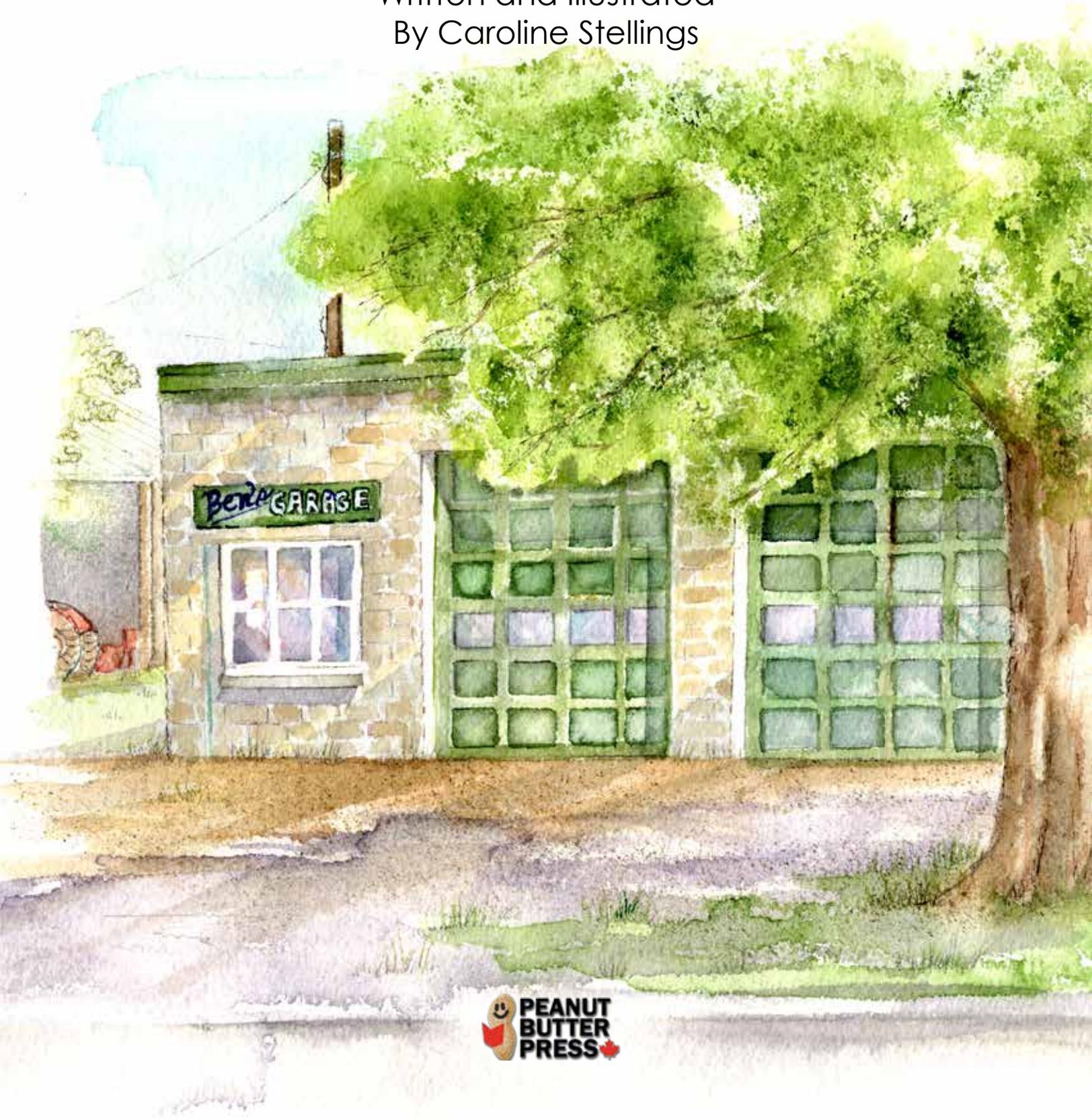


# Eighteen Wheels and a Dozen Roses

Written and Illustrated  
By Caroline Stellings



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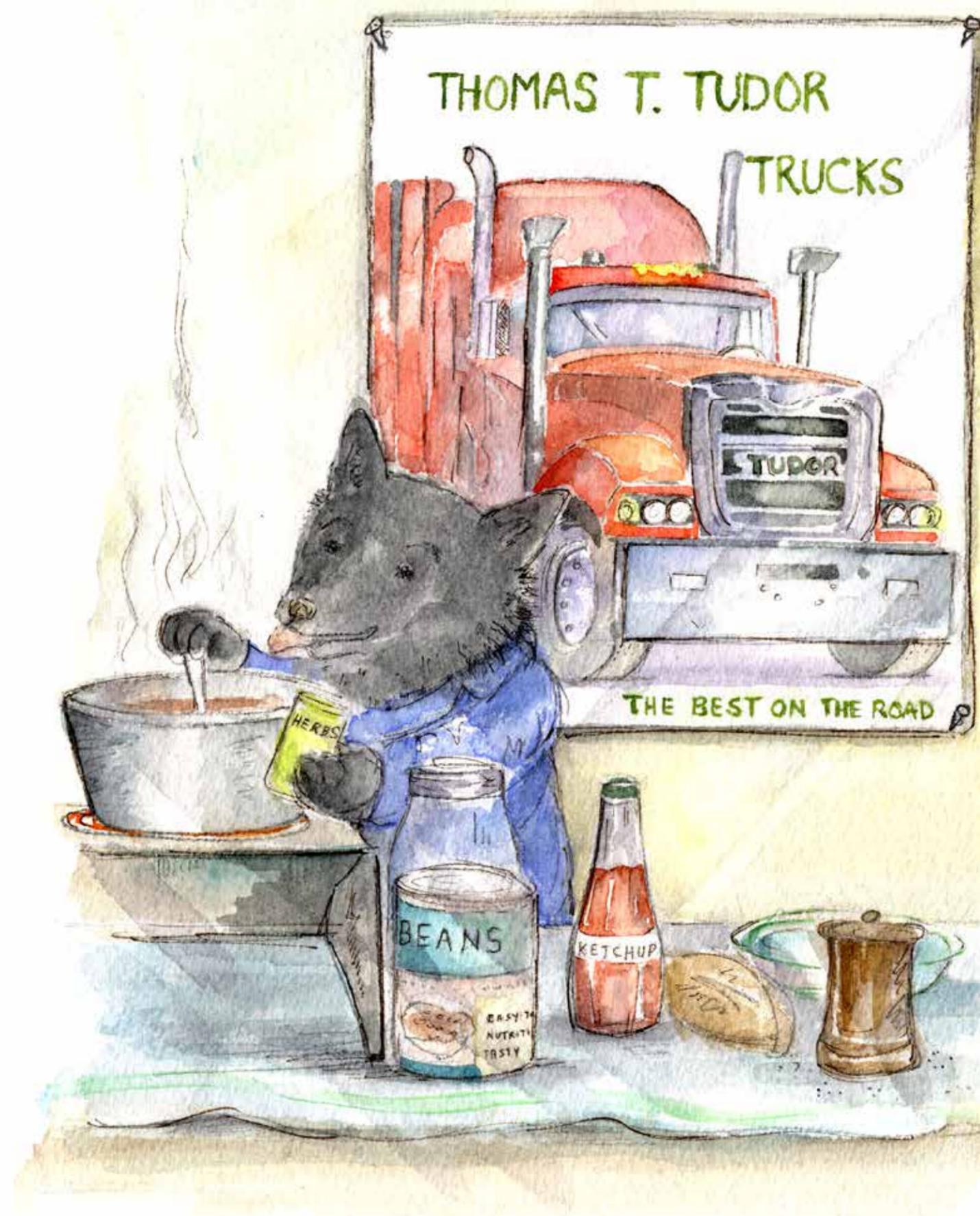
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For my beloved Schipperkes, Matt and Ben,  
and for my mother, who treasured them.



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.



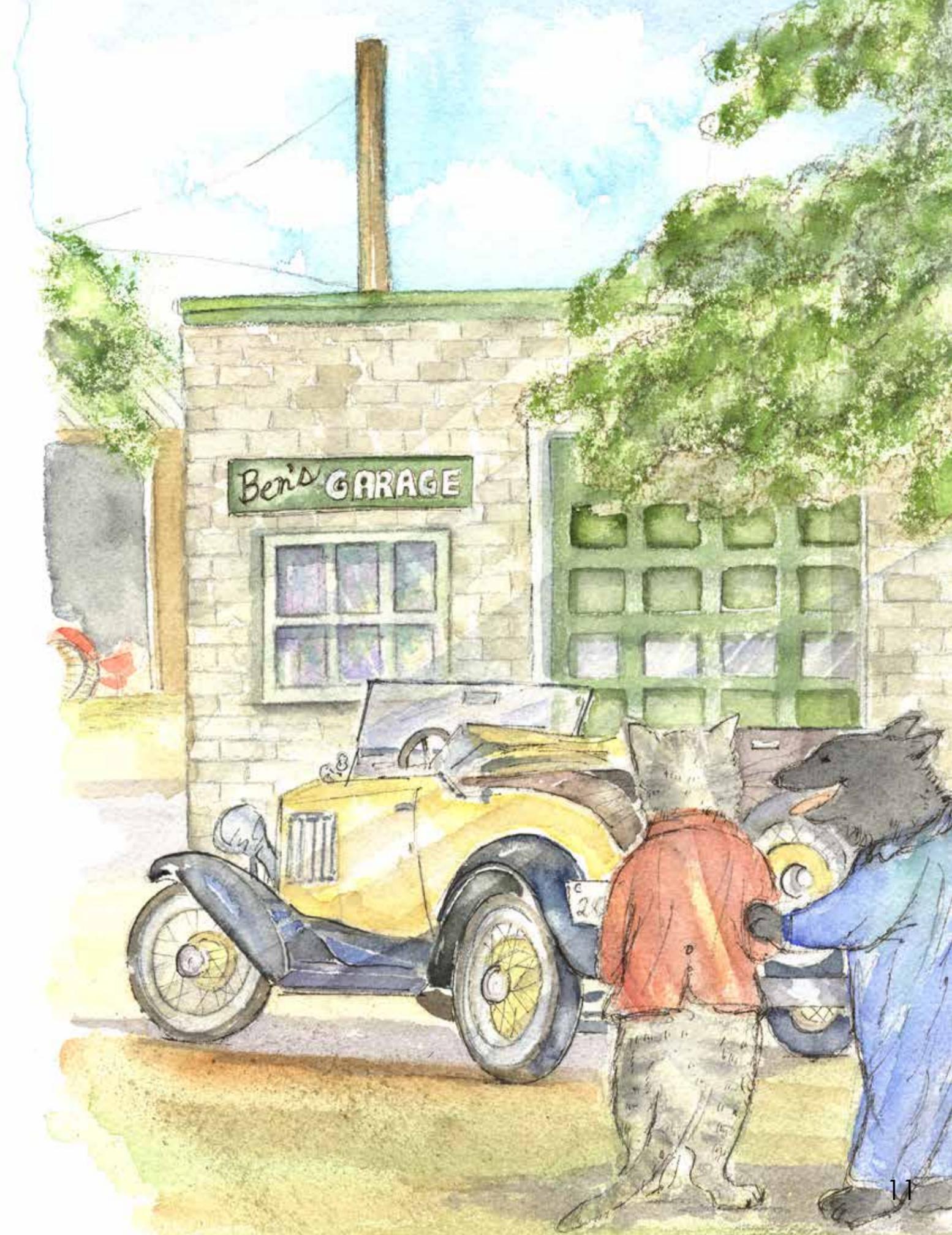
Ben looked at Matt.

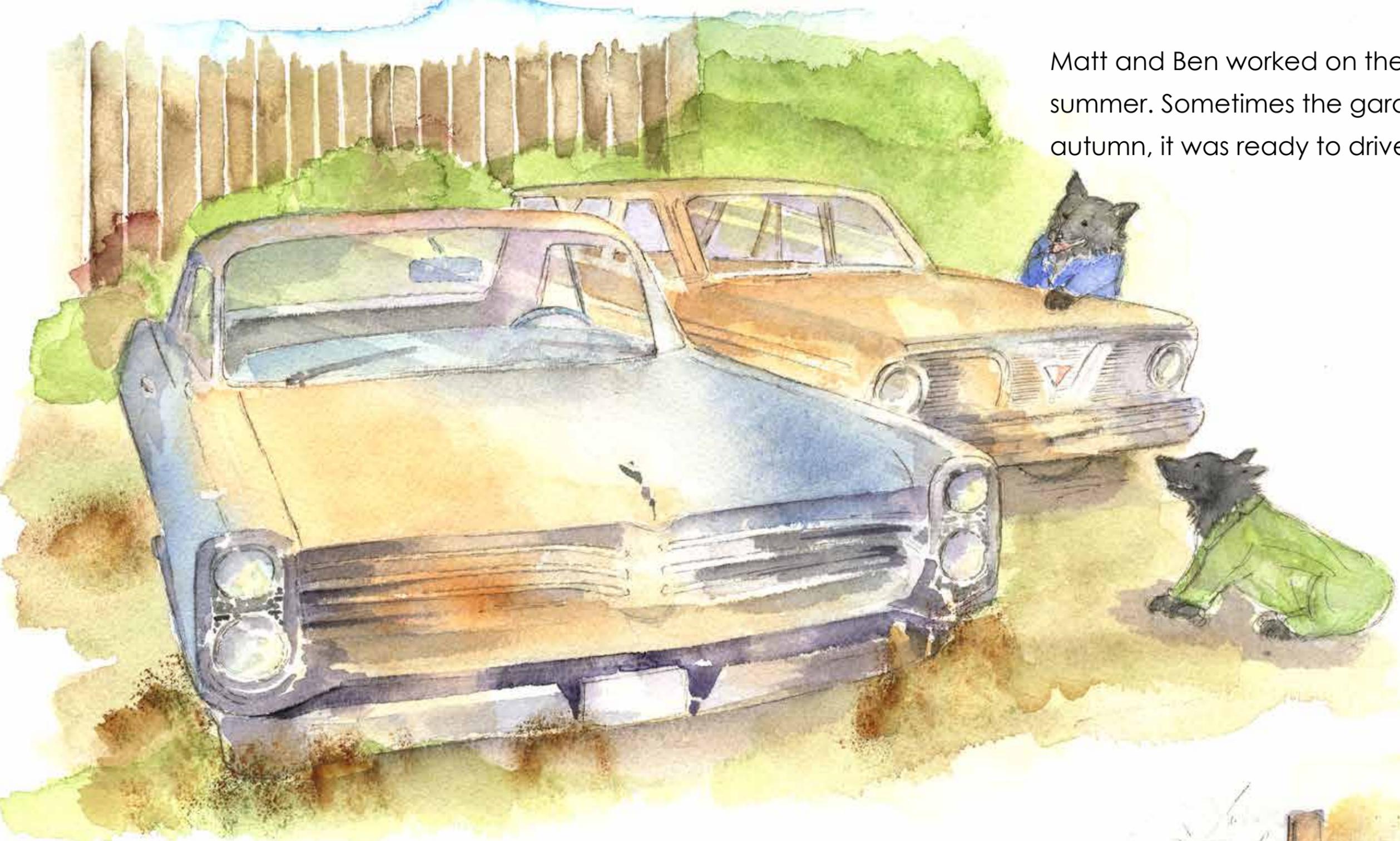
Matt looked at Ben.

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.

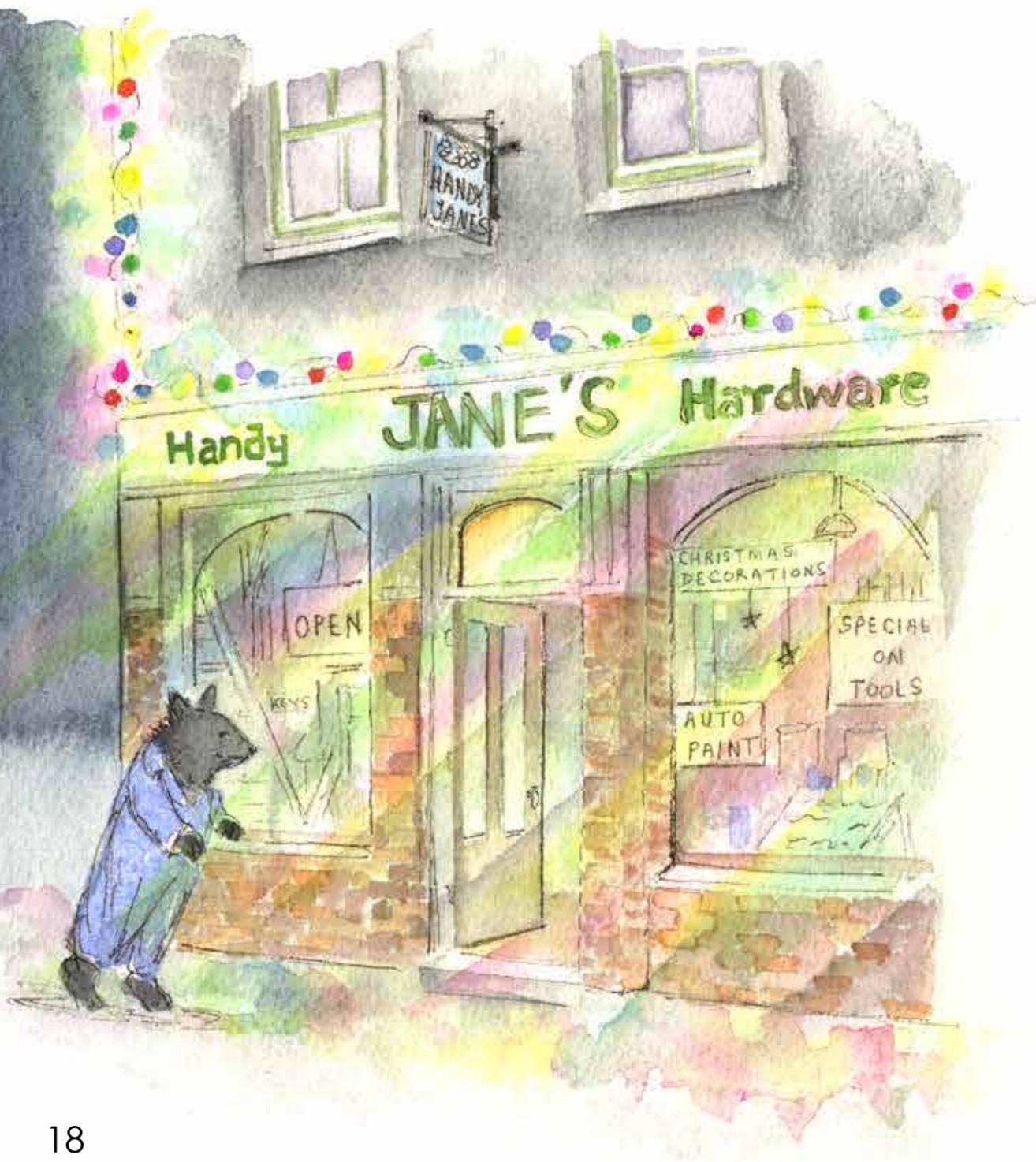


It wasn't long before Ben located a truck. It only had four wheels, but the price was right. It needed a radiator, transmission, brakes, rods, cylinders, valves, fans, gears, gauges, switches, shocks, and spark plugs.

Matt and Ben worked on the truck all autumn. Sometimes they couldn't keep their eyes open. It was almost Christmas when the truck was ready to drive.



Matt wanted to paint it first, so he headed to the hardware store. On the wall, he saw a calendar with a picture of an old truck. He hurried over to take a closer look. "This is just like my truck!" His voice was so loud that everyone in the store heard him and turned to look.



One of the customers rushed over. "Do you really have a truck like this?" he asked excitedly. His ears had perked up and his eyes were as big as saucers.





Then without waiting for Matt to answer, he pulled a faded photograph from his wallet. It was a picture of his wife, taken on their wedding day. She was standing beside a truck, holding a bouquet of roses.

"I'm so sorry. I should have introduced myself. My name is Tom, and I've been searching for a truck like the one in this photo. Searching newspapers, searching magazines, and searching used car lots." He paused. "It was Neptune green."

Matt knew what was coming next.

"If you let me have your truck, I will make it up to you. I promise," said Tom.

But Matt didn't want promises. He wanted a truck.



It was Christmas Eve when Tom arrived at the garage to pick up the truck. He had a dozen roses tucked under his arm.

Matt handed him the key. "It's yours," he said, and Tom drove off through the snow, smiling all the way.

Still, it would haunt him forever if he let the old fellow down. So he told Tom he could have the truck and returned home to paint it green, just like the one the couple had when they were young.



Later that night, Ben and Matt made hot chocolate. Ben asked Matt if he wanted to look for another wreck.

But Matt was done with fixing up wrecks.

He was done with working all night.

He was done with trying to find a truck.

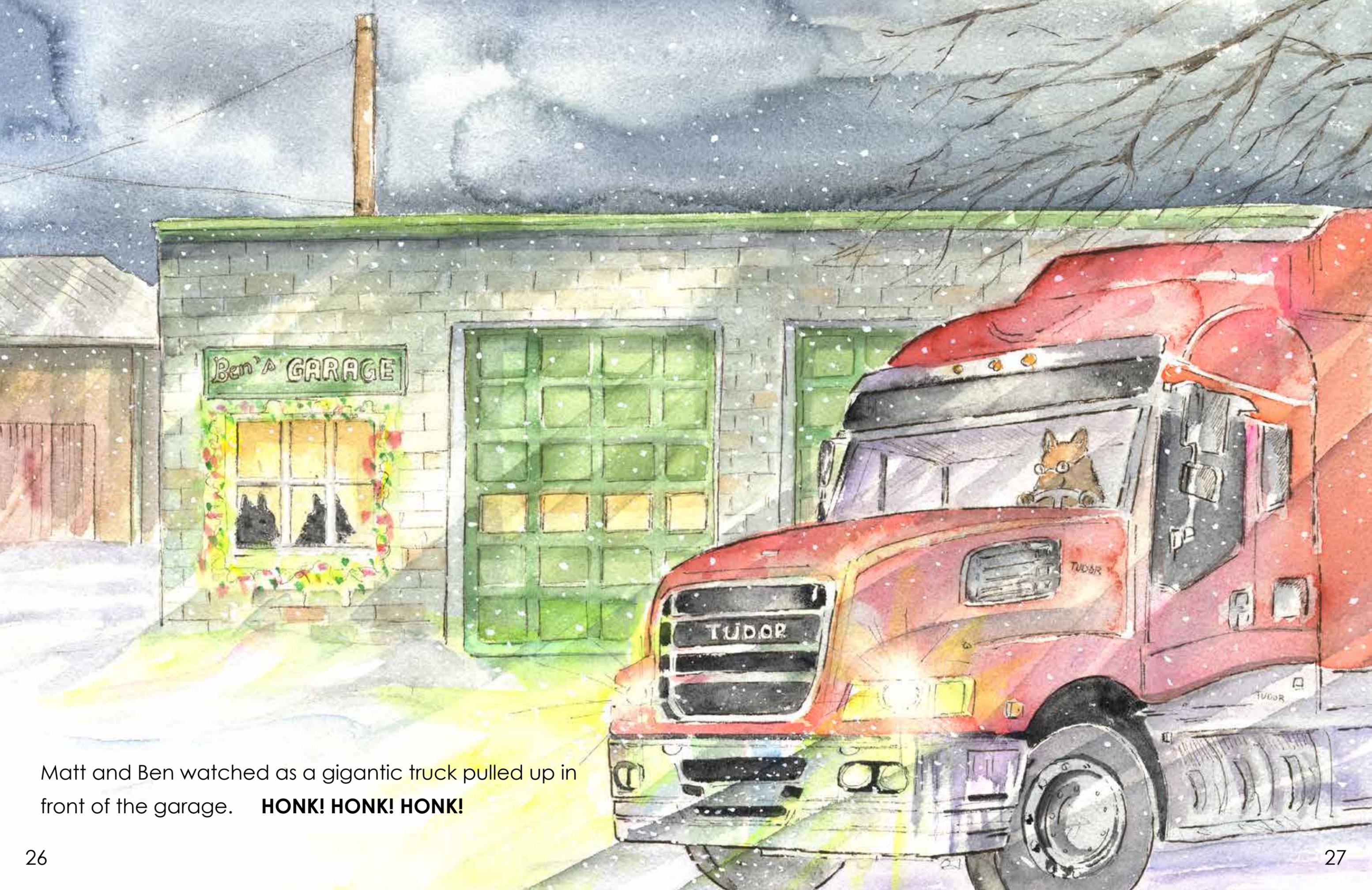


He took the last swig from his mug and clunked it down beside him.

**HONK! HONK! HONK!**

They went to the window.





Matt and Ben watched as a gigantic truck pulled up in front of the garage. **HONK! HONK! HONK!**



It was Tom.

He slid down from the driver's seat.

Matt whistled. "Wow! Where did you get that?"

"Didn't I tell you? I'm Thomas T. Tudor, president of the Tudor Truck Company." Tom gazed up at the eighteen-wheeler. "Isn't it a beauty? It's the best one we make. And guess what?"

Ben looked at Matt.

Matt looked at Ben.

Then Tom handed Matt the key.



"It's yours!"

