

Jamie Drum's

MASSIVE

Recovery

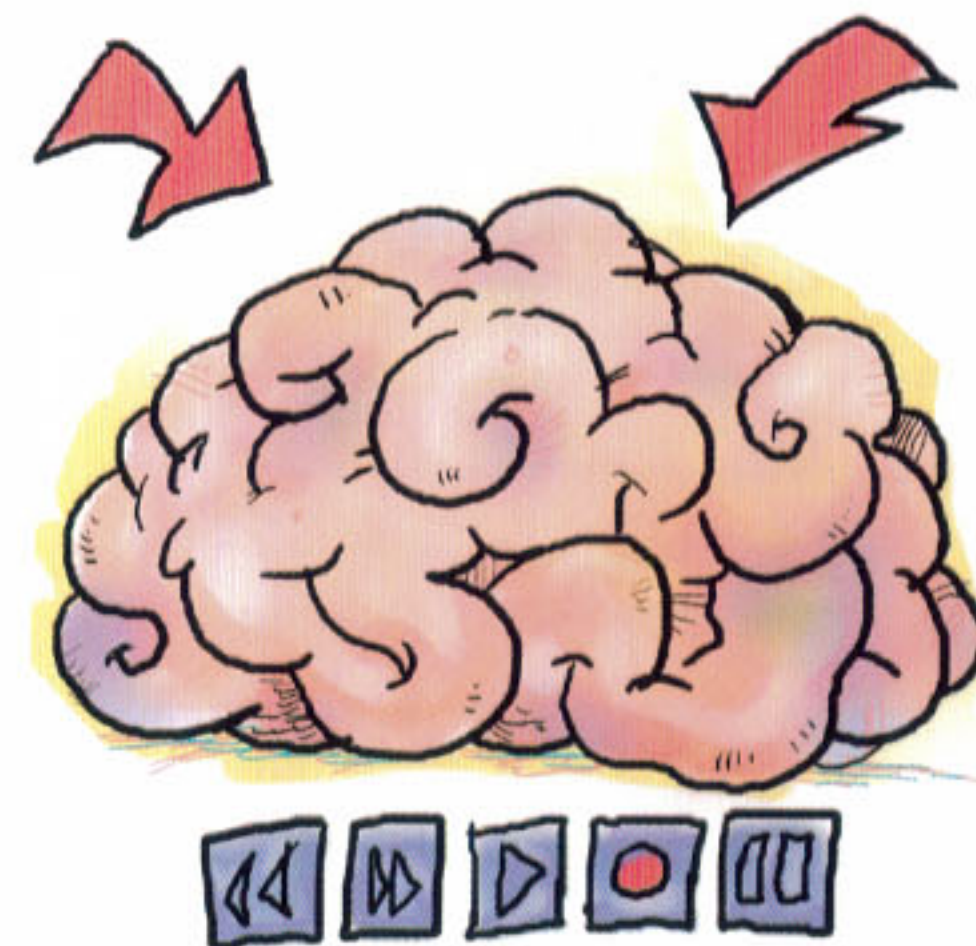
Paul
Davies

DON'T GET SICK,
GET EVEN!



Jamie Drum's
MASSIVE
Recovery

PAUL DAVIES




ELEMENT
CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Shaftesbury, Dorset Boston, Massachusetts Melbourne, Victoria

For Kerry and Sharifa

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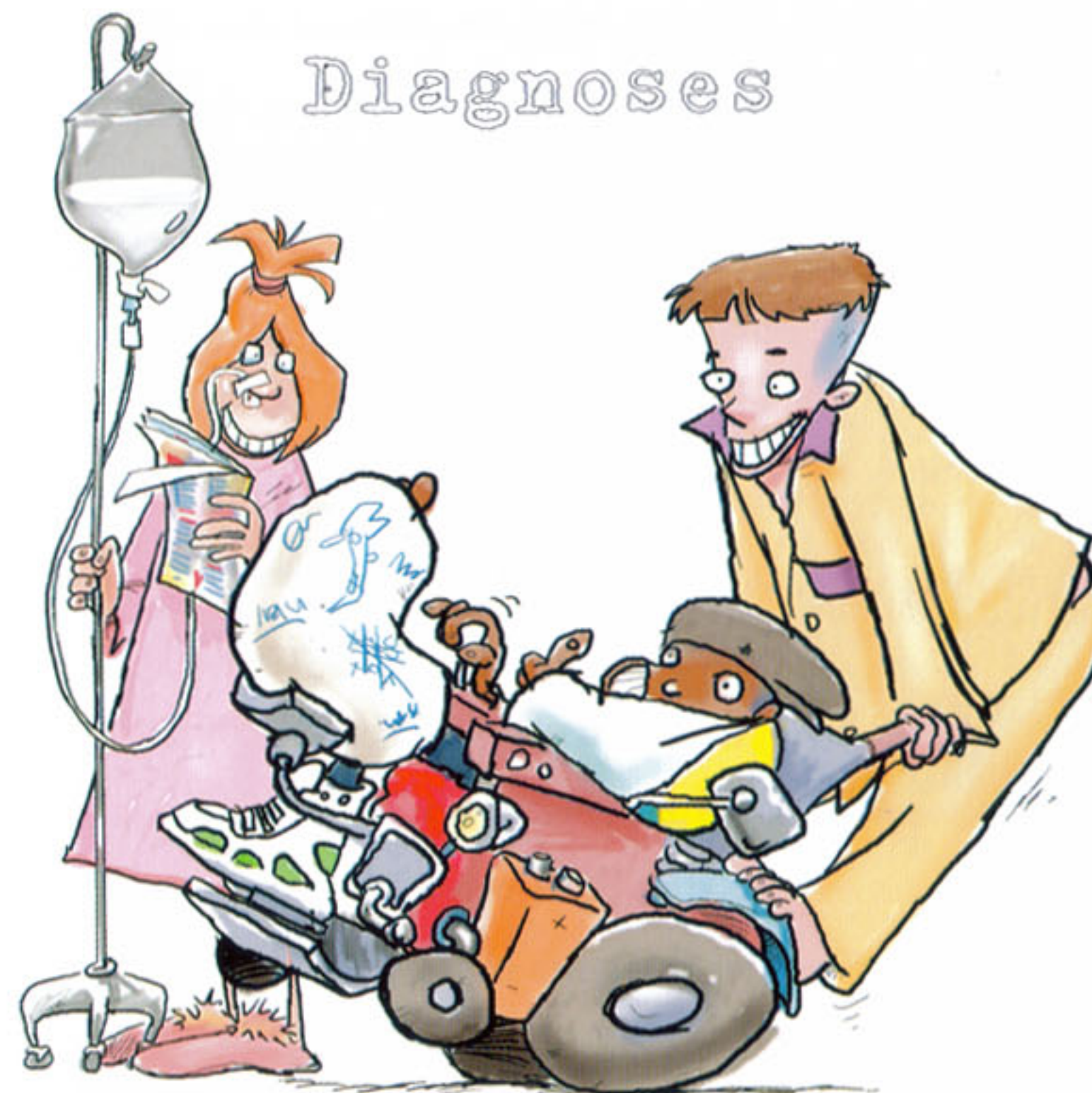
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Reader, I don't want to spoil this tale for you, but (and there is always a but) let me begin by telling you this yarn has a happy ending, I make no apology for it: the boy lives. Life can be bad enough without people dying in stories. If this has spoiled the story for you, tough. Put down the book now. But if you are prepared to heave-to, let me begin, here at the Mount Ararat College Hospital on Cedar Drive.



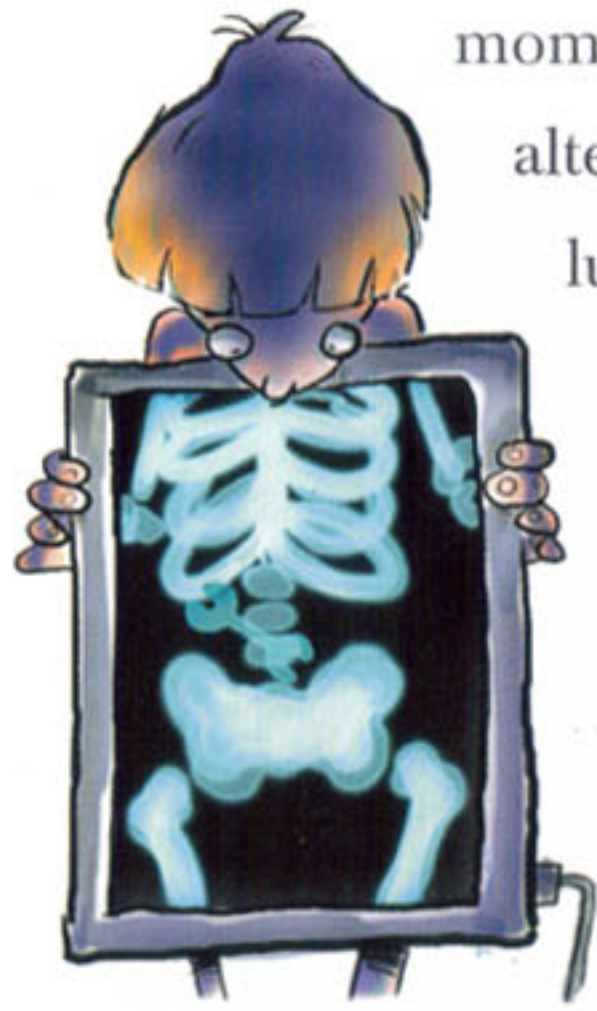
Diagnoses



Jamie Drum was sick, VERY SICK though you wouldn't have guessed if you had seen me clowning around that fateful Saturday afternoon with the other kids on the ward.

The kid in the wheelchair is Eric Beerbaum, my immediate neighbor, and the best kind of neighbor to have. Eric can get anything brought into the hospital—pizza, soda, even cable. Eric is what the hospital likes to call a “Protracted Tenure Occupant.” He’s picked up

something called *Chalk-Bone*—the name says it all. Although the condition isn't considered life-threatening, for a gifted soccer player at his darkest and most painful moments, death would seem a preferable alternative. But Eric is a cheerful kid and luckily his cheer is more infectious than his condition.



The girl wheeling around the drip is Stacy Laurens. Heart trouble. Stacy is a babe—she's got legs and everything. I've never noticed girls' legs before, and I have a massive urge to see the scar that runs the entire length of her upper body. Whoaw! But she's two years older than me and thinks I'm just a kid. I'm almost fourteen.

Me? I've been in and out of this factory six—maybe seven—times over this past year, this time for the best part of a baking August. It was tests, tests, and—you guessed it. They had prodded me, kneaded me, x-rayed me, shot radiation at me, cut me open, stitched me up, taken bits out of me, put bits back in, reduced my blood sugar, increased my salt, lasered me, drugged me, and Nurse Willi—oh, Nurse Willi—had cuddled me. Not because I was crying—I wasn't, I was a bit down is all.

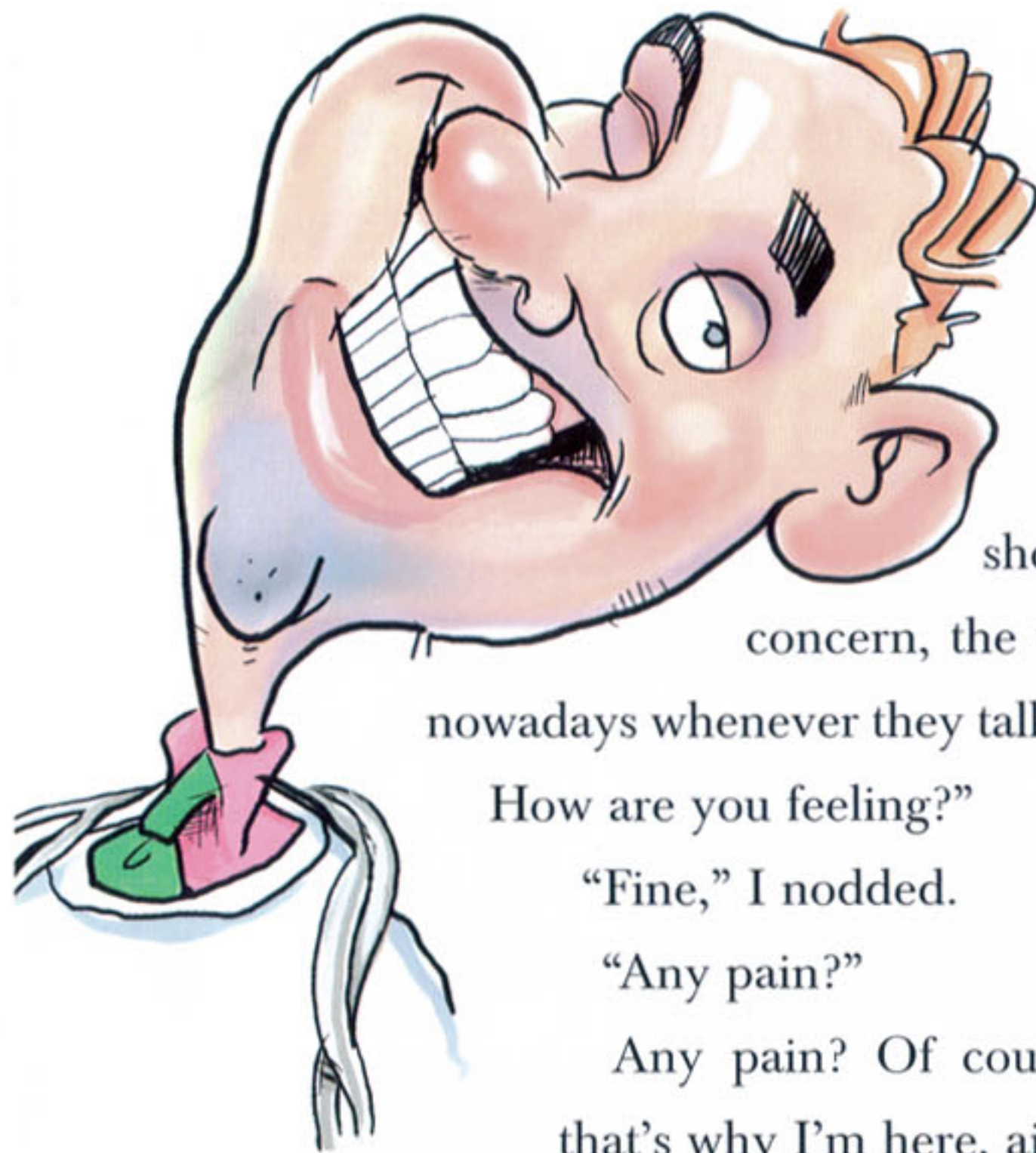
Nurse Willi was good fun though. We always looked

forward to her shift. She wasn't like the other staff at the hospital, she talked *with* us, instead of *at* us, she joined in our games, and sometimes she would bring in some of her home cooking for us to eat—ackee and saltfish, curry goat, rice and peas. She had time for everyone, and seemed to care, really care about us.

To be fair, everyone was concerned. The doctors had tried their best to find out what was making me sick, without any success at all. Medical science was baffled, Mount Ararat medical science anyway. Until this afternoon, that is. Mom and Dad had been asked to call in and talk with Doctor Leech before visiting time. I guessed they had finally found the cause, and the cure. The fact I wasn't invited didn't bug me. Hey, let them sort it. I was having fun.

When Mom and Dad came in, I could sense straight away there was something wrong. Doctor Leech accompanied them onto the ward. Dad was tapping a rhythm on his front teeth with his fingers, a sure sign he wasn't comfortable. Mom had her "no nonsense" face on. She patted the bed, a signal for me to come and sit. Uh-oh.





"Hi, Jamie. How are you feeling, hmmm?" Doctor Leech droned, his head leaning over toward his left shoulder to show his concern, the way everyone does nowadays whenever they talk to me. "Hi, Jamie.

How are you feeling?"

"Fine," I nodded.

"Any pain?"

Any pain? Of course there is pain—that's why I'm here, ain't it? "No," I lied.

"Super! Will you take off your pajama top for me while we have a little listen to you?" he asked with his worst smiley face. Doctor Leech has a face for all eventualities, it's something they probably teach doctors at medical school.

He reminded me of the guy who presents my kid sister's favorite TV show that I have to endure every Saturday



morning—*Hullabaloo Zoo*. Man, it's painful.

"Yop," he said as he listened. "Yop, yop. Super!" He beamed. He seemed to stare at me for just a micro second longer than was comfortable, his face frozen in a cheery grin. Finally he folded his stethoscope, and his face took on a more solemn air. "Well, you've had us all in a quandary, young Jamie, but basically," he confided, "basically, we believe we have found the source of your little prob." To reinforce this, he prodded my stomach with every syllable, "your-lit-tle-prob."

"Great, Doc, give me the tablets, and I'll get out of here." I had to hope.

"The bods in Path. are one hundred percent certain it's a little chap called *Windpepper's Malady*. It's extremely rare. You're very fortunate, not just anybody—"

Mom cut short his enthusiasm. "Jamie, there is something we have to tell you."

"You gotta be brave, son," Dad coughed.

"I'm gonna die," I said, saving them the trouble.

"Not at all, not at all," Doctor Leech sweated.

Dad was shaking his head. "No, no, nothing like that."

"No, no, no, no."

"Yes," they all said, except Doctor Leech who said, "Yop." Mom bit her bottom lip.

"Maybe," offered the doctor. "It's a—possibility. There's



a sixty-forty chance of a remish. Sixty-forty! Super odds, and I should know—I'm a doctor."

"No way, man, you must have got my tests mixed up with someone else's. I—I feel a whole lot better."

"There's no mistake, Jamie," Mom sniffed.

"H-how long?" I trembled. I couldn't believe it. Dad let out a loud trumpet from behind his creased man-sized. Mom grabbed me, squeezing me hard to her breast. It was pointless trying to protest in this position as my top lip was pushed up into my nostril.

The doctor paused to think. "Worst possible nightmare scenario, three—." He looked to Mom and raised a moss-like eyebrow that invited a response.

She cleared her dry throat and responded, "Four, maybe five—"

The doctor raised his remaining eyebrow encouragingly, to form a great hairy caterpillar along his forehead.

"Five years!" I gulped.

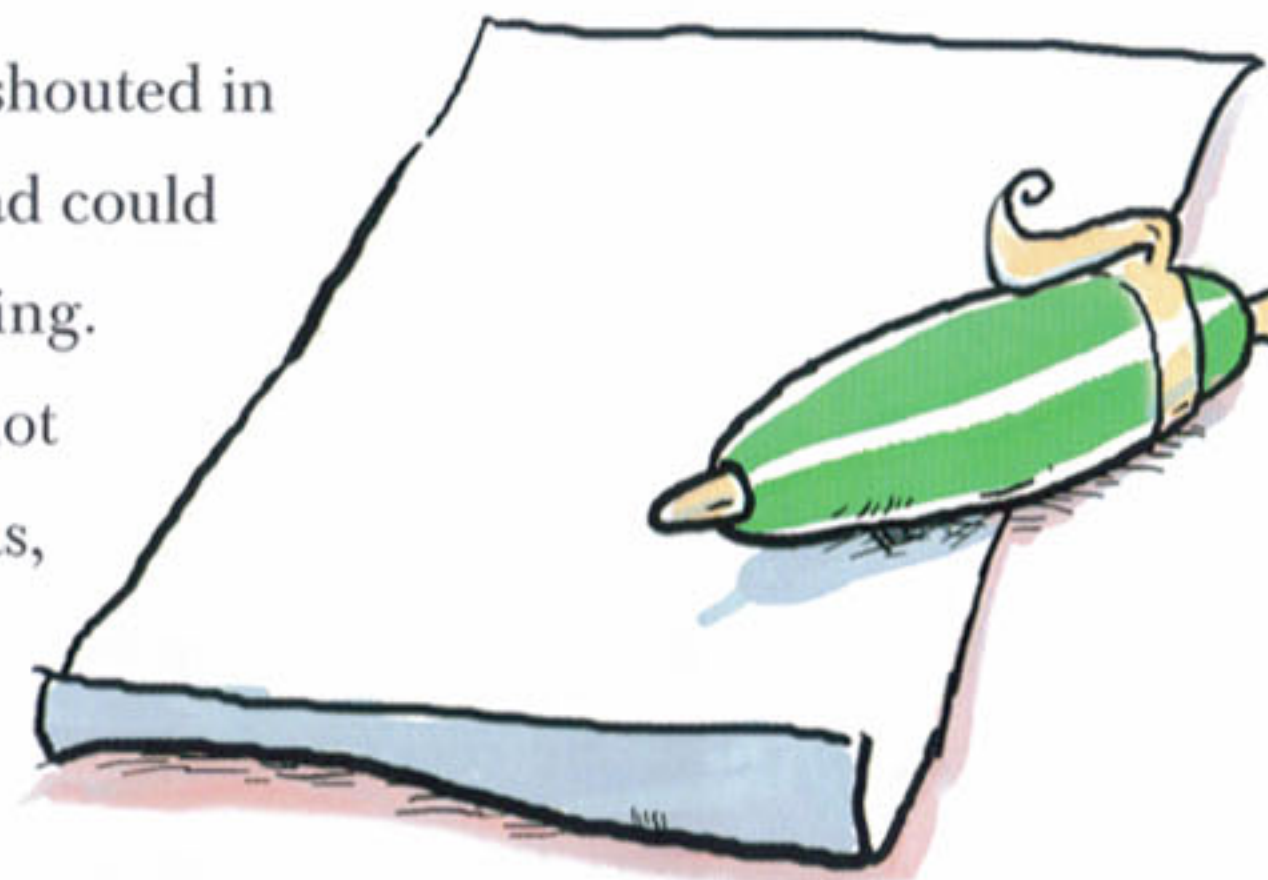
"Months," Leech muttered.

"Months?" I parroted, prizing myself away from the security of my mom. I silently counted off the months on my fingers.

"December!" I shouted in disbelief before Dad could finish his counting.

"Forget it! I'm not missing Christmas, I'm not going to die. Get me a pen and paper, I'll

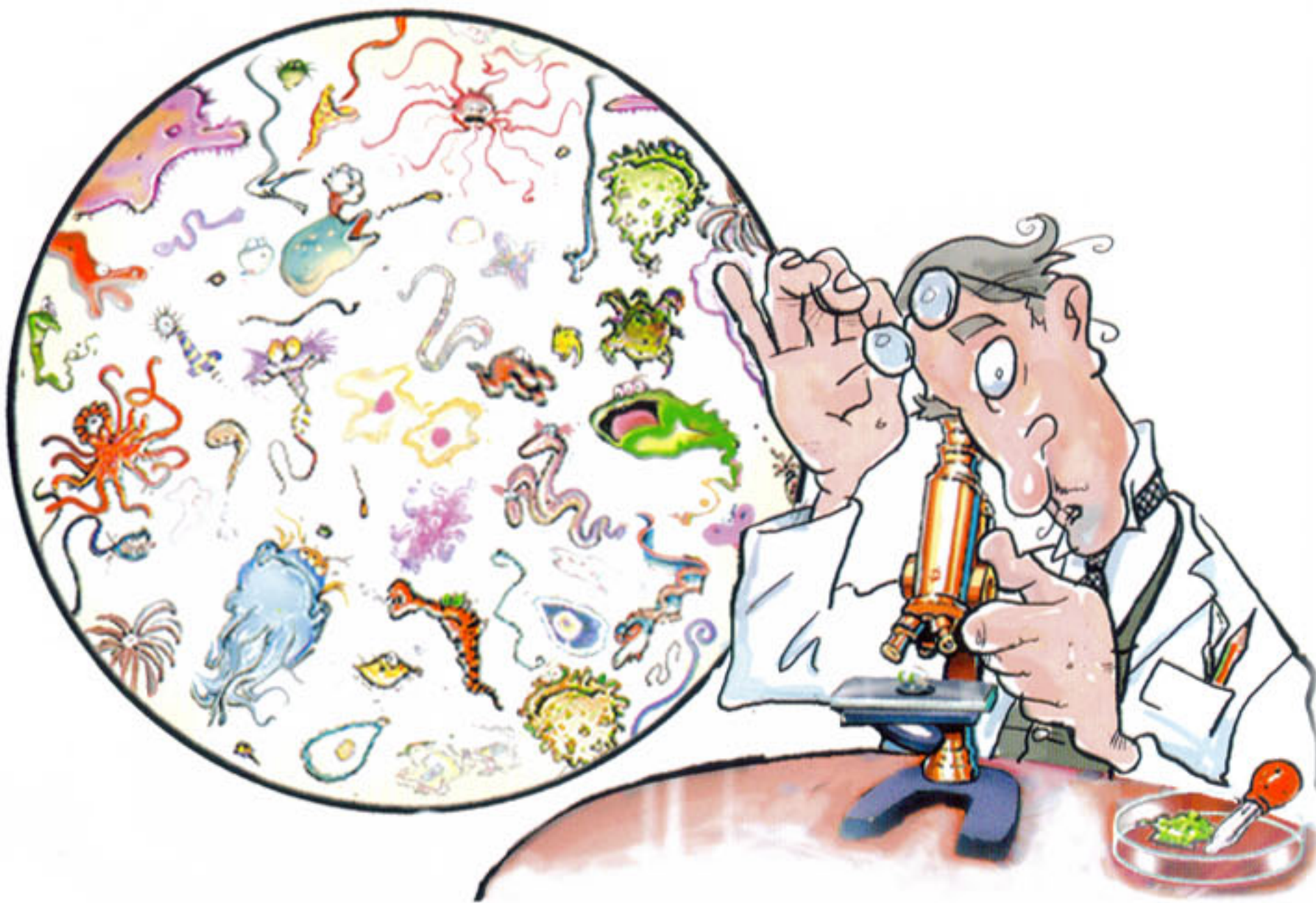
write out my presents list now."



"That's the ticket, Jamie, super, soldier on. As I say, that's the worst possible nightmare scenario, new developments being made all the time, Internet's full of it, and of course we can arrest the disease with drugs and radiation, make you as comfy as poss. Hmmm?"

"Why me?"

He didn't know, he confessed. Neither he nor any other



doctor or scientist knew what caused *Windpepper's Malady*, or what cured it. He reckoned there was more chance of winning the lottery than contracting it. There was no age barrier, it didn't care about your background, what school you went to, how much money your father made a year, what car you drove, whether you were male or female, black or white, Seventh Day Adventist or Hindu. If you got it, Doctor Leech said, it was going to floor you.

Dad put his solid hairy arm, that stuck out from his polo shirt, around his sobbing wife, and grabbed his son's hand and squeezed it tight.

"I'm not piggin' dying," I said. "Bog off, the lot of you." I was upset.

The doctor made his excuses and left. "I can see you need a little time together—quality time—to come to terms. Hmmm? Mr and Mrs—" he cocked an eye at his notes, "Drum. Office door always open."

"Of course you're not dying, son," Dad said with courage. "Of course he's not dying, Viv."

I retrieved my hand from Dad's secure grip, as my parents let out a long snort.

"No, the doctors will do everything they can, now they know the problem," Mom said. "They can work miracles, they can." Though they did their best to reassure me, I wasn't convinced, but I was so pigged off I didn't care.

"Visiting time is over," Nurse Willi said as she helped



"*Acrimonious Killer Instinct III*," Eric sneered and threw me a drum roll, "Bub, boom, cheesh."

"How much?" I asked.

"Only four-fifty each."

I peered from beneath the covers. "Do we get a choice of toppings?"

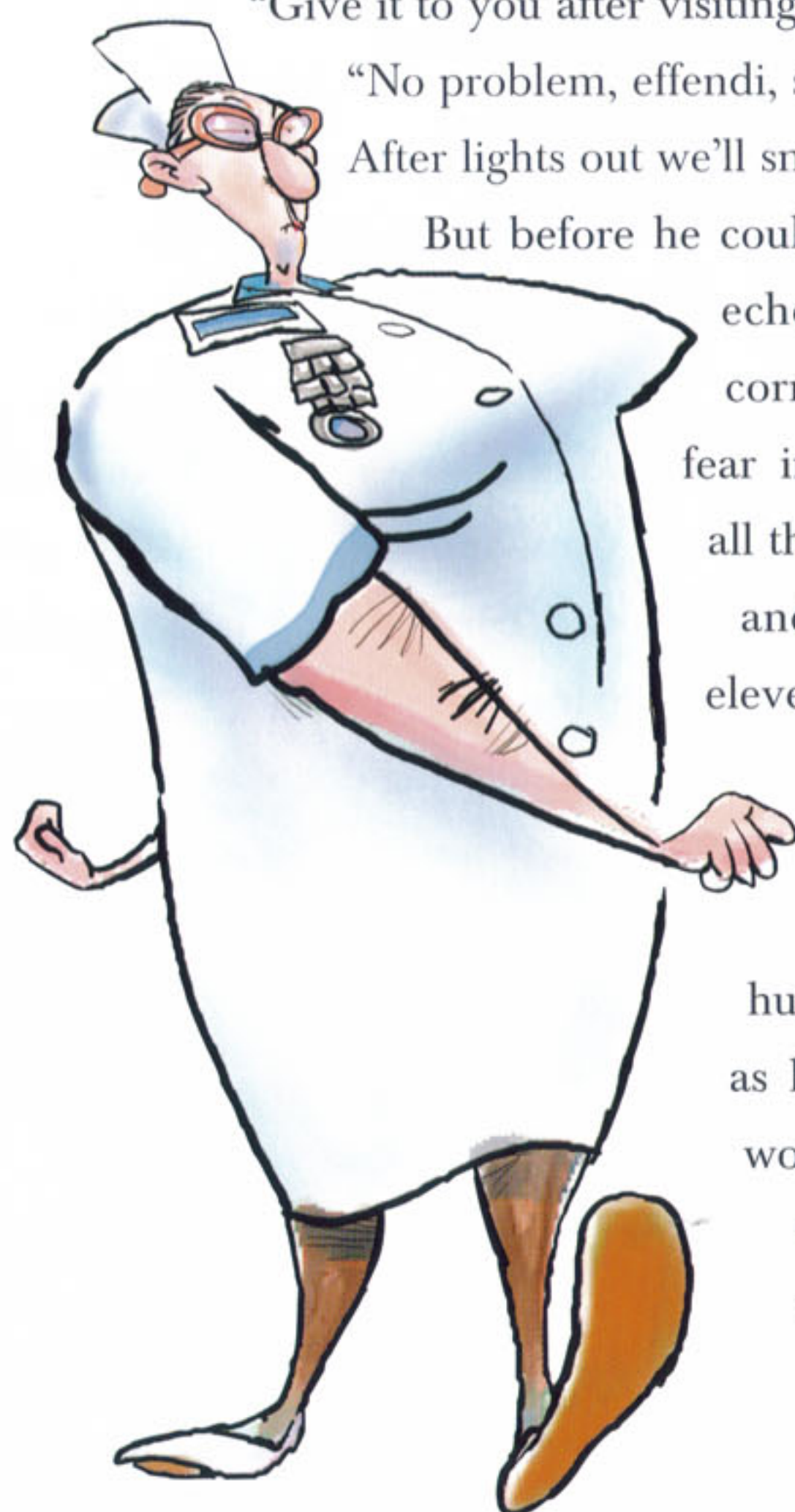
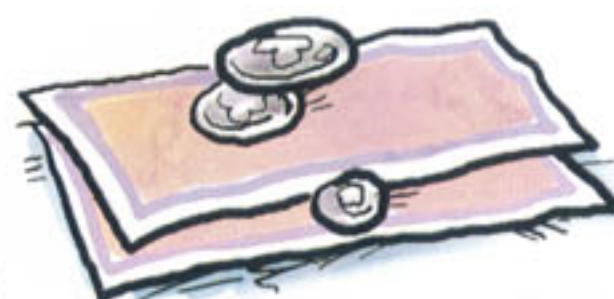
"I can take your order with the cash."

"Give it to you after visiting?"

"No problem, effendi, show starts at ten.

After lights out we'll sneak in—"

But before he could finish, a sound echoed down the corridor that struck fear into the hearts of all the patients, young and old, on the eleventh floor. "Check you later," Eric whispered hurriedly, and hummed off as fast as his electric motor would allow. It was always the sound first, a squeak of



rubber sole against polished linoleum, and the swish of polyester against polyester – squeak, swish, squeak, swish – that heralded the arrival of Head Nurse Bloc, also known as "the Commissar."

The Commissar stood at the open double doors of the ward and surveyed her domain. A tattooed porter stood behind her with an ancient wheelchair and a neatly folded blanket over one arm. Her beady eyes slowly scanned the ward. Stacy was sitting by a window hiding behind a copy of *Guy Trubble* magazine. She made eye contact with Head Nurse Bloc, and immediately a drop of blood trickled from her nose. Eric looked up from his gamester console, which was not switched on, and beamed at the Commissar.

"Yo, effendi. H'ya doing? Nice afternoon."

But her glance did not stop as it reached him. Instead it carried on to where I slouched, hands behind my head, *under*—and I emphasize the word—*under* the covers.



Because Head Nurse Bloc could not—would not—tolerate patients slouching under covers.

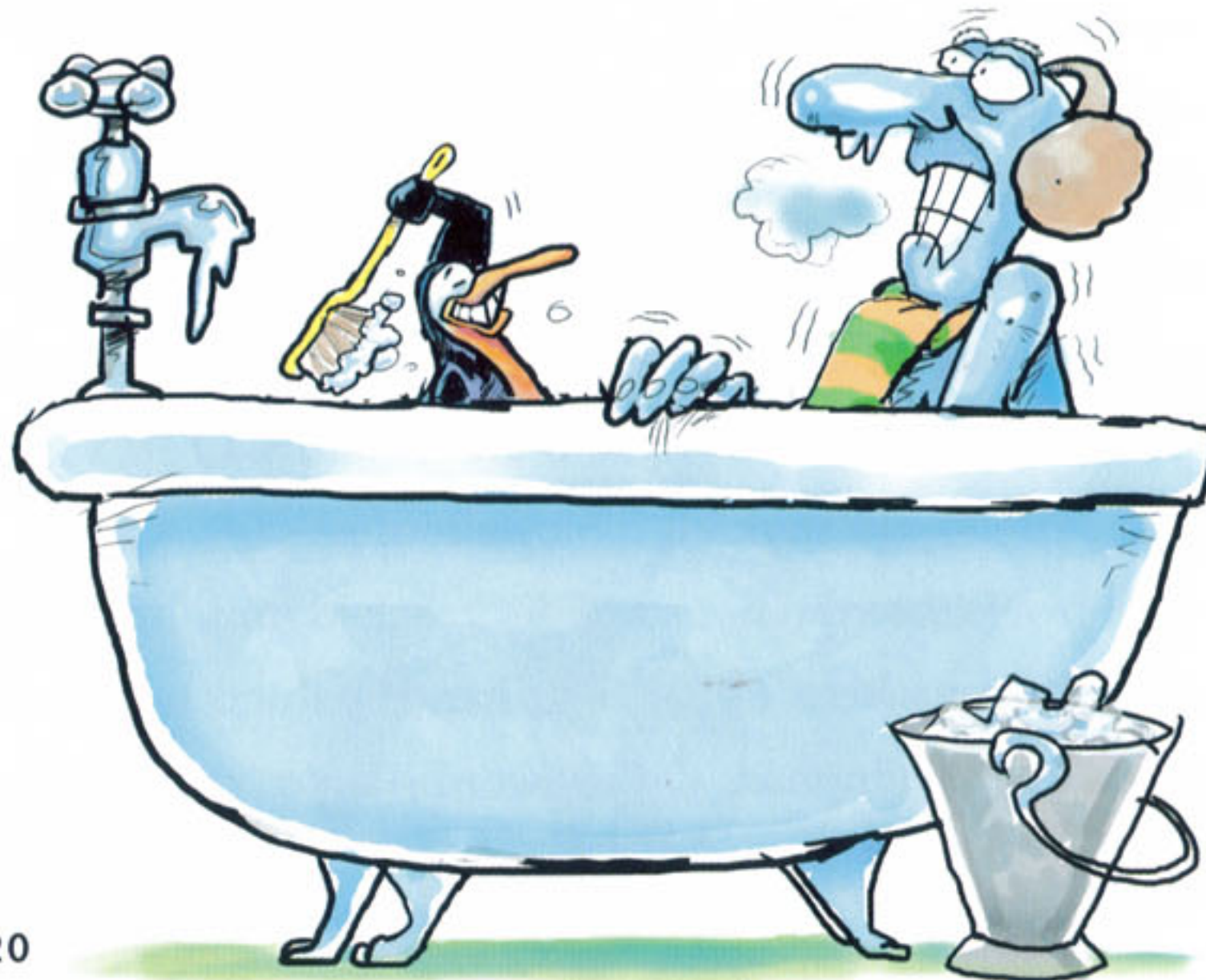
Nurse Willi ran into the ward brushing down her uniform with her fingertips. “Jamie,” she squealed. But the Commissar barred her path and marched over to my bed—squeak, swish, squeak, swish. “We are slouching,” she informed me.

I raised my eyebrows. “Ve ur slowgink?” I sneered.

“We are slouching under the covers,” she droned.

“Jamie has just had a consultation with Doctor Leech,” offered Nurse Willi, “I was—”

“We do not tolerate slouching under covers,” the Commissar went on. I rolled my eyes up into my head and croaked, my tongue lolling from the corner of my mouth, my hands waving limply in a mock fit. A giggle broke the



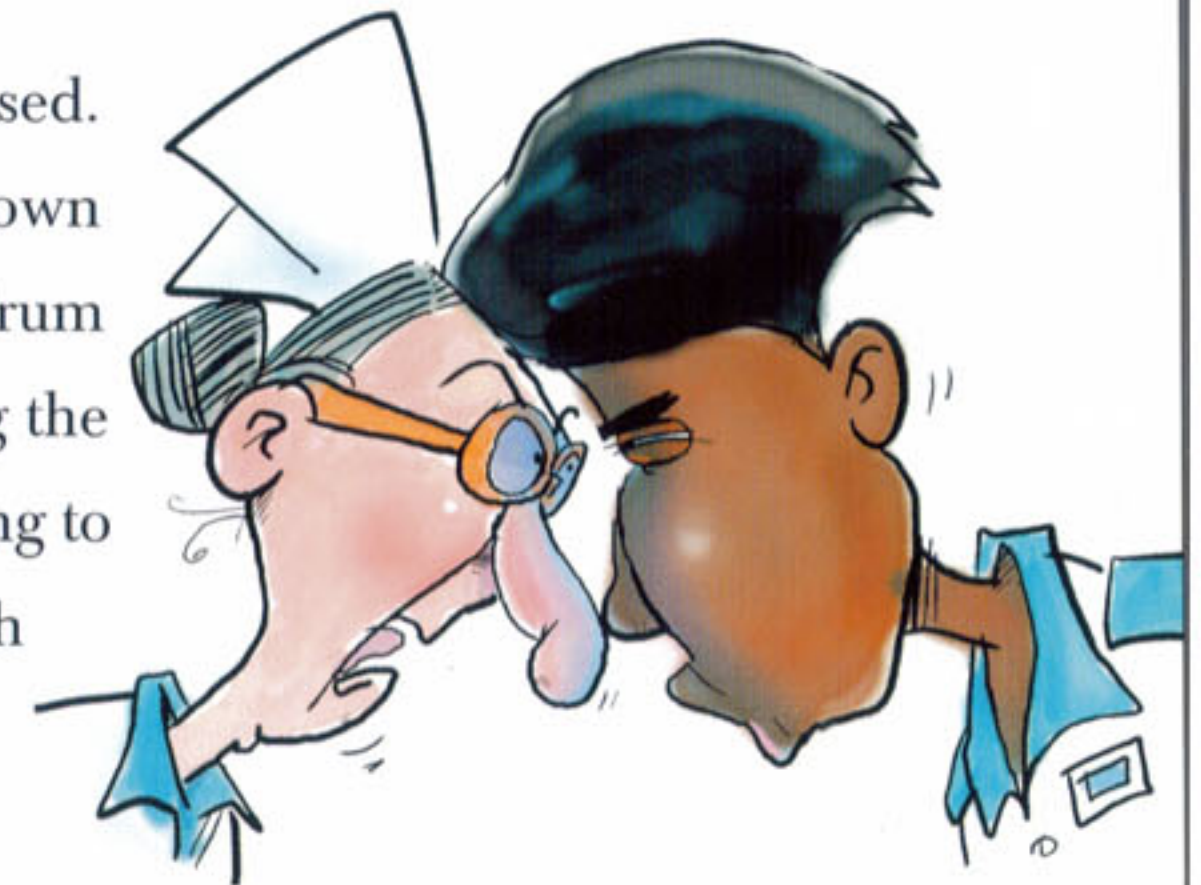
silence. This “under the covers” thing had been a bone of contention between us since we had met.

Head Nurse Bloc was from somewhere east-north-east of Eastern Europe (they had to get nurses from wherever they could these days), where Victorian values held fast and a cold bath “on the rocks” was still a good cure-all. It was this experience that had led Head Nurse Elsa Retnica Bloc to the belief that an upright patient was a healthy patient.

“Out of bed,” she hissed. “Nurse Willi, strip down this bed. As Master Drum seems bent on upsetting the other patients, he is going to join us on the fifteenth floor.” The silence around the ward was shattering. Stacy dropped her agony mag. Eric darted a look at her, and she stared back through a pink paper tissue. Stacy liked pink.

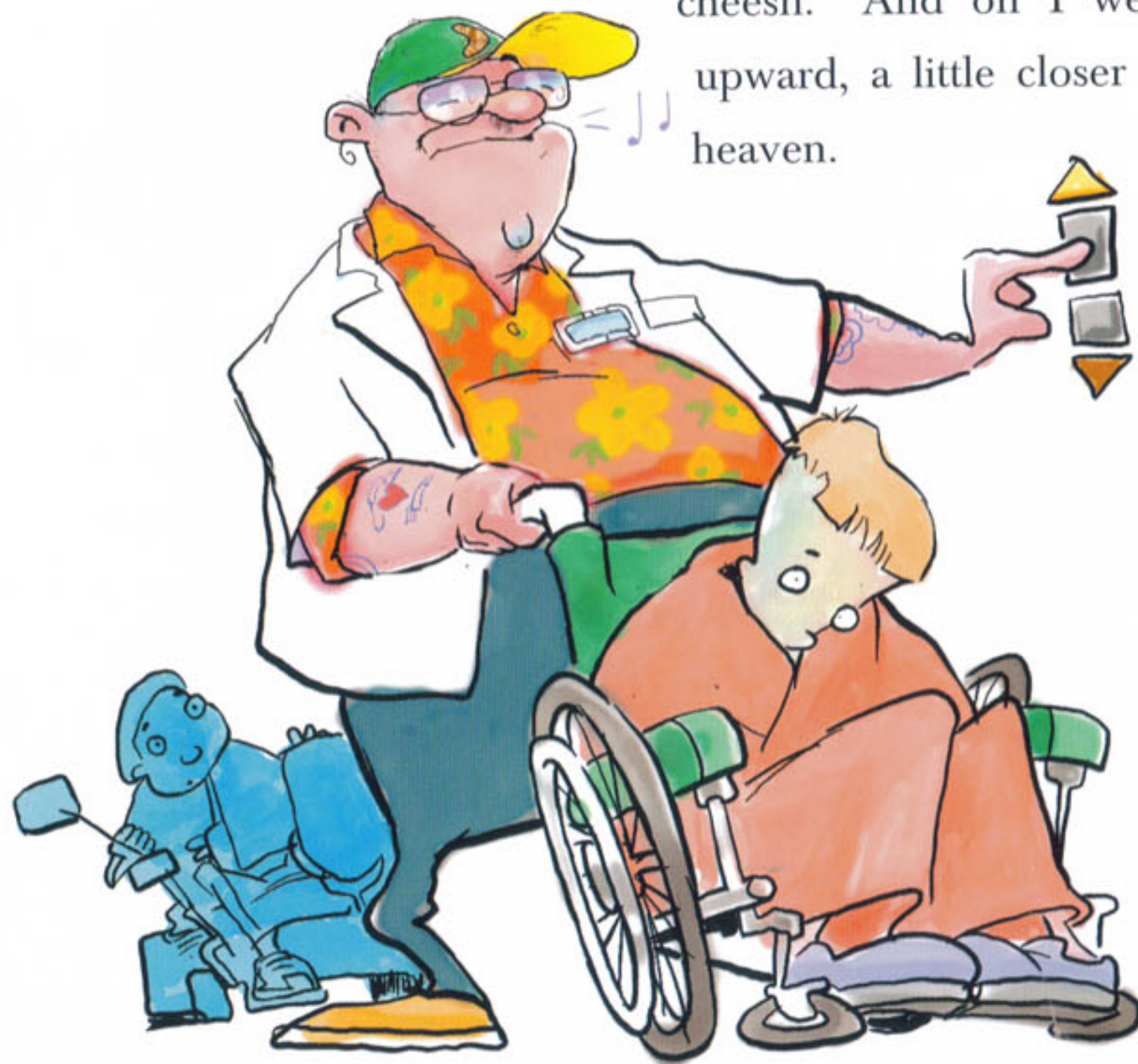
“Is that really necessary? Surely—” pleaded Nurse Willi.

The Commissar turned on Nurse Willi. “I believe it is because of your liberal—” she struggled for a word, “familiarity, that there has been a breakdown in discipline. Strip down this bed, officer!”



I could feel the color drain from my face. Gripping the blankets, I screamed, "No way, you must be kidding me! Fifteenth floor is for the old folks, people that are gonna croak. I ain't going, I AIN'T DYING, PIG OFF! I went dizzy, my head was spinning, there was a pain in my back, then I felt very weak. I fell limp into the arms of Nurse Willi. I caught the scent of starch and a glimpse of her bra as she and the porter lowered me gently into the wheelchair.

The whistling porter wheeled me down the long orange corridor toward the elevators, Eric following behind. As the doors closed, Eric gave me a drum roll: "Bub, boom, cheesh." And off I went upward, a little closer to heaven.



Drake's Law

The elevator ride up the four flights to the fifteenth was a quiet one. The boy just sat there. I could see he'd had the wind taken out of his sails and, I'd bet my cap on it, he'd given up the ghost and jumped ship. I've seen it happen time and again over the years. A doctor diagnoses a person as having a terminal illness, but how does *he* know their illness is terminal? Because, he may inform you with some authority, all the other people he has told that they are going to die, HAVE DIED! Shipworm!

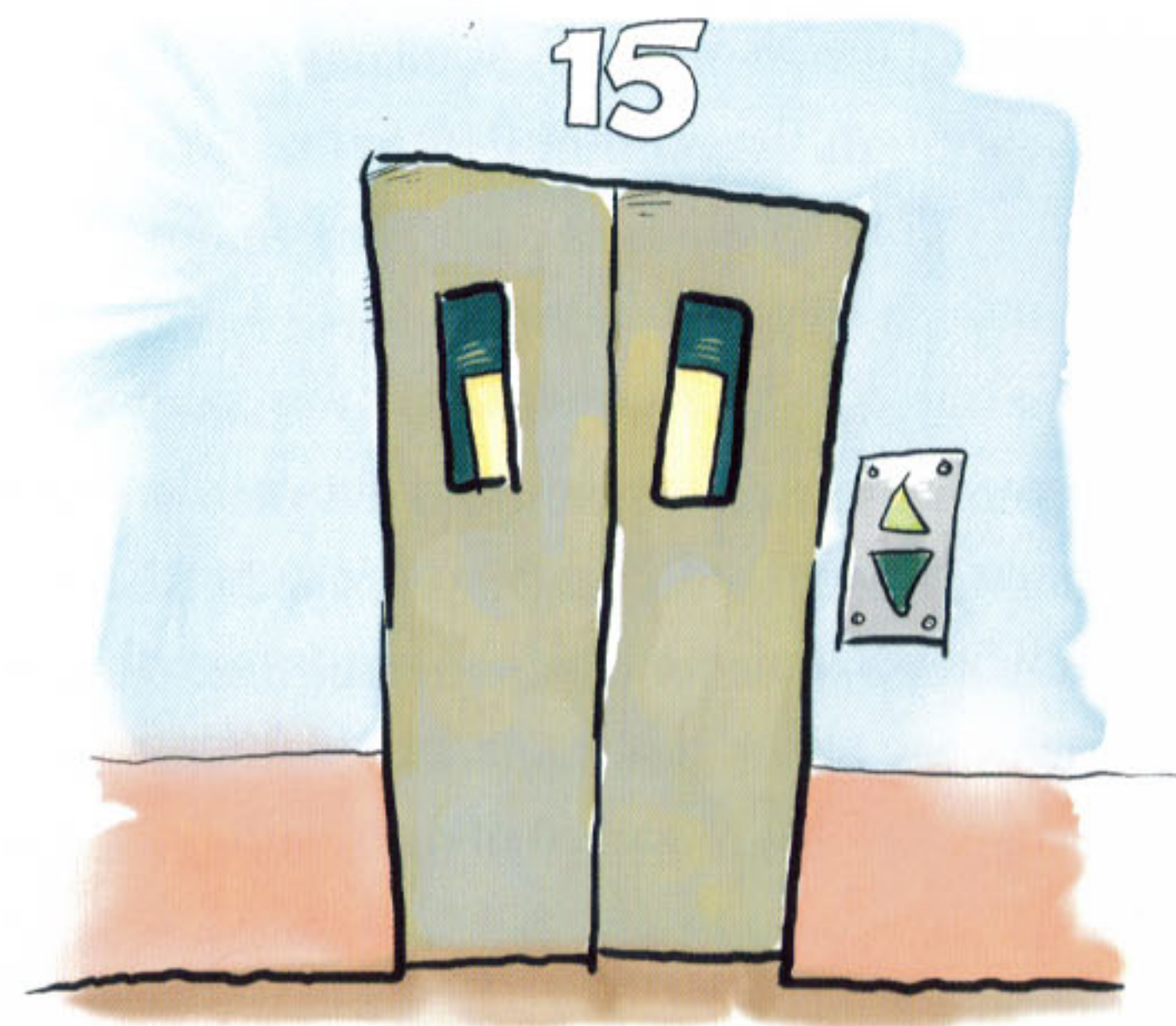
I ain't a bettin' man, but I'd bet my cap on it, if I were to tell you that an African Juju man can kill someone with a curse—just by telling the victim that he is going to die—you'd laugh it off as an old salt's tall story, all



wind and bilge water. Well, I've seen it. Porto Novo, nineteen hundred and fifty—urm—eight, never seen a person so scared, died within the fortnight.

Don't get me wrong now, I ain't saying that the doctor and the Juju man have the same motives. But it seems to me the outcome is the same. The patient (or victim) stops eating, gradually withers away, and finally gives up all hope, firm in the belief that the all-powerful doctor's will must prevail. But what I believe is, if it's possible to plant a death wish in someone's mind, then it must be possible to plant a life wish too.

And so, reader, I decided that I was going to add my two penn'orth, and set the cat among the pigeons.



The Fifteenth Floor

When the elevator doors opened I was greeted by that smell that all public buildings whiff of, you know the sort of smell? 'Cepting this one was mixed up with chest rub and wet dogs. Apart from the sound of coughing, and the occasional curse that



echoed around the place, it was deadly quiet. A shroud of twilight covered the entire floor—the blinds being permanently drawn.

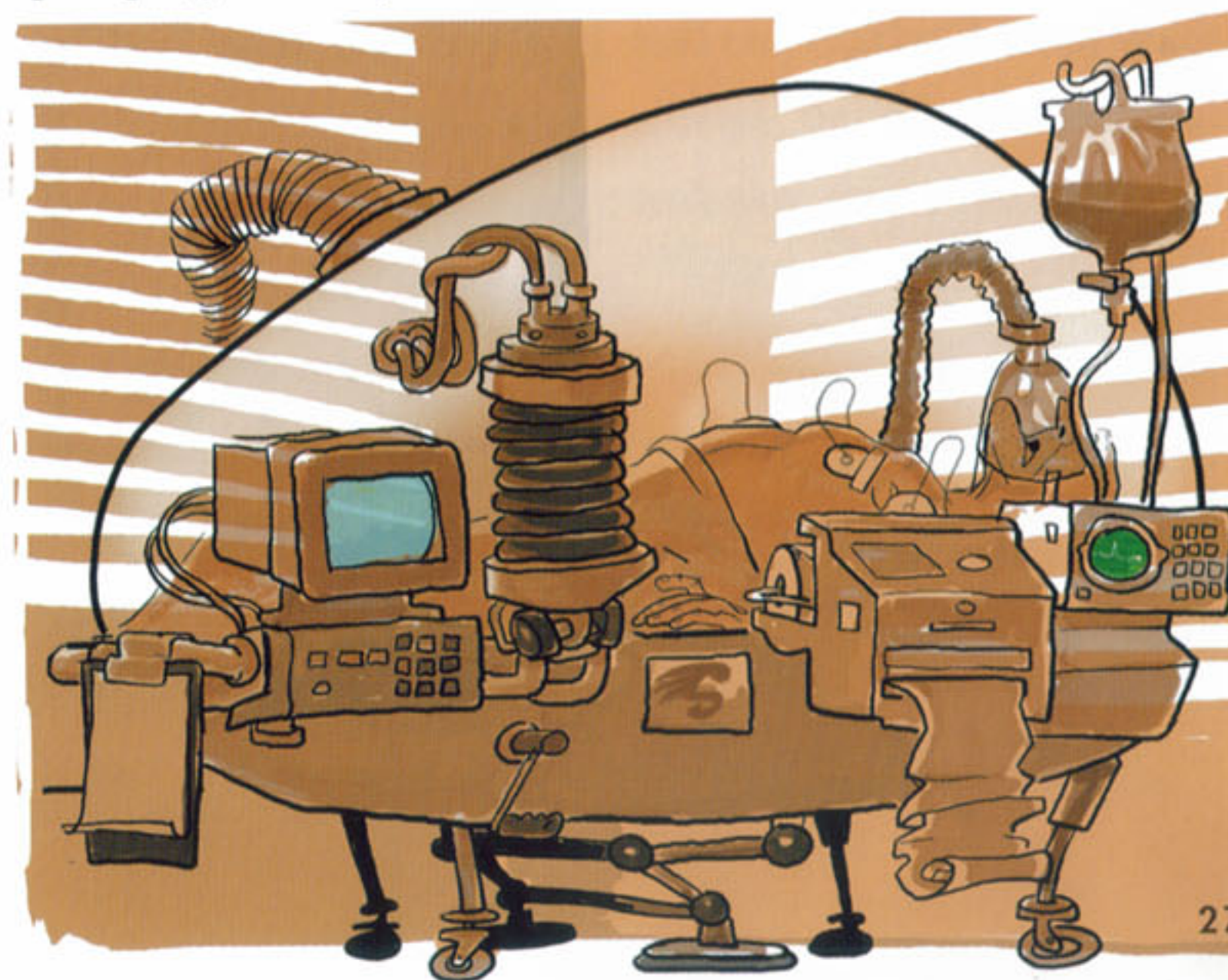
I was pushed in silence to my new ward. Rows of old men sat in the corridor. I could see I was causing some excitement. Some guys smiled in a toothless leer at me, others, their outstretched fingers aching to touch, as if to soak in my youth, squeezed garbled words from the backs of their throats, others just stared blankly into space, or catnapped away what remained of their days.



When we eventually arrived at 1540, my sepia-toned room—they were all private rooms on the fifteenth—the tattooed porter helped me into a straight-backed wooden chair. On the bedside cabinet he placed a brown paper bag containing my get well cards, notepaper, a graphic novel, my toothbrush, toothpaste, and hairbrush. He refolded the blanket over his arm and left. His whistling echoed down the long corridors, until it eventually died away.



I was aware that I wasn't alone in the room. In the bed next to mine was the shape of an old man, hooked up to what I could only imagine to be an iron lung. The machine showed more signs of life than he did, and seemed to be pumping the very life into him. It monitored his heartbeat



with an electronic beep and measured his blood pressure on a small computer screen, which was simultaneously printing out all the relevant information onto what looked like a pink toilet roll. The manufacturer was obviously proud of his machine, for on the side a fancy logo proclaimed it was the Sentinel, made by Platt Bros. Engineering Co., Oskaloosa, USA. Pat. Pending.

The man's breathing was shallow and erratic. Even in our first few minutes together, I was twice sure he had given his last gasp, but then he let out a rattling cough and started over again.

I collapsed back into my chair and let out a moan. I looked around the room and soaked up my new surroundings. Besides a print of some flowers by a guy called Vincent, and the regulation Emergency Fire Regulations pinned beside the door, the room was free of any decoration.

At some point in the afternoon, I can't say when — I had lost track of time — Head Nurse Bloc entered the room. "Master Drum, you



will please to swallow your medication." I held out my hand and she upturned a small plastic tumbler and shook out: one yellow oblong tablet, one white oblong tablet, one minute white tablet, and one capsule which was one half red, the other half transparent. It was filled with a million tiny yellow beads. I dutifully swallowed each one with a gulp of water.

"I think here, we can keep a close eye on you, no?"

I didn't answer, I couldn't even look her in the eye. The nurse bowed her head sharply, sort of military fashion, and left without another word.

"Cabbagebutt!" I shouted after her. The old man in the next bed stopped breathing for a split second. Then he coughed and started up again.

The medication always left me nauseous and tired. I climbed onto the bed and lay back. The blinds were drawn, shading out the afternoon sun, but the window was open and I could hear the Saturday afternoon shopping traffic fifteen stories below me. And it was with the sound of that distant civilization, the old man's rhythmic breathing, and the blips of the Sentinel that I eventually drifted off to sleep.



me back into my pajama top. She signaled to Mom and Dad to meet her in the ward's broom closet-sized office.

"We'll see you tonight, son, seven o'clock," Mom croaked.

"I'm not dying," I shouted after them.

Other parents visiting their sick and broken offspring gave me a disparaging look. "He shouldn't be in this ward, upsetting the other children," said one of them.

Another agreed. "He should be in a special ward, so as our children don't catch anything."

"I blame the parents," said a third.

"It may be contagious," another audibly whispered.



I don't mind admitting I was dip-scared. I didn't want to die, I was

only thirteen. I had only just got pubic hair, man, and they had shaved *that* off. I wanted to kiss Stacy Laurens, I wanted to be home looking through Mom's catalogs picking my Christmas presents, and watching TV. I'm not pigging dying, I thought, and I pushed my face into the pillow so no one would see me cry.

As the other visitors went muttering out of the pediatric ward Eric pushed a button on his state-of-the-art wheelchair and hummed his way to my bedside. "Yo, s'all fix, tonight we are going to party, I got pizza, Lorraine got a four-pack, and we got Nesbitt Bloodnut on video."

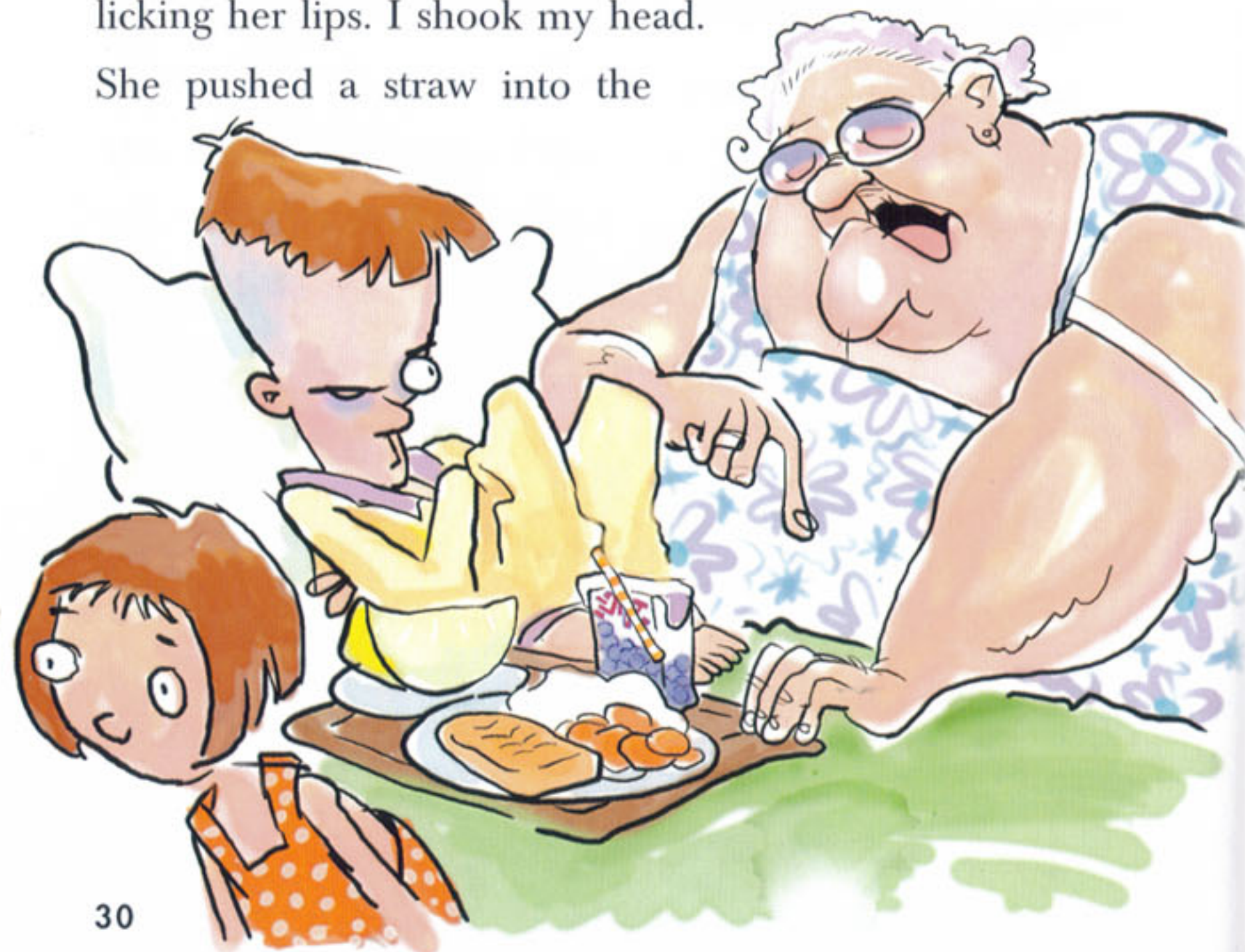


"What Nesbitt Bloodnut?" I asked, my voice muffled by the blankets.

Seven o'clock was the evening visiting time at Mount Ararat. Winter or summer, rain or shine, weary parents, loyal friends, restless siblings, and distant relatives would traipse through the polished corridors to the various wards. Bearing flowers and fruit, they would gather around a loved one and surmise about the other patients' diseases, their chances of recovery, their hopes and aspirations, jobs and calculated incomes, etc.

This evening Grandma Summers and my younger pain-in-the-butt sister Abbi were dragged up. Beside me on the bed lay my untouched dinner tray—melon, fillet of fish, carrots, mashed potatoes, and a carton of juice.

"Ain't y' gonna eat that, son?" asked the old woman, licking her lips. I shook my head. She pushed a straw into the



juice and offered it to Abbi, who was eying up the iron lung.

"Drink," barked Grandma. My sister took the carton, and Grandma put the tray on her lap and tucked in greedily.

"You're late," I snapped.

"You've moved," replied the old woman through a mouthful of cod and potato. I wanted to puke.

"Where's Mom and Dad?"

"They'll be 'long, they's just askin' that burly nurse why you done moved up here."

"Is it because you gonna die?" asked Abbi, still staring at the machine. "I don't want Jamie to die." And she climbed on the bed and gave me a hug.

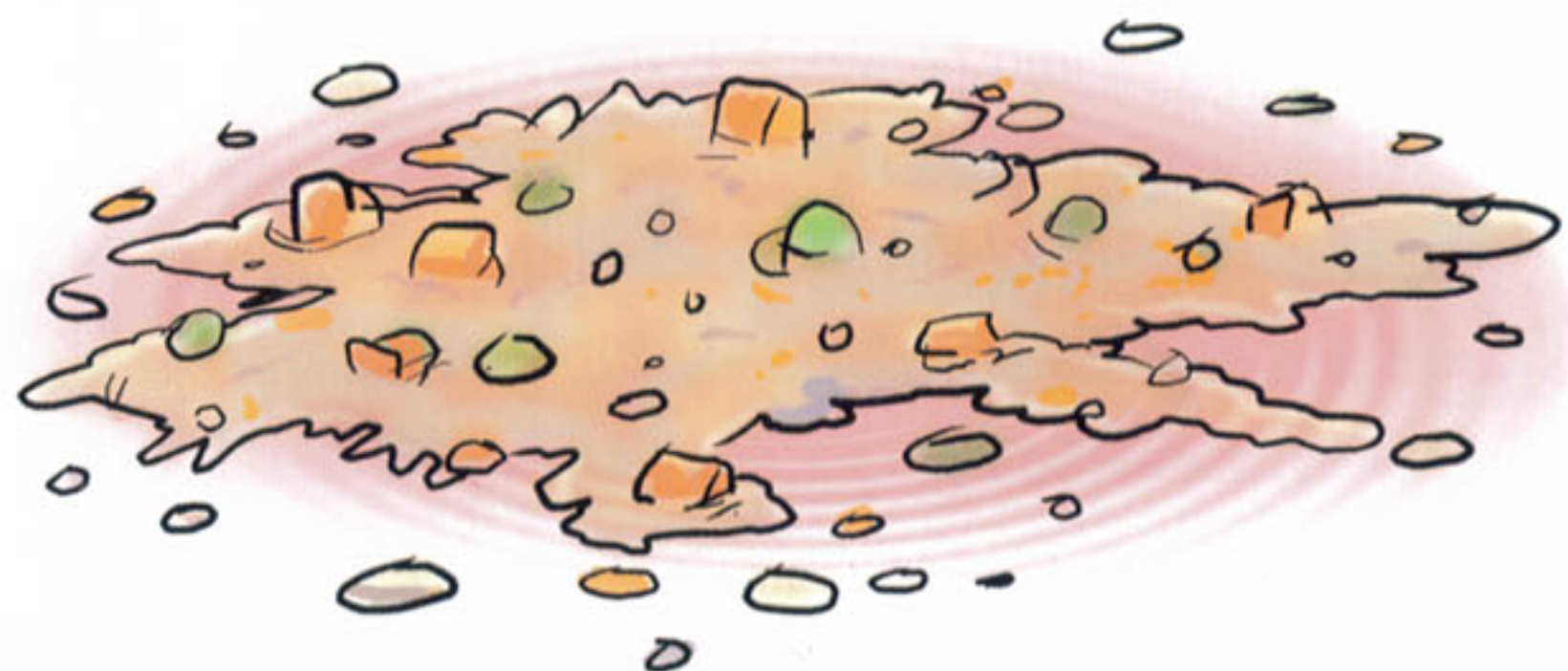
"Whoah!" I said, pushing her off. Well, anyone could have come into the room at any minute. "I ain't dyin'."

"Grandma said you are, and I can have your stuff but I've not to tell," said the girl, all innocent-like. "And I can have your room when you've gone." And now she started with



one of her moods, bawling, screaming, "I don't want your room, Jamie, you come home instead." She was freaking me, my head was spinning.

And with Grandma sitting on the edge of the bed, her mouth gaping wide and filled with cold fish, I couldn't hold back any longer. I threw up over the tray—and Grandma.



"It's just temporary," Mom is saying when Grandma and I've been cleaned up. "It's not a punishment, it's just that they'll be able to give you better care up here, the staff are more trained in your sort of problem. Abbi, don't play with the buttons, dear."

"Nurse Willi assured us that all the latest technology is up here on the fifteenth floor," Dad adds, "and guess what? Nurse Bloc is gonna keep a special eye on you, give you the treatment—ABBI DRUM, WILL YOU LEAVE THAT MAN BE!"

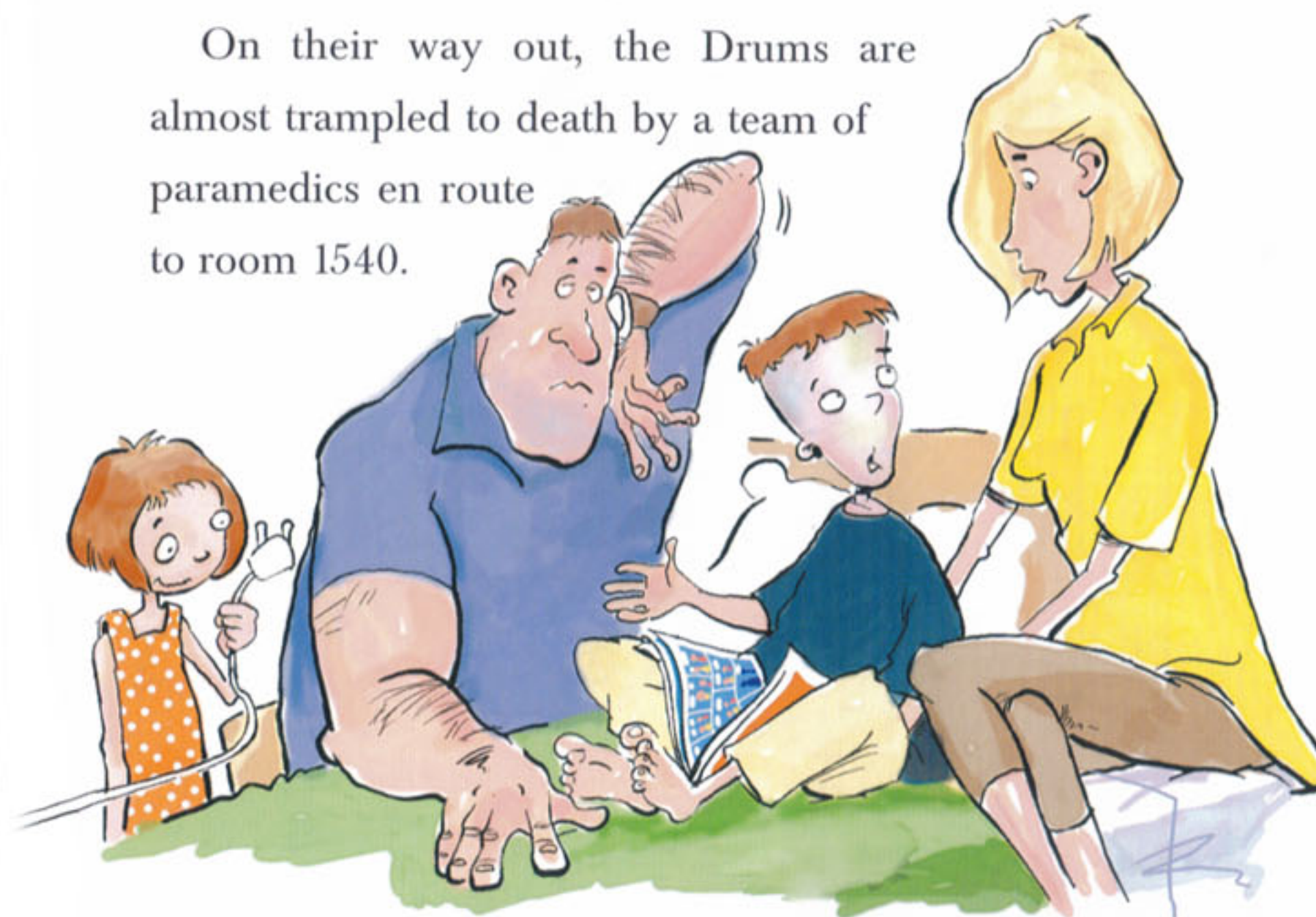
"Yeah, right, Dad, that's just what I'm afraid of."

"Now, now," he says. "I know you don't get along with Nurse Bloc and this isn't going to be easy for any of us, but, well you know we all think a great deal—" Dad is growing more and more embarrassed, tap, tapping on his teeth. "What I mean is, we lo—, we lo—" and just then, to save us all from being embarrassed to death, divine providence steps in with a deafening siren.

"Is that visiting over?" Dad says jumping to his feet. "Don't time fly. Well, guess we'll see you tomorrow, boy." He shakes his car keys.

Mom is shaking Abbi. "Abbi, what is that — YOU PLUG THAT MAN BACK!"

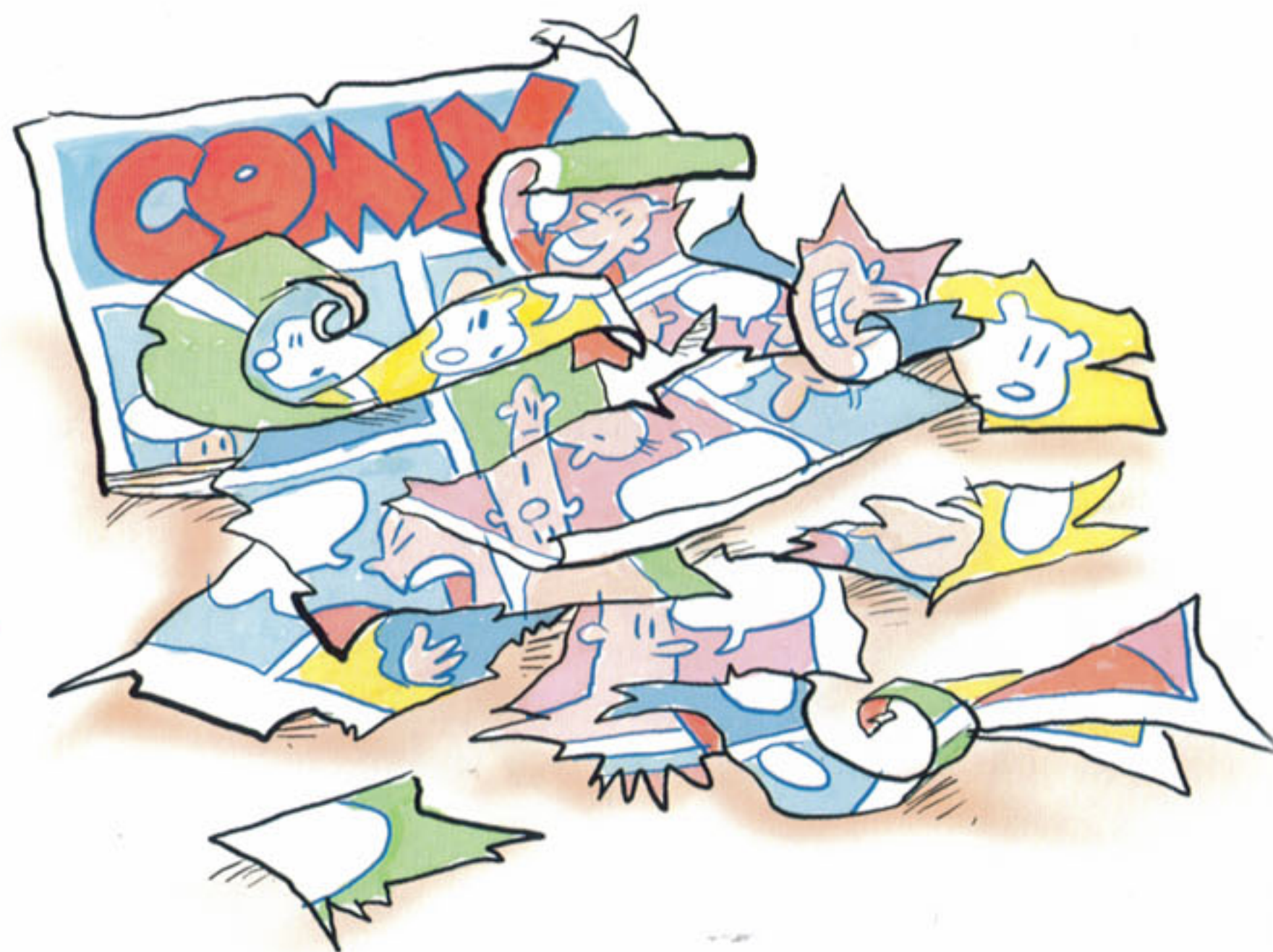
On their way out, the Drums are almost trampled to death by a team of paramedics en route to room 1540.



Jamie Drum's Massive Recovery

As I lie back on the bed, tearing up a comic Dad had left me, thinking about pizza and the Nesbitt Bloodnut body count, it suddenly dawns on me that maybe I am really going to die. I'll miss Christmas. I'll never get to kiss Stacy Laurens. I close my eyes and resign myself to my fate. And you know, I feel better, relieved. I feel as though a great weight has been lifted from my heavy shoulders. All of my problems will soon be over. I can now face the world with my head held high and a smile on my face, and die with dignity.

Like hell I will. I shout, "BOG!" as loud as I can.



Drake's Shipmate

Now, as it happened, the "old man on the machine," as he had come to be known on the fifteenth, was an old shipmate of mine. Most days I'd go visit him in 1540 during my lunch hour. As I entered the room I nodded at the youngster as I passed, and he just stared back at me, scornful like, and for the first

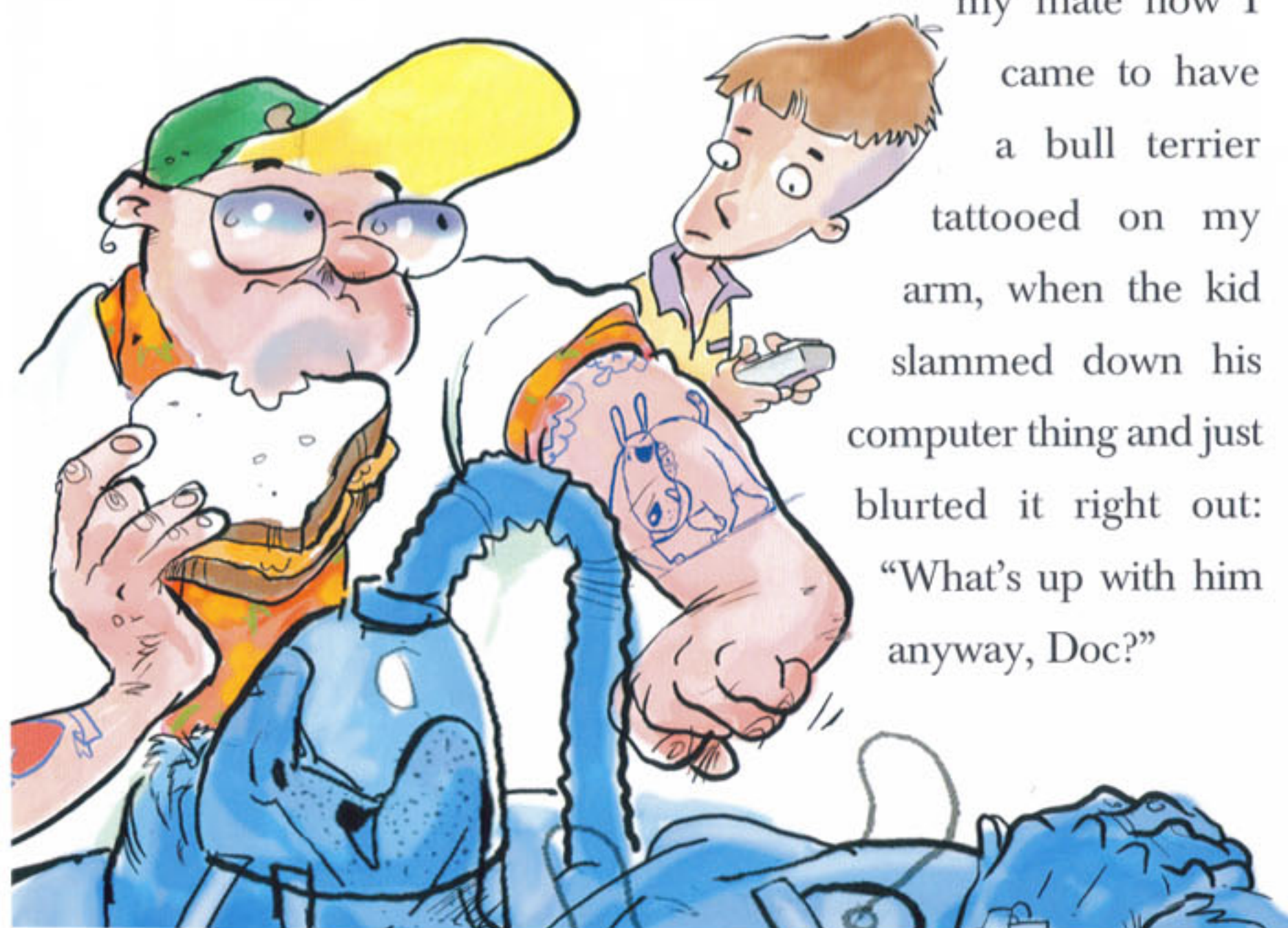


week or so that's about as far as we got. I decided that I wouldn't trouble the kid until he was ready for it. As I say, on our first couple of meetings we were on a sort of nodding/staring acquaintance only.

It was normal during my visit for me to sit and talk with my mate which, as you can imagine, was pretty one-sided. But sometimes, I swear, there were little glitches on his printouts that indicated recognition. I would sit and eat my corned-beef fritter sandwich and tell him about the weather, read the paper aloud to him, tell him who was doing what and to whom, just general tittle-tattle and trivia—nothing gets past me in this hospital.

Anyhow, after about a week of this, the kid could stand it no more. This particular day I was explaining to

my mate how I came to have a bull terrier tattooed on my arm, when the kid slammed down his computer thing and just blurted it right out: "What's up with him anyway, Doc?"



What's wrong with him, Doc? Kid thinks I'm a doctor! "Well," says I, all authoritative like, and I push my reading specs down my nose a touch. "He's ailing from what we like to call—urm—well—" and I ain't that quick on my feet these days, "worst case of *Sheepshank* I've seen in donkey's years." The kid gives me a hard stare. "Caused by smokin' cigarettes, drinkin' beer, and bitin' his fingernails."

As quick as a flash the kid sticks his hands into his armpits. "Aaah!" he hollers in mock horror.

The game's up. "How the heck should I know, I ain't a doctor. They calls me Drake."

"Jamie Drum." And we shake hands heartily.

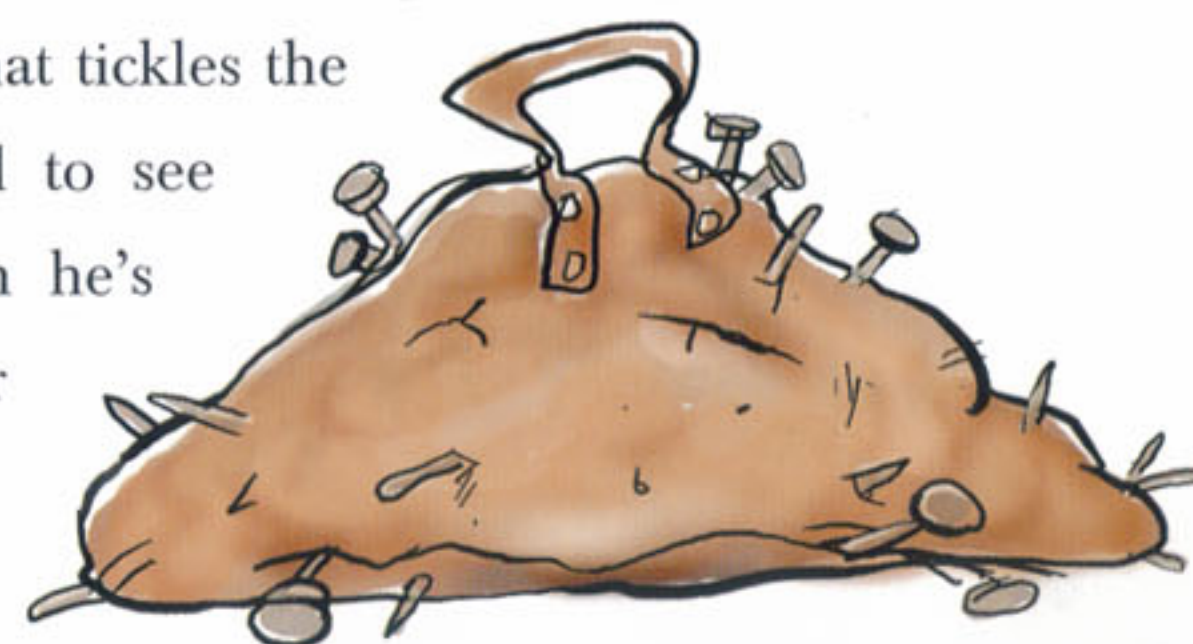
"Get any better?" he asks.

"Wouldn't bet my cap on it,"

I reply glumly. "Don't shed too many tears for him though, he's had a long voyage. Had a

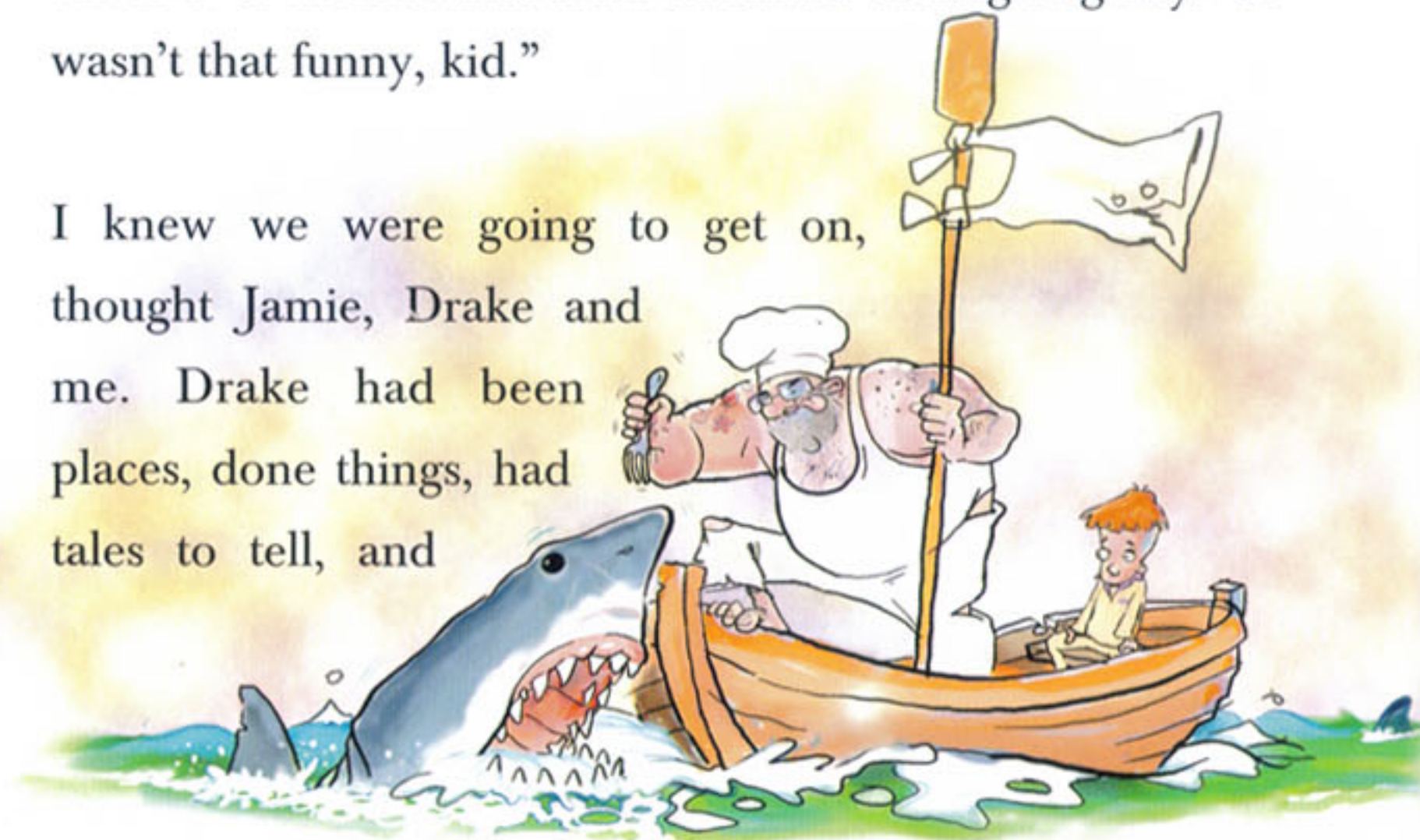
temper like a Barbary ape with a chronic case of

barnacles, and a face like a carpenter's nail bag!" Well, that tickles the kid and it's good to see him laugh. When he's done there's a tear



rolling down his cheek and I can see from the look that has taken over his face that it isn't because of laughing any. "It wasn't that funny, kid."

I knew we were going to get on, thought Jamie, Drake and me. Drake had been places, done things, had tales to tell, and



he could swear in seven different languages. He had an outlook on life that had never touched me before. I was glad of his company. He was also an awful gossip—he knew everything about the hospital, every patient, all the staff.

"I'm dying," I finally confessed to him, but he probably knew.

"Who says so?" asked the old salt.

"Doctor Leech, Bloc, Mom, Dad—"

"And how in Neptune's name do they know?"

"They told me I got—" but he stopped me, with a wave of his hand, and I could see I was in for one of his diatribes. He told me his theory of the Juju man, curses and death wishes.

I had never looked at it that way. What he said made sense but it didn't seem to matter any more.

"So what?" I moaned. "It's too late now, I only got a sixty-forty chance."

"Sixty-forty, not bad odds. I'd bet my cap on it, and I ain't—"

"A betting man. Yeah, you told me."

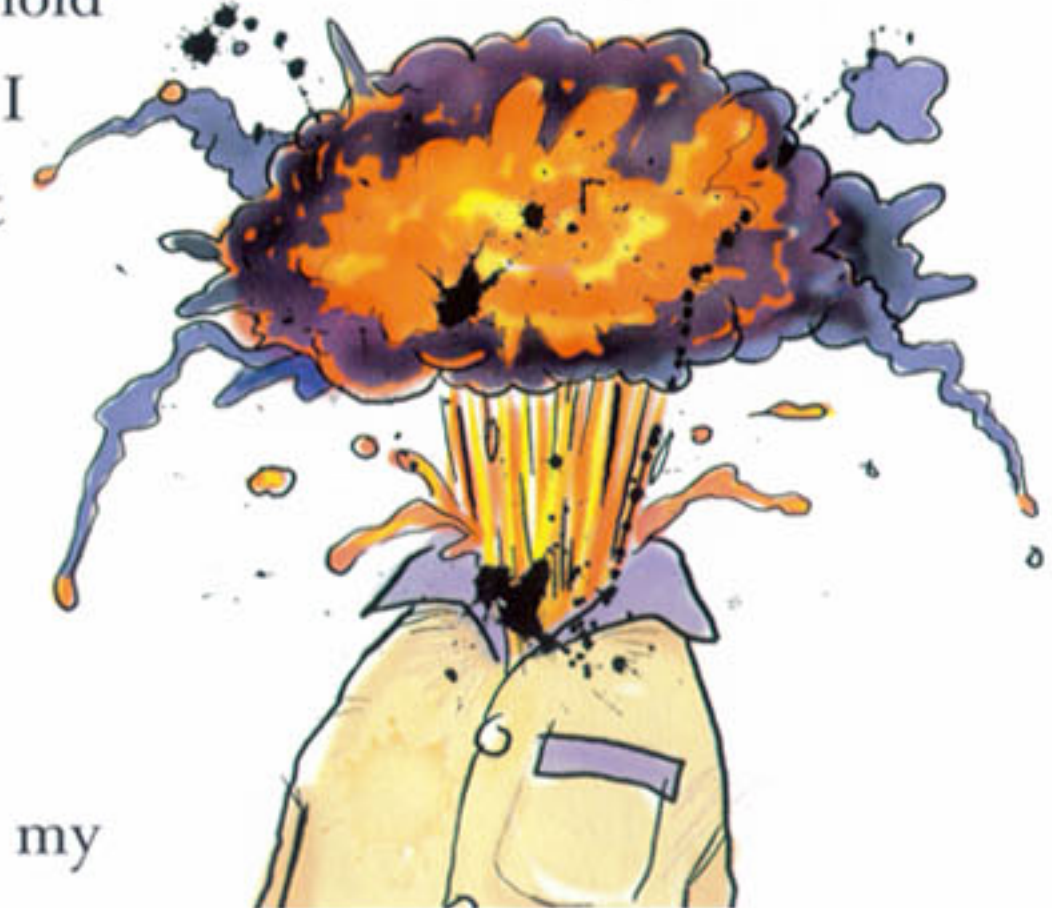
"You have the power to get well, we all do. You've got to help yourself. Doctors are doing all they can to keep you alive, but you gotta aid that medicine you're taking. I'll help you discover that power. If you want to give this disease the old heave-ho, you gotta stop bellyachin' and get on with it."

The boy is staring at me, Drake thought, gritting his teeth, and it looks as though Krakatoa is about to erupt. I don't like the way he has a hold of his hairbrush, so I take a step back, out of arm's reach.

"You want to live, don't you?"

"Pig off," Jamie mumbles.

I feel bad about my



Jamie Drum's Massive Recovery

broadside, but the kid is stuck in the doldrums. I want to get Jamie shipshape with all hands on deck.

"People are like phonographs," I explain.

"Do they still make phonographs?" Jamie laughs. Apparently it's only twelve-inch vinyl nowadays.

"Anyhow, sometimes the needle gets stuck and it needs a shove and a push to move it on a groove or two. Hear this, kid, I can show you how you can help yourself. Whaddyasay, spar?"

"It's up to you," he says.



Drake's Shipmate

"No it ain't, Jamie, it's up to you. You're the one is sick."

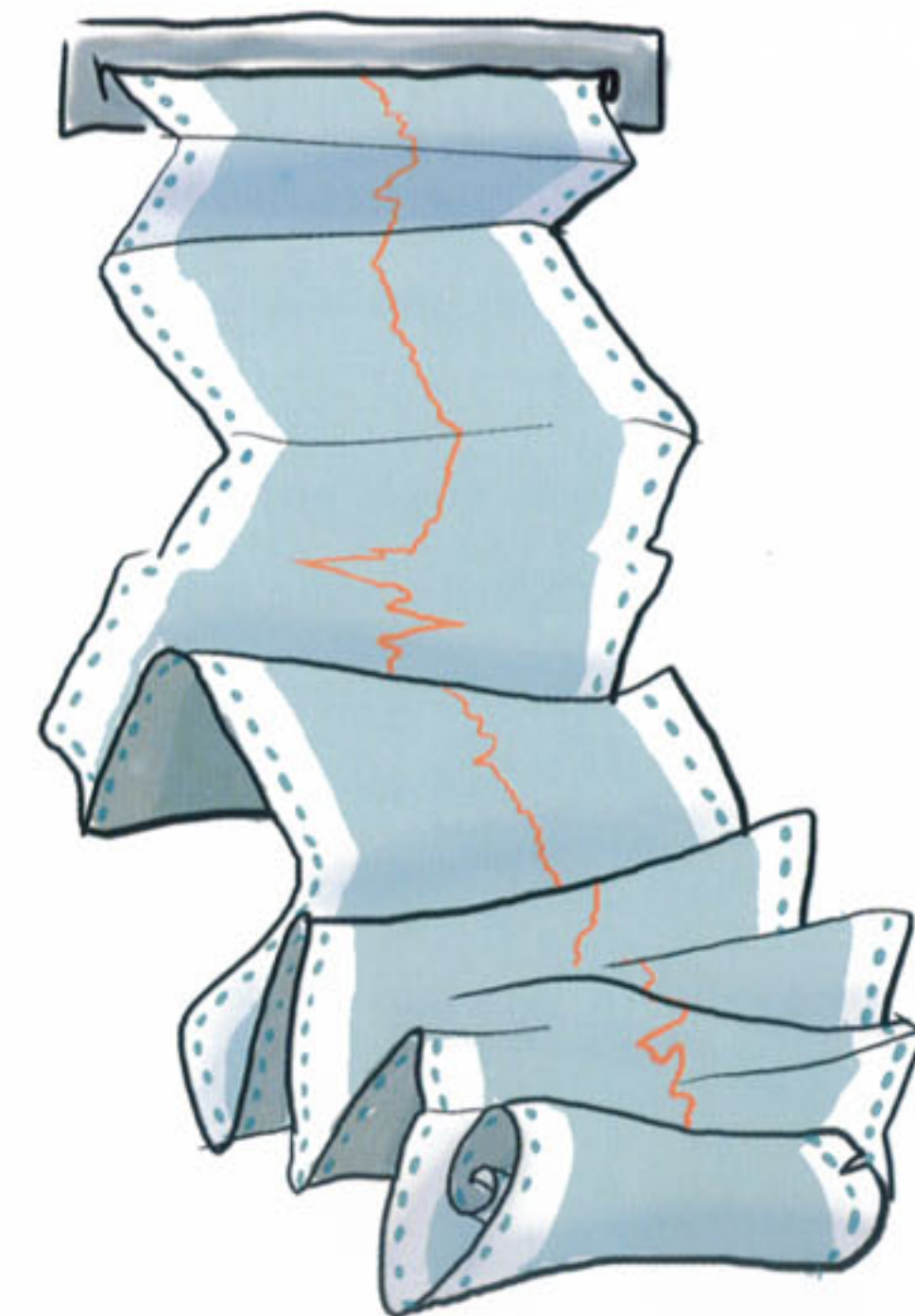
"I'm scared, Drake."

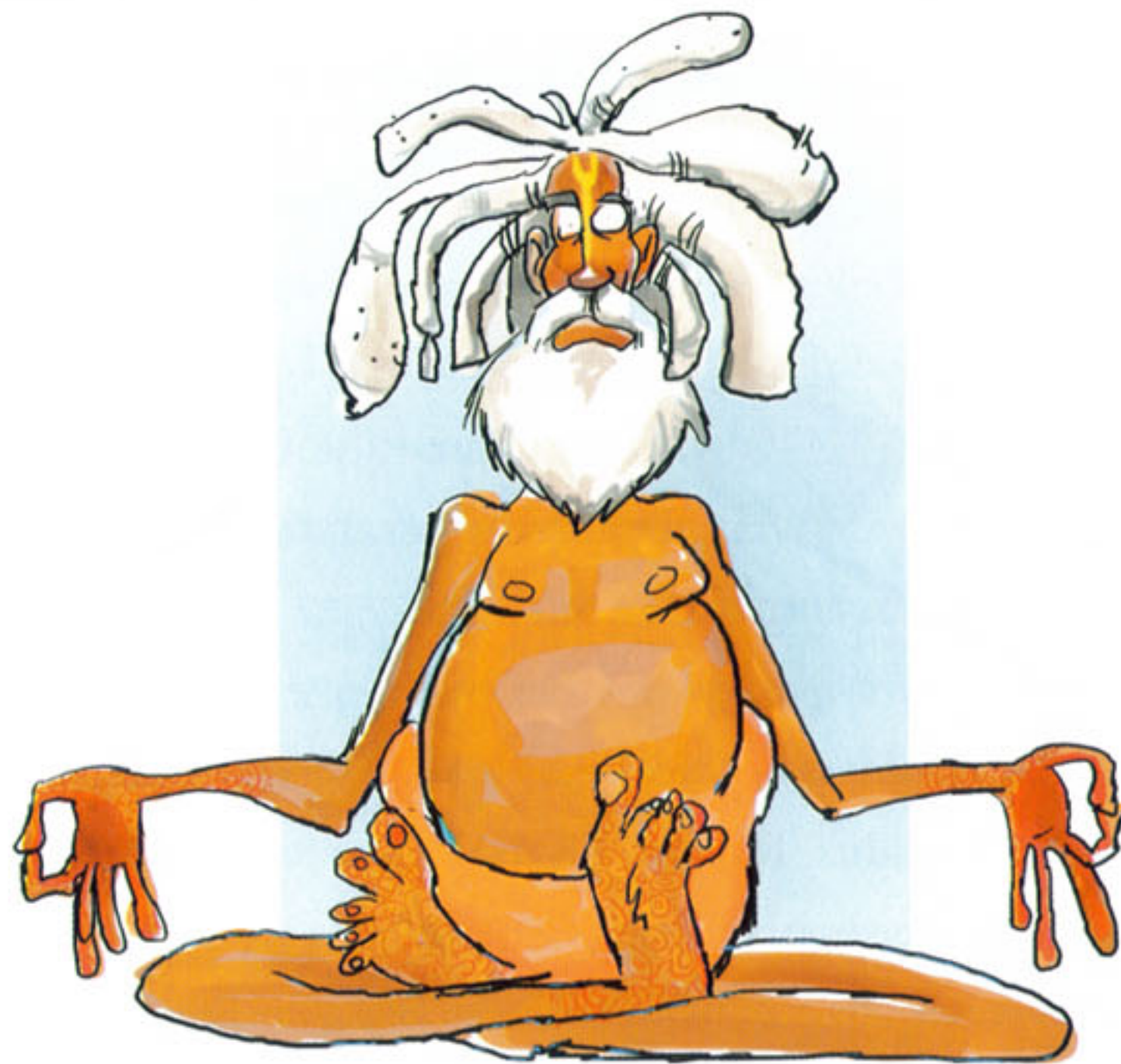
"'Course you're scared, your mom's scared, your dad's scared—"

"Okay, okay. Let's do it."

"Hold on, hold on, it's time I was back on watch. Tonight. Tonight I'll be down around eight bells, we'll begin then. I'll see you both later."

And the old man on the machine let out a rattling cough and the printout showed a little glitch.





The Night After the Night After Next

“Look, spar, if you’re just gonna lie there and laugh—” I’m trying to get this giggling teenager to understand how important this part is. We were three nights in and getting nowhere. It was something the kid had not attempted before, he couldn’t touch it. It wasn’t like TV—he had to participate in something he figured only “freaky hippies” or “Hindu yogis” did.

The Night After the Night After Next

“Ah c’mon, Drake. I can’t help it, I feel stoo-pid. It’s embarrassing. It’ll never work.” Jamie laughed.

“Well it worked for me,” I tell him indignantly. Jamie, suddenly up on his elbow, is interested.

“Really, what did you have?”

“Well, there was I three days out of Sarawak, with a boil the size of an orange on my—mind your own business—but I got shut of it, and that’s the point.”

“Just by relaxing?” He couldn’t get it.

“By learning to relax first.” (It was like playing deck tennis in a force nine.) “This is important, kid. You gotta be able to relax before you can access the power to defeat this thing. Anyway, what’s so embarrassing? There’s only me and you here, you can’t count Robocop over there.” The Sentinel blipped, the old man coughed.

“It’s those goofy expressions your face is pulling,” he sniggered.

By now Jamie is showing signs of exhaustion, his eyes are sunken, and though he has taken to wearing my Boomerang baseball cap, I can see he’s lost most of his hair. I stick out my false teeth and pull my worst face. We both laugh.



Jamie Drum's Massive Recovery

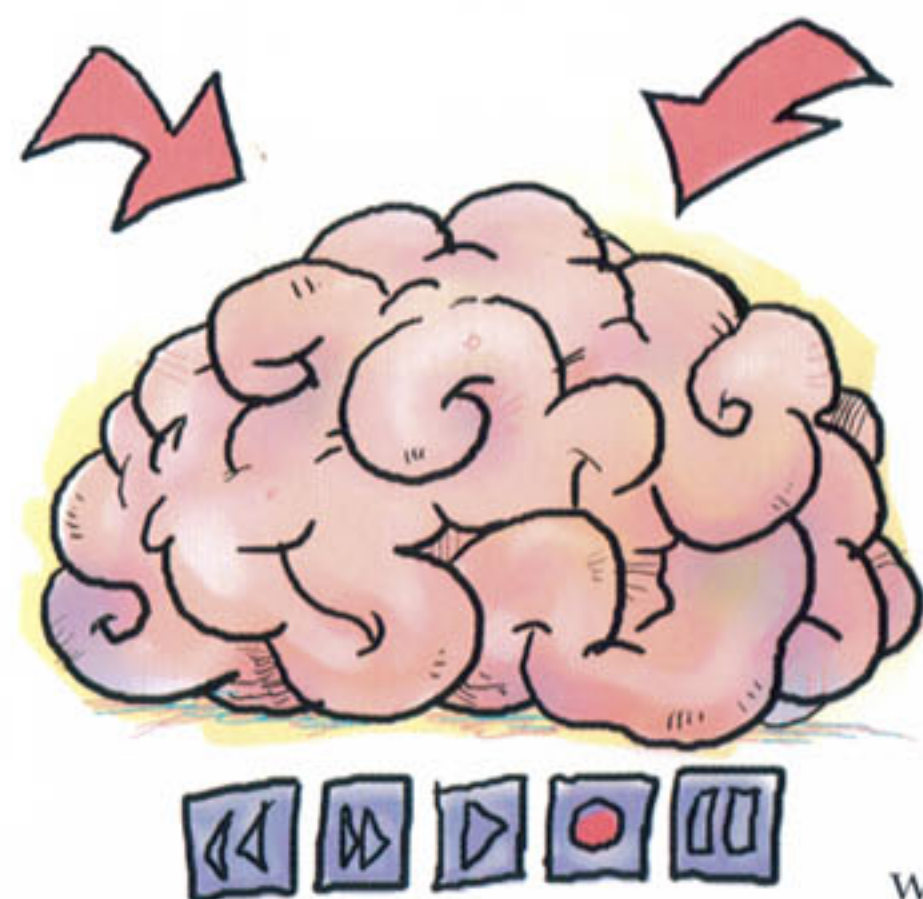
"Seriously, spar, it's a known fact, things like colds and flu, even cancer, can be created in the mind, therefore they can be limited or even cured by the mind. This isn't anything new, mate. Lotta people trying this method—with good results. Now the faster we get started, all the more chance you can kick this thing. At the very least you'll be involved in your own recovery, and not just a passive observer."

"I know, Doc, I'm trying. Okay. Ready." And he lay back in his bunk and closed his eyes.

"Comfy?"

Jamie nods his head and there's a grin spread across his face as long as summer.

"Okay, I'll begin. I want you to remember this—I want



you to relax, not sitting around watching TV relaxing, the kind of relaxed you get staring out of the classroom window, when you're miles away and shut off from the everyday

world, not even aware of your own body. Where your imagination doesn't just see pictures, but you can hear, smell, almost touch, and feel

The Night After the Night After Next



the emotions. Why, it's not until you are hit by the blackboard duster that you realize you have been so absorbed by your own thoughts. This is it, this is the state I want you to get your mind in. This is what you must practice—and not just here, anywhere, even in the john.

"This exercise'll help you get into that state of mind, help you to find that inner peace. So you forget your worries for a while and think positive, get a positive picture of yourself in your mind.



"I want you to flex every muscle in your body—one by one—from your toes right up to your head, even the ones in your neck and jaw, your eyes.

Jamie Drum's Massive Recovery

Pull that funny face, to hell with it. When your body feels warm and relaxed, let your breathing become even and regular. Imagine the sun slowly passing over your body. You can feel its warmth, and the warmth produces a sense of heaviness, until your entire body feels like lead, and you can't move. Jamie, now you're ready to use your imagination. Allow your mind to run free, let any old notion or ideas or thoughts enter your mind. If they seem insignificant, no worry, watch them, change them, become part of them—you are in control."

In a few minutes Jamie was totally conked out. I sat and watched him for a while. Shipworm! If he thought this part was freaky hippy stuff, I wondered how I would whip up his enthusiasm for the next stage — visualizing.

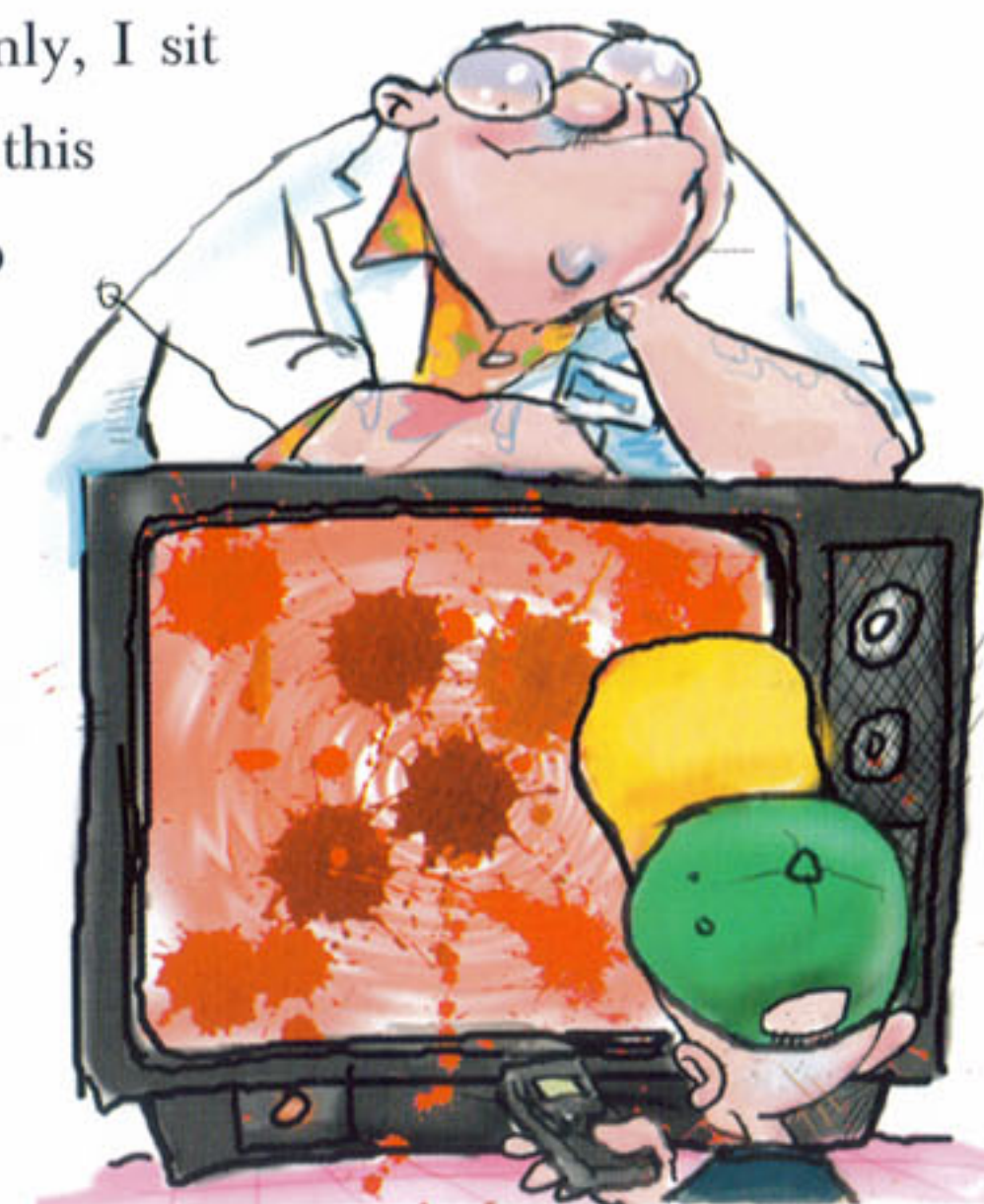


Visualizing

One miserable, wet Sunday afternoon in September I took Jamie below decks to the eleventh floor.

His friends Eric, Stacy, Nurse Willi and me were sat in the TV lounge eating pizza and watching a video that Jamie had been looking forward to seeing. I was not really paying any attention to the screen (Errol Flynn is more my cup of tea). I was more interested in expounding my creed to Nurse Willi, who I think is a little skeptical, but she's too polite to show it. Suddenly, I sit up and take notice of this character hamming it up on screen.

Nesbitt Bloodnut was waging a personal war on arms dealing. He had single-handedly wasted three sleazy politicians, an entire company of mercenary



soldiers and a crooked circuit judge, when it dawned on me that I would have to change tack with Master Drum. Having him imagine himself swabbing the deck of a ship to cleanse himself of *Windpepper's Malady* just wasn't going to raise his mainsail.

"That's it," I tell him through a mouthful of margarita. "You got to imagine there's a war going on inside your body, son, between the good guys—that's you, your immune system, the white blood cells and stuff, your medication," I swallowed, "and them—this deadly disease, *Windpepper's Malady*—the bad guys."

It's suddenly become very clear to me. "What you need to do is give the good guys a little encouragement—inspiration, motivation. You'll be the Generalissimo directing and coordinating the battlefield. You're going to fight this disease to the death. It's aggressive and hostile, so you gotta be too! It's either you or it!"

It clicked.
Jamie's eyes



are darting around like midges over a muddy puddle.

"It's like a movie," Nurse Willi says excitedly, "but you're the scriptwriter, the director, and even the star if you want to be."

"I get it. I could be a cowboy!"

"Kid Drum—the fastest gun in the West!" I declare.

"A medieval knight!" says Stacy. "Sir James De Drum!"

"Top Gun pilot!" says Eric.

"Swashbuckling sea captain!" says I.

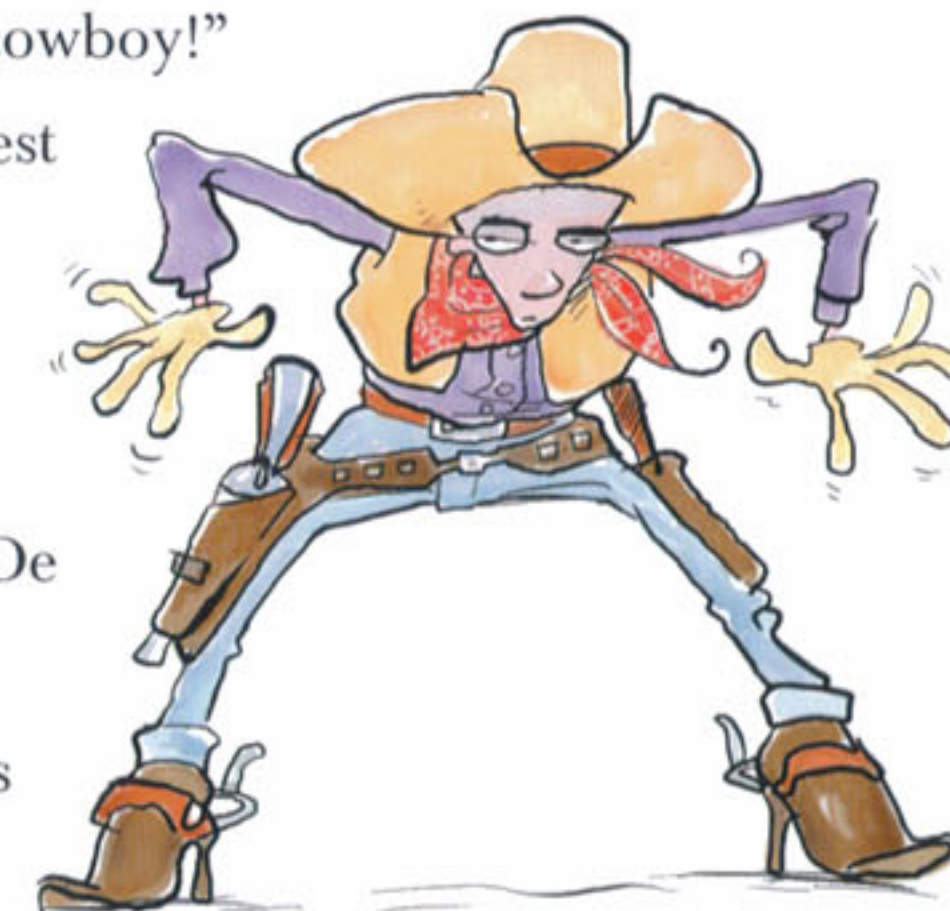
Silence.

"Top Gun pilot!" laughs Jamie. "You got it, you got it." And I'm on my feet dancing around the room with Nurse Willi, and now we're both laughing so hard, we don't notice Head Nurse Bloc is stood by the door.

She just stands there and sniffs, loudly. She stares at Drake and Nurse Willi, shaming them into letting go of each other.

"You're having fun times, no?"

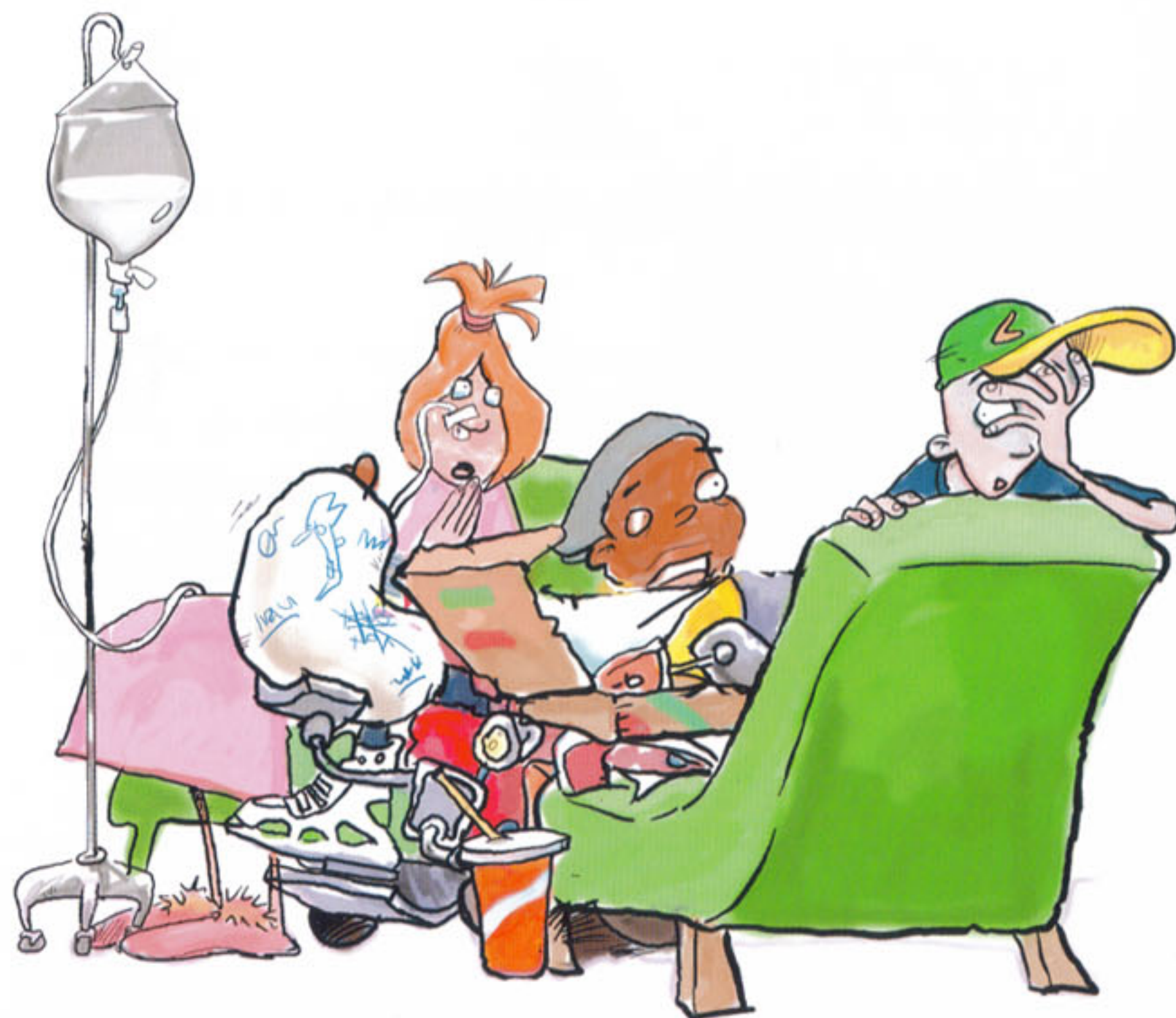
"We were just—"



"I too like to have fun times. You are eating pizza, Jamie, maybe the hospital food you don't like?"

It's a loaded question. I give her my best sneer. I hadn't eaten any pizza, I wasn't hungry, I hadn't been hungry for weeks.

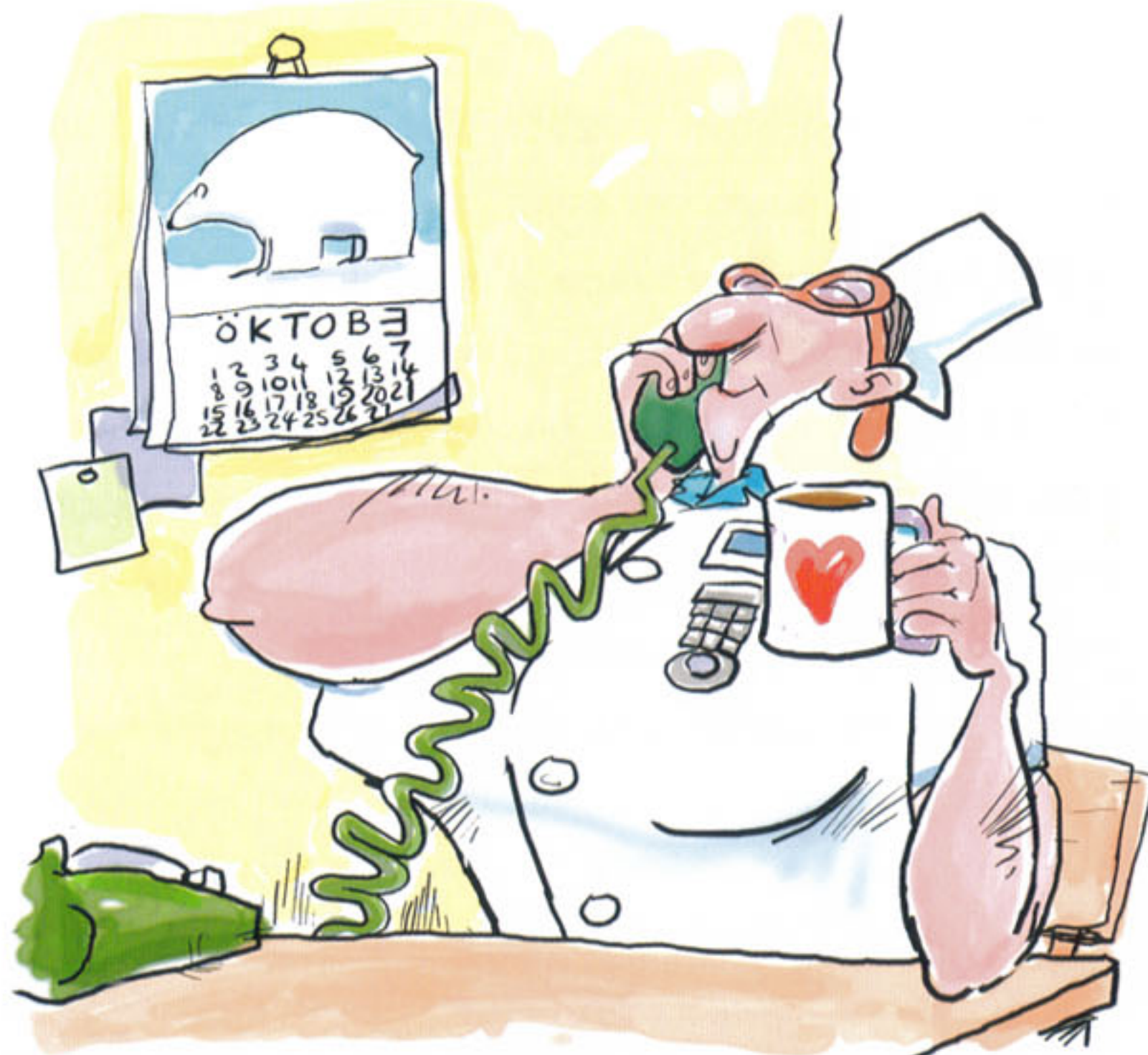
"Nurse Willi, you will kindly inform security I have found Master Drum." The Commissar speaks calmly, yet there is an underlying current of menace in her tone. Nurse Willi gives me a sly wink as she hurries out.



"You shouted 'man overboard' a little early," Drake tells her.

"Mister Drake, Jamie must take his medication at strict regular intervals. That moment is now—" she glanced at the fob watch that rested on her huge Slavic bosom, "precisely twenty-two and a half minutes past. I suggest you take Master Drum back to his room, where I can personally supervise his medical care."





Drug Wars

Head Nurse Bloc sat at her outrageously tidy desk and raised her faithful coffee cup to her lips, as she did every afternoon at four, and smiled. Closing her eyes she took a sip of her earthy coffee, picked up the telephone and bleeped Archie—Doctor Leech.



Drug Wars

“Hi, Jamie. How are you feeling, hmmm?” Doctor Leech droned, his head leaning over toward his left shoulder. Head Nurse Bloc stood at his side, ready to attend his every wish. She handed the doctor a report from my file.

“Fine,” I said.

“That’s not what Nurse Bloc tells me,” he mumbled as he read the report.

I shrugged my shoulders.

“Now what’s all this nonsense about not wanting your medication?”

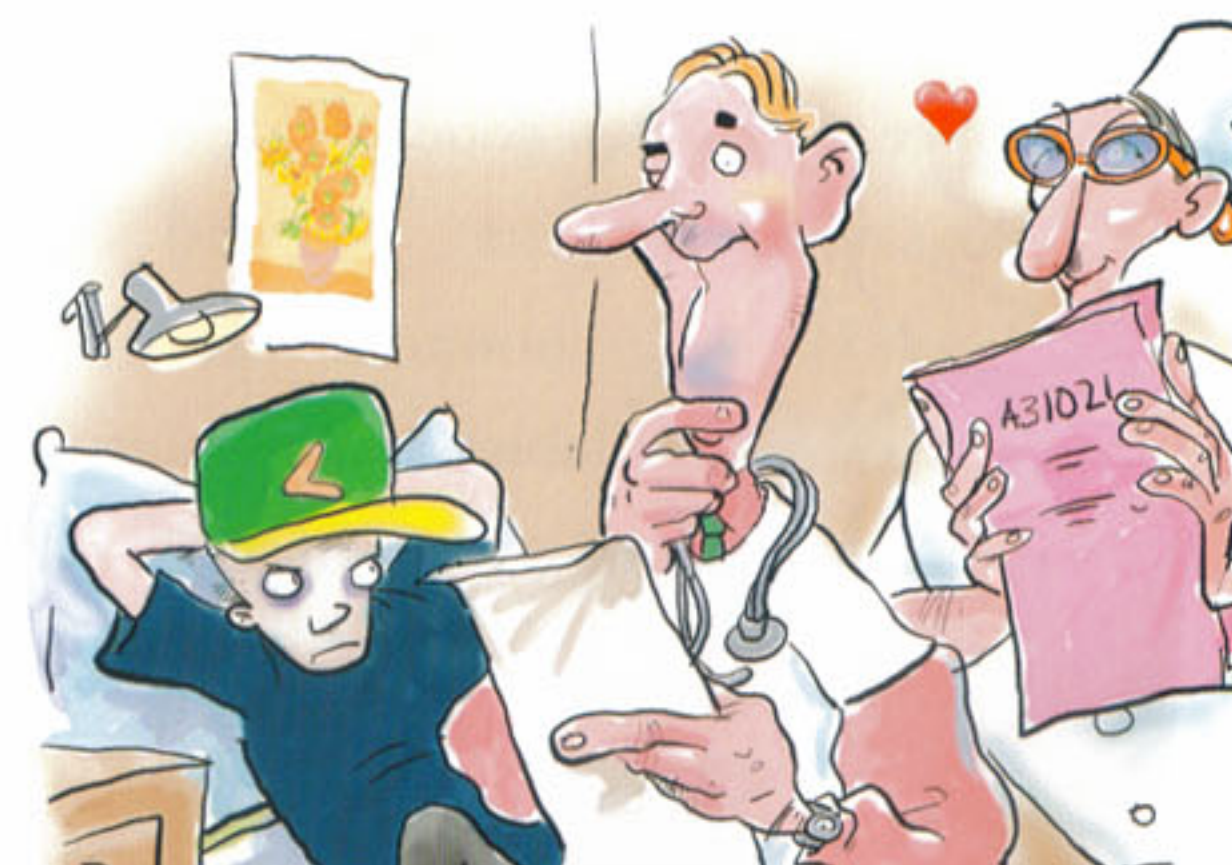
“I don’t want them anymore, they make me puke.”

“What course of treatment is Jamie on at the mo’, nurse?”

Head Nurse Bloc handed him the relevant information before he had even finished his sentence.

“Yop,” he said as he read, “yop, yop—super!” He folded his arms, and fixed his chummy smile on me.

“Well, it’s nothing to be concerned about, Jamie. Side effects, is all. Perfectly normal. So if you’ll—” Head Nurse Bloc handed the doctor the plastic cup, “just take your little tablets, then we’ll say no more about it, hmmm?”



"I said I don't want them anymore. They make me puke!"

"Oh come come, Jamie, they're doing you the p.o.g., really, the power of good—hmmm?" And Doctor Leech cocked me a cheery eye.



"I'm doing me the power of good, I got the power, I don't need pills and drugs anymore."

"We could hold him down and blow them down his throat through a pipe?" fawned the Head Nurse.

I folded my arms, clenched my teeth and growled at them.

They weren't going to get any pipes down my throat, or down anywhere else.

"I don't think that will be necessary, nurse," Doctor Leech said as they both instinctively took a step back. Doctor Leech's cheek twitched nervously.

"I've a lollipop for you in my office, if you're a good boy and take your medicine. Hmmm, Jamie? Well, hmmm?" He offered me the tablets in his upturned palm.



"Oh Doctor," the Commissar whimpered. "You're so

wonderful with children." Her legs turned to jelly.

"Pig off!" I shouted through clenched teeth, and took an upward swipe at the doctor's palm that rocketed its payload skyward. "I don't want them anymore. Drake has shown me what to do, I'm going to visualize me better, that's what'll cure me, not your piggin' pills!"

"Drake? Drake?" said Doctor Leech to no one in particular.

Head Nurse Bloc shrugged her shoulders. "A porter," she offered dismissively.

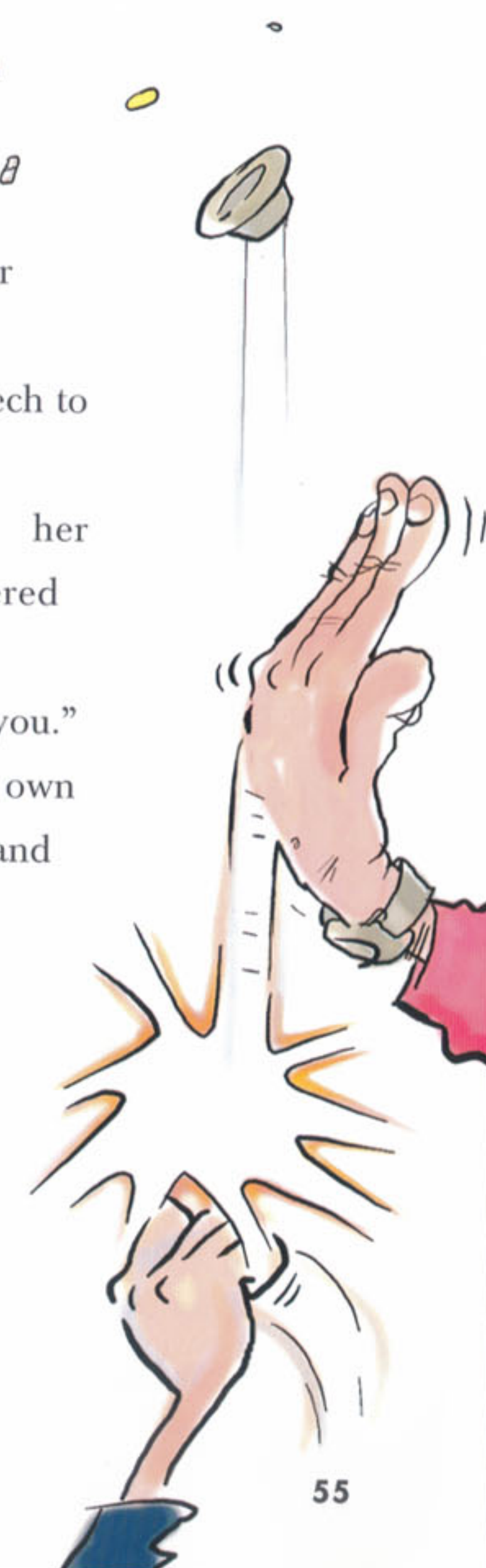
"A porter, you say? I'm not with you."

"Our Mister Drake is a — has his own — individual theories on health and medicine," she scoffed and allowed herself a little laugh. "Mister Drake has been suspended, pending a full investigation."

"You can't fire him. I need him."

I needed him.

My parents were called. The



Commissar got to them first, to make sure they heard her side of the story. They totally flew off the handle.

"This man is a danger to our patients," Nurse Bloc said. "He's wholly unqualified."

"What kind of hospital is this?"

"I assure you, Mr and Mrs Drum, our hospital does not endorse—"

"You have not heard the last of this."

"The guy is a menace."

"Quack."

"Charlatan."

Blahdy blah blah blah.

"If I get hold of this blockhead—"

"He ain't a blockhead, Dad, he's helping me through this."

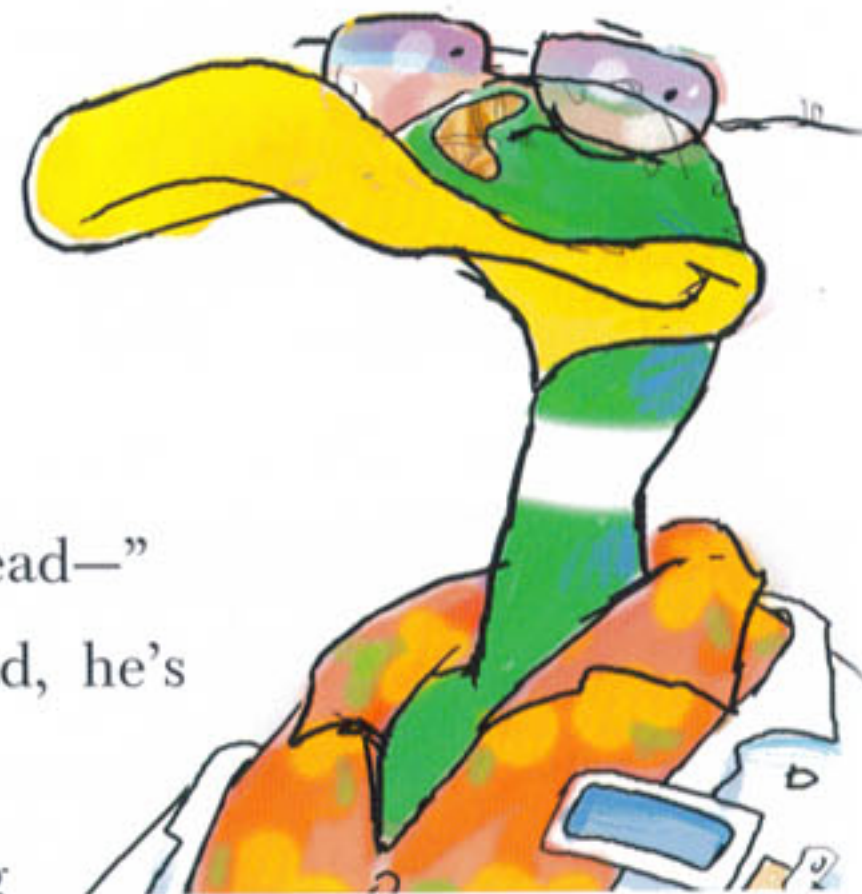
"Oh sure, by encouraging you to quit your medication, he's helping you?"

"It wasn't his idea to quit."

"So you thought it up by yourself. You woke up this morning and suddenly thought: Oh I got a good idea, if I stop taking the medicine I'll get better —"

"Gus," Mom said.

But Dad carried on, in that whiny mocking voice, "I can make myself better by vis-u-al-iz-ing—"



"GUS!" That made him stop, it always did. He tapped his front teeth.

Mom went on, "Jamie told you, quitting wasn't the porter's idea.

Why don't you go and get us some coffee?" Then she turned to me. "He's not angry at you—he just doesn't understand, I don't understand.

Did Drake tell you to stop taking the drugs?"

"No."

"Sure?"

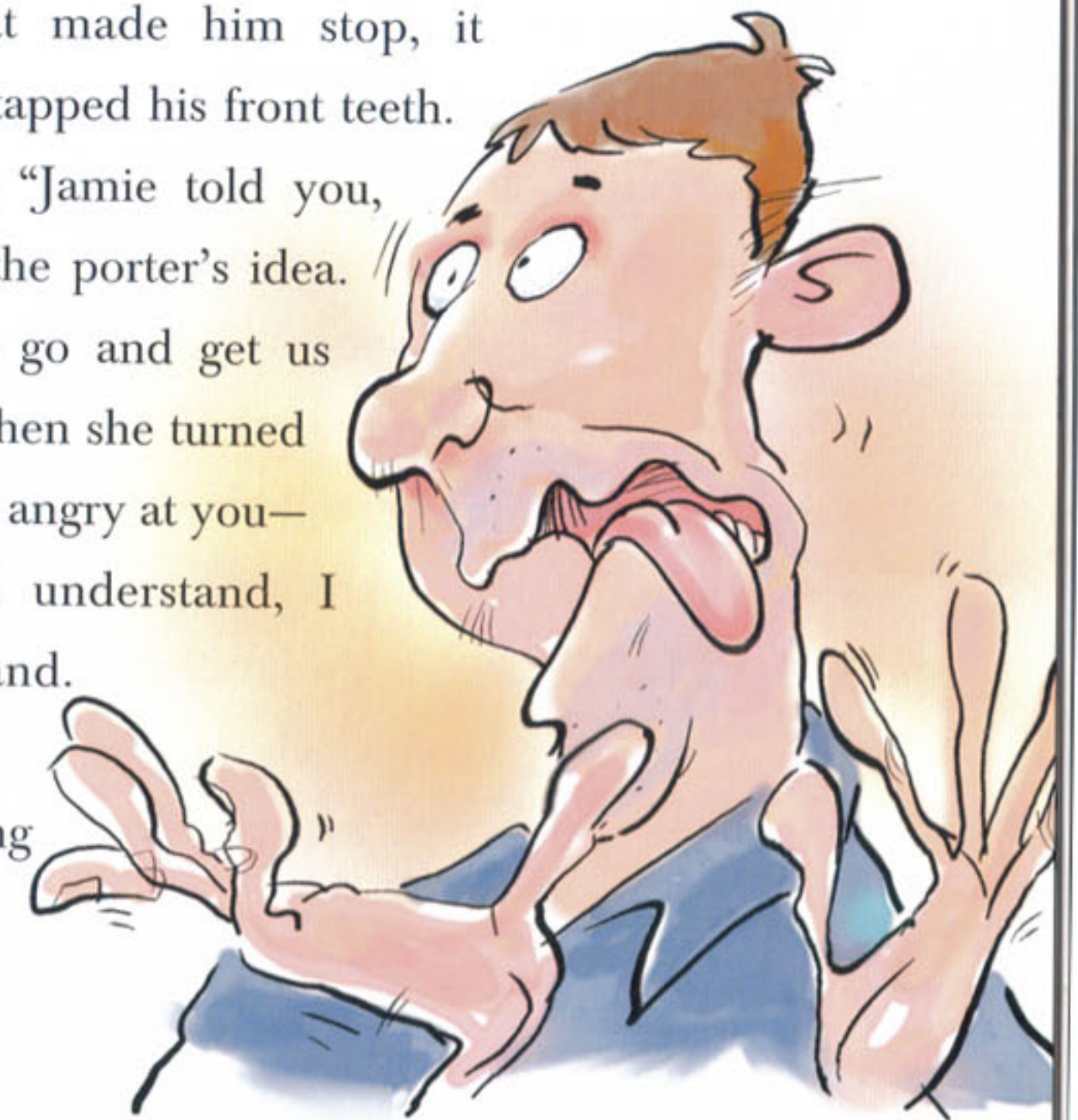
"I misunderstood. I didn't want this to happen, I didn't want to get him fired. He's helping me through this, and he's shown me I can help myself." What a mess! I only did it to spite Bloc ...

"I know. Tell me about Drake."

I tried as best I could to explain Drake's Law: Juju men, relaxing, using my imagination.

Mom thought it was a really good idea. It might work, and there was no way it could do any harm—"As long as you take your medication."

She promised to talk to Head Nurse Bloc about Drake



to see if everything could be sorted without too much fuss.

But first she made me promise I would carry on with the medication, and to make sure, she watched me take my daily dosage.

Later that evening Nurse Willi popped her head around the door. "Hi, can I come in? Gotta visitor for ya." I sat upright in bed and straightened my cap. Nurse Willi wheeled in Eric Beerbaum.

"Bub, boom, cheesh," we rolled in unison.

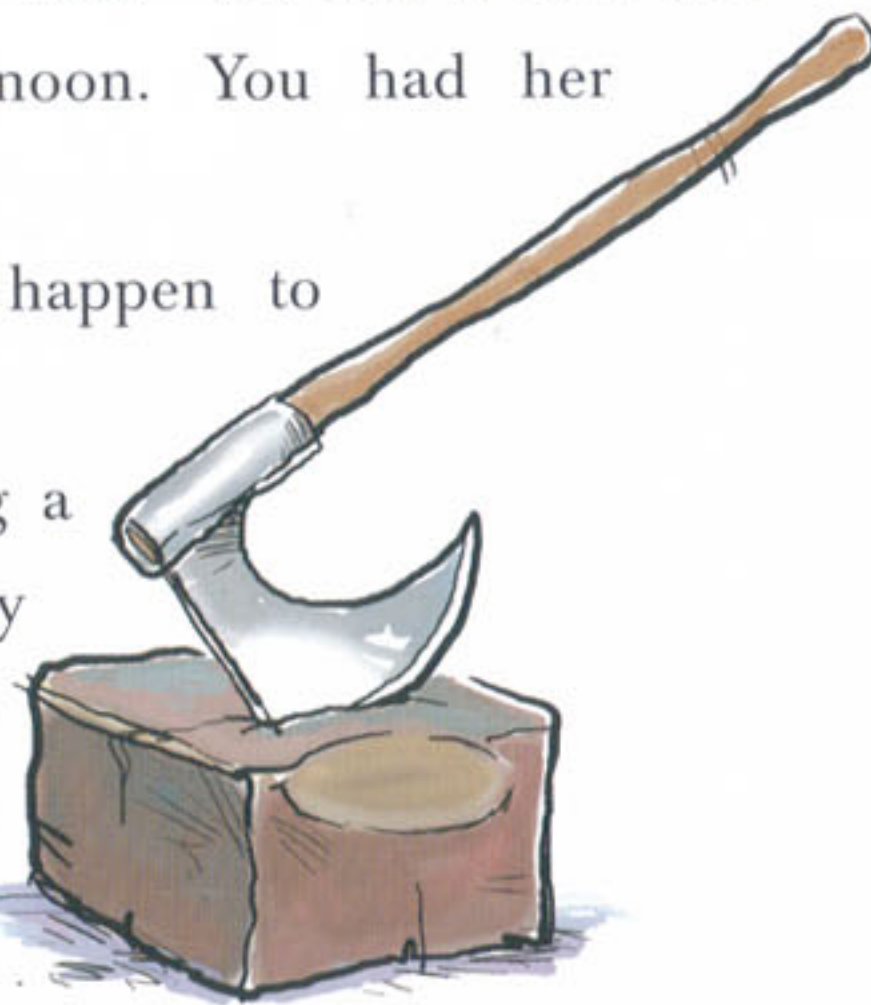
Eric casually threw a pile of cards, addressed to me, onto the bed. "Hey! We heard you had a major run-in with d'Commissar."

I gave them the grisly details.

"Everything okay now? Your mom straightened you out, huh?" Nurse Willi said. "We had a little talk about you this afternoon. You had her worried."

"What's going to happen to Drake?"

"He could be facing a very serious disciplinary charge, he could be dismissed. Your dad wanted to make an



official complaint but Head Nurse Bloc has talked him out of it. See, she isn't so bad."

"I guess not."

"Don't worry. Just concentrate on getting well. Drake will be fine. I'd bet my cap on it."

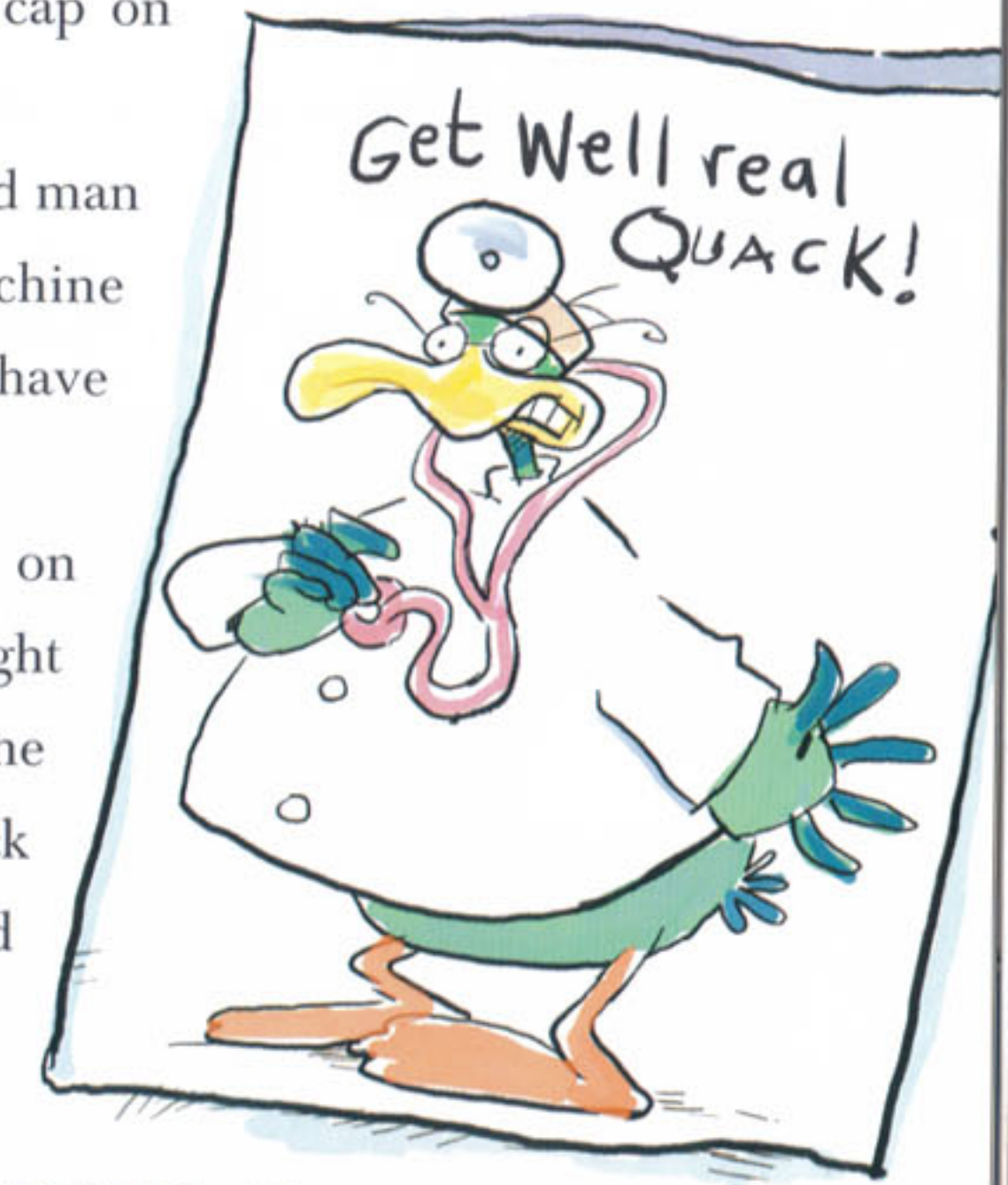
At eight twenty the old man coughed and the machine blipped. Drake should have been here by now.

I opened the top card on the pile Eric had brought up. On the front was the picture of a cartoon duck with a stethoscope around its neck. A speech bubble from its mouth read

"GET WELL REAL QUACK." Inside was a simple inscription. "It's up to you now, Jamie. Look after the old man, see you soon—D."

"C'mon, Eric, I think I'd better get you back before lights out."

"Aah, Willi. I want to watch the old man's machine for a while."



Jamie Drum's Massive Recovery

"I've seen enough trouble today! Let's go."

"Hey, Jamie, how about coming down to finish the Nesbitt Bloodnut tonight – no charge. C'mon, effendi, whaddya say?" Eric whispered.

"I dunno," I said, "I'm feelin' kinda tired, and besides – I got my own entertainment tonight."



Acrimonious Killer Instinct III

Nesbitt Bloodnut swigged down his Snake River mineral water, crumpled the plastic cup in his fist, and tossed it into the wastecan. He kicked open the door and entered the office.

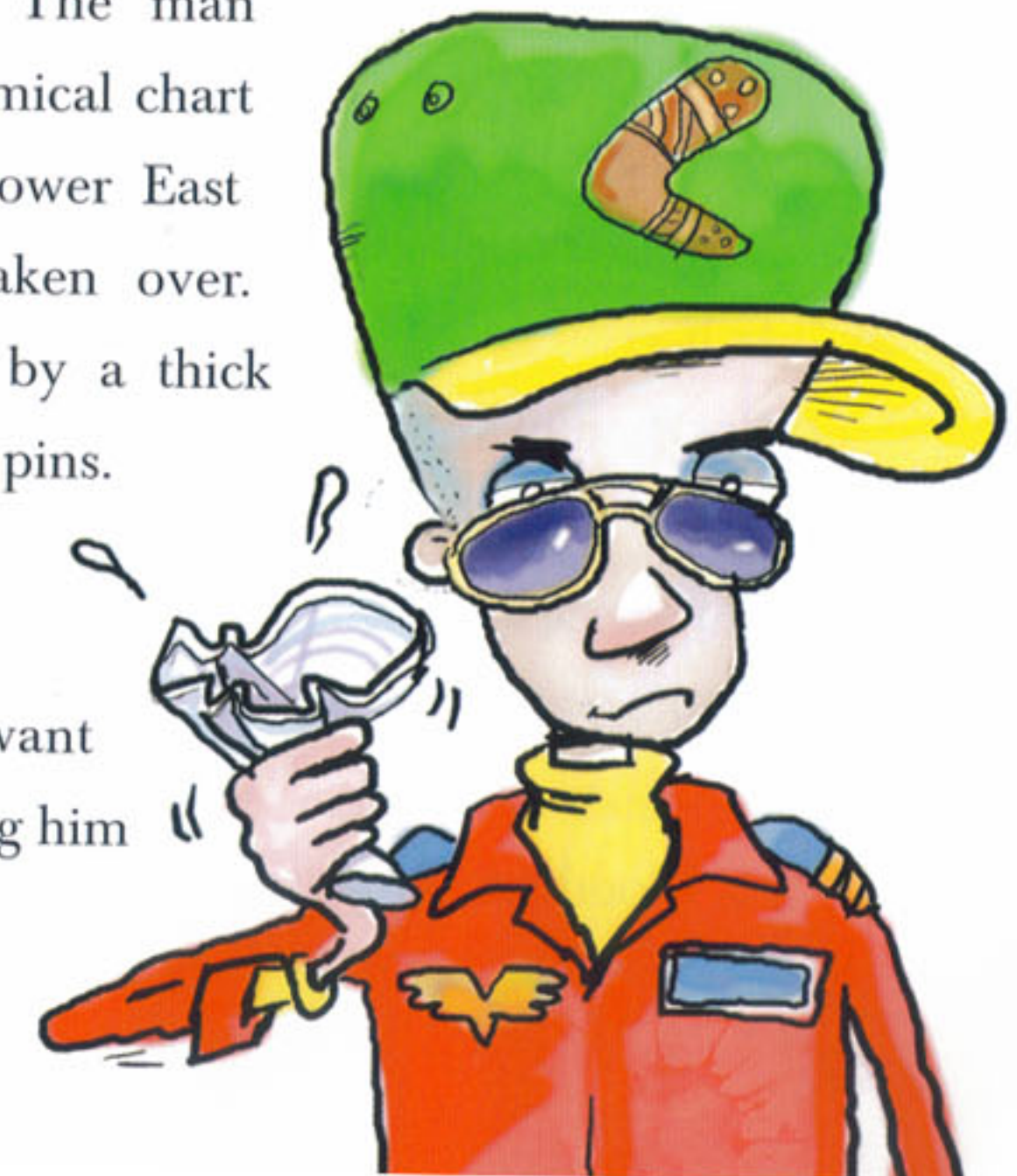
"Bloodnut! We need you. They got the kid."

"They got Drum? Do we know who?"

"Windpepper's mob. They're taking over the whole Lower East Side." The man pointed to an anatomical chart on the wall. The Lower East Side was indeed taken over. This was indicated by a thick covering of red map pins.

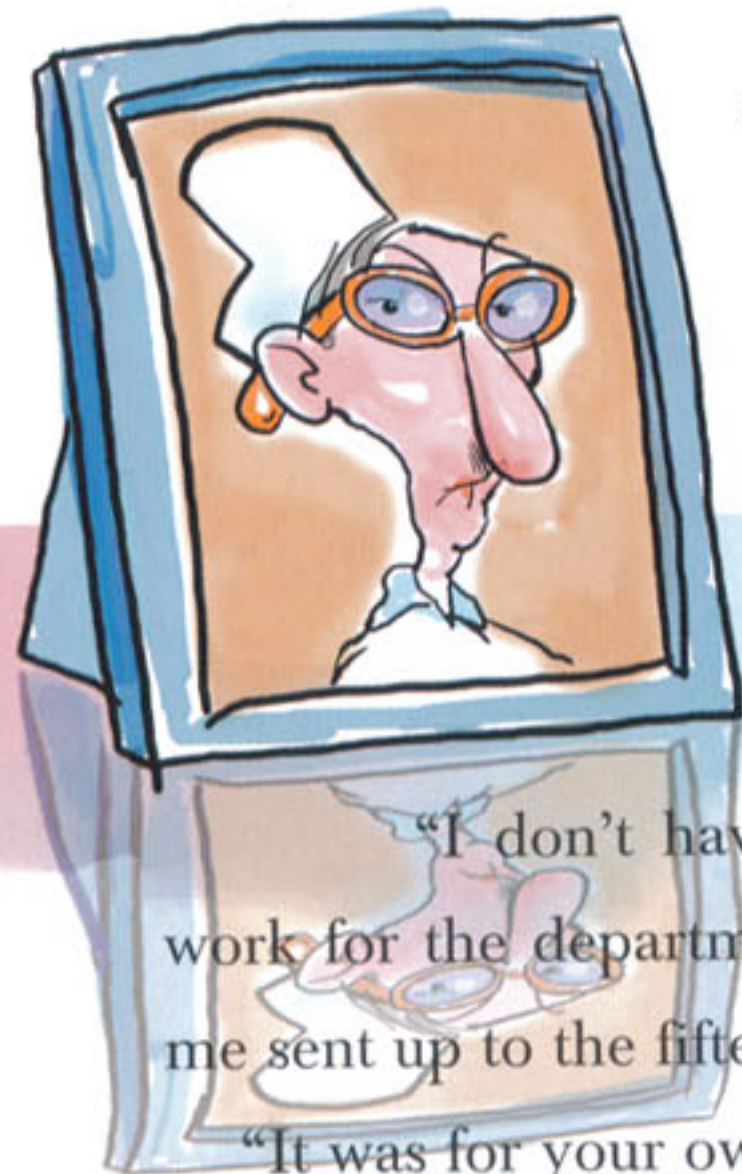
"Ouch!" winced Bloodnut.

"Bloodnut, we want you to go in and bring him back."



"I dunno, Doc, I don't think I could pull it off. It's too risky."

"But the lab boys are gonna kick my ass if we don't get him back—alive."



"Why don't you get Bloc to go in after him?"

"We did," the man said, glancing at her framed photograph. "She didn't make it." He placed it face down on his desk. "You gotta help us, Bloodnut. You're our only hope."

"I don't have to help anybody, Leech, I don't work for the department anymore. Remember? Bloc got me sent up to the fifteenth."

"It was for your own good, Bloodnut. She did what she thought was best."

"Gimme a break, Chief. You're breaking my heart, I'm oudda here."

"Bloodnut, if you won't do it for me, maybe you'll do it for—her."

He turned around and saw, silhouetted in the door frame, the sensuous curves of—that girl. "You," he said coolly.

"Hi, Bloodnut, long time no see," purred Stacy Laurens.

"You look a mess."

"Yeah, well I sort of lost it when Drake—"

"You can't blame yourself for what happened, Nesbitt. That's water under the bridge now. He knew the risks."

Bloodnut stopped her from going on. He grabbed her, pulled her close to his heaving chest and kissed her.



"This ain't gonna be no milk run. Gimme the drugs, Doc."

Nesbitt Bloodnut threw open the throttle of his Mk. II Sentinel and broke the sound barrier, as twenty-two thousand pounds of thrust hurtled him through the *superior vena cava* toward the *pulmonary trunk* and its tributaries.

"Surgical Strike to base. Surgical Strike to base. Come in, over."

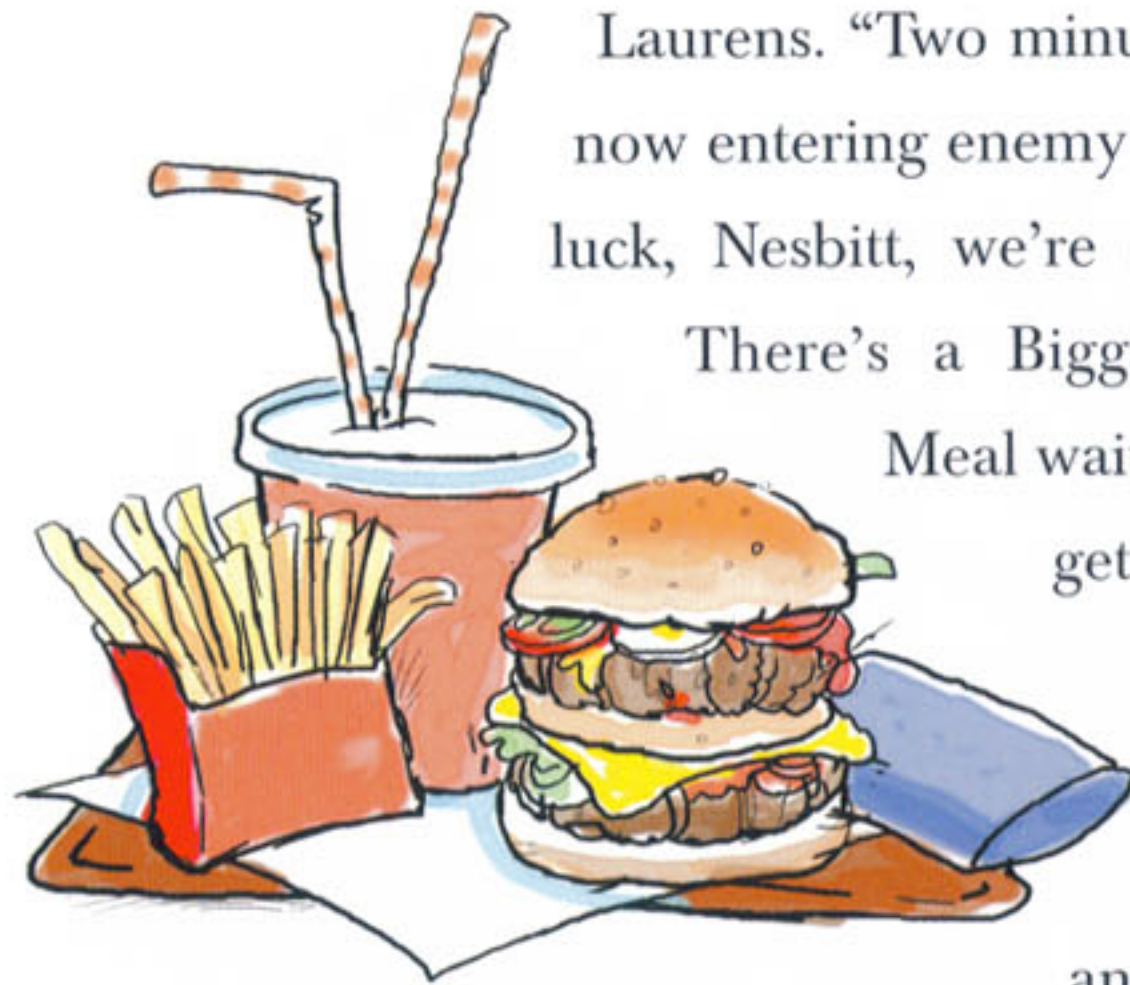
"Reading you loud and clear, over," returned Stacy

Laurens. "Two minutes to primary target, now entering enemy territory. Over. Good luck, Nesbitt, we're all counting on you.

There's a BiggaBurger Super Deal Meal waiting for you when you

get back. Give 'em hell, over."

"Keep it warm for me, baby. Over and out."



When he entered the coordinates on his state-of-the-art radar, it blipped and his target lit up as a white spot on the screen. Beneath the wings of his Sentinel, Nesbitt Bloodnut carried a formidable payload: two free-fall *Thymus* cluster bombs, each packed with five hundred pounds of high explosive *T-lymphocytes*; one low-drag anti-viral *Interferon* bomb; two TV-guided air-to-ground *Macrophage* smart missiles; and three laser-guided fire-and-forget Drug Runner missiles, each carrying 50 mgs of *Coliphenotol*, *Diaprasin*, and *Polyproxinamethalate*.

As Bloodnut entered the *gastro-intestinal tract*, he caught his first sight of Windpepper's base. Its rancid tentacles

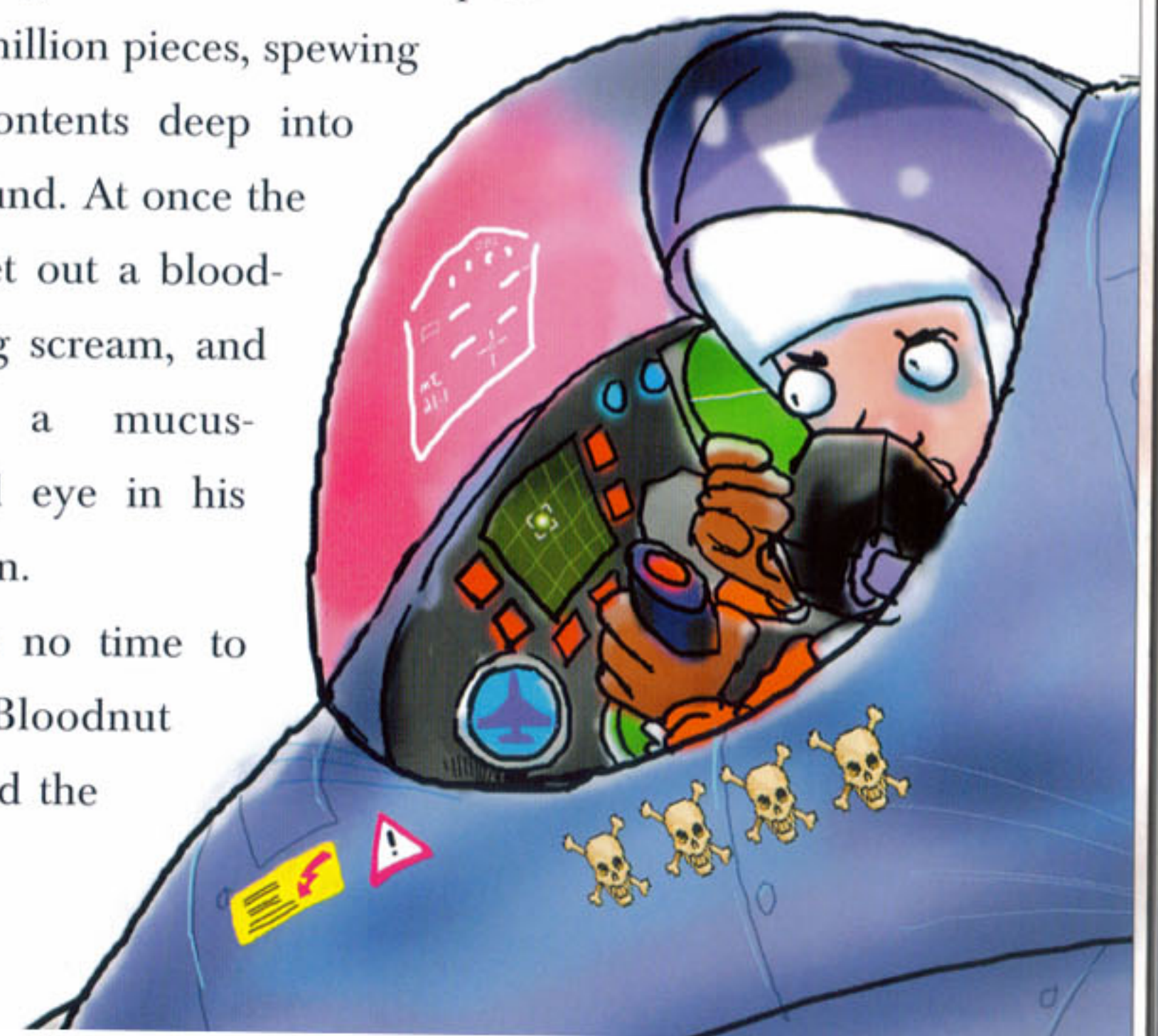
were spread over a large expanse of what was once healthy living tissue.

"Sure is one ugly mother," he mused, and at the push of a button a diamond appeared on his Head Up Display (HUD), confirming the beast as the primary target. His instrument panel indicated his weapons were armed, and he surfed through them and selected the deadly Drug Runner missiles as his first choice.

"Eat *Polyproxinamethalate*, sucker," he sneered, as the HUD flashed 'In Range' and he squeezed the button on his joystick that launched the fearsome killers at their objective.

At Mach II they did not take long to hit home and with a blinding flash the missiles erupted into a million pieces, spewing their contents deep into the wound. At once the beast let out a blood-curdling scream, and raised a mucus-covered eye in his direction.

With no time to waste Bloodnut launched the

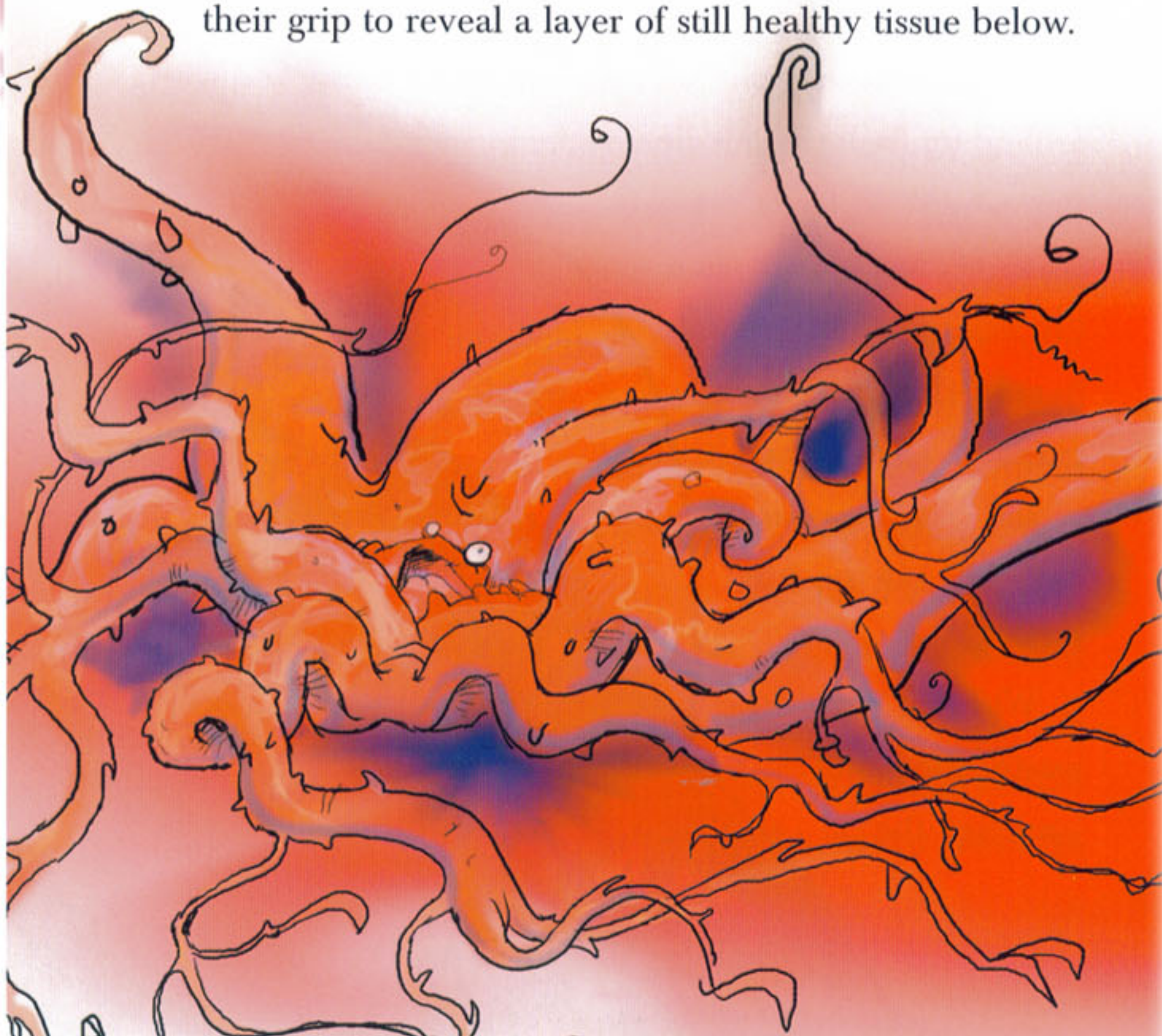


Jamie Drum's Massive Recovery

two TV-guided *Macrophage* missiles next. A terrifying howl indicated their farewell. He watched on his TV screen as they flew to their target at terrific speed. As the missiles' camera zeroed in, he could see dead and dying *leucocytes*—*antibodies* that had been bravely laying siege to the disease—piled up around its base.

"You won't die in vain, guys. 'Reciprocity' is my middle name," Bloodnut snarled. And he pulled back his joystick and began to climb.

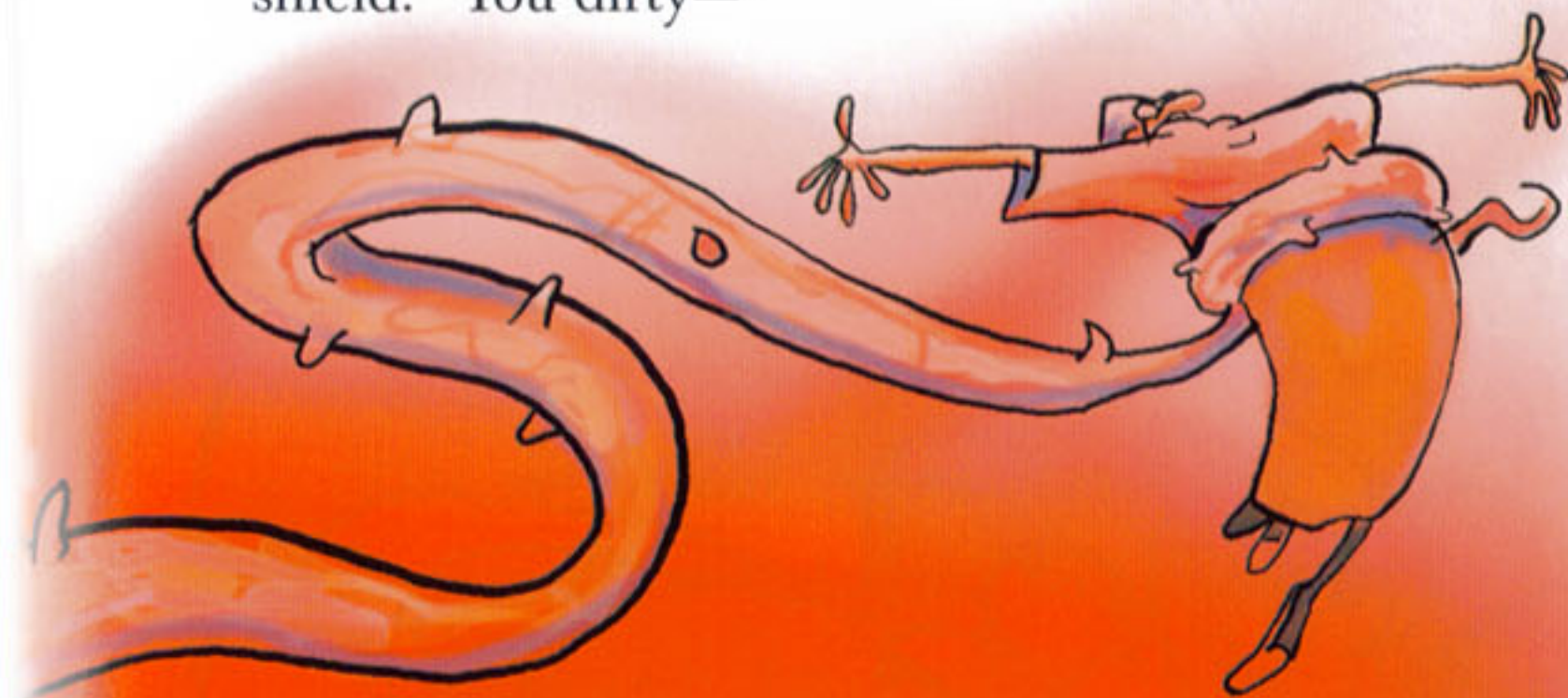
The *Macrophage* bombs exploded, engulfing an entire section of recent growth. The fractured tentacles loosened their grip to reveal a layer of still healthy tissue below.



Acrimonious Killer Instinct III

At ten thousand feet Bloodnut's supersonic fighter stalled and its elegant nose turned as it dived into the bomb run. The diamond on his HUD showed the Top Gun pilot that he was aimed dead center of the squirming, ugly beast—nine thousand, eight thousand, seven thousand feet below him.

At that moment he spotted what he thought was a white flag being waved by the monster. "So you ain't such a tough guy after all, huh? What the—" He zoomed in on his TV screen. The white flag was a uniform—a nurse's uniform. It was Bloc. The fiend was using her as a human shield. "You dirty—"



The Sentinel screeched as it hurtled toward the heaving bloody mess. He had to make a decision, fast. Risk the life of Bloc or pull out of the bomb run. At two thousand feet Bloodnut pulled back the stick and, at the flick of an eye, released the *Thymus* cluster bombs and the anti-viral *Interferon* bombs.

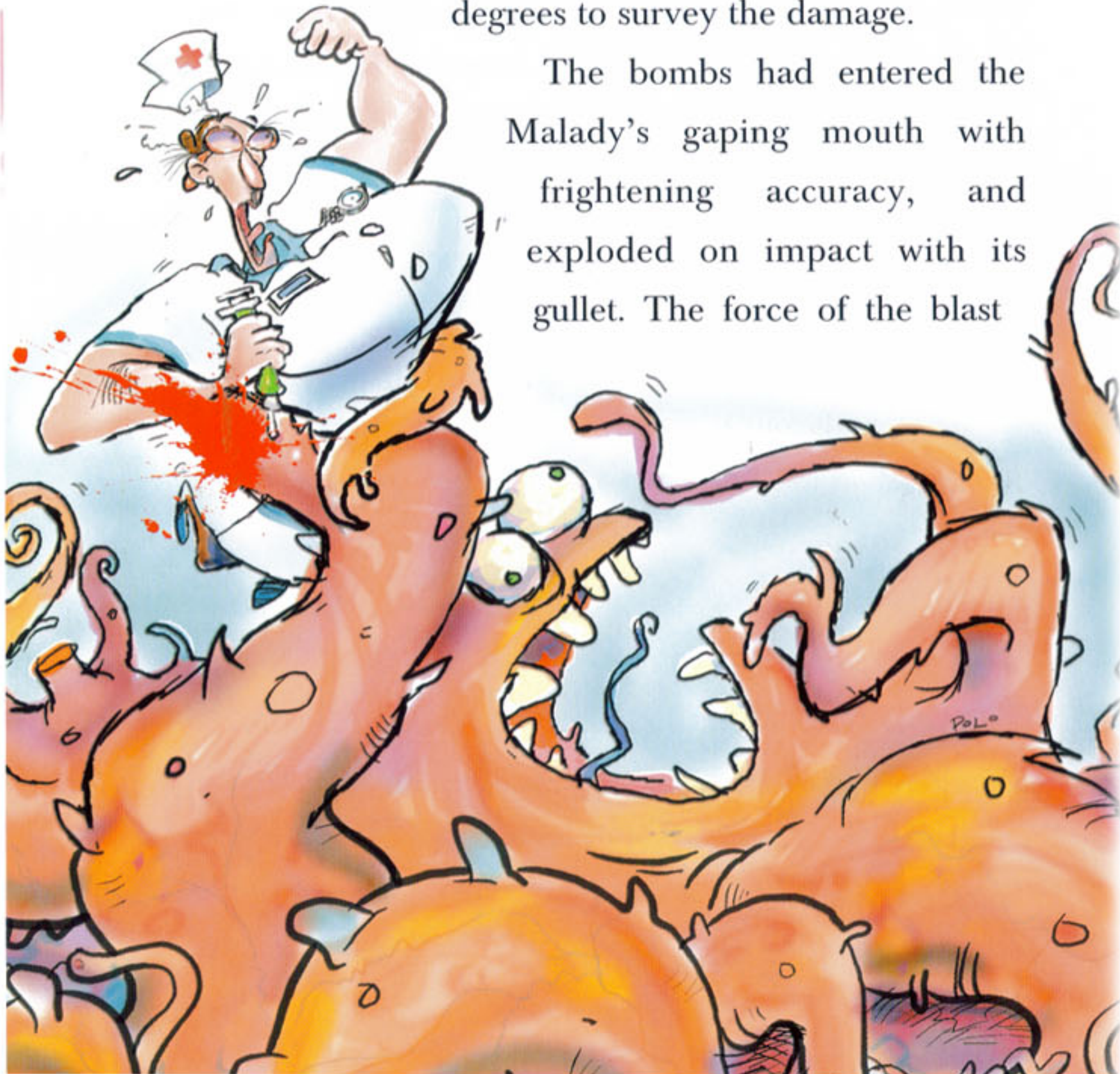
Jamie Drum's Massive Recovery

Head Nurse Elsa Retnica Bloc screamed in disbelief as she saw the deadly plane release its bombs. She waved her fists at the unseen pilot and cursed him in her native tongue, "Yesnaby, yesnaby."

The blast was deafening and Nesbitt "Reciprocity" Bloodnut felt the heat of the flames, as his tail narrowly escaped the clawing tentacles of the desperate monster.

"Not this piggin' time," he laughed, as he pulled the plane around one hundred and eighty degrees to survey the damage.

The bombs had entered the Malady's gaping mouth with frightening accuracy, and exploded on impact with its gullet. The force of the blast



Acrimonious Killer Instinct III

threw Bloc, and the severed tentacle that still held her, into a mucus-covered wilderness.

Cruising over the wreckage, Bloodnut estimated around eight to ten percent damage.

The sortie had been a success. Spotting Head Nurse Bloc, he made a note of the coordinates for the rescue team. She was waving at him and shouting.

"No need to thank me, ma'am, it's part of the job." He switched on his autopilot and headed for home. Below him he could see battalions of white blood cells massing on the borders of the *gastro-intestinal tract*, ready to continue the assault.

"Guess a few more weeks of this and it'll be mission accomplished," he chanced. "Surgical Strike to Ground Forces' Leader. Come in, over."

"This is Ground Forces' Leader to Surgical Strike. Reading you loud and clear," said Wanda Willi.

"It's all yours for tonight, Wanda. Hasta la vista manana. Over and out."

"Message received and understood, sir. Have a nice flight. Over and out."

As he neared his home base, Nesbitt looked up from the book of Sumerian poetry that rested on his lap and thought of Stacy. "She deserves better than a bum like me—"



"Base to Surgical Strike. Base to Surgical Strike. Come in, over," whispered the radio.

"Hi, Stacy. Picked me up on your radar, huh?"

"Sure did, baby. Just wanted to let you know your BiggaBurger Super Deal Meal will be waiting for you when you get back," she simpered.

"Maybe she does deserve a guy like me," he thought. "Maybe she does." And he twisted his fighter into a victory roll.

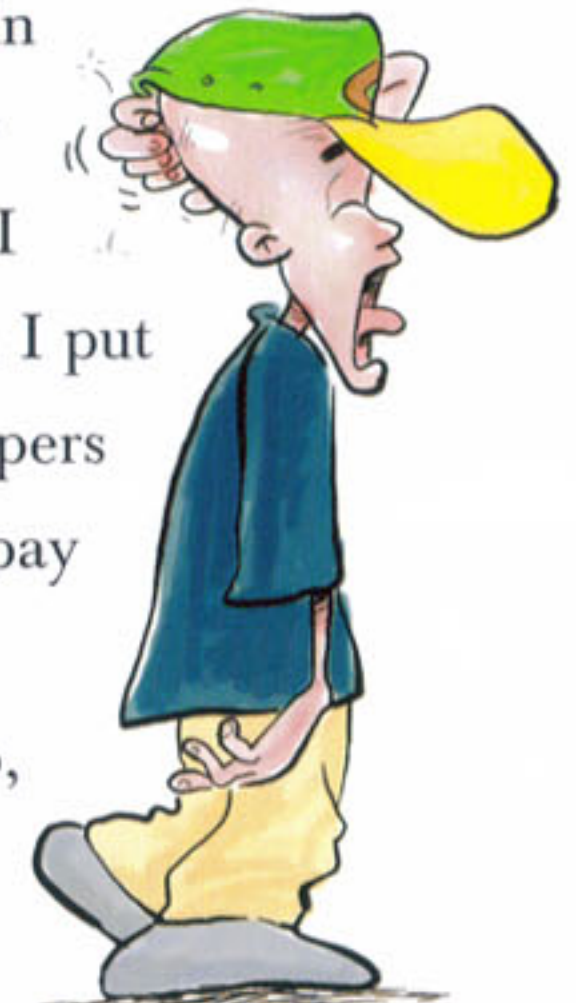


As Well As Can Be Expected

I woke up early that next morning. I lay in bed for a while, thinking about my "movie." I wanted to play it again, but I had a hankering that I had to satisfy first. I put on my standard-issue, hospital-foam slippers and padded out of the room to the pay phones down by the elevators.

"Mom? Can you come over? No, everything's okay. Yeah, I'm fine. I'm hungry. But I don't want the hospital breakfast, Mom, I want a BiggaBurger Super Deal Meal. On your way to work? Okay, Mom, see you in an hour. Bye. Yeah, me too. Bye."

I put down the receiver and searched for returned coins—nothing. I peeked through the blinds that obstructed the new day. It looked massive. The whole town was bathed in a golden wash. I decided to share it with everyone. On my



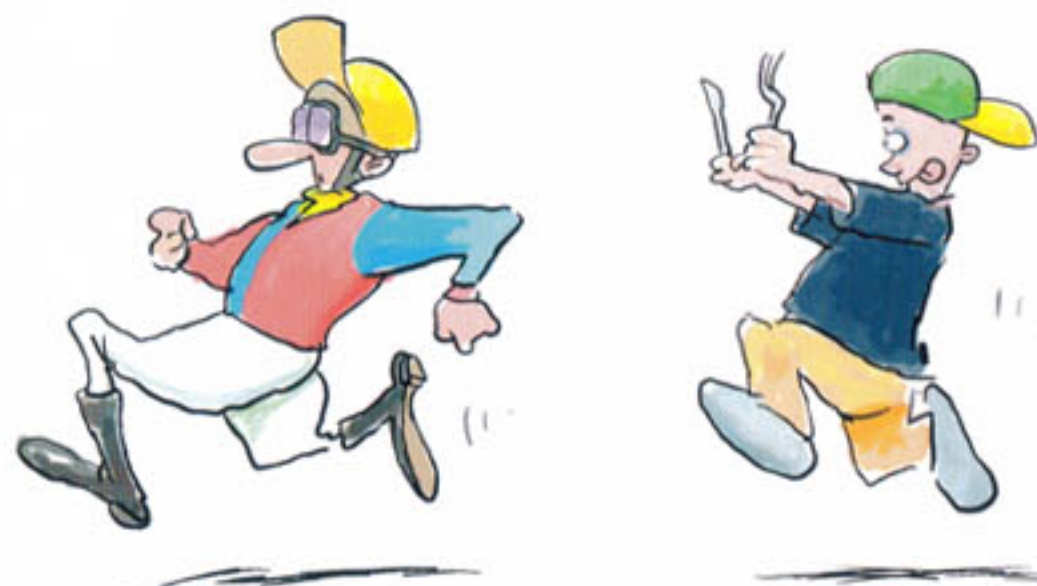


way back to 1540 I opened every blind on every window.

Mom was thrilled that I had found my appetite. Though she was late for work, she stayed until I had eaten the last crumb.

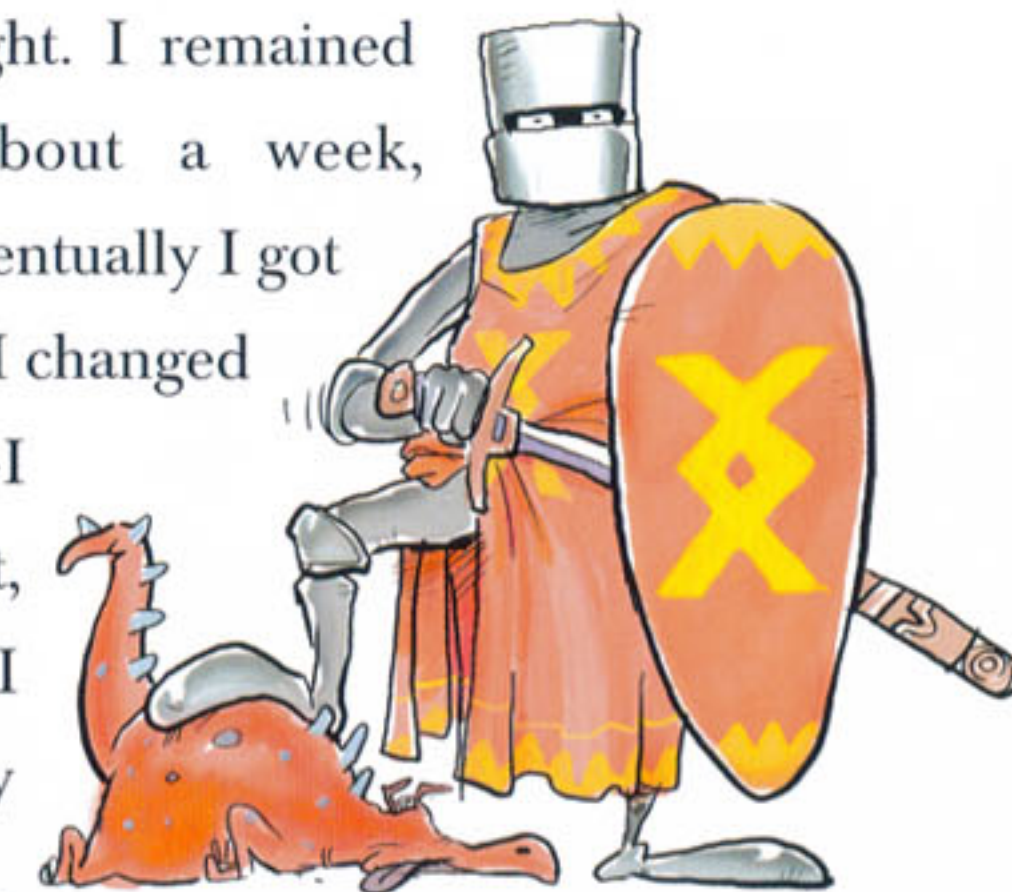
"Boy, was I hungry, I could've eaten a horse."

"And worried the jockey, by the look of it!" laughed my mom. We both laughed.



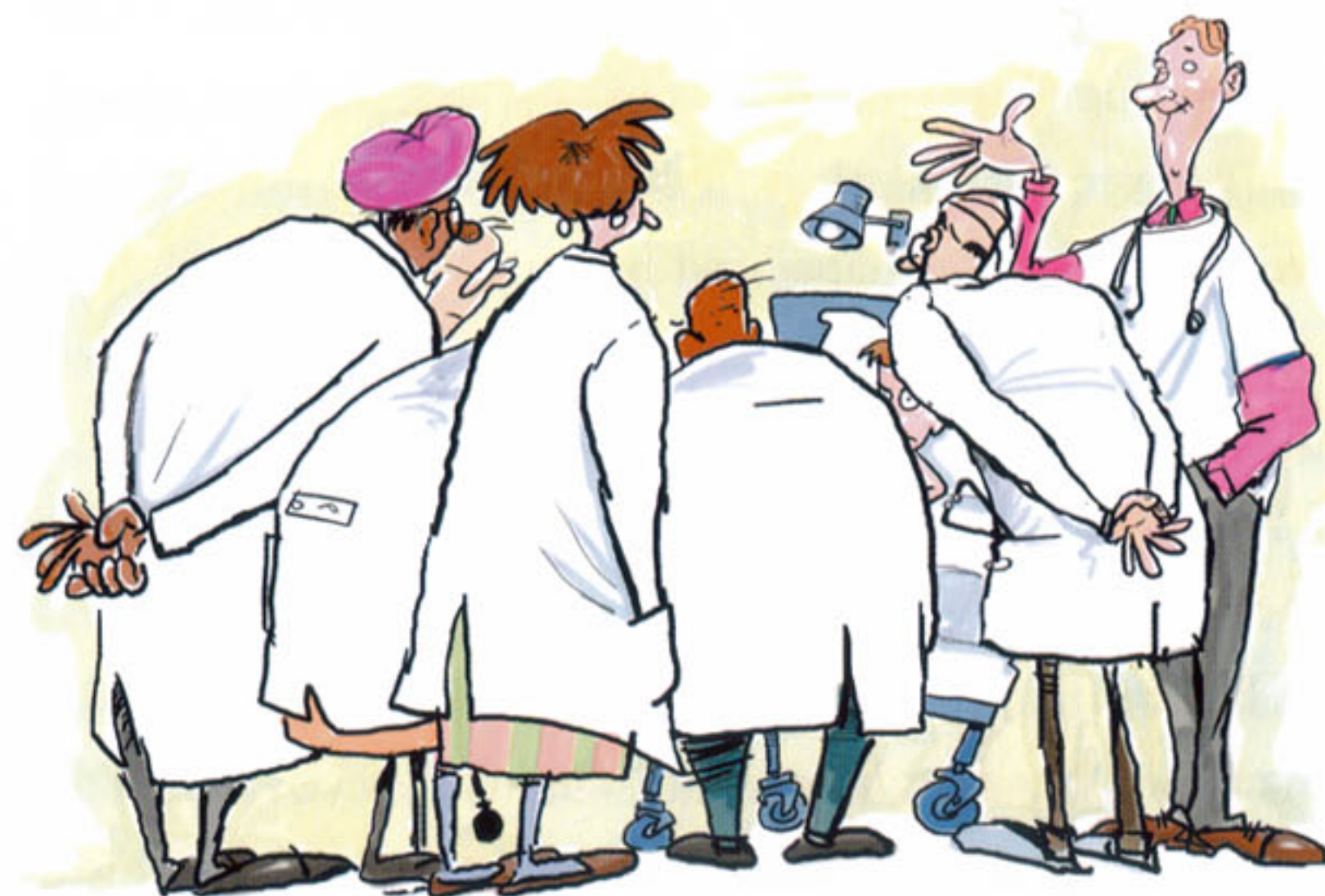
And that was the start of it. I was up and about, on the mend, getting better, on the road to recovery.

Every night was show night. I remained Nesbitt Bloodnut for about a week, changing the script until eventually I got fed up with him. And then I changed the scenario altogether—I was the cowboy, the knight, the swashbuckling captain, I could be anything my imagination wanted to be.



It was up to me.

Doctor Leech was delighted. "Remarkable, yop, truly remarkable, hmmm?" he told the semicircle of white coats that had assembled around my bed. "All the tests showed that there would be no remission. Yet here is this boy,



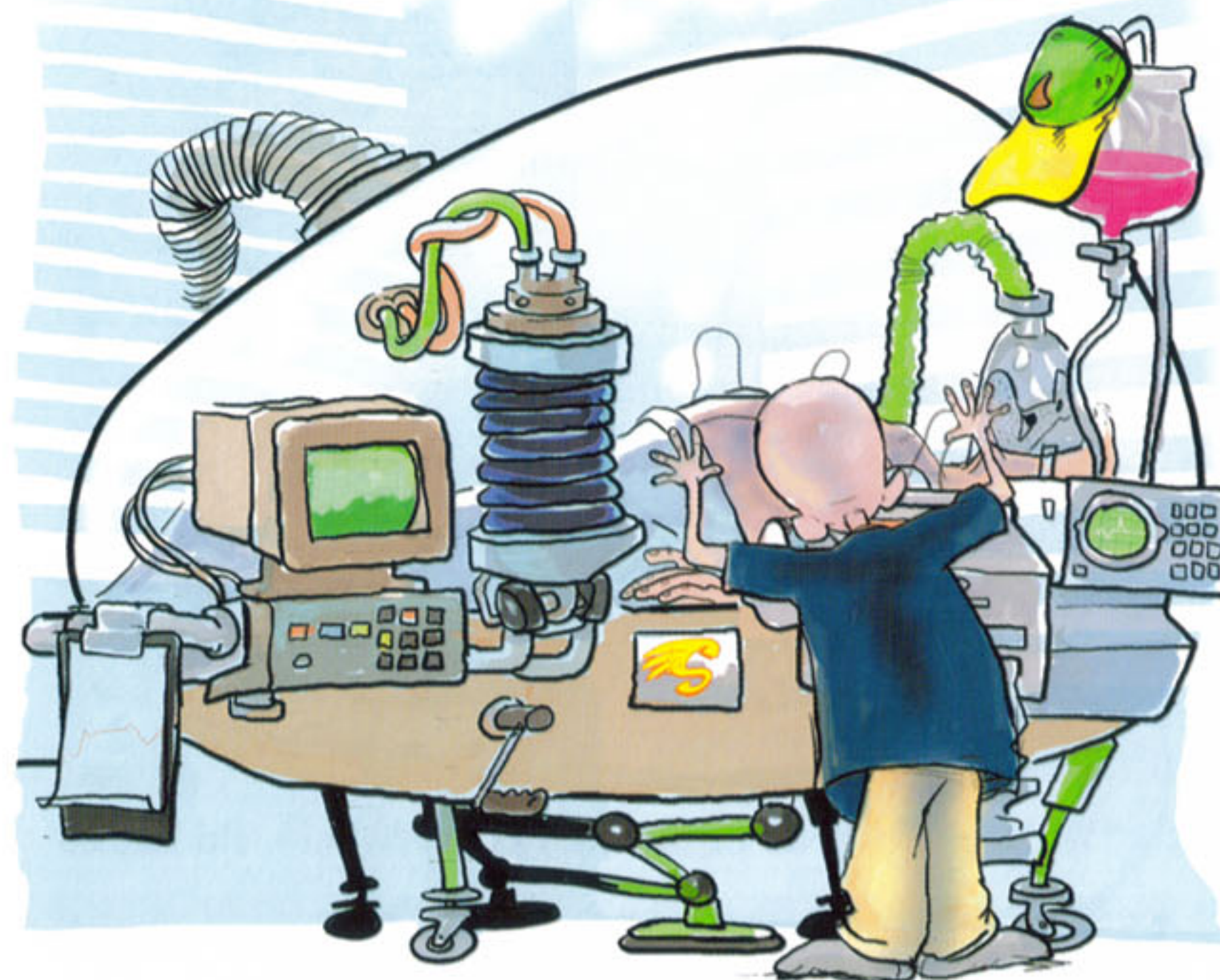
ladies and gents, who, over a period of four months, is making a remarkable recovery." (Much to the relief of my family and friends.) "Super."

When I told Doctor Leech about Drake and visualizing, he warmed to the idea immediately. He became very enthusiastic, grabbing a pen from his breast pocket and scribbling notes furiously on the back of my remaining get well card. He wanted to meet Drake. He was going to suggest visualization to a couple of patients of his. Maybe Drake had found a cure? He could even put his theory down in a book. Leech could introduce him to a publisher he had once treated for *slackjaw*.

Drake was allowed to stay, on condition he transferred to another part of the hospital. He would keep in touch though, he had his network. But it meant he couldn't visit his old shipmate. I gladly took over, it was the least I could do. I was to become close to the old boy over the next few weeks, reading the paper and passing on any gossip.

One afternoon Head Nurse Bloc came with the news that I was "to please return to the eleventh floor." She and I still couldn't get along, but we had a healthy respect for each other.

Before I left, I said my goodbye to the old man on the machine. "See you later, spar." I hooked my Boomerang baseball cap onto his drip. "Say hello to Drake for me."

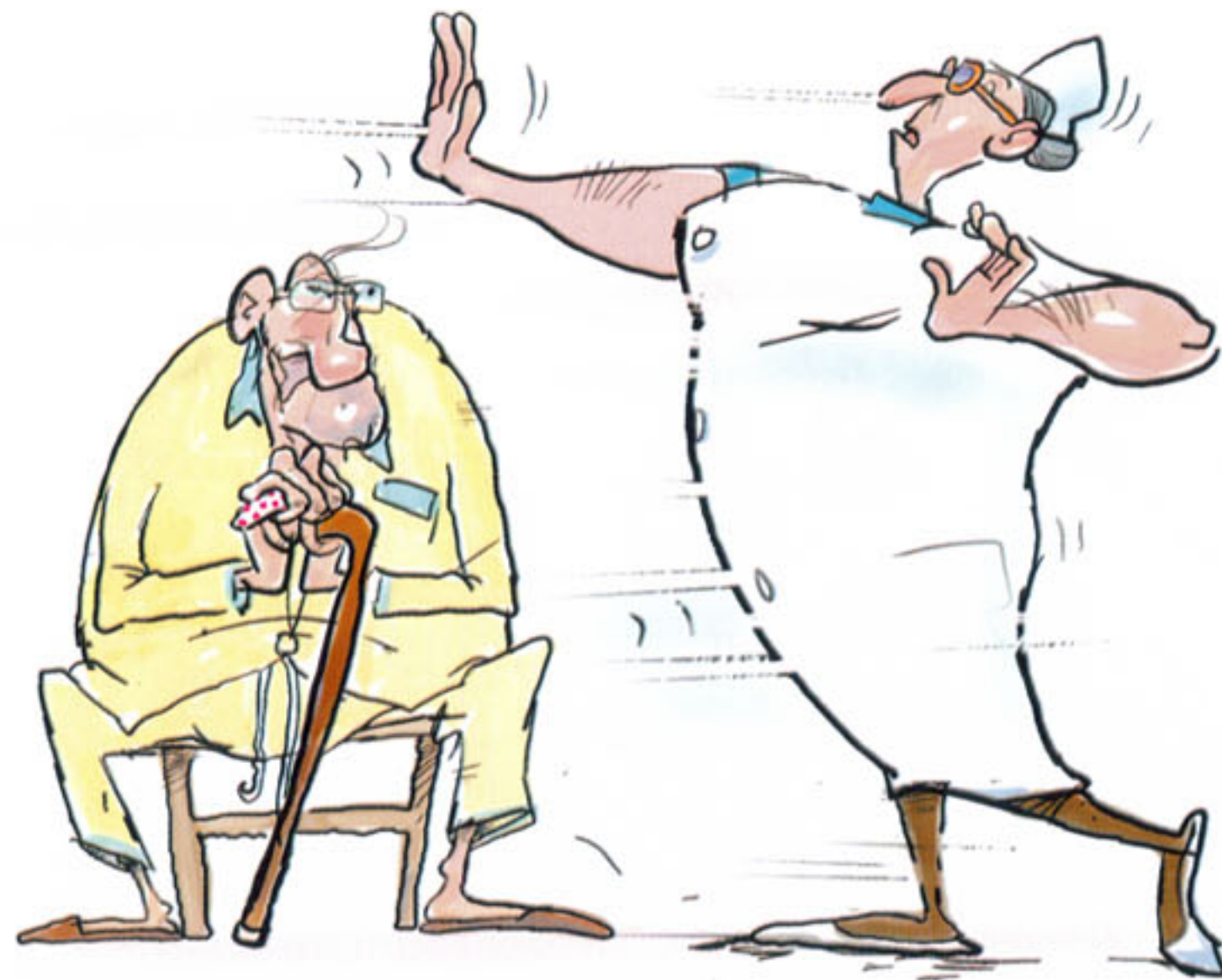


And the machine blipped.

Stacy Laurens had gone home permanently, but Nurse Willi and Eric were waiting to meet me as I came out of the elevator. "Bub, boom, cheesh," we rolled.

"Hi, Jamie," smiled Nurse Willi. "Nice to have you back with us. You're looking well."

"Yeah, massive," said Eric. "Massive to have you back. We could do with a little excitement around the place again. Maybe you could shake some of that Juju stuff on the Commissar."



"Yeah, like instead of marching everywhere, I'd like to see her moon-walk down the corridors."

"Or, or make her pumps fart instead of squeak."

"Or, or—"

"Come on, boys, that's enough. She has her job to do," giggled Nurse Willi. "You'll both be going home for the Christmas break. Try and make the most of it, and don't get into any trouble. Eric, that means not selling tickets for the Gears n' Girls channel."

"Yes, sir, Nurse Willi," he said and saluted her. He turned to me. "Tickets are very reasonable, four-fifty. Count you in?"

"I'll give you the money after visiting."

"No problem, effendi, show starts at ten. Don't suppose that new girl will be interested?"

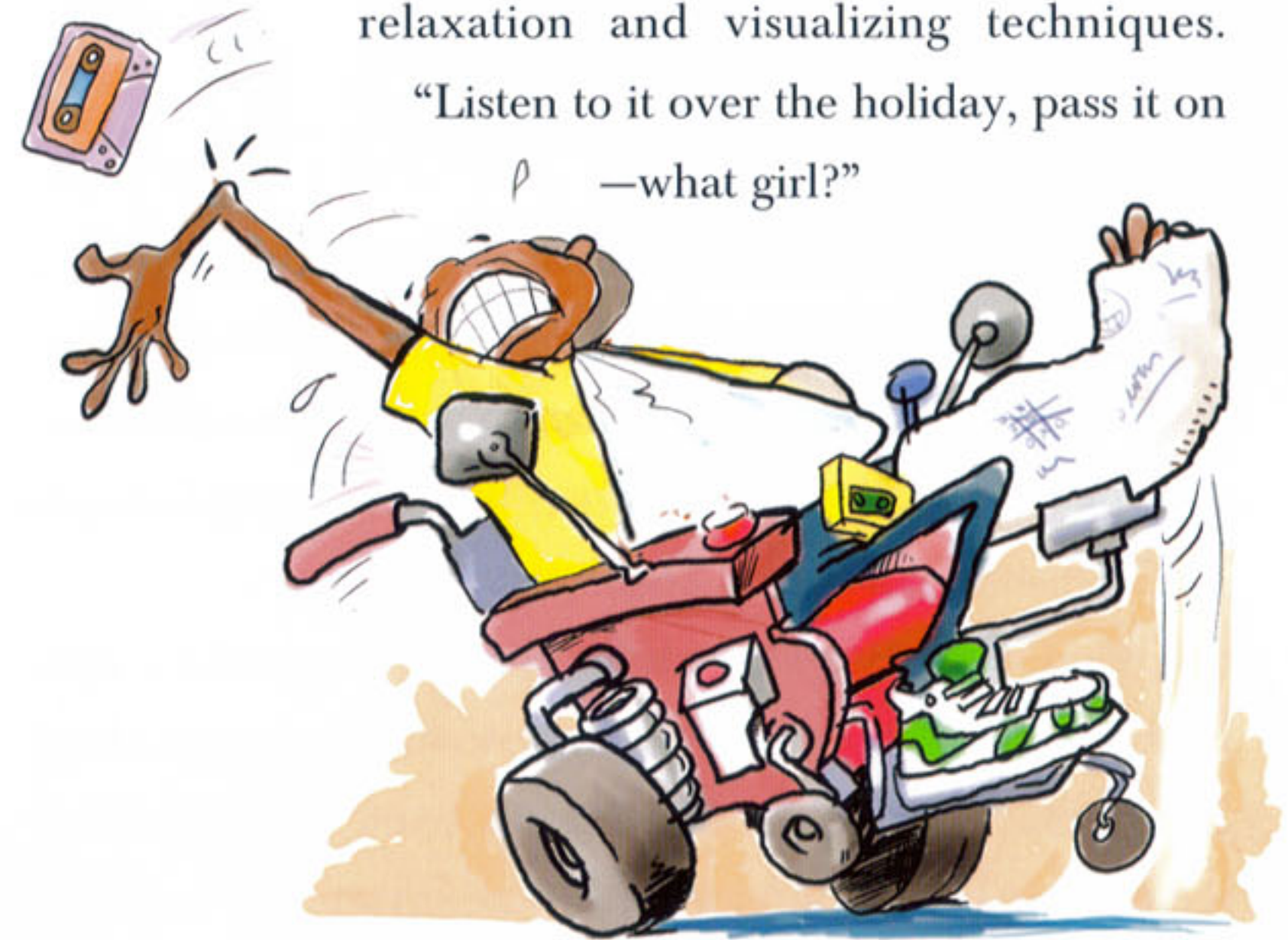
"What new girl?"

"You are looking rubicund, man, ru-bi-cund. I might buy some of that Drake thing myself."

"You? I thought you'd laugh." I threw Eric a cassette

Drake had made for me, outlining his relaxation and visualizing techniques.

"Listen to it over the holiday, pass it on —what girl?"



Outpatients



“Well, a few months ago we were told we might not have you for Christmas, but here you are,” and my mother kissed me, and then Grandma kissed me, and Dad thought better of it and punched me on the shoulder.

“Yep, that Nurse Bloc says there’s a good chance you’ll only be an outpatient in the new year. Good, huh?”

“That will be massive, Dad, massive.”

One cold January afternoon after an outpatients visit, Dad and me had been waylaid in the car park by Head Nurse Bloc. “Hello, Jamie. How are you feeling? He is looking well, Mr Drum, no?” It was threatening to snow, and I wasn’t paying much attention to the conversation.

“—once we ironed out our little difficulties, Jamie proved to be a model patient, and he has responded to treatment most satisfactorily.” Blahdy blah.

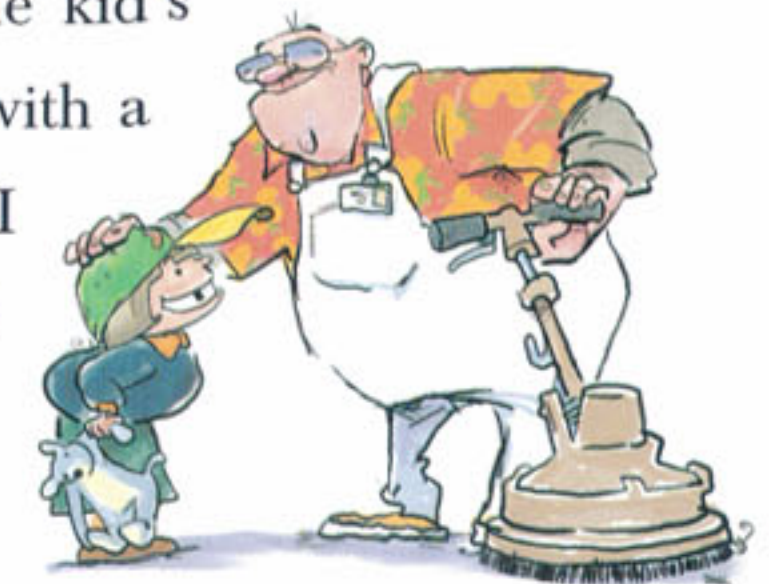
I was cold and bored as the Commissar ingratiated herself with my father. I watched inside the glass doors as

Outpatients



a mother, registering her little girl at reception, attempted to fill in the relevant forms. The kid was tugging at her mom’s coat. I could see the mom was getting agitated. Finally she turned and snapped at the girl.

Out of the corner of my eye I caught sight of a baseball cap, my Boomerang baseball cap. It was Drake. Drake was polishing the linoleum floor with one of those industrial buffers, in my Boomerang baseball cap. As I watched, I saw him stop his machine and bend down to talk with the little girl. He placed my cap on the kid’s bob, and her face suddenly lit up with a beaming smile. I wondered how I had got the cap in the first place, and I found I couldn’t remember.



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