

BAD MULE RAG

A Newspaper of Rhymes for These Crazy Weird Times

ISSUE #1

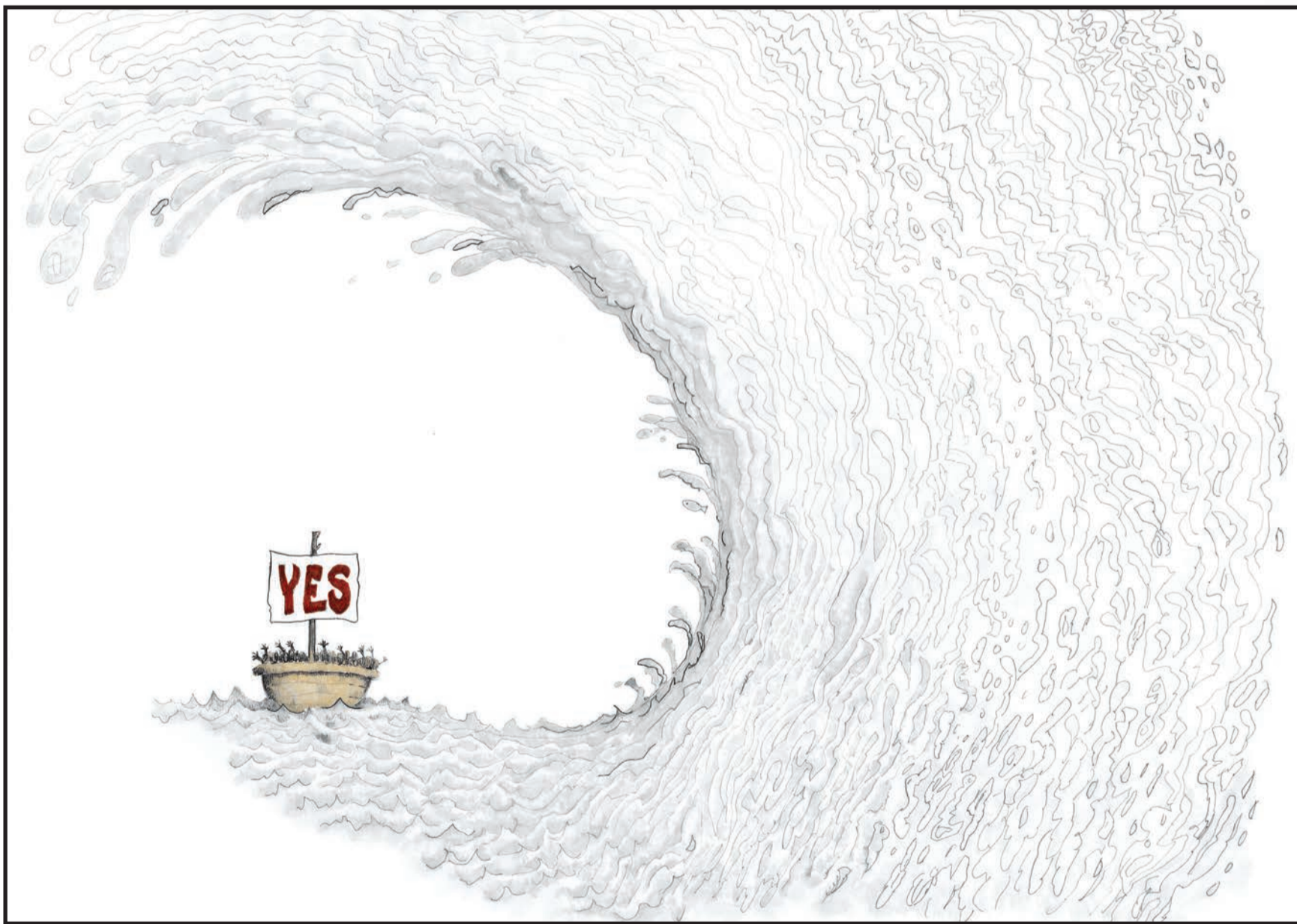


Let's set sail on

FREE!!



"THE S.S. YES"



...and say "yes" to everything we see. We'll say "yes" to the sun and "yes" to the moon and "yes" to the birds and bees.

We'll be "positive pirates" with no anger or scorn and we won't ever feud, fuss, or fight. And none of us will sport a pirate eyepatch, seeing only our left or our right.

We'll say "yes" to the wind and "yes" to the rain and "yes" to this planet we share. And everything we do will be one big "yes," always spoken with kindness and care.

So while the waves may get choppy and thrash us about, we'll never let it cause much distress. We'll just grab each other and hold on tightly as we sail on **"The S.S. Yes."**

**TODAY I SAID "HI"
TO SOMEONE ON THE STREET,
AND THEY DIDN'T SAY "HI" BACK TO ME.**



Now I don't want to cause a ruckus,
but it really chaps my tuchus,
when another person
acts so un-friendly.

I understand that life gets crazy
and our brains sometimes get full,
and we don't know if the world
is up or down.
But if I smile and say "hello"
don't just stare at the ground below,
or look back at me
with an evil snarky frown.

And there's simply no excuse
for behaving so badly,
unless you're deaf or blind
or otherwise impaired.
But if your senses are intact,
I must insist you say "hi" back,
otherwise you need to
sniff my underwear.

Now, it's true that being kind,
should always be it's own reward,
and never done expecting
anything in return.
But is it really too much to ask
that when I say "hi"
you say "hi" back?
If you don't know how,
it's never too late to learn.

First I say "hi"
and then you say "hi,"
a brief but friendly
passing interaction.
Then we continue on our ways,
having brightened each other's days,
thus completing our
HAPPY HUMAN-BEING TRANSACTION.

I offer up this simple equation, as easy as one plus one. It's a mixture of math and history—please don't leave before I am done. What I have to say will come in handy, as you travel life's rocky terrain. It will bring you peace, in times of trouble, and keep you from going insane.



MAD PLUS MAD ALWAYS EQUALS BAD and yelling at the yellor never works. If someone stomps and shakes their fist, to do the same, you must resist, otherwise it's just a slow dance with two jerks.

So if someone's looking for a fight and these days most people are, just smile and walk away, do not engage. Mixing anger with more anger, makes no one a happy camper, filling all our hearts with bitterness and rage.

Now I know to walk the high road is a lonely walk indeed, the spoils are always lauded on the loudest. But being right isn't worth a fight, so just turn and then take flight, go home and have a snack and be the proudest.

Teeth pop in and teeth pop out and that's pretty much the deal with teeth.
You can sprout twenty teeth on top, an incisor bumper-crop, with just two tiny little canines underneath.



Some teeth are big, like ceramic tiles, while others as small as corn. Some teeth don't arrive until you're four or five, while others show up when you're born.



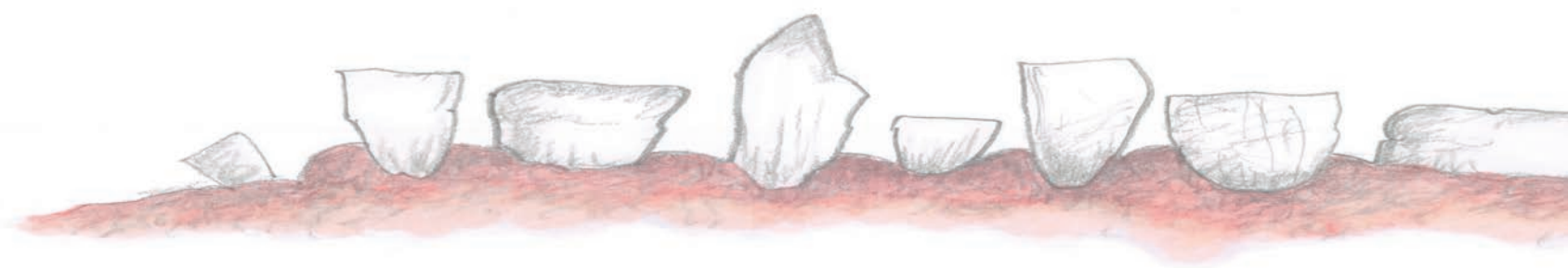
Some teeth are as white as two-percent milk, while others, more brownish in tint. Some teeth are straight, an enviable trait, while others, more crooked and bent.



Some folks have teeth pointed like fangs, like a fruit bat or poisonous viper. When they grin it's a fright, a truly terrifying sight, causing many small kids to fill diapers.



But while no teeth are alike and no mouth is the same, there's one truth that I find beguiling. That's that all teeth are good and beautiful to look at, whenever they're used for smiling.



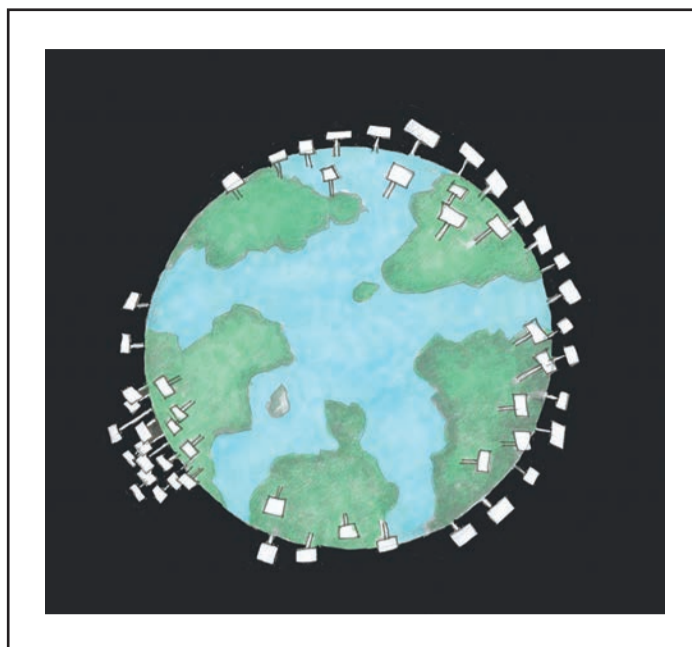
Sally Loves Signs,
she plants a dozen at a time
and her yard is always filled
from sidewalk to stoop.
Her signs cover up her grass,
leaving no safe place to pass
and no room for her dog Dennis
to drop his poop.

She has signs saying how to vote
and signs saying how to think
There's a sign for every
cause you might imagine.
There's a sign saying who to love
and several saying who to hate,
there's a sign for every slogan
now in fashion.

Of course eventually over time
Sally's lawn got so filled with signs
that she snuck a few
inside her neighbor's yard.
Well the neighbor of course
complained,
and Sally called him
unkind names,
the kinds of names
he could not disregard.

So he yanked one of Sally's signs
and then mumbled "okay fine,"
then he tossed it swiftly
back into Sally's yard.
Well then Sally grabbed another
and swung it hard at him,
oh brother,
The man ducked and tripped,
and hit his head real hard.

Then the police arrived
on the scene,
a bigger mess they'd never seen,
Sally covered indoors while her
neighbor
held his ear.
And when the cops found the sign
she'd swung,
that old irony bell
was rung,
when they read the words
that **"HATE HAS NO HOME HERE."**



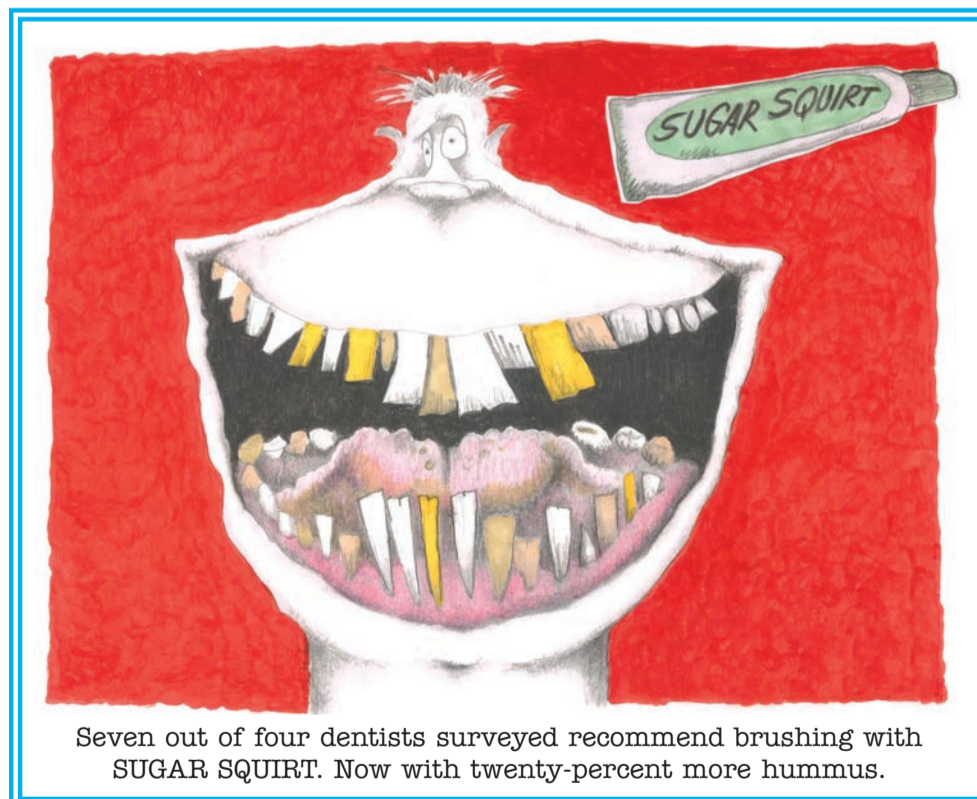
Grandma has a "swear jar" the size of
a small buoy that she keeps upon a shelf above the
sink. Now you'd think it seldom used but here's where
you'll be amused because my grandma swears a lot
more than you'd think.

She swears while riding her bike in the park or eating
an ice cream cone. She swears while pushing a cart
in the grocery store. She swears at bumble bees; at
the arthritis in her knees. Up and down she swears and
then she swears some more.

She'll swear while getting a foot massage or petting
a brand new puppy. She swears while tickling
underneath a babies chin. She'll swear as a parade
goes by. She swears at the clouds in the sky. She
swears all the time no matter what mood she's in.

Now the good news I gotta say: Because my
grandma swears all day, the jar fills quickly then she
gives all the money to me. I've got twenty thousand
squirreled away, earning interest every day, ten in gold
and another ten in a CD.

I've got a college fund going and a pension plan in
place. The cash accrued is just utterly astounding.
I'll retire soon, no doubt, thanks to GRANDMA'S
FILTHY MOUTH, which like my money, is also "annually
compounding."



Seven out of four dentists surveyed recommend brushing with
SUGAR SQUIRT. Now with twenty-percent more hummus.

GO FUND ME PHIL

wants all your money, for any
idea he can muster.
Any poem or portrait he's
written or painted, or his rock
opera about General Custer.

He wants you to fund his
movie idea, based on a book
that also needs funding. He'll
knock on your door and
stomp on your floor, hounding
until you start running.

Go Fund Me Phil wants all
your cash for his notions and
potions and wishes. He needs
cash for new pajamas and his
trip to the Bahamas and food
for his exotic pet fishes.

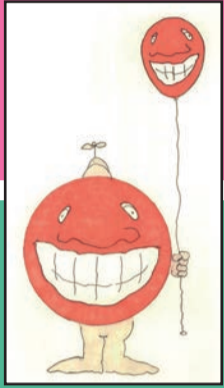
Go Fund Me Phil expects
you to fund, every unearned
trophy on his shelf. But as for
me, I must gleefully, tell Phil to
"go fund himself."



The **Candy Store** near my house is owned by a movie star, and he paints his face on everything that he sells. His smile is frosted on every confection, beaming in every direction, from popcorn balls to chocolate Nonpareils.

He sells smiling cookies and toothy eclairs, all adorned with his face on the top. You can chew his gumball head and blow a big pink bubble then watch his fat face go "pop."

Now because he's so famous, folks will drive really far to eat a cupcake with his movie star face. They'll pay mucho-dinero for a house made of marzipan, depicting his childhood birthplace.



Last week I ate a cake-pop dipped in white frosting with his face made of sprinkles and chips. I bit the top of his head then assuming him dead I ate his eyes, ears, and nose and both lips.

Of course I've never actually seen the star at his store; Folks say he lives in Oregon someplace. But you can't eat his cookies or brownies or cakes without biting his **MOVIE STAR FACE**.



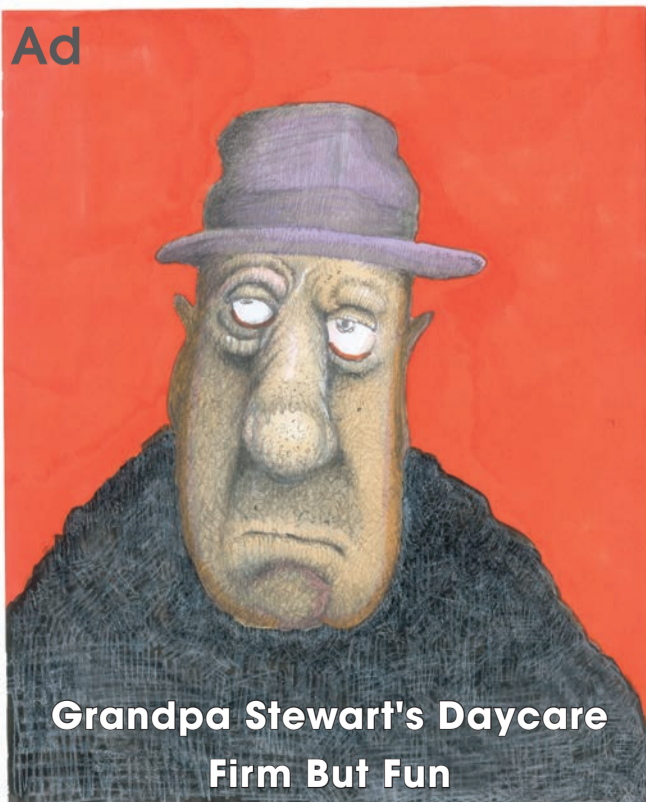
EDDIE P.I.G. loves cupcakes and he'll eat whatever kind you bake. He loves chocolate, vanilla, marshmallow, and maple. There's no flavor he will not intake.

He loves cupcakes from the store, and the kind made from scratch; all cupcakes make his pig tongue unfurl. But his most favorite cupcake is the kind of a cupcake made by a pretty young girl.

Now the problem you see, with Eddie P.I.G. is he just takes whatever cupcake he wants. He'll gobble without asking, just wickedly harassing; A sly smile being his only response.

So if you're a girl making cupcakes, keep an eye out for Eddie and the door locked while your cupcakes are a-baking. Because Eddie P.I.G. truly does believe that cupcakes given are not as sweet as **CUPCAKES TAKEN**.

Ad



Grandpa Stewart's Daycare
Firm But Fun

JASPER WANTS YOUR JUNK



... and that's what's written on his truck
He'll take any scrap of junk
that you want gone.

He'll take broken chairs and tables
and pickle jars that have no labels
He'll take that one-legged pink flamingo
leaning in your lawn.

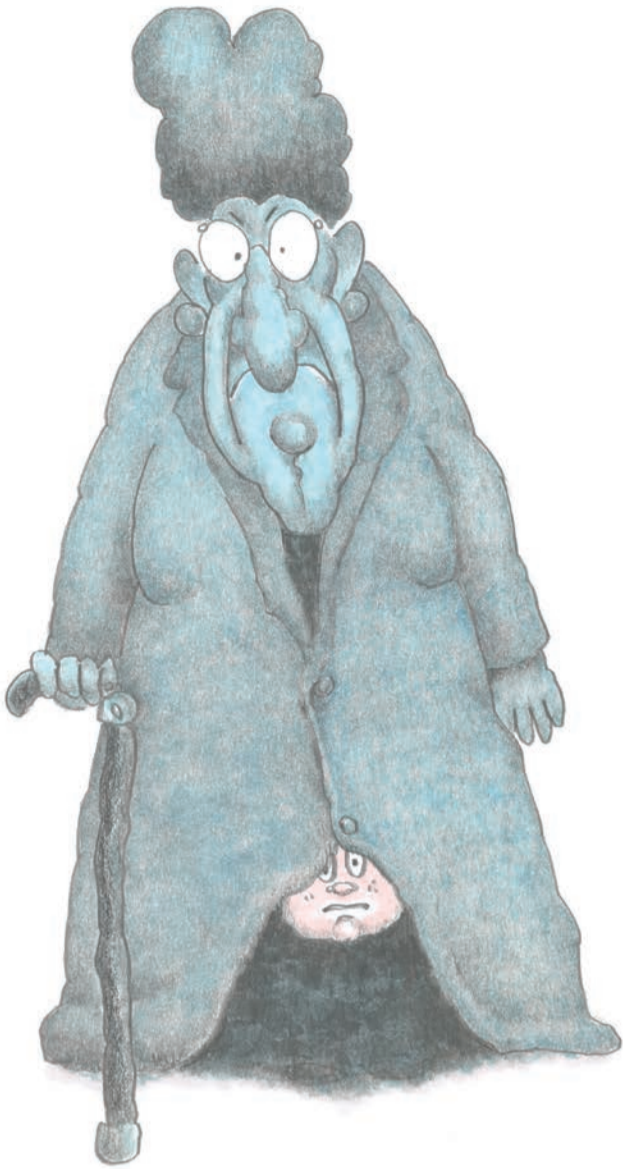
He'll take a sailboat with no sail
and a donkey that has no tail
He'll take that broken toilet
your mom uses as a planter.
He'll take cracked coffee cups and plates,
He'll take three wheeled roller skates
He'll take that headless Elvis J&B decanter.

He'll take a scooter that won't scoot
and a trumpet that can't toot
He'll take that backless lawn chair
buried in your grass
He'll take any and all refuse,
almost anything you can't use
But the one thing he won't take
and that's your sass.

JASPER DOES NOT TAKE SASS.

Ever.

That too is written on his truck.



Grumpy Old Gertie walks with a cane

and shakes it at folks on the street. She spits and sputters if they nod "hello" or walk too close to her feet.

She scowls at the trees and curses the birds, she screams when a dog wags its tail. She'll yell at a horse, with no hint of remorse, she kicks flowers for the way that they smell.

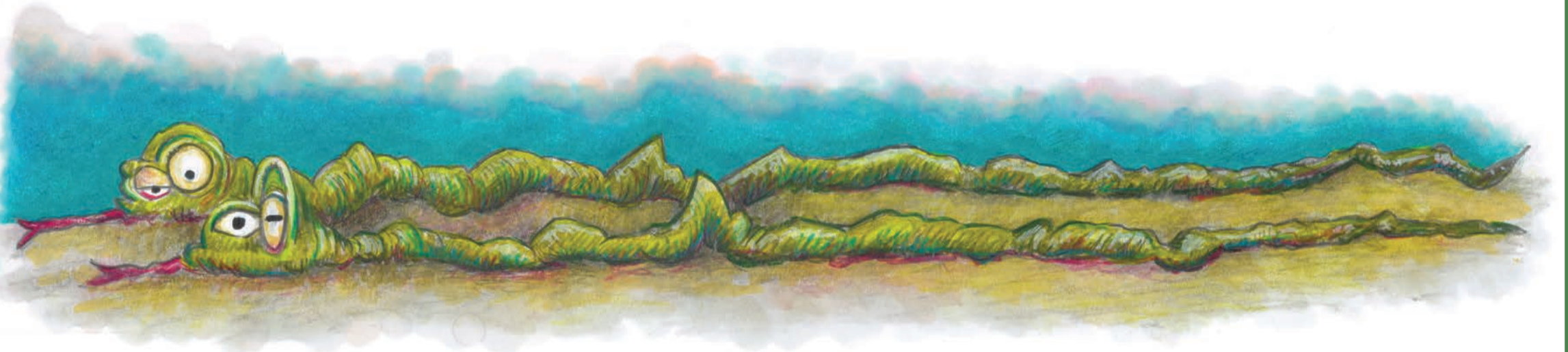
Of course Grumpy Old Gertie wasn't always so dour, she was born with a sweet, loving soul. But the love she needed never came her way, leaving her heart just an empty black hole.

So now Grumpy Old Gertie only sees the bad, her insides all frosty and cold. And for the rest of her life she'll be sad and alone, an old grump who's only six years old.



BUB AND BUFORD are garter snakes, both in their mid- to late-teens. They wear scowls on their faces and boots with no laces, their boxer shorts above their blue jeans.

Now while they both talk super tough and swear a blue streak, B and B offer no kind of threat. They have no venom or fangs or teeth for that matter, no more deadly than a mini-baguette.



And while other snakes dismiss them, and pay them no mind, most people still jump back in fear. So they hide in the grass, waiting for folks to walk past, leaping out as soon as they're near.

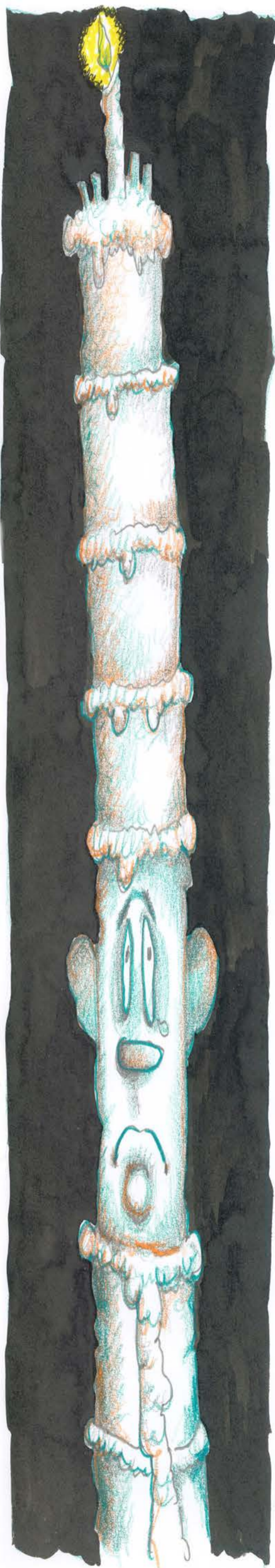
Their favorite pouncing place is next to the bike path, scaring cyclists as they pedal by. They've caused many a near miss as they slither and hiss, they even made one lady cry.

But one day there was a marathon with hundreds of cyclists, with numbers pinned to their backs. And while Buford was scared Bub did not care and goaded his friend onto the track.

Well the first bike over Buford didn't stop or slow down, wearing a sign with a big number eight. Then came sixteen, twelve, eleven, and nine, which pretty much sealed Buford's fate.

Then a hundred more bikes sped over the snake, who was now most assuredly dead. And when Bub wiggled over to say good-bye to his pal, the last biker drove over his head.

So now both Bub and Buford are a part of the bike path, a permanent part one might say. And they'll never forget not to jump in front of bikes, and they're reminded A HUNDRED TIMES A DAY.



A party was thrown,
a magnificent affair,
and everyone was invited except me.
They had hats and horns
and a cake with candles,
and they all got along famously.

Outside I peered
in through an open window,
then I climbed in and mingled about.
But everyone shunned me
and turned away when I spoke,
an unwelcome addition no doubt.

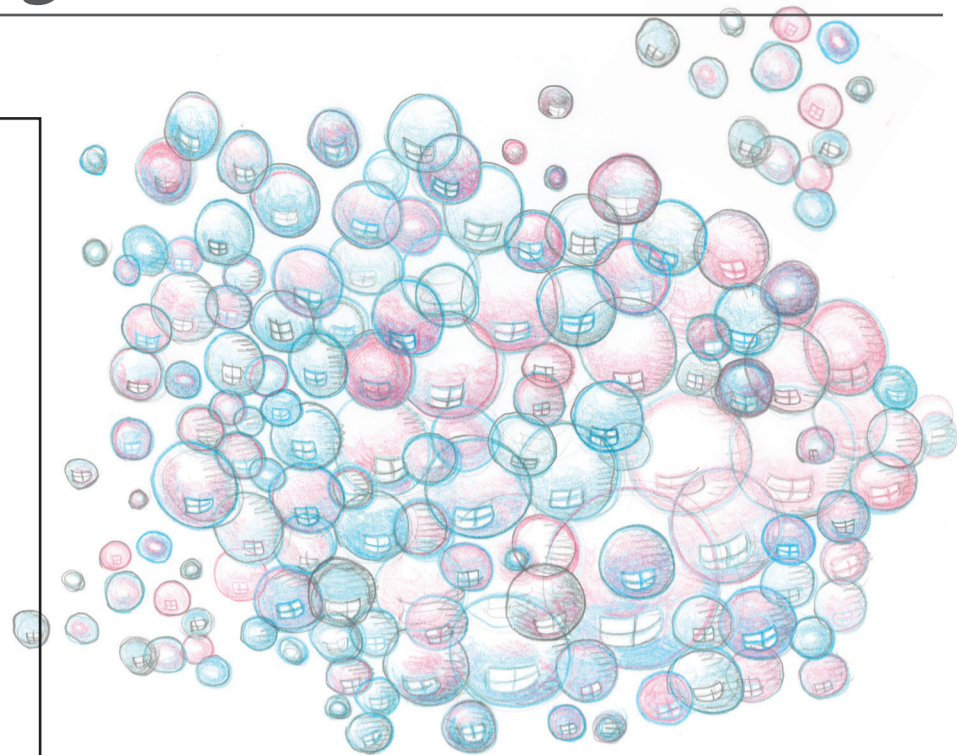
I did my best to fit in,
I smiled and shook hands,
giving compliments to everyone I met.
But they turned up their noses
and then turned their backs,
and my heart became filled with regret.

I was offered no cake,
and told there was no punch,
though the punch bowl proved otherwise.
So I gave up trying and ended up crying,
walking home with tears in my eyes.

What had I done
and why was I shunned,
were the thoughts that rang in my head.
Why did everyone hate me
and not want me around?
Maybe something I did
or I said.

So I laid in bed upset
and hating myself,
UNWANTED, UNWELCOME, AND UNLOVED.
Then I stared at the ceiling,
until sleep finally came,
and I dreamed about not being judged.

I dreamed I threw my own party,
where everyone was welcome,
and we all had pointy hats,
punch and cake.
And while that dream was sure fun,
I got sad at the sun,
because life is way different
when you're awake.



MY MOM BOUGHT SOAP that looks like candy,

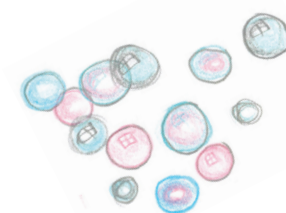
and today I shall eat the whole dish.
And while I know it's meant to scrub
and not actual human grub,
it really does look mighty darn de-lish.

Now the first bite was horrible,
and the second just as bad,
I was not at all enjoying my
soapy snack.

Then I bit into bar number two,
and that's when the bubbles flew,
from my mouth and ears and nose
and...around back.

In fact the more soap I ate,
the more bubbles I made,
my body became a bubble machine.
And when my mom walked in,
I shrugged and I grinned,
like everything was just peachy-keen.

Of course I was way less than fine,
from my soap eating binge,
I had a bad bellyache for my troubles.
And while soap's no good to eat,
a mistake I'll not repeat,
I really kinda miss BLOWING BUBBLES.



“Sharing is Caring”

said Randy the rodent,
to the man holding onto the broom.
“I know this is your house,
but I’m just a small mouse,
and let’s be honest
there’s plenty of room.”

“But I don’t want you in my home,”
the angry man shouted.
“Why not?” the tiny mouse replied.
“Because you’ll tell all your friends
that they can live here too,
and soon there’ll be
no mice left outside.”

“Well that simply won’t happen,”
the rodent retorted.
“Not today or the day after that.
Because I have no friends
or family to speak of,
just myself and a small coat
and hat.”

Well the man eventually
relented
and gave the mouse
shelter,
going to sleep feeling
pleased with himself.
Until he awoke the
next morning,
to find six thousand mice,
in every nook, cranny, cabinet,
and shelf.

“Top of the morning,”
Randy smiled at the man,
as he gnawed through a cereal box.
“I don’t know what happened,
but word somehow got out,
so you might consider
changing the locks.”

The man watched in horror
as six thousand mice,
rudely took over his home.
Eating everything in sight,
and staying up all night,
making long distance calls on
his phone.

Eventually more mice appeared,
and then more after that
and soon the man stayed locked in
his room.
And when he did sneak out,
A MILLION MICE would all shout,
and then chase him away with a broom.



P. Gregory Persnickety

P. Gregory Persnickety is a critic most finicky, who hates everything that he sees. Every movie, musical, or light comic opera, and every show that he watches on TV.

He hates every song played on the radio, loathing country, contemporary, and rap. He listens with a frown, holding his thumb upside down, calling it all just “a big load of crap.”

P. Gregory is also a critiquer of food, he whines every time that he dines. He gripes about the flavor, and total lack of savor, plus the plates, cups, and saucer’s design.

P. Gregory Persnickety sees nothing but bad, in all people, places and things. He tells the clouds they’re too fluffy, and a dog he’s too scruffy; he mocks birds for the way that they sing.

P. Gregory Persnickety has to criticize everything, every knick-knack and book on his shelf. Of course the big hate in his heart, he’ll never impart, because that’s THE HATE HE SAVES for himself.





Jack-In-The-Box Junior did not like his job.

He hated it, truth be told. He'd inherited the business from his father, Jack Senior, who'd retired when he got too old. Now at first Jack Junior, did the best that he could, popping out with a big friendly smile. But as the years went by, he lost that twinkle in his eye, his disposition growing angry and vile. Course the older of the "Jacks" was loudly aghast. How could this line of work cause depression? He'd done it his whole life, raised a son with three wives, "proud as punch to be a part of his profession." Well Jack Junior did not share his father's fondness, and had very little interest in his work. He'd appear two beats late, in a belligerent state, going from Jack-In-The-Box to just Jerk. Eventually the angry clown, started tossing liquor down, getting wibbly-wobbly-wacky before noon. He'd forget what to do, missing almost every cue, popping out way too late or too soon. Now naturally this sort of behavior doesn't get one very far, and soon Jack Junior fell and he fell hard. He's no longer Jack-in-the-boxing, but in a hospital bed, de-toxing, his liver, kidneys, and credit badly scarred. Course the moral of the story, if a moral is what you need, is that you have to live your life to please yourself. You can't stay locked inside a box, trying to wear YOUR FATHERS SOCKS; you must honor what's in you, and no one else.

HEY WHICH WAY DID THE WOODPECKER GO?



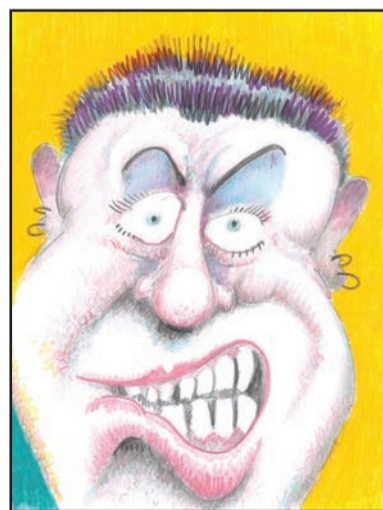
The one with the ivory bill,
It'd peck at my tree,
then smile down at me,
as I waved from my window sill.

And what about the sparrow,
from the dusky seaside?
I haven't seen one in so long.
It's been forty plus Aprils
since they sat in my maple,
chirping and singing their song.

And where oh where
is that little blue macaw,
with the sapphire feathers and face?
They've been gone for so long,
I hope nothing is wrong,
they just vanished overnight,
with no trace.

In fact there's so many birds,
missing from my trees,
sometimes it causes distress.
They packed up and left, leaving me bereft,
with no goodbyes
or forwarding address.

Of course I won't give up hope,
or stop filling my feeders,
I believe all those birds
will return.
As soon as we give them
fresh air and clean water,
with livable trees
that don't burn.



"No beer for a year," Grandma shouted, when she got home from her AA meeting. "I ain't touched a nip, so I got my gold chip," which explained her exuberant greeting.

So, I gave her a big hug and climbed onto her lap, the warmest and best place to be. And we played our favorite game, which is "count the tattoos," Grandma explaining each tattoo to me.

On her right arm was a snake, with big bulging green eyes, wrapped around a devil's head skull. "I got that one in Vegas, to celebrate my first marriage, which a day later was legally annulled."

The tattoo on her left arm showed Jimi Hendrix at Woodstock, his guitar all smoking and ablaze. "That was such a great concert, at least what I remember, I passed out when he played 'Purple Haze.'"

Then grandma kicked off both boots, and rolled down one sock, showing a tattoo that she said "needed fixing." It was a badly drawn portrait of Wile E. Coyote, holding a sign that said "Please Impeach Nixon."

Now above her left breast was a small black marking, showing the Chinese symbol for "truth." "Your grandpa paid for that one, on our third anniversary, before he ran off with some Dead-Head from Deluth."

Then Grandma got sad, so I grabbed her ring finger, which bore a small red heart, slightly worn. "That one's my favorite," she said smiling sweetly, "I got that one the day you were born."

Then we hugged and laughed, and hopped on her Harley, I held on with a tight loving grip. Then we ate hamburgers, french fries, and big chocolate milkshakes, celebrating my GRANDMA'S GOLD CHIP.



BUCKSHOT BILL (1961-2022)

Gather round young ones
and I'll tell you a tale
about a hunter named BUCKSHOT BILL.
He owns row after row
of swords, guns, and bows,
an arsenal wall built to kill.

And no animals are safe
when Bill is nearby,
he considers all creatures fair game.
He shot a bunny rabbit on Easter,
popped a cap in its keister,
his heart not as good as his aim.

He once shot a turkey,
that was standing in the road,
waiting for her babies to pass.
He grabbed a gun from his rack,
and pumped two in her back,
while her children all hid in the grass.

Then there was the time
he killed a big deer,
a large and powerful buck.
He shot thirty-five arrows into
its front, back, and center,
after hitting it first with his truck.

And because Buckshot Bill
is so proud of his prowess,
he mounts every kill on his wall.
He's got a lion and a tiger
that he shot at the zoo,
and a rhino that he bought at the mall.

Now you may ask why Bill
has such a hankering to kill,
his hobby sure begs explanation.
You'd think he'd enjoy,
instead of trying to destroy,
all of these beautiful creations.

Well, nobody can say
why Bill turned out that way,
why he shoots everything that he sees.
Perhaps he's just dumb,
with a brain that's just numb,
and a heart made of
stinky blue cheese.



Hogwash Poppycock

... graduated with honors,
from THE UNIVERSITY OF
FLIP-FLAP-DOODLE.
He has degrees in both
bunkum
and balderdash,
folks marvel at the
size of his noodle.

He's a celebrated expert
on hooey and humbug,
an authority on
boloney and bunk.
His razzmatazz malarkey
on both Mumbo and Jum-
bo,
cause elephants to
unpack their trunks.

His lectures on tommyrot,
rubbish and drivel,
are riveting,
right from the start.
While his speeches about
trickery,
and trumpety tomfoolery,
are award-winning
clattering claffarts.

Of course his most
respected poppycock
and grim-gribber gab,
is his take
on flapdoodle twaddle.
That's the tommyrot load,
that paved his road,
as a beloved academic
role model.

So three cheers for rubbish,
tripe and flummery,
hoorah for bletherskate
and blather.
And hats off to Doctor
Hogwash Poppycock,
an expert on
nothing that matters.





Wanda The Whale swallows her feelings, along with many other things from the ocean. She eats plant life and fishes, on styrofoam dishes, with half-empty bottles of sun-lotion.

And while Wanda doesn't like having a gut full of garbage, that's not what she finds indigestible. It's those pesky old feelings that appear out of nowhere, an occurrence she finds most detestable.

Of course there's no creature alive, that can ignore it's insides, and keep every single feeling tapped down. If that were the case, there'd be a smile on each face, with no weeping willows or sad clowns.

"You gotta let it out," her friend Henry would shout, a sea lion with deep anger issues. "If you're mad then shout, whip your tail all about, and if you're sad, don't worry, I've got tissues."

But as hard as she'd try, to get angry or cry, Wanda could not let her feelings be known. She'd choke down the sad, ignoring the bad, just swimming and swallowing alone. Because Wanda learned young, to squelch her anger and fun, and to never give in to emotions. So her blow-hole's clenched tight, which takes all of her might, trying to

**NEVER MAKE WAVES
IN THE OCEAN.**



Levi Lovejoy is my best friend, I've known him since I was four. He lives just three houses down from me, it's the white one with the green door.

We attended the same pre-school, and grades K through four, people often assume that we're brothers. But our friendship would crumble, if I mistakenly mumbled, that I'm secretly in love with his mother.

Mrs. Lovejoy is the name I use to greet her, but in my heart she's "sweetcheeks" or "hon." She's kind and funny, smells like mint tea and honey, with a smile that can outshine the sun. ➡ 🗨️ ➡

When I knock on their door, it's always quite thrilling, when Mrs. Lovejoy appears at the screen. And when she escorts me inside, it's a rollercoaster ride, I'm all atingle, right down to my spleen.

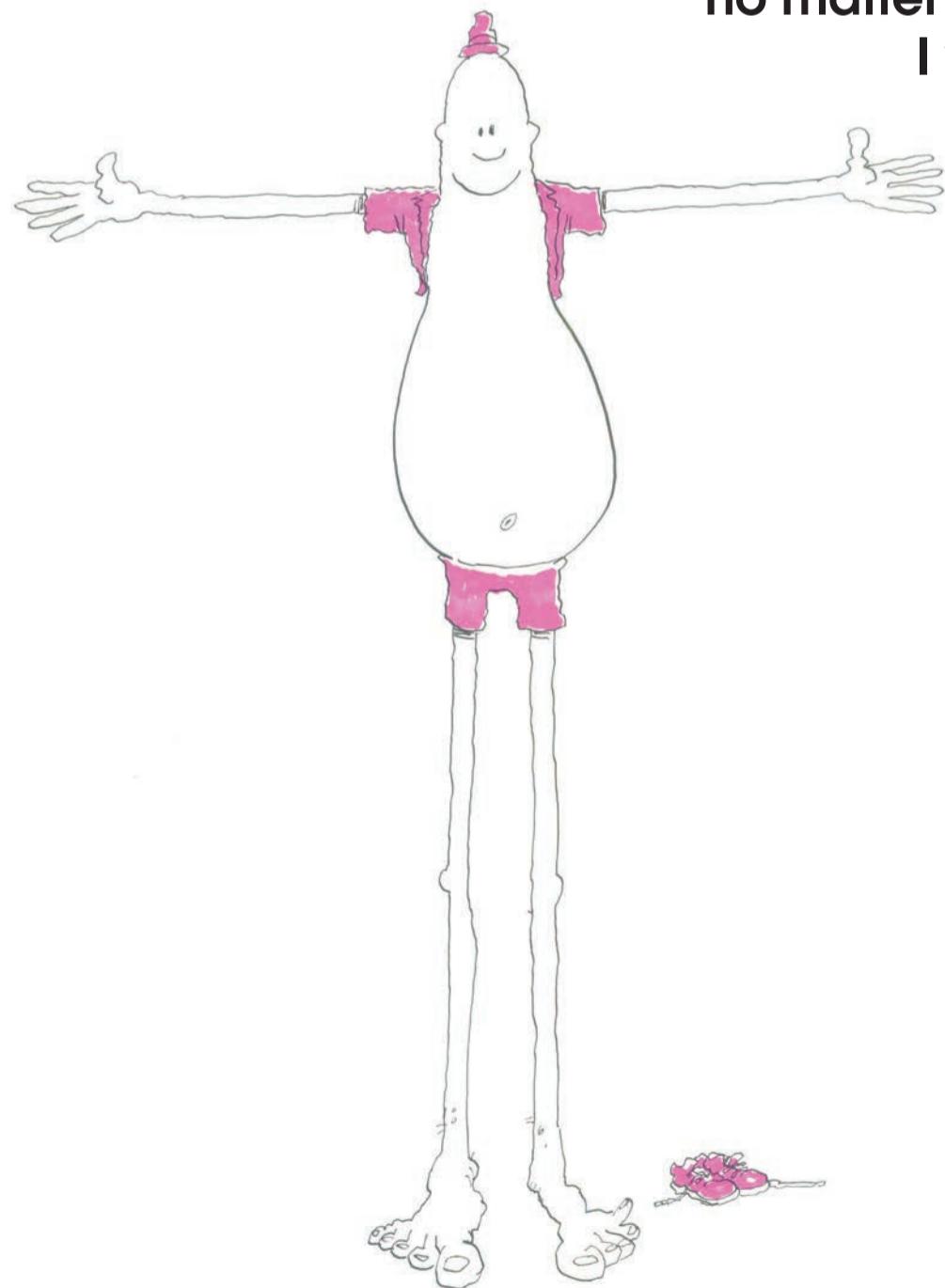
"Would you like some juice," Mrs. Lovejoy asks, in a voice that's raspy and hot. "No thank you," I reply, letting out a deep sigh, accidentally blowing a bubble with snot.

Then she asks how I'm doing and I say "I'm alright," although inside I'm as nervous as can be. I want to drop to my knees and beg her to please, divorce her husband and run off with me.

But then Levi appears full of good morning cheer, he high-fives me and we walk towards the door. Then his mom kisses him good-bye, which makes me want to cry, my own needs being sadly ignored.

"I love you, Mrs. Lovejoy," I say in my head, like a lonely and lovesick little fool. And I'm sorry to say, that it's heartache every day, when my best friend and I walk to school.

**This old coat doesn't fit me no more,
no matter how hard I try.**



**I yank and I pull, on the
weather-worn wool,
but the garment
just will not comply.**

**I've outgrown it, you see,
it's too small for me,
the sleeves are now horribly short.
And the zipper won't close,
half my belly is exposed,
this coat and I no longer consort.**

**And it's always bittersweet,
when your buttons don't meet,
and you're out-sizing
something you love.**

**I've bidden many a farewell
to clothes I found swell,
not to mention all the hats,
scarves and gloves.**

**But growing is a good thing,
you can't stay small forever,
and sometimes your seams
will start busting.**

**You'll just learn to
say good-bye,
to your favorite
shirt or tie,**

and those OLD UNDERPANTS

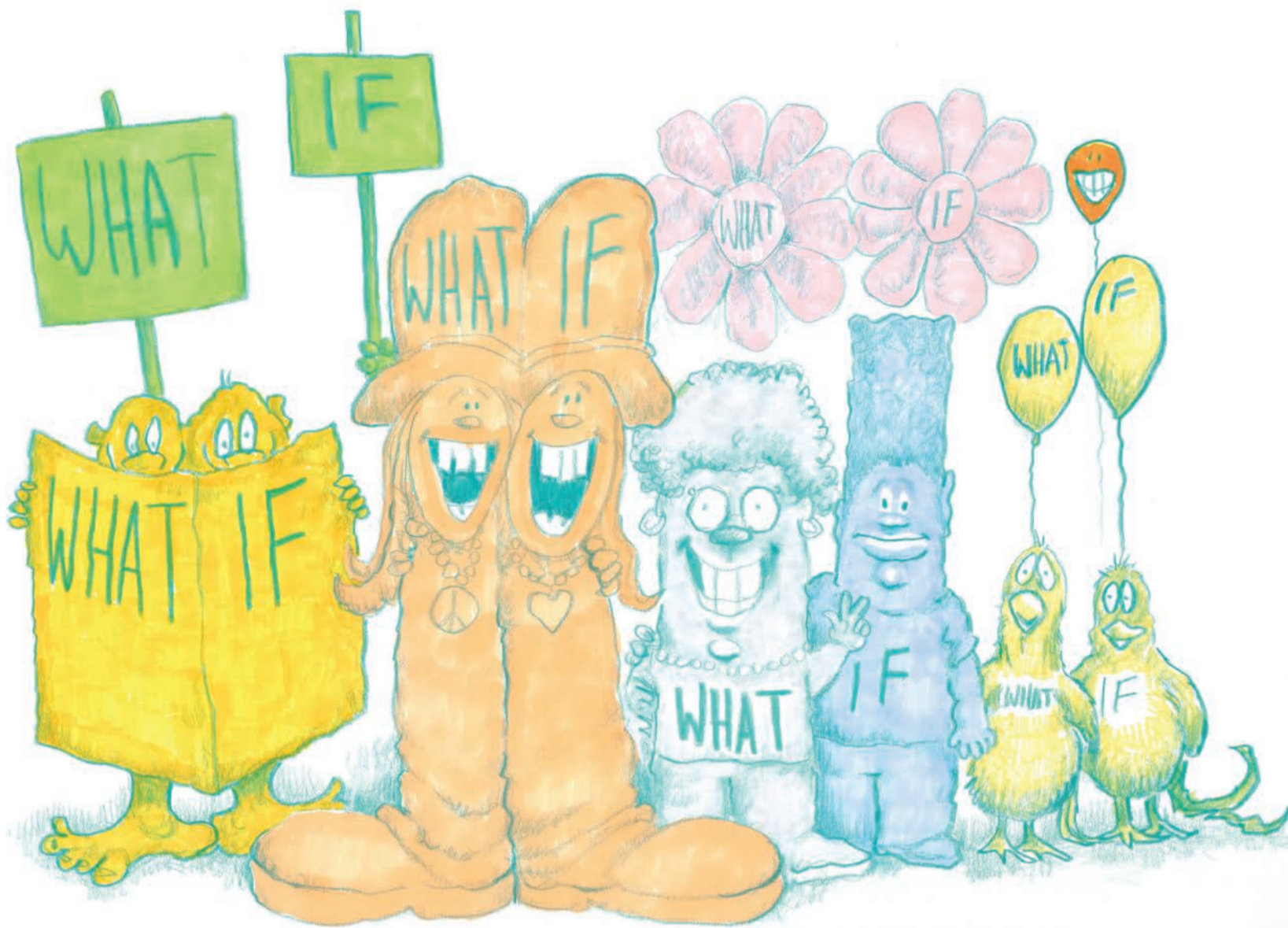
now used for dusting.



Patsy takes pictures of every meal, and posts them on Instagram. There's a close-up of pancakes, french toast and french fries, and a very nice portrait of ham.

She takes photos of her oatmeal, before taking a bite, imagining her breakfast as news. And she won't sit and eat, just continuing to tweet, until her oatmeal gets TEN THOUSAND VIEWS.

Meanwhile in Haiti, in a room with no floor Fabienne eats a stale crust of bread. And the only pictures of food Fabienne ever sees, are the pictures she sees in her head.



My favorite two words in the English language, are **“WHAT” AND “IF” side-by-side.** It helps me to imagine a world more caring, whenever those two words collide.

What if people never got angry and shouted their hate in the street? What if everyone was warm and safe from all harm, and had plenty of good food to eat?

What if every disagreement was settled with a hug, instead of fists and flames and war? And what if happiness was had by all of us, instead of so many folks being ignored?

What if children felt safe, and old folks appreciated and no one at all felt discarded? What if differences were embraced, never clubbed or maced,

and we all behaved more open-hearted?

What if kindness and love, were readily available, and everyone enjoyed life's gifts? And what if we all worked together to make those things happen, thus retiring the words “what” and “if.”



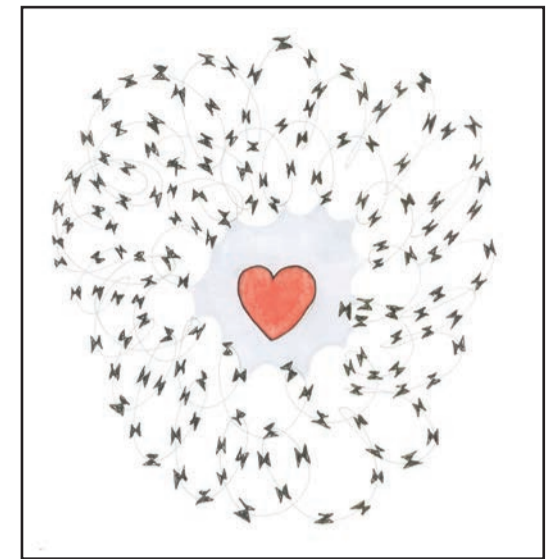
“No more soda,” is Mom’s new coda, so I have to drink Kombucha instead. And while she serves it up real nice, with an orange peel over ice, it’s flavor is still something that I dread.

While it’s hard to describe the taste, let’s start with toxic waste, or perhaps a tea made out of stinky socks. Or maybe it’s derived from mud, a cider squeezed from crud, or the run off from a twenty-cat litter box.

And what is that goop glopped at the bottom? Like sea-monkeys dancing in spit. My belly churns and gurgles, and my face turns purple, as I struggle to swallow that...stuff.

So “no more Kombucha,” get rid of it all, pour it all into a big tanker truck. I’d rather drink water or nothing at all, than to choke down a

“BIG GLASS OF YUCK.”



Cornelius locked his HEART IN A BOX,

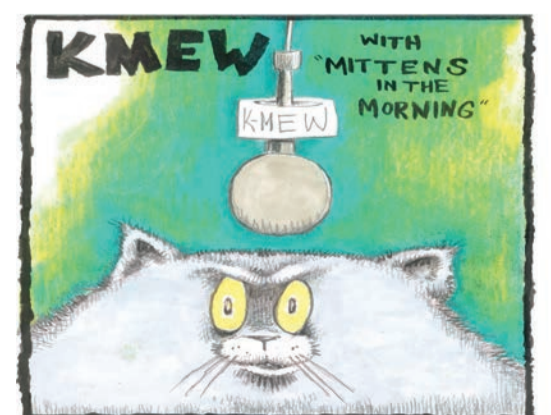
inside a safe made of galvanized steel. It was surrounded by a mote with two guards in a boat, to get near it was a frightening ordeal.

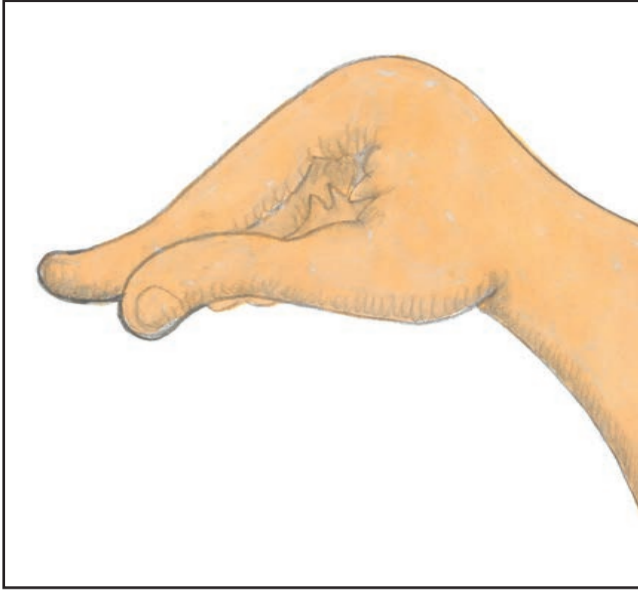
He built a ten foot wall, to conceal it all, a thick structure made of mortar and brick. With booby traps and land mines surrounding the site, and ten mean dogs taught to “sic.”

And if that wasn’t enough to keep folks at bay, he installed two gigantic loud speakers. They boomed day and night, and caused quite a fright, with a voice just like the grim reapers.

“Keep away from my heart, don’t you dare come close, I’m warning you to just stay away. If you try to draw near, I’ll pull out my spear, and you’ll never see another birthday.”

Of course Cornelius didn’t mean it, he wouldn’t hurt a fly, but his heart had been broken too often. So he kept it locked away, and I’m sure sad to say, that it never ever again did soften.





GARY THE GOOSE LIVES IN THE CLOSET, and never comes out to play. He hides behind a suitcase, and six pairs of sneakers, in the shadows he's determined to stay.

And while the other geese try to coax him out, Gary just ignores their pleas. He cowers behind raincoats and broken umbrellas, their taunts he'll never appease.

"Come out of the closet," his friend Mathew cries, "come out of the closet right now. The clouds have parted, and the sun is shining, it's beauty you cannot disavow."

But Gary doesn't listen, he just cowers in the darkness, hidden, unhappy, and blue. And he never came out and he died all alone, a scared bird that NEVER ONCE FLEW.

BILLY THE BEAR LOVES THE BUFFET BAR



...and the four words "all you can eat."
He piles his plate extra high,
reaching up to the sky,
a leaning tower
of salty and sweet.

Then he gobbles and munches,
inhaling his lunches,
licking every last crumb
from his dish.
Then he's back at the buffet,
re-stocking his tray,
with hot wings
and sticks made of fish.

Mumbling "Nummy-num-num,
stuffing his tummy-tum-tum,
devouring biscuits, potatoes,
and red beans.
He eats till he bursts,
popping buttons on his shirt,
and the seams of
his skinny white jeans.

And just when you'd think
Billy'd eaten his fill,
he tears off
his now buttonless shirt.
Then he burps really loud,
frightening the crowd,
shouting "NOW I'VE GOT ROOM
FOR DESSERT."

Which means six more plates
of cookies and pie,
and pudding and cake
and ice cream.
Then he stands and departs,
cutting twenty loud farts,
shouting "I'll see you again in the spring."



It was a dark, dismal day,
when the clowns went away,
and the circus stopped being fun.
No more big floppy shoes,
blasting horns or kazooks,
seems the bad times had clearly begun.

And I was quite brokenhearted,
when the clowns all departed,
with their balloons,
and exploding cigars.
I saw a hundred with suitcases,
and painted frowns on their faces,
all piling into one tiny
clown car.

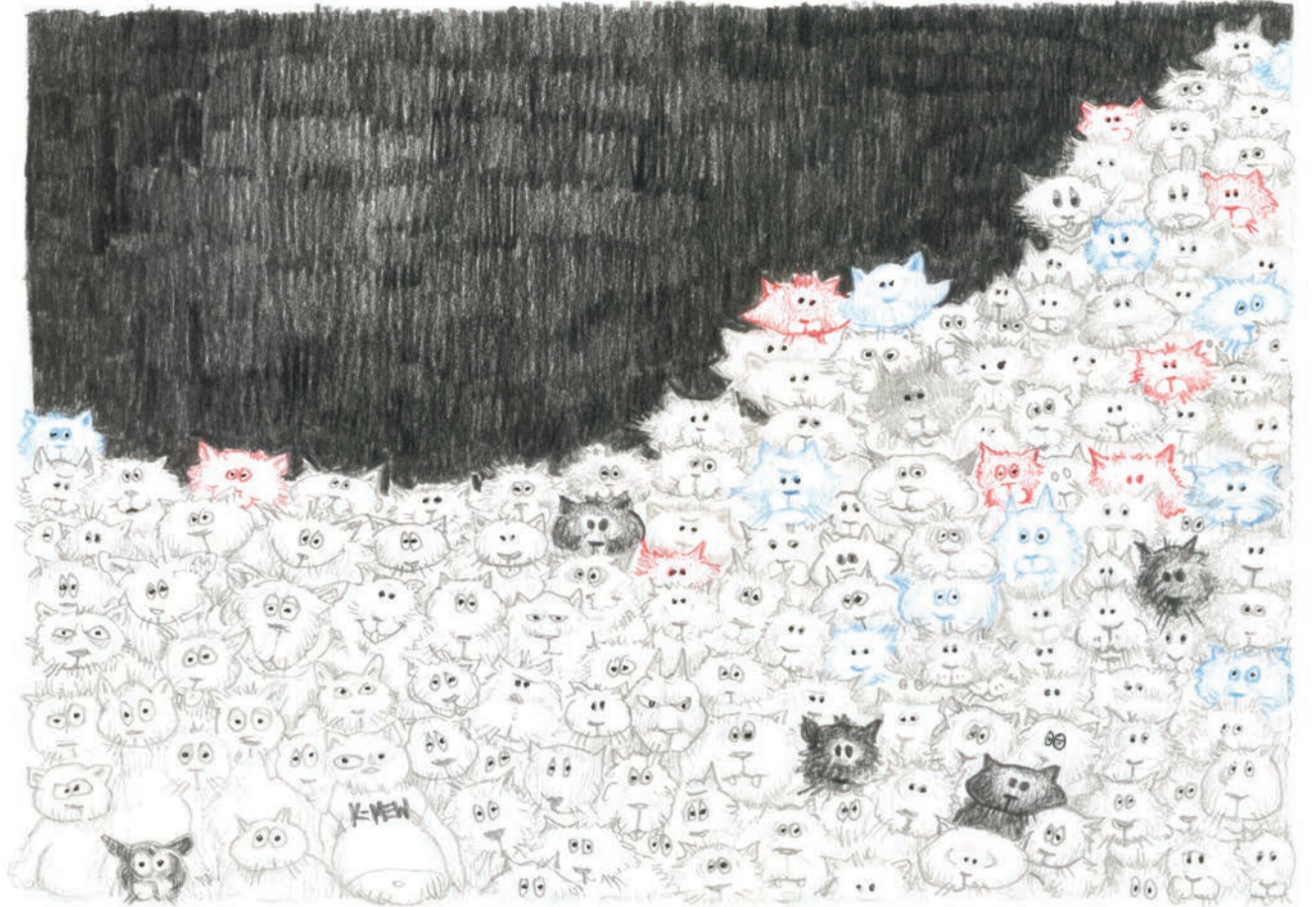
Now I've no idea why they left,
leaving us all so bereft,
and the Big Top,
now a dank, dusty tent.
And it's been quite awhile,
since I've managed to smile,
in this winter
of our discontent.

So bye-bye to Blinky,
Dum-Dum and Dimples,
so long to Jimbo and Moe.
Farewell to Sweetback,
KoKo and Freckles,
where did all of those
funny clowns go?

Ta-Ta to Toodles,
and Toodles to Ta-Ta,
Smarty-Pants
and Crackety Crackpot.
Au revoir to Patches,
Pickles and Humpty,
and sayanaro to
Sir-Stinks-A-Lot.

Of course I hope and I yearn
that the clowns will return,
and that laughter and joy
are not done.
It's the same prayer I've prayed
for the last seven hundred days,

WHEN THE CIRCUS STOPPED BEING FUN.



LAST NIGHT I SQUEEZED MY PILLOW

real hard, and all of my dreams flew out. They circled the ceiling, every fantasy and feeling, just hovering and mingling about.

Some dreams were scary, with goblins and zombies, and various assorted foul creatures. There was one where I was naked on a basketball court, with TEN THOUSAND CATS in the bleachers.

In one of my dreams I was a submarine captain, dodging torpedoes and a huge killer whale. In another one I was lost inside a Walmart, during a half-off holiday sale.

There were nice dreams too, with family and friends, and kids that I like from school. There was a funny one too, with my dad going poo and he's glued to the toilet stool.

Now while some dreams make sense, most of them don't, just a mish-mash of crazy and weird. Like the one where my grandpa had the head of a frog and was wearing my grandma's brassiere.

But that's the fun about dreams, they don't have to make sense, just an odd brew of fiction and fact. And most of the time my dreams are just fine, unless I'm naked in front of ten-thousand cats.



Rocketship Randy lives a life fine and dandy, owning everything that money can buy. He owns boats and trains, a thousand jet planes, and every hot air balloon in the sky.

He owns hotels and spas, Van Goghs and Degas, and a garage full of fine classic cars. He owns freeways and stadiums, and high-end gymnasiums, he has ten humidors with cigars.

He owns twenty-six houses, and nineteen apartments, with a villa in Saint-Jean-de-Luz. He owns solid gold slippers and two-thirds of the Clippers, and a submarine he bought from Tom Cruise.

He owns pure bred dogs, wearing hand-made togs, and each has their own personal trainer. He owns a hippo and giraffe, and just for a laugh, he keeps a monkey on a monthly retainer.

So by and by, he'll just buy and buy, until he owns everything HERE ON EARTH. Then he'll move to Mars, with his canines and cars, and our galaxy becomes his net-worth.



SOMEBODY TOLD ME SOMETHING

...about somebody somewhere, and I've no idea if it's true. But I've told ten people and they've told ten more and now I'm telling it to you. It seems that SOMEBODY SOMEWHERE said something about someone and then somebody then said something back. And then so and so got angry and then so and so did too, and that's when the train jumped the tracks. Now whoever it was and I don't really know, but I do know somebody somewhere got mad. And that somebody said something and I'm not sure what that was but it made somebody somewhere feel bad. And then somebody somewhere said something about something, that angered somebody somewhere. And then another somebody told me all about it, and that's why I called you, to share. But please don't repeat anything that I've said, to your good friends or close family. And if you do let it slip to somebody somewhere, please don't say you heard it from me.

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the audiobook
of

THE LONELY BANJO
written+rendered
by
mark roberts

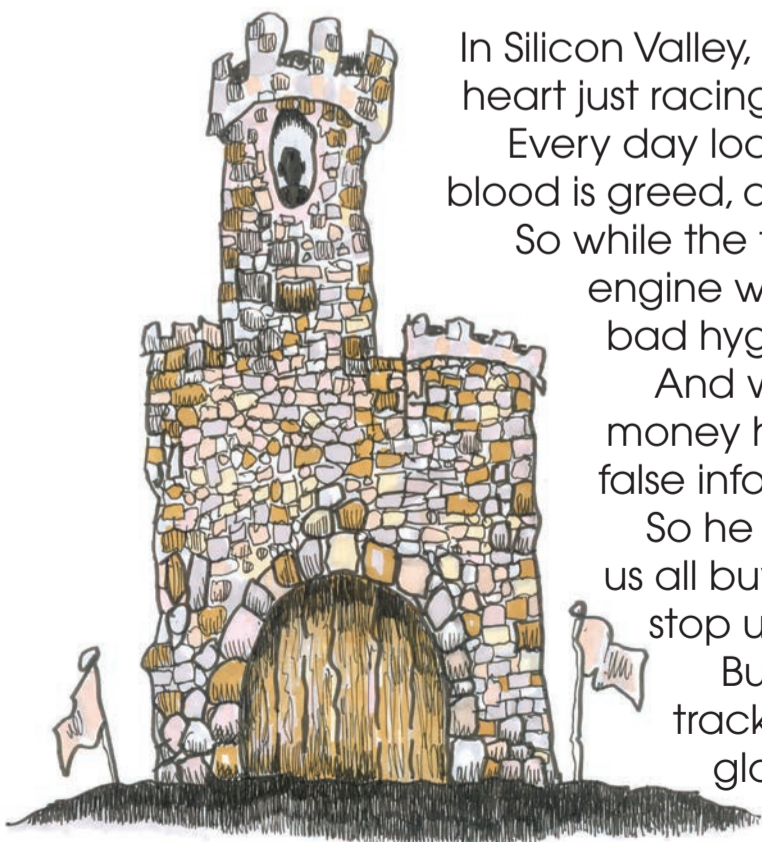
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T.J. JAGODOWSKI	MARK ROBERTS	

Produced by:
LISA CISNEROS + LIAM DAVIS + DAG JUHLIN + MARK ROBERTS

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MATT HENNESSY WITH TY CAUGHELL
VSOP STUDIOS IN CHICAGO, ILLINOIS



In Silicon Valley, in a dark, lonely chalet, a mad scientist is wide awake. He's frantically pacing, his heart just racing, over what new device he can make.

Every day locked away, all work and no play, his heart containing no love or pity. His life's blood is greed, domination his creed, he's the meanest man inside Redwood City.

So while the town is a-sleeping, at his computer he's a-creeping, searching every search engine worth searching. He's pasty and pale, and his clothes kind of smell, bad food and bad hygiene converging.

And while he's worth ten-gazillion, it's not near enough to fill him, and besides it's not money he desires. He wants us stuck to his devices and believing every crisis, building his false information empire.

So he contemplates new scams in his Mukluks and jams, creating new toys that keep us all buying. Which means a lot more screen time, with no brain left behind, he won't stop until the whole world is crying.

But that's always been the plan, for this sickly pale man, to keep us purchasing his trackers and bugs. And it would have been a different story, if instead of fame and glory, he'd simply asked his mom for **more hugs**.



KNOTTY PINE NICK, KNEW ALL THE TRICKS for surviving in the wilderness brush. He ate twigs and berries, and trail mix that he carried, which he'd stir into mud making mush.

His house was a tree, hollowed inside, that he'd furnished with chairs made of logs. He had zero utensils, just the barest essentials, living his own ECO-FRIENDLY ECLOGUE.

He had no computer, or phone for that matter, never able to text or to tweet. His friends were the birds, and they didn't mince words, because sometimes he'd have to kill one to eat.

He had no fast car or horse to ride, if he went anywhere he would walk. So he didn't produce smoke, or pollutants that choke, his only toxic emission were his socks.

Of course while his footprint was small, his heart was a squall, like a hurricane blowing through The Grand Canyon. He yearned for love and prayed up above for a soft-spoken, outdoorsy companion.

But it's tough to connect, when your best pals are insects, with no hook-up to any hooking-up app. And what would he say on a date anyway? His favorite topics were just acorns and sap.

Then one lonely night, giving in to his plight, Nick built himself a girlfriend outta sticks. He stuffed her with leaves, his true love, he believed, the only downside, of course, were the ticks.

He named her Daisy, and loved her like crazy, they'd take long daily walks through the pines. He shared every secret, knowing she'd keep it, because her mouth was just a Wisteria vine.

Over time their love grew, they stuck together like glue, side-by-side they were always attached. Until one dreadful winter when the cold got real bitter, and they had no firewood and one match.

As Nick's fingers turned blue, there was only one thing to do, so he snapped off Daisy's left arm. Then he broke off the right and built a fire that night, killing the love of his life to stay warm.

"Good-bye my dear," Nick said, most sincere, as he warmed his hands over Daisy's hot flames. I'll miss you I s'pose, but I'd rather feel my toes, say it's my fault if you need to "place blame."

Then Nick lived out his life, with no girlfriend or wife, just another life lesson hard learned. If you love or befriend, it always seems in the end that one of you is bound to get burned.

Yet Another Sighting of Corny Cornhusker

CORNY CORNHUSKER
likes ketchup
and mustard,
and corn dogs
and corn chips
and cobbler.
She lives in
the corn,
that's where she
was born,
raised by two
kindly crows
and one gobbler.

She wears clothes
made of corn husks,
corn silk
and tassels,
and a necklace
made of roots
and kernels.
She sleeps all day,
on corn cobs
and hay,
because Corny Cornhusker's
nocturnal.

And it's probably best
that in the daylight
she rests,
her appearance is
for sure
quite jarring.
She's got corn
yellow hair,
and a corny-eyed stare,
in a movie
she will never
be starring.

But she's sweet
as can be,
Corny wouldn't
hurt a flea,
except the one's
in her ears,
that she eats.
And sometimes
she'll eat a rat,
if one crosses her path,
but only on occasion,
as a treat.

Then at nighttime
Corny prowls,
with the coyotes
and owls,
sneaking yard to yard,
quietly in the dark.
Staring inside
people's houses
at the children
and spouses,
running scared
if a dog
starts to bark.

But there's no need
for alarm,
Corny do not
mean harm,
and you need not think
Corny is a creep.
She just likes
sneaking round,
tip-toeing through town,
watching strangers,
at night, when they sleep.

So if tonight
after midnight
you peer out your window
and see two corny eyes
peering back.
Do not grab a gun,
or shriek, scream
and run,
just toss her
a fresh Corny snack.

Because Corny Cornhusker,
likes ketchup
and mustard,
and corn dogs
and corn chips
and cobbler.
And she won't
make a peep,
she'll just
watch you sleep,
late at night,
standing under
your poplar.



Every day at noon, in my school lunch room, I stand staring, holding onto my tray. Wondering where I should sit, at what table I'd fit, a conundrum I go through each day.

To my right sit the jocks, with unibrows and sweat socks, and their names written on the backs of their shirts. And if I make eye-contact, they pull my shorts up my crack, and I'm telling you, that that really hurts.

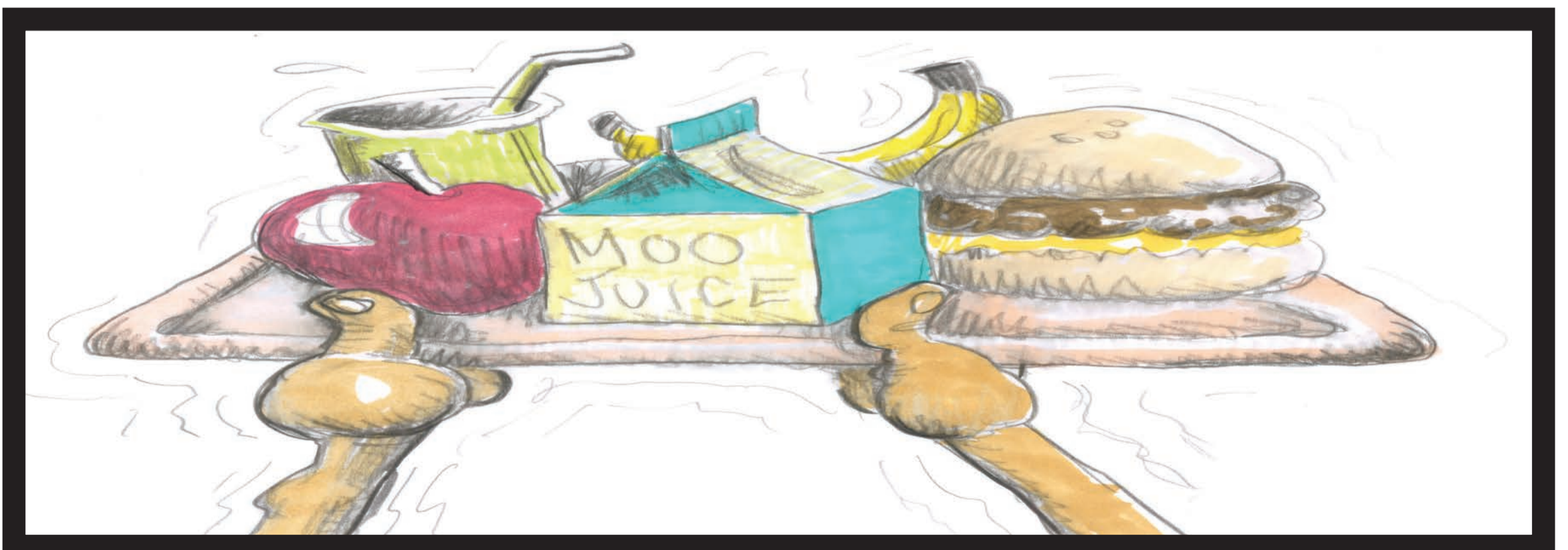
To my left are the cheerleaders, with their pom-poms and sneakers, each brimming with amazing school pride. But when I say "hello," they all shake their heads "no," saying "Get lost you loser, go die."

Now in the way, way back, is where the smart kids snack, theorizing about the Big Bang explosion. And while I'm welcome, no question, it challenges my digestion, because those nerds chew with their mouths wide open.

Seated across from the brainiacs, are the trouble-making maniacs, with their tough talk and double-entendres. They've got pierced ears and noses, and tattoos of dead roses, and I heard they sold guns to the Contras.

So I've absolutely no hunch, where I should eat my hot lunch, a daily dilemma that causes me strife. Because no matter where I choose, I'll most likely lose

MY SANDWICH, MY BROWNIE, OR MY LIFE.





MILBORN

THE

MONKEY

Milborn the monkey was a
WALL STREET FLUNKY,
in a necktie and freshly
pressed suit.
He sipped coffee on the train,
through the sleet, snow and
rain,
the first leg
of his
daily commute.

Then he'd walk sixteen blocks
to where they buy and sell
stocks,
and he'd sit behind a cold
metal desk.
He ate his lunch at one,
two bananas on a bun,
with a view, not at all
picturesque.

Then he'd answer emails,
return calls on his cell, then
pack up
and head straight for home.
He'd slump from the train,
to his one-room domain,
where he'd eat his sad dinner,
all alone.

And that was
Monday through Sunday
for Milborn The Monkey,
his life just
a long, lonely grind.
He hadn't smiled or chuckled
or walked on his knuckles,
in what seemed like a very
long time.

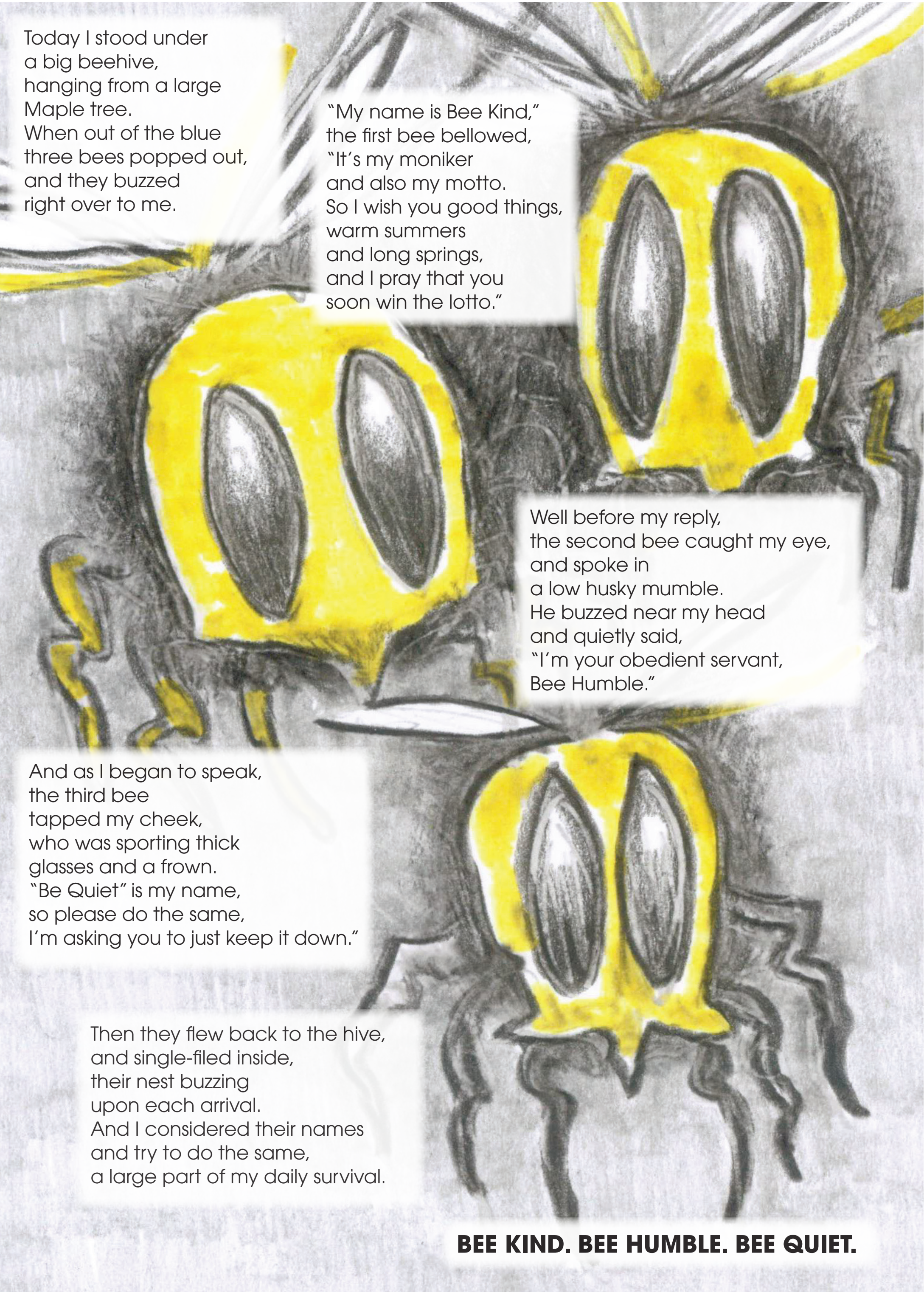
Then one morning
in the rain,
on a crowded
G Train,
that was stuck
on the tracks,
due to weather.
Amongst the haves
and have-nots,
he sat alone
with his thoughts,
something he had
not done
in forever.

He remembered being
young,
outside,
having fun,
just scampering
and frolicking
with ease.
His heart bursting
with hope,
as he swung
from a rope,
doing whatever he wanted,
when he pleased.

After an hour
of such musings,
the train
began moving,
taking Milborn The Monkey
to his stop.
And as he walked,
his heart swelled,
because he knew
darn well,
that the bubble
he lived in
had popped.

And when he walked
into work,
with no suit,
tie or shirt,
his co-workers
all called him
a nut.
But Milborn didn't mind,
he just shook his behind,
saying "kiss my big red
monkey butt."

Now Milborn The Monkey
is nobody's flunky,
or a part of
that silly
rat race.
He lives in the jungle alone,
with no suit,
tie or phone,
just a big
happy smile
on his face.



Today I stood under
a big beehive,
hanging from a large
Maple tree.
When out of the blue
three bees popped out,
and they buzzed
right over to me.

"My name is Bee Kind,"
the first bee bellowed,
"It's my moniker
and also my motto.
So I wish you good things,
warm summers
and long springs,
and I pray that you
soon win the lotto."

Well before my reply,
the second bee caught my eye,
and spoke in
a low husky mumble.
He buzzed near my head
and quietly said,
"I'm your obedient servant,
Bee Humble."

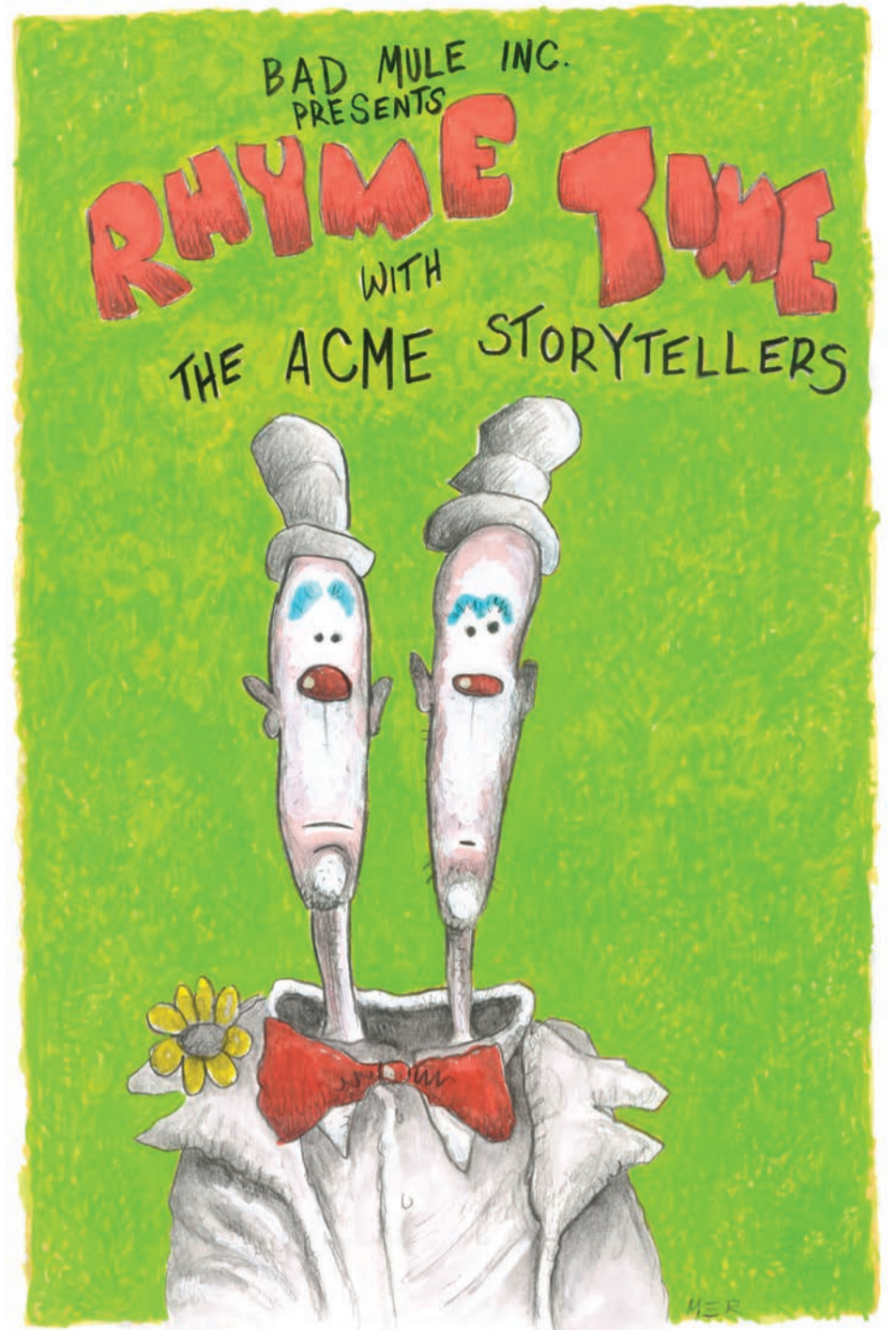
And as I began to speak,
the third bee
tapped my cheek,
who was sporting thick
glasses and a frown.
"Be Quiet" is my name,
so please do the same,
I'm asking you to just keep it down."

Then they flew back to the hive,
and single-filed inside,
their nest buzzing
upon each arrival.
And I considered their names
and try to do the same,
a large part of my daily survival.

BEE KIND. BEE HUMBLE. BEE QUIET.



Bad Mule Staff, Christmas 2022 (Mostly Disgruntled)



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**JASPER
WANTS
YOUR JUNK!**

"Your Garbage is His Gold"

Substitute Teachers Union
*We know we're not your regular teacher,
but we still matter*

Bad Mule Rag was created by Mark Roberts, comedian, actor, writer, producer, and director, best known for creating the American sitcom Mike & Molly.

Bad Mule Rag was lovingly typeset and assembled in Urbana, Illinois by Lori Stewart-Weidert of Gal Friday Industries (lori.weidert@gmail.com)

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BANJO**
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by
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