



THE PERFECT PERFORMANCE

Written and Illustrated by Carmen Cruz

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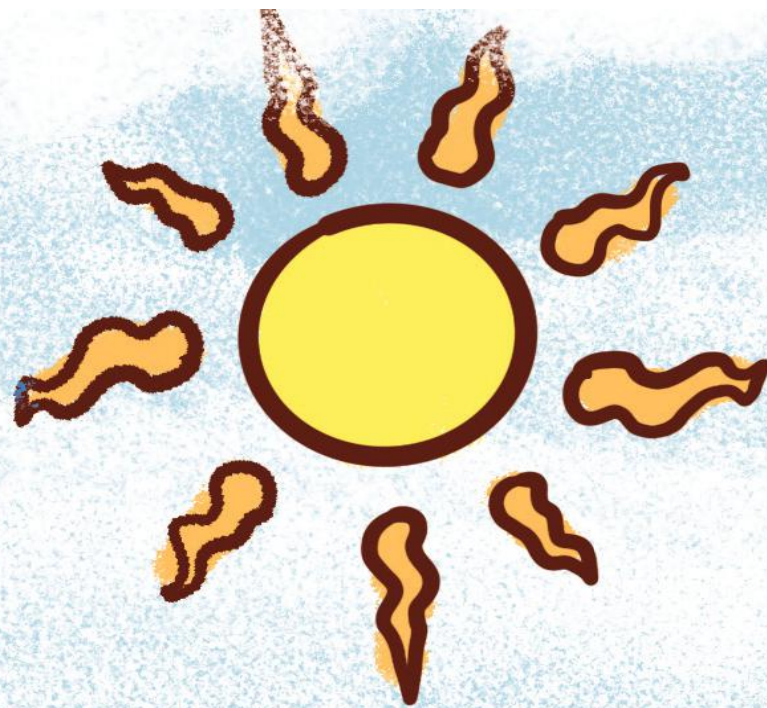
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To my parent, brothers, friends, professors, and peers who helped
me make this tiny spark a story.

Thank you so much!

- Carmen (The clown obsessed designer and Illustrator)

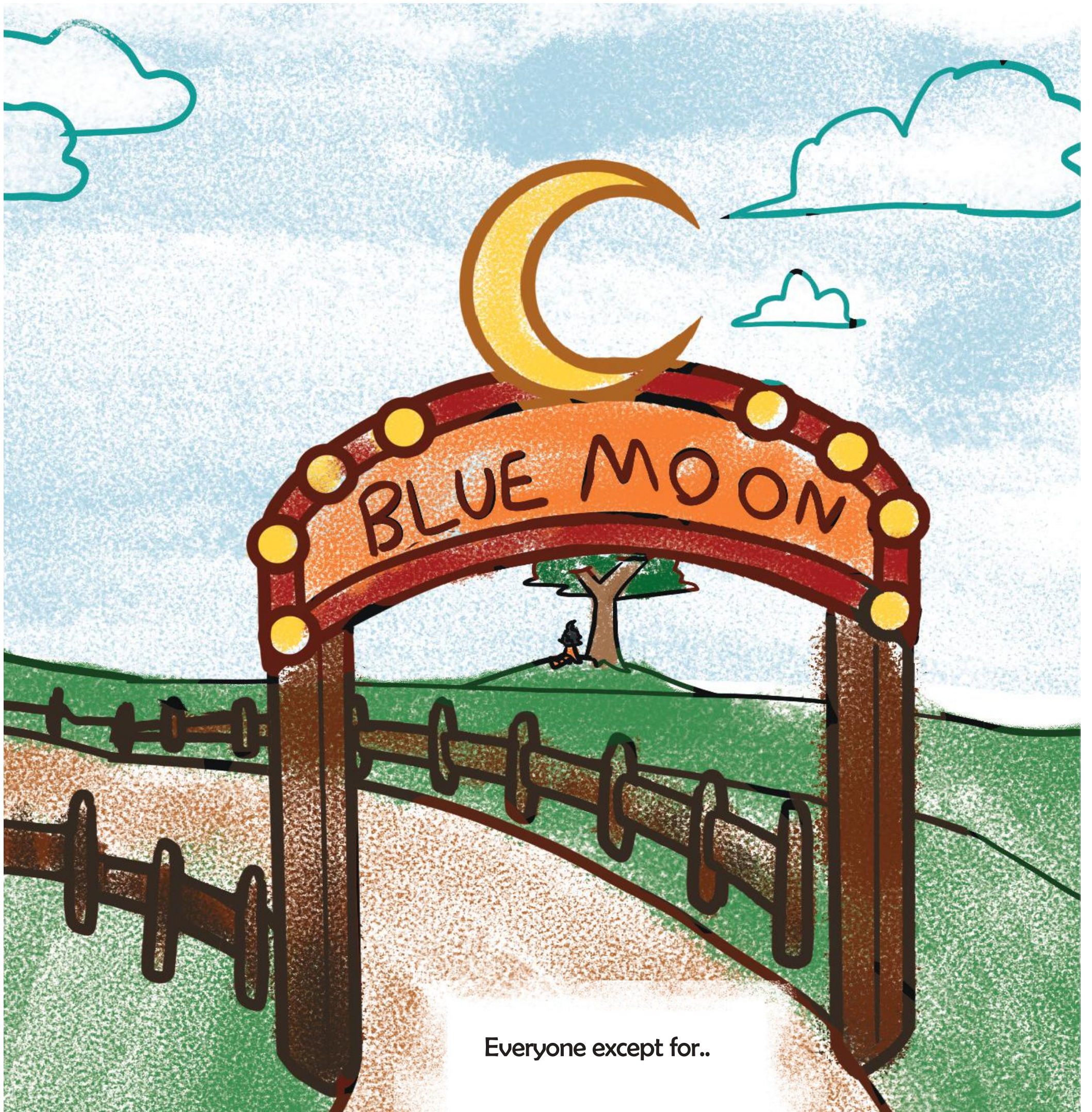




The circus is here! It has rolled into town! As the afternoon rays danced along the stripes of the big top, all the performers are bustling around the grounds preparing for tonight's big show.

Everyone is filled with excitement to perform their acts.



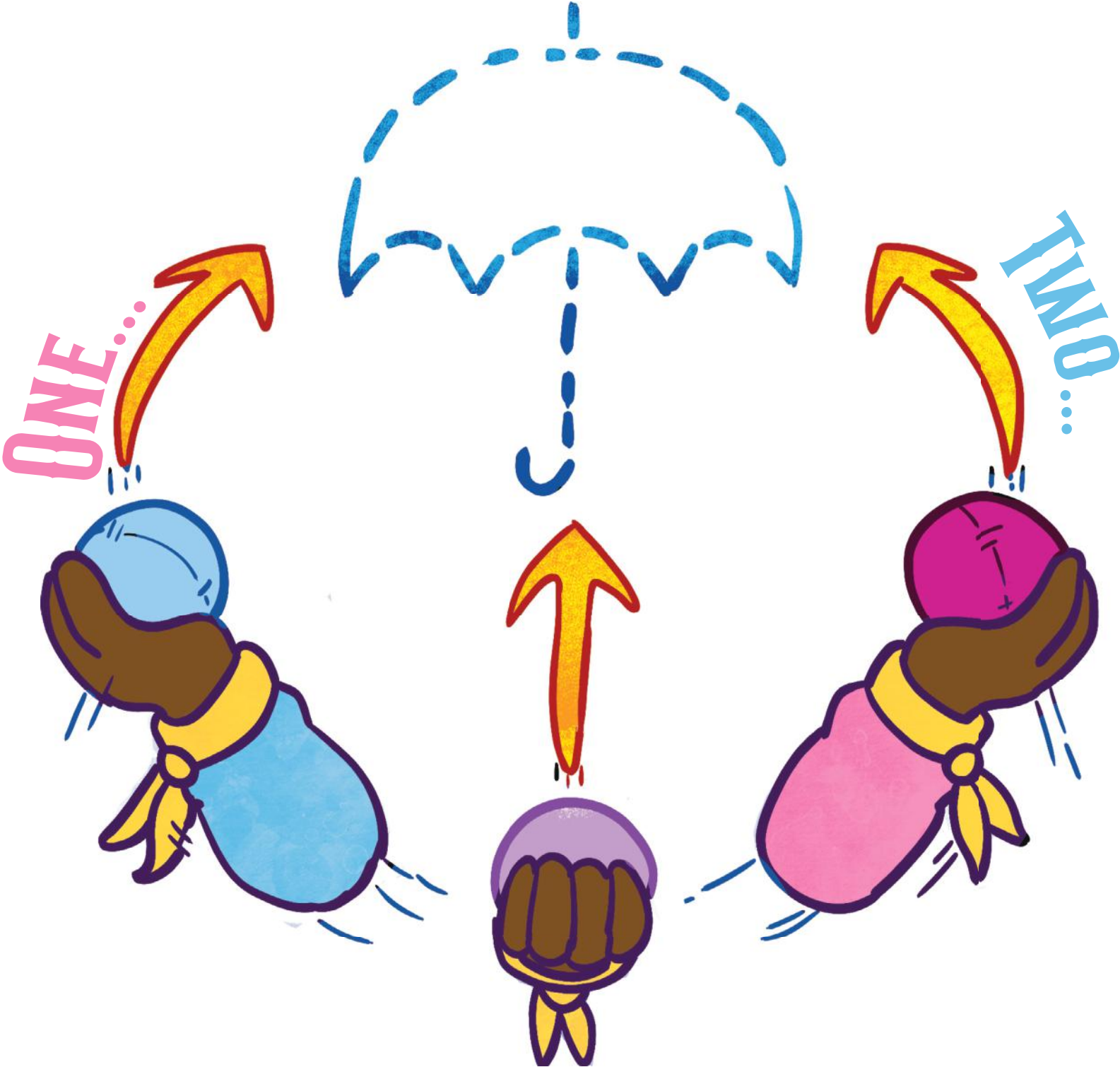


Everyone except for..



She was having trouble with her juggling trick, “The Umbrella.”

It always ended the same. With her hands frantically tossing the balls up into the air







Molly let out a huff. It was always the third ball...

Usually Molly is a fast learner.

She can juggle with her eyes closed.

But this new act, is trickier than she thought.

Maybe she should go visit her brother Markus.

He would know what to do!



Markus and Molly always shared the spotlight.

He is a whirlwind of jokes and musical notes!

While Molly prefers telling her story through her juggling...





**They tossed jokes like juggling balls, sending giggles
rolling through the whole tent.**

**At first they may seem like opposites,
but together they balance each other out!**



However, this afternoon was different.

The circus was quiet... Too quiet.

Molly strained her ear and realized,

the familiar accordion tune wasn't flowing from Markus's trailer.

When Molly approached and gently knocked on his door,

it creaked open and she saw...



Poor Markus bundled up as tight as a spring in his blanket.
His cough was so powerful it shook the paintings on the wall.
He peeked from the covers and offered Molly an apologetic smile.



“Hey Molls...” he croaked out,

“Guess my accordion’s taking the afternoon off.”





“Well... You know what they say,
the show must go on!” he rasped.

“Don’t worry, I’m sure your
performance will be...

PERFECT!

As Molly slipped back into the lively circus air,
the cheers and chatter around her seemed to fade.
She felt her chest tighten as Markus's words sank in.
For this would be her first act...

ALONE!

What if no one laughs,
or smiles,
or even claps?

What if the audience is tired of the same old juggling trick?





WHOOOSH!



The bad thought snapped away in a puff of dust,
and out stepped Andy!

Her rowdy brother, who always speaks his mind.

“Well now, Peanut, what’s got you in a knot this afternoon?” He said with a drawl.



WATCH ME





Molly lifted her juggling balls
but her worries kept tumbling in.

What if the show went wrong?

What if her act flopped?

What if the toaster at home was still

plugged in and making toast all by itself?!



“Ah, there’s the problem!” he chuckles.

“You forgot to feel the rhythm.”





“You see, Molly...

I don't think when I'm out there. I just act!”

Andy is a haze of boots and lasso loops.



“And when I take a tumble... **WOAH?!**”



“I just roll with the punches,
and the crowd eats it up every time.

Now it's your turn!”

Molly took a deep breath, squared her shoulders,
and tried to sweep her worries away.

Keep the rhythm, she reminded herself.

Keep the rhythm.

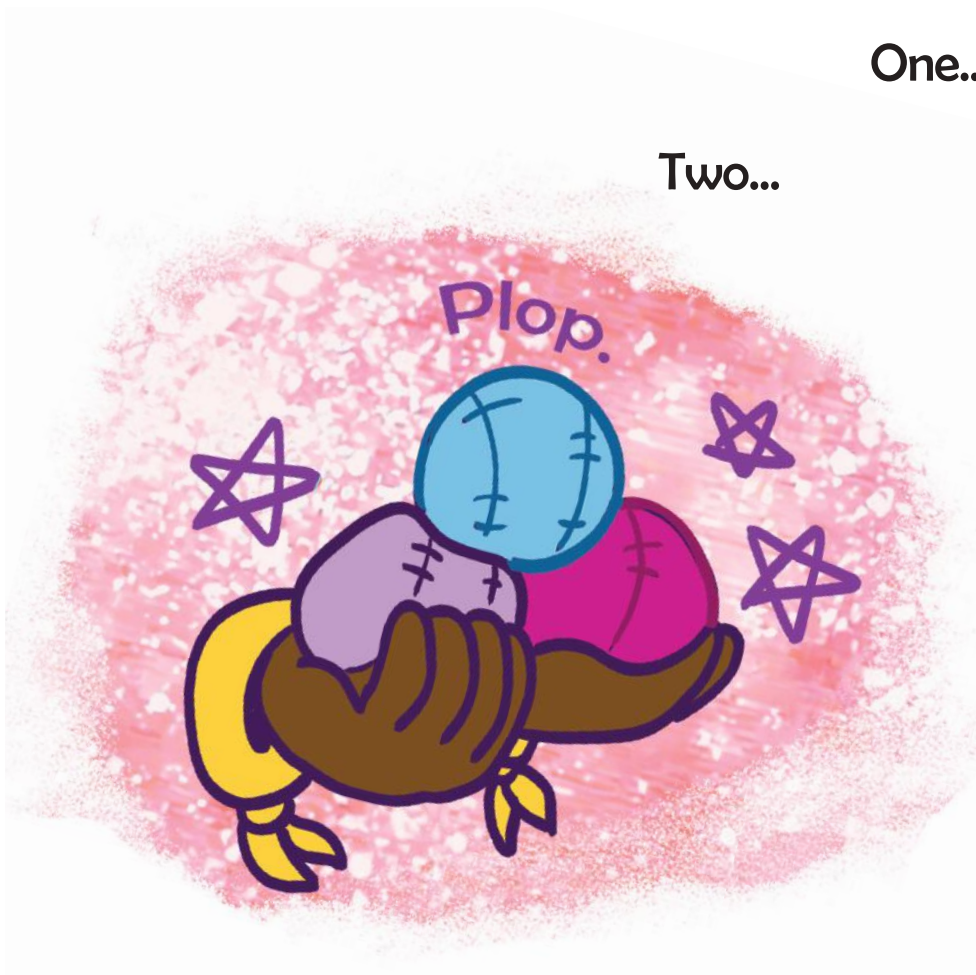


Everything seems to be going okay so far.

Now came the trickiest moment of all.

One...

Two...

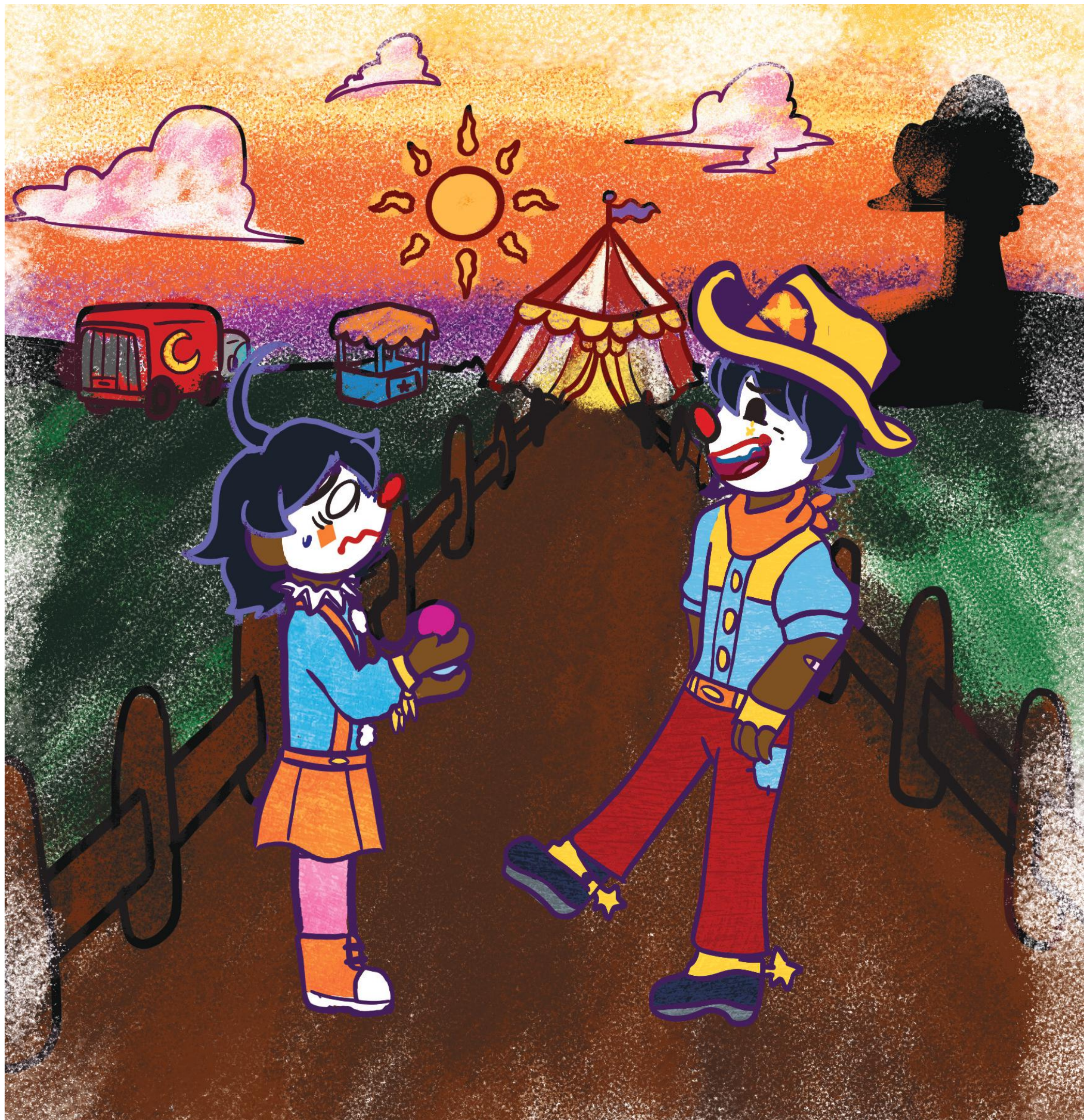


WHOO HOO!!!

“You see that! I knew you had it in ya!”

Molly gave a shy smile,
maybe this solo show won't be so bad after all.
If she can practice for an hour,
maybe the performance will be perfect.





OH NO!

How could it have gotten so late?

Molly doesn't feel nearly prepared enough!

Oh, what will she do!

Andy huffed,

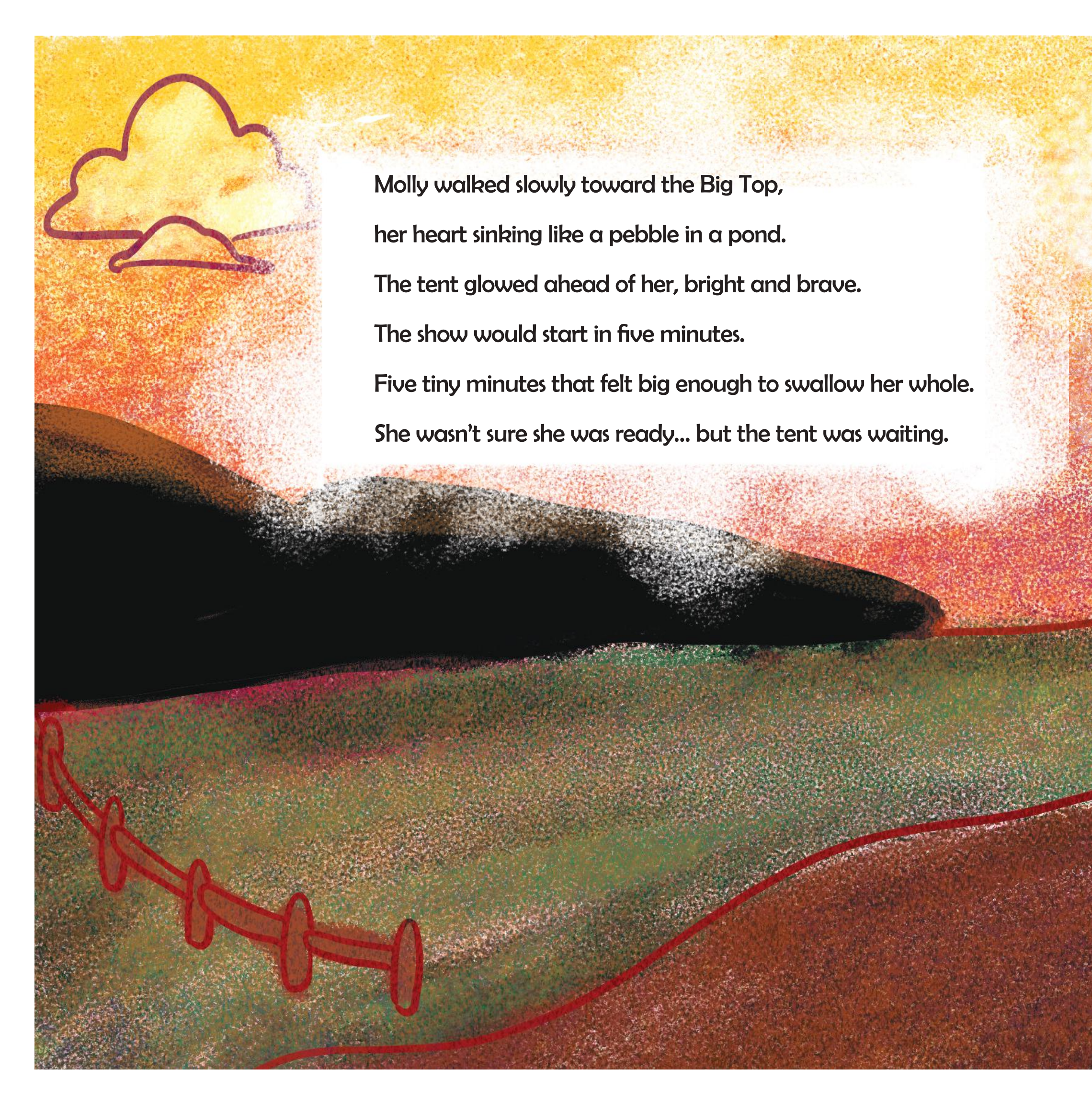
“Time flies when you're working hard, huh?” Andy asked,

“I'll catch ya there. I've got to get my shoe polish.”

Andy gave her one of his lopsided grins,

and Molly couldn't help smiling back.





Molly walked slowly toward the Big Top,
her heart sinking like a pebble in a pond.

The tent glowed ahead of her, bright and brave.

The show would start in five minutes.

Five tiny minutes that felt big enough to swallow her whole.

She wasn't sure she was ready... but the tent was waiting.



Backstage was chaos.

Performers scrambled into costumes, smudged on makeup, and raced through last-minute lines.

The ringmaster barked orders over all the noise.



But in the middle of the commotion, one performer lounged as if she had all the time in the world.



When she spotted Molly.

She swung upside down from her hoop and swooped toward her with sudden, joyful energy.

“Why hello there,
my Little Gem!”





Penelope sprang from her hoop and swept Molly into a giant spinning hug!

“EEE!! Oh, Molly, your first solo show!”

She babbles,

“The crowd is enormous already!

I can hear them from behind the curtains!

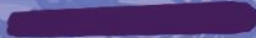
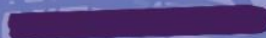
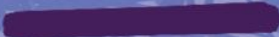
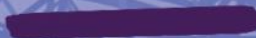
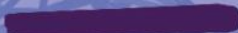
I think this might be our biggest audience yet!

“Oh, it’s going to be-”

Penelope pauses

“...Molly?”







“Oh, Molly...” Penelope said softly.

“Here’s a secret from all my years performing.

There’s no such thing as a

PERFECT PERFORMANCE

The audience doesn’t remember “perfect”.

They remember heart.

They cheer the loudest for the performers
who get back up.”

“Just try your best. And when the curtain falls,
you still have Markus, Andy, and me.
We’re not going anywhere...
What do you want to do tonight?”





...

(TRY)



“Ladies and Gentlemen!! Welcome to tonight’s spectacular show!!”

The ringmaster voice booms through the big top.

“Our first act of tonight!! Give it up for...”





The crowd erupted with applause
and roars of cheers right in front of her.

Molly looked out into the sea of faces,
and they looked right back at her.

She inhaled and steadied herself.

You can do this...

Don't lose the rhythm...

Just try your best...

You can do this...

you can- **COUGH!**

COUGH!



Markus! He came! He actually came!
Suddenly the stage didn't feel so scary.
The audience faded like a dream.
This was her act, and for the first time all night,
she felt ready.

She flung her juggling balls into the air.

Each one arched high and dropped neatly into her hands.

With every flick of her wrist,

her mind went wonderfully blank.

Her juggling flowed like a happy little song.

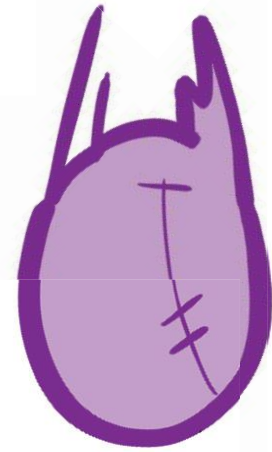
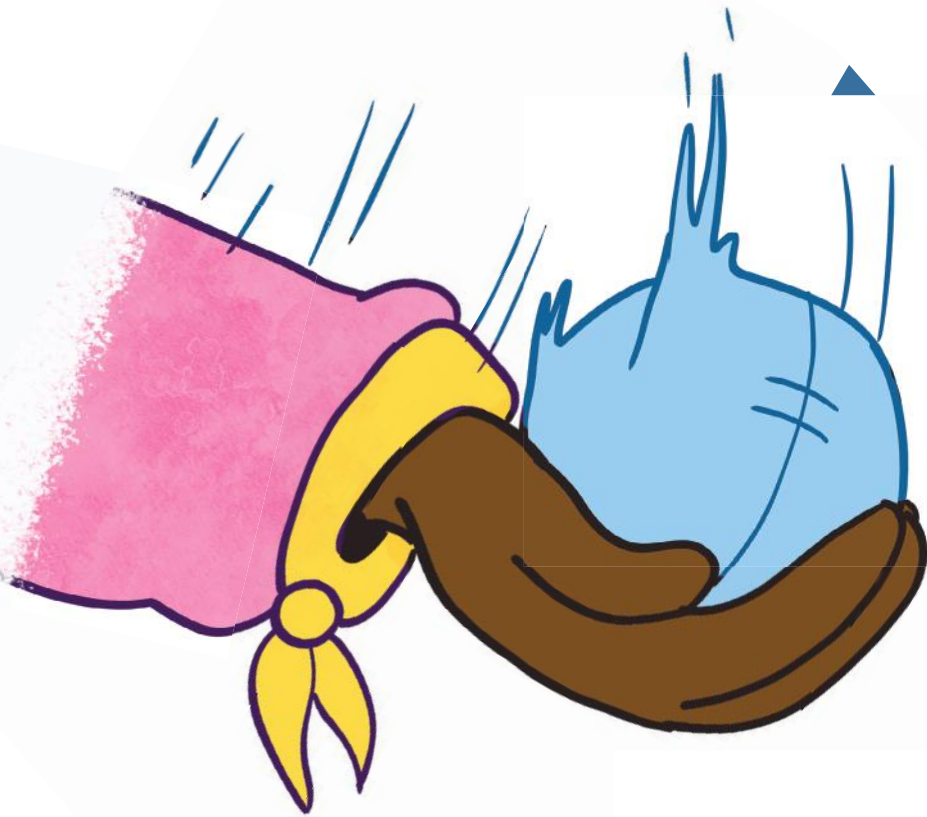


Now she just had to end it strong.

ONE



TWO



AND



Welp... That wasn't suppose to happen!

The crowd gasped and watched with baited breathes.

What should she do?

What should she do!



Just roll with the punches and laugh it off



HA!

HA!

HA!

CLAP!

CLAP!

CLAP!



Laughter exploded like popcorn throughout the tent.

The crowd loved it! Joy fluttered through her as Molly bowed,
cheeks warm with pride.

As the cheers faded, and the lights dimmed as the curtain drew.

Molly let out a happy little sigh.

No more attention for now, thank goodness.

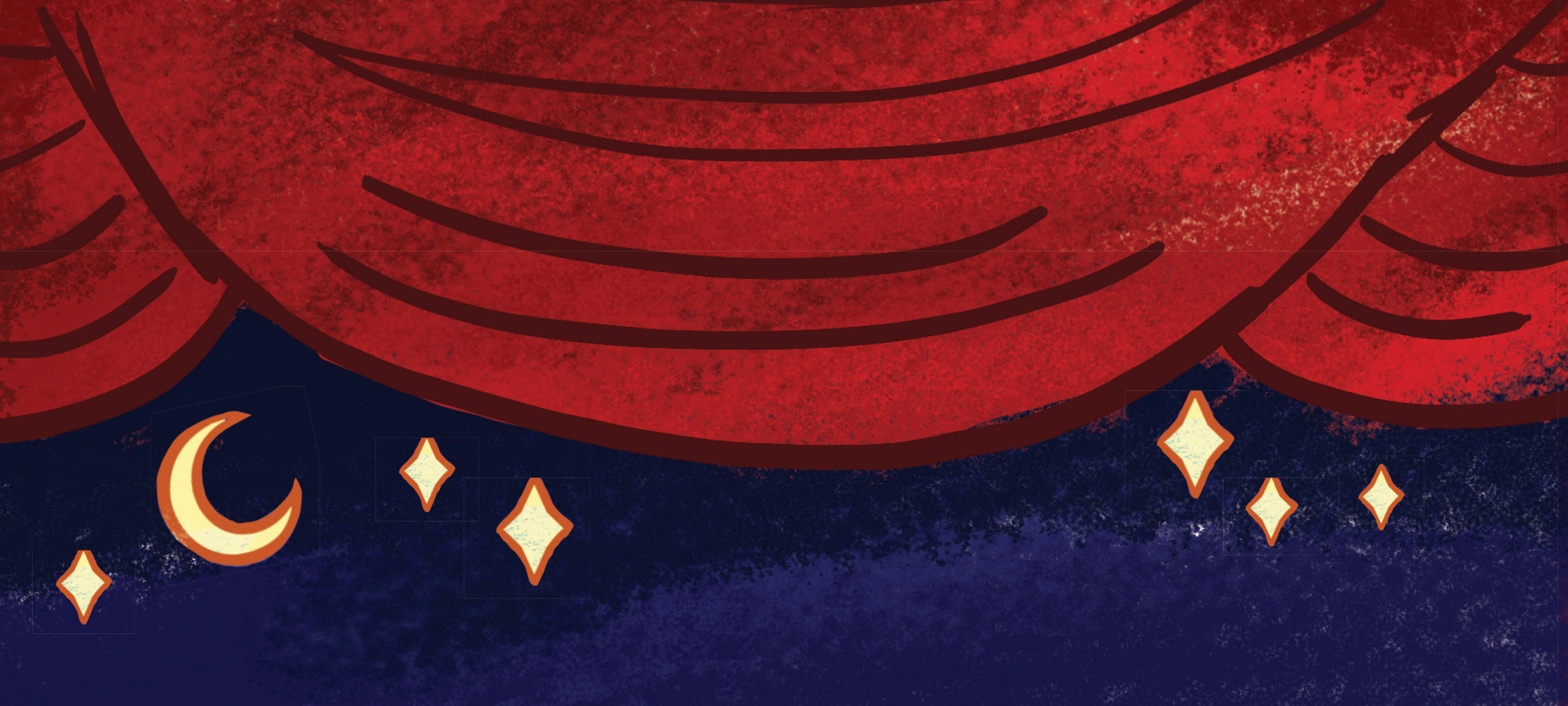
The best part was yet to come, because celebrating with her siblings....



That's what made her performance feel truly perfect.



THE END



The circus is here, and tonight is a very special night! Molly, the youngest clown in her family, usually performs side-by-side with her big brother Markus. But when Markus catches a cold, Molly must step into the spotlight all on her own. Molly is mute, so she lets her juggling and bright expressions do the talking but tonight, her nerves feel louder than ever. With her siblings cheering her on, can Molly find the courage to shine in her very first solo act?