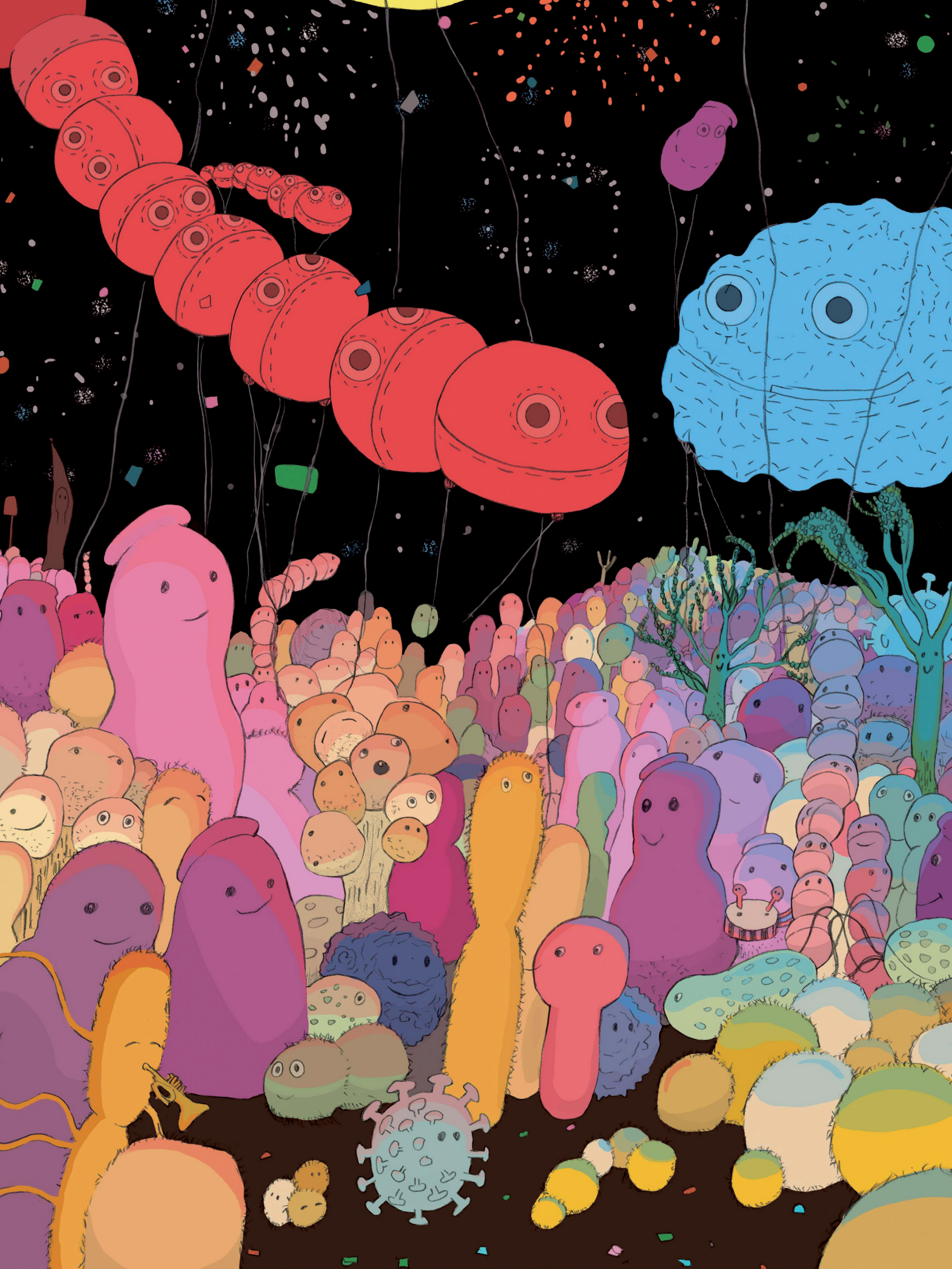


The Germ Parade

Hurry, hurry to the parade
Of the strangest creatures ever made.

No legs, no fins, no mouths, no eyes,
Little beasties of the tiniest size.

Far too small for the eye to see—
"Just how small *is* this menagerie?"

Imagine, Zac, if you can,
A tiny dot, a grain of sand.

Break each grain into tinier ones still—
Into a thousand, if you will.

Into each minigrain (big enough),
Thousands of germs you can stuff,

With lots of room for every germ
To swim and tumble, turn and squirm.

Want to see them, every kind?
"Where to look, and how to find?"

Everywhere! In soil and air—
They're on your skin, your nails, your hair.

From between your teeth, scrape out some goo
Or take some dirt from off your shoe.

Spread it on a clean glass slide,
Under a microscope magnified.

Now peek through the lens, and in the light
A new world appears. Fantastic sight!

Rods, short and long, dart in and out,
Among dead stuff they weave about.

Germs can be wispy or thick or round,
All alone or in groups they are found.

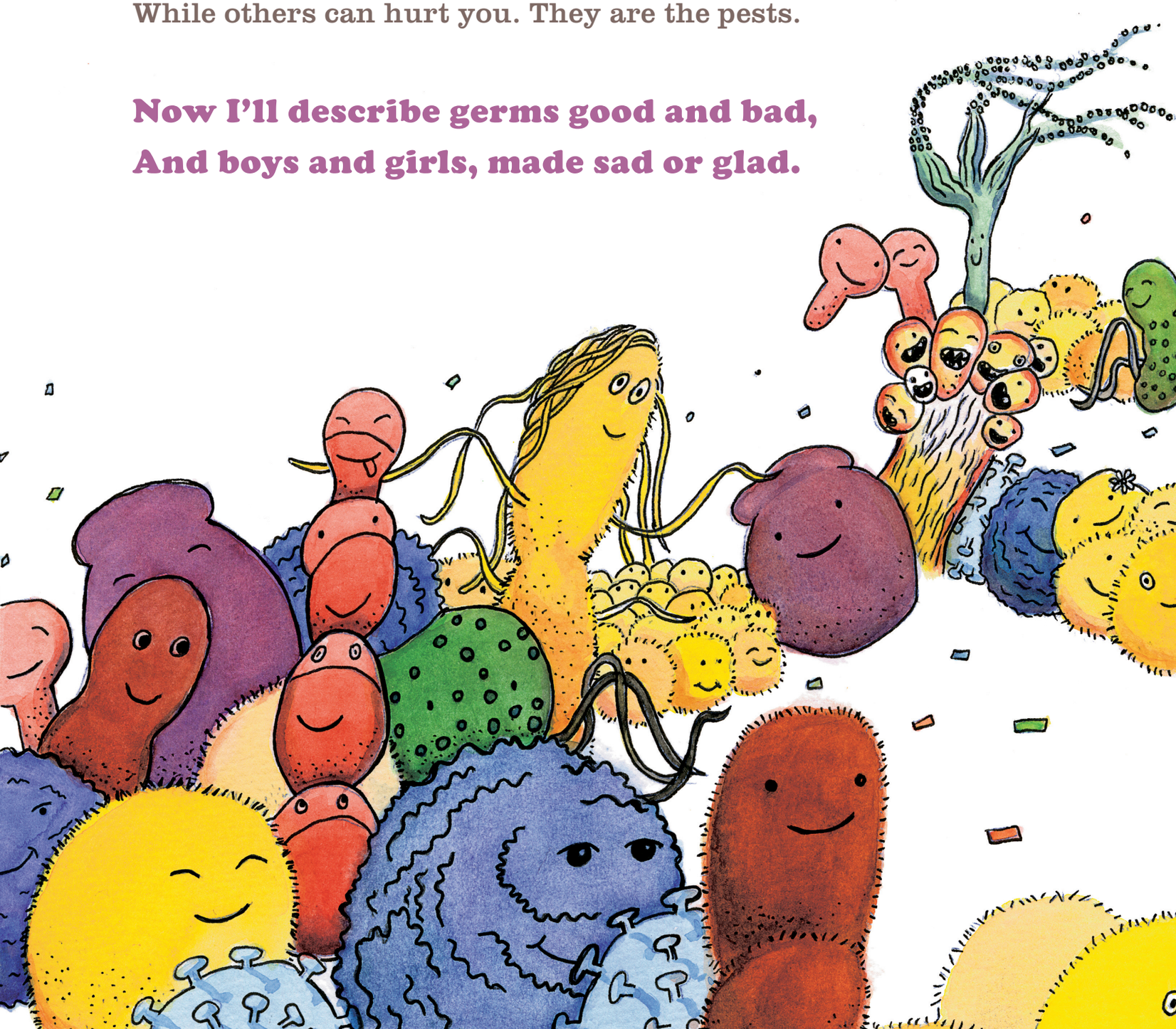
"Wow! A hairy monster is swimming!
And there's a snaky thing that's wriggling!

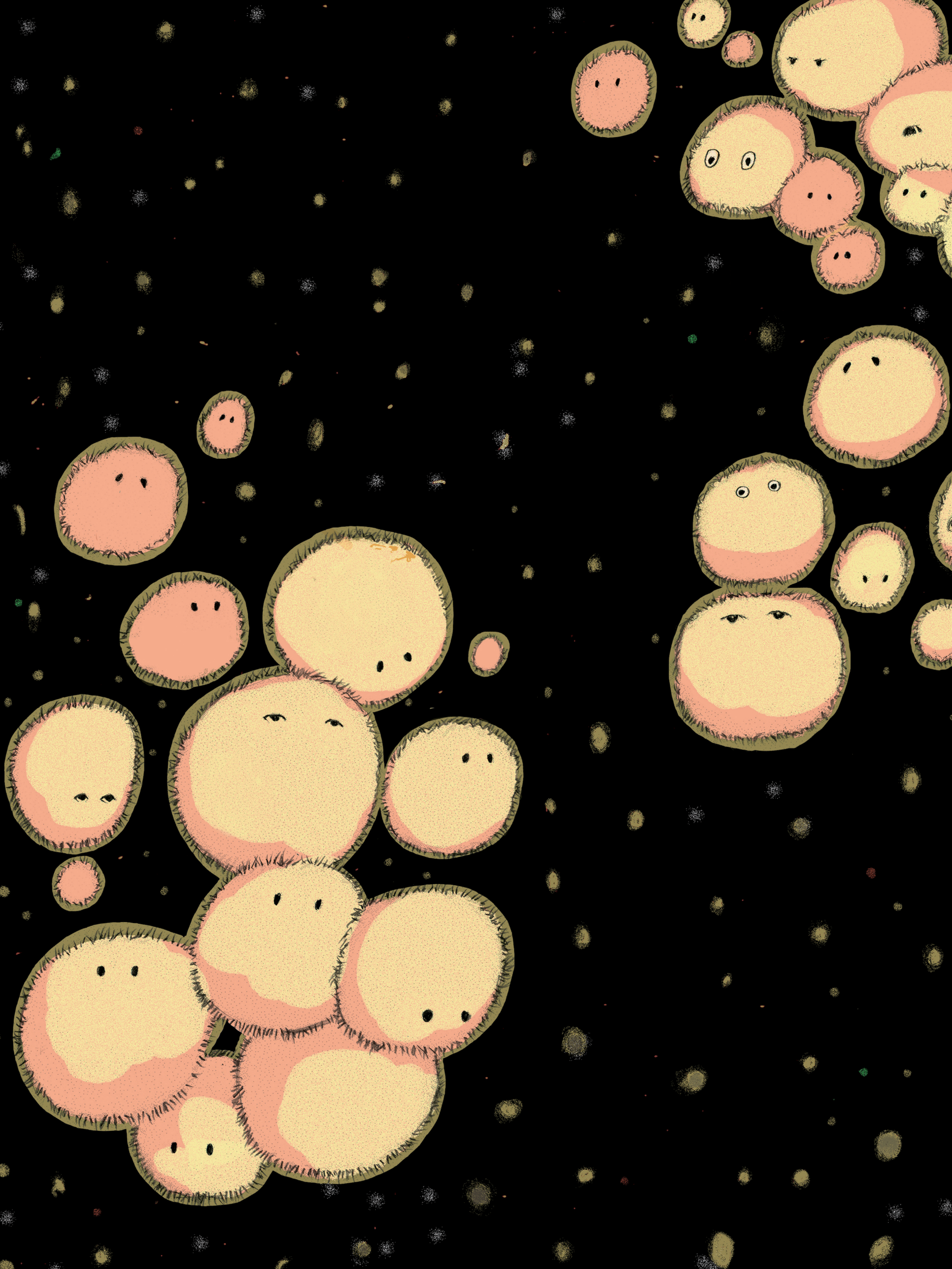
“Can these germs live inside me?
In dogs and cats? In a fish? In a tree?”

Yes, Zac. It’s unquestionably true,
Within your bowels there is quite a zoo.

Some germs are helpful, really good guests,
While others can hurt you. They are the pests.

Now I’ll describe germs good and bad,
And boys and girls, made sad or glad.





Staphylococcus Aureus

(Staf·lo·kok´·us Or´·ee·us) **FOOD POISONING**

Staph aureus is on your hands and on your hair.
It's in your nose—it's everywhere!

If you prick your skin, it enters and thrives:
Millions of germs, very much alive.

But our body cells and antibodies
Can vanquish invaders with the greatest of ease.

When germs are surrounded, they soon are gone.
The battle is fought and quickly won.

From a baker's hand on one rare occasion
Some *Staph* broke out for a new invasion,

This time into a warm custard pie
Baked that day. Oh, dear. Oh, my!

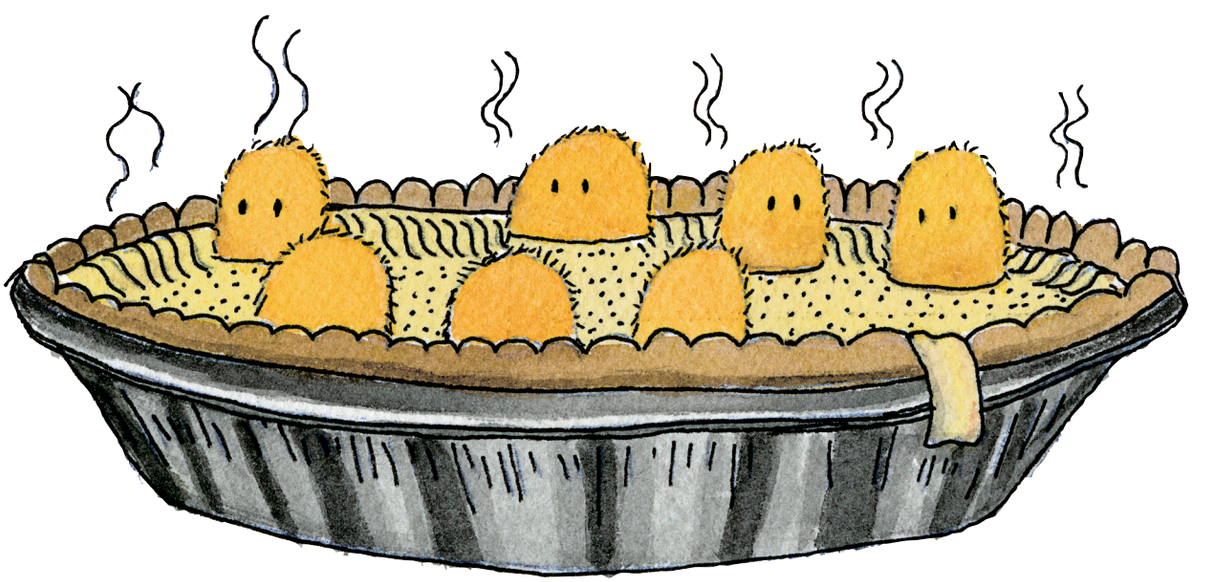
In the pie germs grew and frolicked
And spewed out poisons that can cause colic.

Along came Jessica home from school.
When she saw the pie, she began to drool.

For dinnertime she couldn't wait
And from the pie she ate and ate

Far more than a little girl should.
She couldn't stop, it was so good.

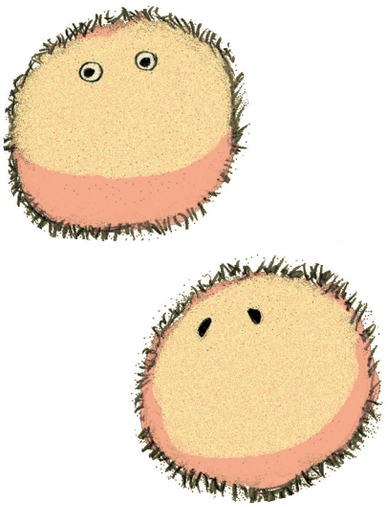
Late that night as she lay in bed
Her tummy ached. So did her head.



To the bathroom she had to run
Again and again, it was no fun.

"Mom—I'm hot, I'm cold, the room's awhirl."
"Oh, Jessie darling, my poor little girl.

"Doctor Jacobs, please do come quick.
Our Jessie dear is very sick."



"I know the problem," the doctor said.
"**Food poisoning** is what I dread.

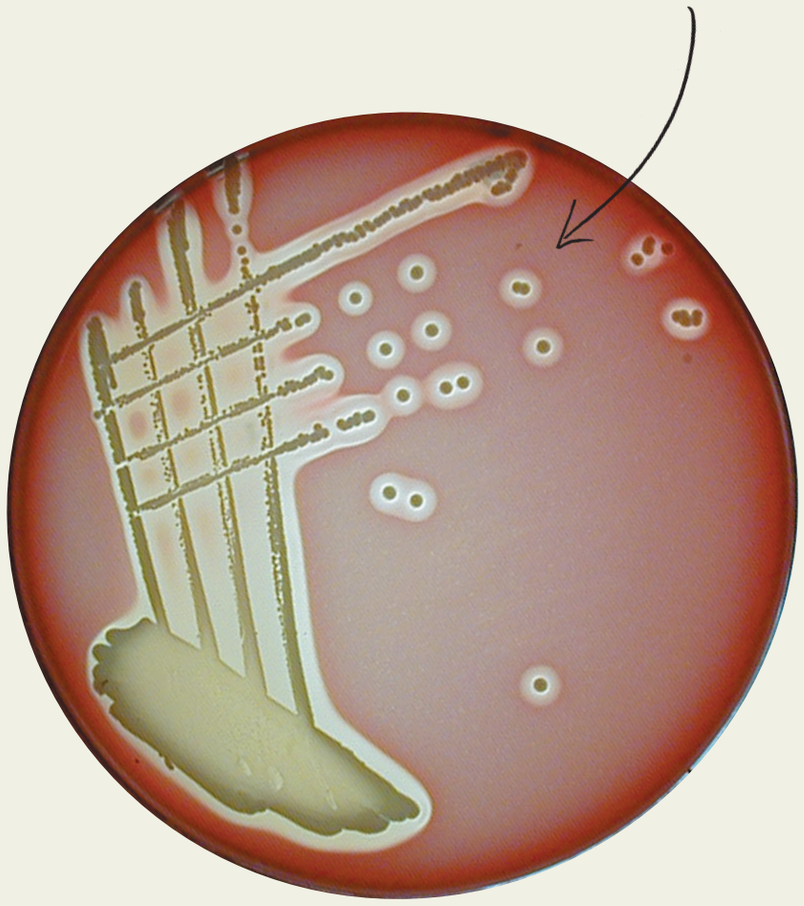
"To the hospital! She *must* go there
For fluids, shots, and nursing care."

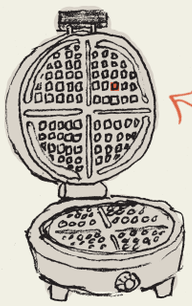
After some days Jess began to heal,
Hungry again for a good big meal.

But one thing you can know for sure,
Custard pie held no allure.

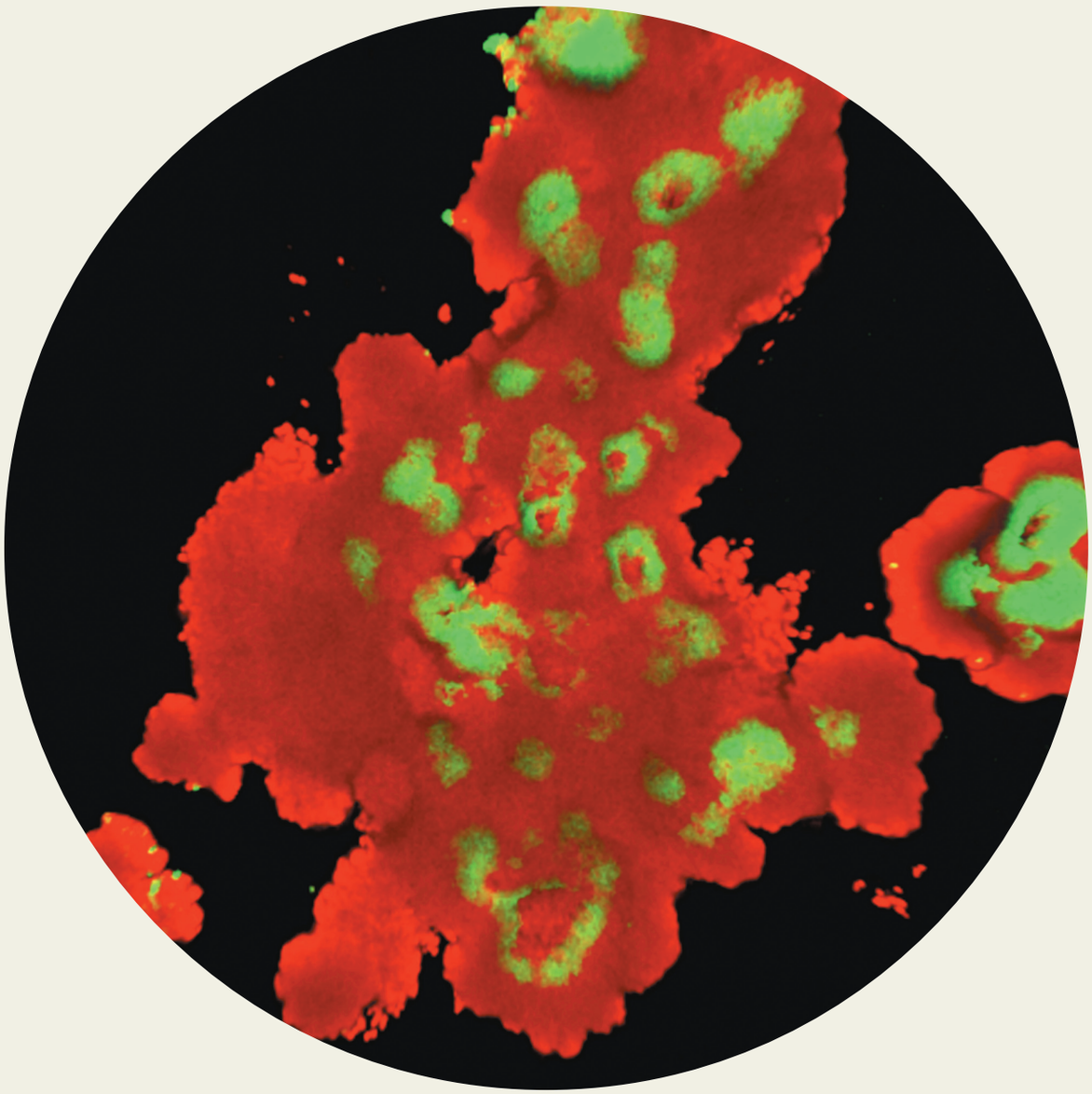
And now you know:
when handling food,
Wash your hands,
germs to exclude.

Staphylococcus aureus: A spherical bacterium commonly found on skin and mucous membranes. When colonies of *Staph aureas* are grown in a medium containing blood, they break apart the red blood cells, producing clear halos around the colonies, as shown in this photograph.





You could fit about 22,473,516,200 colonies of *Staph aureas* in a single hole of your waffle.



Staphylococcus aureas growing on a surface in a biofilm. Its grapelike clusters, which appear golden as a colonial mass, can produce toxins that invade the body and cause serious infections.