

# FUNBITS

Vol. 9



January 2022

# FUNBITS

invites you to



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Rejected *New Yorker* cartoons by  
Lauren Summerlin

Cover photo by Vi Nguyen

# ABOUT US

ALLISON ASBURY is a UX designer living in Denver, CO. She enjoys listening to true crime podcasts, playing with dogs, traveling, and being outdoors. Her background is in UX/UI design and front-end web development. Check out her website:  
[www.allisonardenasbury.com](http://www.allisonardenasbury.com)

ANDREW EATON lives in Alexandria, VA. By day, he works in tech education. With the rest of his time, he writes, directs, and produces. His work, including an ongoing retrospective of Alfred Hitchcock, can be found at [andreweaton.me](http://andreweaton.me).

VI NGUYEN is a photographer based in Washington D.C. who wants people to feel. To feel all the feels, go to [www.viwashere.com](http://www.viwashere.com). Most importantly, she has a six year old Border Collie who sounds like Chewbacca whenever he needs attention.

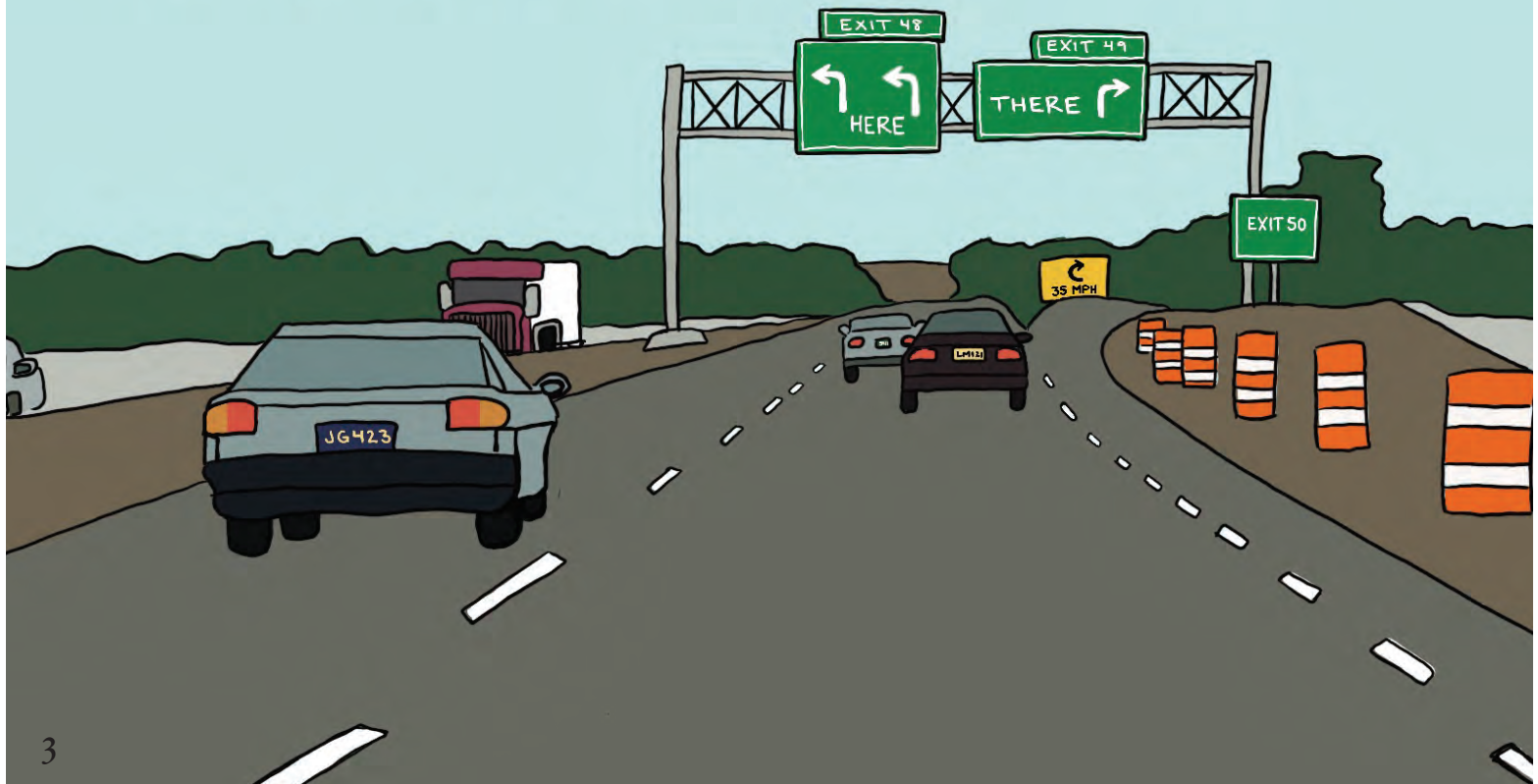
LAUREN SUMMERLIN lives in Austin, TX. She wishes someone would pay her to draw. Until then, she's asked some people if they wanted to make a zine and they said "yeah." You can see stuff she's made at <https://lsummerlin.com/>

ERIN SUMMERLIN is a person who does graphic design and likes to explore what it means to be a human and an artist.

JESSIE MITCHELL is a cog in the machine living in Ardmore, PA. She likes large bodies of water, coffee, and chachkies. She dislikes onions, when people are only described as "nice," and mechanical pencils. You can see more here:  
[jsmeej.wixsite.com/seasonsnbread](http://jsmeej.wixsite.com/seasonsnbread)

JULIAN JONES is a teacher in Austin, TX. He likes hanging out with his dog and reading the news (sorta, it's kind of a love/hate thing). He has some affiliation with Lauren.

I'VE BEEN READING A LOT ABOUT HIGHWAY HYPNOSIS - WHITE LINE FEVER - AND THE WAY THAT YOUR CONSCIOUSNESS CAN JUST SORTA DETATCH FROM THE REST OF YOU. LIKE HOW YOU CAN DRIVE A CAR SAFELY AND CORRECTLY FOR MILES AT A TIME, AND THEN SUDDENLY REALIZE THAT YOU'VE ALREADY PASSED THE TRAIN STATION AND ARE NOW TURNING LEFT ON BUTLER AND YOU HAVE NO MEMORY OF THE PAST THREE MINUTES OF YOUR LIFE. IT'S VERY FUCKING SPOOKY. THEY SAY THAT IT HAPPENS MOST WHEN YOU'RE TIRED, BECAUSE YOUR BRAIN SLOWS DOWN THE WAY IT DOES WHEN YOU'RE ASLEEP. TO ME, IT FEELS LIKE ACCIDENTAL ASTRAL PROJECTION - A LITTLE BIT OF COMMUTE WITCHCRAFT. NOTHING LIKE COMPOSING A PASSIVE AGGRESSIVE EMAIL WHILE OPERATING A MOVING VEHICLE IN A TRANCE-LIKE STATE TO MAKE YOU FEEL MAGICAL.



# WORK WIFE IN A CUP

You thought working from home would be great, that it probably wouldn't even *feel* like work if you didn't have to deal with interruptions, traffic, and Tony (fucking Tony).

But you're missing something. Why doesn't work feel as fulfilling? Why is it more draining and bland now?

It turns out, the best part of everyone's work was seeing their *work wife*. Fortunately, cutting technology has allowed for the **Work Wife in a Cup™**.

## How to Operate **Work Wife in a Cup™**

1. Find a work wife vessel – it could be a box, a bowl, a cup, or a mason jar (if you're basic).
2. Cut along the dotted lines on the following page.
3. Place the pieces of paper in your work wife vessel.
4. Voila! Pull a piece of paper out of **Work Wife in a Cup™** when working from home feels like an endless blank landscape devoid of anything worth living for.



Yo, you're totally right.

Have you had enough water to drink today?

Do you wanna get a bagel?

"You can't use up creativity. The more you use,  
the more you have."  
- Maya Angelou

"All of us, at some time or other, need help. Whether we're giving or receiving help, each one of us has something valuable to bring to this world. That's one of the things that connects us as neighbors--in our own way, each one of us is a giver and a receiver." - Fred Rogers

"If you're always trying to be normal you will never know how amazing you can be."  
- Maya Angelou

Do you wanna get coffee?

"If you could only sense how important you are to the lives of those you meet; how important you can be to the people you may never even dream of. There is something of yourself that you leave at every meeting with another person." - Fred Rogers

I'm sorry that asshole is being an asshole again.

"What did the ocean say to the beach?"  
"Nothing, it just waved."  
- Dad

"To capitalist logic, which thrives on myopia and dissatisfaction, there may indeed be something dangerous about something as pedestrian as doing nothing: escaping laterally toward each other, we might just find that everything we wanted is already here." - Jenny Odell

"Whether you think you can or think you can't, you're right."  
- Henry Ford

"There will always be someone who can't see your worth. Don't let it be you."  
- Mel Robbins

"The difference between a stumbling block and a stepping stone is how high you raise your foot."  
- Benny Lewis

"Life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you react to it."  
- Charles R. Windoll

Some people suck. Not you though,  
you're awesome.

"Sometimes the questions are complicated and the answers are simple."  
- Dr. Seuss

"I'm a survivor. I'm not gonna give up. I'm not gonna stop. I'm gonna work harder."  
- Destiny's Child "Survivor"

"In every life we have some trouble. But when you worry, you make it double."  
- Bobby McFerrin / Don't Worry be Happy

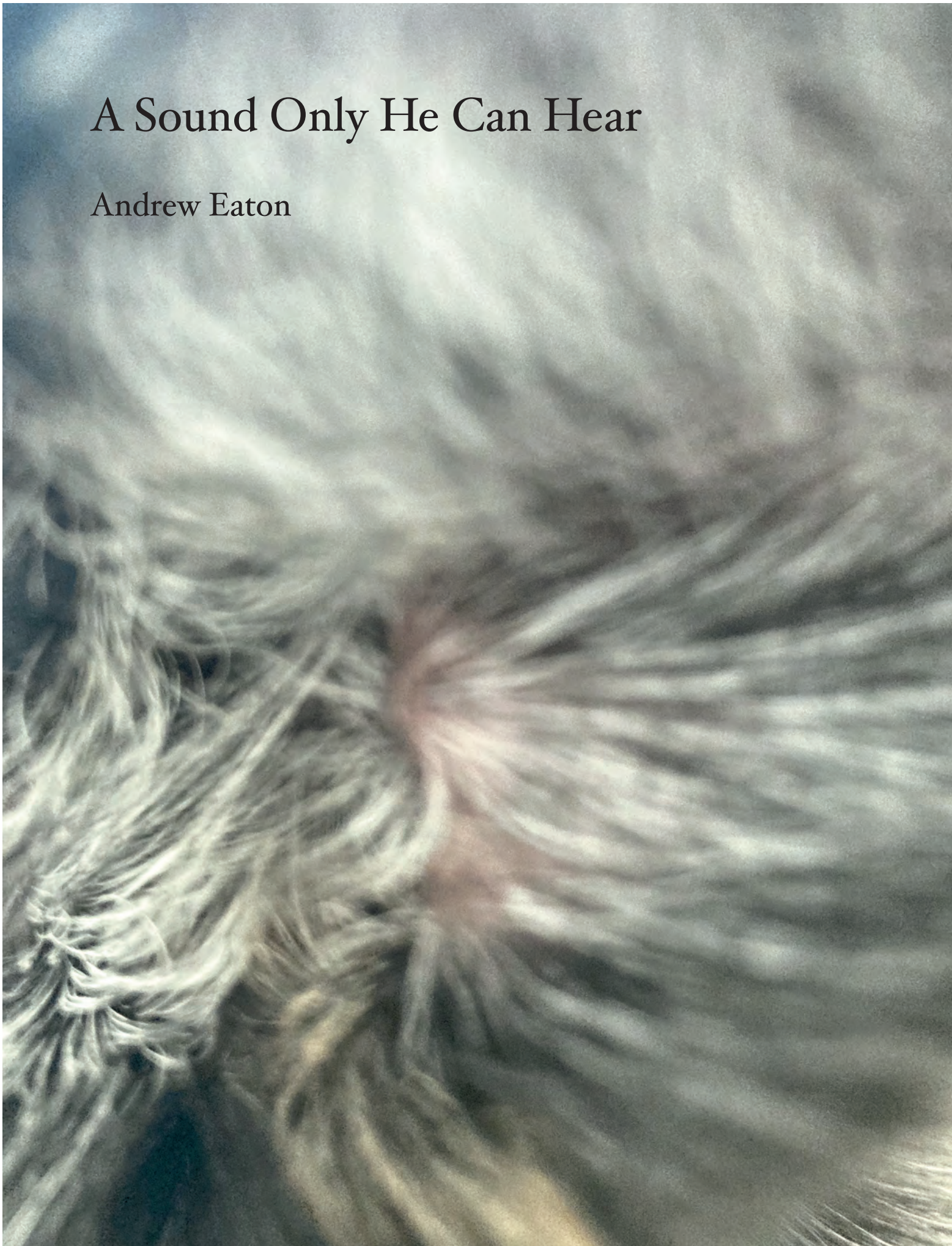
Take a walk! Fresh air will do you good.

Breathe in for 5 seconds.  
Exhale for 5 seconds.

"I'm afraid for the calendar. Its days are numbered."  
- Dad

# A Sound Only He Can Hear

Andrew Eaton



## 1

*A wave of feeling crashed over him  
As a bell struck a bowl  
And made a sound like a small voice singing*

*He had heard every sound before but this  
Could now hear nothing but this  
And was being carried by the wave of it*

*Then came a light  
And a shape in the light  
The shape of himself in a new form*

*And he could feel it move  
Feel the shape become him  
In his hair and under his skin*

*He lay still as it went on  
Because he began to believe  
He would finally become what he wanted to  
be*

## 2

*Burnt hair*, Oliver thought. *It smells like burnt hair*. Like when Lora used her straightener, but overpoweringly so.

He looked down at the vinyl floor and saw the source. There, in the shape of a human body, was a black mat of dried blood and scorched hair.

Questions arose but were put aside by a sudden insatiate thirst. Oliver went to his water bowl. He dropped his face in and lapped up eagerly, unable to drink fast enough. His mouth seemed smaller and his tongue shorter, fatter, *heavier*.

Oliver stopped to examine himself. He was naked and recoiled at the sight. He had become very nearly hairless, his limbs spindly, and his torso retracted and elongate. Sitting felt unnatural and walking caused him pain. By some transformation he seemed to have slept through, he had become human.

Oliver went to a cheval mirror in the corner of the room to study his reflection. Yes, this confirmed it: he had become one of *them*. And yet the reflection registered as *him*. He was looking at *himself*.

He looked back down at the floor. What a mess. Ash and blood and hair and who knew what else. He turned to the bed. The covers were thrown back and it was empty.

*Lora*, he thought. He'd been sleeping at the foot of her bed, as he always had. She must have seen the whole thing happen. Or, at the very least, heard it.

He became self-conscious. Where before he was only concerned with meeting a hierarchy of basic needs and, when possible, comforts, now he was worried about what he looked like, how long he would be like this, and what to do next. It was overwhelming.



*"The school board thought My Octopus Teacher was a cost-saving plan."*

Oliver came out of the room, hair standing straight up, wrapped in a bedsheet. He had no clothes – had never worn clothes – but now his nakedness felt shameful.

This was not his home. Nor was it Lora's. This was a house she and her friends had gotten for the weekend. He didn't know where this house was, but he knew it was a long car ride to get here and that it had a big yard with no fence.

Oliver walked down the hallway to the living room. There, on a loveseat in the corner, surrounded by her five friends and her shithead boyfriend Todd, sat Lora. They were sitting completely still, staring back at him. In a corner was a television playing a news program at low volume. It was a segment showing the indigenous inhabitants of an island adorning an enormously round man on a beach with garlands and laying gifts at his feet as he beamed enthusiastically. The people on the beach kept pointing to the water in response to the reporter's questions.

No one in the room moved. Tears streamed down Lora's face. Her friends seemed poised to protect her. Owing to experience, and perhaps aided by his new consciousness, Oliver comprehended the situation: they were afraid.

Oliver began making a repetition of pained glottal noises, trying to recreate a sound he'd thought and heard at least a thousand times. The group winced at each attempt, until finally he was able to produce the word: "Lora."

She blinked, astonished. "...Oliver?"

His tongue felt nimble, his mouth wet, and his lips elastic. Suddenly every word felt moist and sayable.

Todd, who he liked least, turned from Oliver to Lora, then back again. And, in that shithead voice of his, brayed: "*Wait - that's your dog??*"

Lora had long wanted a dog but had been hesitant to commit. She knew that if she were to get a dog, it would be from a shelter, showing concern for the great many abandoned or passed over in favor of more fashionable breeds. Lora's sister was oblivious to this concern, however, and on Lora's 30<sup>th</sup> birthday gifted her Oliver – a shaggy Otterhound pup with big, webbed feet. Though Lora wished her sister had gifted her a rescue (or at least consulted her about the feasibility of this gift first), she graciously accepted Oliver and raised him lovingly.

Now at age five (in human years), Oliver remembered it all. He remembered life from a lower vantage point – long walks, dry food, strong scents, the desire to be touched – and it all seemed like a perfectly natural way to live. Now he conceived of his life differently. He could discern, through new awareness, a life before and after.

*Is this how humans remember childhood? Or how they remember their time before being born? Who could say? Maybe humans don't think too hard about their existence. Or maybe they do but are far more sophisticated in their thinking after years of contemplation and learning than he could possibly muster in his limited experience as a person. And another thing: can they tell what each other are thinking? Can she hear all this?*

"Do you hear me?" Oliver asked.

Lora looked at him, still put off, but managed to answer, "Yes."

"And you understand me?"

"Yes," she nodded.

After a protracted non-verbal negotiation, Lora and Oliver had managed to get away from the group and were now walking along a garden path outside the house. His ability to speak now more assured, Oliver recounted to Lora how the night before began like any other:

he fell asleep at the foot of her bed, then awoke the next day to find her gone and himself transformed. In turn, Lora described a fantastic commotion that drove her to sleep in the living room, and that she thought it had all been a nightmare. That was, until she returned in the morning to find a person sleeping where a dog should have been.

"You see now, Lora, that person is me – Oliver."

"Yes, I didn't believe it at first," she replied. "But then I saw all that stuff on the news and... well, you're here now."

He felt a great tenderness toward Lora. She had given him so much so freely and expected nothing in turn. Now he was excited to be speaking a language she could understand, and he had so much to say. Though he wasn't conscious of it, somewhere deep down he'd hoped something like this would happen.

"Am I supposed to say what I feel out loud?" he asked.

"You can. But usually we don't say everything."

She started to say something else, then hesitated before beginning again.

"Oliver, I'm sorry but I wasn't prepared for... this. This isn't what I had in mind when I took you in."

"Me neither. I don't know why it happened or what it means, but I'm grateful it did."

He began to feel poetic. He felt like rhapsodizing to Lora about all the possibilities of their life together. Now he could experience things like she experienced things. They could continue living together – not as romantic partners – but as best friends, just as they were before.

"Honestly, this is all a lot to take in," she said, "and I think it'd be best if you speak to someone about this."

"Someone?" he asked, puzzled.

"I called a specialist. They have people who've been responding to this kind of thing and know how to handle it."

Oliver stopped. "I see. And I'm to go see them."

"Actually, they're coming to see you." She tried to smile, but it was unconvincing, even to Oliver.

"I realize this is all happening very fast," he said, "But I hope you'll give me a chance to prove I'm still me. Still Oliver. And I'd like to find a way to continue being together. You know, as friends."

She pushed her hands into her pockets and looked at the ground. "I just need some time to think about it." She glanced back up, eyes moist, and walked back toward the door.

*This is going poorly*, Oliver thought. But she's all he knew. Where would he go without her? Who was he without Lora? The thought of entering the world without her caused him great anxiety.

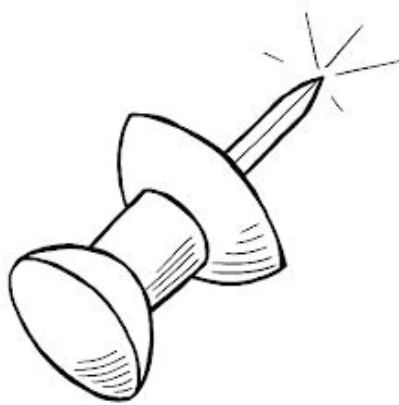
At that moment, a black sedan pulled into the driveway of the house. A bespectacled middle-aged man wearing a white lab coat got out.

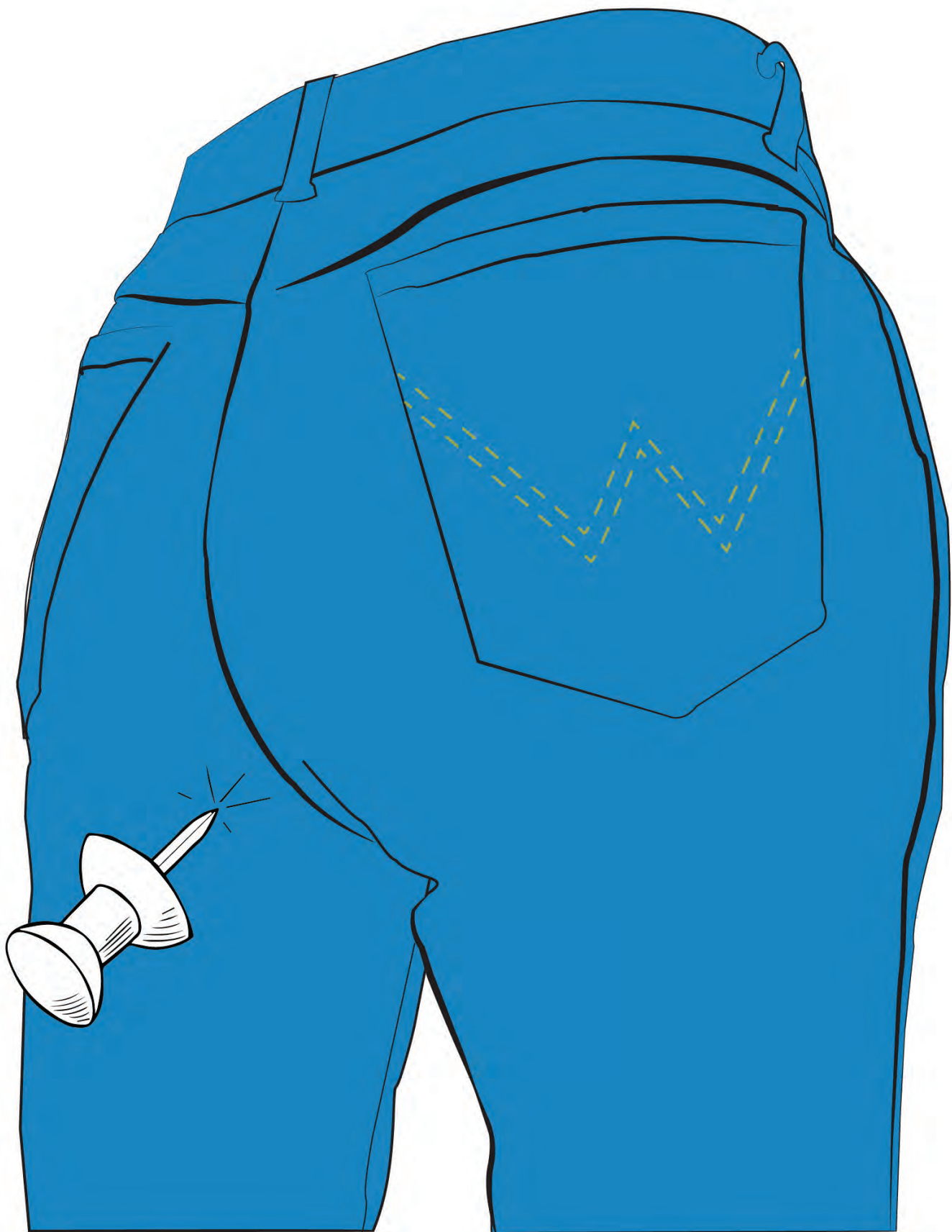
"Hello," he announced loudly. The man approached, sizing up Oliver, who was still wrapped in a bedsheet. He smiled and extended his hand. "You must be Oliver."

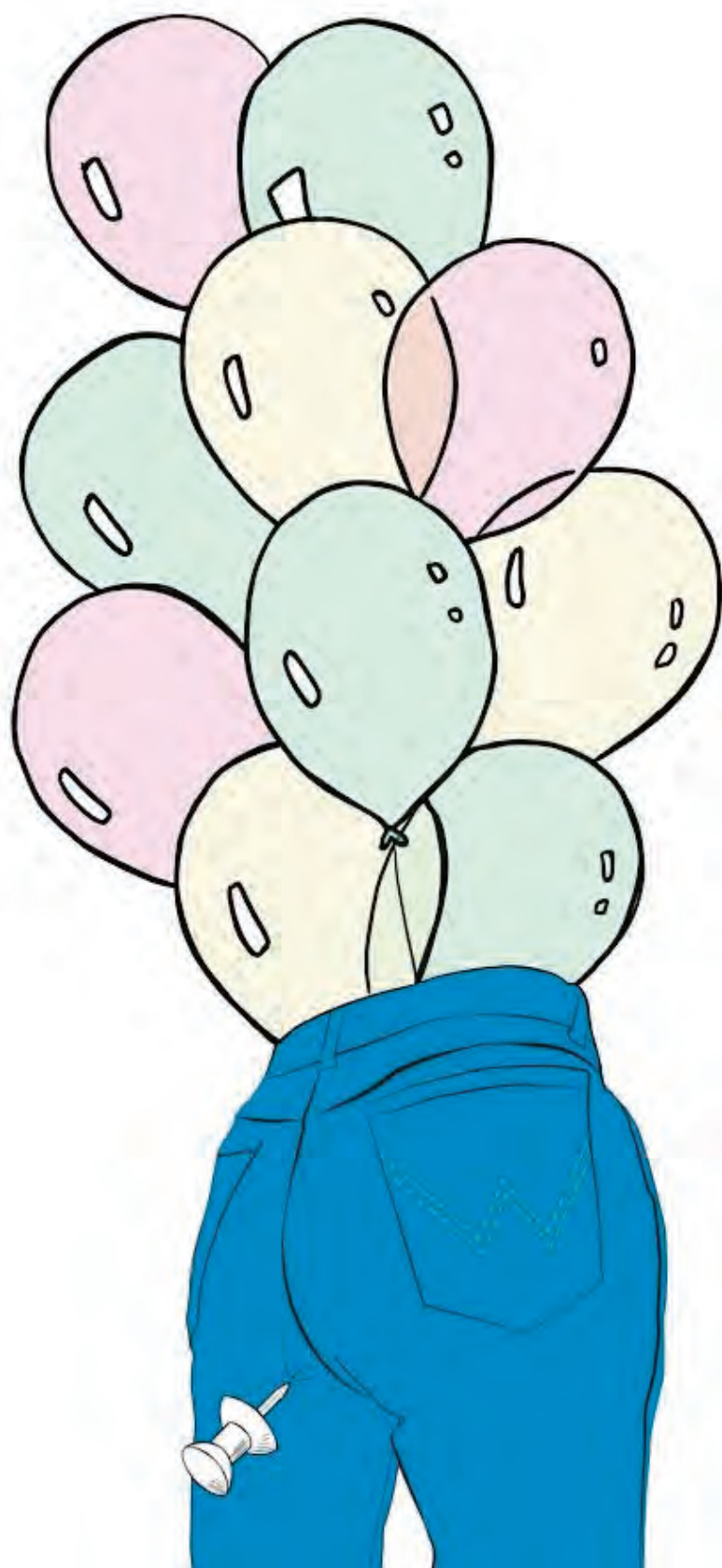
"Yes," Oliver replied, not taking the man's hand.

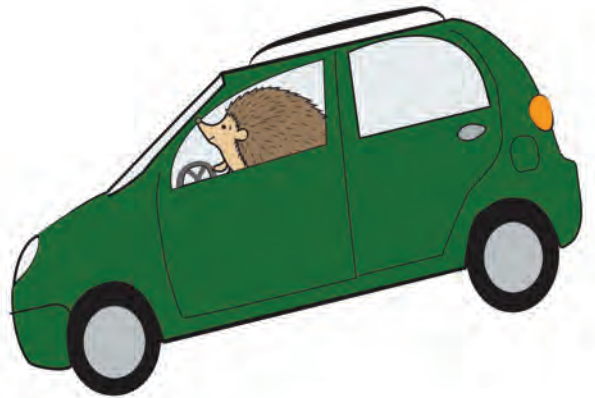
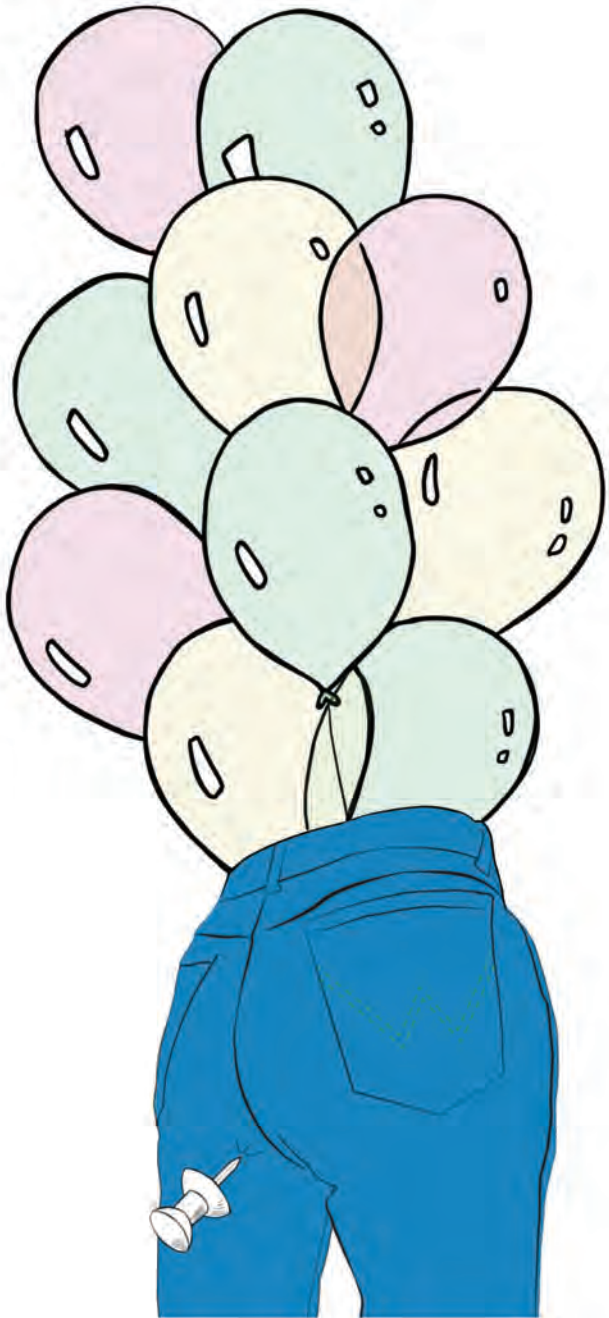
"I'm Dr. Reynolds," the man said, and withdrew his hand. "I was called by a concerned party about your situation. I think I might be able to help." (*continued on p.28*)

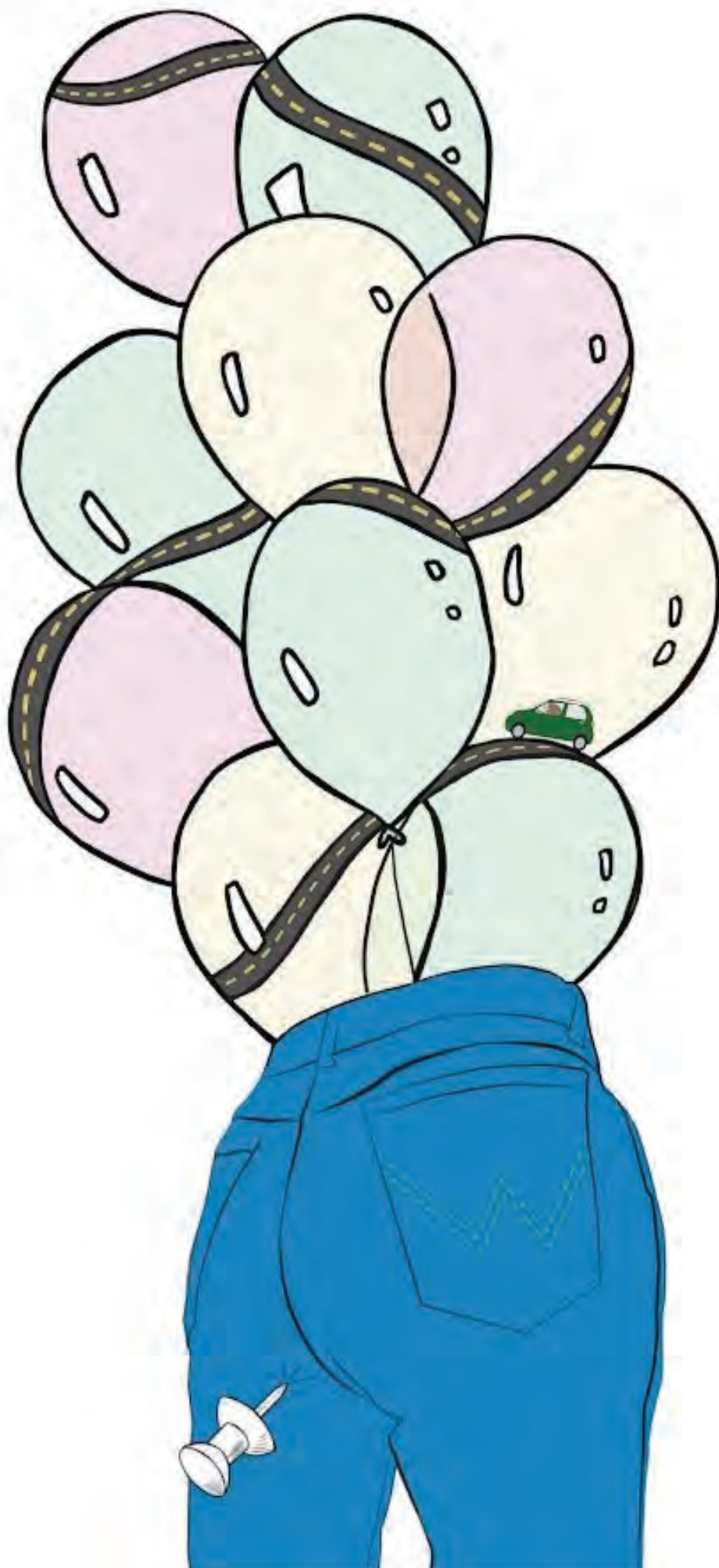
We just wanted to see where a doodle went - how far it escaped the original.

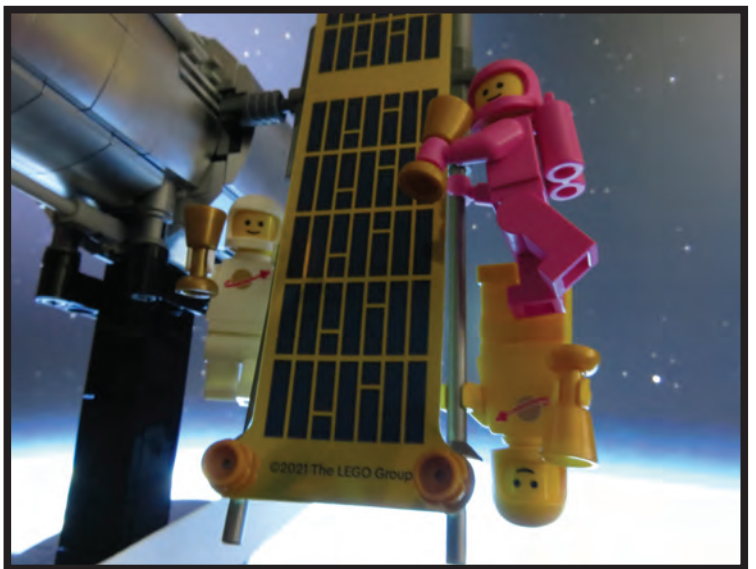
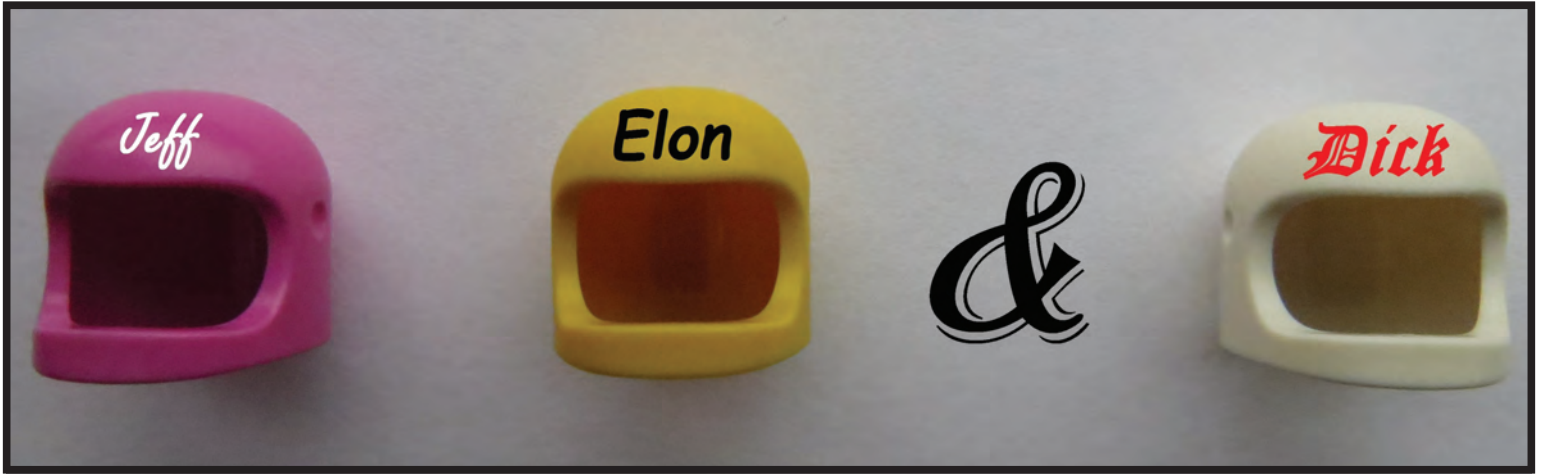












# The Adventures of Kingly Brave Man






CAPRICORN (DEC 22 – JAN 19)

**YOU READ SOMEWHERE THAT IT'S A TURN-  
ON TO GET SCARED ON A FIRST DATE. SO  
YOU MAKE A DATE WITH A TINDER MATCH  
AND PLAN A STAGED MUGGING IN WHICH  
YOU WILL ACT HEROICALLY. THIS CHARADE WILL BACKFIRE.**

AQUARIUS (JAN 20 – FEB 18)  
**YOU'LL FIND OUT YOU'VE  
BEEN SERIOUSLY OVERPAYING  
FOR WEED WHEN, AFTER TELLING  
YOUR DEALER YOU'RE CALLING  
IT QUITS, THEY COUNTER WITH  
SERIOUS DISCOUNTS ON WHAT  
YOU'VE PREVIOUSLY BEEN  
BUYING. "ARE YOU BUYING  
FROM SOMEONE ELSE?" THEY'LL  
ASK, ACCUSINGLY.**





**PISCES (FEB 19 - MAR 20)**  
**YOU WILL FINALLY MEET THE**  
PERSON OF YOUR DREAMS! BUT  
**AT THE END OF YOUR FIRST**  
FLIGHT TOGETHER, YOU WILL  
BE HORRIFIED TO DISCOVER  
THEY'RE ONE OF THOSE  
**PEOPLE WHO GETS OUT OF**  
THEIR SEAT WHEN THE PLANE  
STOPS TO STAND IN THE AISLE  
**FOR SOME REASON.**

A close-up photograph of a wet tortoiseshell cat. The cat's fur is dark with patches of orange and white, and it is dripping with water. A person's hand, wearing a pink glove, is holding the cat's back. The background is a light-colored, textured surface, possibly a wall or a shower curtain.

**ARIES (MAR 21 – APR 19)**

**YOU'LL DISCOVER**

YOUR NEIGHBOR IS A HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL TELEVISION PRODUCER AFTER HE INVITES YOU AND YOUR KIDS OVER FOR DINNER ONE NIGHT. WHEN YOU ASK WHAT SHOW HE WORKS ON, HE'LL TELL YOU IT'S A HIT FAMILY SITCOM AIRING LATER THAT NIGHT.

**YOU SETTLE IN TO**

WATCH IT WITH YOUR FAMILY LATER AND DISCOVER IT'S AN **UNFLATTERING PORTRAIT** OF YOUR OWN LIFE IN EXACTING DETAIL. YOUR CHILDREN WILL FIND IT UPROARIOUSLY FUNNY.

TAURUS (APR 20 – MAY 20)


**YOU'VE BEEN ANONYMOUSLY SENDING**  
FLOWERS TO A CRUSH AT WORK. THEY  
**BELIEVE THESE TO BE FROM ANOTHER,**  
**MORE SUCCESSFUL PERSON IN THE**  
**BUILDING. THEY WILL SOON FALL IN LOVE.**



GEMINI (MAY 21 – JUN 20)

A COWORKER WILL TELL YOU ABOUT THE INCREDIBLE  
THINGS THEY HALLUCINATED ON AN AYAHUASCA  
RETREAT, SO YOU DECIDE TO ATTEND ONE YOURSELF.  
THE ONLY VISIONS YOU WILL MANIFEST, HOWEVER,  
WILL BE OF ALL YOUR EXES, TAKING TURNS DISSECTING  
THE VARIOUS LIFE CHOICES THAT LED YOU TO THAT  
MOMENT WHILE YOU VOMIT INTO A BUCKET.





CANCER (JUN 21 – JUL 22)  
**FOUR WORDS FROM THE DISTRICT  
ATTORNEY'S OFFICE WILL BRING  
ABOUT YOUR DOWNFALL: "YES,  
THERE WAS VIDEO."**

LEO (JUL 23 – AUG 22)

**YOU'LL BEGIN GIVING MONEY TO EVERY**


HOMELESS PERSON YOU MEET. THIS PRACTICE

**BEGINS AFTER ONE DRIFTER'S ELABORATE**


CLAIM - THAT HE NEEDS IT TO REPAIR HIS  
TIME MACHINE - TURNS OUT TO BE TRUE, AND

**YOU GO ON A LIFE-CHANGING ADVENTURE TOGETHER.**





**VIRGO (AUG 23 - SEP 22)**  
**THE SEXY BARTENDER YOU'VE**  
BEEN TRYING TO HOOK UP WITH  
**WILL FINALLY GET DUMPED BY THEIR**  
LONGTIME PARTNER AND BECOME  
SINGLE. YOU ASK HOW THEY'RE  
DOING AND THEY TELL YOU, WITH  
**A SMIRK, THAT THEY COULD REALLY**  
USE A SHOULDER TO CRY ON. THEY  
**COME BACK TO YOUR PLACE WHERE,**  
**TRUE TO THEIR WORD, THEY WILL**  
**DO NOTHING BUT SOB UNCONTROLLABLY**  
ABOUT THIS BREAKUP ALL NIGHT.




LIBRA (SEP 23 – OCT 22)  
YOUR FATHER, AN ASTRONAUT IN THE  
APOLLO PROGRAM, WILL BEGIN TO FALL  
IN HEALTH. WHEN HE NEARS THE END,  
HE WILL RECOUNT THE STORY OF THEIR  
LAST MISSION. "DAD, I'VE HEARD  
THIS," YOU SAY, TRYING TO COMFORT  
HIM. "NOT THIS PART," HE SAYS.  
HE'LL TELL YOU THERE WAS A COVER-  
UP AND THAT, THOUGH THEY LANDED ON  
THE MOON, THEY DIDN'T TALK ABOUT  
**WHAT THEY FOUND THERE - AND THAT**  
ONE OF THEM DID NOT COME BACK THE  
**SAME. HE WILL DIE AT THIS MOMENT,**  
LEAVING YOU TO WONDER WHAT HE MEANT.



**SCORPIO (OCT 23 - NOV 21)**  
**A FAUX PAX AT TRIVIA NIGHT, IN**

**WHICH YOU CONFUSE TWO FAMOUS  
PEOPLE WHOM EVERYONE CAN TELL  
APART AND SHOULD BE OBVIOUS TO  
ANYONE WITH HALF A BRAIN, WILL  
BECOME YOUR NICKNAME, THE NAME  
OF YOUR GROUP CHAT, AND A POPULAR  
STORY AT YOUR FUNERAL.**

A photograph of a tortoiseshell cat with dark brown, black, and white fur, sitting inside a shallow cardboard box. The cat is looking directly at the camera with large, light-colored eyes. The box is placed on a light-colored wooden floor. In the background, there is a colorful, patterned rug and some indistinct objects. A white, jagged, zigzag line, resembling a paper cutout, is layered over the bottom half of the image, partially obscuring the cat and the box.

SAGITTARIUS (NOV 22 – DEC 21)  
**YOU WILL BECOME AN IMMENSELY  
RESPECTED ARTIST - BUT NOT  
IN YOUR LIFETIME. CRITICS  
WILL ARGUE OVER YOUR WORK,  
WHETHER IT'S WORTH PRESERVING  
FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS TO  
DISCOVER, OR IF IT'S TRULY  
AS VALUABLE AS THAT OF YOUR  
CONTEMPORARIES. CRUCIALLY,  
THIS ARGUMENT WILL HAPPEN  
BETWEEN MUSEUM EMPLOYEES DURING A FIRE.**

Oliver looked toward the living room window and saw all of Lora's friends (and Todd) staring at them.

Still smiling, Dr. Reynolds asked, "Perhaps we could find a place to speak more privately?"

5

The kitchen seemed as good a meeting place as any. The group was still huddled together and taking sanctuary in the living room.

Oliver followed Dr. Reynolds into the kitchen and watched him do a quick inspection. He opened the walk-in pantry and looked around, then closed it and all the other doors to the kitchen.

"Well," he said, seemingly satisfied, and motioned toward a chair at the high-top table. "Will you sit?"

Oliver blinked but didn't move.

"I'm sure this has all been quite a shock for you," Dr. Reynolds said, pushing his glasses up the bridge of his nose. "You must be very confused about who you are and what you're doing here."

"I know who I am and what I'm doing."

"And what is it you're doing?" Reynolds asked, incredulously.

"Standing here, talking to you," Oliver shot back.

"Fascinating," Dr. Reynolds said. He stood quietly for a few moments before reaching into his coat pocket to produce a small pen light. He then motioned toward Oliver. "May I?"

Oliver didn't know what he was asking permission to do, but Dr. Reynolds didn't wait for an answer and began inspecting Oliver's ears with it.

"What are you doing here?" Oliver asked.

"A number of animals, like yourself, have begun taking human form lately. It's not unheard of, but we're not sure what's causing it to happen so rapidly - and in such high numbers. In any case, I'm here to help you find a way to turn back to your old self. Please stick out your tongue and say 'ahh.'"

"I don't want to change back."

"Hm?"

"I want to stay this way."

"I see," Dr. Reynolds said with concern. "And what do you hope to do in your present state?"

"I want to stay with Lora. As I am now," Oliver answered.

"I don't think that's a likely outcome given the circumstances," he said, while checking Oliver's pulse. "There's also Lora's opinion to consider."

"What are you doing with the others who've changed?"

"It's hard to explain," Dr. Reynolds shrugged. "Every case is different."

"Do the others like me, the ones with homes, get to stay with their..." Oliver couldn't find the word but Dr. Reynolds understood his meaning.

"Think about it, Oliver. Our society couldn't sustainably accommodate every household-pet-turned-person that wanted to stay with their owner. There's the economic burden they present, as well as the nightmare this creates for our census-takers. Assuming these individuals would be welcome to stay. Of course, exceptions could be made for the right cases."

Oliver swallowed. "So how will you change me back?"

Dr. Reynolds avoided his gaze while putting his effects back into the pockets of his lab coat. "Well, we're still working out the details,

but we're going to start by bringing you together with some of your other kin who've also changed and try a few things, play around, see what works."

"I don't understand," Oliver said, alarmed. "What if I don't want to go? Will I be allowed to leave?"

Dr. Reynolds flashed the same smile he did when he greeted Oliver. "I think that's enough for today. You should get some rest. I'll tell you all about it when I come back in the morning. Oh! I almost forgot."

He reached into his pocket and produced a small biscuit. "For doing so well," he said to Oliver, and pressed it into his hand.

## 6

Oliver left the kitchen, chafed from his meeting with Dr. Reynolds, and was heading back toward the bedroom to be alone, when he ran into Todd.

"Hey Oliver," Todd greeted him, blocking Oliver's path. "Pretty crazy, all that stuff that's happened to you, huh?"



*"I think you're on mute."*

"Yeah, I guess so."

"Look, I know Lora cares about you and all, but none of us feel safe right now with you around. I think it's best if you go with Dr. Reynolds until this whole animals-turning-into-people thing blows over."

Oliver felt the back of his neck go red. "Yeah, I don't know what's going on either, Todd. But I care about Lora too, what with her being my best friend and all, and I'm not going to hurt her. And I'm not going with that Dr. Reynolds."

Todd walked right up to Oliver, until their faces were practically touching. "I wasn't asking."

Oliver was incensed. He could bite Todd's nose off – but what then? Lora would get upset and he'd only prove Todd's point: that Oliver was a danger. No, better to let this one slide.

Todd backed off when he didn't get a rise out of Oliver. "Thought so," Todd sneered as he passed by into the kitchen.

*What a shithead*, Oliver thought, and walked down the hallway.

In the living room sat the rest of Lora's friends, their eyes glued to the television. It was the news showing the same island villagers, but now they were struggling to carry the enormous man along the beach. He was flailing and shouting at them to let him down, though they were undeterred in their task: they were returning him to the ocean.

## 7

*I'd like to be turned back now*, Oliver thought, alone in the bedroom. He'd had enough of being a human. It had so far been one disappointing encounter after another, and he wasn't up for any more. All the thinking and speaking was too complicated. Where was the pleasure in this?

*If they won't accept me as a person, then I want to be my old self again.*

But how did he get this way? What force of nature compelled him to change? And could it see him now? If so, why had it stood by and done nothing to help him?

"I'm done!" Oliver shouted at the ceiling. "Send me back!"

Silence.

"I didn't ask for this! I don't want this!"

Nothing.

He picked up a ceramic vase from the nightstand and chucked it across the room, where it crashed against a wall and fell in pieces to the floor.

"Now! Please!"

Still without a response, Oliver picked up a shoe he saw under the bed and threw it at the cheval mirror, which also broke and fell into pieces to the floor.

"Fuck! Shit! Ass!" He was shouting every bad word he could think of. "Cock! Bitch! Hump!"

He tore off the bed sheet he was wearing and ripped the covers off the bed, shouting madly. He fell to the floor and began pounding it – then the lights began to flicker. The floor began to vibrate. The ceiling fan started whirling in circles. The lights began getting blindingly bright.

Oliver looked around, suddenly afraid of whatever force he had just summoned. Then came a terrible high-pitched screaming sound. Oliver covered his ears and squeezed his eyes shut.

This must be it. He couldn't remember how it happened the night before. It felt like a dream; the farther he got from it and the harder he tried to recall it, the less he could remember. But perhaps this is how *it* happened.

And what was *it*? A reincarnation? Would he be doomed to relive this all again with the same stupefying results? He knew so little about his own life. But he knew Lora. He felt like he had

known her forever, that they were kindred spirits, and that they would be best friends in every life.

He opened his eyes and uncovered his ears and let whatever *it* was envelop him.

## 8

Oliver awoke on the floor again. He had no sense of what time it was, but it felt like a night had passed. The room was disheveled – the covers were still on the floor, the vase and mirror still broken – but otherwise there was no indication a cataclysm had occurred.

He sat up and looked at himself. He was still a person.

*How disappointing.* And after all that.

It was time to face facts: this is just how things were going to be. He would have to keep being a person, in this body, with this awkward beginning. And these people didn't want him here, didn't trust him or understand him. So it was time to move on. Go somewhere where he would be welcome.

## 9

Lora was talking to her friends in the living room when Oliver came in, kempt and dressed. His appearance was a far cry from the bedsheet and static hair of yesterday morning; he was dressed in a button-down with jeans that more-or-less fit and flattered his appearance.

The group fell silent.

"Lora, I want to let you know that I've decided to leave. I don't think I can go back to what I was before. This is my body and it's just what I'll look like now."

Lora stood up from where she was sitting, listening intently while her eyes turned glassy.

"I love you, Lora. Not in the way you love Todd, but..." Oliver faltered, "as a friend. I know you cannot love me back the same way and that I can't stay here. So, I'm going out on a long walk, to explore the world on my own."

Lora looked down at her feet while her friends looked at each other.

Oliver addressed her friends. "I took these clothes out of some bags I found in the other room. I don't know whose I've taken and I probably won't be coming back so... I'm sorry."

He took a deep breath. "Well, goodbye." He started for the door.

"Goodbye, Oliver," Lora said to him, softly. "And good luck."

Oliver smiled and gave an awkward wave before leaving.

## 10

Once outside, Oliver breathed in fresh air and felt renewed by the sense of opportunity.

As he walked toward the gravel road leading up to the house, two black sedans appeared. They were driving toward the house but stopped in front of him. Dr. Reynolds emerged from one of the cars.

"Hello, Oliver!" he shouted, smiling.

"Hello, Dr. Reynolds," Oliver said, worried.

"Where are you going?" Dr. Reynolds asked.

"I've decided to leave."

"I thought we agreed," Dr. Reynolds said, "that you'd come with me to see some of your other friends."

"My friends are here," Oliver said, turning to look toward the house – though unfortunately the only person he saw was Todd, watching from the porch with a big shit-eating grin. "But they don't want me here, so I've decided to go out on my own."

At that moment, two more men in white lab coats emerged from the black sedans and began walking toward Oliver.

"Oliver, we care a lot about your well-being. It's important you come with us."

The two men in white lab coats took Oliver by the shoulders and began walking him toward one of the sedans.

"Why are you doing this? I just want to go out on my own!"

"We're concerned about the tendencies of your kind," Dr. Reynolds explained, "We need to take precautions – for everyone's safety."

"I don't want to hurt anyone! Why won't you help me?!" Oliver yelled back as he got pushed into the backseat of the car.

Dr. Reynolds ducked his head into the backseat window, a pained look on his face. "Be reasonable," he said, but Oliver was too busy struggling to hear. "You're doing terrific. Let's just see this through."

The car started and began to drive away. Oliver looked back through the rear window. Lora and the rest of her friends had come outside to watch the scene. Todd was still grinning, unphased by everything he'd seen, while Lora began to cry.

Oliver, still restrained by the two men in lab coats, watched her sobbing figure disappear as the car drove away.