

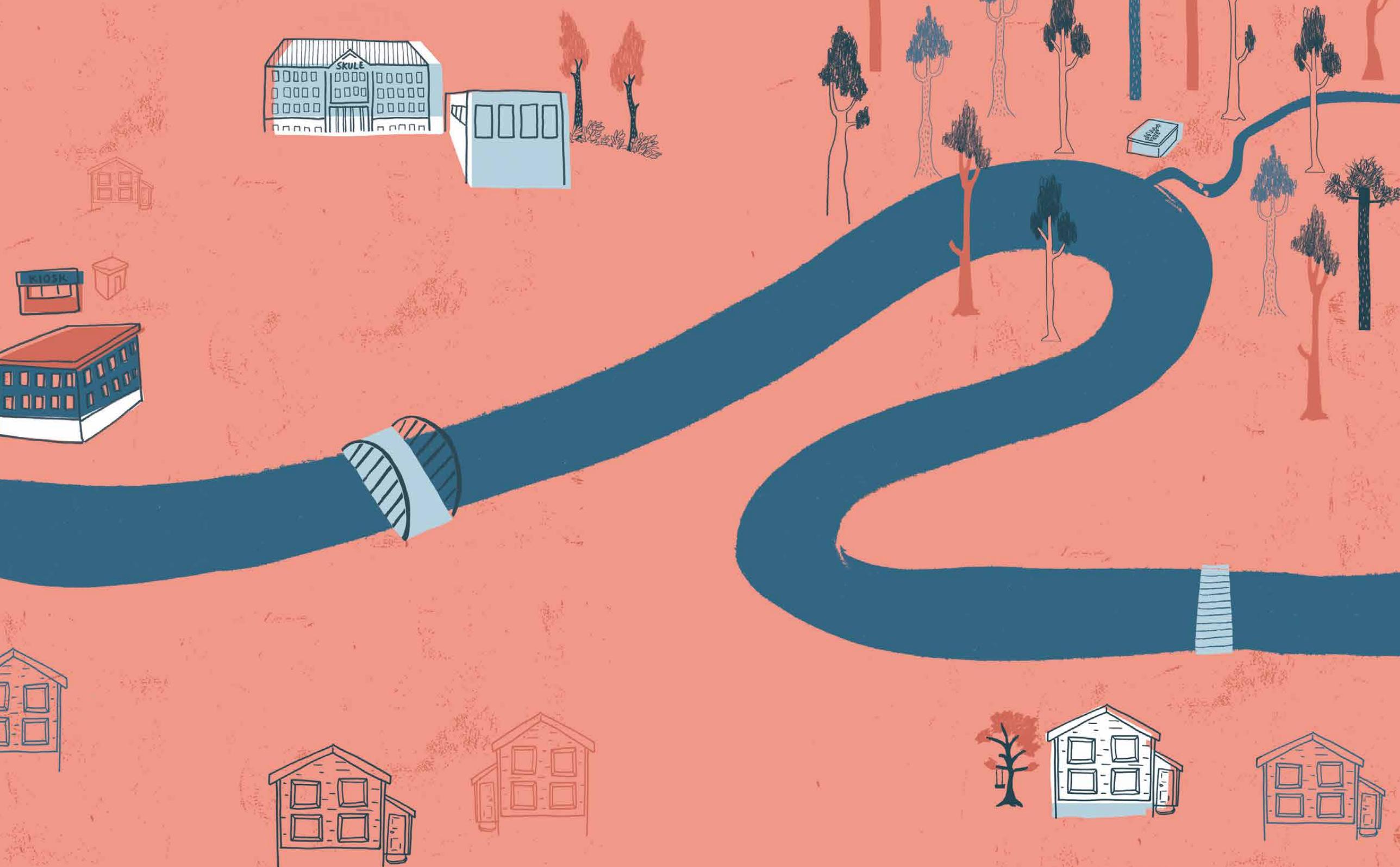
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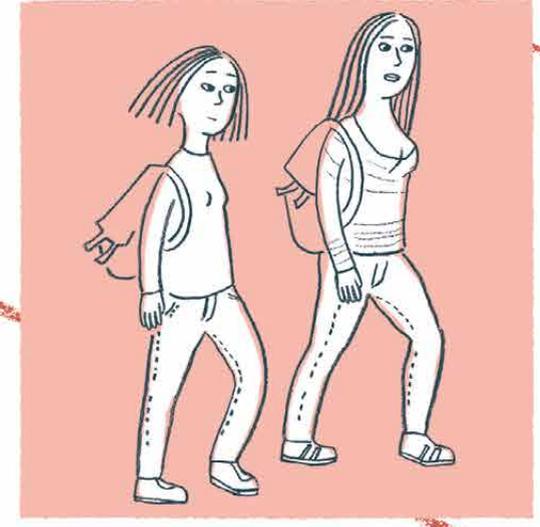
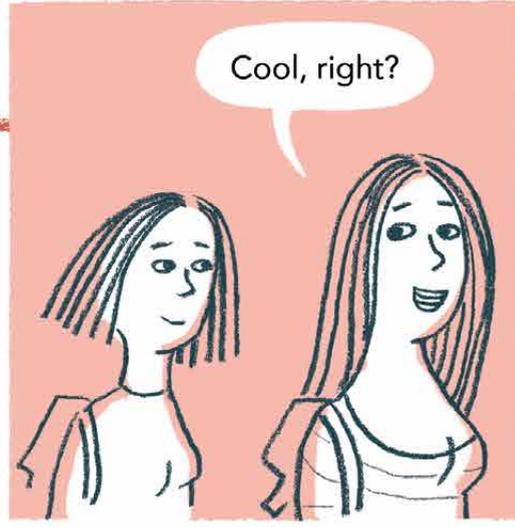
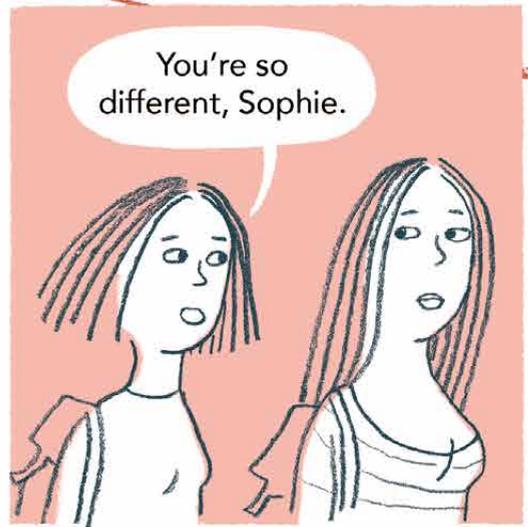
VOLVO



Trude Tjensvold







I noticed it on the first day of school.
That Sophie had changed.
Before you say something out loud, it's almost like it
hasn't happened. But now it has actually happened,
the stuff with Sophie. She isn't at all the same as she
was before.

Have I changed? Is it just something other people
see? I've had a good look at myself in the mirror but I
look like I did before.
Or almost, anyway.

I'm looking at Sophie. She isn't saying anything.
We've been best friends since we started school,
Sophie and me. Most of the girls in class live in the
same neighbourhood. Others have parents who are
friends with each other. Sophie and I were somehow
left over so we found each other.



I go to my place in the woods. It lies right where the wide river bends under the treetops. The river then heads out into the meadow and further through the fields.

It's just here that the stream flows through the forest and out into the river. I've seen oyster catchers by the riverbank. Many times. There's probably a nest nearby.

My place isn't so far from home, and it's quite near school. There's a path leading down here from the bushes behind the gym. I don't think many people know about the path. Because this place belongs to me. Only me. And the birds, of course.

I can stay here for hours.

I can just be here. Neither too big nor too little, as I often feel in other places.

Over by the stump, I lift up a branch and take out a cake tin. I'd put my notebook and pencil in there. I'm filling up the notebook with words and small drawings, jotting down what I see. I do this almost every day. No one knows about the tin. Not Ollie. Not Sophie. Just me. Last year, it snowed so much that the box got stuck in the forest, but it didn't matter because I'd covered it with plastic.





Sam's having a party on Friday.

I heard.



I dunno. Everyone in class is so childish.



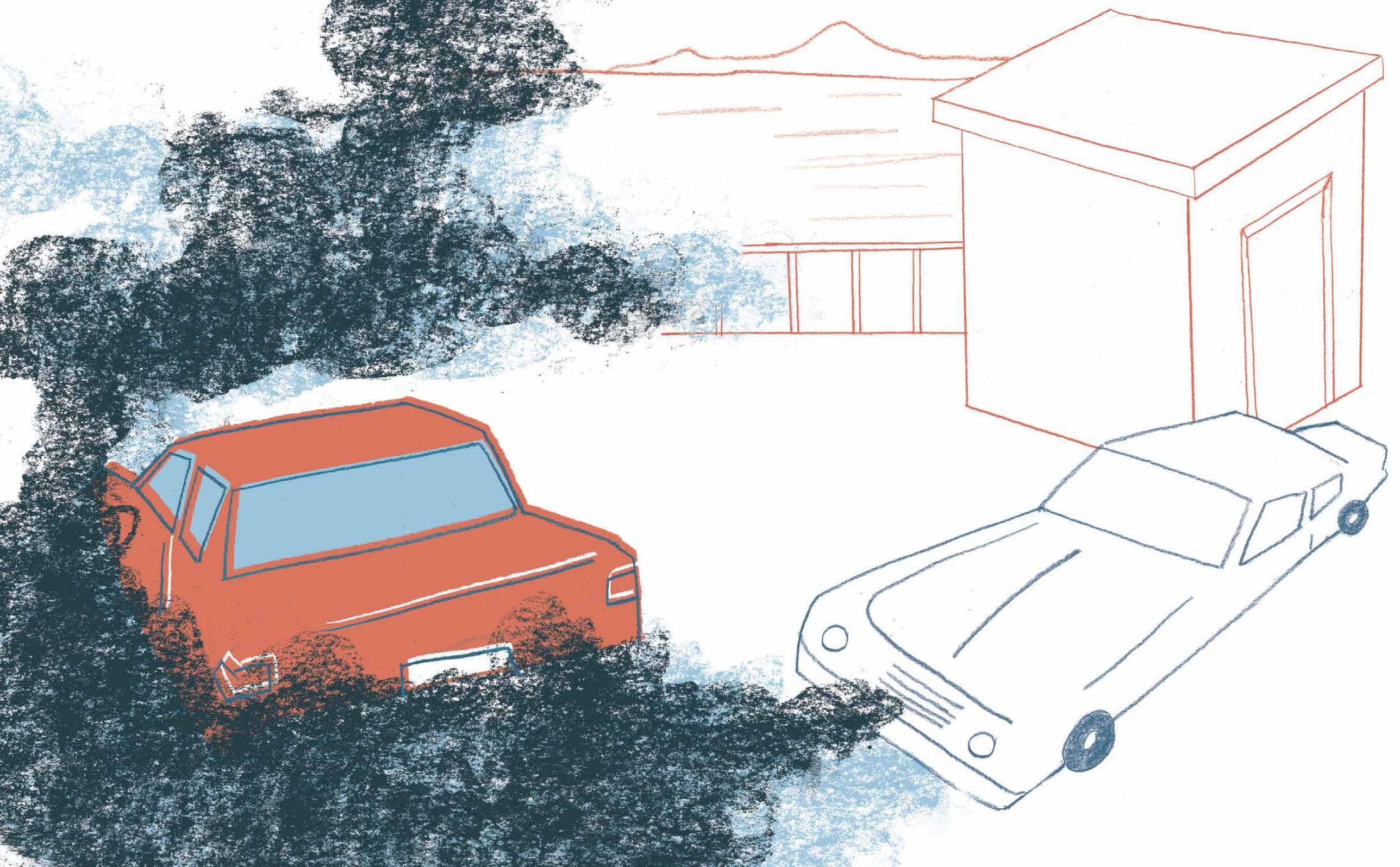
He's invited the whole class.

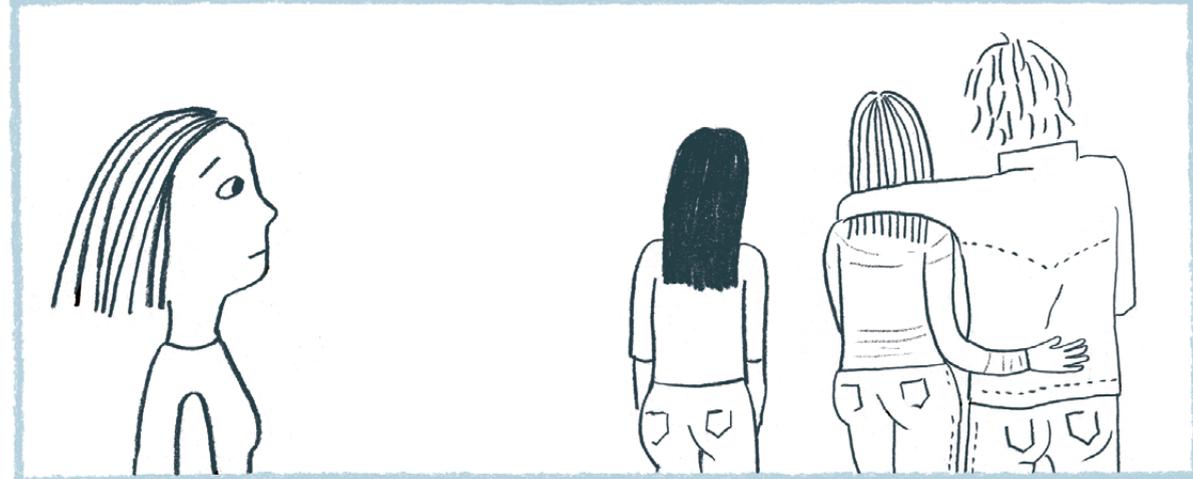
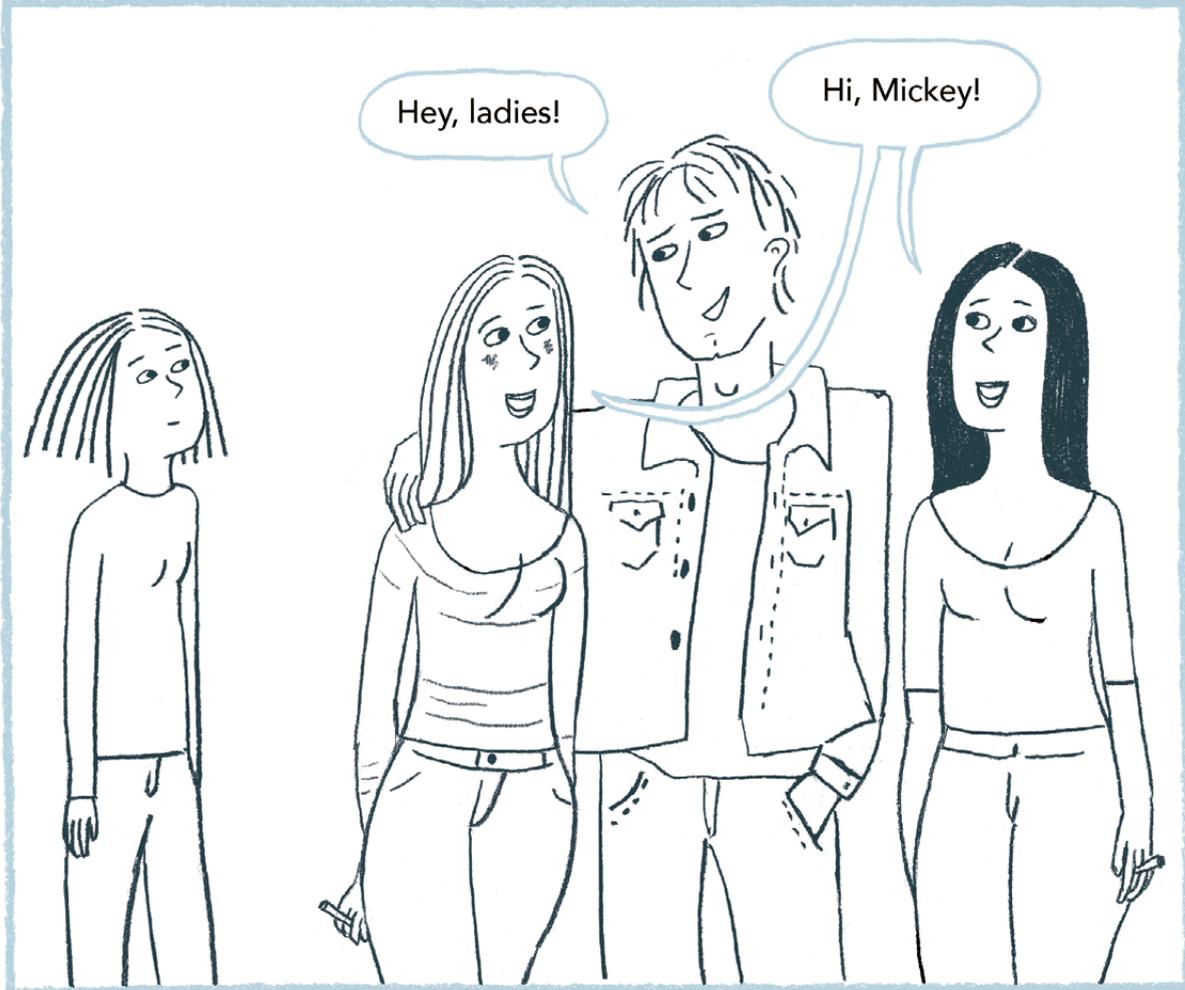
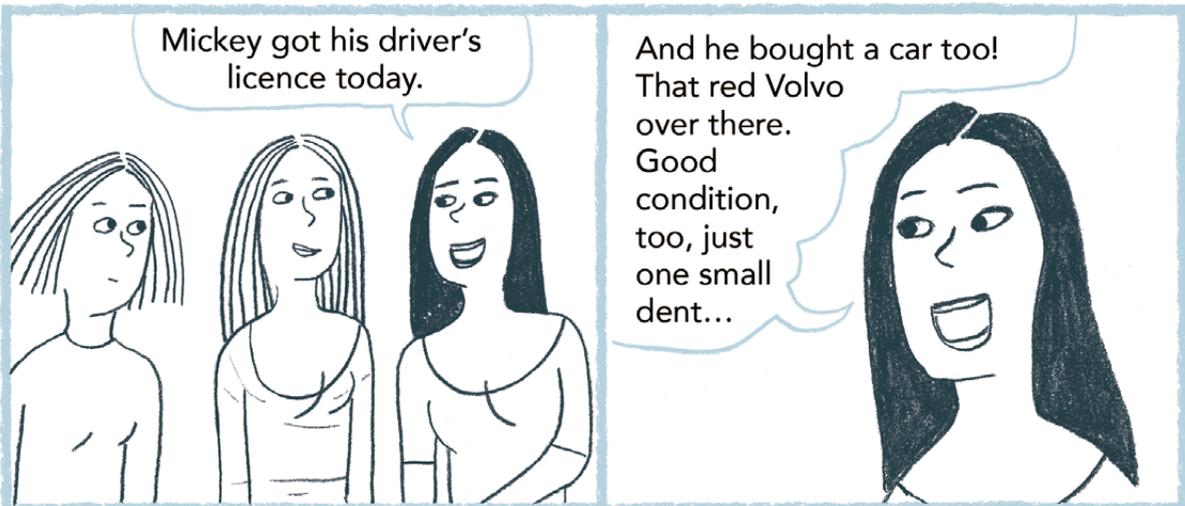


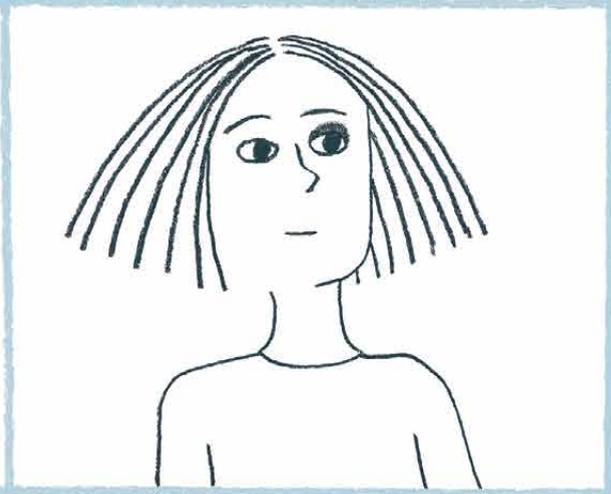
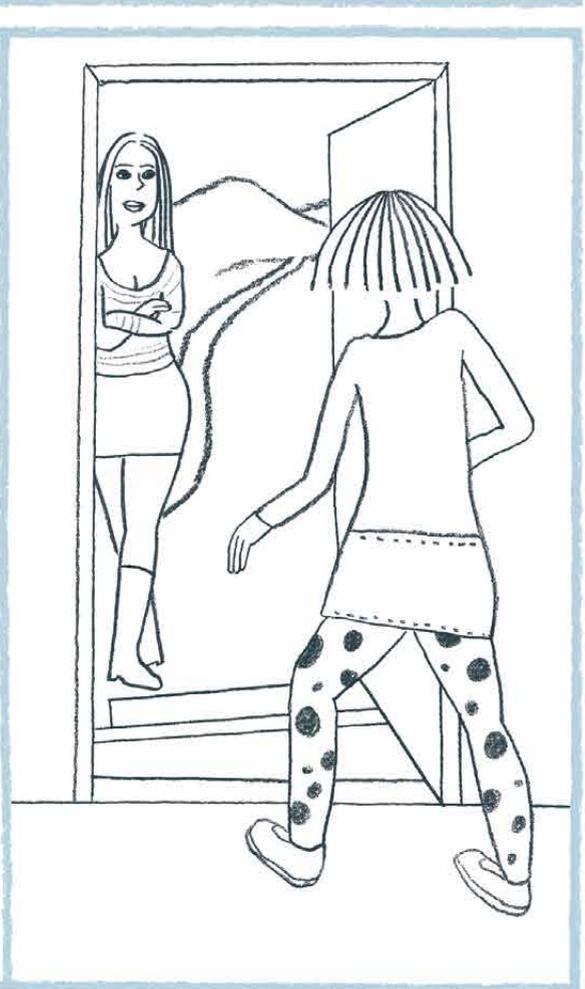
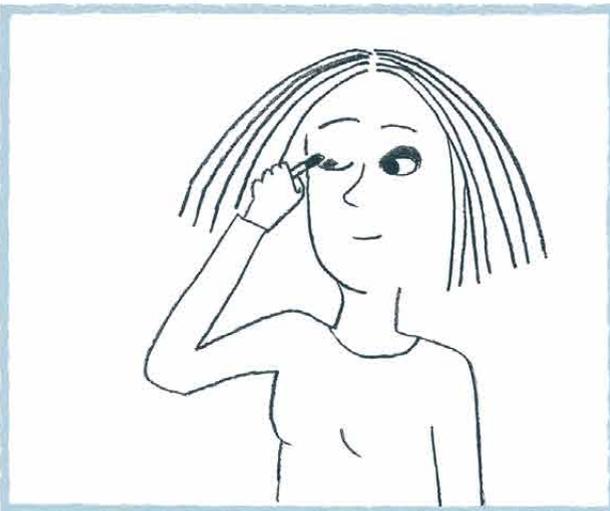
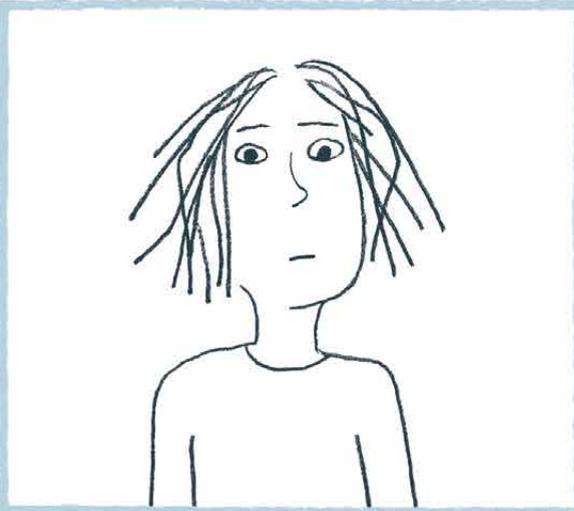
Are you gonna come?



Oh, go on!









We're dancing. At first, it's wild and silly.
Then a slow song comes on. And then another.
Make-out music.
It's Sam.
Sam and me.
Sam?
Me. And Sam.

I feel his breath against my cheek.
Warm, ticklish breath creeps around my earlobe.
Fast breaths.
Can Sam feel my breath?
Am I breathing a little too fast?

It's me who starts it.
I press my lips against his.
He startles, but immediately opens his mouth.
Greedily.

His tongue. Wet, clammy, slippery.
Sam's tongue.
In my mouth.
It fills almost my entire mouth.
I concentrate hard on following along, my eyes
closed.
It's weird.
I need to sneeze.
No! I can't sneeze!
Not now.
I don't sneeze.

Sophie is standing over by the door.
I hope she looks over.
Please look over!
Unkissed! Me?
Not bloody likely.

Sam's tongue retreats into his own mouth.
I don't dare open my eyes.
Not right away.



Do you wanna come round for pizza tonight?

I'm going to the cinema with Mickey.

Oh. Okay.

Maybe you should get yourself a boyfriend too?

Yeah, right. Who though?

Sam maybe.

But he's so childish.

So are you though :-)

"Is Sophie coming?" Mum asks.

"She's out with a new friend," I respond.

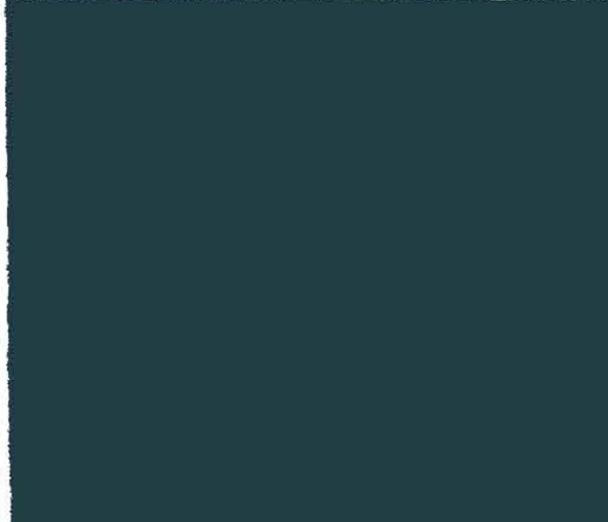
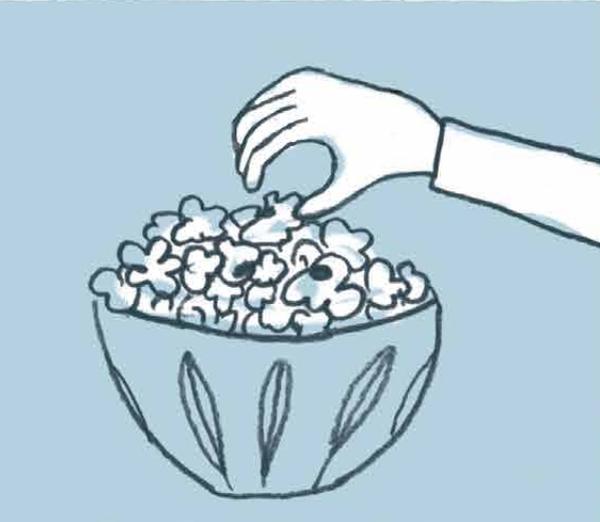
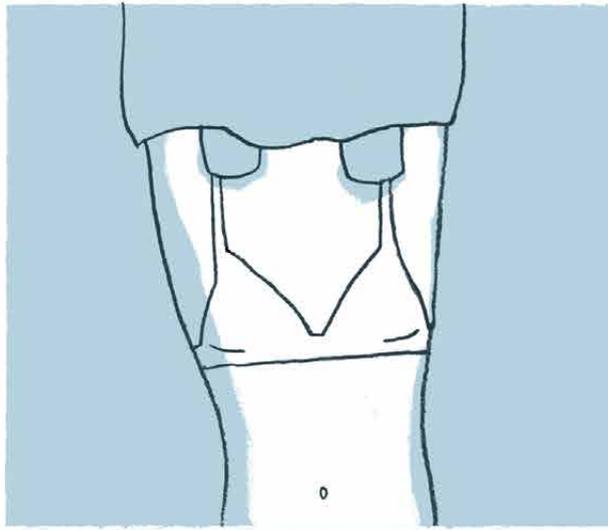
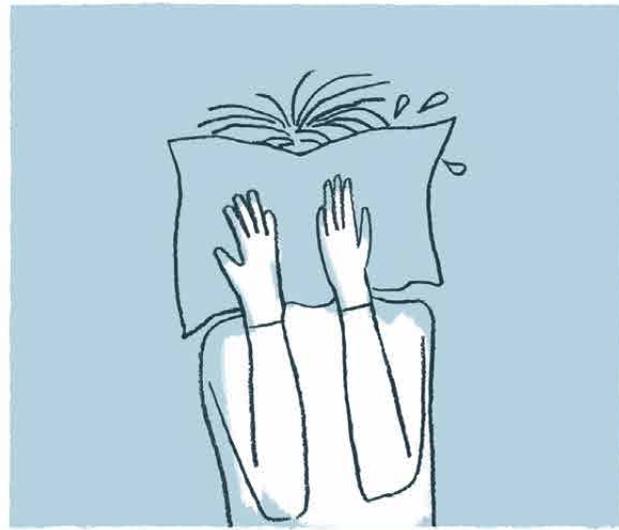
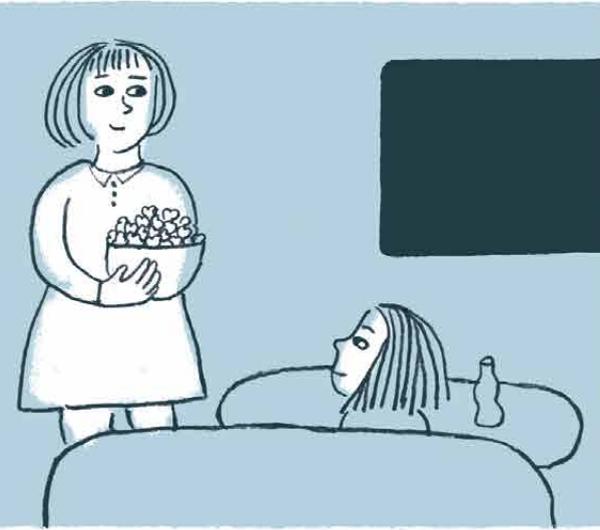
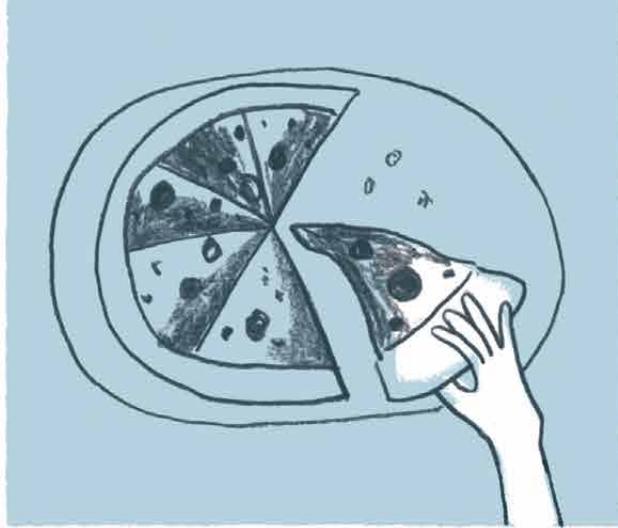
"I see," says Mum. "Sophie's starting to grow up."

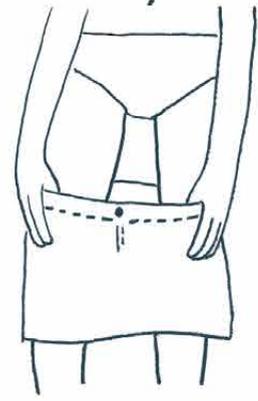
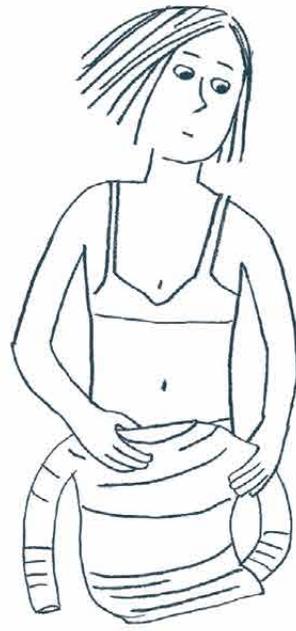
I'm sitting here with Mum, and Sophie's out with Mickey. I looked up Mickey online. Saved his phone number too. I don't know why I did that.

Mum makes good pizza. Scratch that, she makes the world's best pizza. I take another slice. The tomato sauce is piping hot. I get a blister in my mouth. I poke it carefully with my tongue. It hurts, but it feels good.

"You'll be growing up soon too," Mum says comfortingly.

She strokes my hair. She has soft hands.



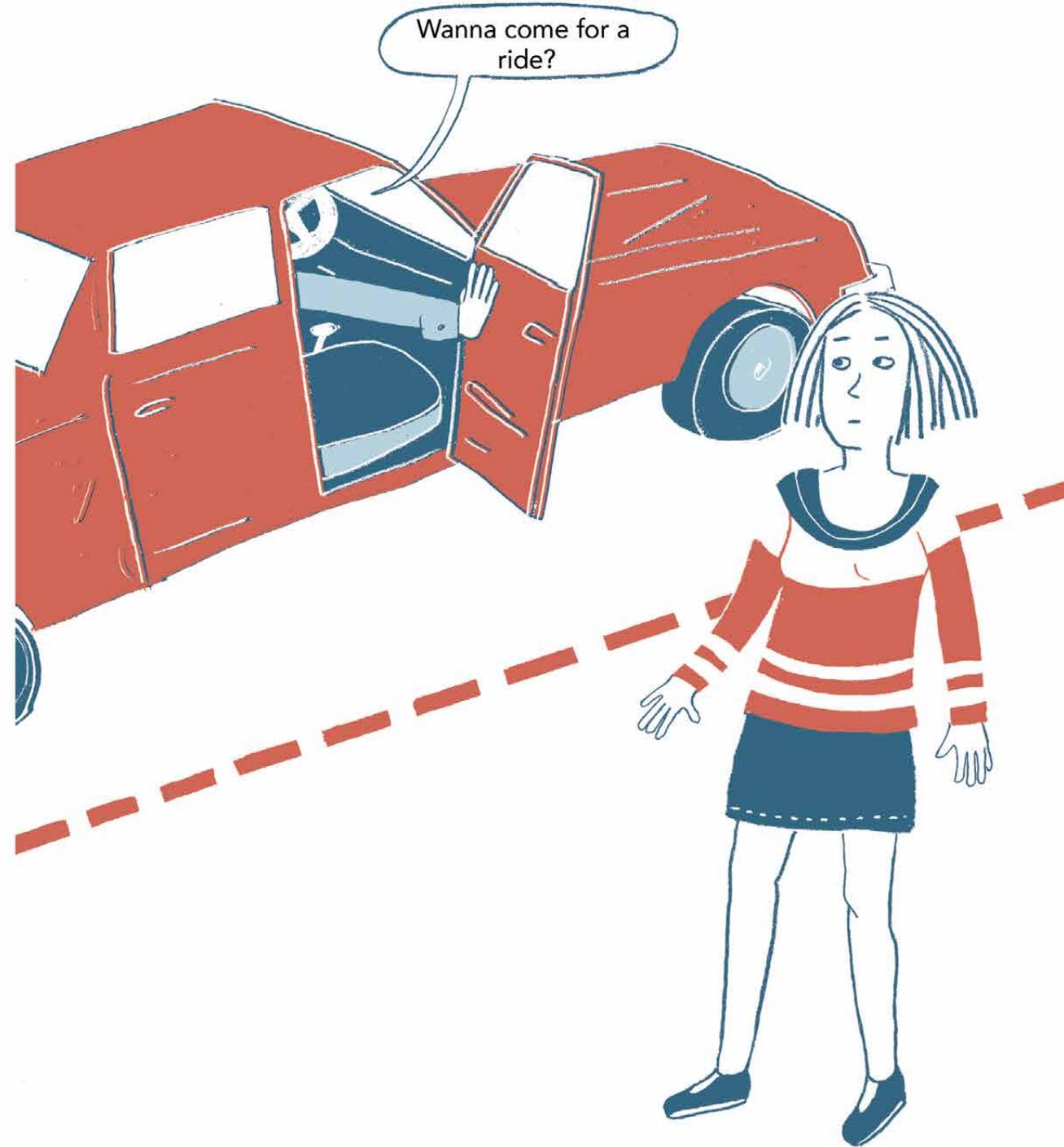
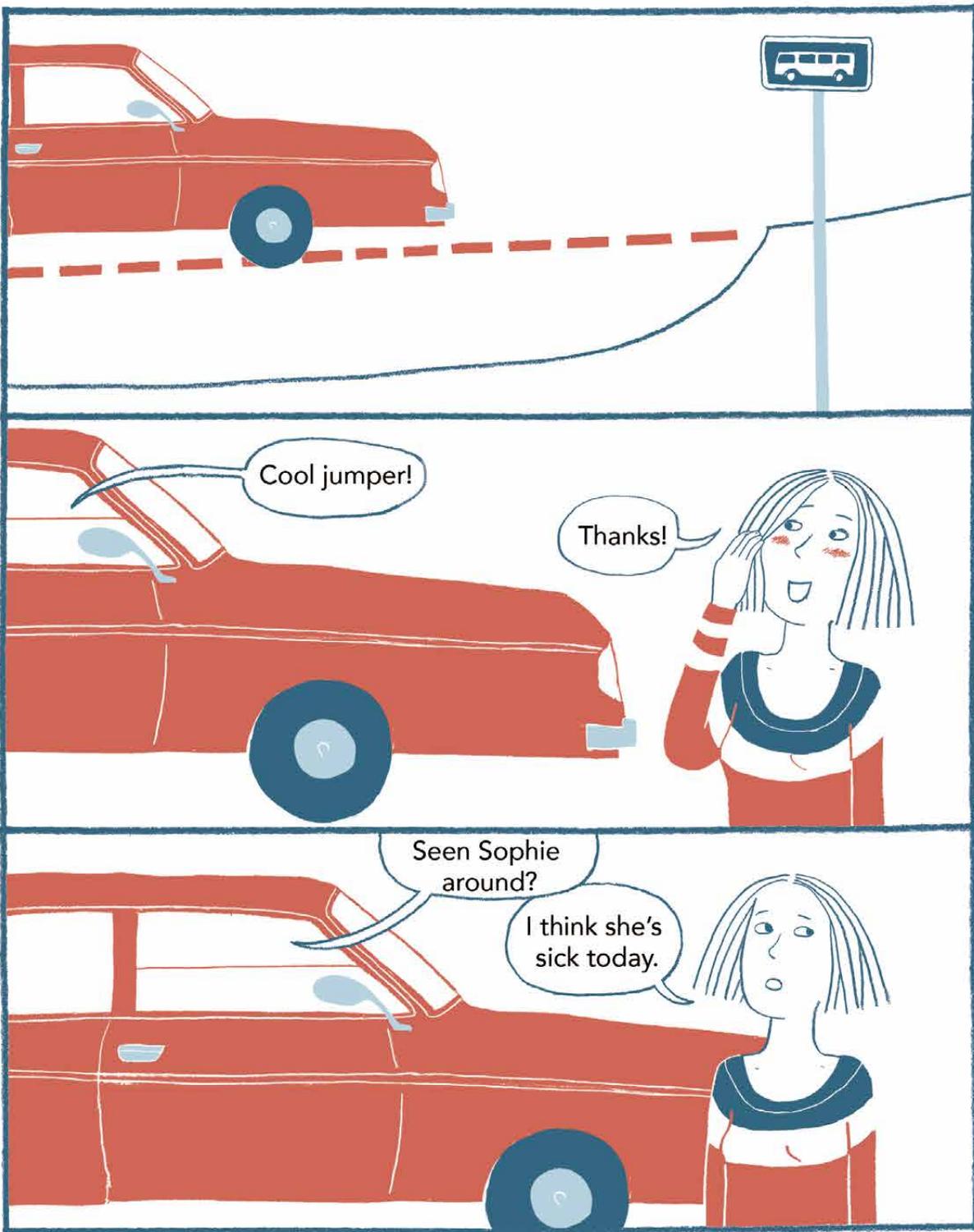




It's only a short way to the bus stop, but I run.
I can't be too late.
Mickey'll be here soon.
He's coming to meet Sophie, but it's me who's here.

I wonder what Mickey's breath would feel like on my
cheek.
Thin like cigarette smoke?
Or thick like exhaust fumes?

My stomach muscles are too tight.
My breath isn't going all the way down; it's stuck up
around my throat, getting in the way.
Will he come? I think he'll come.
Maybe he won't come after all?
Mickey, you HAVE to come.







Mickey pulls up in the car park. The one right behind the gym. It gets strangely quiet. Gone is the hum of the engine, the squeal of the breaks, the clunk of the gear, the flashing lights.

The autumn air is crisp. It's getting close to the time when the birds start flying south. I get out. The door slams behind me with a dull metallic sound. I move my legs, try to cross them. It looks stupid so I lean back against the car, just like Mickey.

Now it's me who's standing here with Mickey.
Mickey and me?
Me and Mickey!

I accept another cigarette. My mouth is dry, and the cigarette tastes like warm concrete. All the same, I squint and press my lips tightly together.

For a long time.

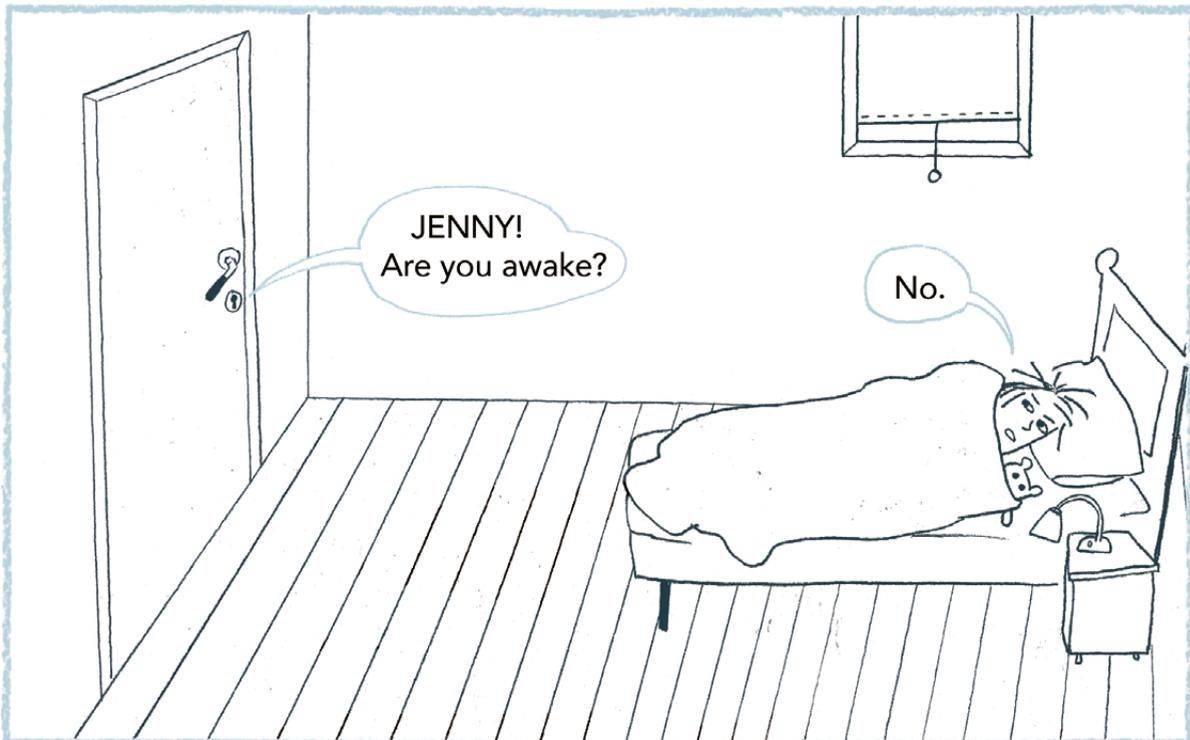
I breathe in. Smoke fills my body. It fills my mouth, my throat, my stomach, my thighs, right down to my toes.

My lungs shrink in on themselves. My stomach writhes. I throw myself towards the bushes by the slope and crouch down. I bend right over so I don't vomit on my clothes.

I wipe my mouth with the back of my hand. I spit and the blob hits a leaf. The spit runs slowly down. Clear, slightly pink and with a tiny bit of mince.

Behind me, I hear Mickey fiddling with the car door. It's over now.



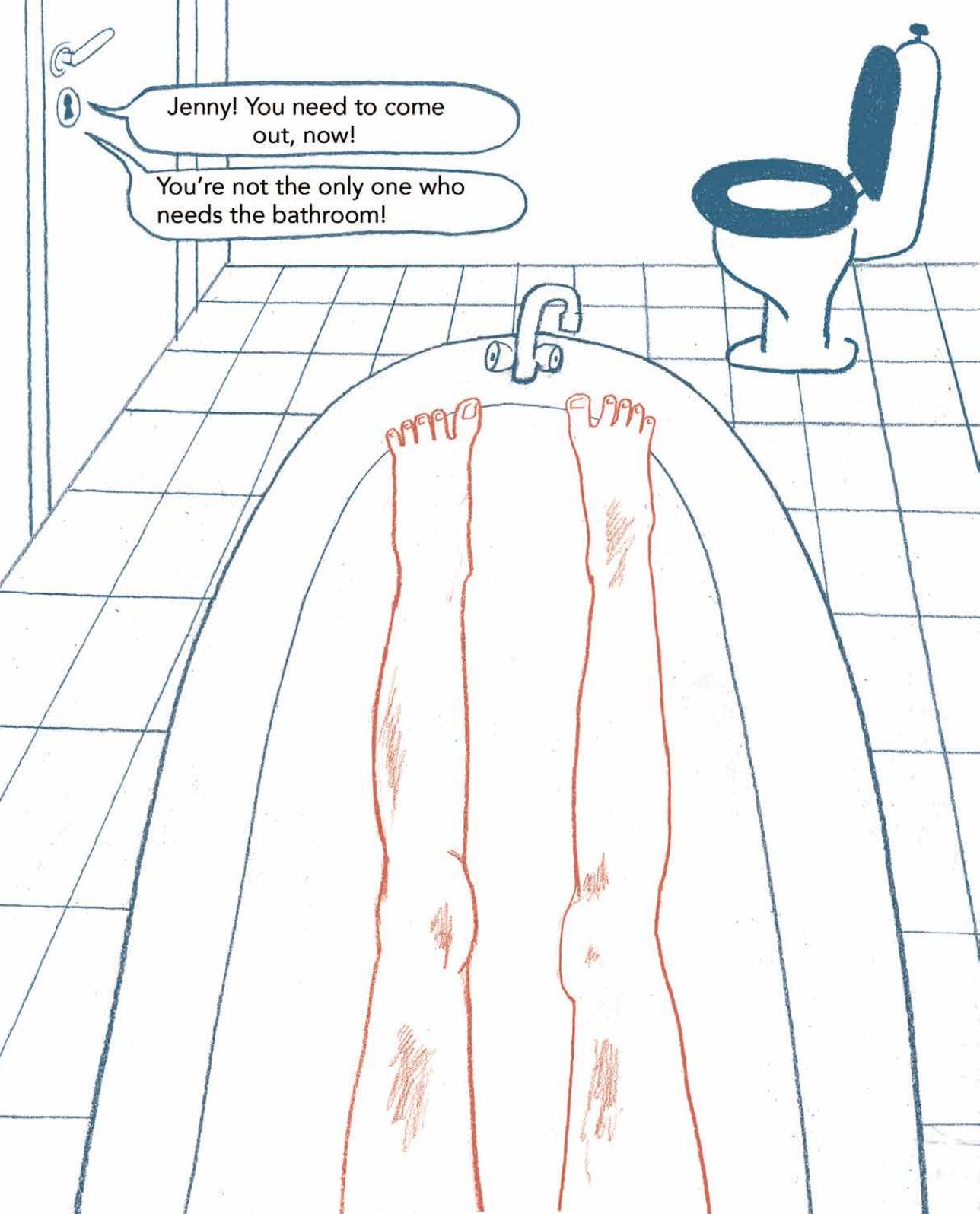




I slowly lower my body into the water.
I hold my breath.
The water is fiery.
Somehow it still isn't hot enough.

My whole body needs to go down.
I open my eyes.
I'm almost there.
The water is pushing the thoughts clean out of my head.

I add more hot water.
And more and more!



Jenny! You need to come out, now!

You're not the only one who needs the bathroom!

Tomorrow I'll make the water even hotter.
Boiling.
Tomorrow I'll lie here longer.
I'll lie here until the water goes cold.
Until my body starts to shake.
Until the water turns to ice.



