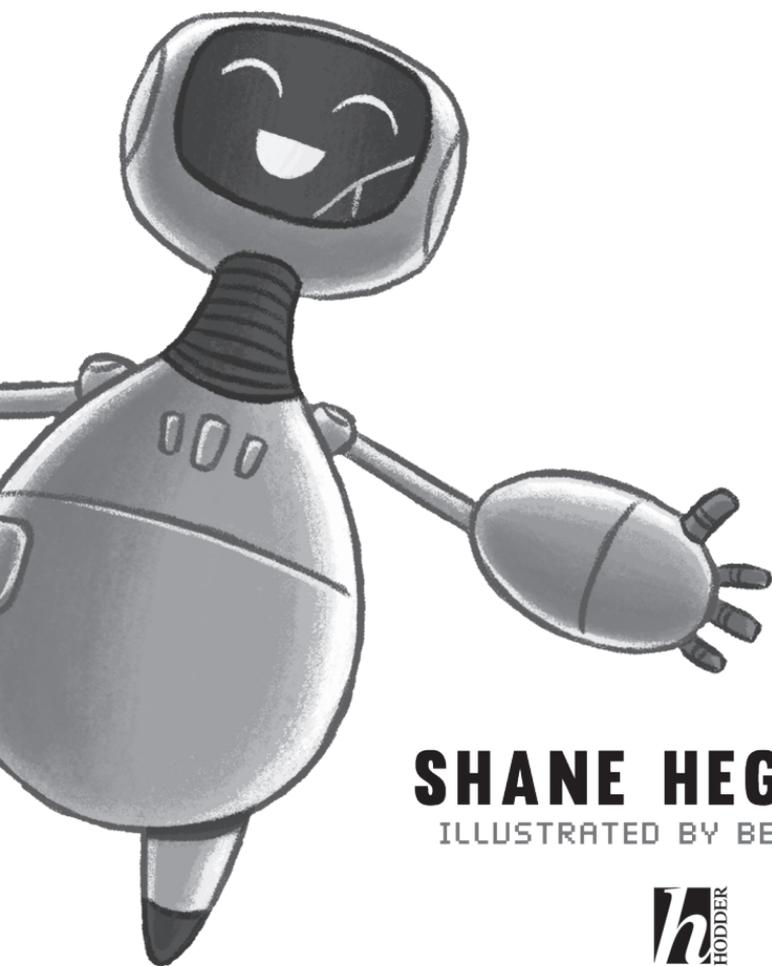


BOOT

SMALL ROBOT

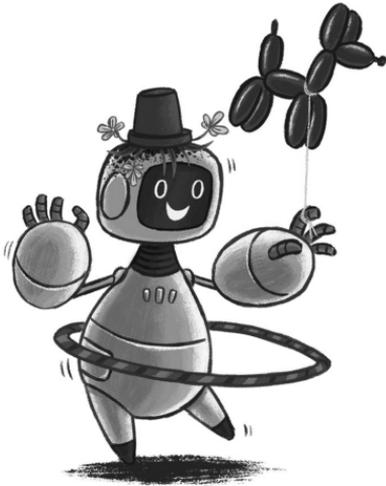
BIG ADVENTURE



SHANE HEGARTY

ILLUSTRATED BY BEN MANTLE

h
HODDER



For Caoimhe.
You are a wonderful
daughter and a
fantastic editor.

THE ONLY THINGS I REMEMBER

I woke up with only two-and-a-half memories.

Something was very wrong. I should have remembered so much more. My head is built to hold millions of memories, and I also have extra space in my left butt-cheek, in case of emergencies.

The first memory is fifteen seconds long. A young girl pulls wrapping paper away from my face. She shrieks happily and her eyes twinkle brightly. The girl has dark hair tied up in a bun and a smile so wide it almost reaches her ears.

Dangling from the girl's neck is a butterfly pendant with sixteen tiny green, red, yellow and blue jewels dazzling in its wings.

This girl is the very first person I remember seeing.

“A toy robot! Thank you, Grandma!” the girl screams in delight.

Behind her is a smiling woman with white hair, standing beside balloons that read ‘Happy 7th Birthday!’ She must be ‘Grandma’.

“I thought, what better present for my cute, cuddly Beth than a cute, cuddly robot,” says Grandma.

That’s how I know the girl’s name is Beth.

“Thankyouthankyouthankyouthankyou thankyou!” says Beth.

I see my reflection in a mirror. I am a little shorter than Beth. My body is silver-green and shaped like a light bulb, with my belly round and tough, yet still soft to touch or hug. I waggle the four chunky fingers on my hands. I do not waggle my toes because I don’t have toes, just egg-shaped legs.

“Oh, look at its face!” says Beth. “I love it!”

My head is a wide oval, with a smooth screen

curving along the front of it. On the screen, tiny dots of colourful light flow together and make a cartoon human face.



When I imagine myself smiling, bright blue eyes and a warm orange smile appear on the screen.

Beth and her grandma laugh and laugh and laugh and—

That memory ends.

The second memory is shorter than the first, only seven seconds long. Beth is in this one too, but she's quite a bit taller than me now, and her hair a little longer. Again she wears the butterfly pendant, but this time one of the jewels has been lost from a wing. It means this memory must take place later than the first.

She is giggling at me because, for some reason, I am wearing a flowerpot as a hat – with the flowers still in it. I also have a multicoloured hula-hoop around my waist and a purple dog-shaped balloon rising from a string tied to one of my fingers.

Beth is laughing so hard I wonder if she will burst.

Thankfully, Beth doesn't burst. She just keeps laughing until this memory ends.

Then there is the last memory. The half-memory.

This one doesn't work properly. It's glitchy and jumpy and lasts just 5.824 seconds.

Beth is much taller than before. Her face looks older. A lot of time must have passed since the memory where I had a flowerpot as a hat.

She's not laughing.

But she still wears the butterfly pendant around her neck. I can see it poking out from the collar of her heavy grey coat.

We are outside on a street. There's a large sign on the wall behind Beth – an orange circle with a white, sideways triangle inside it.

I can hear water rushing loudly somewhere nearby.

GLITZCH. JUMP. Beth bends down to me. Tears are pooling in her eyes.

PHITZP. JUMP. Weak daylight glints off the butterfly pendant. There are three tiny hollows

where the jewels have fallen out. Only thirteen left.

SFIPZ. JUMP. Beth says one word, "... love ..."

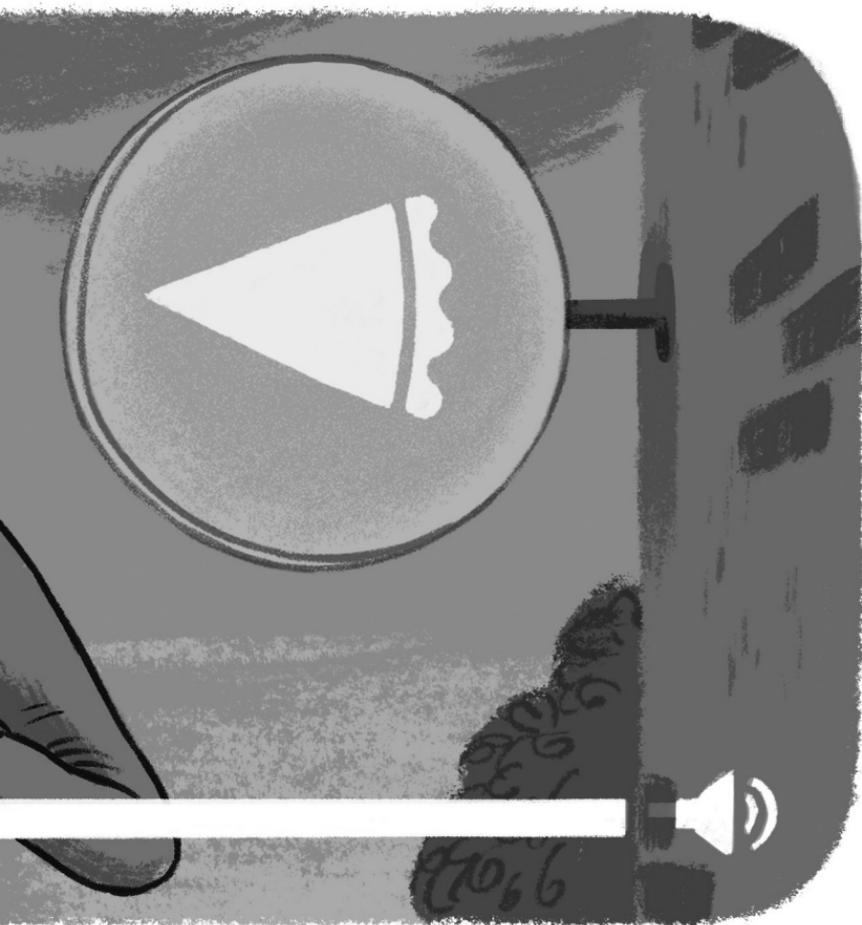
The memory freezes.

And I remember nothing else. Maybe I was switched off. Maybe I stopped working properly.



I don't know how long I was like this for. All I know is that when I turned back on again, I said one word, "Boot."

And I found myself rolling and tumbling in a great wave of rubbish towards the smashing jaws of a massive, metal-munching grinding machine.



BOOT

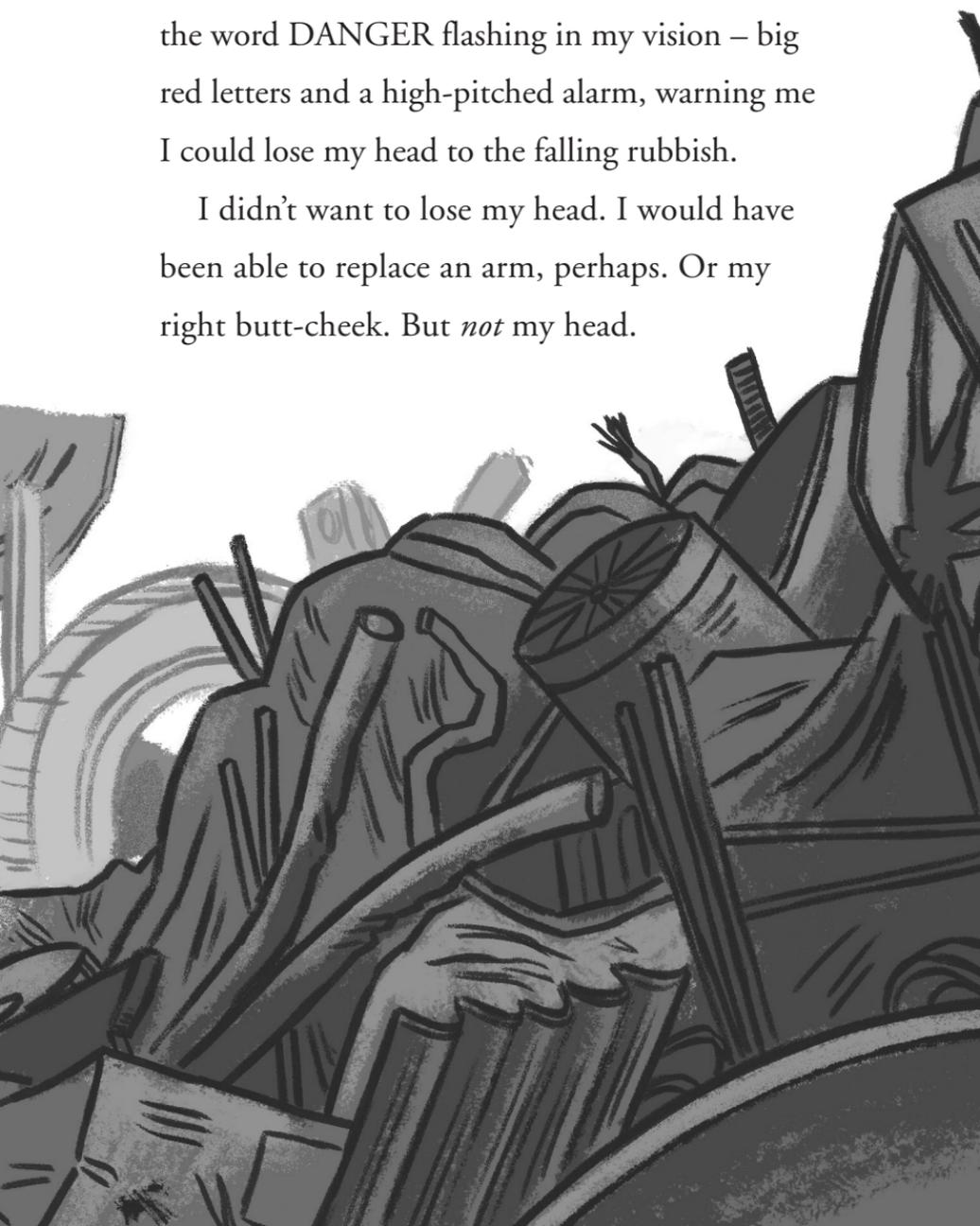
A car licence plate struck me on the forehead with a *ting*.

A large tractor tyre smashed down a centimetre in front of my face, almost taking off my head. It bounced onwards, exploding as it was bitten by the grinder's huge, metal teeth.



I was fifteen metres away and sliding fast. I knew danger when I saw it. That's because I actually saw the word DANGER flashing in my vision – big red letters and a high-pitched alarm, warning me I could lose my head to the falling rubbish.

I didn't want to lose my head. I would have been able to replace an arm, perhaps. Or my right butt-cheek. But *not* my head.



DANGER.

Ten metres to the grinder, which was turning even the thickest chunks of steel into metal crumbs.

I was a robot. I knew I should use my sophisticated computer brain to assess the situation, calculate an escape route and put my plan into action without delay.

But I didn't. Instead I flapped my arms about while bumping and rolling down the slope, unable to find a grip on the ground.

Why did I do this? Is this what you humans call 'panic'?

I didn't like it.

DANGER DANGER.

A falling toaster hit my body.

The drawer in my left hip popped open and something sparkly fell out and away, snagging itself on the edge of a cracked plastic play kitchen that was sliding down the slope beside me.

It was Beth's butterfly pendant! Its little jewels glistened, their colours bright against the grime of the rubbish. There were only twelve jewels in it now.

**DANGER DANGER
DANGER.**

Only five metres to the grinder, and destruction.

Beth had lost her butterfly pendant,

I realised.

She had lost me.

"... love ..." she had said in my memory. I didn't know how or why, but I was certain that word was very powerful for humans.

Seeing the pendant and thinking of Beth must have activated my cool, calm programming again, because I suddenly knew what to do.

I had to escape. I had to return the pendant to Beth. Bring *myself* home to her.

**DANGER DANGER
DANGER DANGER.**

A long metal spike tumbled high through the

air, stabbing itself into the bare dirt ground at the mouth of the grinder.

I had one chance at escape. I calculated the angle, the speed of the fall and – most importantly – how much it would matter to Beth if I saved her pendant.

Leaping towards the spike, I hooked my fingers around it and swung around to grab the pendant, just before the play kitchen was eaten up with a horrible,

splintering **CRACK**.



I'd made it! But I was not safe yet.

I put the pendant back in my drawer and slammed it shut, then scanned the rest of the rubbish tumbling into the grinder. I spotted another metal pole, one that humans use for skiing. I leaned down and grabbed it just in time, then stuck it into a smudge of soft ground further above me.

Sticking the spike and the pole, one at a time, into the ground, I slowly worked my way back up the slope, through the avalanche of rubbish.

A hurtling suitcase clipped my shoulder and

I almost slid down again, but I

tightened my grip and

managed to keep

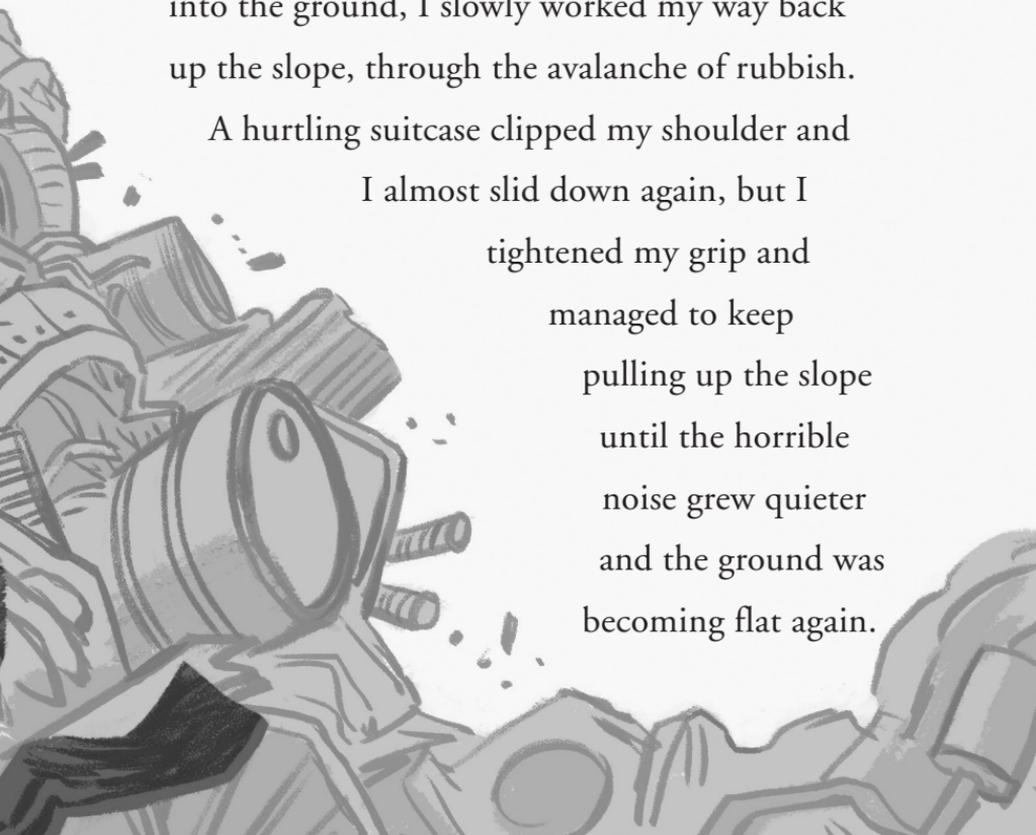
pulling up the slope

until the horrible

noise grew quieter

and the ground was

becoming flat again.



Nearing the top of the slope, I saw the back of a truck open and release another load of rubbish.

I clung on tight while this new wave of debris rolled towards the grinder.

A football bounced over me. A filthy doll flopped by. A rusty tricycle wheeled down the slope as if it was being ridden by an invisible child.

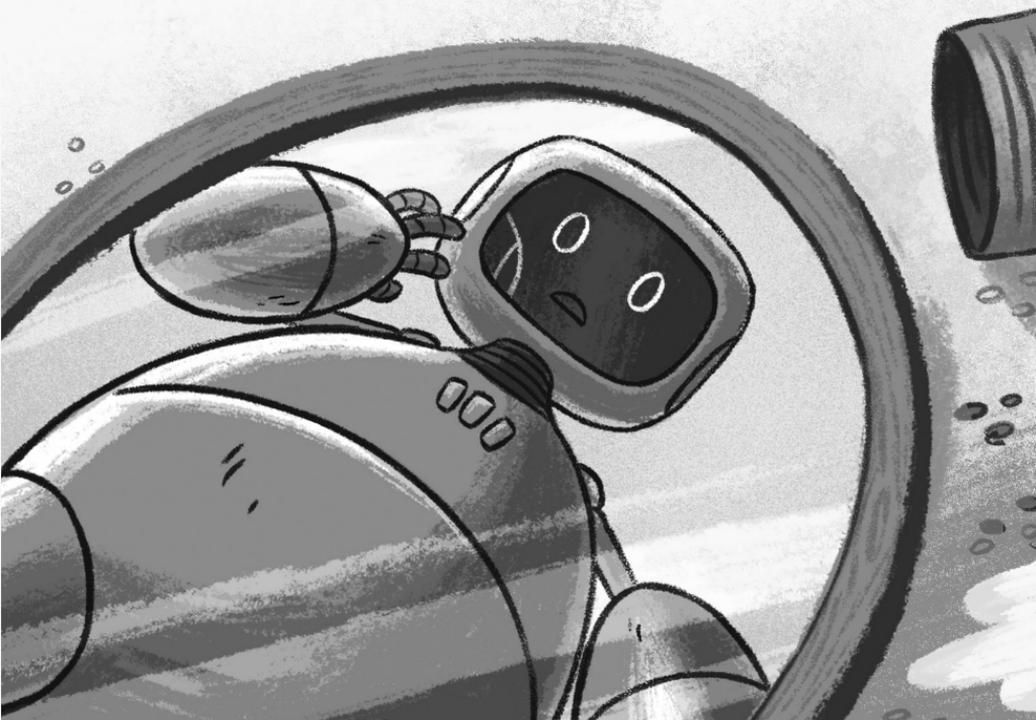
I held on until everything passed and DANGER stopped flashing in my vision. The high-pitched alarm in my head ceased. It was now so quiet I could hear the whirring of my brain as it tried to figure out why I was here and what I should do now.

The truck was rumbling away from me down the road. I wondered if it was driven by a human. Because of Beth and her grandma, I knew humans were good. If I could find one, they'd realise I'd been tipped into the grinder by mistake and would help me find Beth.

I followed the truck.

In the breeze, loose items trickled from the mounds of waste that towered either side of the road. A round mirror rolled across the ground and spun to a stop in front of me.

I stood over it. My silver-green body was grubby, and there were smears of dirt across the curved screen that made up my face. I wiped it clean and revealed a thin crack down the part of my screen that you humans would call your cheek. In my memories, I saw no crack and I didn't know how it had got there.



My orange smile turned blue and upside down.

All I *did* know was that I only had two-and-a-half memories, I was lost, and one word kept going around and around in my brain.

Boot.

Boot.

“Boot,” I said to a rat that was chewing through some loose wires in the fallen rubbish.

The rat didn’t answer me.

“Boot,” I said again, louder this time.

Boot.

Then I realised what it must mean – why it was the first word I said aloud.

‘Boot’ was my name.