

Pipo and Pepo  
Two Tiny Explorers



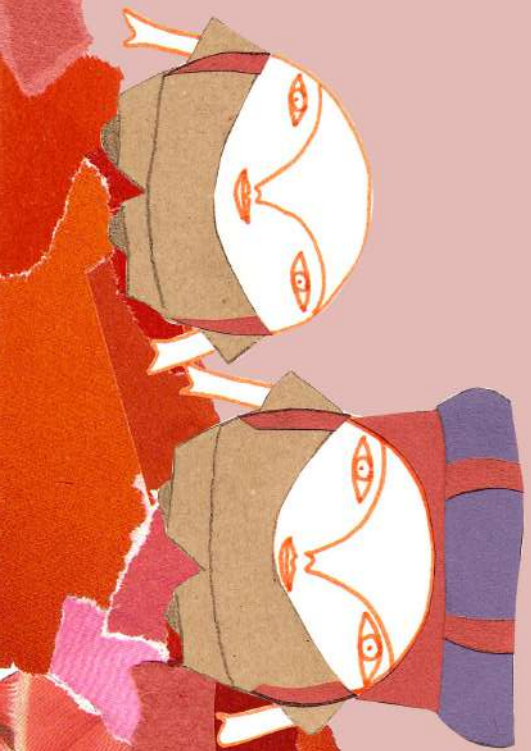
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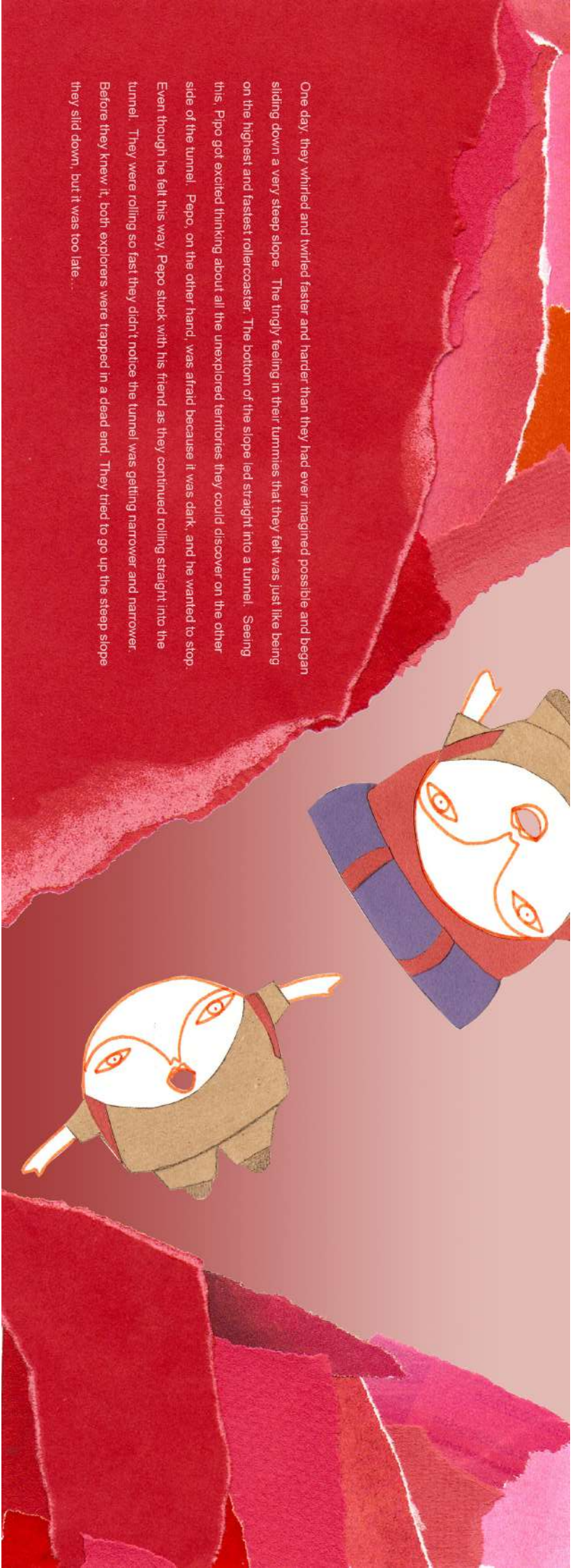
Once upon a time, there were two tiny, round explorers that lived in a cosy, comfy cabin. Their names were Pipo and Pepo. They were about the size of a ping pong ball, and they especially enjoyed whirling and twirling with incredible speed.



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Every morning, they popped on their backpacks and went out on an adventure to see what there was to see. In order to decide where to go each day they held on tightly to each other in a big warm hug and spun around like a top. Wherever they landed when the spinning stopped is where they would explore that day.

One day, they whirled and twirled faster and harder than they had ever imagined possible and began sliding down a very steep slope. The tingly feeling in their tummies that they felt was just like being on the highest and fastest rollercoaster. The bottom of the slope led straight into a tunnel. Seeing this, Pipo got excited thinking about all the unexplored territories they could discover on the other side of the tunnel. Pepo, on the other hand, was afraid because it was dark, and he wanted to stop. Even though he felt this way, Pepo stuck with his friend as they continued rolling straight into the tunnel. They were rolling so fast they didn't notice the tunnel was getting narrower and narrower. Before they knew it, both explorers were trapped in a dead end. They tried to go up the steep slope they slid down, but it was too late...



It took a few minutes for them to grasp the trouble they were in.

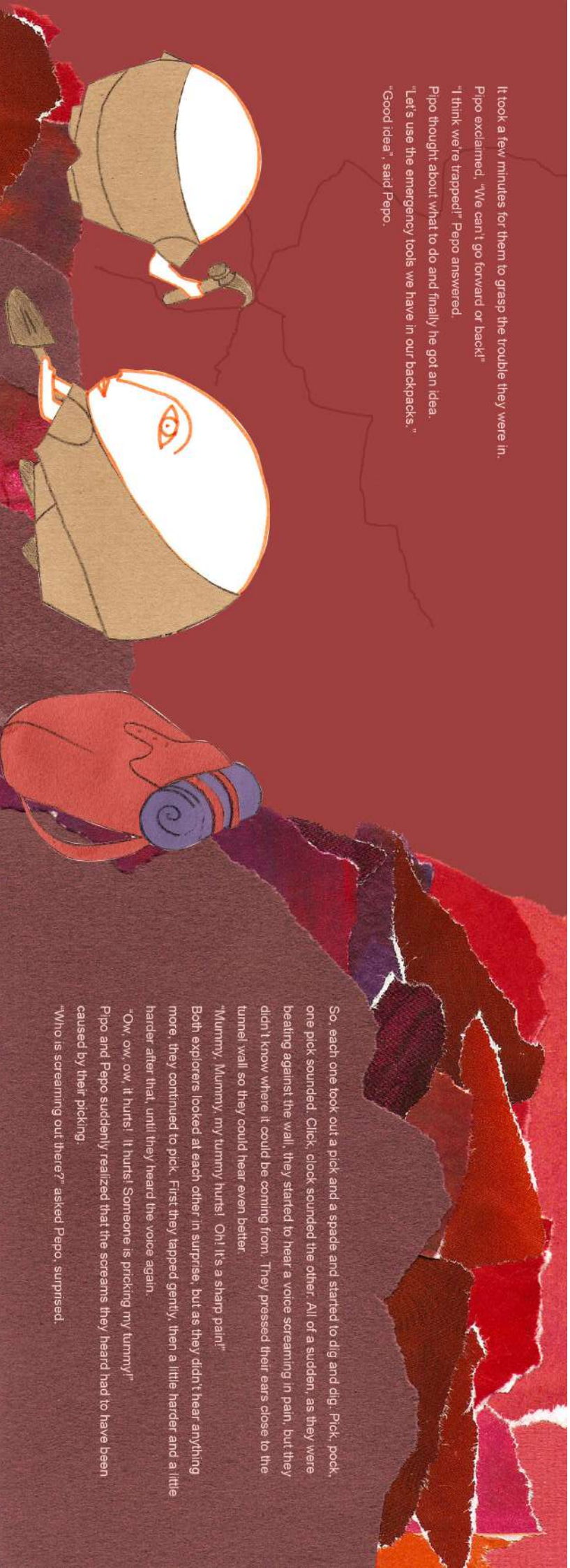
Pipo exclaimed, "We can't go forward or back!"

"I think we're trapped!" Peppo answered.

Pipo thought about what to do and finally he got an idea.

"Let's use the emergency tools we have in our backpacks."

"Good idea", said Peppo.



So, each one took out a pick and a spade and started to dig and dig. Pick, pick, one pick sounded. Click, click sounded the other. All of a sudden, as they were beating against the wall, they started to hear a voice screaming in pain, but they didn't know where it could be coming from. They pressed their ears close to the tunnel wall so they could hear even better.

"Mummy, Mummy, my tummy hurts! Oh! It's a sharp pain!"

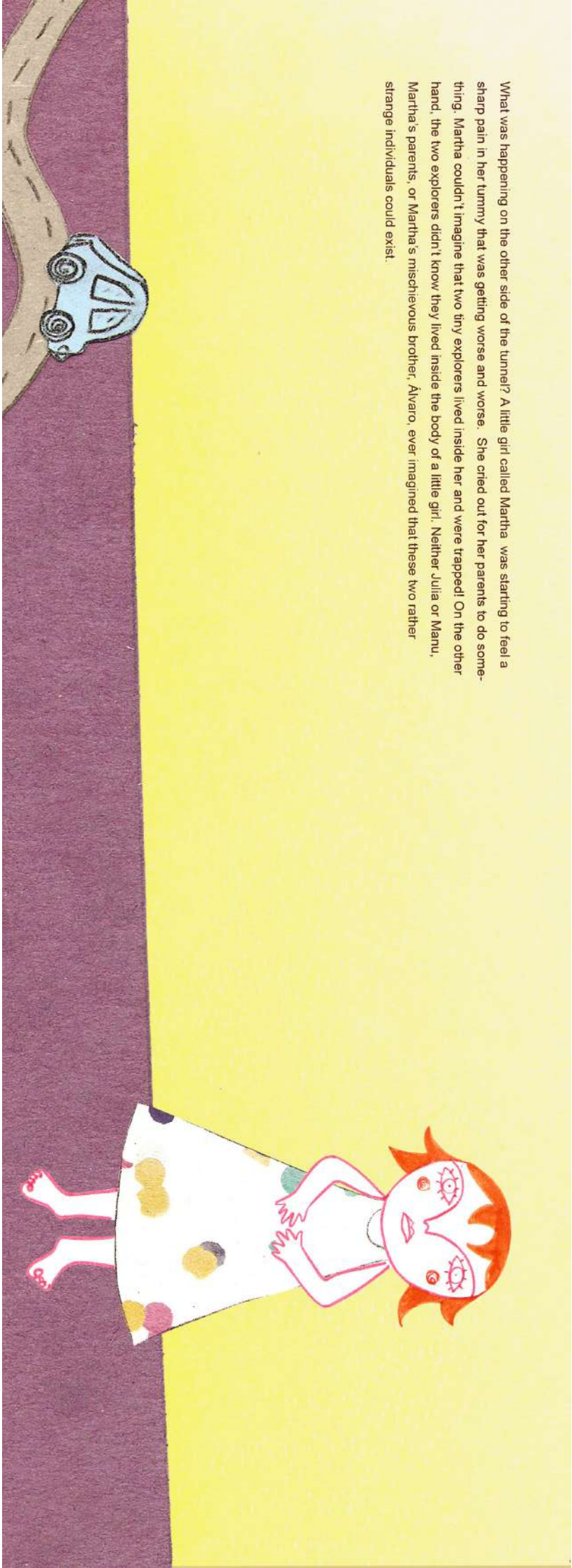
Both explorers looked at each other in surprise, but as they didn't hear anything more, they continued to pick. First they tapped gently, then a little harder and a little harder after that, until they heard the voice again.

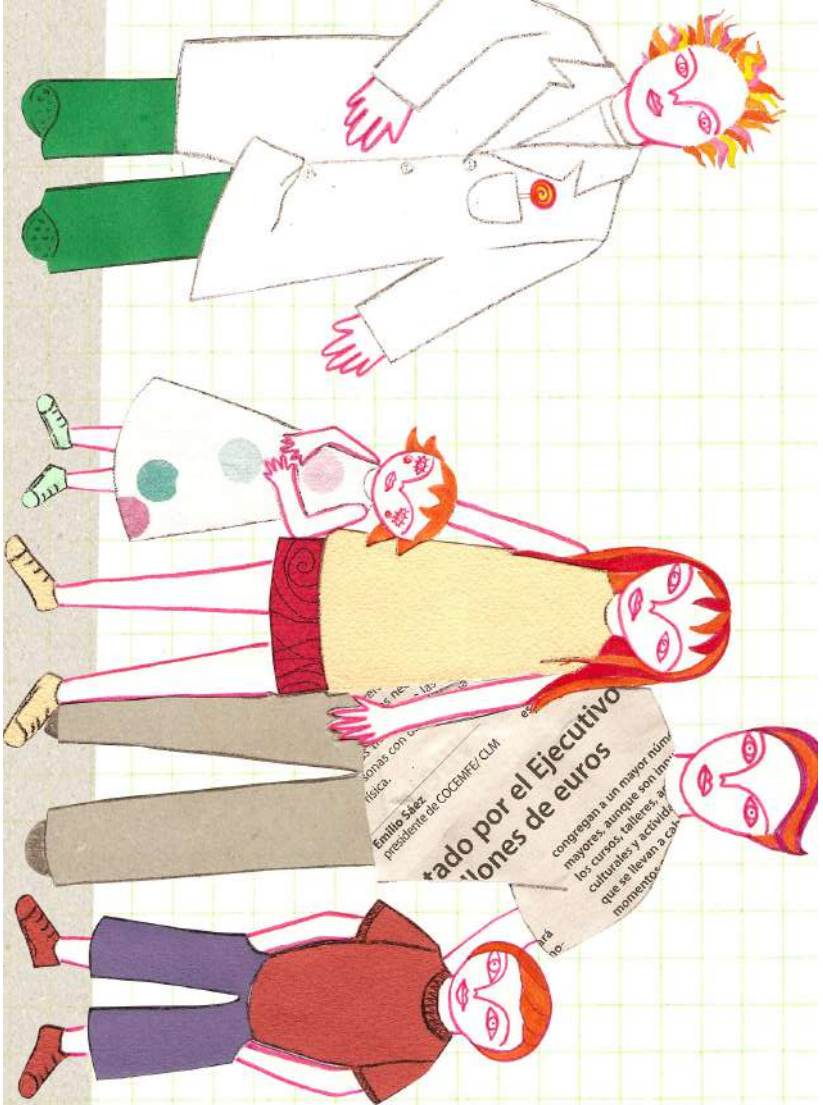
"Ow, ow, ow, it hurts! It hurts! Someone is pricking my tummy!"

Pipo and Peppo suddenly realized that the screams they heard had to have been caused by their picking.

"Who is screaming out there?" asked Peppo, surprised.

What was happening on the other side of the tunnel? A little girl called Martha was starting to feel a sharp pain in her tummy that was getting worse and worse. She cried out for her parents to do something. Martha couldn't imagine that two tiny explorers lived inside her and were trapped! On the other hand, the two explorers didn't know they lived inside the body of a little girl. Neither Julia or Manu, Martha's parents, or Martha's mischievous brother, Alvaro, ever imagined that these two rather strange individuals could exist.





Julia and Manu didn't know what to do so they gathered up the family and rushed to the hospital. Even upset as they were, Martha and Alvaro forgot everything. In fact, they forgot their manners and stared at the man inside the room!

His hair was all dishevelled, he winked his eye every now and then, and he made funny faces when he spoke. The children smiled at the funny looking man. Martha's parents quickly told him all that had happened. When the scatter-brained doctor stood up to examine Martha, he caught his toe on the table leg and looked at the children, an embarrassed grin on his face. The children caught each other's eyes and tried not to laugh.

"Let's see", began the doctor. "What happened to this sweet girl?"  
"I have sharp pains in my tummy", answered Martha, openly.

The doctor felt her tummy and did some tests. After looking at the results, he told Julia and Manu that their daughter had nothing less than two tiny, round and restless explorers inside her.

Julia and Manu both looked astonished at this news. They couldn't believe what that doctor, like some crazy scientist, was trying to tell them. After they got over the shock, they asked the doctor,

"How is it possible that our daughter has two little explorers inside her?"

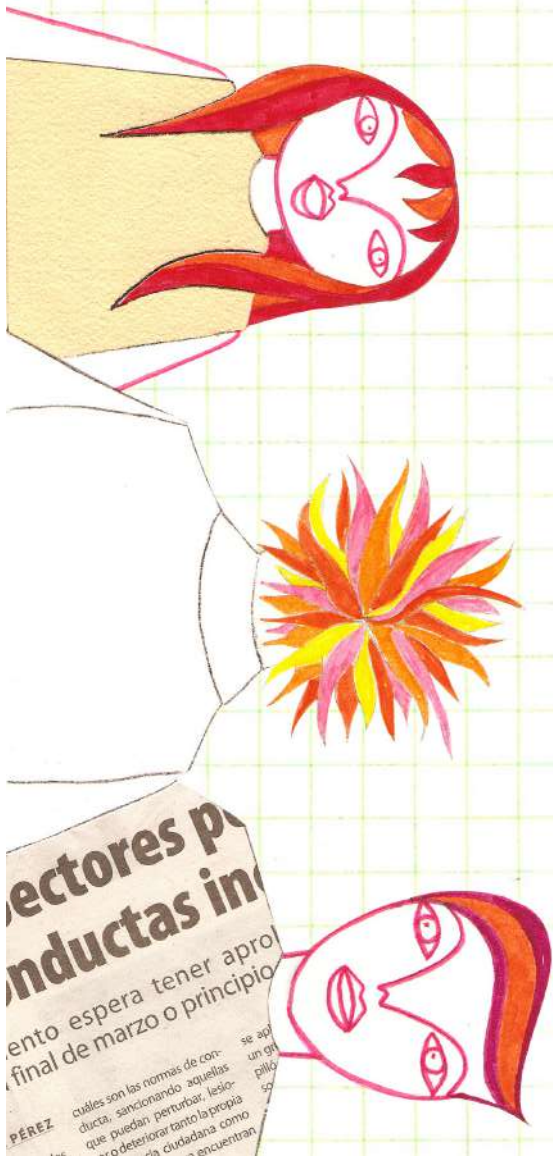
"It sounds unbelievable, but sometimes it happens", answered the doctor, quiet and serious.

"Is it dangerous for her?" the parents asked the doctor.

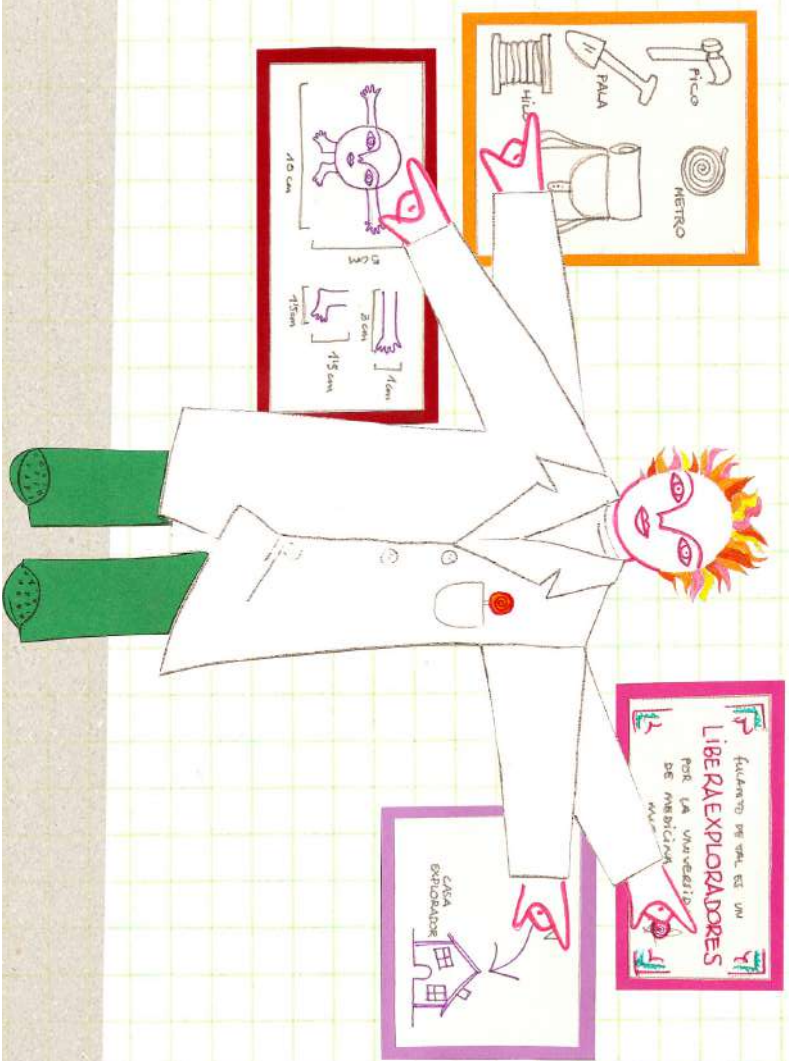
"Don't worry. These explorers are peaceful by nature," answered the doctor, as he shooped a fly away from his paperwork. "Nevertheless," he added, "if the explorers stay trapped, they could get angry and come out by force."

"So, what is the best way to treat these kinds of explorers?" asked Julia.

"I advise you try to get them back to their cabin inside Martha as soon as possible," declared the doctor.







"I see, but what is having two tiny explorers inside our daughter going to do to her?" asked Manu, a little upset at this news and unsure because of the doctor's quirky appearance.

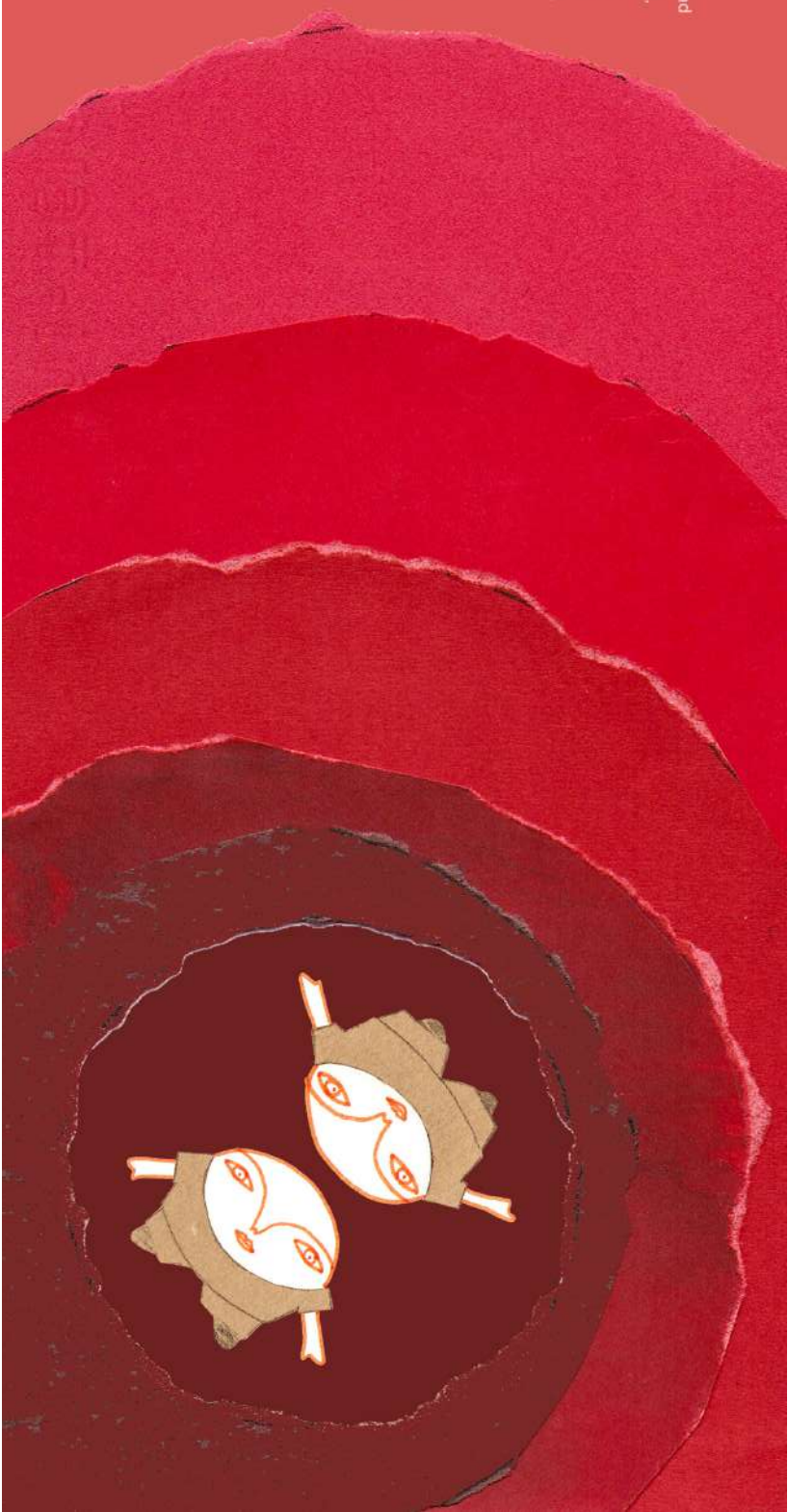
"Well," replied the doctor, "these explorers can be very useful because they have valuable tools in their backpacks for Martha to grow up healthy and happy, and we can always free them when she grows up."

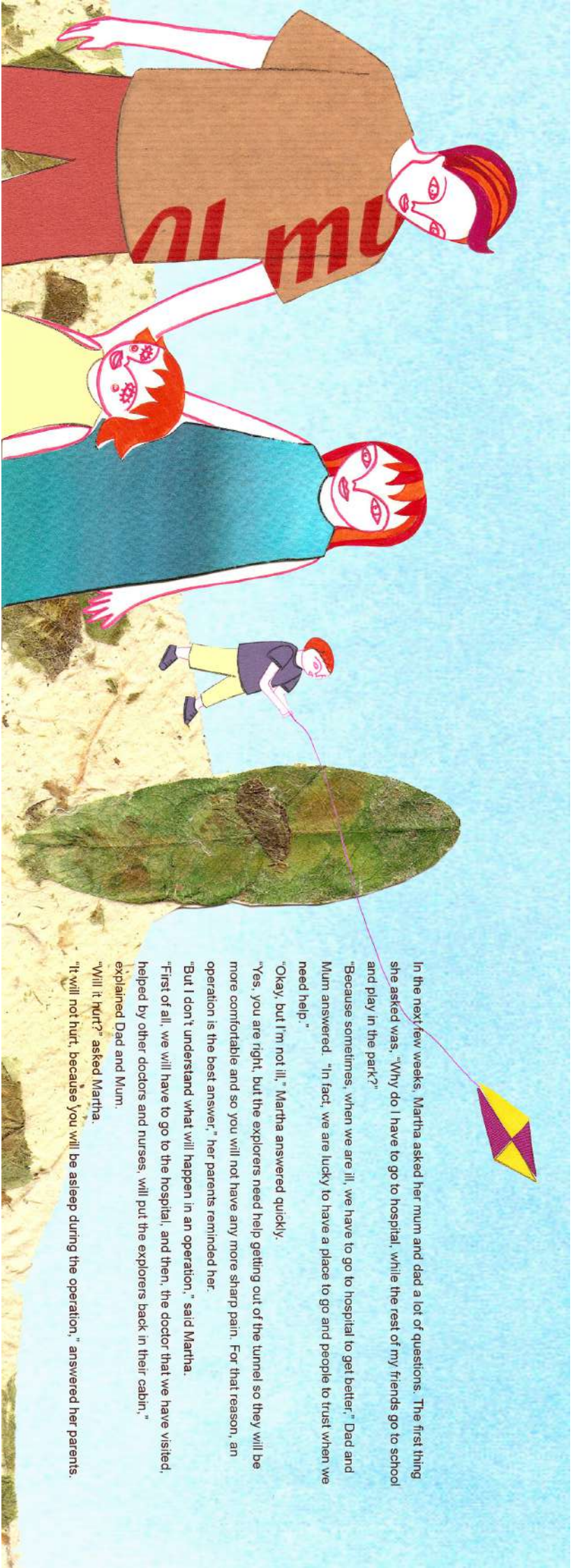
"Oh, really?" Martha's father continued, still upset. "And how will we get these tiny explorers that we can't even see, to their cabin?"

"Ahhemmmmm!" exclaimed the doctor, trying to draw attention to himself, with sparkling eyes and a grin. "This is the reason you have come to visit the "Free-the-explorers" doctor! My colleagues and I will perform an operation and the explorers will be at home again in a jiffy. They will never complain again."

Julia and Manu listened to the rest of the explanation, stood up, and went back home amazed at all they heard. Until this very moment, they had never imagined that this kind of unexpected thing could happen inside the tummy of their darling daughter Martha. While Martha's daddy and mummy thought about what they had learned, the story of our other two heroes continued in the tunnel.

During the whole visit with the doctor, the two explorers kept their ears up against the wall of the tunnel, intending to learn all they could. They could only hear a few of the words, but it was enough to know that the conversation was about them. As the last few hours had been so exhausting, they decided to have a rest. Before they did, they checked that they had enough provisions to stay in the tunnel for a bit more time, just in case.





In the next few weeks, Martha asked her mum and dad a lot of questions. The first thing she asked was, "Why do I have to go to hospital, while the rest of my friends go to school and play in the park?"

"Because sometimes, when we are ill, we have to go to hospital to get better," Dad and Mum answered. "In fact, we are lucky to have a place to go and people to trust when we need help."

"Okay, but I'm not ill," Martha answered quickly.

"Yes, you are right, but the explorers need help getting out of the tunnel so they will be more comfortable and so you will not have any more sharp pain. For that reason, an operation is the best answer," her parents reminded her.

"But I don't understand what will happen in an operation," said Martha.

"First of all, we will have to go to the hospital, and then, the doctor that we have visited, helped by other doctors and nurses, will put the explorers back in their cabin," explained Dad and Mum.

"Will it hurt?" asked Martha.

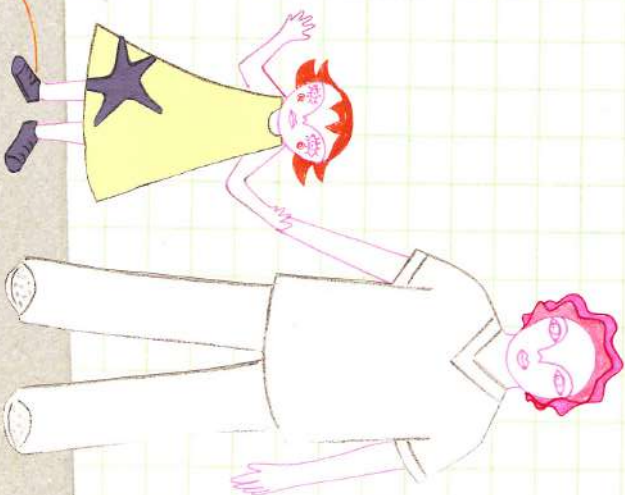
"It will not hurt, because you will be asleep during the operation," answered her parents.

Martha started to pout. "I don't want to have two explorers inside me," said the girl. "It's a silly thing. I'm sure nobody else in my class has them. Why do I have to have them?"

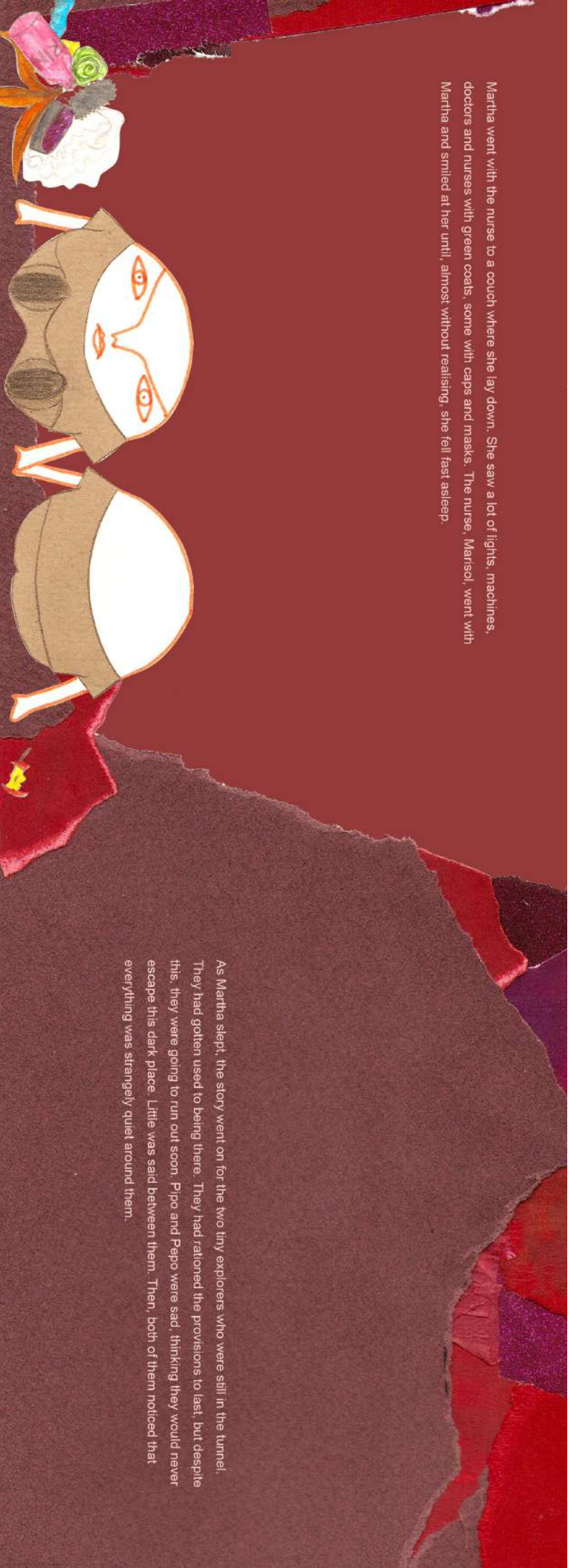
"Well, it's something that belongs to you, like your eye colour or your hair colour," explained Dad and Mum. "Besides, there are other children that have little explorers and maybe one day, you will meet them and make new friends."

After this conversation Martha's mum and dad were silent and Martha became quiet, too. She was lost in thought.

When the day of the operation arrived, Martha felt all alone and a little worried about being separated from her family. Dad and Mum told her that they would stay close to her in their thoughts. It would be kind of like being tied to the end of an invisible but very, very strong thread that no one and nothing could break. Besides this, the nurse Marisol, who was very nice, was going to look after her the whole time.



Martha went with the nurse to a couch where she lay down. She saw a lot of lights, machines, doctors and nurses with green coats, some with caps and masks. The nurse, Marisol, went with Martha and smiled at her until, almost without realising, she fell fast asleep.

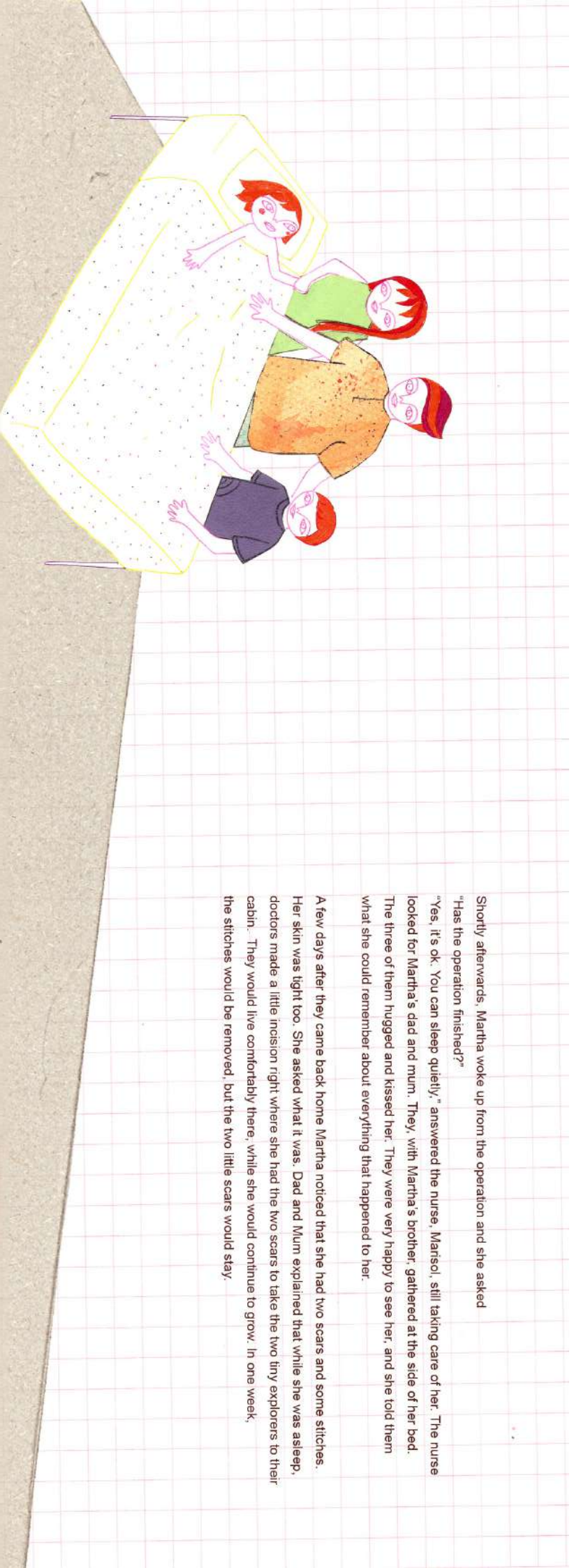


As Martha slept, the story went on for the two tiny explorers who were still in the tunnel. They had gotten used to being there. They had rationed the provisions to last, but despite this, they were going to run out soon. Pipo and Pepo were sad, thinking they would never escape this dark place. Little was said between them. Then, both of them noticed that everything was strangely quiet around them.

All of a sudden they saw a faint beam of light from far away, and little by little, it got brighter and brighter. Something big and strong pushed them up the big slope that they went so happily down many, many days ago. For them, it was just like magic. Far away, they could see their house and it brought tears of joy to their eyes.

When both explorers finally arrived at their cabin, they laid down in their beds they had missed so much, and they fell fast asleep. When they woke up, they promised each other that from this day on they would only go on short trips to places that they knew. Maybe in the future, a long time from now, they would venture again into unknown territories.



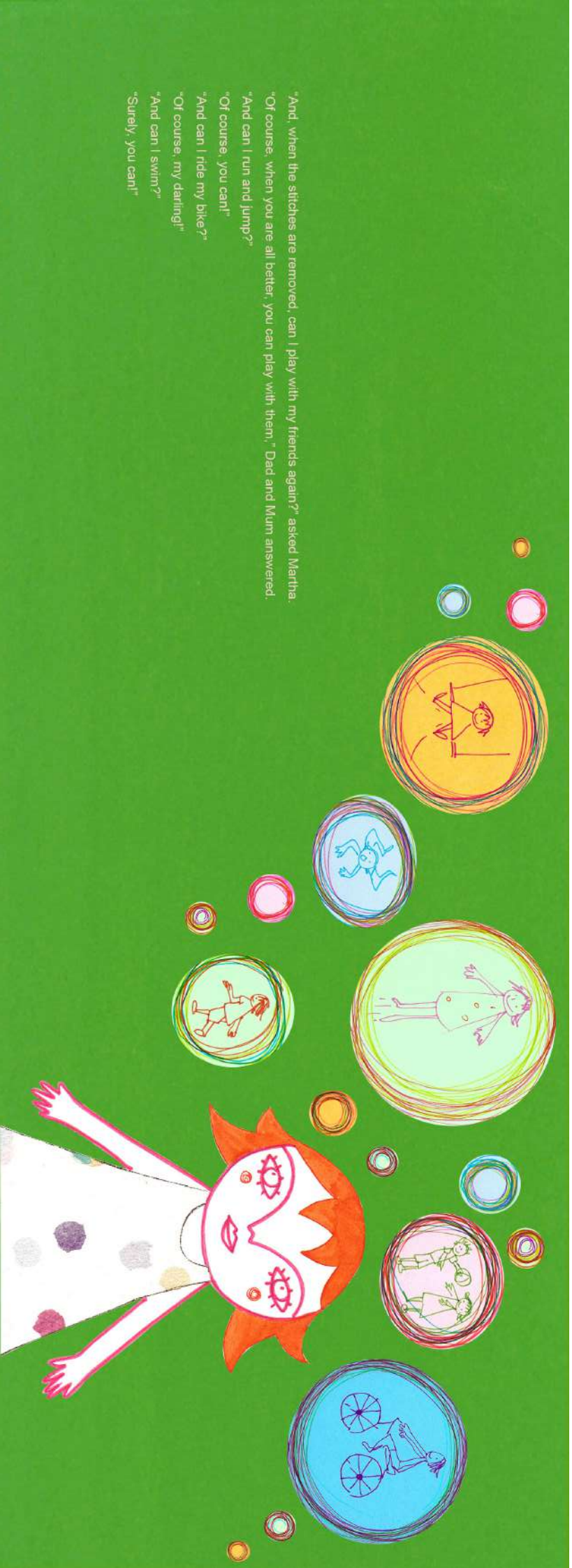


Shortly afterwards, Martha woke up from the operation and she asked

"Has the operation finished?"

"Yes, it's ok. You can sleep quietly," answered the nurse, Mansol, still taking care of her. The nurse looked for Martha's dad and mum. They, with Martha's brother, gathered at the side of her bed. The three of them hugged and kissed her. They were very happy to see her, and she told them what she could remember about everything that happened to her.

A few days after they came back home Martha noticed that she had two scars and some stitches. Her skin was tight too. She asked what it was. Dad and Mum explained that while she was asleep, doctors made a little incision right where she had the two scars to take the two tiny explorers to their cabin. They would live comfortably there, while she would continue to grow. In one week, the stitches would be removed, but the two little scars would stay.



"And, when the stitches are removed, can I play with my friends again?" asked Martha.

"Of course, when you are all better, you can play with them," Dad and Mum answered.

"And can I run and jump?"

"Of course, you can!"

"And can I ride my bike?"

"Of course, my darling!"

"And can I swim?"

"Surely, you can!"



Sometime later, Martha went back to school. The smell of the chalk welcomed her back reminding her of all the good times at school. Her classmates were very happy to see her again. As it was her first day back, she was the centre of attention, and her friends asked her all sorts of questions about her operation. She told them about the hospital and all the new things she had seen there. She told them that she had two tiny explorers in her tummy, and that one day, when she grows up, she would set them free to explore the world. And maybe she would join them in their adventures because she also had the heart of a globetrotter, and one of her dreams was to discover the wonders that are hidden in so many corners of this wonderful planet.

