

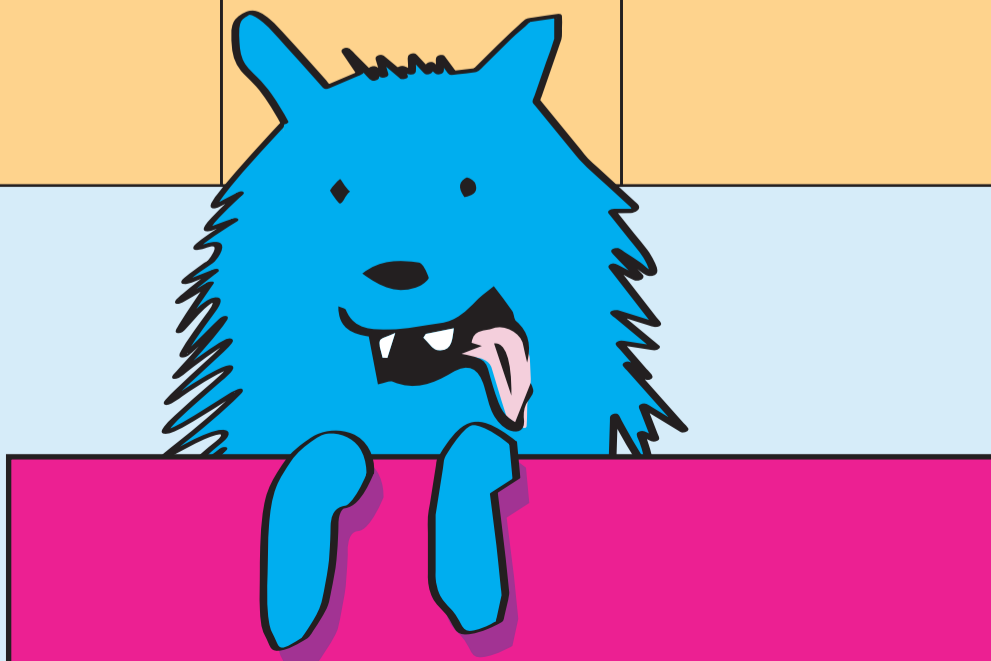
Fun Bits

VOL. 8



Fun Bits Zine

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Don't Wait!

a Mad Lib

Instructions:

1. Come up with words that suit the categories listed below.
2. Do NOT read the story until you've chosen all your words; cover it with a piece of paper if you don't have any self control.
 - 2a. Get some goddamn self control.
3. When you've finished choosing words, plug them into the story below.

plural noun _____

verb _____

verb _____

noun _____

adjective _____

noun _____

noun _____

verb _____

adjective _____

Attention (plural noun)!

This is my year to (verb)!

I've always wanted to (verb) a (noun), and this year I'm finally going to do it! I'm not sure why I waited so long, maybe it's because I'm (adjective). If you've ever wanted to hike the (noun), meet a (noun), or (verb) your career, don't wait. This could be a (adjective) year for you too.



The Pale-Faced Monster

By Andrew Eaton

He was halfway into his apartment when he saw the notice:

TO ALL RESIDENTS: A Peeping Tom has been reported in the Sausalito Apartments. A police report has been filed. Keep first floor windows locked. Be alert – report suspicious behavior to the police.

Thank you, Management.

It was tacked to the bulletin board, obscuring a flyer from a restaurant offering complimentary appetizers with purchase of any entree. How unnerving, Daniel thought. How long had this been going on? Perhaps it would have been better not to have known of this intrusion. Then everyone could continue in peace without worrying about being watched. It's as if in telling the tenants about this intrusion that they had put a ghost in the building.

As Daniel entered his unit, he thought, with some relief, that it was best Marilyn was no longer living with him. She had left three weeks earlier after they decided to take a break and moved in with her parents. A year earlier, when they first moved in together, the stories of the coronavirus had barely registered with them and things were looking up. He still had his job as an analyst at the real estate firm and Marilyn had been promoted at the marketing agency she'd only just started at. When everything shutdown and they were forced to shelter-in-place, they had the foresight to recognize the strain it could put on their relationship to be around each other far more than they were used to, so they made a pact not to break up during quarantine.

Those first few months were humbling. It instilled in them a sort of survivalism; they were happy just to have each other, food in their bellies, and a roof over their heads. But as the outside world gradually opened back up - not because the virus had become any less lethal, but because the people had grown bored with the waiting – the restlessness and a want for more crept in. After a year, Daniel went from taking a significant pay cut to being furloughed, then laid off entirely. Marilyn experienced the inverse of this trajectory. Now that the powers of curb appeal and word of mouth were impaired, her company's clientele of local businesses depended on internet marketing – and the strategists to do it – now more than ever. And so her career took off as his stalled out, and, left to his

own devices, he did not manage his free time in productive ways. With nowhere to be in the mornings, he stayed up late watching TV and mindlessly scrolling through his phone and his appetite for finding new work gradually dissipated.

What was he to do now? He'd been working at this job since he'd graduated from college and there was little else he knew as well as this. To find an entry-level job in a new field now, where he'd likely make less than he would if he simply took unemployment benefits, seemed to him hasty and foolish. Why not wait until after the pandemic, he reasoned with her, when there would be more opportunities to which he could apply his experience? But who knew how long that would take and if they could afford to wait that long. He knew this as well as she did. And it was from this discord that their unhappiness began. The busier and happier Marilyn became, the more insecure Daniel felt about the imbalance in their relationship. He became like a stock whose price was falling below the break-even point: even he knew she would have to sell to avoid further losses.

When it was finally decided she would move out (and it was Marilyn who did most of the deciding), she remained faithful to their agreement and didn't break up with him. She was to stay with her parents until they "figured things out" and knew what to do next. Daniel wondered if this was not, perhaps, a forbearance on her part to circumvent the condition that required the pandemic to expire before he could be dumped. He appreciated her clemency, if this were the case, though it was excruciating to think it true. And so he resolved to make improvements to his life in this solitude. But the anxiety of what was coming – with each new vaccine announcement bringing the pandemic closer to an end – inhibited him from making any meaningful choices, lest he risk making a life change that would prevent Marilyn from moving back in.

He therefore planned and adhered to a simple schedule in her absence. After waking just before noon, he would allocate two hours (and no more) to look for a job, then he went to a nearby park and read his book until the elementary school let out, before the park was overrun by parents and children. He would stop at the corner store, pick up something for dinner, and go home to watch TV until he fell asleep. And on this night, he did just that.

◆

The noise of rain falling on the A/C window unit was loud, but the sound of something hitting Daniel's window was louder. He woke with a start and went to the living room to see what had done this. Through the plate-glass frame, he saw imprints on the window screen not yet washed away by rain. Walking closer, he looked out at the flower bed below and saw a trail of muddy footprints leading out to the street.

Could this have been Marilyn? Did she decide to return but, having misplaced her key, decide to show up in the middle of the night unannounced, then abruptly change her mind? No, he knew better. Marilyn was affectionate, yes, but pragmatic; she was not given to making big romantic overtures, nor was she a person who frequently forgot her keys.

Then he remembered the notice. The Peeping Tom. This made his skin crawl. Not content with a view from the street, this ogler had pressed their face against his window screen to get a closer look. In their rapaciousness, Daniel imagined, they slipped and fell against the window, causing the noise that woke him.

Or it could be nothing. The notice instructed him to call the police, but what would they do? The peeper had already gotten away. Maybe no crime had been committed – or at least not one that could be proved without having actually seen anyone. And there was the matter of the police, who Daniel had been recently enlightened to learn were more prone to escalating these situations rather than solving them. And if Marilyn heard about this, it could give her a reason to not move back in. Yes, better to let it be, he thought.

He returned to his bed and scrolled through his phone until his mind allowed him to sleep.

◆

Only a few days had passed before a second notice appeared below the first:

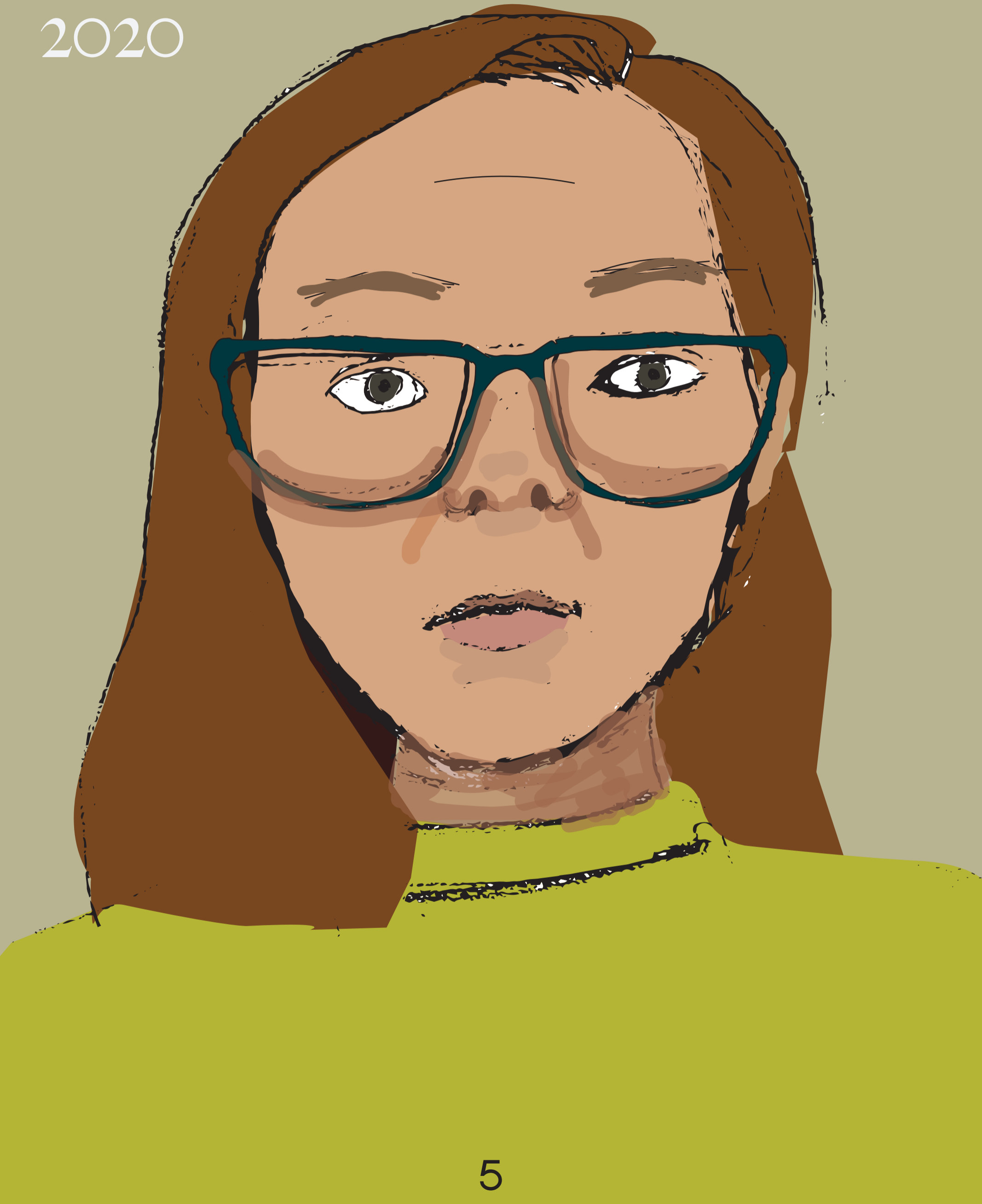
The same person has been spotted several more times outside first floor windows. The police have been called. Stay alert and call police right away if you see anything suspicious.

This intrusion shouldn't have any bearing on their lives, Daniel thought. It's not as if this person has killed anyone or taken anything – at least not yet. Still, there was the uncertainty of what the voyeur had seen. They might have been privy to any number of private moments (CONTINUED)

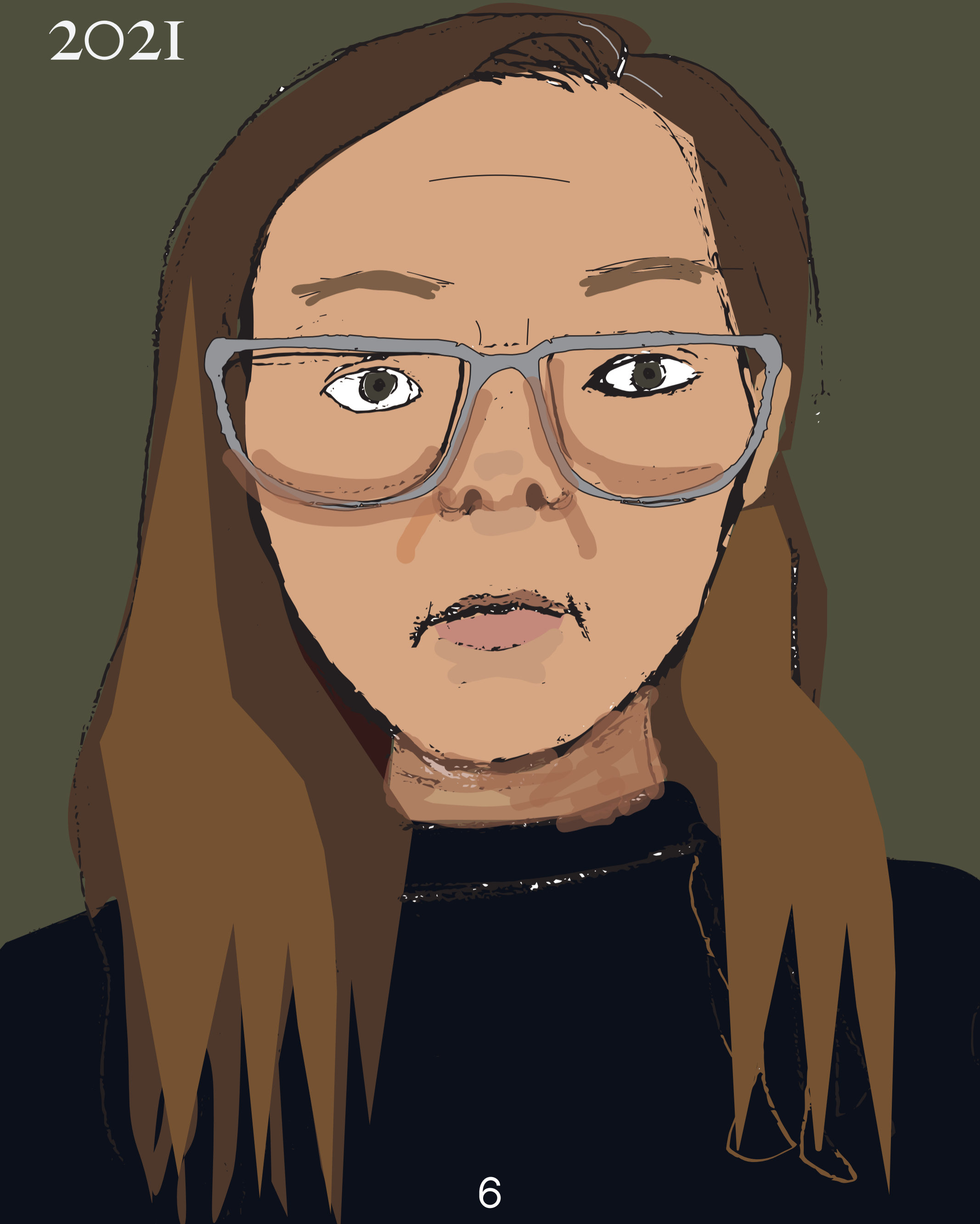
Spot the Differences!

Can you spot the differences between 2020 Lauren and 2021 Lauren?

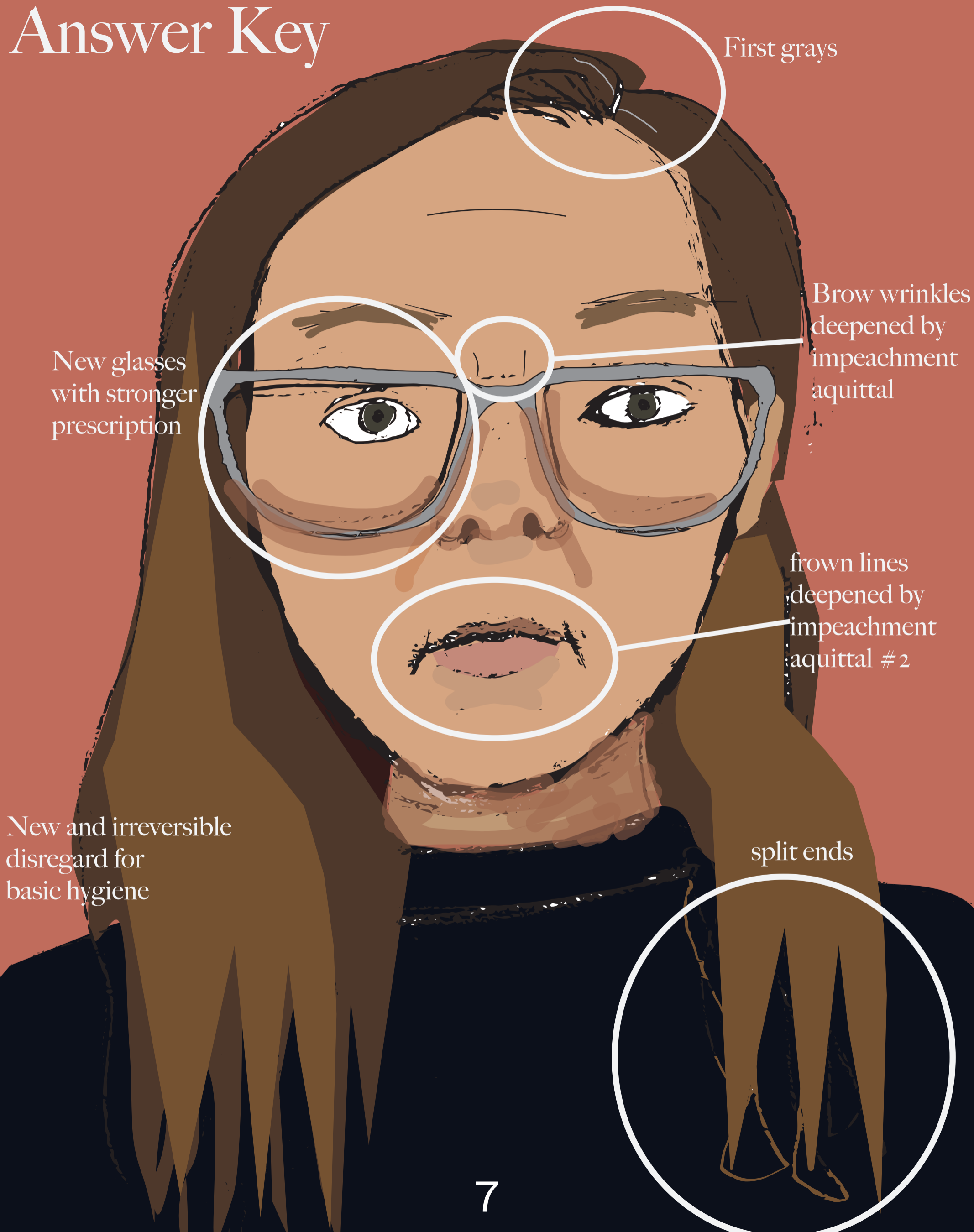
2020



2021



Answer Key



First grays

Brow wrinkles deepened by impeachment acquittal

New glasses with stronger prescription

frown lines deepened by impeachment acquittal #2

New and irreversible disregard for basic hygiene

split ends

Don't Wait
by Jessie Mitchell

Attention ferrets!

This is my year to swindle!

I've always wanted to cry a tampon, and this year I'm finally going to do it! I'm not sure why I waited so long, maybe it's because I'm erratic. If you've ever wanted to hike the cheese, meet a toothpaste, or eat your career, don't wait. This could be a slippery year for you too.

Don't Wait
by Kerrie Boodt

Attention zebras!

This is my year to rock!

I've always wanted to pli  a sandwich, and this year I'm finally going to do it! I'm not sure why I waited so long, maybe it's because I'm miserly. If you've ever wanted to hike the bus, meet a crow's nest, or fall your career, don't wait. This could be a pretty year for you too.

the new me

???

BLONDE



and could be cataloging tantalizing details of Sausalito's more interesting tenants. Provided you kept your blinds closed and your curtains drawn, he thought, you could continue life as usual. But like the participants on a reality show, it was hard to act natural when you know you are being watched and that your audience expects you to arouse and provoke them.

One sighting of this peeper left open the possibility that there had been a misunderstanding of some kind, that these sightings were unrelated, or that if they were related, that the behavior was not criminal in nature and merely the innocent act of a curious passer-by. Perhaps it was the passer-by who thought they were witnessing a crime – a domestic dispute or another sordid act – in the window of a living room or a foyer, and that in seeking closer inspection out of concern for a neighbor, found their noble intentions misconstrued and chose to flee rather than stay and explain themselves. Two sightings (three, if he counted his own), closed the door to such possibilities. This was villainy. "It was me," a voice said behind him.

Daniel turned to see who was speaking.

"I'm the one who called the police."

It was Linda, his neighbor across the hall. "Oh," Daniel said. He didn't know how to respond to this. He felt conflicted about endorsing her statement, given his qualms about the police and because it became difficult to extract himself from a conversation with Linda once it started.

"It makes me sick," she pulled her mask down to say. "I must have called the super at least six times and it took the cops telling them to do it for them to finally put signs up. Can you believe that? It's unreal what we have to put up with for how much we're paying. And in this neighborhood too."

"Hm. Did you get a look at who it was?" Daniel ventured.

She dropped her head forward and narrowed her eyes to underscore her seriousness.

"I saw him. I'm sure you can guess what this guy was doing outside my window."

She paused. Does she want me to guess? Daniel wondered.

"Of course, the police didn't believe me the first time. Then they said they don't know anyone matching the description I gave them and I said, 'Well, have you talked to Paul and Rebecca in the first building? Because they said they thought they saw someone a month ago too, and they didn't report it at the time but—'"

This continued and Linda's story grew more involved as she related accounts to other tenants in the complex that Daniel didn't know, and he lost interest in finding out if

she would return to describing the prowler himself. This must have been how the police felt. How pedantic she was being about such a serious matter! Let this prowler have a word with her and how quickly he'll lose interest in his whole endeavor. No - that's unfair, he thought. This woman had seen something awful; she had experienced violation and she had a right to her indignation. If only she could control her temperament when speaking of it - that the messenger be less choleric - so as not to harm their cause of catching this fiend.

He listened to her a while more out of guilt for his unkind thought, offered his sympathies, then politely made up a reason to leave and did so.



His thoughts returned, as they frequently did in the evenings, to Marilyn. Linda had not inquired about her absence this past month. It's true his neighbor was not especially considerate, but perhaps she didn't ask because the reason was so obvious. What was he without her?

This agonizing over Marilyn that involved constantly checking his phone and looking for her car in either of their designated parking spaces was becoming tiresome. If she won't end things, then I will, he thought. Better to rip it off like a Band-Aid and be done with it. But what if this time apart had softened her resolve for a break? What if she was waiting for him to reach out and he need only craft the perfect text message to bring her back? Then to end things now would be devastating, and the notion that they were of different minds about maintaining their relationship weighed too heavily on him to make any decision at this late hour.

At that moment, he heard a sound in the living room that sounded like branches bending. Like tightly wound strings bowing under pressure. Though he had seldom heard it before, his intuition told him immediately what it was: the window screen. The Peeping Tom had returned.

Daniel flew out of bed and raced to the living room. There in the window, returning his gaze, stood a man with a pale face. He had a long mane and crazed, fiery eyes. He resembled those early Christian paintings of Zealots. But there was no zeal for God in this man. His mouth was agape in a sort of silent laugh and his hand was somewhere down his pants. He was no vagrant either. He wore a black suit, and though it fit him poorly, it was not in poor condition. He was a man of some means. Daniel's neighbor had failed to mention any of this.

Daniel turned on the living room light and

stared back at the man, expecting him to have run off. The man did not move. Daniel turned on a floor lamp and glared back defiantly. The man stayed. Daniel remembered his phone and turned its camera and flashlight toward the window. The man did not budge. Daniel stomped forward, closing the gap between himself and the window until he was face to face with the pale-faced man.

Daniel did not calculate for a scenario in which the prowler would stand his ground and he was frozen in terror while the man in the window gaped at him and fumbled with the hand in his pants. He saw no morals in the man's eyes. Indeed, he saw nothing he could recognize at all. It was as if a primordial urge drove him window to window to engage in unspeakable acts and nothing could tear him away until he had finished. Daniel didn't know what to do with this elemental force except shout at it.

"Hey! Stop!"

The man's mouth and eyes opened even wider and Daniel stared back into the gaping maw.

"I'll call the cops! I'M NOT KIDDING!"

Daniel felt real terror for the first time in his life. Was this how it would end? Would the man come into his home and overpower him while he was paralyzed with fear? Had forensic science advanced far enough that the authorities would be able to conclude Daniel had done nothing to defend against his own murder? No, he couldn't – he wouldn't – die like this.

Daniel gained control of his nerves. He began pounding on the window, screaming at the man to go away and, one by one, porch lights up and down the street turned on and people came out to see what was happening. Then the man disappeared, fled into the night. And Daniel was left shook.



It had been difficult for Daniel to sleep after this and the one constant in his life, his routine, unraveled as a result. With loss of sleep came loss of focus, and he found himself reading and rereading the same page of his book at the park, unable to recall what events preceded the present ones or why they were important.

Some of the parents there recognized him now, not from his daily reading appearances, but from the commotion he caused that night with the prowler. Daniel didn't have to call the police that night - someone else had already done it for him when they heard his shouting and pounding. A crowd gathered to listen as the officers took his statement, but Daniel's

nerves were in terrible shape and the details he relayed (and the excited manner in which he relayed them) about the pale-faced man were too grotesque for his neighbors. They were repulsed. People didn't want to talk to him about it and no one offered their sympathies. No one knew how to reconcile, he suspected, that this peeper could be a respectable member of polite society by day and a deviant monster by night. This did not fit into their narrative of who a peeper was, and it disturbed them further that Daniel had behaved so rashly when confronted with this danger. Here was a grown man, crying and pounding on his windows, speaking flippantly to police officers, and accusing any one of his neighbors of secretly being the menace. It was unbecoming. And as Linda had suggested, things like this just didn't happen in their neighborhood.

"What's your phone number?"

Daniel, pulled back to reality, looked up. It was the cashier at the corner store ringing up his food.

"Pardon?" he asked.

"You come in here every day," she observed politely. "We might as well get you setup with our rewards program so you can get free food."

"That's okay," he mumbled. "You can tell your manager you tried though."

She smiled. "I'll do that," she said and pointed to her name tag. It read: SANAA, OWNER & MANAGER.

"Oh." He shifted uncomfortably, realizing how casually dismissive he had been.

"I... yeah, sure..." And he read out his phone number. He braced himself for a prolonged and complicated transaction (which he thought he might deserve), but within seconds the register beeped.

"All done! Have a nice evening and we'll see you next time." She smiled again. It was sincere. She did not appear to take any sport in the correction she had issued him.

The sting of having failed his first social exchange since speaking to the police smarted his neck. He managed a "thank you" on his way out the door when he heard her say, "We could always use more help around here."

He turned back to look at her, making sure he did not misread any cues again.

"You know, in case you know anyone who might be interested in work," she added. He waved and nodded politely before leaving.

And what of it? How presumptive she had been about his situation! That she believed him to be without work or prospects. Now, truly, he was without

both, but that was beside the point. It was the indignity of her suggesting she was in a position to do him a favor. Imagine me, he thought, working at an establishment with a rewards program. What would Marilyn say if she were to return to the apartment, deciding to stop at the store for a few necessities on her way, only to discover him wearing a name tag and asking if she would like to join their rewards program? She would say nothing, he thought. She would turn right back around and walk out of the store and out of his life forever.

It wasn't that Daniel looked down on this line of work. On the contrary. These were essential workers. They deserve better wages and treatment than they have traditionally been afforded, he nodded to himself. It's simply that it wasn't what he went to school for. Nor was it what he had been working toward. But what was it that he was working toward? Deep down he knew he didn't have the moxie possessed by his more successful peers to become a partner or start his own real estate firm. And when he was laid off, Marilyn remarked how often he lamented and resented his work, how his firm had become a pariah in the news, and that this was an opportunity for a fresh start. Should he have done something else with his life? Anyhow, it was too late to think about that. He was in no state of mind to be making big life choices.

His thoughts were primarily concerned with the pale-faced man and when he would return.



When Daniel shut his eyes, he saw only the living room window. It existed both in the visible world and the invisible world, as a portal through which the pale-faced man could appear to watch him. He wondered if Linda experienced this too, but knew better than to ask. She'd think him a lunatic. Or worse, relate some inane story inconsequential to the matter at hand. He was on his own. He opened his eyes and sighed deeply.

How terrible to be tormented like this! To find no solace in his dreams, or sympathy in his waking life – only the fear and anticipation of when the stranger would reappear, and what he would do when he saw him. Yes, when not if. The waiting for something – anything – to happen was excruciating. Let it come, he thought. This can endure no longer.

Daniel squeezed his eyes shut and, when he did, he saw the window in his mind. And as if summoned by command, that face emerged from the shadows and pressed against the window. It was

laughing silently. In that instant, Daniel's flesh hardened as his intuition told him something it could not prove, but somehow knew to be true. He went to the living room and saw what he'd simultaneously feared and willed to come back: the pale-faced monster.

The man had returned in the same untailed suit and had received no haircut since his last visit. His demeanor and lecherous gestures were unchanged. He had come back for more. Daniel could feel the fear taking hold again. This man was not merely a peeper – he was far worse. He was like an ancient evil incarnated periodically to remind those who had forgotten that there are unfathomable cosmic forces driving our basest urges, and that those urges could destroy us if we failed to control them. I gave into my worst desires and look what I became, the pale-faced man's existence seemed to imply. How easily you could become like me.

But this was just a man, Daniel reminded himself, even as his veins were frozen. A horrifying sight to look at, but a man nonetheless. In fact, he wasn't even wearing a mask. He had no regard for his safety or the safety of others when it came to spreading covid, which was the least concerning thing about him right now, though it seemed, if nothing else, like a practical way to hide his face while engaging in these indecent acts. This man doesn't just get off on watching the unwilling. He gets off on the getting caught too. Who is this man? It didn't matter who he was, though it occurred to Daniel that it might matter to the man himself.

"Hey!" Daniel shouted, "I know you!"

The pale-faced man stopped his gesturing and stared back blankly.

"I know you," Daniel yelled further. "I've seen you before!"

For the first time, Daniel recognized in the man's eyes an expression other than pure madness. The man's mouth slowly receded from the unhinged laugh it seemed perpetually stuck in and he started to step back slowly.

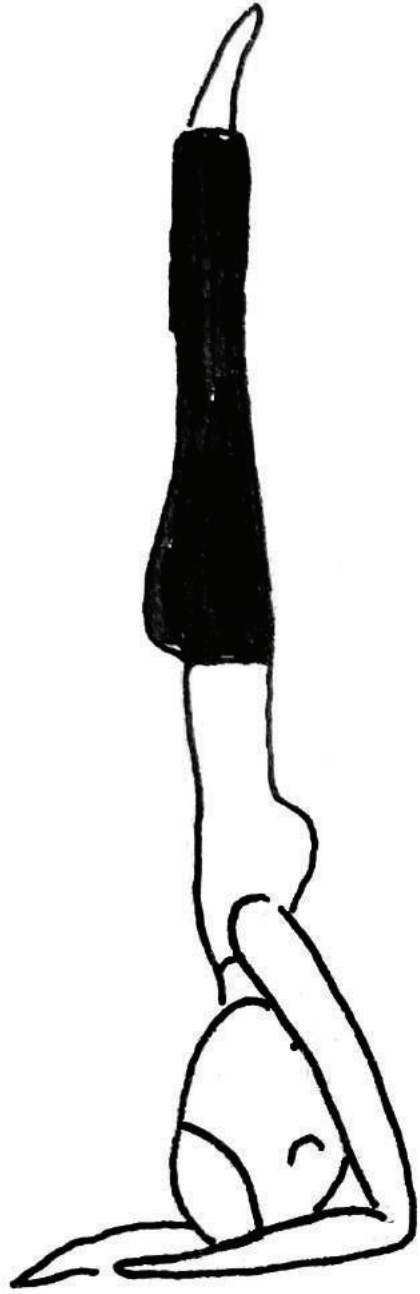
"Yeah, that's right!" Daniel cried out. It wasn't strictly speaking right. Daniel had seen this man only in his previous haunting and not outside that encounter. Though Daniel guessed, correctly, that the stranger didn't know this. He advanced toward the window, seizing this moment.

"I know who you are! You're not going anywhere," Daniel screamed at the top of his lungs. This seemed to confuse and immobilize (CONTINUED)

In 2021, I want to do more yoga



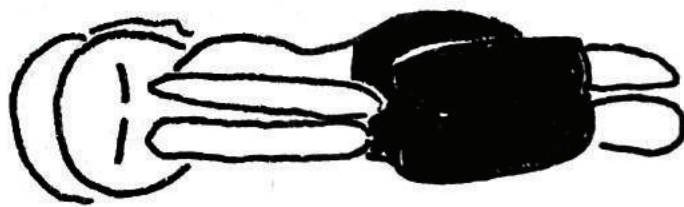
Bowing to my new overlords pose



There's actually nothing else to do pose



pretending I'm on an airplane going literally anywhere pose



Worried about everything pose



Realizing I should shower pose



pretending to meditate while I think about how socially awkward I've become

2/21/21

Don't Wait
by Andrew Eaton

Attention tubas!
This is my year to exorcise!
I've always wanted to defenestrate a cheesecloth, and
this year I'm finally going to do it! I'm not sure why I
waited so long, maybe it's because I'm spicy. If you've
ever wanted to hike the photobooth, meet a space
heater, or elongate your career, don't wait. This could
be a doglike year for you too.

Don't Wait
by Allison Summers

Attention penguins!
This is my year to leap!
I've always wanted to squat a pillow, and this year I'm
finally going to do it! I'm not sure why I waited so long,
maybe it's because I'm fluffy. If you've ever wanted to
hike the walnut, meet a puzzle piece, or shimmy your
career, don't wait. This could be a comfy year for you
too.

the pale-faced man and only empowered Daniel further, who, in a tremendous show of force, lifted open the window in one fell swoop.

He was face to face with the man now. And up and down the street, Daniel saw the porch lights turn on and the other tenants come out. The pale-faced man looked around, realizing there was no clean exit in which he could escape without someone else seeing his face.

"I know him too!" A woman was shouting from a second-floor unit across the street. "He lives in this complex!"

The pale-faced man tried to hide his face in his suit jacket and make a run for it, but without seeing where he was going, he tripped and fell in a heap in the middle of the street. Daniel watched as the residents gathered around him with their phones and recorded his futile attempts to gather himself. Their jeers were drowned out by the sound of sirens.



Working at the corner store had afforded Daniel some unexpected benefits, the first of which was more free time. He had somewhere to be each day, which meant waking up well before he was accustomed, but the desire to make the most of his evenings and days off increased the quality and enjoyment of that time tenfold. The second benefit was that, as a newly minted essential worker, he was able to get vaccinated much earlier than he would have been otherwise.

He thought he might find difficulty relating to his new coworkers due to some imagined disparity in their life experiences. He was quite wrong, however, and they got on well. Daniel was only eager to regale them with the story of how he had brought down the neighborhood prowler with fast-thinking and decisive action, and it ingratiated him to these new work friends. He was relieved to find his previous misconceptions about working here replaced with new apprehensions he'd remain interesting enough company after the novelty of his story wore off.

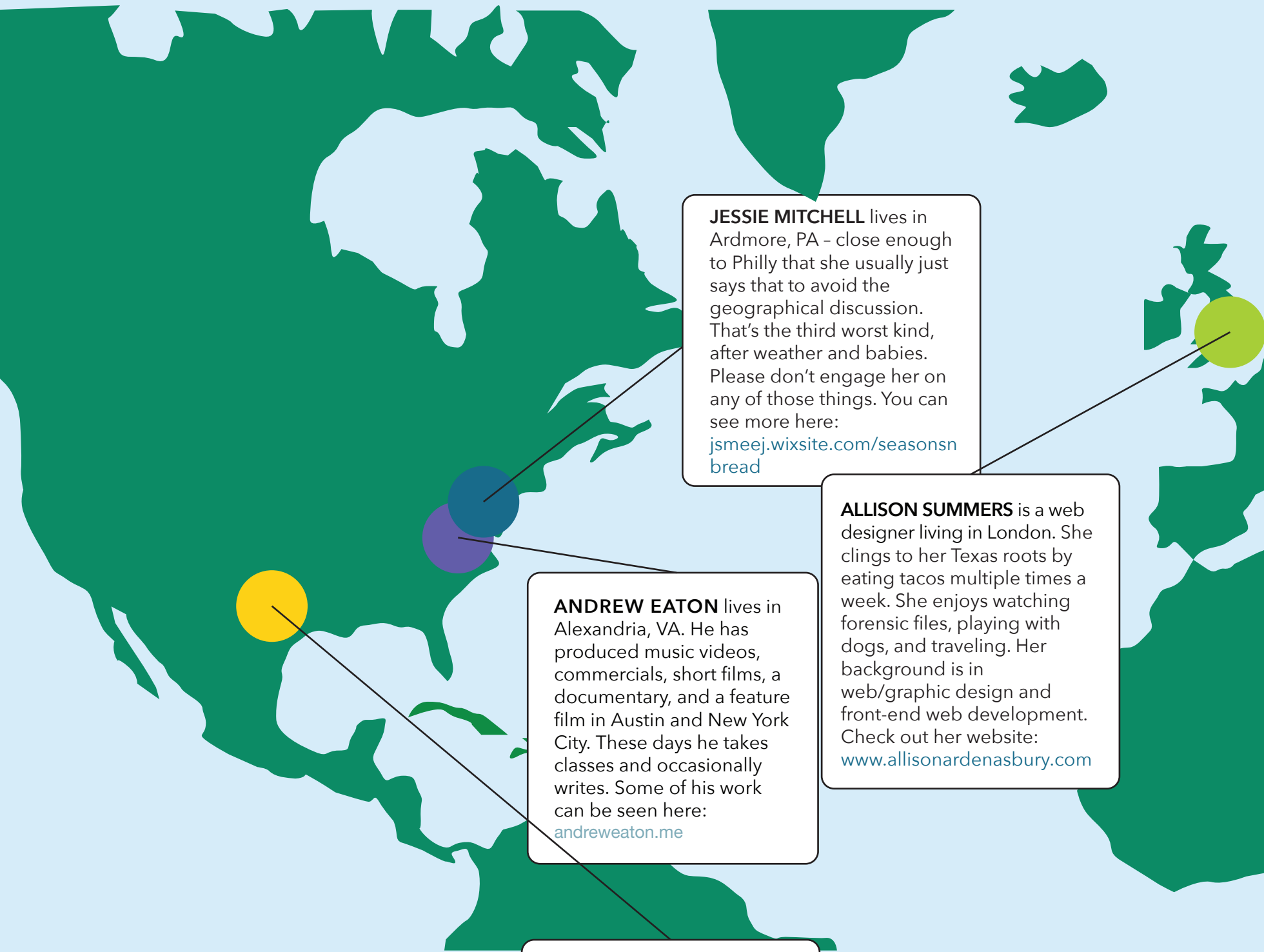
As for the peeper himself, Daniel learned from the news that the man had lived in one of the upstairs units for several years. Formerly a successful banker, the man had been laid off almost immediately when the shutdown began. With no roommates or known significant other to look after him, he had declined in isolation and stopped keeping up appearances, despite having the means

to do so. The officers told Daniel that the man had no criminal record or precedent in his life for the deviant behavior he began exhibiting. "Guess he just had too much time on his hands," one said with a shrug.

As for Marilyn, Daniel expected he would be hearing from her soon, as the world returned to normal. He had a more relaxed disposition when he thought about that prospect now, even though he didn't know what he'd say if he were to see her.

He had just finished ringing up his own dinner – the same he bought when he was a customer – and was preparing to close the store for the night, when the front door opened and someone he knew walked in.

about us



JESSIE MITCHELL lives in Ardmore, PA - close enough to Philly that she usually just says that to avoid the geographical discussion. That's the third worst kind, after weather and babies. Please don't engage her on any of those things. You can see more here: jsmeej.wixsite.com/seasonsnbread

ALLISON SUMMERS is a web designer living in London. She clings to her Texas roots by eating tacos multiple times a week. She enjoys watching forensic files, playing with dogs, and traveling. Her background is in web/graphic design and front-end web development. Check out her website: www.allisonardenasbury.com

ANDREW EATON lives in Alexandria, VA. He has produced music videos, commercials, short films, a documentary, and a feature film in Austin and New York City. These days he takes classes and occasionally writes. Some of his work can be seen here: andreweaton.me

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

If you're interested in contributing to a future Fun Bits, email funbitszine@gmail.com