

In the winter of 2012, my first winter in New York City, I spent a lot of time ruminating on things that eventually shaped the final version of “Number 41.” The afterlife, how it might somehow justify the separateness and the need to connect, the feeling of being homesick, but not for home—for whatever reason, these things were on my mind, though I wasn’t intending to put them into a story. I’d also been thinking about morality as a fundamental part of religion; we take for granted so often that the two are intertwined, but why? Might it somehow behoove us to “do unto others” more than we know?

Anyway, that was the general mental climate I’d been living in, and then by chance one day I listened to the Radiolab episode “After Life,” in which Jeffrey Tambor reads from *Sum: Forty Tales of the Afterlife* by David Eagleman. Immediately after, I sat down to write, and an hour later, there it was: “Number 41.”

—Kimberly Bunker



Photo: Samantha Coggin