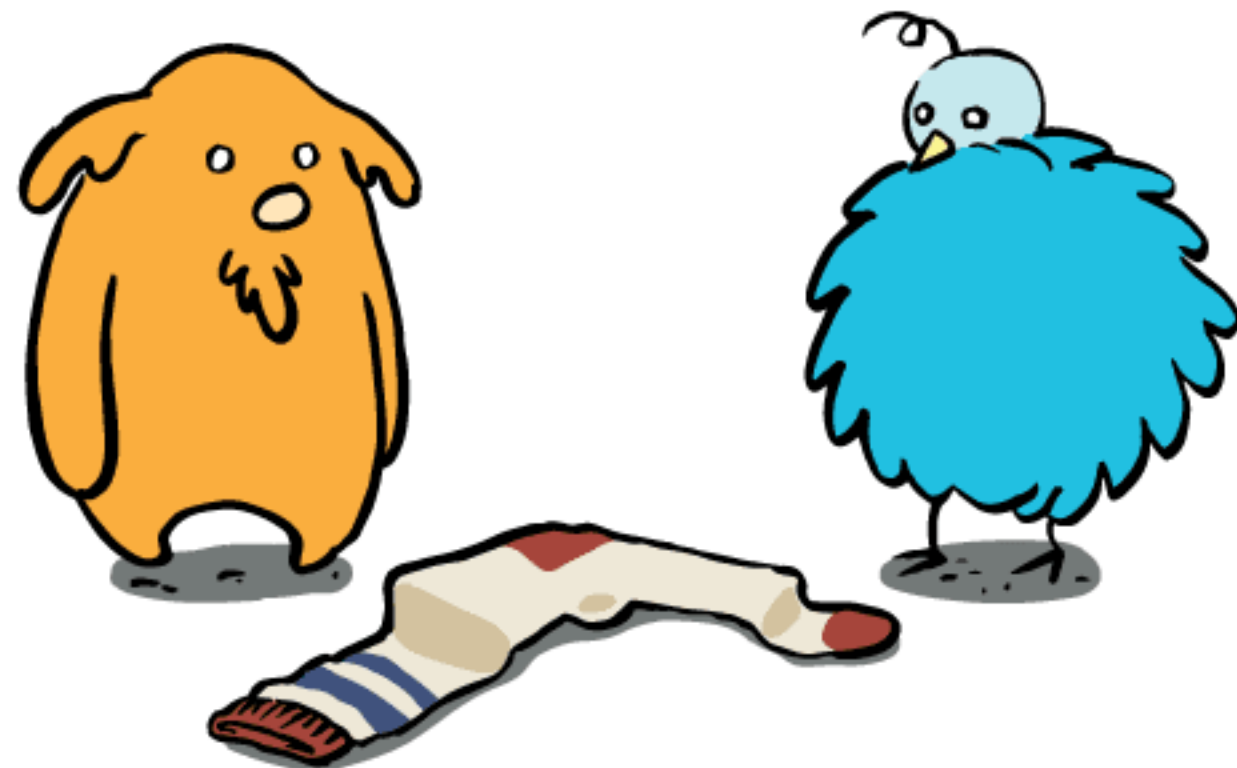


# Little Monster Finds A gun

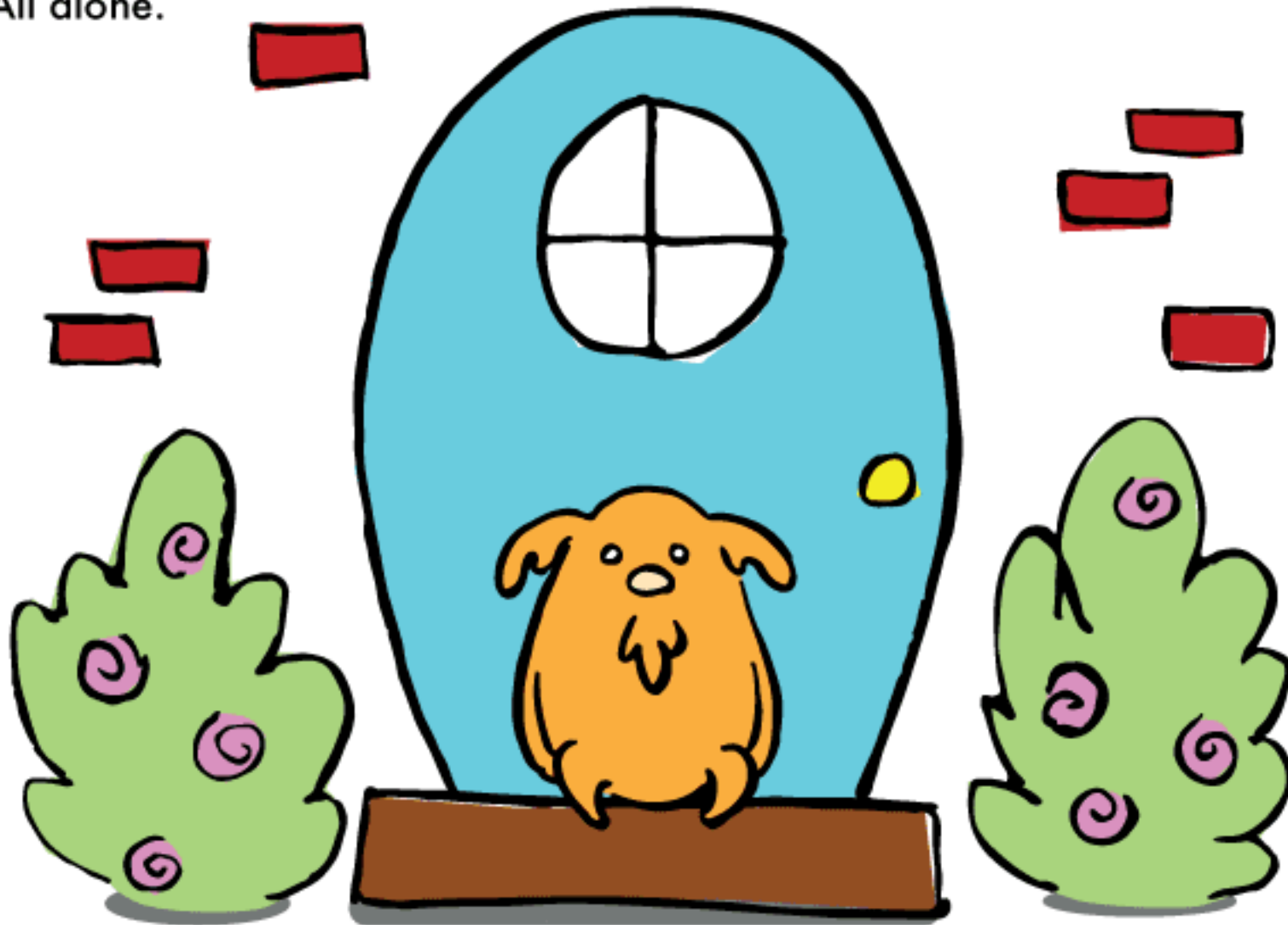


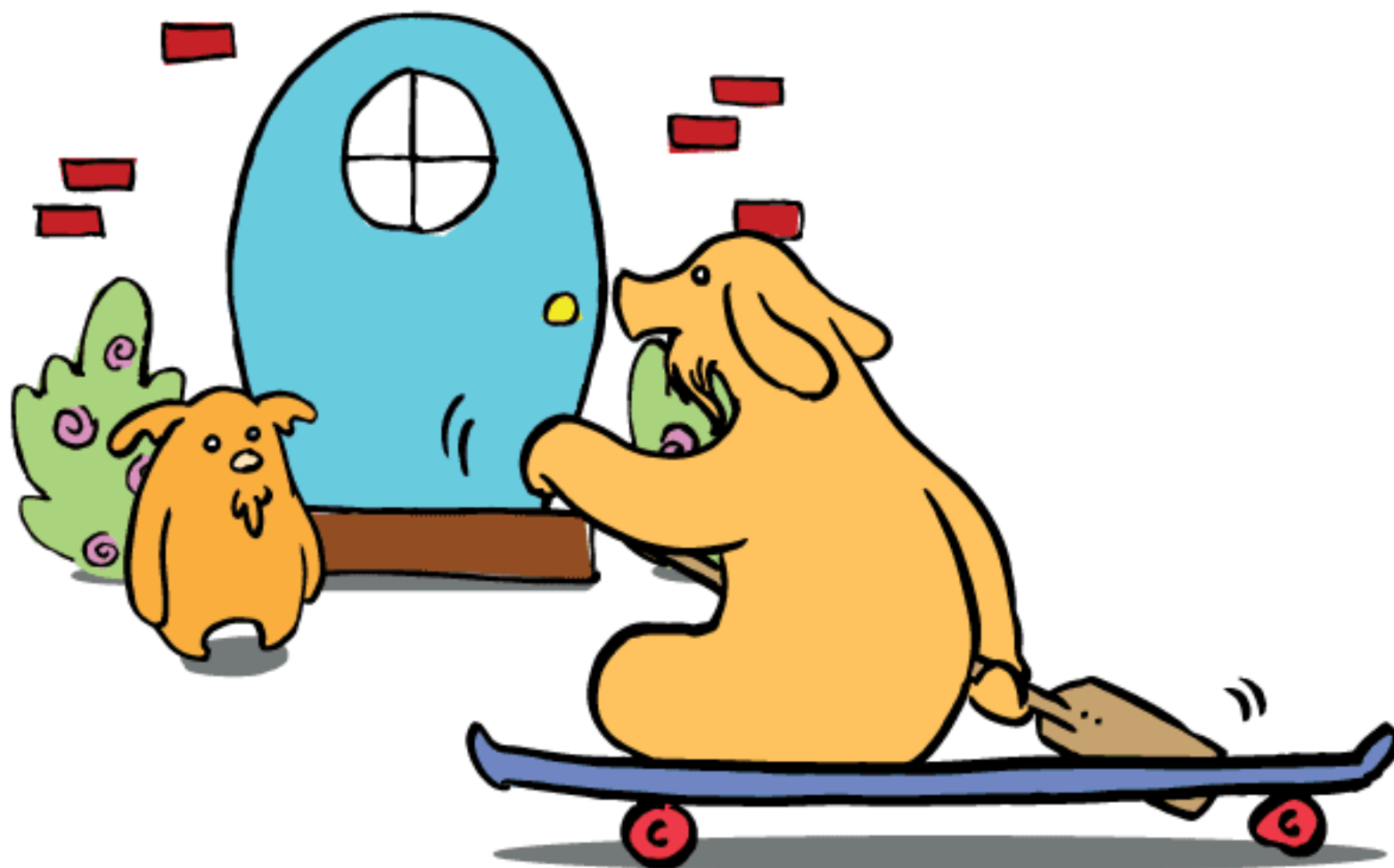
by tracy park

It was a bright sunny day in the monsterhood, the kind you'd want to enjoy with your best friend.

But Little Monster sat outside the house of her best friend, Rascal, alone.

All alone.

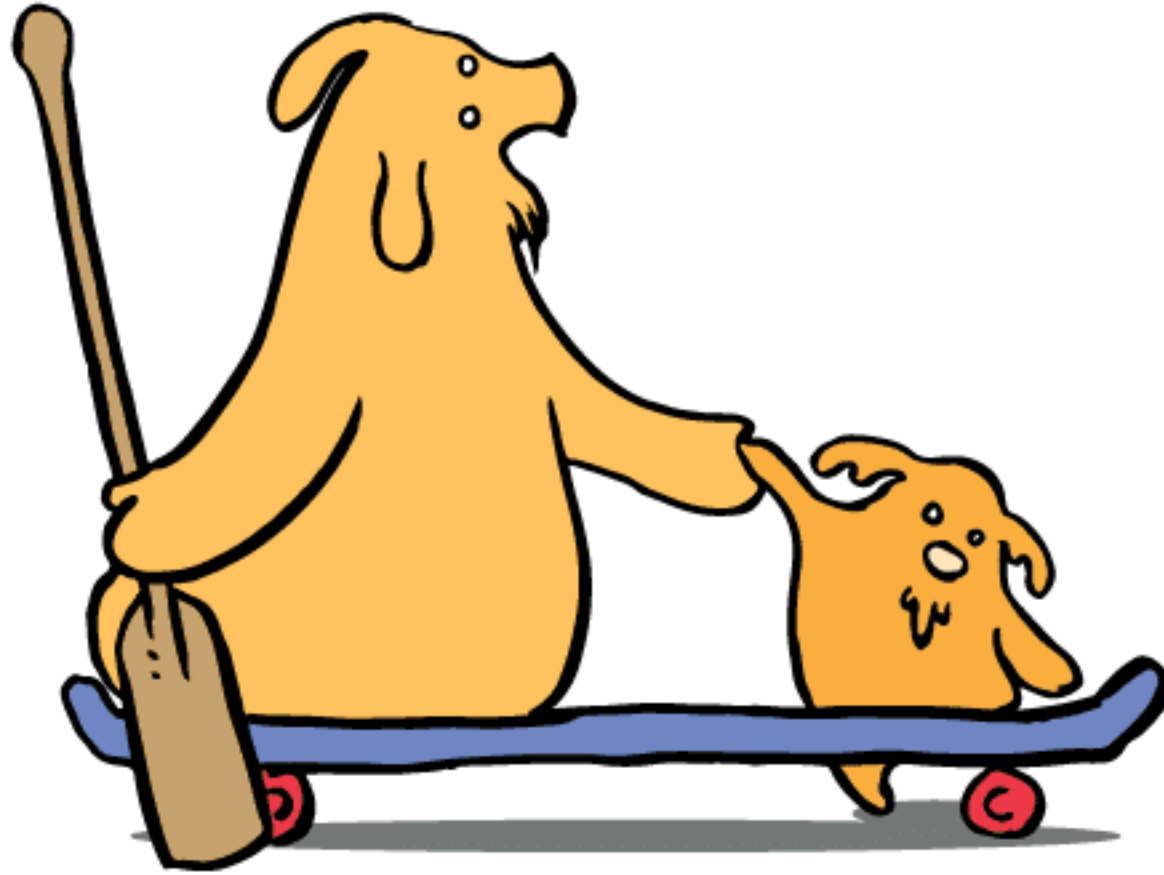




And that is how Mama Monster found her.

“What are you doing out here all alone?” Mama asked.

“Waiting for you,” Little Monster replied. “Can we go home now?”



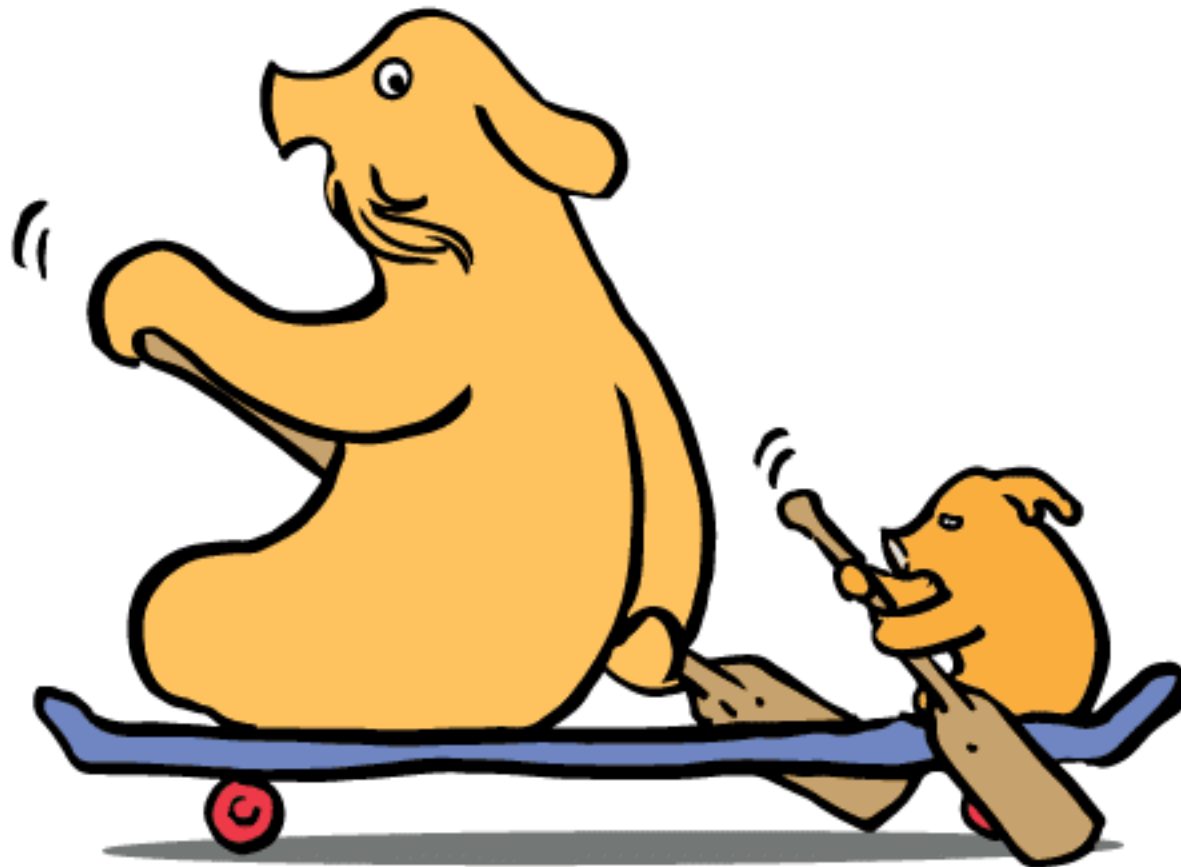
Mama gave Little Monster a sideways glance but said nothing, helping her onto their skateboard.

At least now she didn't have to make awkward small talk with Rascal's Pop, and she imagined he'd be happy to get out of it too. It was rather unfortunate that their kids were friends.

Little Monster and Mama Monster paddled the skateboard down the road in silence.

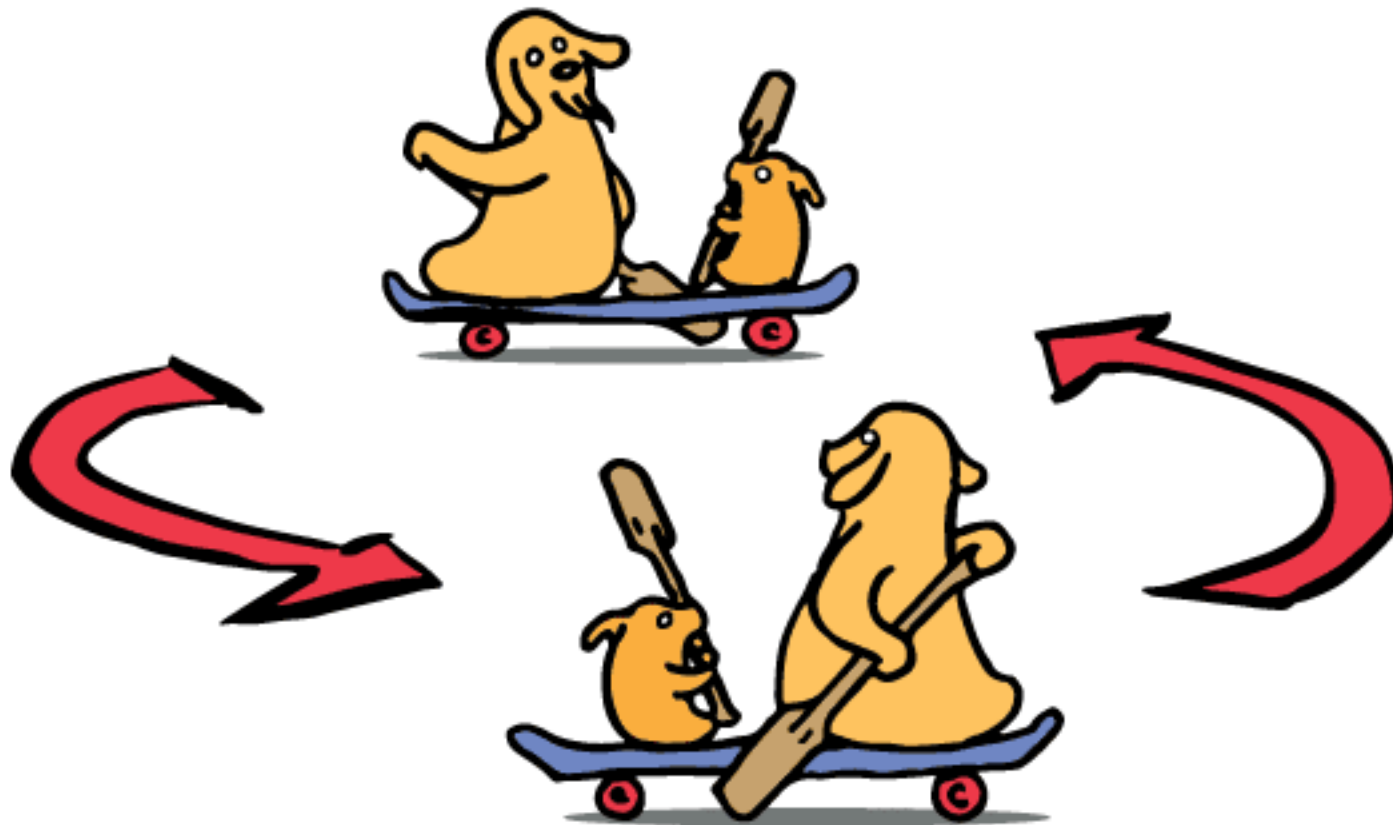
This was odd because normally Mama Monster couldn't get Little Monster to stop talking.

"Why are you so quiet?" Mama finally asked.



Little Monster stopped paddling, causing them to go round in circles.

"Something weird happened at Rascal's," she said. "But I don't want to tell you and get in trouble."

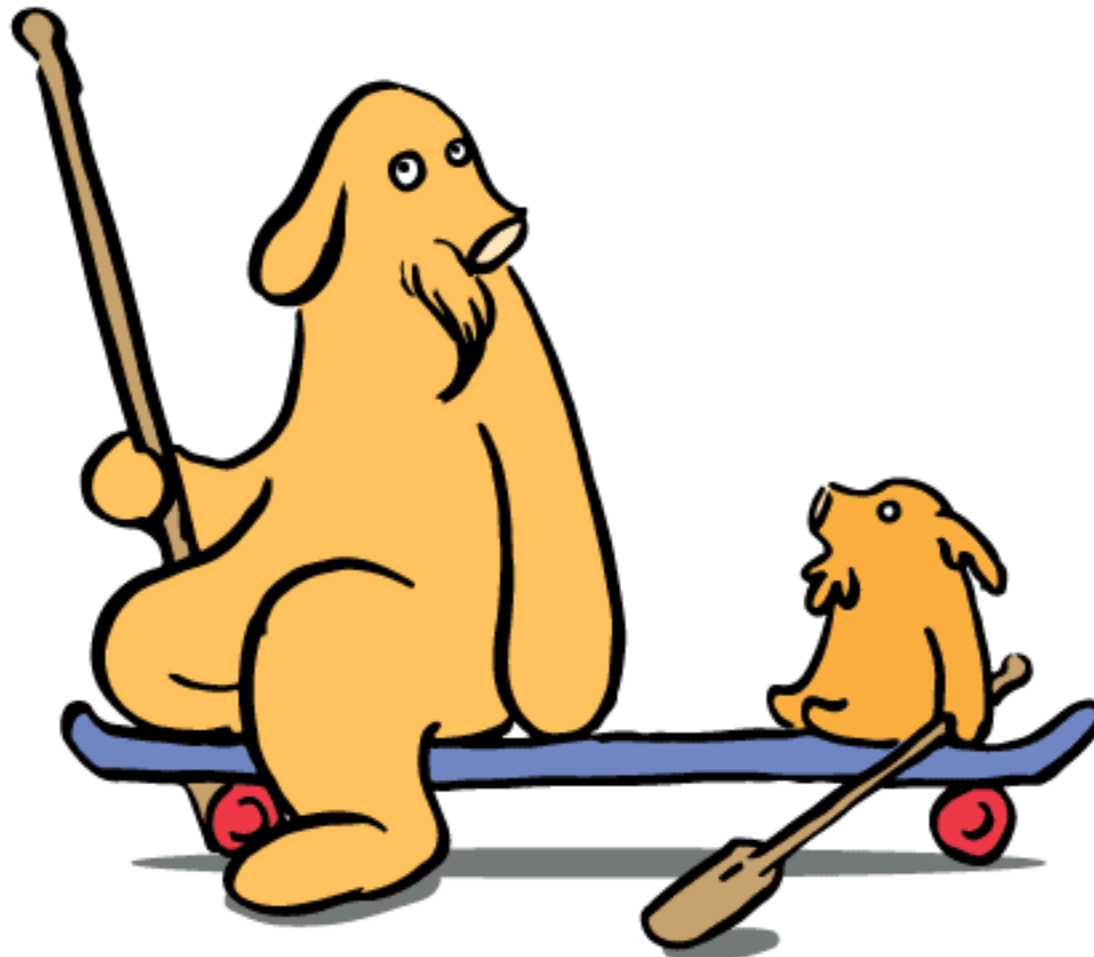


Mama Monster couldn't remember what the book on raising well-adjusted monsters said she should do in this situation.

She decided on: "You can tell me anything and you won't get in any trouble. I promise."

"Like how you promised you would save all my artwork?" Little Monster asked. "And that I could live at home forever?"

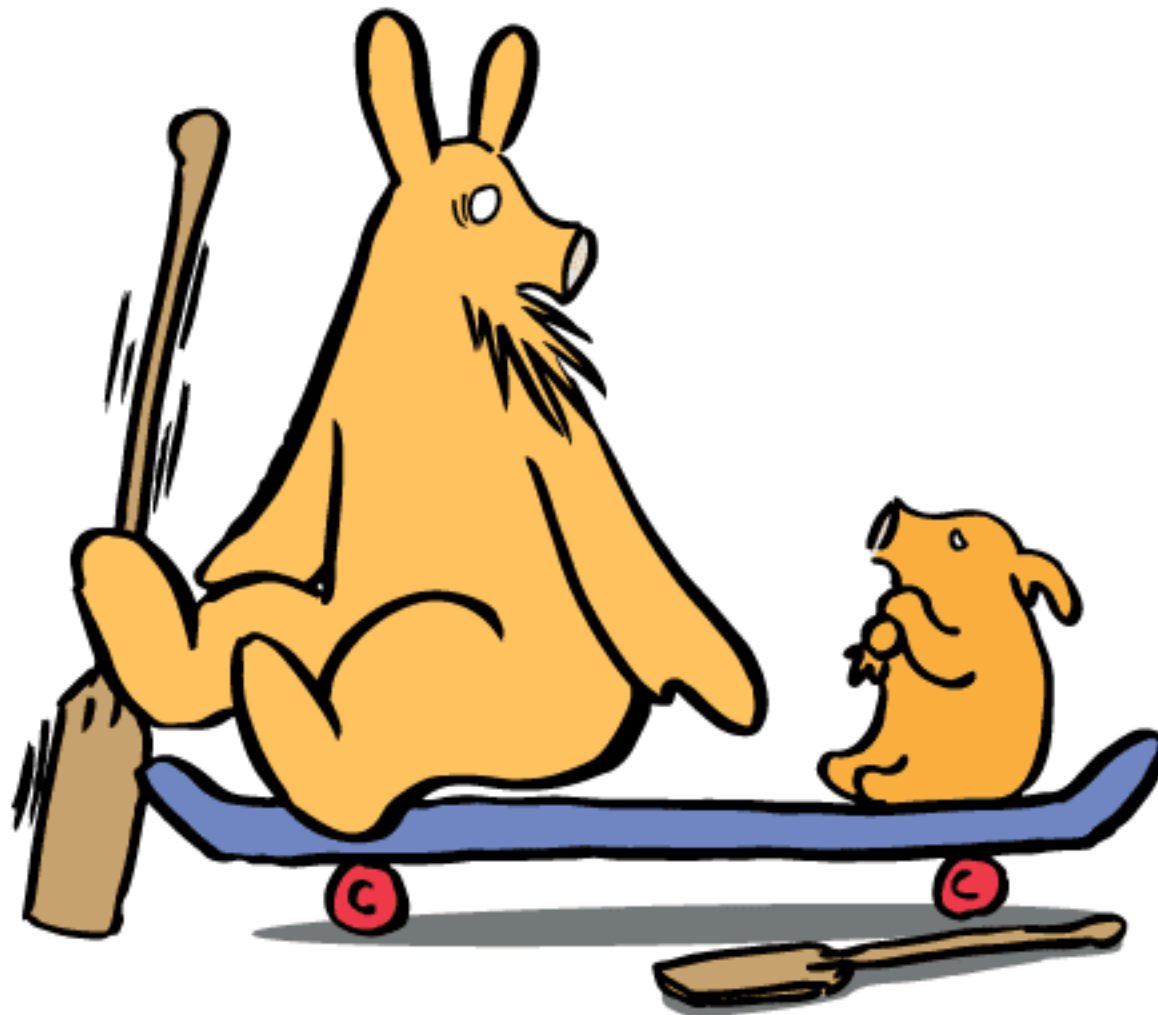
"Yes," Mama Monster lied.



So Little Monster took a deep breath and said, "Rascal showed me her Pop's gun."

"WHAT?!" Mama Monster shrieked.

Little Monster tugged her beard. "You promised I wouldn't get in trouble!"

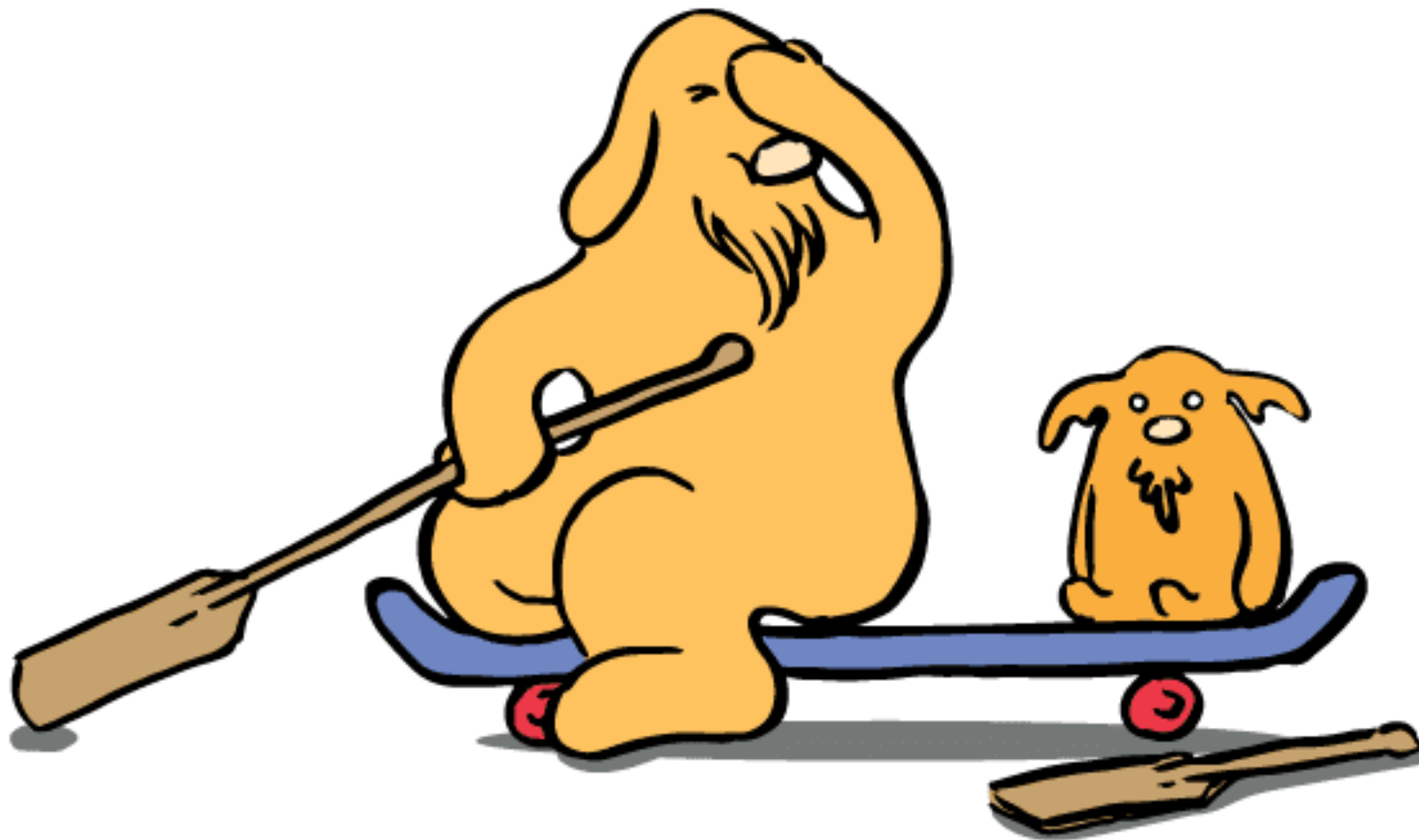




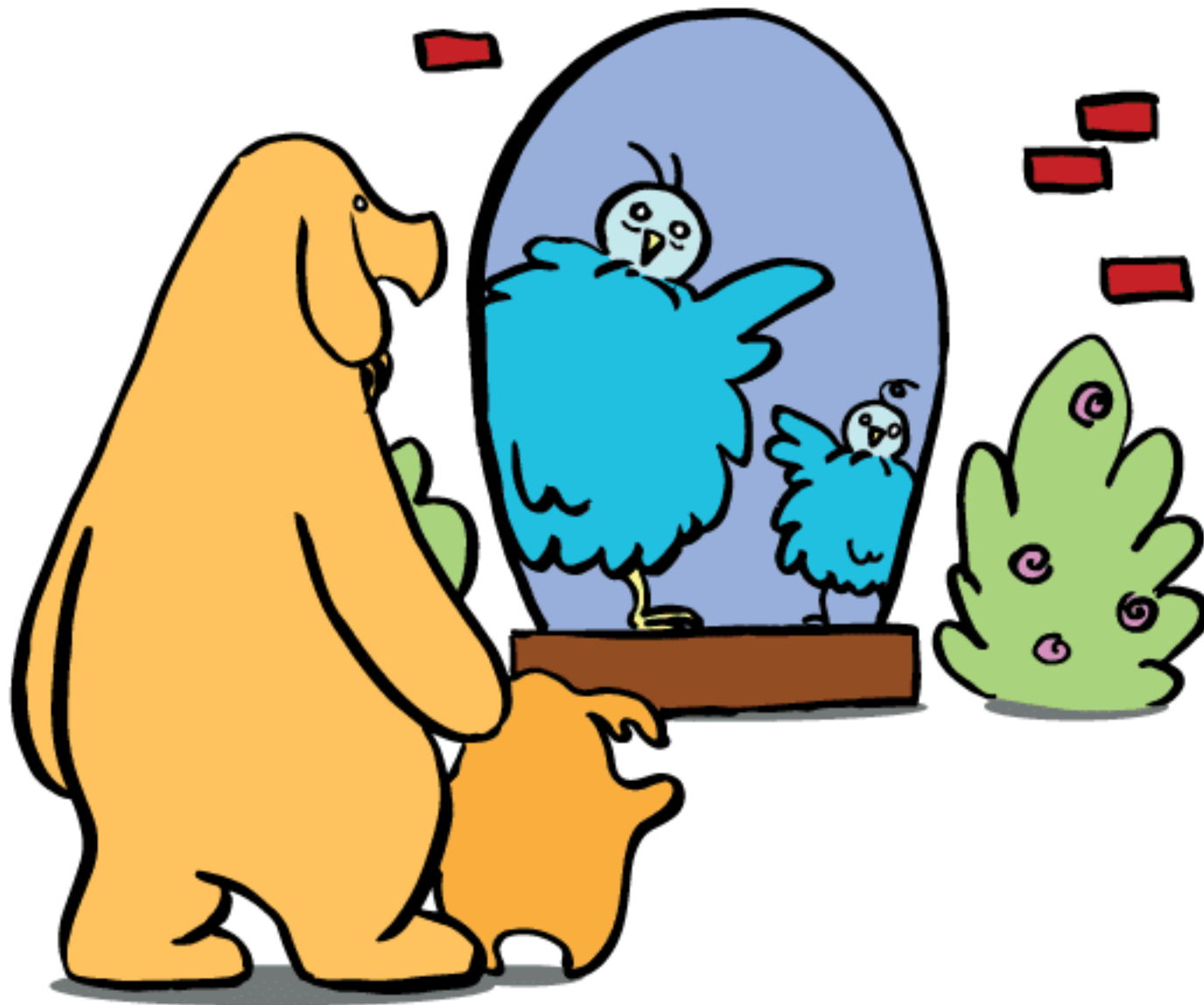
Mama inhaled through her snout deeply and counted to ten by twos because she was impatient.

When she felt like she could see Little Monster for the little monster she was, she said, "Tell me what happened."

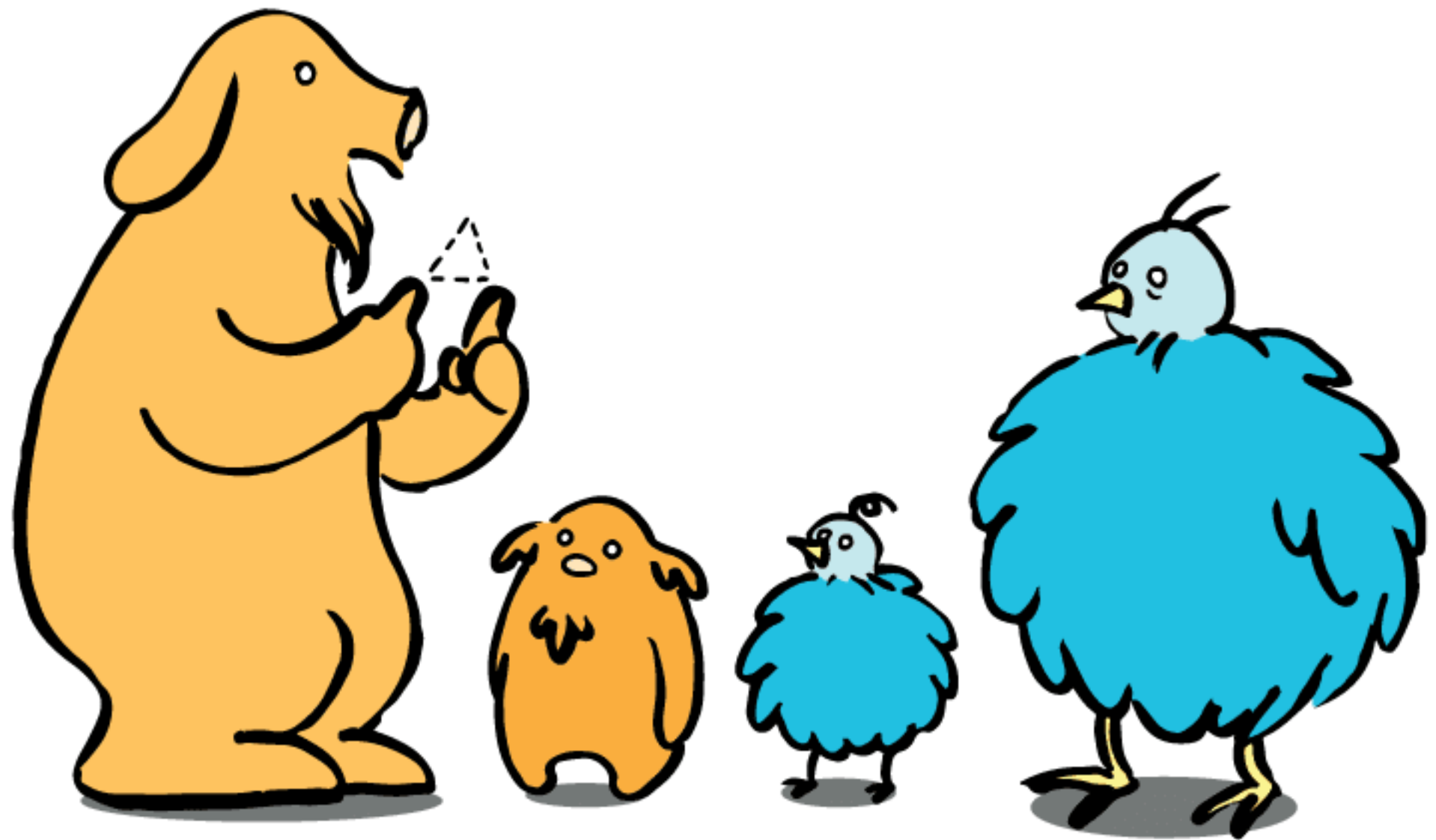
Little Monster took a deep breath and began.



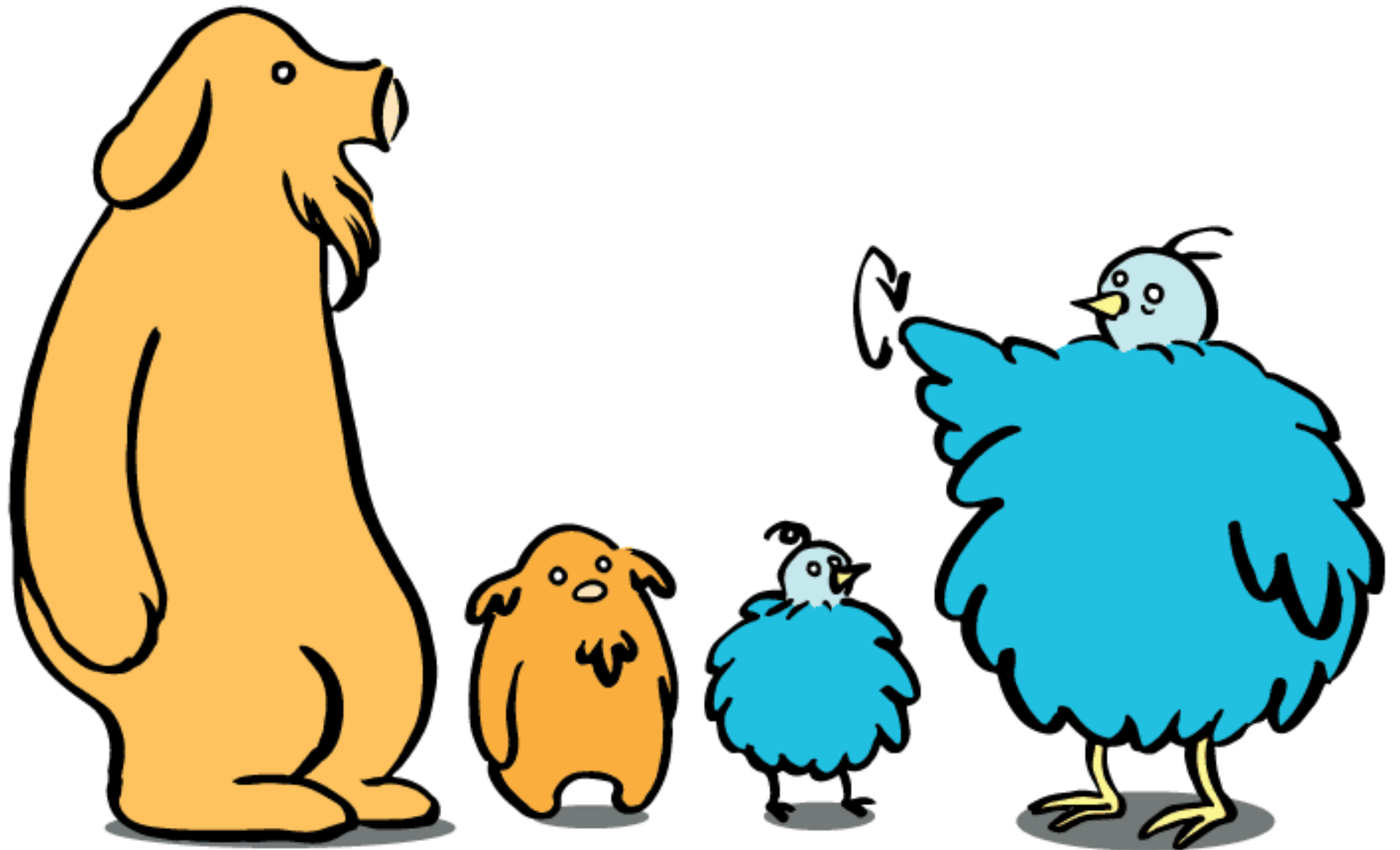
It had started off normally enough, like any bright sunny day in the monsterhood.



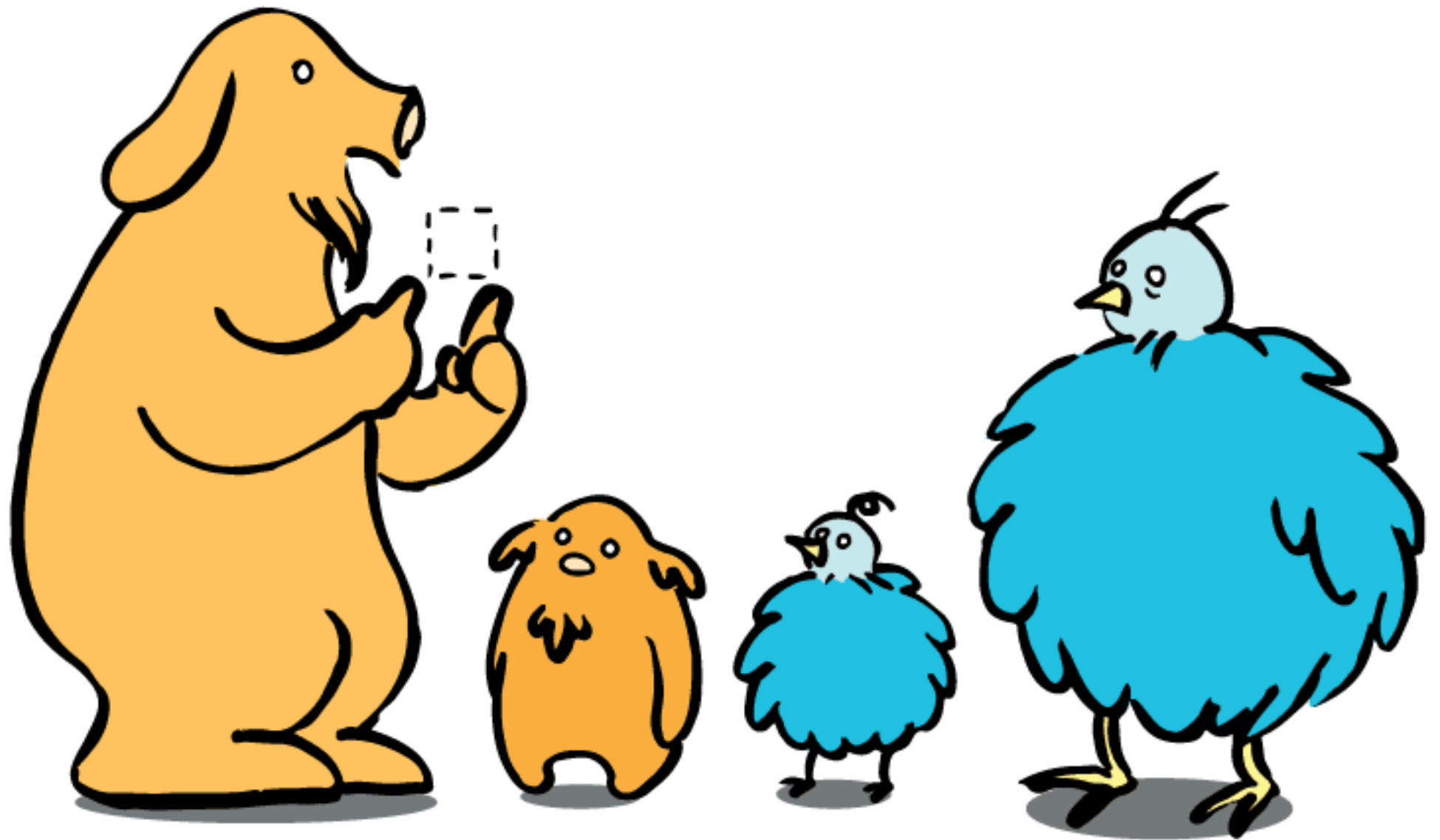
Mama had dropped her off at Rascal's house, reminding Rascal's Pop about Little Monster's triangle allergy.



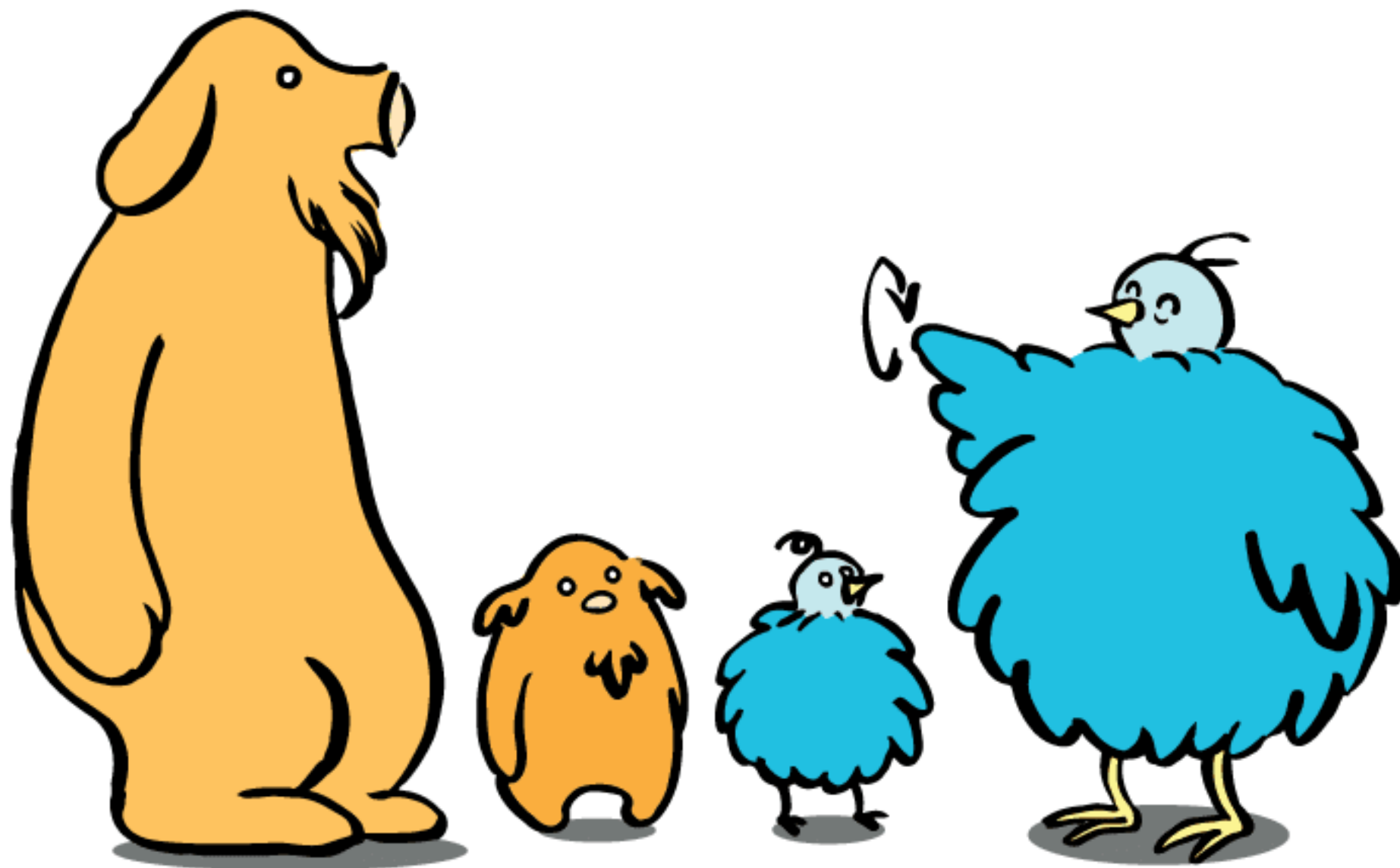
Rascal's Pop assured her that their pet triangle had been put outside and that he'd cut the monsters' sandwiches into circles instead.



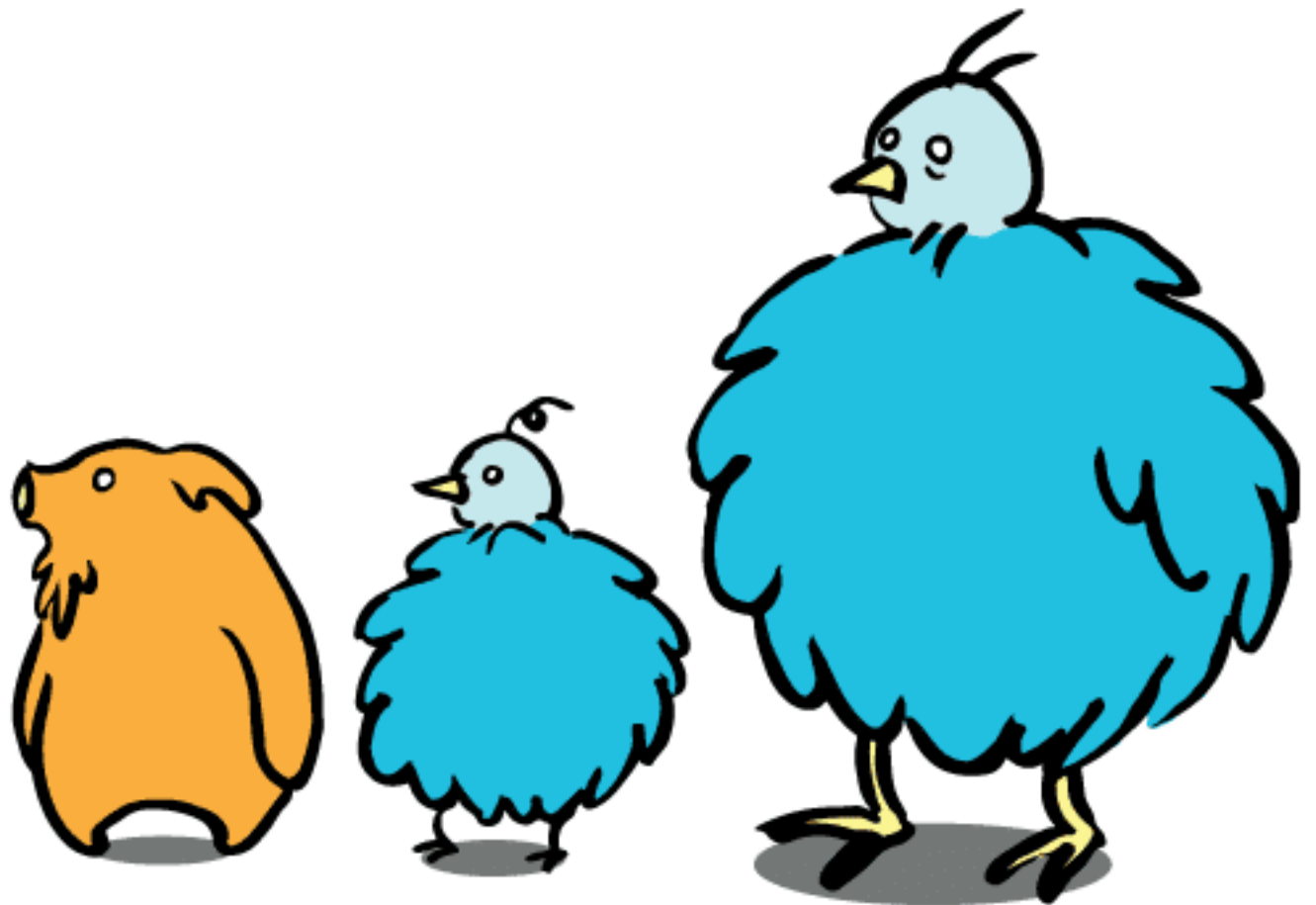
Mama pointed out that he could have left them as squares.



Rascal's Pop replied that maybe if their daughters ate circle sandwiches, they'd grow up well-rounded.



Mama left immediately without saying goodbye, thinking it was rather unfortunate that their kids were friends.





Rascal's Pop instructed them to play nice before settling into the gravy boat to read the memoir du jour.

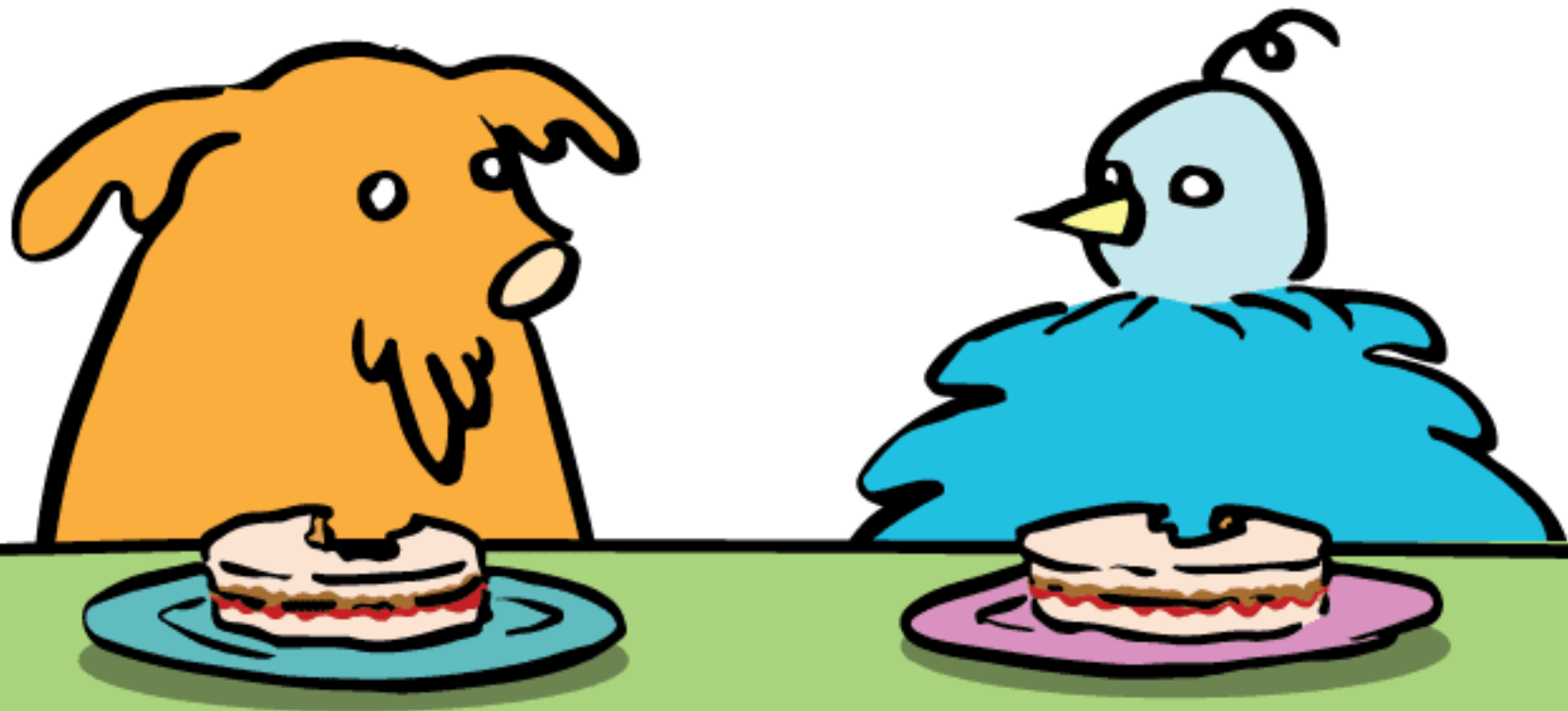
Little Monster and Rascal played make-believe, pretending they were a human accountant and a human struggling novelist who were complete opposites sharing an apartment and hilarity ensued.



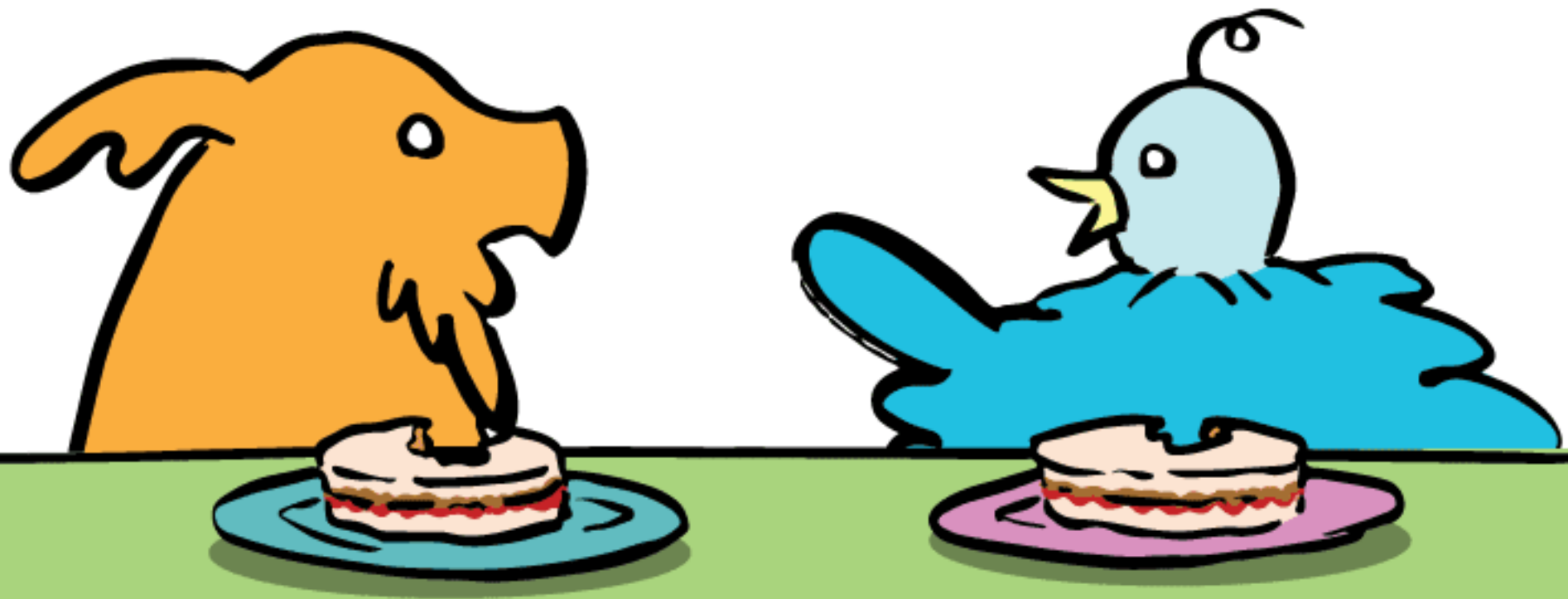


Over their circular sandwiches, Rascal suggested they play a game called Secrets. The rule was that each monster had to share a secret that was more secret than the last.

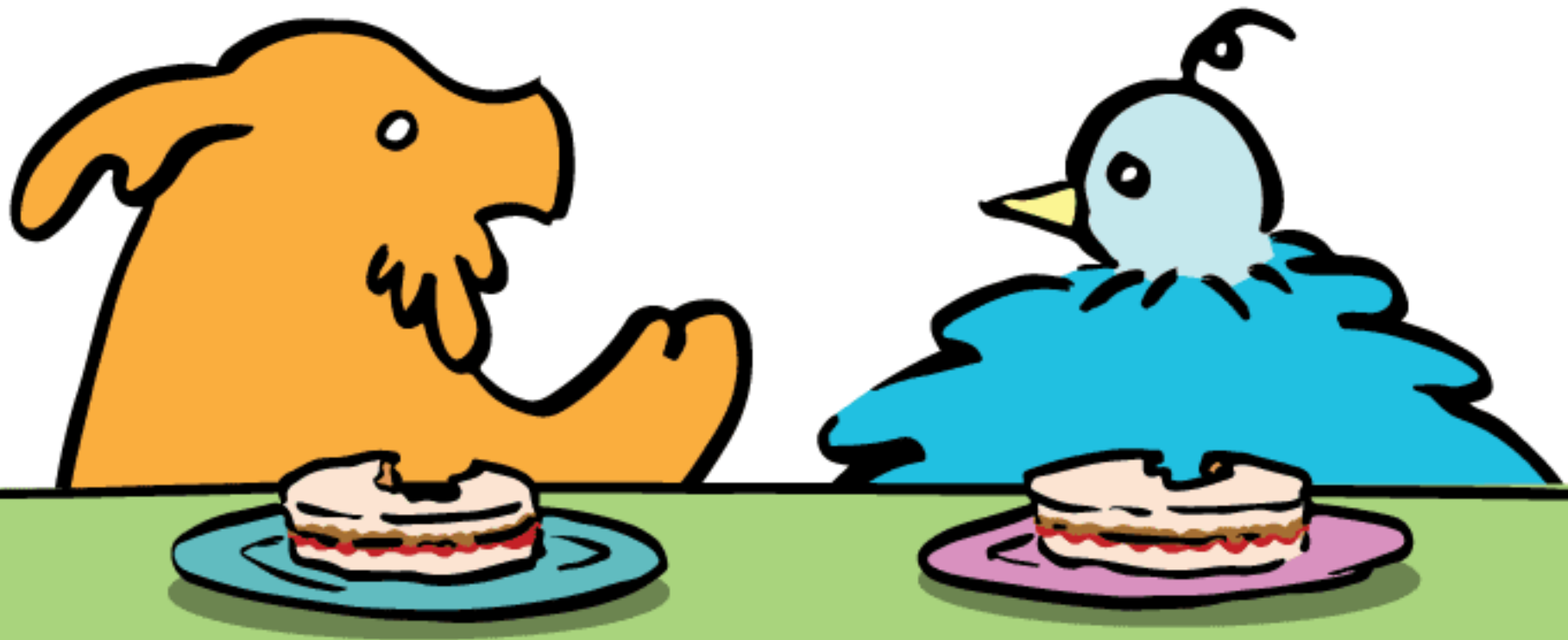
It sounded like a terrible idea, so they began to play.



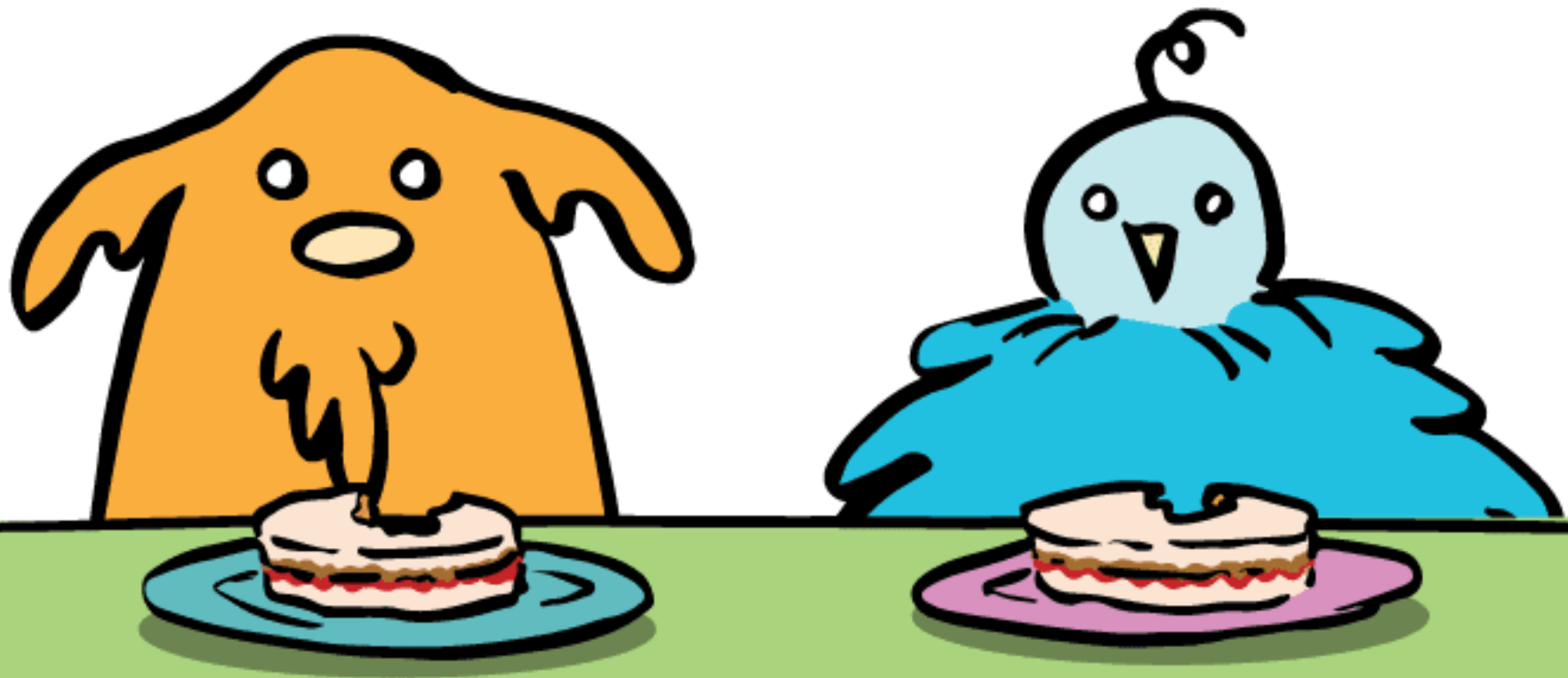
Rascal went first: "My secret is that I don't really like circle sandwiches but I pretend to because I don't want to hurt your feelings."



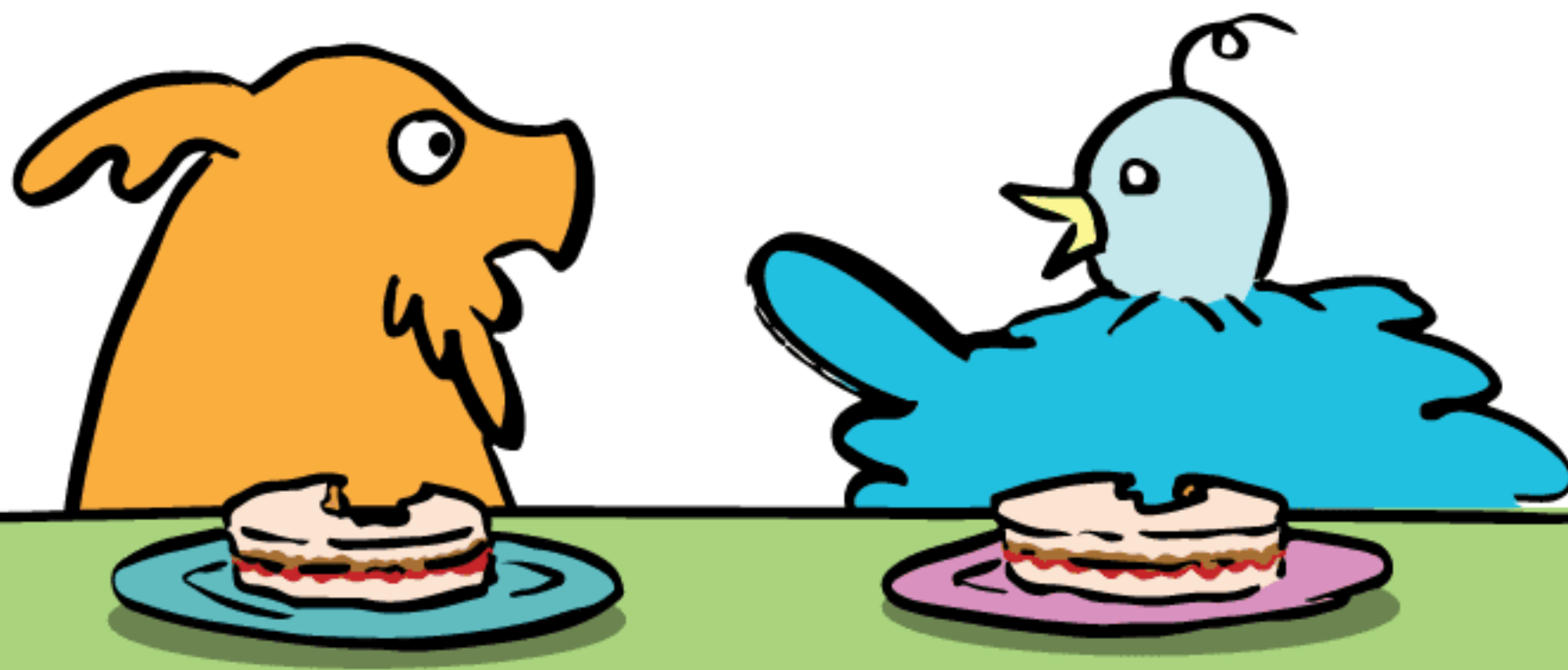
Little Monster thought hard, then countered with: "My secret is that I already knew your secret about the circle sandwiches."



Then they both got stuck because they were still little and just hadn't made enough poor life decisions yet to have the kinds of secrets it takes to win such a game.

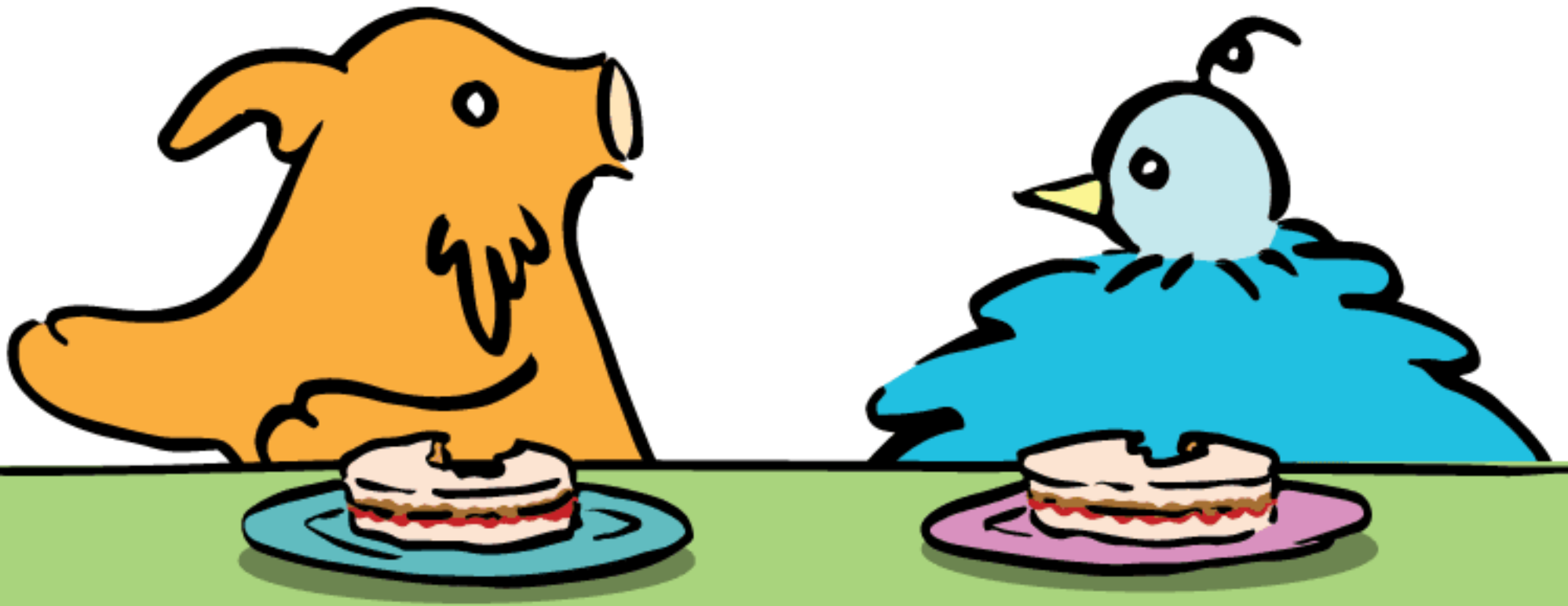


“Oh, I’ve got one!” Rascal perked up. “I found Pop’s gun.”



Little Monster sensed a shift in play.

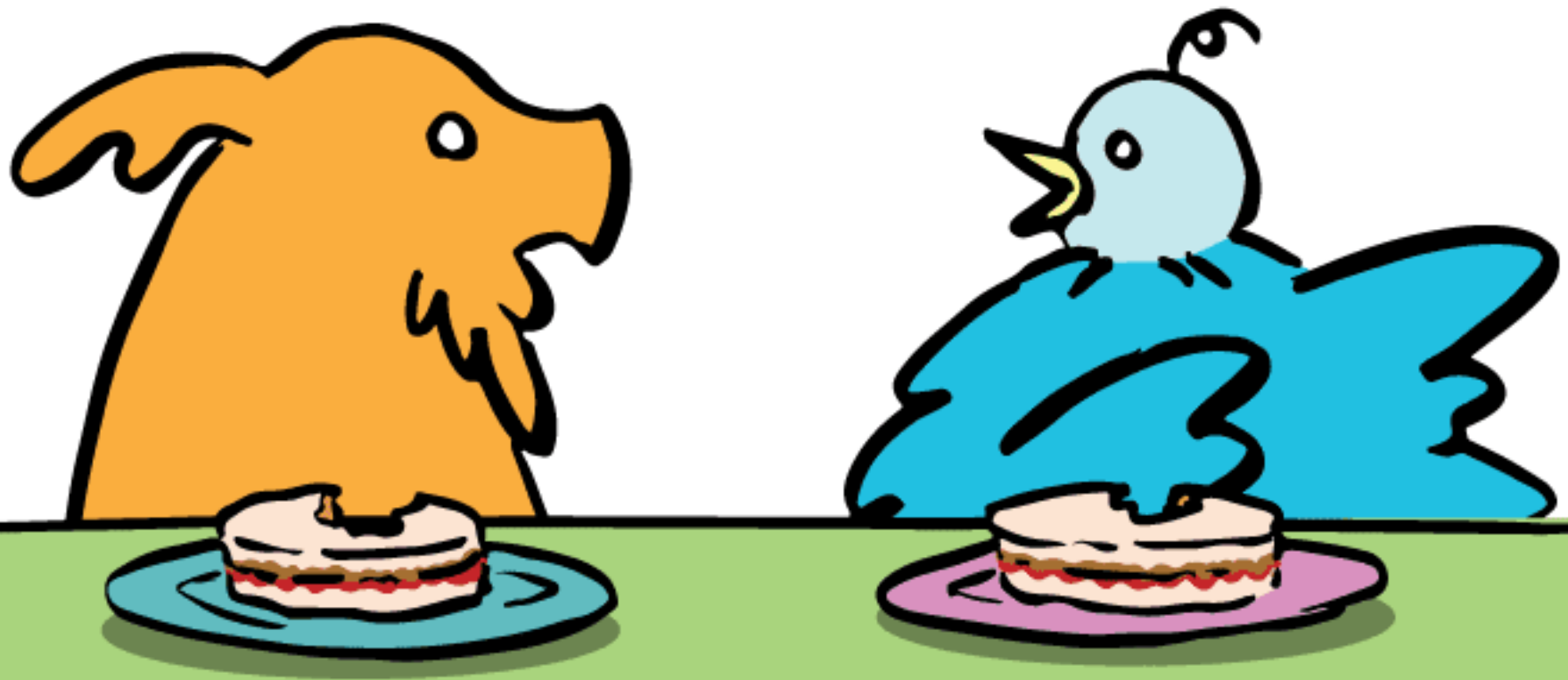
"Ok, you win!" Little Monster quickly said. "Want to go outside and climb trees?"



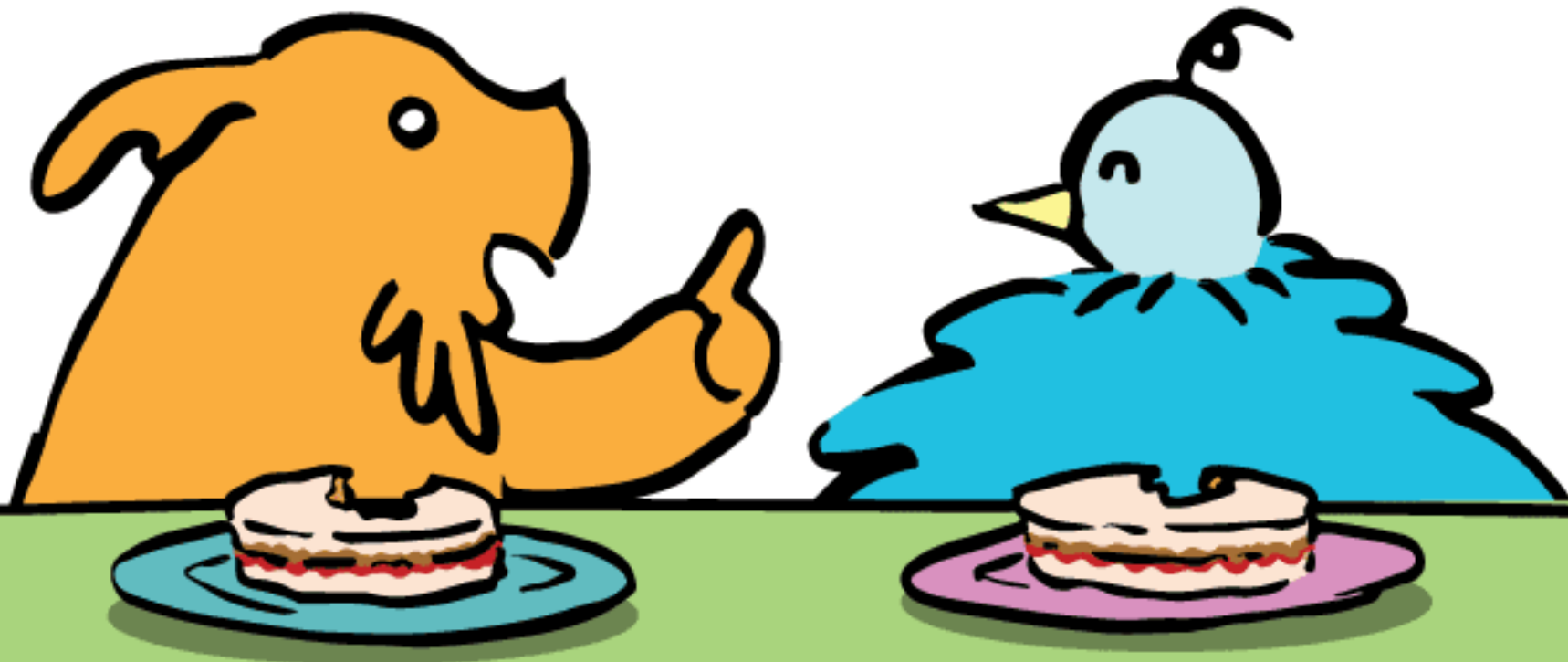
"Don't you want to see the gun?" Rascal asked. "How do you know I'm not pretending?"

"Because we were pretending earlier to be humans with jobs and you're not very good at it," said Little Monster. "Come on, let's just go outside."

"Just one peek," Rascal insisted. "I won't feel right about winning otherwise."

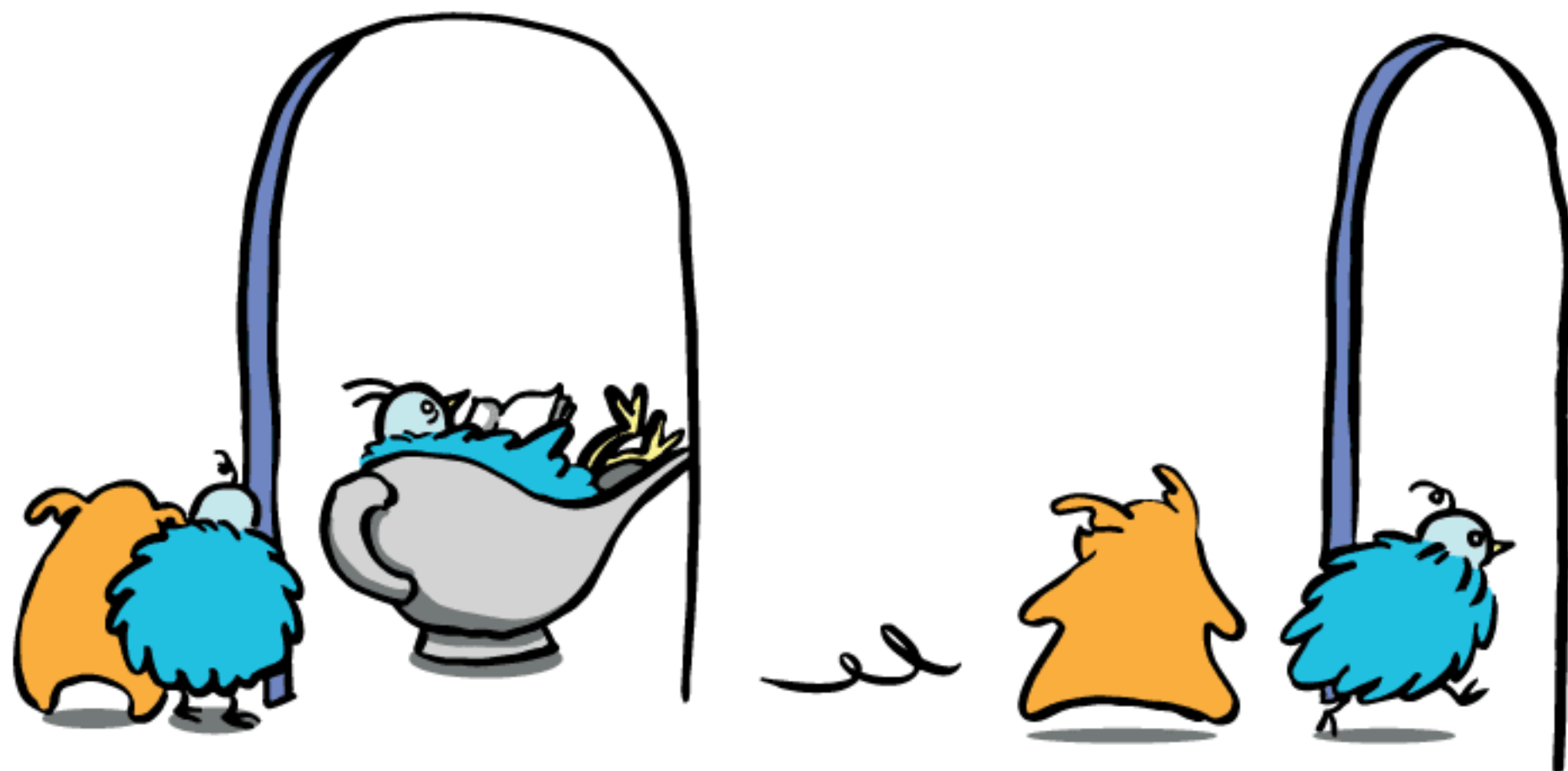


Little Monster felt like there was no other way this was going to stop, so she sighed, "Fine, one peek, then we go outside."





They made sure Rascal's Pop was still sitting in the gravy boat judging the author of the memoir, then snuck into Rascal's parents' room.



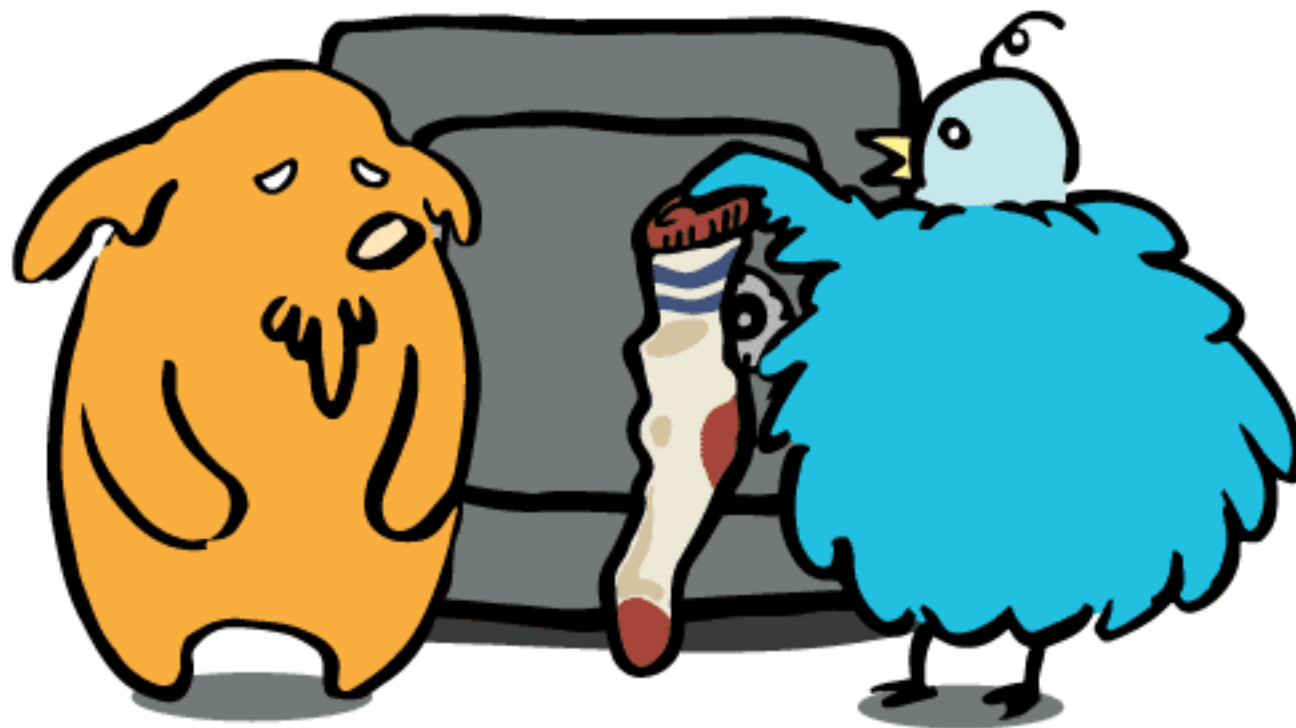
Rascal opened her parents' closet to reveal a big black safe.

Little Monster breathed a sigh of relief. "Too bad it's locked up."



"Oh, Pop just hides unreturned library books in there. The gun is in here," she said, picking up an old sock right next to the safe. "Want to hold it?"

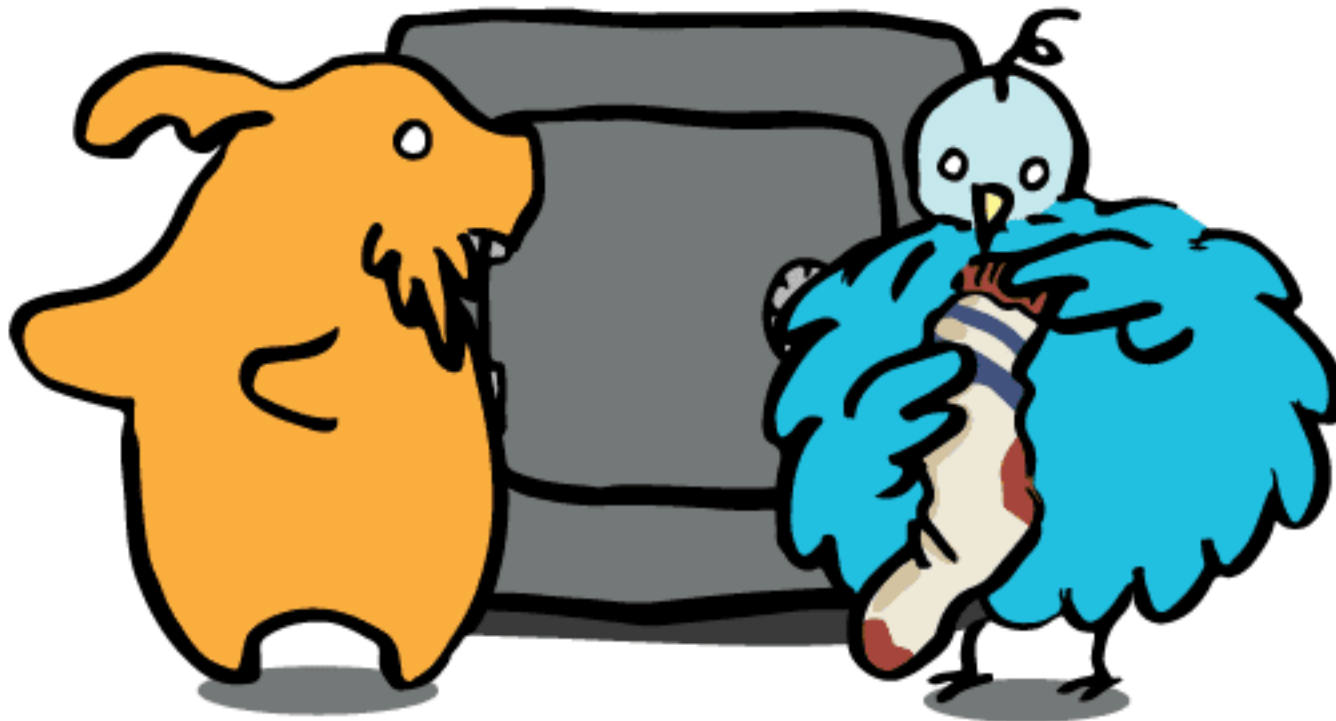
"No," Little Monster said, feeling her tummy start to hurt.



"It's ok, I can show you how," Rascal said, trying to squeeze the gun out of the sock.

"I don't want to," Little Monster said. "I'd rather play outside."

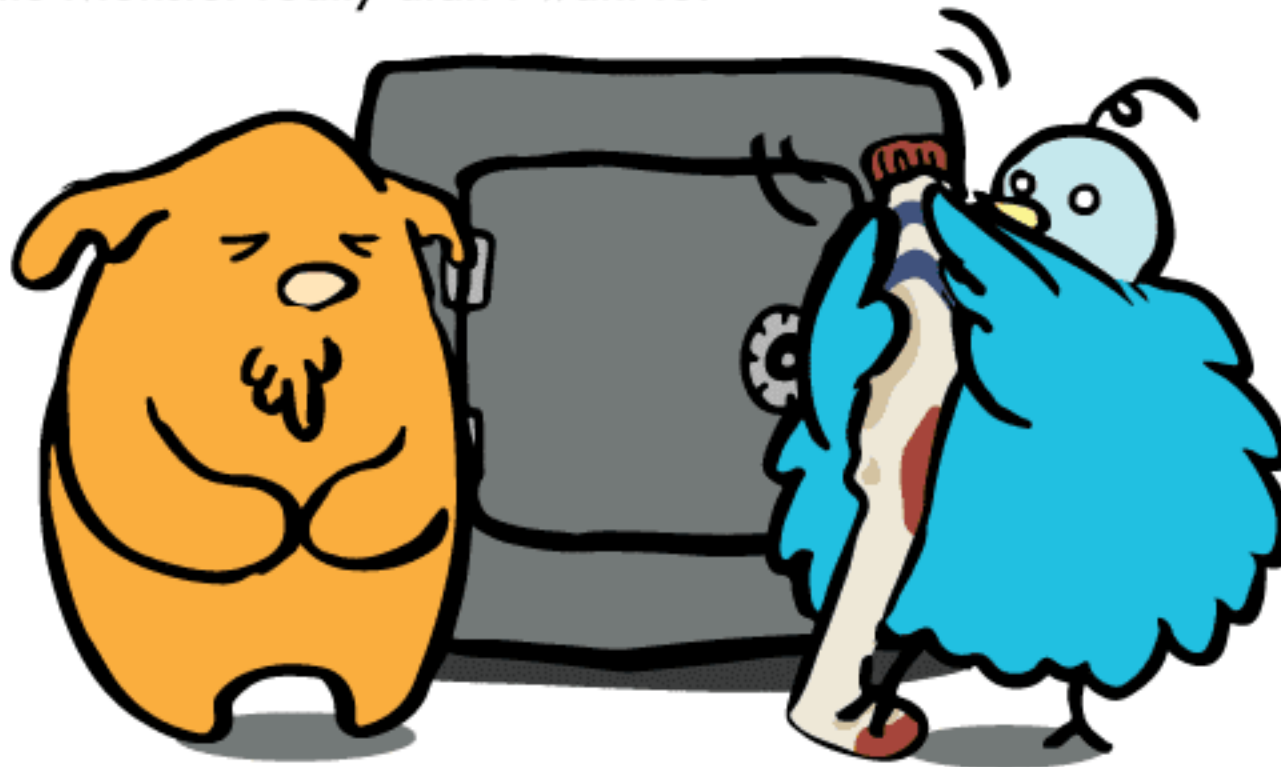
"Don't be scared," Rascal said. "I don't think it even works."



Little Monster's tummy hurt so much it felt like she had to go to the bathroom and throw up and cry all at once and in all directions.

"You can touch it once I get it out," Rascal said.

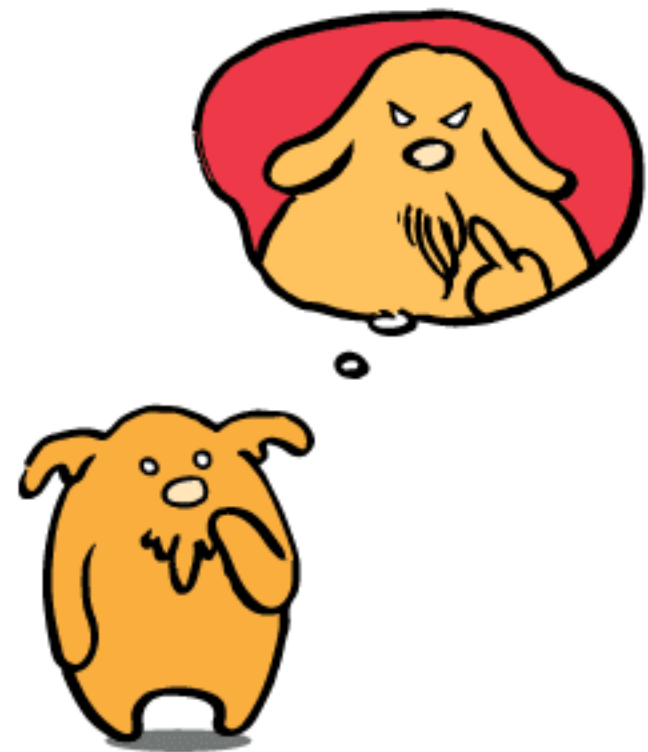
Little Monster really didn't want to.



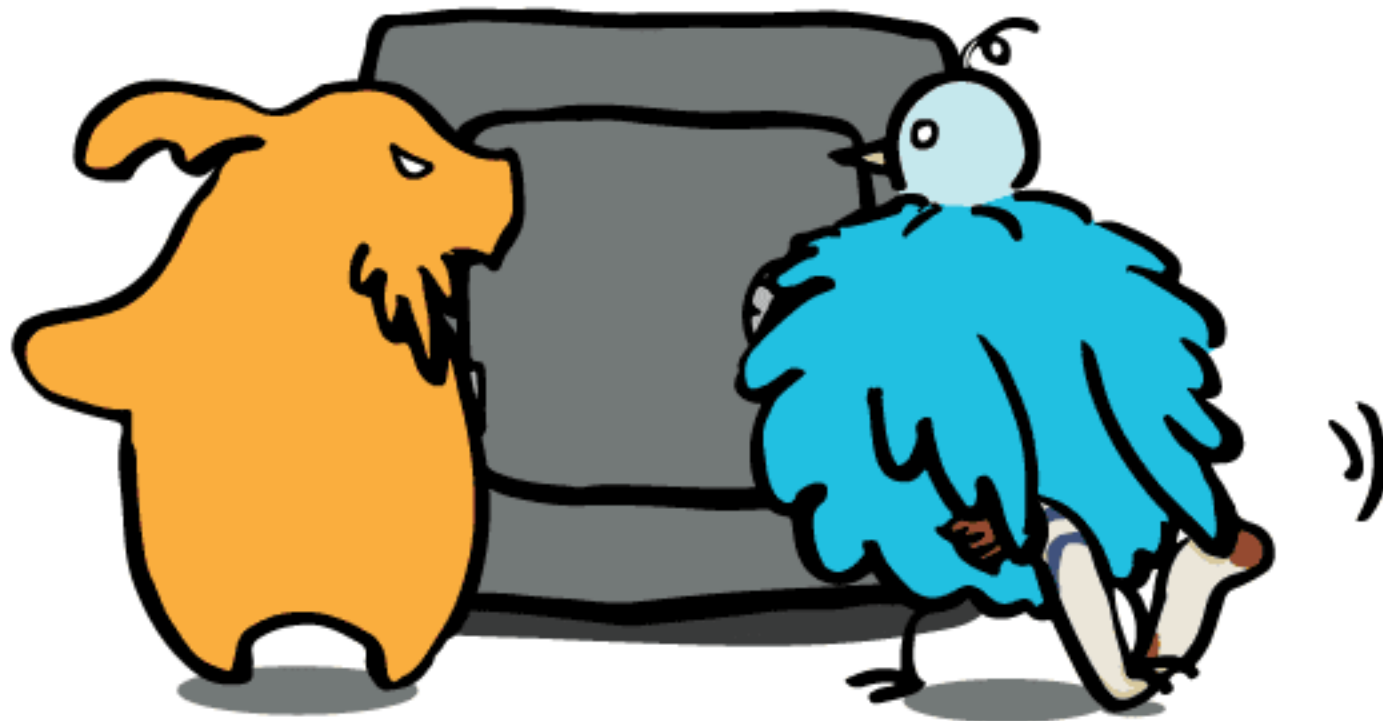
Then she remembered Mama Monster telling her she never had to do anything she really didn't want to...



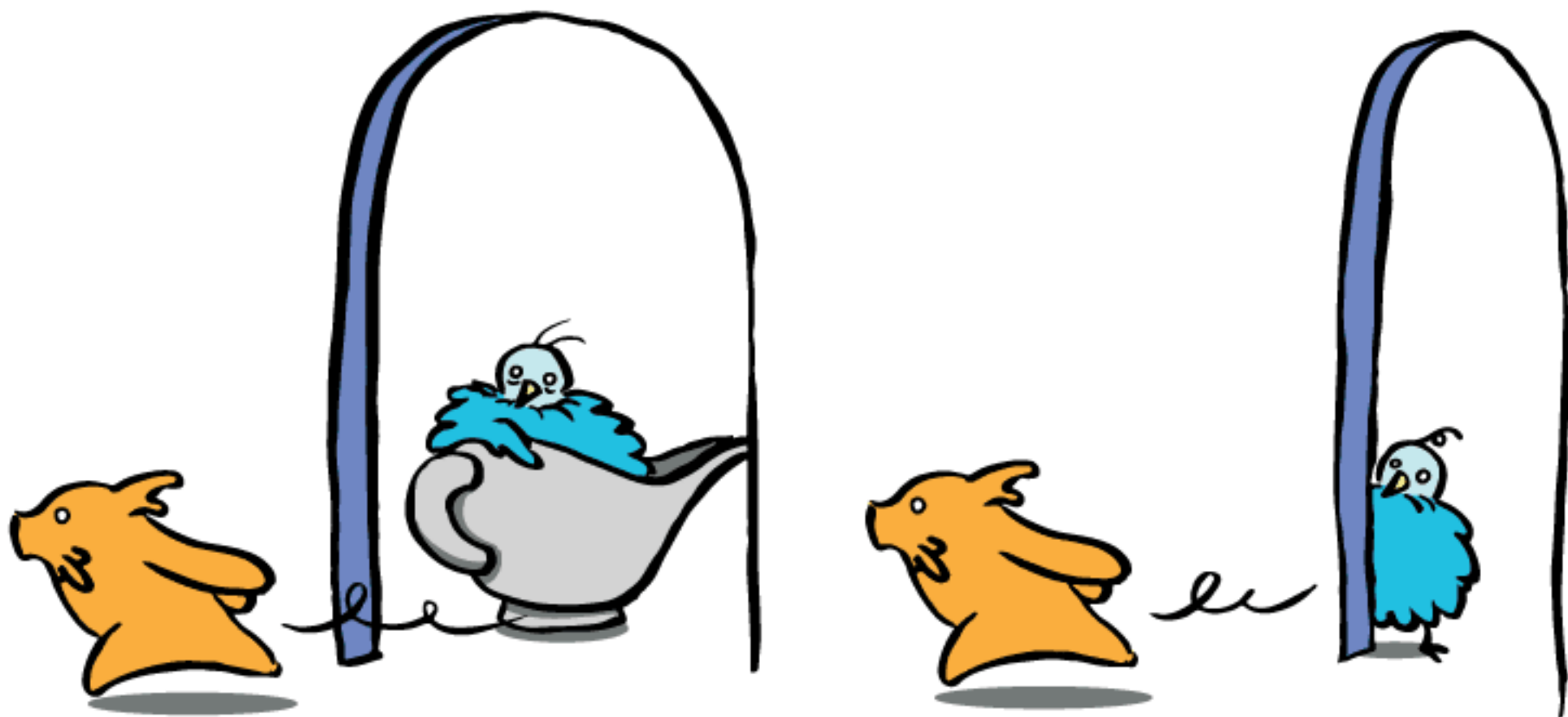
...excluding anything Mama Monster told her to do.



"I'm going outside now," Little Monster decided. "You can come or just stay in here with a bunch of overdue library books."



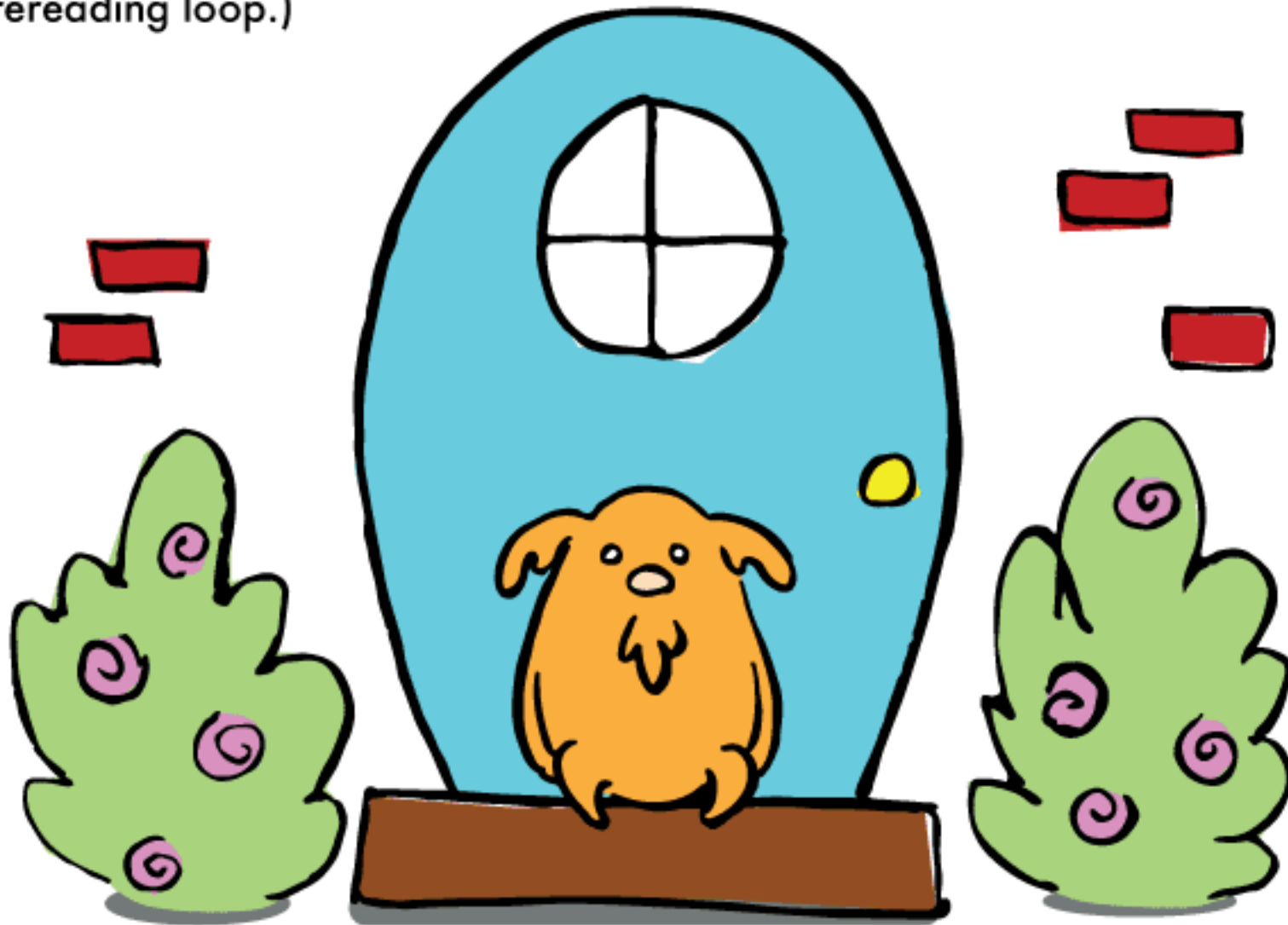
Little Monster quickly scurried away from the gun in the sock, the books, the closet, Rascal's Pop in his gravy boat and out the front door where she sat anxiously on the stoop and hoped Mama Monster might come early, although Mama Monster was almost always late.





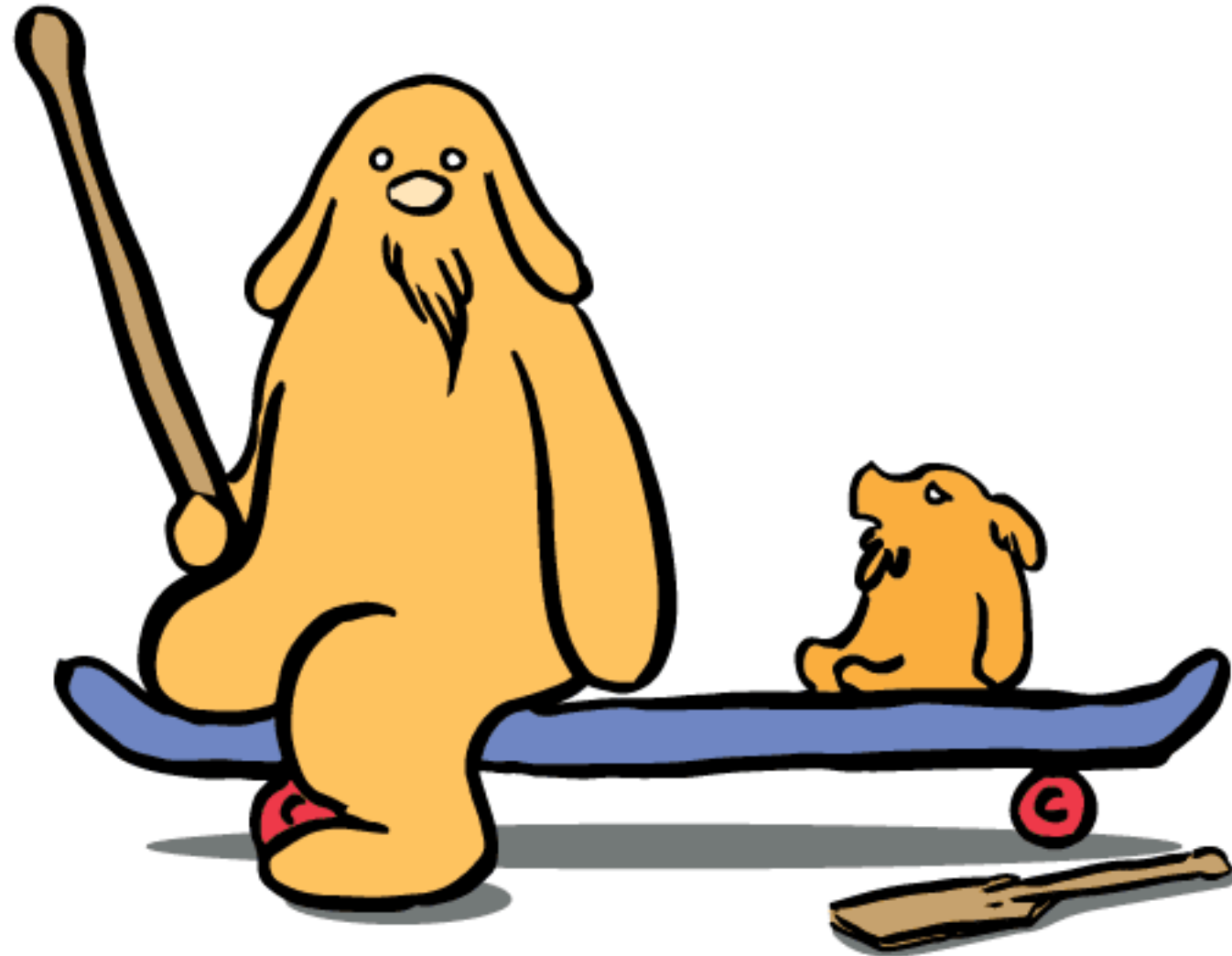
And that is how Mama Monster found Little Monster, just as she had at the beginning of this story.

(Go back and check out the beginning if you don't remember. But then come back here and continue forward, otherwise you'll get stuck in a rereading loop.)

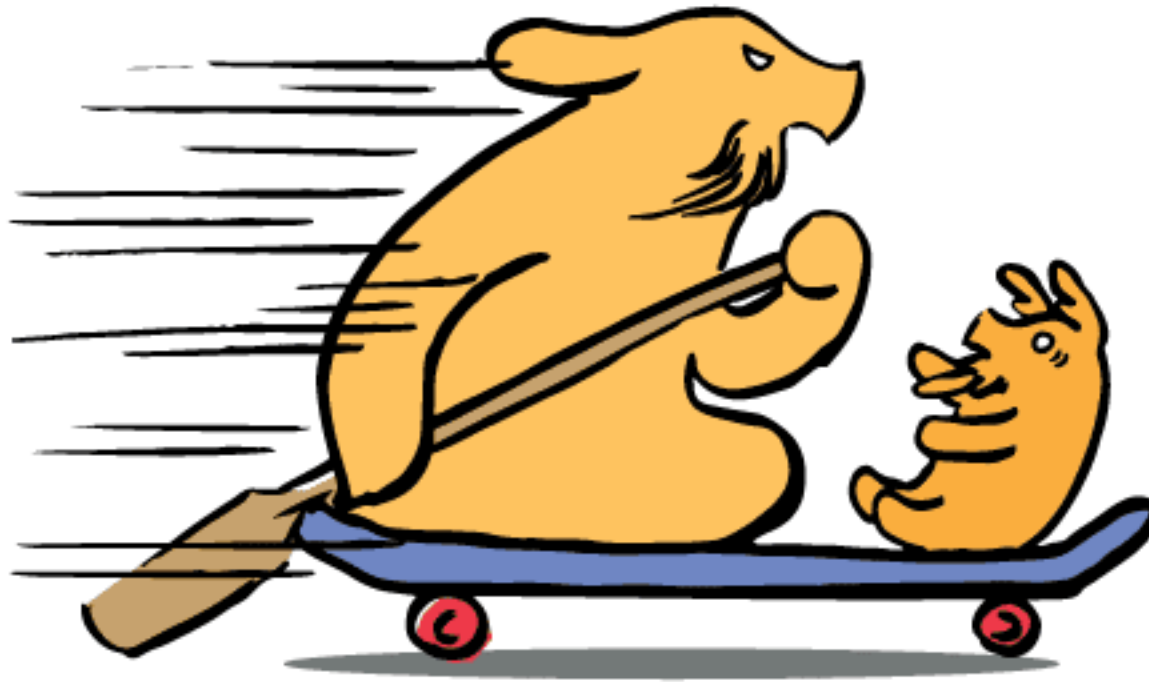


Mama Monster was quiet (too quiet!).

"Are you... processing?" Little Monster asked timidly.



Without a word, Mama Monster spun around and began paddling furiously, because that was much easier than doing a skateboard U-turn and in fact one of the major advantages of traveling by skateboard.

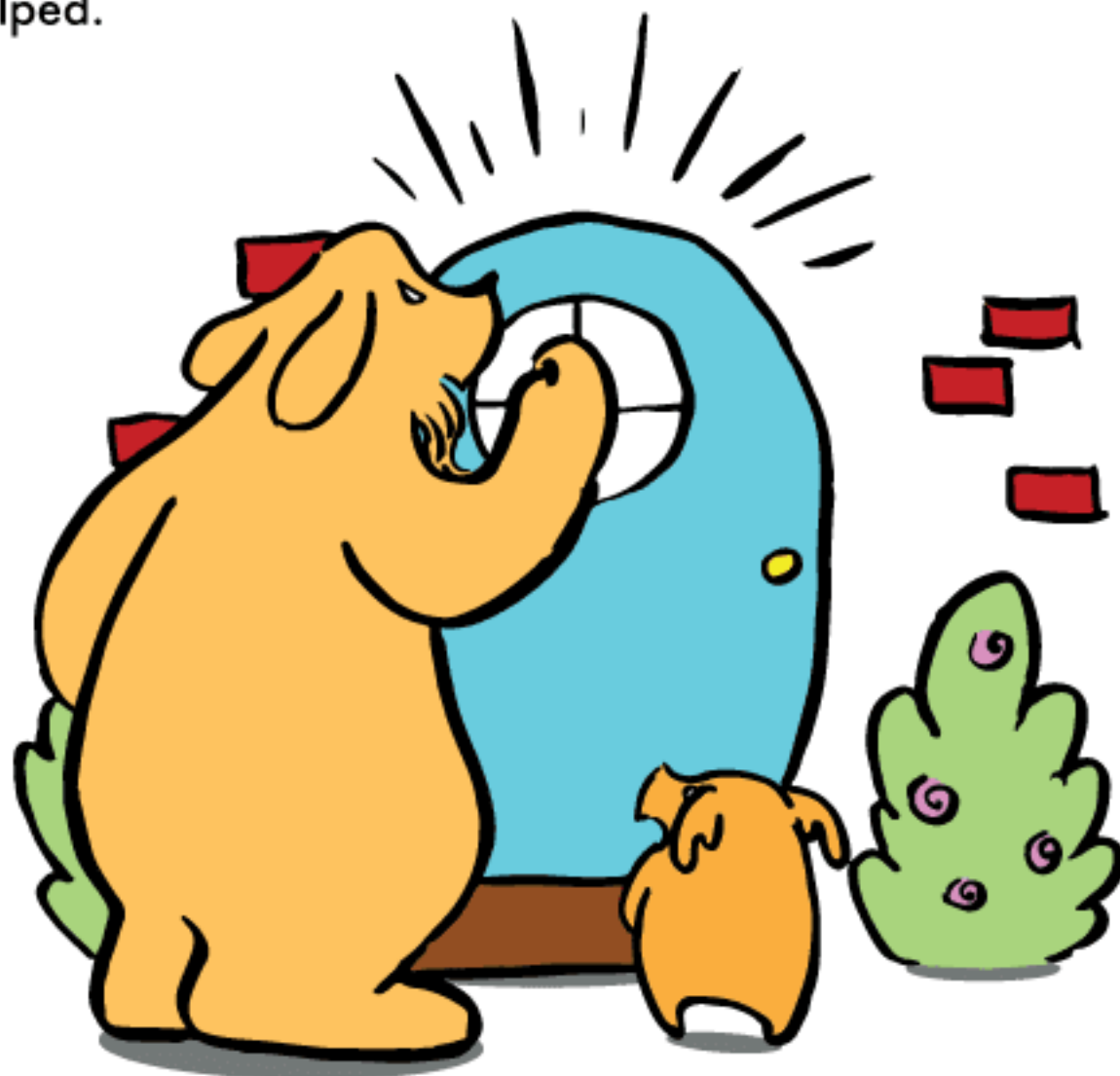


"No!" Little Monster cried as she sped backwards. "Please, Mama, let's just go home. I want to do my homework."

"You *never* want to do your homework," Mama Monster said with a big row that got them halfway up the street.

Soon they were right back outside Rascal's house.

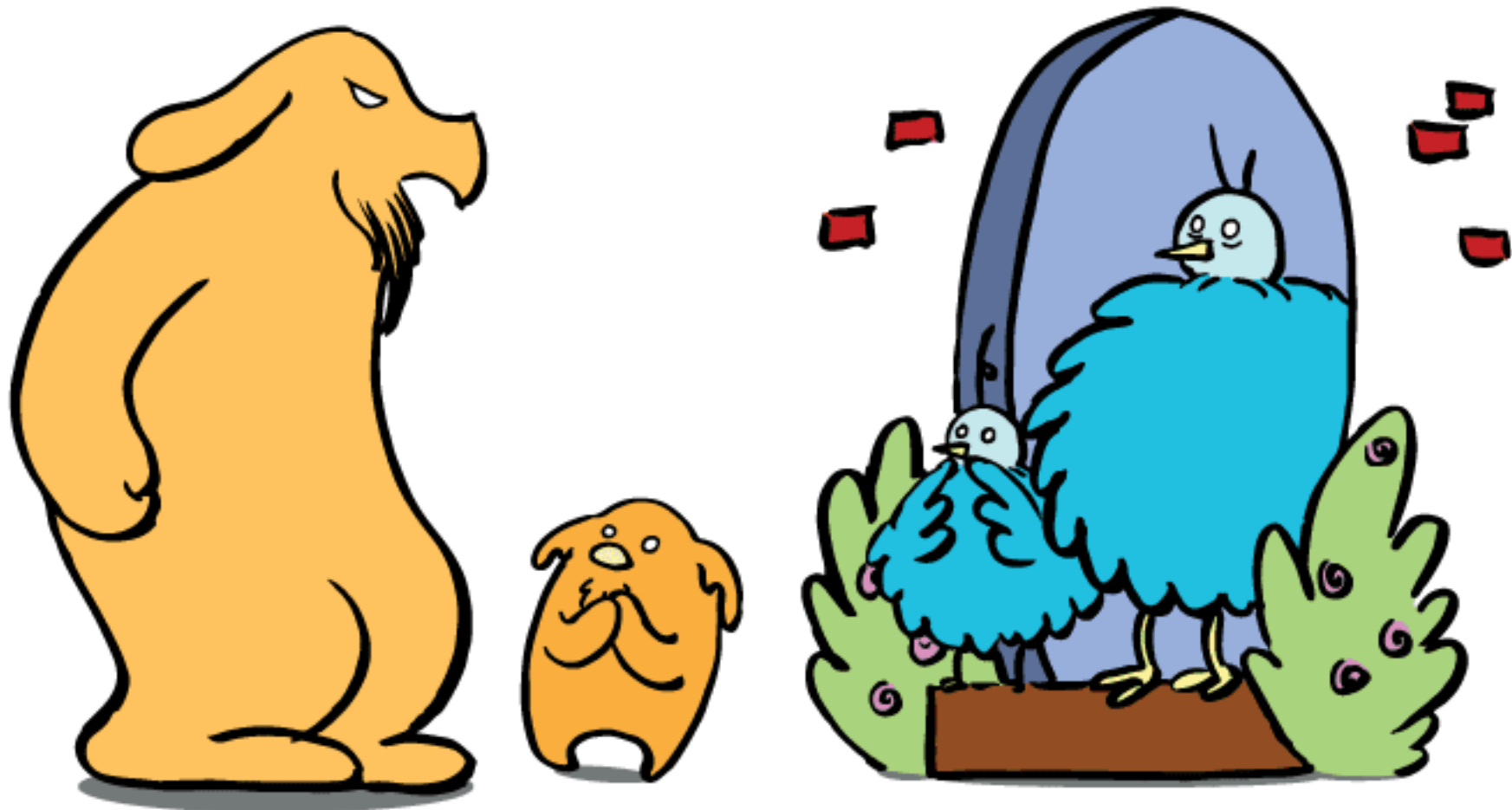
Mama Monster marched straight up the stoop and knocked that door so hard it yelped.



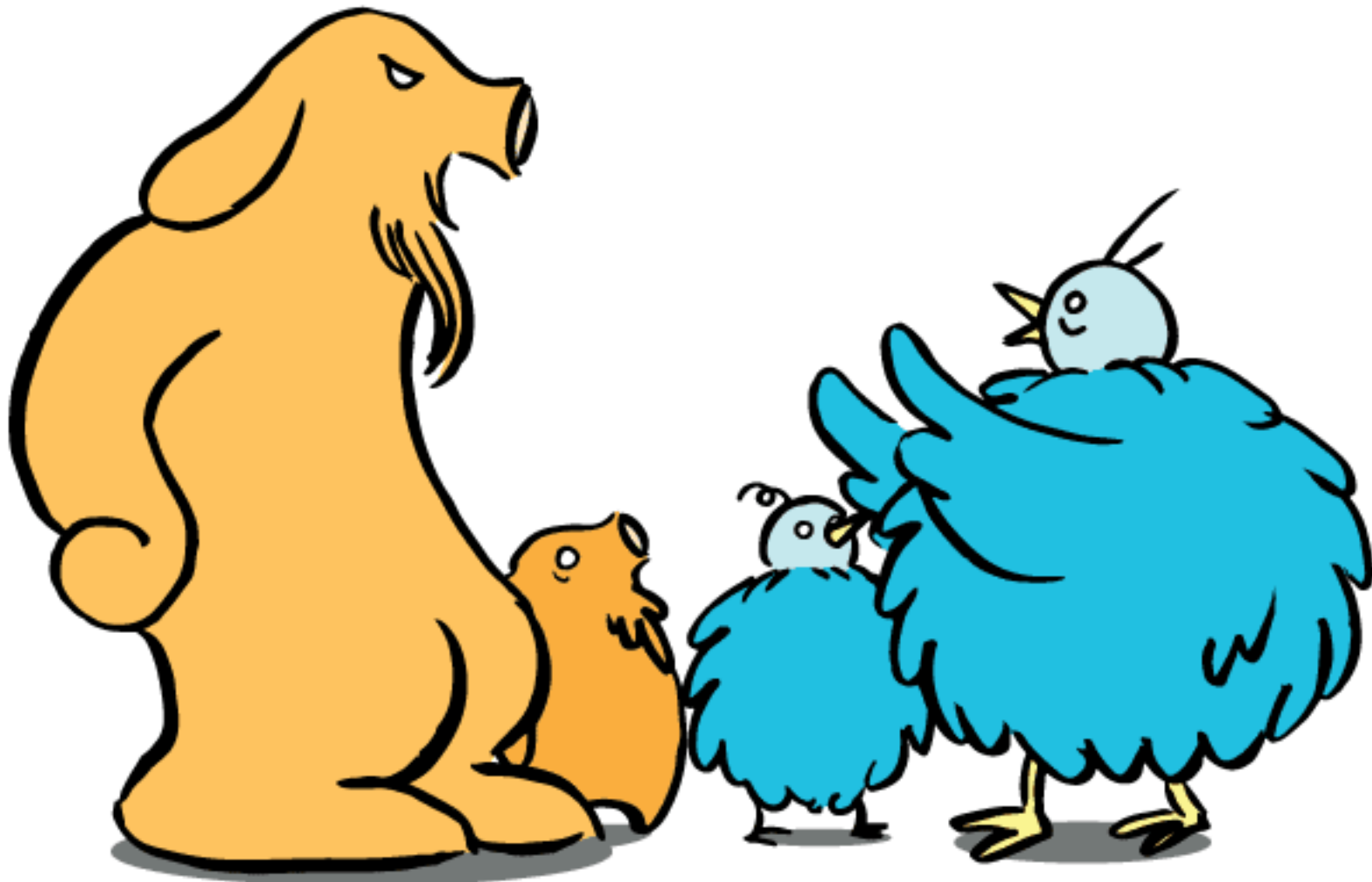
Rascal's Pop opened the door, smelling like gravy. He looked like Rascal did when she got caught nibbling on her feathers.

Rascal also looked like Rascal did when she got caught nibbling on her feathers because she was nibbling on her feathers.

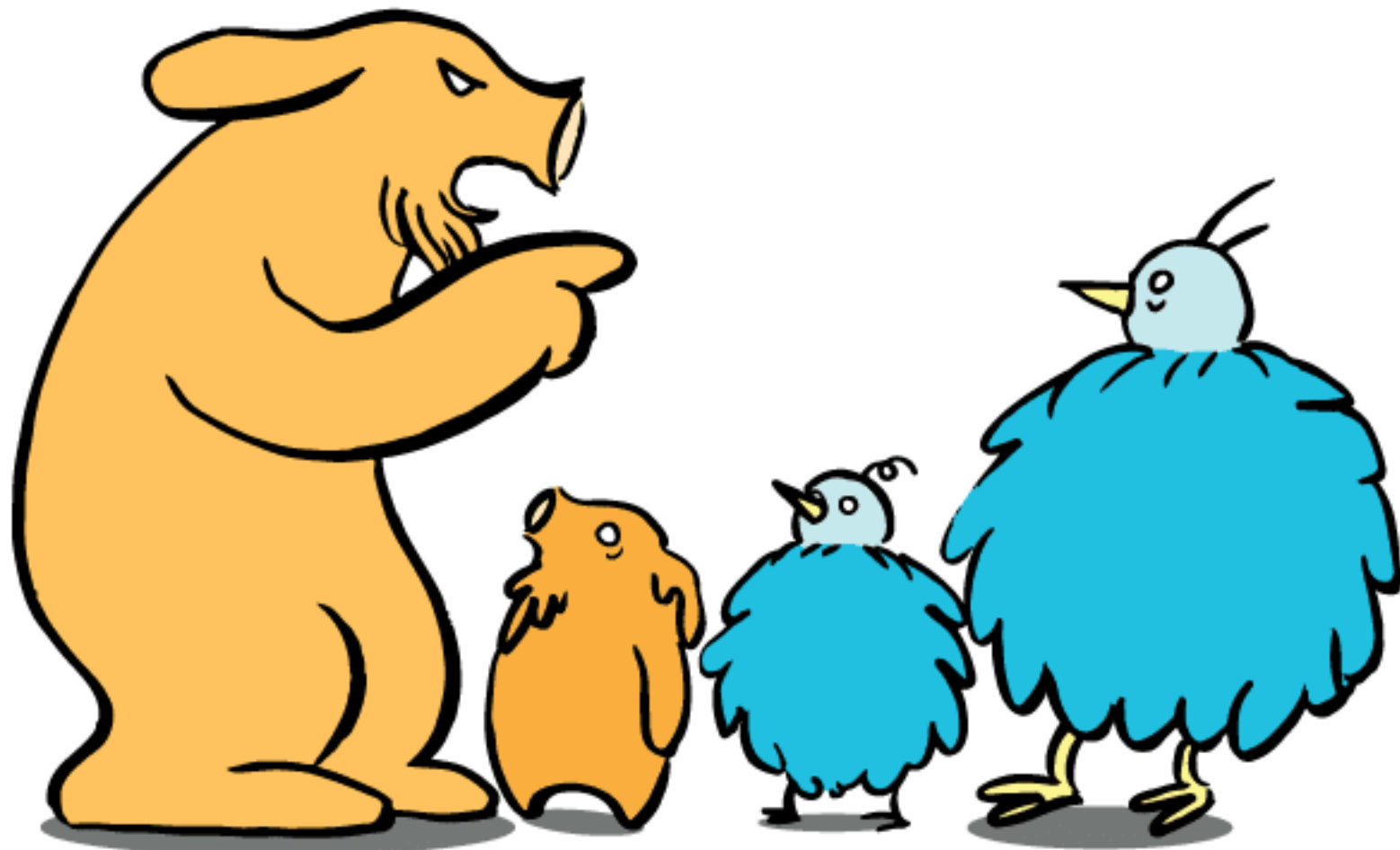
The two friends shared a nervous glance and looked back at their parents.



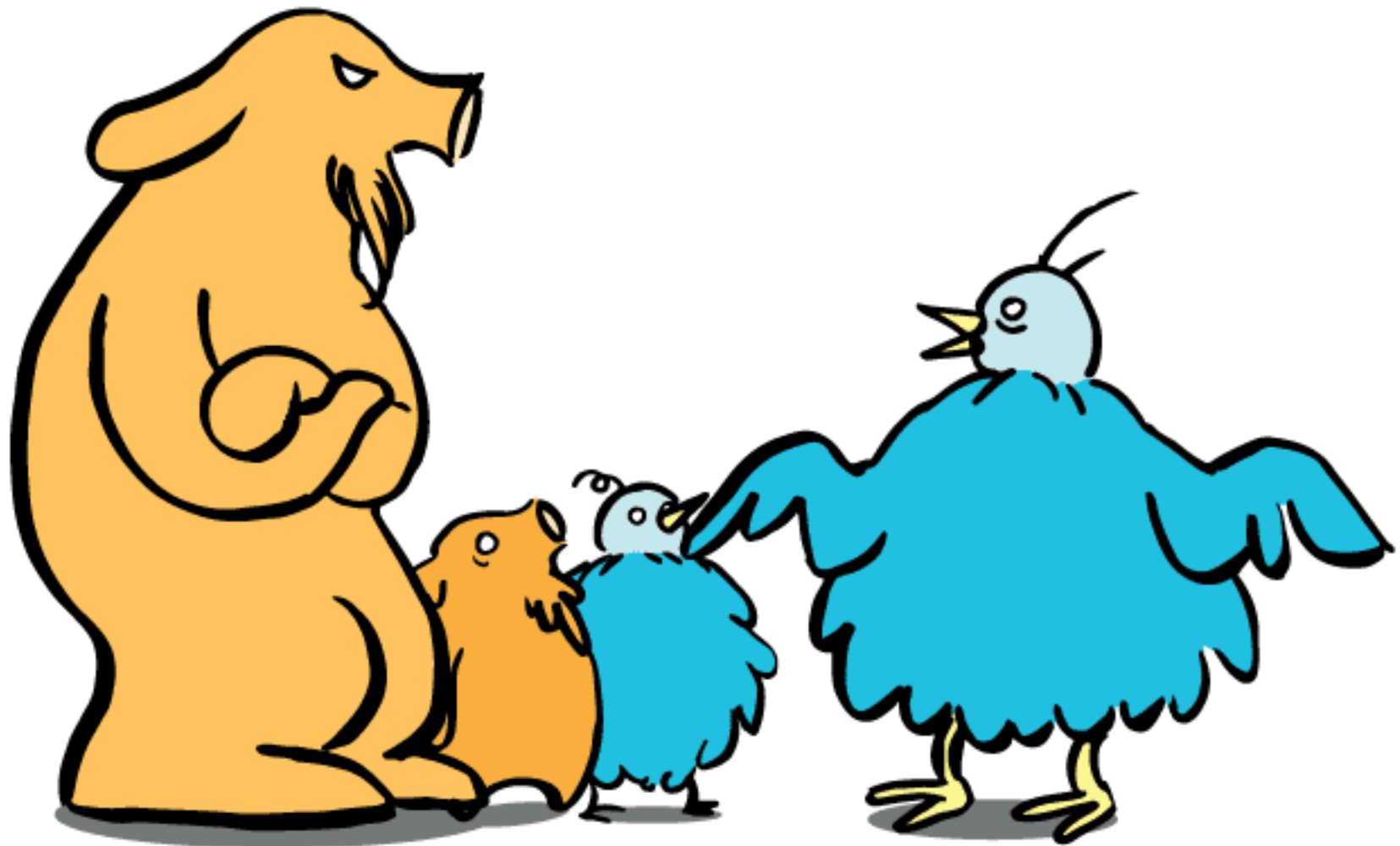
"Geraldine, I'm so very sorry. Rascal told me all about stumbling across the gun," Rascal's Pop began.



"They did not stumble across your gun," Mama Monster launched back. "Your daughter knew exactly where it was, and it was practically in plain sight."



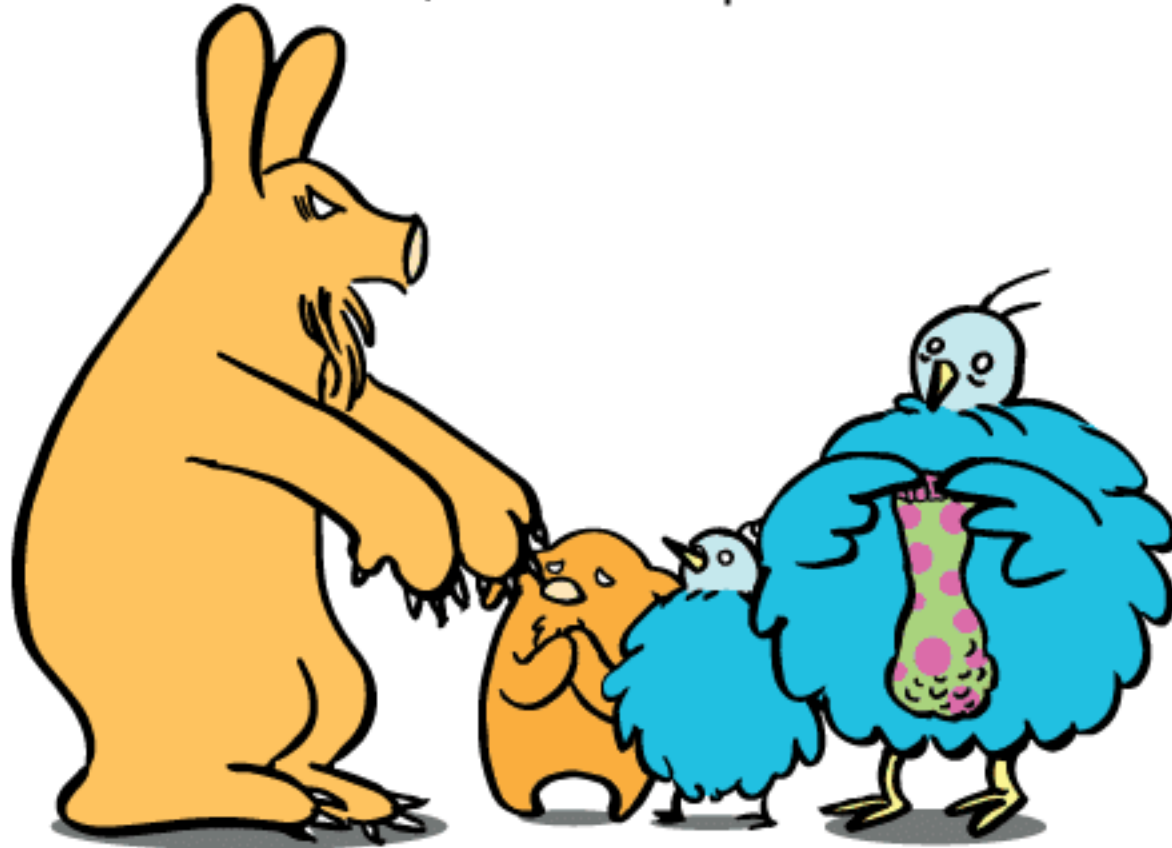
“Well, technically she did stumble across it at one point, like the first time she found it,” Rascal’s Pop started, then hurriedly added, “The monsters were perfectly safe, though. I’m like fifty percent sure it doesn’t even work, plus it wasn’t loaded.”





"Where was your ammunition?" Mama Monster asked in a sharp tone.

"In the other sock next to it," Rascal's Pop admitted.

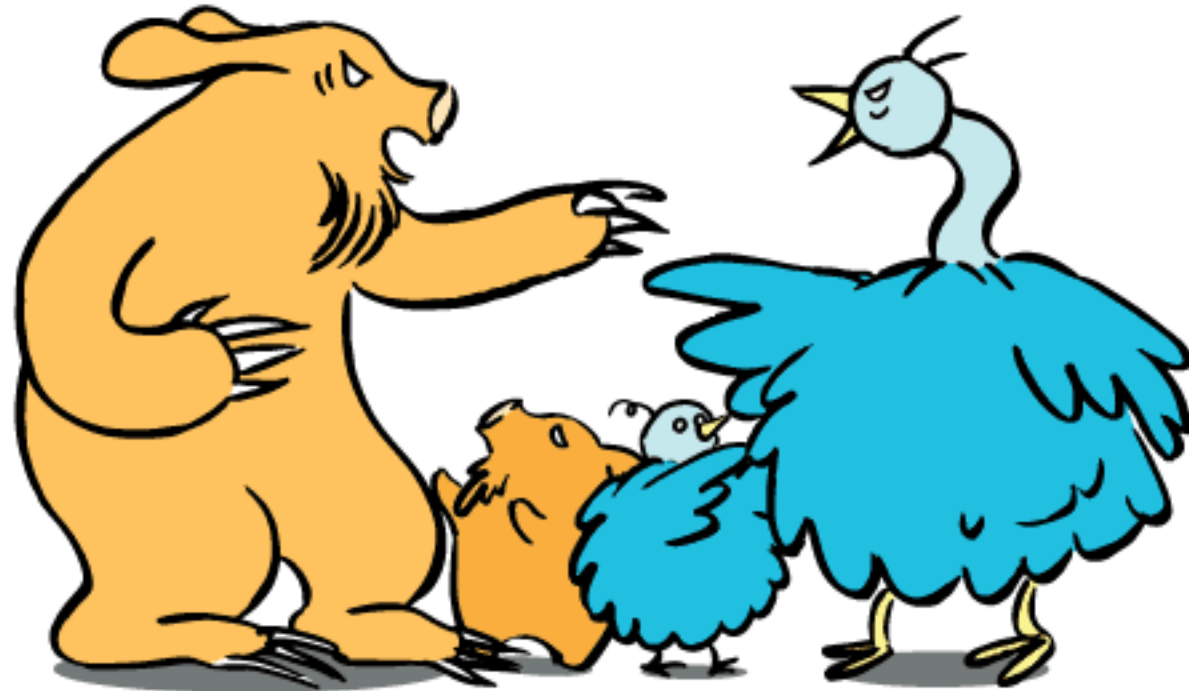


"The ammunition was right there, also completely in plain sight and not locked away?" Mama Monster's voice was getting higher.

"Hey, the socks don't match," Rascal's Pop said. "I doubt they would have put them together."

"They could have been hurt!" Mama Monster exclaimed. "Or even killed!"

"Now, let's not get ahead of ourselves," Rascal's Pop held up his flappers defensively. "They're smart little monsters. They know better."



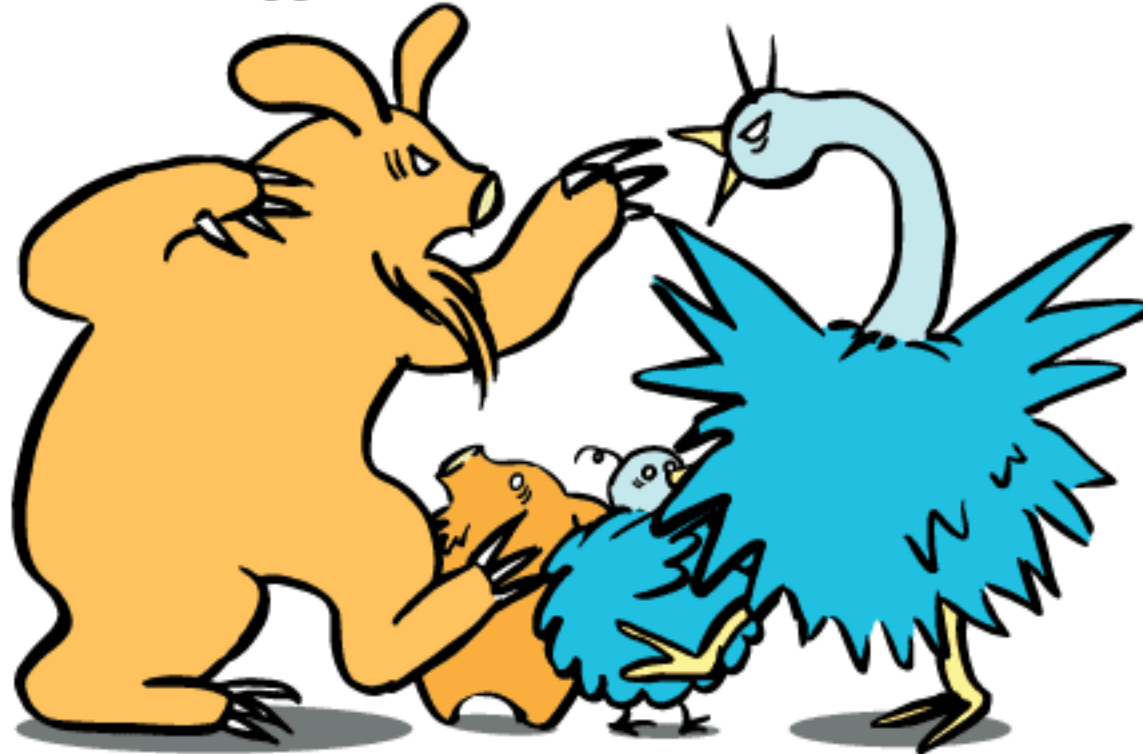
"You should know better," Mama hissed. "I can't believe you'd even have a gun in your home with a little monster running around. You should have gotten rid of it the moment she was hatched!"

"Now just wait a minute," Rascal's Pop clucked. "You don't get to tell me what I should and shouldn't do about my gun."

“Pop—” Rascal started.

“When it concerns my daughter, I certainly do!” Mama Monster yelled back.

“Mama!” Little Monster tugged on her beard.

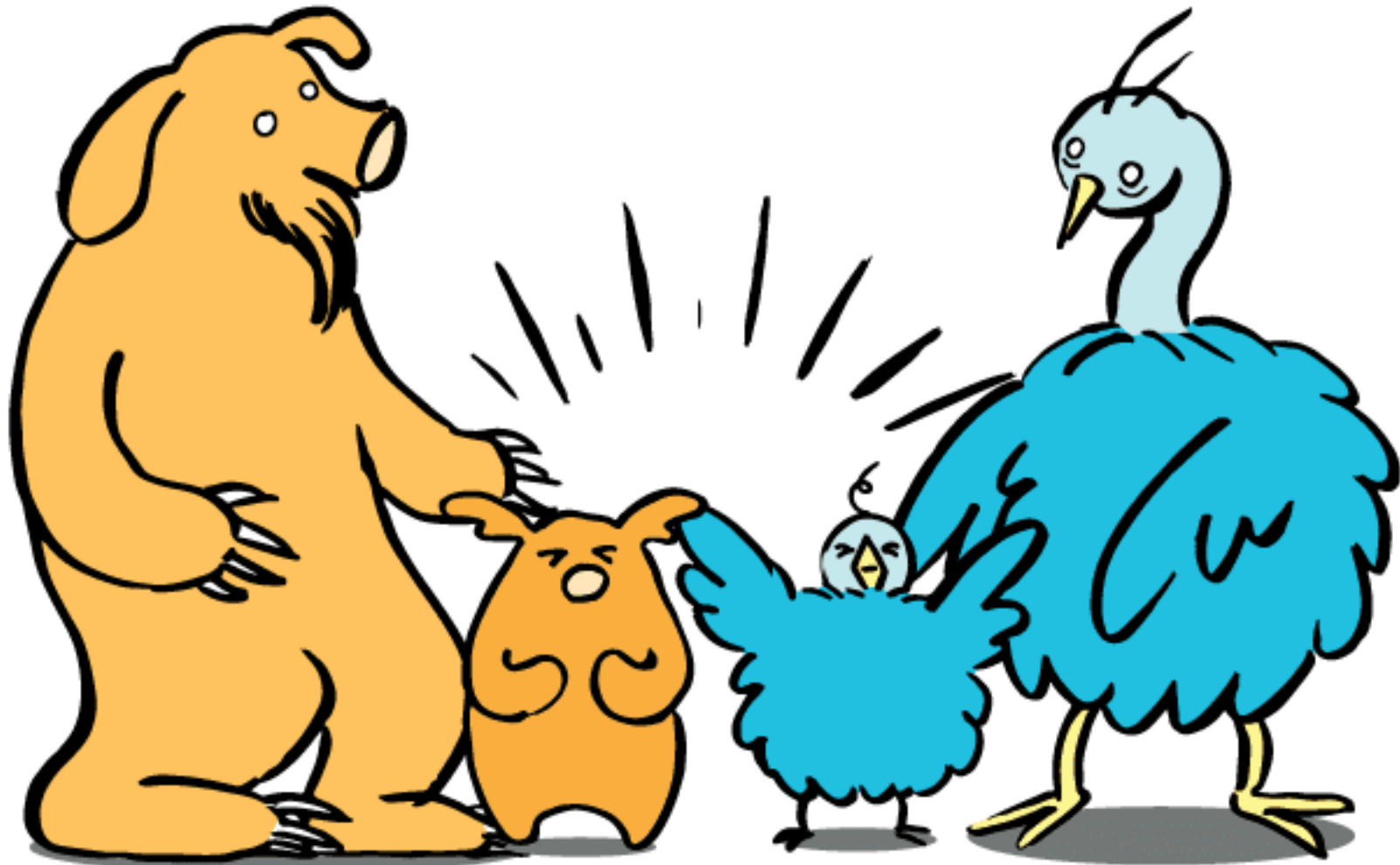


“Well, then, maybe your daughter shouldn't come over anymore if her mother doesn't think any monster should own a gun!” Pop yelled.

“Don't worry, she won't be back! I just hope Rascal doesn't get her beak blown off because her father's a real idiot!” Mama roared.

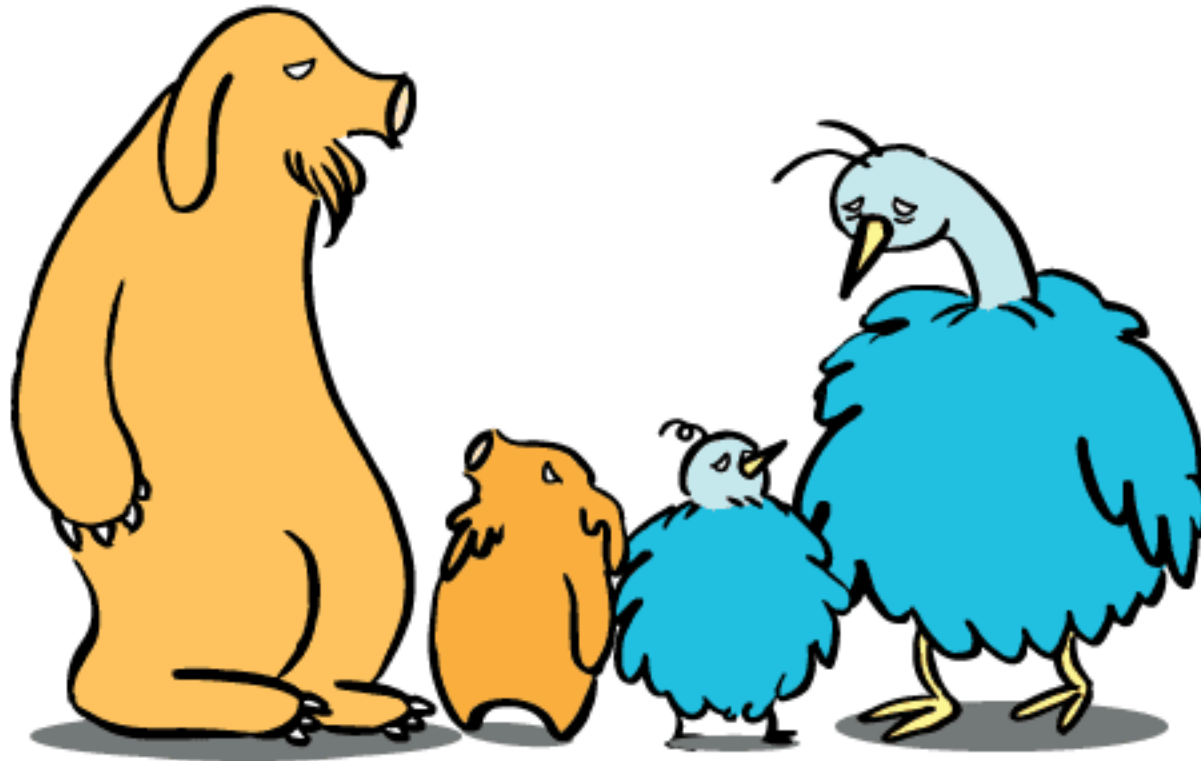
"I'm sorry!" Little Monster and Rascal shouted at the same time.

Both Mama Monster and Rascal's Pop stopped yelling and looked at the girls.



"I'm sorry I found it," Rascal whimpered. "It was my fault for looking around one day and finding it."

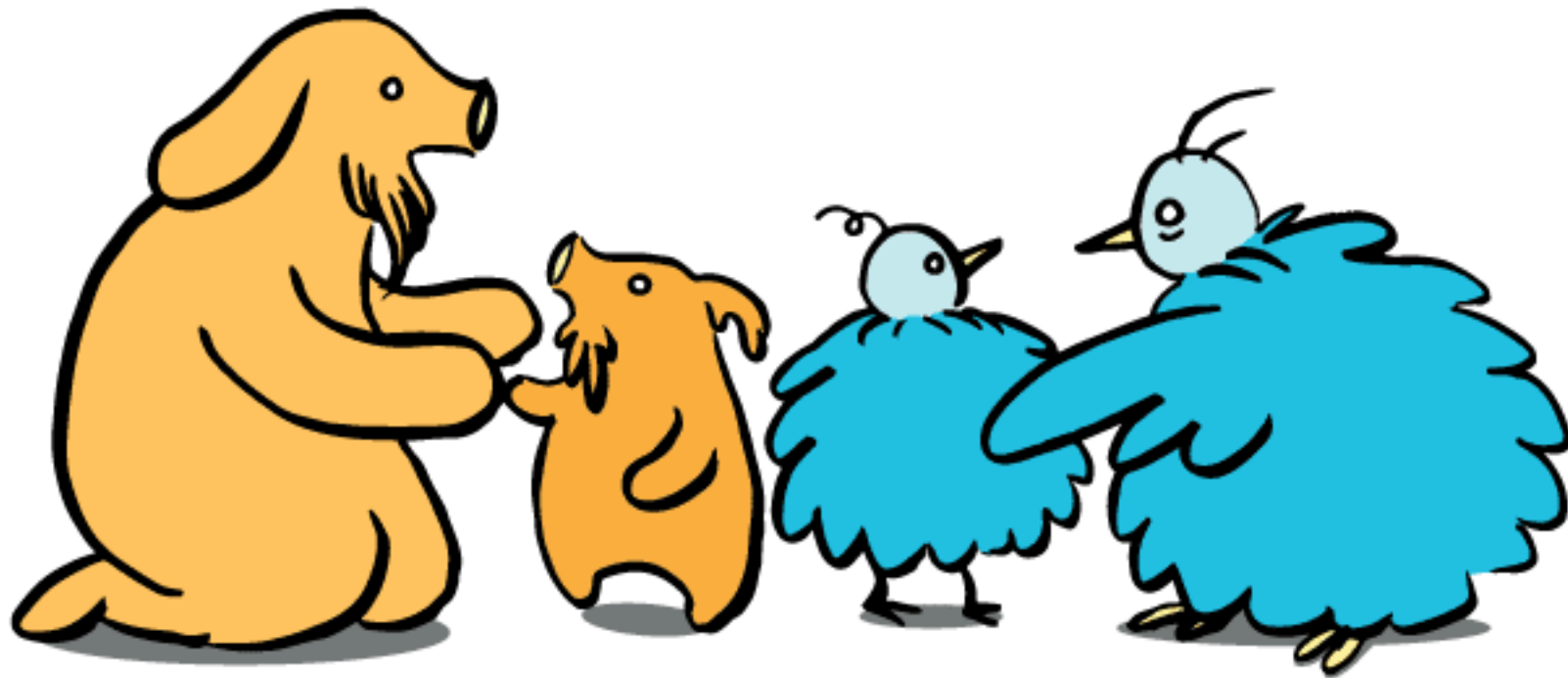
Rascal's Pop looked ashamed.



"I'm sorry I told you about it," Little Monster cried. "Please let me still play with Rascal sometimes."

Mama Monster and Rascal's Pop stared at their daughters, then at each other. Mama Monster took a deep breath.

"You have nothing to be sorry about," Mama Monster said quietly. "You should never feel sorry about sharing something with me. I'm the one who's sorry for making you feel that way."

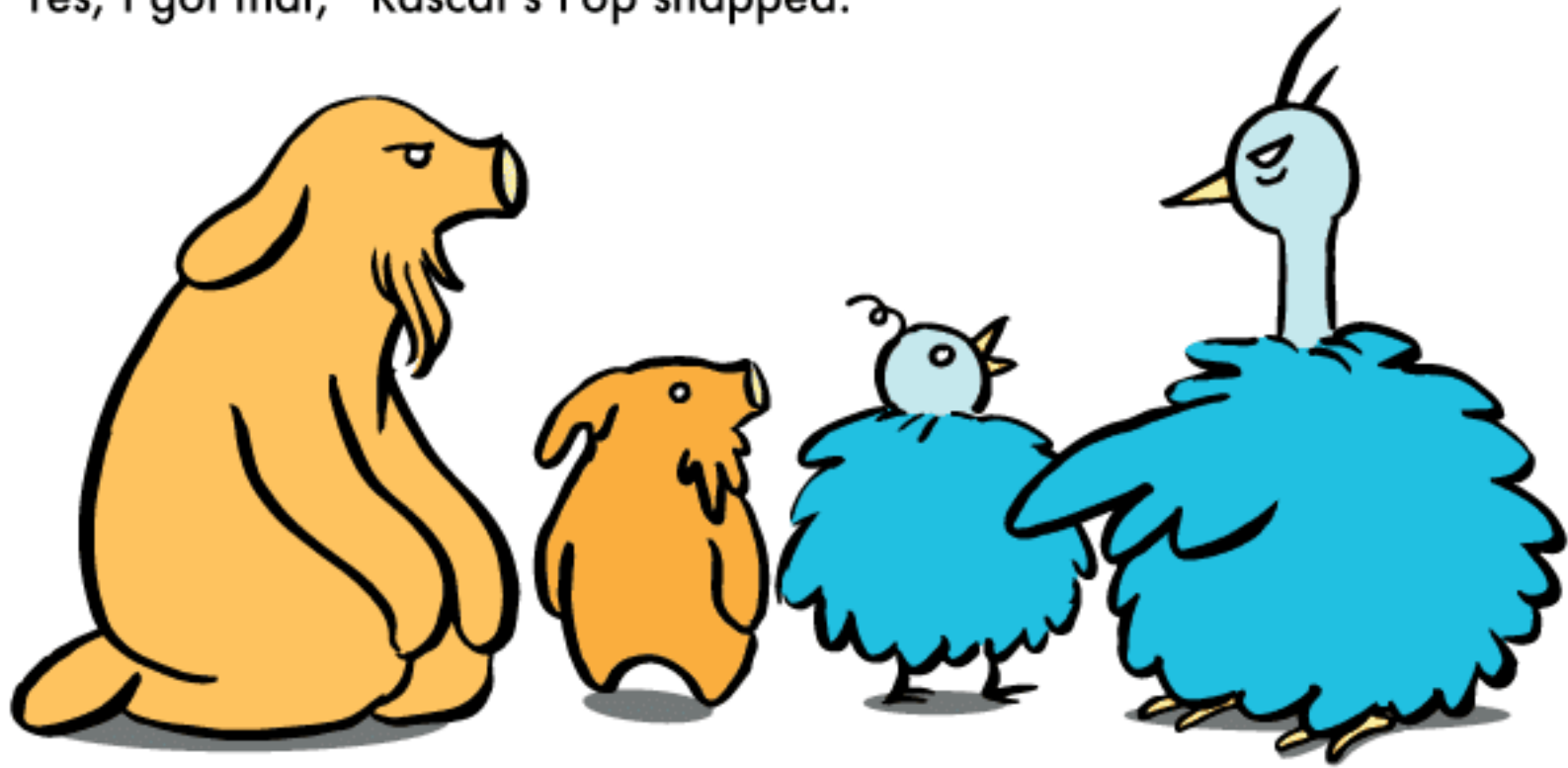


Rascal's Pop cleared his throat. "And I'm sorry, too," he said to Rascal. "It was my job to make sure that gun couldn't be found by anyone but me."

"It was really easy to find," Rascal quietly said.

"Ridiculously easy," Little Monster agreed.

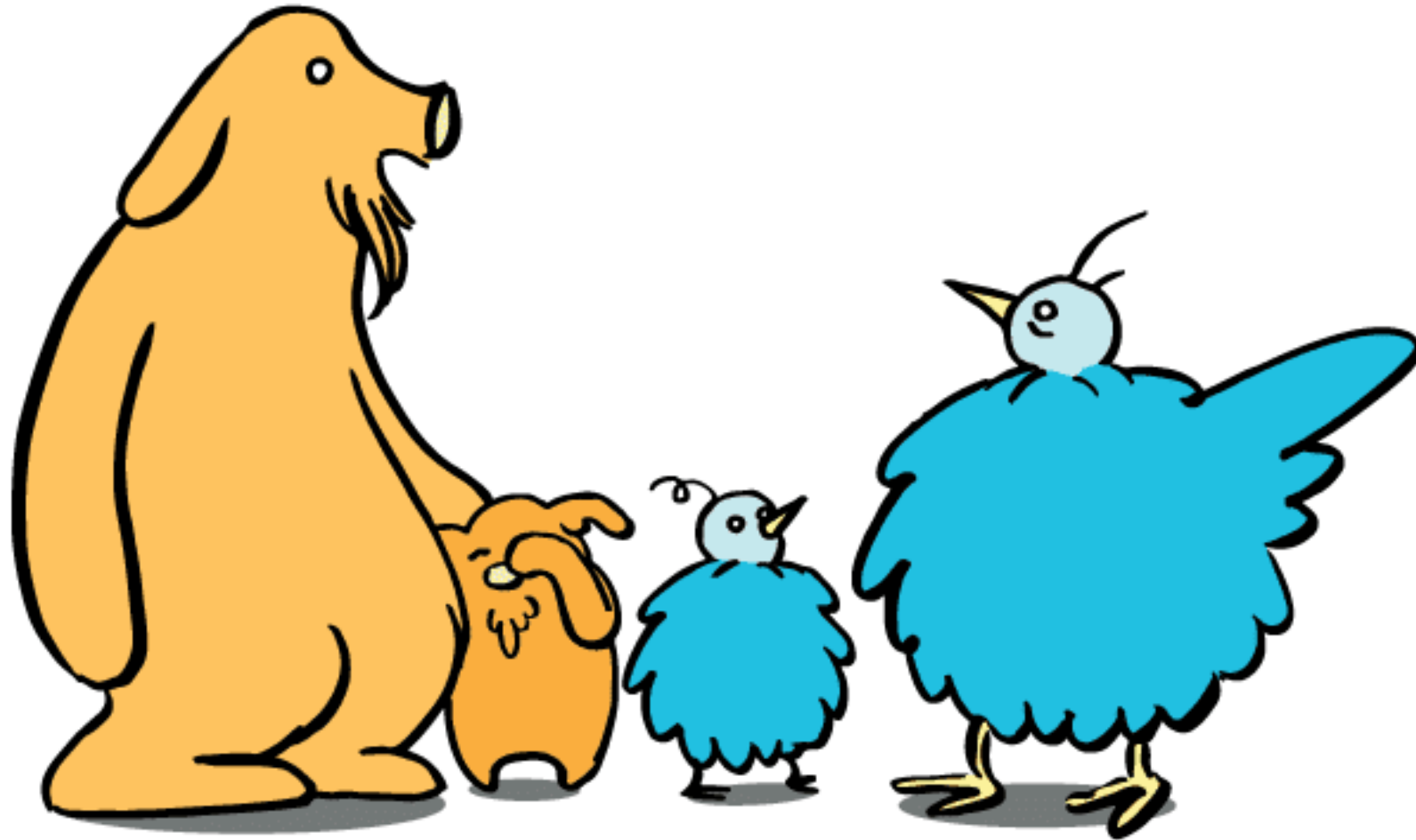
"Yes, I got that," Rascal's Pop snapped.



He looked over to Mama Monster. "Would you like to sit down and have a cup of tea?"



Mama Monster looked at Little Monster, who was still rubbing tears out of her eyes. She sighed. "I'll take a potted plant if you have any."



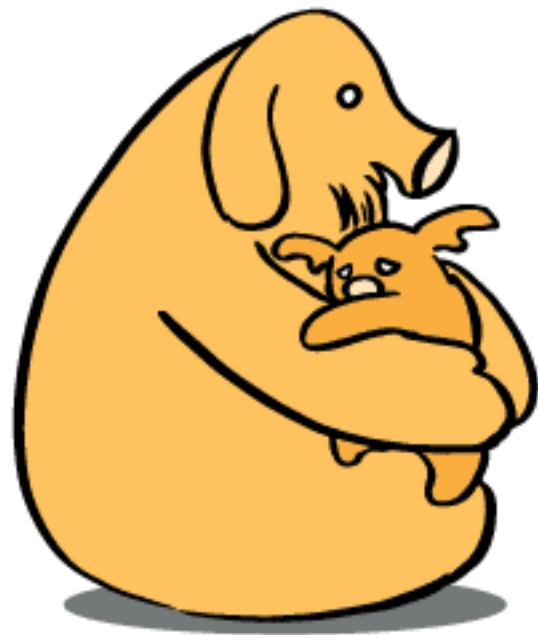
Rascal's Pop nodded. "I could use something stronger, too. Rascal, come help me in the kitchen."



Mama Monster sat down and held out her great big furry arms to Little Monster, who cautiously sank into them.

"I really am sorry, Mama," Little Monster whuffled into Mama's fur.

"You should never feel scared to tell me anything, and I'm sorry I made you doubt your decision to be honest with me," Mama said.



"I didn't mean to make you mad," said Little Monster.

"I wasn't mad. I was scared," Mama admitted.

“Really? You get scared?” Little Monster asked, eyes wide.



Mama was quiet for a moment, thinking of how to best tell her daughter that a mother's life is pure, unadulterated and ever-present fear. That every day, it took an act of foolish faith to open the door and let her daughter step out into a world she had never trusted less. That there were things happening out there that brought her to her knees and robbed her of breath, that made her yearn to feel desensitized to atrocities again, that made her see her daughter's snouted bearded face in the place of each little monster involved in any tragedy she heard or read about, that made her wonder if she had been wrongly selfish in wanting to bring a little monster into an existence in which idiocy, greed and complacency took precedence over little monsters' lives. That each time a little monster fell victim to bigger monsters enabling the reprehensible actions of any monster who did not value life, she was no longer sure if the pain of losing a little monster was still worth the joy of having had one at all. That if her daughter was taken from this world by an armed monster, she would consider following to make sure her baby would never be alone or afraid in whatever came after this life.

But those were big feelings for another time, and she simply said, "Yes. Mama gets scared."



“Oh, you were scared that time the magician picked you as the volunteer,” remembered Little Monster.



“Right. That was scary,” said Mama, eyes narrowing. “For *him*.”  
Mama loathed magic only a little less than those who performed it.

Rascal's Pop returned and presented Mama with a magnificent fern, which Mama accepted graciously.



"Well, Geraldine, the girls said sorry, but I guess I'm the one who ought to say it," he said as he hunched over his African violet, picking off the flowers and going straight for the potting soil. "I know that I should keep my gun somewhere Rascal can never get her wings on it. Every time I thought about securing it better, some other chore would come up or there'd be a new dictionary edition to read."



"I understand," Mama said although she didn't. "But I think we agree it's important to take security measures, especially if you want to continue having a gun and a little monster under one roof."

"I don't know that I'm willing to get rid of her," Rascal's Pop said.

"Hey!" exclaimed Rascal.

"The gun, I mean," Pop corrected. "I'm scared for my family's safety, and having it feels like something I can do to protect them."



"We're both scared about the safety of our kids," Mama said. "But if that means owning a gun for you..."

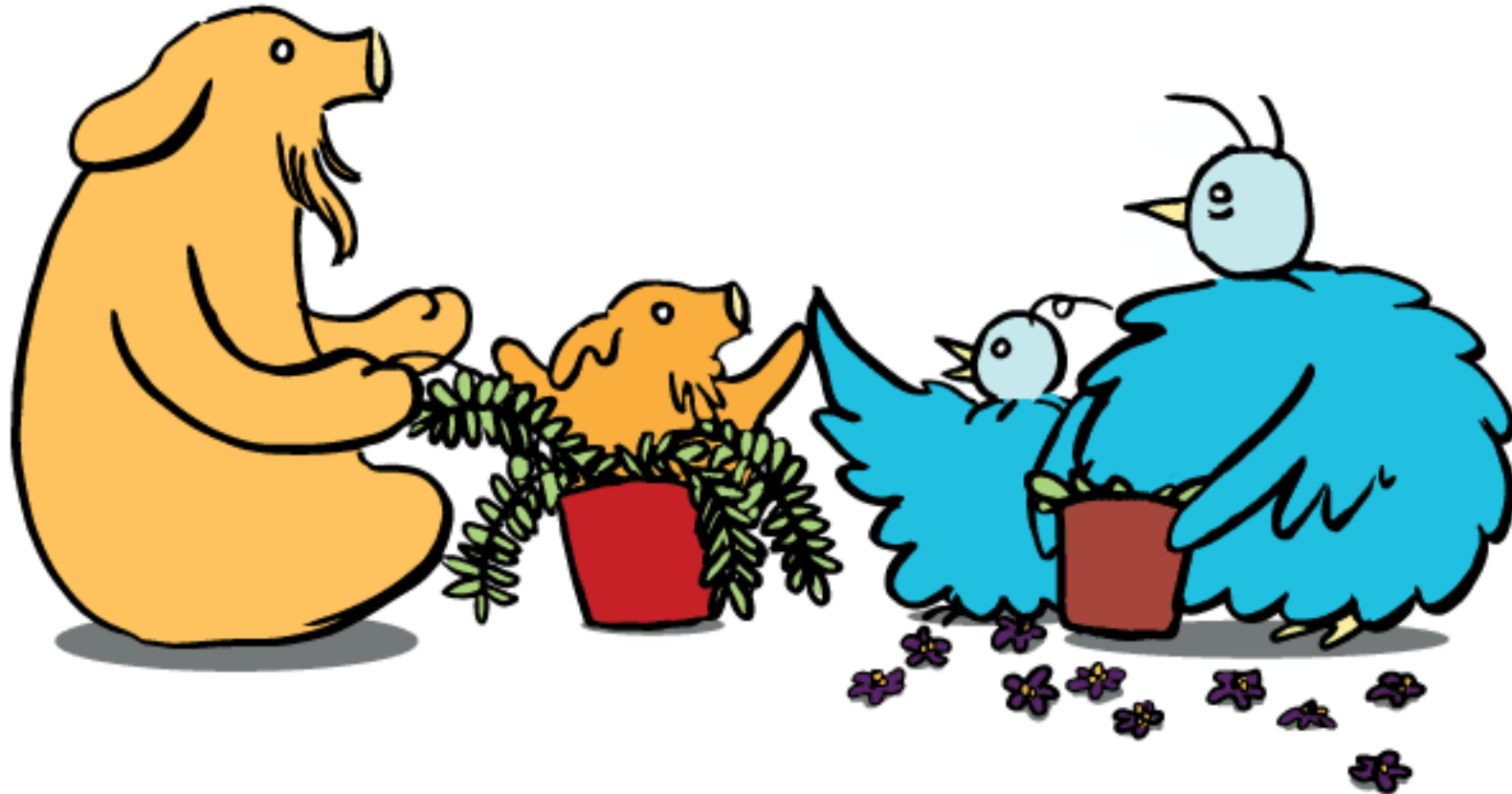
"Then it also means keeping it safely secured," Rascal's Pop finished.



“And anyone who can’t understand at least that...” Mama began.

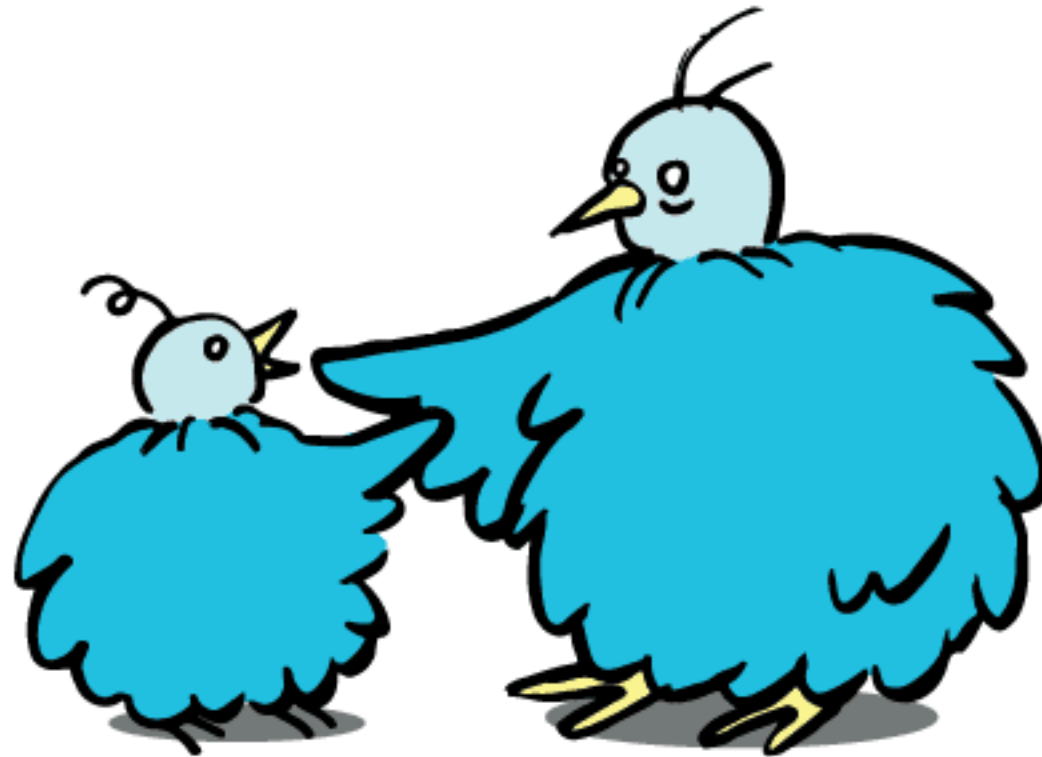
“Is a real idiot!” Little Monster and Rascal chimed in together, high-paw-wing-ing.

“You know they sell gun safes at the Everything Store, right?” Mama Monster asked around a bite of fern.





"Really? I get my work gloves and bagged salads there but had no idea they sold gun safes as well!" Rascal's Pop exclaimed.



He looked down at Rascal. "How would you like to go to the Everything Store before Mom comes home from work?"

"But, Pop, you already have a safe," Rascal said.

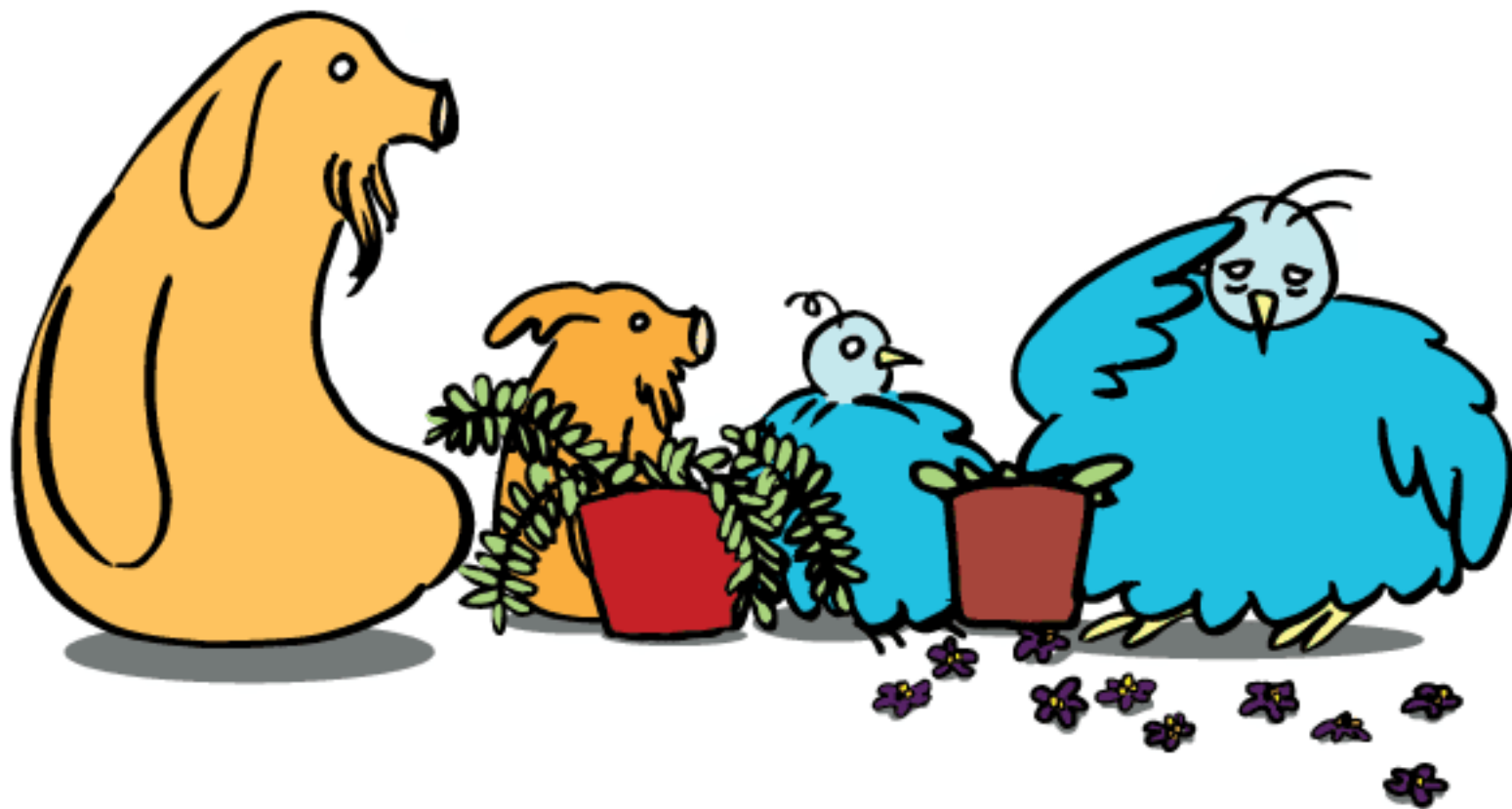
"I think we want the latest and greatest if it means keeping you safe," Pop said. "Plus, if the gun's locked up in there, where am I going to hide all those overdue library books?"

Mama Monster and Little Monster laughed gaily.



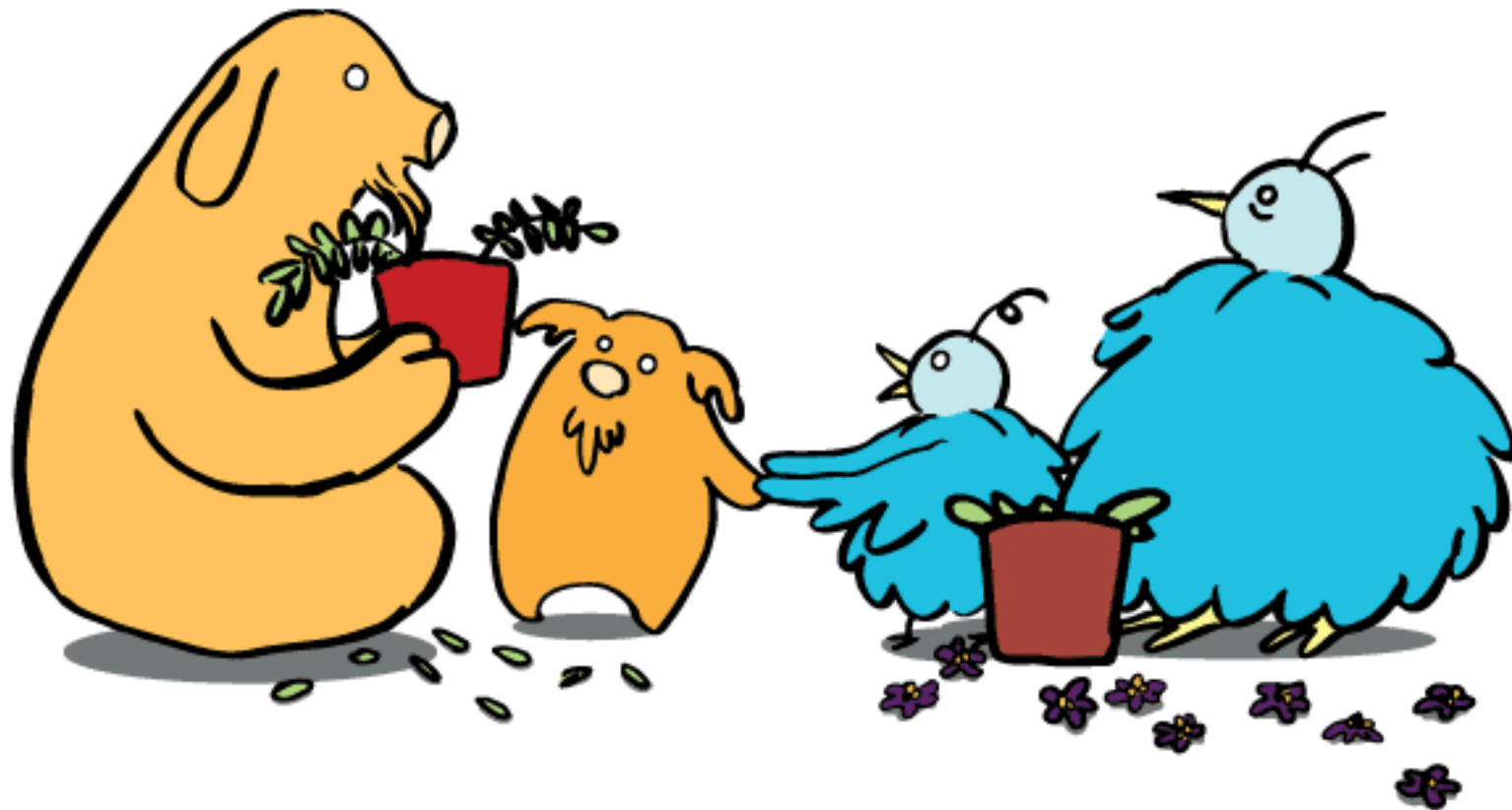
“Seriously, though, it’s like almost a thousand dollars in late fees,” Rascal’s Pop said. “I’m not sure how to break it to Frances. Things are strained enough as it is.”

Mama Monster and Little Monster stopped laughing.



"So can Little Monster still come over to play once there's a new safe for the gun?" asked Rascal, hopefully.

"Of course," Mama Monster said. "As long as Mr. Rascal doesn't mind me asking about the gun being safely secured and separated from the ammunition whenever we come over."



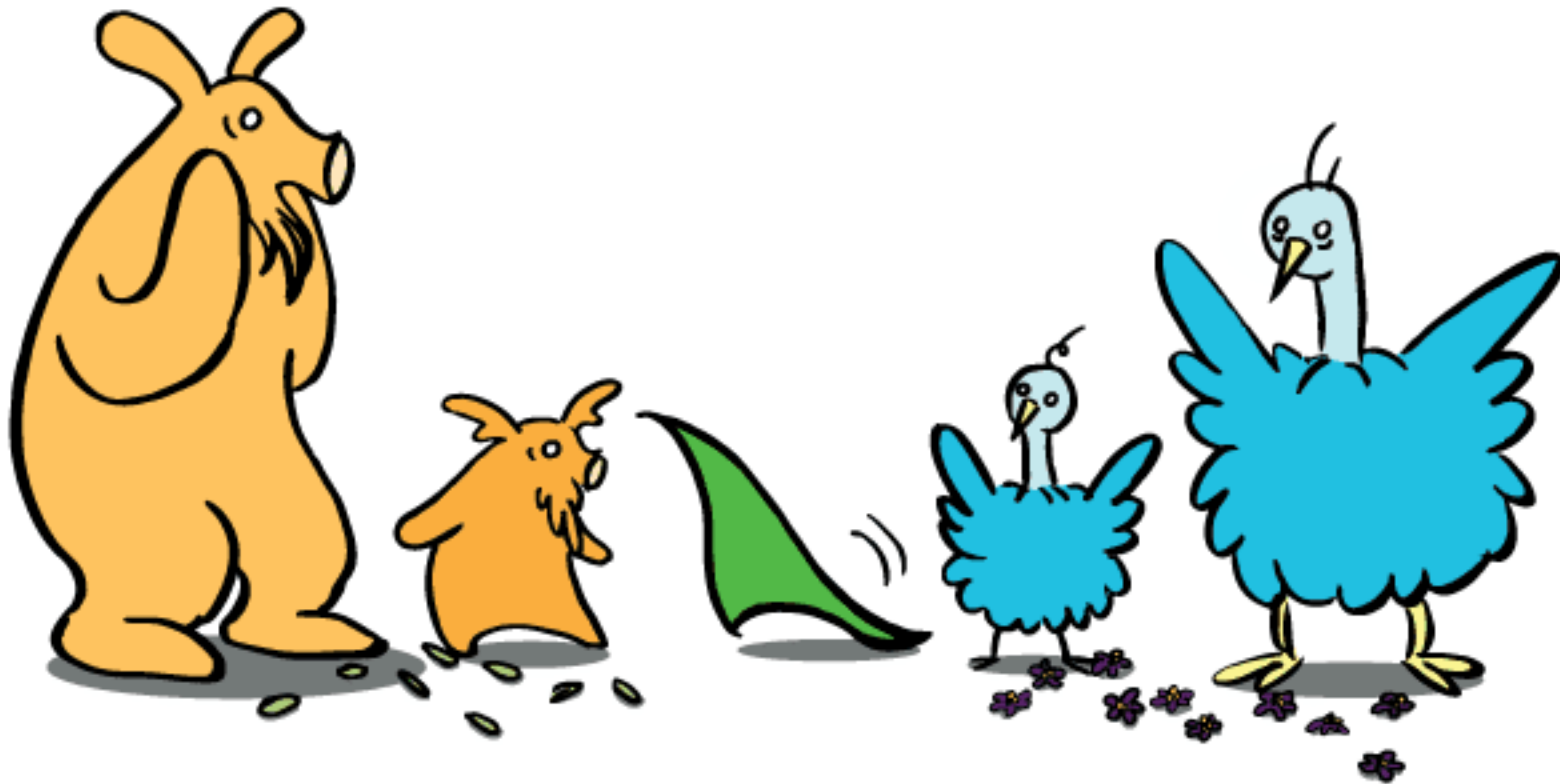
"I would expect nothing less and will make sure it is," Rascal's Pop said. "Just like making sure Scalene is out in the yard."

Rascal froze. "Uh-oh."



At the sound of his name, Scalene the triangle bounded into the living room and snuggled up to Little Monster.

"I'm sorry! I forgot to put him out when Little Monster came back!" Rascal moaned.



Little Monster just giggled and hugged Scalene back. "It's ok. I just get hives, not anaphylaxis."

Rascal's Pop laughed gaily. Mama wanted to slap Rascal's Pop for a moment but counted to ten, one number at a time, and felt herself relax.

Her Little Monster was itchy but happy, and Mama was one fern heavier but one worry lighter.

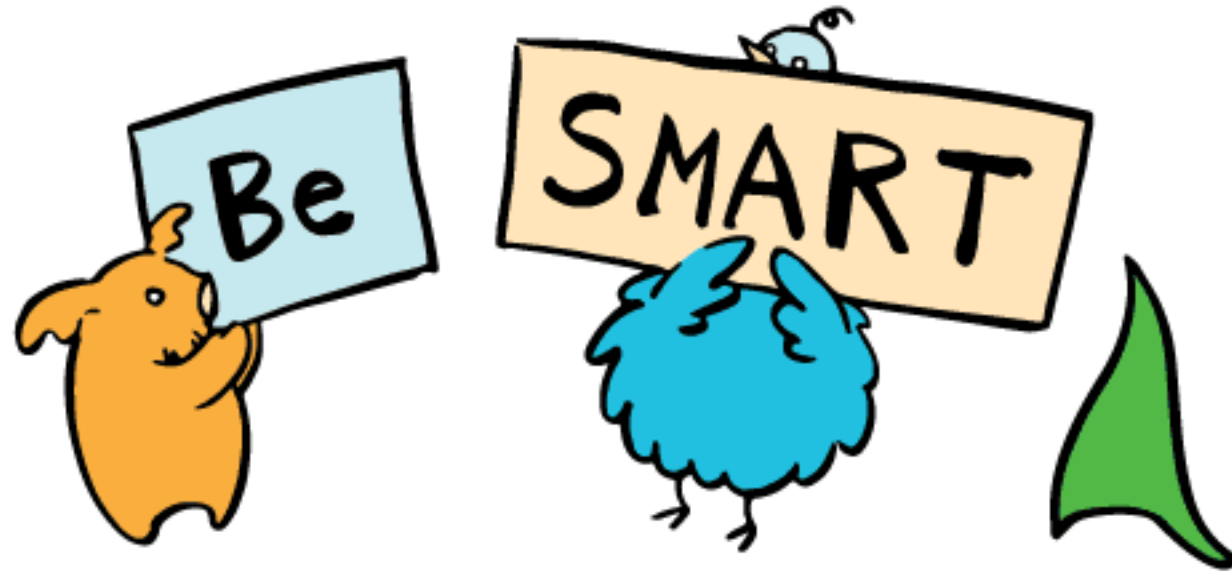


She glanced at Rascal's Pop as he called the Everything Store to ask about their gun safe inventory and, more importantly, their parking situation.

Perhaps it was not so unfortunate that their daughters were friends after all.







**S**ecure all guns in your home and vehicles

**M**odel responsible behavior around guns

**A**sk about the presence of unsecured guns in other homes

**R**ecognize the risks of teen suicide

**T**ell your peers to be SMART

### *FROM THE AUTHOR*

Gun sense requires action at every level.

Demonstrate gun sense at home and in your community.

Vote for gun sense advocates.

Throw out gun sense opponents.

Please consider volunteering time, signatures or money to Everytown For Gun Safety.

Visit [everytown.org](http://everytown.org) or [momsdemandaction.org](http://momsdemandaction.org) for more information.

### *ABOUT THE AUTHOR*

Tracy Park is one of those rare artists who has the full love and support of her family. Visit [tracyparkdraws.com](http://tracyparkdraws.com) or email her at [tracy.park.draws@gmail.com](mailto:tracy.park.draws@gmail.com).