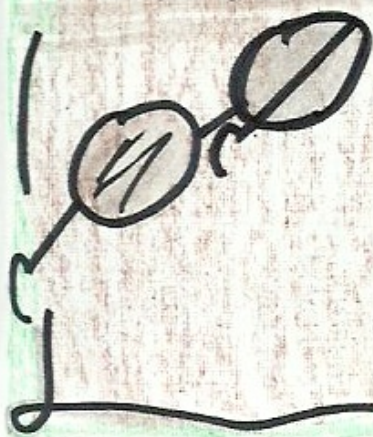


Old Man  
FRANCIS  
and the  
MAGIC BEANS



By  
Kristen  
Chaffee

Old Man Francis and the  
Magic Beans

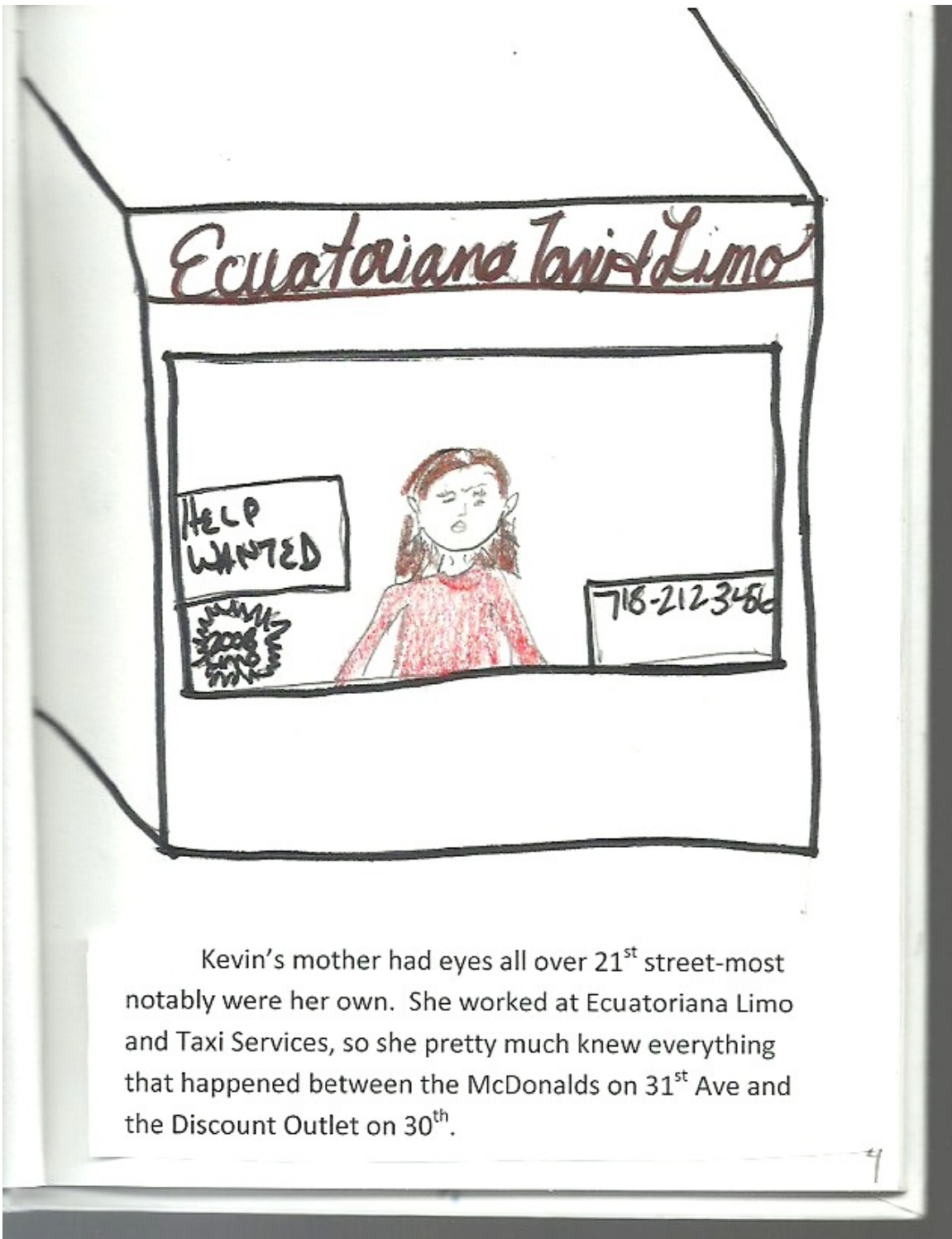
Kristen Chaffee  
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Once upon a time there was a crazy man who roamed 21<sup>st</sup> street in the middle of the day. He responded to "Francis," but no one really knew if that was the strange stranger's name.



One day Kevin, a fifteen year old trouble maker, was taking his pogo-stick for a joy hop down 21<sup>st</sup> Street. He had to be sly about it, because his mother would go ballistic if she knew he was riding recreational bouncing sticks through two-lanes of traffic again.



Kevin's mother had eyes all over 21<sup>st</sup> street-most notably were her own. She worked at Ecuadoriana Limo and Taxi Services, so she pretty much knew everything that happened between the McDonalds on 31<sup>st</sup> Ave and the Discount Outlet on 30<sup>th</sup>.

"Hey there," called a scratchy voice. Kevin lost control of his pogo stick and nearly collided with an oncoming paperboy.

"AAARGH!" Kevin cried.



"Sonny? Sonny boy!" called the voice. Suddenly, a wooden stick hit Kevin mid fall. He grasped it instinctively, then swung around and around until the momentum of the crash died out.

"Old man Francis?" Kevin croaked, struggling to his feet.

"Why, no one's called me that since I was a little boy," the old man mused.

"Really?" Kevin frowned. "But that doesn't make any sense."



"It doesn't have to," Francis replied. "I'm beautiful!"

"Ummm, whatever." Kevin picked up his pogo stick and started limping toward Ecuatoriana. Grounded or not, he suddenly had a strong urge to see his mother.

"Wait!" Francis called. Kevin turned back, hesitantly.

"What?"

Francis reached into his filthy tattered pocket and produced a small satchel with a bread-tie on the top. He pulled off the bread tie. "Hold out your little mitts."

"Huh?" Kevin asked stupidly. Francis began dumping the contents of the bag into Kevin's hand.

"What's this?"

"Magic beans," said Francis.



"These are just kidney beans!" Kevin snapped. "I can see the Goya bag inside your pouch."

"You? Who? What? Where? Why?" Francis began to go cross-eyed.

"Never mind," said Kevin. "Er-yeah. Thanks. I'll take them." Kevin stuck the beans in his pocket and rolled his eyes. "See you later."

"Don't spend 'em all in one place, Sonny boy."

"Yeah, whatever . . ." Kevin leapt onto his pogo stick and bounced off, leaving Francis in a cloud of dust. "Crazy old man."





Later that night, Kevin was hanging out his bedroom window, wishing he was outside in the cool night breeze. His mother had caught him, of course. She'd seen his pogo stick crash on 21<sup>st</sup> street and had grounded him, accordingly.

Kevin had broken his old Nintendo, leaving him with absolutely no entertainment in his boring, stuffy room. He reached into his pocket for his cellphone to text his friend Adam when his hand hit a pile of beans. He'd completely forgotten about Old Man Francis and his magic beans.

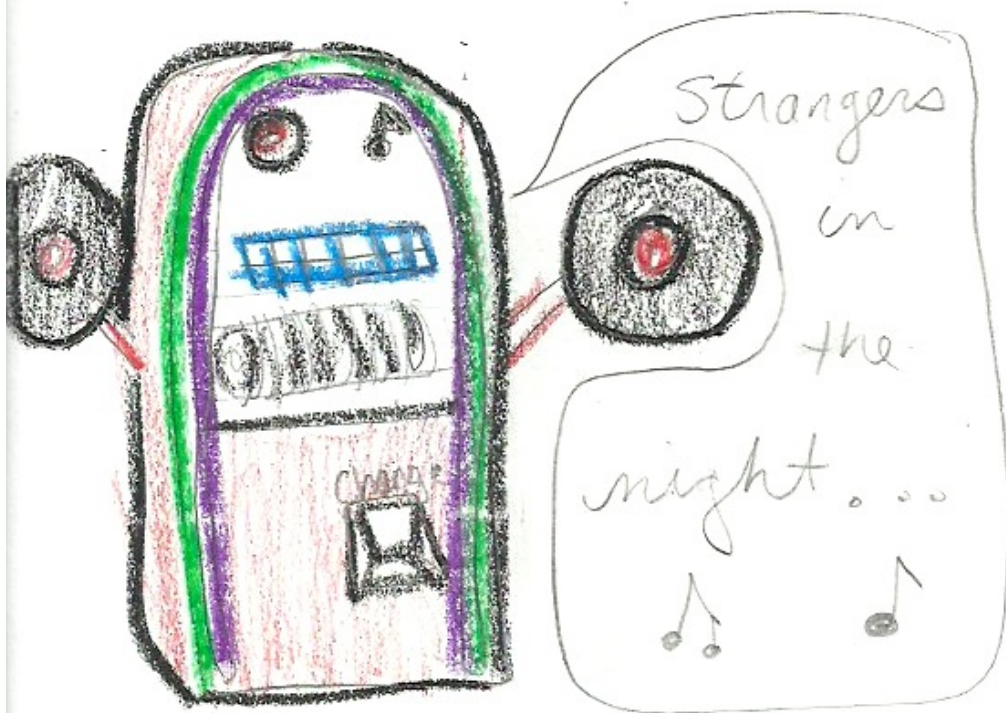
"Beans," he grumbled. "A useless lot of beans." He picked up the pile and chucked them across his bedroom. They landed with several sharp pinging sounds. "I wish I could go outside," he snapped. "Let's see how magical you are, beans!" He paused and watched the final bean roll to an anticlimactic stop under his bed. "Yeah," he said. "That's what I thought. Not magic at all. Just a bunch of stupid 97 cent Goya bea . . . ohh . . ."



Suddenly, Kevin's bed began to shake. There was a rumble. A grumble. And then a tumble. Kevin was thrown off his bed as it contorted into the shape of a bucking bronco.

He crashed to the ground and hit his head on the corner of his nightstand. The impact knocked him unconscious and everything went black.

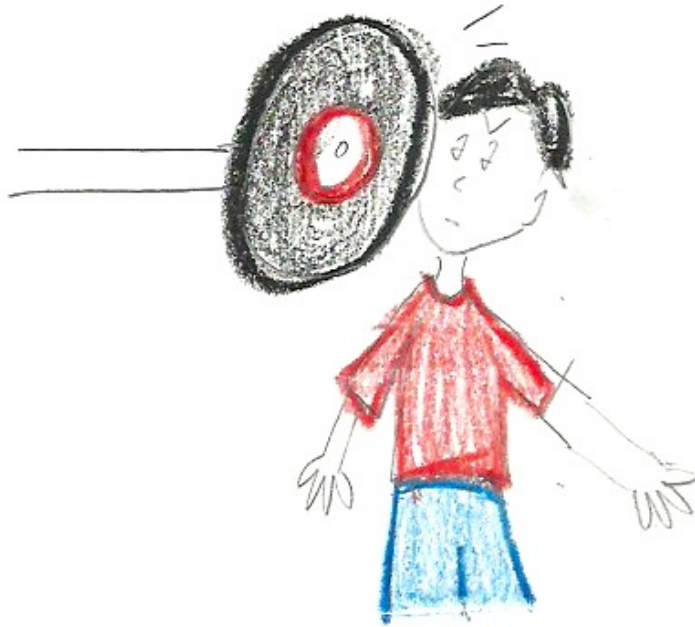
The crooning voice of a nineteen-fifties singer lulled Kevin out of an uneasy sleep. "Who is that?" he croaked.



"Strangers in the night," sang the voice,  
"exchanging glances . . ."

Kevin opened his eyes and gasped. No longer was he in his stuffy bedroom on 31<sup>st</sup> Road in Queens. No. He was in some sort of nineteen fifties soda shop nightmare! Hovering over him was a jukebox with a robot face who had records for hands.

The robot reached out a record and poked Kevin in the face with it.



"Get off me!" he cried, kicking the robot in his jukebox knee, which, come to think of it, was actually a coin change slot.

"Play a song, Kevin," said the voice. "Play any song you like!"

"What I'd like," Kevin retorted, "is to go back to my room!"

"Really?" the voice said three time in an echo.  
"That's not what you said before."

Kevin's own voice rang out around the room in surround sound. "I wish I could go outside," he said. "I wish I could go outside. I wish I could go outside."

"See?" asked the robot. He started to sing again.

"No! Shh-be quiet!" said Kevin. "I'm not even outside! What kind of useless magic beans are these, anyway?"

"The beans would have worked," said the robot, "except your friend Francis soaked them for 24 hours in a metal kettle." The robot shrugged. "That makes the magic wonky."

"I don't want magic!" Kevin cried. "I just want my life back!"

"Here," said the robot. He handed Kevin a CD-Rom. "Your life. In a 1024 x 628 Resolution screen."

"Noooooooooo!"



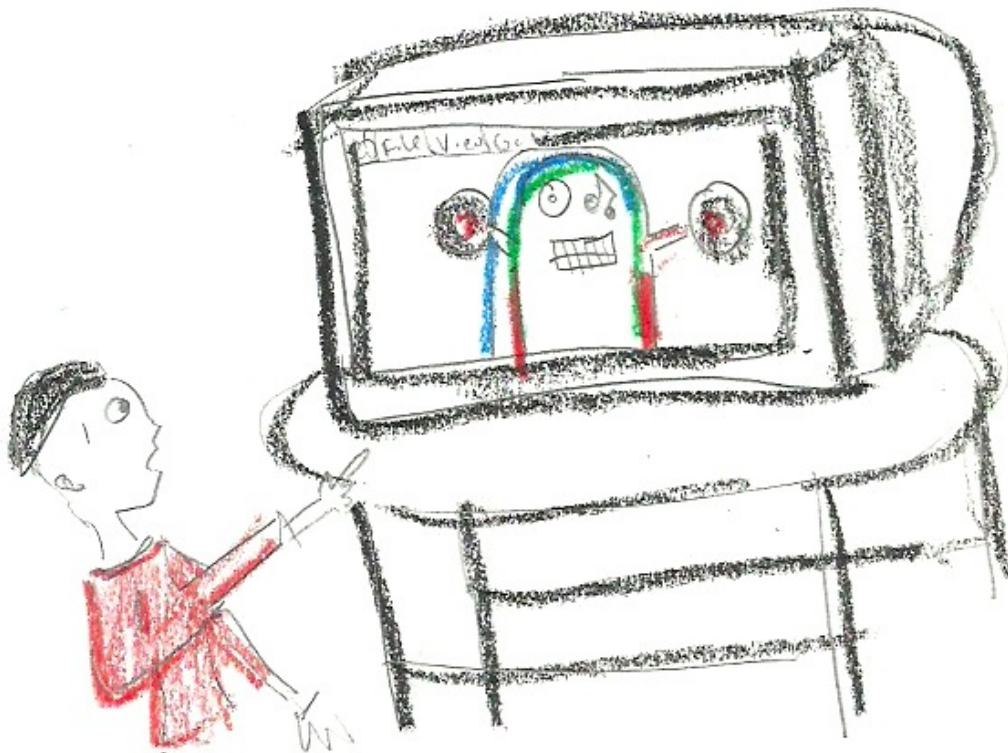


Kevin opened his eyes. He was in his room, surrounded by beans.

"Honey?" His mother threw open the door. Kevin let out a sigh of relief at his mother's familiar face. "Are you alright?"

"What happened?" Kevin moaned, rubbing his head.

"There was an earthquake," she said. "But it's alright. It was only a 5.6 on the Richter Scale, according to the news."



"Great," Kevin muttered. "You sure it wasn't worse?"

"Why?" his mother asked. She frowned. "Kevin, what is that on your computer?"

"What?" he asked, getting to his feet. He looked at his computer and froze.

On the screen was the robot from his dream! It was waving a record-hand at him and crooning. "Strangers in the night! Exchanging glances."