

STORY OF A CIVIC SENTINEL



BY ANNA BERTI SUMAN
AND ALICE TOIETTA

SCIENTIFIC SUPERVISION
BY SVEN SCHADE



OUR STORY BEGINS IN A LAND AFFLICTED BY OIL EXTRACTION. COMPLEX INTERESTS AND A RELENTLESS NEED TO PRODUCE AND OBTAIN PROFITS HAVE OVERTIME GENERATED A PERVASIVE IMPACT ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND ITS INHABITANTS. WE FACE A REALITY MADE OF SILENT CONTAMINATION, OF OFFICIAL DATA THAT HIDE THE BARE TRUTH, AND OF UNHEARD CITIZEN'S COMPLAINTS. ON THIS LANDSCAPE OF UNSPOKEN TRUTH, THE PEOPLE WHO CULTIVATE THE LAND, BREED ANIMALS OR SIMPLY LIVE HERE, ARE DIVIDED BETWEEN THOSE WHO WANT TO DISCOVER AND DENOUNCE, AND THOSE WHO REMAIN SILENT, CAPTURED BY THE SYSTEM. "STORY OF A CIVIC SENTINEL" TELLS THE CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY THOSE WHO DECIDE TO INVESTIGATE THE CONTAMINATION, REPORT IT, AND FIGHT FOR THE TRUTH TO BE KNOWN.



LISA IS DEAD. SHE WAS MY FAVOURITE COW. SHE'S LIVED ON OUR FARM SINCE I WAS A LITTLE GIRL. EVEN THOUGH SHE WAS NOT YOUNG, HER SUDDEN DEATH IS QUITE SUSPICIOUS...

WHO CAN I TALK TO ABOUT THIS? I DON'T WANT MY DAD TO WORRY TOO MUCH AND FOR HIS HEADACHES TO GET WORSE, AND MOM HAS NEVER CARED ABOUT ANYTHING BUT HER BIG, SHINY OFFICE. I GUESS I'LL HAVE TO GO TO STEVEN.



STEVEN IS OUR NEIGHBOR, A CONSPIRACY THEORIST WHOM I NEVER REALLY LIKED. HE KEEPS SAYING MOM'S FIRM IS POLLUTING OUR AIR AND SOIL, AND A BUNCH OF OTHER HIPPIY NONSENSE. BUT HE DOES KNOW HIS WAY AROUND FARM ANIMALS...



THAT'S IT, I CAN'T TAKE IT ANYMORE! THE JUDICIAL TRIAL HAS BEEN DRAGGING ON FOR YEARS, AND I SPENT A FORTUNE ON LAWYERS AND ANALYSES... WE ARE FIGHTING AGAINST A CORRUPTED SYSTEM: EVEN THE JUDICIARY DOES NOT LISTEN TO US OR, IF THEY DO, THEY TAKE TOO LONG. MY HERD DIED OFF ONE BY ONE, AND I HAD TO SELL THE FARM. I ONLY MANAGE TO GET BY BECAUSE I DON'T HAVE A FAMILY. WHAT KIND OF LIFE IS THIS ?!



AT STEVEN'S...

STEVEN HAS BEEN FOLLOWING FOR YEARS THE TRIAL AGAINST MORTAL. MY MOM SAYS IT'D BE BETTER IF STEVEN JUST STOPPED COMPLAINING, BECAUSE MORTAL ACTUALLY FEEDS HUNDREDS OF FAMILIES AND SUPPORTS MANY OF OUR TOWN'S PROJECTS. I AM SORRY TO SEE STEVEN SO BEAT, HE'S USUALLY VERY FEISTY. IT LOOKS LIKE HE'S GIVEN UP...

I DIDN'T WANT TO BE

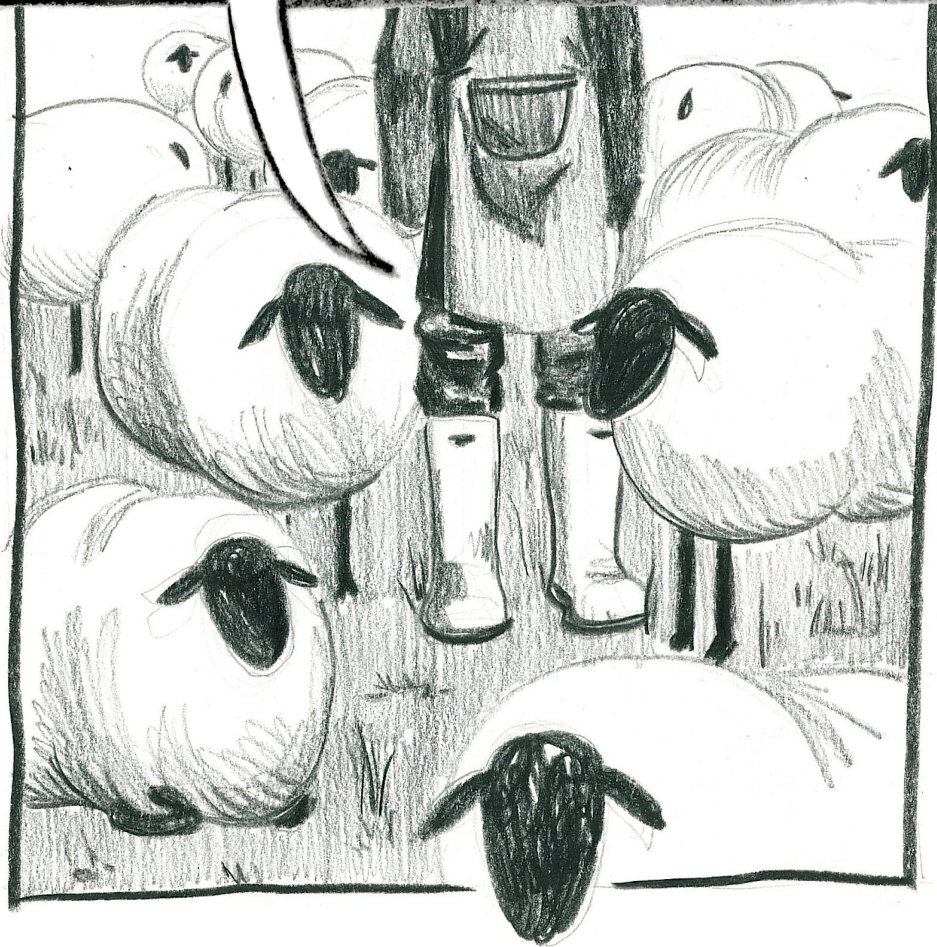


A MERCHANT OF DEATH...

HE EVENTUALLY SPUTTERS A NAME OUT: LEO. STEVEN SAYS HE COULD HELP ME WORK OUT WHAT HAPPENED TO LISA. I DON'T FULLY TRUST HIM, BUT I HAVE NOTHING TO LOSE... AND I HAVE THE WEIRD FEELING I OWE IT TO POOR LISA.

A COUPLE OF DAYS LATER, I DECIDE TO PAY LEO A VISIT. ONCE AT HIS FARM...

NOBODY WANTS TO BE A SHEEP FARMER ANYMORE. WE HAVE TO SELL OUR MEAT FAR AWAY FROM HERE, WHERE THE RUMORS THAT OUR LAMBS ARE CONTAMINATED HAVE NOT ARRIVED YET. I MYSELF AM A **CANCER SURVIVOR**, I AM LUCKY TO BE ALIVE : DO YOU SEE HOW FAR CHEMICALS CAN SEEP INTO THE HUMAN BODY ? MY ANIMALS HAVE PROBLEMS TOO : THEY HARDLY EAT, THEY ARE ALWAYS TIRED... WE PERFORMED ANALYSES AND FOUND HEAVY METALS IN THEIR LIVERS.

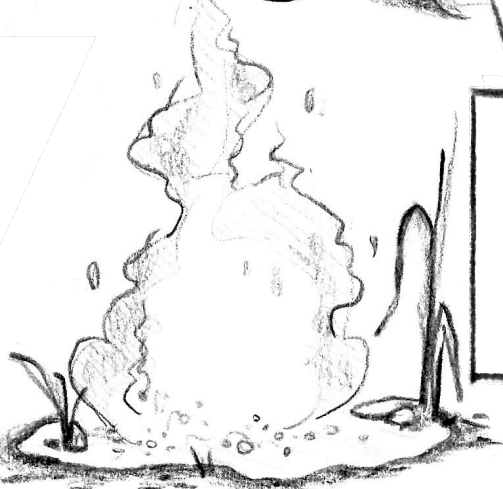
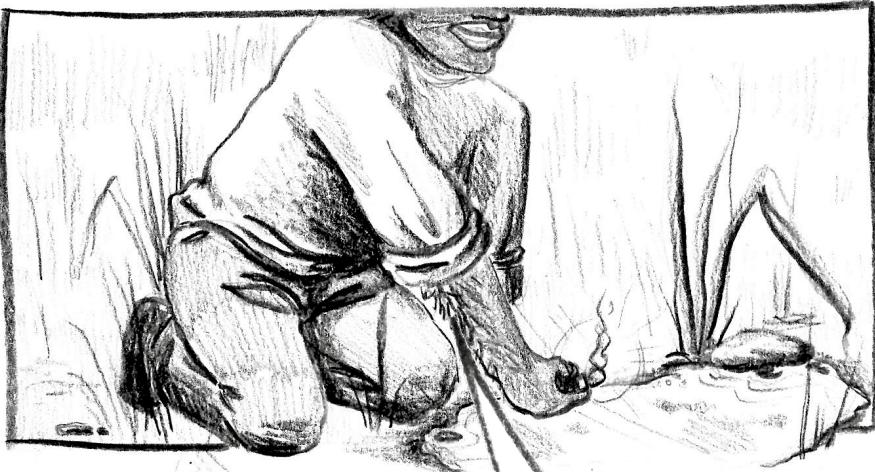


IN OUR FARM WE NEVER TESTED OUR ANIMALS. IF CERTAIN ANALYSES ARE NOT REQUIRED, WHY RISK FINDING OUT SOMETHING YOU DON'T WANT TO KNOW, LIKE LEO ?



I FINALLY MANAGE TO ASK FOR LEO'S HELP WITH INVESTIGATING THE DEATH OF MY COW.

THE DAY AFTER THAT, AT MY FAMILY'S FIELD, HE BARELY TAKES A LOOK AT LISA AND SWIFTLY STRIDES TOWARDS THE WATER WELL.



SEE? THIS WATER CONTAINS A HUGE AMOUNT OF HYDROCARBONS, THAT'S WHY IT BURNS. THEY ARE PUMPING RESIDUAL OIL INTO THESE AQUIFERS. IT'S JUST BRUTAL!

WHAT'S HE TALKING ABOUT? AND WHAT THE HECK ARE HYDROCARBONS? DESPITE MY CONFUSION, SOMETHING IN MY MIND CLICKS: WE OFTEN HEAR ABOUT THESE STORIES ABOUT CONTAMINATION, BUT WE USUALLY JUST IGNORE THEM. NOW THAT IT IS ME IN THIS SITUATION, THOUGH, HOW CAN I TURN MY HEAD THE OTHER WAY?

THE WORST THING IS THAT THERE'S NOTHING YOU CAN DO. JUST MOVE THE COWS TO ANOTHER FIELD AND HOPE MORTA'L WON'T GET THERE AS WELL.

IT IS SO UNFAIR! IT'S NOT OUR FAULT THIS FIELD IS POLLUTED AND CANNOT BE USED ANYMORE! I AM SO ANGRY... IS THERE REALLY NOTHING I CAN DO?



THOSE LIGHTS COME FROM THE OIL EXTRACTION PLANT.
MY ENTIRE LIFE THEY'VE HELPED ME FALL ASLEEP:
I SEE THEM FROM MY BEDROOM WINDOW.
TONIGHT, THEY'RE KEEPING ME AWAKE...



I DECIDE TO FOLLOW LEO AND HIS FRIENDS IN THE MONITORING ACTIVITIES. WHILE WORKING, ANGELA TELLS ME ABOUT THE SUSPICIOUS DEATHS AMONG HER ANIMALS...



...MIKE ABOUT THE OIL WASTE BARRELS HE FOUND IN HIS FIELDS...



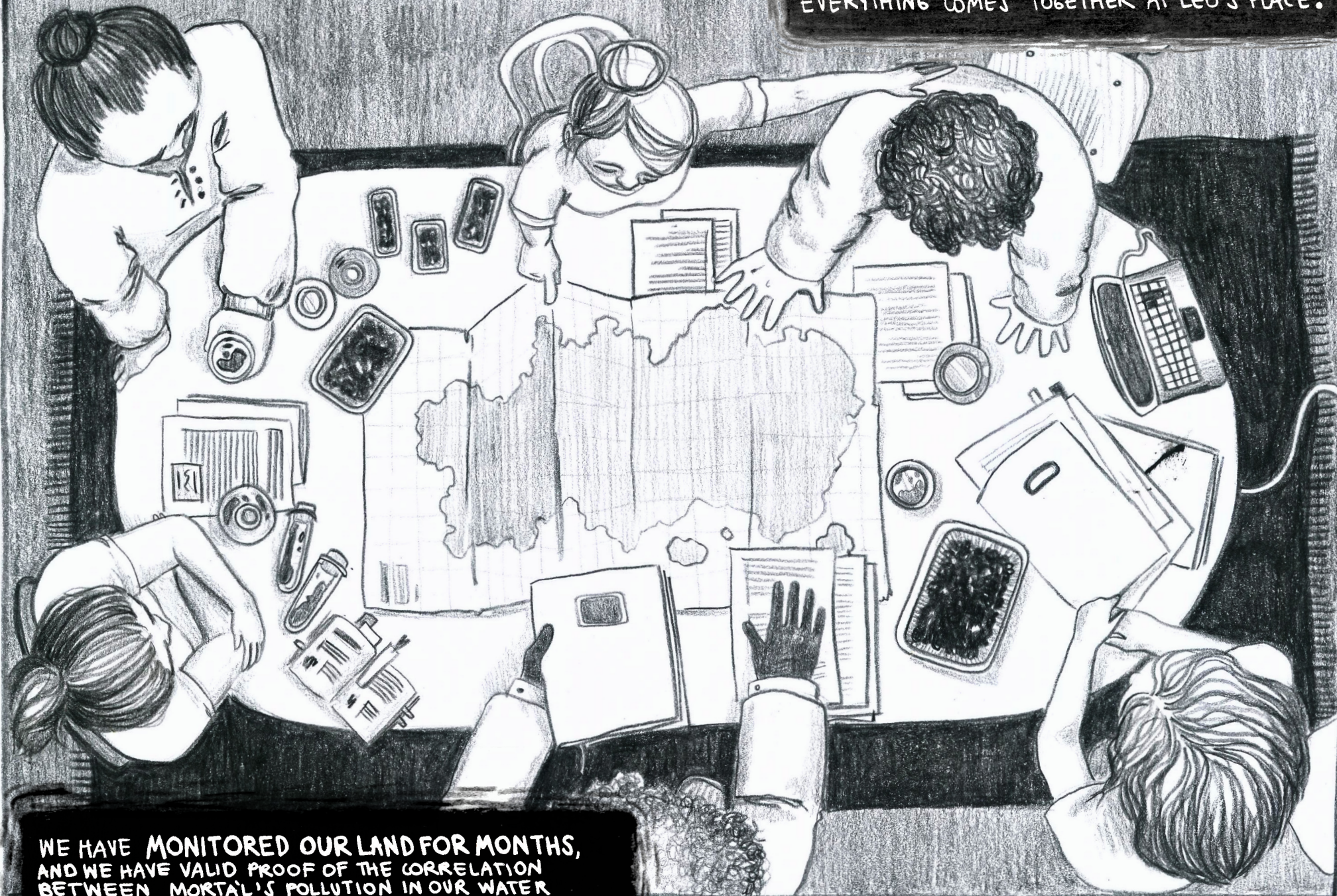
...JULES ABOUT THE MANY POLLUTION-RELATED DISEASES.

I AM GROWING ATTACHED TO THESE PEOPLE AND THEIR STORIES. HOWEVER, WE ARE STILL A VERY SMALL GROUP OF DATA COLLECTORS, PROBABLY BECAUSE OF THE ROYALTIES, SUMS OF MONEY THROUGH WHICH MORTAL IS ABLE TO SILENCE CITIZENS AND INSTITUTIONS.



THE STORIES ARE NUMEROUS, AND ALL OF THEM CAN BE TRACED BACK TO MY MOM'S COMPANY. I AM SERIOUSLY QUESTIONING MY LIFETIME'S BELIEFS.

EVERYTHING COMES TOGETHER AT LEO'S PLACE.



WE HAVE MONITORED OUR LAND FOR MONTHS,
AND WE HAVE VALID PROOF OF THE CORRELATION
BETWEEN MORTAL'S POLLUTION IN OUR WATER
AND SOIL AND THE MORTALITY RATES OF OUR ANIMALS.

A FEW WEEKS LATER, ON AN APPARENTLY NORMAL DAY, I HEAR NOISES COMING FROM LEO'S HOUSE. WHY IS THE POLICE THERE?

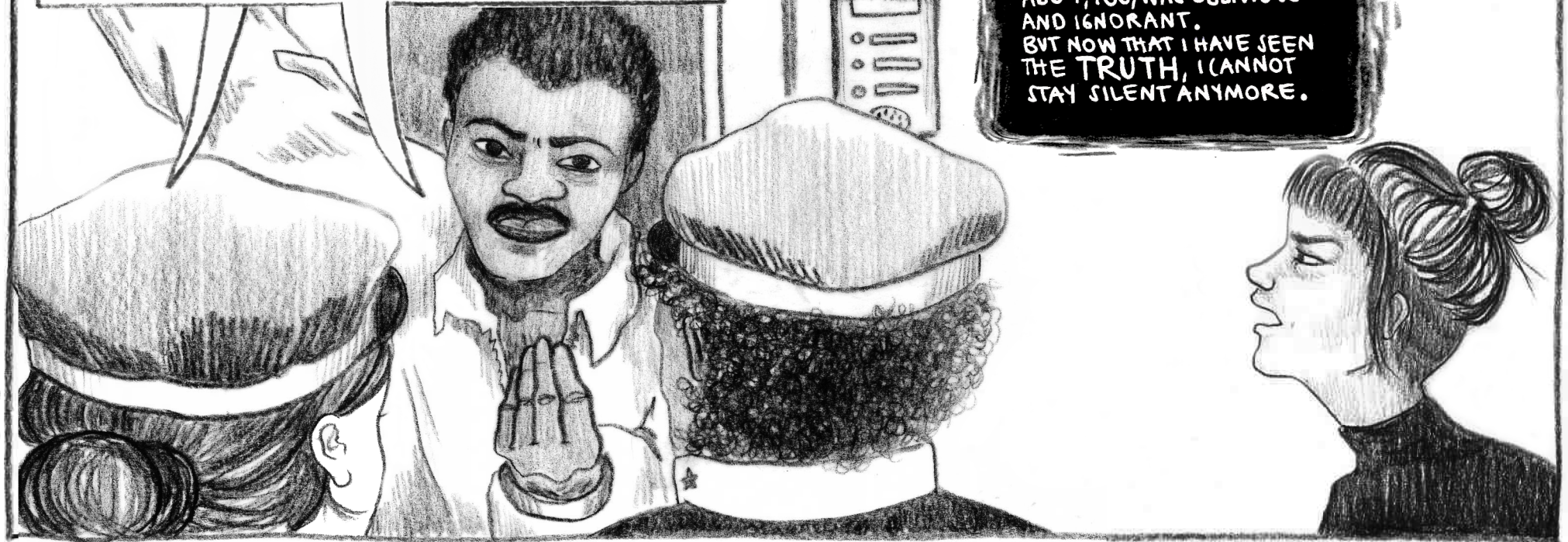
WHY DID YOU GATHER THOSE DATA? WHAT'S YOUR JOB? MORTAL'S PRIVATE SECURITY TOLD US YOU WERE STATIONING SUSPICIOUSLY IN FRONT OF THE COMPANY'S MAIN GATES THE OTHER DAY.

I CALLED YOU BECAUSE SOMEONE STOLE MY HARD DISK WITH MONTHS' WORTH OF IMPORTANT DATA! WHAT'S WITH ALL THE QUESTIONING, THE THIEF HERE IS NOT ME!!

THEY WRITE DOWN MY NAME AND ADDRESS, TOO, BECAUSE I KNOW LEO. THEY TELL US TO STOP OUR RESEARCH ON PUBLIC LAND, WITHOUT MENTIONING ANY ACTUAL BREACH OF THE LAW.

I AM FURIOUS. THIS WHOLE THING IS NOT JUST ALL ABOUT ME ANYMORE. I AM AWARE WE ARE DEALING WITH INJUSTICE, EVEN THOUGH NOBODY SEEMS TO CARE.

UP UNTIL A FEW MONTHS AGO I, TOO, WAS OBLIVIOUS AND IGNORANT. BUT NOW THAT I HAVE SEEN THE TRUTH, I CANNOT STAY SILENT ANYMORE.







THE STORY OF ZEN AND HER COMPANIONS TEACHES US THAT THE FIRST DRIVE TO BECOME A CIVIC SENTINEL IS THE ATTACHMENT TO ONE'S LAND, TO ONE'S ANIMALS AND A SENSE OF CARE AND RESPONSIBILITY.

NEITHER MORTAL NOR THE CHARACTERS OF THIS STORY OR THE DESCRIBED LAND EXIST. HOWEVER, IN MANY PARTS OF THE WORLD, CITIZENS AND COMMUNITIES ARE FIGHTING THE ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE THIRST FOR PROFIT OF BUSINESSES.

CIVIC ENVIRONMENTAL MONITORING - THE COLLECTION OF ENVIRONMENTAL DATA WITH THEIR OWN SENSES OR WITH TECHNOLOGICAL TOOLS CONDUCTED BY ORDINARY CITIZENS - CAN BE A CRITICAL AND DISRUPTIVE RESPONSE TO ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS CAUSED BY PRIVATE ACTORS AND ENABLED BY INSTITUTIONAL INERTIA. EACH OF US CAN DO THEIR SHARE BY REMAINING VIGILANT AND HAVING THE COURAGE TO UNCOVER UNCOMFORTABLE TRUTHS.

THIS STORY WAS PRODUCED AS PART OF THE SENSJUS - SENSING FOR JUSTICE PROJECT.

SENSJUS RESEARCHES THE POTENTIAL OF CIVIC MONITORING AS A SOURCE OF EVIDENCE TO PROVE ENVIRONMENTAL CRIMES. THE PROJECT, HOSTED BY THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION'S JOINT RESEARCH CENTRE (JRC), ISPRA, ITALY, IS SUPPORTED BY THE DUTCH NATIONAL RESEARCH COUNCIL (NWO) - THE RUBICON FELLOWSHIP NO. 66202117.

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THE AUTHORS OF THIS STORY HAVE HAD FIRSTHAND EXPERIENCES SIMILAR TO THOSE RECOUNTED HERE.

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