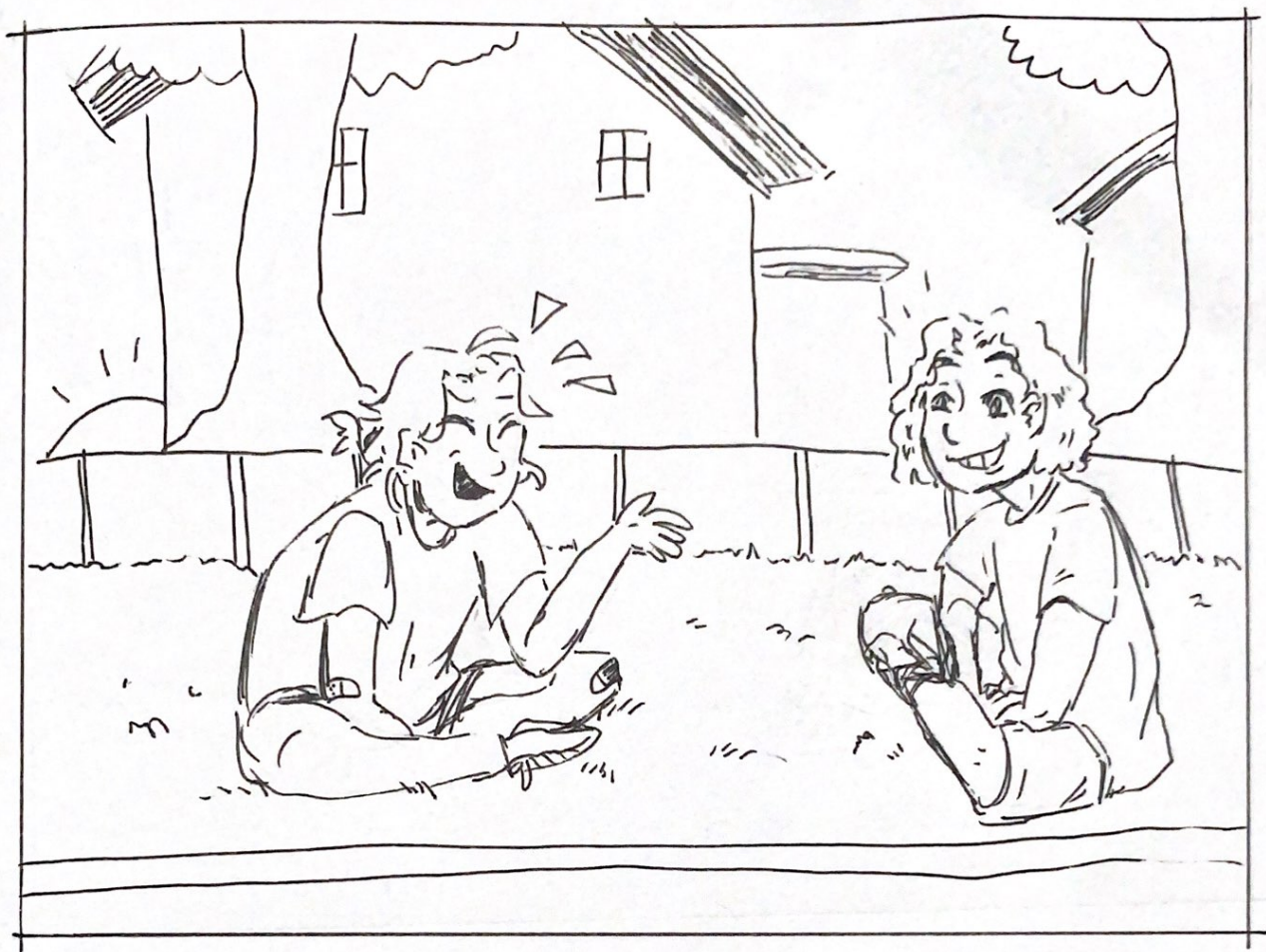


RIVER

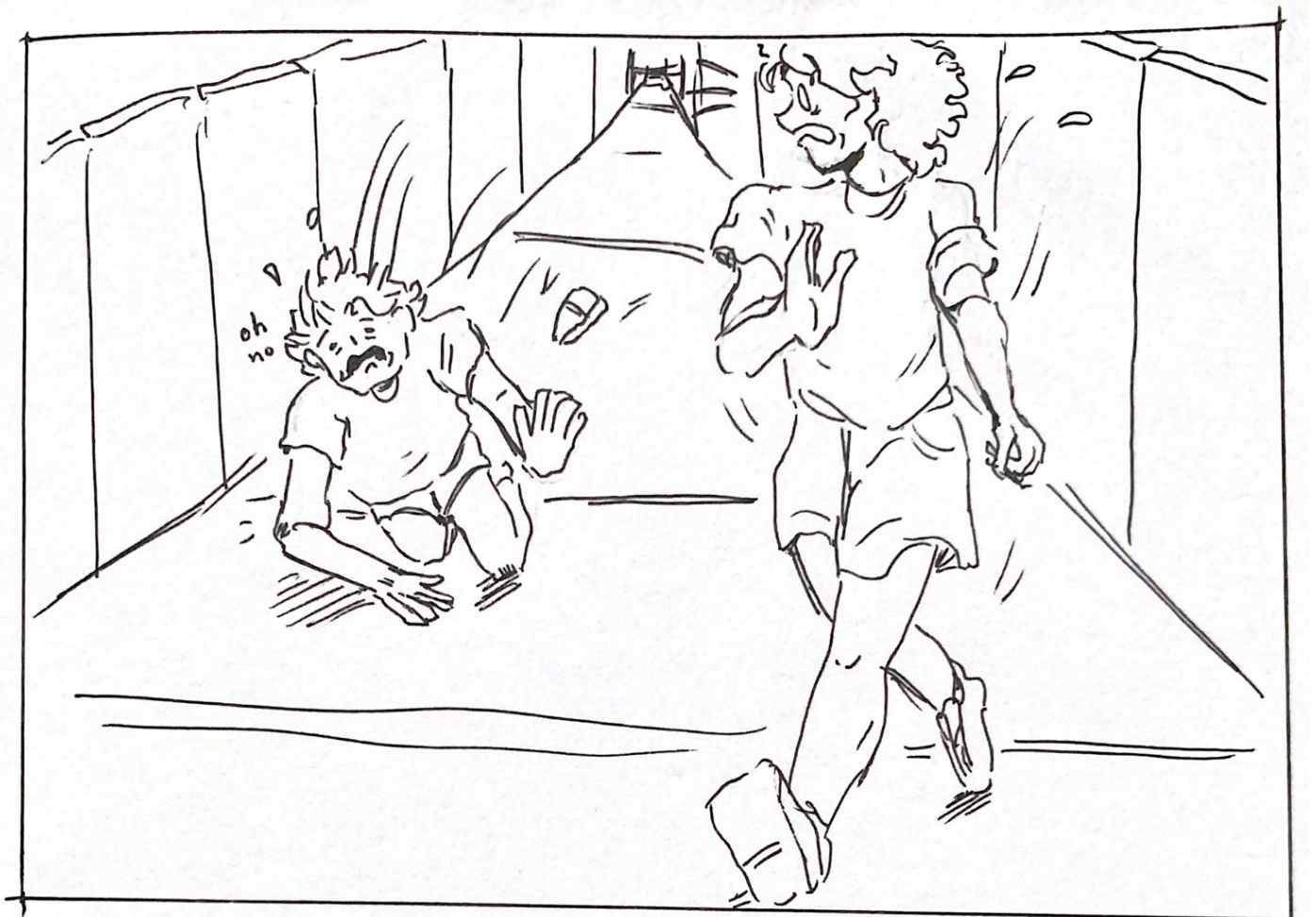




CHAPTER ONE!

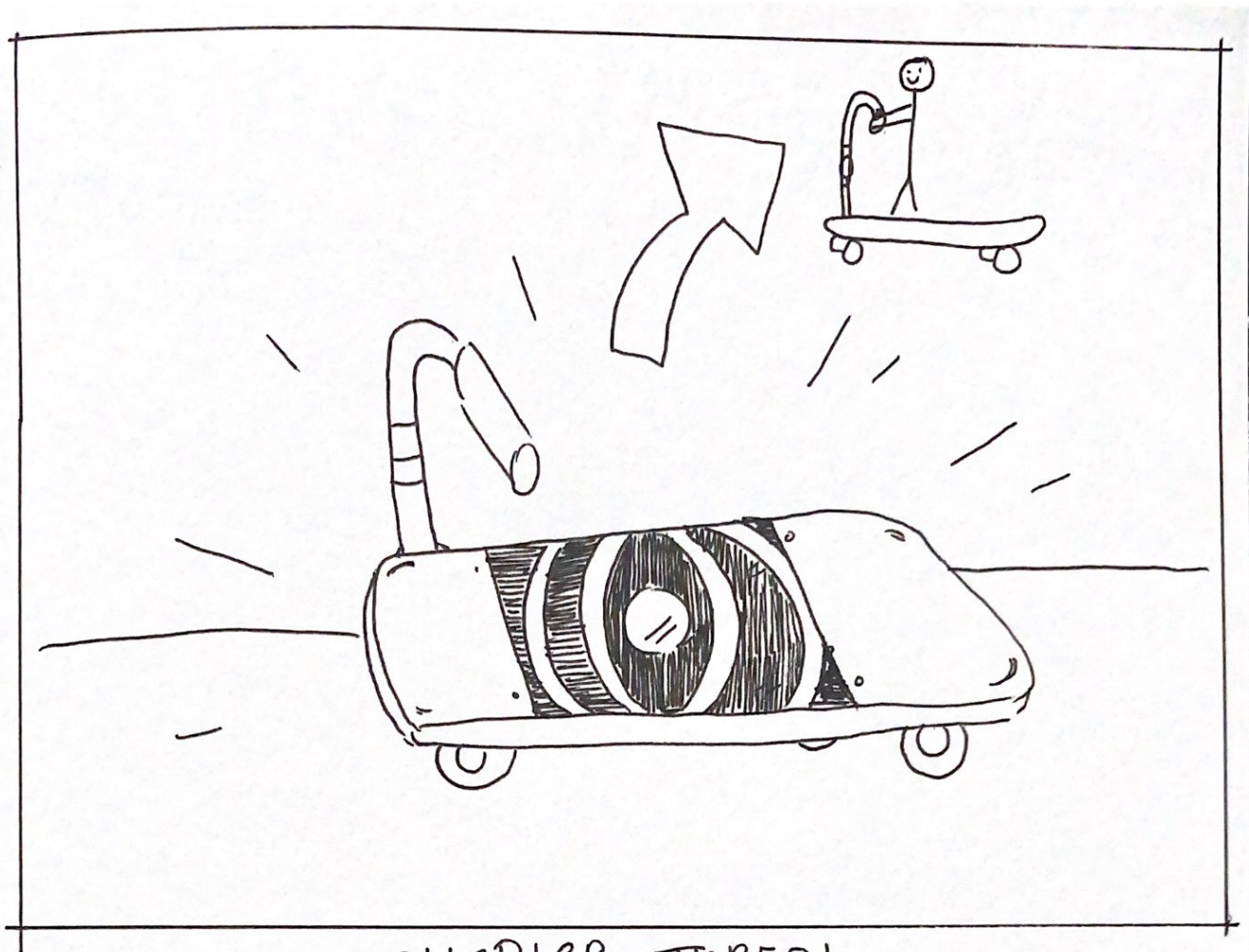
Justin and I laughed loudly together as we joked.

It was a later summer day, the sky painted orange and the breeze creating bumps on our skin. I'm sitting on the grassy patch by the side walk with my friend Justin. He and I just spent another day together, laughing and playing — usual activities for kids. Tired, we're just sitting and chatting before he and I had to be home for dinner. The grass made my legs itchy, but I was too caught up on spending time with one of my closest friends.



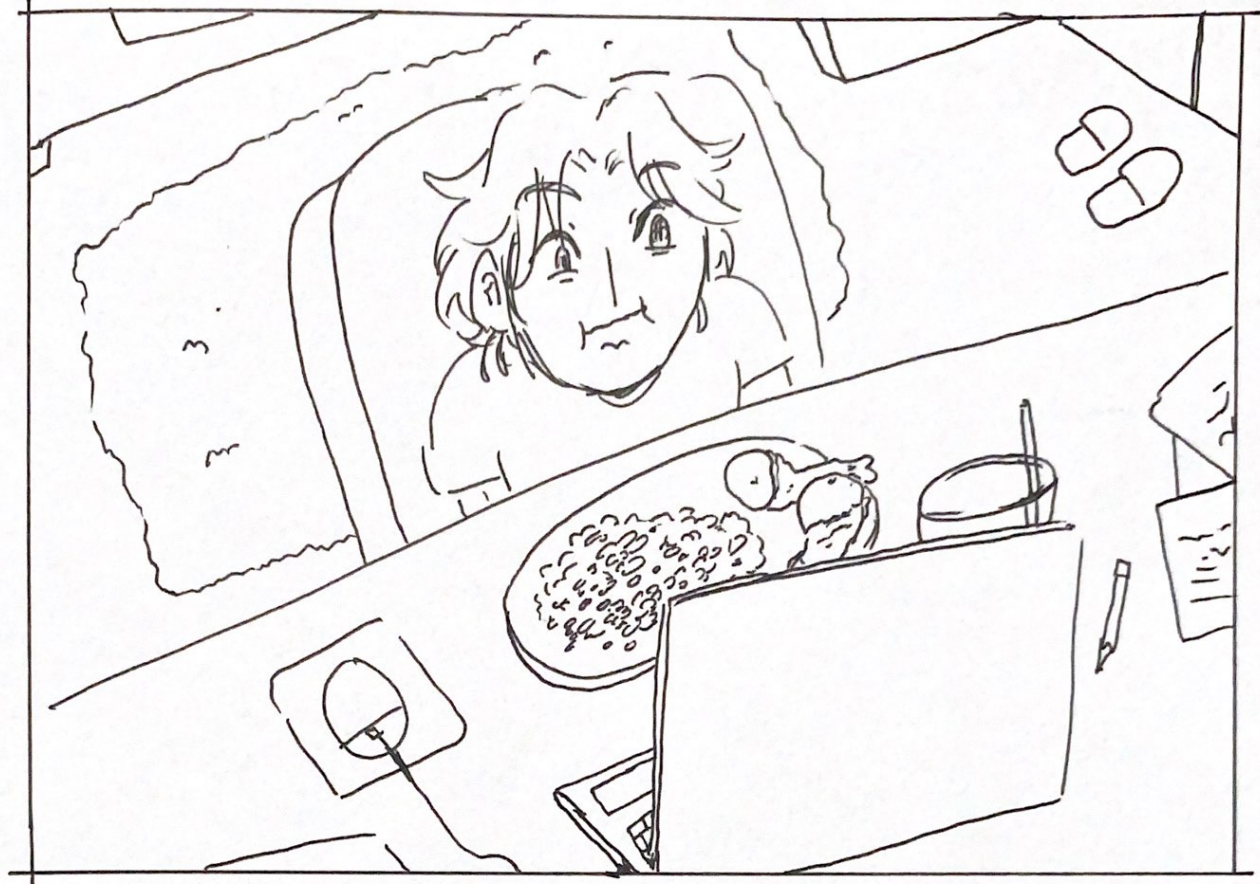
CHAPTER TWO!

Earlier today, I actually accidentally scratched myself. Well more like I tripped. You see earlier, Justin and I had a great idea to race on another in this one little side path in our neighbourhood. With my confidence in short length sprinting I agreed! The race began and my legs went! I was running so quickly my legs ~~were~~ ^{were} struggling to keep up! I stumbled forward and scraped my left knee and right elbow.



CHAPTER THREE!

Growing up, I wanted a scooter, but my family couldn't ever afford one—which is fine. I eventually was surprised by my dad ~~by~~ when he came one day with something that looked like a skateboard with a handle. He called it a "switchboard". I ran to Justin to tell him first. Then we both went to see it. A lot of our afternoons were spent with him riding his scooter, and me on this. He also of course teased me a lot on it, but it was fine!



CHAPTER FOUR!

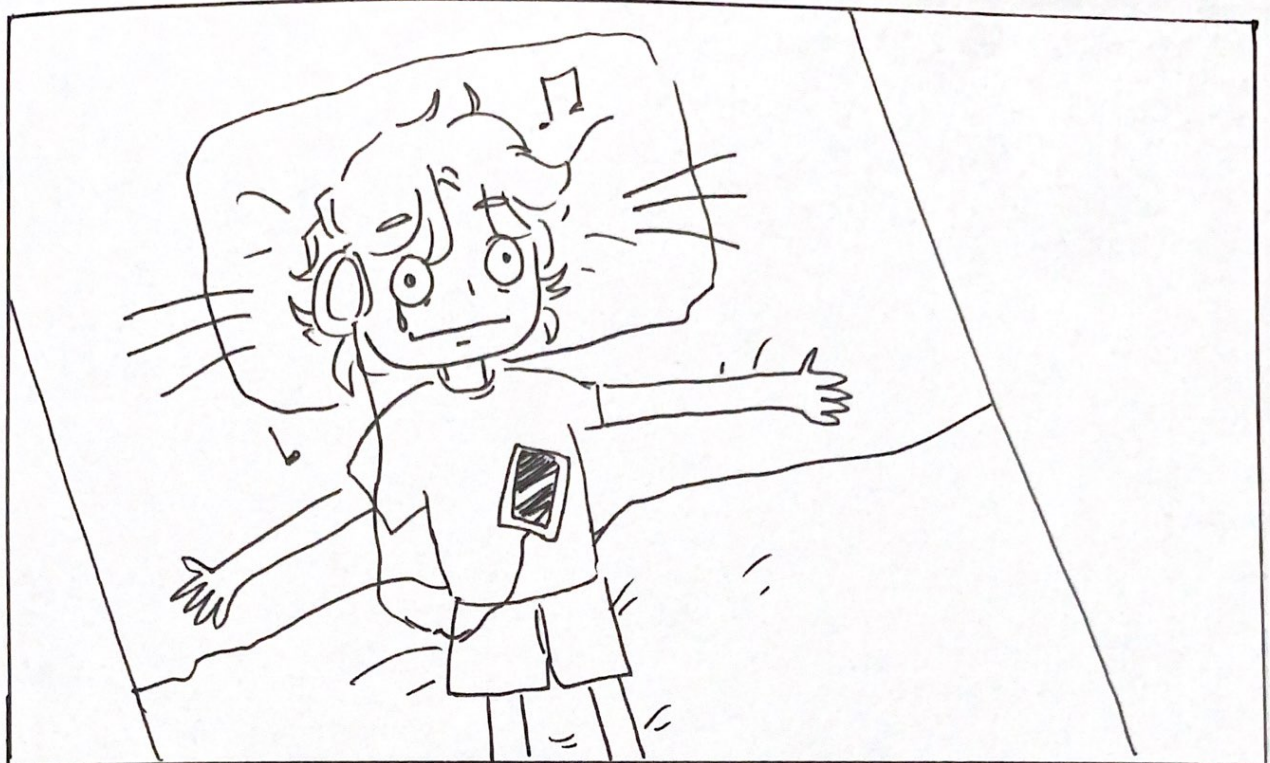
Growing up, I remember being teased a lot about Justin at school because we were such good friends. So I often heard from his friends that he liked me. I still remember being approached by one of his friends one day on the playground, "Hey ~~bro~~—y'know Justin has a crush on you." He said to me. "You should hurry and tell him you like him back!" Then he would laugh and run off. I didn't really like that friend of his anyways. Whenever he would say things like that to me, I would always just say "Good for him" or "Okay cool."



CHAPTER FIVE

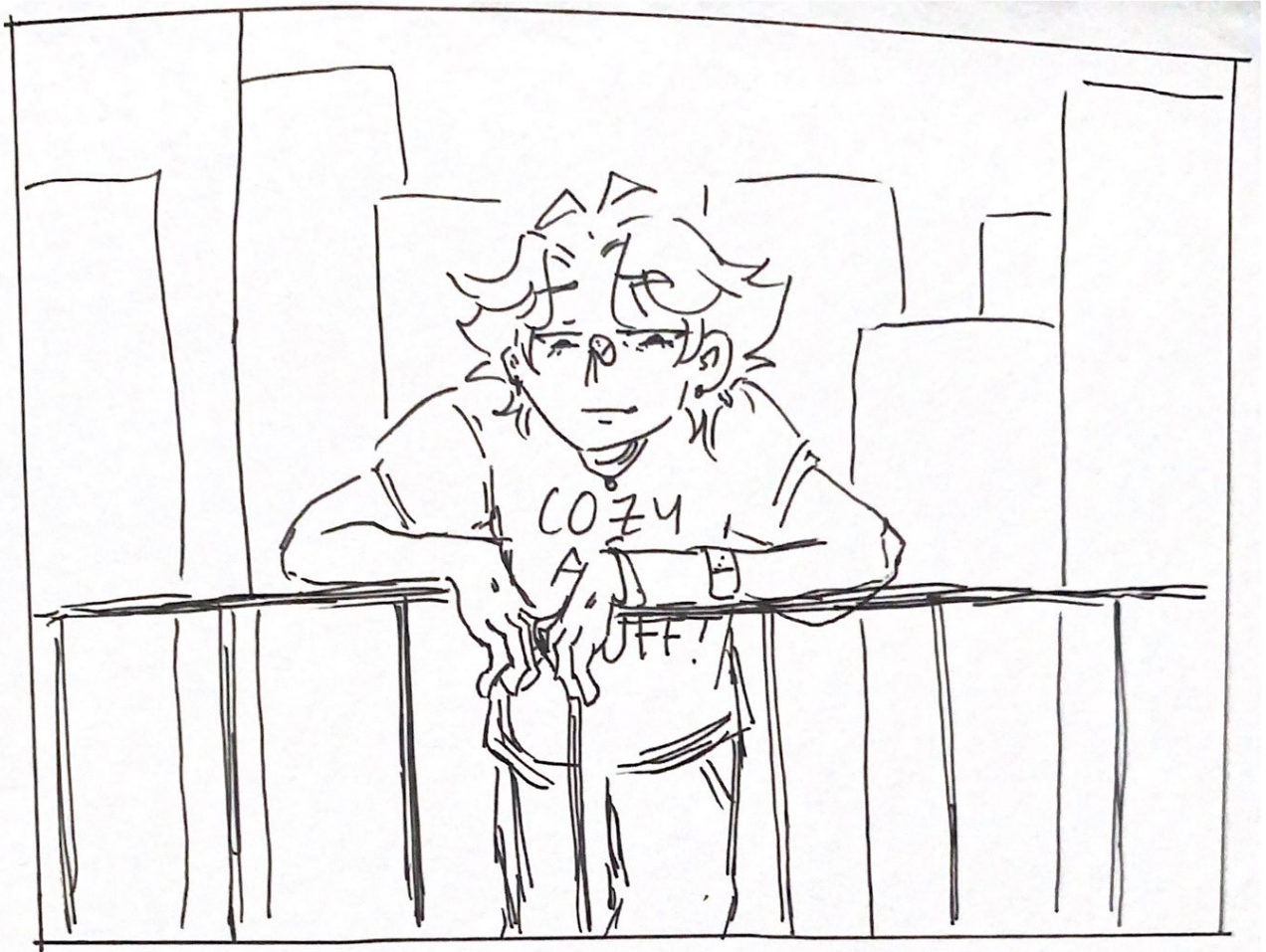
River

~~They~~ loves walks, especially when good music is combined with it! So on nice sunny days, they have a habit of looking up to the sky and making up shapes out of the clouds passing by. What's funny about ~~is~~ this is that, no matter how often they look up at the clouds, it seems like they always see random animals. Often times, it's not even real or ~~an~~ accurate looking. Even when walking in the real world, ~~they~~ ^{River} still finds ways to make up random characters out of the things they see. Almost like a fantasy out of the reality.



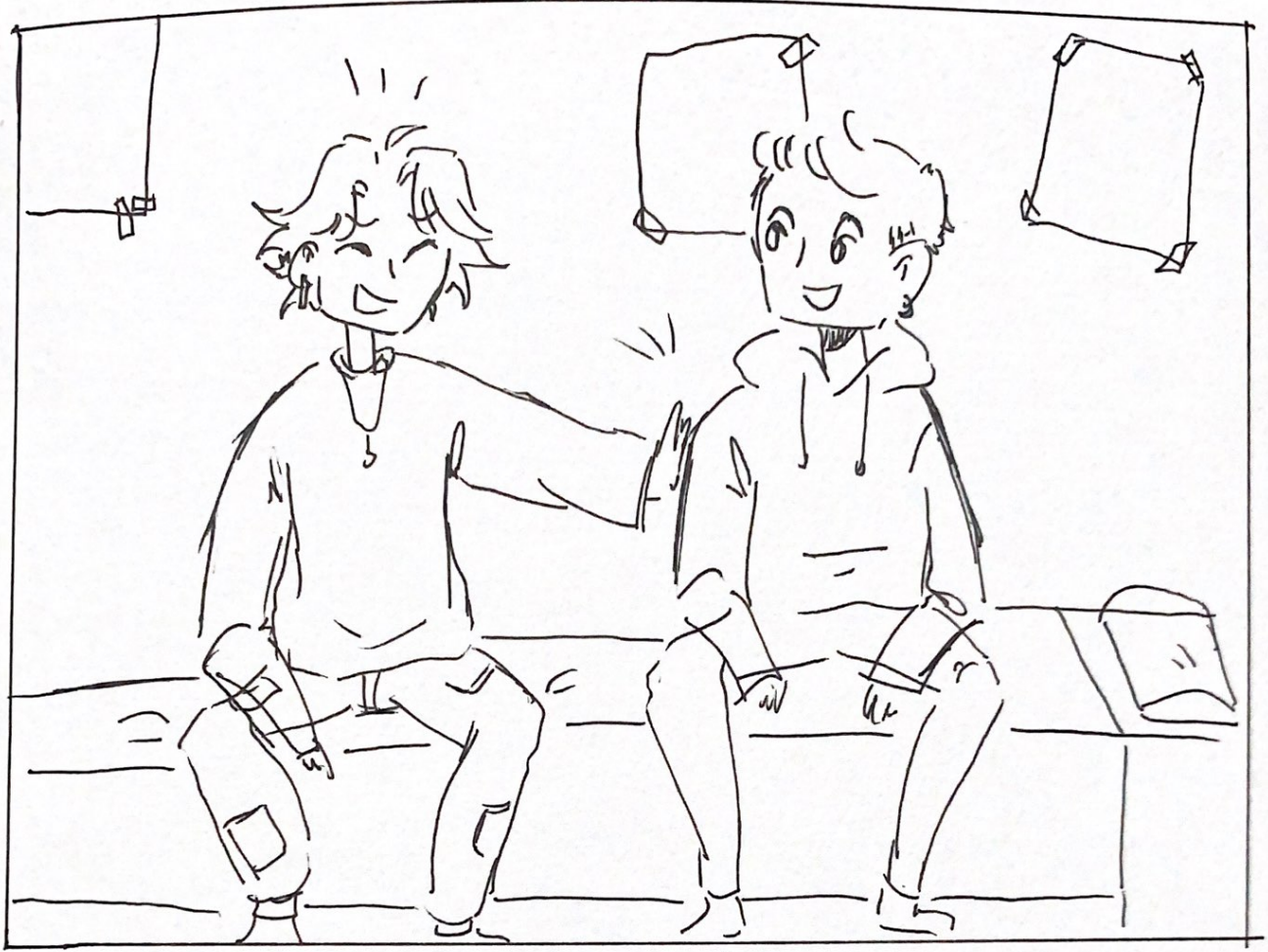
CHAPTER Six!

A few days ago I was shuffling through music, finding ~~a~~ something to listen to. Then I came across a song that reminded me of River. It was "Alien Blues" by Vundabar, and the lyrics reminded me of 'em. Listening to it, I couldn't help but think about them. The words was a mix of frustration, confusion and angst, especially the line: "The sun is fun, the land is dandy, I only talk to dogs because they don't understand me. My teeth are yellow, hello world, would you like me a little better if they were white like yours?" I couldn't help but remember River's internal issues.



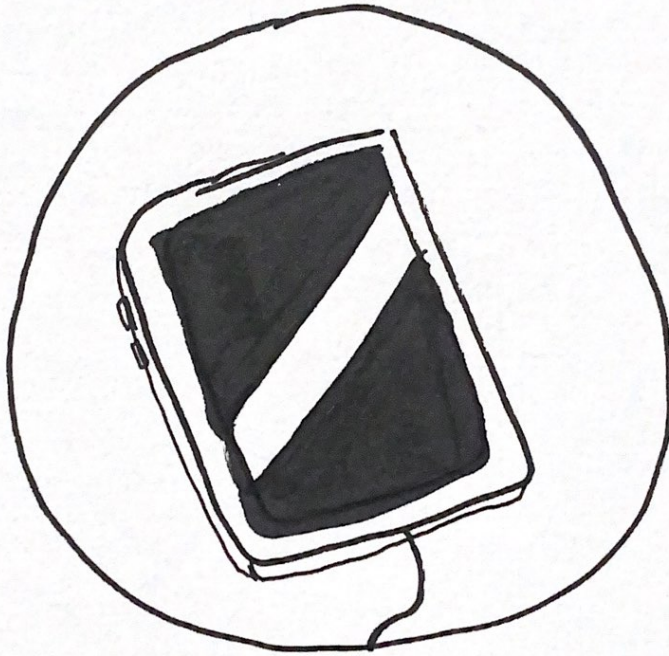
CHAPTER SEVEN!

As a special treat from themselves, River decides to take a short trip to a different city for a concert. The night after the show, they were slowly making way back to their hotel. Crossing the bridge, they paused and caught a glimpse of the city shining and moving as if it was alive. With a sigh, they smiled and said a thought out loud, "Life at night truly is a different experience."



CHAPTER EIGHT!

The last time I saw him was a few years ago. When my father stopped by his house and asked if I wanted to come. Naturally I did. Seeing him caught me off guard. Sitting in his room, I can see how much the years have changed us. I think we both noticed the change in appearance, interest and mannerisms. We still talked and joked like we did as kids.



by Auto Guarin
2022