

*Written by*  
VICTOR FERNANDO R. OCAMPO

# ~ HERE BE ~ DRAGONS

*Illustrated by* JON JAYLO





**I**n the long days before her sister was born, Isabella went to the *panaderia* every afternoon to buy her mother's favorite bread.

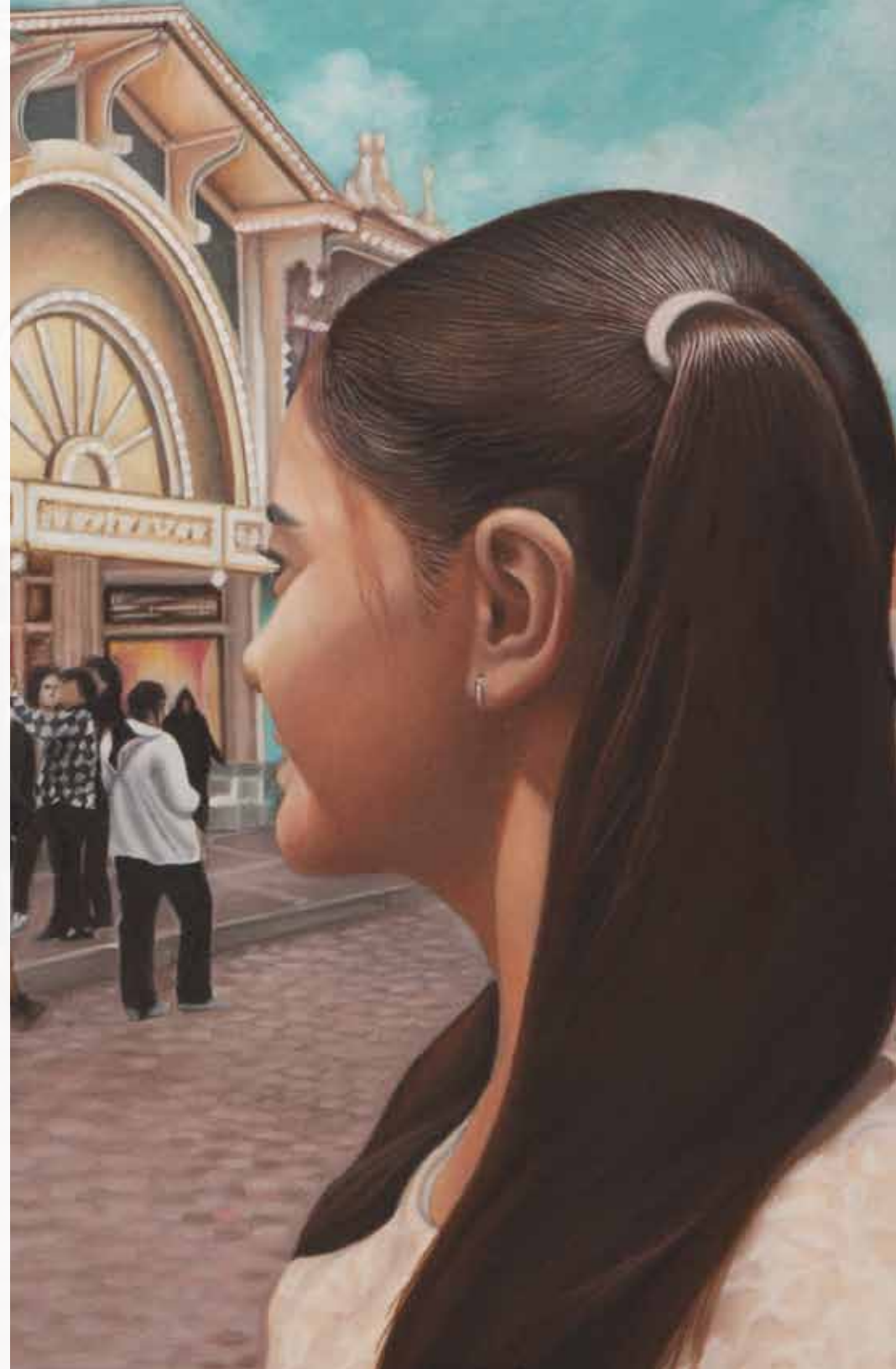
She might pick some flowers along the way. Otherwise, Isabella was sent out at the same time every day, carrying the same amount of coins. She was also given the same admonition not to tarry nor talk to strangers, and most importantly, to buy the same *pan de coco* that her mother loved to eat at exactly four o'clock p.m. with a warm glass of milk.



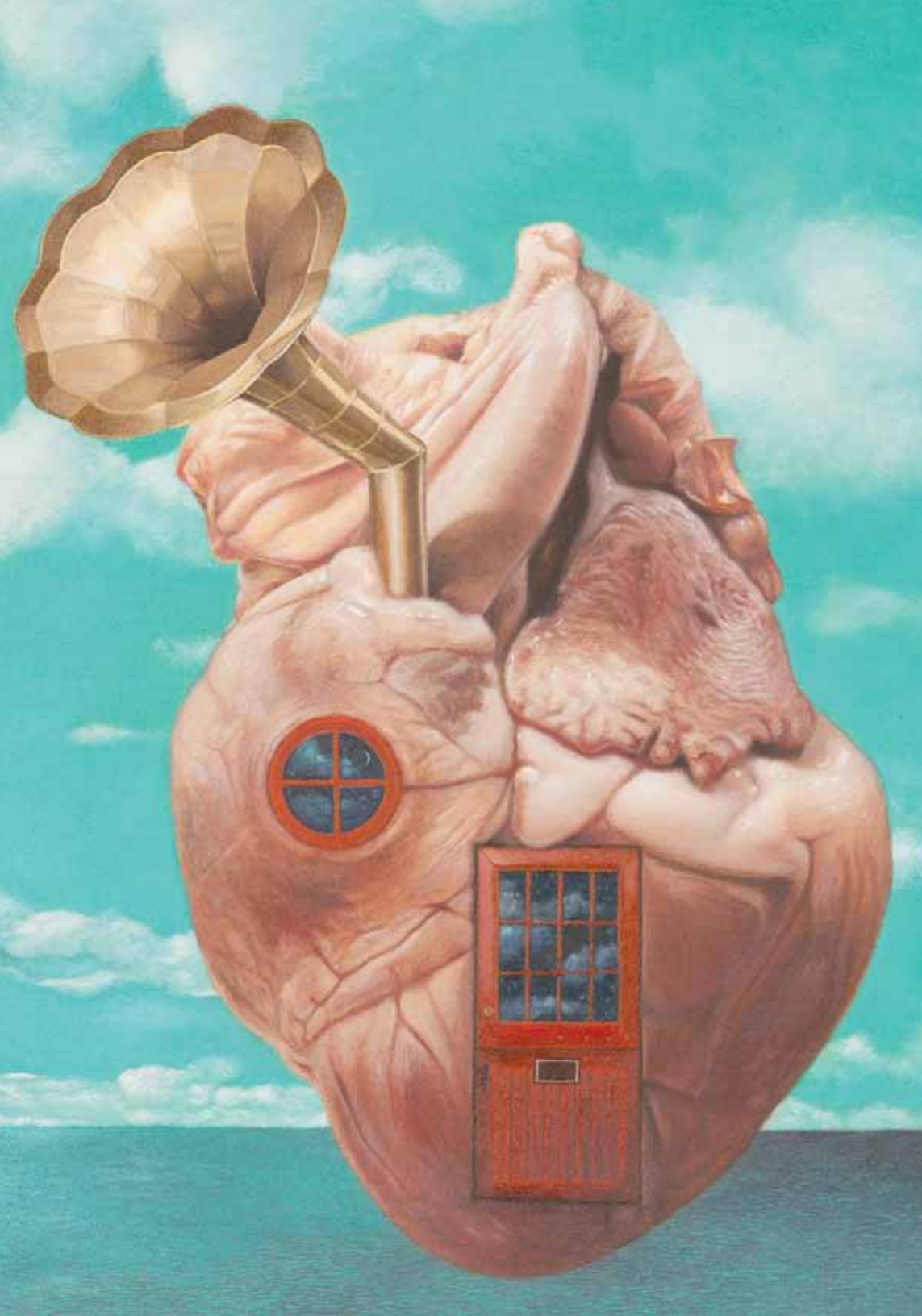


One unusual day, a new shop opened in a row of old houses. The store had a peculiar name – *Here Be Dragons* – and it sold nothing but maps.

Isabella loved maps with a great passion! Her father owned a dog-eared *Atlas of the World* which she had kept hidden under her bed. Every night, she would stick her finger into the middle of the book and imagine herself in Addis Ababa, Saskatchewan, Ulan Bator, or Llanfairpwllgwyngyll.







But Isabella could not bear to enter the strange store that called constantly to her heart. Her parents would offer to take her there, but she always refused – afraid that once she had seen all the maps they sold, there would no longer be any place for mystery and imagination.

“The proprietor, Mr. Strabo, is a very nice old man,” her father said. “I told him that you loved maps and he said you could come by anytime.”

Isabella would only shake her head.

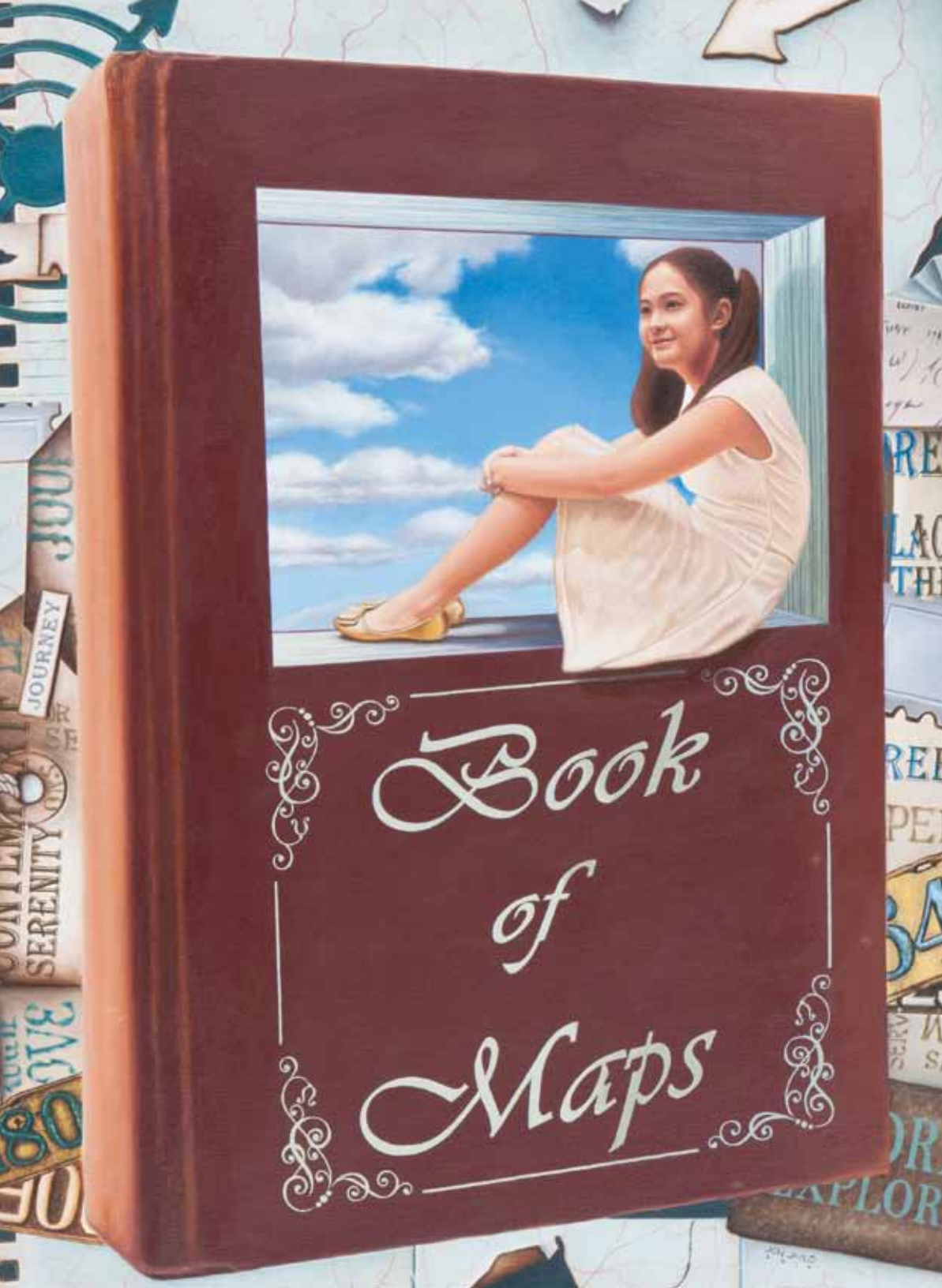


One rainy day, on the week before her sister was born, Isabella finally got tired of her father's atlas. After buying her mother's *pan de coco*, she decided to walk past the shop and brave a peek inside.

As she got near the door, she turned down the hood of her raincoat and hid behind her umbrella like a spy. For a few minutes she waited uncertainly, watching the rain paint the street with the color of the sky. Finally, she made up her mind and poked her head inside the shop.







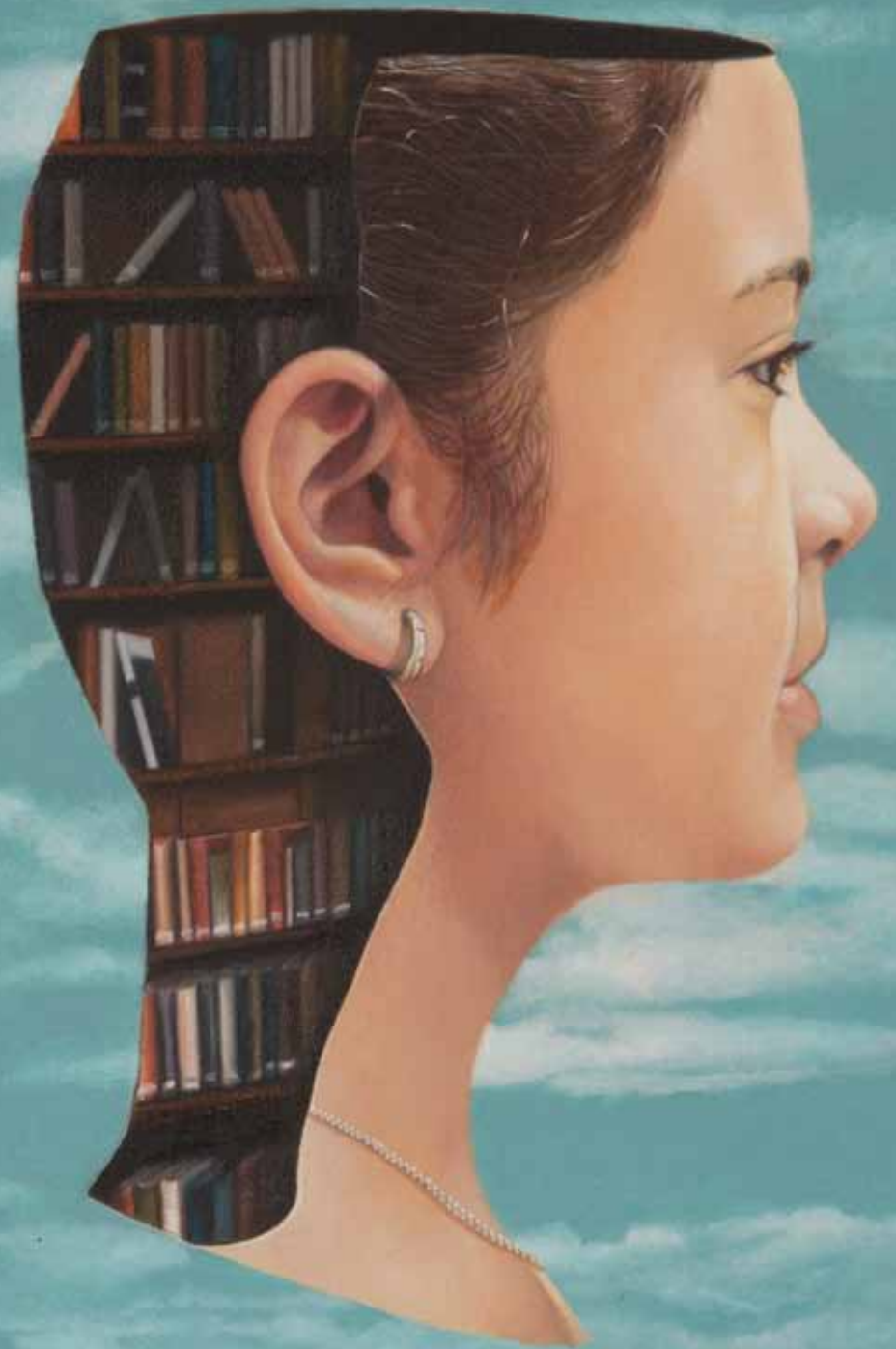
She called out softly to the owner, but no one seemed to be around.

*Here Be Dragons* seemed much too old to be new.

There were antique maps that lined the walls, globes piled over dusty desks, atlases stacked on wooden shelves, and rolled-up maps strewn carelessly on the stone floor. There were two doors behind the front counter – one that led to a small kitchen and the other to a large library that seemed oddly bigger than the house itself.

Isabella's curiosity got the better of her and she slipped behind the counter to take a better look.

The library was huge! It seemed to extend forever. It had many rooms like honeycombs connected by staircases, all stacked up farther than the eyes could see. Just as Isabella was about to step inside, a furry hand closed the door and someone tapped her shoulder from behind.





“Excuse me,” said a young boy wearing a curious outfit. He reminded her of a circus ringmaster, with his plaid vest, bowtie, and black striped long johns. On his head was a large top hat with aviator glasses wrapped securely on its brim. A strange metal watch with many dials covered his entire left arm.

He seemed to be the same age as Isabella and she noticed that he had a nice smile.

“You’re not allowed in there,” he warned.

“I’m sorry,” she apologized. “I was looking for Mr. Strabo.”







“You must be Isabella,” the boy said, tipping his hat.

“How do you know my name?” she asked suspiciously.

“You told me,” he answered, with a cheeky grin.

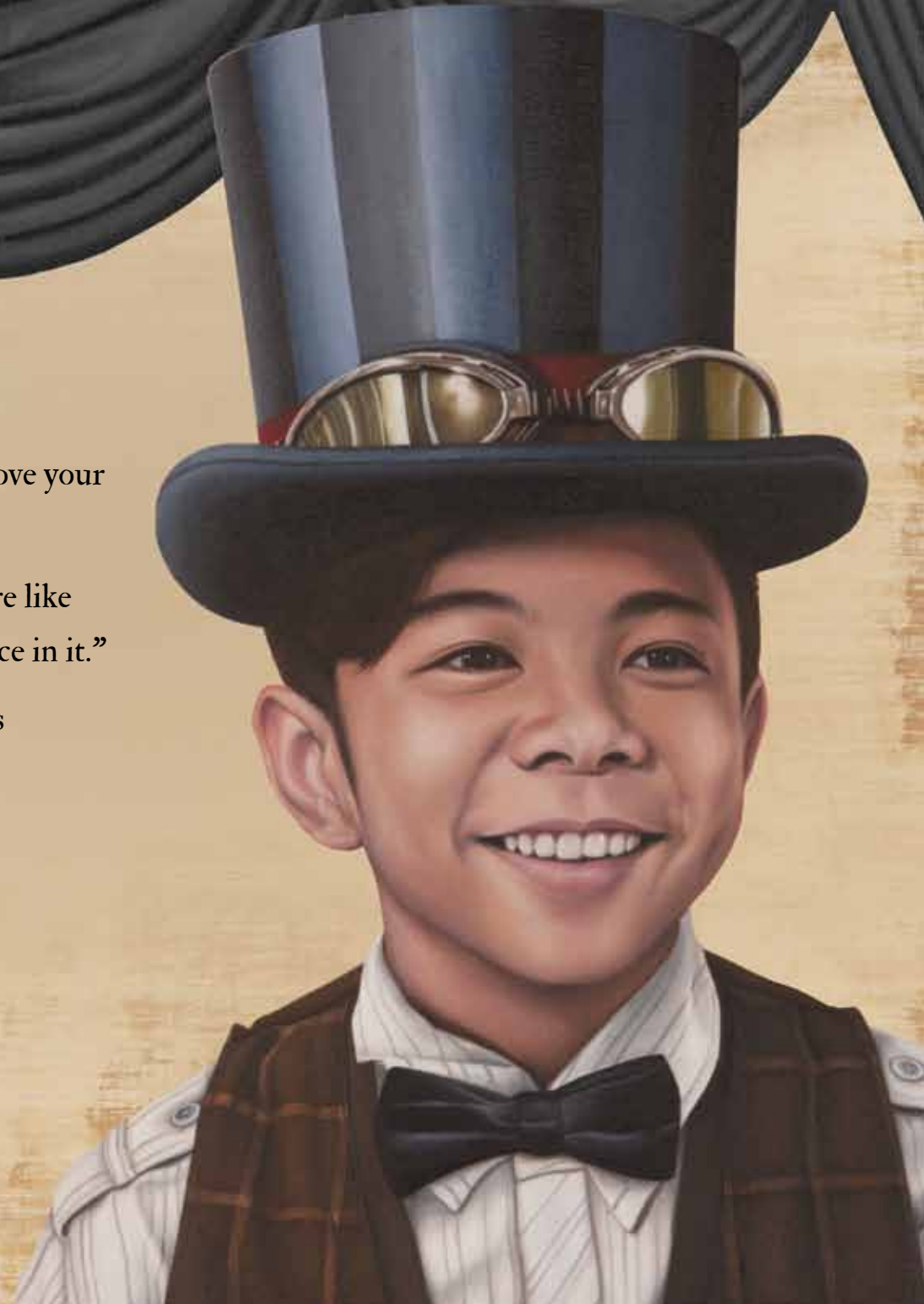
“There must be some mistake,” she said, thinking that her father must have spoken of her. “Where is Mr. Strabo?”

“I am Strabo,” he said, waving his hand in the air like a magician. “Not Mr. Strabo, just Strabo.”

“Pleased to meet you, Strabo,” she said excitedly. “I love your store! But who would need all these maps?”

“Everyone needs a map,” the boy answered, “Maps are like books. They help you build your world and find your place in it.”

“I already own an atlas,” Isabella boasted. “It contains everything there is in the whole wide world.”







“Maps can show more than just continents and oceans,” Strabo said. “There are maps to heaven and hell, to happiness and sadness. There are maps of music, of loves lost and found. There are maps to imaginary places known only to dreamers and mapmakers like me. I can even make a map of you, if you’d like.”

“What do you mean a ‘map of me’?” she asked.

“I can create a map that charts everything from the tip of your toes to the last hair on your head.”





Strabo pointed to a painting on the wall and explained. “My bird, Animaxander, will record everything you will ever see and hear. My bear, Eratosthenes, will do the same for everything you will ever touch, and my apple, Ortelius, will lay out all the things that you will ever taste in your life.”



“Oh! How much will it be for my map?” Isabella asked, excited at the prospect of a new map adventure. “I don’t have a lot of money.”

“A map like this is not made in every lifetime,” The boy said. “But for you, the cost will be one bag of *pan de coco*, payable in advance.”





Isabella made a mental calculation of her savings and decided she had enough to buy more bread. She turned to Strabo and said, “Alright, it’s a deal.”

“You have to give me time to make the map,” he answered. “Come back to the shop when you face your greatest uncertainty.”



“How do I know that you will make me a real map?” she asked astutely.

“A map is true only if you have been there before,” Strabo answered profoundly.





Time passed swiftly and on her one-hundred-and-eleventh birthday, Isabella sent her great-granddaughter Sophia to buy *pan de coco* for their four o'clock *merienda*.

“On your way to the *panaderia* you will see an old shop called *Here Be Dragons*. It’s a place that you have never seen before,” she explained to the baffled child. “Go inside, my dear, and ask the owner named Strabo for my map. I have paid for it already so you just need to pick it up.”



Eleven-year-old Sophia was the spitting image of Isabella when they were the same age.

Sophia skipped down the street and found the store. Inside, she saw the young boy for the first time. Strabo greeted her then handed her great grandmother's map to her.





“Thank you for being so prompt,” he said, handing the girl a rolled-up parchment. The map was secured by a small red ribbon with a label that read: *On the Exactitude of Isabella Ocampo, Age II.*

“We had just finished mapping everything a few minutes ago.”



Sophia returned to their house to see  
an ambulance wailing by the driveway.



# Here be Dragons



Somewhere in time, Isabella stepped out of a curious shop called *Here Be Dragons* and felt a sense of déjà vu.

She remembered what Strabo said... Was it just a few minutes before or a lifetime ago?



**A** map is true only if you  
have been there before.”



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

VICTOR FERNANDO R. OCAMPO is a Singapore-based Filipino writer. His writing has appeared in *Apex Magazine*, *Bahamut Journal*, *Lakeside Circus*, *The Philippines Free Press*, *Strange Horizons*, *The Future Fire*, *Likhaan Journal*, *The Quarterly Literature Review of Singapore*, as well as anthologies such as *The Ayam Curtain*, *Fish Eats Lion: New Singaporean Speculative Fiction*, *Lontar: The Journal of Southeast Asian Speculative Fiction*, and the *Philippine Speculative Fiction series* (volumes 6, 9, and 10). Visit his blog at [vrocampo.com](http://vrocampo.com) or follow him on Twitter, @VictorOcampo

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

JON JAYLO's art is inspired by dreams, daily occurrences, and direct experience. Often surreal and whimsical, his works reflect life itself, and the enigma of thought beneath it. His technical skills are widely admired, his depictions vary in display and style, and all are constantly evolving in both idea and form as the artist himself matures.

To date, Jon's works have been showcased in various museums, galleries and art spaces in Germany, Italy, Singapore, Switzerland, the United States, South Korea, and the Philippines.





CANVAS' **One Million Books for One Million Filipino Children Campaign** aims to inspire in children a love for reading by donating its award-winning books to public schools, hospitals, and disadvantaged communities throughout the country.

*A child that reads is a creative, empowered, and imaginative child who will learn independently, envision a brighter future, and ultimately lead a productive and meaningful life.*

You can help us!

For more information, visit [www.canvas.ph](http://www.canvas.ph), email [info@canvas.ph](mailto:info@canvas.ph), or find us on Facebook: **Center for Art, New Ventures and Sustainable Development**.

---

*CANVAS, a non-profit organization, works with the creative community to promote children's literacy, explore national identity, and broaden public awareness of Philippine art, culture, and the environment.*