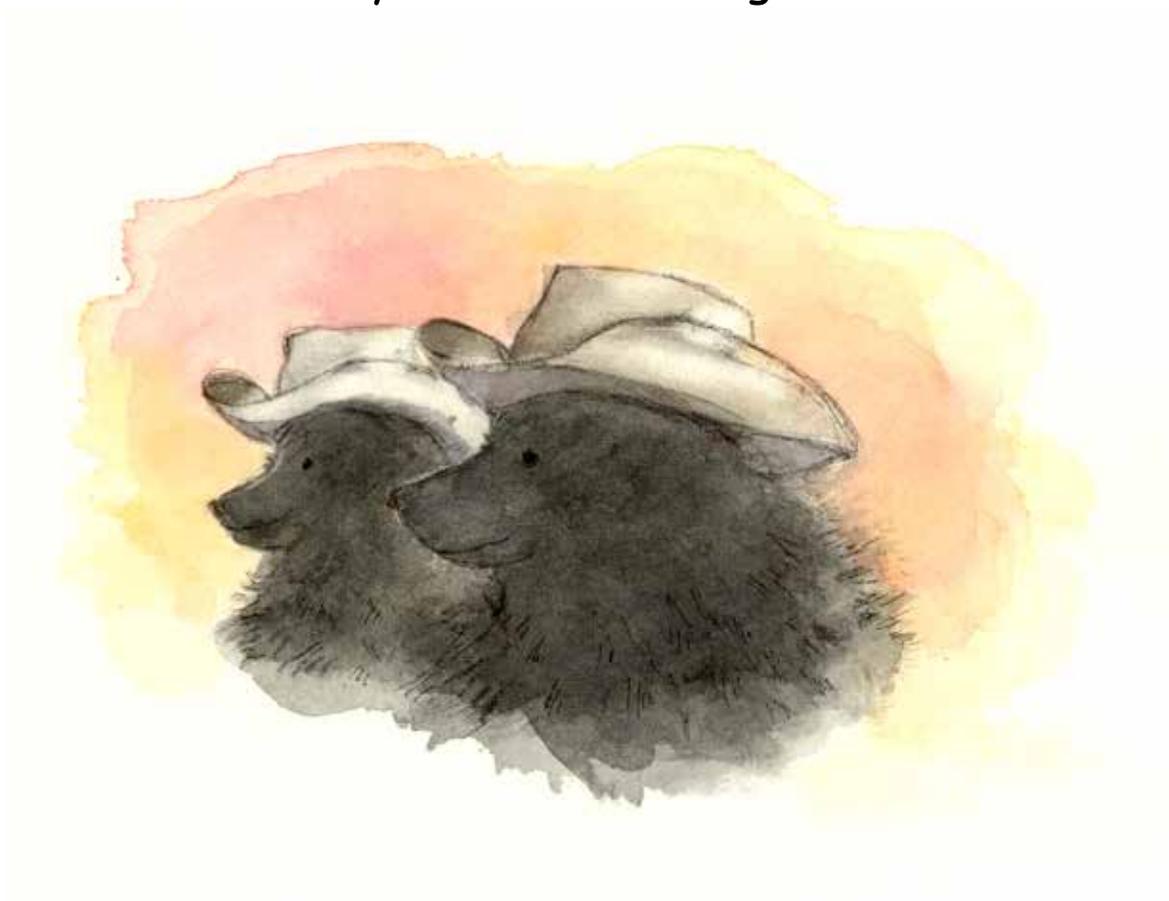


The Spaghetti Did It!

A Spaghetti Western

Written and Illustrated
by Caroline Stelling



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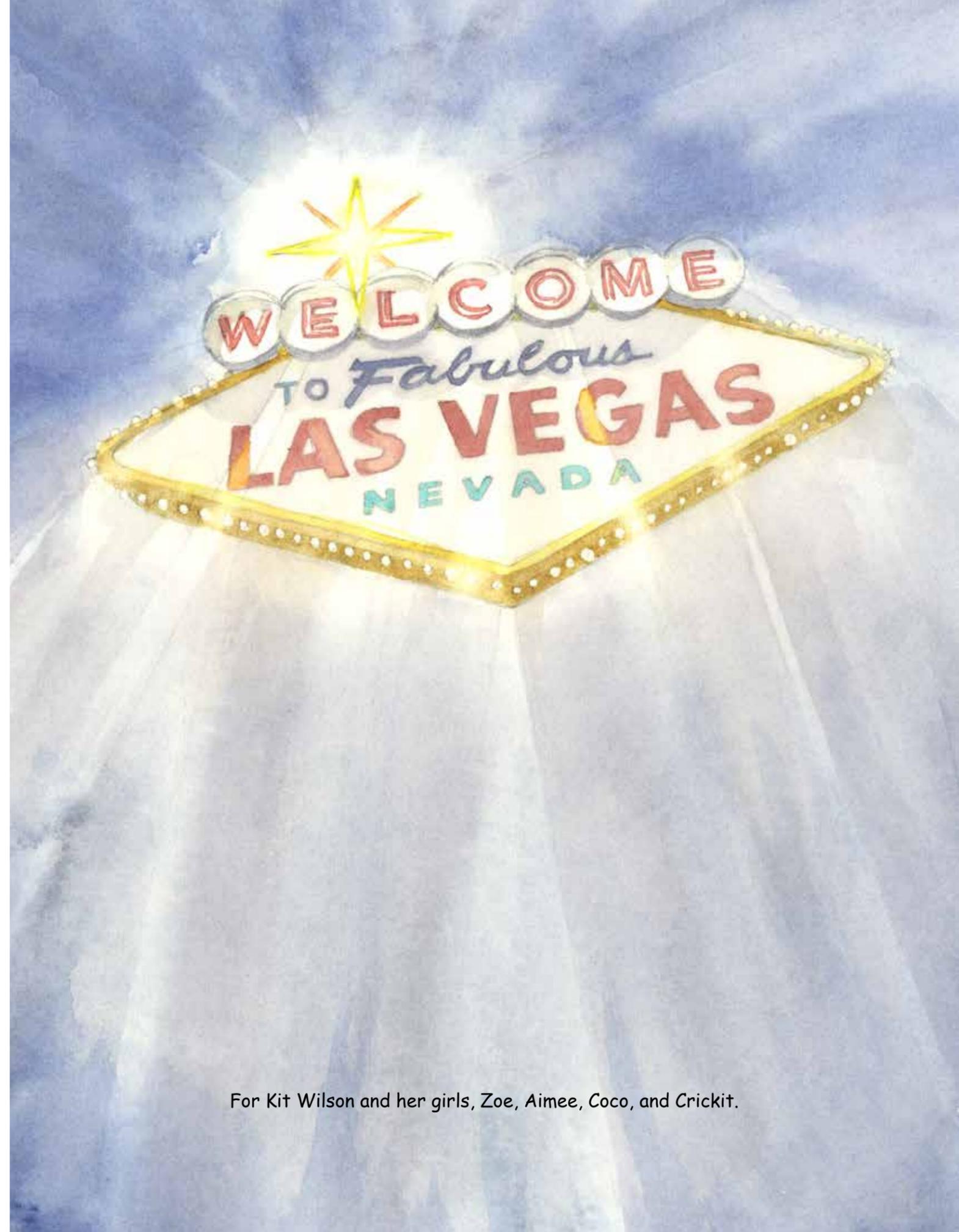
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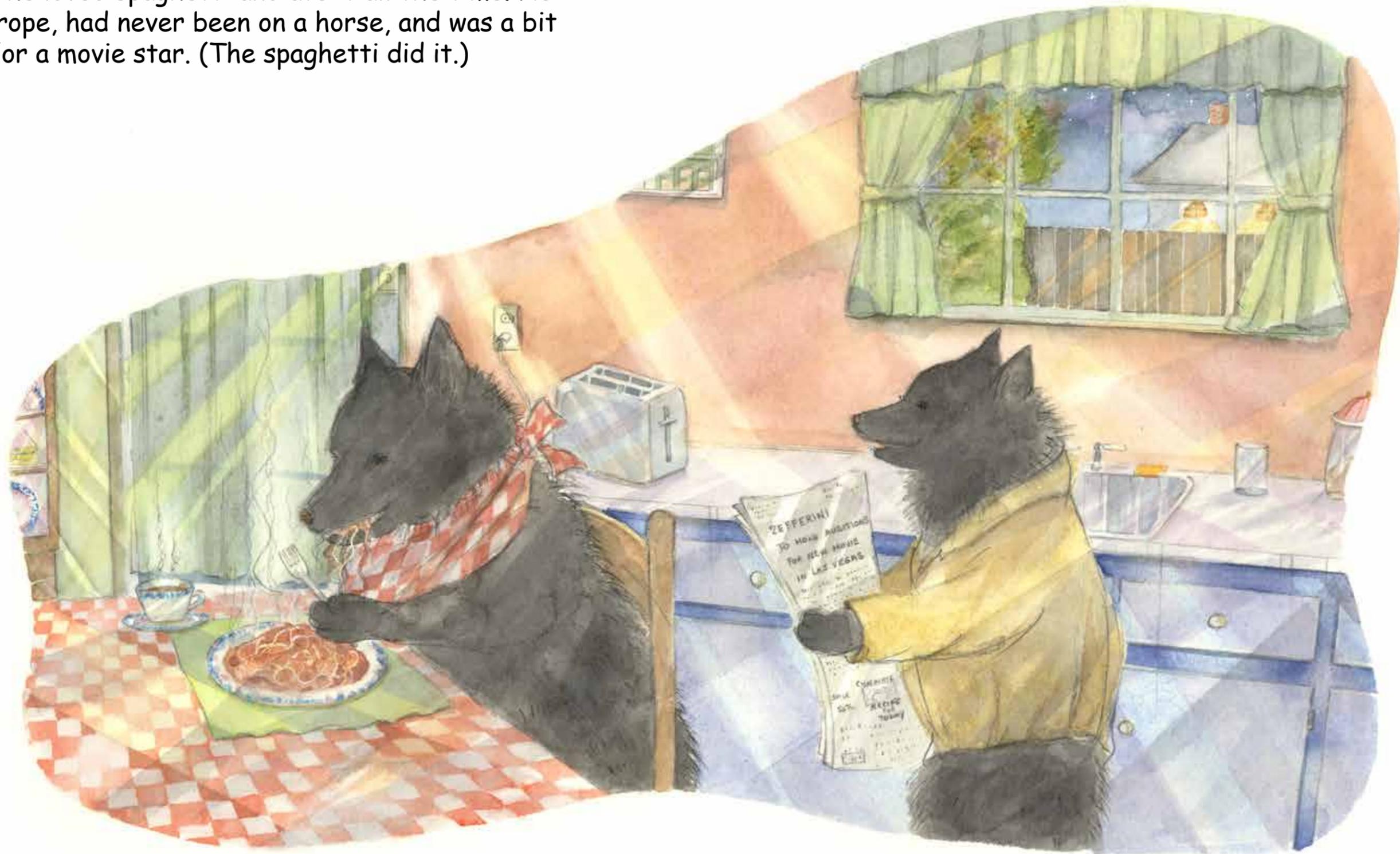


For Kit Wilson and her girls, Zoe, Aimee, Coco, and Crickit.

Steve was good at everything. Among his many talents were roping, riding, and doing the quick draw. He'd always wanted to be in a spaghetti western, so when he read that the Italian film director, Federico Zeffirelli, was holding auditions in Las Vegas, he ran to tell his brother Eddie.

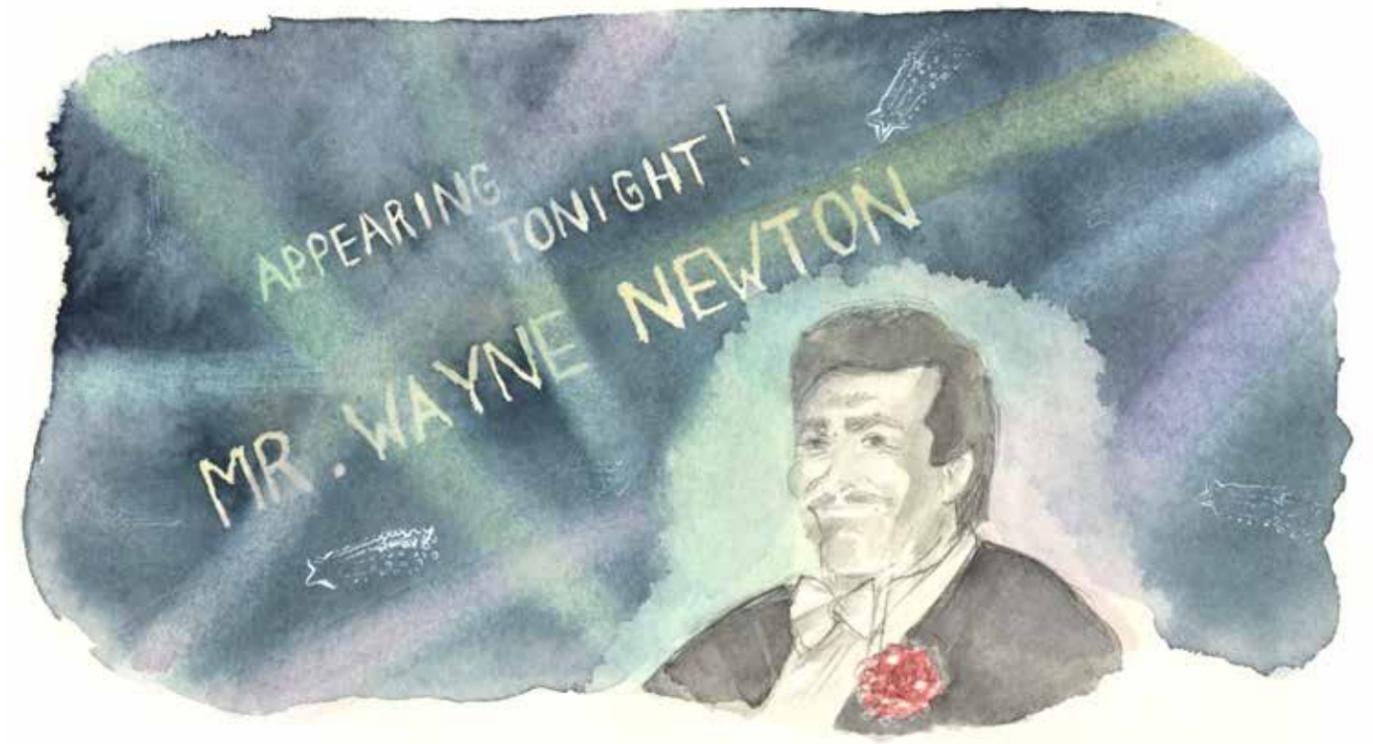


Eddie's only qualification for being in a spaghetti western was that he loved spaghetti and ate it all the time. He couldn't rope, had never been on a horse, and was a bit chubby for a movie star. (The spaghetti did it.)



But Eddie jumped at the chance to go to Las Vegas and see the famous celebrity Wayne Newton perform in real life. It would be worth the long ride in a sidecar to hear Mr. Newton sing "Danke Schoen," his first and most popular hit — and the song that Eddie loved best.

Now for those of you who have never heard of Wayne Newton and his old-fashioned music, it may be worth noting that he was a star in this glitzy city for so many years that he became known as Mr. Las Vegas. Something else you might not know is that the German phrase *danke schoen* means "thank you very much" in English.



Steve and Eddie drove for days and days. Every evening at dusk, they set up their tent and cooked dinner. Eddie heated canned spaghetti over a campfire. It wasn't as good as homemade, but they enjoyed eating under the stars.

Once Steve pulled onto Highway I-15, it was a straight run to Vegas. Just outside the city limits, they stopped at a roadside store for gas and to rent western costumes for the audition.



Steve found a spiffy sheriff's outfit, but the storekeeper had nothing in Eddie's size. They tried to squeeze him into a gambler's suit, but he burst the buttons. Steve apologized, explaining Eddie's craving for Italian food. The storekeeper didn't blame Eddie. He knew it was the spaghetti that did it.



Then he thought of a costume! He rifled through the racks and pulled out a Zorro cape and mask. "This is perfect!" he declared jubilantly. "It's one-size-fits-all!" But his mood changed when he went behind the counter and saw the poster on the wall. He rang up their bill and told them the whole story.



"Those squirrels have wreaked havoc. It began with a jar of peanut butter and a can of mixed nuts from this very store. Next it was bandanas to hide their faces. Now this! They've been seen all over the city, but they're fast. No one can catch them." The storekeeper shook his head from side to side. "Wayne Newton will not perform without his rhinestone-buckled shoes."



Eddie was devastated. He'd come such a long way to see Mr. Newton. But he kept a brave face, knowing how much Steve wanted to enjoy the afternoon in Las Vegas.



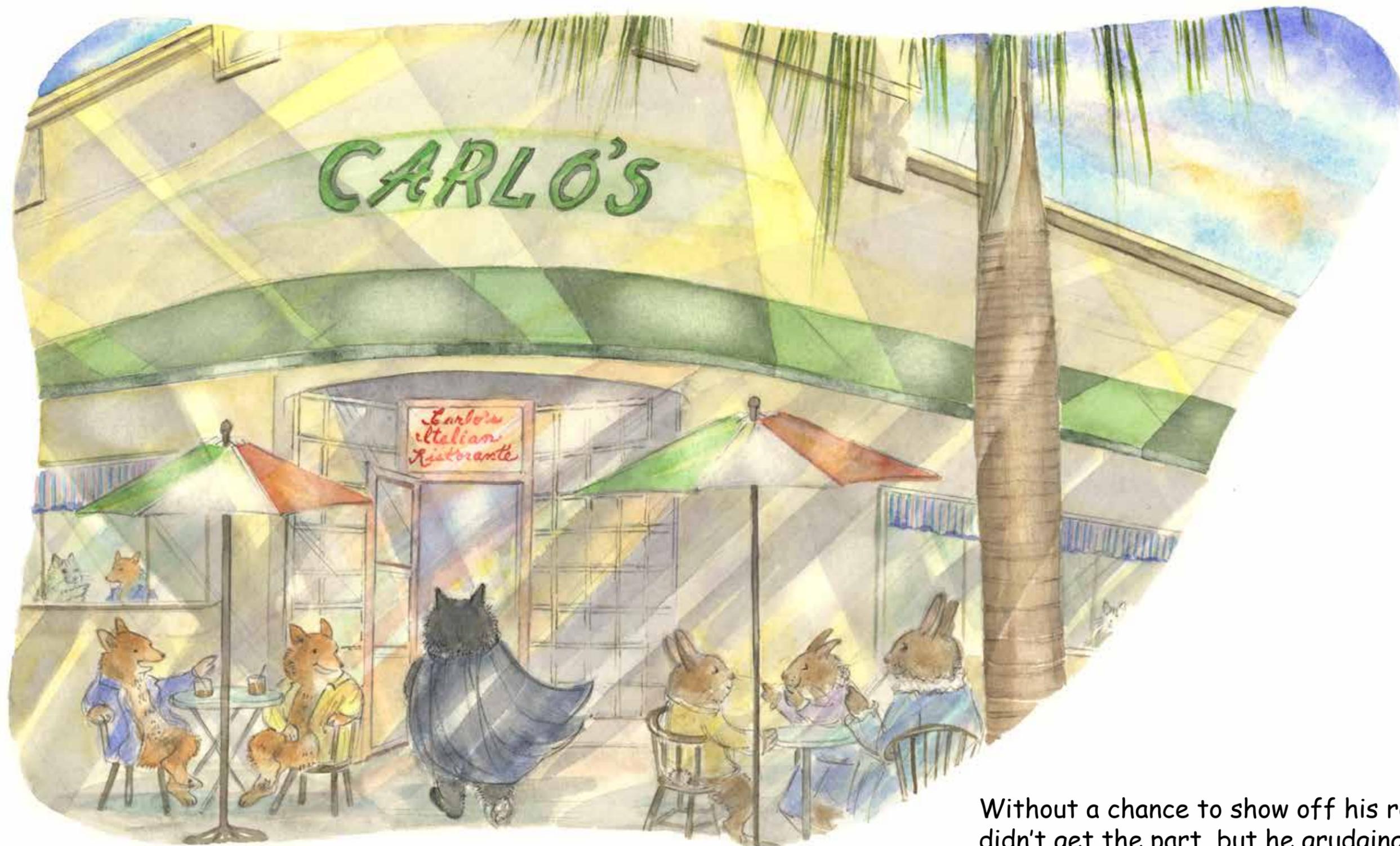
As evening fell on the sparkling city, they took one last drive down Fremont Street before looking for a campground nearby. They needed a good night's sleep because the audition for the male lead was bright and early the next day.

In the morning, Zefferini walked up and down the row, examining everyone carefully. He sat back in his chair, and then his booming voice announced through a megaphone: "Number seven!" Eddie counted from the beginning of the line. He was the seventh. "You're eliminated, number seven. I'll use the rest of you as extras in my movie."

Eddie wondered if his weight had anything to do with the director's decision. He had heard that the camera adds ten pounds.

Steve whispered, "It's not your fault, Eddie. The spaghetti did it."



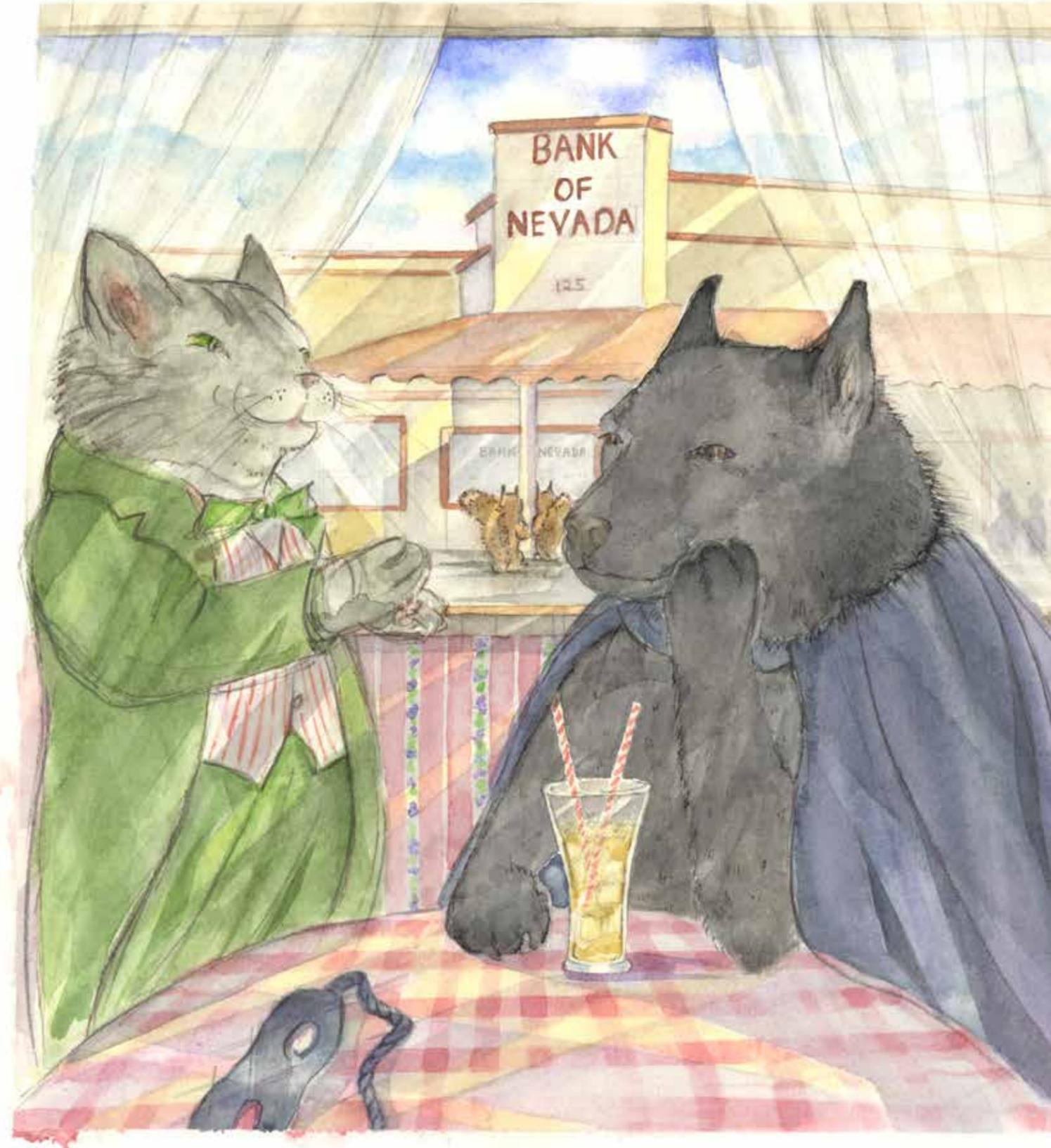


Without a chance to show off his roping skills, Steve didn't get the part, but he grudgingly decided to stay on as an extra. Eddie left his friend on the set and walked down the street to an Italian restaurant. He was sick of canned spaghetti and longed for a plate of the real kind.

While the pasta boiled, Eddie told Carlo everything that had happened to him since coming to Las Vegas — how he burst out of the gambler's suit, how he wasn't asked to be an extra, and worst of all, how he wouldn't get to hear Wayne Newton sing "Danke Schoen."

Eddie's disappointment was clear, so Carlo thought of a way to cheer him up. He offered Eddie all the spaghetti he could eat while he was in town if Eddie would pose in his cape and mask for a newspaper ad. All he had to do was climb up onto a horse and let Carlo take his photograph. The caption would read:

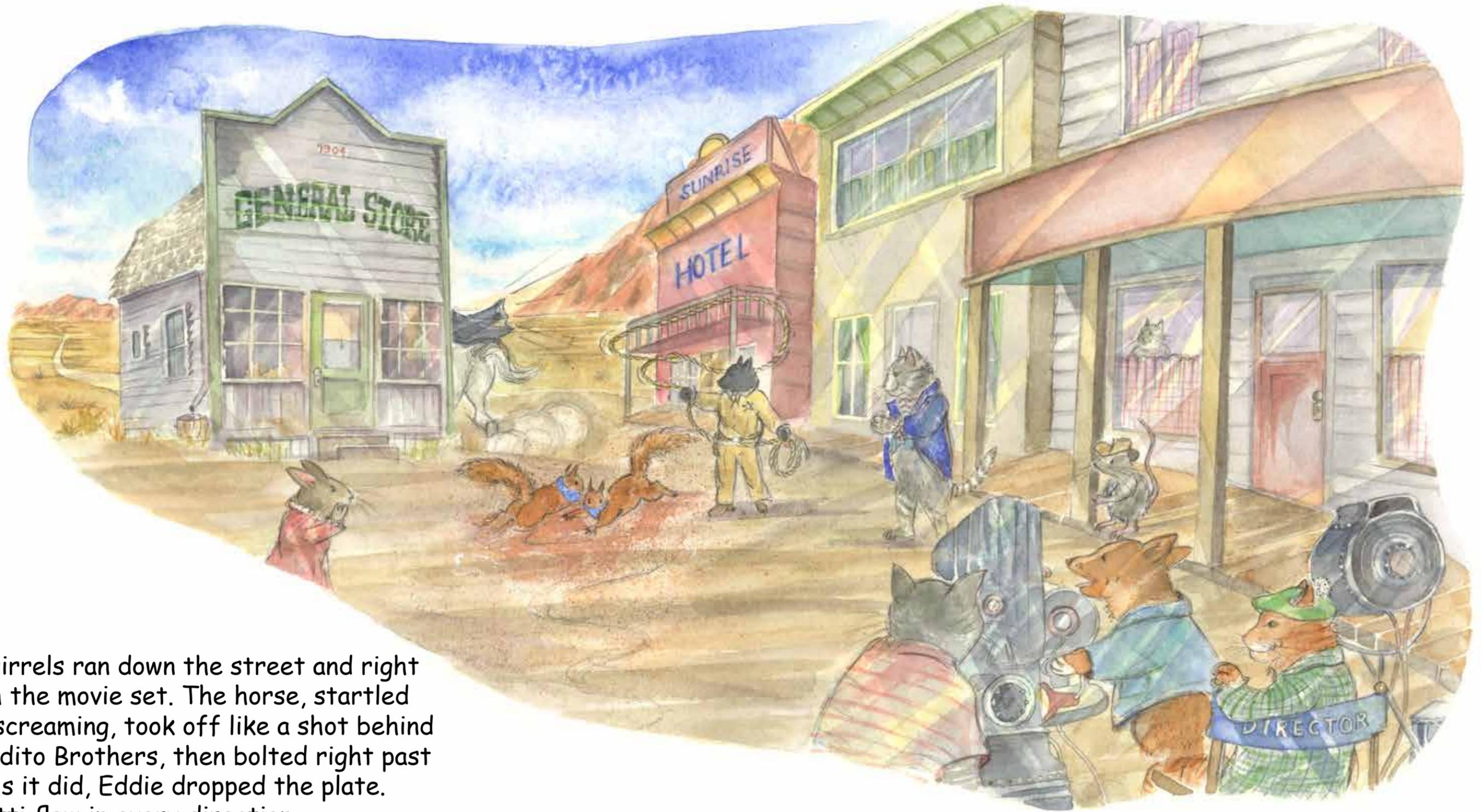
EVEN ZORRO LOVES TO EAT SPAGHETTI AT CARLO'S.



Carlo boosted Eddie into the saddle and handed him a plate of spaghetti, loaded with sauce. Just as Carlo went to snap the picture, Eddie spotted the Bandito Brothers across the road. They were going to hold up the bank!

"Stop, thieves!" he hollered. "Somebody stop them!"





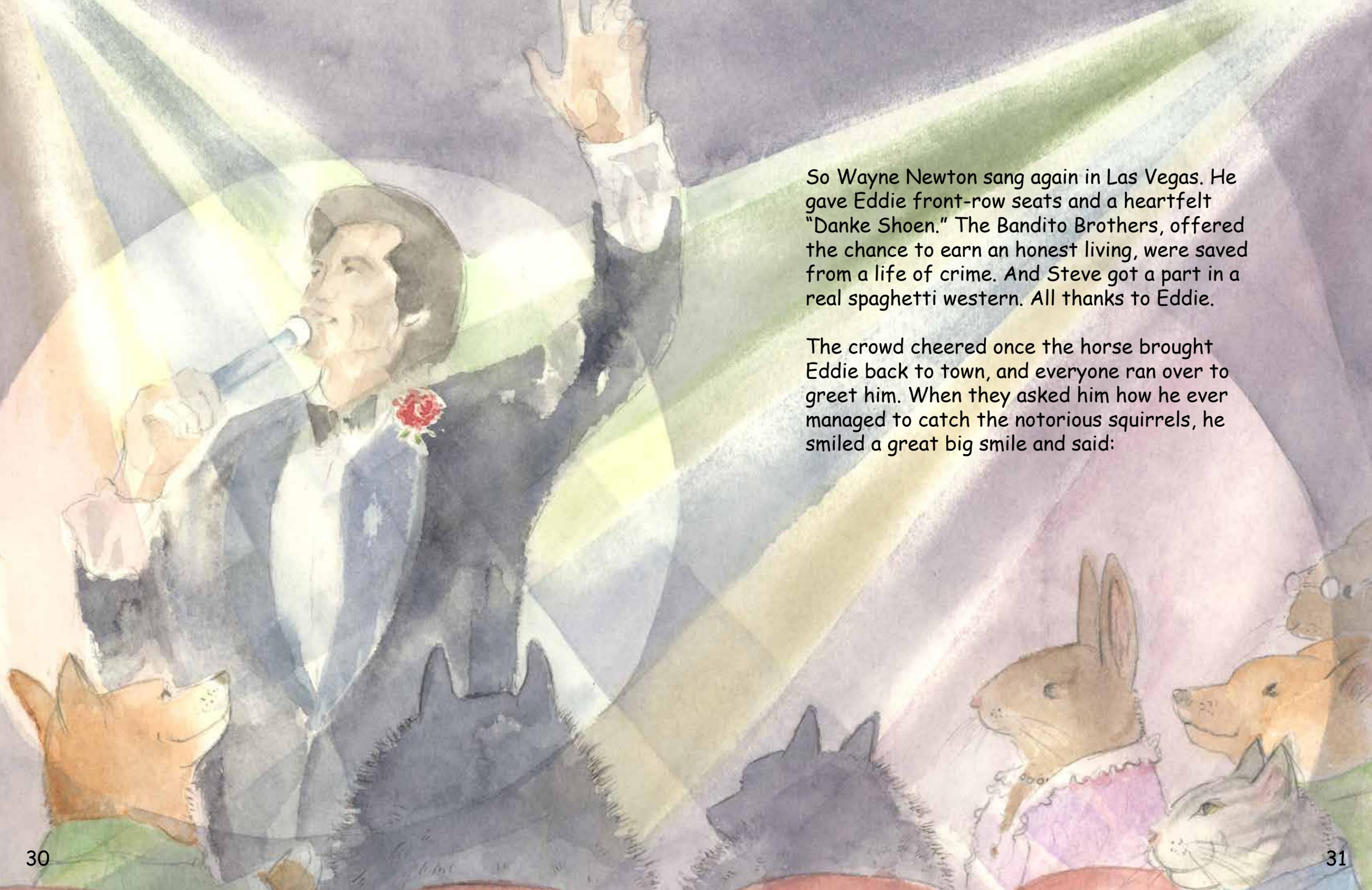
The squirrels ran down the street and right through the movie set. The horse, startled by the screaming, took off like a shot behind the Bandito Brothers, then bolted right past them. As it did, Eddie dropped the plate. Spaghetti flew in every direction.

The squirrels slipped in the sauce and skidded toward Steve. He grabbed a rope, tossed it into the air, twirled it 'round and 'round, and lassoed them so they couldn't move.



"Cut!" yelled Zefferini. "Cut and print!" He jumped out of his chair. "That was terrific! Who was that Zorro? I must have him in my movie." But Eddie and the horse were nowhere in sight. Then Zefferini shook Steve's paw. "I've never seen anyone throw a rope like that. I want you, too." Even the squirrels, who agreed to give back the rhinestone-buckled shoes, were cast as outlaws.





So Wayne Newton sang again in Las Vegas. He gave Eddie front-row seats and a heartfelt "Danke Shoen." The Bandito Brothers, offered the chance to earn an honest living, were saved from a life of crime. And Steve got a part in a real spaghetti western. All thanks to Eddie.

The crowd cheered once the horse brought Eddie back to town, and everyone ran over to greet him. When they asked him how he ever managed to catch the notorious squirrels, he smiled a great big smile and said:



"The spaghetti did it!"