if she was my accomplice to something secret.

“If you want to buy it, you can. This robot will make you coffee in the morning, a special kind with hazel flavor. It will record your dreams and show them to you when you wake up and forget. It will wash the dishes for you and play your favorite music while making you a cup of hot chocolate. It will talk to you and guess your wishes.”

I stared at her. She seemed serious about it, but her smile made me wonder if there was more meaning behind her words.

“What’s your name?” I asked her. “Are you Ariel?”

“Do I look like an Ariel?” she seemed amused. “No, I’m Heidi”

“That’s not a Japanese name.”

“I’m multilingual and multicultural...”

She seemed to have an answer to everything, calmly observing me with an amused expression. She didn’t seem much like a twelve year old. She had more deliberate thoughts and she was too mysterious for that. She was leaning on the plushy train seat, relaxed and warmly holding the robot in her arms as if it was a puppy or a teddy bear.

“Is the name of the robot Ariel?” I tried again.

“No, but you can name it whichever way you want.”

“And it’s from Tokyo?”

“Exactly.”

She was waiting for my decision: to buy or not to buy a multifunctional robot.

“I don’t know”, I said. “I’d rather share it with you tomorrow morning for that special coffee...”

“You can think about it. I’ll be on the train for a longer while.”

She folded back the robot and hid it in her bag. She stood up and, before closing the door, her eyelashes winked at me while her chocolate eyes were glimmering intensely:

“Coffee would be good tomorrow morning. In the meantime, if you want to see a bridge beyond the window, turn on the light in here”, she told me.

Her head disappeared beyond the door.

“Hey!” I said calling her back, suddenly hit by an idea.

Her head appeared again from beyond the door. She kept smiling subtly, as if she was planning a childish trick. Her polished colorful nails were tapping on the plastic frame of the door.

“What?”

“You said there’s a bridge beyond the window. So I turn on the lights. And then what?”

“Wait and see.”

“Do you know about the rainbow children?”

“Possibly.”

“Are you one of them?”

She took a pair of sunglasses from her bag and hid her eyes behind the shades.

She looked even more mysterious now. She grinned slightly, with the corner of her delicate mouth.

“I might be”, she said.

“Do you have superpowers or something? Like read thoughts or fly or turn into a bunch of rays of light?”

“Do you think people should do that?”

“It would be great, wouldn’t it? Can you do that?”

“My robot could.”

She laughed to herself.

“And people will be able to do that, in like five thousand years or something...”

She stood there in the doorway, in the dim lights of the train compartment. She seemed real enough to me, even though what she was saying went beyond reality. I wondered if the sleeping people had heard anything from our conversation – and would they believe it? Not for a second.

“Okay Heidi”, I said eventually. “I’ll look out for that bridge you mentioned.”

“See you next station”, she said and I saw a flicker of her red hood disappear beyond the door.

And then, silence. I was alone with the sleeping people in the compartment. It was as if they were under a spell, they were sleeping so deeply. I got up and looked for a light switch. I found it by the window and turned on the light. It was a small light bulb near the small coffee table that was pinned to the train floor. As soon as the light went on, I could see a reflection of the train outside the window. You know, when it’s night and there’s light inside a room, you can see a parallel vision beyond the glass. Right then, I could see the train running parallel with me, it was as if another train was going the same way – only it was dimmer and ghostly, flickering through the shadows of the trees by the railway tracks. I expected to see something different, but I only saw the train.

And then, suddenly, there it was: the image of two shadows on the train, running along, holding hands, with their faces against the current and their hair fluttering in the night chill. I stared at them, trying to see if they were a reflection or just an illusion. I knew if I opened the window, the image would disappear,

since it was there only because of the glass. Yet, I suddenly heard steps running on the roof of the train that was turning towards a tunnel in full speed. I thought it would be dangerous for them to be up there running on the train, if they actually were. They looked like two girls, one with black spiked hair and one with reddish long curly locks. They had only t-shirts, shorts and sneakers on, they must have been cold up on the train, but they didn't care. I realized their steps on the roof made them as real as they could possibly be, so I opened the window and I stuck my head outside, climbing on the ledge of the coffee table, to get a glimpse at the train roof.

I saw their silhouettes above and their sneakers, near the edge. They had paused to tie the laces of their shoes. The train was approaching a dark tunnel, rushing through the night.

“Hey!” I yelled at them.

They turned their heads to look at me attentively.

“What are you doing up there?” I asked them.

“Running”, the black haired answered me boldly and without hesitation. “What you forgot to do”, she added and I just remained there, staring at them in bewilderment, while the cold air of the night was freezing my hands.

They were teenagers, fourteen or sixteen at most.

“You could fall, it's dangerous to run like that on the train”, I told them. “The guardians will call your parents about it”.

“They're not gonna get us”, they answered.

My arms were slipping off the ledge of the window, but I kept hanging on.

“Who are you? Are you rainbow children?” I asked them, shouting against the rumbling noise of the metal wheels.

“We are Night and Day. And we are here to remind you about the bridge. “

“What bridge?”

“At the beginning.”

“What beginning?”

“The beginning of the rainbow. That's where you are too.”

“What do you mean that’s where I am? I am right here!” I shouted but they started to run again and jumped from one roof top to another and disappeared in the dark.

“Can’t you just talk to me for a while?” I yelled after them and I heard their voices like echoes from the distance:

“No, we can’t! Things are never the same from one second to another, and we must keep going ahead.”

The train went into the tunnel.

I had to get back in the compartment and I closed the window. I was sure, somehow, that the two teenagers would be just fine, on their own.

I sat down and opened the laptop. Still no sign of Ariel. And then, my mobile phone rang its message tone. I switched it on and saw a text on its small screen: “Are you on the train yet? A.”

I smiled. Finally, she had discovered another way to get connected. I wondered how she knew my number, though. But I remembered anything was possible as long as things were moving...

“I’m on the train, waiting to see the bridge. Where are you A.?” I replied.

I waited for another message. It came fast:

“By the bridge, of course.”

“How do I get there?”

I hit send. A few more seconds and she replied again:

“You are there now. You just don’t see it.”

“How do I get to see it?”

“I don’t know. You have to figure it out yourself.”

“I met some rainbow children. They said I’m at the beginning of the rainbow. What did they mean?”

“They meant your true self is halfway in our world, because you are already projecting your wishes in our sky over here. That’s the beginning of the rainbow in our world. And once you start to see it, you will be able to get back to your true self that knew how to run. And you will run again - and you will be forever



able to see us. But you must find the bridge. Then, our worlds won't be separated anymore."

The phone went silent after that. I waited for another message, but it didn't come. And I couldn't contact her in any way. She had to be the one to find me.

I rested my head on the plushy seat. I checked my watch: 2 a.m. People were still sleeping. I turned off the light above the coffee table. I closed my eyes, and just as I was about to fall into a dreamy state, while the headphones were purring their music, the door screeched open again.

Tokyo Heidi reappeared, with her subtle smile and deep mysteriously gleaming eyes that gave me a fuzzy feeling whenever they were turned towards me. This time, she didn't have a bag. She had a camera and she sat in front of me again.

"Hey", she said softly, not willing to awaken the others, but distinct enough for me to hear her voice.

She looked straight to my eyes.

"Hey", I answered and I smiled at her and her red fluffy hood.

"Have you seen the bridge?" she asked me.

"Not yet. But I've seen some rainbow children instead..."

I felt as if there was no need for speaking in riddles anymore: we could be honest with each other – and I was sure she had plenty of her own secrets that were from another world. We stared at each other, relaxed and contemplating, in the dim light of the room.

"So... have you come to present something else? Where's the robot?" I asked her casually.

"You can have the robot if you like. It's not about the money, it's a promotional sample. I'll give it to you if you wish... tomorrow morning. However, there's something else indeed that I have come to show you – but it's actually your turn to tell me about it."

"I don't understand."

She handed me the camera.

“This. It’s for you to tell me what it is.”

I looked at it.

“I still don’t get it. What about it? It’s a camera. You take photos with it.”

“No. It’s not just that.”

She waited, as if I knew what she meant.

“The rainbow children want you to help them with something. And this camera is a part of the deal.”

I flipped the camera from one side to the other, not finding anything unusual about it.

“What deal? I don’t know anything about any deal with the rainbow children.”

“It’s simple: when you get to the bridge, you find your own innocent self and your ability to run again, and they find something you can provide.”

“What is that?”

“The timeless machine. They need it. And this is your part of the story. You can make time stop with this. Nobody but you can do that - you just don’t remember. Now, tell me who you really are.”

“I am who I am. But you don’t know me. Who do you think I am?”

“If you remember who you are, let me know. When you know for sure...”

She seemed serious, though the deep waters of her eyes were revealing mixed lights of amusement and observation. It was as if she was halfway there, halfway in a world of unimaginable endless possibilities, a different galaxy - an entire universe beyond where we were...

I stared at the camera. Something seemed to rise from the depths of my mind, but I still couldn’t make sense of it and bring it to light.

“When you decide who you are you will find the bridge”, she said once again.

“I don’t need to decide, I already know who I am. It’s you who are not sure about it.”

“It doesn’t matter if I am sure or not. What matters is the rainbow. You’ve got the rainbow with you because you are there – and you have always been. You just need to remember. It’s your choice now. Your decision.”

“Decision to what?”

“If you go to the bridge at the beginning of the rainbow and stay with its golden light – or just keep going with this train wherever it takes you.”

“Where is this train taking me anyway?”

She smiled, then raised her hand and pointed to the window with one of her polished nails:

“Look.”

I turned my head and I noticed the big round silver moon passing by, downwards, as if the train was ascending somewhere out in space.

As I was staring into the deep mysterious eyes of the Japanese girl, her hypnotizing glance made the room seem so warm and cozy, while the roof was lowering down above my head and I was sinking in the plushy armchair, slowly falling asleep, in a train that had passed by the silver moon and was endlessly ascending to nowhere...

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You know those summer nights when everything seems so quiet and you can only hear the crickets... it was one of those nights when the train stopped in the middle of a field.

I woke up to find the compartment completely dark. The lights inside the train were off everywhere and people seemed to keep on sleeping. I yawned and tried to adjust my eyes to the darkness. I could sense the presence of someone in the seat in front of me, breathing softly and I could feel her eyes on me, through the night, watching. She was awake. She had been watching me the whole time.

“What time is it?” I asked her sleepily.

“It’s 4 a.m.” she replied in a whisper.

She was waiting for something – for me to do something or to say something. I glanced out the window, but I could only see the tall grass, like waves of a sea, spreading in the night – and I could hear the crickets.

“Where are we? Is there a station around here? Why has the train stopped?”

“It stopped for a purpose. Maybe it needs fuel or whatever...”

Yet her voice didn't seem to show much interest in the reason why the train was there, why it wasn't moving anymore. She was watching me. I couldn't see her eyes. She extended her feet and rested them on my knees: I noticed she had taken off her shoes. Her toes were glowing in the dark, as they were slightly tickling my jeans, barely touching me.

“Let's go for a walk outside”, she said. “You can take off your shoes.”

I figured the train would not leave without us, so I took off my sandals. She stepped out in the hall and I followed her. The floor was cold, but sneaking out seemed like an adventure, so I didn't mind. She opened the door and we jumped off the train, into the tall grass.

“Did you remember?” she asked while we were walking in the night.

“Remember what?”

“How to run. Who you are.”

“I know who I am. Why should I have to remember?”

“Because you're so much more than this - right now. And the rainbow is with you.”

She smiled at me.

“I know these things. You just got to keep trying. Run. Right now.”

“Will you run with me?”

“I might.”

“What if we step on a piece of broken glass?”

“What if we don't?”

“What if we step on thorns?”

Her eyes glimmered in the night, fixing me with indulgent amusement, but I sensed a challenge in her voice too.

“Are you always so cautious? Take a chance!”

We started running at the same time, as if we had read each other’s minds and anticipated the next move. It was a casual race, but there was a thrilling energy about it. I could feel the soft grass under my feet and the rough ground, while some lost stars dozed off in the abyss above – and it was reassuring to see her shadow running beside me, matching my steps and bravely confronting the dark. However, the grass was too tall and we had to slow down eventually, after having made a trail behind us that led back to the train. I could not see the way ahead. It was just a deep sea of swishing plants that whispered and kept swinging mysteriously like waves.

She stopped to pick up something from the ground. She was gathering branches probably to make a decoration.

I looked back at the silent train that was submerged in darkness, like a submarine with no lights. It was waiting in the darkness, not moving, not making any sound, like a giant animal, waiting for us to find a reason, to find the meaning of life or whatever could have been in that field.

I glanced at the sky.

“Did we fly to the moon?” I asked her. “Are we on another planet now?”

“We might be”, she answered amused.

Her voice had an unusual tone that meant endless possibilities. At that moment, the train started flashing its lights – and it actually had so many of them, a lot more than I had thought: it looked like a Christmas tree, with blinking colorful bulbs from its tail to the locomotive, as if a giant dragon had just awakened and was breathing in the night in rays of laser and blazing signals, calling for us.

After we returned to the train, it resumed its movement as if it had been waiting for us and no one else.

In the morning, as I opened my eyes to the sunrise, I noticed Heidi from Tokyo was gone, but she had left a note on the seat in front of me: “*Coffee at the train café 8 o’clock* “.

I went out of the compartment to look for the café. People were beginning to wake up and walk along the corridors. I found the café next to the locomotive. It had transparent doors and as soon as I got in, I was greeted by a tall waitress, wearing a fancy dress and wings on her back:

“Hellooo!!” she said smiling generously at me. “Welcome to the Space Café, captain! What table would you like?”

“Why are you calling me captain?”

“Dear, just dance along, will you? I know what I’m saying here! Heavens, this dress never really stays the way I want it to and it never sparkles enough!” she said, arranging the folds of her dress and swirling around. “A diva’s got to look her best, you know? Today I’m playing the waitress though, so I guess it will have to be enough. Have a seat! Choose a table, whichever you want.”

I chose a table by the window and I opened the laptop. The sun was throwing its rays inside the café, when the laptop screen lit up in a greenish phosphorescent nuance. The waitress was standing by my table, waiting. I looked up at her. She explained, somehow entertained by it, as if it was part of a show:

“I’m usually the princess, but today I’m the waitress – what can I get you? You can go wild about it. What will it be?” she inquired decisively, but very friendly.

“Coffee and...”

“And what?”

I looked at the screen. I expected to see some words from Ariel. I was a bit worried about her, since she had been silent for hours. I had already become accustomed to her presence, even though she was just talking to me on my disconnected equipment. Not hearing from her made me wonder if she was still around. Maybe she was not allowed to talk to me anymore. Maybe she couldn’t find the way. The screen was still phosphorescent, but no words.

I looked at the waitress again. Her theatrical angel wings made me think of something.

“Are you a rainbow child too?” I asked her.

“Honey, I used to be one, and I still am a child at heart – but right now I’m playing the waitress.”

“Why?”

“It’s for you. To help you decide.”

“Decide what?”

I was beginning to think everyone on the train wanted me to decide something – to be something – to remember something...

“Decide to run, of course. Keep running.”

“How is your being a waitress helping me decide to keep running? And where would I run anyway?”

I didn’t understand her logic.

She shifted the tray from one hand to the other, balancing it in the air, while the glasses on it rattled for a second.

“It’s obvious”, she explained. ”I must convince you that it’s worth it. And that you can... if you run towards something, not from something – you know?”

“I’m not running anywhere. I know I could if I wanted to... but what’s in it for you? Why are you doing it? This waitress show.”

I was determined to get to the truth of it.

“I’m doing it because I care - because you’re one of the rainbow children too. You have always been – you’ve just got to remember.”

I looked at the laptop screen again. I was waiting for Ariel to speak, to give me a sign. I was missing her somehow. I was wondering about the Japanese girl from the other night too. She hadn’t shown up for coffee yet.

“So, can I get you anything?” the waitress asked again.

“Just coffee”.

“Sure thing, captain.”

She strolled away, swinging the tray on her hand, somehow amused by it.

I was staring absently at the phosphorescent screen.

And then, two teenagers came to my table, a boy and a girl. They looked fourteen at most, but their determined and concerned attitude made them seem more mature.

“We have a message for you”, the boy said. “It’s from the locomotive.”

“Yes, and by the way, he’s Yanny and I’m Florence”, the girl said seriously. “He’s working on the locomotive and I’m with the diplomatic team.”

The boy had indeed very big hands, large shoulders and he seemed very strong, self confident and smart, while his eyes were still innocent and honest in the light of the sunrise. He had hopeful enthusiasm glowing on his face, as he was waiting for me to say something. Florence was one of those wise intelligent girls that understand more of life, ahead of her age, but her eyes were looking around with such positive and noble intentions, that I had the feeling she was too good for the world and I wished, in that very second, that the world would never change her good nature.

They seemed the brightest, most interesting teenagers I had ever seen, like pure beings from a much better world – and I wondered by what privilege they were sitting at my table.

“We need you to come with us to the locomotive”, they said. “We need you there.”

I wanted to ask why, but both of them were just too good to be questioned about anything. I decided to go with them unconditionally, without any doubt. I got up and followed them inside the locomotive.

“What seems to be the problem?”

“Look. There are too many railways ahead. You must tell us which way to drive this locomotive. You have been here before, haven’t you?”

Yanny looked at me hopeful and with a belief that surpassed my own expectations of myself.

“You do remember, don’t you?” Florence added, a bit anxious, watching me attentively and I sensed she wanted to believe I was there to help them and she trusted I had absolute power to do so.



I wanted to remember so much, but the railways spreading ahead, mixing in a net of shiny metal brought no memory to my mind. I couldn't recall having seen anything like that before - but I wanted to help them so much, that I decided to go with what I knew.

"We'll be just fine if we keep the direction of the train on the tracks that reflect the rainbow. Can you see the colors on the silver metal?"

I didn't know how I came up with that idea. It was like a lucky guess. I just said it instinctively. It occurred to me that I might have passed by that place sometime ago. I began to believe that I had been there before – and I really knew more than I thought I did.

The two of them seemed so happy to have a leading clue that they immediately started following the tracks where the sunlight reflected rainbow colors on the metal.

"Yes, just follow the light", I told them reassuringly.

I realized we were the only ones in the locomotive. I wondered if the train had actually been driven by teenagers the entire time.

Florence was already giving directions, while Yanny was adjusting the levers and the switches.

"A little to the right. No, to the left. No, that's too much to the left. Be careful!" she said sounding worried.

"I'm doing my best, quit nagging me", Yanny told her a bit annoyed, while his big strong hands were turning the direction lever and the locomotive was sliding along the innumerable metal rails.

"Please try not to argue", I said to them, still glancing ahead at the dazzling multitude of tracks. "We'll be fine if we just follow the light."

They listened to me and we remained silent until the locomotive was finally getting beyond the net of intersected metal lines, leaving it behind. It eventually started along a clear shiny set of railway tracks that went to the horizon, just two parallel lines, glimmering in the distance.

“Wow! That was close!” Yanny exclaimed relieved and Florence managed to smile.

“We’re going the right way now.”

“Is this the right way?”

“It must be.”

They were talking to each other in amiable manner again. I decided they were doing fine, so I could let them be by themselves.

I returned to my table inside the café.

I was glad I had been of some help to them, even if I was not sure it was something meant only for me – or if anyone else could have done the same. It didn’t matter anymore: they needed me and I was there. And that was the only thing that had meaning. The most important.

I had a feeling everything was just right – and it was going to be just fine. I knew the train was on good hands at that moment.

The winged waitress placed a steamy cup in front of me.

“Here’s your coffee, captain”, she said. “It’s on the house. Enjoy!”

I am Yanny. I grew up by a lake in the mountains – but most importantly, I grew up watching him run along the rainbow and disappear at the end of it.

The first time I saw him I was in the boat on the lake – the deep water was silent and peaceful as usual and the tall fir trees were whispering unknowingly their unspoken language. The big rocks that guarded the lake in the distance stood tall towards the sky, mysteriously watching the plateau. And then, that light appeared above the water, rainbow rays of light coming down from the sky and forming a bridge that extended to the other side of the mountains, beyond the lake. I was rowing casually when I noticed this rainbow above the lake. Florence was just asking me to hand her the oars. Florence is my sister. She likes to row just as much as I do, so we take turns when we are on the lake.

“Let me row, you’ve been doing it for a while now. It’s my turn”, she said.

At that moment, I was looking up and I noticed the rainbow appear above the lake. Even the dragonflies on the shores seemed to be fascinated by it, rushing in circles to get lost in the colorful rays.

“Did you hear what I said?”

“Yeah, shh. Wait a minute. Look! Do you see it?”

Florence looked up and stared at the surreal rays of light that reflected colors in the greenish water, blazing like a vault in the air, bright and sparkling.

“Can you see something move across the light?” Florence said.

I noticed a figure, someone’s spectral contour. It was as if a strange being of light was running along the rainbow, towards the end of it, beyond the lake and the mountains...

I was a simple boy at that time. I had never wanted anything else except to be the strongest, the most powerful in the valley, to have the biggest hands and to be able to lift rocks above my head, more than anyone around me. I was proud to be smart enough to know the paths through the forest and my only concern was

to not get bored and to not miss a piece of the action, wherever that action might have been. I was ambitious, but I had never thought too far away beyond the lake and the high rocks – and the difficult life of winter when the mountains were covered by snow while a freezing menacing blizzard howled through the trees. I was, just like I said, a simple boy. But when I saw that flash of light - that someone running along the rainbow - I knew there was nothing in the world I wanted more but to be able to run across the rainbow too... and to see what was beyond it. I was staring at it fascinated. After it disappeared in the horizon, the rainbow softly melted in the air and the colors faded away. I kept staring up, at the clear blue sky.

Florence shook the boat.

“Hey! Wake up!”

I looked at her, still thinking, my eyes burning with the idea of a new possibility: to be able to run along the rays of light.

“What was that?” I asked her.

“How should I know? It looked like someone running.”

“It must be somewhere beyond the mountains by now. Let’s go to the other side of the valley and see if it’s still there.”

I started rowing faster, to the end of the lake. Florence was more worried about many more things than I could have been.

“I don’t know... what if there are dangers out there? “

“What dangers?”

“Dangers we don’t know anything about.”

Suddenly I felt so enthusiastic, that I just had to find out more about what I had seen.

“Do you think we’ll see it again?”

“Maybe... I don’t know. We might...”

When the boat reached the other side of the shore, we jumped off and started to run uphill, through the wild flowers and the yellow summer grass. The dragonflies were following us, buzzing in a strange dance, with their velvet wings

and big shiny eyes, throwing blue and green sparkles around. Florence was a cautious girl, but she also had a brave side like a risky taste for adventure that encouraged her to go along with some of my craziest ideas, so it didn't take much to convince her to go find the rainbow alien.

When we reached the top of the hill, we glanced to the other side and we saw the rainbow disappear in the distance, fading in the horizon, as the sunset was spreading its soft shadows across the field. We stopped there to breathe and to cool off.

“Do you think it's an alien?” I asked her.

“It could be. It didn't look human anyway. It looked like a ghost... of light.”

Florence was smart and she could understand things in a blink of an eye. I relied on her wisdom many times, when we decided to do things together, just as she trusted my restless ideas and my need for action.

“So how do we meet him again?”

“I don't know... I think we should just wait. We should wait around the lake. If it shows up again, it could be in the same place.”

“You're right. Let's go back to the boat.”

We hurried down to the shore.

I must tell you about this lake. It's an unusual lake because it was formed by a mountain fall. Actually, they say the earth slid and crumbled into the valley, trees and everything, making a dam on two rivers that accumulated water and covered the valley completely. There was heavy rain too and who knows what other phenomena that led to the formation of those deep waters, dozens of meters going down. That happened more than two hundred years ago. The trees are still there, in the water, perfectly preserved, vertical trunks rising up with their heads beyond the surface, so you have to be careful when you go with the boat on the lake, you could hit any of them any moment. On top of some of those trunks there are bushes of grass and random plants that grow undisturbed, a proof that life goes on under any conditions and in the most peculiar circumstances. But this is how our world is. Anything you can imagine, you can accomplish. Anything is

possible here. Even the dragonflies know that and they dance happily along the lake shores, weaving their secrets with their wings. The lake is still surrounded by hills and growing trees that extend their branches almost touching the water: nature is in its full expansion here - no boundaries, no end to it.

You can't get to this valley easily. The mountains are so high and rocky; you could get dizzy glancing up. There is just a narrow path beneath the sharp cliffs, climbing a steep winding road that goes through a tunnel and a long trail of stones. The path was created by a fast running river. The water eroded the cliffs and made its way down the mountains. The other way to get to the lake is uphill, but only I and Florence know about it.

We waited for the rainbow to appear again, but it didn't – not on that same day, anyway. It was sunset already and we had to go home eventually.

We returned to our wooden cabin in the forest.

It became a habit for us, to go on the lake every day, waiting for the rainbow to appear. And it finally did, but it was only as a fast vision; we could never really get close to the spectral figure running along the colorful trail of light. It just passed us by in a flash and we couldn't understand what it was or how to make it stop and communicate with us – if that was in any way possible.

One year later, when we were on the lake again, we saw the rainbow appear and we became attentive. There it was: the flashy running alien, right before our eyes. I stood up in the boat and yelled at it:

“Hey! Come here a minute!”

Florence was just about to grab my sleeve anxiously and make me sit, when the alien stopped.

“He heard me!” I shouted triumphantly. “Hey! Get over here!”

I waved my arms in the air. The boat was shaking from side to side, but I didn't care.

“Be careful! What if it's a harmful alien?” Florence tried to reason with me.

But she was just as eager to see what could be the alien's next move. I picked up the oars and rowed the boat closer to the rainbow. When we were just

under it, the alien leaned forward and looked at us. It was not an alien, it looked human enough – but its figure was a burning flash of light, like a blurred vision, as if its atoms were flowing freely, unattached, transparently melting in the rainbow.

“Who are you?” I asked him.

“I’m Ben”, he answered.

We were surprised to see he looked just like a teenager. He seemed to be close to our age somehow. It was strange that he had a name too – somehow, we thought something so immaterial couldn’t have a name.

“Where do you come from?” Florence inquired, curiously.

“I’m from the world beyond the rainbow’s end. There’s another realm and another space. It’s like another universe parallel with this one.”

“Are you alive in our world too?” Florence wanted to know.

“Of course I’m alive. But you can only see me as a fragmented vision. You don’t see me completely right now.”

“How can you run on the rainbow?” I asked immediately the most important question that had been burning in my mind for a year, while I was watching him fascinated.

Ben smiled at me.

“It’s not difficult, if you envision the whole idea. You just have to capture the moments and then they become timeless and you become timeless too and you can run on the rainbow because you have the power in your mind.”

“I don’t understand. Can you teach me how?”

I was so eager to know – I had never wanted to know anything more than that, ever. It was like boiling fire in my veins.

“I could teach you – but you need one of these.”

That’s when I saw he had a camera.

“You capture the moments with this and they remain alive - and then you have a continuum of moments which becomes your flowing power that lifts you

and makes you immaterial. Then, you can run along the rainbow anytime you wish.”

“This sounds so interesting”, Florence intervened, “but how do we find such a camera in our world? And can we return home after we travel along the rainbow?”

Ben seemed kind and friendly enough to explain to us whatever we wanted to know:

“Of course you can return anywhere you want. The only place where you can never return is yourselves. You will evolve and become much better: you won’t be the same persons anymore; you’ll be an improved version of yourselves. If you’re willing to take that chance, I can get you a camera like this. I can borrow you mine, if you want – just for a ride... only until you can have your own.”

“I want to try!” I said quickly, reaching out my hand.

“Wait! You are not ready for this now. Think about it”, Florence warned me.

I had waited too long for this opportunity to just sit still.

“No, I want to try it right now! You can come too! It will be fun, you’ll see!”

I told her.

Ben had another explanation for me.

“You can try it, but not right now, because you haven’t accumulated enough moments to create your own flowing power. I’ll tell you what: I can take pictures of you two every time I come around here – and after a while, the camera will have enough images of you to create your continuum. Is this what you want?”

“Yes!” I said without a second thought and without any shadow of doubt.

I wanted so much to be able to run along the rainbow that I couldn’t wait. It was amazing to see someone do it - and just talking to such a being of light was a dream come true for me. Florence was beginning to enjoy the idea too. I could see it in her eyes, the wish to know what was beyond the end of the rainbow. Another world... another universe...



The running figure appeared again, very often, in the following years. He always came when we were on the lake, in the boat. And in time, we became friends. Actually, three years had to pass before the camera could accumulate enough moments with us. Ben made a habit of coming around the lake and our valley. He often stopped to talk to us and to describe his world. It was a bit different from ours: most of the things he spoke about were beyond our knowledge, but we were so eager to learn and to understand, that we didn't miss any of those encounters. And we were happy to see him take pictures of us – sometimes we took pictures together. The pictures remained inside the camera, alive and bright, as if they were indeed captured moments, pieces of time, instances of our lives, infinitely projected – I believe that was what they actually were.

In time, I grew up. I became taller, my hands grew bigger, I felt stronger and more confident, I became smarter and I felt I could do whatever I wanted. I felt as if nothing would be impossible for me and no one would surpass my power. But the burning wish to run along the rainbow was still there, motivating me more than anything. I began to dream of another world beyond our valley – and Ben had shown us images of it inside his camera: bright lights, glass buildings, wide roads, endless oceans, flying planes and fast trains. I knew Florence was dreaming of it too. She had become taller and more beautiful, she was stunningly pretty, sensitive and intelligent. We had silently agreed that we wanted to see the other world someday, together if possible. Of course, our valley had more magic than anything could exist, in any universe. The charming dragonflies would dance like strange forest spirits in the warm sunlight, the fir trees would whisper their unknown language at night and the majestic rocks would guard the valley with their mysterious and magnificent presence, watching us and keeping the peace. It was a splendid world, away from evil. Basically, anything your mind could imagine, you could make it come true. But we still wanted to see the parallel universe that Ben had brought to us in his stories and his blazing rainbow trail.

You wouldn't believe it, but Florence was the first to run on the rainbow, before me. I don't know why, maybe it was because I had become so eager, so restless about it and she had used the passing time to gain confidence instead... or maybe her pictures just reached the continuum faster than mine. Anyway, it didn't matter why she started first. Maybe she had more patience than I could ever have, but it just happened that she went ahead of me to see that other world.

One night, as we were lying on our beds, watching the ceiling in the darkness and talking, like we always did, I asked her what she thought about that rainbow running alien, Ben.

"I trust him", she answered. "He's our friend. Don't you trust him?"

"I do, a lot. I wish I could be like him – run like him... Do you think we'll see his world one day?"

"I think yes, we will."

We had grown up to believe anything was possible. And I think it was the right thing to believe.

When we saw Ben the next day, he told us we could finally try to run on the rainbow.

I can't tell you how enthusiastic and thrilled I was about it. I think I was glowing in the boat; I rowed so fast that I scared the dragonflies away. I thought I would be the one to take off and fly, but Florence extended her hand to him, as he was leaning on the edge of the rainbow, his atoms in movement, transparently flowing like drops of water – and the next thing I knew, he told her "Don't stop believing, just keep going" and I saw her become a bright figure, radiating beams of light...

I watched her lifted in the air. She began to run along the colorful trail, a blinding spectral vision, disappearing with Ben in the distance. I remained there in the boat, wondering if they would ever return. Half an hour passed by. I was sitting in the boat, worried about Florence, still eager to jump on the rainbow and run, wondering about Ben, trying to keep my trust unshaken, trying to still believe he wouldn't give up on me. And then, he came back. He leaned forward

and extended his blurred arm. I grabbed the hand and I must have made a leap of faith, because I found myself on the rainbow, suddenly feeling light as a feather and a flow of energy making me more alive than ever. I looked at my own body and I could see I was just as transparent as light: I had become a bright spectral vision. The energy I felt was so powerful, so amazing, much more inspiring than anything I knew. It was as if I could fly in a second wherever I wished, nothing could keep me down and nothing could stand in my way.

“Isn’t it wonderful?” Ben asked me, and I could hear his words even if he didn’t really speak.

It was as if his thoughts resonated in my mind instantly and effortlessly.

“Yes, it’s great!”

“Let’s go then - to the end of the rainbow!”

We started running. It was like flying. It was like sliding on water, while the view beneath the rainbow path was splendid: fields and valleys, mountain tops, clouds, a swirl of breathtaking images, seen from above... I felt like a comet, running across the colorful trail.

At the end of the rainbow we met Ariel.

Ariel was an eleven year old girl, with shiny ribbons in her hair. She just waited for us there, holding a piece of glass in her hand. Florence was by her side and they had apparently become friends already.

“Ariel is my assistant”, Ben explained to me. “We discovered the rainbow trail together, a few years ago. When there isn’t enough rain to make a rainbow in the sky, Ariel shines this light from pieces of glass and we can cross over to your world. She has been there with me a few times, but you couldn’t see her because your eyes weren’t trained to distinguish details. She knows about you. Sometimes she accompanies me. Now you can see her clearly. “

“You’re late”, Ariel told me fearlessly, even though I was a thirteen year old teenager and she was just eleven.

I could see she had a lot of self confidence.

“Why didn’t you come at the same time with Florence?” she inquired boldly.

“Why do you need to know?” I answered with a question, a bit bothered by the fact that she seemed to be patronizing me.

“Chill out,” she replied sarcastically. “I’m the rainbow assistant and I must stand here holding up the glass to reflect the trail. The longer you take to get here, the longer I must stand and wait. That’s why.”

“Get over yourself, I wasn’t that late.”

I was a bit annoyed that a little girl would question my rapidity. But she had her reasons and I was too happy to be there, at the rainbow’s end, to care about anything else.

We learned to get along, in time, and taking trips from one world to another became our favorite activity. It turned out that Ben had been in many different places and had met many teenagers, from our world and from his own. However, he gave us his full attention, teaching us how to travel along the rainbow. We were his favorite team – we were the best runners, as he often said.

We went flying above the tall metal buildings with glass windows, we saw endless oceans and electric bridges, we saw ships and trains, wide roads and infinite horizons, bright stars and a big round moon... Florence was always with me and Ben was always with us, showing us things we wouldn’t have dreamt of otherwise.

The real problems began when the two worlds started to tear him apart.

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Ben had taken so many trips between the two worlds that he began to behave like two different persons. It seemed to us – to me and Florence – that he was in a certain way in one world and different in another. His usual self, free and powerful, was reduced to the limits of the world from one side – and was becoming more transparent when he crossed over the rainbow. It was as if each world was trying to keep him there. Having to adjust to the contrasting conditions

of the two was beginning to burden him. He was beginning to forget on one side – and he was beginning to disappear on the other. Sometimes, Florence and I would watch anxiously how he left and we wondered if he would ever return, because he seemed so frail, so immaterial when he was running. Ariel said that he used to run in the other world too – but it was a different kind of running. Ariel also said that he was in danger of becoming a cartoon. He had already become a cartoon character in our world, they named him Ben 10 - and the Japanese found out about his power and wanted to make a deal with him, which could be of some help, because they offered an improved camera that could create a new continuum. If he accepted the deal, they could provide him with this device that would enable his true self to survive in both worlds without losing any of his abilities in either of them. The Japanese had already sent a representative to find him, but he was nowhere to be found. Ariel knew about it, but she couldn't do anything – it was up to him. Meanwhile, time was running fast and Ben had already begun to forget. One day, he didn't return to us anymore.

Florence was so anxious. She kept looking up to the sky, but there was no rainbow in sight. We waited and waited... and when we saw a frail rainbow, we thought Ben would be on it – but he wasn't. So we jumped on the colorful bridge and ran to the end of it. We found Ariel waiting there, desolate and silent.

“What happened?” I asked her.

Ariel shrugged.

“He didn't come anymore. He's gone. He just left and didn't come back. And without him, the connection between the two worlds will be gone forever too. The rainbow won't be a bridge anymore. He's the key to it. He lights up the path, I don't know why – maybe it's because he's idealistic like that. Or maybe it's because he believed in this rainbow so much. Anyway, without him, there's no way back.”

Florence sat down in the grass, next to Ariel who was looking ahead, with clouded eyes.

“Don't worry, we'll find him.”

“How? He doesn’t remember any of us anymore. He stopped running too. I tried to contact him but he doesn’t know who I am. He’s stuck in this world now. And so are you, because this is the last time you could use the rainbow as a bridge between. Look, it’s already disappearing now.”

We noticed that the rainbow had faded away. We couldn’t go home anymore, none of us.

“Listen Ariel,” I said. “We can bring him back here if you contact him. We’ll make the connection with those Japanese and their new invention. Everything will be fine.”

I don’t know if I believed it enough, but I wanted to believe it - and I was so sure that anything you could imagine, you could make it come true. Ben had proved it to us anyway. We had to do something. We couldn’t just sit there waiting. I knew we had to take some initiative and solve the problem ourselves.

“I’ll contact those Japanese”, I told Ariel. “Do you know how to find their representative?”

“Yes. She’s one of the rainbow runners. The rainbow trail doesn’t function anymore in Ben’s absence, but I can signal to her and she might meet one of us... somewhere.”

“I’ll go”, I said. “I’ll explain the situation to her. But why are these Japanese involved in this?”

“They have the ability to see things as they are beyond the surface and they appreciate life as it is. They can accept the miraculous diversity of the universe – and the endless possibilities of it. They have imagination and that is the most important part. And they keep their word, so you can trust what they say. They are very interested to keep the rainbow bridge functional: this is why they invented that new camera for Ben. Maybe they want to visit another universe and Ben can show them the way. But right now, he must remember how to run – how to fly again.”

I spoke without hesitation:

“I’ll get the Japanese representative and you get Ben. We’ll set up a meeting between them.”

Ariel looked at me with a slight trace of hope in her eyes.

“It will have to be somewhere in motion. It would be great if we could get him on a plane.”

Florence came with another idea:

“Why not a train? Yanny, can we get a train for him?”

We looked at each other.

I had always wanted to drive a train.

At first, they called me Grizzly because I'm grayish, but soon enough, Ariel changed my name to Peter Pan - from the story. She just liked it that way, so when I was given to her I accepted it since it was a good name. Who wouldn't want to be young forever? Especially a creature like me who needs luck to get by, even though they say I must have nine lives in my celestial account. To tell you the truth, there have been moments I was certain I wouldn't see the next morning. Don't get me wrong, I've been very lucky in my life and I am grateful for it, but sometimes, you just need that little extra something to get you beyond a situation. Like a miracle, like a chance.

I had a lot of luck when I escaped that pet shop that wanted to hand me over to a crowded shelter – and then, I would have only two weeks to find a home. I was already a neutered tomcat, one year old, and they called me Grizzly. I think people were scared of that name and they avoided taking me home for that reason. They always chose the little kittens instead. One day, Ariel just walked in and pointed at me.

“I want that one”, she said.

They tried to convince her that I wasn't the perfect choice, that I wouldn't be good for her, but she must have seen the rainbow in my eyes, so she was determined to keep me. In return, I also noticed the rainbow above her head. I think I was the only one in the shop who saw it. I should tell you about the rainbow trail. I used to see it come in through the window, and I wanted to jump right on it – so I smashed the window a few times, until they locked me away in a cage. They didn't see the rainbow and they didn't know I was trying to escape from the shop by walking on that colorful bridge. They kept me in that cage and it was really boring. I could only play with the little kittens that threw their paws behind the metal bars and tried their claws on the plastic walls. Sometimes their fluffy tails pointed to the rainbow in the air and I wondered if they saw it too. But



they were oblivious to it – however, they were nice enough to play with me even though I was in a cage. Nevertheless, the pet shop had decided to send me to a shelter. And then, by some lucky game of chance, Ariel walked in.

“I want that one”, she said.

“You wouldn’t want that one. It’s wild and strange”, they told her. “It could be dangerous for you. Why not take one of the little kittens? Look how cute they are.’

“No, I want that one.”

I felt my fur electrify with anticipation, when they opened the cage. How I wanted to run free! Instead, I played the good cat and I sat in the basket that Ariel had brought along. I knew I had to be patient to get out of that shop. Eventually, I was planning to run away on the rainbow, when I would be safe enough, yet Ariel has convinced me to stay. Besides, Ariel is very kind and she takes me everywhere.

Ariel is a nice teenage girl, but she’s growing up so beautifully now; I don’t know why on earth she would choose a grayish tomcat like me to keep her company, but she did it just like that – maybe it was because we both see the rainbow and she knows it. She has even taken me to the end of the rainbow where she made a fire – with a few other teenagers. They just made that fire to signal something to someone, I don’t know why. I’m telling you, I was just sitting in my basket, purring comfortably, and it was getting dark outside. And then, they lit the fire and the sparks started flying high up to the sky, so high in the night, and landing everywhere around me, so I jumped off because I didn’t want them to burn my fur. It was annoying: I spend a few hours of the day arranging my fur and wiping it clean, so that I would look decent enough when I sit in my favorite armchair in Ariel’s room, but those fire sparks were ruining it instantly, so I just jumped off the basket and ran away to hide in the bushes nearby.

From the darkness of the bushes, I could still see their faces lit by the huge tall fire in the middle of the field. Their glowing eyes became brighter and I heard

the sound of an engine or something approaching from a distance. I could see the rainbow above the fire. The teenagers were looking up, waiting for something. I was mostly worried about Ariel, because she was the youngest – the other girl and the boy looked taller and more mature – and I was concerned to watch her sitting so close to the fire, but she was very attentive to the rainbow above. Actually, the three of them were intensely preoccupied by it. I didn't want to get close to the flames. No sane or insane cat would ever approach that blazing apparition - ever. I preferred to watch from under the leaves and branches where I was hidden. And then, a deafening sound reached my ears. It turned out to be a very advanced and high tech air-cushion vehicle. I had heard about something like that when I was listening to the news in the pet shop - and I was always listening, since I had nothing better to do there, in my cage. I knew there were such machines invented by people, but I had never seen one. The hovercraft came above the rainbow and landed next to the fire, swinging slightly from side to side. It made a round circle and parked further away, in the dark. A girl with sunglasses got off. Why would a girl wear sunglasses in the night, I didn't quite understand. She approached in a relaxed manner, walking calmly but somehow very decisively. I heard her speak, extending her hand to the teenagers:

“I'm the Japanese representative. My name is Heidi. You asked me to come. Now, how can I help you?”

The boy stepped ahead and spoke in a hurry, very determined and a bit restless:

“We need to find a train for Ben. And we need to do it immediately, otherwise he will disappear forever – and the bridge with him too.”

“If we can get him on a train, we might find a way to reconnect with his memory, because he doesn't remember us”, Ariel specified. “We must do this before it's too late. And time is running out.”

The Japanese girl seemed to remain silent for a few moments, thinking deeply. Eventually, she said:

“I think I could find a train. But will he take the camera we prepared for him? It’s a new camera, for a new continuum.”

“You could negotiate on the train”, the other girl intervened.

I was listening to their discussion, but the heat from the fire was getting to me and was making my skin tingle. I had to get away from it, so I stepped carefully out of the bushes and walked unnoticed to the hovercraft that was waiting in the dark, like a long shadow. The heat of the fire had made me uneasy, so when I found the cool metal and the soft saddle, I just jumped on it. At first, I inspected its frame and the leather cover. It wasn’t real leather, I could tell when I sniffed it – but that was a relief to me, actually. I wouldn’t have liked to sit next to some dead animal’s skin. The backseat of the hovercraft felt so comfortable, that I curled on it and closed my eyes. I was a bit tired, and it was a good place to rest, away from the fire and the voices that kept discussing details about how to get a rainbow runner back on the rainbow. To me, it was pointless: why bother? If he wanted to get back on the colorful trail, he would come on his own. If not, it seemed like so much effort to make him remember and to restore the bridge. And why would the bridge disappear in his absence? I didn’t believe it. Not one word of it. I thought they were probably making it up, to entertain themselves by that fire. So I just closed my eyes and decided not to worry about anything.

I must have dozed off, because I didn’t hear when Ariel discovered I was gone and called for me. I didn’t even notice when the Japanese girl returned to her vehicle. I woke up only when she started the engine. It was a sudden thunder that started deafening me again. The engine was high technology and it was elegant enough to have a low rumbling sound that must have been heard by humans like a bee buzzing around. However, to me and my feline hearing which is about ten times more accurate than human ears, it sounded like fireworks or thunder. I only had time to stick out my claws and grab the saddle with my front paws. The next moment, I was up in the air, swishing above the fire and everything, with my tail hanging along the colorful rainbow path. I couldn’t do anything about it anymore. There wasn’t enough time. I had to remain there, with

the fur on my back sticking up like a bunch of long needles on branches of a pine tree.

When the vehicle finally arrived at its destination, slowing down and swinging from side to side, past the basement doors of a building, the girl noticed me, on her back seat, in her garage. She stared at me for a while, a bit surprised. I bet she didn't know a tomcat could land on her ride across the rainbow. She watched me carefully, taking off her sunglasses. I must say her eyes had something feline in the way they glowed sideways at me, attentively and thoughtfully. I stared back at her, waiting for her to blink. You should know this is the sign you can trust someone – in cat language, it means a lot. It's the border between peace and war. They must blink at you. If you're a cat, you know this for sure. If you're not a cat... well, you still need to blink. You must blink. Otherwise, it's not safe. You're a threat if you don't blink. She made a step forward and I arched my back, ready to jump up and stick my claws into anything, or just hiss and attack. I could've jumped on her head and out through the garage doors that were still open.

She stopped and her eyes looked directly in mine. The garage was empty and silent. "Blink," I thought. "Blink already, so I can relax!" I told her in my mind.

She must have read my thoughts because the next moment, she smiled and she blinked slowly, still looking in my eyes.

I relaxed and the tension in my paws dissipated. I was still dizzy from the fast ride. She turned around and flipped a remote control. The garage doors started to close. I looked at them anxiously. She must have sensed my fear, because she turned off the remote and the doors became motionless, stopping half way. She turned towards me and leaned forward, speaking softly:

"They don't make many like you around here, do they?"

She seemed to observe me attentively. I think she wanted to figure out if I was really a live creature or a machine. She extended her hand above me and I flinched. But her hand stopped just above my head and I could feel energy

radiating from the open palm. I looked up and I saw rainbow rays running through her hand. I recognized the rainbow: it was a good sign.

She smiled again.

“You little alien... how did you sneak on my ride and get here to Tokyo?”

I was perplexed: so, I had arrived in Tokyo... And I had been willing to think her vehicle was a UFO.

I looked through the garage doors, relinquishing my plans of getting out in the open. I could see the tall sky scrapers, the many flashing lights and the crowded traffic in the puzzling net of roads, bullet trains and steel cars. What would I do alone in Tokyo?

I glanced up at the Japanese girl. She was the most certain hope I had at that moment. I figured I had to take a chance and remain with her. I wondered if she could look after me until Ariel might find me, eventually, if she ever would - but Ariel was already too far away. There was no way back, at that moment. It was a change I had to accept. It seemed I was on my own again and I had to find a new life in that new place. At least I wasn't in a cage anymore. I could run off if I really wanted to. I thought about many things, in the few seconds when I stared at the Japanese girl, pondering: maybe she could be good to me... or maybe I should just run out of the garage, in a second, and find a life outside, remaining by myself... I was hesitating. I felt lost and unsure, but something from her eyes was keeping me calm. There was a deep, warm and soft certainty in the way she was watching me observantly. Maybe she was kind to animals... but what if she wasn't?

“Don't worry”, she said. “It's a beautiful world around here. And I like you, so you're safe. Don't worry now.”

She seemed content to have found me.

“Come on”, she whispered softly and she picked me up.

Suddenly, I was overwhelmed by the warmth of her arms and I rested my head on her shoulder, touching her neck with my ears and tickling her pale moonlight skin with my whiskers. She took me upstairs to a cozy room and put

me on a fluffy blanket, on a couch. The room was slightly lit; it only had neon lamps by the walls. I noticed a big shadow on the couch and I arched my back instantly, hissing at it.

The girl laughed.

“That’s my teddy bear. It won’t attack you – I think you’ll get along just fine.”

So, she had a bear as a toy. That was nice. It meant she was a kind person and I liked that.

I walked slowly to it and after I sniffed it, I decided I could sit next to it without any problem.

When she returned with a can of rice and some Japanese sauce for me, I was already asleep, curled up next to the teddy bear.

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At first, I missed Ariel quite a lot. I had gotten used to her sweet presence, her bold enthusiasm and the warmth of her receptive eyes that were sometimes glancing beyond me with melancholy and peaceful thoughts... I missed the rainbow above her head and her laughter and her quick understanding; I longed for her kind, soulful nature and the stubborn decisive attention that she used to surround me with; I needed the endless, limitless generosity of her affection that was so resourceful, making me feel most wanted in return. I missed our long walks and my place in the basket. I missed my favorite armchair and the comfort of her smile when she saw me there. I had always been a lonesome tomcat before I met her. Don’t get me wrong: I was interested in cats, but that’s another story – and even though people had neutered me from a very young age, I still needed company. But I didn’t get much of it in the pet shop, except for the playful kittens – and after that, Ariel became my world.

I was worried to live in her absence.

However, the Japanese girl was very kind and she took care of me as if I was her most important guest. She bought me the best cat food from the Japanese shops – I must tell you it was exquisite. She left during the day, seemingly busy with something, but she returned in the evenings and she always brought a can of that delicious pâté for me. I started to look forward to her coming home. It was very comfortable and relaxing with her and I enjoyed curling up on her lap to sleep in the dim cozy lights of the room with the teddy bear next to us. Listening to her deep voice, as she was softly speaking to me, seemed the best way to relinquish my worries and just feel good at the moment, as if the moment was a piece of forever.

She was sweetly thoughtful, mysterious and wise – and she had the quality of an unlimited willingness to understand me, which was very reassuring. Sometimes she told me about her dreams, about traveling to another world beyond the rainbow where she wanted to open up a restaurant – or maybe a café – or maybe a library. She kept thinking about it, yet the rainbow bridge seemed more important to her. I was glad when I could see the rainbow around the palms of her hands or her wrists; it looked like we had something in common then. The rainbow was something I knew. It was something I trusted. And she was a part of it. Whenever I felt anxious or missing Ariel too much, the Japanese girl always blinked at me in complicity and I could close my eyes and purr for hours until I fell asleep. Then, I could dream of rainbow meadows and teenagers running happily in the sunlight.

One day, she told me:

“You know what? I think I’m addicted to you. It’s so nice to find you here every night. “

I was pleasantly surprised by the way she had accepted my presence. I was actually very thrilled about it. I was glad to have someone who cared enough to keep me around – and to make me a priority.

But soon enough, the situation started to move faster. One night, I saw her pack up a few things. Then, as I became worried that she would abandon me and leave, she just glanced at me and said:

“We’re going for a ride.”

I thought we would jump on the hovercraft and take off, but she had other plans.

She picked me up and placed me in a bag. I could see nothing the rest of the way, so I stayed inside the bag and waited.

When she opened the bag, we were on a train.

And just then, I saw her turn into a cat. Yes, you heard me right and I’ll say it again: she turned into a feline. Her contour shifted into pure light, dissolving its shape. Then, the bright flow of light, gleaming like a colorful rainbow, melted into a smaller being, taking another shape. I kept staring, completely bewildered as if struck by lightning, unwilling to believe that it was her, the fluffy chestnut velvet creature that jumped on the luggage above the seats.

“I’m going on a trip”, she told me. “Can you keep it a secret? The rainbow runners can take any shape they want. It’s a privilege of the immaterial travel: when we are in motion we can transform into anything. Right now, it suits me to be like you. It’s easier to pass by unnoticed.”

She winked at me, and then she took another leap. I watched her disappear through the compartment doors.

I didn’t wait enough to react or think. The next second, I just jumped after her and followed her trail.

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We were walking in the hall of the train when it started to get dark. And the next thing I knew, it was sunrise. I don’t remember what had happened in the meantime. I just knew I was on the train with the Japanese girl who was still a



chestnut colored, velvet feline. She waved her tail left and right, touching my ears with it, to wake me up. I opened my eyes to full sunlight. We were both curled on the metal top of the train that was speeding ahead.

She lifted her head toward the rays of light, yawning, and stretched delighted in the energy of the sunrise; then she arched her back, with her tail to the sky:

“Ah, I wanna be here eternally! Isn’t it wonderful?” she exclaimed.

“How did we get on top of the train?” I asked her, sticking out my claws to scratch the surface of the metal, unsure of what I could grab onto, while the train was speeding ahead – and I suddenly realized I was actually talking.

She purred very content, licking one of her paws to wipe her head that was glowing with rainbow reflections - and her fur became instantly shiny.

“How can you not remember? You should... Maybe you will, in a short while. Look!” she told me.

I looked ahead and I saw that the train was approaching a meadow where half of a rainbow was hanging in the air, as if it was just a piece of a bridge and the rest had been erased. At the bottom of it, I saw someone – it was Ariel. She stood up when she saw the train. She looked like a small figure, but I could still distinguish her in the distance. She waved at us. It was as if she was trying to convince us to go there.

I was so happy to see Ariel that I walked to the edge of the metal surface, ignoring the slippery danger.

“Jump!” the Japanese feline told me, with her eyes blinking reassuringly.

“Jump where?” I asked her, very amazed at the fact that I was talking - again.

“Off the train, to the rainbow. I’ll jump with you. Come on. You’ve done this before.”

Her tail locked on mine.

“I won’t let you go, don’t worry. I’ll never let go.”

The train was slowing down, as if especially for us. I looked at the tall grass of the meadow – and then I jumped. We jumped together, at the same time, as if we knew how to synchronize our leap. At first, we plunged down toward the

ground, but then, something unexpected happened: the air lifted us up, the speed increased and it became a smooth continuous flow; I felt as if I had suddenly grown wings and the flight jolted me upwards; the earth became smaller and smaller. I was actually floating, powerful as an eagle, easily agile like a kite, soaring over the meadow and the train that looked like a shiny metal lizard on patches of grass, while the rainbow ahead was beginning to expand, stretching visibly and rapidly into the morning light, a longer bridge to the horizon, its colors becoming more intense and shiny, burning in atoms of immaterial energy. The absolute freedom and exhilarating endless space around, the power of flying above felt like something I was truly born to do – like something I had always done - forever. It was so strong, like a definition of life. I felt as if I had suddenly become the rainbow itself: there was only the blue sky, the horizon and the absolute freedom. I was absolutely happy. Eventually, I returned to the meadow, approaching it slowly.

Actually, both of us landed at the same time, because my Japanese friend was flying too: we met in the air and came back to earth smoothly; we rolled in the grass, until we were at Ariel's feet. After having rolled over a few times, my head felt dizzy - but when I opened my eyes, Ariel was standing in front of me, smiling and holding a camera in her hand.

“Good morning, Peter Pan”, she said. “Or should I say Ben. Here's your new flying device.”

I took the camera from her hand. The train had paused on the shiny tracks and I saw Yanny and Florence getting off, approaching us quickly. I stood up.

And I remembered everything.

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I have started to fly when I was a child. I've always seen the rainbow, flowing around, ever since I opened my eyes in this world. I believed it was

something that I would be able to reach one day – and I tried my best to run after it, hoping I could eventually have that power of flying away with it. I believed I would, if I tried hard enough. I was the fastest boy in the neighborhood, and they called me “captain” because of it. One day, when I wanted to surpass my own records, I crossed the street in a flash and I only had a single second to see the bus coming from around the corner. I think that was the moment when my feet began to run on the rainbow rays. I just saw my feet dissolve in the rainbow, while they were still moving, in a fraction of a second - I was lifted high up in the air and I could see the street from above. It was like a leap, over the bus that went under the rainbow and stopped by the sidewalk. The boys were staring at me and the bus driver was confused and disoriented, trying to distinguish my contour that was dissolving in immaterial atoms, somewhere higher than the buildings, while I had ascended over the street, as if in slow motion, becoming immaterial and faster than eyesight could understand.

I had already gained speed and I was on the other side, still running on the rainbow that had suddenly appeared in the middle of the road. It was like a thin cloud, beaming in drops of light and colorful reflections. I could see another realm expanding at the opposite end of the bridge: it was bright and surreal – and it was so appealing that I went in that direction without any second thoughts, without looking at the street behind me. I just crossed the colorful distance to see what was beyond it... and that’s when everything started.

I can’t tell you about the freedom, the brightness and the marvelous existence I found on the other side. You wouldn’t understand it from words and it’s hard to describe anyway. It’s another realm of endless possibilities, where you can create whatever you imagine – actually, imagination is the main value there: the greatest power. That is why it takes teenagers a lot less to get there. They can see it faster and they can learn easier to have flying power because they believe in it more than adults. Besides, they have a pure and innocent side that allows them to be a part of that realm – because nothing evil can get beyond, or ever stay in that place. You know, most of the stories you have read during your

childhood have tried to warn you of that other realm – have tried to tell you something about it. Most of the tales you know have some truth in them. Most are right about their message. If people could learn how to read between the lines, what to believe, they would get closer to the connection of the rainbow. And they would be happier.

You must know something: if you start running on the rainbow, between parallel universes, the moment you start anew and you become your true better self, you might forget about the past. Everything that happened before will remain behind you. It might be that you will forget, from time to time. You'll be so happy that your mind will become blank to everything else except the present moment. The rainbow does that to you, quite often. The idea of a new self is so appealing – and your new self is so powerful, that you instantly forget the past. The atoms rearrange themselves and some memories might disappear in the process. Don't worry: you will remember it just as quickly as you forget. Nothing is actually lost. Everything is still there. But it's just in a concentrated form: whatever and whoever you were, whatever you wish to be, it just disappears the moment you are on the rainbow. And then, there's just you and the light. And you won't have any regrets about it, because it will be amazing.

You're probably wondering why the rainbow bridge depended on me, at a certain time, when I forgot how to run. You're probably wondering why I was so important for it to happen. Well, I'm the one telling the story, right? For as much as you know, you might be just an invention in this whole event – the universe and everything. You might be a part of it, but you might be here just because I see you and I imagined you here. Do you understand? Everything you know might be just a dream. It might be just an idea in my head. But this is only another relative perspective of the whole picture: I might be just an idea in your mind too, instead. You never know for sure. Things are changing and can be seen from many different sides and levels. And after you run on the rainbow, you will understand how this is possible. Well, if you ever get there, I mean, if you wish for it to happen. And if you believe in it - I mean, truly believe.

If you ever get there, take your time and stay long enough to be changed for the better. Time doesn't matter on the rainbow bridge. Only the way you change does. You will want to return, after a while. But you'll see you aren't the same anymore – actually, you have become your true self while you are there. When I tried to come back to this world, I noticed I was different and I could take any shape I wanted. I saw reality in a different light – and I was in a different light indeed. I still am.

I am going back to the beginning now.

I'm going to the rainbow bridge – to its beginning, which is my beginning too. I belong with it. And I'll be there whenever you're looking for me. I'm gonna be there forever. Somehow, I'll always be there, running in the light. You might even see me, if you look attentively enough.

Don't ask me what the rainbow bridge actually is, or where it really is, for that matter. I could tell you, but you must understand it by yourself. I won't elaborate on it now. When you find it, you will know for sure. I mean if you ever do. But you will. There's a good chance you will. If you're reading this story, it's a first step towards finding the rainbow.

Do you remember when I told you that one day, something might happen to you, something unusual, that can change your entire view on reality? Well, this is your chance now: if this story didn't change your mind, something else will, very soon... because it's just how it goes. It has already happened for me and it will happen for you too, one of these days. It's inevitable: miracles are a part of life – not just the magic of life, but its essential truth. You will believe it just as I do. I believe in miracles and in the continuous motion of life.

Right now, it's up to us, the rainbow runners, to keep this rainbow bridge connecting the parallel worlds, to keep it bright and glowing – and accessing different realms of the universe. It is for us to discover the meaningful presence of the rainbow, it is for us to believe in it because we are the ones who can run and learn to fly with it, accessing parallel worlds that would otherwise remain unseen and unimagined. We are that miracle in motion. We are that changing

truth that affects reality. And it is this truth that makes dreams come alive, just like the rainbow. We are the energy that makes this universe infinite and we are alive in this world and in many other worlds too, because we're the flow, the light and the cartoons; the breathing sunrise and the speed; the creatures that wake up to become the diversity of life; we are the hope and the new morning. We are the belief and the tomorrow, the beginning and the spiral that goes on endlessly. We are your thoughts and the meaning behind your questions; your answers and your doubts; your courage and your lucky guess; your rainbow bridge to yourself.

And I am here to tell you about it.

If you still don't understand, keep reading. Keep looking. And keep believing. Whatever you do, just keep going ahead. You'll get there eventually.