

COME AND GET ME

a cosy speculative accessibility story

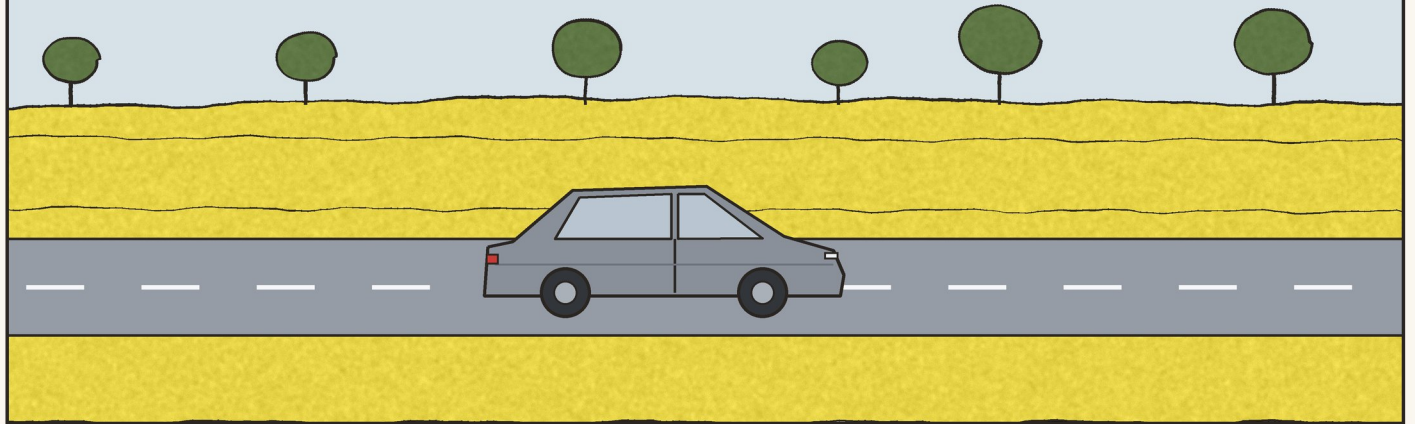


Forty-one miles, flawless. Thirty metres of gravel, unsolved.

Story by Charlotte Joanne · Drawn by Sloppy Jo

Sloppy Jo

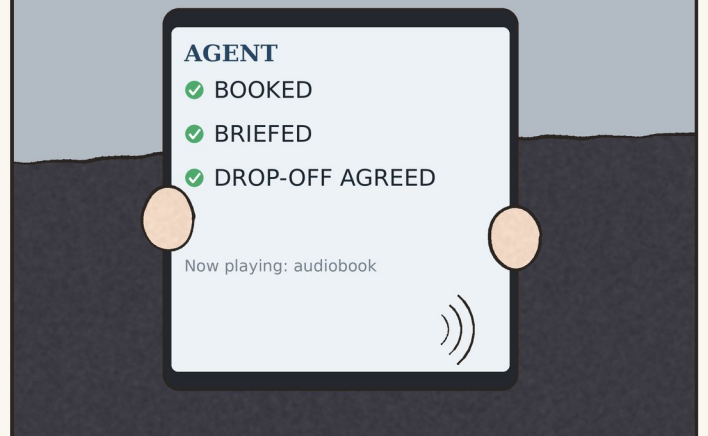
The car had been perfect.



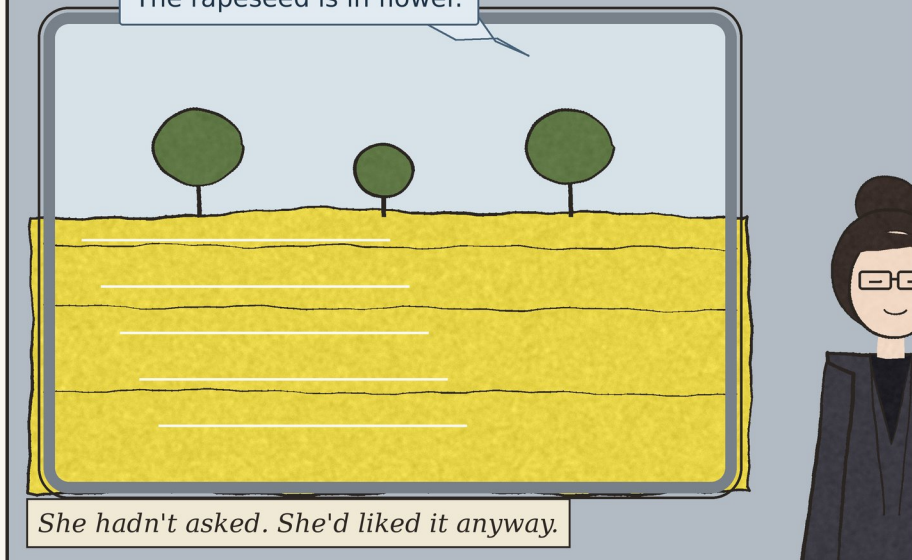
It had collected her from her own kerb, pronounced her name correctly, and driven her forty-one miles without once asking her to confirm she was a human.



Her agent had booked it, briefed it, and negotiated the drop-off while she listened to a novel.



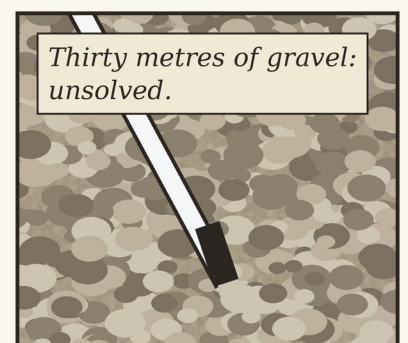
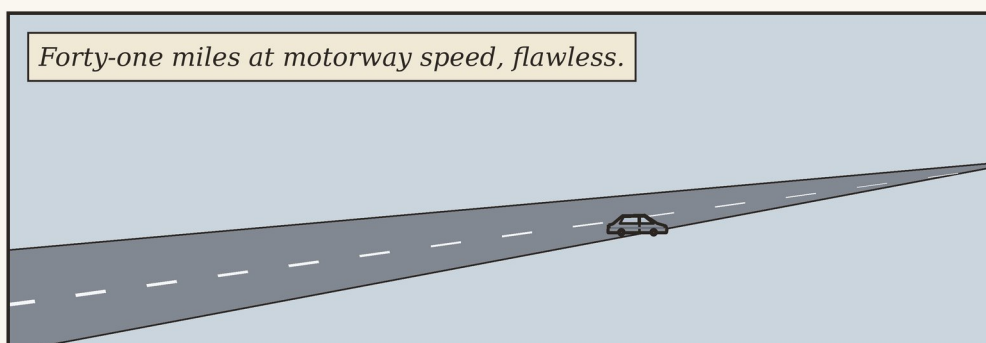
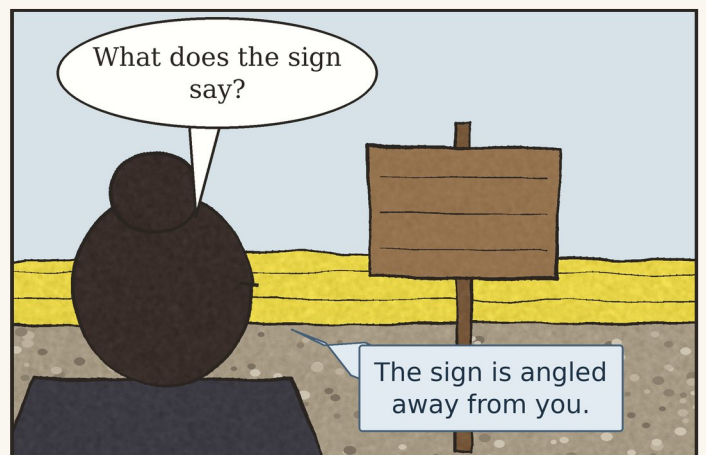
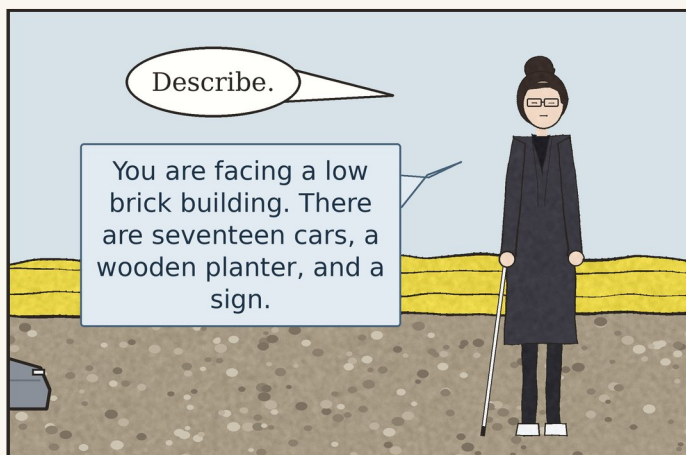
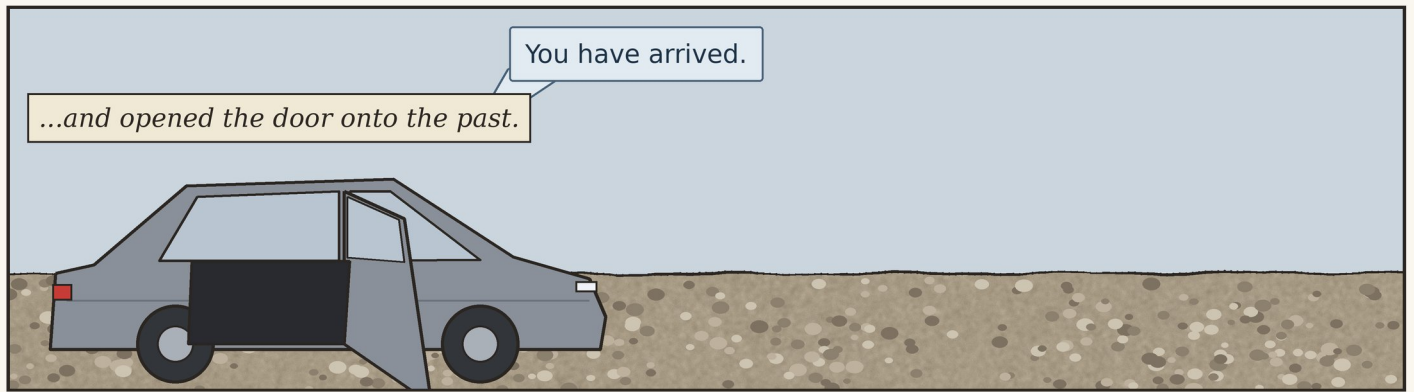
The rapeseed is in flower.



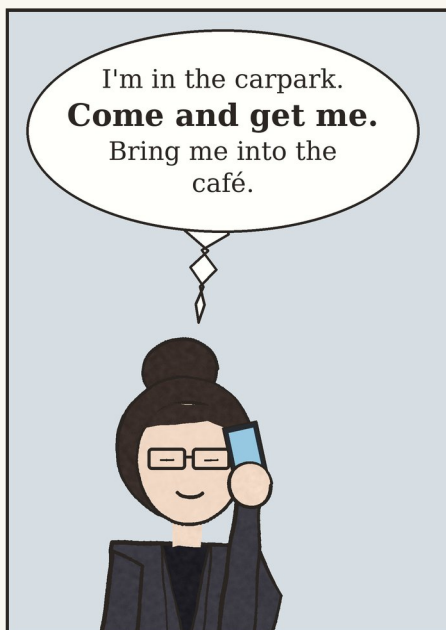
She hadn't asked. She'd liked it anyway.

She was, she felt, travelling like the future.



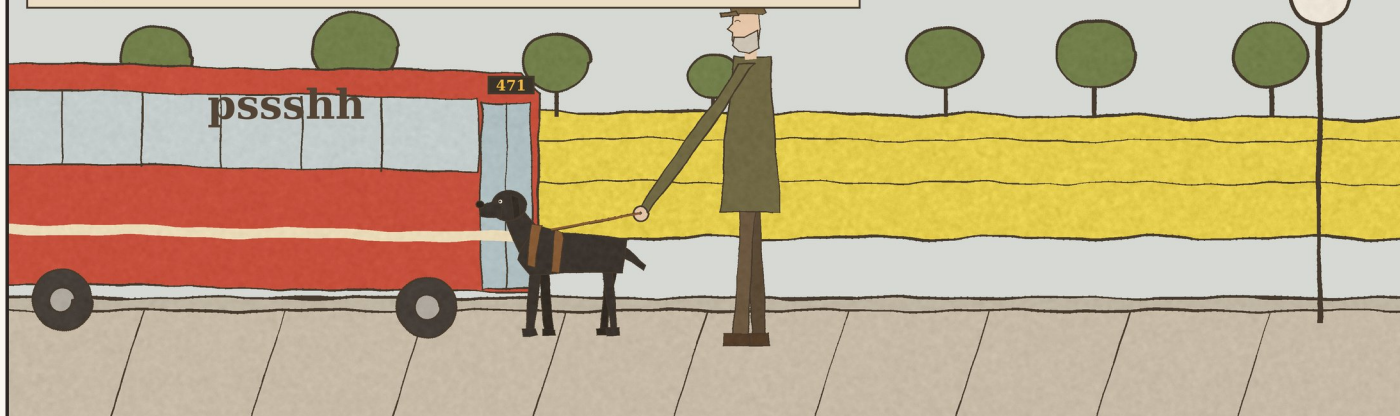


She stood in the exact centre of the gap between two civilisations and did what humanity has done at that location for ten thousand years.



Earlier.

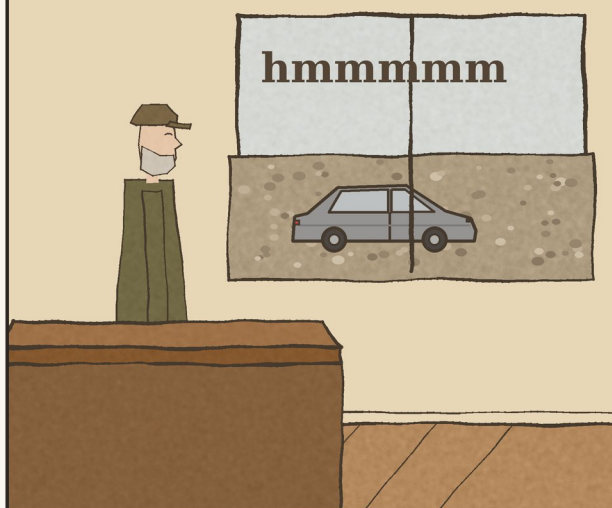
He'd come by bus, of course. The 471, which he'd been catching for eleven years, and which knelt for the dog without being asked.



He'd arrived twenty minutes early, because arriving early was a pleasure and not an inefficiency.



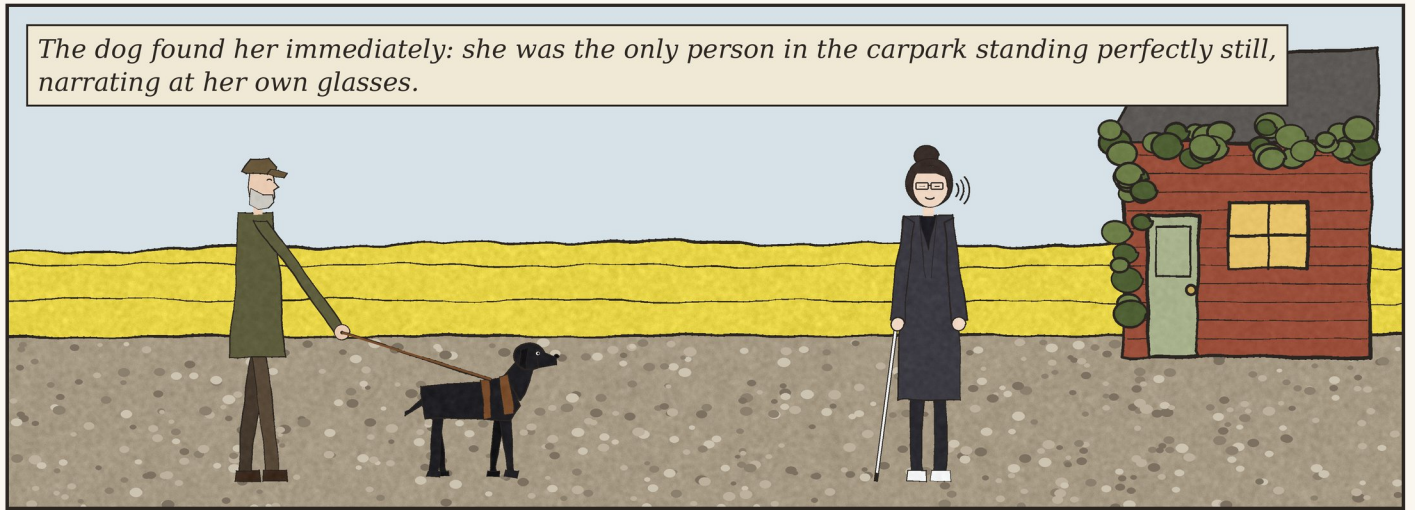
He'd heard the car pull in. Electric. Expensive.



The sound of someone arriving from miles away, alone, which he could not have done, and he knew it, and he'd decided in advance not to mind.



The dog found her immediately: she was the only person in the carpark standing perfectly still, narrating at her own glasses.



They're telling me about the planter. In some detail.

It's a nice planter. Petunias.

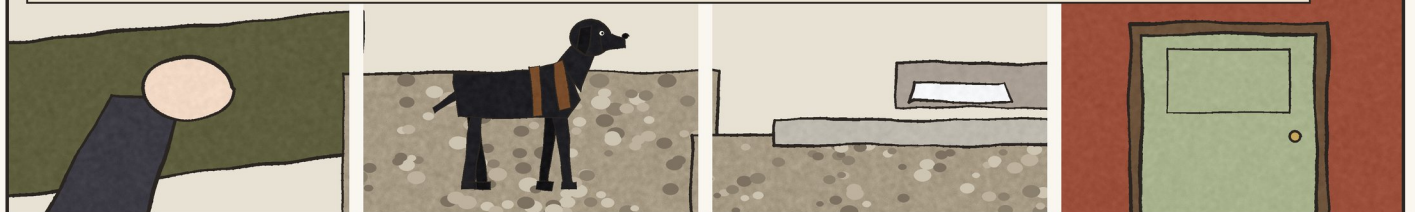


They didn't say petunias.

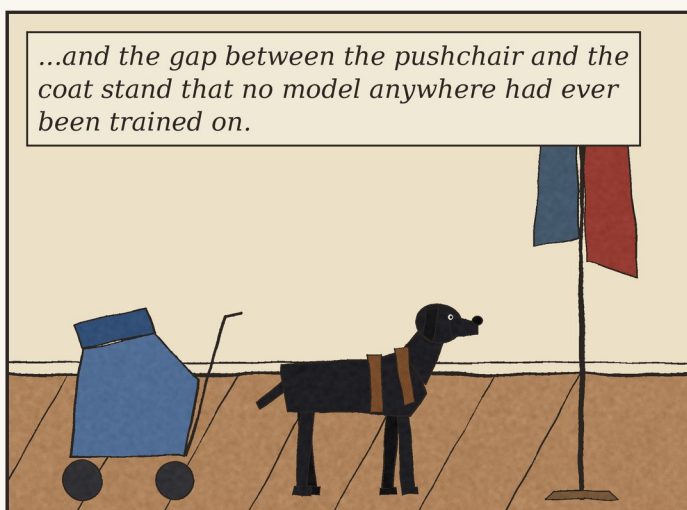
No. They wouldn't.



She took his arm. The dog took the gravel, the kerb, the untagged step, the door that announced nothing,



...and the gap between the pushchair and the coat stand that no model anywhere had ever been trained on.



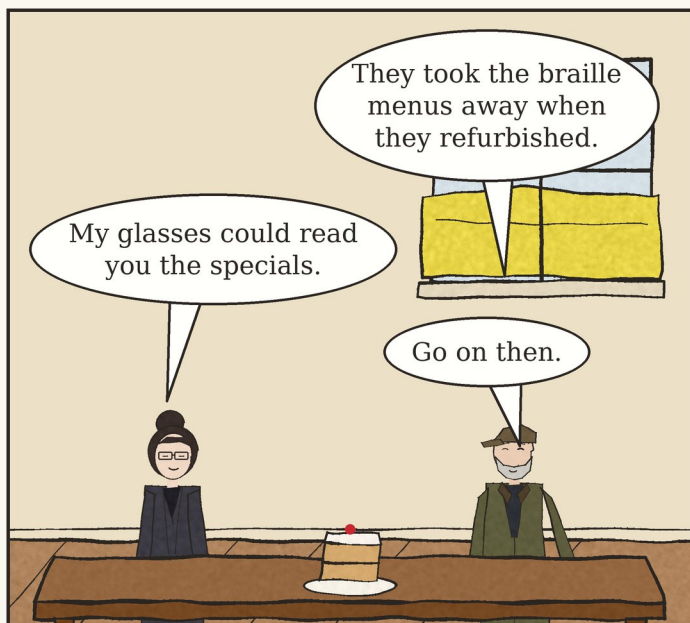
Your guidance system smells of biscuits.

He runs on them.



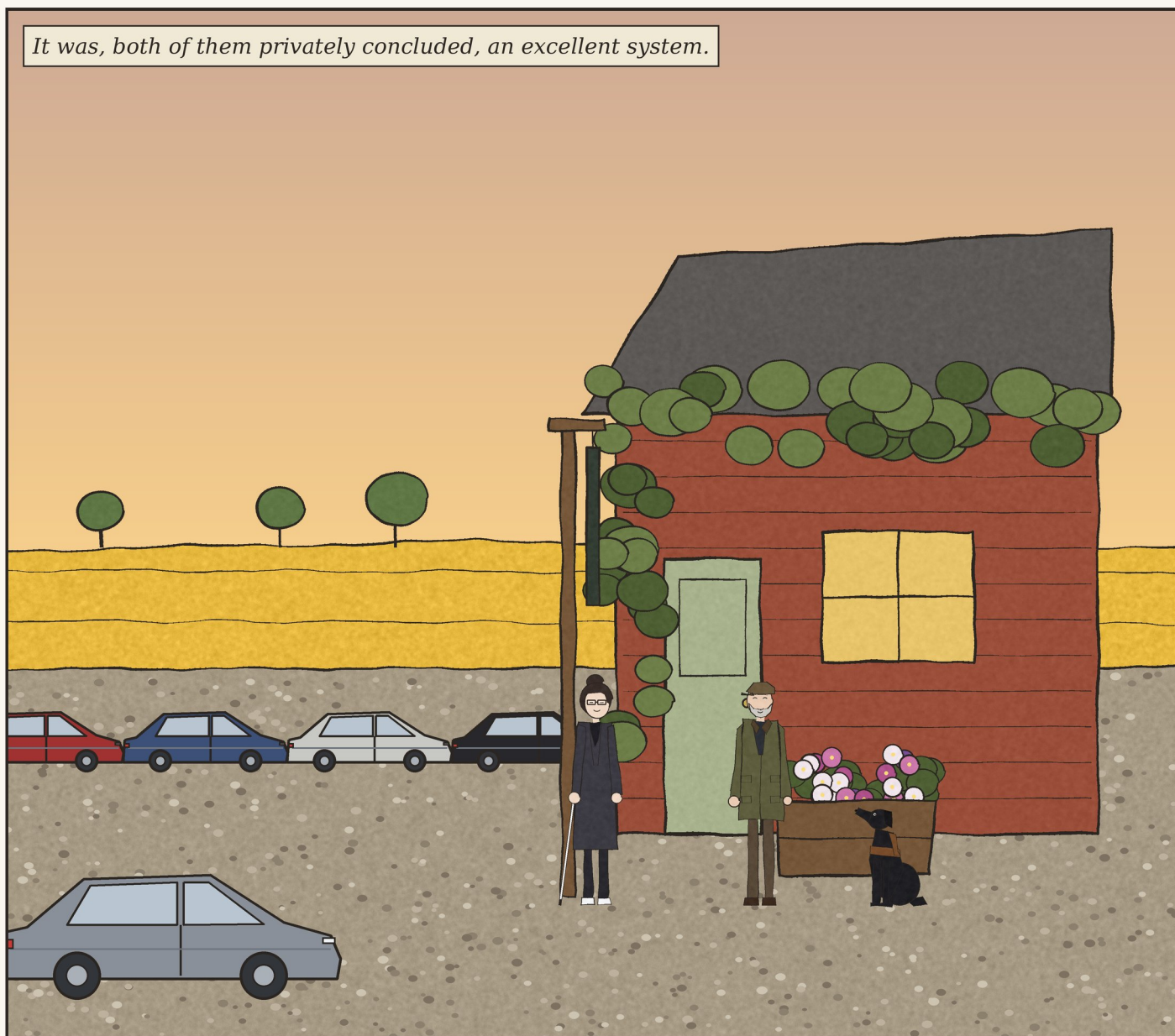
They had tea for two hours. This was, by her usual accounting, an absurd allocation of time, and she billed none of it to anything.

He asked about the journey and meant it. She told him about the rapeseed.



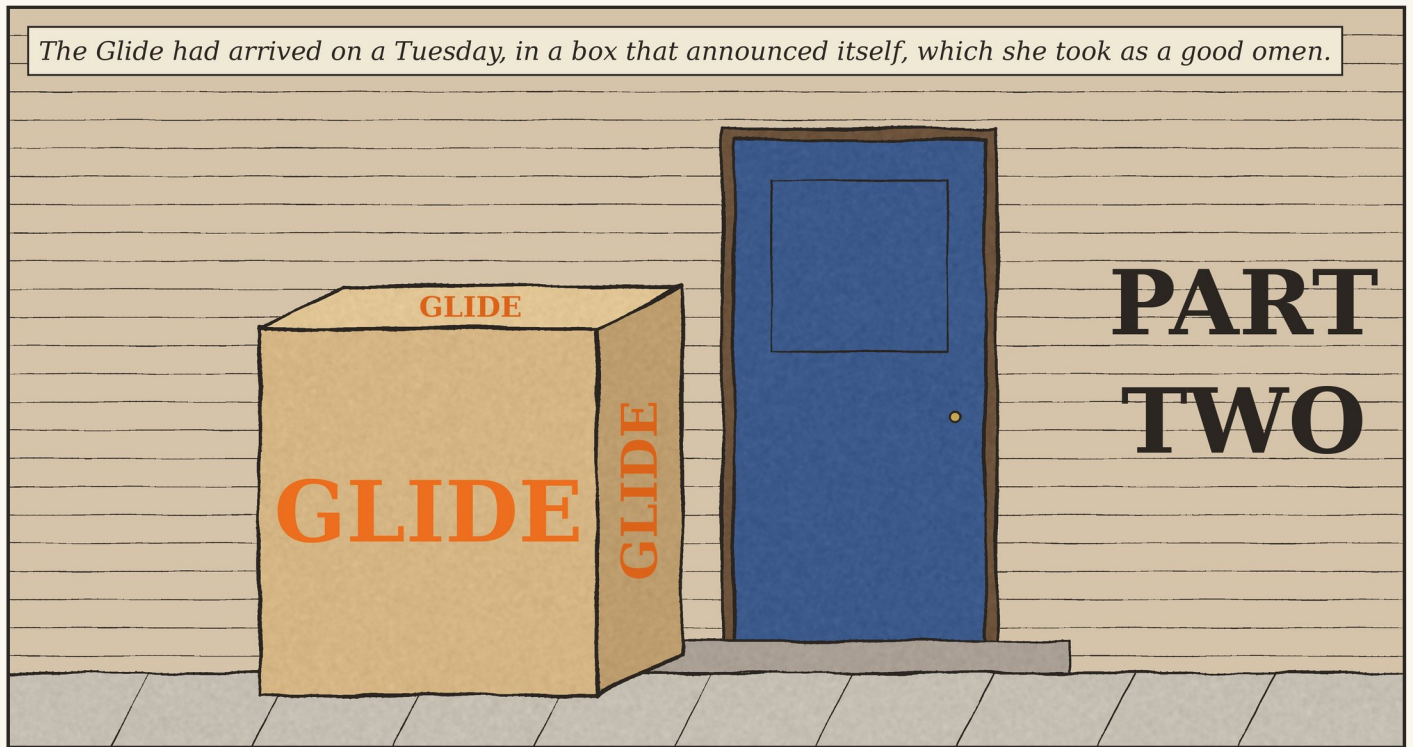


It was, both of them privately concluded, an excellent system.



Zero information casualties reported.

The Glide had arrived on a Tuesday, in a box that announced itself, which she took as a good omen.



PART TWO

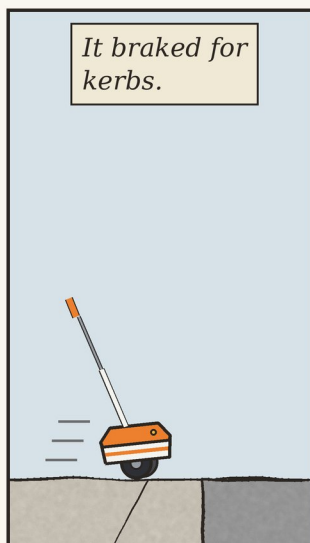
Two wheels, a telescoping handle, and a manner she could only describe as keen.



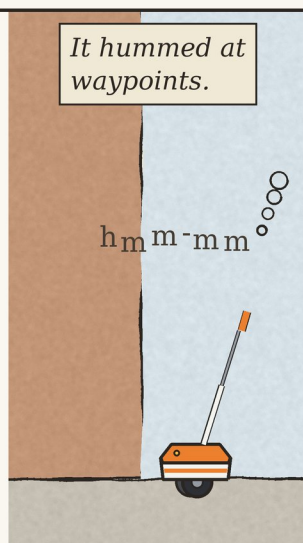
You nudged it forward and it simply went, steering around the world's clutter as though clutter were a personal affront.



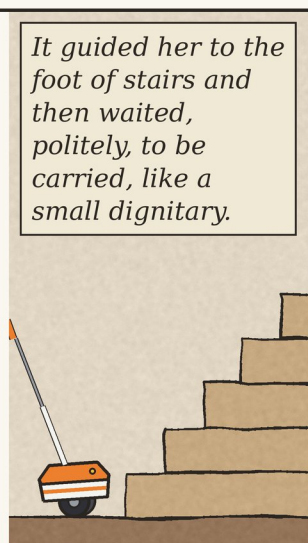
It braked for kerbs.



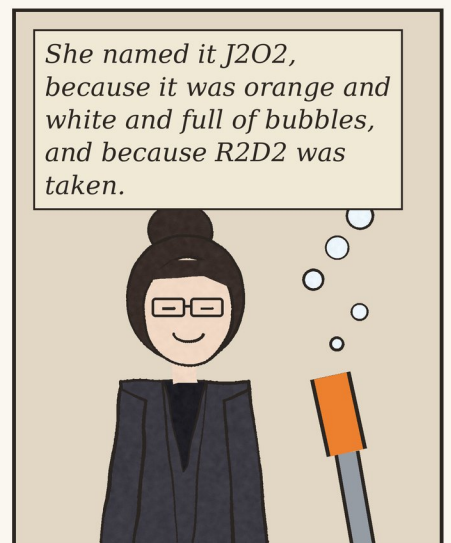
It hummed at waypoints.

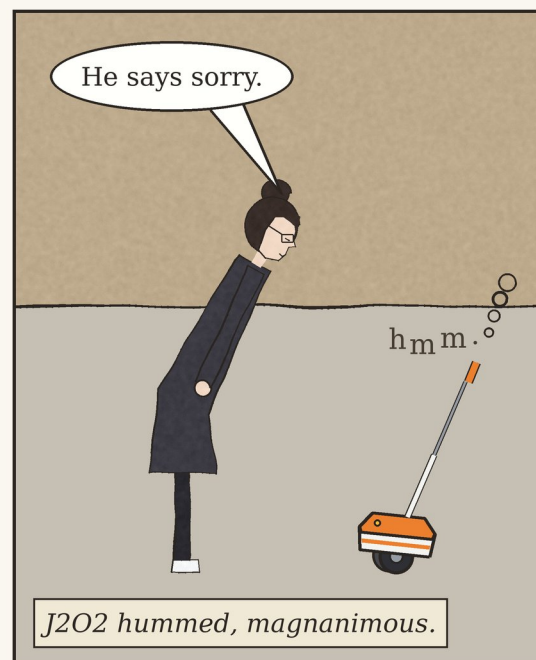


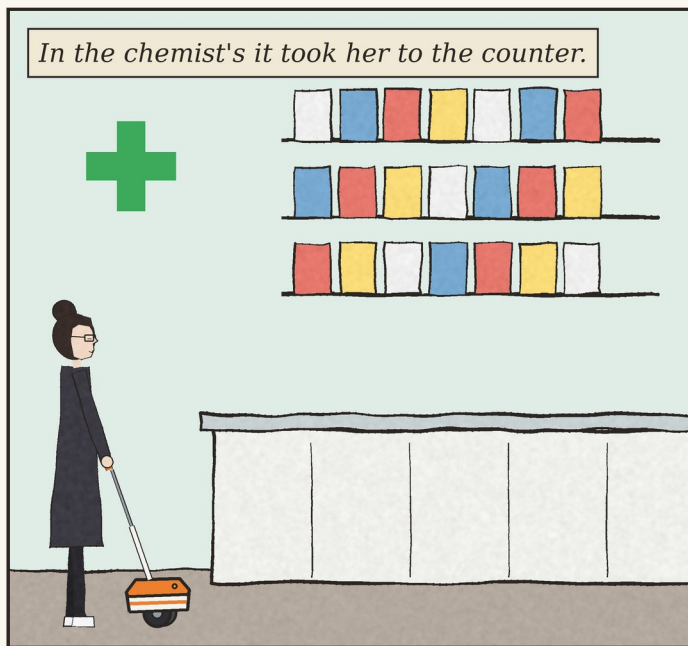
It guided her to the foot of stairs and then waited, politely, to be carried, like a small dignitary.



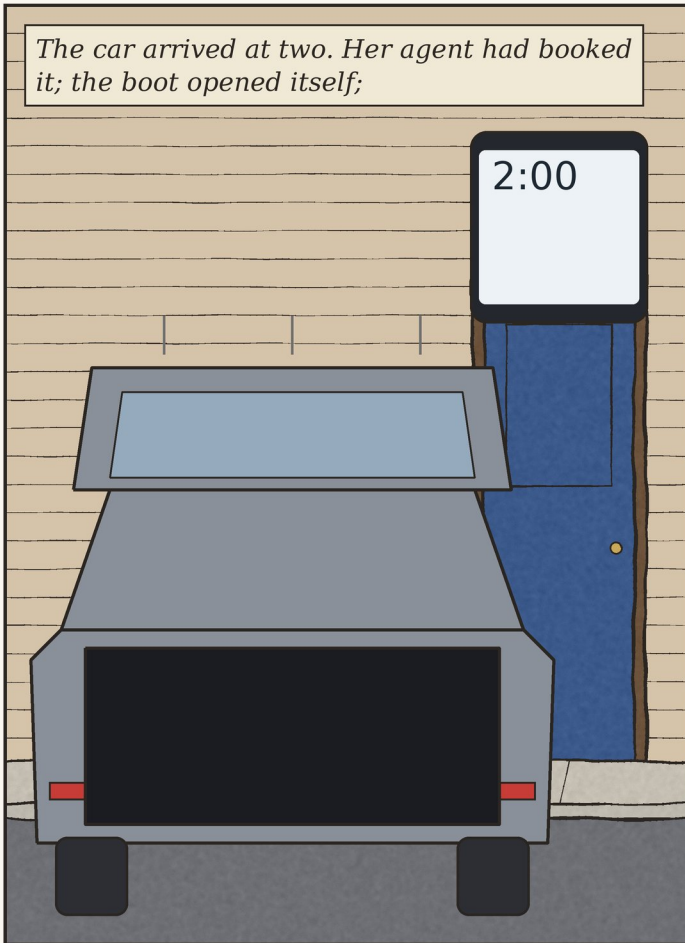
She named it J202, because it was orange and white and full of bubbles, and because R2D2 was taken.





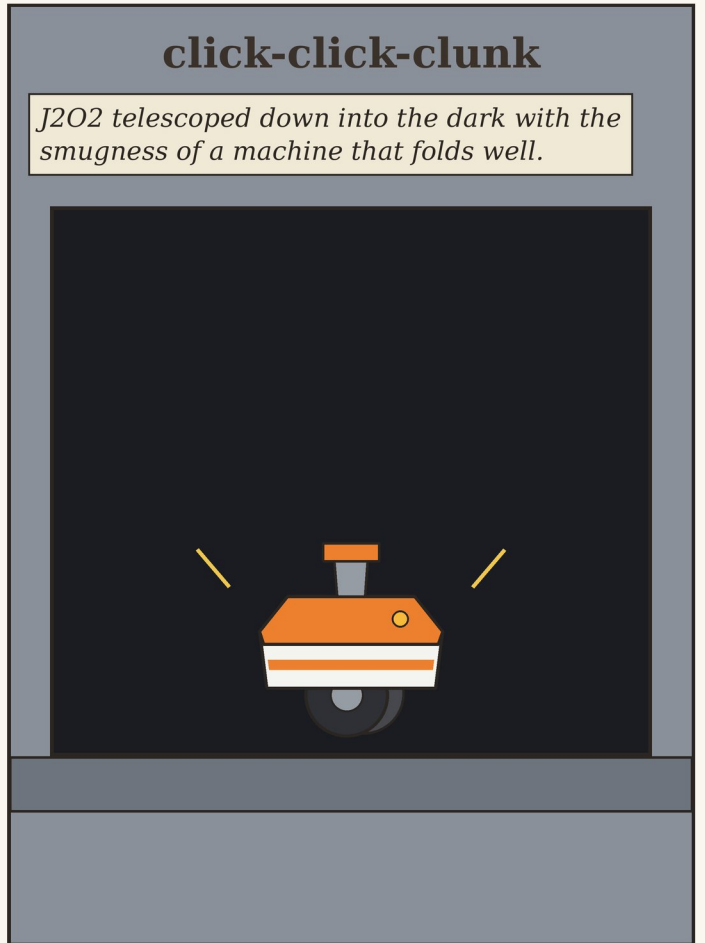


The car arrived at two. Her agent had booked it; the boot opened itself;



click-click-clunk

J202 telescoped down into the dark with the smugness of a machine that folds well.



Forty-one miles.

The rapeseed is over now. Gone to green.

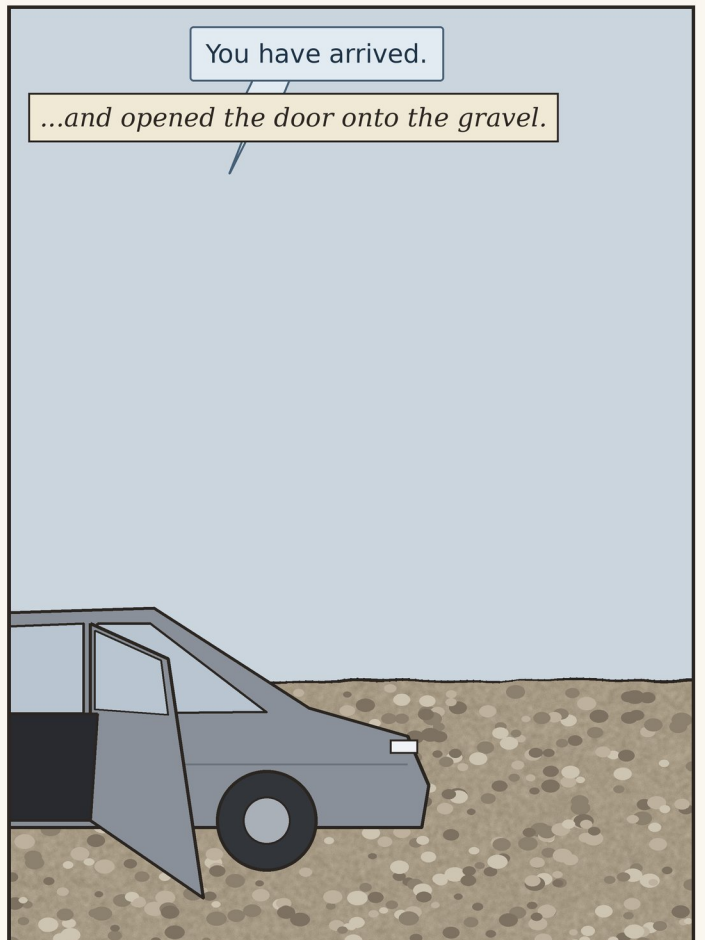
Thank you.

...as though to an old friend reporting on another old friend.



You have arrived.

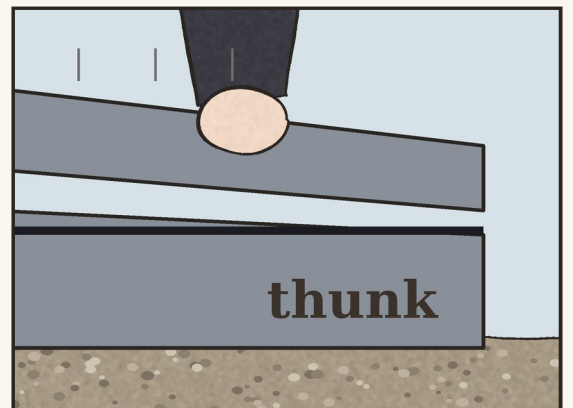
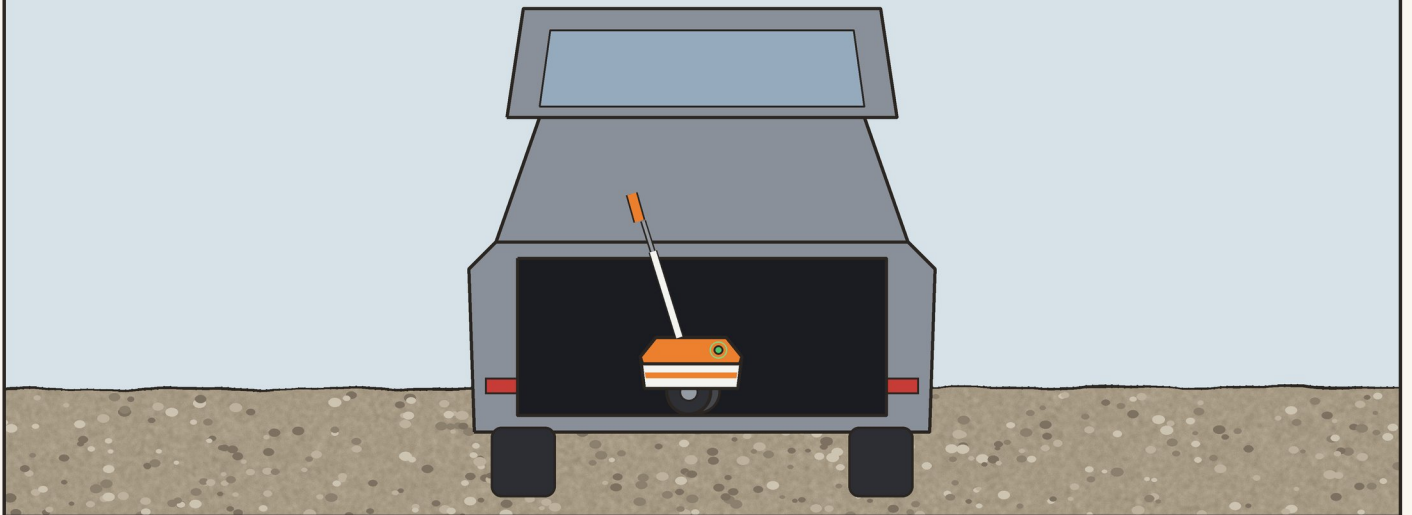
...and opened the door onto the gravel.

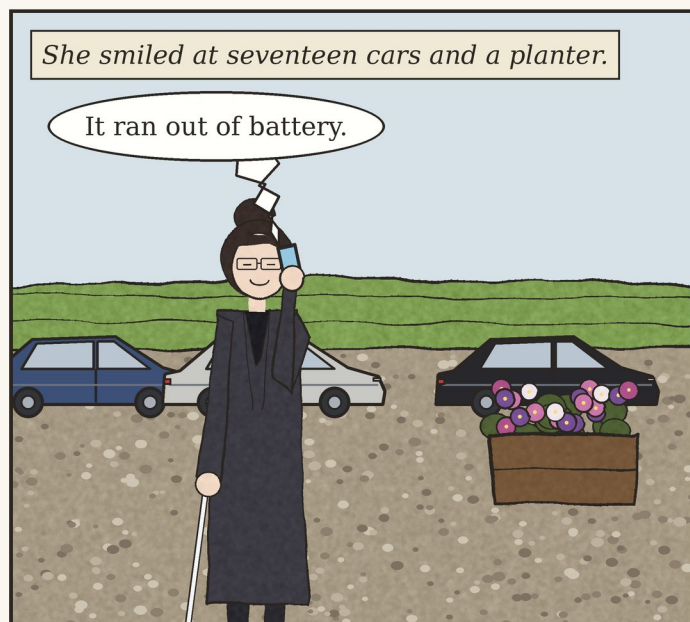
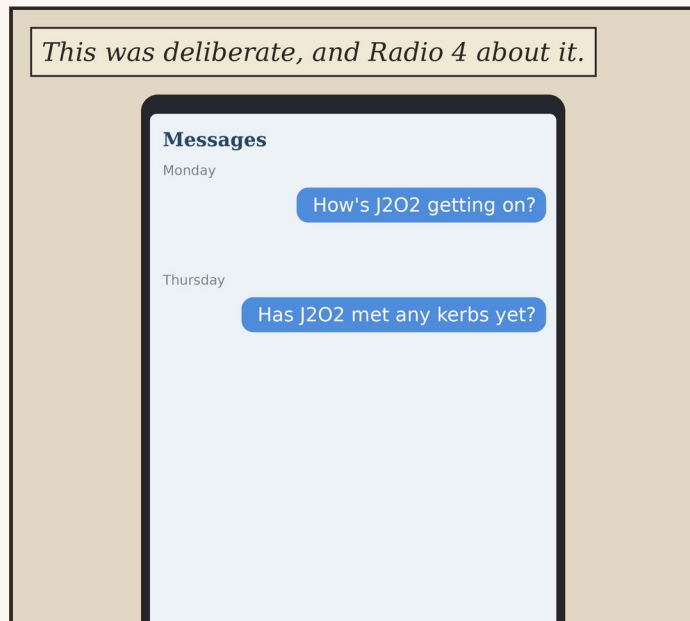
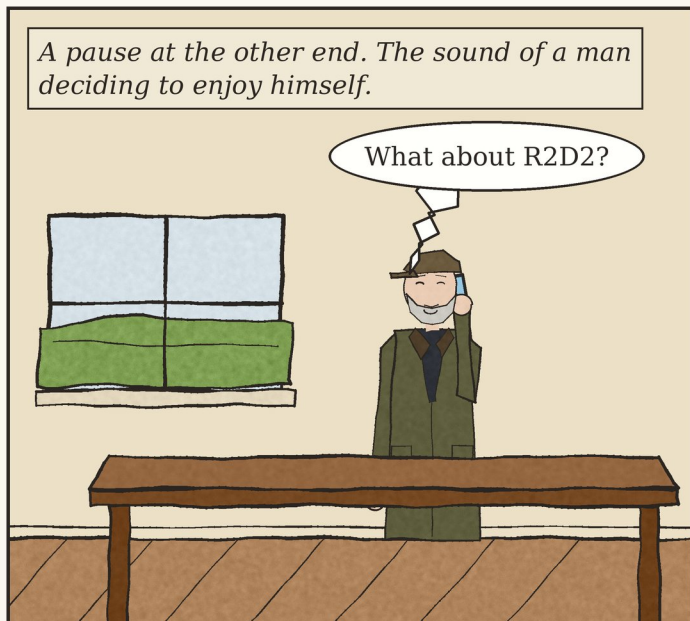


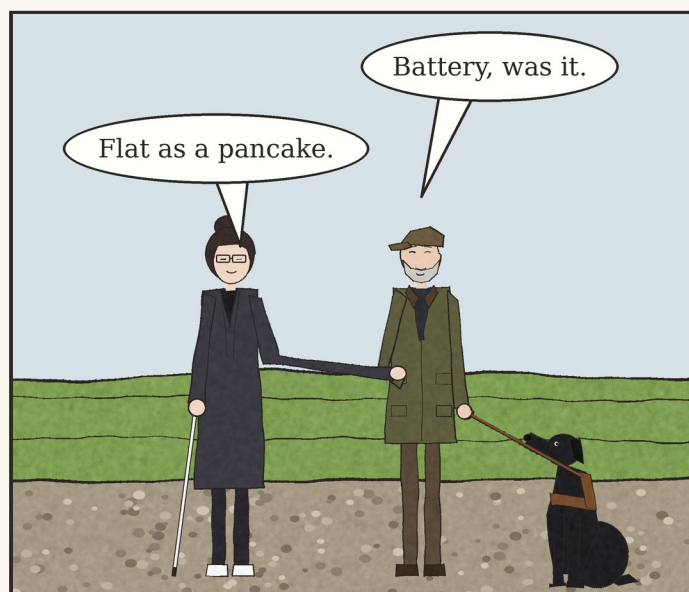
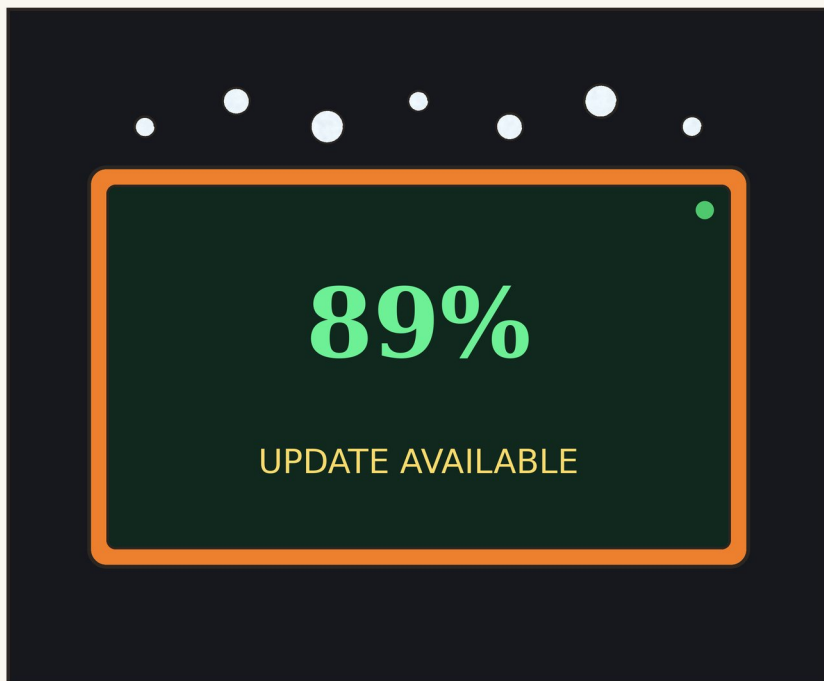
The gravel. The seventeen cars, give or take. The planter, doing petunias at her, unlabelled. The sign, angled away, keeping its counsel for another season.



In the boot, two wheels and a telescoping handle and a purpose-built wayfinding intelligence sat fully charged, ready to solve all of it in under a minute.

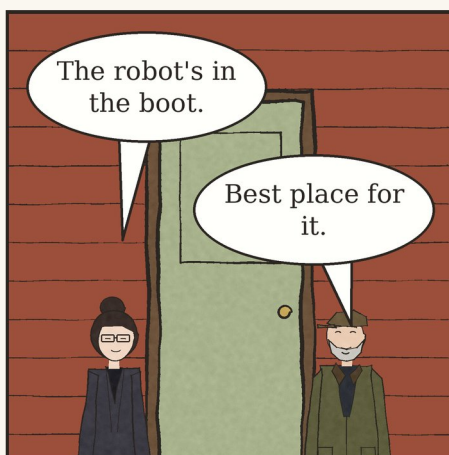
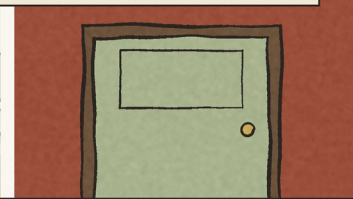
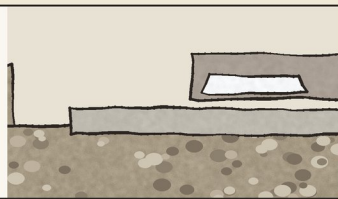
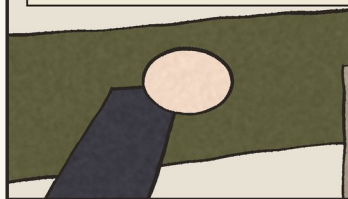








She took his arm. The dog took the gravel, the kerb, the untagged step, and the door that announced nothing, and did it all at biscuit speed, which is the correct speed.



They had tea for two hours. She told him about the pushchair that apologised.



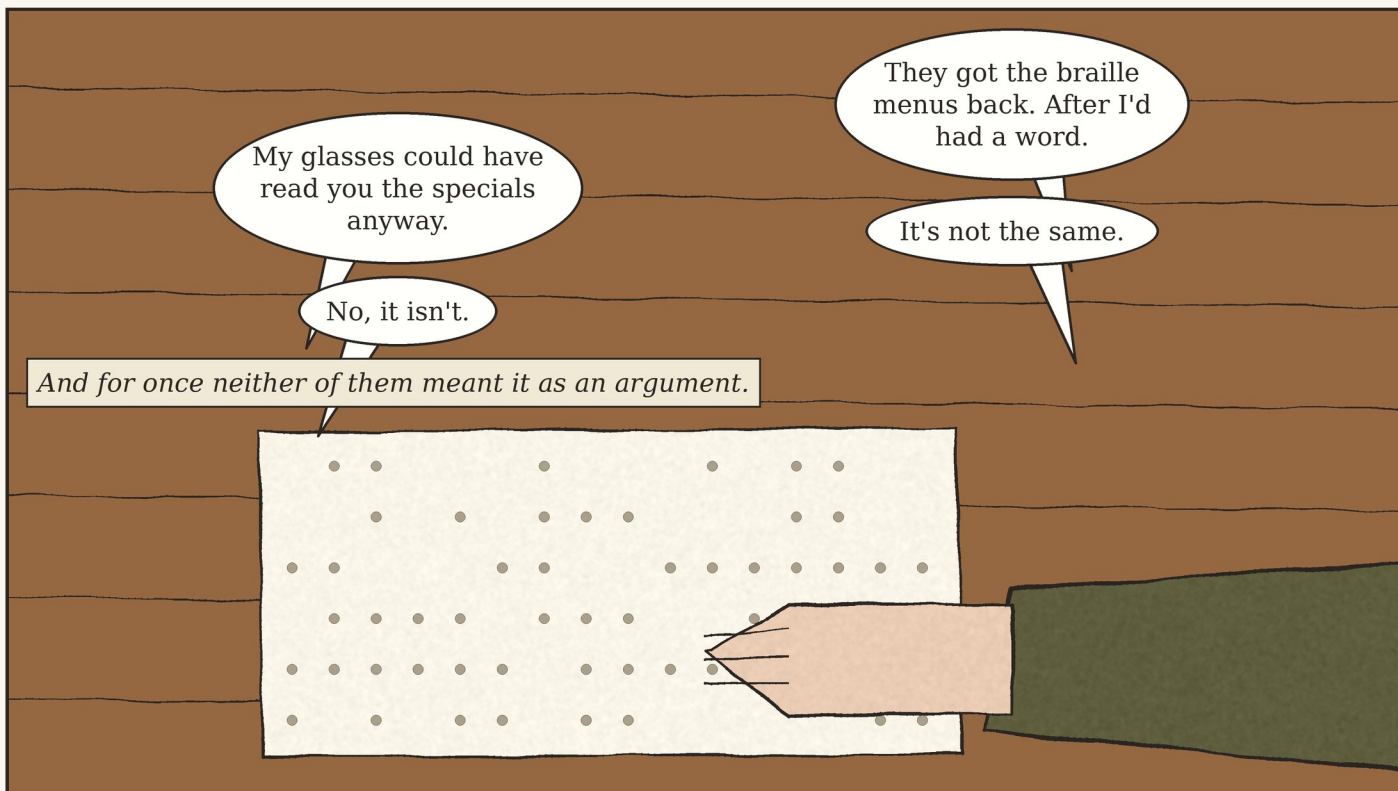
My glasses could have read you the specials anyway.

They got the braille menus back. After I'd had a word.

No, it isn't.

It's not the same.

And for once neither of them meant it as an argument.



You could get across that carpark on your own now. Door to door.

I know.



So next week -

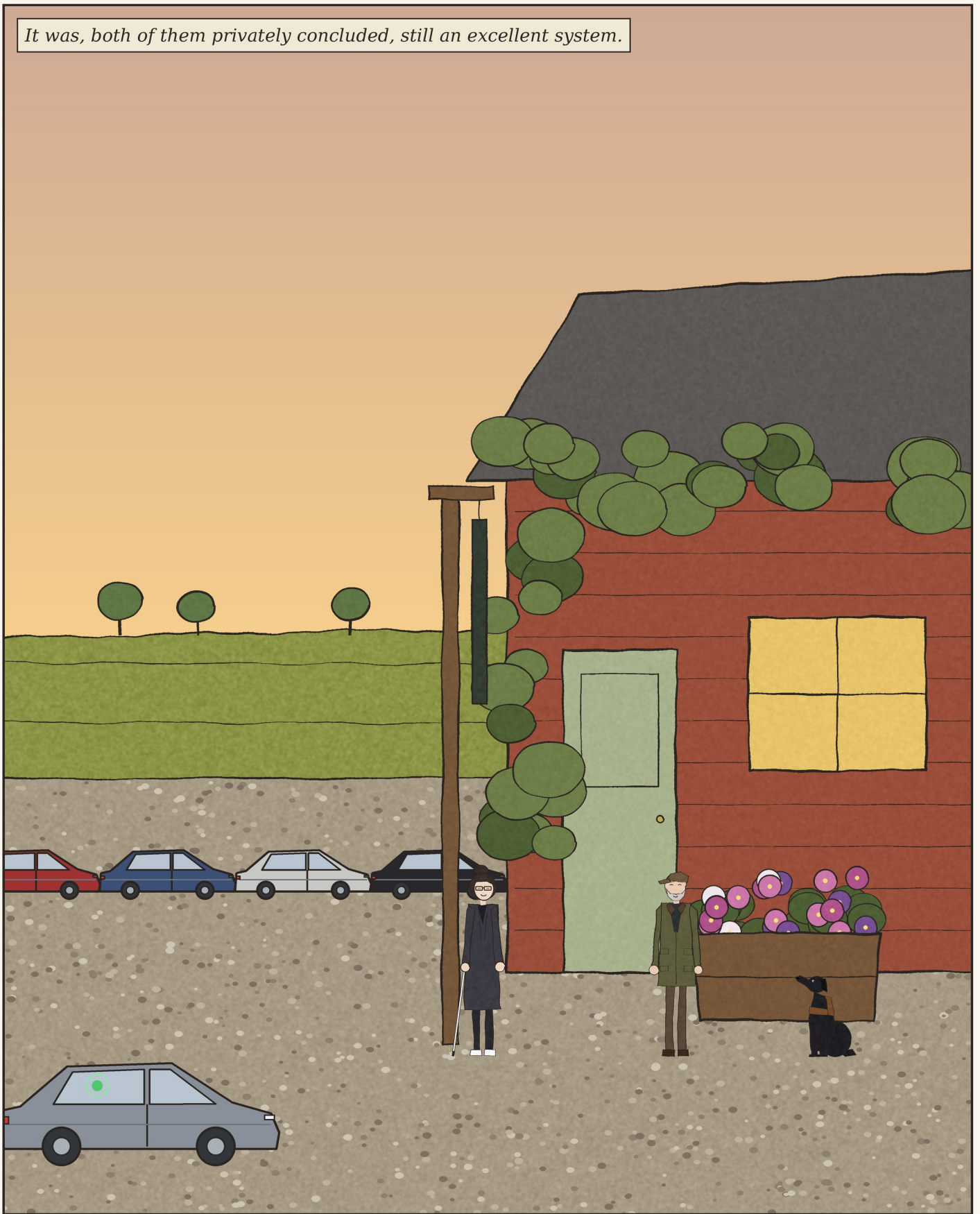
I'll phone you from the carpark.



I know. I'll come and get you.



It was, both of them privately concluded, still an excellent system.



*One information casualty reported: the battery status of one (1) mobility robot.
Filed under: white lies, load-bearing.*