

Eighteen Wheels and a Dozen Roses



Written and Illustrated
By Caroline Stellings

For my beloved Schipperkes, Matt and Ben,
and for my mother, who treasured them.

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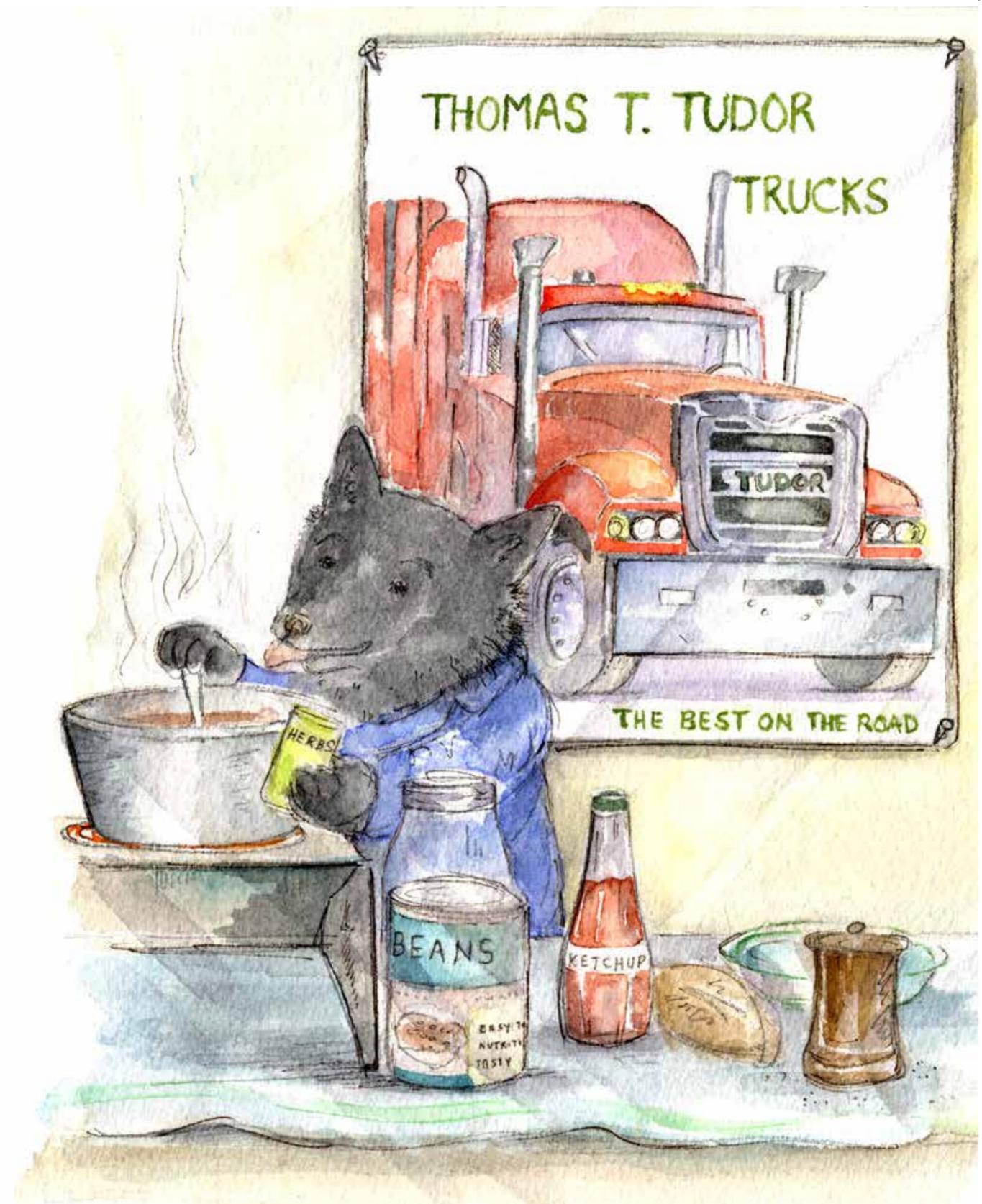
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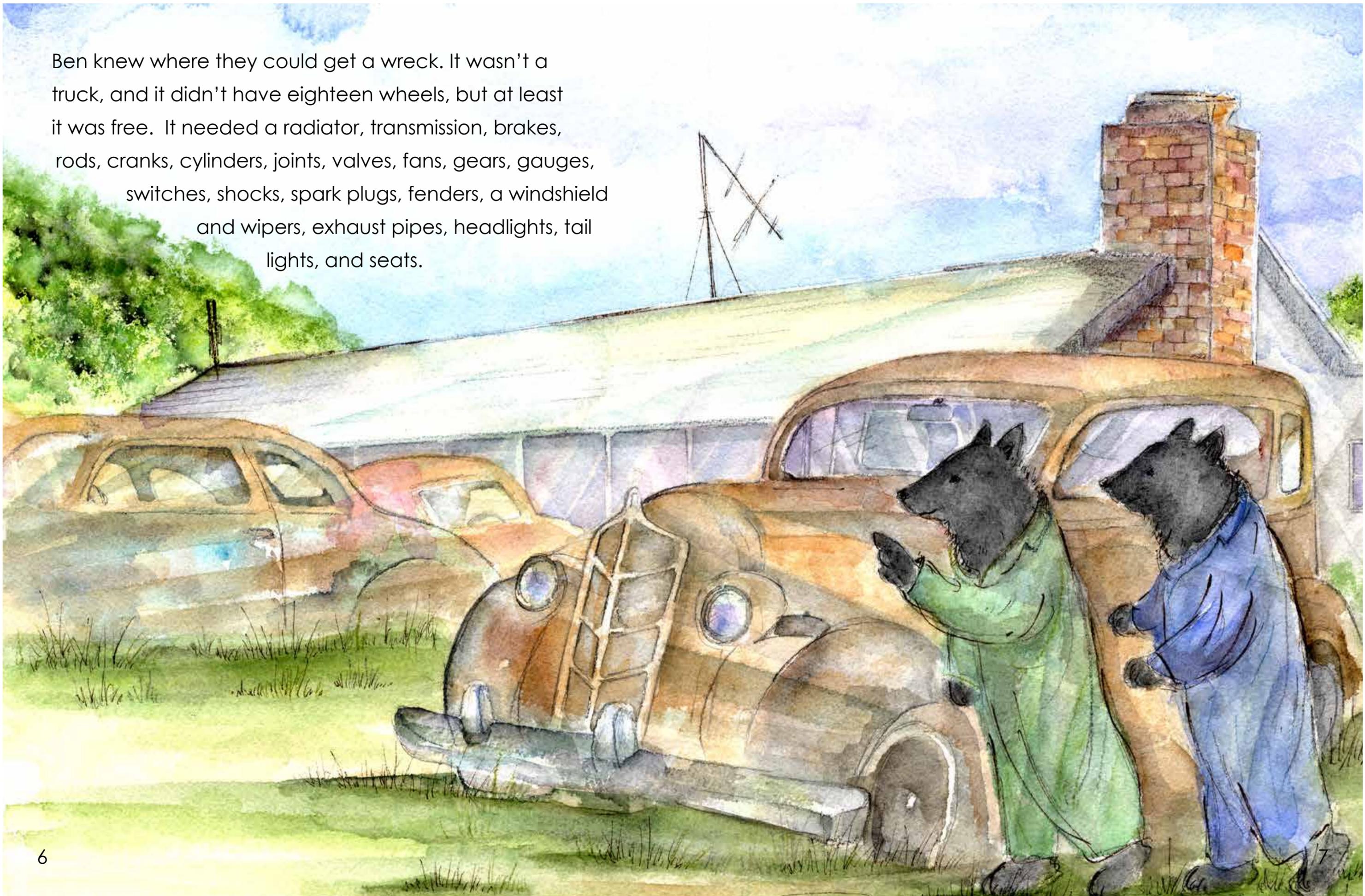
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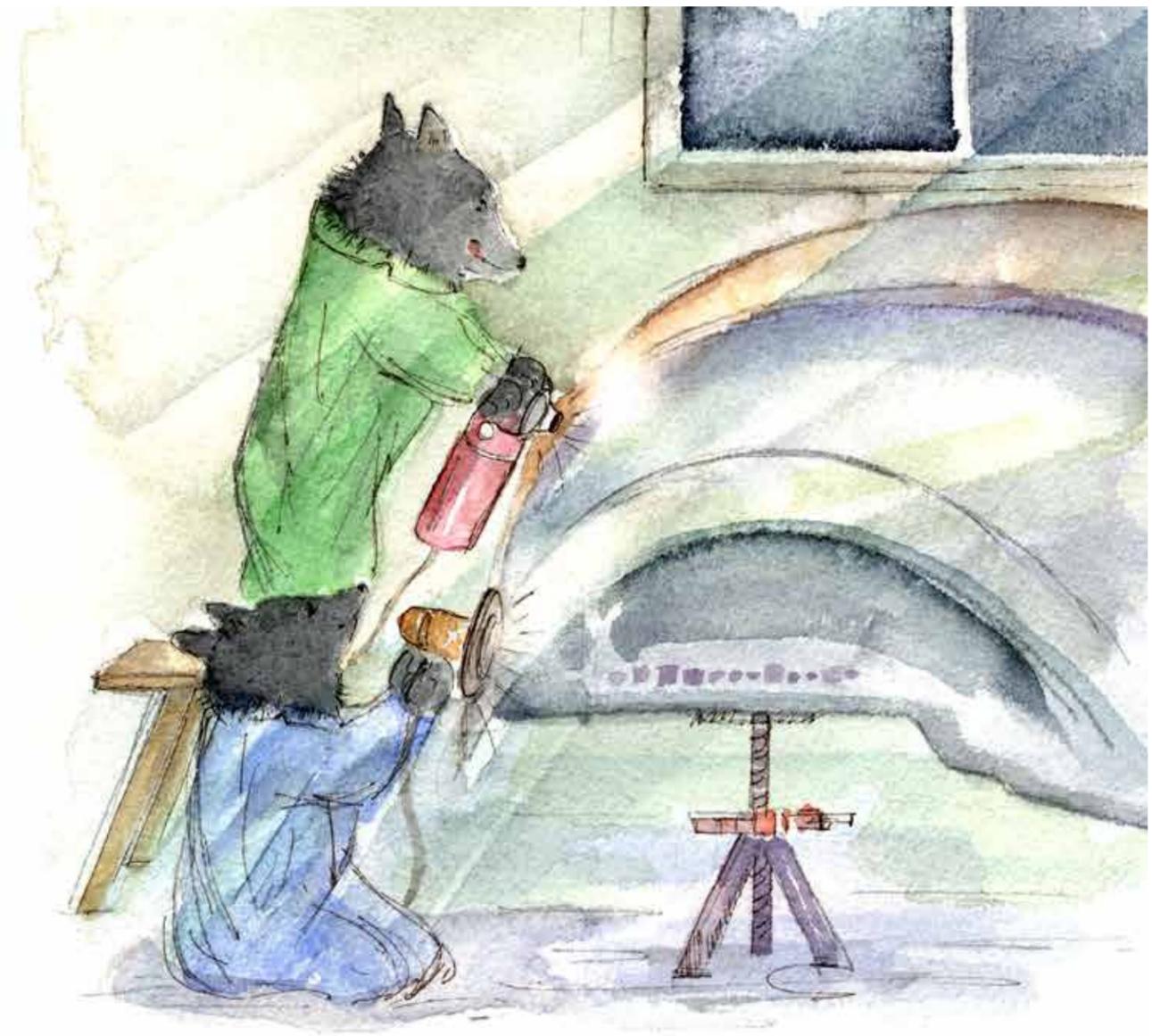


The only thing Matt wanted was a truck – a big one with eighteen wheels. But he didn't have any money. He worked at Ben's garage and slept in the backroom. He had a bed, a table, a chair, and a hot plate.



Ben knew where they could get a wreck. It wasn't a truck, and it didn't have eighteen wheels, but at least it was free. It needed a radiator, transmission, brakes, rods, cranks, cylinders, joints, valves, fans, gears, gauges, switches, shocks, spark plugs, fenders, a windshield and wipers, exhaust pipes, headlights, tail lights, and seats.





Matt and Ben worked on the wreck all spring. Sometimes they worked until late at night. By summer, the car was ready to drive.

Just as Matt went to start it up, he saw his friend Harry riding down the road. Snap! The chain on Harry's bike broke.

"Now I'm in trouble," said Harry. "If I'm late for work again today, I'll lose my job." He kicked the back tire. Both pedals fell off.

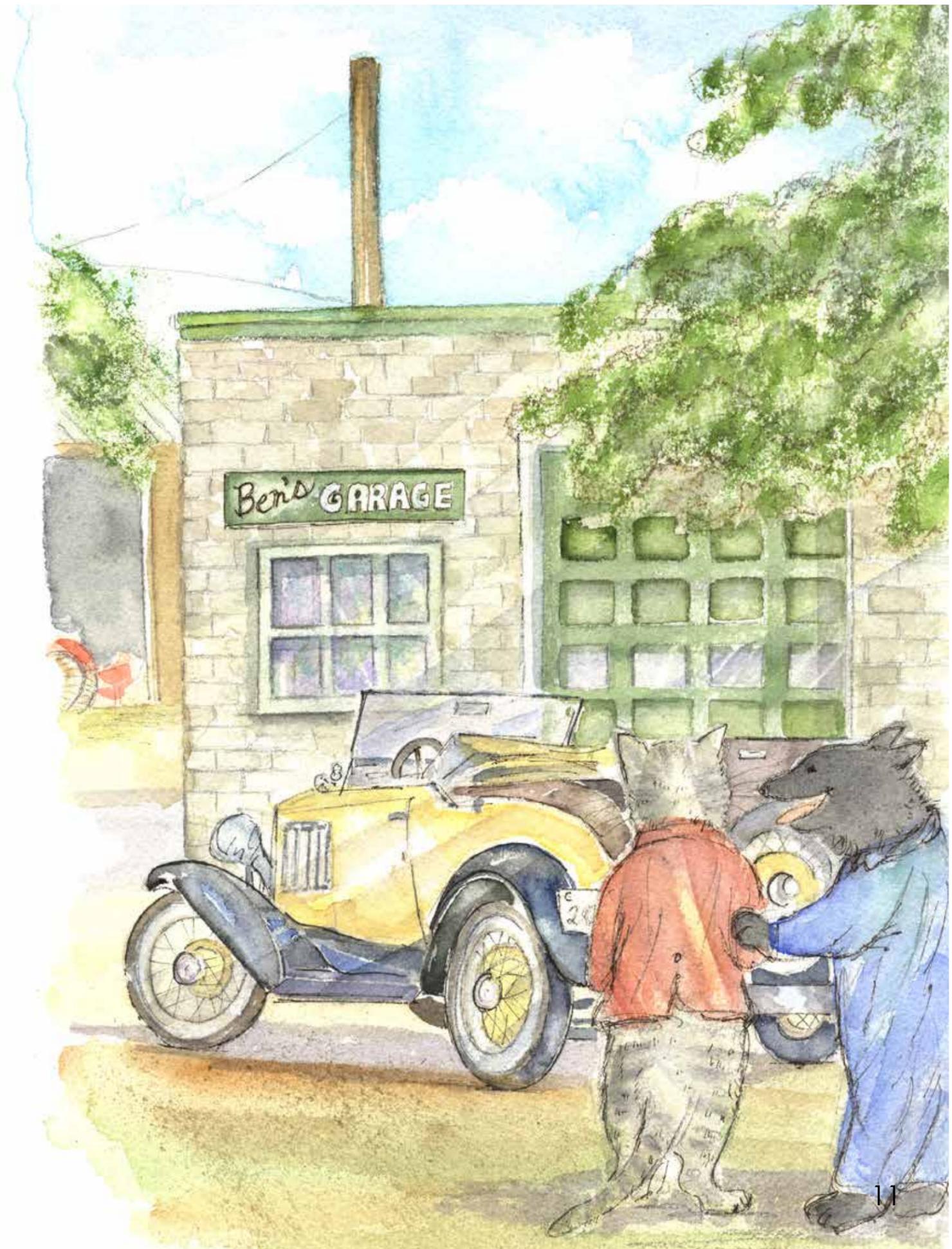
Ben looked at Matt.

Matt looked at Ben.

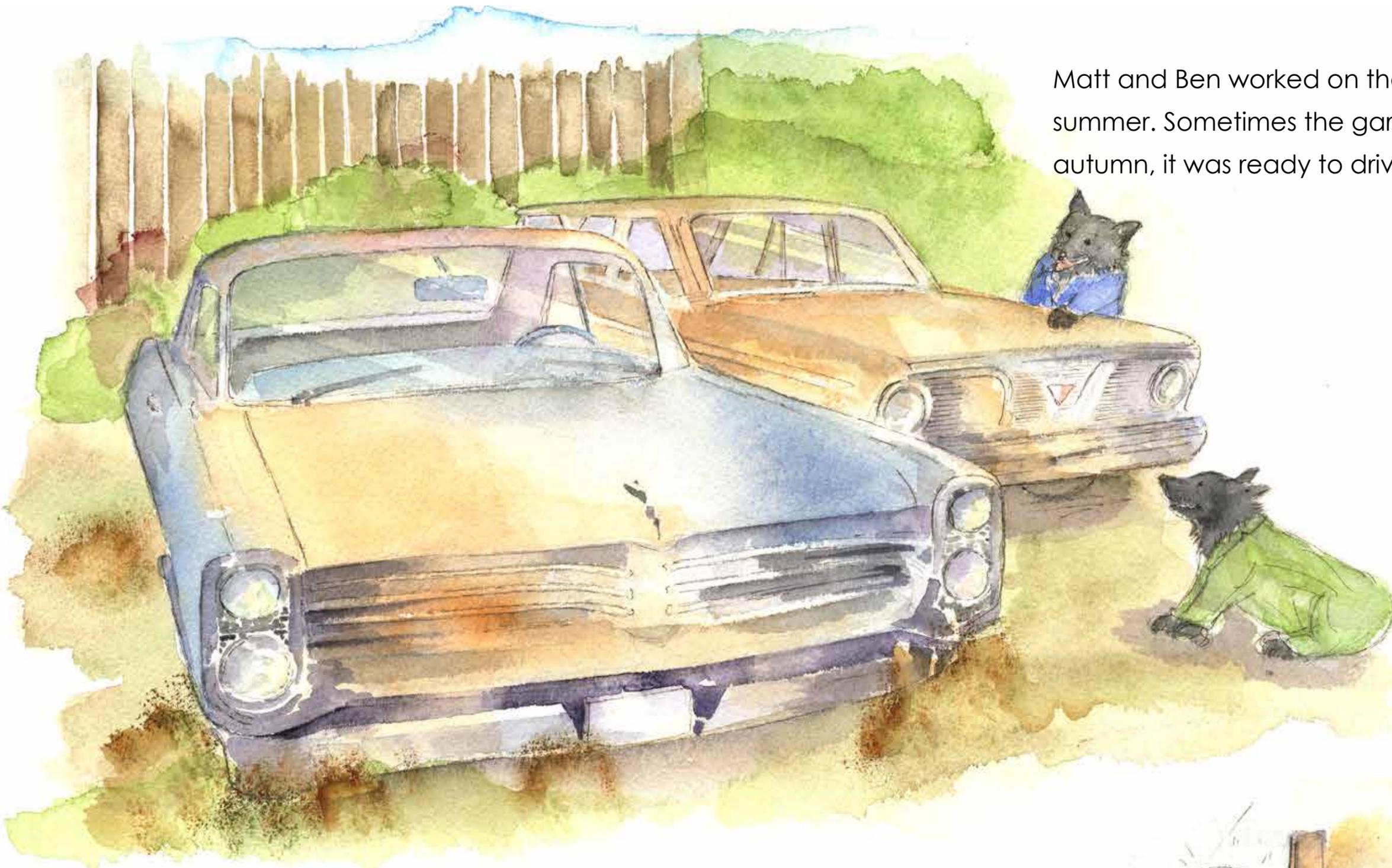
Then Matt handed Harry the key.

"You mean I can have it?" Harry asked.

"It's yours," replied Matt, and Harry motored off in a cloud of dust.



Matt and Ben worked on the station wagon all summer. Sometimes the garage got really hot. By autumn, it was ready to drive.



Ben found a station wagon down the road. It only needed a radiator, transmission, brakes, rods, cylinders, valves, fans, gears, gauges, switches, shocks, spark plugs, fenders, exhaust pipes, headlights, and tail lights.

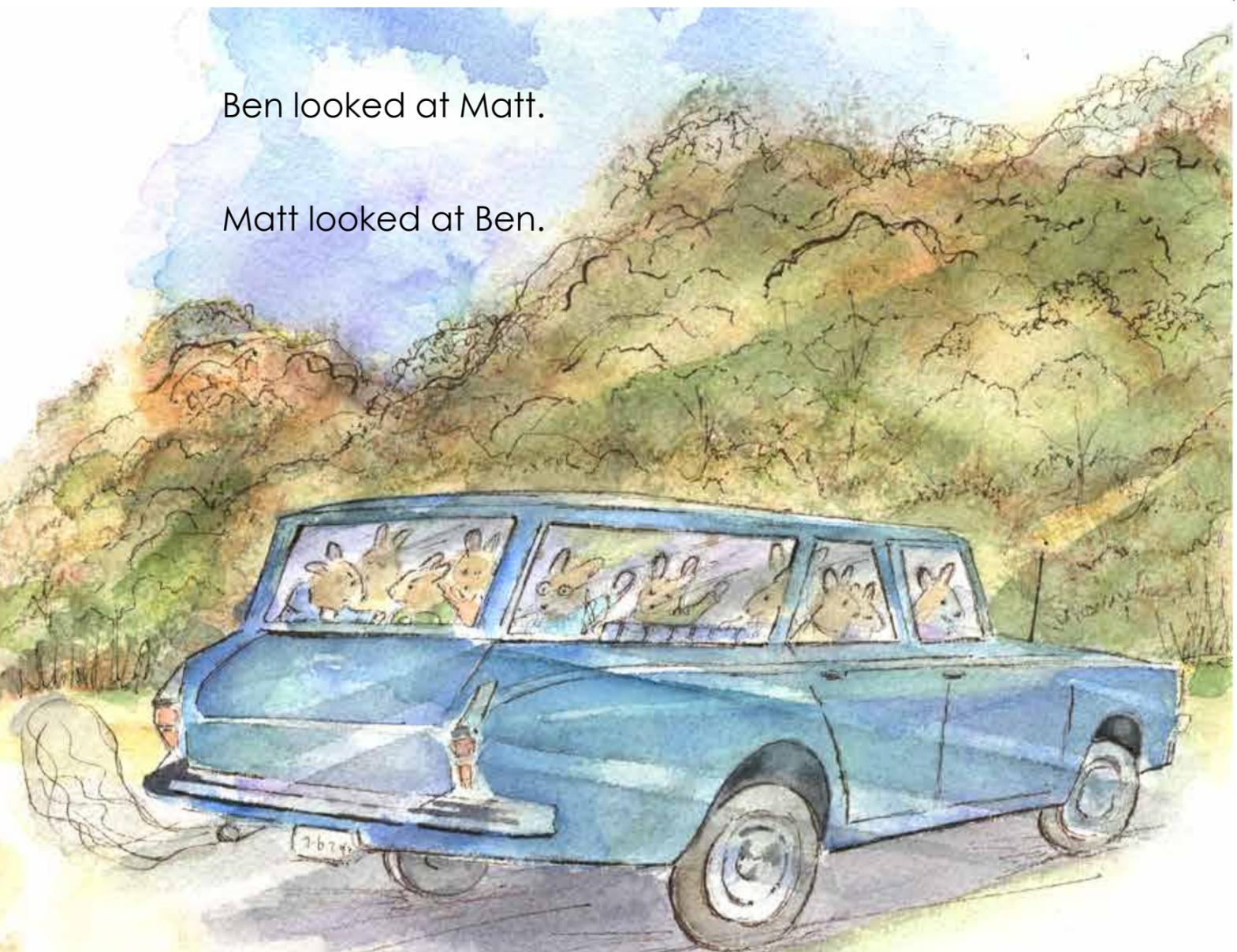


Just as Matt went to start it up, he saw Mrs. Potter hustling her children to school in the pouring rain. The little ones splashed in the puddles. The big ones all had colds. Their homework was drenched, their lunches were ruined, and their feet were soaked.



Ben looked at Matt.

Matt looked at Ben.



Then Matt handed Mrs. Potter the key.

"You mean I can have it?" she asked, holding a tissue to her daughter's nose with one hand and stopping a fight between her sons with the other.

"It's yours," replied Matt, and the kids piled into the car. Five minutes later, the sun came out.