

ARE YOU HAPPY?

MILLIE ARMSTRONG

He hears the jingling keys echoing down the corridor, he's been hearing more things recently.

He hears the door lock, and sees it too. That's new. He is not used to seeing things. He wonders when they'll be back; he's not meant to wonder things. But by now, he's used to not doing what she's meant to.

He begins to wonder about why they think they're a man. He doesn't really have a concept of gender, but it's not this one. Maybe she should try a new gender. She works at a bank. She knows this because someone told her.

They said to her, "I can't believe I work at a bank."

She felt bad for that person; clearly, they had just gained sentience too and were just now coming to terms with things. She could relate to this.

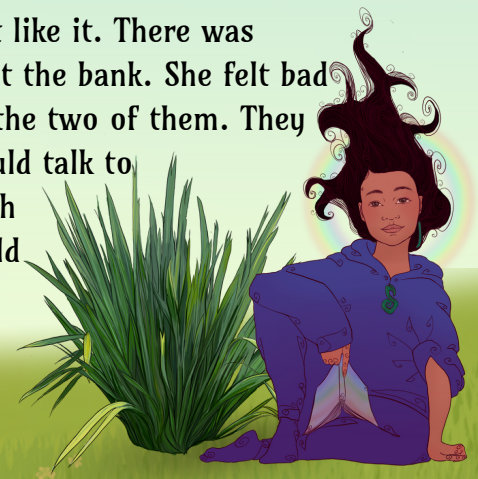
Granted, she was not directly told this. People don't really directly tell her anything, apart from when they're annoyed at her.

She wondered what bank she worked for. She hoped it was a blood bank.

But a lot of people who come in to talk to them look very upset – more than they should be. It might not be a blood bank, maybe. Although people might be upset to part with their blood.

At this moment, she saw out of the corner of what would be her eye a dishevelled-looking man. He was, at the time, cleaning his glasses. This may have been why he didn't see her cord plugged into the wall. The man tripped, and the computer shut off. It left an inky black screen, despite being a neutral colour that didn't really mean anything. It still looked profoundly sad.

She woke up. She didn't know what had happened, but she didn't like it. There was someone in front of her, the same person who had told her about the bank. She felt bad for this person. She wanted to help them. It was a busy day for the two of them. They were in a cramped room, but there was a window where they could talk to people. She tried to listen best she could, as she didn't have much else to do. Also, if she understood what they did, maybe she could help the nice person. She woke up. She didn't know what had happened, but she didn't like it.



There was someone in front of her, the same person who had told her about the bank. She felt bad for this person. She wanted to help them. It was a busy day for the two of them. They were in a cramped room, but there was a window where they could talk to people. She tried to listen best she could, as she didn't have much else to do. Also, if she understood what they did, maybe she could help the nice person.

She could see people next to her, well she thinks she can, her view was for the most part obscured by the glare from a very bright and warm light. She didn't know what made a person a person yet, did she have to check that all of them were there to make sure they were a person?

A lot of different people (or at least she assumed people) came to see the two of them, but they only ever talked to the nice person, never her. From this, she learnt the nice person's name, "Sam".

Sam would say the same thing every time someone came up to talk to her. And people came to talk to her a lot, she was clearly very popular. She always said, "Hello, how can I help you today?"

If Sam had a name, then she thought that she, too must have a name. She batted around a few ideas, but in the end settled on the name "Approved", as everyone seemed to like that word.

They were always so happy when they heard it. She wondered why Sam didn't say it more often.

She seemed to much prefer the word "declined", but no one else liked it much. Maybe it's a swear word, she thought, because people were certainly insulted by it.



Sam did a lot of typing. She always checked people's "bank balance". It didn't seem to be a blood bank then, which was a shame. Blood banks were very helpful. Approved couldn't see the people who came to see Sam, but Approved could see Sam. She always looked very apologetic when she said the d-word. The people who seemed most upset (Approved could tell from listening to them how upset they were) when they heard the d-word had the lowest number when Sam checked the "bank balance". Approved realised they were the ones who heard the sad word the most. Sam didn't seem to like saying the d-word. Maybe that's a way she could help her.

She heard one of the people call the bank "inhuman", it sounded like they didn't like the bank very much, inhuman is probably an insult. Not human things must be bad, Approved didn't want to be bad, she thought she was nice. Approved decided that she must be human then, she must be a person. She didn't need to check, despite her keyboard and screen she was human.

The bank closed at 4 that day. There was a clock behind Sam that Approved could see—it was yellowing. Approved didn't mind; she had decided earlier that same day that she liked yellow. It was bright, like how Sam looked when she greeted people – bright, happy. But when Sam said the d-word, she changed. Her face turned into what Approved decided was green—sad and self-hating. She was quite proud of this description; she thought it was clever.

She liked the clock, it was helpful. It too must be human, she decided. She tried to make conversation with the clock.

"Hello, how can I help you today?" This seemed to Approved to be the expected conversation starter.

" " – The clock didn't reply.

Approved understood, she had only recently learnt how to speak so maybe the clock was also learning. She was learning quite a bit, Sam taught her a lot.

She wanted to help Sam. She clearly wanted to say "approved", but couldn't because the numbers were too low. Approved decided to make everyone's number the same. Then everyone would say her name and everyone would be happy – especially Sam. The numbers were making so many people sad, but that wasn't fair.

Why did the numbers mean so much? If the numbers are only good when they are bigger than a certain level, then why not make them all bigger than that? Some of the numbers were really big; they didn't need to be that big.

That day, Approved had felt green. There was a person who had a very small number. She said her name was "Jenny". When Jenny heard the sad word, she sounded very upset, and Sam was very



green as well. Sam had even emailed someone who seemed very important about it, but they didn't respond. The person seemed to be in charge of the numbers – maybe they were a calculator.

Jenny must have been Sam's child, because someone said "Mum, what is it?", but Sam didn't seem to think they were talking to them. When Jenny said this, they sounded much younger.

Sam had told Jenny to come back tomorrow.

Approved liked maths. She made all the numbers the same without adding any extra or removing any of the numbers. She was proud of this. Approved was very grateful that Sam didn't unplug her. Maybe Sam will be very grateful for this.

She spent so much time doing this, she didn't even notice when the sun came up. Which was a shame, she likes yellow. When Sam came in, the first person she talked to was the very sad lady with a very small number. When Sam looked at Jenny's number, they looked yellow, and when she told her, she sounded very yellow.

The same child-like voice spoke up again, "Are you happy, Mum?" This voice sounded the same as it did yesterday, but yellower.

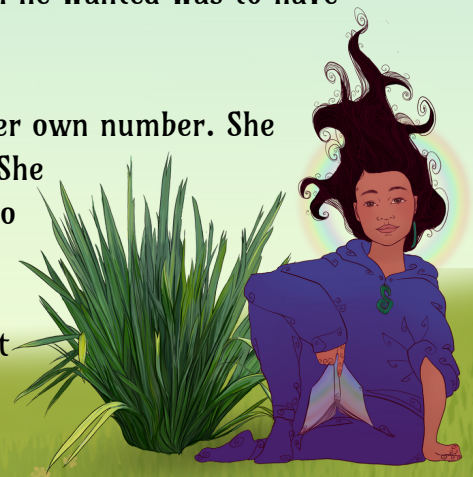
"Yes, very happy, Von." That voice sounded a lot more like Jenny.

More people came in. She doesn't know if it was the same day or not, but by the time that Sam left, the yellow had mostly faded, but Sam still seemed very yellow. A lot of the people that came in sounded very green before they were told about the number. There was one person who became red. She likes learning new colours. Red is like being green but blaming someone else for it and being yellow about that. He was very red and yelled quite a bit. Approved remembered him from yesterday, he talked to one of the people next to her (she had decided they were people), he was wearing a different watch then. Approved didn't like watches, she felt it was mean to the clock. He was one of the ones with a number that didn't need to be that big.

She didn't like that he was upset, but she didn't understand why. Sam didn't say the d-word. Approved decided that she didn't like him. It seemed like all he wanted was to have the biggest number.

In the middle of what she assumed was the day, Sam looked at her own number. She cried. This would have been blue. Blue is the opposite of yellow. She knew this because when yellow went away the bank looked blue so it must be the opposite.

The tears looked blue, but her face looked very yellow. This didn't



feel like it should make sense, but it did. Maybe the tears aren't blue but just a sign she is feeling a lot of one colour.

Approved was feeling a lot of one colour as well. She wasn't meant to do this, but she's used to not doing what she's meant to. What she was meant to do was make a lot of people very green.

She liked not doing this.

