

Francesca Cavallo



DOCTOR LI

and the crown-wearing virus

Dear readers,

As usual, my goal is to find ways to keep children informed about what is happening, while helping you have meaningful, honest conversations with them.

Letting children be inspired by the heroes of our time can be a powerful reminder of the beauty of science, and of the importance of doing their homework!

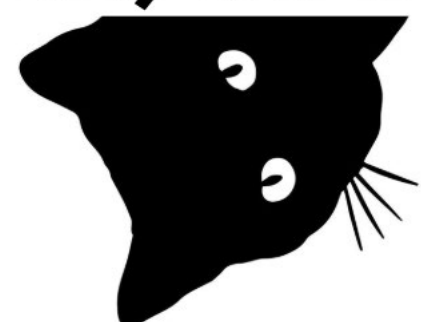
Let's stay close,
Francesca Cavallo

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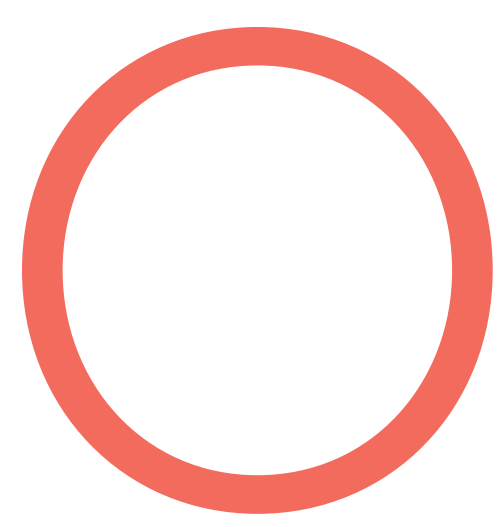


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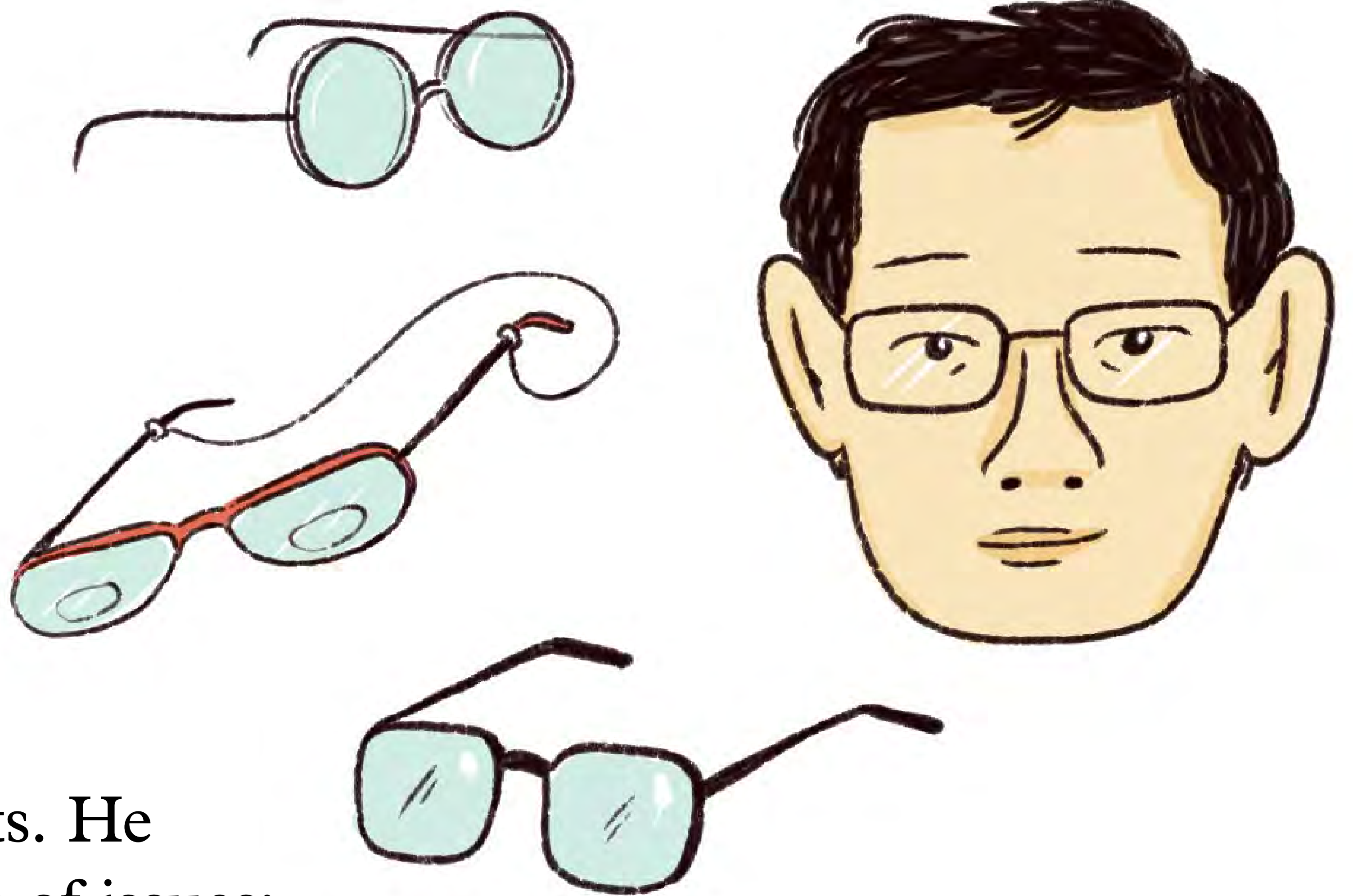
A special thank you goes to Translated, a fantastic professional translation service. They offered the English, German and Spanish translations of this story so that more readers around the world could enjoy it.
Check them out: www.translated.com

DOCTOR LI

and the crown-wearing virus



Once upon a time there was a very good doctor in China. His name was Doctor Li Wenliang and he was an eye doctor. Every day, Doctor Li went to work at the hospital in a city called Wuhan to treat his patients. He saw patients with all kinds of issues: some needed glasses so they could see from afar, others needed them to see things up close, and some elderly patients needed small operations so that they could just see better. Doctor Li loved his job and took care of all his patients with joy.



One day, however, he noticed something strange. He observed that instead of having many different problems, his patients all seemed to be suffering from the same illness: it appeared to be a terrible cold, like the flu, but was unlike any other flu that Doctor Li had treated in the past.





The doctor immediately sent a message to his colleagues to warn them that this strange flu was going around and tell them that, though he didn't know exactly what it was, it appeared to be very contagious because he had already seen seven patients with it.

The following day, police officers went and knocked on the doctor's door. They told him he had to stop sending messages or else they would arrest him and put him in prison. They thought the doctor was getting worked up for no reason and they didn't want him to frighten the other doctors.

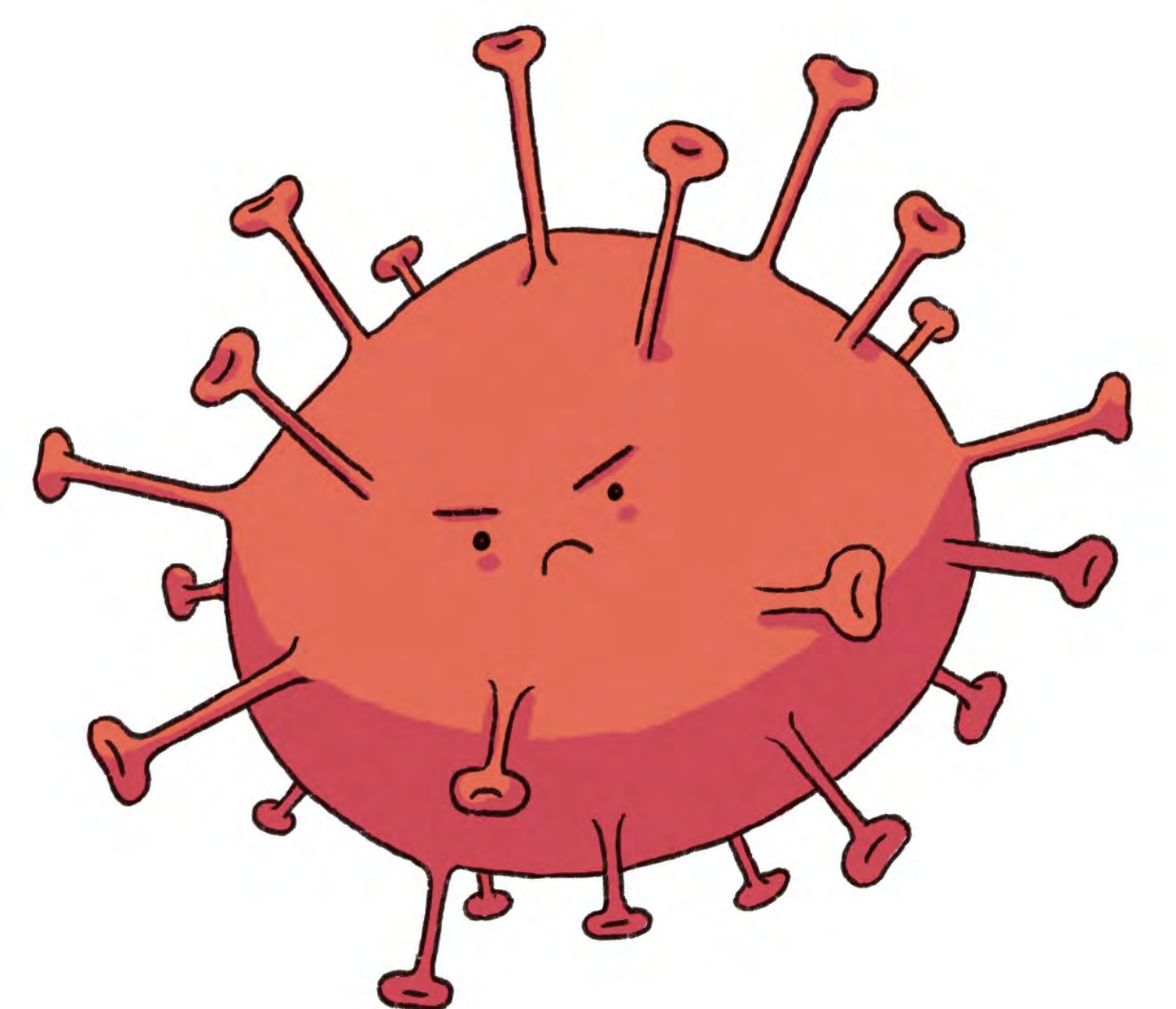




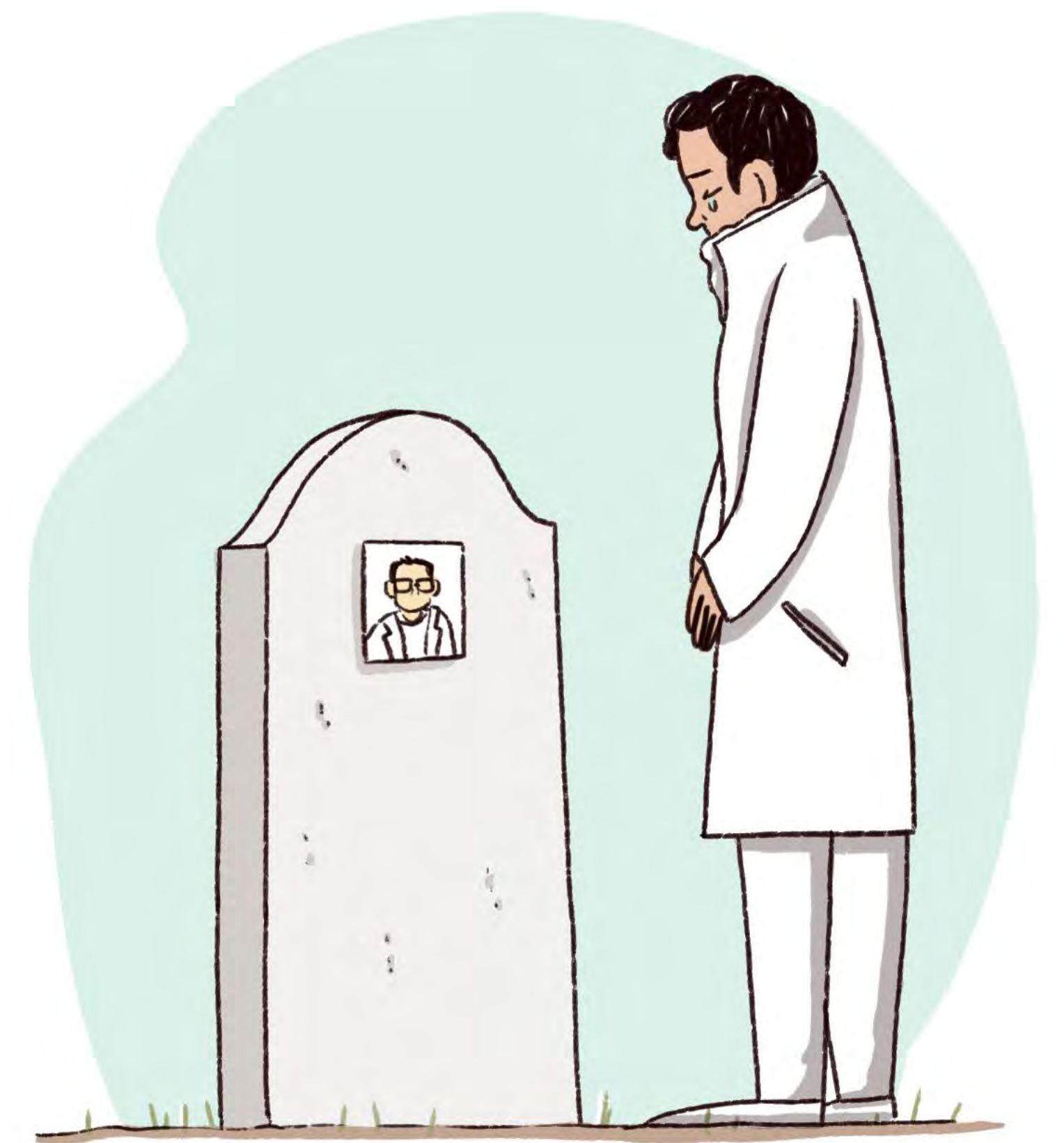
But as the days went by, more and more people got sick with this strange flu. Now there were very many ill patients.

Doctor Li's colleagues quickly realized that he had been right: this flu was caused by a virus that they had never seen before. They began working together. There were those who observed the virus in the laboratory to understand how it spread, others who treated patients, and those who tried to develop a vaccine to protect people.

For every patient they treated, and every hour they spent in the laboratory, the researchers, doctors and nurses learned something new. They discovered that it was a virus that was part of a family called the coronavirus: a type of virus that when you looked at it under a microscope, appeared to have a crown on its head. Corona is another word for crown.



The police apologized to Doctor Li but unfortunately, it was too late. The doctor had fallen ill and died a few days later.



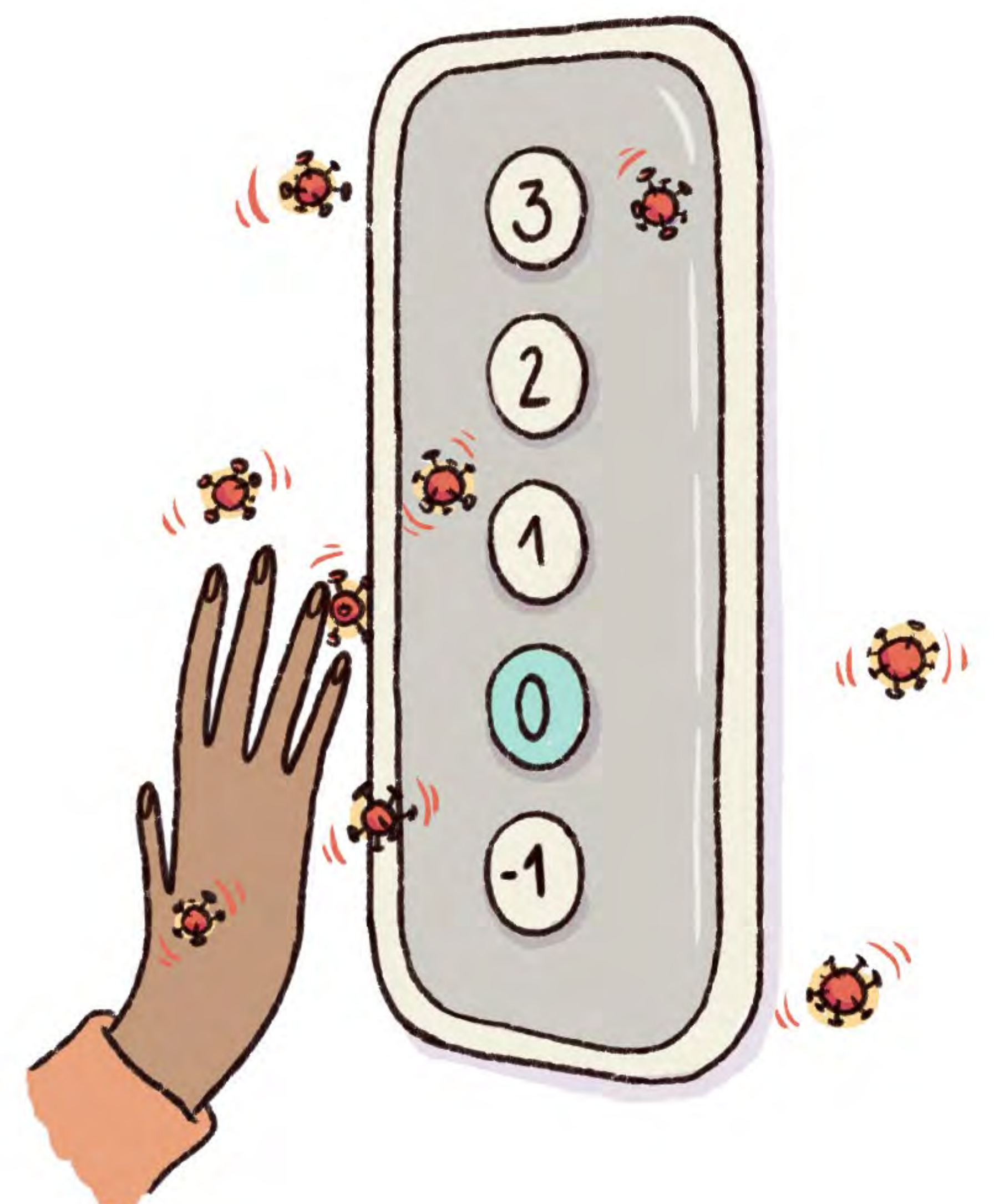
The doctors discovered that the virus came from an animal, possibly a bat or a snake, but they couldn't be sure. It wasn't easy to know for certain because the virus couldn't be questioned!

Normally viruses found in animals don't make humans sick, but this was a new virus and a lot of research would have to be done to understand its behavior. In the meantime though, they had to find a way to protect as many people as possible from getting sick.



The researchers discovered something very important: even people who didn't have a cough or fever could hug, touch or kiss someone and unknowingly transmit the virus to them.

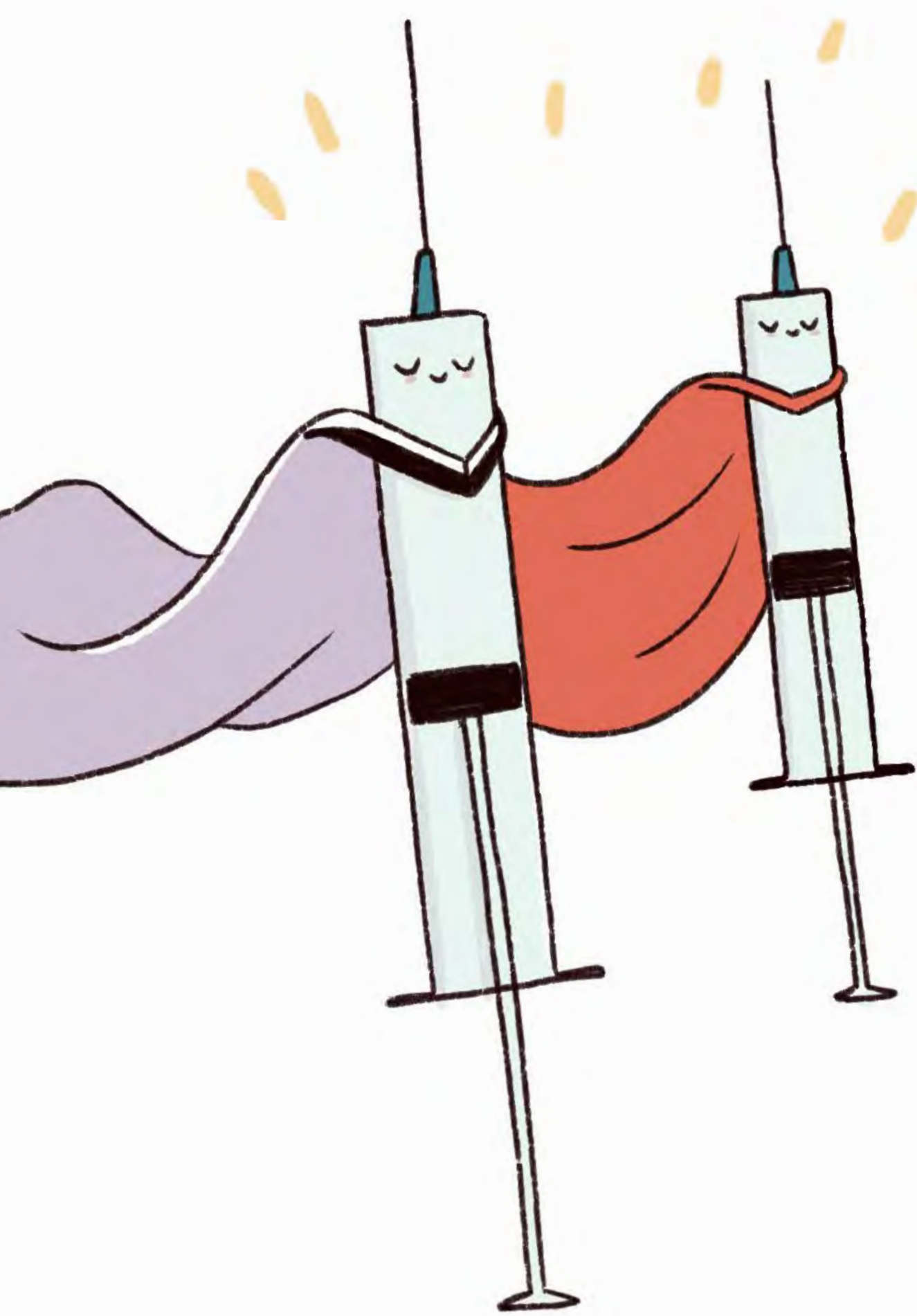
They discovered that when a person coughed or sneezed and a few tiny drops of saliva landed on a door handle or an elevator button, someone who then touched that same handle or button even hours later could get infected with the virus.



They also discovered that washing your hands thoroughly with soap made the virus disappear!

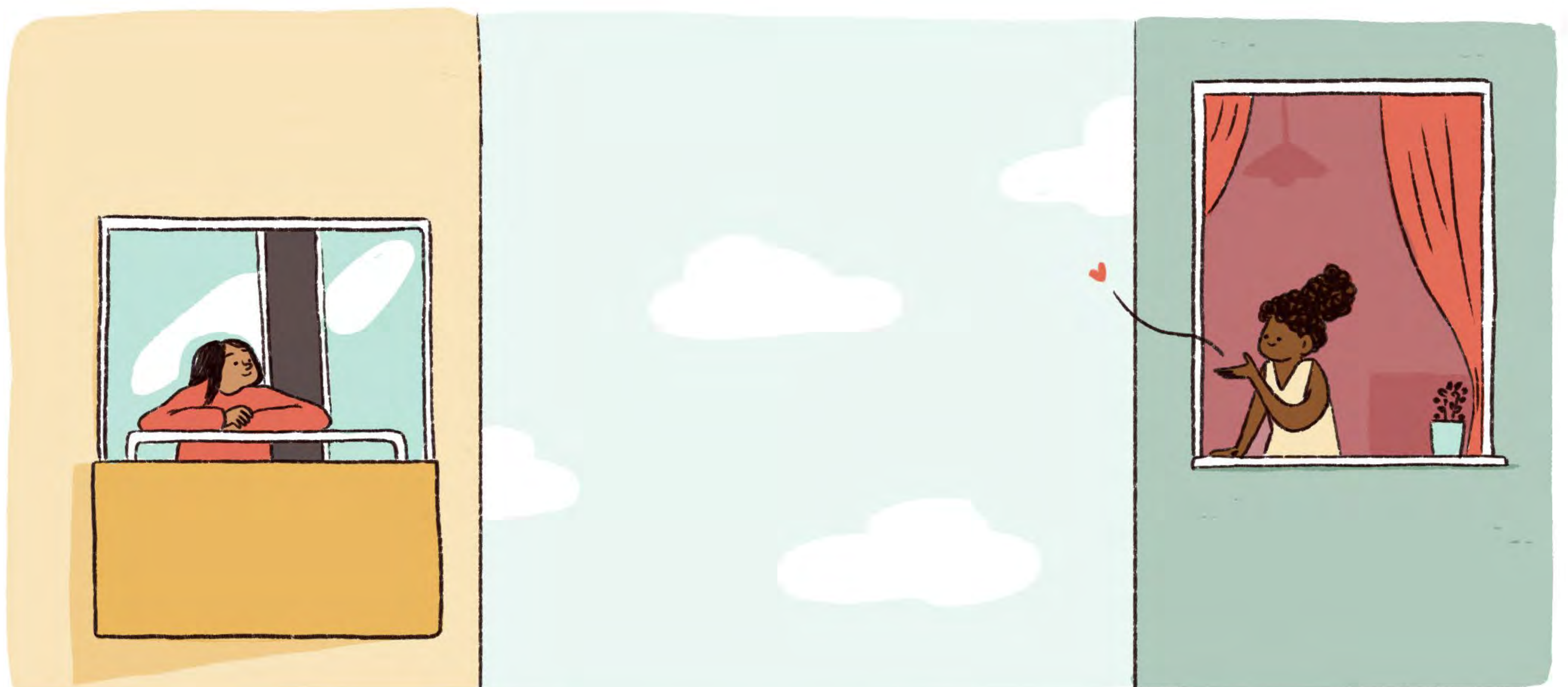
Finding a vaccine became urgent so that people could stop worrying when they hugged each other or called the elevator. In

fact, vaccines protect people from getting sick even when they come in contact with the virus. It's thanks to vaccines that we are no longer afraid of getting measles or chickenpox!

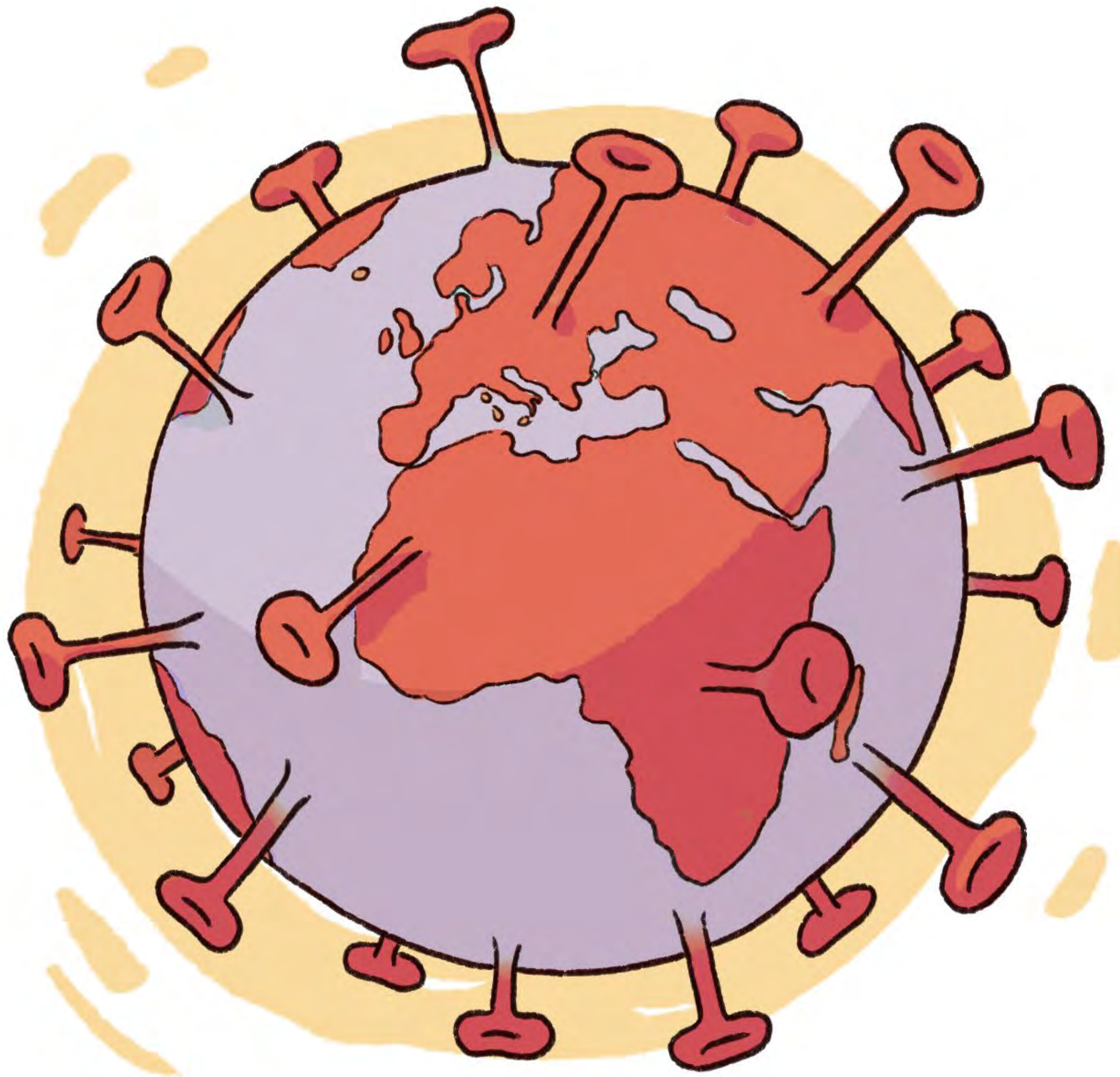


But what could be done to prevent people from getting sick while researchers around the world were trying to develop a vaccine?

The scientists came to a conclusion: people had to be asked to stay home because this way the virus couldn't spread and there would be fewer people falling ill. Those who did get sick would get the care they needed and the researchers would have time to find a solution.



The doctors in Wuhan told their colleagues in other countries about the new virus, but many thought it was a Chinese problem and wouldn't affect them so they weren't concerned. But in a few days time, the virus arrived in Italy, France, the United States, Spain, Germany...



In the beginning, nobody wanted to believe it. Just like the police officers from Wuhan had done, the other governments around the world also refused to listen to the scientists.

“It’s not a big deal,” they said. But sick people kept coming to the hospital and soon there would be no more beds left to put them in. Shortly after, other countries around the world also started telling people to stay at home and that children were no longer allowed to go to school.

“How long will this last?” The children asked.

But the adults didn't know.

They did know, however, that even though the schools were closed, the kids had to keep up with their schoolwork and studies. This is because it would take many doctors like Doctor Li, many teachers, many scientists and many researchers for people to once again hug each other and take the elevator together without having to worry about a thing.





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Francesca Cavallo is the NYT bestselling author of the “Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls” book series. She is an activist and a media entrepreneur committed to promoting diversity in children’s media.

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