

# The Utopist

by C. P. Boyko

Marjoey, you asked the clerk at a candy kiosk for sugarplums.

“Not without a parent’s permission,” kindly the clerk replied.

When I couldn’t sleep, I, Marjoey, slept in your bed, Fiyatsi, beside you.

You, Marjoey, putting your shirt on, paused with your head inside it, and peered around at a dim and alien world of fabric.

I, Marjoey, felt sometimes sad after pooping.

You, Marjoey, and Leni, riding the omnibus with your teachers to the museum, rapturous watched the city roll past outside, an unending puzzle of brilliant color and noise.

A tall person boarded, swaying and cursing under their breath.

You offered your seat. —“Thanks, kid.”

“I admire your shoes.” —“All right, kid.”

You basked in your teachers’ various smiles.

You, Fiyatsi, were looking eagerly forward to your first wanderyear.

Marjoey, you cupped your hands on your groin while falling asleep.

You, Marjoey, attacked me, Leni, with “nuntle kisses”—the smacking, slobbery kind we hated to get from adults.

Pouring a bath, Marjoey, you watched as continents made of soapbubbles

formed and grew.

You, Odori, passed by the washroom. There, in plain view, Marjoey was squatting over the toilet.

“Wouldn’t you like some privacy?”

“No. I’m lonely alone.”

Ingenuously, Marjoey, you told the grocery storehouse clerk that the stone of sugar with which you struggled was just for you and your friends to batten on.

Of your burden and of your error the clerk relieved you and disabused you, respectively.

You, Marjoey, to me, Fiyatsi, confided, “You are my favorite sibling.”

I feigned astonishment. “But Zodeek and Asfalyi ...?”

“They are my favorites, too,” you assured me. “You are my mostest favoritest, though.”

“And you are my mostest favoritest person ever,” I cried, and, trapping you in a ticklehug, hugged and tickled you.

Far from home, you, Marjoey, suddenly needed badly to pee.

We looked for a public washroom—and promptly found a pristine and opulent one whose cheerful attendants, after you’d washed your hands, with hot towels patted them dry.

Marjoey, often you saw Fiyatsi give hugs to mailpersons, bakers, rubbish collectors, juicepersons, neighbors, nurses, and clerks.

I, Marjoey, and you, Fiyatsi, in bed lay reading *Bertrolu’s Fables*.

“ ‘One bleak and desolate night, there out of the woods and into the

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*stone*: a measure of weight equal to fourteen pounds.

*batten on*: to feed gluttonously on.

*disabuse*: to free someone from a false belief.

town came staggering, cold and famished, a wolf. It climbed through an open window and found two succulent children cozily swathed, like delicacies in pastry, in blankets, sleeping. But which to eat? With a coughlike growl, it politely wakened them both, and asked them themselves.

The one to the other pointed and cried, “My sibling! Not me!” ’ ’ ”  
We tickled each other, squealing, “Not me! Not me!”

Marjoey, you gave your teachers a hug apiece.

“ ‘The other sibling gave thought, and bravely agreed. “Although I had hoped to live to adulthood, one of us now must die, I suppose. It might as well as my sibling be me. To spare you both grief, I’ll try not to scream or struggle too much; but please, my dear wolf, be quick if you can, and spare me the pains of being dislimbed.”

“The world,” said the wolf, astonished, “can scarcely spare such a valiant, generous human; I will devour your sibling instead”—and saying so did so.

Selflessness has rewards that the selfish even might envy.  
Thus is this fable ended.’ ”

Marjoey, you came to breakfast with feral cowlicks and shirt on backwards. I, Joopi, asked if you’d done your gratitudes.

“Yes,” you lied, then recanted: “Possibly I forgot to.”

You hurried back to your bedroom. Drawing the curtains open, you thanked the world for another daybreak, and marvelled rotely, “Today I get to be me again: what a gift!”

You, Marjoey, placed on the checkout counter a head of lettuce, a bar of soap, and a pound of sugar. “My parents asked me to fetch these.”

“Maybe,” the clerk said kindly, “but if they did, you should tell them that, in this storehouse, sugar is never given to unaccompanied children.”

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*dislimb*: to tear limb from limb; to dismember.

I, Joopi, asked you, Marjoey, whether you'd fed the animals yet.

"I'll do it," you, guilty, mumbled. "Stop objurgating me, please."

You, Marjoey, kicked the ball hard. It struck your friend Leni right in the face.

"I'm sorry," you told your teachers. "I played too earnestly."

I, Joopi, quoted for you, Odori, " "Stop objurgating me, please." "

We tenderly chuckled.

You, Marjoey, begged to be brought along to the sugar factory.

"Sugar's bad for you," said Zodeek. "I'm afraid that, left to your own miswishes, you'd eat it only and nothing else."

"Why not *let* me do what I *want*?" you pleaded.

You, Marjoey, didn't want me, Fiyatsi, to leave.

"Because you're still just a kid," Zodeek said.

You, Marjoey, wanted, like me, Fiyatsi, to leave.

Zodeek, you, sucking on sweets, were grateful to be an adult.

Leni solemnly told Marjoey, "My sibling says that the sugar shop will serve kids."

You, Marjoey, and I, Fiyatsi, as limp as puddles, lay breathing steadily, back to back in my bed, asleep.

Marjoey, you told the clerk at the sugar shop that you needed only a little sugar for snacks occasionally.

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*objurgate*: to chide, rebuke, or scold.

*miswish*: a wrongful or improper desire.

“This isn’t a storehouse, kid. I don’t need your stories; I need your gold. It’s a millipiece for that pound of sugar.”

“But I don’t have any gold!”

The clerk recommended kindly, “Then get some.”

I, Marjoey, objected uncomprehendingly, “But you’ll miss the physical fair!”

The physical fair had last come to town before I was born; we’d always been looking forward to it.

Fiyatsi, you reassuringly smiled and patted my nape. “But think of the countless physical fairs I’ll get to attend abroad!”

In a sulk, I shrank from your touch.

Your face, Marjoey, was always moving, as though in fluctuant thought. In fact, though, your nose was only enlisting help from your cheeks and brow to more firmly settle your slipping glasses upon its bridge—a maneuver that you were altogether unconscious of.

What fun it would be, Marjoey, to be an adult!

Having convinced themselves, if not us, that it would be educational, our, Marjoey’s and Leni’s, teachers were taking us to the mirror maze.

“No running,” the mirror maze’s attendants cautioned us.

We, Marjoey and Leni, signaled compliance.

We, Marjoey and Leni, shriekingly and collidingly through the mirror maze ran.

In bed, Marjoey, to me, Asfalyi, you read aloud from *Bertrolu’s Fables*: “Some earthbound ostriches mocked a swift as it swooped and soared through the sky by day and by night, for weeks and for months.

“You’ll make yourself dizzy!” laughing they warned. “You’ll wear yourself out!”

The swift paid no mind—and flew till it, dying, into the ocean fell.  
To this day, the ostriches, old and feeble now, mock its memory still.  
They shouldn't.

Expend your strength till you lose your health, for you never had  
what you didn't use.

Thus concludes this fable.' ”

“Well read,” I said, and goodnighted you.

The mirror maze was in need of cleaning.

Because you were hot, Marjoey, you gave your hat to me, Leni.

Later, now cold, you asked for it back.

“Ungifter!” I shouted, running away. “Marjoey's a mean ungifter!”

You thought this slander—particularly because you hadn't yet got  
your hat back. You chased me, screaming (if disingenuously), “I gave it to  
you to hold, not to keep, you thief!”

Absorbedly and with skill, I, Marjoey, picked at a scab. My aim was to free  
it bloodlessly.

The afternoon waned. I, Leni, and you, Marjoey, grew restless, strident, and  
inattentive.

Our teachers, losing their patience, told us to meditate on our deaths  
till hometime.

There was something hard in your mouth, Marjoey. You spat it spittily out,  
and looked at and touched it uncomprehendingly.

Your left lower central incisor long had been loose, and now had at  
last come free.

You quizzically, shyly, proudly, Marjoey, held out your tooth to Joopi.

“Congratulations! The gardenpixies will be delighted. Now keep it  
safe till Repasttime somewhere.”

You, nodding solemnly, closed your fist.

You, Joopi, asked me, Odori, “Should I have told Marjoey that gardenpixies aren’t real? At what age do children usually stop believing such things? And why do we tell these lies to begin with?”

Sighing, I said, “Society is to blame—the relentless creep of acculturation. We want our kids to fit in.”

Marjoey, your tonguetip wallowingly explored the new groove, the slippery, salty grotto where once, improbable as it seemed, there had lived a tooth.

Parenting would be easy if not for teachers and other parents.

I, Marjoey, supposed that surely the gardenpixies preferred real teeth to the painted pebbles that they were given by younger children; and surely I could expect a larger reward this year than the toffee, pencils, and socks to which I had grown accustomed.

I wished Repasttime would faster come.

You confided your plan, Marjoey, to Leni, who, having lost and buried two teeth the previous year, was like an authority.

“But the gardenpixies don’t need our teeth till Repasttime,” said the authority. “They don’t lose their own till the trees lose leaves—like the carol says.”

“They can keep mine safe till they need it. Wouldn’t that be less worry for them?”

Less worry for you as well, though you didn’t say so.

Marjoey, you placed your tooth in the shallow hollow that you and Leni had dug by hand in the pea patch, covered it with the backfill, and marked the

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*acculturation*: the process by which the culture of a particular society is instilled in a human from infancy onward.

*backfill*: earth used to refill the hole from which it was excavated.

spot with an inconspicuous woodchip.

Leni said, “Good.”

“You look like a fart that’s snuck past a turd,” I, Joopi, suspicious, teased you, Marjoey. “What are you up to?”

“Nothing!” you sang.

I, Marjoey, was out again in the pea patch digging at sparrowfart. Though I scooped and sifted the dirt with care, I found neither treasure nor tooth.

I deeper dug.

Pausing to wipe with dirtier hands the dirt from your face, Marjoey, you noticed in the next row a woodchip that more resembled the one with which you had marked the burial spot, perhaps.

Marjoey asked, “May I use a shovel?”

Thoughts elsewhere, Joopi said, “Sure. There’s one in the potting shed.”

Leni offered to help.

“There’s shovels,” Marjoey said, “in the potting shed.”

Odori, you stared aghast at your pea patch, which in the night, it seemed, had been rootled up by some herd of creatures as big as bears.

But the garden fencing was undisturbed.

We, Odori and Joopi, found you, Marjoey, crying.

“I lost my tooth!”

In staccato hiccups and sobs, the story came spilling out.

We, to soothe you, Marjoey, said that the gardenpixies had surely taken

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*sparrowfart*: break of day, or very early morning.

*rootle*: to root or grub in the earth; to poke about; to search around or rummage.

your tooth and would, come Repasttime, gratefully recompense you for it.

You, Fiyatsi, and I, Marjoey, that night in bed, with the door between us ajar, lay talking and giggling sillily.

You, the next day, Marjoey, while penitentially prettifying the damage done to the pea patch, found in the dirt your tooth. You, bewildered, brought it to us, Odori and Joopi.

“Sometimes the gardenpixies don’t find a tooth for a day or two,” we extemporized.

You objected sensibly, “At Repasttime they always find them.”

“They look more carefully then, because they expect to find them then.”

“Oh.”

In school that day, we, Marjoey and Leni, danced a pavane.

Lies are philoprogenitive.

In the flowerbed, you, Marjoey, buried your tooth again, but with better landmarks this time.

You waited not one or two but three nights for it to be found.

But there it still was, untouched, when you dug it up.

You were mystified.

I, Marjoey, running from crazed pursuers, awakened suddenly, frightened, sweating, and blind.

I slipped from my bed and opened, a crack, the door to your room, Fiyatsi.

You sprawled, your head on your desk, asleep.

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*extemporize*: to speak or perform without preparation; to improvise.

*pavane*: a slow, stately dance performed in elaborate clothing.

*philoprogenitive*: having many offspring.

I arranged myself on the floor, so that the thin ray of light from your desk lamp fell across both my eyelids.

By fits I shivering dozed.

On my nameday, I, Leni, gave away lemonade to repay my debt to society.

“Did you make this all by yourself?” —“How tasty: both sweet and sour!” —“So refreshing!”

Gracious, I beamed.

You were, for an hour, Marjoey, intensely envious.

Then you weren't. You believed that you could do something better.

You, Fiyatsi, rehearsed your speech of farewell until you were letterperfect, then added pauses and little errors back in, to artfully simulate an extemporaneous artlessness.

You, Marjoey, wetted your lips with sips of Odori's wine, then pretended that you were drunk, by simpering, laughing, swaying, embracing, fumbling, and singing.

Everyone thought your mimicry cute—until you began to bellow, to slur your speech, to collide with others, to stamp your feet, and to flee.

Odori and Joopi took you aside and browbeat you.

Suddenly it was midnight. The lights were brightened and doors flung open. The bands blew fanfares. Drageets, Odori, and Joopi hugged you, Fiyatsi. Waving and blowing kisses, you briefly paused in the doorway; then you were gone.

Unable to sleep, Marjoey, you smuggled into your bed Fiyatsi's memento pillow.

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*letterperfect*: correct to the last detail; knowing by heart the words for one's part or speech.

*extemporaneous*: spoken or performed without preparation; impromptu.

*flee*: to laugh impudently or jeeringly.

*browbeat*: to intimidate or subjugate by stern looks or domineering words.

At the physical fair, Marjoey, you ran the steeplechase, leaping hurdles and streams and ditches—and secret obstacles, too: this pebble, that shadow.

Laughing you flew.

“How did you like the physical fair?” Odori and Joopi leadingly asked.

Recalling Fiyatsi’s absence therefrom, Marjoey, you said that it had been crap.

Marjoey, you lay alone in Fiyatsi’s bed, but you couldn’t sleep.

With the spine of *Bertrolu’s Fables*, you knocked, Marjoey, on my, Zodeek’s, bedroom door.

You, snuggled between Nurfuhl and me, soon were dozing, the tented book like a little shelter that rose and fell with your breath.

In pajamas, clutching Fiyatsi’s pillow, Marjoey, into your boombis’ bedroom you peered.

Odori and Joopi tenderly beckoned.

Although rain fell listlessly from a ponderous sky, our spirits were fair. Today was Marjoey’s nameday.

Neat rows of glistening trellised vines reached the distant, misty horizon; here and there, emphasizing the farm’s immensity, hunched a few hatted figures.

“Those,” you, Marjoey, proudly informed us, “are the goetics. They don’t need help.” This fact you had learned last year.

The goetics monitored the machines: the robotic friskers, which shook and rummaged the plants, and handequipped arms, which plucked their knurled

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*steeplechase*: an obstacle race.

*knurled*: having knurls, or small protuberances; knotty; knobby.

fruits and placed them upon conveyers, which, from the pergolas' mouths protruding like tongues, then trundled them into crowded and steaming tents.

I, Odori, deeply inhaled the vegetal smell of earth after rain, and sighing exhaled. "No foodwork like farmwork," Joopi, you said.

There were longer queues at the sorting, washing, preparing, pruning and paring, packing, and shipping tents than there was at one of the waste tents. Nevertheless, we waited an hour in line; then the nozzle, sputtering, slowly filled our four bowls with stems, rinds, and seeds. I, Joopi, had brought some celery salt, white pepper, and peanut oil, which we used and passed to the other tables. We munched and swallowed and munched and swallowed. It then was time to return to town.

At the omnibus stop, we waited again in line.

We, Odori and Joopi, asked you, Marjoey, if there was any favor society could perform for you in return. Your answer was ready.

"Yes. I would like a worldbuilding kit of one million souls unbraided, with both utopian and dystopian capabilities."

Smiling blankly we said, "We'll see what society can provide."

"I'm bored," said Marjoey.

"Boredom's a thought," said Joopi. "Let's practice thinkinglessness."

"We do that in school. It's boring."

Asfalyi explained, "A worldbuilding kit is certainly not a toy. It's a theoretical, academical tool that researchers use to mimic and study civilization's patterns of growth, migration, and distribution of goods and services. Braided systems are somewhat simplified: groups of souls, like communities, work together—making them much more manageable, but less, some say,

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*pergola*: a covered walk or shelter, especially one formed of growing plants trained over a framework.

verisimilar. But the *unbraided* ones are famously difficult to control, and, even when operated by teams of brilliant goetics, often degenerate into chaos faster than hares flee wolves. So a university isn't likely to give a worldbuilding kit away to a child not out of their second lustrum yet, I'm afraid."

We asked you, Marjoey, whether you wanted anything else. "A worldbuilding kit might not be attainable."

Your face fell. "I wanted to help society reach utopia."

Brains dissolving with love, we said that we'd try our best.

You, a professor, smiled at our story. Clapping your hands, you said, "I believe we've several unbraided worldbuilding kits just gathering dust downstairs. They have only five hundred thousand souls, but two years ago that was cutting edge. Yes, an independent investigator," you winked, "should find it quite adequate."

You, Marjoey, were overjoyed. "It's exactly what I desired!"

We didn't correct you.

I, Leni, and you, Marjoey, sat leaning over the domed terrain of the world, and watched as the sparkling, billowing lights of numberless souls awakened to troublous life.

We, Marjoey and Leni, watched in alarm as clusters of lights turned amber, then red; there meanwhile arose from under the dome a rumbling and hissing noise, like a boiler building up steam—a tiny and muffled din of despair.

"It's going dystopic!" —"Do something, fast!"

You frantically waved the wand of alignment over the world, Marjoey—to ill effect: the souls reddened quicker, shrieking louder.

"Turn it off! We can try again."

First you kicked it.

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*verisimilar*: having the appearance of truth or reality.

Again and again, Marjoey, your little world fell to irremediable strife and woe.

You believed that it was defective. Angry, you cursed your parents for ever giving you it.

Marjoey, you stuffed the worldbuilding kit—still glowing vermilion, buzzing, and shaking—under a sack of rags in the cellar.

Made playful by pride, Odori and Joopi asked you, Marjoey, “Fares the utopist bravely?”

Uncomfortable, you prevaricated.

On the floor, you, Leni, and I, Marjoey, played war.

The snow was too wet, Marjoey, to make a snowperson with.

You made with it snowconfections instead.

In notewriting class, Marjoey, you wrote, ‘Fiyatsi, my dear, in death class today, we studied a famous tragedy called *The Brinkmaster*. Have you heard of it? In it (this is what makes it tragedy) Meel, the brinkmaster, dies—but first gives a speech. We each of us took a turn playing Meel, and giving the speech, then dying. I coughed a lot and pretended I was in lots of pain, which our teachers said was veracious. Leni just laughed, which maybe is not veracious. We all, however, had fun. And now I’m prepared to die. We adore our teachers. I miss you lots. All my love, Marjoey.’

Said Marjoey, “I’m bored.”

“You can’t be,” said Joopi. “Think of the countless things that there are to do and to learn!”

“I’ve done them and learned them.”

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*war*: a game of chance played with cards.

*veracious*: accurate, truthful.

Joopi refuted this.

Marjoey, to get attention, you badly sang.

Marjoey, you poked your head into Shtuli's bedroom and grimaced piteously.

"It's lonely, without Fiyatsi, to sleep alone in my bed."

"I know how you feel," said Shtuli, and, moving over, made room for you.

To you, Marjoey, Fiyatsi wrote that the gardenpixies' repast in Brookstate was called "the dirtfairies' feast." 'How funny that sounds!'

Your Grambi Exodi read aloud from *Bertrolu's Fables* to you, Marjoey: " 'A runnel, swollen by upstream rains to a raging river, had inundated and smashed to flotsam a beaver lodge, which was being washed by the flood away. Cried the beaver, "Help! Save my home!"

A crocodile, hearing, swam to the rescue, catching the logs and clods that had been a lodge in its mighty jaws and conveying them to the shore.

A gaggle of geese had witnessed this daring exploit, and claiiked in dumbfounded admiration.

"But why," they asked, "would you risk your life for some silly rodent's abode?"

The crocodile grinned and glided away.

With strength comes responsibility.

Thus this fable concludes.' "

You asked, for a start, the meaning of 'inundated.'

Said Marjoey, "I'm bored."

"Then help me make supper," Joopi suggested.

"That's the most boring thing on the planet!"

Joopi denied this.

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*claiik*: to honk or cry like a goose.

We played the boardgame Prosocial Ocelot, which was won by the most cooperative player.

Early, Marjoey, you took the lead by sharing your prey; but in the last round I, Shtuli, by sacrificing my offspring to the pack, clinched the victory.

Minifying my luck, I vaunted my skill.

You grumbled, “I wish Fiyatsi was here.”

Said Marjoey, “I’m bored.”

“And boring,” said Joopi.

“Huh?”

You, Marjoey, and Leni took your pet lobster out of its tank and cosseted it.

Whenever I, your, Marjoey’s, pet lobster, was removed from my tank, I suffered a constant, ever renewing terror of you.

You, Marjoey, referred obliquely to poop, and quivered with stifled giggles.

“And thus,” said Odori, closing *Bertrolu’s Fables*, “concludes this day.”

You, Marjoey, yawned. “May my sleep be deep until daypeep?”

“Sure. May your sleep be deep until daypeep.”

Marjoey, you hated Leni today. You couldn’t remember why. There were reasons, though, you were sure.

“I’m bored.”

It saddened and pained you, Joopi, to hear Marjoey, your little light-

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*minify*: to depreciate or belittle; to regard or represent something as less significant than it really is.

*vaunt*: to boast about or praise something.

*cosset*: to fondle, caress, pet, indulge, or pamper.

*daypeep*: the first appearance of daylight; dawn.

bulb of curiousness, imagination, and wonder, say such a thing.

Marjoey, you asked to borrow my, Leni's, plaything.

I, reawakened to its desirableness, rejected with grand regret your request.

“ ‘A slinking, slithering skink crept out of the undergrowth,’ ” I, Marjoey, read from *Bertrolu's Fables*. “That's hard to say. What does ‘slinking’ mean?”

You, Odori, told me.

“And ‘slither’?”

“Move like a snake, in esses, or undulations, along the ground.”

With your hand, you showed me.

I lay absorbing this information awhile; then, pushing my luck, I asked, “And a skink?”

You, Leni, played with your plaything fitfully.

I, Marjoey, stood watching by.

“Everything's very boring.”

I, Joopi, wondered where you, Marjoey, had even learned such a phrase.

Marjoey, you asked to borrow my, Leni's, plaything, which lay forlorn in a corner.

After a moment's thought, I said simply, “No.”

As we, Marjoey and Shtuli, leafed through a picturebook, we with naughty pleasure identified all the things we deemed to be boring.

“Houses: so boring!”

“Bicycles: very boring!”

“A trumpet: boring!”

“So very boring!”

Marjoey, you and I, Leni, walked home from school on opposite footpaths.

Feigning forgetfulness, you retraced your steps to the school, alone.

Marjoey, you smuggled home and all evening played with my, Leni's, plaything.

That morning, I, Leni, caught you, Marjoey, putting my plaything back in the corner. Screaming, I called for advocacy. "You borrowed without permission!"

Your teachers asked for an explanation.

"I claim," you sniffled, "the right of usufruct."

"Still, you ought to have asked permission first."

Too upset and confused to raise a defense, you lowered your head and wept.

Aghast and angry, Odori cleaned out the storage room in the cellar.

Dusty old junk!

"I'm bored," Marjoey said.

Joopi solemnly asked, "And what is that like?"

"It's boring!"

You snited your nose, Marjoey.

You, Marjoey, mistook for boredom a vague unhappiness.

I, Odori, unboxed Fiyatsi's first powered skateboard.

It didn't work; it was trash.

I hardened my heart.

You said, Marjoey, "I'm bored."

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*usufruct*: the right to use or enjoy another's property without destroying or wasting it.

*snite*: to wipe snot from one's nose with one's hand.

I, Joopi, sat next to you, and, relaxing, took a deep breath. “I think I can hear my heart beat. Can you?”

You took a deep breath and listened.

Odori, you took Marjoey to try to spot at the lizardforest a skink.

“Is that one?” Marjoey pointed.

“No, that’s a gecko.”

“Is that one?”

“That’s an iguana.”

“There’s one!”

“I think that that one’s a newt.”

“Well, where are the skinks?”

You ruefully shrugged.

Galoshes squelching and splashing, Leni and you, Marjoey, explored the glittering marsh of meltwater.

Marjoey, arriving home you exclaimed, “Tomorrow we get to write an examination!”

We cheered for you.

“I’ll go study now! I don’t need to eat any supper.”

“Maybe a snack?”

You shrugged. “Maybe later.” Dropping your bag, you ran to your room.

We, smiling, became nostalgic. Said Shtuli, “Really we adults ought to give one another examinations as well.”

You, Odori, discovered, under a sack of rags in a dimlit corner, Marjoey’s worldbuilding kit.

Marjoey, you stared at shelffuls of sugar longingly.

It hummed contentedly, glowing emerald green.

We, Marjoey and Leni, sat at our tables, wriggling with readiness. We were given paper, erasers, pencils, protractors, compasses, rulers, scissors, and glue. Our teachers then gave us each an exam, face down.

“Have you closed your books?” —We cried, “Yes!” —“Begin, then!”

We flipped the page and read: ‘Tell us everything that you know about everything that you love. (No time limit.)’

Tongues protruding through grins, we started to write.