



The Messenger

& The Skeptic

**by Karen Mitnick Liptak
illustrations by Jana Liptak**

The Messenger & The Skeptic

Cosmic Light Publishing

Tucson, Arizona

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She said, "I'm a Messenger
of the cosmic kind."
The Skeptic assumed
she was out of her mind.

Arrogant, too,
and annoying as hell,
saying she'd come
with a message to tell.

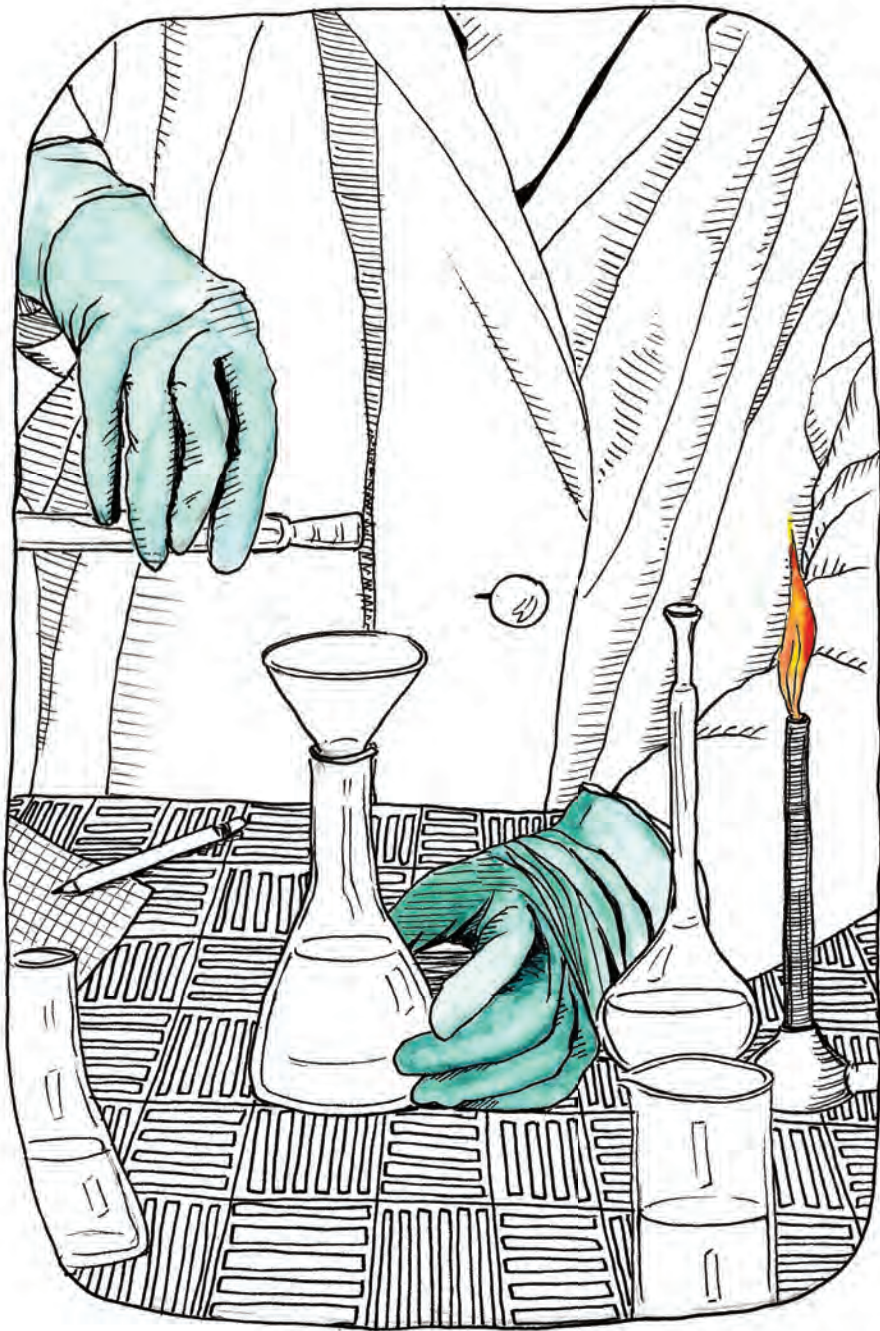
Leery of phonies,
honest to the bone,
The Skeptic put faith
in tests—and tests alone.

So, with truth his objective,
he locked her in a cave
with lab apparatus
to see how she'd behave.

His goal was to prove
by her actions and words,
her claim no more real
than flying Elephant Birds.



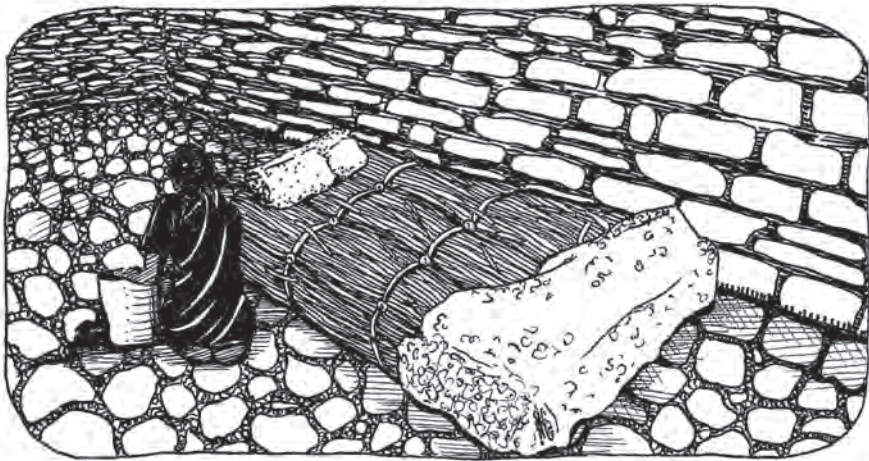
Elephant birds were enormous flightless members of the extinct family Aepyornithidae, native to the island of Madagascar. They are believed to have been over 10 feet tall, weighed close to 880 lbs., and became extinct in the 17th or 18th century.



He got right to work
in his gloves and lab coat,
expecting to soon
have the data to gloat.

He began with commands
in a growl worse than gruff,
and when she flinched, yelled,
"Messengers would be tough!"

He singed every hair
that grew on her head,
and each time she spoke,
ridiculed all that she said.



He forced her to sleep
on a mattress of straw,
and scrub every rock
on the cave's filthy floor.

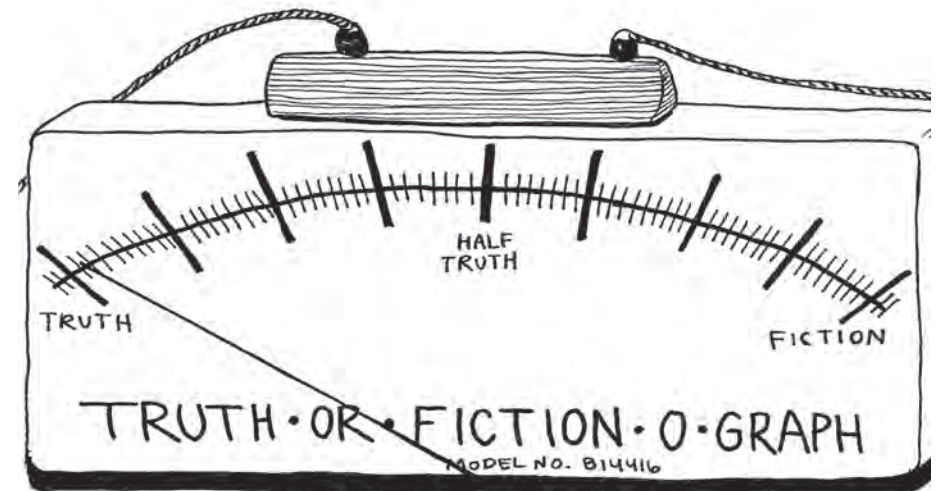
He forbade her fresh water
when she wanted a bath,
and sneered when she tried
to help him do math.

He refused her a light
so that she could read,
and bossed her around
like a bully on speed.

When her birthday arrived,
all he gave her was grief.
He tried robbing her faith
like the world's biggest thief.

But whenever he checked
his Truth-Or-Fiction-O-Graph,
he didn't know whether
to cry or to laugh.

It clearly revealed
she was being sincere.
She'd come with a message
he needed to hear.

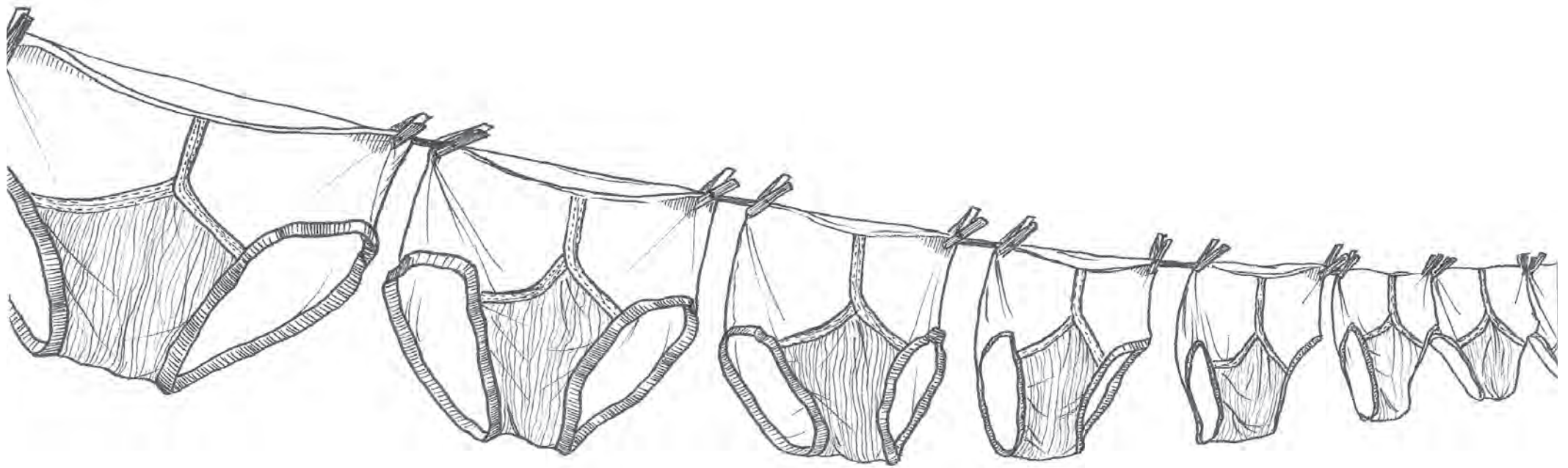


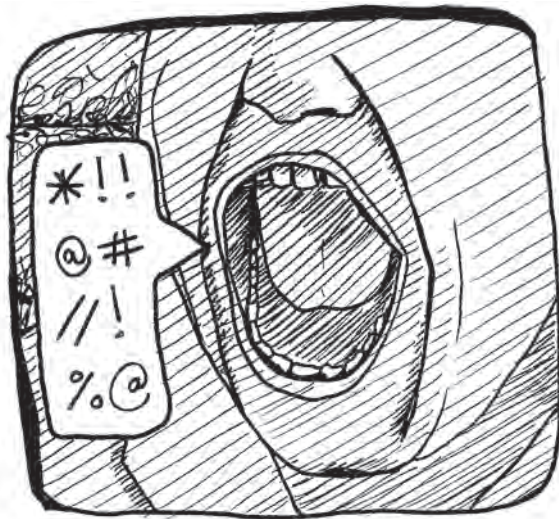
Refusing to think
he might not be right,
he slept not a wink,
running tests day and night.

"The truth is my God,"
he said time and again,
"And until you confess,
you're not leaving this pen!"

The more that she swore
not once had she lied,
the more his blood boiled
and tests multiplied.

He demanded she darn
his socks one by one,
then wash all his briefs,
and he had a ton.

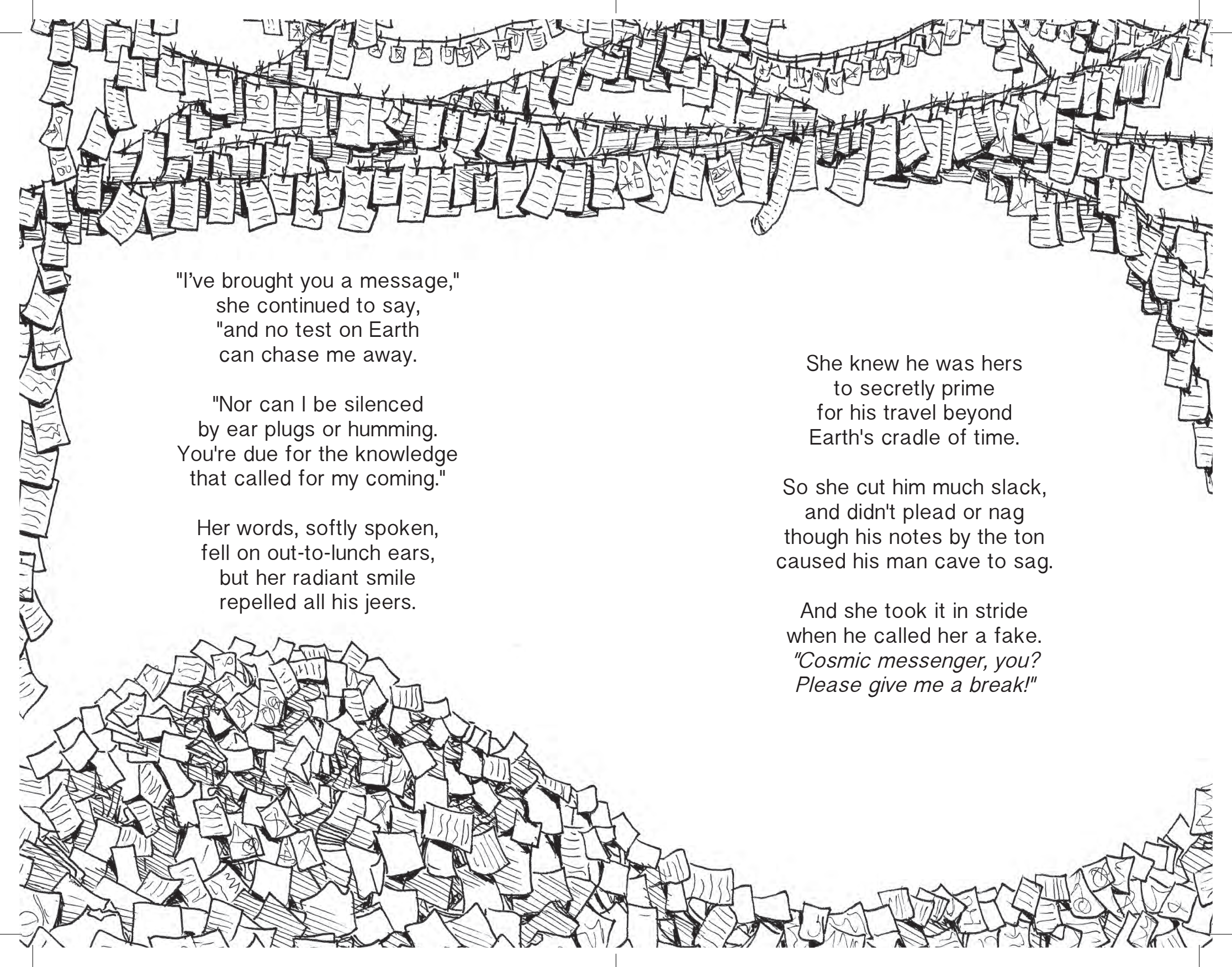




He belched in her face
like a drunk, sloppy lush,
and cursed her with words
that would make bouncers blush.

He said she was ugly,
and looked twice her age.
The verses she wrote
he called:





"I've brought you a message,"
she continued to say,
"and no test on Earth
can chase me away.

"Nor can I be silenced
by ear plugs or humming.
You're due for the knowledge
that called for my coming."

Her words, softly spoken,
fell on out-to-lunch ears,
but her radiant smile
repelled all his jeers.

She knew he was hers
to secretly prime
for his travel beyond
Earth's cradle of time.

So she cut him much slack,
and didn't plead or nag
though his notes by the ton
caused his man cave to sag.

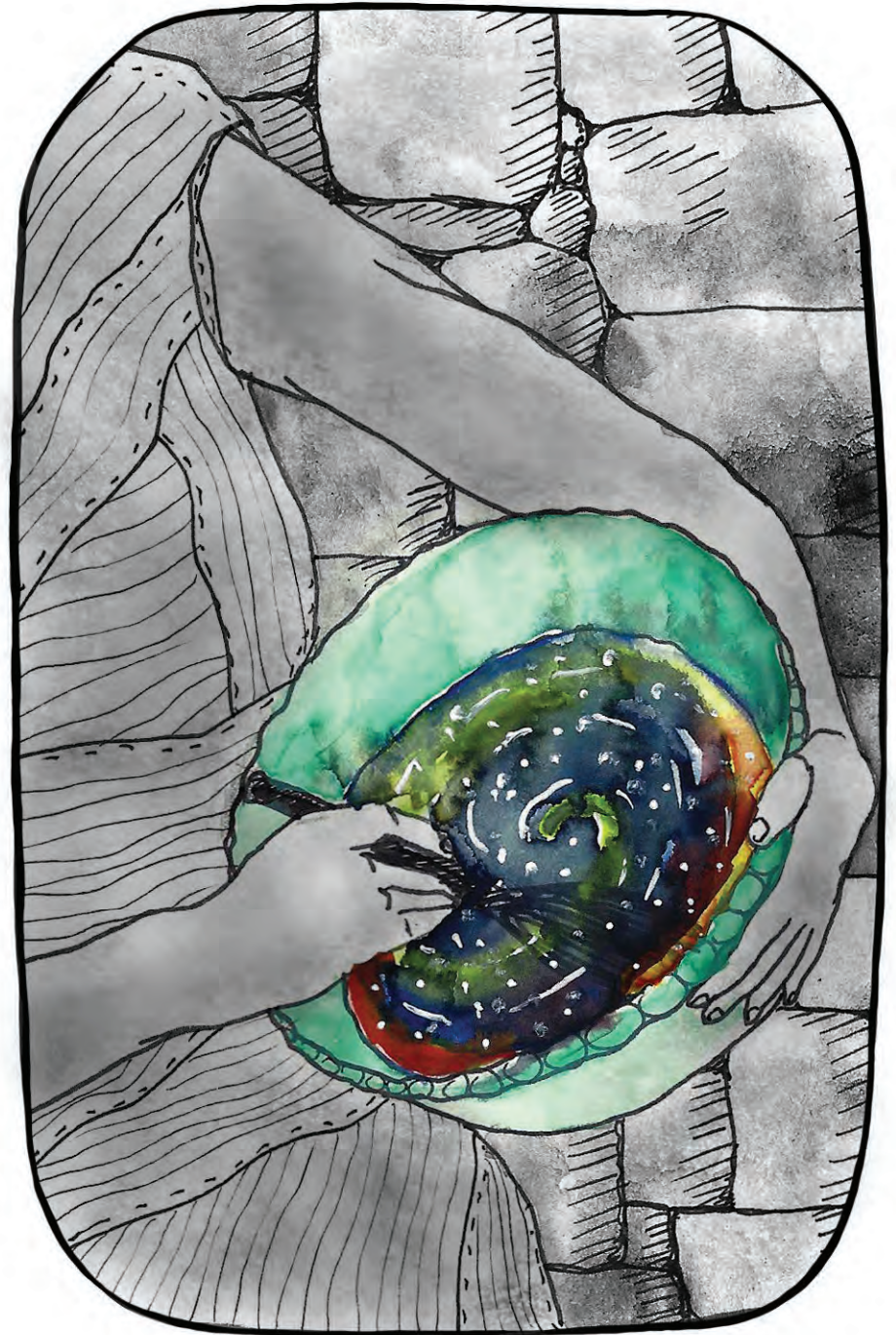
And she took it in stride
when he called her a fake.
*"Cosmic messenger, you?
Please give me a break!"*

As a matter of fact,
he got a breakthrough,
prompted by sensing
how little he knew;
his findings so baffling,
he couldn't help but think,
for his sanity's sake
he needed a shrink.

But the crack in his ego
was The Messenger's cue
that her strategy worked,
now on to step two.

So, acting demure,
she asked to please bake
a treat he would love,
her Deep Sky Angel Cake.

Despite bouts with doubts,
he granted her wish,
unaware cosmic gifts
went into her mix.

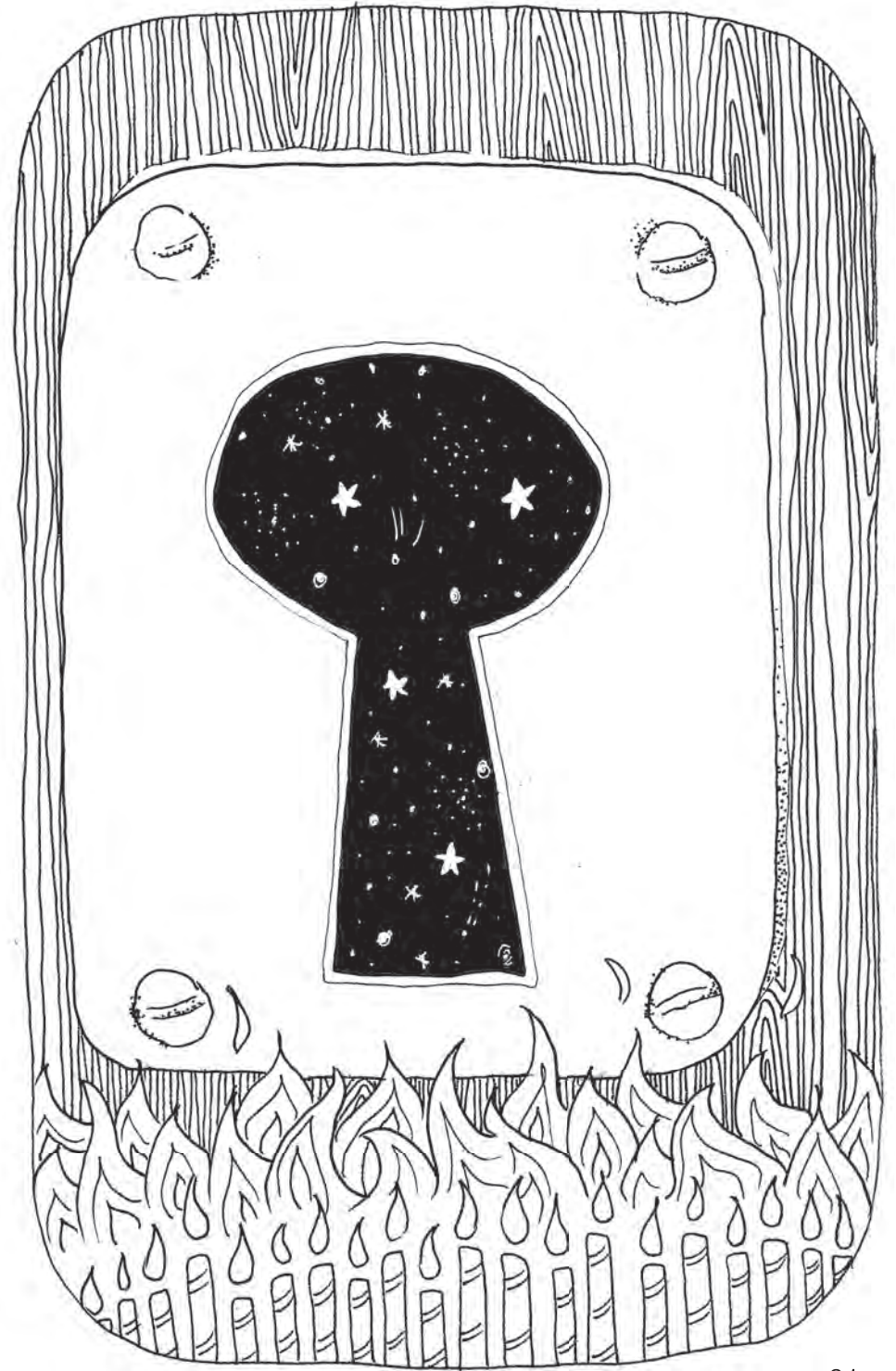


And when smells warm and sweet
filled the cave from her cake,
standard candles went on,
the most it would take.

Soon those candles blazed
mesmerizingly bright,
and The Skeptic, amazed,
in his mind found a light
that showed him a key
that led to a door
it fit perfectly.



With a leap of faith
he opened that door,
to behold a world
he'd dwelt in before,
and sensed he was due
to return there anew,
memories to reboot,
forecasts to compute,
his brain expanding
at so fast a pace,
he felt both dizzy
and abundant grace.





What The Skeptic next saw
made him gape in awe;
his past intermingling
with what was in store.

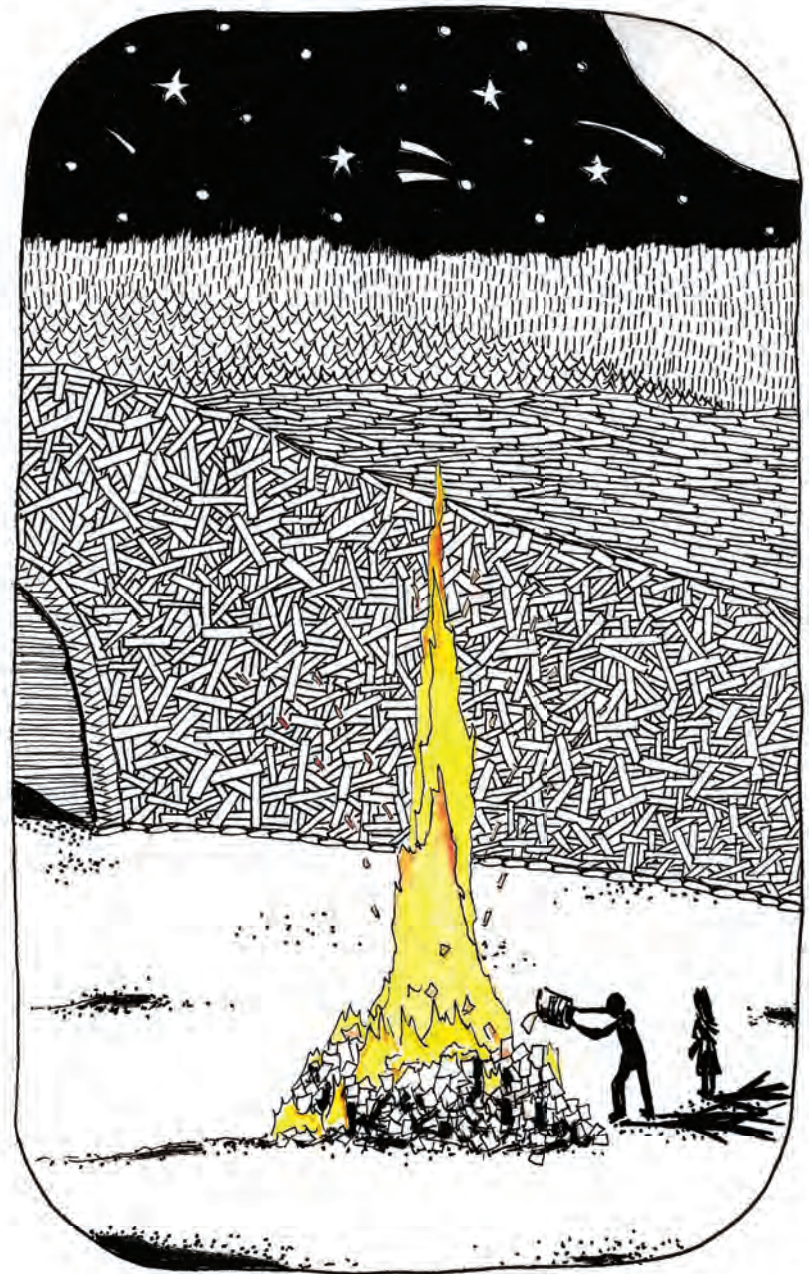
He viewed himself as a child
staring up at the stars,
and future kids giggling
in a playground on Mars.


Then, tasting the cake,
he received a new jolt.
Wisdom struck deep,
like a lightning bolt:

*Homo sapiens will become an ancient race.
Earthlings are needed to move on in space.*

"It appears," said The Skeptic,
"I've been living a dream,
with nothing the way
it once seemed to be!"

Then he tossed all his notes
into a fire surreal,
and as its sparks rose,
he felt himself heal.






At last, rightly humbled,
he told his now guest,
"I want to move on.
What must I do next?"

"Breathe," said The Messenger,
her words warm and hushed.
"Just go with the flow.
No need to feel rushed."

Above both their heads,
stars whispered, "Shalom,"
showing The Skeptic
the path leading home.

The next move he made
brought The Messenger joy:
she saw a man kneel,
where before stood a boy.



Then, reading his lips,
she watched him give praise
to the force transmitting
his species' next phase,
history ending,
the cosmos sending
a guide to those tending
tomorrow's new roots,
Earth's precious young fruits.

The ex-Skeptic marveled
as thoughts filled his brain
that as yet unborn Earthlings
will grow up to explain.

Meanwhile, mission over,
her delivery done,
The Messenger hoped
she might have some fun.

The very next instant,
with unseen pokes,
the energy creating
Earth's best cosmic jokes
made them turn to the east,
and what they saw in the sky
had them laughing in sync
as it went whooshing by.



Though skeptics insist
they're flightless and extinct,
this one did a nose dive,
and lovingly winked.



KAREN MITNICK LIPTAK: Karen is a native New Yorker, Brooklyn College graduate, and author of many nonfiction books, including *Out In The Night*, *Dating Dinosaurs And Other Old Things*, *Native American Sign Language*, and *Endangered Peoples*. A former documentary filmmaker and editorial director, she's currently a tour guide at Kitt Peak National Observatory, near Tucson, Arizona, where she offers visitors scientific facts and a cosmic perspective. She is indebted to her daughter, Jana, for artwork that brings *The Messenger & The Skeptic* to life.

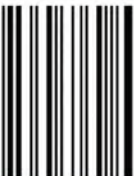
JANA LIPTAK: Jana is an artist, illustrator, and muralist born in Tucson, Arizona and currently based in Brooklyn, New York. She graduated from Edinburgh College of Art with an MFA in painting in 2008. Jana is a proud member of United Scenic Artists Local 829 in New York, with whom she paints sets for stage, film, and television. She is excited to collaborate on this project with her mother, Karen.



\$8.00

ISBN 978-0-692-92013-8

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