

The Last One Awake

LittleTale



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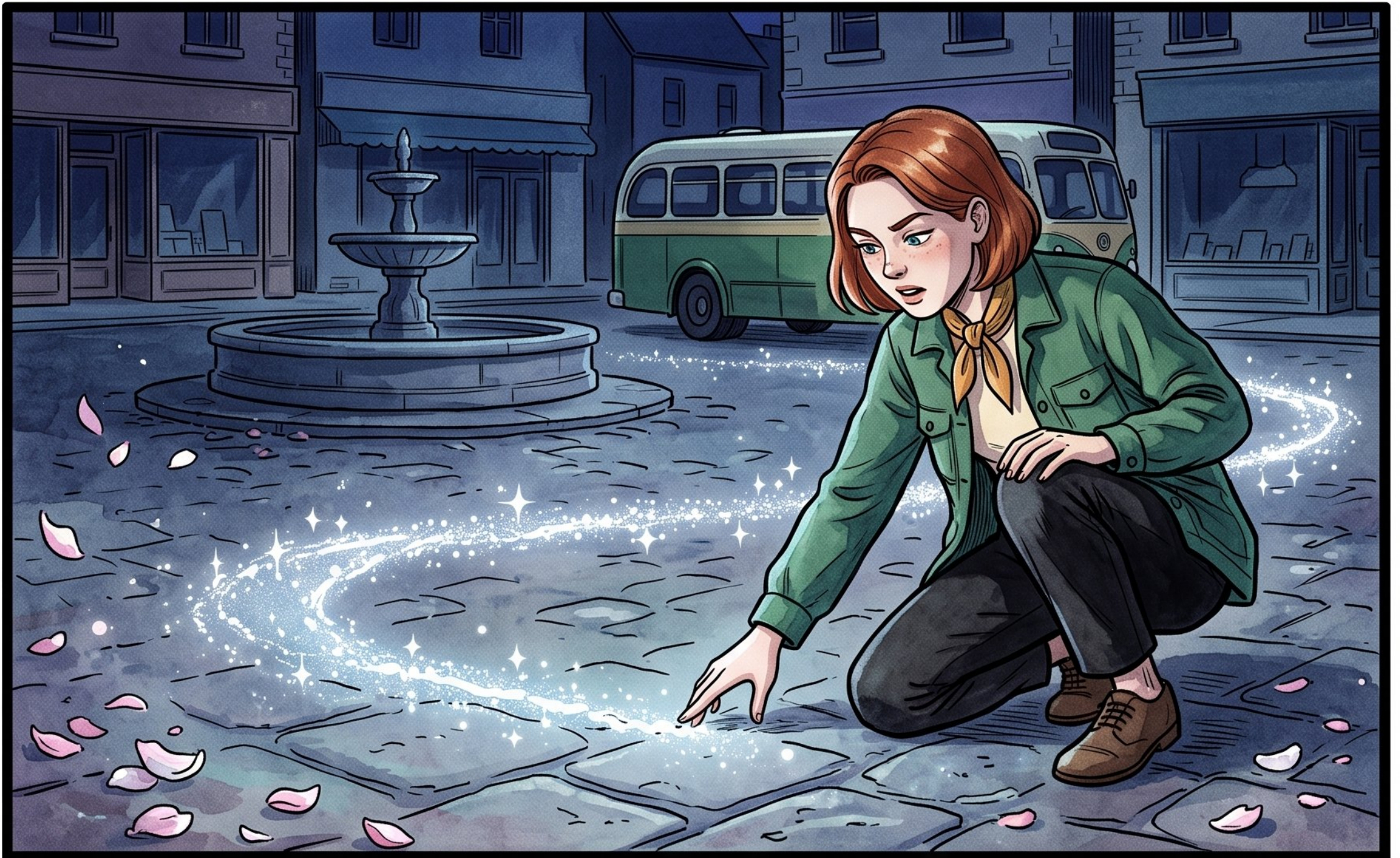
a story in twelve pages



At nine o'clock, the whole little town sighed and fell asleep mid-sentence. The bakery window dimmed, the buses hummed themselves quiet, and even the birds tucked their beaks beneath their wings. Only Rowan was still awake when every streetlamp blinked out at once.



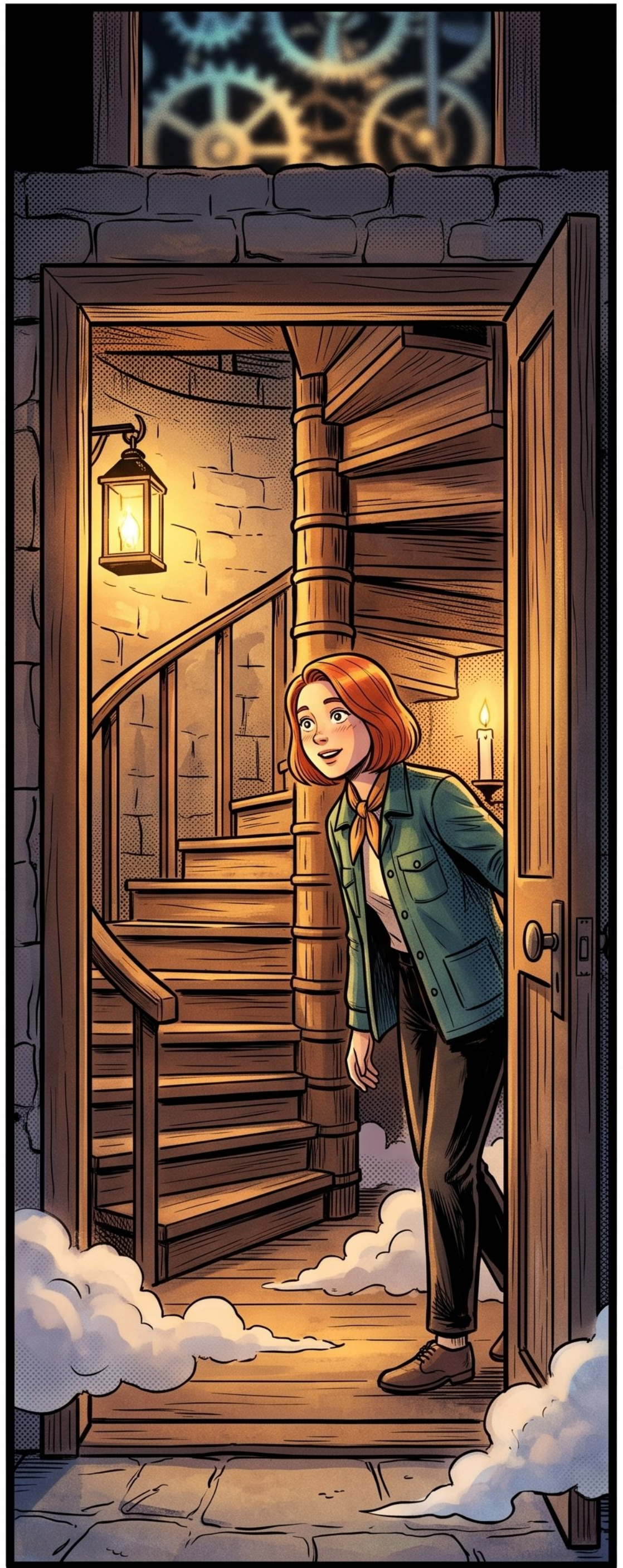
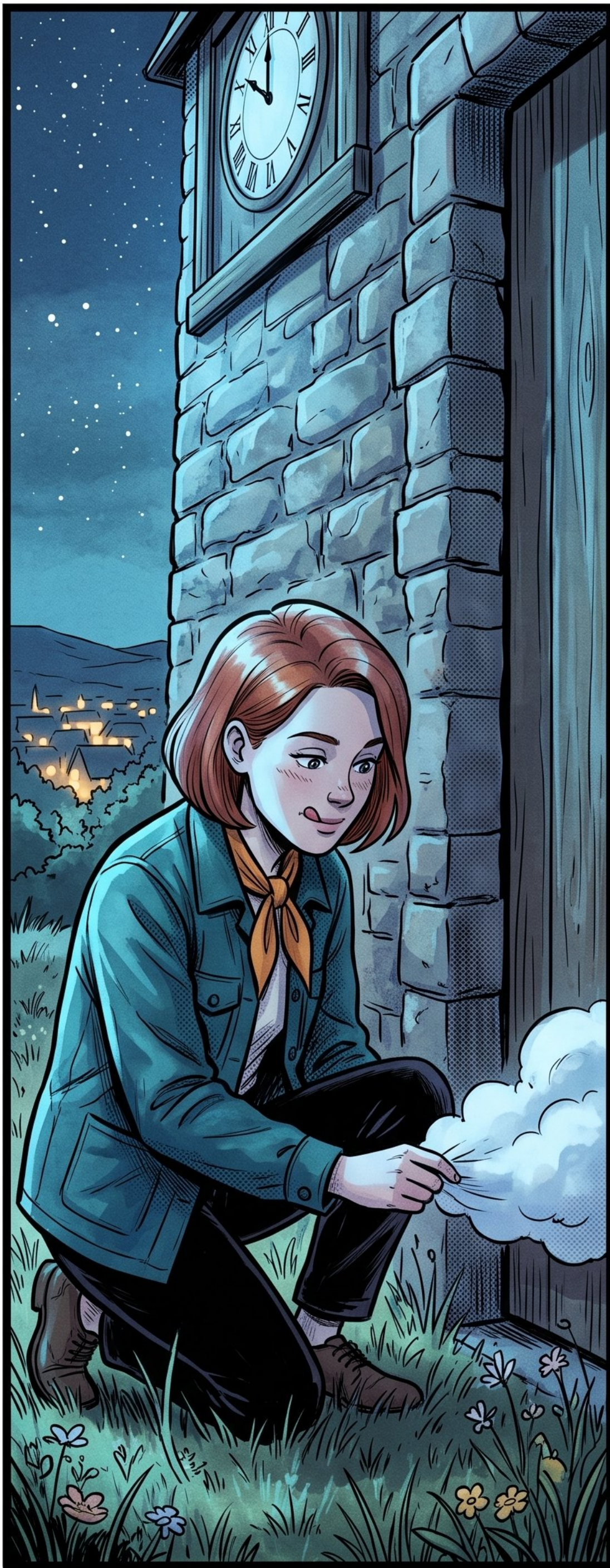
Rowan checked the kitchen clock: nine o'clock exactly. Then they peeked outside, where the last golden square of light vanished from the bakery. Somewhere in the quiet, a tiny click-click-click was moving uphill.



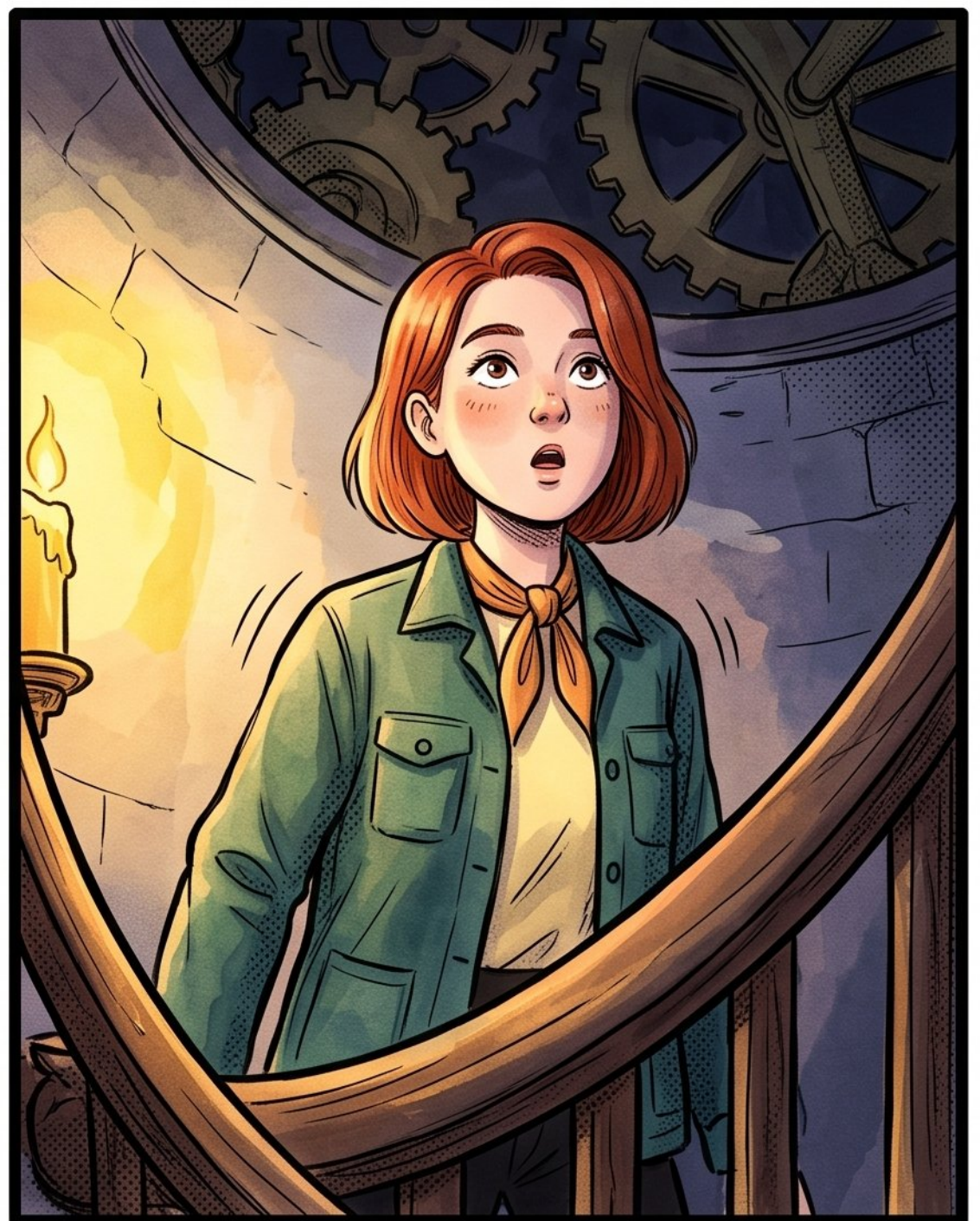
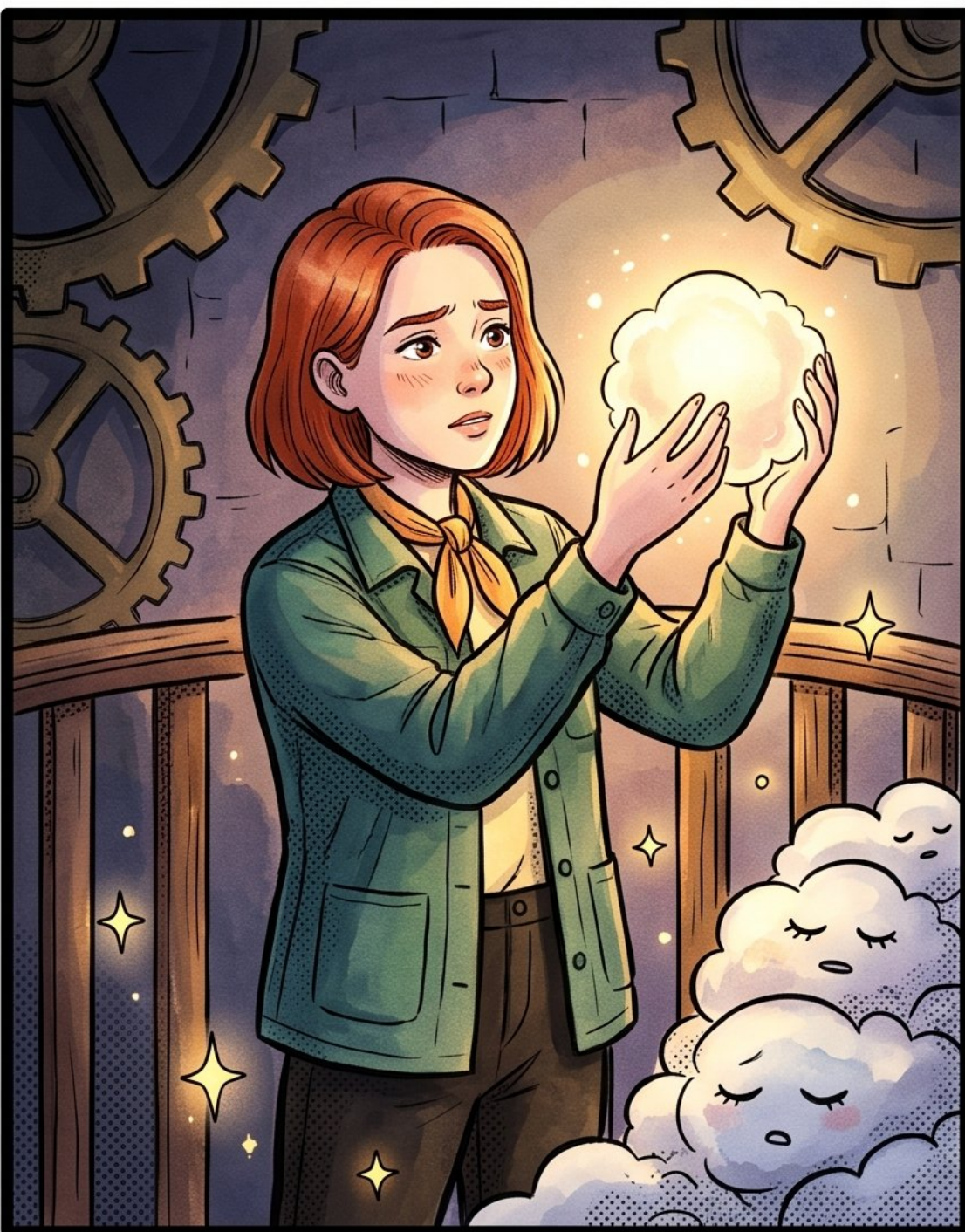
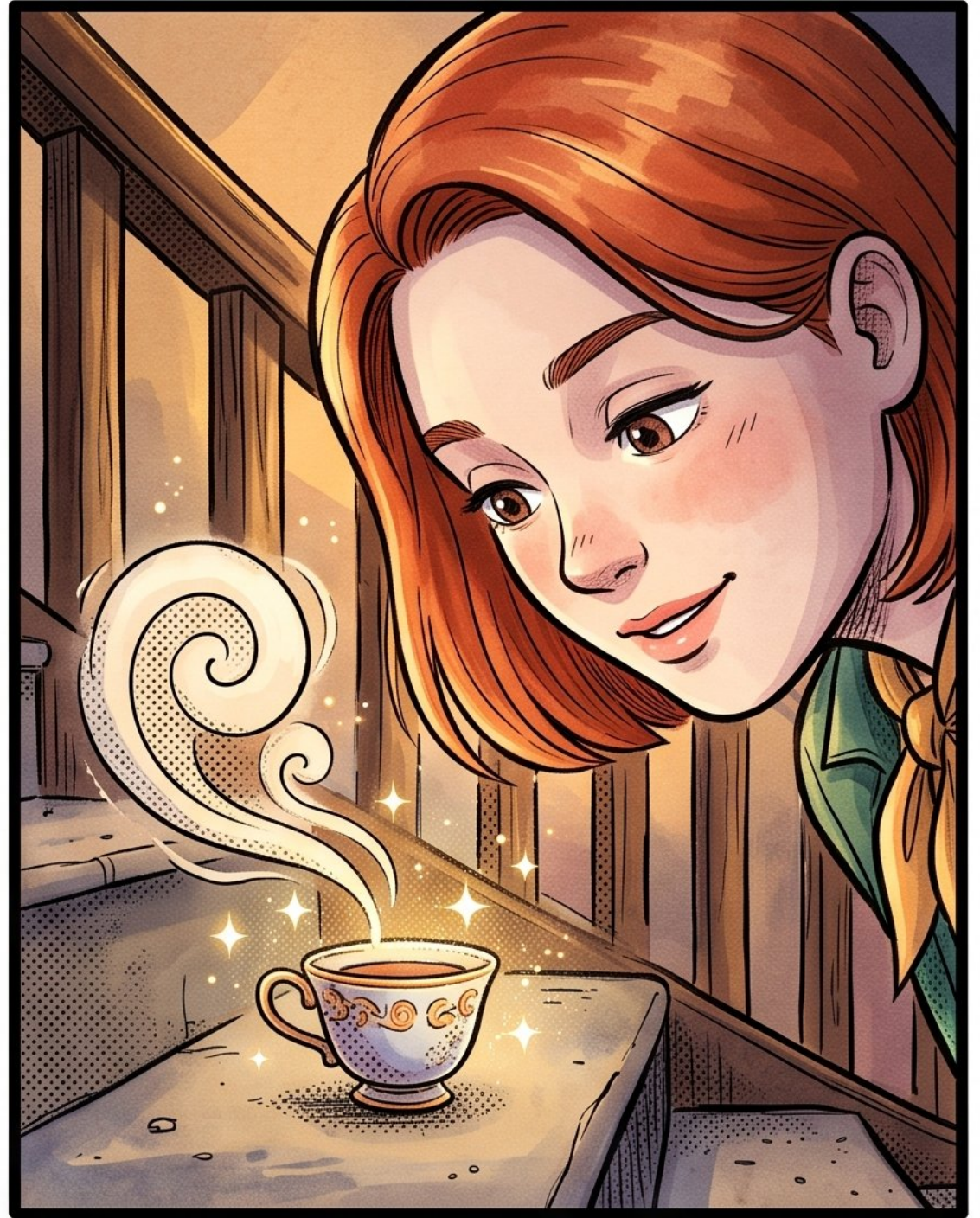
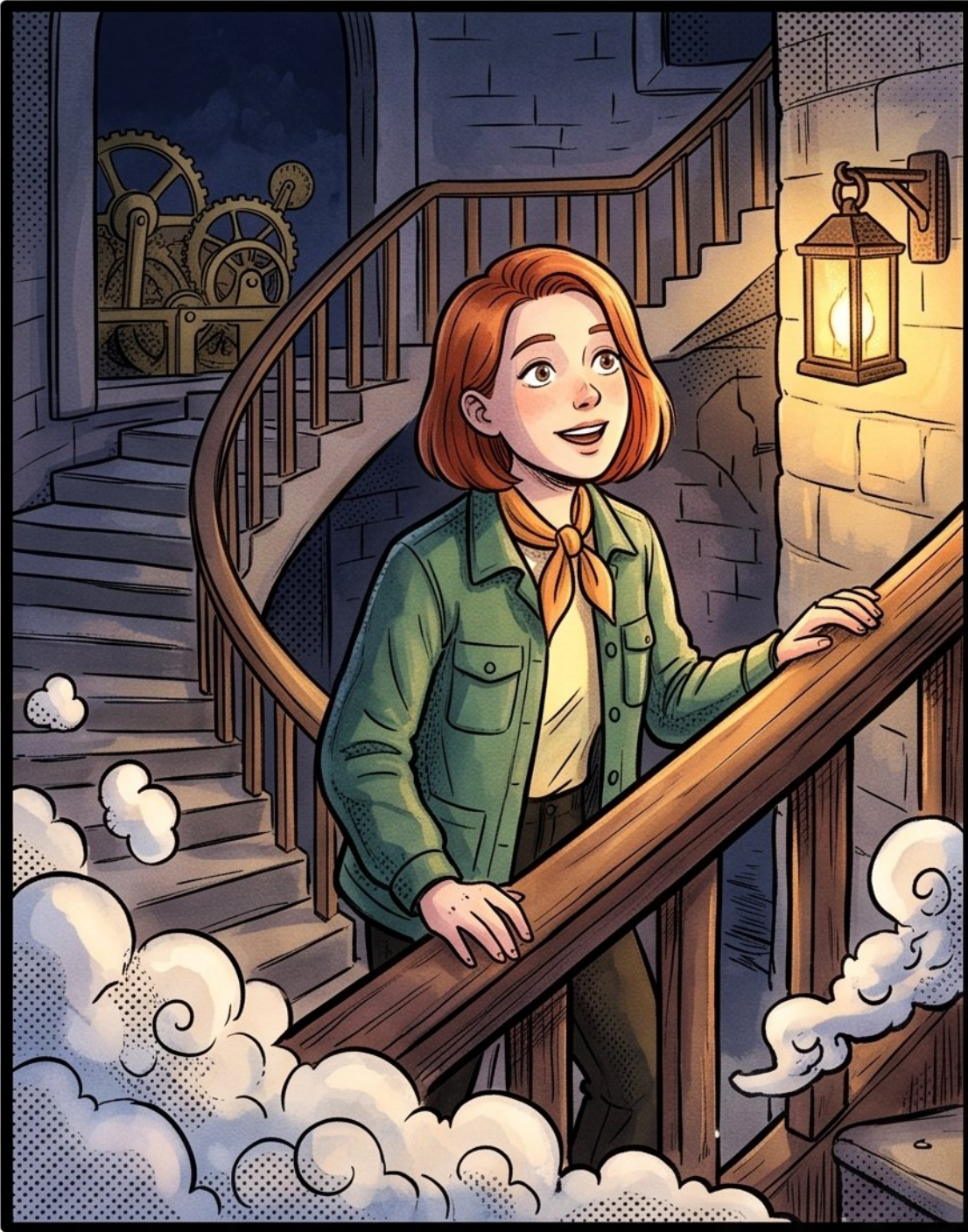
The click-click led past the sleeping bus and through the town square. It stopped beside a silver thread of moonlight on the ground. When Rowan followed it, the moonlight curled around the corner like a ribbon.



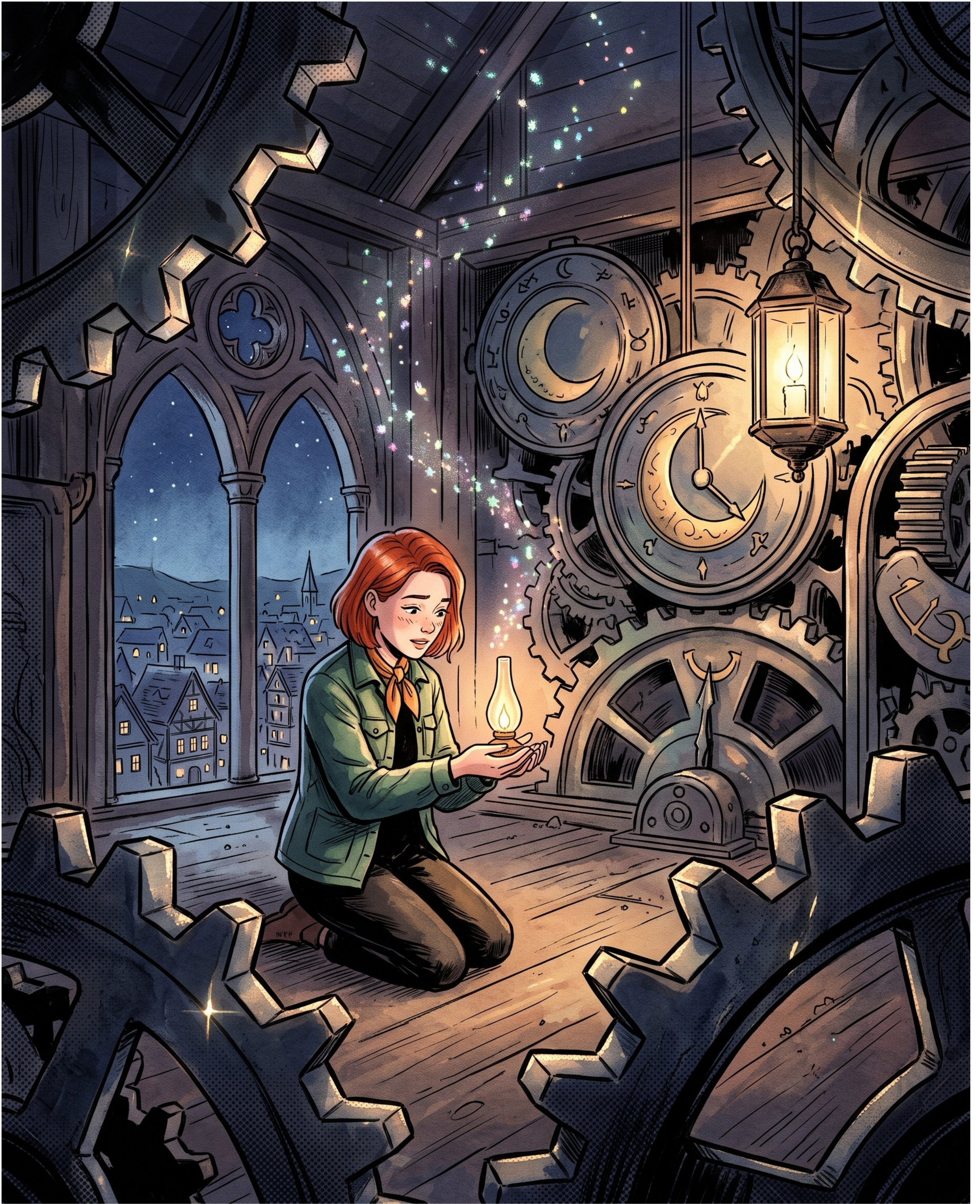
Up the hill stood an old clock tower that Rowan had never noticed before. Its round windows glowed softly, though the town below was dark. From inside came the click-click-click—and a very tired little sneeze.



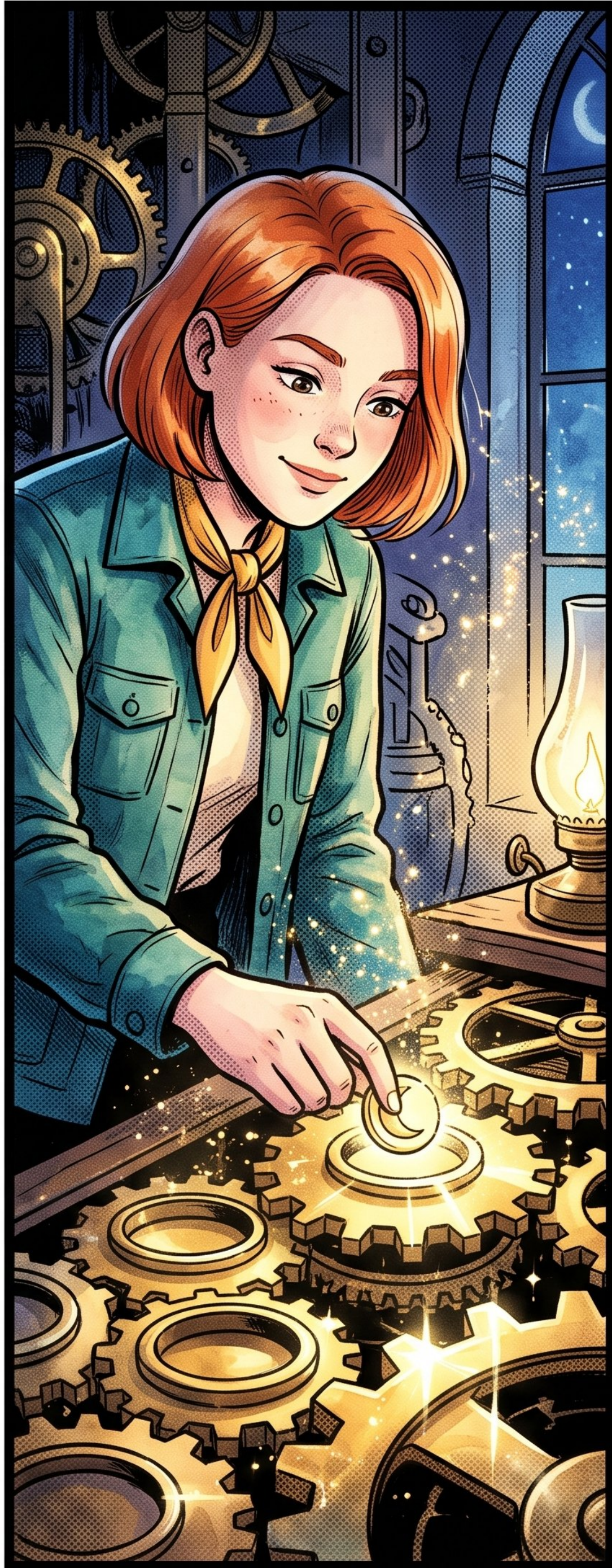
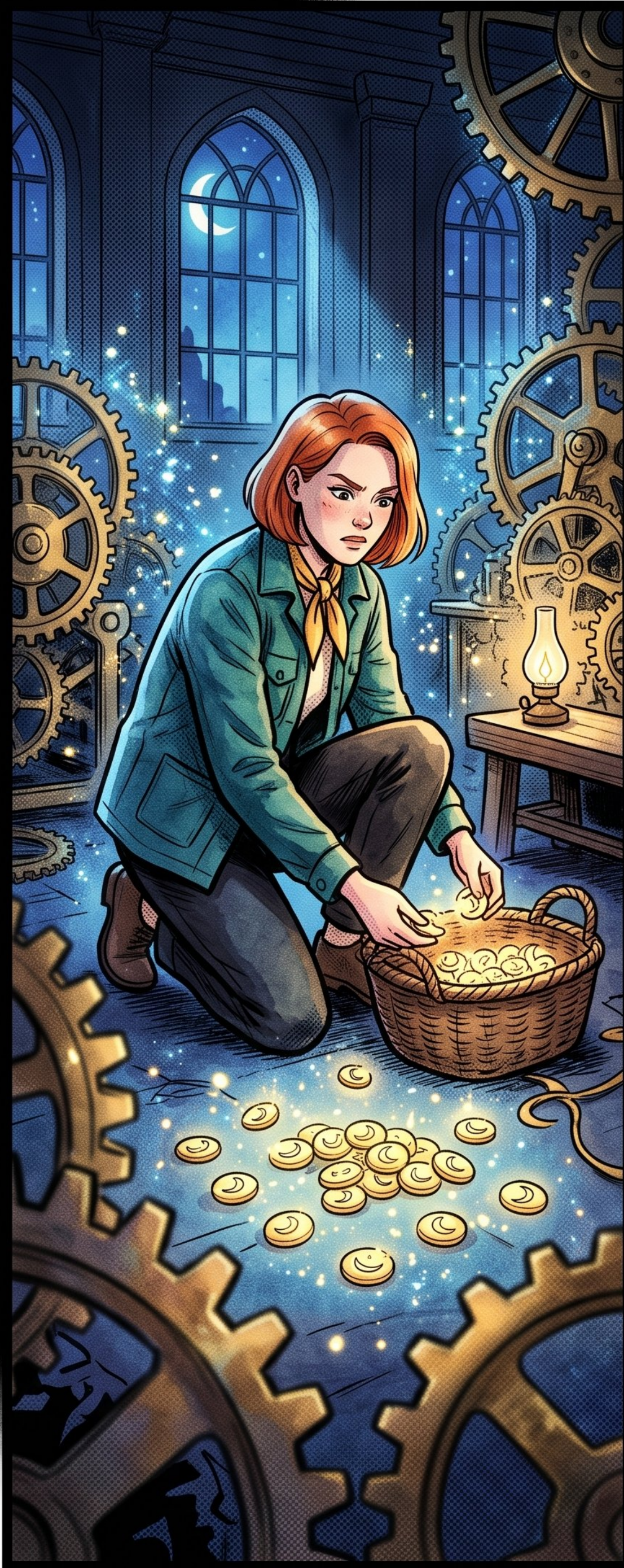
The tower door was not locked; it was simply stuck beneath a pile of sleepy clouds. Rowan gently tugged one cloud aside, then another. The door swung open, revealing a staircase that climbed into a soft golden glow.



Halfway up, Rowan found sleepy things everywhere: a yawn folded in a teacup, a lost lullaby resting on a rail, and a pile of dreams waiting to be sorted. But the click-click was slowing down. At the very top, something gave a worried little wobble.



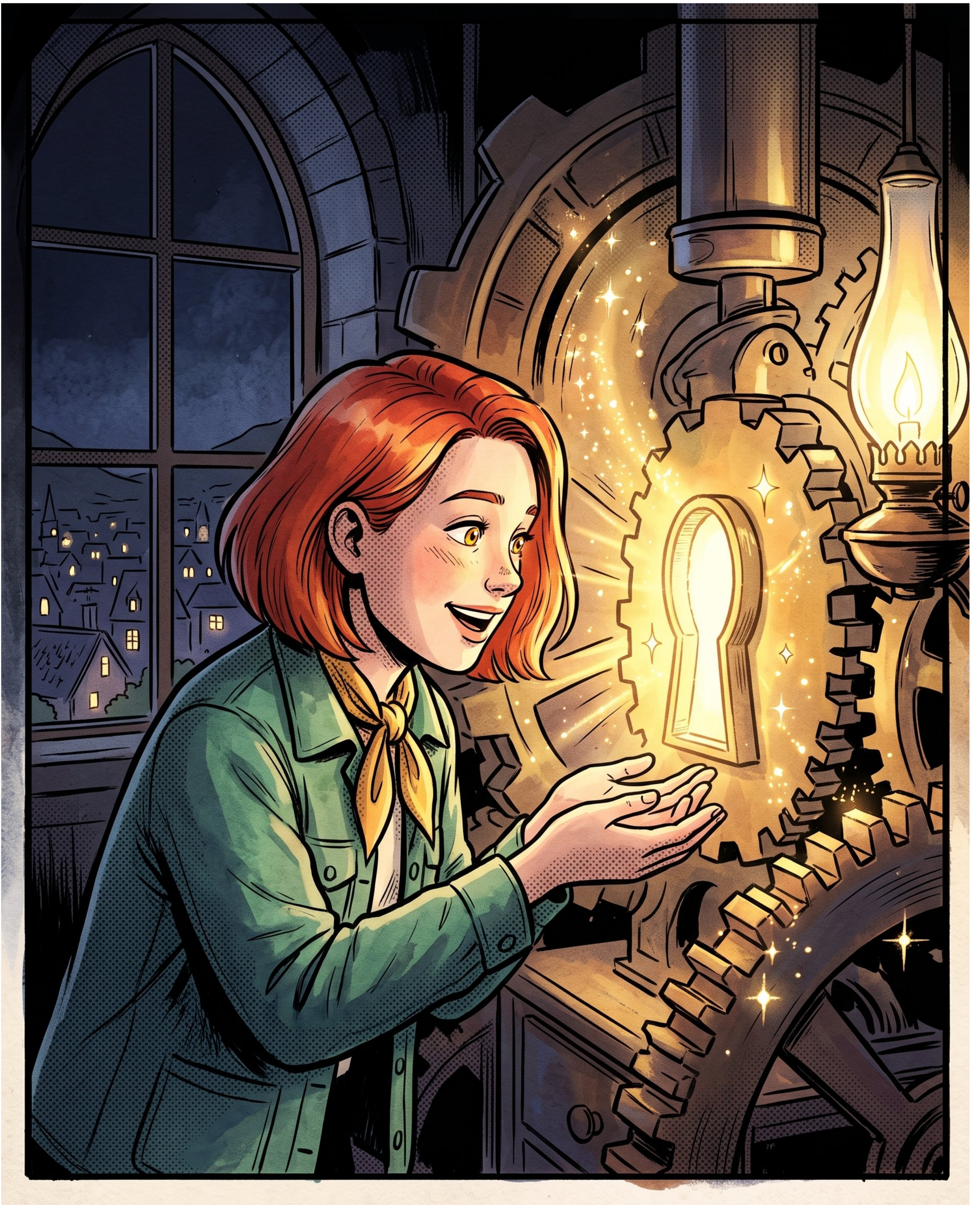
At the top was a room full of gears, moons, and one tiny keeper lamp. The lamp was trying very hard to stay bright, but its flame was no bigger than a firefly. “Oh,” whispered Rowan. “You are turning out the lights because you are tired.”



The keeper lamp flickered toward a basket marked by moon-shaped buttons, but it could not reach. Rowan gathered the buttons one by one and fitted them into the waiting places. Click. Click. Click! Yet one empty space still gleamed at the very center.



The last empty space was shaped like a yawn. Rowan remembered the yawn folded in the teacup far below. Down the staircase they hurried, around the landing, and back again—before the final click could fade away.



Rowan placed the little yawn in the final space. For one breath, the room held perfectly still. Then the keeper lamp blossomed into warm gold, and every sleeping light in town began to glow again.



Across the town, the bakery gave one cozy blink, the bus sighed a sleepy hum, and the birds rustled their feathers. The lights did not wake anyone; they only tucked the night in properly. The keeper lamp dimmed to a peaceful glow, and Rowan suddenly felt a yawn of their own.



By the time Rowan slipped back into bed, the town was sleeping deeply and warmly. Outside, every streetlamp shone like a tiny promise: someone was keeping watch, and someone was allowed to rest. At nine o'clock tomorrow, Rowan knew exactly where the first little click would begin.



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