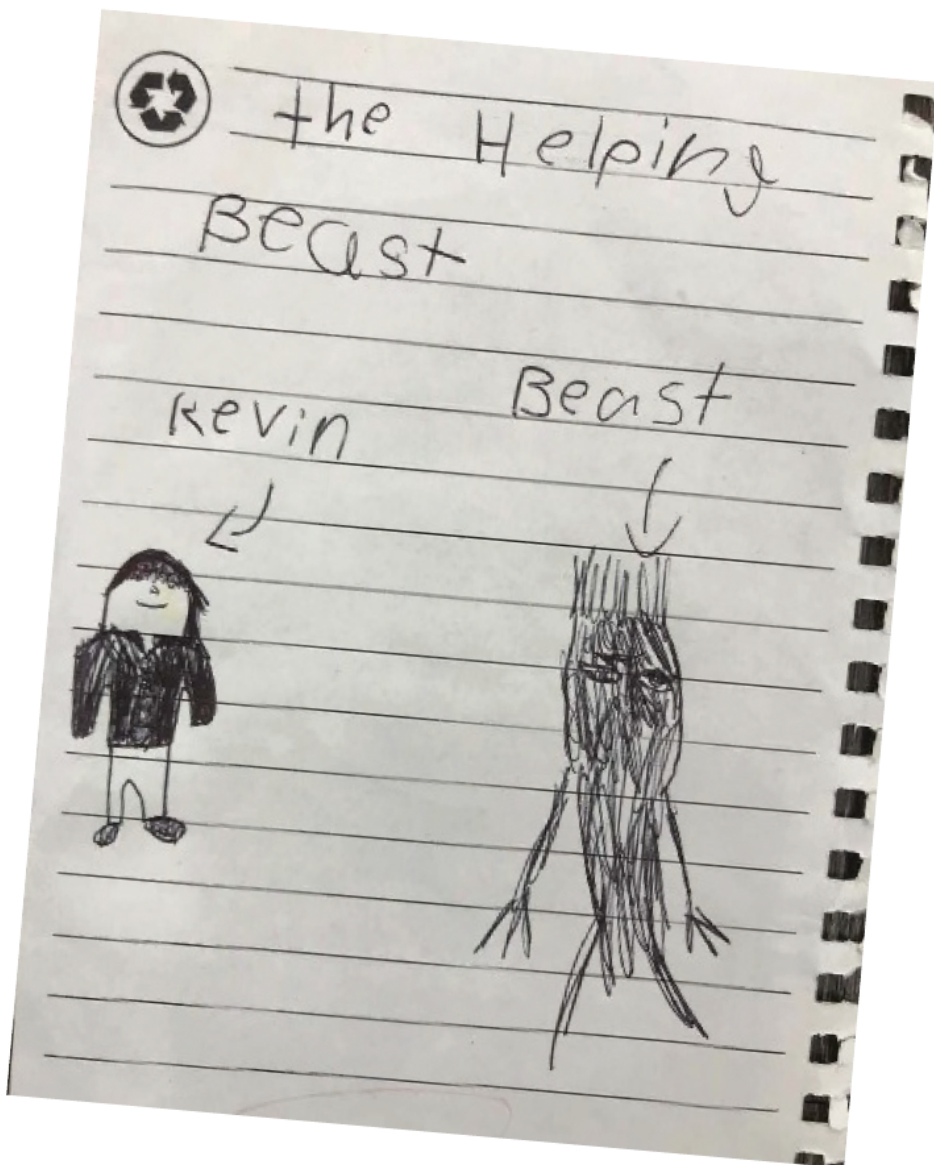


THE HELPING BEAST

BY
MICHAEL DURWIN

Midway between here and there, in a medium-sized town, in a middle-income neighborhood, lived a messy boy, in a mediocre house.

Kevin was the boy's name and this is a story about Kevin and the Helping Beast.



In a valley at the bottom of a great mountain lay Kevin's town. It was a nice little town, pretty clean and pretty bright.

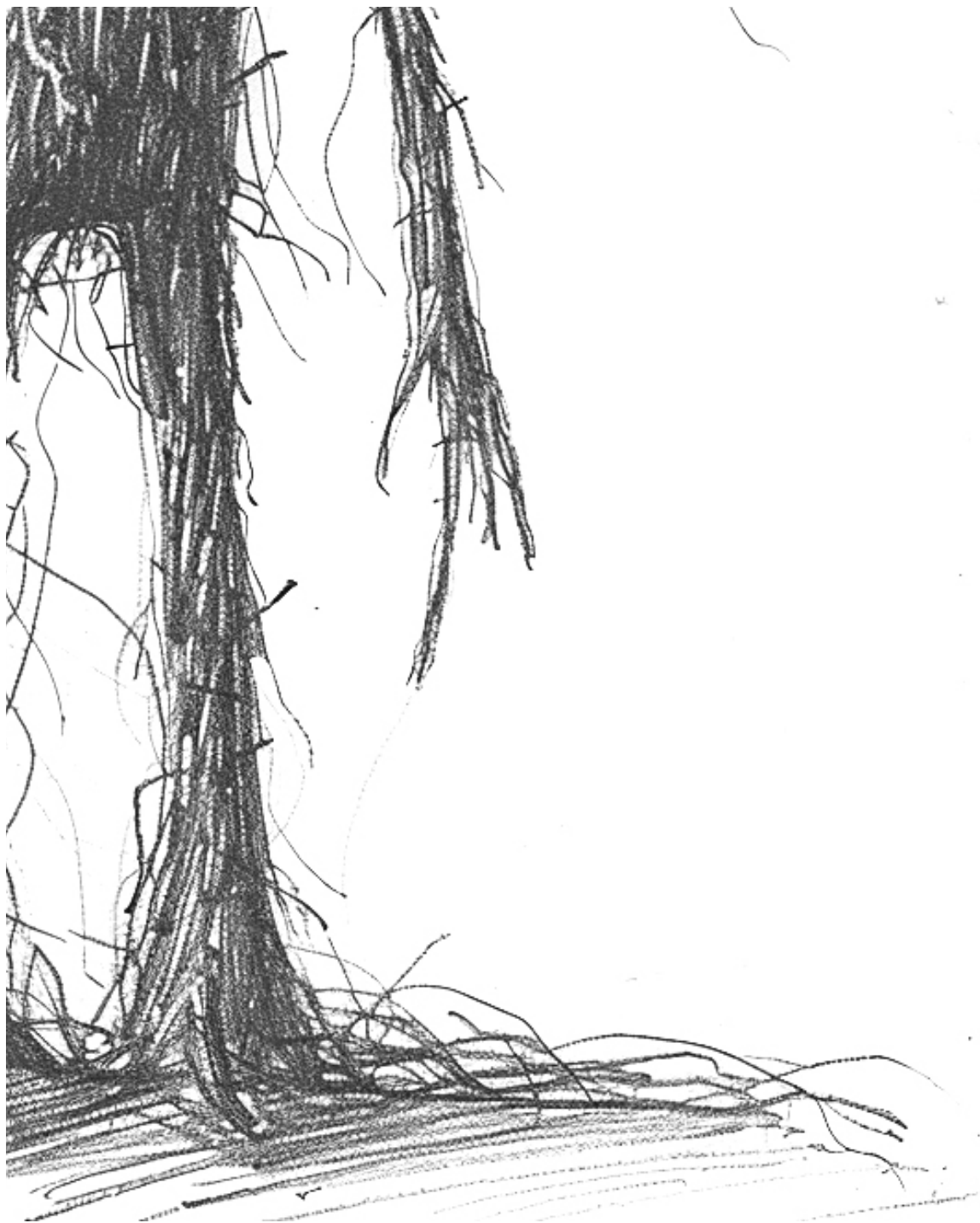


But above the valley, rose a large dark mountain with a deep damp cave. In the cave lived the Helping Beast.



The Helping Beast wasn't nice, but he wasn't bad either. He was just big and grumpy. People in the village said that if you needed help the Helping Beast would help.

But it was never for free.



One day Kevin needed help. He had a big project to do that required precision and skill that Kevin couldn't muster on his own.

Kevin asked his Mom. "Ask the Helping Beast", she said.

So Kevin asked his friends what he should do. "Ask the Helping Beast," they said.



Kevin even asked his dogs, Piddle and Poke. They just looked at Kevin with a look that seemed to say, "Ask the Helping Beast."

But dogs can't talk, so there was no way to know for sure.



Kevin filled up a plastic bowl with goldfish crackers and headed out on his adventure to seek out the Helping Beast. Kevin trudged and hiked, and climbed and clamored. Kevin even scaled. Kevin stopped. He was exhausted.

"Oh my gosh, this is a HUUGE mountain, I must be pretty close to the top," he said.



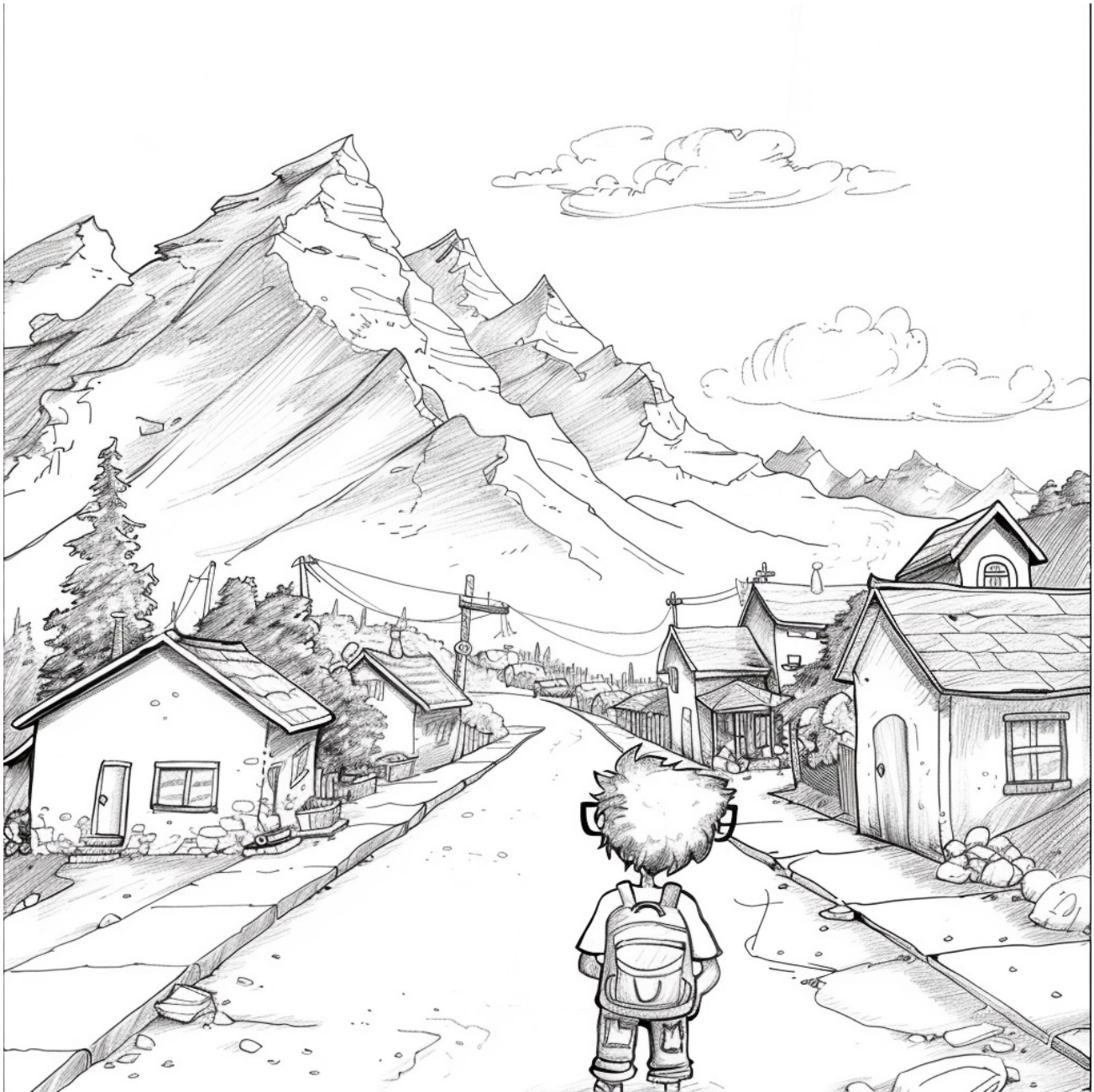
Kevin's mom called to him from the kitchen window; "Kevin, I thought you were going to see the Helping Beast today?"

"I am mom, GEEZ-UH", Kevin replied from the opposite side of the yard.



Kevin steeled himself and stepped right out of his yard and headed toward the mountain. As Kevin continued on his journey he passed many neighbors that wished him good luck with the Helping Beast.

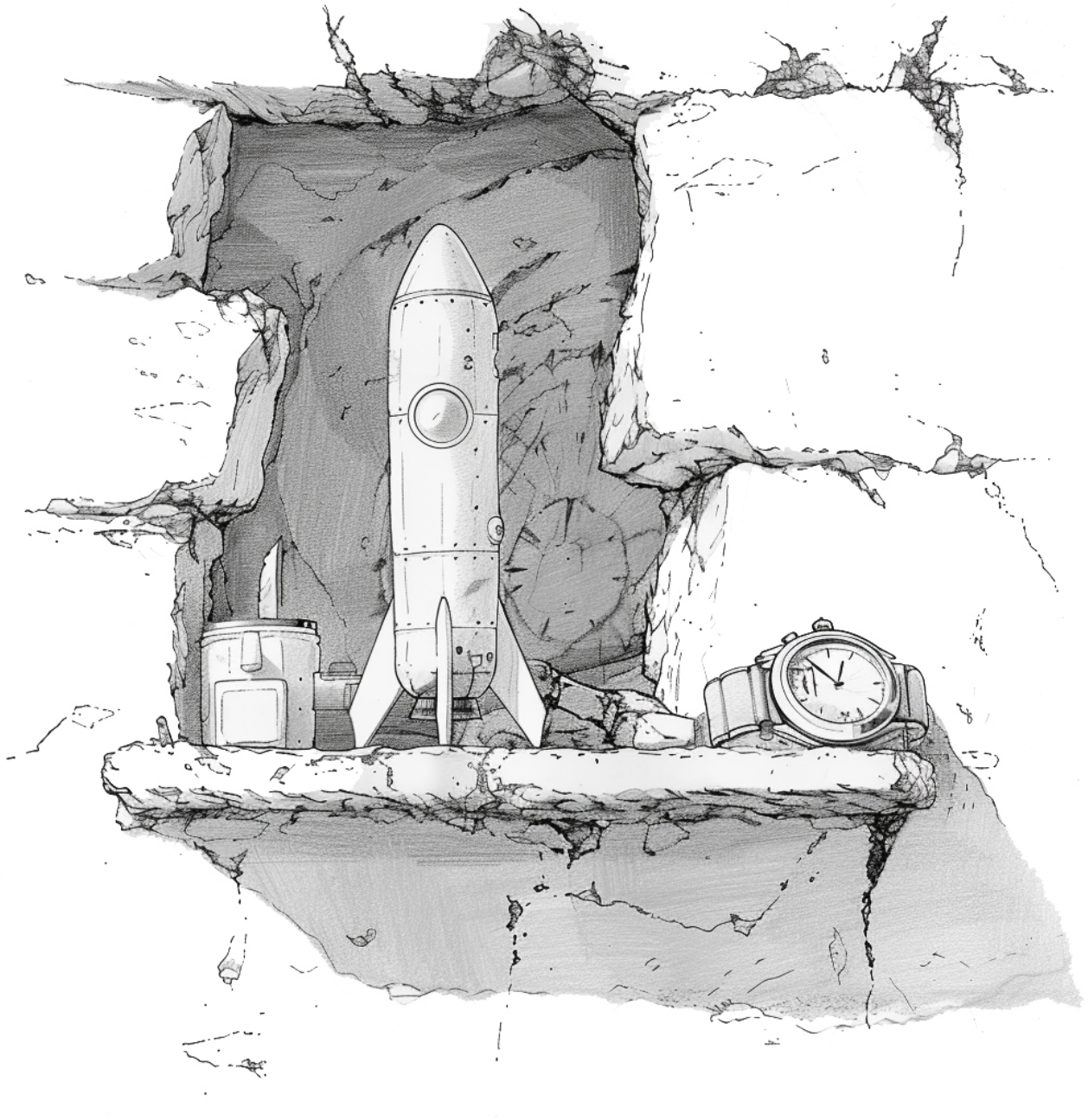
He waved back at them confidently.



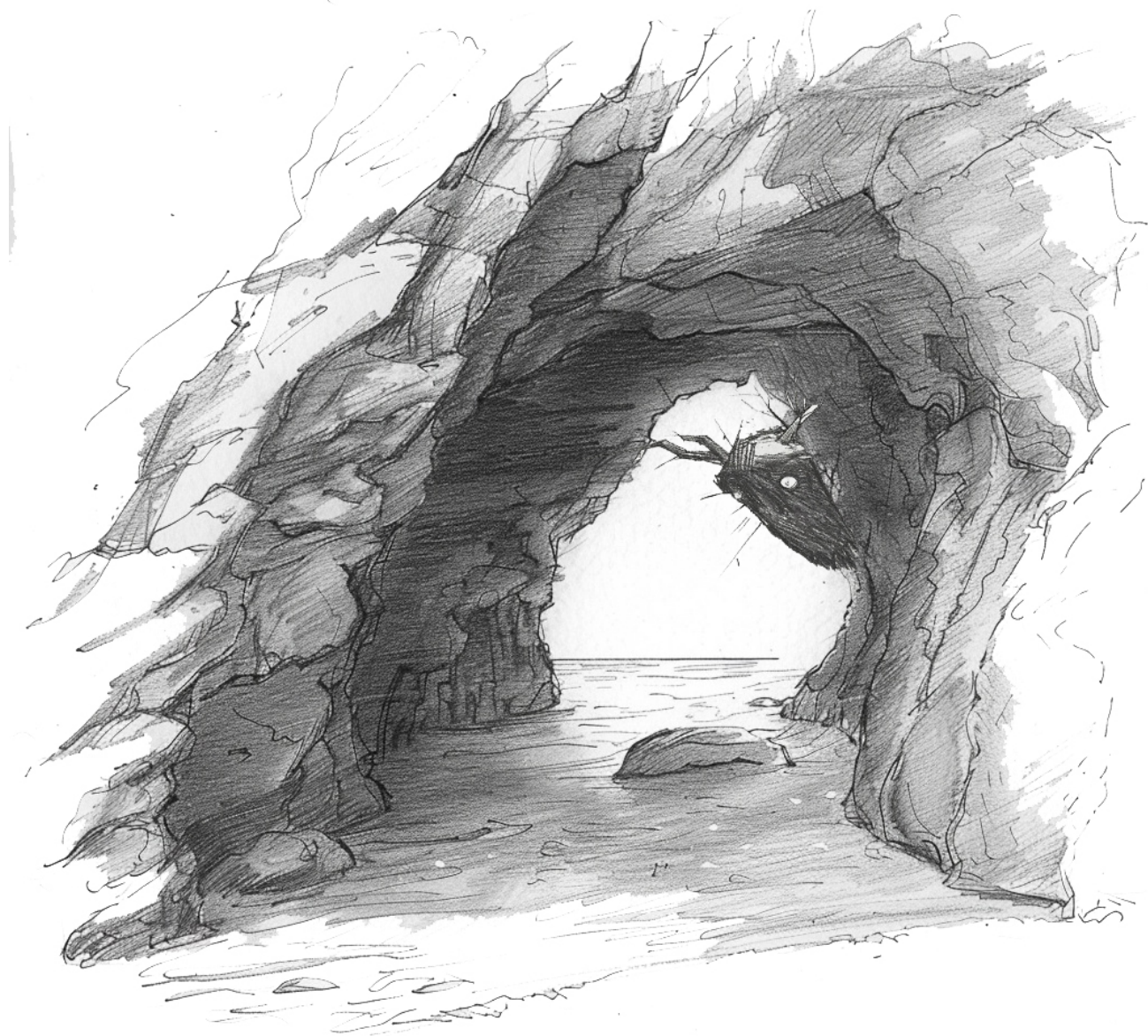
Soon, Kevin was at the mountain. He climbed and climbed and climbed for what seemed like forever until he finally arrived at the lair of the Helping Beast.



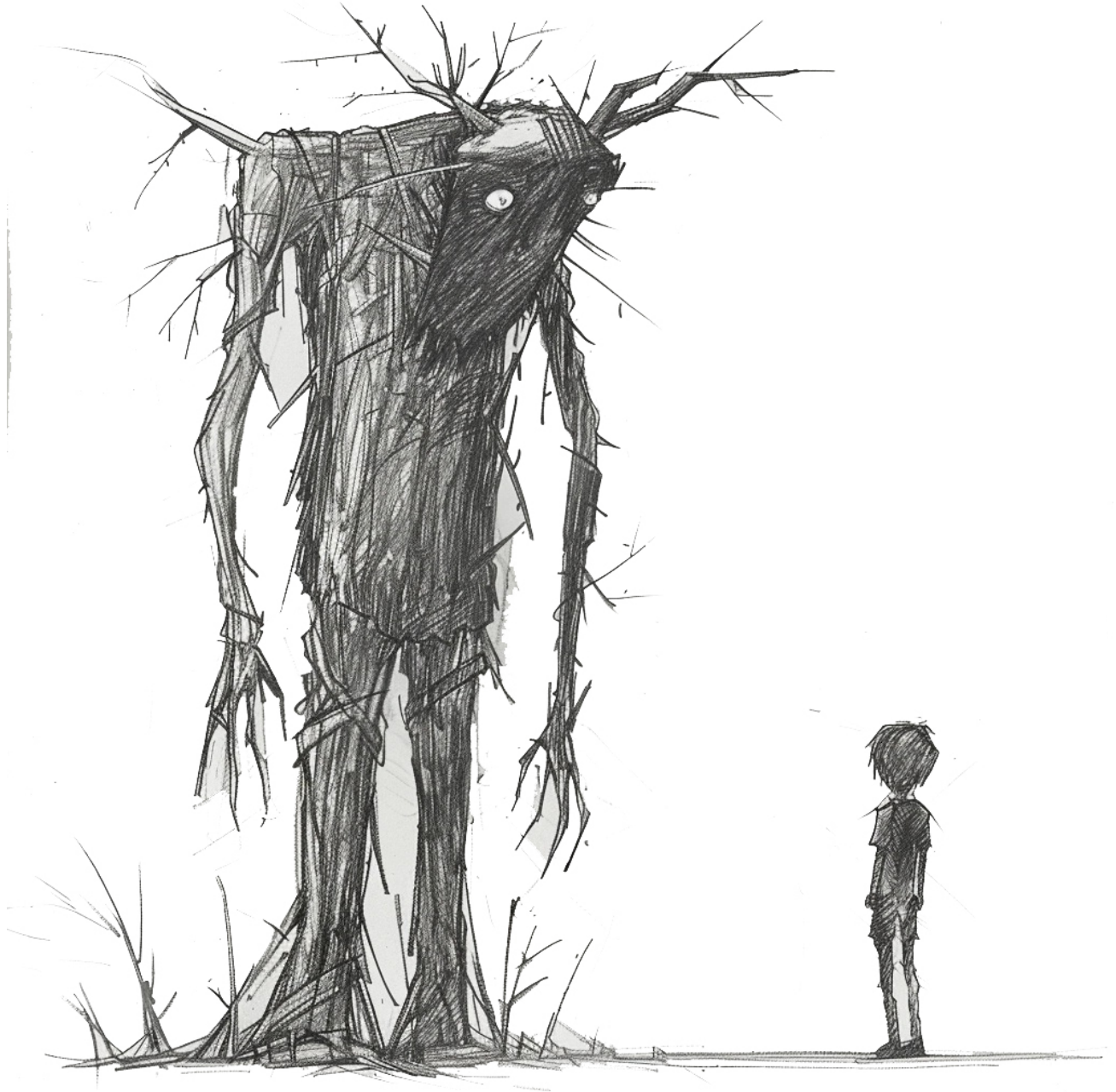
Kevin entered the Helping Beast's dark and dank cave. There were many odd things in the lair. There was a giant bed, piles of rags, and other strange objects that looked very interesting to a young boy, mostly because they seemed just like the kinds of things a young boy shouldn't touch.



Kevin looked around the cave nervously. Soon he heard a creaking and a groaning coming from way back in the cave. Out of the darkness, coming right from where the creepy sound arose, lumbered the large grumpy Helping Beast.



Now, the Helping Beast couldn't be blamed for his grumpiness, if people were always asking you for help you'd be grumpy too, especially if you were asleep when they asked.



"Yeah, yeah, yeah," the Helping Beast bellowed as he approached Kevin.

"And what do you want little boy?"

"I came to get some help, Beast," Kevin replied.

"Come back later!" the Beast roared at him.

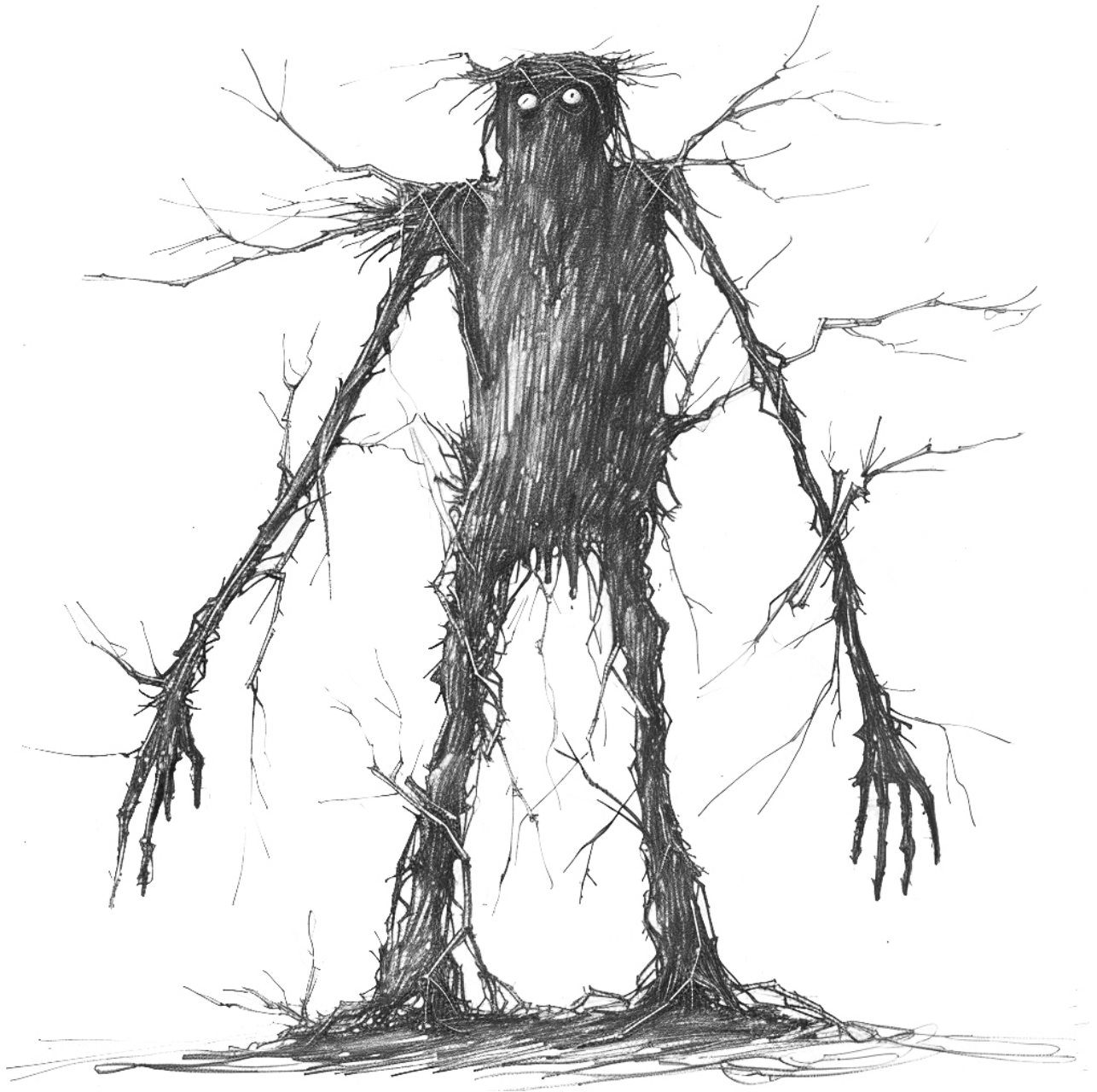


"But Beast", responded Kevin,

"I need help right now, not later."

"Very well", the Beast sighed, "But I need you to do something first."

"What? I didn't come all the way up your mountain to help you!", Kevin exclaimed, "I came here so you would help me!"

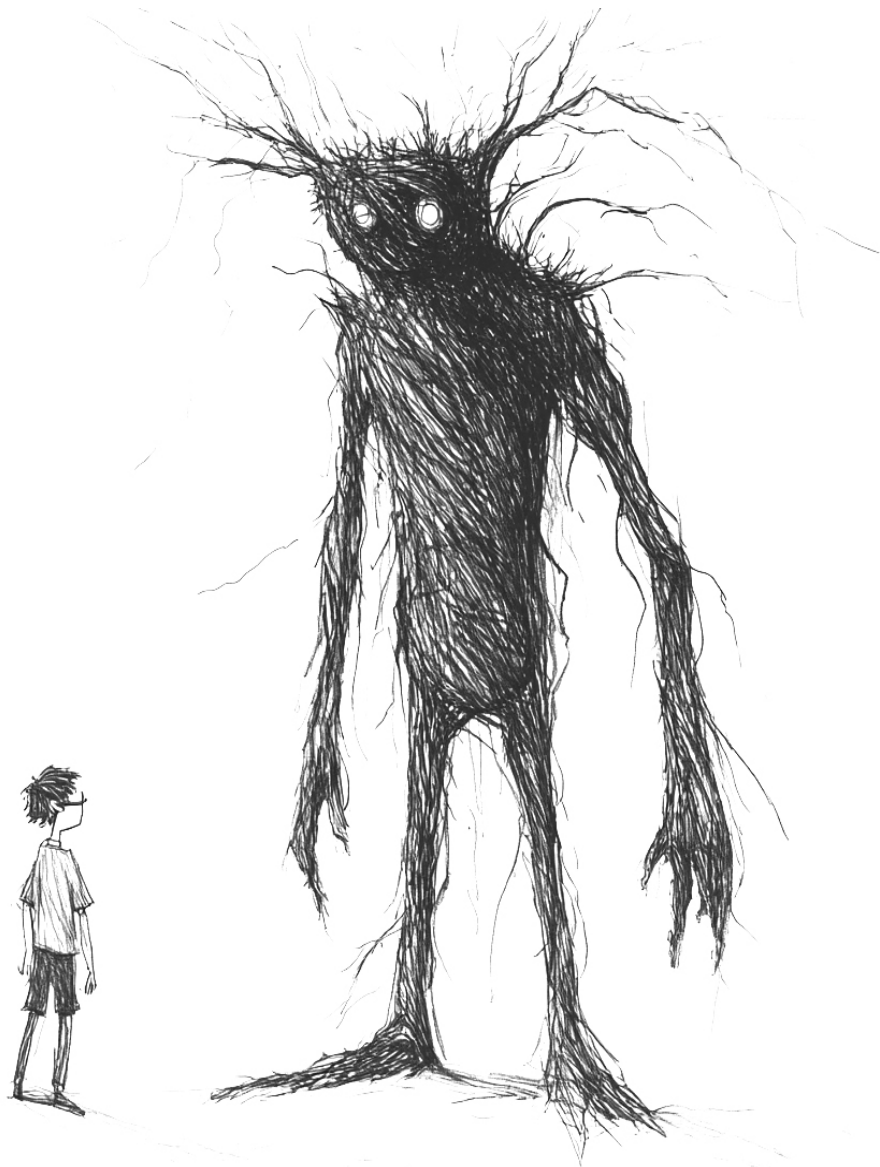


"That's all well and good child, but I'm not going to help unless you do as I say first."

"That's not fair!" Kevin replied, as his voice got higher.

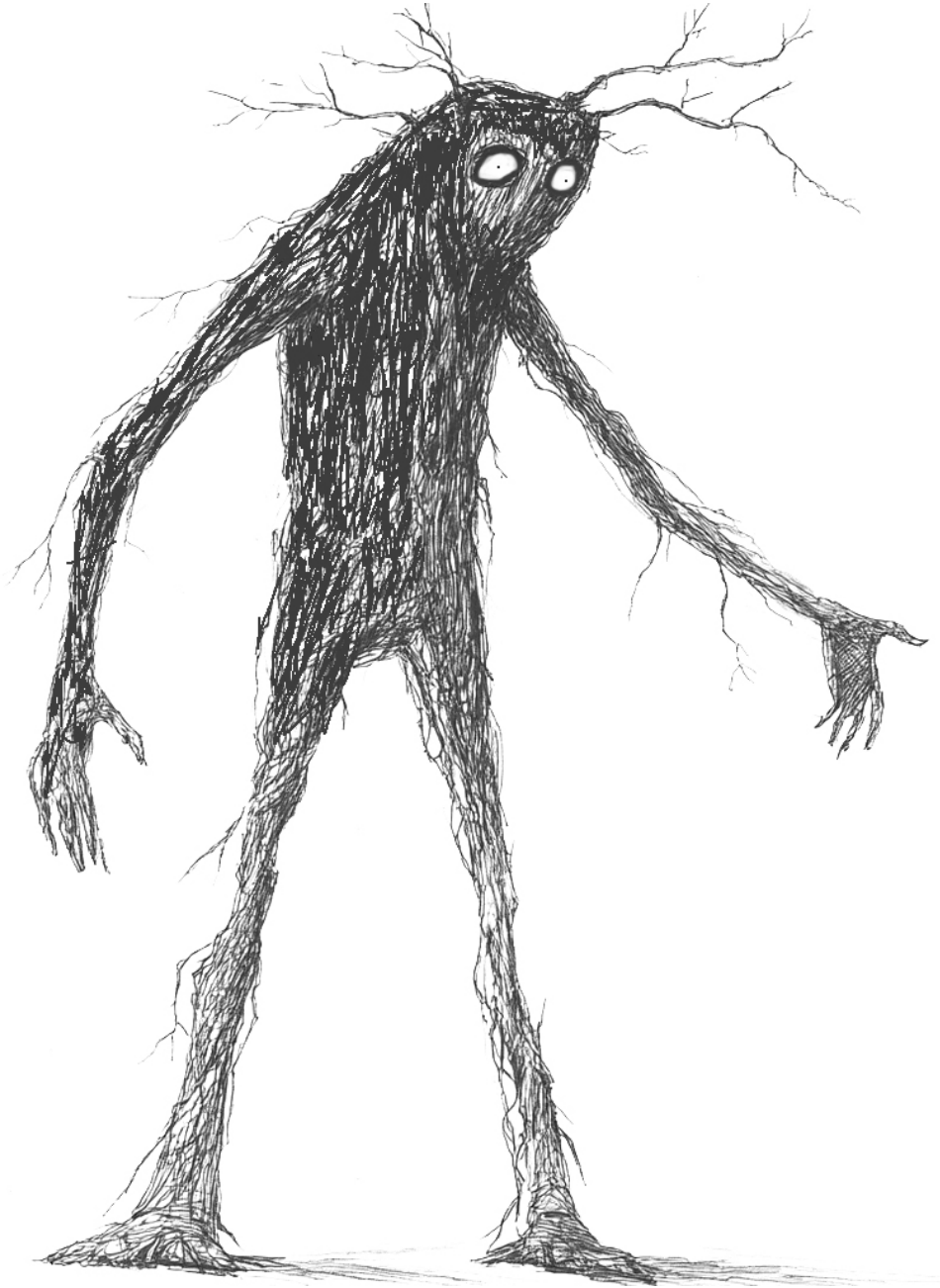
"Ha, ha, ha. Life's not fair." responded the Beast. "Now, do you want my help or not?"

"FINE-UH" Kevin said "What do you want me to do?"



The Beast thought and pondered, considered and contemplated then said "HmMMMMM."

The Beast looked at Kevin and said, "Boy, I require an astronaut."



"What?! Where am I supposed to get an astronaut?! They're not just lying around!" Kevin pouted.

"I'm not picky", the Beast said, "Any old astronaut will do."

Kevin was about to protest. In fact, his finger was in the air and his mouth wide open with a little squeak about to sneak out when he quickly snapped his jaw shut, and said "I'll be right back."



And out the door, down the mountain, through the town, across the yard and back to his house he ran.

Kevin's mother found him in his bedroom, tearing it apart and mumbling to himself, "Where is he, where could he be?"

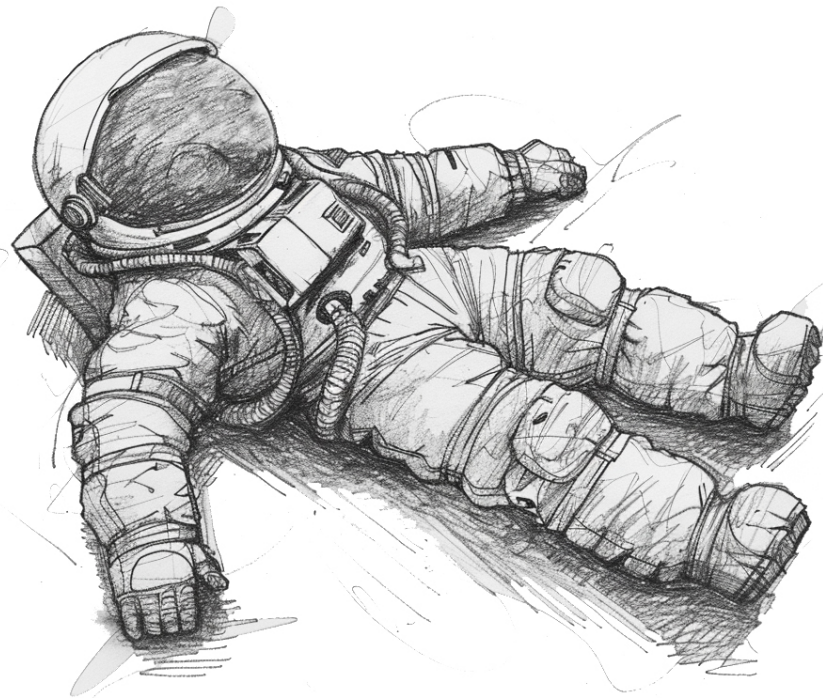
Kevin's mother asked, "What are you doing? I thought you were going to see the Helping Beast."

Kevin stopped and 'hmmphed', "The Beast needs an astronaut and I can't find mine."

"Perhaps if you put some things away you'll be able to see better," his mother suggested.



So, Kevin began to sift through the disaster that was his room. He put the LEGOS where the LEGOS go, he put his trains and cars in the box with the stars, his army men were stacked defensively across his dresser until he found a little piece of white paper stuck to a piece of putty, stuck to ... a small plastic astronaut.



Kevin pulled the little astronaut free and ran out the door, with the putty and paper stuck to his shoe.

Kevin ran across the yard, through the town, up the mountain and into the cave.



"I've got it!", he shouted.

The Beast was startled awake.

"Oh, let me see," he grumbled, taking the orange astronaut from Kevin, "Oh, yes, this will do nicely." He reached up and placed the orange astronaut on a high shelf. "Now, I need ... "



"What?!" Kevin hollered, "I just ran all the way down the mountain, through the town, across my yard and had to pick up my whole room to find that dang astronaut."

"I can't help that," the Beast explained, "just like I can't help your stinky breath."

Kevin stomped his foot, "Are you insulting me, Beast?"

"I'm sorry if you're insulted but your breath is making my ears hurt," the Beast went on. "I feel like the stench of your tongue is drying out my eyes. Why, I can't even tell which end of you is speaking right now. Please boy, do something about it before you shrivel up my arms and legs."

"FINE-UUUH" And off Kevin stomped, out of the cave, through the town, across the yard and into his house.



Kevin's mother yelled to him from the other room "your toothbrush is on the sink!"

"What?" Kevin hollered back. "What?" his mother replied.

Upstairs to the bathroom he went.

He picked up his toothbrush and began;

10 seconds on the top outside right, 10 seconds on the top inside right, ... and so on until his 2 minutes of brushing was complete.

Kevin heard his mother holler. "Don't forget to floss,"

"Dang it", and Kevin said to himself.



One minute later Kevin was off; across the yard, through the town, up the mountain and into the cave.

"Ah, I could smell your minty aroma from the bottom of the hill. Well done boy, much better." Said the Beast as he breathed it in.

"Now, can you help me Beast?" Kevin implored.

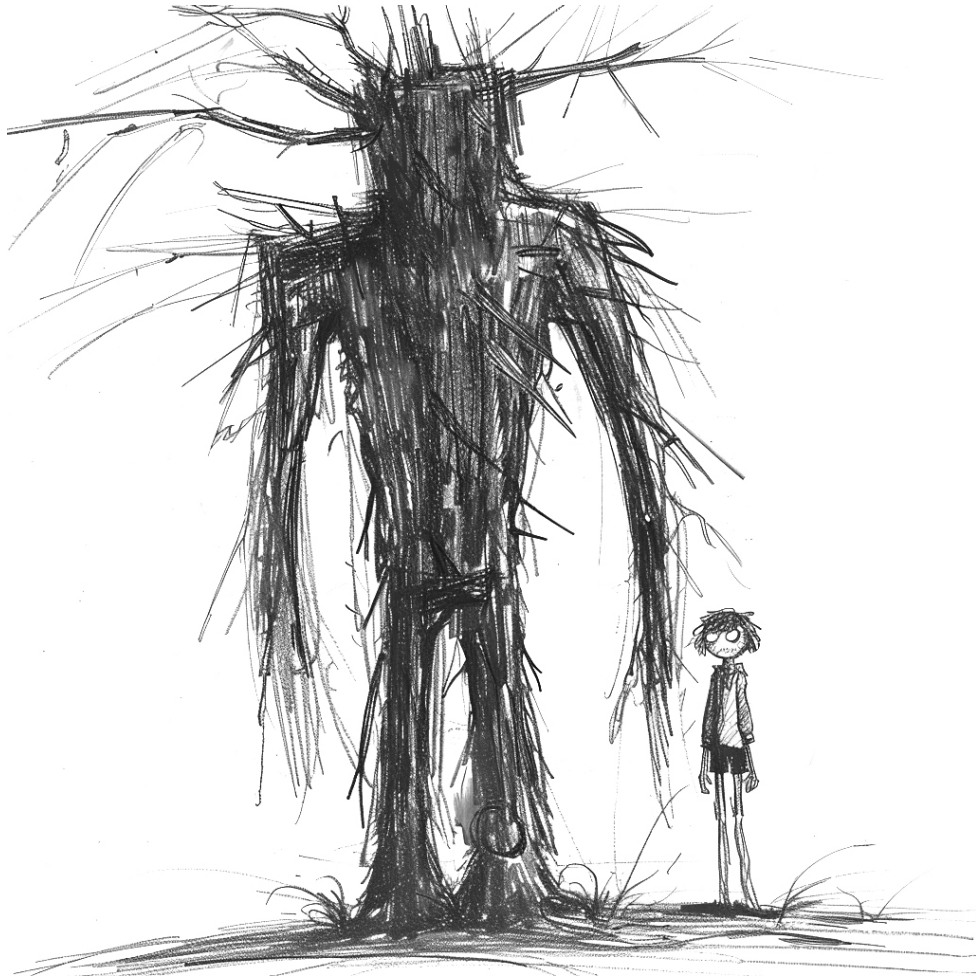


"Well of course boy, that's what do, I help people," replied the Beast.

"Great," began Kevin, "So, I want to build a ... "

"But, I have a feeling this is going to take awhile," interrupted the Beast.

"So?" Kevin asked.



"It's just that it's a bit damp, and cold in my cave and you're not suitably and comfortably dressed," The Beast explained.

"And what, great Beast, do YOU think would be more suitable attire?" Kevin responded, using his sarcastic voice.

"Why pajamas of course!" replied the Beast.



So off Kevin went without a word, down the mountain, through the town, across the yard and into his house. He returned a short time later in his most cozy, fuzzy, long sleeved and long legged super hero pajamas. He even wore his slippers, he wasn't going to take any chances this time.



"Ah, a vast improvement my boy," the Beast grumbled happily. "Now, we can get down to business. What can I help you with?"

Finally, Kevin thought but didn't say it. "I want to build a Great Big Train Track, with lots of engines and bridges," Kevin demanded.

"Well, that sounds wonderful, boy." The Beast said lightly, "Did you bring ... "

"Yes. I. Did!" interrupted the boy.



Kevin had dragged his box of trains and tracks all the way across the yard, through the town and up the mountain.

He pushed the box into the space between himself and the Beast as they both settled onto the cave floor. Kevin and the Helping Beast built the biggest track full of engines and bridges anyone had ever seen.



The End