

Our Wish

By **Ralph da Costa Nunez**
with Jenna Mandel

Introduction by
Allison Maher Stern

Illustrated by Madeline Gerstein

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Introduction

A forest can be a lonely place, especially when you are without a home. In *Our Wish* the realities of being homeless become very real for the animals involved. But *Our Wish* is not just a story about a rabbit family, a dog, a cat, and a bird—it is also a tale of the many homeless children across America today. They represent a new poverty in our country: over a million children find themselves living in shelters, welfare hotels, or doubled and tripled-up with family and friends. Like the homeless animals in this story, they do not have their own room, their own bed, or a safe place to play, but they all wish they did. They have experienced hunger, cold, loneliness and fear and they all wish they hadn't.

So come along with us on Mrs. Bun E., Butch, Carlos, and Francesca's journey, marked by a fear of the unknown yet filled with hope for tomorrow. As we follow their stories, keep in mind there are countless homeless children today who face similar journeys. Only when we as adults understand that the greatest numbers of homeless in America today are in fact children can we move our nation away from this new poverty and fulfill the wish of every young child for a clean, safe, and warm home of his or her own.



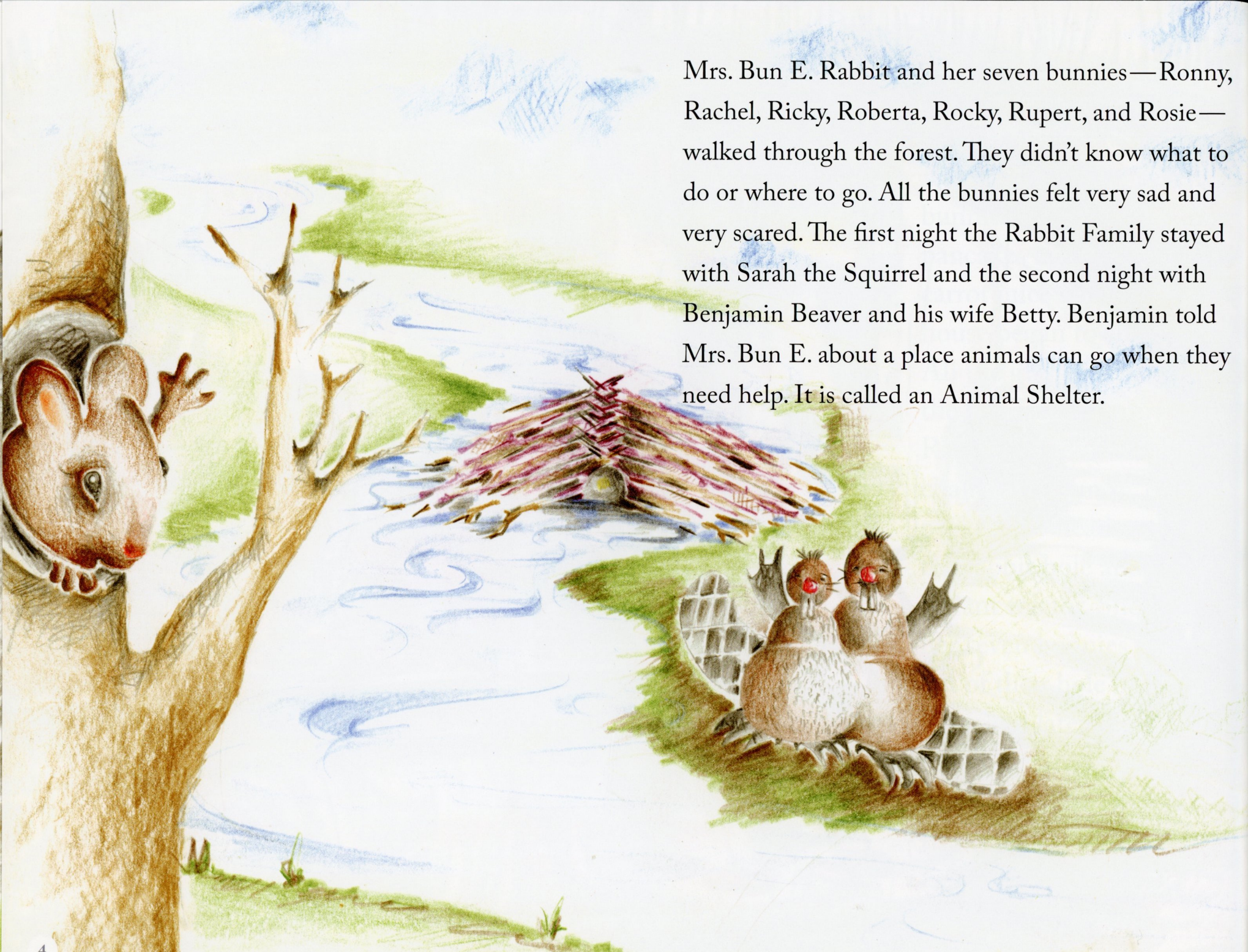
Allison Maher Stern
Trustee of The Wildlife Conservation Society
April 1997
New York City



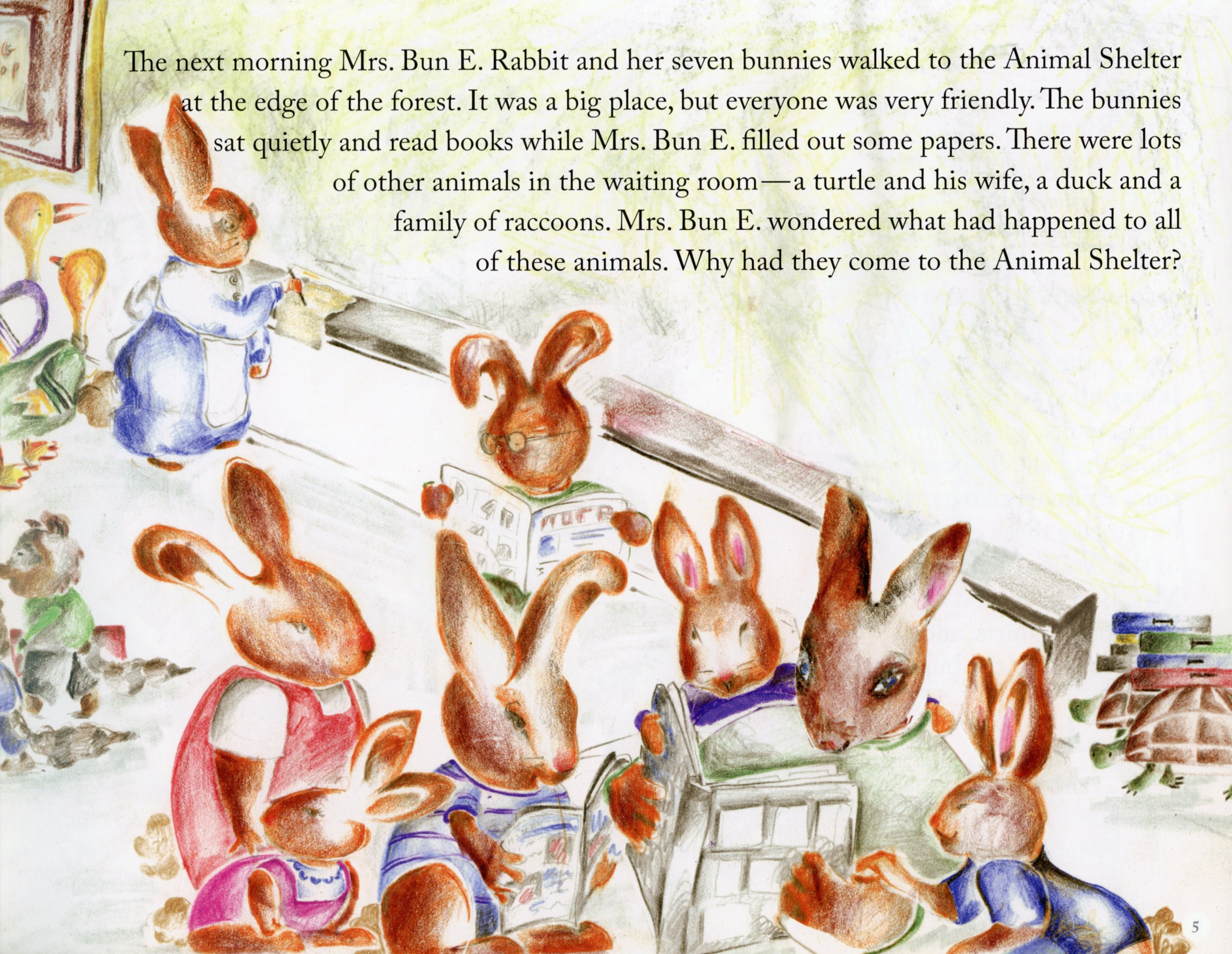
One morning Mrs. Bun E. Rabbit and her seven bunnies were eating carrot pancakes and drinking carrot juice when their house began to shake. All the glasses fell off the table, and Ronny Rabbit rolled out of his chair. Mrs. Bun E. Rabbit peeked her head out of the rabbit hole and saw a giant tractor. She and her seven bunnies scurried out of their hole in a hurry. A second later the tractor rolled over their home, destroying everything. In a flash, the Rabbit Family was homeless.



Mrs. Bun E. Rabbit and her seven bunnies—Ronny, Rachel, Ricky, Roberta, Rocky, Rupert, and Rosie—walked through the forest. They didn't know what to do or where to go. All the bunnies felt very sad and very scared. The first night the Rabbit Family stayed with Sarah the Squirrel and the second night with Benjamin Beaver and his wife Betty. Benjamin told Mrs. Bun E. about a place animals can go when they need help. It is called an Animal Shelter.



The next morning Mrs. Bun E. Rabbit and her seven bunnies walked to the Animal Shelter at the edge of the forest. It was a big place, but everyone was very friendly. The bunnies sat quietly and read books while Mrs. Bun E. filled out some papers. There were lots of other animals in the waiting room—a turtle and his wife, a duck and a family of raccoons. Mrs. Bun E. wondered what had happened to all of these animals. Why had they come to the Animal Shelter?



The bunnies sat in the waiting room for a long time. Rupert and Rosie, the youngest bunnies, fell asleep. The rest of the bunnies played tic-tac-toe and made goofy faces at each other. Mrs. Bun E. looked in a special closet next to the waiting room. It was filled with more shirts, pants, coats, and shoes than she had ever seen. Animals all over the forest gave these clothes to the Animal Shelter. Mrs. Bun E. picked out clean pants, shirts, and shoes for all of the bunnies.



Around lunchtime Olivia the Owl, the shelter director, told Mrs. Bun E. that their beds were ready. Mrs. Bun E. didn't want to wake up Rupert and Rosie, but she had so much to carry.



Just then, a friendly dog walked over and introduced himself.

“My name is Butch,” he said.

“I work with Olivia the Owl, helping new families when they come to the shelter.”

Butch took Ronny, Rachel, Ricky, Roberta, Rocky, Rupert, and Rosie into the shelter's giant sleeping room. There were three long rows of beds. The shelter was very crowded. Ronny looked after his brothers and sisters while Butch showed Mrs. Bun E. around the shelter. There was a gigantic bathroom that all animals shared, a cafeteria, a playroom, and a living room.

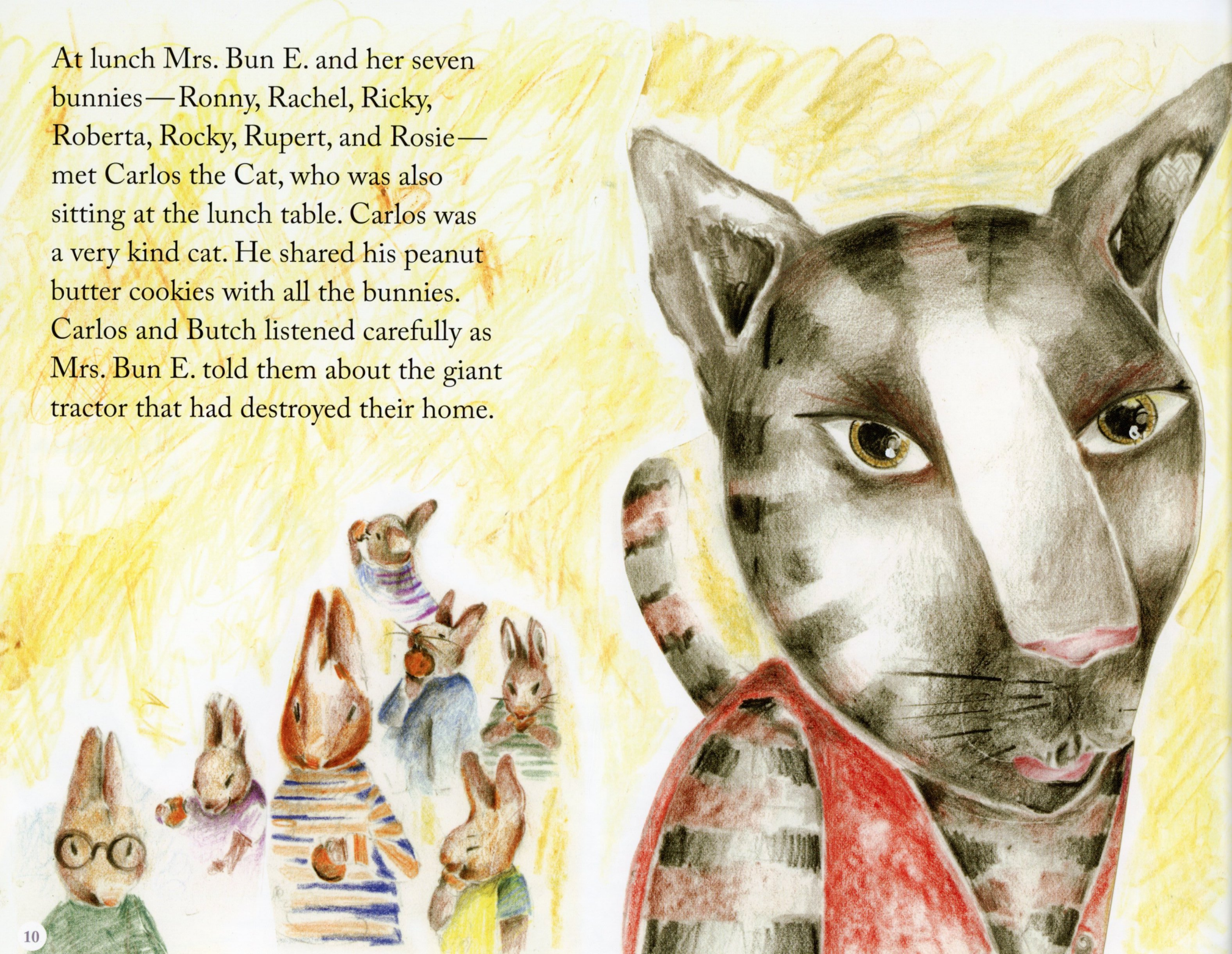


Mrs. Bun E. and her seven bunnies made their beds, took hot baths, and changed into their clean shirts, pants, and shoes. Then, they hopped to the cafeteria. The bunnies filled their plates with turnips, mashed potatoes, and carrot bread. All the bunnies were very hungry.

Butch the Dog had saved seats for the whole family.



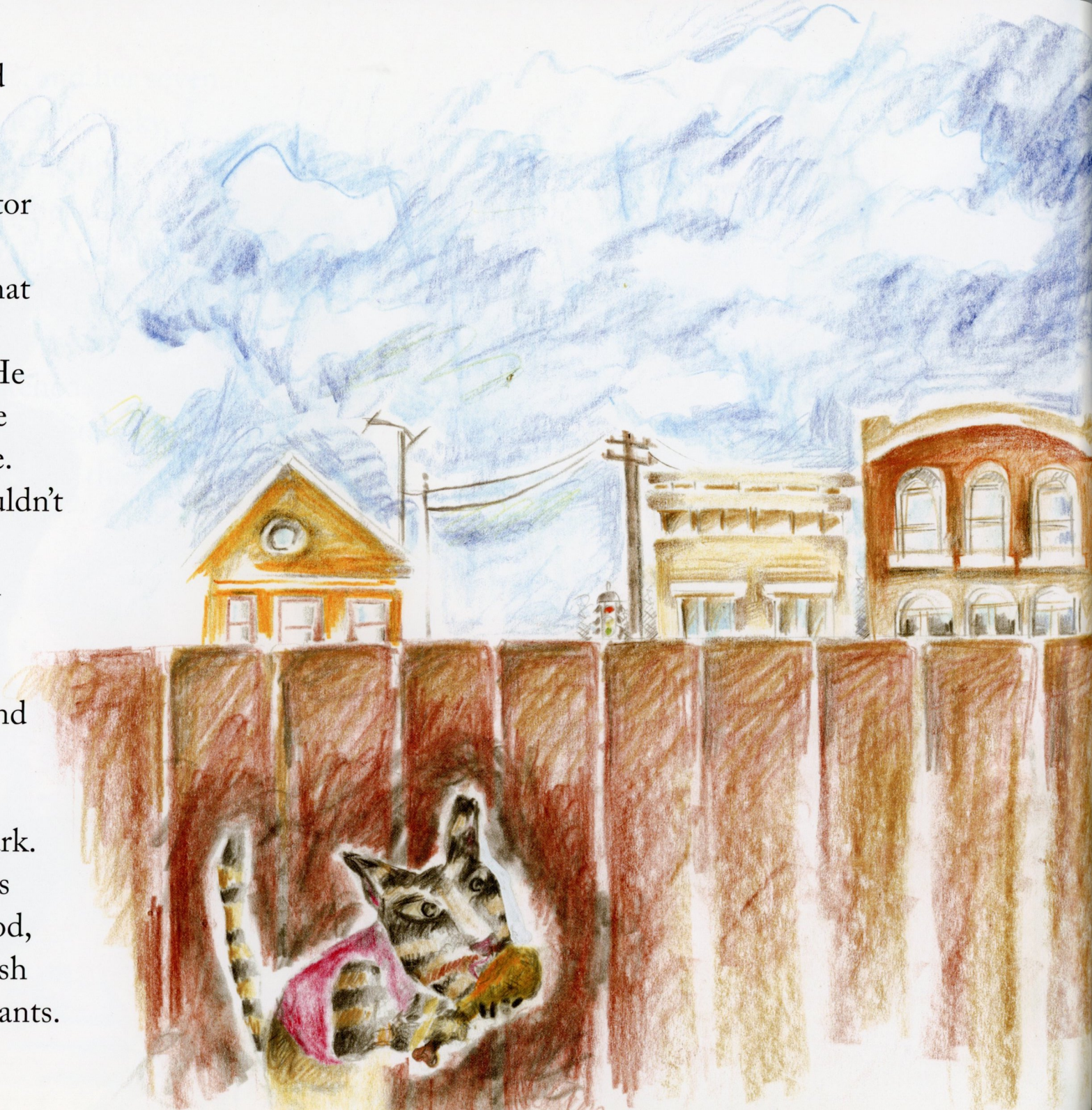
At lunch Mrs. Bun E. and her seven bunnies—Ronny, Rachel, Ricky, Roberta, Rocky, Rupert, and Rosie—met Carlos the Cat, who was also sitting at the lunch table. Carlos was a very kind cat. He shared his peanut butter cookies with all the bunnies. Carlos and Butch listened carefully as Mrs. Bun E. told them about the giant tractor that had destroyed their home.





SHELTER

Ricky Rabbit asked Carlos the Cat if his home had been destroyed by a tractor too. Carlos said no. Carlos explained that he had never had a home of his own. He was a street cat. The street was his home. Roberta Rabbit couldn't believe her ears. "But where did you sleep?" she asked Carlos. Carlos the Cat told Roberta and the other bunnies that he slept under bridges or in the park. And food, there was always plenty of food, especially in the trash cans behind restaurants.

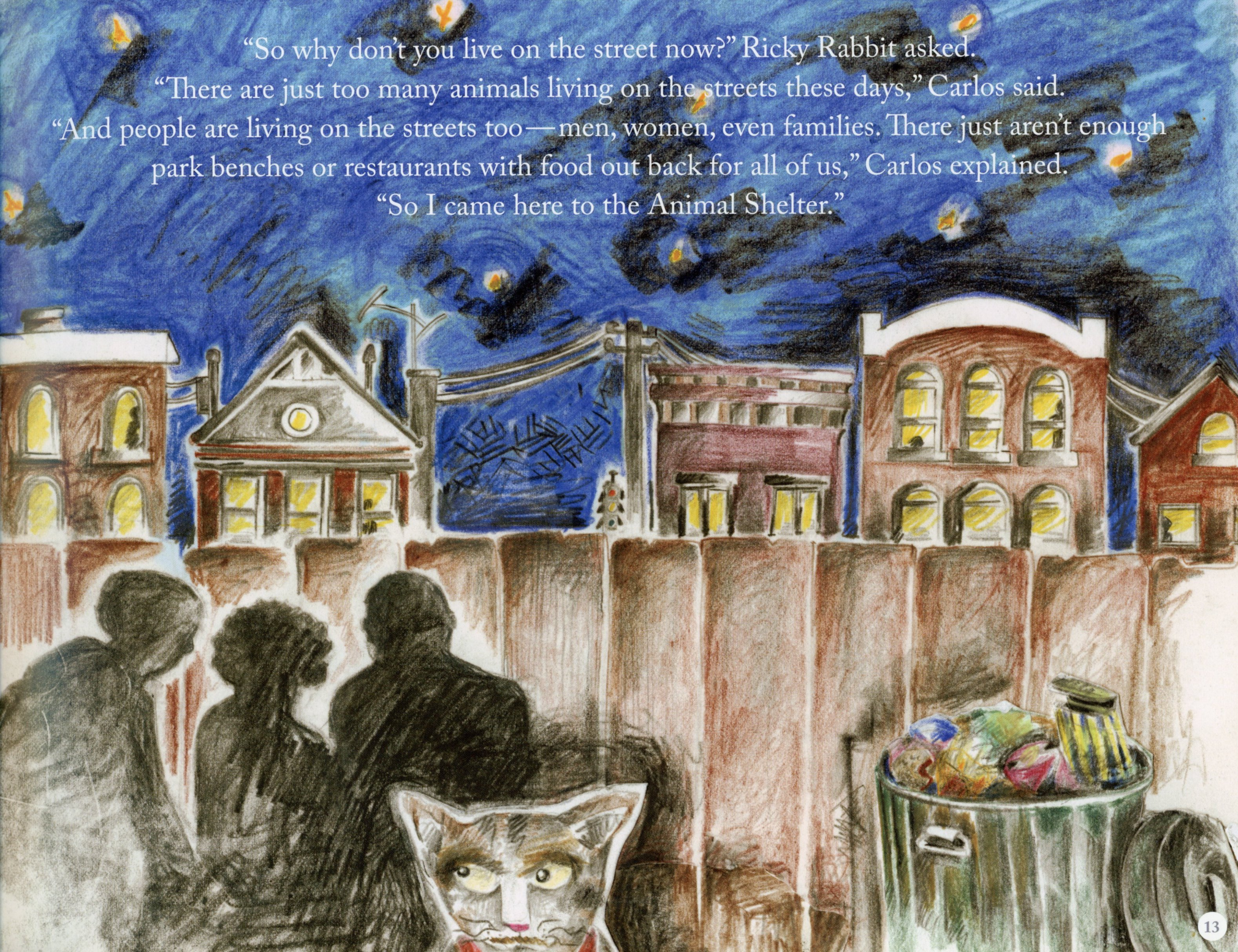


“So why don’t you live on the street now?” Ricky Rabbit asked.

“There are just too many animals living on the streets these days,” Carlos said.

“And people are living on the streets too—men, women, even families. There just aren’t enough park benches or restaurants with food out back for all of us,” Carlos explained.

“So I came here to the Animal Shelter.”



That afternoon, while the bunnies painted pictures in the playroom, Mrs. Bun E. went to talk to Olivia the Owl. Olivia helped the animals find new homes and new jobs.

Francesca, a beautiful canary, was waiting to talk with Olivia too. A month earlier Francesca had been flying south for the winter with her family. It started to rain very hard and Francesca lost her way.

Francesca's family would fly north again when spring arrived, but until then she was all alone and she needed a home.





Late
that night
Mrs. Bun E.
lay in her bed, trying
to fall asleep. It was hard
with so many animals in
one room, and the turtle was
snoring very loudly! Mrs. Bun
E. kept thinking about Carlos
the Cat and Francesca and all the
other animals with no place to go. She
felt lucky to have all of her bunnies—
Ronny, Rachel, Ricky, Roberta, Rocky,
Rupert, and Rosie—with her, even if they
didn't have a home of their own. This year was
almost over. Maybe next year would be better
for everyone.



At lunch the next day all the animals were talking about the party at the shelter that night. It was December 31 — tomorrow the new year would begin. The animals spent all afternoon making paper chains to decorate the living room and preparing cakes, sandwiches, and punch for the New Year's Eve party. After dinner all the animals gathered in the living room. They played lots of games — Pin the Tail on the Donkey and Duck, Duck, Goose. At midnight they cheered in the new year, laughing and dancing. All the animals made wishes too. Mrs. Bun E. wished for a new home.





When Mrs. Bun E. opened her eyes she saw

Butch the Dog sitting alone in the corner.

“Butch, it’s the new year. Why do you look so sad?” Mrs. Bun E. asked, quite concerned

about her friend. “Oh, I was just thinking

about the family I used to live with, and how

much I miss them.” Butch had lived with

a very nice family for many years. During

the day he would watch the house while the

parents were at work and the children were

at school. In the evenings he would play with

the children. He liked his job very much.

But then the family moved away and

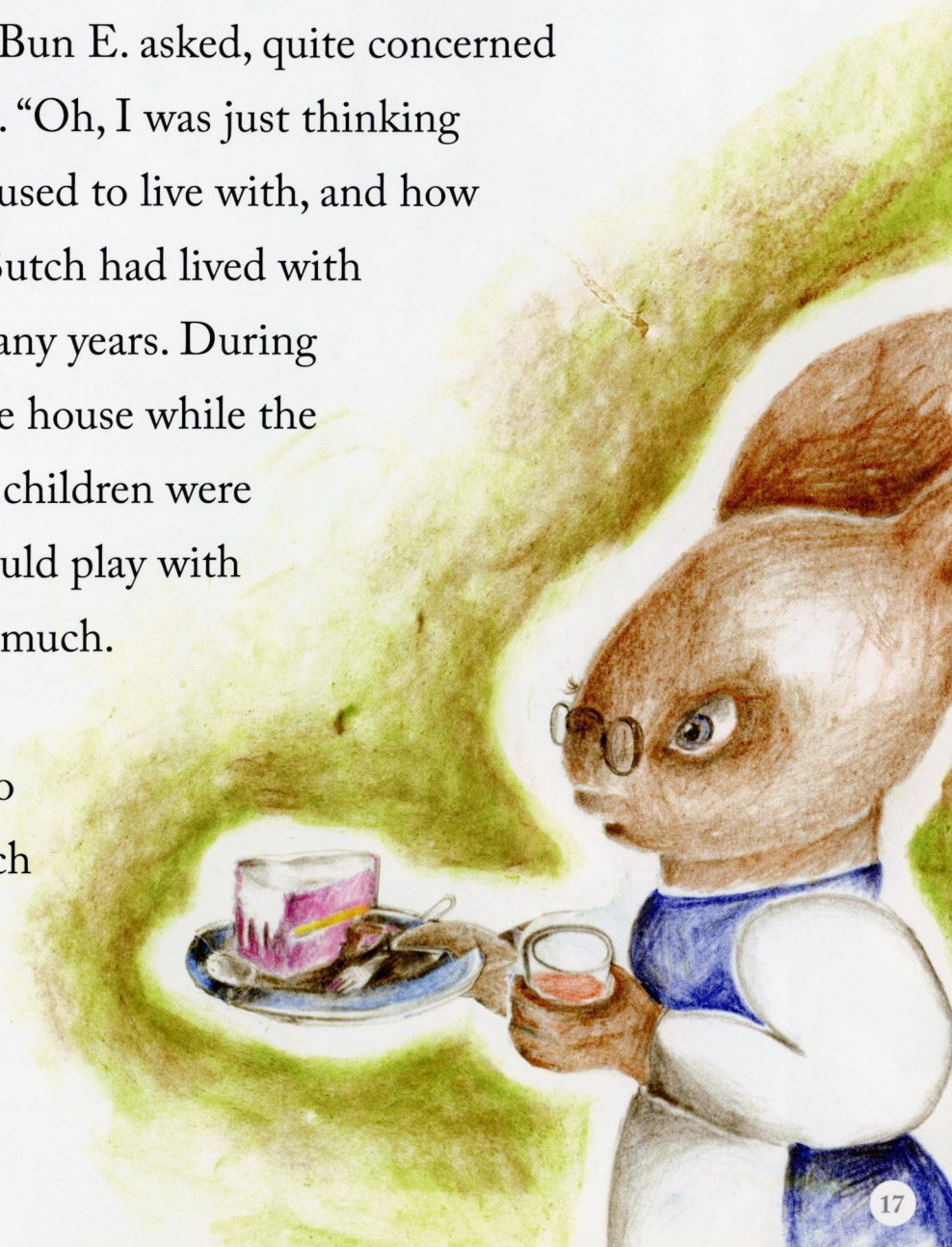
couldn’t take Butch along. So he came to

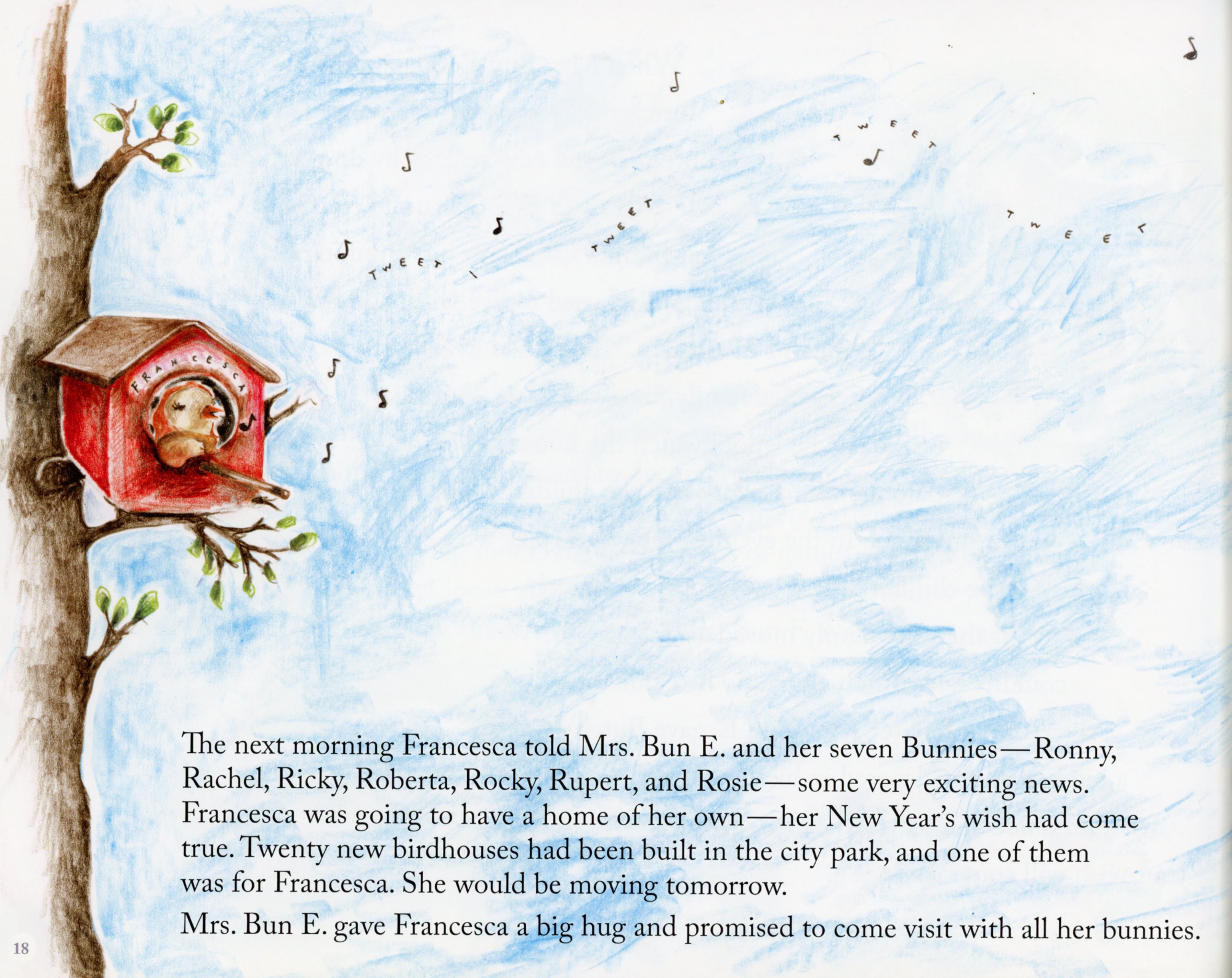
the Animal Shelter. Mrs. Bun E. gave Butch

a big hug and whispered in his ear, “If you

wish for a new family to take care of, maybe

your wish will come true.”





The next morning Francesca told Mrs. Bun E. and her seven Bunnies—Ronny, Rachel, Ricky, Roberta, Rocky, Rupert, and Rosie—some very exciting news. Francesca was going to have a home of her own—her New Year's wish had come true. Twenty new birdhouses had been built in the city park, and one of them was for Francesca. She would be moving tomorrow.

Mrs. Bun E. gave Francesca a big hug and promised to come visit with all her bunnies.



The next week Carlos' wish came true. Olivia the Owl helped Carlos find a job and a new home. Carlos was going to live and work at the Senior Center down the street. Being a very musical cat, Carlos was given the job of entertaining the old people and visiting the sick people in their rooms.




The next day Olivia the Owl found Mrs. Bun E. and all her bunnies in the cafeteria. She gave every one of them a bright, shiny, red apple.

“Do you like apples?” Olivia asked. All the bunnies nodded yes.


Olivia had found a wonderful new home for the Rabbit Family—on an apple orchard. There would be lots of space and fresh air and, of course, lots of apples. All the little bunnies hugged and kissed one another and danced around the table, holding their apples tightly.

Mrs. Bun E. just sat and smiled—her New Year’s wish had finally come true.



A whimsical illustration of a rabbit family cleaning a room. The room has a large, light green rug and white walls. Several rabbits are engaged in different cleaning tasks: some are sweeping the floor with brooms, one is holding a bucket, and others are carrying laundry. The rabbits are dressed in various colorful clothes like sweaters, overalls, and dresses. The scene is lively and depicts a busy day of household work.

Moving day was very exciting for the Rabbit Family. Ronny, Rachel, and Ricky swept the floor and tidied up while Roberta, Rocky, Rupert, and Rosie helped their mother pack. Then Mrs. Bun E. and her children walked down the street to the Senior Center and said good-bye to Carlos the Cat. Next, they visited Francesca in the park.

A watercolor illustration of a dog and a young girl. The dog, on the left, has a white face with brown patches around its eyes and ears, and its tongue is hanging out. The girl, on the right, has dark hair and is wearing a purple shirt. They are both looking towards the viewer. The background is a soft yellow glow, and several small red hearts are floating around them.

Olivia the Owl was busy helping a family of possums when a woman and her daughter came into the shelter. "Can I help you?" Olivia asked politely. "Yes, maybe you can," the woman replied. "I need a dog to watch my house and play with my children. He must be brave, but friendly and kind, too." "I know the perfect dog," Olivia the Owl said, with a big smile across her round face. Olivia quickly found Butch and introduced him to the woman and her daughter, Christina. The little girl fell in love with Butch immediately, and her mother was very impressed with Butch's past job experience.



As Butch the Dog was leaving with his new family, the Rabbit Family returned.

Christina was very excited to meet Mrs. Bun E. Rabbit and her seven bunnies—Ronny, Rachel, Ricky, Roberta, Rocky, Rupert, and Rosie. She told them to come visit Butch whenever they liked. A taxi arrived to take the Rabbit Family to the apple orchard. Butch put all the bunnies' things in the trunk. After lots of hugs and a few tears, the bunnies crawled into the back seat of the taxi. They waved and waved until Olivia, Butch, and Christina disappeared. Then they curled up for the long trip to the orchard. Soon all the bunnies were fast asleep—it had been a long morning. Mrs. Bun E. looked at all her sleeping bunnies and thought about their wonderful new home. Her wish had come true.

The
End



Our Wish is the first in a series of children's book published by White Tiger Press. Each book addresses the issue of homelessness and poverty, and the approachable story lines make ideal points for discussion.

Our
Wish



cooper's
tale



Sally's Journey



VOYAGE



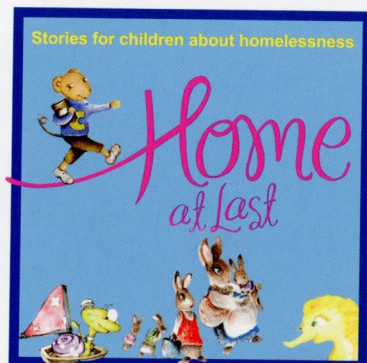
mango's quest



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Home at Last is a collection of animated videos on family homelessness and poverty for grades K–5, based on the children's books by Ralph da Costa Nunez.

For bonus content, including a Learning Toolbox for educators, author interviews, activities and games, and ideas for helping in your community, or for more information on how to order, please go to: www.ICPHusa.org/HomeAtLast or email: info@ICPHusa.org.



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All of the children's books published by White Tiger Press are the result of a collaboration between three organizations: White Tiger Press, the Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness, and Homes for the Homeless. Please visit our Web sites for further information on family homelessness and to see what is being done every day in New York City and around the country to educate the public about family homelessness and to describe some of the approaches that are at work to end homelessness for all children and families.

After their home is destroyed, Mrs. Bun E. Rabbit and her family find themselves in need of a helping hand. Come along with Ronny, Rachel, Ricky, Roberta, Rocky, Rupert, Rosie, and Mrs. Bun E. as they make the often difficult journey to their new home.



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