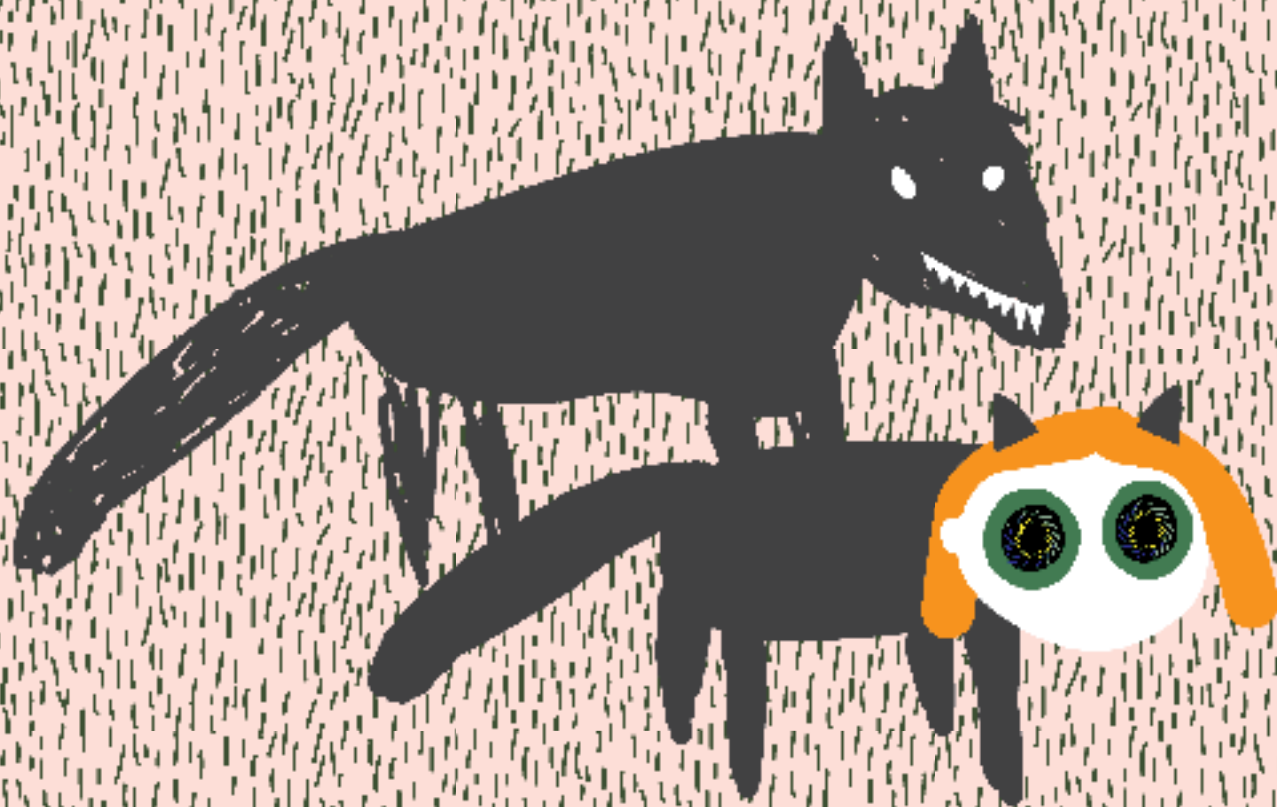


SEEING WOLVES



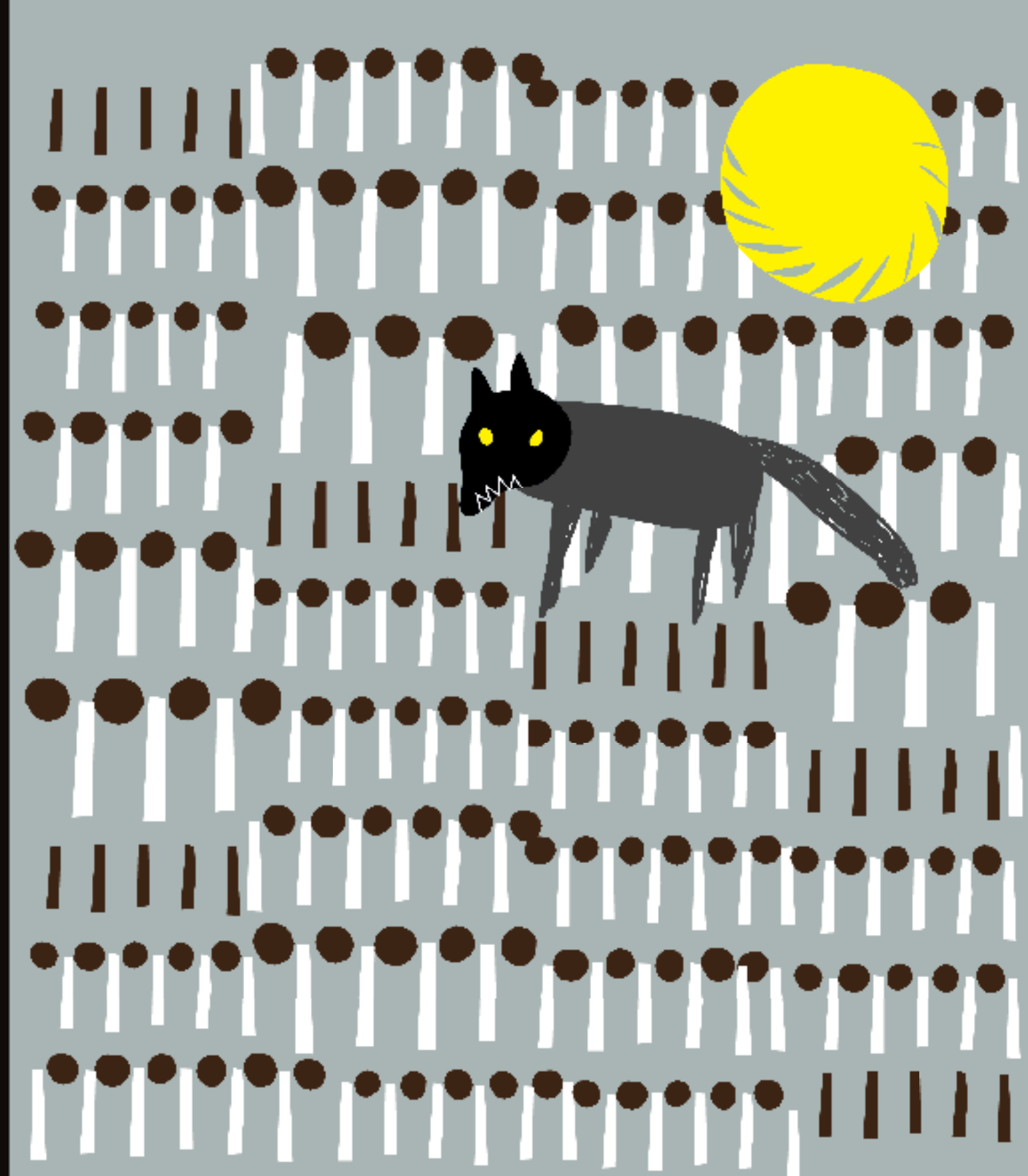
Richard Pecha & Babeta Ondrová

It's nice to think about things like this. But it seems to Berta that the wolf-like shadow is still there, and it still looks like a wolf, even when she gives it a nudge. What's worse, it seems to get darker and denser. Berta freezes. Then she sees flashes of yellow – pieces of a toy she has forgotten to tidy away (Mum hates that), she supposes. But wait! Can it be? Can these be the shining eyes of the shadow wolf?

By now, the situation is so critical that Berta wonders whether to burst into tears or scream her head off.



She is about to make her decision when the wolf moves and says: Well? Are you just going to stand there shaking or do you want to come with me?





So Berta went with the wolf

We can't say exactly where, because, of course, it was in the shadows and in secret. Let's just call it a wolf's way.

Are you afraid?

I am, wolf. When I'm alone at night. I so wish I wasn't!

But you're not afraid of me?

Oh I am, wolf.

Will you still be afraid of me if I promise not to eat you?

Even then.

You can't walk with wolves if you're afraid of them. You must go back.

I don't want to go back. If you were my friend, I wouldn't be so afraid of you. Will you be my friend, wolf?

I'm no one's friend, I'm a wolf. You and I are just walking side by side on the wolf's way.

Will you at least tell me your name? If I could call you by your name, I think I'd be less afraid of you. I don't want to go back to my room.

So the wolf told Berta his name.

But his name was a word she couldn't pronounce.

I can't say your name, wolf. Can I call you by another?

No.

Do let me. Please.

If you gave me a name, I'd be a dog, not a wolf. And if you try to do so, I'll eat you.

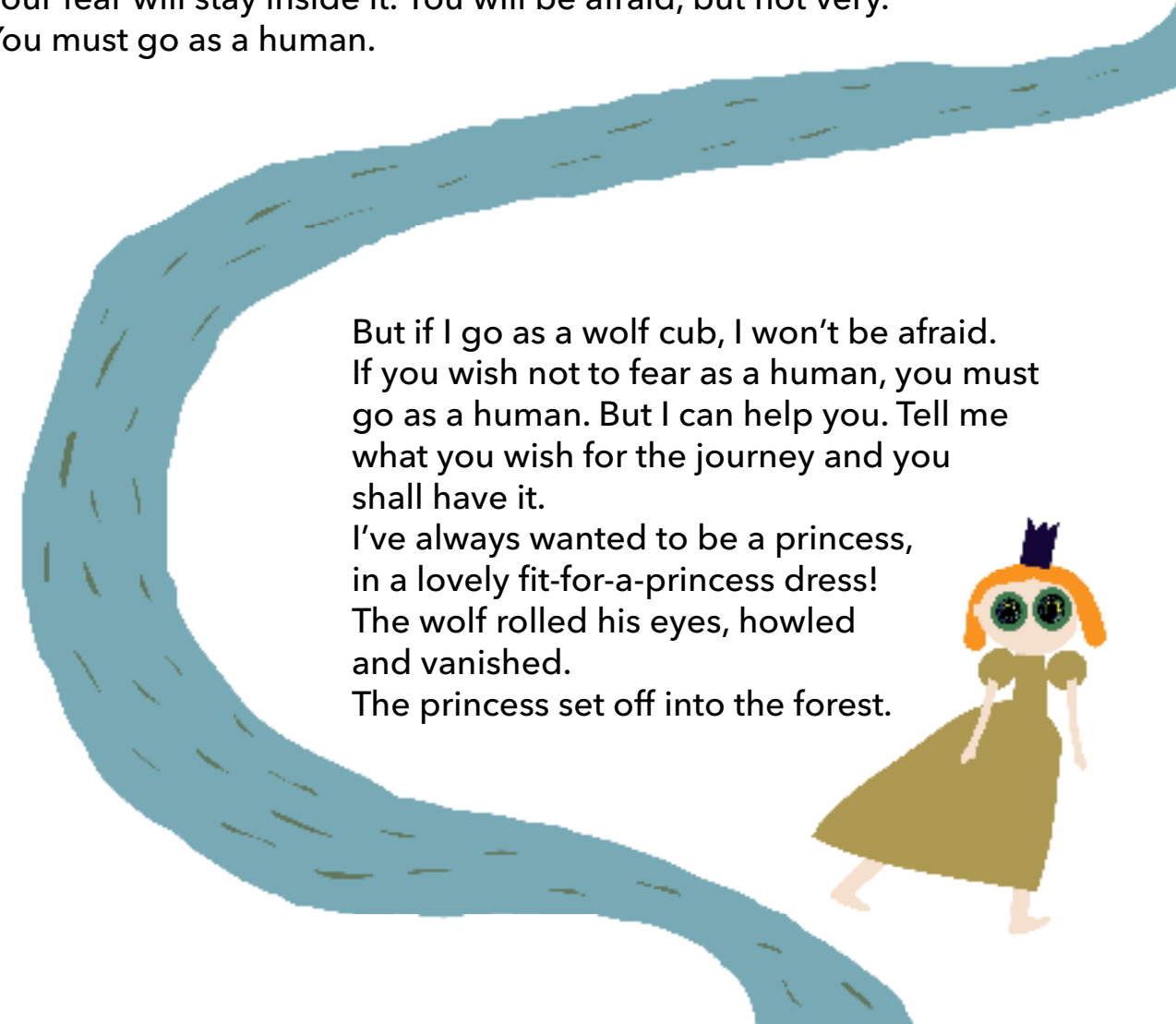


Because those are humans. When a human dies, he or she becomes a tree. To keep the balance as it should be.

Is it a punishment?

For balance, I said. Punishment is unknown to me. Go to the very middle of that forest. You will come to a clearing with one large tree in it. There we will meet again. If you walk through that forest, your fear will stay inside it. You will be afraid, but not very.

You must go as a human.



But if I go as a wolf cub, I won't be afraid. If you wish not to fear as a human, you must go as a human. But I can help you. Tell me what you wish for the journey and you shall have it.

I've always wanted to be a princess, in a lovely fit-for-a-princess dress! The wolf rolled his eyes, howled and vanished.

The princess set off into the forest.



Holy moly, he really did switch off the light and leave me!
What now? Will the wolf come? Will I have that lovely dress on? Will I be a wolf cub? Or will I just lie here and wait for the fear to come?

Suddenly Berta felt something grab her from behind and pull her upwards. Her head was spinning. Of course - she was flying! Down below she saw forest, mountains, rivers, everything really tiny because she was so high up. And she was wearing the princess dress. Something was scratching at her back, and she heard the splitting of seams. Oh no! Surely I'm not about to fall all the way down? If I do, I'll be squished. She wants to turn her head to see what is holding her up, and to cry out too, but she finds she can't. She goes into a sharp turn and suddenly she is falling towards rock. Luckily, there is a hole in the rock. It's a cave! Berta whizzes in before braking sharply. Then she shoots off again, into the dark. As she falls, she gets bashed about. The rock seems to be making a creaking sound.

She finds herself trapped, in a windowless cave dungeon. There is no light and no sound. How much better it would be to lie in bed or to run with a wolf! Should she burst into tears here and now? No, first she will try to find the entrance and push away its stone. She thinks she remembers where she fell into the hole. She feels about and leans her weight against the rock.

It's no use, I can't shift it. Berta sits down and waits. Maybe the wolf will come to free me. Or maybe he will do some magic. This princess dress isn't very warm, and it's uncomfortable too. A princess dress was a stupid wish. Worst of all, the wolf got mad about it.

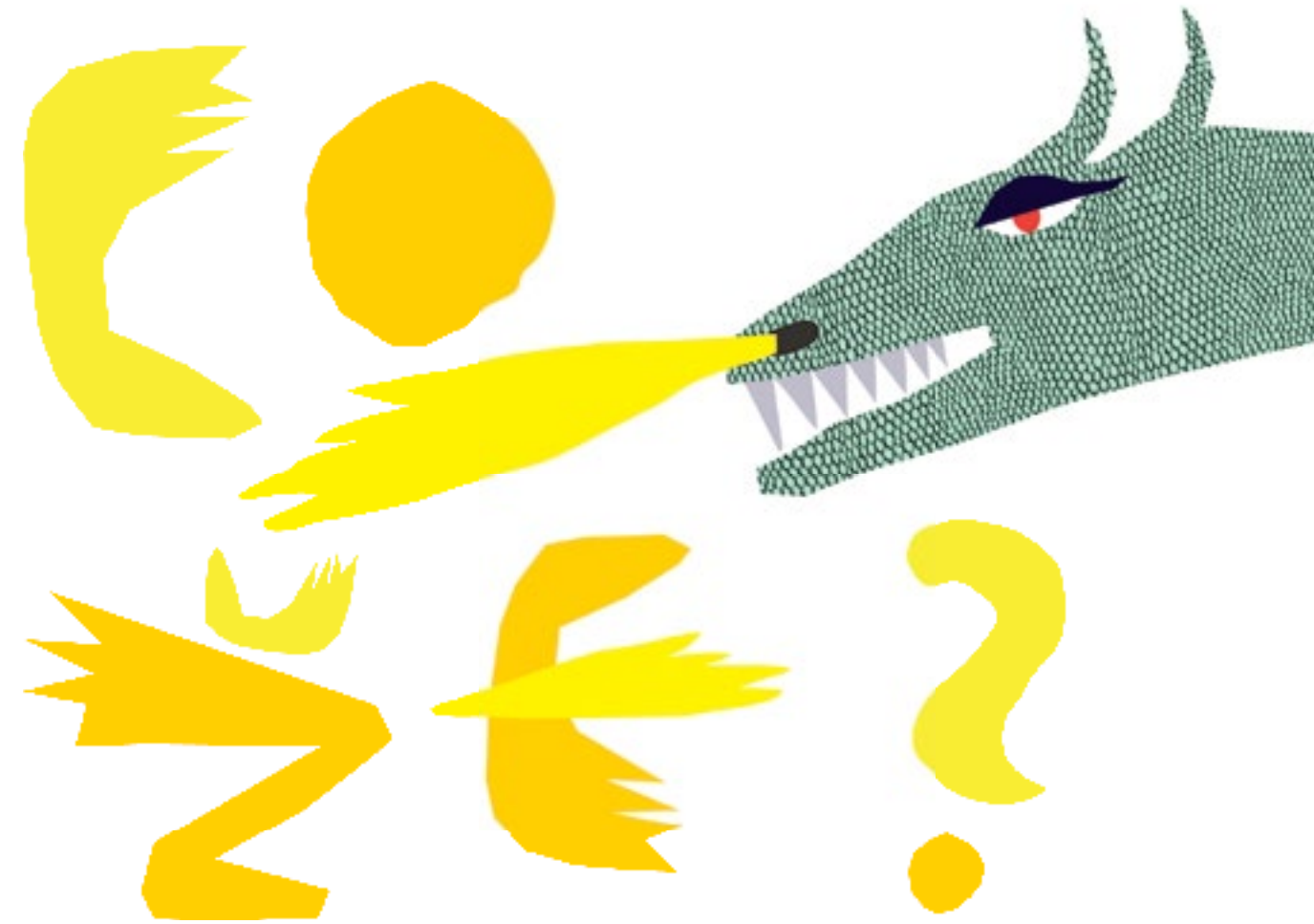




But what's this, pushing into the hole? It's a dragon's head!

All is ready and I am faint with hunger, hisses the dragon. Come here, little princess: our time has come.

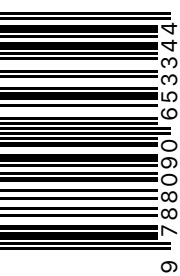
Berta is on the verge of tears.



Leave me alone, horrid dragon! How dare you eat someone you can talk to? Besides, I'm not even a real princess. I'm wearing this dress because I wished for it. What are you saying?!

The dragon's roar is so deafening that Berta must cover her ears. You almost killed me, you little cheat! You almost killed the last dragon alive in the wild! You're a silly sausage, that's what you are!

Still complaining, the dragon pulled his head from the hole. Before he disappeared, he pushed the stone back into place.



Vršovice 2016