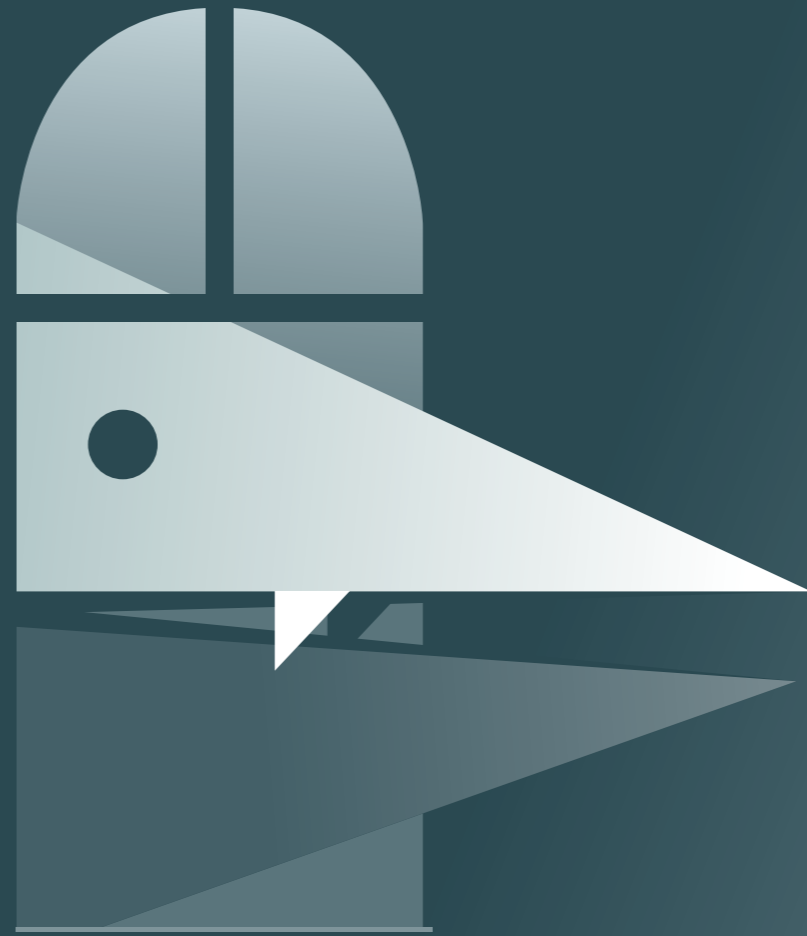


On a Warm Summer's Night

THE BEAST



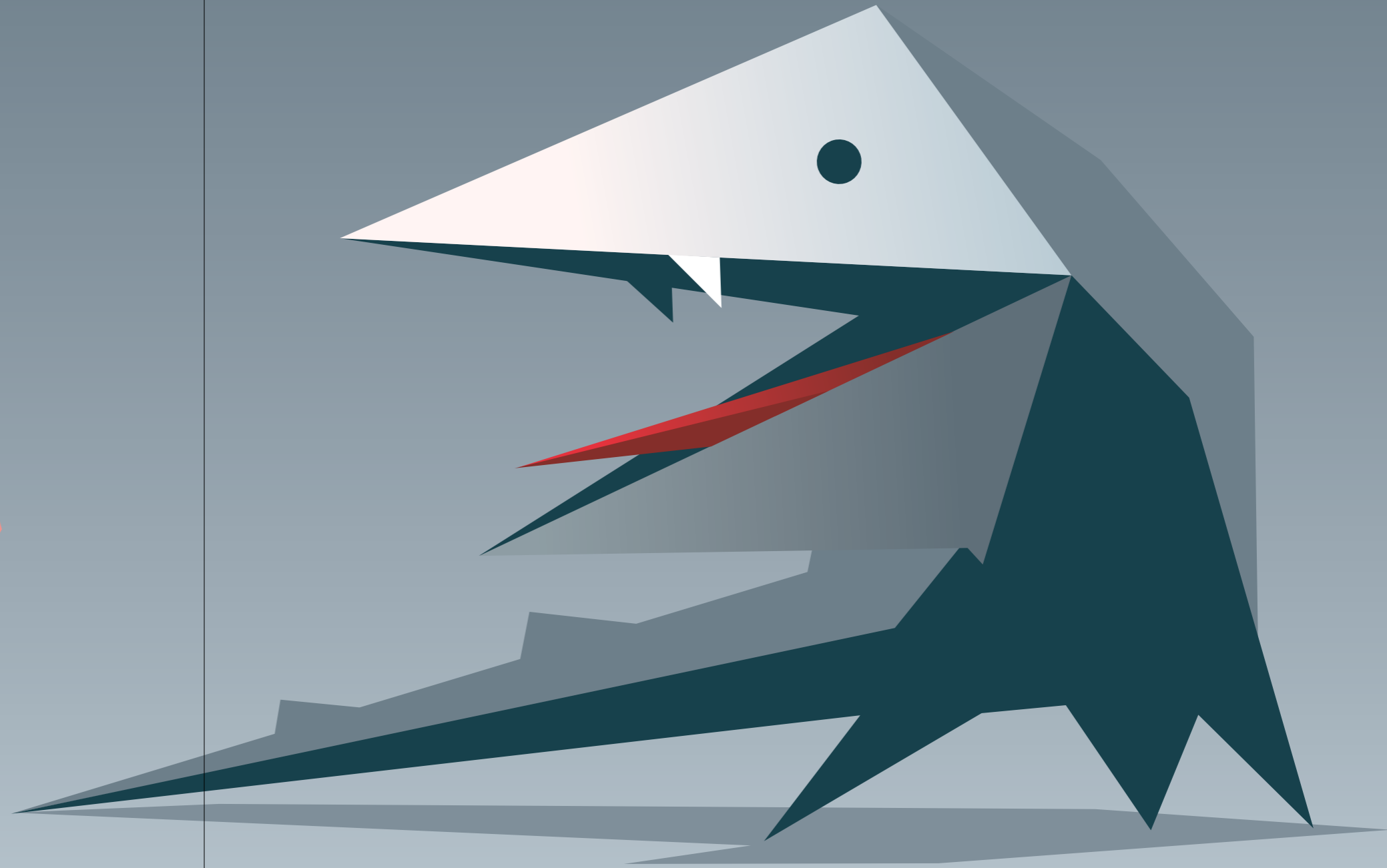
Discusses Happiness with Chef Vasiliauskas



On a Warm Summer's Night the Beast Discusses Happiness
with Chef Vasiliauskas

This tale is from the *Book of Tales of the Beast of Kaunas*

The fairytale book of the mythical Beast of Kaunas and his adventures. This book promotes knowledge of Kaunas, the European Capital of Culture 2022, and its values, for English-speaking audiences.





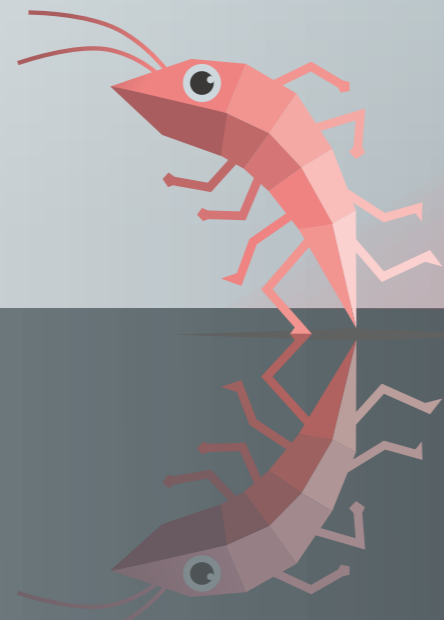
Summer nights are magnificent in Kaunas. Amorous shadows linger in the city streets, cats nap on warm paving stones, woodland fairies spread their picnic blankets in Ažuolynas Park, people lounge on balconies and in numerous cafés with lights twinkling in their windows.



The evening hustle and bustle quiets down after midnight, and the only thing you can still hear in homes with attics are the martens quietly nibbling the eggs they've stolen from pigeons.



Around this time of night, a certain well-known Old Town restaurant sees off its last diners, but Chef Vasiliauskas is in no hurry to turn the stove off just yet. He takes out a large copper frying pan, into which he pours some of his finest Tuscan olive oil; then he adds some garlic and ginger, along with his secret concoction of herbs that he has collected from the banks of the river Neris that same day; he heats everything up, and tosses some tiger prawns from a large bowl into the sizzling pan.





As soon as the smell of roasted prawns reaches the intersection of Vilnius and Mapu streets, there comes a knocking on the small kitchen window.

No guesswork is needed to tell who the mysterious guest is – the chef already knows him. Vasiliauskas takes the pan off the stove, opens the small window, and places the pan on the windowsill.



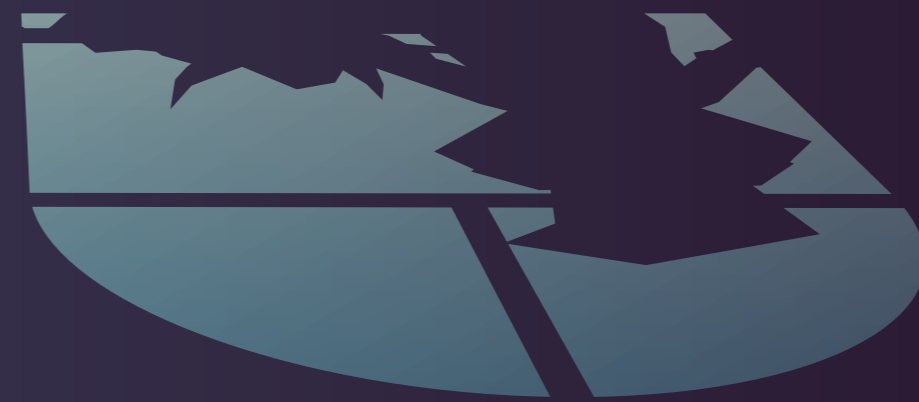


A paw appears in the opening, gently skewers a prawn with a claw, then disappears and, after a moment, there comes a chomping sound from outside.

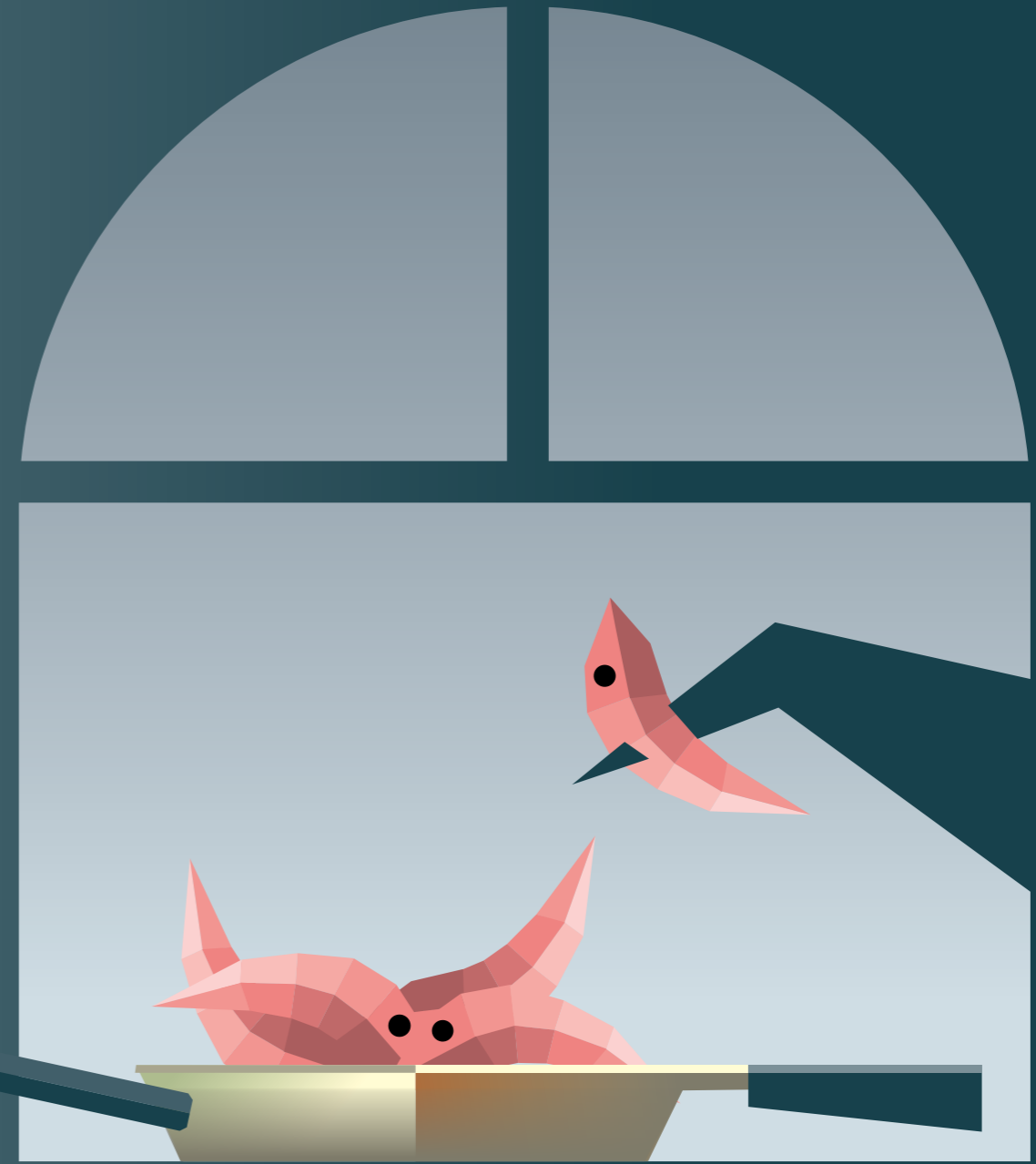
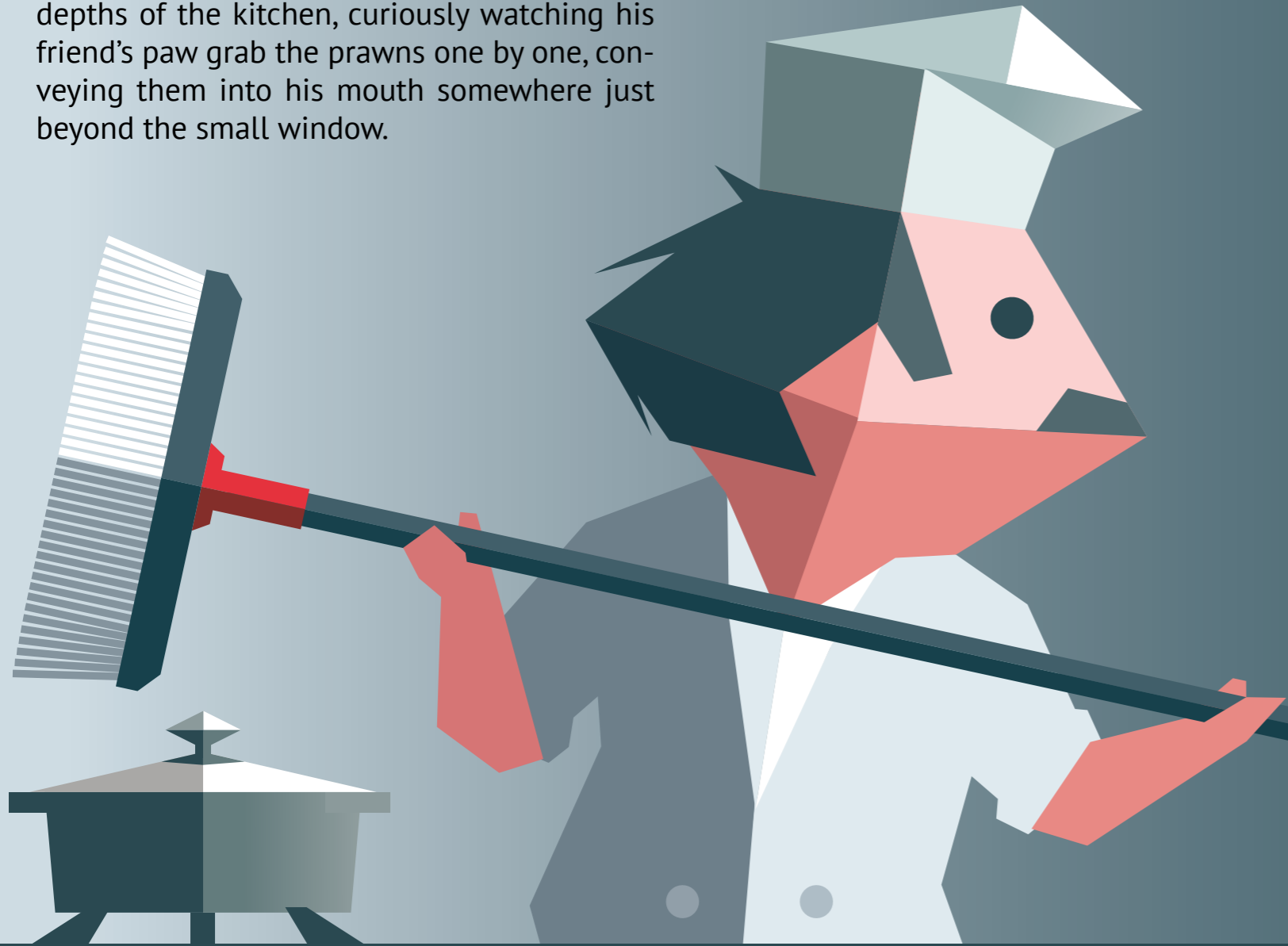
'Chomping is bad manners, don't you know?' says the chef.

Now one of the Beast's eyes appears in the small window.

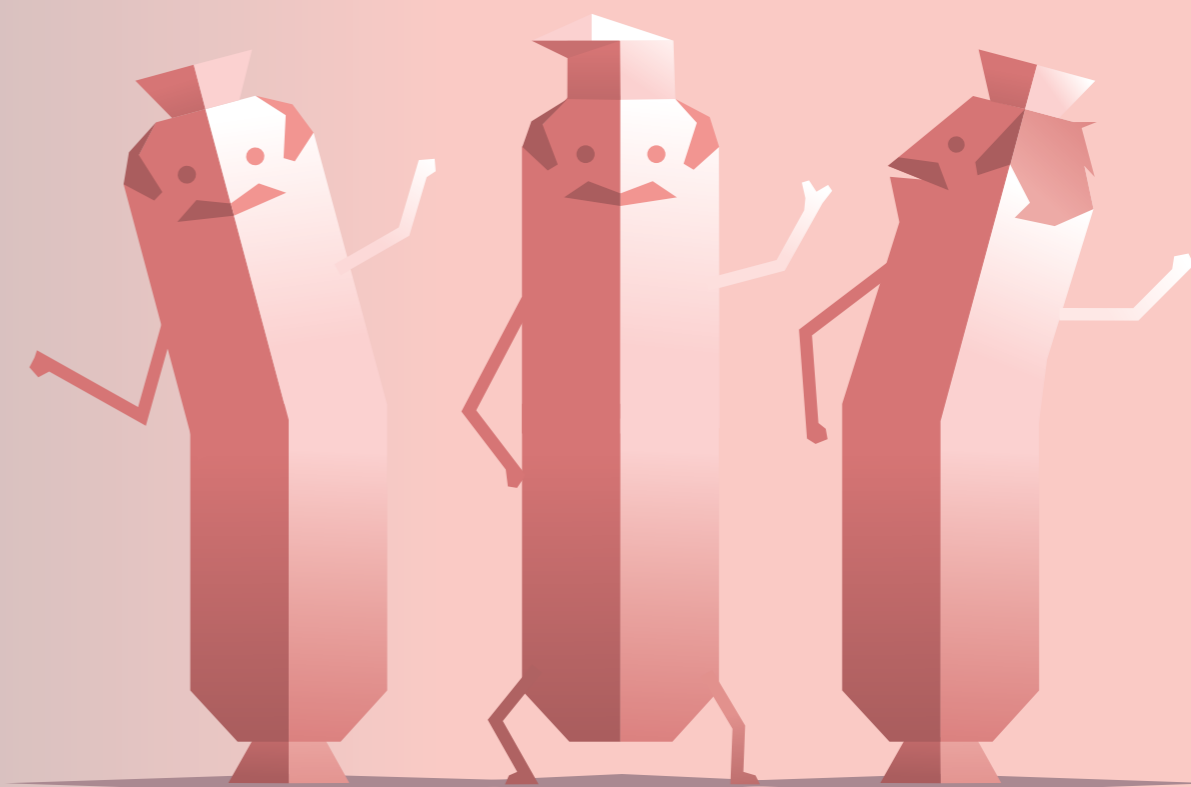
'I am terribly, terribly sorry,' says he, and gives a wink to Vasiliauskas, his old friend.



Vasiliauskas rotates the pan to make it easier for the Beast to reach his food, and sits in the depths of the kitchen, curiously watching his friend's paw grab the prawns one by one, conveying them into his mouth somewhere just beyond the small window.



The chef doesn't come very near to the window, and the Beast, too, prefers to interact with his friend through what is one of the smallest restaurant windows in all of the Old Town, through which not even his head would fit.



Obviously, the Beast of Kaunas is not a man-eater, unlike some of his old-fashioned relatives in Europe. Still, with Chef Vasiliauskas – a man of a rather chubby constitution with sausage-like fingers, who from tip to toe is seasoned with delicious sauces, with a delightful scent of onions and even a whiff of saffron – he cannot be too careful. There are times in life when you accidentally eat a friend and have to live with the regret for the rest of your days. This would be a terribly, terribly unfortunate outcome for them both.



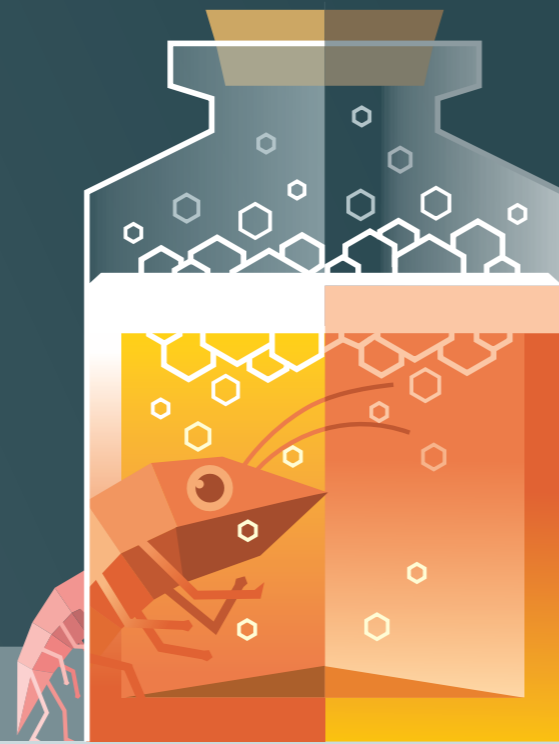
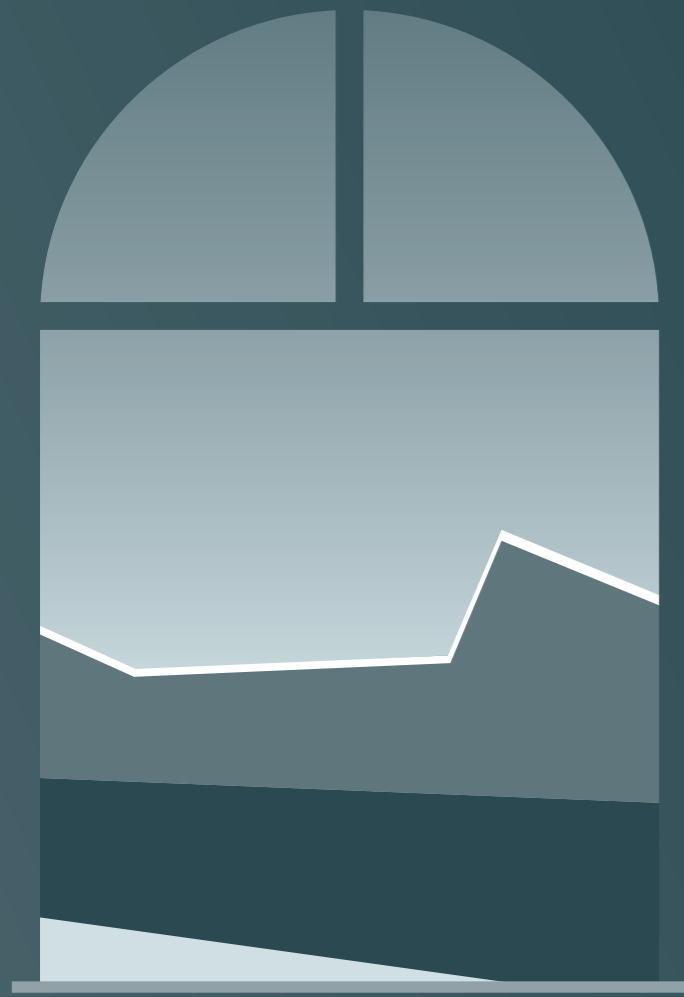
When the Beast is finally full-up, the chef pours them each a glass of kvass; they gulp it down. Then the Beast rests his nose on the windowsill, and the two begin to talk.

‘Are you happy?’ asks Vasiliauskas.

‘Uh-huuuh,’ the Beast draws happily. ‘And how about you?’

‘I often feel sad.’

‘All happy people must feel sad at times.’



‘Is that so?’ says the chef, rather surprised. ‘Indeed,’ nods the Beast. ‘You humans often look for happiness in all the wrong places. You seem to believe that someone who always laughs must be happy, which is utter rubbish. A person who laughs all the time is not happy, but rather mad.’





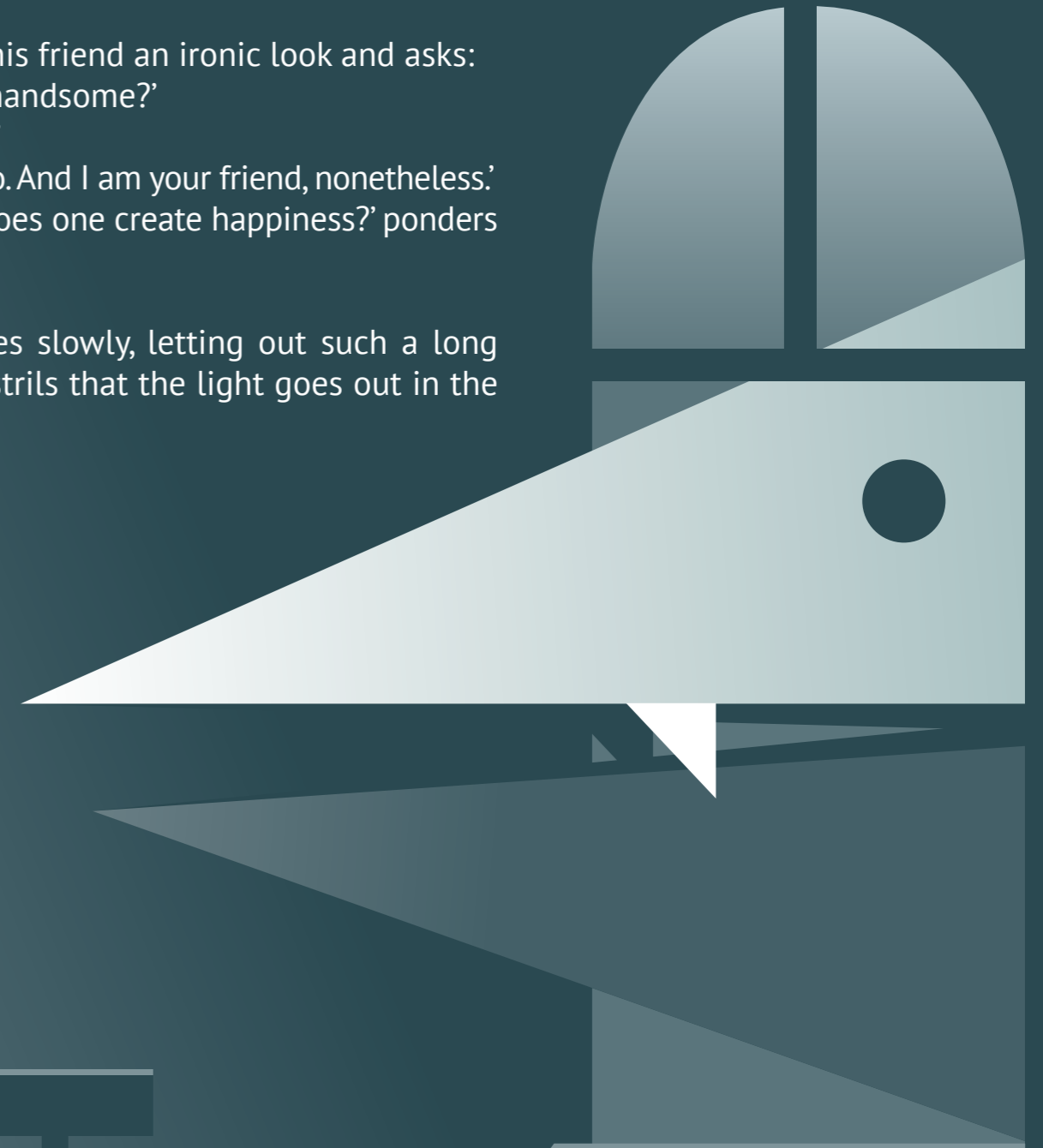
‘Perhaps, then, happiness means being rich?’ wonders Vasiliauskas. ‘I don’t believe so. In Žaliakalnis, there lives a collector so rich that no one knows how much he actually owns – not even he himself. Yet he is more burdened than the poorest of the poor, for he is plagued by the fear of getting robbed. I have even paid a visit to the local thief chieftain for him, and the chieftain has guaranteed he has no intention of stealing anything from the collector, yet still the rich man cannot find peace.’

'Happiness means being handsome,' says the cook, somewhat bitterly, examining his image in the lid of the pot, '...and slender.'

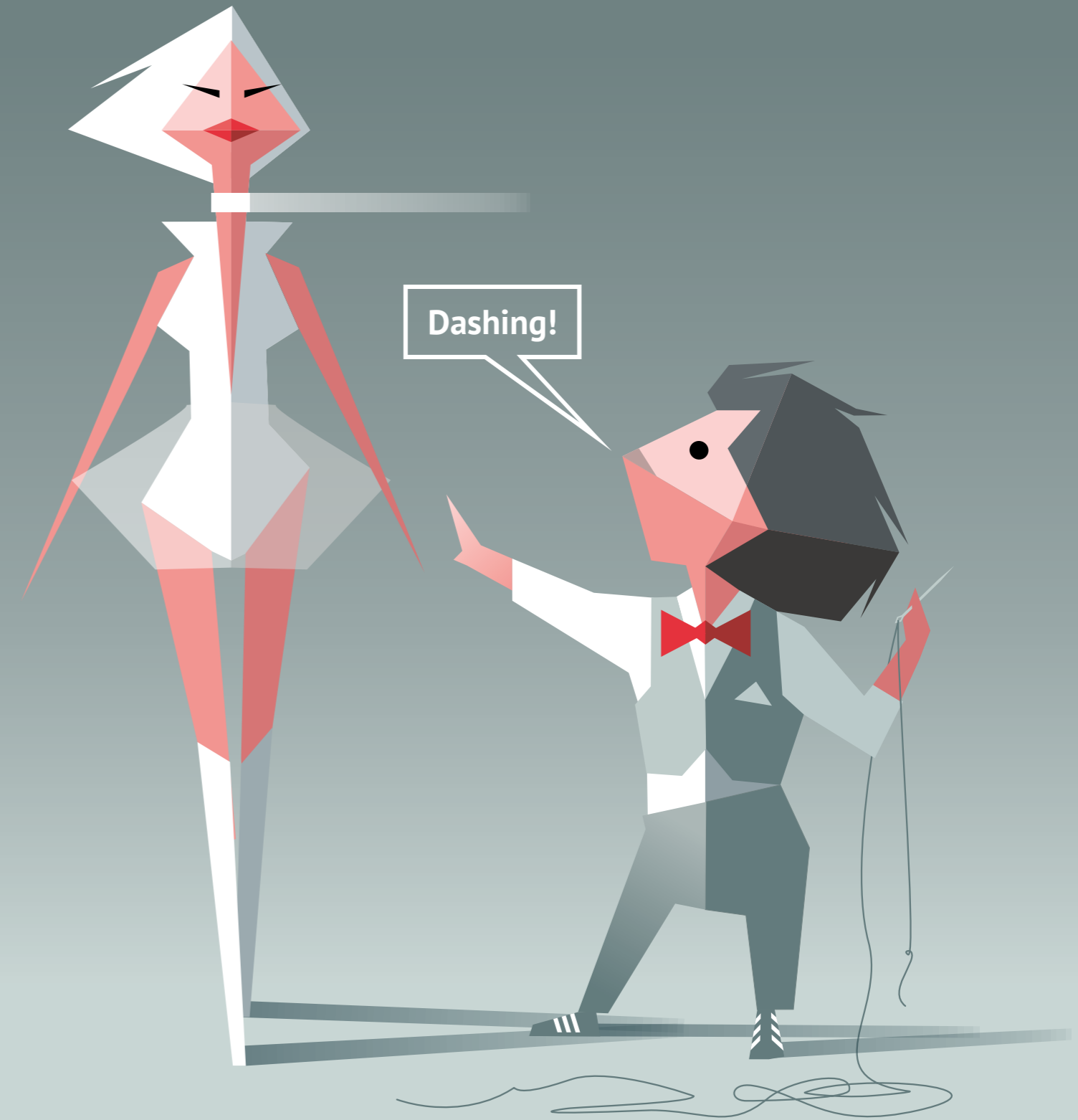
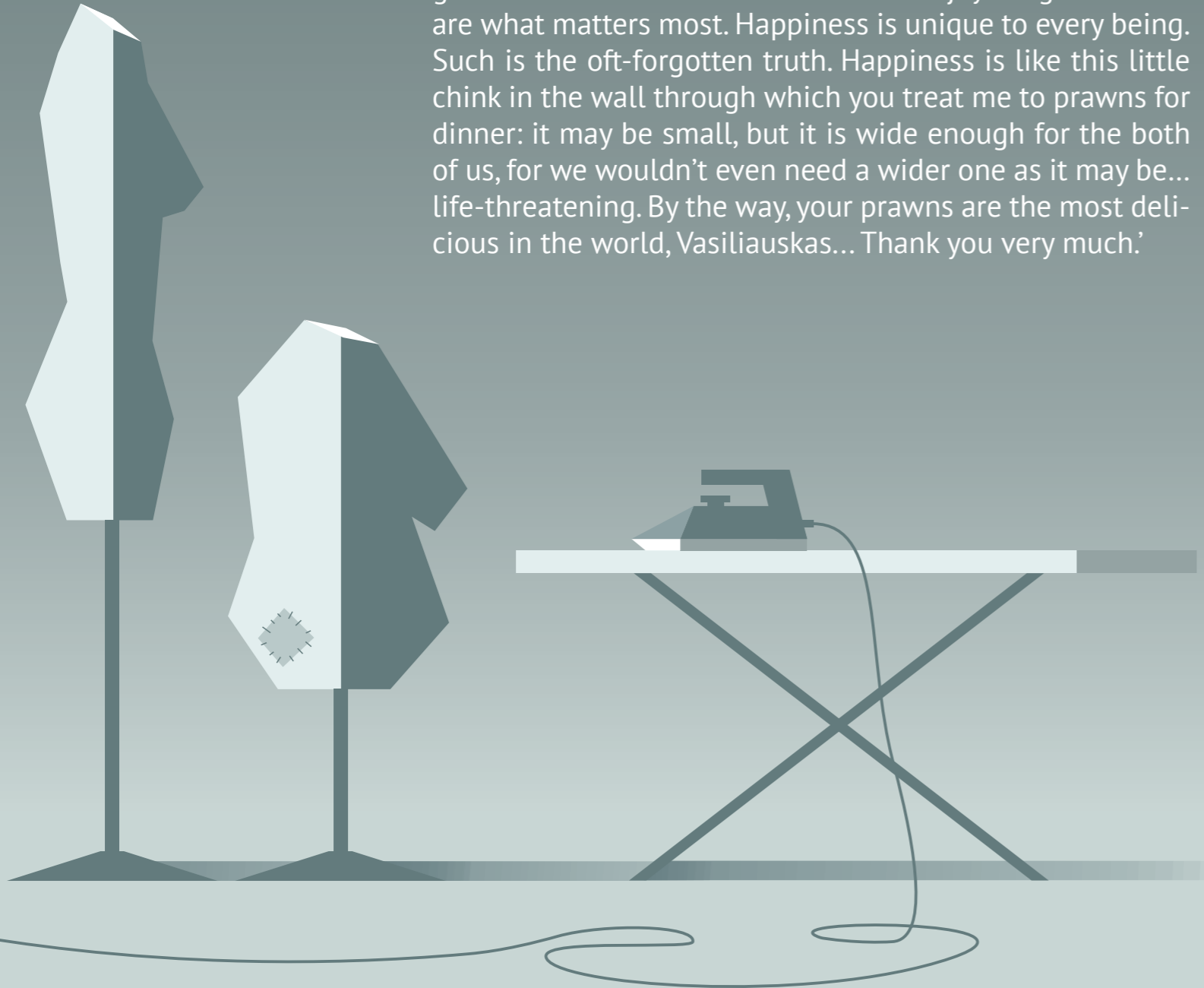


The Beast gives his friend an ironic look and asks: 'Do you find me handsome?' 'Frankly, not very.' 'Well, there you go. And I am your friend, nonetheless.' 'Well then, how does one create happiness?' ponders the chef.

The Beast exhales slowly, letting out such a long sigh from his nostrils that the light goes out in the kitchen.



'Now, there you've asked the right question. Happiness is, indeed, cre-a-ted. Just as an architect designs a house or a fashion designer sketches a garment, so do we create happiness – we build it like a house or knit it like a coat. We are our own architects and builders, designers and tailors. A good fit that matches our build and the joy we get out of it are what matters most. Happiness is unique to every being. Such is the oft-forgotten truth. Happiness is like this little chink in the wall through which you treat me to prawns for dinner: it may be small, but it is wide enough for the both of us, for we wouldn't even need a wider one as it may be... life-threatening. By the way, your prawns are the most delicious in the world, Vasiliauskas... Thank you very much.'



A smile appears on the chef's face. He stands up, and would like to run and hug his friend's nose, but the Beast, sensing it, blows air through his nostrils so hard that the gust blows Vasiliauskas back into his chair.

'Until the next warm night, Vasiliauskas!'

'Until then, my friend! By the way, Beast...'

'Yes?'

'Perhaps happiness is the absence of misfortune?'

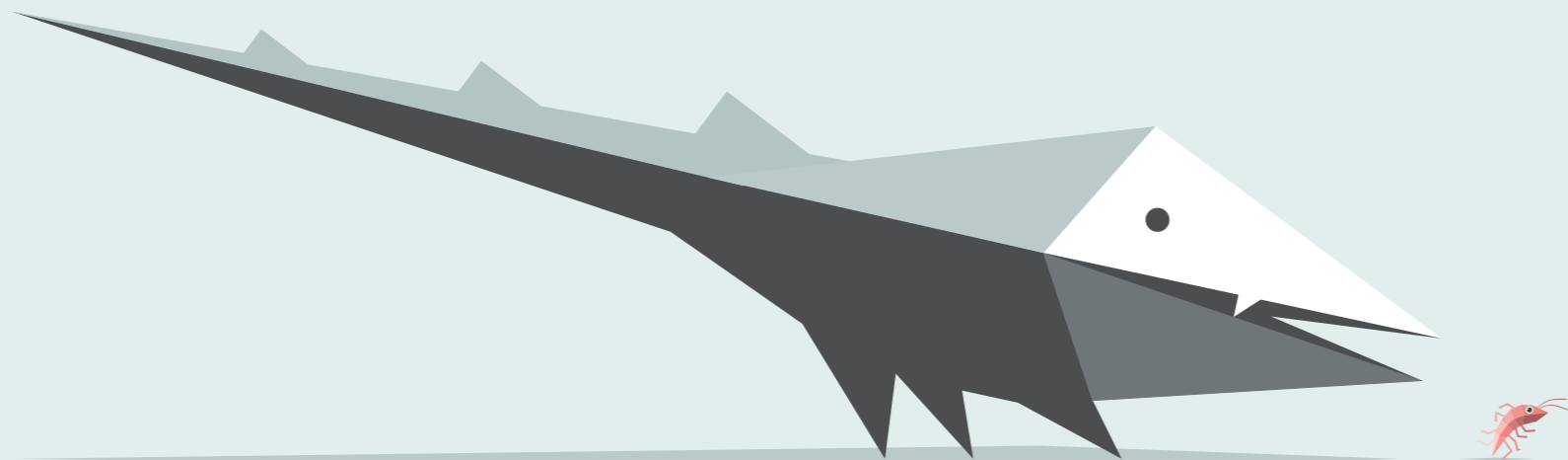
'Happiness and misfortune are strangers to one another. They belong to different tales, so don't confuse them.'

And the Beast disappears into a warm Kaunas night. Through the small window, instead of a nose or an eye, the moon is glistening. While moonlight streams leisurely into his kitchen, the chef settles into his chair feeling elated, although he can't really tell where this feeling is coming from.





HAPPY!



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**On a Warm Summer's Night the Beast Discusses
Happiness with Chef Vasiliauskas**

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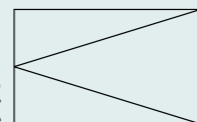
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A wonderful story about the friendship between the Beast of Kaunas and Chef Vasiliauskas. Their thoughtful and meaningful conversations exchanged through a small kitchen window will not only reveal to little ones, but also remind adults, where happiness comes from and what it consists of.

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