Irreplaceable Me

Tetsuya Miyamoto







Discover

Published by Discover 21, Inc.,
2-16-1 Hirakawacho, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 102-0093, Japan
http://en.d21.co.jp

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Introduction

Hello to all my friends in the United States!

In America I'm known as the inventor of KenKen, but my real job is teaching mathematics to elementary school students. Today, in 2014, my classroom is located near Tokyo Station. I'm the only teacher and I only hold classes on Saturdays and Sundays. My students range from third to sixth grade, with a limit of 20 per grade. My third-graders spend a full year solving puzzles before moving on to mathematical problems. In fact, I originally developed KenKen as a puzzle for them.
So why did I decide to write Irreplaceable Me? Because it makes me sad whenever I read articles about young people who commit suicide. When I was in my teens, I thought about dying all the time. I didn't think my life was worth very much,

and I was sure I'd be dead before twenty. The only thing that kept me from killing myself was the sense that I was at rock bottom—that it couldn't get any worse—and that it would be a shame to end it all there. I figured I could always die later after reaching the next level. I started university, moved in with a family that ran a newspaper distributorship, and started a new life. Soon I was too busy to think about dying.

I wrote this book because I want to help young people who are anxious about the same things I was as a teenager to feel better about themselves and to think twice before committing suicide. There's nothing wrong with anxiety; positive anxiety helps you grow. But negative anxiety can make your heart grow dark, and drag down your self-esteem, and ultimately make you want to disappear. These days I'm full of positive anxiety, and the thing I'm most anxious about is how to keep growing.

Since establishing my classroom in 1993, I've developed all sorts of puzzles and math problems and published many books. At the end of 2013 I was all alone in my classroom, thinking how I'd done just about everything I thought I could do and wondering what to do next, when all of the sudden the words, "New York" popped into my head. This was a bit of a surprise at first, but no matter how much I thought about it no other options came to mind.

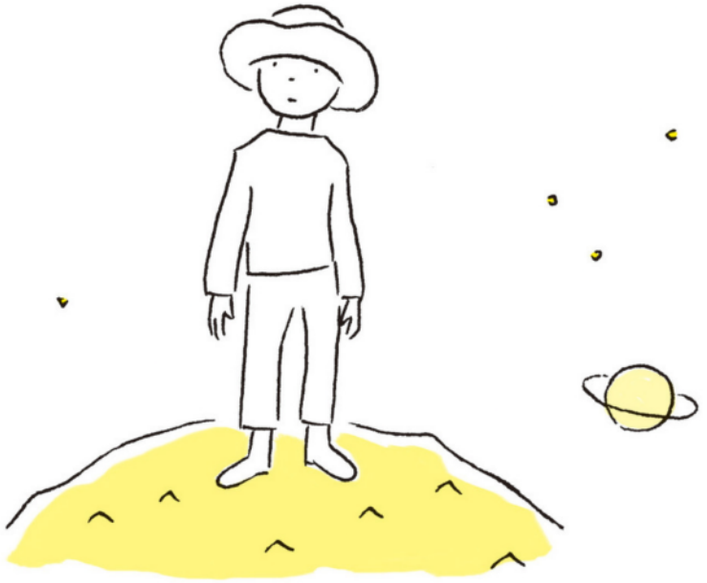
So I plan to move my classroom from Tokyo to New York in February 2015. I hope you'll welcome me warmly, but in the meantime, I'm sending Irreplaceable Me along ahead.

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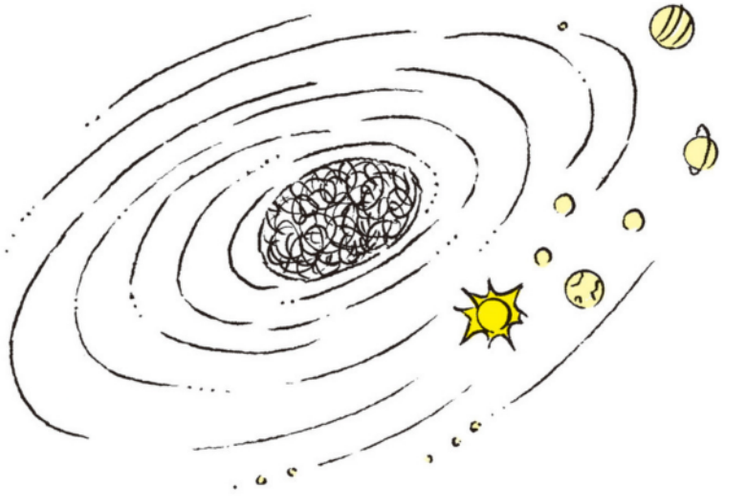
Dedicated to you, a true 1/1.

What does the universe make of my existence?



The universe is outrageously big and ridiculously vast. As far as the universe is concerned, the earth is miniscule: not even a drop of water to the Pacific, or a grain of sand to the Sahara.

There are seven billion people living on this tiny little planet, which makes me just 1/7,000,000,000.





So no matter how hard I try, or even if I don't try at all—whether I live or die—it makes no difference to the universe.

Thinking this way makes me sad.
It makes me want to die.



But what if I turn the question around?
What is the universe to me?
What happens to the universe if I die?





If I die . . .

Well, as far as I'm concerned, a universe without me is utterly devoid of meaning or value. After all, I'm not there.

When I disappear, so will my universe.

As far as I'm concerned, then, I am my own universe.





We use the word “irreplaceable” when talking about the things that are most precious to us, things for which there is no substitute. Often we use it to talk about someone else: some special “you.”

But even if you fall in love with someone, and they seem like your “one and only” right now, you might still fall in love with someone else later. There’s always the chance of finding a new “you.”



But there will never be another me.
After all, I'm my very own universe.

And in my universe, there's no doubt that I'm the star of the show, and that all the other people are just supporting actors there to make my life more exciting.

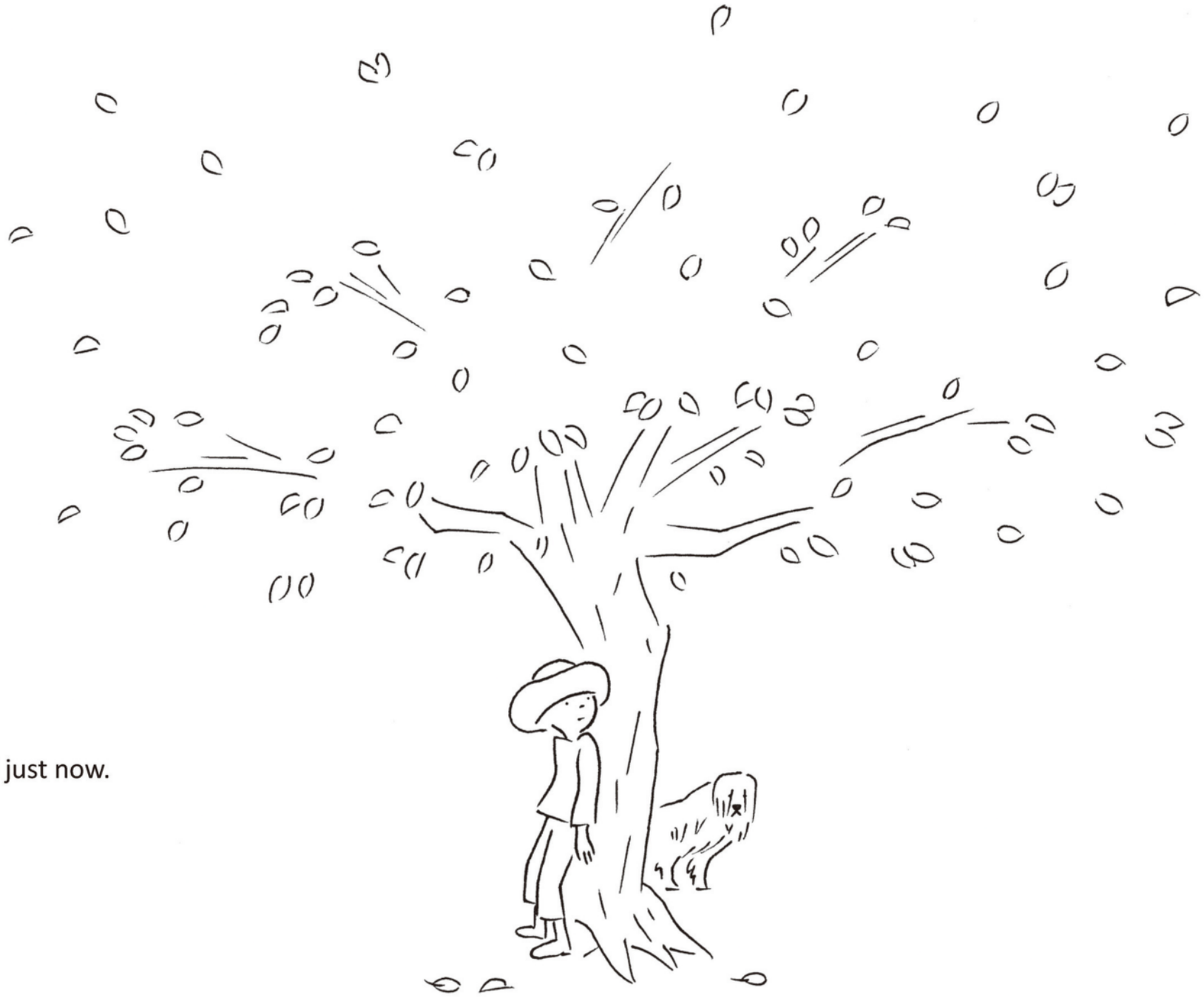


The same applies to you, too.
You have a universe all your own.
And in your universe, you're the star of the show, and all the other people—parents, teachers, everyone—are just supporting actors there to make your life more exciting



Okay, then. So why is life so difficult?
How come nothing ever goes smoothly?

Maybe these questions crossed your mind just now.



But think about it for a minute.

In all the books you've every read—in all the movies you've ever seen—have you ever run across a story where the main character smiles from start to finish?

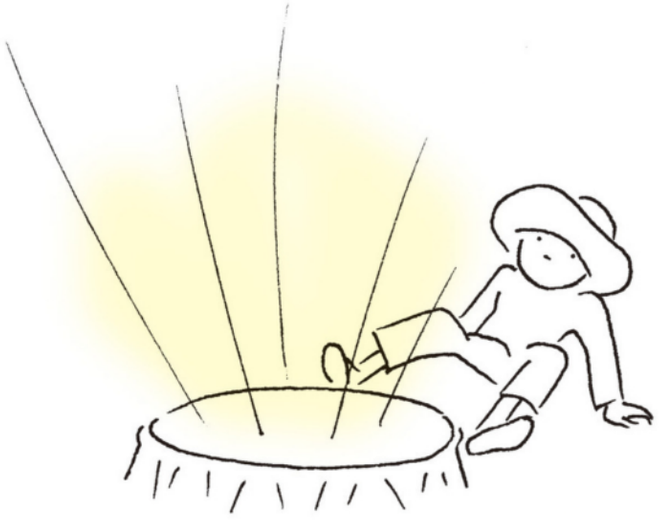
Even in the superhero tales that boys like so much, the bad guys get the best of the good guys during the first half.

Even in moving stories that get the tears flowing, all sorts of terrible things happen to the main characters at the beginning.



But the main characters never give up. They don’t get discouraged and they don’t stop trying. And in the end, they succeed just once and find happiness.

That’s the basic outline.













It’s better not to get what you want too easily. Would it really be very much fun to have every wish granted, one after the other?

As soon as you say, “I want money,” a million dollars appears. “Hooray! Now I can buy anything I want.”

But once you’ve bought everything you want, what next?

As soon as you say, “I want to be liked, to be popular,” people all over the world start crowding around and saying, “Be my friend” and “Marry me!” Would that really be fun?



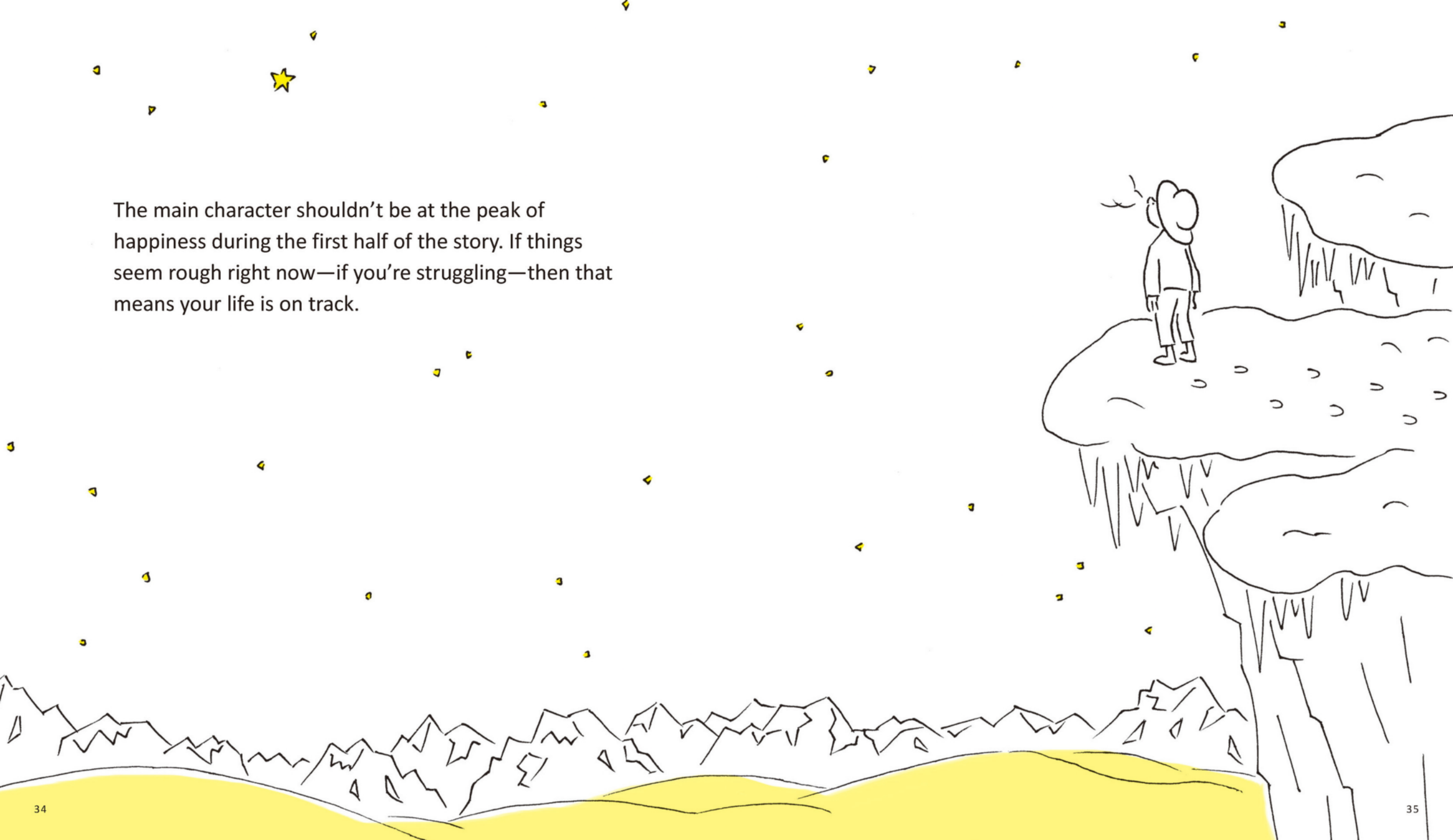
Just because you're the star of your own universe doesn't mean you can do anything you want. The universe has rules of its own.

If you work hard, you'll be rewarded.
If you slack off, or grow arrogant, or do bad things, you'll be punished.

This is the way things work to ensure you can enjoy a long, fulfilling life of 80 years or so without getting bored.



The main character shouldn't be at the peak of happiness during the first half of the story. If things seem rough right now—if you're struggling—then that means your life is on track.



If you tell yourself you won't try because you don't want to fail, you'll end up with an awfully dull life.



10 failures and setbacks lead to one small success.
100 failures and setbacks lead to one midsize success.
1,000 failures and setbacks lead to one big success.
10,000 failures and setbacks lead to one huge success.

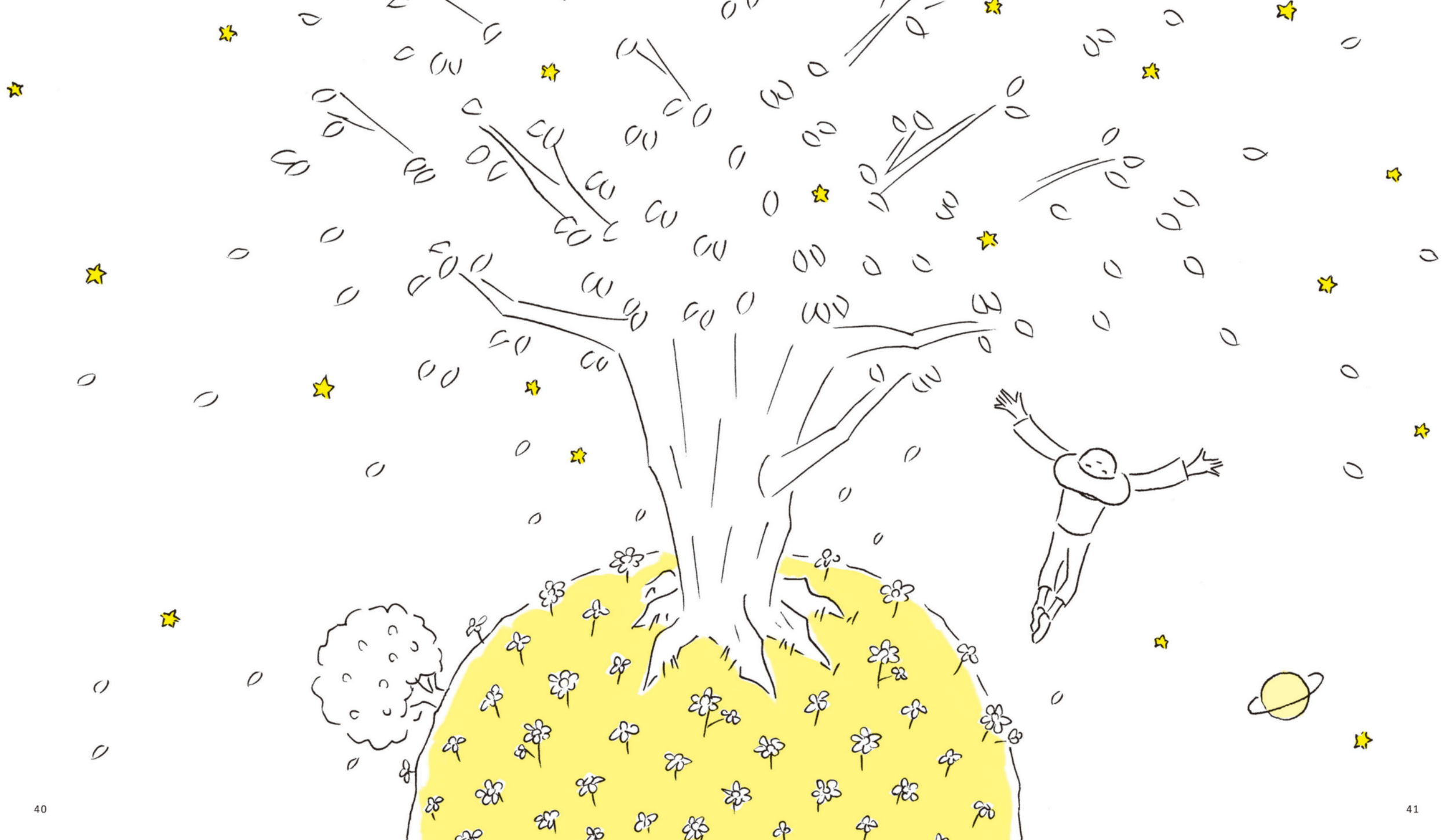
Failure really is the stepping-stone to success!

Next time you fail big, try and think about it this way:

“What kind of person can I be if I overcome this failure?
What’s the scenery like on the other side of this setback?”



Pretty exciting, huh?



There are really only two things that are important:

- Go all out in doing what you want to do.
- Go all out in rejecting what you don't want to do.



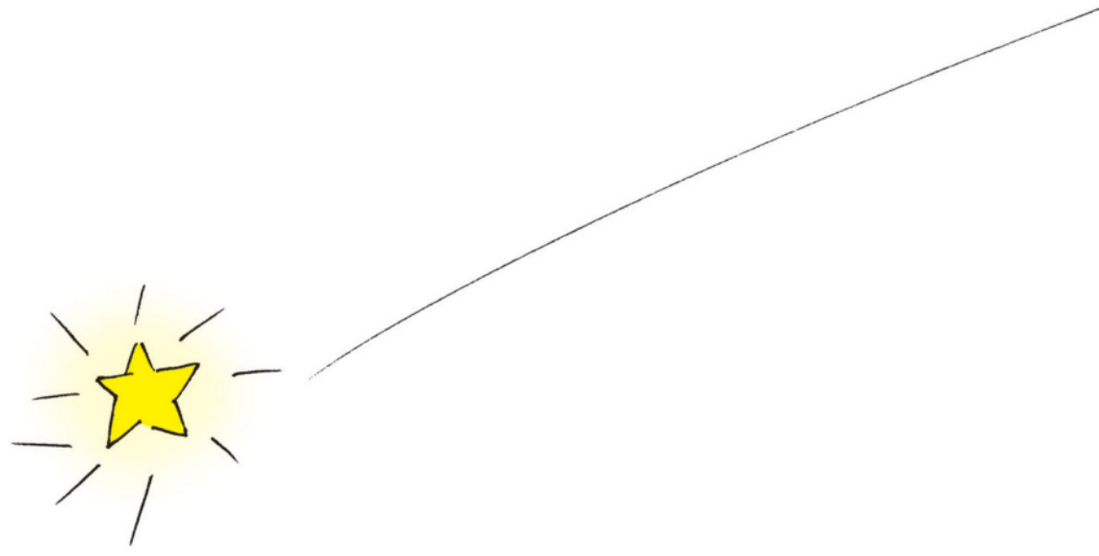
A life of 80 years is too long to spend doing nothing,
but too short to really accomplish anything.



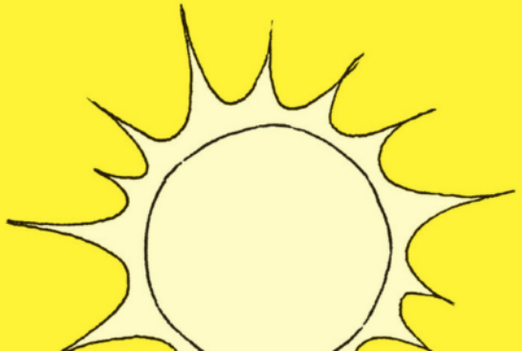
So get out there and start failing!

When you find something you enjoy no matter how many times you fail, you'll know which direction to take in your life.

Things are sure to turn our all right in the end.



After all, you’re the star of your own universe.





Afterword

Have you ever wished you were dead?

When I was fourteen years old, I stood at the first crossroads of my life. I had two choices: live an ordinary life or live on my own . I didn’t want to any have regrets, so I chose to live on my own.

I was determined to study hard, get into university, and build a life for myself. I set about my studies in earnest, but no matter what I did I never seemed to get any better at it. “Maybe this is just wasted effort,” I thought. “And if it is, I might as well be dead. What a boring life that was!”

But then I stopped and thought about it. “This is probably as bad as it gets. I can die anytime. I really ought to get to the next level first, and if it’s still boring I can always die then.”

By the time I entered university at the age of nineteen, I got so busy I no longer had time to think about dying.

I’ve stood at the crossroads many times since then, and I’ve always chosen the more challenging path. As a result, I now live a fulfilling life.

If you think of yourself as just 1/7,000,000,000, it can make you want to die. But if you think of yourself as an irreplaceable 1/1, doesn’t it stir just a little bit of courage?

Take care of your life; it’s the only one you get.

I leave you now with my personal motto: “Every day, always try to beat your personal best!”

Tetsuya Miyamoto

