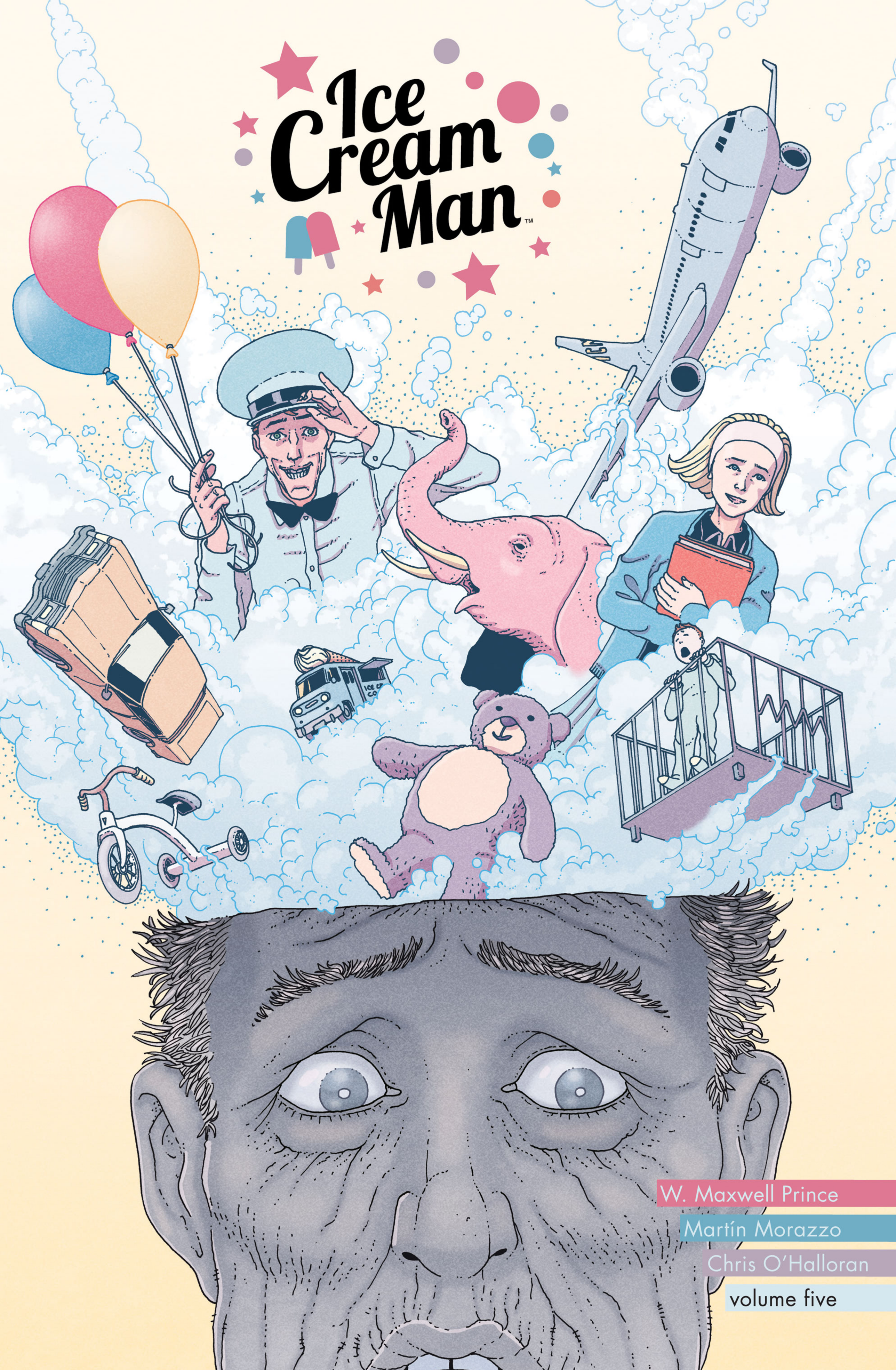
Ice Cream Man™



W. Maxwell Prince

Martín Morazzo

Chris O'Halloran

volume five



VOLUME FIVE

OTHER CONFECTIONS

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"Have I mentioned that I expect death around every turn, that every blue sky has a safe sailing out of it, that every bus runs me over, that every low, mean syllable uttered in my direction seems to intimate the violence of murder, that every family seems like an opportunity for ruin and every marriage a ceremony into which calamity will fall and hearts will be broken and lives destroyed and people branded by the mortifications of love?"

–Rick Moody, *The Mansion On the Hill*

What do you remember?
Email wmaxwellprince@gmail.com

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Chapter 20 contains parodic takes on existing works.

CONFLATION COMICS



MILITARY FAMILY.

SUBURBAN UPBRINGING.

RICCARDUS

JOURNALISM SCHOOL.

ICM

GLASS CEILING...

...SHATTERED!

The **All-Star** Story of Peerless Reporter **Parker Paige** and Her Date with **Ice Cream Man**!

ANOTHER OF CAL CANTER'S *HAREBRAINED* ***SCHEMES*** FOILED BY *ICE CREAM MAN...*

GUY'S GOT A *ZILLION* DOLLARS AND ***THIS*** IS WHAT HE COMES UP WITH?

COWBOY ROBOTS?!

EVERYDAY WORLD

ONE MAN TO SAVE US ALL

WHAT ABOUT MY PIECE ON THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT? ***WAR CRIMES***, CHIEF.

THEY'RE USING *SARIN GAS* ON KIDS!

WAR CRIMES DON'T SELL *PAPERS*, PAIGE. PEOPLE WANT ***HOPE*** FOR A ***BETTER TOMORROW.***

TAKE A CUE FROM ***RICK SWEET*** AND WRITE ABOUT OUR *BIG WHITE HERO* IN THE SKY.

SOMEONE SAY MY NAME?

SORRY I'M LATE! GOT *CAUGHT UP* AT THE GYM.

-Tt-

LOOKING *BUFF*, RICK!

BRAWN MAKES THE MAN!

SEEMS AWFUL ***COINCIDENTAL*** THAT EVERY TIME ICE CREAM MAN SAVES ***URBANOPOLIS***, YOU'RE *WORKING OUT.*

WHAT CAN I SAY, PARKER?

THIS *UNASSUMING* COUNTRY LUMMOX LOVES TO STAY IN SHAPE!

ENOUGH CHITTER-CHATTER, ALL OF YOU. WE'VE GOT ***PAPERS*** TO SELL.

GO COVER OUR CITY'S GREAT SAVIOR!

They call Ice Cream Man our *savior.*

Like Jesus of Nazareth...except he wears *bleached pajamas* and a ***cape.***

Big White, The Man of Titanium, *McCreamy*...there's no shortage of cute little monikers.

Whatever you want to call him, the ***truth*** is the same:

Ice Cream Man showed up three years ago out of *absolutely nowhere.* Like a magic trick-- ***POOF*** and he's there in the sky...

...just in time to save Urbanopolis from ***LUNARCY THE MAD MOON.***

(It should be noted here that the moon to that point had displayed no previous signs of mental instability.)

And so our white-clad Messiah did go on to perform a multitude of ***ineffable miracles,*** each one more *Herculean* than the last...

He conquered a race of *cat-eating werewolves* from the forests of Saint Generous City.

...fought a *backwards* version of himself named ***Strange-O.***

WE AM ALL ONE!

NOT ON MY WATCH!

He even started a whole ***team*** of cheery, ***absurd*** superpersons, each one dressed more *garishly* than the last.

LICKETY SPLIT

WONDROUS WOMYN

PINKY RING

But I'd like to posit that the *idea* of Ice Cream Man is a ***bad*** one.

MISS PAIGE... YOU GOTTA COME *SEE* THIS!

GOSH, GOLLY, GEE...

Something is ***very*** wrong in Urbanopolis.

A GIANT SPIDER IS ATTACKING THE CITY!!

LOOK! ICE CREAM MAN'S SPEEDING RIGHT AT IT!

"One man to save us all." It's a nice sentiment...

OMICS

PLEASE, LYLA, JUST *HOLD ON.* I'M ON MY WAY.

But that math has ***never*** added up.

WHOOSH!

GOODBYE, DAD.

The world is a *complicated* and scary place, full of ***tough*** questions...

DOWN, BOY.

To believe in simple answers isn't "hope for a better tomorrow."

...it's an *abdication* of our human responsibility ***today.***

People are suffering everywhere you look.

HE'S HURTLING IT INTO THE SUN!

Tomorrow is ***too late.***

I'VE GOT WRITING TO FINISH.

HE'S NOT WHAT EVERYONE THINKS HE IS...

CAL CANTER?! YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE IN *JAIL!*

YOU CAN'T IMPRISON A *FEELING.*

THIS WORLD ISN'T YOUR OWN, MISS PAIGE. IT'S A *FARCE*--ONE OF HIS *PLAY PLACES.*

I'M CALLING THE COPS.

HE'S GRAFTED A CHILD'S MYTHOLOGY ONTO THE *SKIN* OF YOUR REALITY...

SAVE IT FOR THE *FEDS*, BUCKO.

ONE MAN TO SAVE US ALL? YOU KNOW BETTER THAN THAT.

SALVATION'S ON *ALL* OF US, PARKER. WE'RE ALL *CONNECTED.*

EVERYTHING...

...IS *ONE* THING.

PARKER PAIGE!

YOU CAN COME OUT NOW.

THE BIG *CREEPY-CRAWLY* IS ALL GONE.

THERE SHE IS! URBANOPOLIS'S *REPORTAGE LAUREATE.*

CAN I HELP YOU?

IT'S THAT SPITFIRE CHARM THAT I JUST *LOVE.*

PLEASE...

JOIN ME AT MY *ISOLATION PALACE* IN THE ARCTIC CIRCLE.

DINNER AND AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW.

THE *SCOOP* OF THE CENTURY...

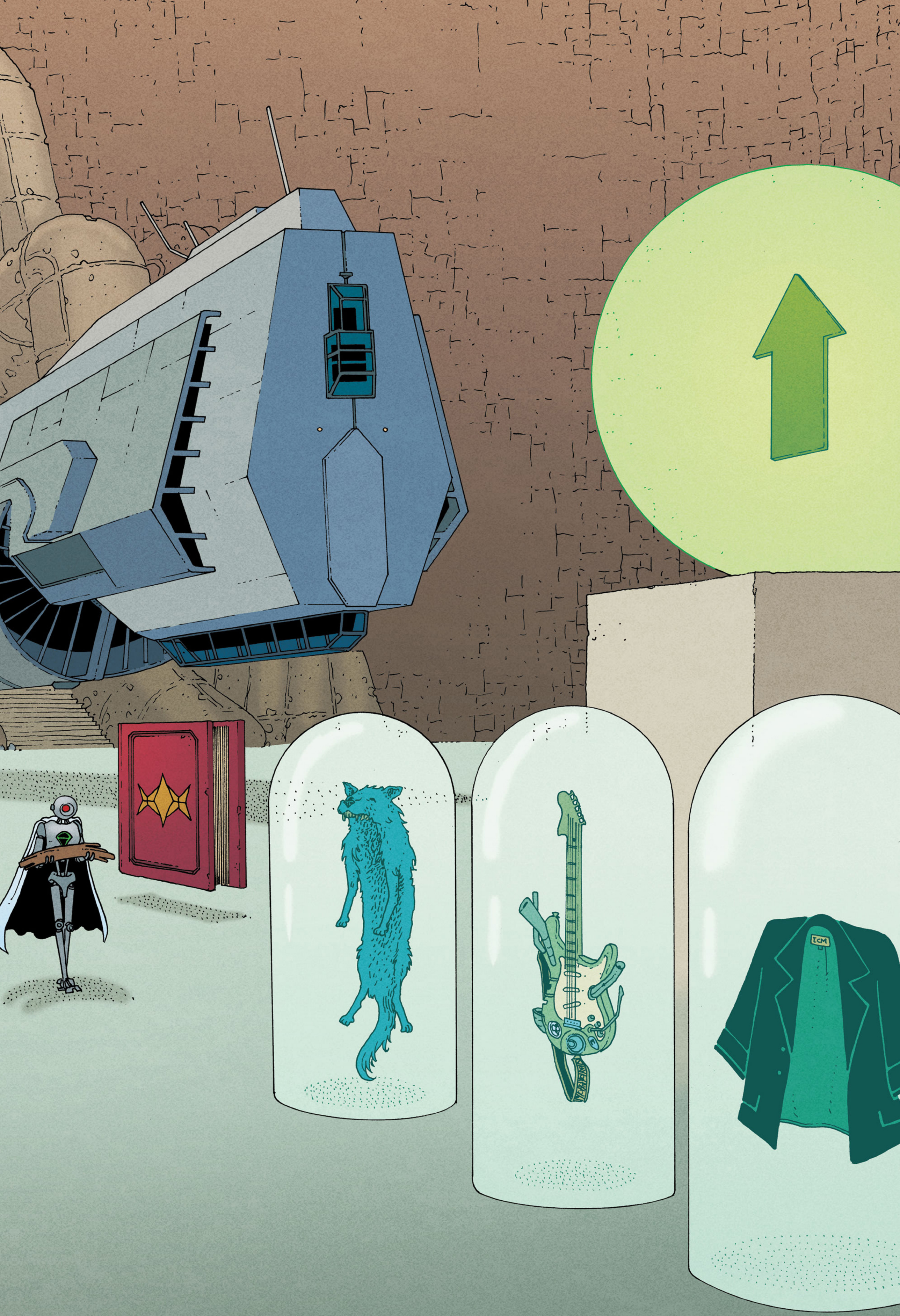
YOU'RE RICK SWEET.

SURPRISED?

NOT REALLY. IT WAS KIND OF OBVIOUS.

...THIS PLACE IS UNREAL.

A.R.C.


ICM

THAT'S WHY I BROUGHT YOU ALL THE WAY OUT HERE, PARKER. TO SHOW YOU MY HOME.

SO YOU CAN GET TO KNOW THE ***REAL*** ME AND *TELL MY STORY.*

bOb-9, PLEASE TAKE MISS PAIGE'S LUGGAGE TO HER SUITE.

NO OFFENSE, BUT THERE ARE MORE ***IMPORTANT*** THINGS TO REPORT ON THAN SUPERHEROES.

AND YET HERE YOU ARE.

THAT'S GOTTA MEAN *SOMETHING*, RIGHT?

COME...

LET ME SHOW YOU SOME ***AMAZING*** STUFF.

THESE ARE *DRIPPERS*--LIQUID SENTRIES FROM A MUSICAL *BASEMENT DIMENSION.*

THEY FEED ON MELODY--THE ***PROTEIN*** OF PURE SONG.

Rock in the morning! Rock around noon!

THEY'RE... ***DISGUSTING.***

EVERYTHING'S DISGUSTING ONCE YOU START TO PAY ATTENTION.

THERE ARE MICROSCOPIC *INSECTS* CRAWLING ALL OVER YOUR SKIN...

CAREFUL OR THEY JUST MIGHT *EAT* YOU ALIVE.

THE ISOLATION PALACE IS MULTI-MODAL:

IT'S A LIBRARY, A PRESERVE, MY *SANCTUM*...

THIS BIRD WAS *BORN OF MAN*-- BIRTHED THROUGH A STERNUM INTO A *THREE-COLORED* WORLD.

wuhh

A HOSPITAL, TOO.

WE CAN CURE A HEAD OF *NASTY* THOUGHTS...

COME, I WANT TO SHOW YOU ONE LAST THING...

I KEEP HERE THE LAST FEW EXTANT SPECIMENS OF A RARE SPECIES: *CUTUS MINIMUS*, MORE COMMONLY KNOWN AS ***FIGGLYBUMPS.***

FIGGLYBUMP DNA IS CODED FOR *CULINARY SACRIFICE.*

THEY SERVE NO OTHER PURPOSE THAN TO BE ***DELICIOUS.***

A DOCILE SPECIES--ESSENTIALLY *WORDLESS.*

THEY ***WANT*** US TO EAT THEM...SO THAT WE CAN *ENJOY* THEIR GAMEY MEAT.

DINE WITH ME TONIGHT, PARKER.

LET US HONOR THE FIGGLYBUMPS' WISHES AND SUP ON THEIR TINY, ADORABLE BODIES.

I saw dogs performing a lobotomy.

Dairy monsters feeding on old pop lyrics...

Unnerving oddity after *unnerving oddity.*

This isn't the lonely fortress of a superhero...

This is...something else.

The scoop of the century:

They call Ice Cream Man our savior.
Like Jesus of Nazareth...except he wears bleached p as
Big White, The Man of Titanium, McCreamy...there shorta
Man showed up three years ago out of absolute where. Like
LUNARCY, the MAD MOON. (It should be note e that the moo
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He conquered a race of cat-eating werewol om a nascent backyard
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Cream Man is a bad one.

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-ing everywhere you look.

Tomorrow is too late.

I saw dogs performing a lobotomy. Dairy monsters feeding on old pop lyrics. U nervi
of a superhero. This is... something else. The scoop of the century: Who is Ice ea
...NOW.

Who is Ice Cream Man? *WHAT* is he?

I need answers to tough questions...***NOW.***

Tomorrow's just too late.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

H-HELLO?

WHAT THE DEV--

Miss Paige...

Dinner is served in the main dining hall.

Master is waiting patiently.

MY TRAVELS ACROSS THE ***MANYVERSE*** HAVE OPENED MY EYES TO THE *TRUTH*, PARKER.

THE ***FUNDAMENTAL AXIOM*** HAS PRESENTED ITSELF TO ME IN THE FORM OF A *HAIKU.*

I'D LIKE TO RECITE IT FOR YOU NOW:

"EVERY LITTLE THING IS FRAGMENTED-- ATOMIZED, LIKE A BUNCH OF BUGS."

BON APPÉTIT.

Lady, you gotta help me!

We're not *food*! The smiling man...h-he's ***drugging*** us!

The Figglybumps are being *slaughtered*!

It's genocide, I tell ya!

bOb-13, IT APPEARS THE KITCHEN MADE A *MISTAKE.*

PLEASE BRING MISS PAIGE A NEW DISH...

My apologies, ma'am. Your meat is... undercooked.

Don't let them put me in the deep fryer!

I...

This place...it's a house of horrors.

PLEASE!

It's a ***TRAP.***

In what are likely the final seconds of my life, I'd like to reiterate:

There's no-where to go, Parker...

The idea of Ice Cream Man is a ***bad*** one.

Running is pointless.

Salvation isn't a one-person job...it's on *all* of us.

EVERYTHING IS ONE THING!

NOT REALLY.

I WAS HOPING TO CONVINCE YOU TO ***PROCREATE*** WITH ME TONIGHT...

TO BRING INTO WRETCHED EXISTENCE A WHOLE *RACE* OF DEFORMED, SUPERHUMAN HORRORS.

SHAME...

ONE DAY THE WORLD'S GONNA WAKE UP AND SEE WHAT YOU REALLY ARE:

A LIE.

THE WORLD IS PREDICATED ON LIES, PULLED APART BY THEM.

"EVERY LITTLE THING IS FRAGMENTED-- ATOMIZED..."

"LIKE A BUNCH OF BUGS."

bOb-BOTS, PLEASE TREAT OUR PEERLESS REPORTER TO A THERAPEUTIC BATH...

...IN THE DEEP FRYER.

NO! YOU'RE A MONSTER!

YOU'RE A--

GOLLY, GOSH, GEE...

H

AAA!

SHE'S AWAKE!

WELCOME BACK TO THE LAND OF THE LIVING, KIDDO.

W-WHAT HAPPENED? MY HEAD...

"WHAT HAPPENED?"

WHAT HAPPENED IS MY STAR REPORTER WAS IN A COMA FOR *THREE YEARS.*

SALES ARE IN THE TOILET!

THREE YEARS? BUT THAT--

WAIT.

WHERE'S ICE CREAM MAN?

YOU HEAR THAT, TIMMY? GET HER SOME OF THAT LEMON SORBET IN A CUP, WILL YA?

IN A *JIFFY*, MISS PAIGE! *LICKETY SPLIT!*

"*ICE CREAM MAN.*" PARKER PAIGE'S INFAMOUS ***SWEET TOOTH***, ALIVE AND WELL.

IT'S GOOD TO HAVE YOU BACK, PAIGE...

THIS WORLD COULD USE A HERO RIGHT ABOUT NOW.

EPILOGUE

THE MASKED WHATEVER

ICM

CHYAH!

THE MASKED WHATEVER IS THE COOLEST!

HE SURE IS, SPORT. SURE IS.

DOUBLE-CHYAH!

SUPER-HEROES, TOM? ISN'T IT ALL A LITTLE... DÉCLASSÉ?

OH, COME NOW, MARTHA...

A LITTLE CANDY NEVER HURT ANYONE.

THERE GOES YOUR LIFE

OE

EVERYTHING'S DISGUSTING ONCE YOU START TO PAY ATTENTION...

THE BUGS ARE EVERYWHERE.

WE DON'T WANT ANY TROUBLE, GUY.

JUST TELL US WHAT YOU--

WHO'S--

MY GOD... YOU...YOU *SAVED* US.

WHAT'S YOUR NAME, NOBLE STRANGER?

I'M--

A **Bad Idea**?
Or Just the Thing to
Jolt This Story Alive?
Find Out **Never** in
the Pages of

CONFECTIVE COMICS #1

Watch as it all Recedes

Chapter Eighteen



The gremlin am

The gremlin ***is*** at it agon

again

The gremlin is
at it again

He's stealing mine

Morning, George.

Medicine time.

Stealing **my** memories

I've got some good news:

Your son called.

Gone they are gone they...

go.
They're going and

He's coming to see you.

gone.

Re memeber now...

large sycamore
(dogwood? oak?)

I am

was three or,
though

Maybe *two*
years old?

Mom/Dad lay out
blank____

Blanket. Mom
and Dad lay out
blanket

Sister?
(cousin? friend?)

and Anne who is

Anne who is [blank] reads book under tree and everyone is

BLANK

Happy

Early memory (earliest?)

But wait there **he** is now...

Little Gremlin

He's come to take this memory away

from me

He's ***taking*** it. It's

gone.

"How you doing, Pop? You hanging in there?"

I'm, uh, sorry it took so long for me to get out here.

Me and Jen have been having some... problems.

I guess she's talking to a divorce lawyer...

Anyhow, I'm *here*. And Midge just texted...

She gets in tomorrow.

Never too late for a family reunion, huh?

Blink if you're comfortable, Pop.

Later memory, am ten years old.

See it so clear: Base, ball, dime, and

Diamond.
Baseball diamond.

peewee league with
I…***me*** up to bat

Bobby K pitch Pitching

Field, grass
dappled with
sons

dappled with
sun.

Sweet, light breath
of sun/sons

I want to hit the
ball—I want to hit
a ***home run.***

Deepest feeling
of deep in gut

But don't
think…

I don't think that I ever did do **that**

WHOOSH!

Was always told:

YOU'RE OUT!

the Little Man is on the field now

taking like he's been taking

Stealing second base...and *the second baseman*.

Goodbye, Bobby K

Goodbye, too: umpire

Goodbye, sweet light breath of

"Hi, Daddy..."

Jesus. Why haven't they given you a shave?

Look, Dad. It *took*.

The ***in vitro***.

I know you said going it alone was a bad idea, but...

I'm *ready* to be a mom.

Let me ask the nurse where they keep the razors in this place.

at [not day] he brings—

Night. At **night** he brings him

his friends.

Many of such similar

Many that are alike to—

They are **not** very nice

at all.

I do not like them one bit

Recall, suddenly now **one bit** of

a good thing.
A vary—

a ***very*** nice memory
(Nicest?)

Cara and my self:
young.

Young love young
lovers of

each-other/
one-another

We walk like—

we **glide** across it

The **beach**. The Sand
and the Water

Eating and
sharing a?

an ***Ice Cream
Cone***.

Recall smell of
her: **lovely**

and she

ran. From me.

Catch me if you can!

I run to—

I run, too. After her

No words can do

Cannot describe how

Happy I was

No. Please don't
Not **this** one Please

It is my **favorite** One It is

taken

All is being taken

Has been took

Later: Cara and I

we could not—

I'm *done*, George. I refuse to live like this anymore!

I was unable—

BEER

did not love like—

BOURBON

Did not love like one **should.**

was **cold** when I should have been...

different.

Why, back then, did I not—

Do we have to leave?

Daddy?

did/could not **love** like I should have Loved

Nothing lasts forever. ***Remember*** that.

Why? So mean/cold

when all I wanted was to be

I hope you're happy.

Happy.

I...

have never been

was never again:

Happy.

She **ran** from me.

"Jen's gonna take the kids..."

I guess the apple doesn't fall too far, huh?

I thought I was doing everything--

All the... *stuff* a person does to make a ***good*** life.

But I fucked it up.

Nothing lasts forever, right?

Christ, I can't spend more than an hour at a time on my feet.

Fucking *gravity*.

Do you think...

Did I make a *mistake*?

I was so certain...

But now I'm just...***scared***. I don't want to *screw it up* like you and Mom did.

No offense, Daddy.

none taken

except all That are taken
like this One will be.

This is before
Cara left

Before days of dark,
days of: **alone**

remember: [car]
Re member smell of:
Desert Road

Entire all of
whom I—

family trip with **Everyone**

Cara driving
(or though?)

Cara in next seat
while I do—

while I am
the one who

drives.

back seat it is There **are**

my **children**.

John who is Very same
to much similar as



Margaret/Midge.
Sweeter than
[name of flower]

his father.

We are going to the **Grand Canyon.** I know that

we are going there in this Memory.

can recall like very close: **heat** of air

heat of bodies that are My Family

but do **not** recall As I am seeing **now**

Him.

Little Gremlin.

NO...

I do not like seeing Him.

"I hate seeing him like this..."

Just so... *helpless*.

The lighting in these places....

It's no wonder so many people wind up dying.

You okay, Johnny? You don't seem super great.

My marriage is disintegrating, and my dad--with whom I have ***major*** unresolved abandonment issues--is a lifeless vegetable with one foot in the fucking grave.

I'm *peachy*, Midge.

Thanks for asking.

You know, it's uncanny...

...you sound *just* like him sometimes.

I...

Hey... when are you due?

Six more... -nng-... weeks.

If I *last* that long.

I have no idea what the fuck I'm doing, John.

Midge, come on...

You're gonna be *such* a great mom.

Even when we were kids, I always knew it.

"*When we were kids*" was a long time ago...

Oh!

She's *kicking*.

...you wanna feel?

Well hello there, little gremlin.

re member thinking this Thought:

how **accurate**. the Name of it

518

519

how ***Grand*** it was

Wow.

Super-
wow.

everything does
get taken

in the End.

everything goes: Goodbye.

Cara went Goodbye.

married Tim.
(Dan? Jason?)

then got sick with

did Die of [blank]

ran from me and was

Gone.

wish I could have been Different.

Come on, Pop.

Lay on down, Daddy.

my **children**...

grown. And did turn—

have become

Complicated People.

but also are (will always be) So

beautiful to me

How ***beautiful***, both my children.

It's time.

Let go, Dad.

do wish very

deeply that they can know—

can find a way to be

Happy.

Oh! Just realized I not—

No longer can recall who I

am or

was.

but do feel very certainly that, indeed,

I *was*

a **Person**! who lived a

Life and perhaps once felt

The sweet/light breath of



the **Sun**.

how lucky, me

to have *been*.

Chapter No. 019 Price $3.99 US

ICE CREAM MAN™
HAUNTING FOR BEGINNERS

"HOW TO BE A TRUE-BLUE APPARITION"

WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

01. One Pair of Kitchen Scissors
02. One Clean White Bedsheet
03. A Sense of Your Own Insignificance
04. The Propensity to Quietly Wander

SIMPLE INSTRUCTIONS:

Step 1:
DON YOUR SUIT



Cut holes for your peepers. Place linen sheet over your head and assume a ghostly aspect. Try your hand at some low-level moans or otherworldly lamentations. Do NOT remove your garment in the presence of the living, lest the spell of invisibility be broken and your extant self exposed. Understand: you are dead.

Step 2:
ROAM INVISIBLY



As if floating, plod lightly across the expanse of your home, your town, your city. Keep your footfalls light and ethereal. Do NOT try to phase through solid objects (e.g., walls, floors, ceilings, old rocking chairs, kitchen tables, other persons). Remember: you are a ghost and ghosts are not seen or heard—until they wish to be.

Step 3:
OBSERVE THE LIVING



Now you're ready to watch the sad show. Take note of how forlorn people are. See the woman crying to herself on the cellar stairs. Witness the man apart from his family. Know this: people are suffering, everywhere and in every way. The living are no more alive than you are. (You are a ghost you are a ghost you are a ghost.)

NOTABLE RESTLESS SPIRITS:

W. Maxwell Prince, who haunts dialectically; Martín Morazzo, who haunts via delineations; Chris O'Halloran, who haunts in colour; Good Old Neon, who haunts in absentia

image®

THE TRUTH ABOUT YOUR CORPOREALITY "YOU'RE MORE DEAD THAN ALIVE"

After Field Notes

Nomenclature (age 9)

Silky, soft wool
(*14-16 microns*)



Angora rabbit (*alive*)

Fox (*alive*)



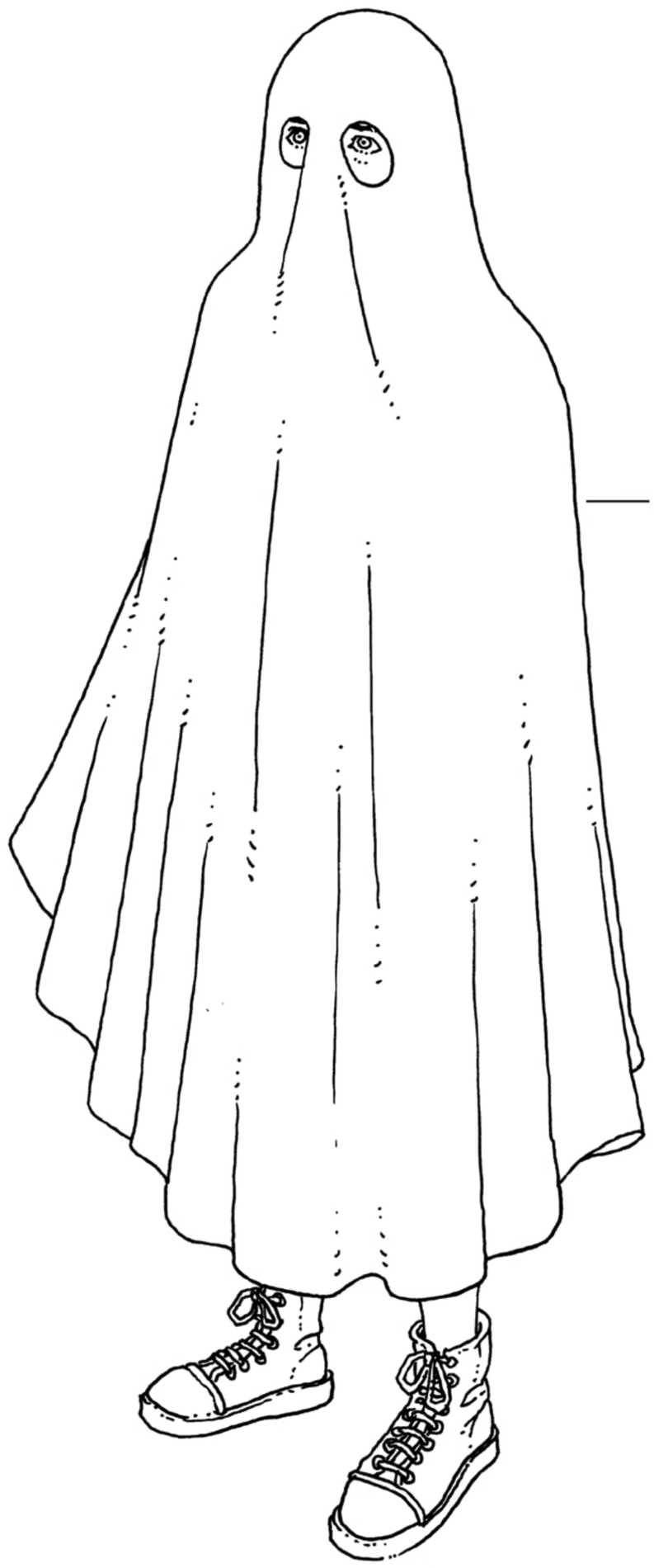
Dairy-based
dessert



Name of manufacturer

Flavor

Ghost (*dead*)



Modified linen
bed sheet (see:
Steps1-3)

High tops
(see: *new kicks*)

Step 4

Hear their voices from downstairs.



Step 5

Hear the television set announce its programming. Note the ambient volume: *loud enough to be heard from space.*



Step 6

See your parents in repose. Question your shared DNA. Dream of various emancipation scenarios.



Step 7

Glide down the stairs. You are a ghost.



Step 8

Glide across the room. You are a ghost.



Step 9

Pass through the door, completely insubstantial...



Step 10

See your town at sunset. Note the way the day recedes—how it gives birth to a liberating blanket of darkness.



Step 11

Approach the Trabelli home under cover of new night.



Step 12

See, through the window, Mr. and Mrs. Trabelli arguing about Mr. Trabelli's failed business venture. (You are a ghost.)



Step 13

Note, as you make your way to the back of the house, that pretty much every Mr. and Mrs. in your town are caught up in some kind of years-long argument about *something*.



Step 14

Wonder if marriage is ever really worth it. Wonder if your Uncle Pete, whom your mom calls *The Perpetual Bachelor*, might not have the right idea vis-à-vis love.



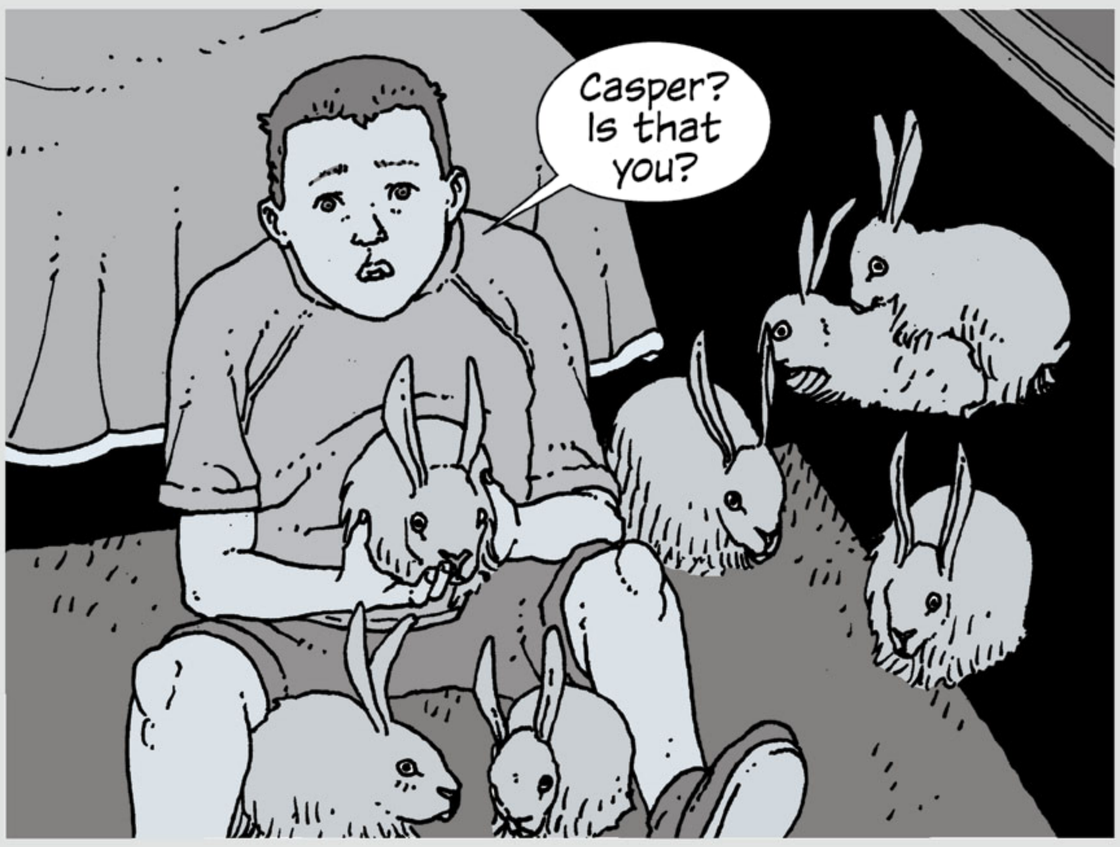
Step 15

Give Jimmy Trabelli a scare. You are a ghost.



Step 16

See Jimmy awash in Angoras.



Step 17

Invite this living human to join you in the spirit realm as an apparitional sidekick of some kind.



Step 18

Hear of the curse cast upon poor Jimmy by forces beyond all reckoning. Feel sorrow at his apparent misfortune.



Step 19

Politely decline this earthly offer—you are a ghost, and ghosts have no need for familiars...even if they are kind of fuzzy and adorable...



Step 20

Understand, finally, the meaning of that phrase your dad once used regarding your uncle Pete and his old girlfriend: *"I bet they fuck like rabbits."*



Step 21

From a purgatorial place, transmit a parting message to this sorry oxygen-breather. You are a ghost.



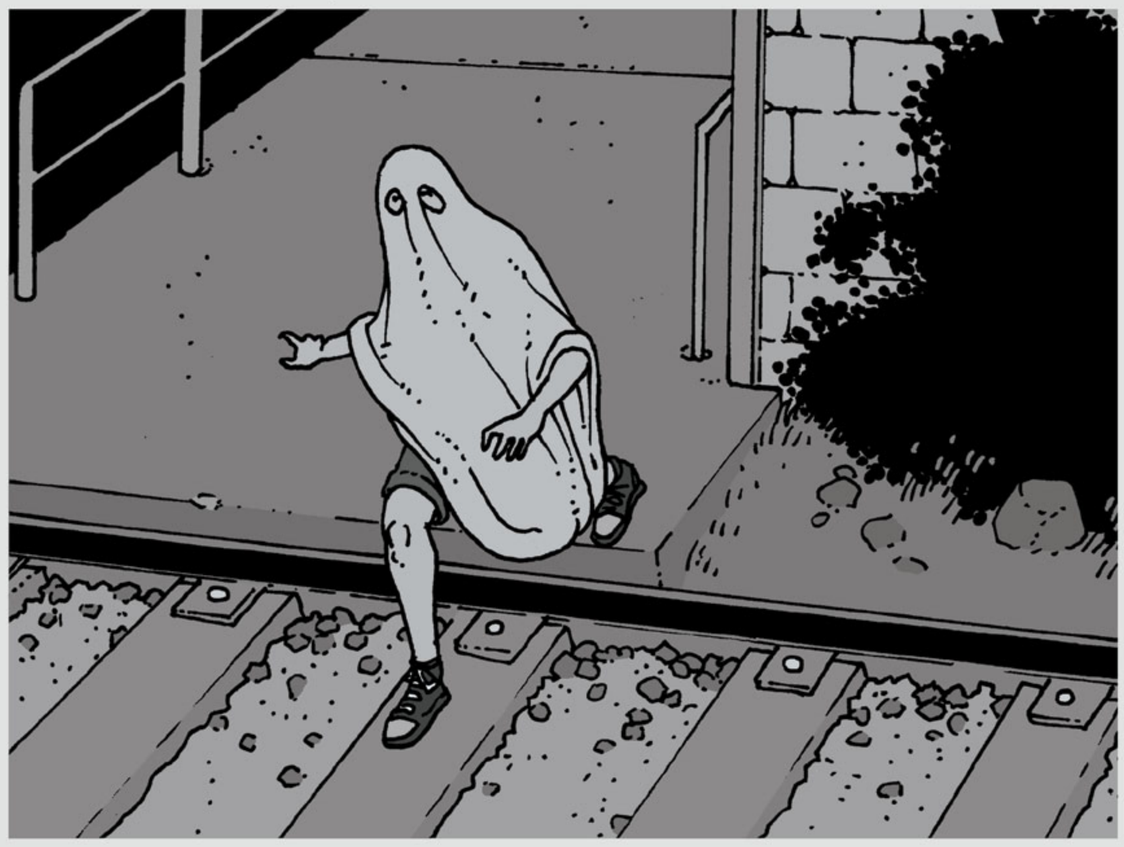
Step 22

Float through your town, past the convenience stores, past the shuttered video rental place, past the spot where that one high school kid crashed his car into a bus.



Step 23

Advance—non-corporeal and totally *diaphanous*—over the train tracks, despite explicit instruction from your mother to never, ever do so.



Step 24

See the dead fox by the tracks.



Step 25

Disregard that sick feeling in your stomach. You are a ghost, untethered from sentimental mortal stuff.



Step 26

Make your way to that spot under the pedestrian bridge you've always liked—the one at the edge of the long tunnel, where the feral cats hunt for food scraps.



Step 27

Haunt at your discretion.



Step 28

Remember, as the animal ignores you: you're completely invisible. Unseen, unheard, unregarded. *Alone*.



Step 29

As such, try out the aforementioned lamentations (see: *Step 1*). Ululate freely.



Step 30

Hear the echo of your spectral noise.



Step 31

See the man aloft. See him, on the ledge, in a posture that's kinda weird.



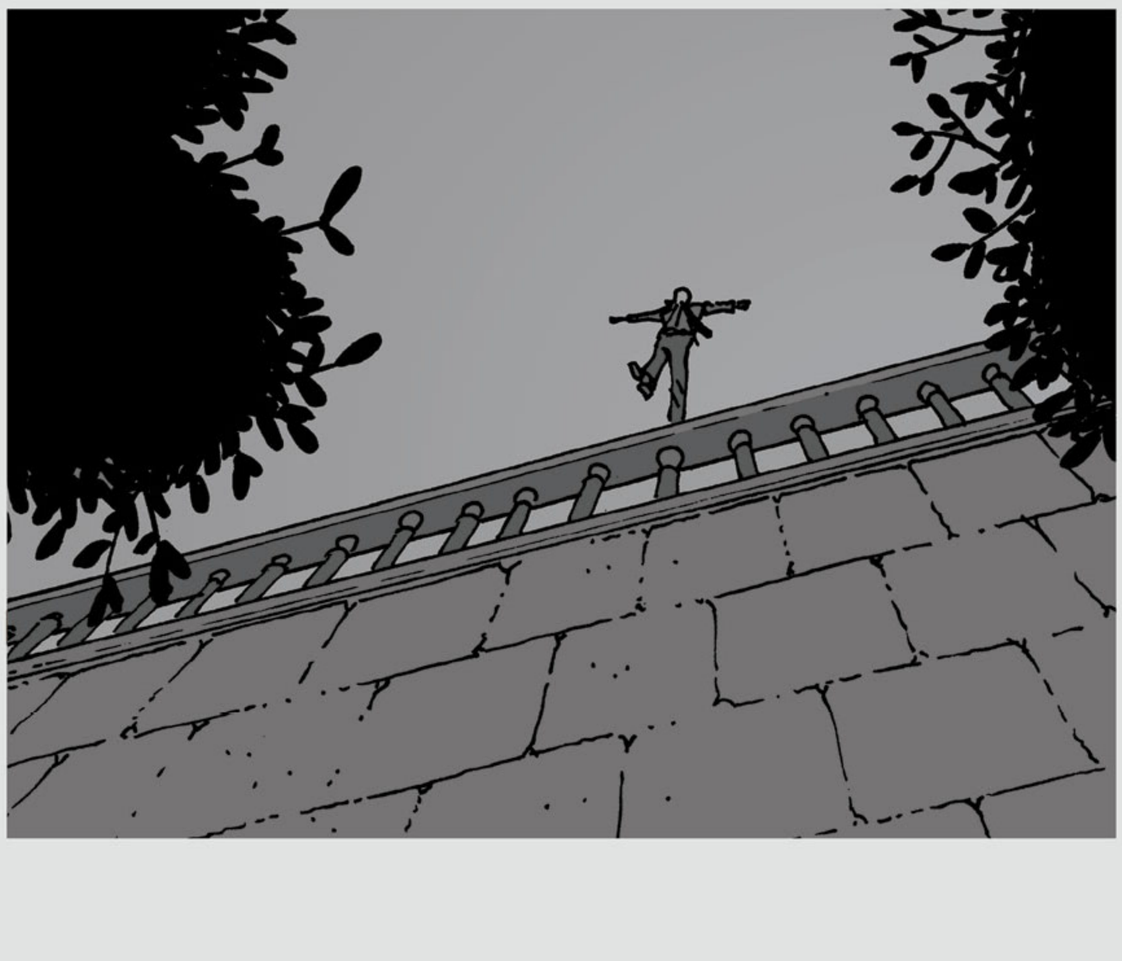
Step 32

Wonder what it is he's doing up there.



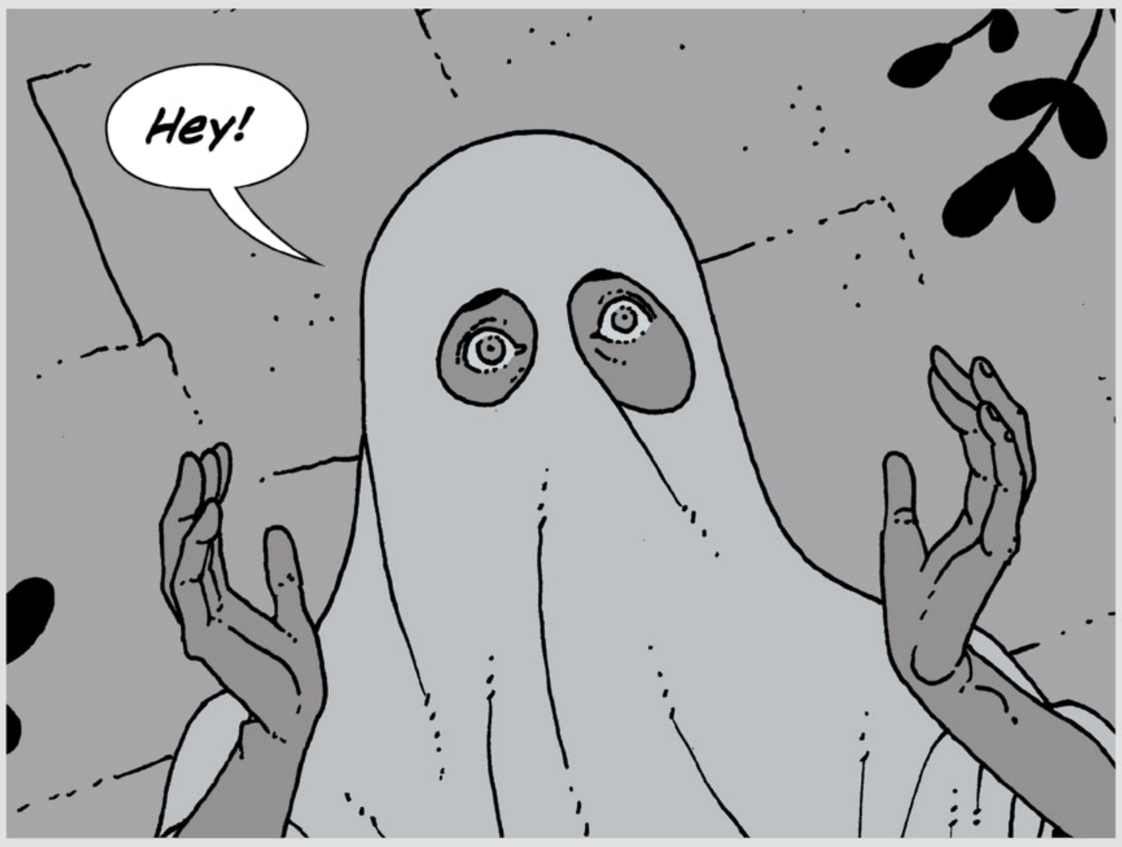
Step 33

See the man's shoes lift off. Try to discern the look on his face: fear...or *relief*?



Step 34

Try in vain to call out to him.



Step 35

Watch the man's body yield to gravity. See him begin to fall.



Step 36

Remember: he can't hear you.



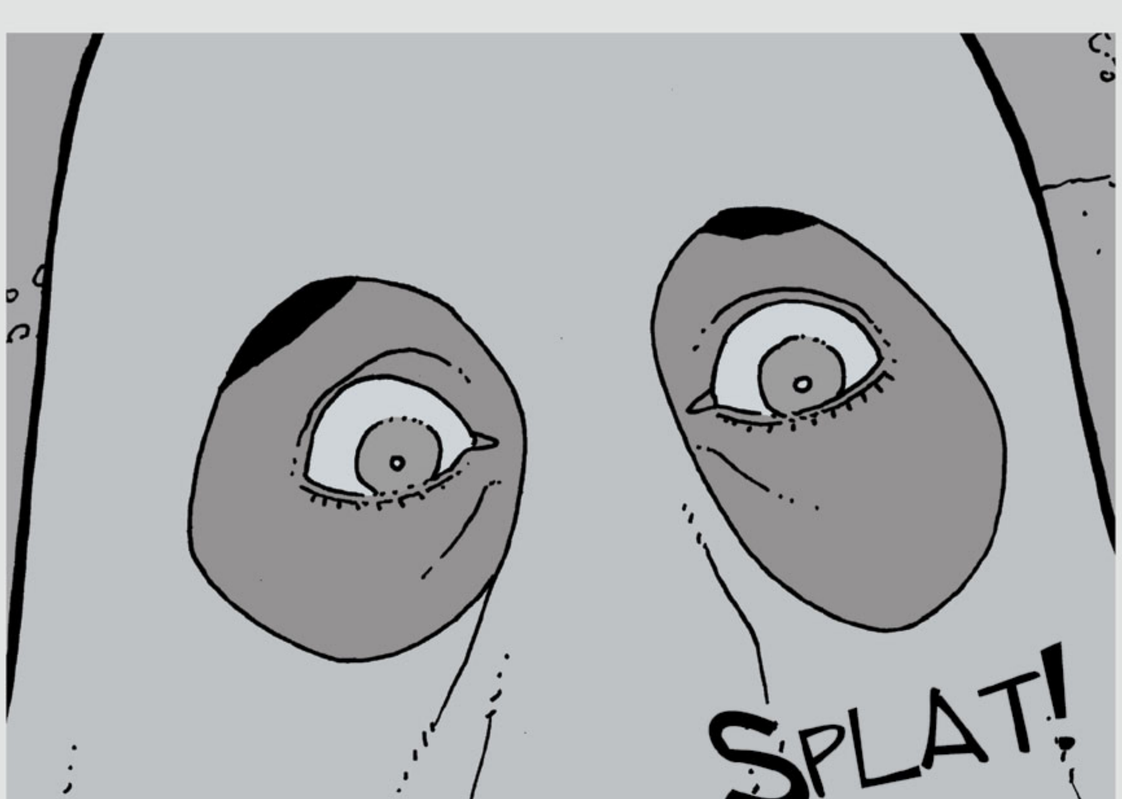
Step 37

Watch him fall. Feel the little hairs on your shoulder stand up as if electrified.



Step 38

Watch and understand that there isn't a single thing you can do. You are a ghost—a *non-entity*.



Step 39

Hear the thud of bone against concrete. See the man's legs go akimbo. Hear the weird gurgle as blood frees itself from inside his skull.



Step 40

From the spirit-plane, call out to the lifeless figure before you.



Step 41

Hear his response...



Step 42

Deny the truth; refuse, vehemently, to accept what's just happened before your eyes.



Step 43

Beseech the land of the living.



Step 44

Understand: no one can ever hear you.



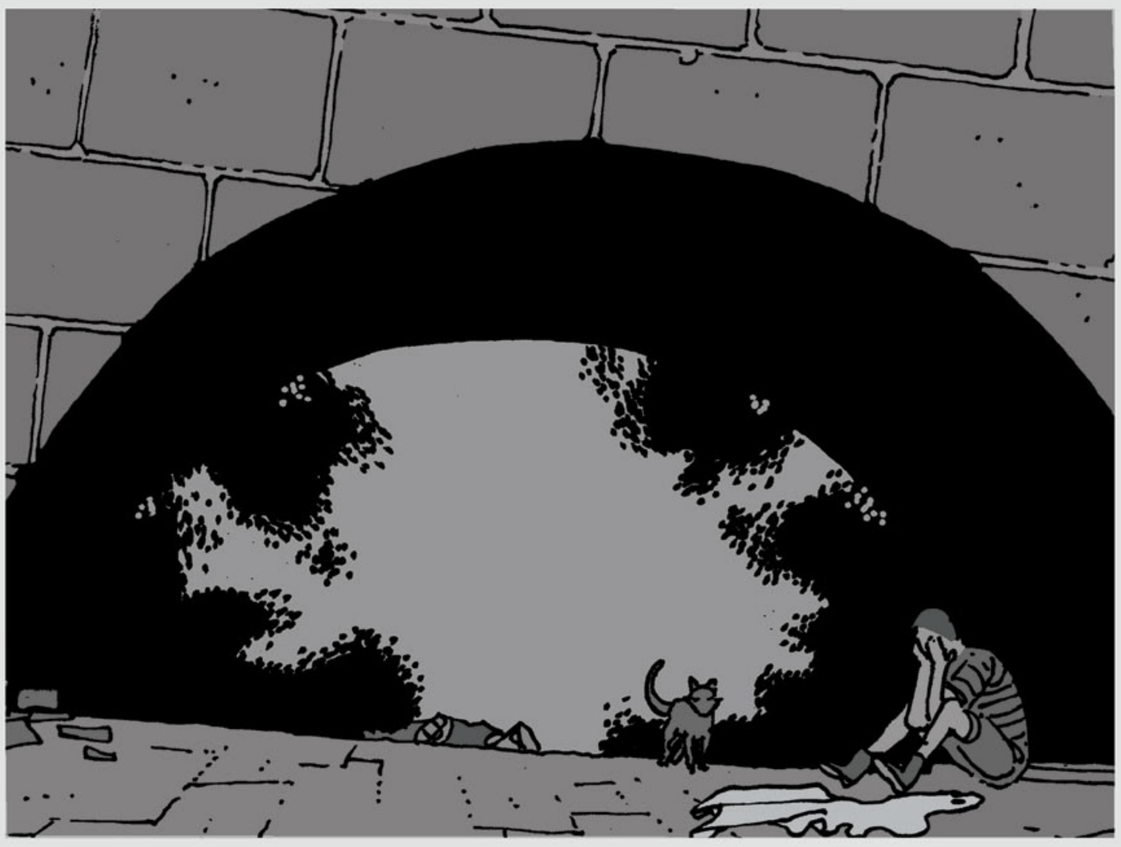
Step 45

Know: you are a ghost.



Step 46

Try and fail to understand what you've witnessed.



Step 47

Try and fail to erase the sound of the gurgle from your ears.



Step 48

Having regained your corporeality, find comfort in the soft purr of a kitten.



Step 49

Wonder why a person would—as your dad puts it—*off themselves*.

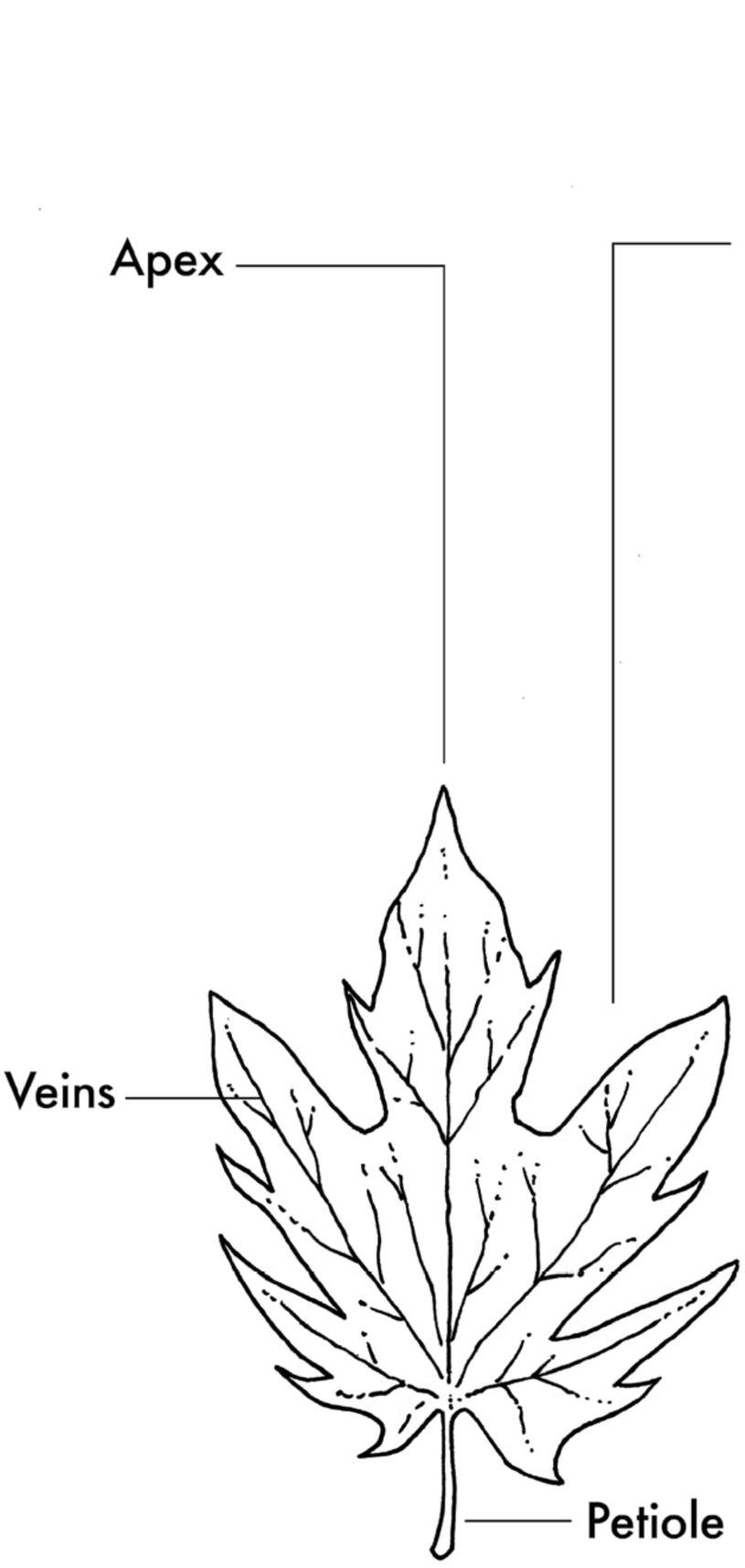


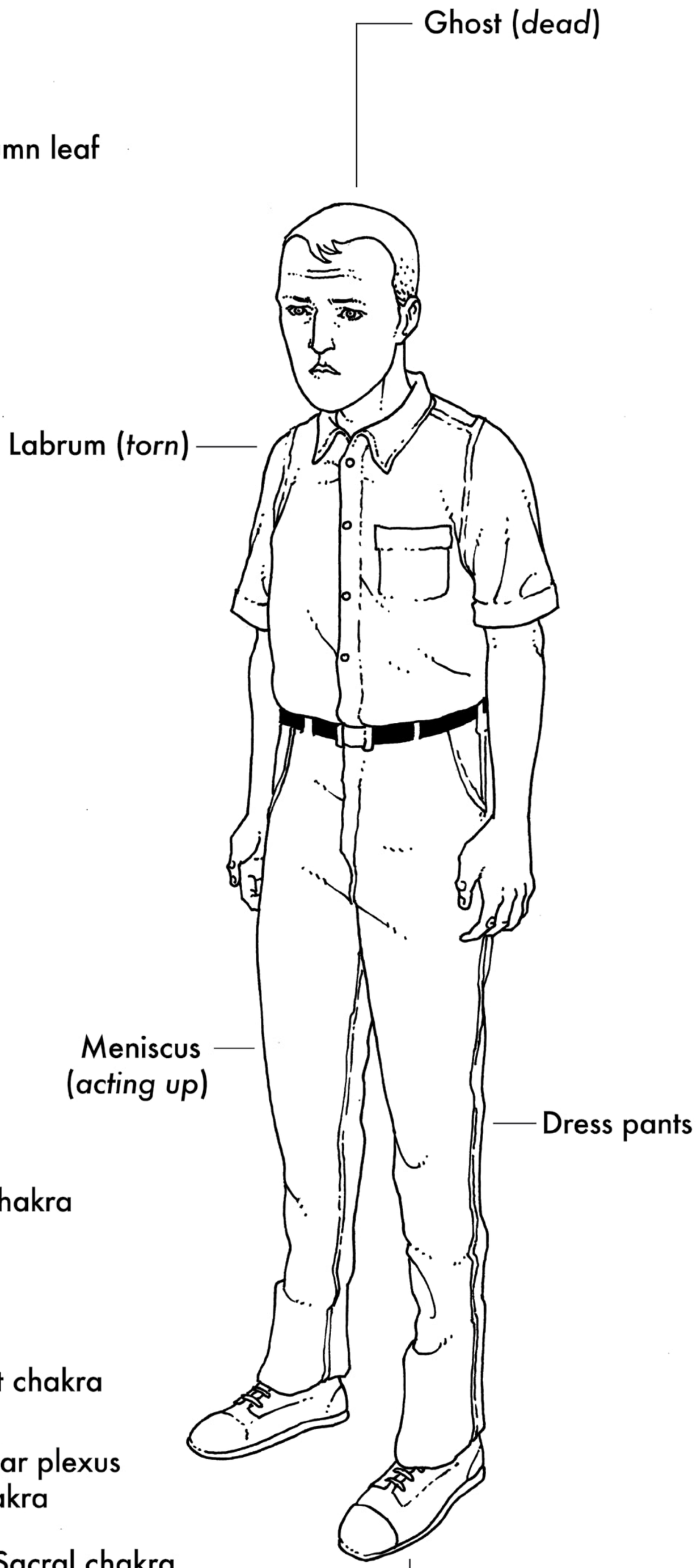
Step 50

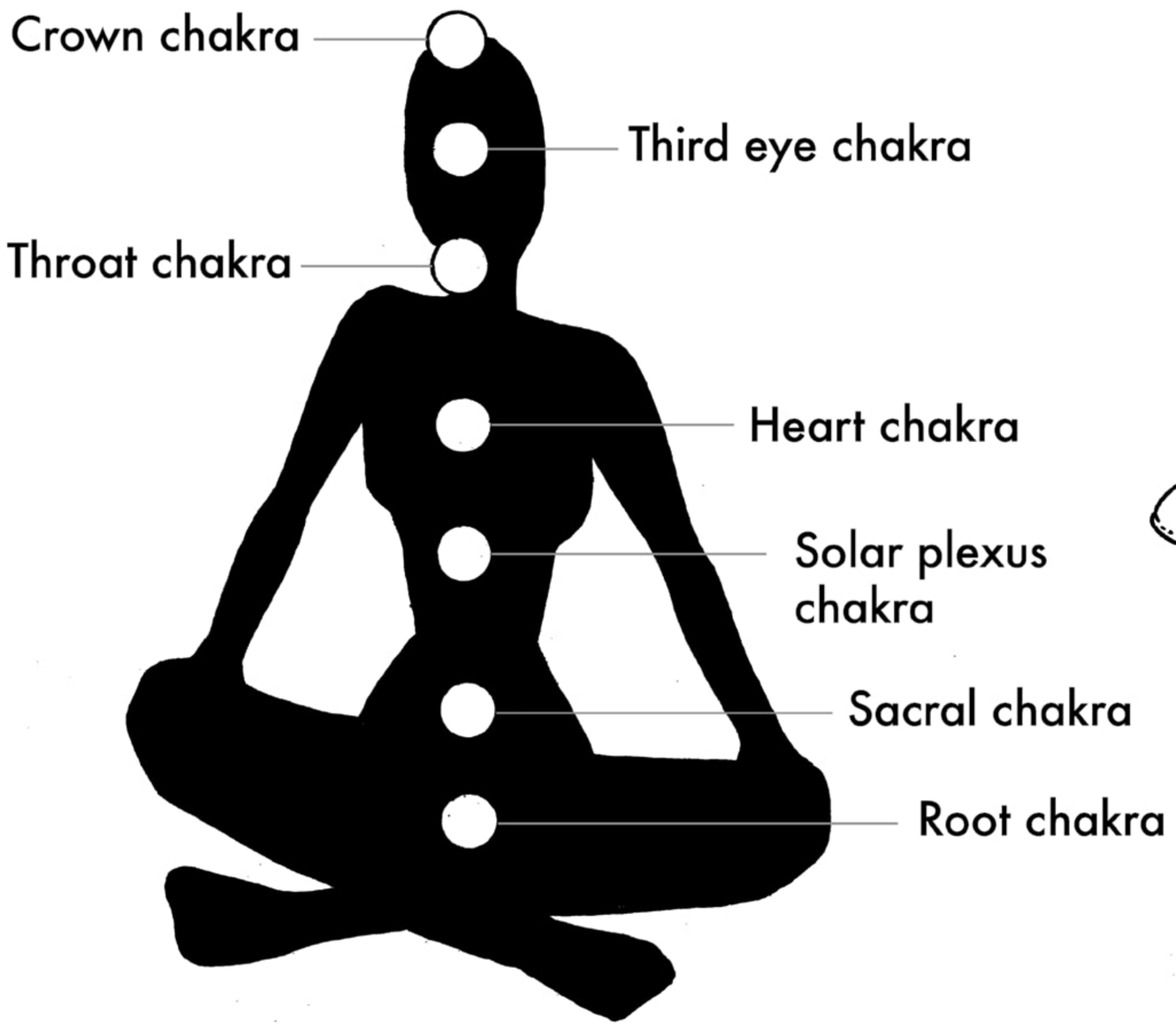
Wonder it for thirty years...



Nomenclature (age 39)







Step 1

Mope at your desk, in your cubicle. Mope under the fluorescent lighting of your office.



Step 2

Mope at the copy machine. Mope as one report becomes ten reports, as ten become a hundred.



Step 3

Mope at the water cooler. Mope as Greg tells you about his business idea.



Step 4

Mope at the way certain details of your sorry, sadsack life tend to *reflect* like light through a prism.



Step 5

Mope through the parking lot, against the autumn wind, all the way to your compact automobile.



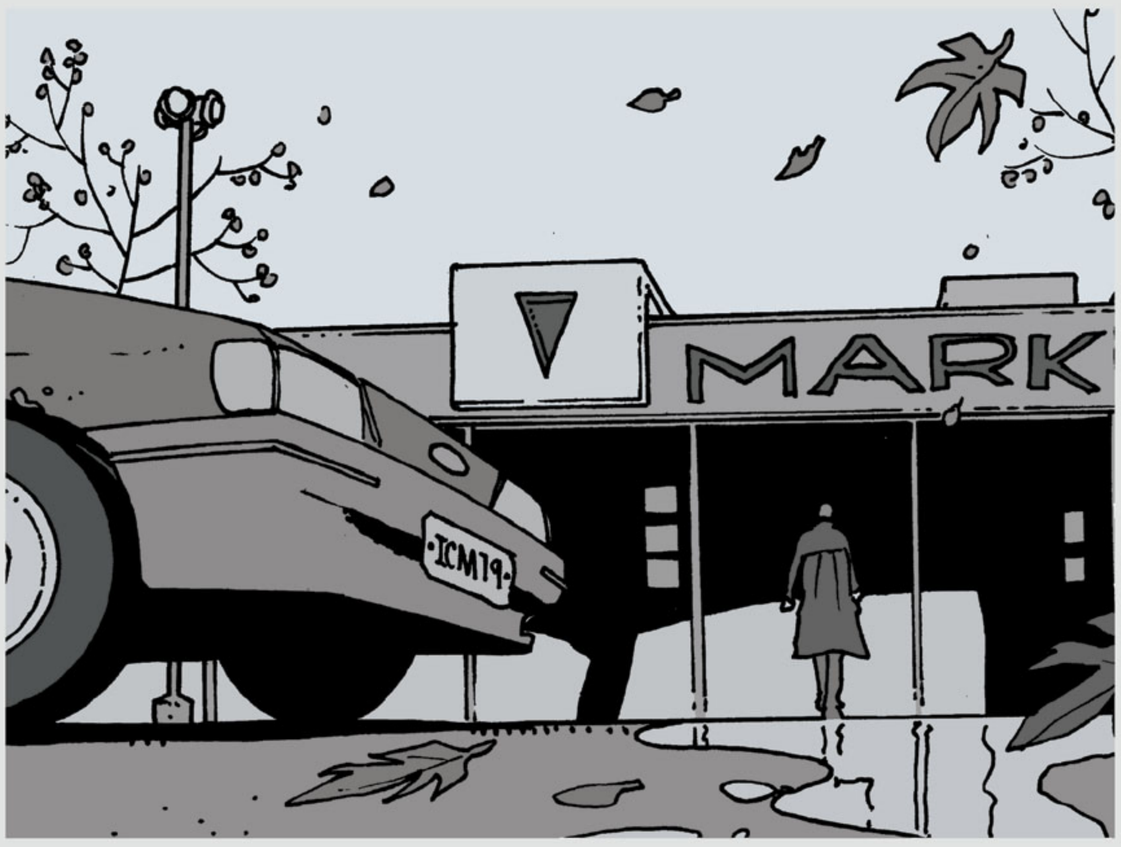
Step 6

Understand: you are a ghost, completely *insubstantial*. Mope about it the entire car ride home.



Step 7

Stop at the supermarket for groceries.



Step 8

Read the ingredients of your favorite dessert. Wonder what exactly *sodium carboxymethyl cellulose* is. Wonder if it isn't, perhaps, something people shouldn't be eating.



Step 9

Mope all the way to the crowded checkout lanes.



Step 10

As the checkout girl ignores you, remember: ghosts are not seen—they go completely undetected by the human eye.



Step 11

From deep in the ether, zap a spooky missive in her direction.



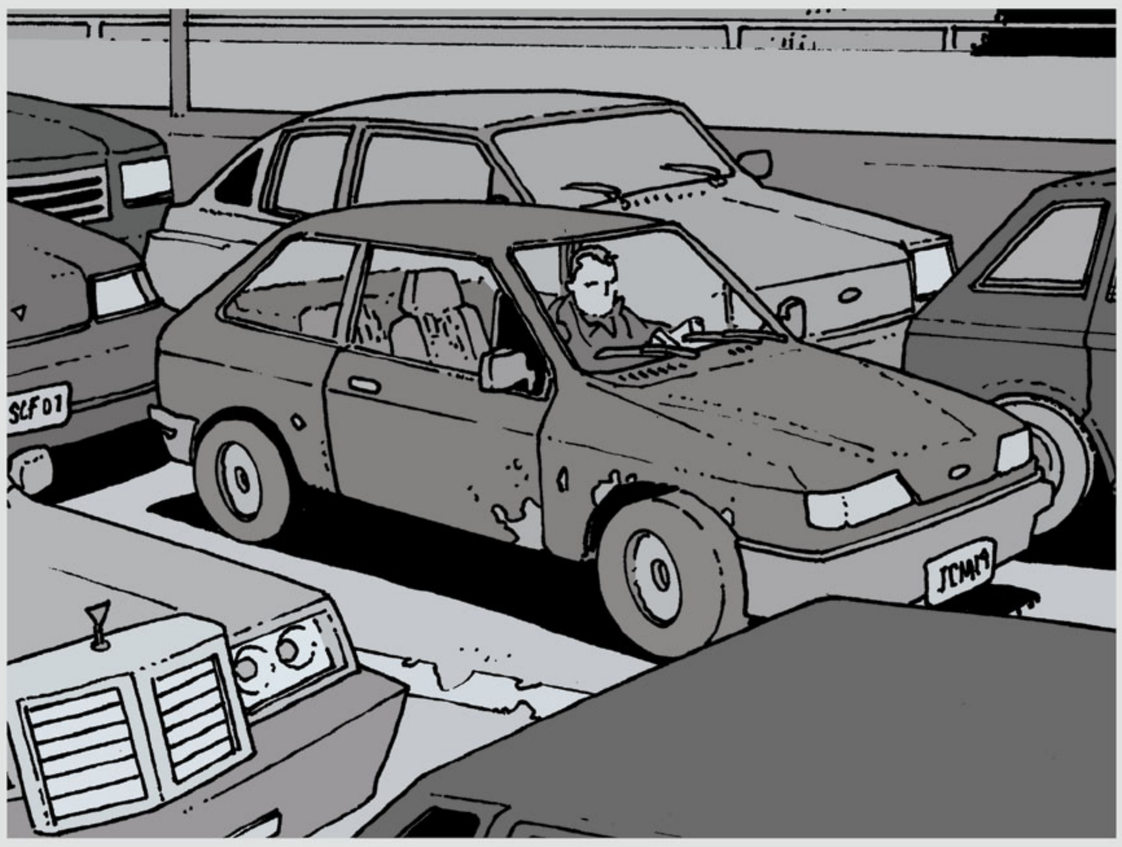
Step 12

Though she'll never see you, remind this living, breathing specimen of your relative proximity.



Step 13

Sit in traffic. Scan the radio stations and avoid, at all costs, the following:



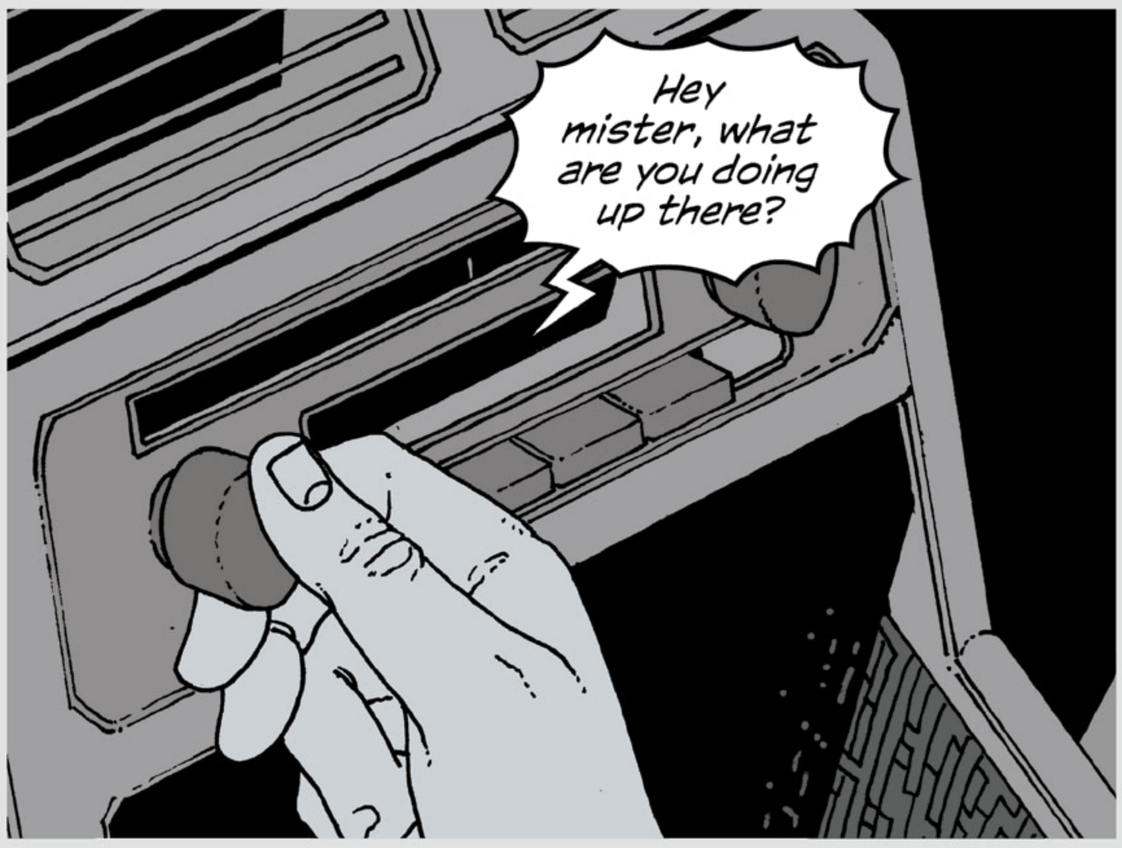
Step 14

Elevator Muzak; anything house- or techno-adjacent; Gregorian chanting; that one interminable Bud Hickey song...



Step 15

Hear a familiar voice emit through the transistor.



Step 16

Recognize it as your *own* voice. Hear yourself, age nine, plead with the man on the bridge.



Step 17

Remember the *thud* of the man's body hitting the ground. Remember the *gurgle*.



Step 18

Try to forget, but always remember...



Step 19

Steel yourself for another interaction with your wife and kids. Perform a thirty-second meditation.



Step 20

Breathe in through your nose; breathe out through your mouth. Speak your mantra.



Step 21

Phase through the door. Float across the threshold and into your home.



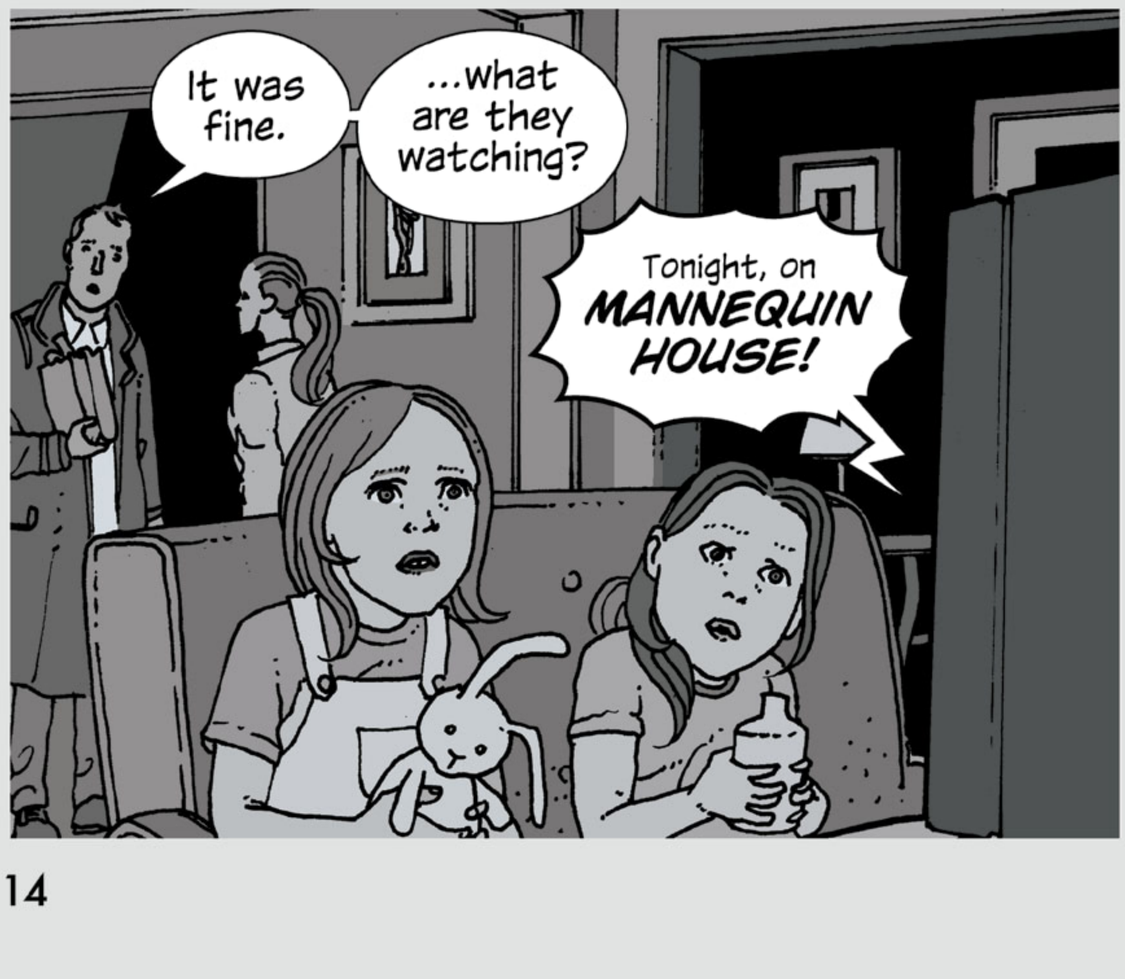
Step 22

See your wife—note how beautiful she remains, year after year after year.



Step 23

Give the answer you always give when asked, "How was your day?"



Step 24

Feel disconnected from the people you love most. Feel stuck, feel lost.



Step 25

See her apply lipstick. Wonder where she's going.



Step 26

Remember that even in your own house, you're a ghost.



Step 27

Do the math in your head.



Step 28

Hear, from your living wife, a bunch of nonsense.



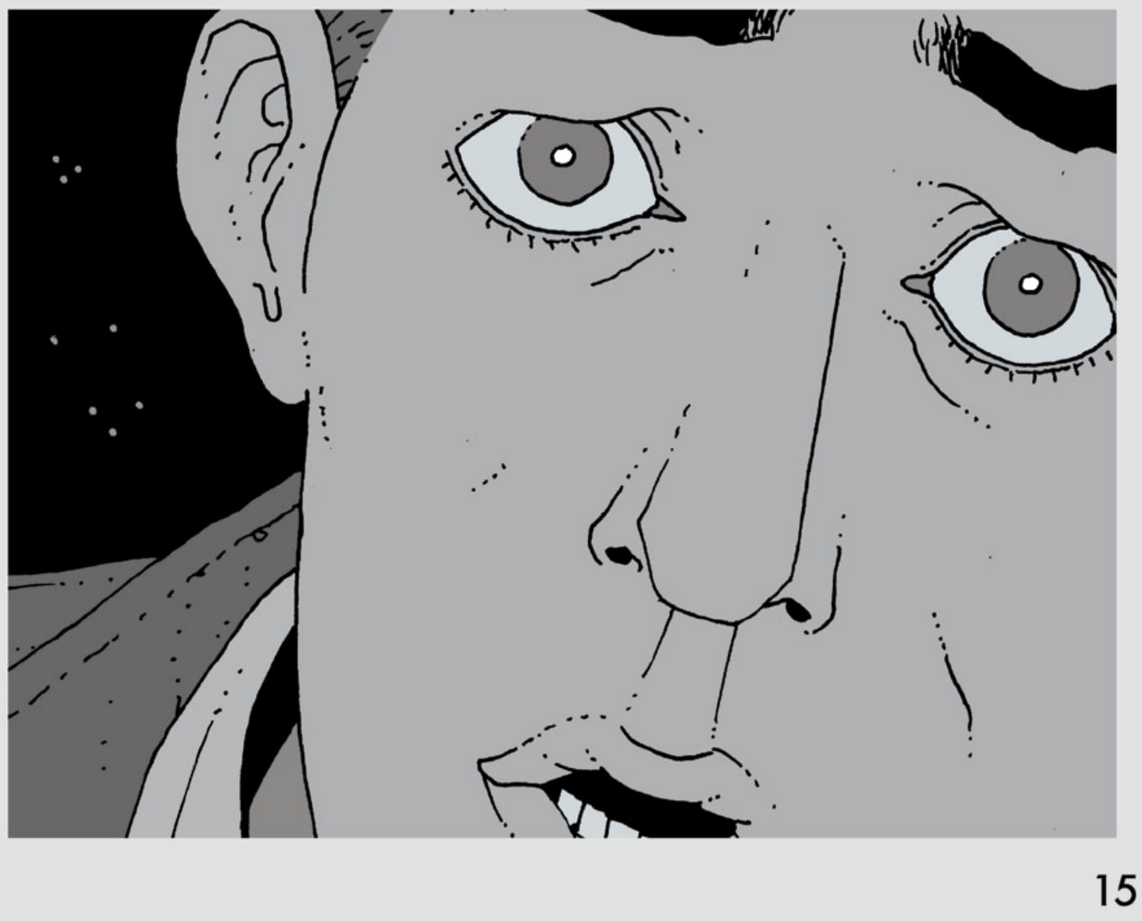
Step 29

Feel her pass through you and make her way to the door.



Step 30

Don't forget about the gutters.



Step 31

Enter the garage to retrieve a ladder.



Step 32

Grope around for (and finally find) the thin string that grants small light to this sorry carport.



Step 33

Wonder why you never seem to actually park your car in here; say a silent prayer for every unused garage across this benighted world.



Step 34

See the dusty box of childhood mementos on the floor.



Step 35

See yourself as you were, all those years ago.



Step 36

Wonder what ever happened to Jimmy Trabelli; lament the way all relationships *disappear and no one can find 'em*.



Step 37

Prepare for your ascent.



Step 38

Float upwards—you're lighter than air.



Step 39

Float up, up, up—all the way to the very tippy top.



Step 40

Clean the gutters. You are a ghost.



Step 41

Feel sorry for the leaves, how they're separated from their branches; feel sorry for everyone, how they're separated from each other.



Step 42

See it...



Step 43

See your town, its fragmented and haphazard architecture: *Tudor*, *Colonial Revival*, *Craftsman*. See each edifice and its sheltered secrets...



Step 44

Remember, from up here, the man on the bridge. Wonder if he saw what you see now...



Step 45

A world full of ghosts.



Step 46

Wonder if the man, pre-THUD, pre-GURGLE was scared or relieved...



Step 47

Feel, as he probably felt, the gentle pushback of air as you extend a limb into the void...



Step 48

Feel it...



Step 49

Think about your kids. Think about your wife.



Step 50

Do the math in your head.



Step 51

Mope down the ladder.



Step 52

Mope back into your house.

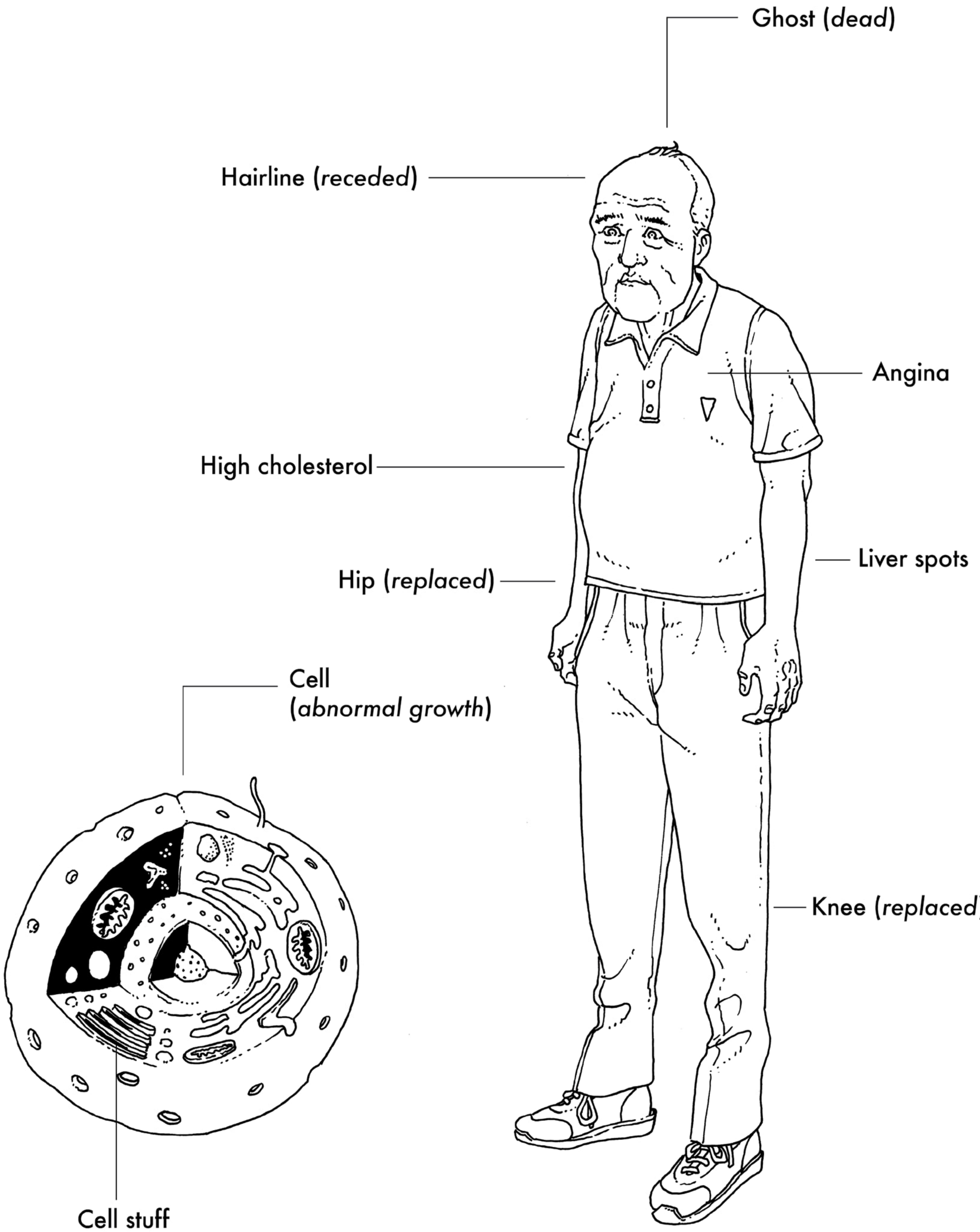


Step 53

Mope for the rest of your life.



Nomenclature (age 78)



Step 1

Get cancer of some kind.



Step 2

Hear the doctor do the math of your mortality.



Step 3

Do the math in your head.



Step 4

Mope back to your car. Get ready for the end.



Step 5

See the scared animal in the Oncology Center parking lot.



Step 6

Note how soft. Imagine a sweater this soft.



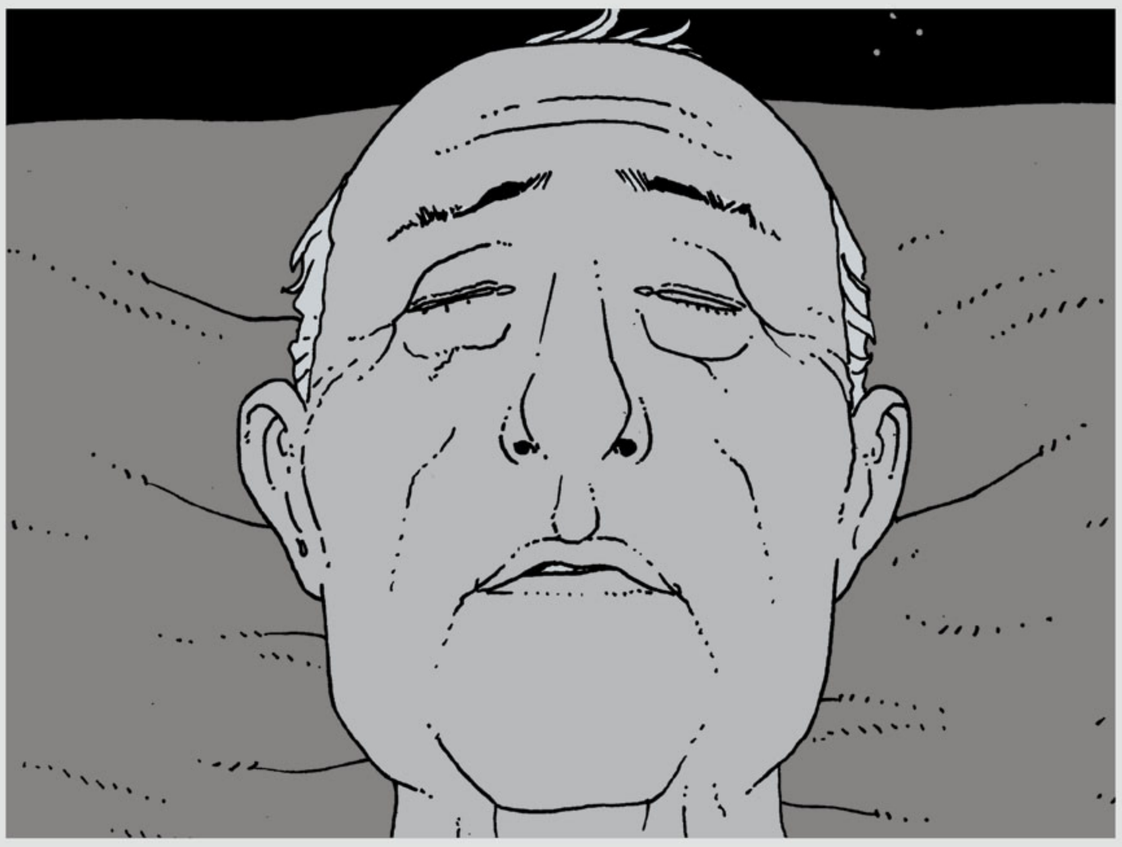
Step 7

Pass quietly in the comfort of your home.



Step 8

Be dead.



Step 9

Float, suddenly, out of your body and into the air above the bed.



Step 10

From four feet aloft, look down at yourself.



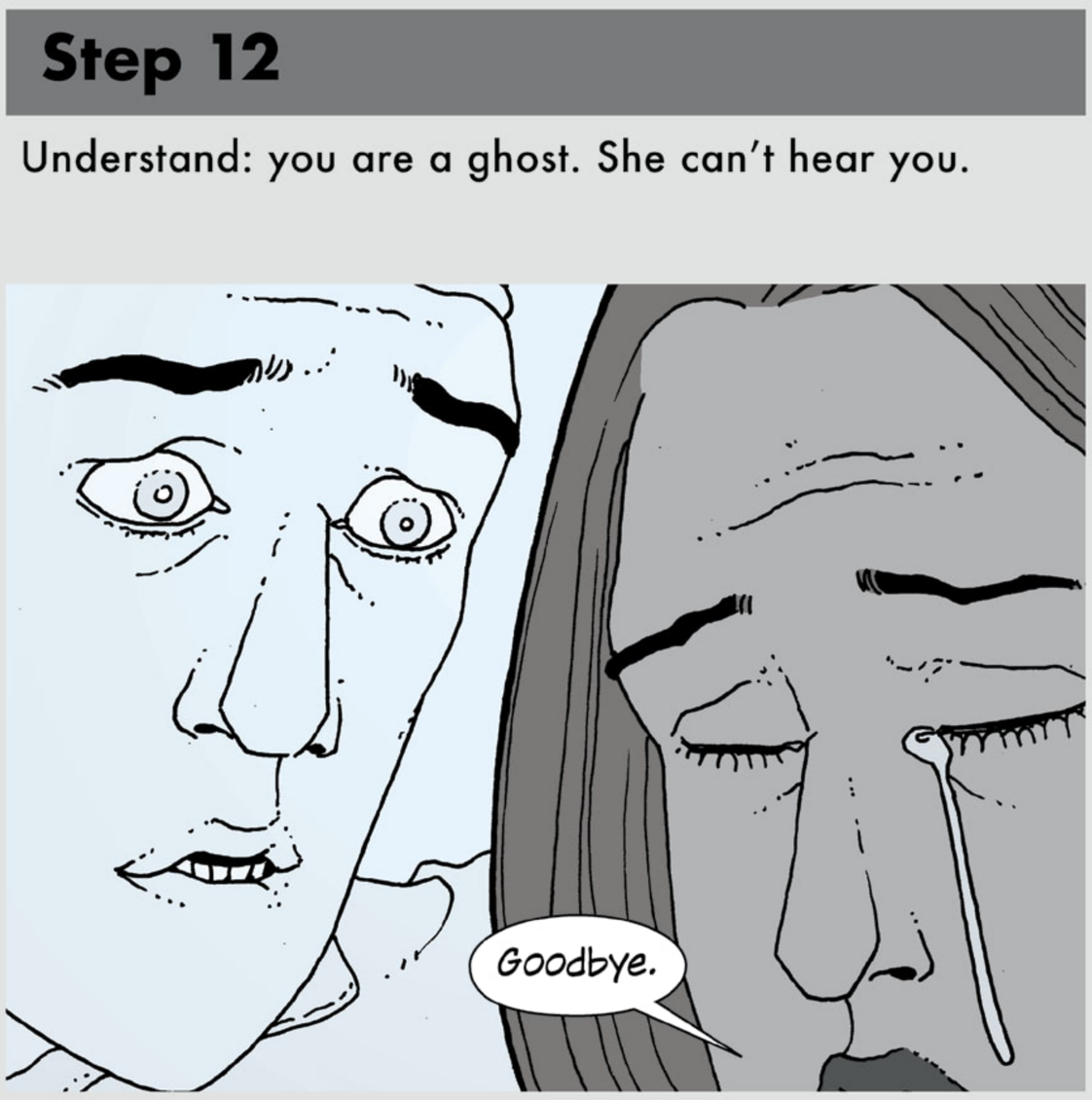
Step 11

Attempt, from the afterlife, to communicate with your youngest daughter.



Step 12

Understand: you are a ghost. She can't hear you.



Step 13

Rise up through the ceiling.



Step 14

Emerge from your roof, completely insubstantial.



Step 15

Fly into the crisp air of late October.



Step 16

See, higher than ever before, the humble expanse of your town.



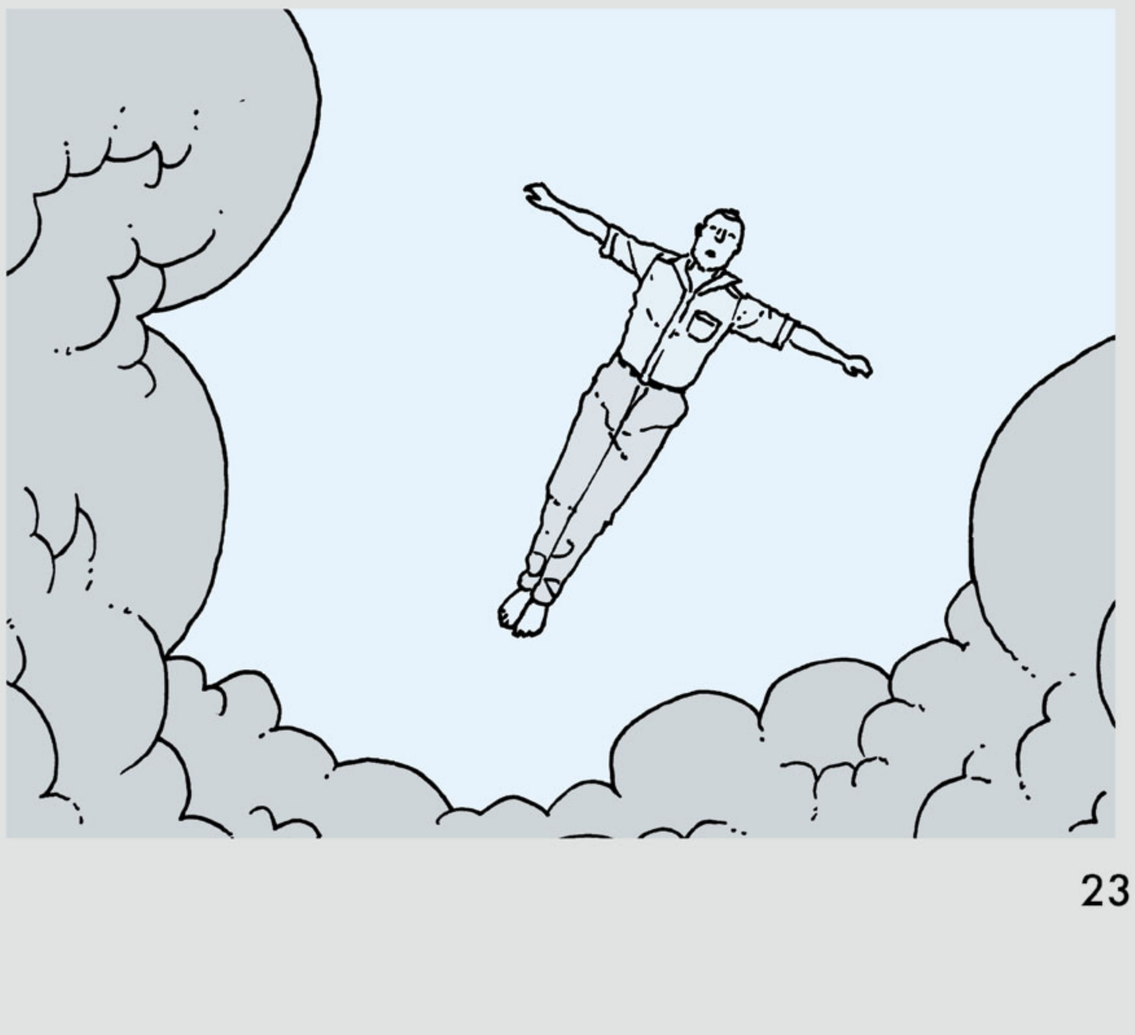
Step 17

From this spectral vantage, hear the multivalent noise of the living: conversations in kitchen nooks; arguments about wall paint; *thuds* and *purrs* and *gurgles* and radio static.



Step 18

Travel through the air.



Step 19

See how small it all gets from on high. See the things of this world shrink until they're nothing but faraway ideas. See them gain significance in the shrinking.



Step 20

Wonder: is this what the falling man saw? Wonder: was it relief on his face after all?



Step 21

Wonder no more; see him next to you in the sky.



Step 22

Speaking in a language made of light, join hands with the falling man.



Step 23

Fly together—over your town, over *every* town.



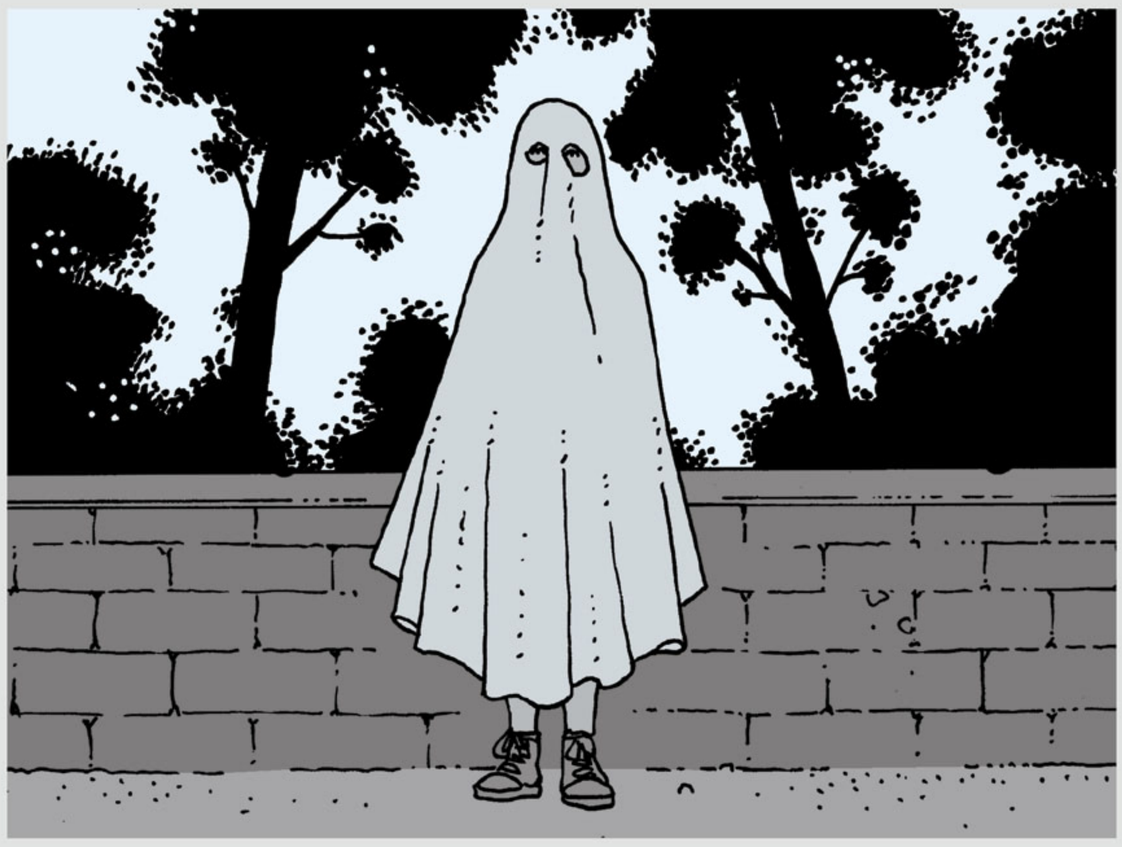
Step 24

Float through the air above a categorically substantial world.



Step 25

See the story of Casper, with all it's sweet and bitter vicissitudes.



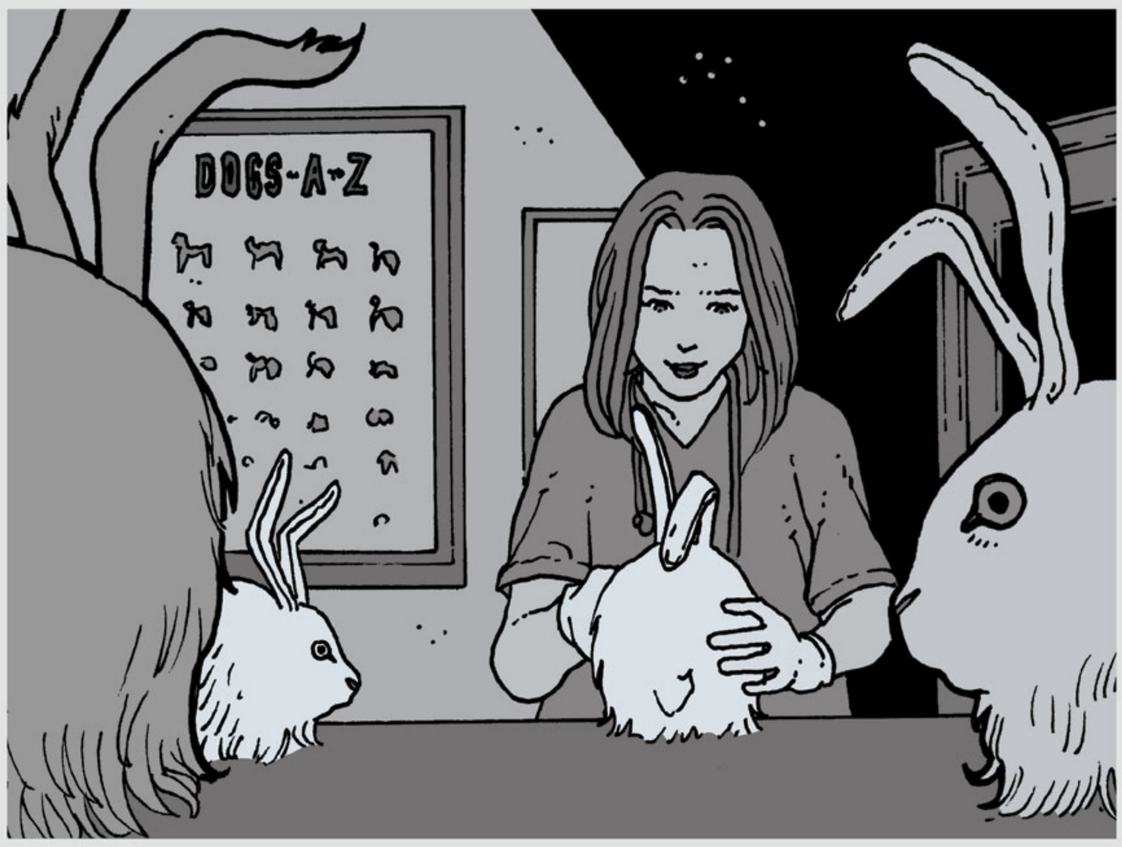
Step 26

Your wife and her massage therapist, married, living a long life together, always seeking peace...



Step 27

Your oldest daughter—a veterinarian—saving the lives of countless lesser creatures.



Step 28

No, not *lesser*. Nothing is lesser. Understand from up here:



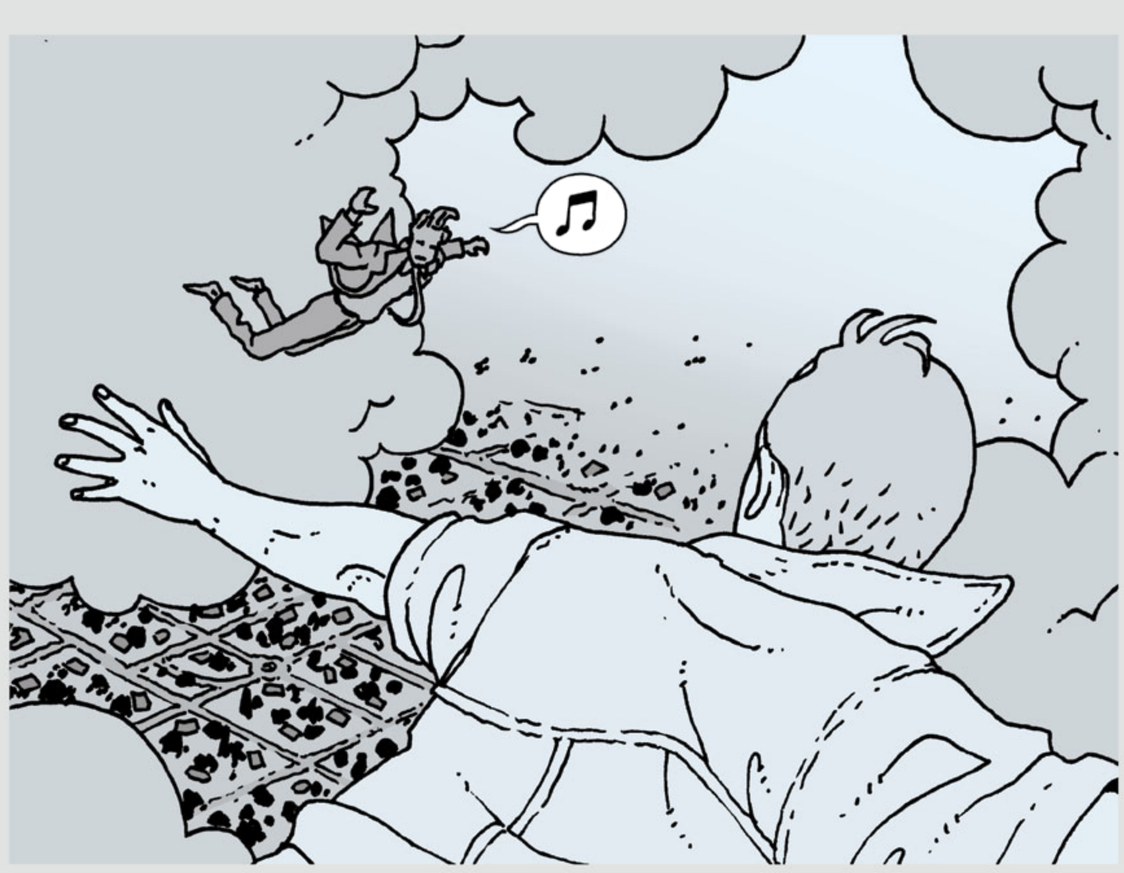
Step 29

All things are one thing.



Step 30

Every story...



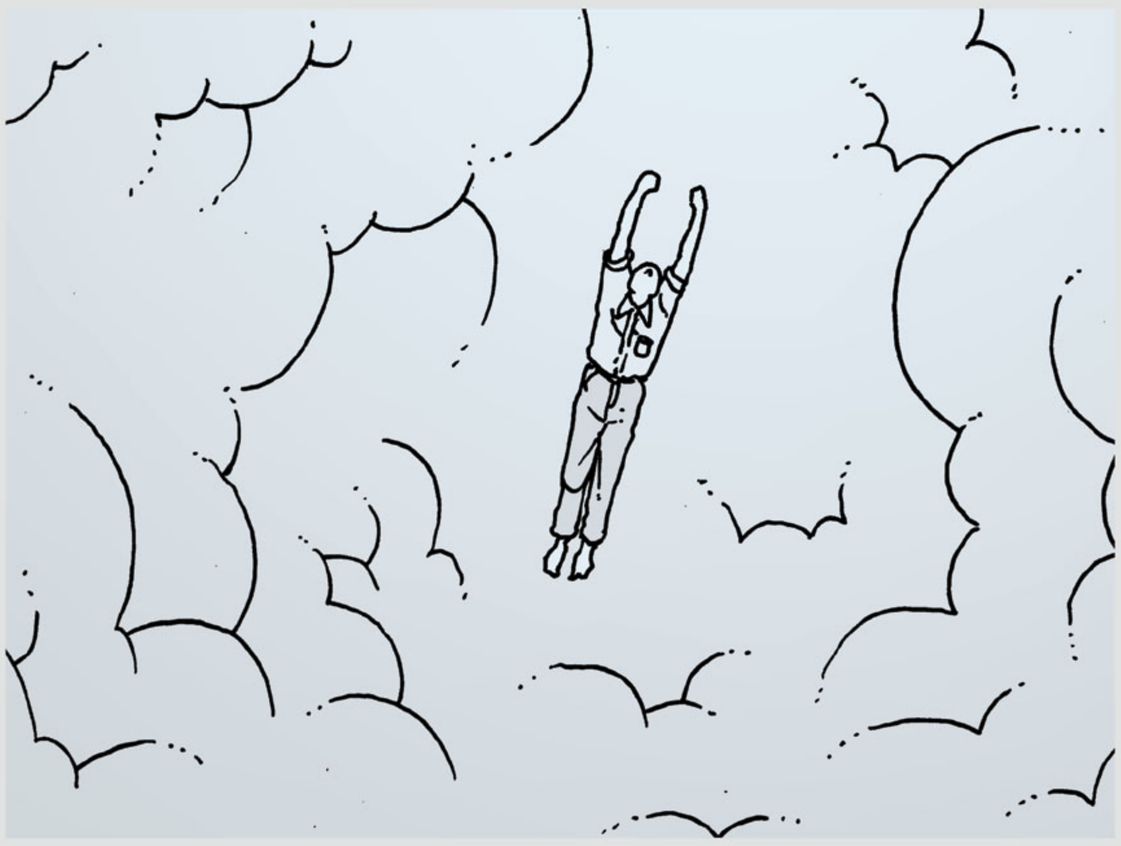
Step 31

...is a ghost story.



Step 32

Climb higher; ascend forever.



Step 33

And then, when you think you're as high as you can go...



Step 34

Climb some more. You are a ghost...



Step 35

But you are seen.



For kids

Chapter Twenty

STORIES FOR KIDS

Alright, little bugs. It's time for beddy-bye.

ICE CREAM

But, Dad! You promised us a story!

Stories. Mul-ti-ple!

k-keretz

fer my kidzz

I suppose I did, didn't I?

Well *alright*...a couple **yarns**, then.

But after that, it's ***lights out***, understand?

I want the both of you asleep in a jiffy...

Lickety split, brains off.

Aye aye, Captain!

Bueno, General! Mi cerebro será comida.

Good little buggies.

Story numero uno...

GOODNIGHT YOU

Yes!

Double-yes!

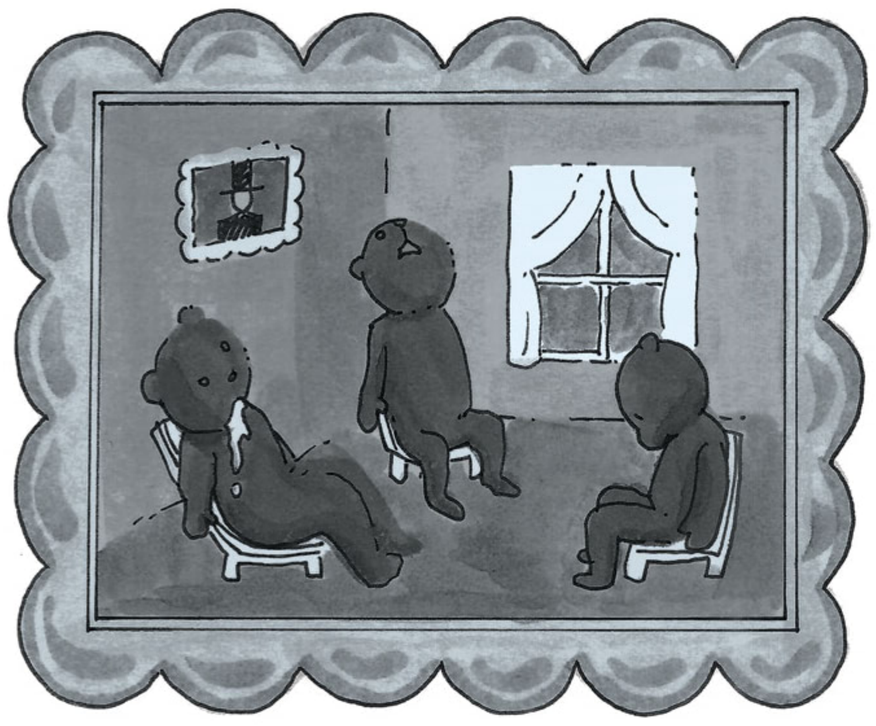
"In the small padded room..."

In the small padded room
There was a tissue box
And a boy with a balloon
And a picture of—

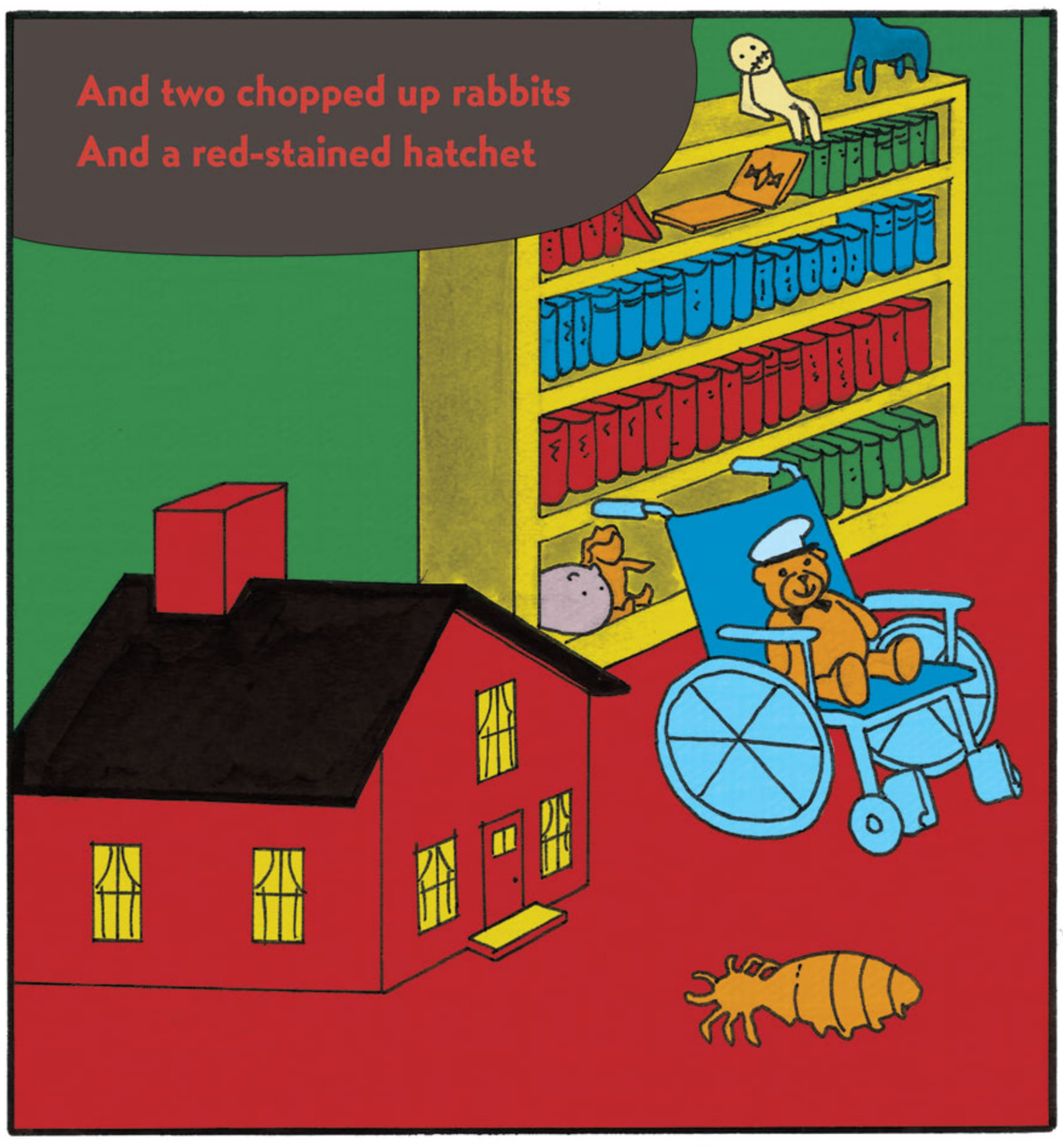




A girl heating up a spoon



And there were three cruddy bears sitting on chairs



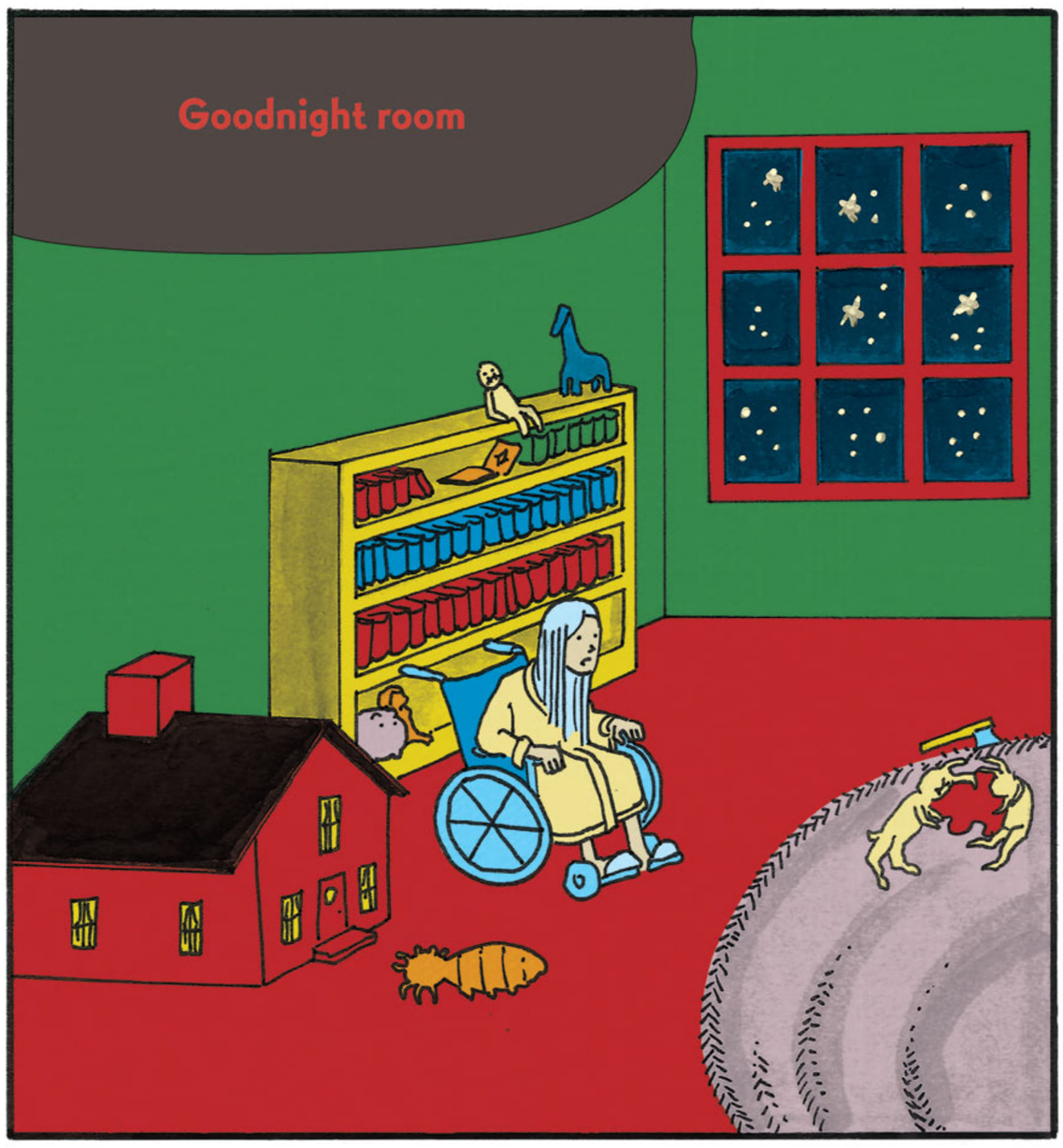


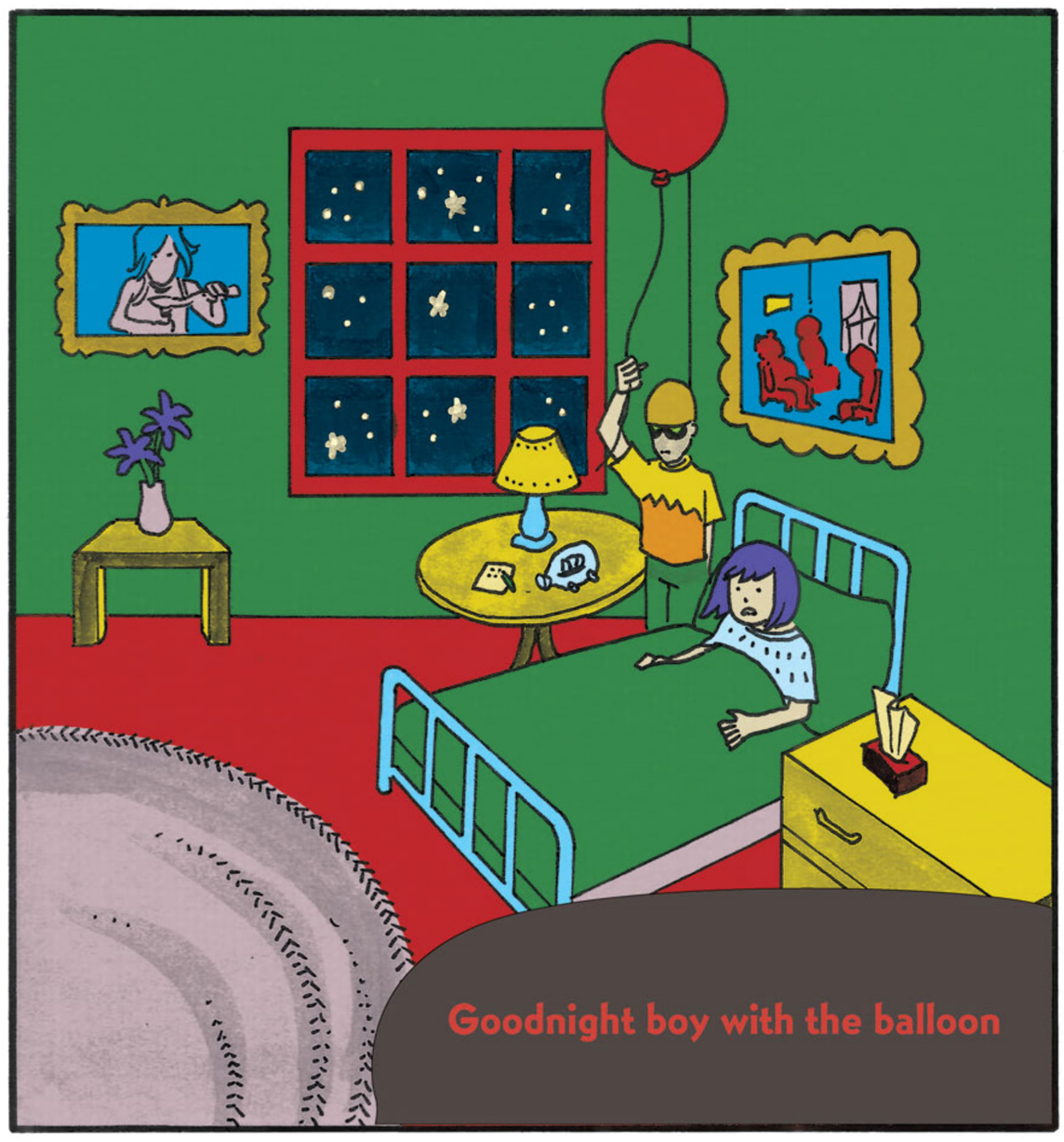


And a bottle and a boat and a suicide note



And a sick old lady whispering, “It’s the one that I wrote.”





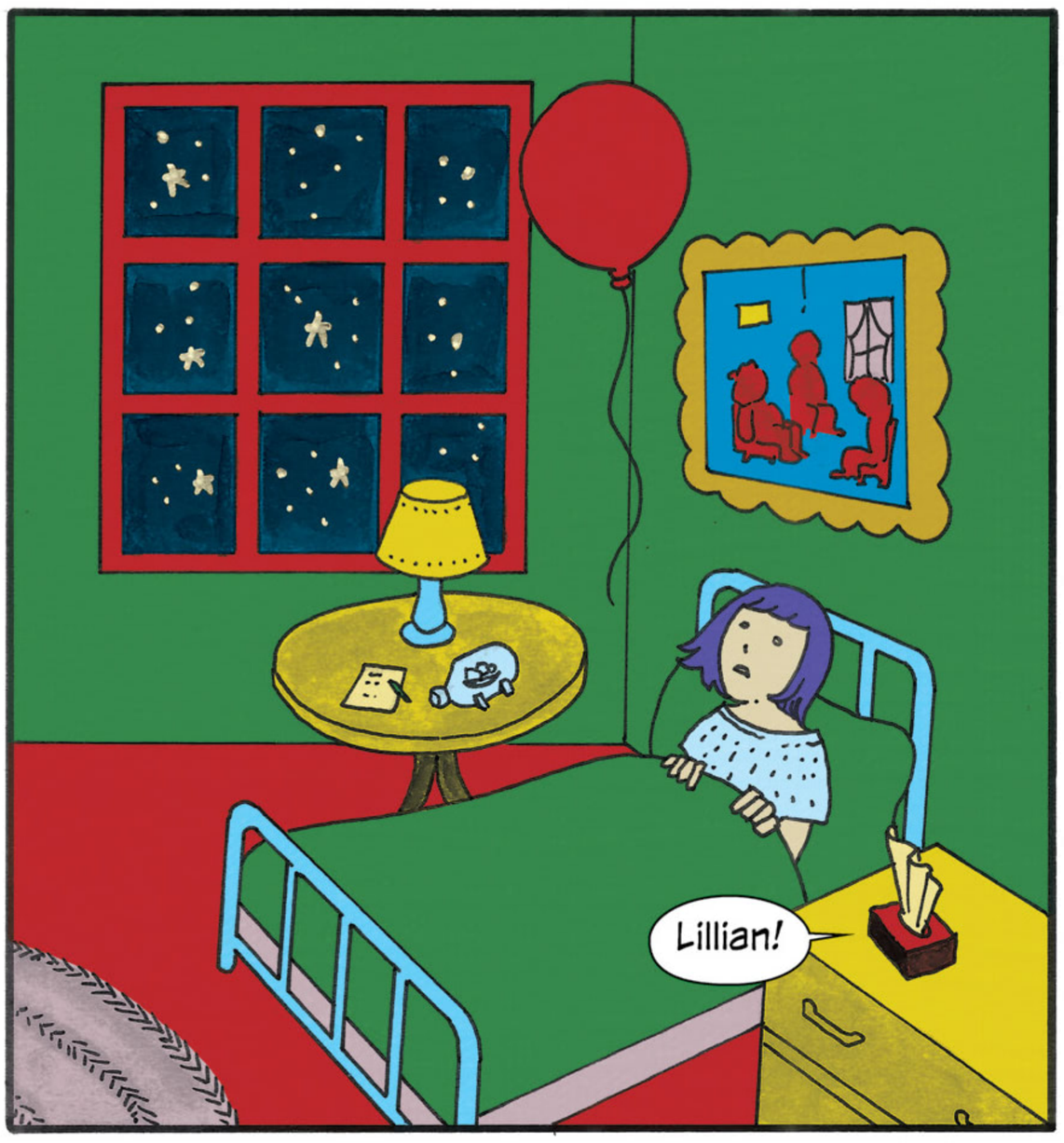


Goodnight girl who’s heating a spoon



Goodnight louse and goodnight house



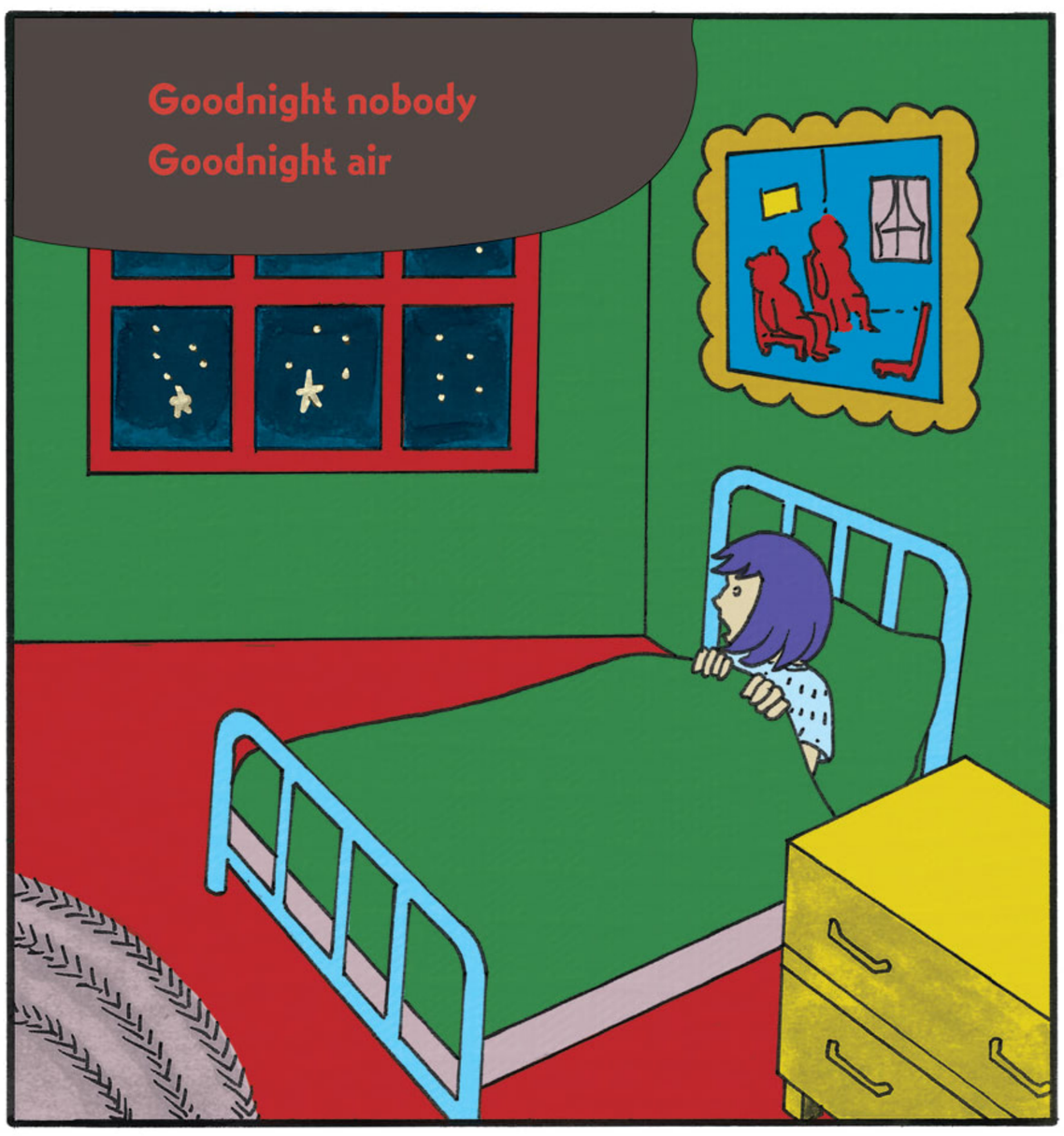




Goodnight bottle, goodnight boat



Goodnight to the lady and her suicide note
(But she was mistaken—that note, I wrote)



Goodnight to the things not really there

She was crazy, wasn't she?

I *knew* it.

Hey, Dad...

Why do people go nuts?

It's because their brains are mushy and full of *holes*.

Ew!

...and the holes are where the crawling things wiggle their way inside.

People are so susceptible to bad ideas.

Did somebody say nighttime carrots?

...or did the caterpillars get into my head again?

Mommy!

K-keretz

carrots for my k-kidzz.

Hey, hon...

You're frowning again.

G-gareee

Why doesn't Mommy go pour us some big ol' glasses of milk, huh?

Milk for my sweeties. Yes.

Now, where was I?

Oh, this is one of my *favorites.*

The Loving Tree!

That one's kinda ***sad***, Daddy.

Triple-sad.

Everything's sad.

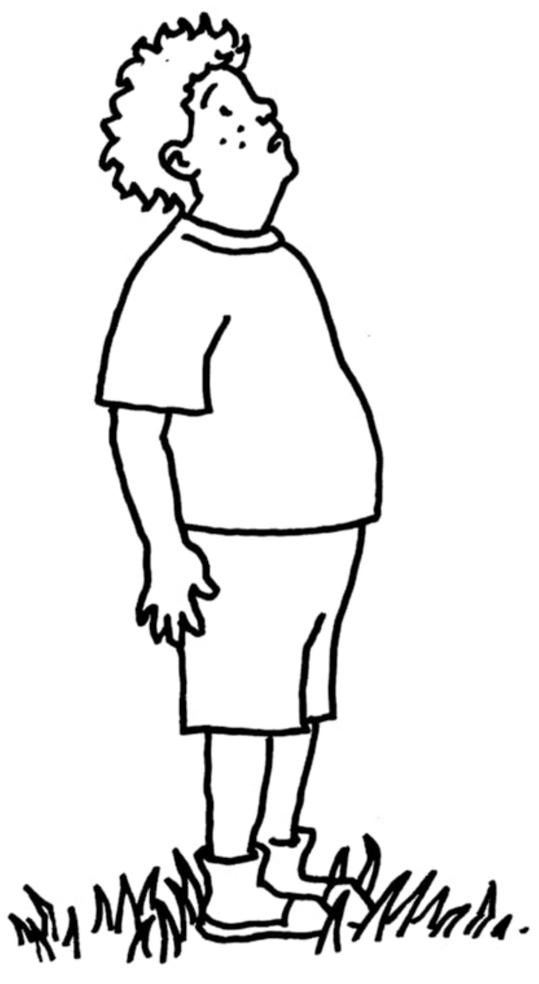
All the time, every day.

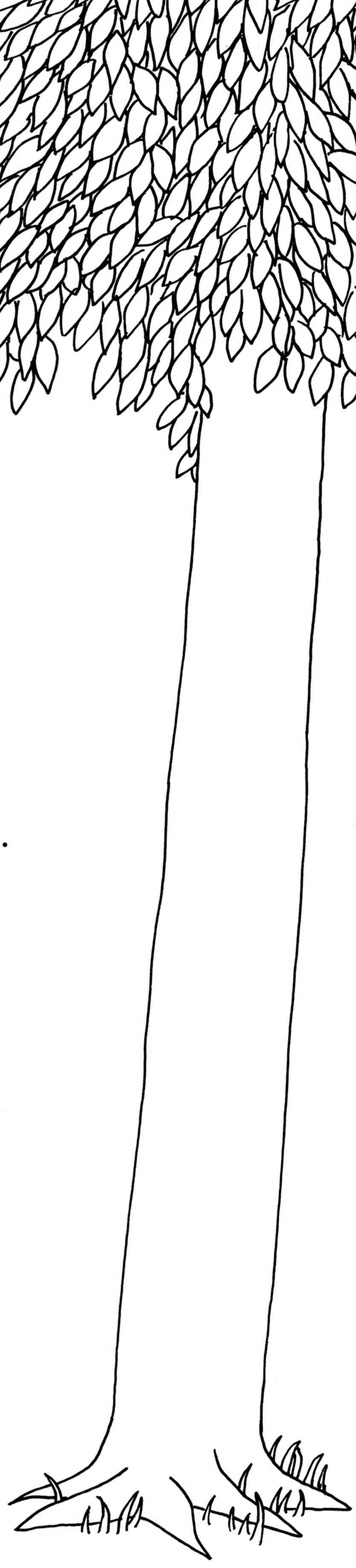
"Once there was a tree who loved a boy..."

The Loving Tree

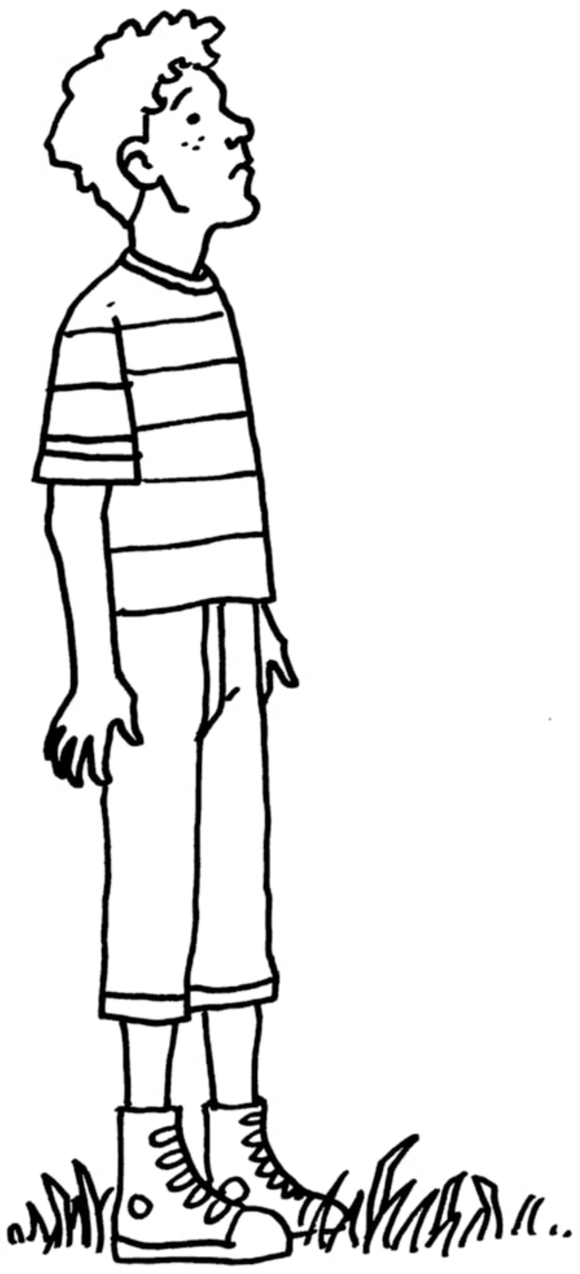
by Rick R. Duss

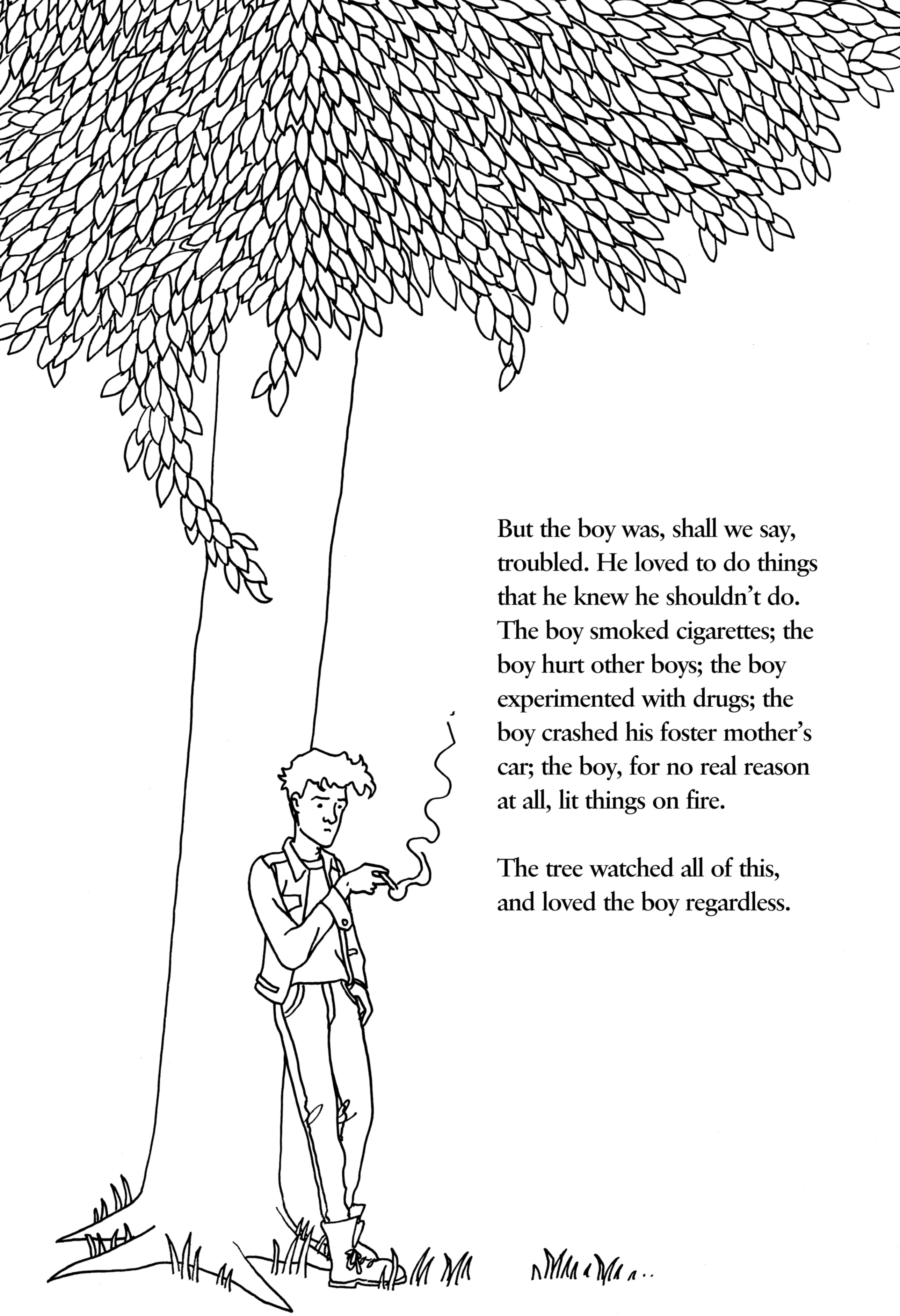
Once there was a tree who loved a boy...





And the tree watched
as the boy grew up.





But the boy was, shall we say, troubled. He loved to do things that he knew he shouldn't do. The boy smoked cigarettes; the boy hurt other boys; the boy experimented with drugs; the boy crashed his foster mother's car; the boy, for no real reason at all, lit things on fire.

The tree watched all of this, and loved the boy regardless.

Until one day the boy poured kerosene onto the tree, and took a match to its bark.

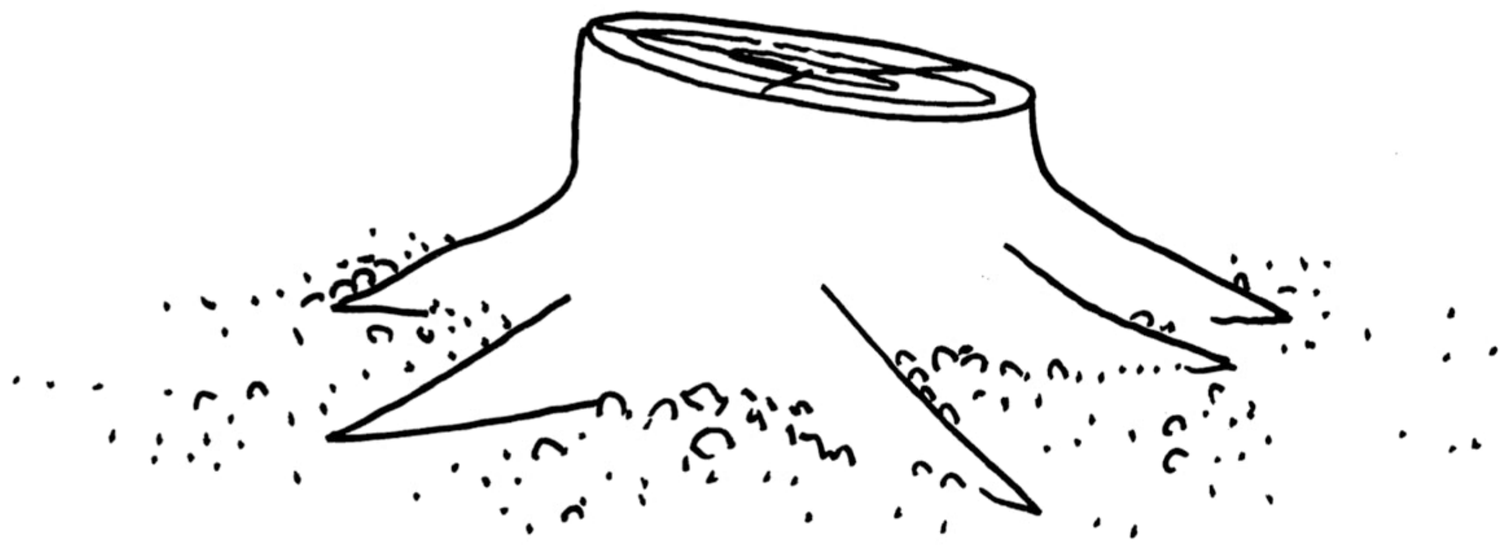


And the tree asked,
"Why are you doing this
to me? I've loved you your
entire life. I even looked
the other way that one
time when you reached
your hand under Jenny
Kerowitz's blouse despite
the fact that she clearly
didn't want you to."



And the boy said,
"I've got a hole in me
I can never fill. I'm
gonna do bad stuff,
all the time, because
I'm a broken person.
I'll probably die
before I turn fifty,
is my guess."

And the tree burned down to nothing.



And since that tree was
on a piece of land outside the
jurisdiction of certain preservation
laws, a developer paved the forest
and sold the plot to one of those
overbright big-box stores.





And the boy was right: he died in his forties in some kind of accident on the factory floor where he worked. The specifics don't really matter.

The hole in the boy was never filled.

The tree was long gone.

And many more trees would soon follow.

Listen close and you can hear another one being chopped down, screaming,
"But I loved you! I loved you!"



See? That wasn't so bad.

The world *needs* more stores.

Now you two sit tight while I go check on your mom real quick.

We've got one more ***story*** to tell.

♫

Evening, Gary.

Knock knock.

How's that milk coming, honeybear?

M-milk for my--

Wherez Gary?

You're making an awful mess.

B-bad mess

Relax, Jane.

It's just some spilled milk.

You're not supposed to **cry** over it.

"He's not our real dad, you know."

Our dad's name is *Gary*.

The smiling man...

My head gets all fuzzy when he's in the room.

These *stories*... they're all ***wrong***.

"Weed Laced with Coke".

...like the soda?

Please don't read it, sis.

Please don't--

"That Grem-a-loke..."

Weed Laced With Coke

I CAN SMOKE IT ALL BY MYSELF

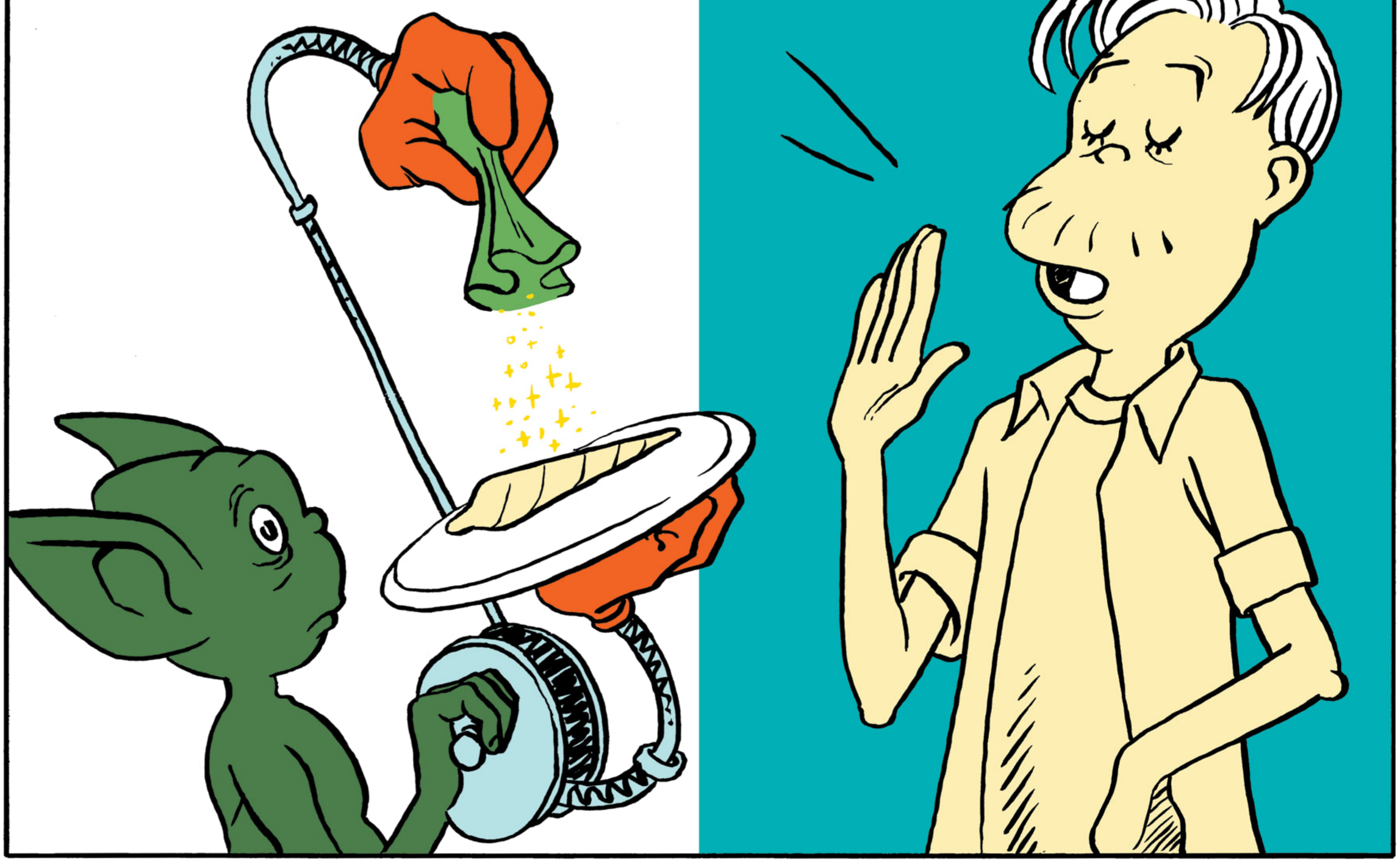
Beginner Books

By Dr. Sweet

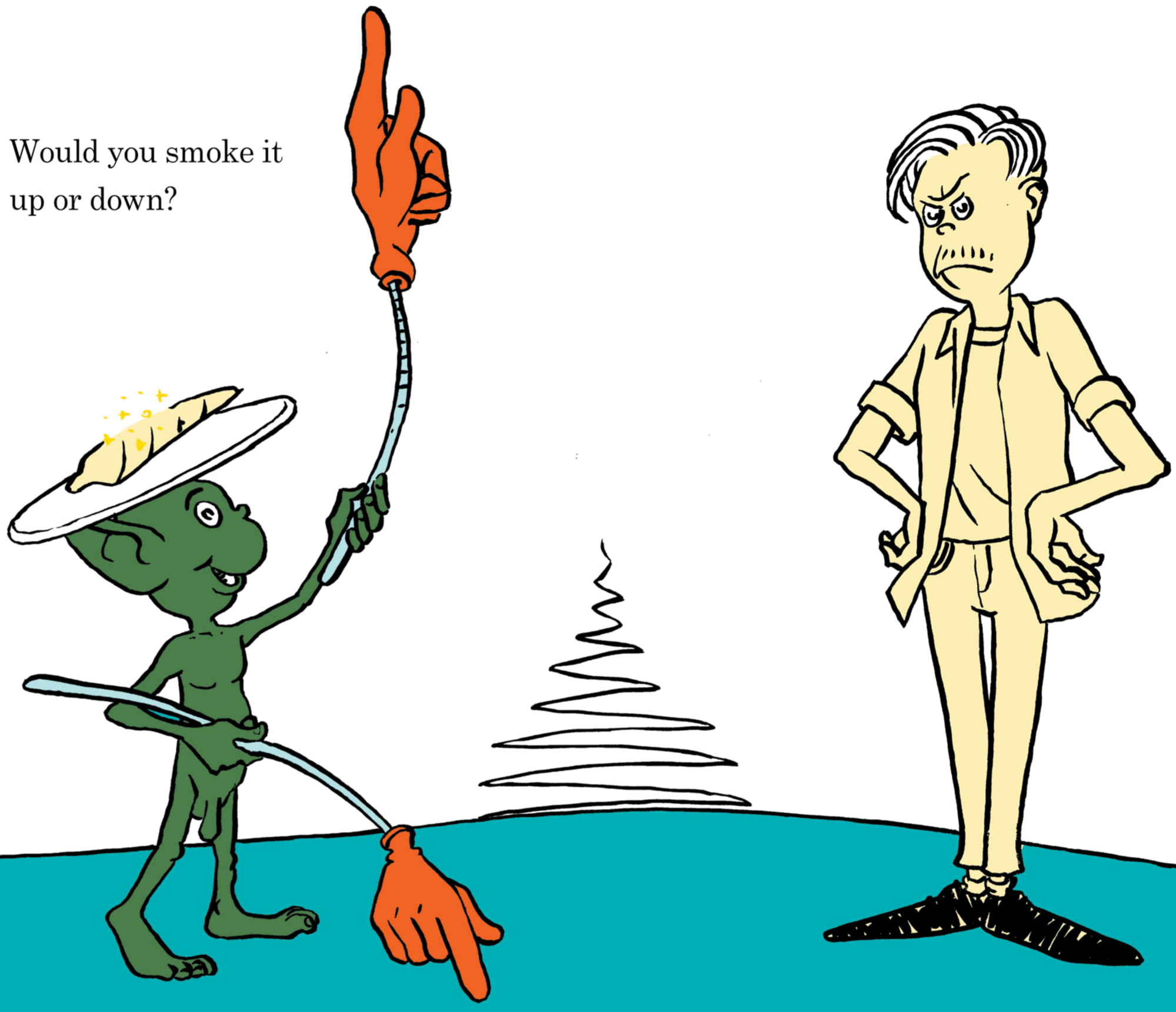
That Grem-a-loke!
That Grem-a-loke!
I do not like
that Grem-a-loke!

Would you smoke
weed laced with coke?

I would not smoke
weed laced with coke.



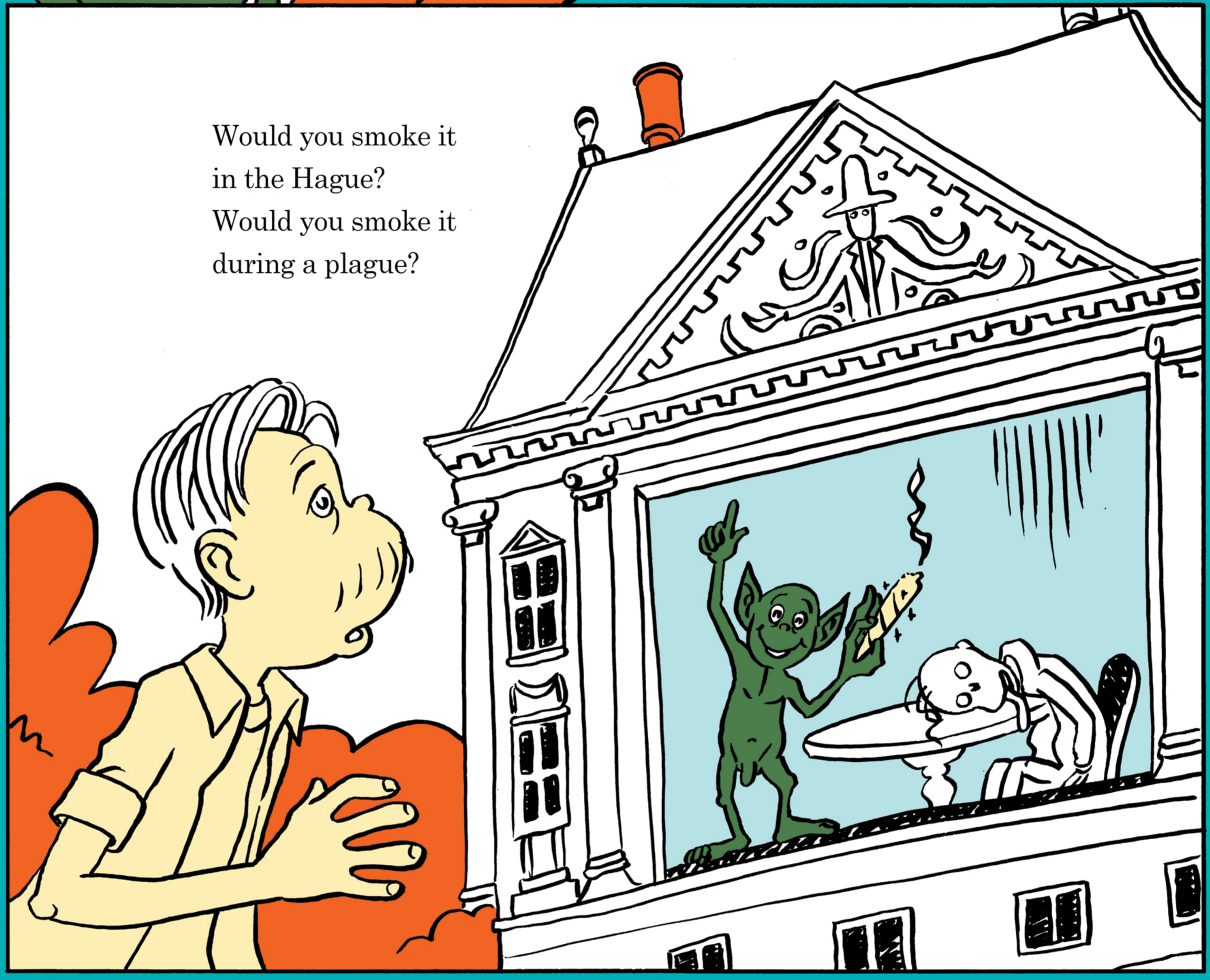
Would you smoke it
up or down?



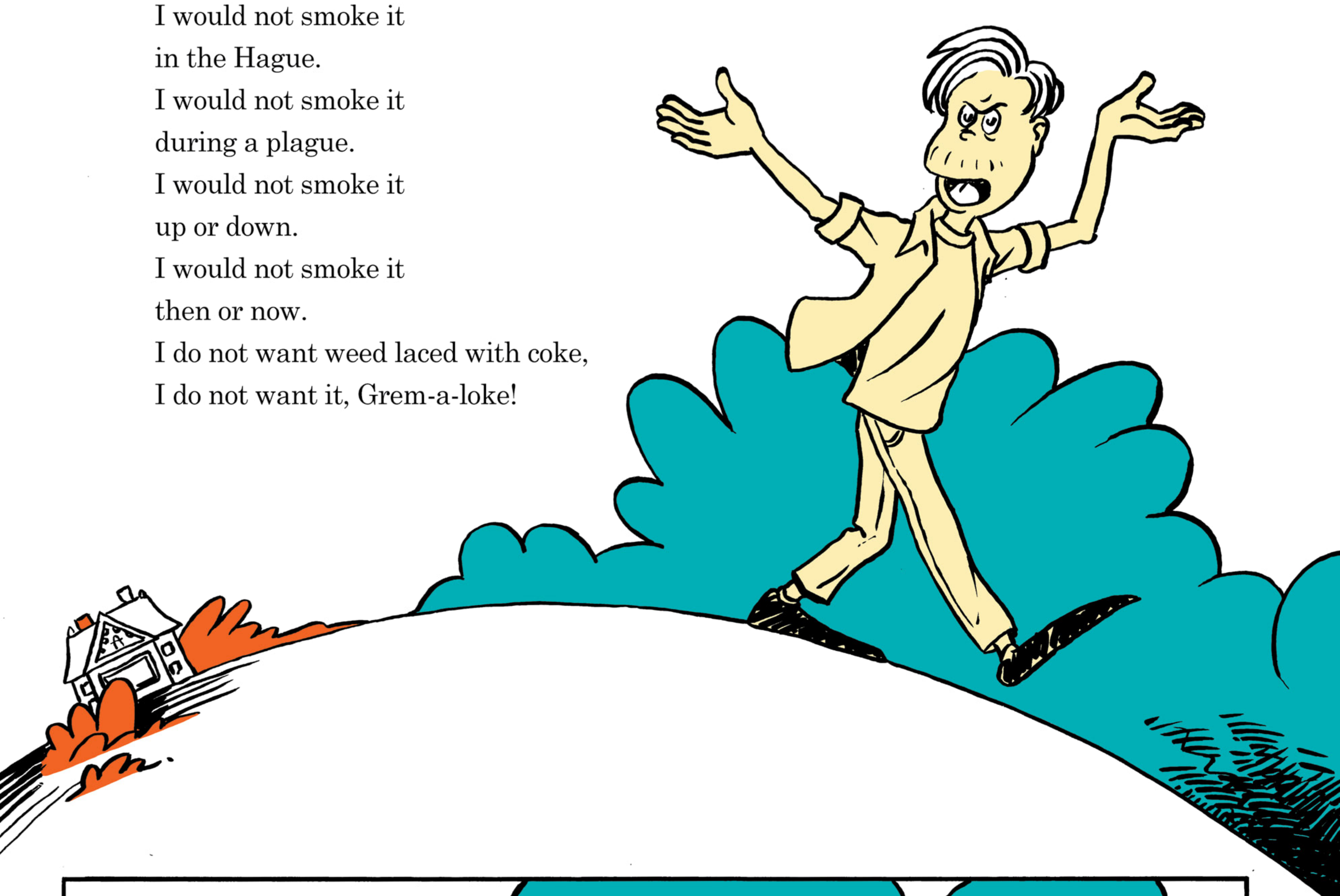
I would not smoke it
up or down.
I would not smoke it
then or now.
I do not want
weed laced with coke.
I do not want it,
Grem-a-loke!



Would you smoke it
in the Hague?
Would you smoke it
during a plague?



I would not smoke it
in the Hague.
I would not smoke it
during a plague.
I would not smoke it
up or down.
I would not smoke it
then or now.
I do not want weed laced with coke,
I do not want it, Grem-a-loke!



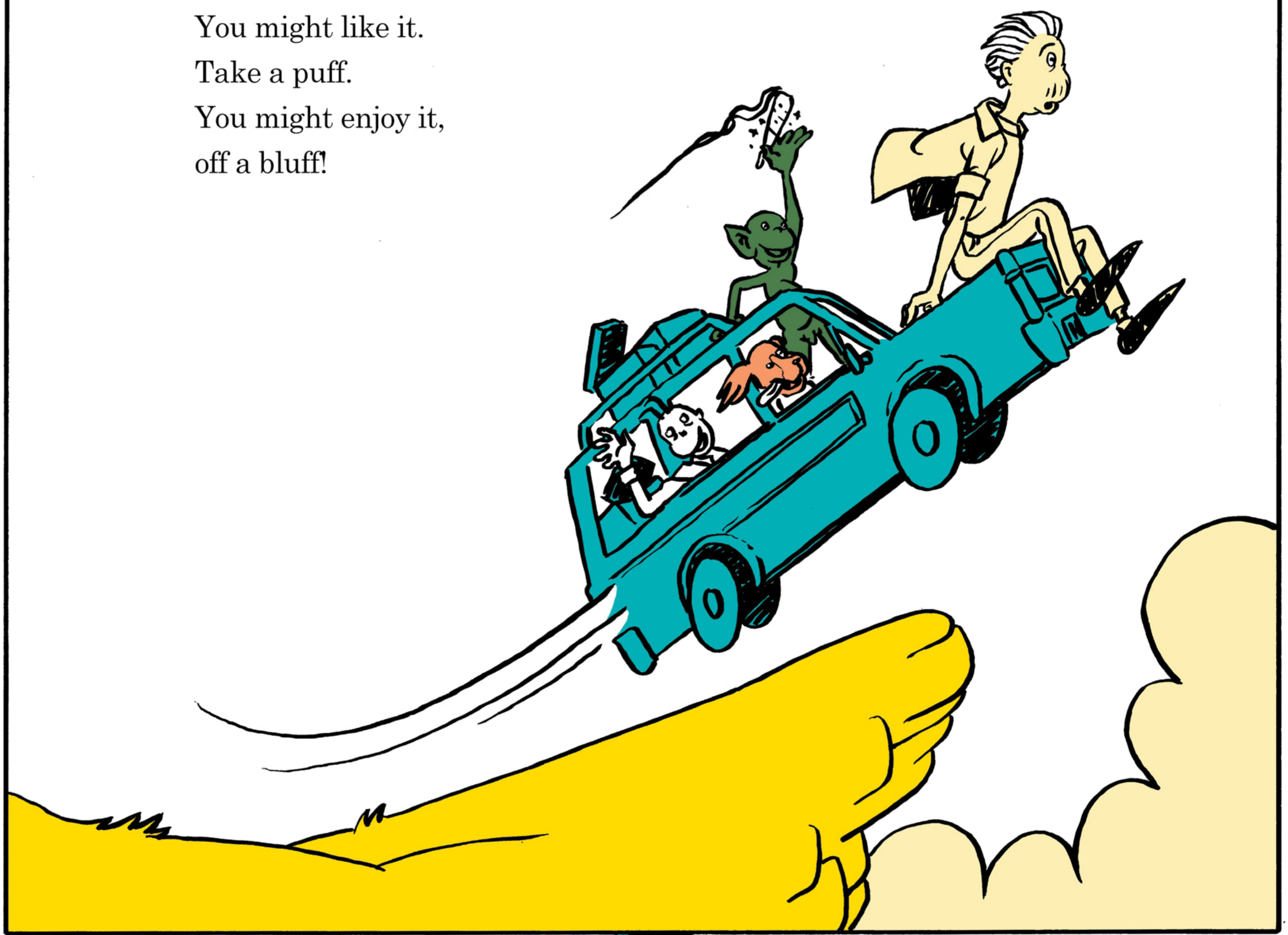
Would you smoke it
in a cog?
Would you smoke it
with Mad Dog?

Not in a cog.
Not with Mad Dog.
Not in the Hague.
Not during the plague.
I will not smoke it up or down.
I will not smoke it then or now.
I will not smoke weed laced with coke.
I do not want to, Grem-a-loke!

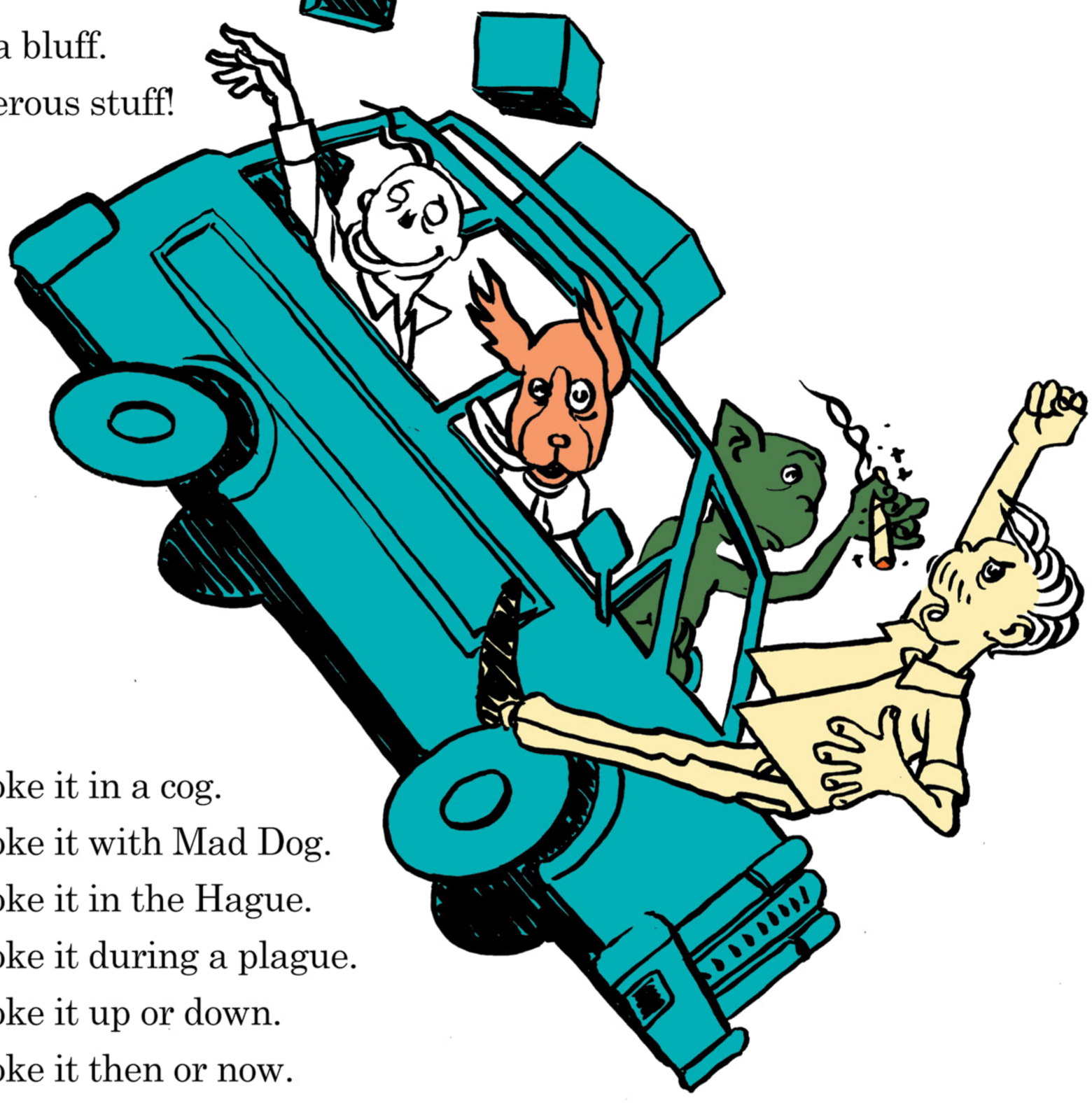
Would you? Could you?
On the hood?
Smoke it! Do it!
You'll feel good!

I will not,
won't not,
on the hood.

You might like it.
Take a puff.
You might enjoy it,
off a bluff!



I would not, could not, off a bluff.
Not on the hood! It's dangerous stuff!

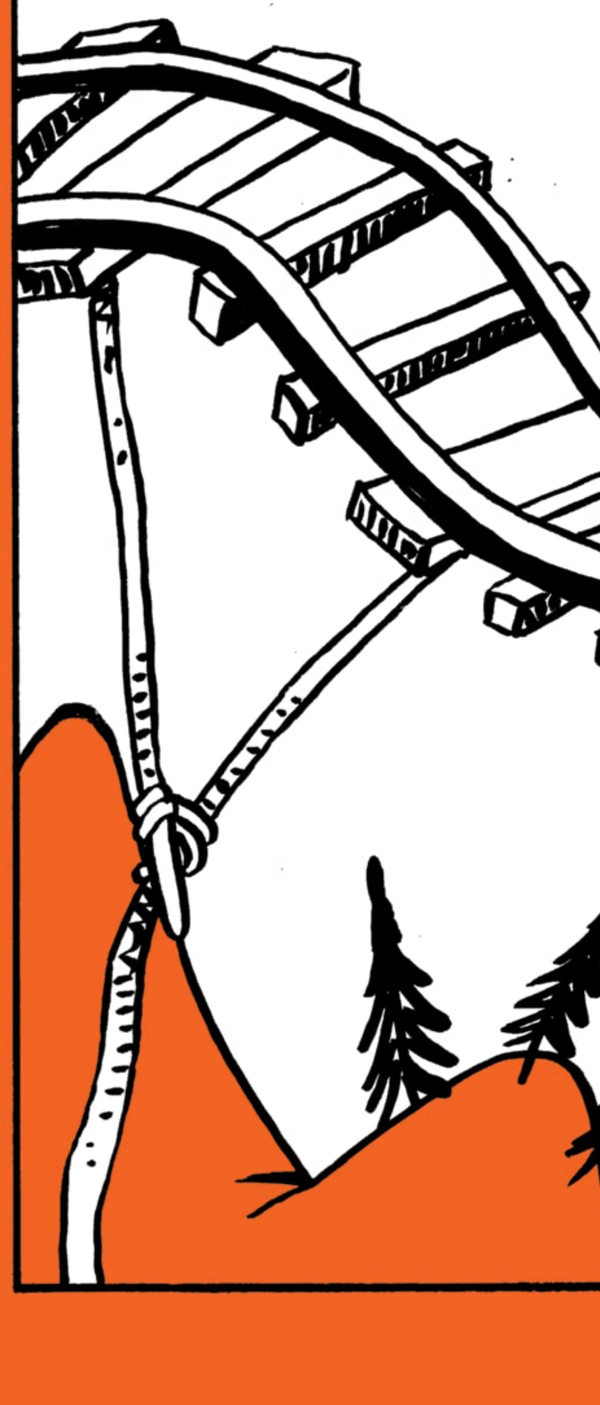


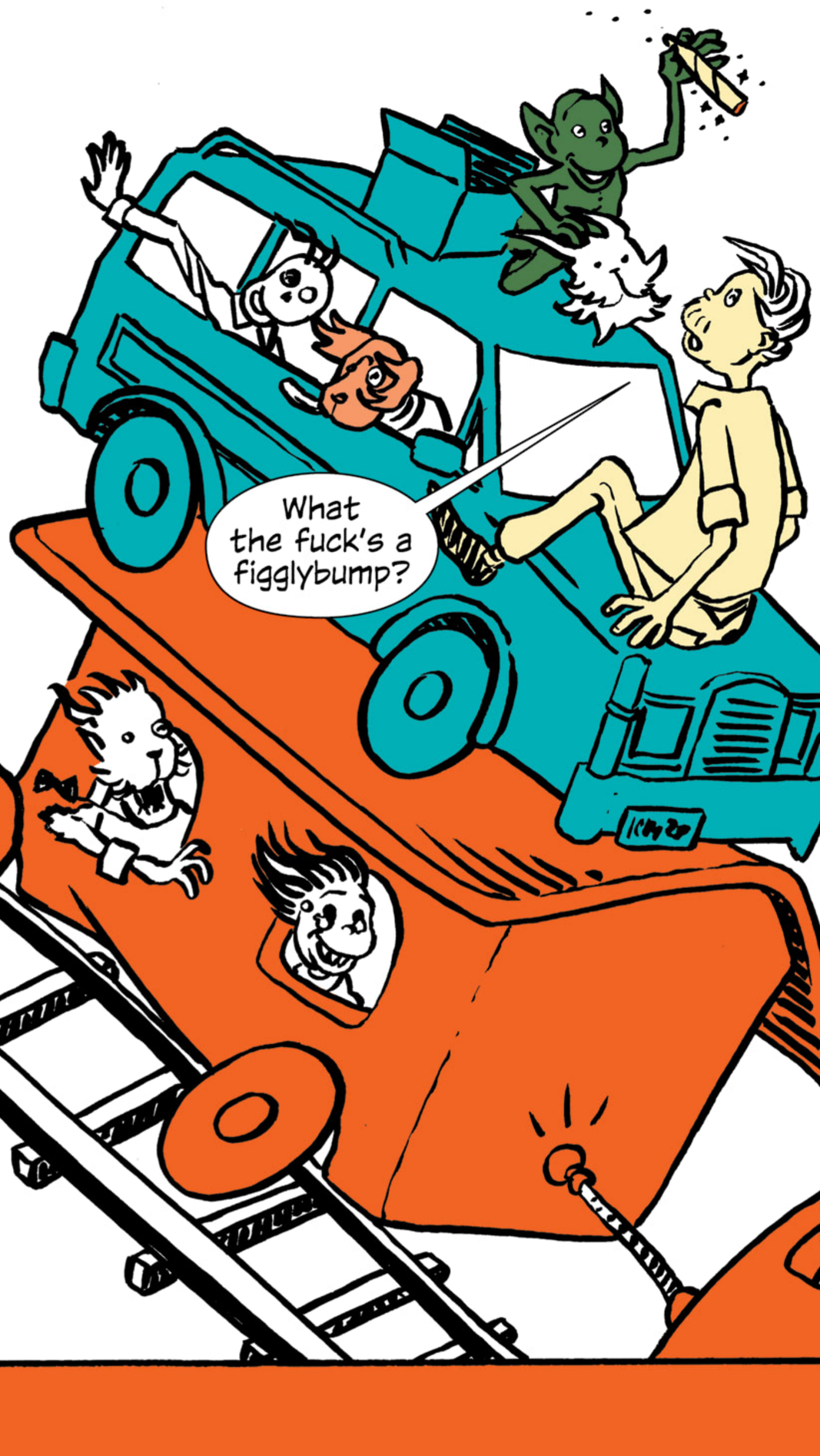
I will not smoke it in a cog.
I will not smoke it with Mad Dog.
I will not smoke it in the Hague.
I will not smoke it during a plague.
I will not smoke it up or down.
I will not smoke it then or now.
I will not smoke weed laced with coke.
Ain't gonna happen, Grem-a-loke.

You will not smoke
this little joint?

I do not want to—
that's the point!

Maybe with this
figglybump?





Would you, could you,
as we jump?

I could not, shall not, as we jump.
And no way with a figglybump.
I will not smoke it in the Hague.
I ain't inhaling while there's a plague.
Not in a cog! Not with mad dog!
Not on the hood, you ne'er-do-good!
I will not smoke it up or down.
I will not smoke it then or now.
I will not smoke it WHILE WE DROWN.

You don't wanna.
So you say.
Just try it, man.
And you may.
Smoke it and you may, I say.

Gremlin!
If you will let me be,
I'll smoke the thing.
You will see.

Wow!
I like weed laced with coke!
I do! I like it, Grem-a-loke!
And I would smoke it in a sepulcher.
And I would smoke it with a vulture…

He smokes it for the rest of his life, you know.

You guys read without me.

S-sorry, Daddy.

Daddy dearest.

Dearest Daddy.

Oh, it's alright!

Who can stay mad at two *adorable* little skeletons covered in meat?

...I bet it slides *right* off the bone.

Hey! How about one more for the road?

This one's called "*Little Jane*".

Little Jane was very plain, and lived a life of plenty.

She married Gary (who now looks scary), back when they both were twenty.

But life, you know, is long and strange—and full of small frustrations.

The world gets warped (mixed up! deranged!), despite your lamentations.

Now Little Jane, she took great pains, to flee her charming captor...

help

She waved at all the small-town cars—but *WHOOSH*, they whizzed right past her.

HELP ME!

And then, poor Jane, damn near insane, head hot and heart a-flutter...

MISSING PARSONS

8PM ET

icm

Approached a cow (a burger, now), and asked:

Are you my mother?

And that, my friends, is where it ends; the screws were put upon her...

ST GENEROUS HOME FOR THE MAD

...as she canonized her *favorite* guys:

Saint Manson! Gacy! Donner!

ST. GENEROUS HOME FOR THE MAD

So Little Jane (her arms restrained) was hauled off in the wagon...

Her brain was mush...

And full of holes...

SLEEP

But who knows why that happens?

Nighty night...

DON'T LET THE BED BUGS BITE!

COVER GALLERY



What follows are variant covers from the fifth volume of **ICE CREAM MAN**, by Michael Walsh, Emma Ríos (with Miquel Muerto), Gabriel Walta, and Martín Morazzo (with Chris O'Halloran & Good Old Neon).

Defund the police.

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Issue #20

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See here, see here!

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Horror
Rated **M** / Mature
Collects ICE CREAM MAN 17-20