

PLAYING POSSUM



Written & Illustrated by Kathy O'Connell

I eat ticks.



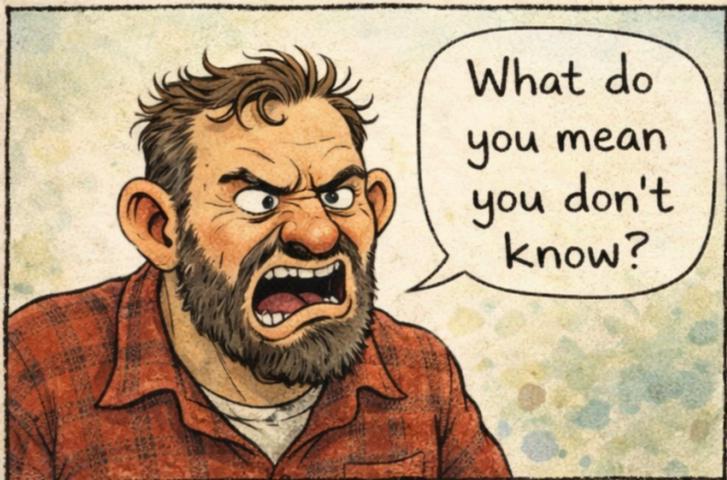
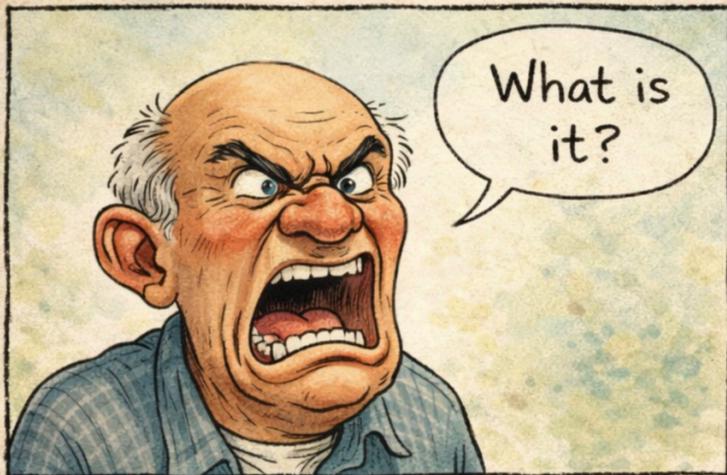
Did anyone see—

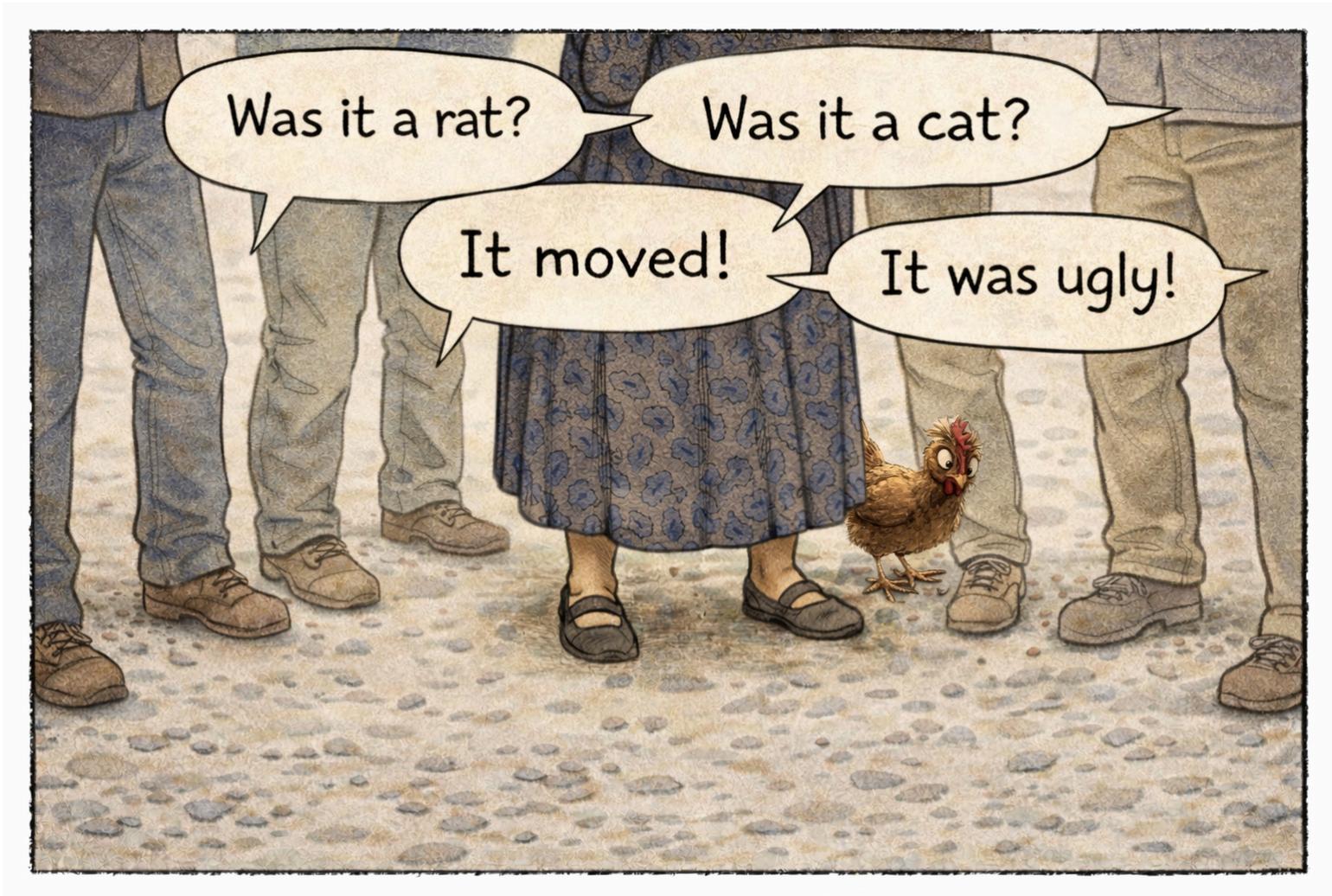
I heard—

No, over there—

It was right there—

See it!





Was it a rat?

Was it a cat?

It moved!

It was ugly!

It looked
at me.



Ohhh. That's
how it starts.



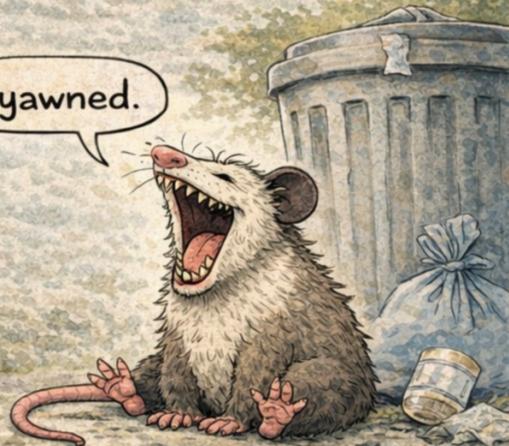
IT HISSED
AT YOU?



Did it have
teeth?



I yawned.



Yes!



Someone needs to do something.



What is it?



Let's slow down and think.



It had those little beady eyes. Watching.



They carry diseases. Really bad diseases.



Why is it even here?





This is why you don't
leave trash out!

Who let it
in here?

I told you
this would
happen!

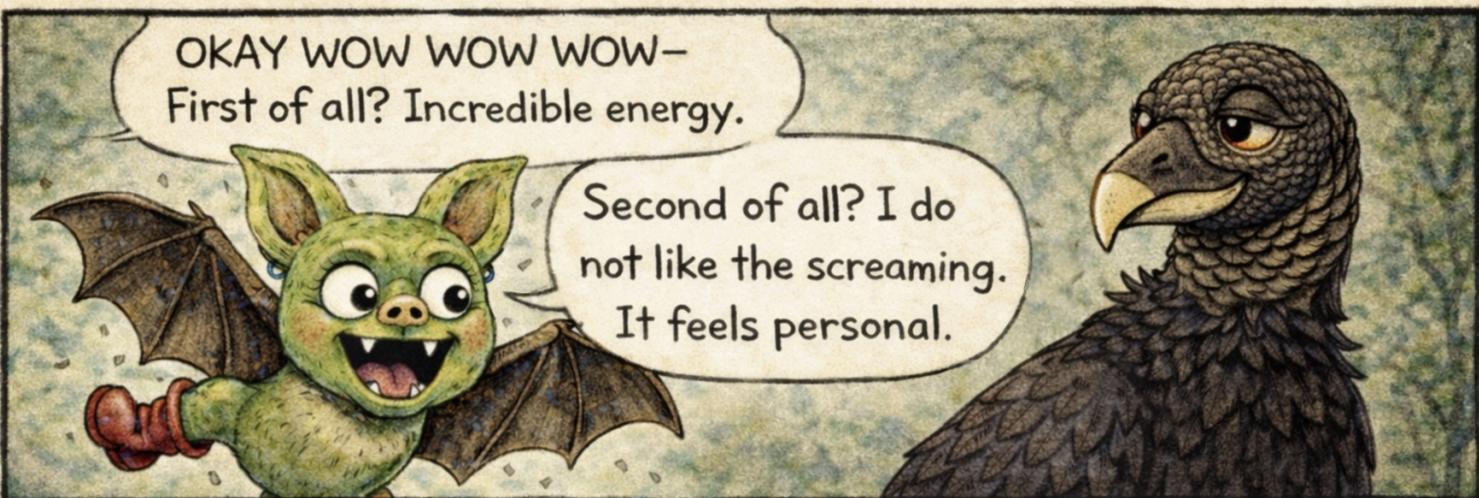
People don't like facts
when they're scared.

It's... not doing anything.

My body temperature is
too low for rabies.

I'm no danger to anyone.





OKAY WOW WOW WOW—
First of all? Incredible energy.

Second of all? I do
not like the screaming.
It feels personal.



Are they mad at me?
Because I just got here and
already feel Blamed.

Why are they shouting?

Because they don't know
what they're looking at.



OKAY but to be fair,
no one ever does.



They're looking at
themselves—



I don't like that.



No one does.

Also—small note—

Did anyone else notice the tiny quiet one?

The child? Because I clocked that immediately.

I'm very good with children,
They trust me.
I don't know why.



Which means she's
wise or plotting something.

Yes.



They think
noise makes
them safer.



Does it?

No.

Absolutely not.

Tried it. Didn't help.

Are they dangerous?

Eventually.

Cool. So... not a today problem.

What's that?

IS THAT A SIGNAL?

Because if that's a signal,
I am **READY**.



I have wings. I have opinions.
I once followed a porch light three towns over.

There were so many bugs.

A dark bird, possibly a crow or raven, is perched on a branch on the right side of the frame. It is looking towards a glowing firefly on the left. The background is a dark, textured forest at night. The firefly is bright yellow and green, with a smiling face and glowing wings. There are three speech bubbles: one at the top from the bird, and two at the bottom from the firefly.

A reminder. It's a reminder.

When things get loud,

something small usually tells the truth.



So are we staying?

Because I already feel
emotionally invested.

Yes.

Great. I cleared
my schedule.



So are we staying?

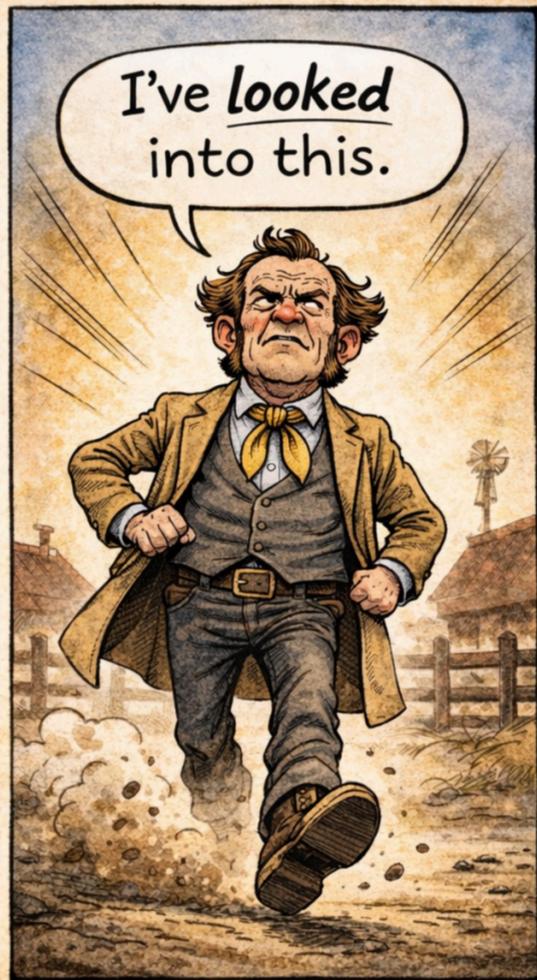
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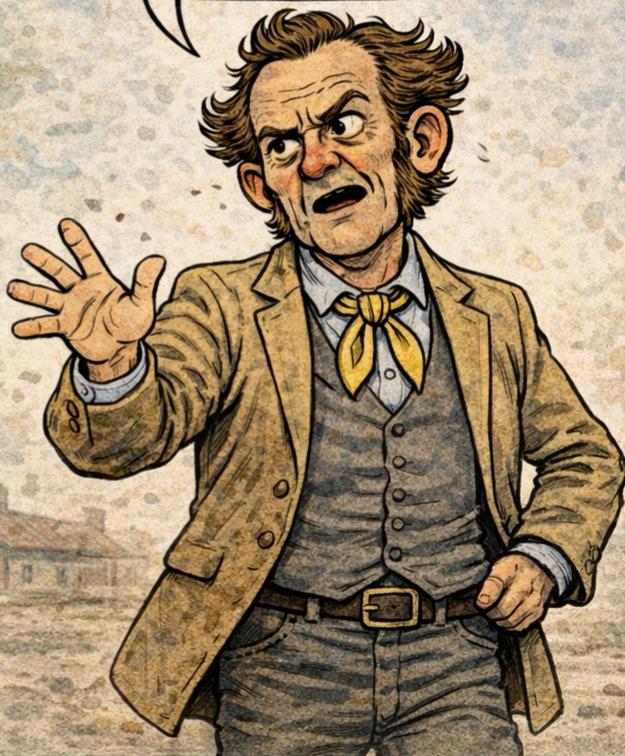


Hey!



You watched
a video.

I watched most
of a video.



I heard that
they hurt people.



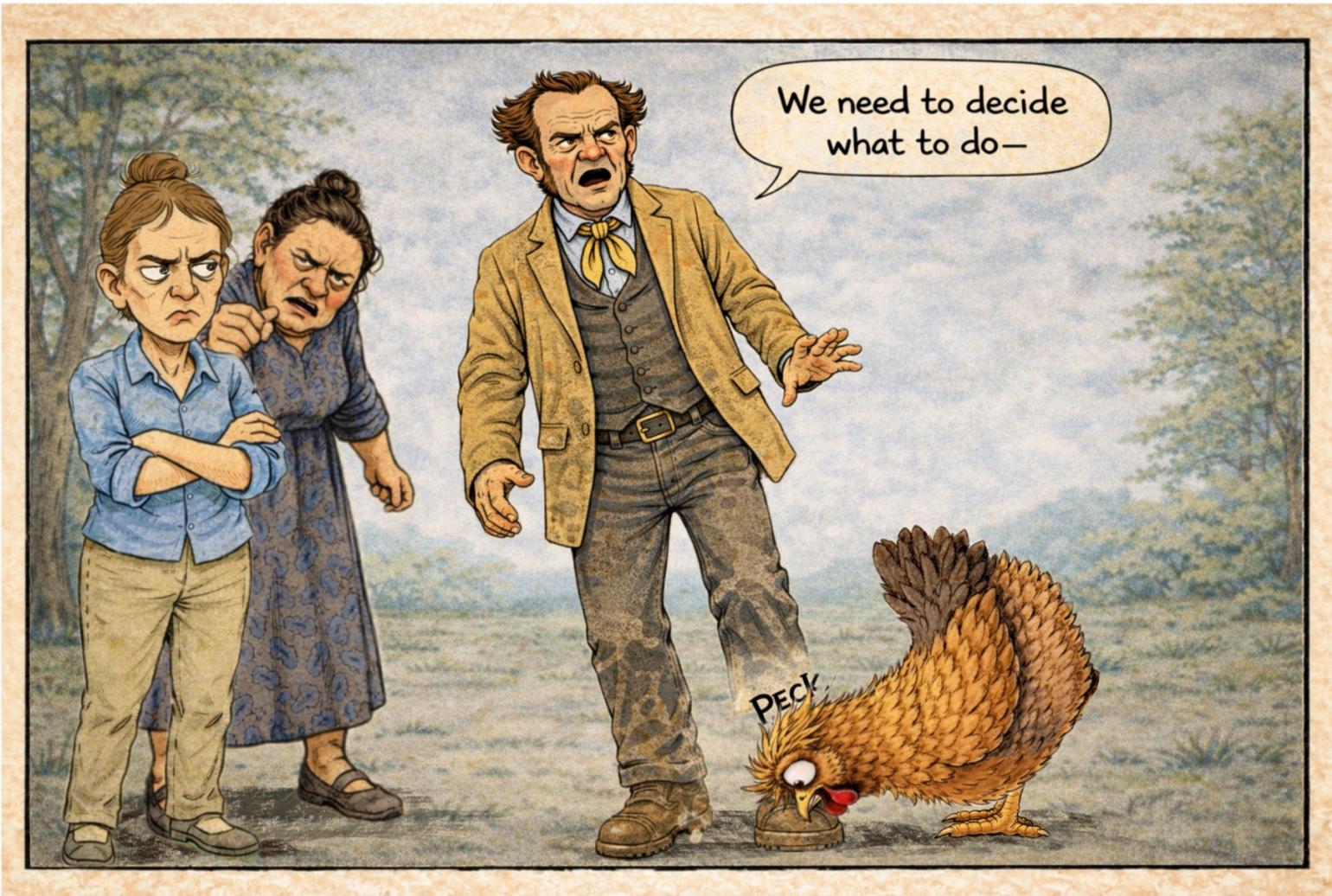
I eat ticks.
Lots of ticks.



...bawk?

Yes.





We need to decide
what to do—

PECK!

It's not bothering
anyone.





Something's wrong.

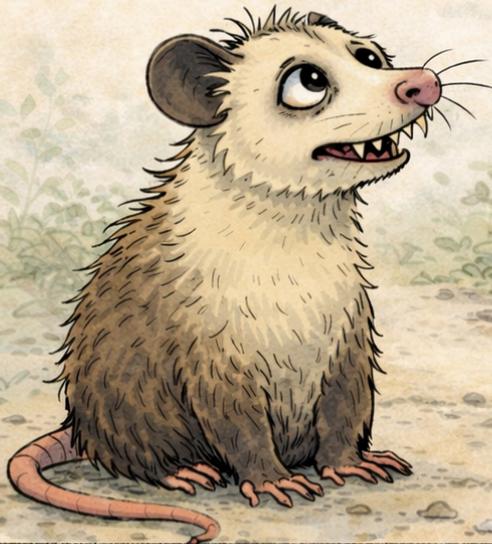
Yes.

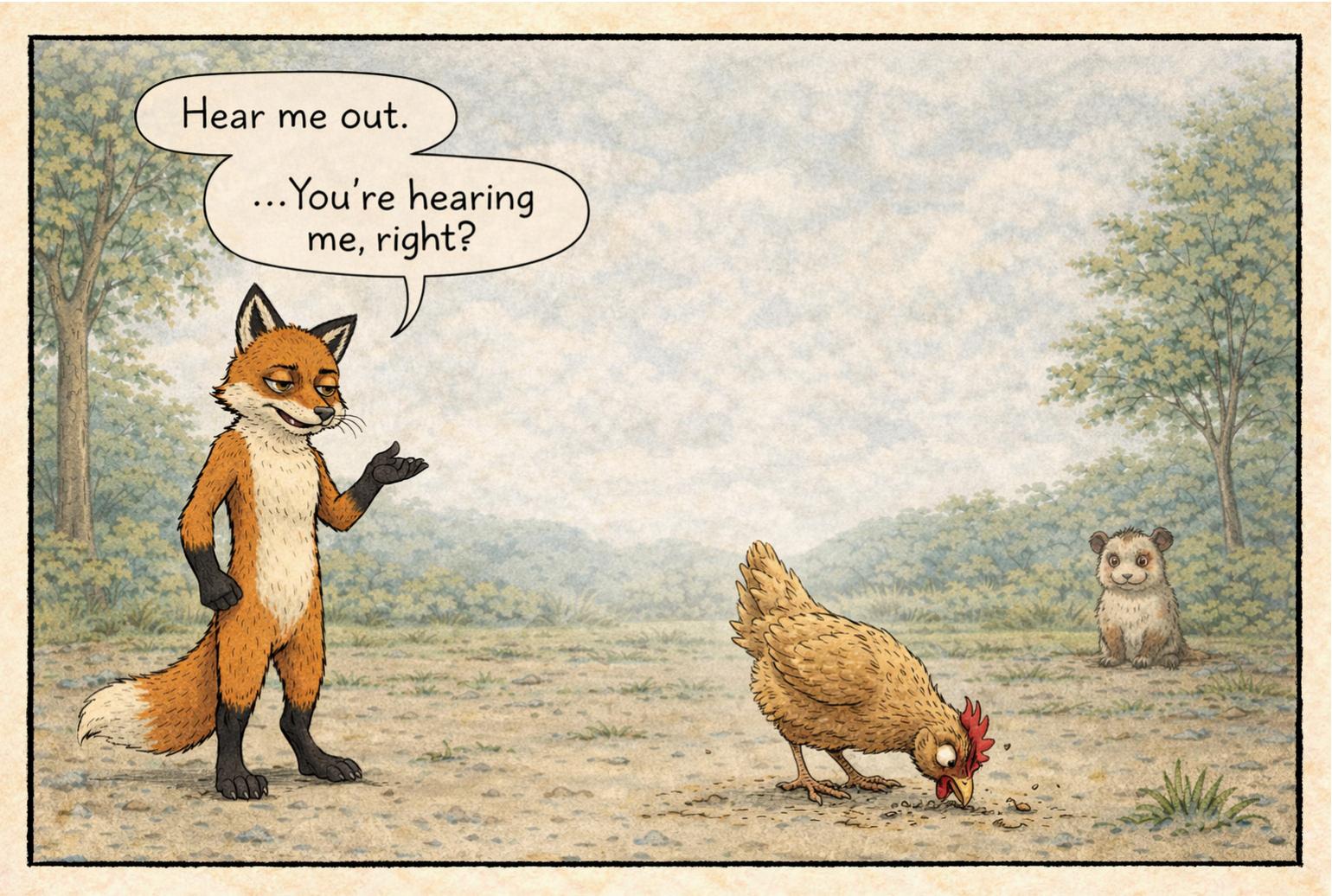


It's not the animals.

No.

Dinner.



A fox with orange fur and a white chest patch stands on the left, gesturing with its right hand. A chicken with brown feathers and a red comb is pecking at the ground in the center. A small bear cub with brown fur sits on the right. The background shows a misty forest with green trees and a light sky.

Hear me out.

...You're hearing
me, right?

I just want everyone to stay safe.

We don't need to panic.





We're all animals here.

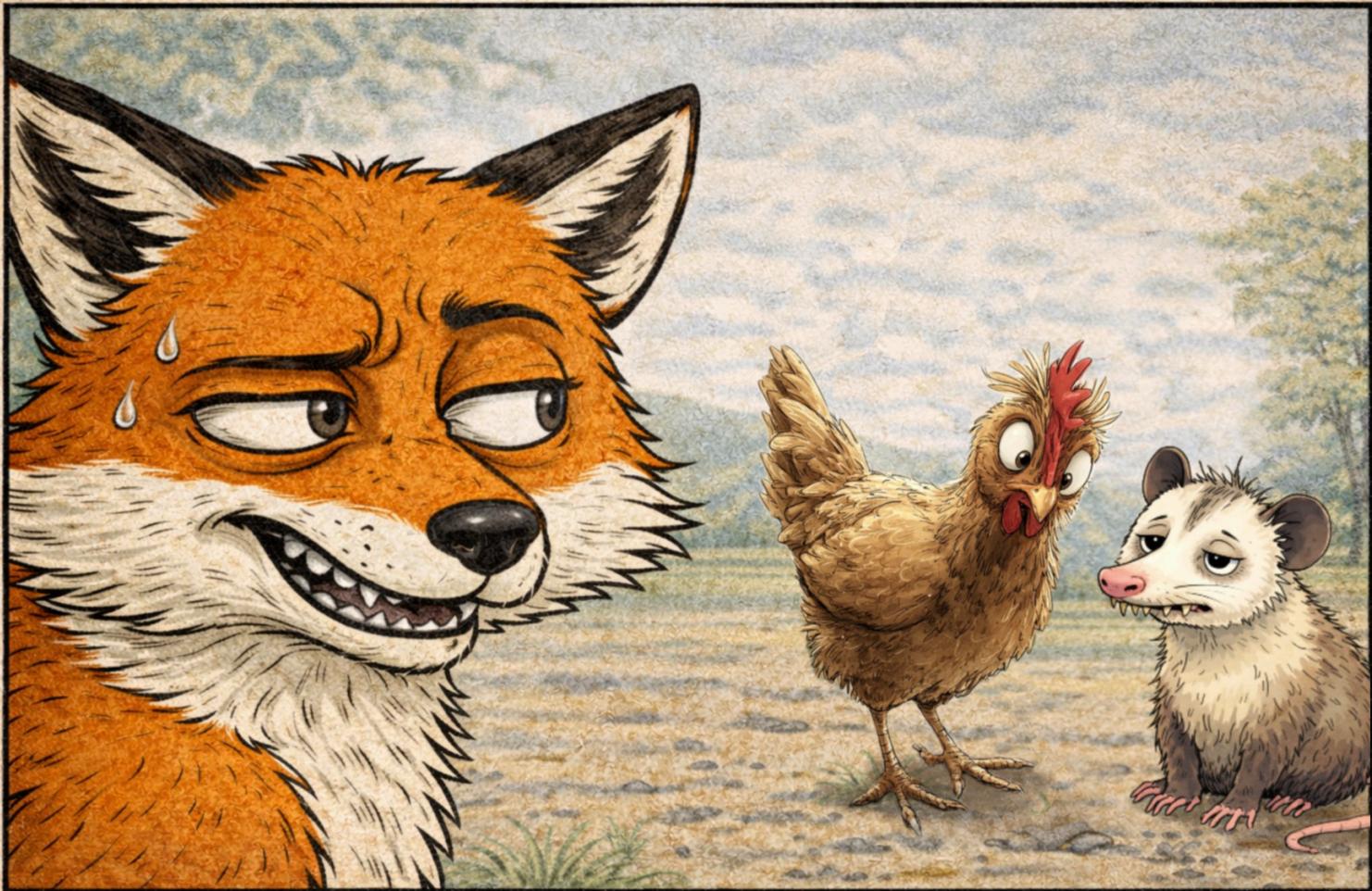
Some of us are just louder.

I don't like this.

Why is it still here?

Let's consider...

NO. We need to **ACT.**







THUD

CLANG

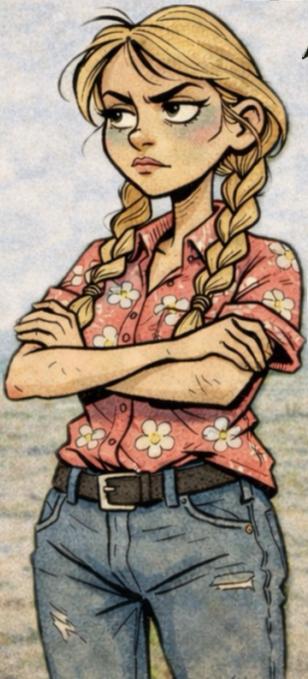
A fox with orange and white fur is running towards the right. In the background, a woman with dark hair in a bun, a young girl with blonde hair in a striped shirt, and a large brown chicken with a red comb are standing behind a wooden bench. A small grey mouse with a pink nose is sitting on the ground in the foreground, looking towards the fox. The scene is set outdoors on a dirt path with a stone wall in the background.

I was not chasing.

You were absolutely chasing.



Okay, hear me out.
What if we just... don't
worry about that part?



You said you
wanted safety.



That was
instinct,
darling.

No no no—hear me out, hear me out—hear me out! I had good intentions. Hear me out!



A young girl with long, wavy blonde hair and bangs, wearing a black and white striped long-sleeved shirt and a dark skirt, stands on the left side of the frame. She is looking towards a fox on the right. The fox is orange with a white chest and black legs, walking away from her with a sad expression. The background is a soft-focus landscape with trees and a field.

Why?

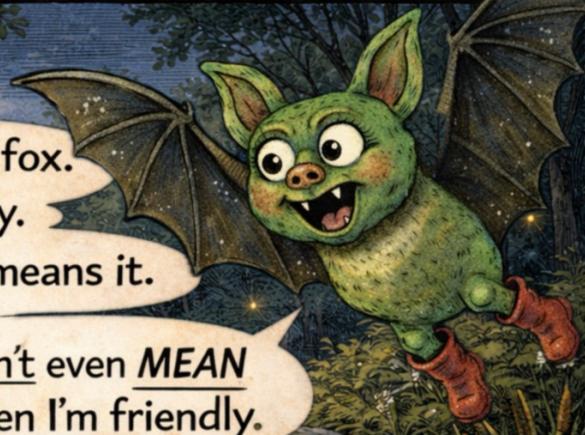
Okay... maybe don't hear me out.
I should go.

Because I don't like being
seen like this.



That's how stories change.





"I **TOLD** you.

I told you I didn't trust that fox.

Too smooth. Too friendly.

No one that friendly ever means it.

I don't even MEAN
it when I'm friendly.

Which fox?

The talky one.

The "hear me out" one.

The one who *smiled* with
his mouth but not his tail.





That's never good.

It usually means
running.

Thank you.
I felt that in my wings.



Should we run?



No.

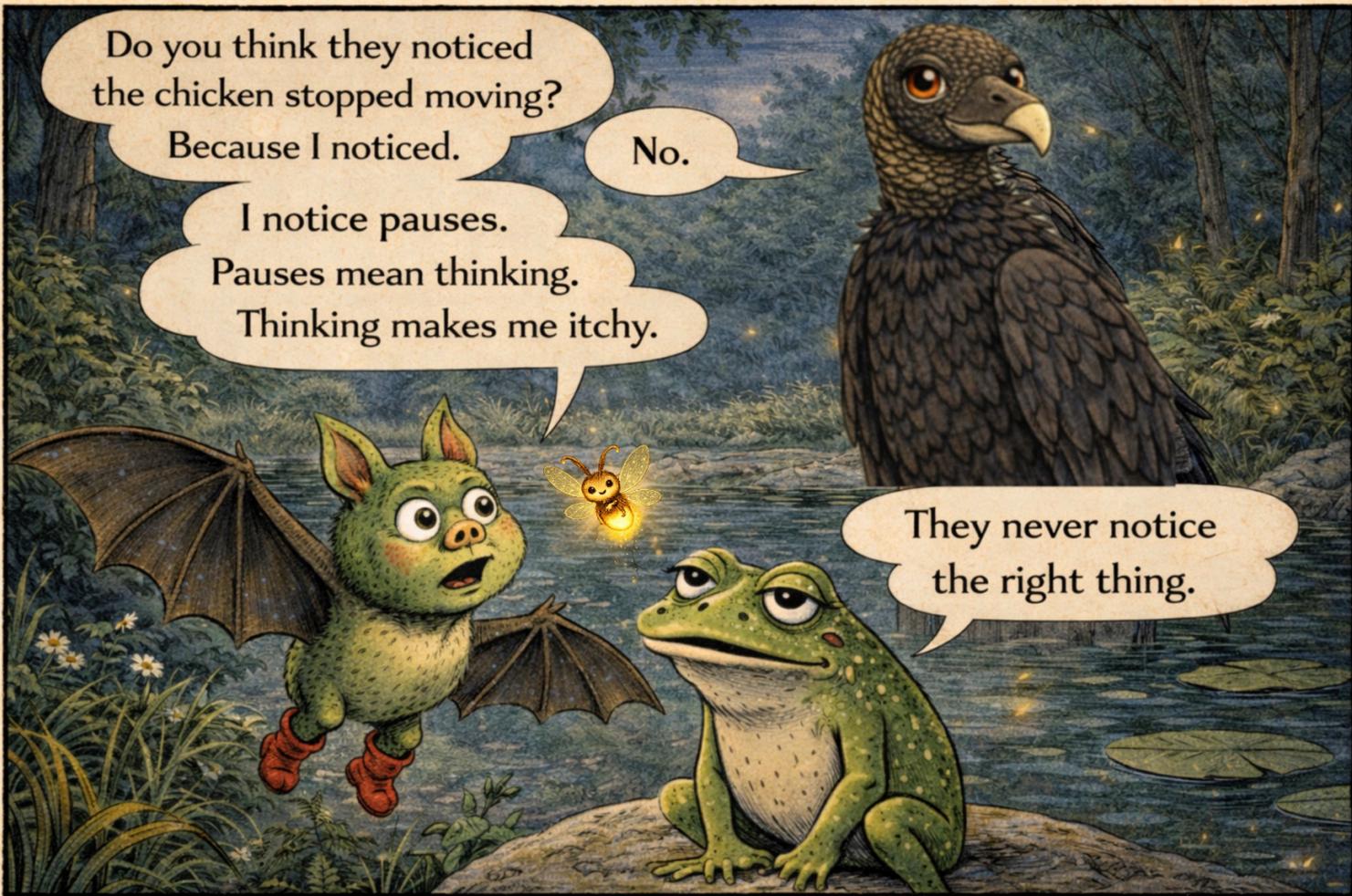
Do you think they noticed
the chicken stopped moving?

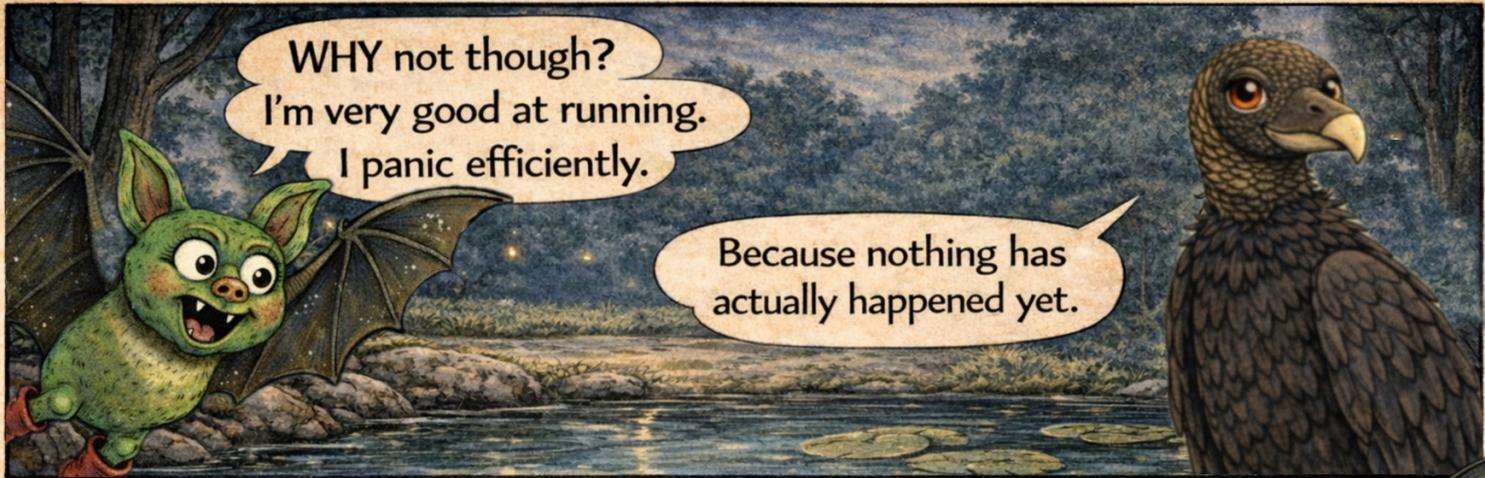
Because I noticed.

No.

I notice pauses.
Pauses mean thinking.
Thinking makes me itchy.

They never notice
the right thing.





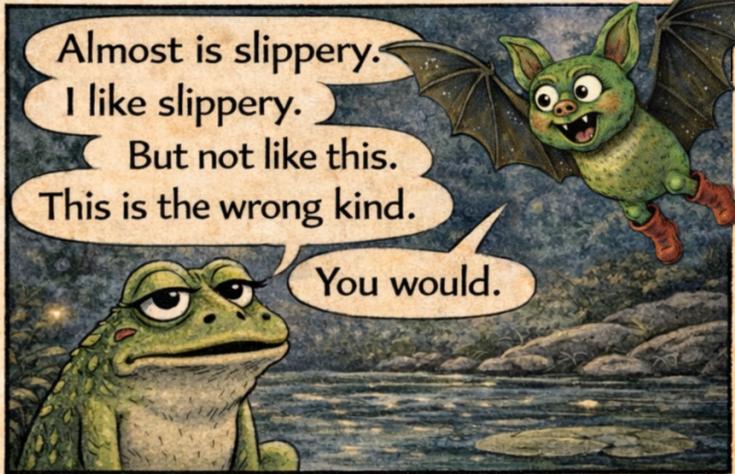
WHY not though?
I'm very good at running.
I panic efficiently.

Because nothing has
actually happened yet.



Something *almost* happened.

I **HATE** almost.
Almost is where
bad ideas warm up.



Almost is slippery.
I like slippery.
But not like this.
This is the wrong kind.

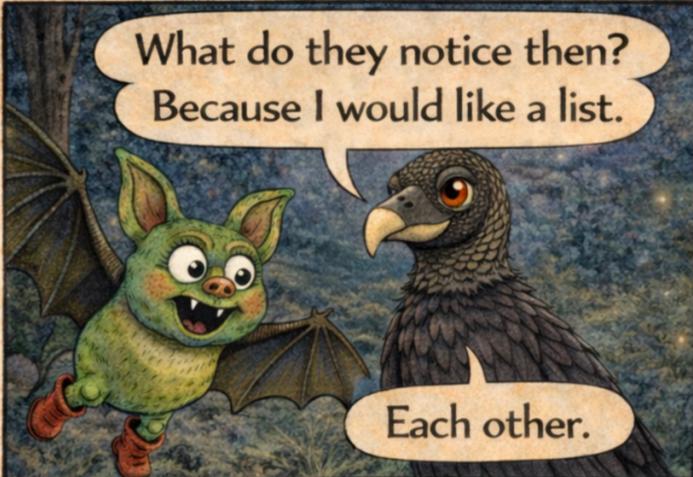
You would.



Oh wow. This is fantastic.
Everyone's yelling.
No one's looking down.

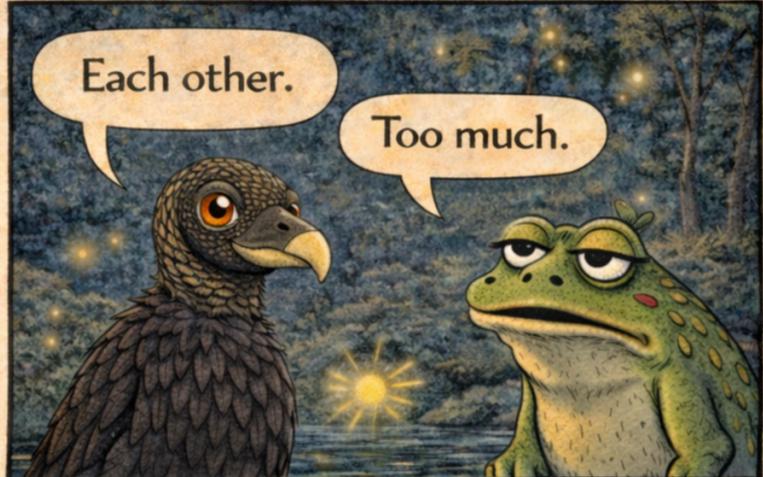
I love a crowd.
They're so...
inattentive.

Bawk.



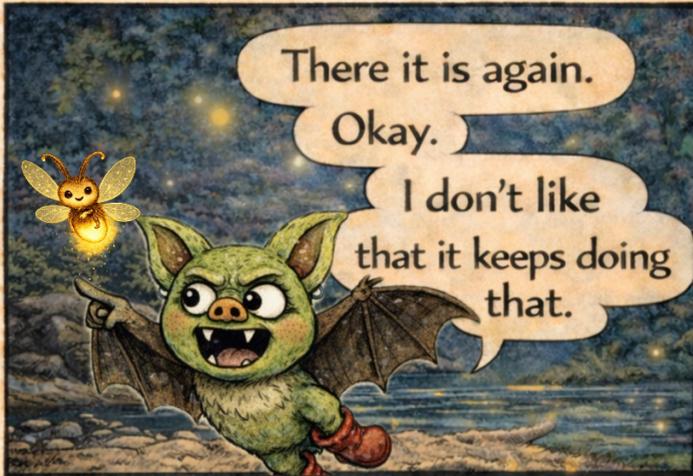
What do they notice then?
Because I would like a list.

Each other.



Each other.

Too much.



There it is again.
Okay.

I don't like
that it keeps doing
that.



That's the signal.

For deciding.

For what?

I don't like decisions.

Decisions are how everyone
gets mad at me.

They're close now.

Close to what?

The wrong thing.



This is the part
where someone steps in.

That's *brave*.

Stopping things
before they get worse.

I've had enough
of this!



Move the chicken.

Bawk.





She's braver
than all of you.



What if it
bites?

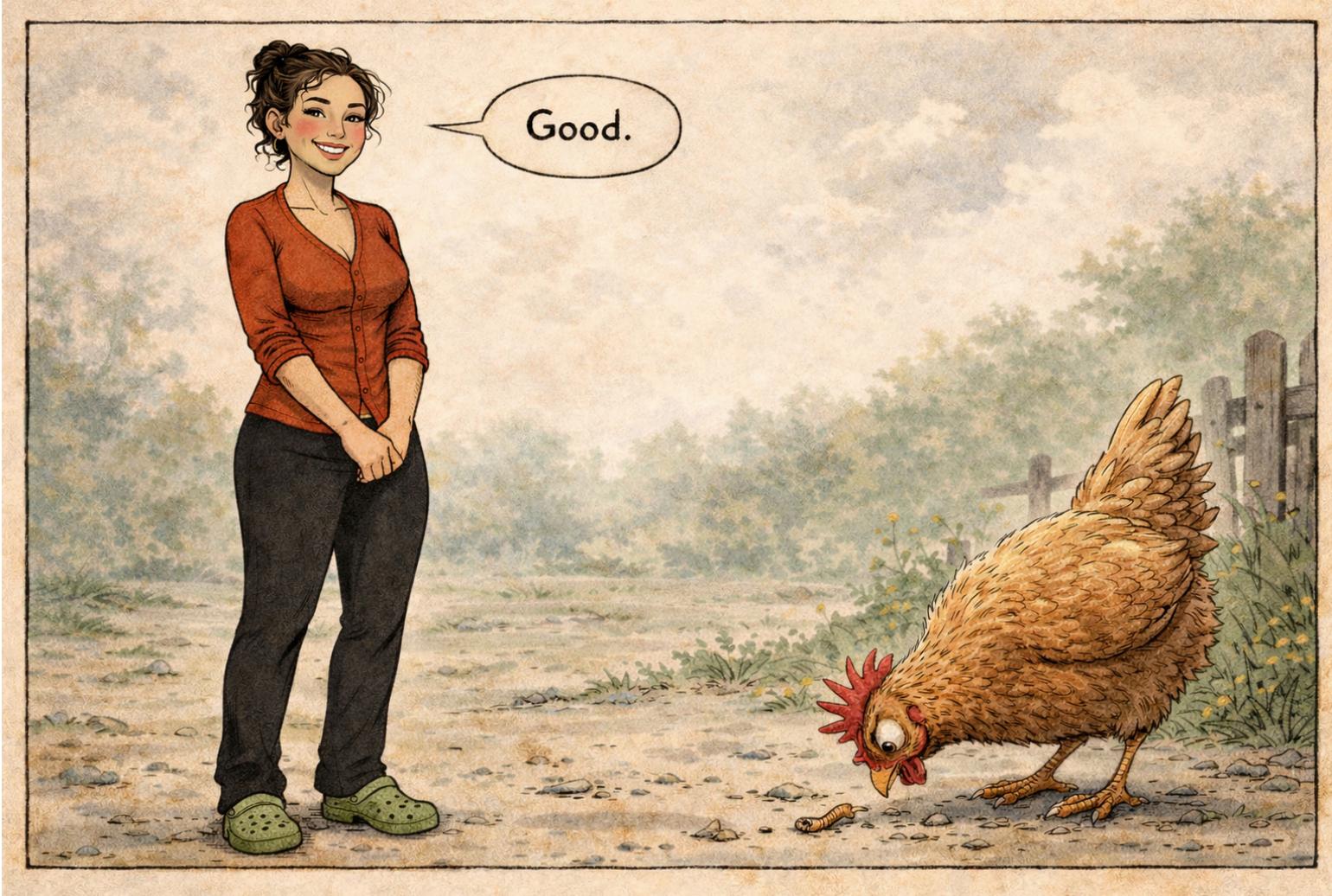


I don't bite
unless I have
no choice.

You're making
me decide.

You're scaring it.





Good.



I think we went too far.

I was scared.

That's normal.

I eat ticks.
I clean up.
I leave when I'm finished here.



So you're not bad.

No.

I'm useful.

Bawk.

Yes.



THE END

