Audrey Harings

Ferdinand,
the last
Christmas Dragon

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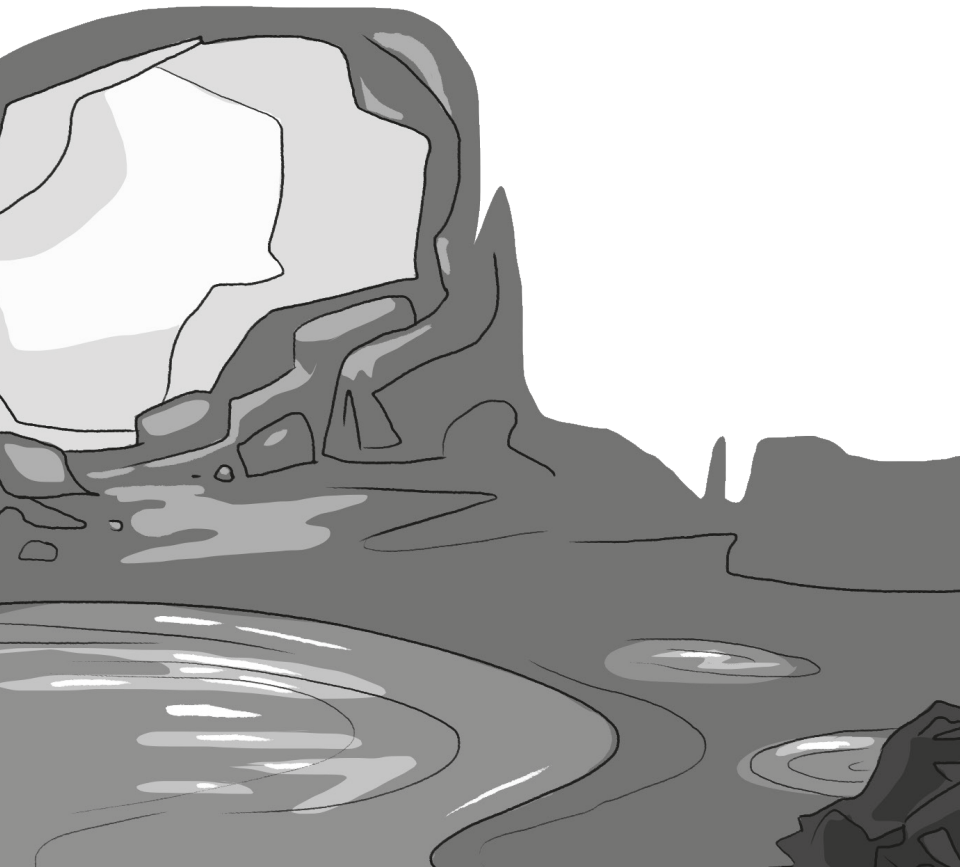
Dedicated to those
who know the reality
of magic....

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The Outsider

Far away from the never-ending buzz of things, a dragon lies still and alone, his wings across his chest, hidden by an ancient, softly grumbling oak tree. This isn´t your everyday dragon. This is Ferdinand, the last Christmas dragon. It´s been more than a thousand years since he has ventured outside.



His magic of invisibility has withered and gone. Within his cave, his only shelter and lonely home, he is the last of his kind. Ferdinand still had three dragon eggs but, without magic, these would never hatch.

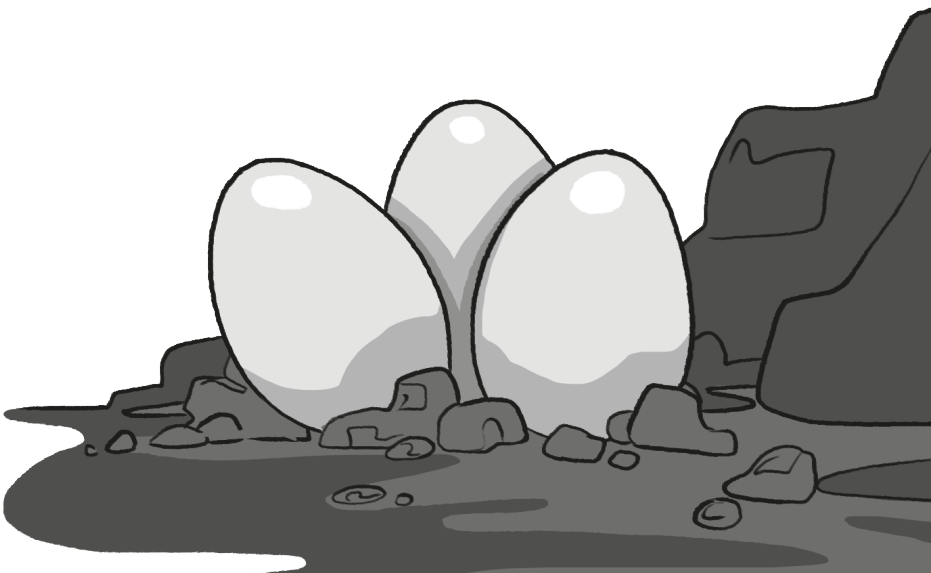


Ferdinand wept a lot and often and, through the years, gave form to a massive lake he affectionately called the Lake of Sadness.

If only people would believe again in Christmas dragons, as in generations past; he would get his magic back. Ferdinand would once again be able to bring gifts to the children.
No-one can quite remember the last time Christmas dragons were known to ride the wind, bringing joy. Ferdinand´s mother had told him all the stories and, time and time again, whispered: "Get ready, the time will come when you will become the magnificent Christmas dragon you are meant to be".
Sadly, this day had never come.
By the time his beloved mother had closed her tired eyes for the last time and disappeared with the last bit of magic, Ferdinand was alone.

Late each night Ferdinand used to go outside to look up at the night sky because at the end of their lives all dragons became stars! Ferdinand knew that his family were his guardians, watching over him from the heavenly skies. But he had not been outside now for a long time.

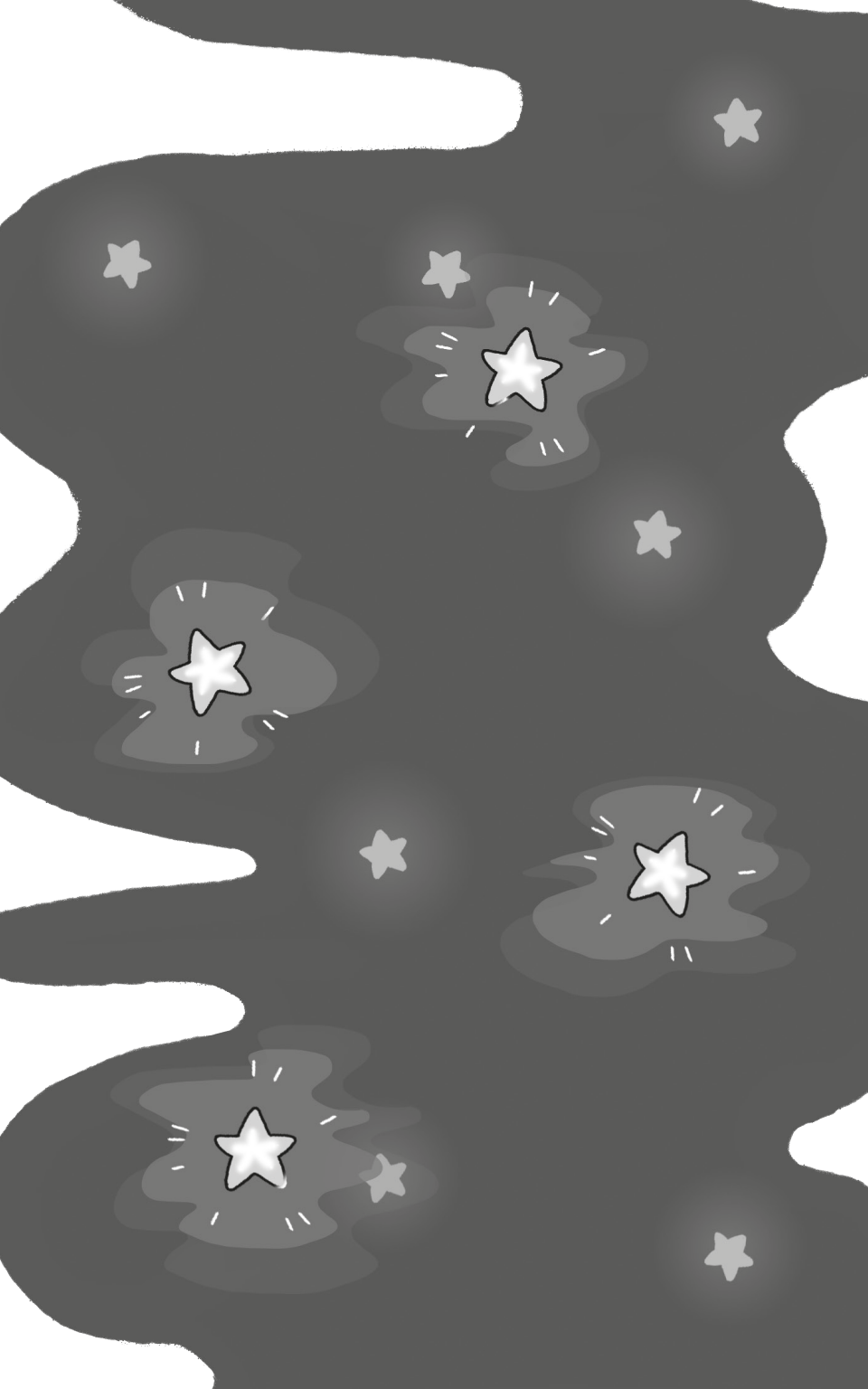
Ferdinand was lonely. Terribly, terribly lonely. Day after day he struggled with his fate, withdrew into his cave and sobbed sadly. And each day the lake filled with new tears.



Exhausted from all the crying, Ferdinand fell asleep.

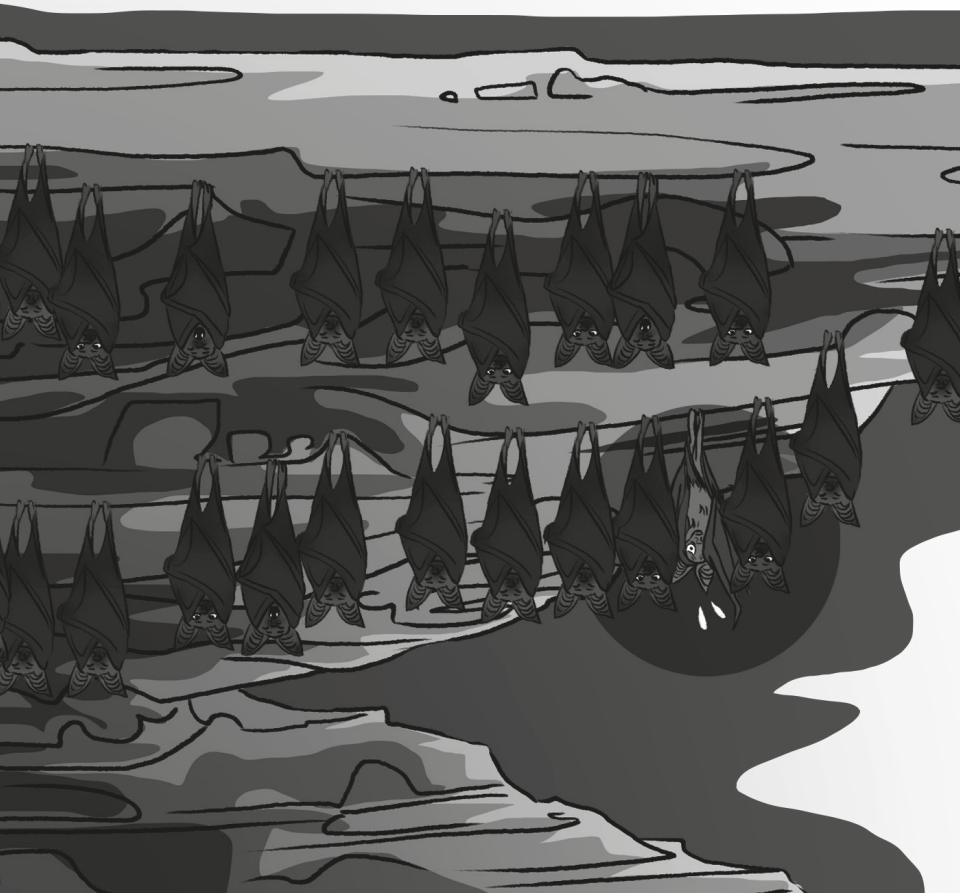
Time passed, and it was Winter once again. A big snowdrift covered the cave´s entrance creating an ideal sanctuary for Ferdinand. During Spring and Summer, wild ferns grew high around the old oak tree protecting the entrance from prying eyes. In the Autumn, fallen fronds from the ferns, and in Winter, the snow, made Ferdinand´s home invisible.

Not so very far away, there was another home; a very different kind of home.
This home wasn´t a cave, it was just a crevice in a mountain face. In that crevice were hundreds of bats. The cave was much too small for such a large bat family. They all pushed and shoved each other because everyone was fighting to find the best place to sleep.



Hugo was one of them. For a bat Hugo was pretty small, and so when he moved he usually got the short end of the stick. If his Brothers and sisters hung next to him, they kept bumping into him both from the right and from the left. Hugo moved and looked for another niche to hang onto for the day.

But his grandparents were in the next spot

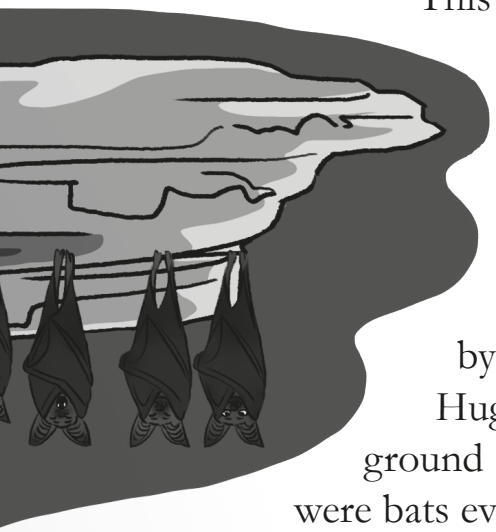


he chose. They also nudged him from the right and from the left, bumping him from side to side. So once again, Hugo looked for a different place but wasn't comfortable in that one either.

"Go away," his sister hissed. "This is my place!"

"But I only need a very small corner."

"No", another brother also grumbled. "This is our place and there´s no room for you here. Look for another place!"



"Oh Man!" said Hugo who was getting really upset by now.

Hugo dropped to the ground and looked up; there were bats everywhere. He was tired of being pushed around, of always being the last and always being the smallest. Everyone just thought of

themselves. Nobody thought about him. Hugo was fed up with his life here. It was really quite boring. Hanging around in the cave all day long, then in the evening swarming out to eat insects and afterwards, back into the cave to hang out again. As always, waiting for the darkness to arrive. Hugo stamped his feet. "I don't want to be a bat anymore!" He gathered his few belongings together, found an old handkerchief that, at some point, a human had thoughtlessly thrown away. He put everything inside, picked up a twig, tied the handkerchief around it and marched out into the snow with his backpack.

He stamped again. "I don't want to be a bat! I won´t be a bat. I cannot be a bat anymore!"

Unfortunately, once outside, he got very cold, very quickly. He felt horribly frozen. Nevertheless, he resisted the temptation to turn around and go back home.

Hugo didn't want to fly. He didn't want to

take to the skies. He just wanted to leave! With his little legs he slowly trudged on…

Passing a rubbish dump, a really disgusting stench reached his nose and he had to gasp. Even though he wanted to hurry to get past, his little yellow eyes saw something. It was a doll. A broken doll. But on her feet were little shoes. Hugo looked around furtively. He didn't want to be discovered as he was taking off the doll's shoes to wear himself.
Now he proudly looked at his feet.



"Well, I'm not a bat anymore.
I have shoes," he said to himself. "No bat wears shoes. So, I can´t be a bat anymore."

Hugo journeyed on, whistling merrily and walking much faster than before because his heart was full of happiness and his feet weren´t so cold. He didn't know where he was going and he didn´t care. The most important thing was to get as far away from his family as possible.
Darkness came very slowly.

Hugo wasn´t afraid of the darkness, but was rather worried that soon his family would be about. If they saw him wearing those little shoes, they would be absolutely sure to mock him. He wanted to hide overnight so that they would not see or find him and so he began looking for a safe house. Right in front of him stood an old and gnarled oak tree. Hugo remembered that old and stately trees sometimes

had spaces
under the roots, or in the
trunk. He would have an inge-
nious hideout!
This oak tree was beautiful. Certain-
ly she was very old and she had a mighty
trunk. Slowly it got dark.

The Oak tree´s naked branches were co-
vered with snow, and the moonlight was
shining a brilliant shade of blue.
Hugo wanted to examine the trunk more
closely. As he got closer the snow under
his feet suddenly gave way and he fell –
right into the middle of a huge cave!

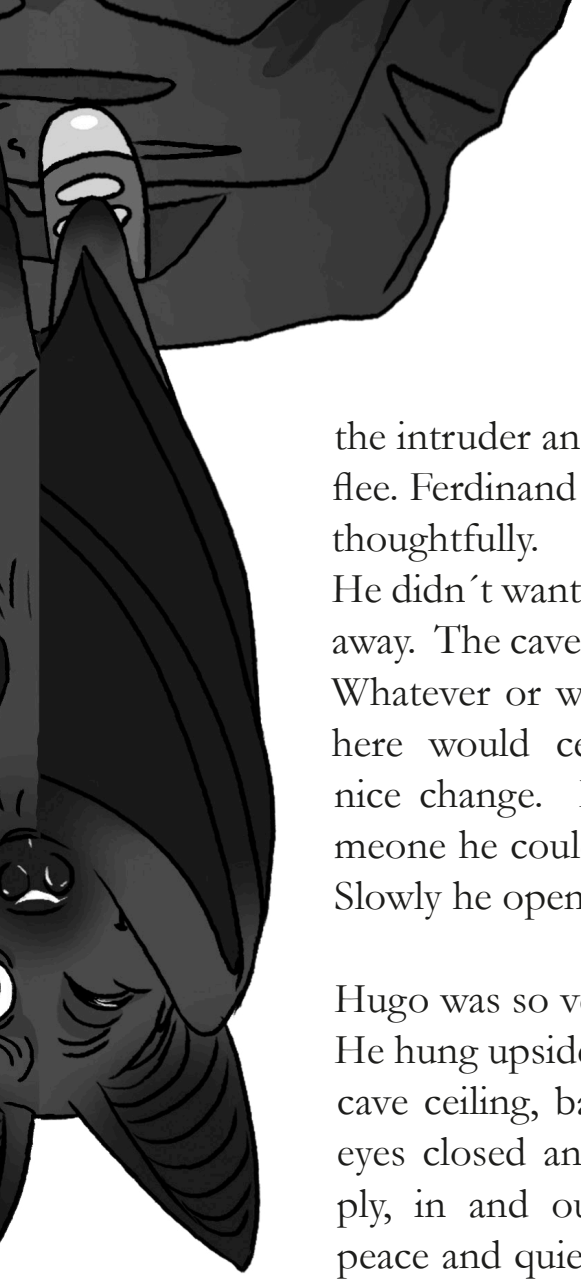
Totally astonished, Hugo looked around.
He had fallen surprisingly softly and had
not been hurt. Wow, he thought.
It´s really cozy down here - and there´s
even a lake. I´ll have to take a closer look
at that later. Hugo tightened the laces of
his new shoes and did what bats usually

do when they want to rest; he hung himself upside down from a rock ledge. He was tired and wanted just one thing. Finally, to sleep undisturbed!

Am I alone?

Was that a noise?
Ferdinand thought he had heard something. For a dragon, he slept lightly. His ancestors had slept deeply for centuries, but Ferdinand lived alone and so was very sensitive to the slightest change in his environment. Even though he had been around for a long long time, not much had changed over the years, apart from the changing of the seasons. Ferdinand always looked forward to the snow melting and the scent of the green ferns wafting into the cave.
Now he heard the noise again, something dull and scratching. He was sure he wasn´t alone. That scared him. What was he to do now? Something or someone was in his cave. He was sure of that now. He couldn´t hide – after all, he was a gigantic dragon! Every move he made would startle





the intruder and cause him to flee. Ferdinand pondered thoughtfully.
He didn´t want to chase anyone away. The cave was big enough. Whatever or whomever was in here would certainly make a nice change. Maybe even someone he could have fun with. Slowly he opened his eyes...

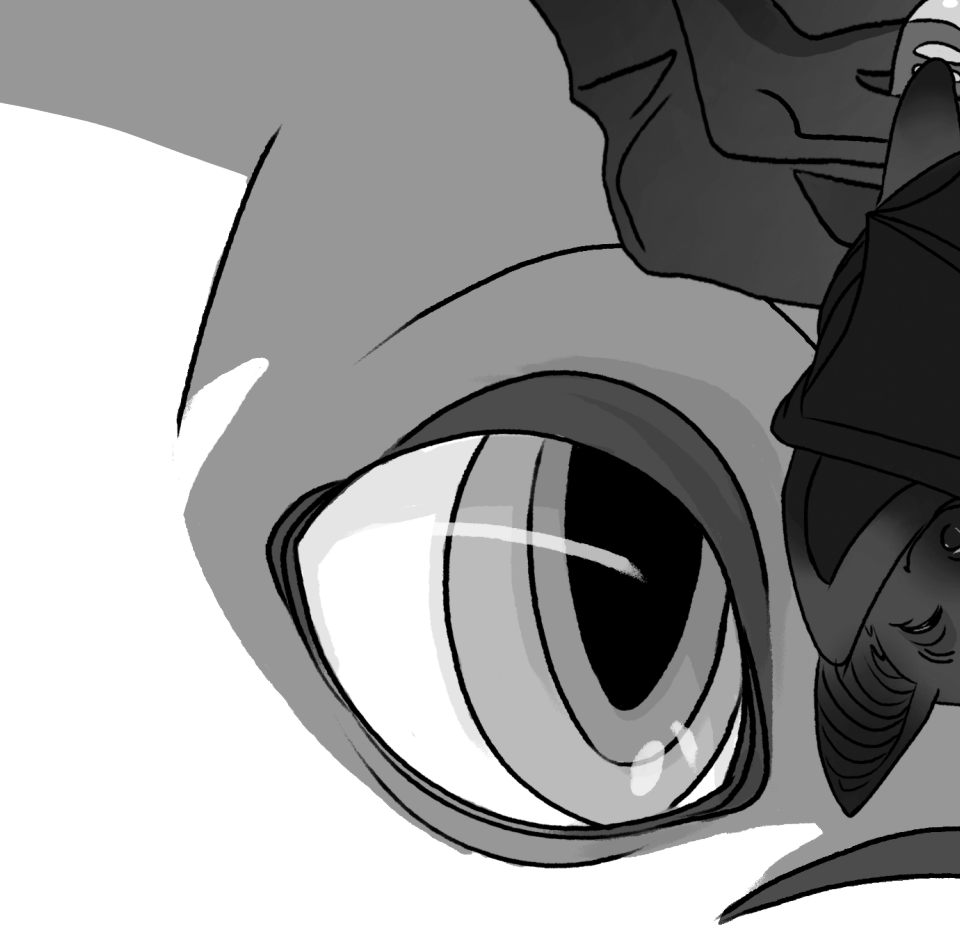
Hugo was so very comfortable. He hung upside down from the cave ceiling, bat-style, kept his eyes closed and breathed deeply, in and out, enjoying the peace and quiet. No other bats pushed, jostled or insulted him.

He had the cave all to himself – it was his. "Wonderful!", he thought "finally I have my own place and can do whatever I want. I could even swim in the lake or have a bath."
Hugo felt blessed. All he wanted to do was to sleep after his long and exhausting journey through the cold snow.

Then he noticed that the cave was unusually warm for the time of year. Another bonus! "What luck that fate had brought me right here. It also smells different from my previous crevice. There, there had been a coldness and a damp, musty smell." He sniffed again with his little nose. But here, even with the lake, there was no musty odour. It was comfortably warm, almost as if there was an oven someplace close. This cave was wonderfully dry. He hated nothing more than damp walls. When hanging from them, the moisture crept into his delicate bones

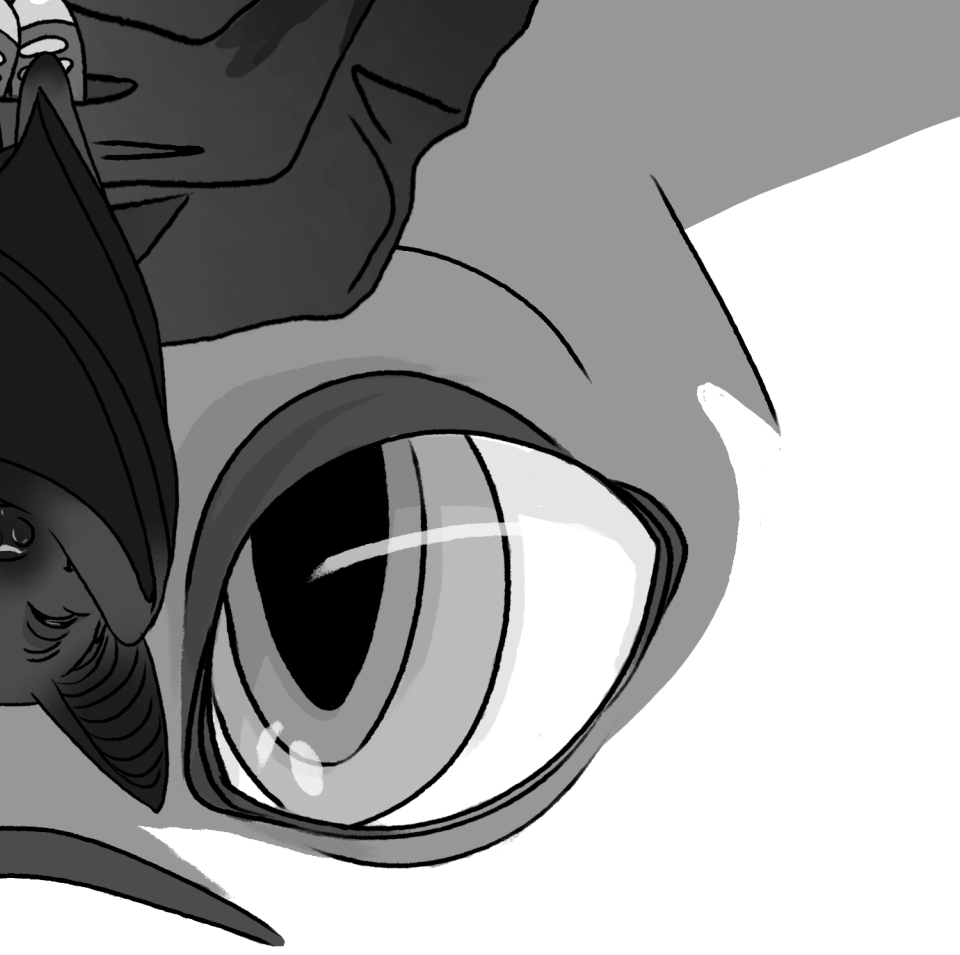
and stiffened his wings. It always took a long time for the pain to go away. The older he got, the more laps of the cave he had to fly until the suppleness returned and he could hunt. Every night it had been the same thing.
This cave, however, was perfect. Should he go back to his family and tell them about this shelter? He pondered for a moment, and then firmly shook his head. "No, no, no, no! This is my cave!".

A rustling sound mingled with his words. Hugo opened his eyes and looked at the cave walls. Was there something or somebody there? Or, God forbid, his family laughing at his stupidity? No, that couldn´t be. This was his cave.
Everything was quiet, nothing was moving. And yet, once again he heard a rustling. He looked exactly in the direction of the noise, but could see nothing. He chastised himself for being so unreasonably frightened.



Just as he was about to close his eyes, he suddenly did see something.

Full of astonishment, Hugo opened his eyes wide and found himself starring into a massive eye – honey-colored with a red pupil.



Fear, no - panic shot through him. His feet gave way and he fell, frozen with shock, from the safe edge of the wall into the deep abyss below.

But his fall ended sooner than expected…