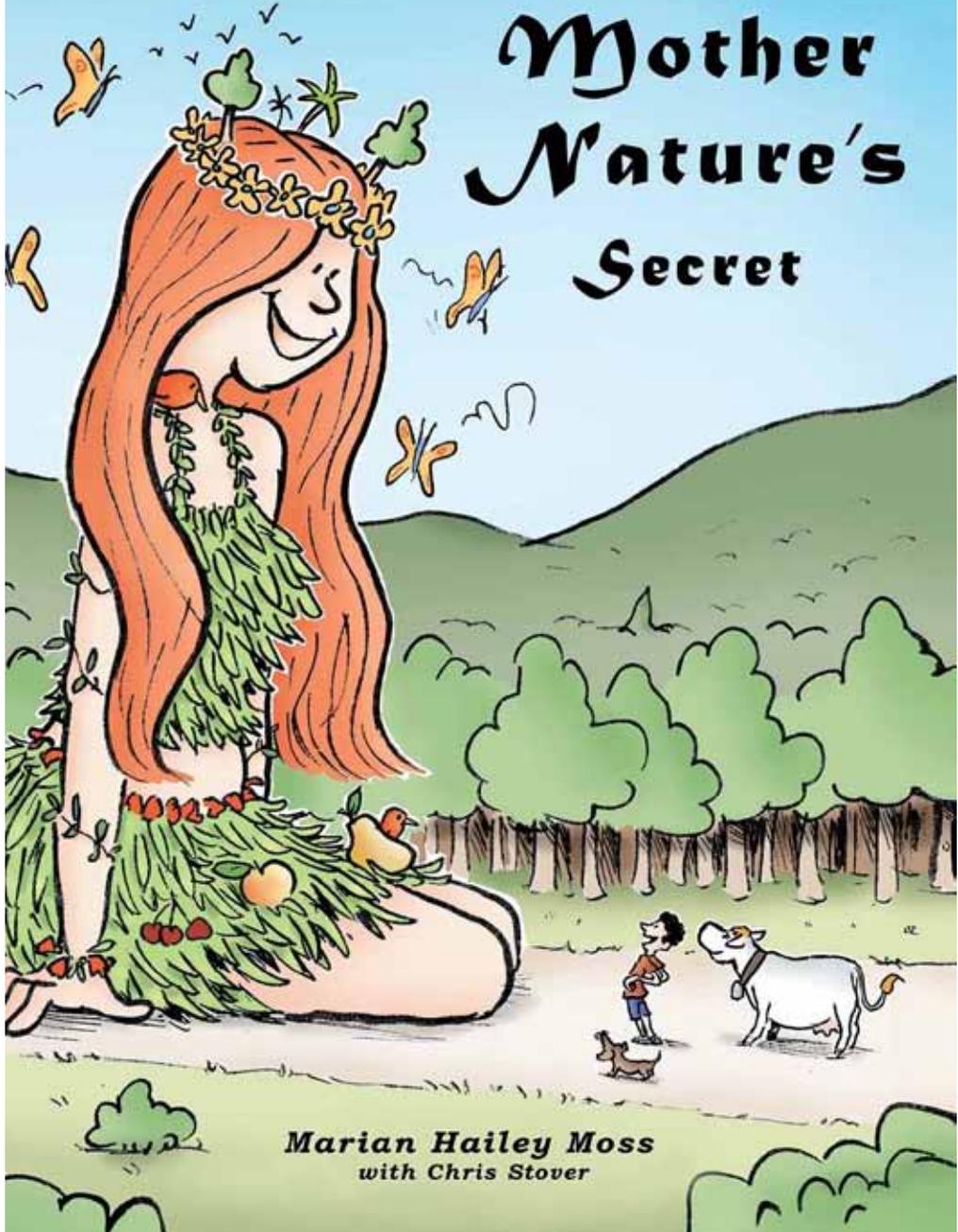


Mother Nature's Secret



Marian Hailey Moss
with Chris Stover

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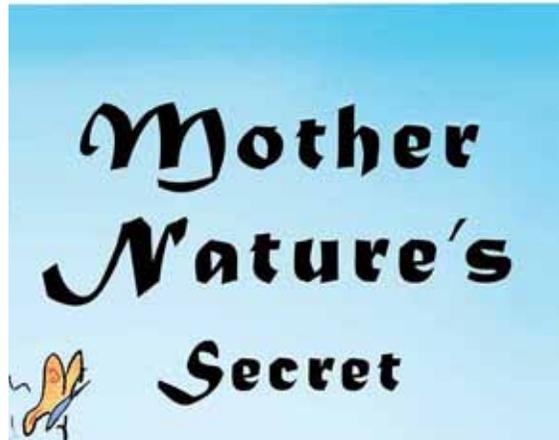
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By Marian Hailey-Moss
with Chris Stover

Illustrated by Marc Chalvin

for Elizabeth

Chapter 1

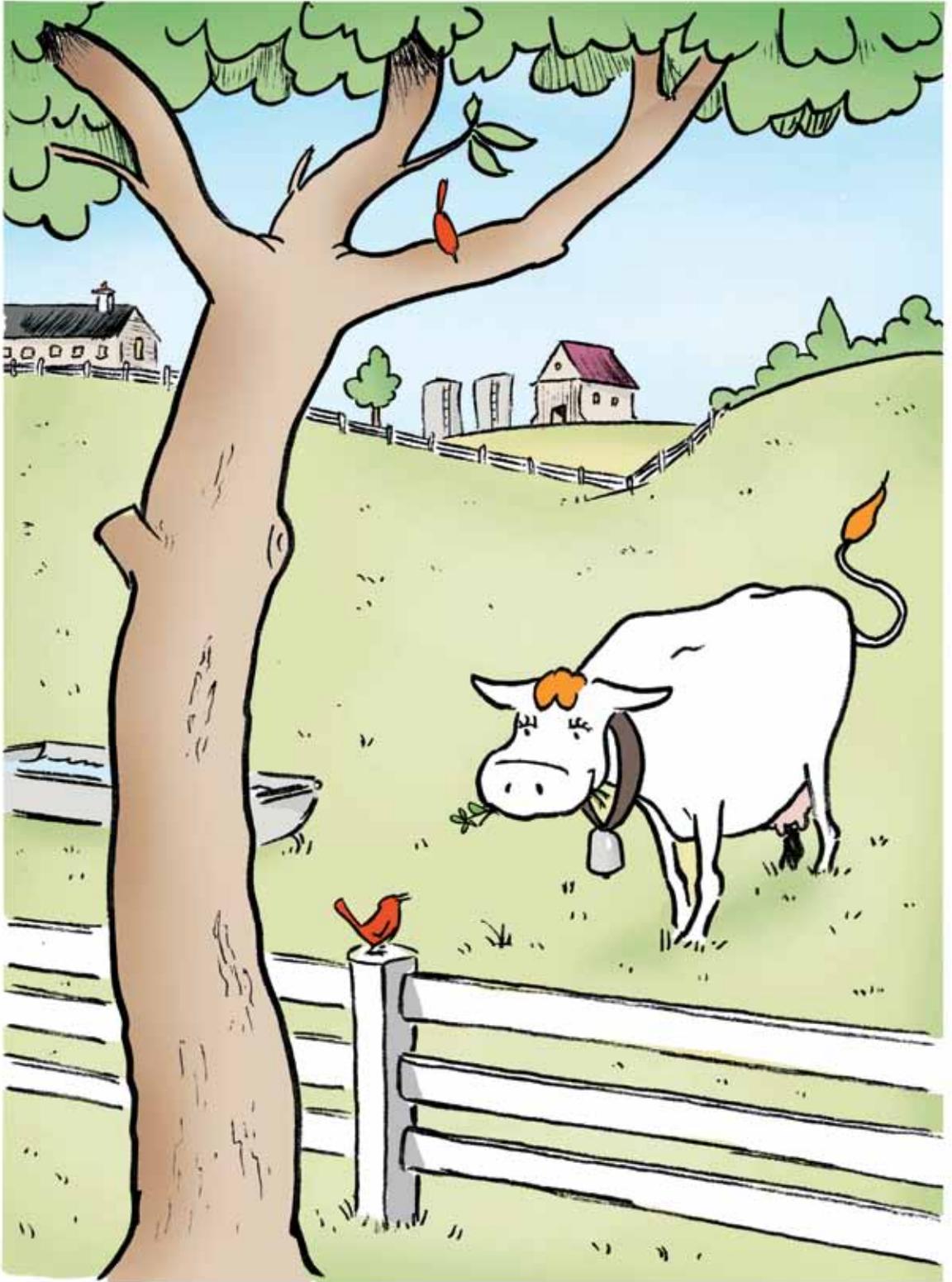
A cheerful sparrow sang nearby while grasses in the field danced in the breeze.

Life is good for now, thought Cornelia as she munched on a dandelion leaf. She and her barnyard friends lived on the Hillside Farm. It was a warm summer day, and the sun was shining.

Farmer Frank, who owned the farm, loved his animals. He thought of them as friends—until it was time for them to be sold. He worked hard growing fruits and vegetables and taking care of the farm animals.

Cornelia enjoyed the routine of grazing and lazing from morning to night. Being a cow in her favorite pasture was much the same from day to day.

But then Dudley arrived and turned everything upside down.

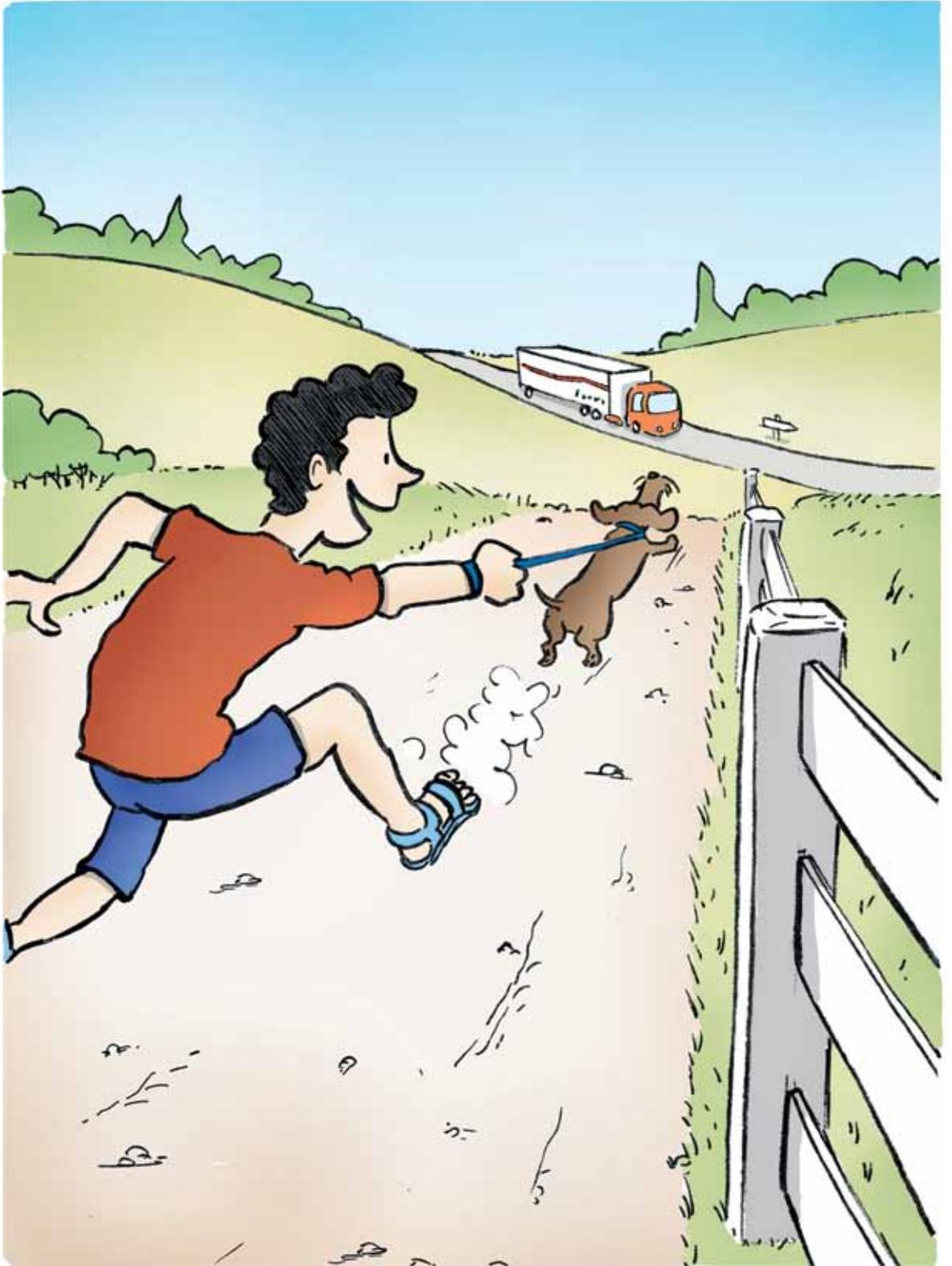


Dudley was the new rescue pup of Farmer Frank's young nephew, Owen. They were visiting from New York City. It was the first time Dudley had been to the country. He thought it was a big doggie playground. Owen could hardly keep up with his little dachshund mix. They went around the farm to see the different animals. Cornelia was the first to greet them. All the animals were curious to meet these two strangers from the city.

After lunch, Owen decided they would explore the surrounding countryside. He and Dudley walked along the road and passed by neighboring farms.

"Hey, Dudley!" called out Owen. "Take it easy! Slow down and check out the scenery."

Everything was fresh from last night's rain. Several horses were grazing in a nearby field, contented and happy with the afternoon sunshine.



A big truck slowly passed by on the road ahead. Dudley heard a “moo” coming from the truck, and he froze right there by the side of the road. In an instant the fun came to a screeching halt. He sensed fear in the air, and his heart sank. Something was very wrong.

“It’s all right, Dudley,” said Owen, who understood what the matter was and leaned down to pet him. “I feel bad, too, but it’s the way things are. Animals are taken away from the farm when the farmer is ready. Come on, I’ll race you back to the farm.”

Dudley thought of Cornelia. A new surge of energy coursed through his long little body. Like lightning he ran toward the farm. He jumped up and down at the gate until Owen opened the latch.

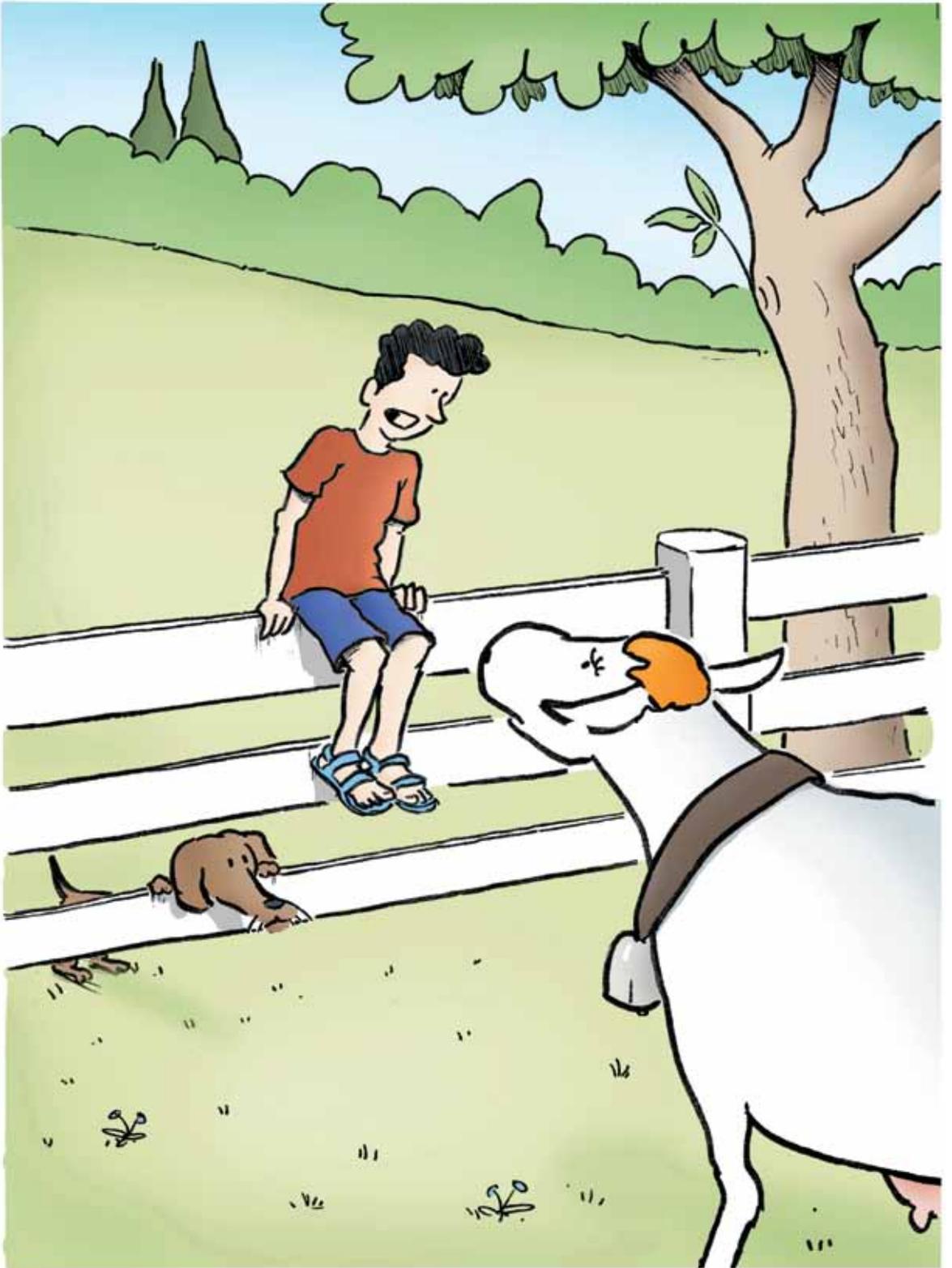
Dudley ran to where Cornelia was lolling in the sun. “Cornelia! Cornelia! We’ve got to do something!”

What's all the excitement?" she asked while calmly chewing on her cud.

"Oh, Cornelia," said Owen as he patted her forehead. "It's beautiful here. We saw the horses next door, and we went all the way to the next farm. We like this one better. On the other farm with so many cows we wouldn't be able to find you." He gave Cornelia a hug.

"It was a terrific day, Cornelia," said Dudley. "Except for one thing . . ." Gently, he told Cornelia about the truck that passed by on the road. He knew what kind of truck it was and what it meant for the animals inside. "What will happen to you, Cornelia?" asked Dudley. "Will you be taken away in a truck, too?"

Cornelia looked down at the ground. She didn't know how to answer. She guessed she had better tell them the truth. She gave a little sigh and said quietly, "Yes, one day it will happen to me."



Dudley was horrified. Owen didn't know what to say. Just then his Uncle Frank called from the farmhouse for them to come for dinner.

"We've got to go now," said Owen. "We'll be back tomorrow and figure this out."

Dudley lingered a bit. "There's no way we'll let that happen to you, Cornelia," he said. "We'll think of something, even if you have to come live with us in New York City." Off he ran on his short legs to catch up with Owen at the farmhouse.

That night, Cornelia was in her stall and looked up at the stars. She made a wish: *I wonder if Mother Nature might have some good ideas about my future.* Then she dozed off to sleep.



Chapter 2

Bright and early the next morning, Cornelia was having her breakfast of oats and barley. She was about to set out for pasture when she heard: “Cornelia! Cornelia!”

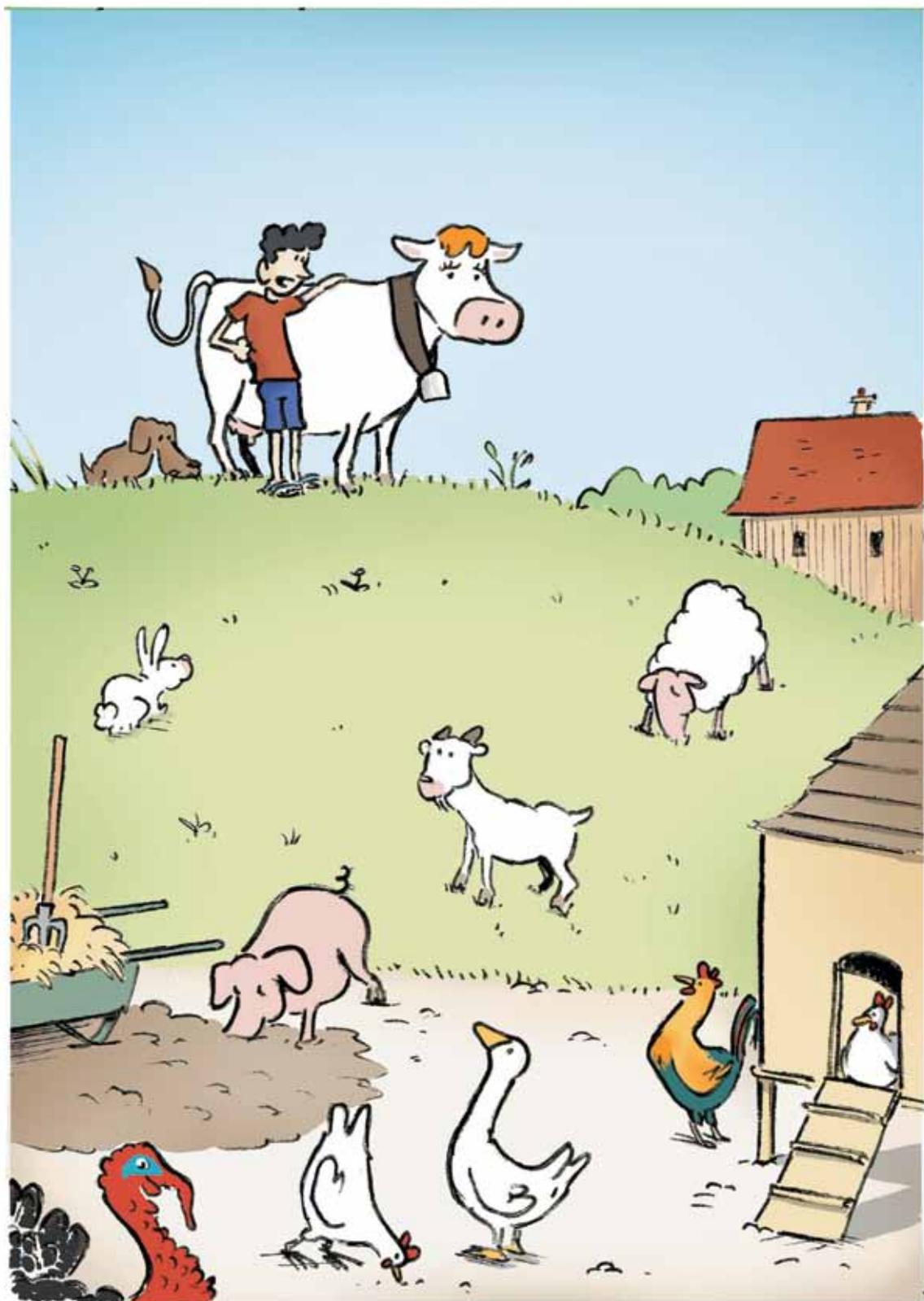
Owen and Dudley came running toward her. “We were up most of the night,” said Owen, catching his breath. “We decided we would have a heart-to-heart talk with Uncle Frank soon.”

Cornelia told them an idea also came to her the night before after looking at the stars. “Maybe we could have a heart-to-heart talk with Mother Nature.”

“Mother Nature!” exclaimed Dudley. His little legs quivered with excitement.

“Great idea!” said Owen. “We’ll go right to the source.”

“She’ll know what to do!” said Dudley. “But how do we find her?”

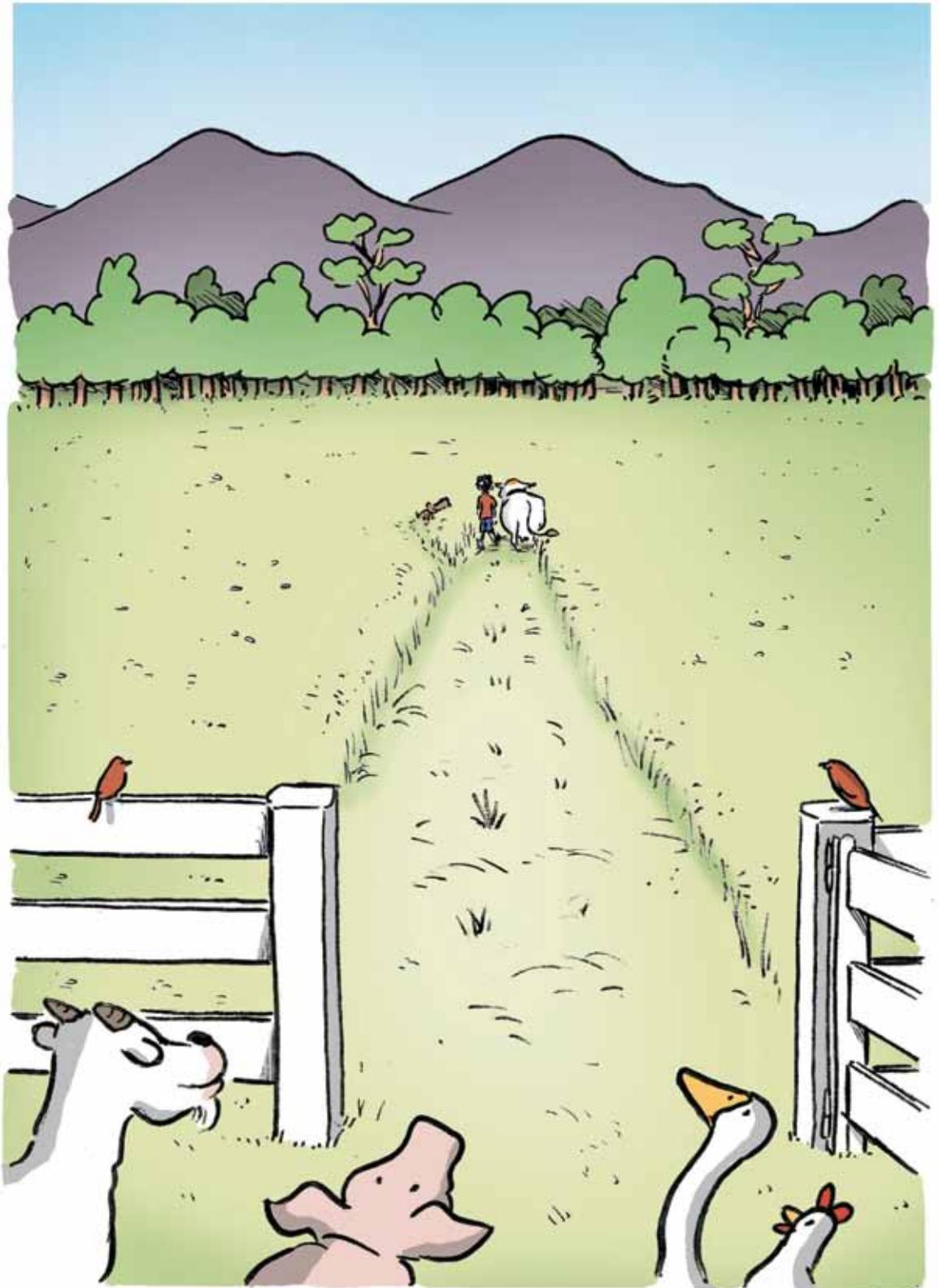


That was the big question. They would have to go looking for her. And they would also have to be back before sundown. That was when Farmer Frank would return from selling at the market in town.

“We’ve got to try to find her,” said Dudley. “Not only for Cornelia—but for them.” Many of the barnyard animals had been listening in to their conversation.

“Can I come with you, Cornelia?” asked Lily the lamb. Cornelia kindly told her to stay and watch the farm while they were gone. She promised they would be back with news before Lily could bleat “Baa! Baa! Baa!”

Cornelia, Owen, and Dudley walked to the pasture gate. Gus the goat opened the latch with his horns. The three friends stepped into the big field with trees and hills in the distance. Should they go right? Should they go left? They took a deep breath and went straight ahead. They were on their way to find Mother Nature and a bright future for Cornelia and all the farm animals.



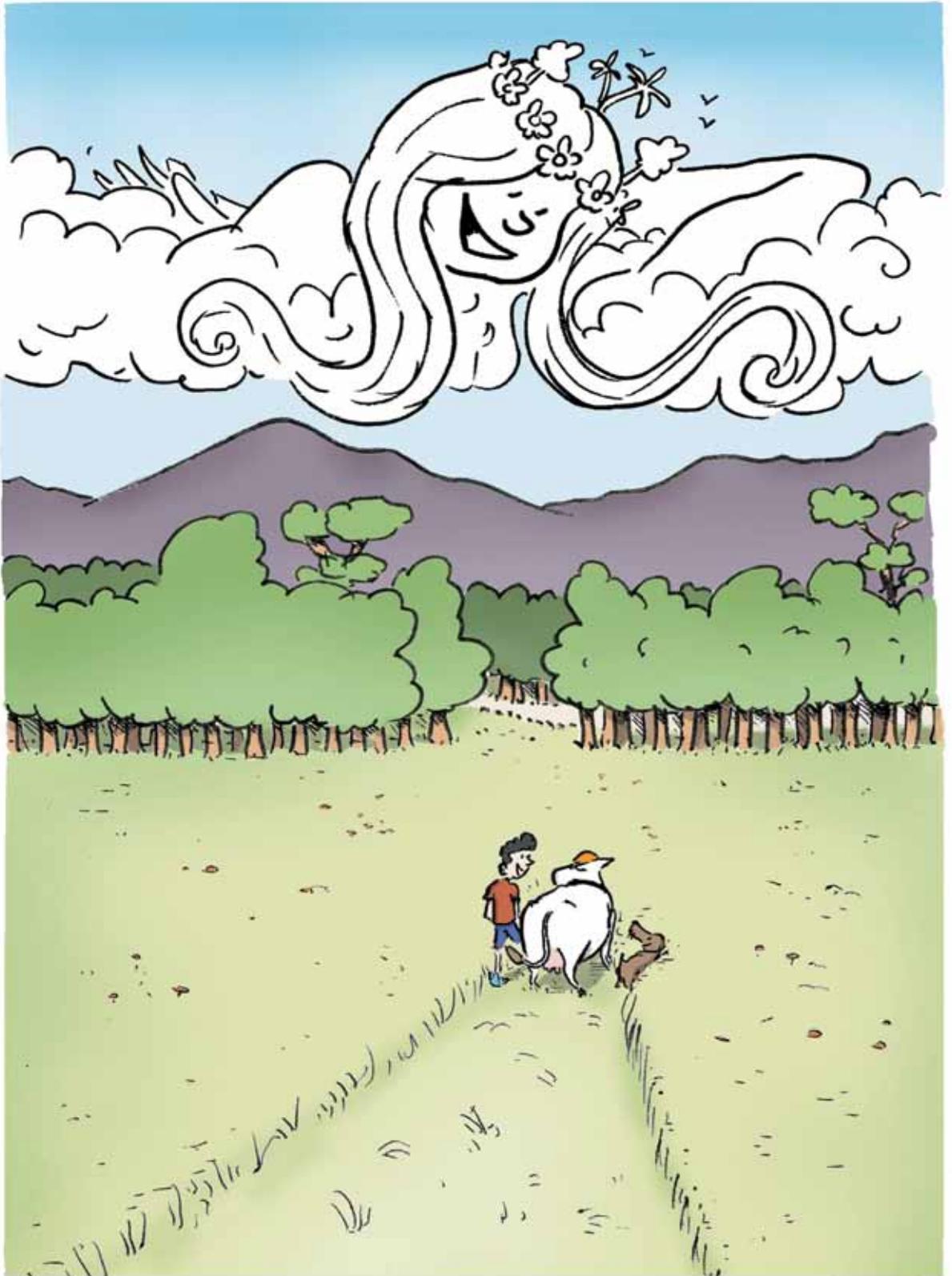
Chapter 3

“Well, this is quite an adventure!” said Owen as they walked across the field. “It’s a big world out here. We don’t even know what Mother Nature looks like. But I’m sure we’ll know her when we see her.”

A steep hill loomed ahead of them. It was a beautiful day for a hike. Perhaps a little too warm but they couldn’t complain. They hoped that Mother Nature would hear them talking or hear the cowbell around Cornelia’s neck. And maybe she would be kind enough to show herself to them.

“Whew! This goes on forever,” said Dudley. Just as they were nearing the top, the hill seemed to grow higher. Was the noonday sun playing tricks on their imagination?

Finally they reached the top. They looked down over the big expanse of countryside.



“Oh, look at all those beautiful trees,” said Owen.

“Yes! There’s something magical about them,” said Cornelia.

It was mid-afternoon, but they continued walking and soon came to a beautiful meadow. Nearby was a little pond.

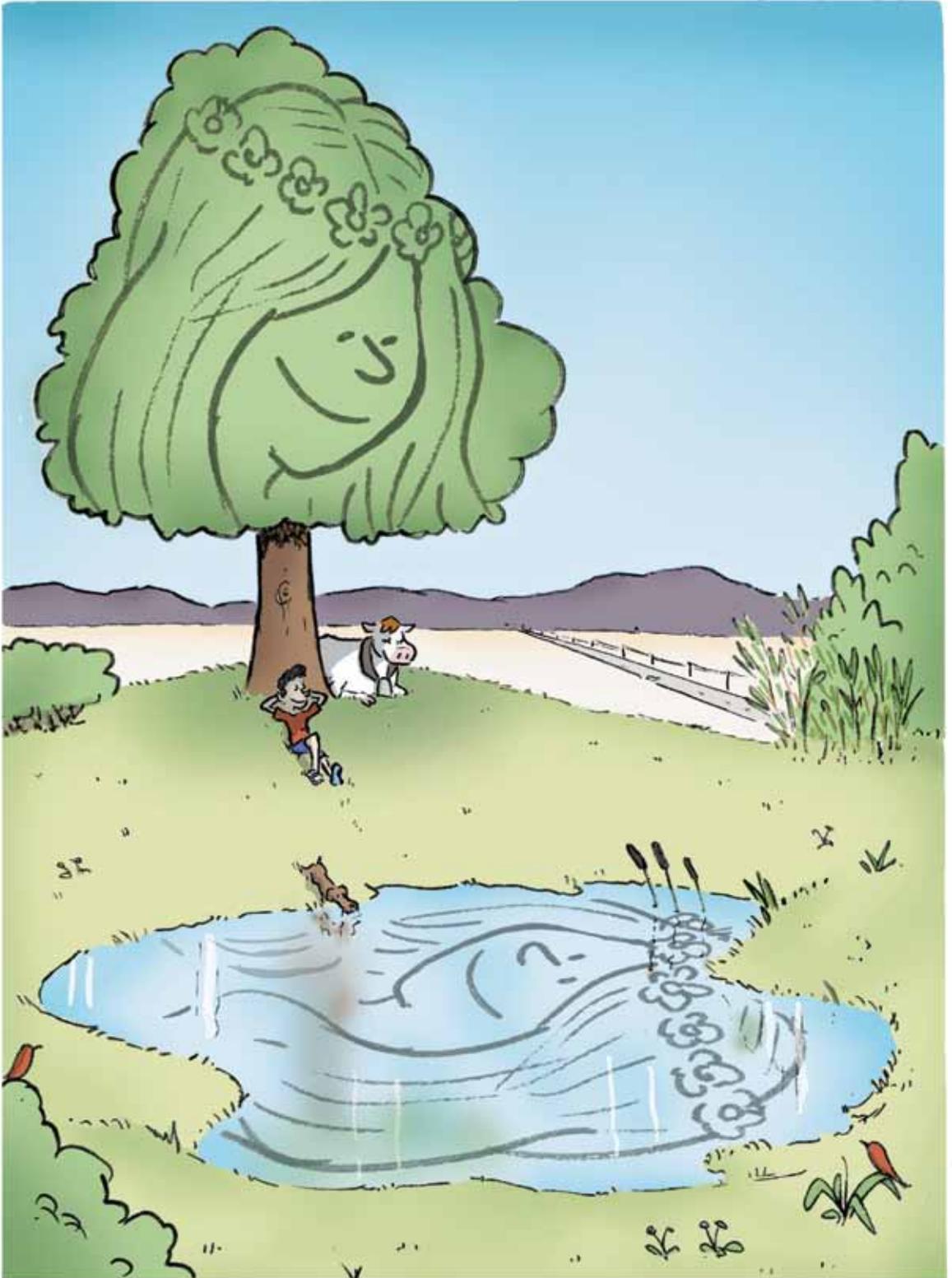
“Let’s sit here for a bit,” said Owen. He gazed at the water, and a feeling of quiet joy came over him.

“Do you feel like I do?” he said. “That she’s all around us but we can’t see any definite shape?”

“Yes! Yes!” the other two replied.

“Okay, then let’s rest for a while under the shade of this tree,” Owen said.

Within a minute or so, they were fast asleep.

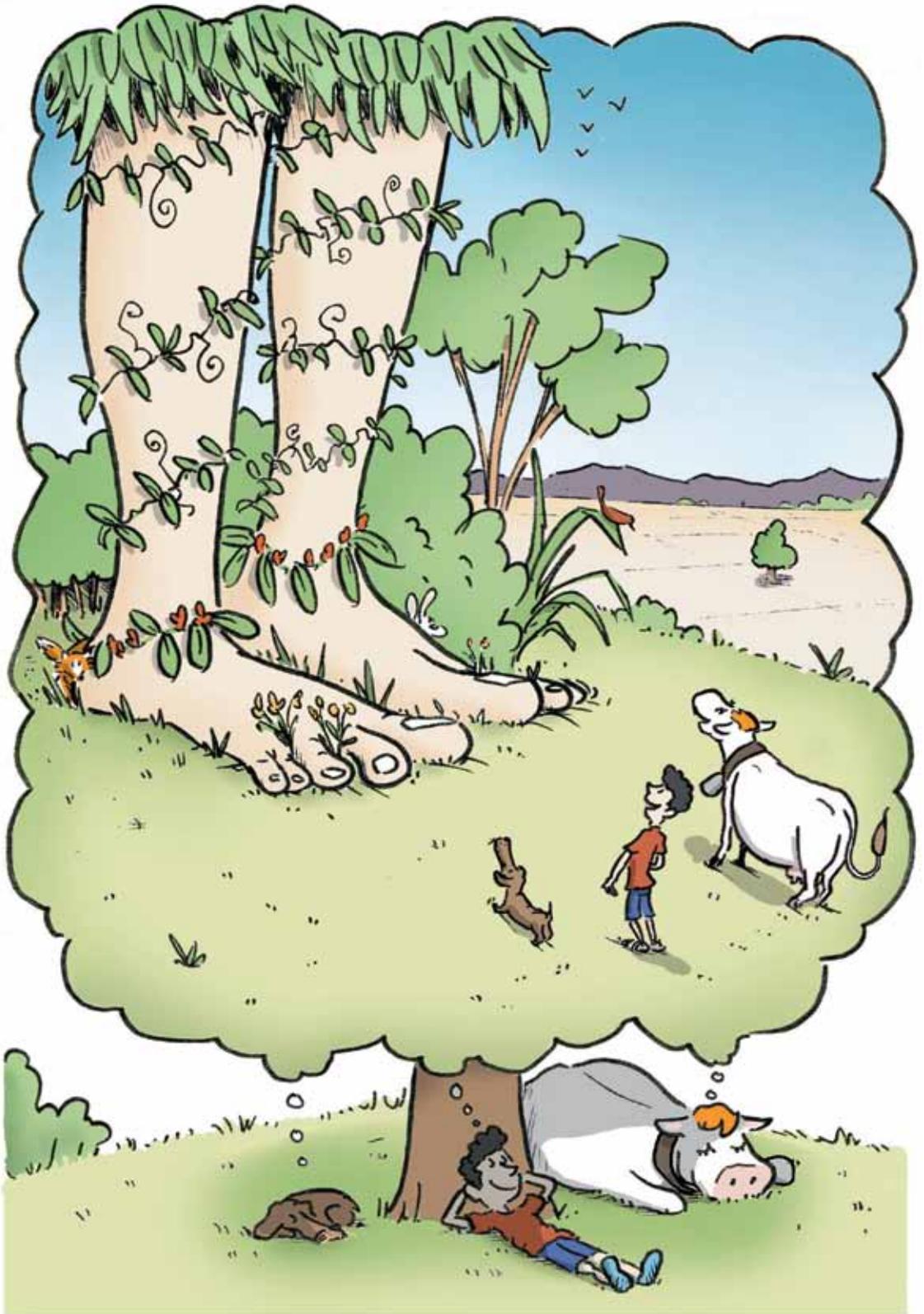


Chapter 4

Gradually a faint aroma of cinnamon and clove and orange blossoms filled the air. It was fresh and delightful! Then Cornelia's left ear began to twitch, Owen heard a buzzing sound, and Dudley's nose quivered as if being tickled by a feather.

“Helloooo!” a melodious voice called to them.

Startled by this greeting, they opened their eyes to see two very large, human-like feet and legs. A bit frightened they dared to look up . . . and up . . . and up. Their gaze rested on the most wondrous face that they had ever imagined. Light shone all around her and she was dressed in leaves. Among the leaves were flowers, insects, sparrows, and butterflies. But it was her kind and radiant attitude that made their hearts almost burst.



“Mother Nature! It’s you!” gasped Cornelia. She threw her head back and let forth a loud “Mooooo!”

“Wow!” exclaimed Owen. You’re really . . . big!”

“Woof! Woof!” barked Dudley. His tail wagged so hard it almost propelled him into the air.

“Hi, kids!” said Mother Nature. She couldn’t help laughing at such a reception. “I’m glad you found me. I’ve put on my Sunday best for you. I’m happy when friends are looking to make our world better. And I feel sad when it’s taken for granted. I’m everywhere, you know, but since you didn’t spot me, I’ve changed into human shape so we can speak with one another.”

They all started talking at once.

“One at a time, please,” said Mother Nature, smiling.

Owen spoke first and introduced Cornelia. “It was Cornelia’s idea to meet with you,” he said.

“Oh, well,” said Cornelia, her eyelashes fluttering, “I forgot what we wanted to ask.”

“Was it making sure there’s a safe future for farm animals?”

“Yes! Of course!” Cornelia said, clearing her throat. “I heard from my friend Dudley that . . .”

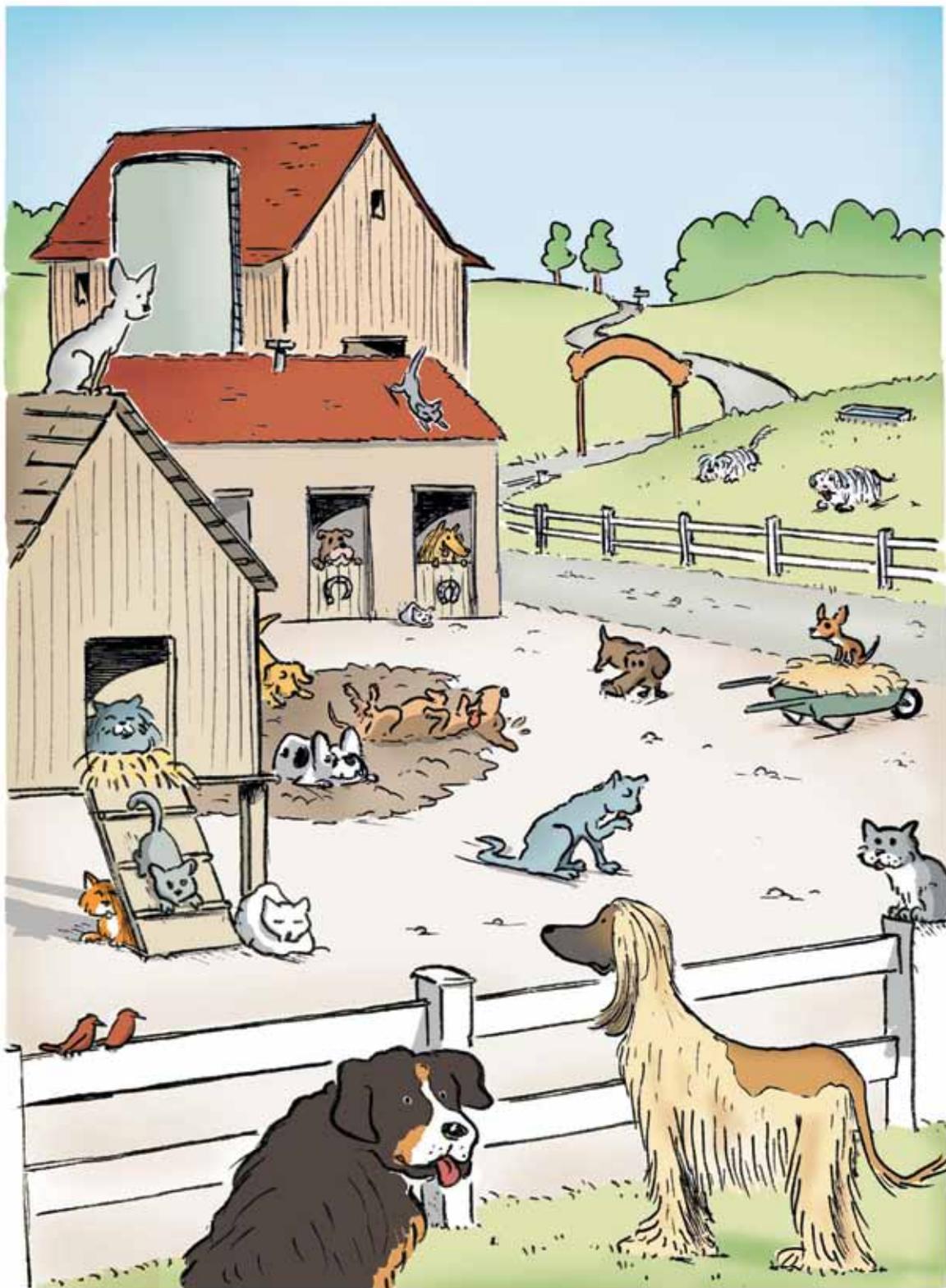
When she paused, Owen explained to Mother Nature how he and Dudley had a wonderful day meeting the horses and cows, but their good feelings crashed when they saw the truck. Dudley felt that the truck was taking its passenger on a slow journey to the dining room table.

“So I was wondering,” said Dudley. “Could you change all the cows and farm animals to look like cats and dogs?”

“Why, Dudley?”

“Because then the farm animals would be loved and treated nice like we pets are treated. And people wouldn’t eat them.”

“Okay, I could do that, but then they wouldn’t be farm animals, Dudley, they’d be cats and dogs.”



“What if I tell you all a secret?” she said.
Everybody chimed in a rousing, “YES!”
“Promise you’ll tell *everybody*?”
“We’ll tell everyone if you tell us the secret!”
said Owen.
“Now listen carefully.”

Chapter 5

Everyone leaned forward to hear Mother Nature.

“Ready?”

“YES!”

“Are you sure?”

“YES! YES!”

“Okay! *This* is the secret: farm animals and pet animals and human beings are . . . *all the same.*”

There was a loud silence.

It was Dudley who finally spoke. “Did you say . . . ?”

“*The same!*” said Mother Nature.

Owen couldn’t believe it. “How can that be? Pets and people and farm animals look different. They have different homes, and different things they do during the day. A chicken living on a farm is different from a person living in an apartment in New York City!”



“Those are small differences that give life a bit of color,” said Mother Nature. “May I ask a few questions?”

Everyone nodded yes.

“Does everybody here love their mothers?”

They all said “yes.”

“Does everybody here have friends? Have feelings of being sad, happy, loving? Do you bleed when you are cut? Do you need shelter and food? Does everybody here like to look at the stars and the sunrise and flowers? Do you like to play? And most of all, do you want to keep living your life?”

The answer was a resounding “yes” to all the questions.

“There’s your proof! *You are all the same.* Now you know the most precious secret in the world! In the beginning, everyone knew it. But as time went on, sadly, it has nearly been forgotten.” She paused.

The Powerful Secret of Mother Nature



“Whenever you think of the secret, you will always treat the other being well and do good in the world. The secret is a super power. It can bring happiness to our planet and to all creatures. People will want to cherish animals instead of eating them.”

“I’ll leave it up to you to spread the word. Remember: all are precious! I love you!” And with that, Mother Nature slowly lost her human shape and faded into the trees, the grass, and the sky.

“Wait a minute, please!” said Owen. “What about Uncle Frank?”

Owen heard Mother Nature’s voice like a gentle breeze from far away saying, “Uncle Frank will surprise you. . . . Don’t worry about Uncle Frank . . .”

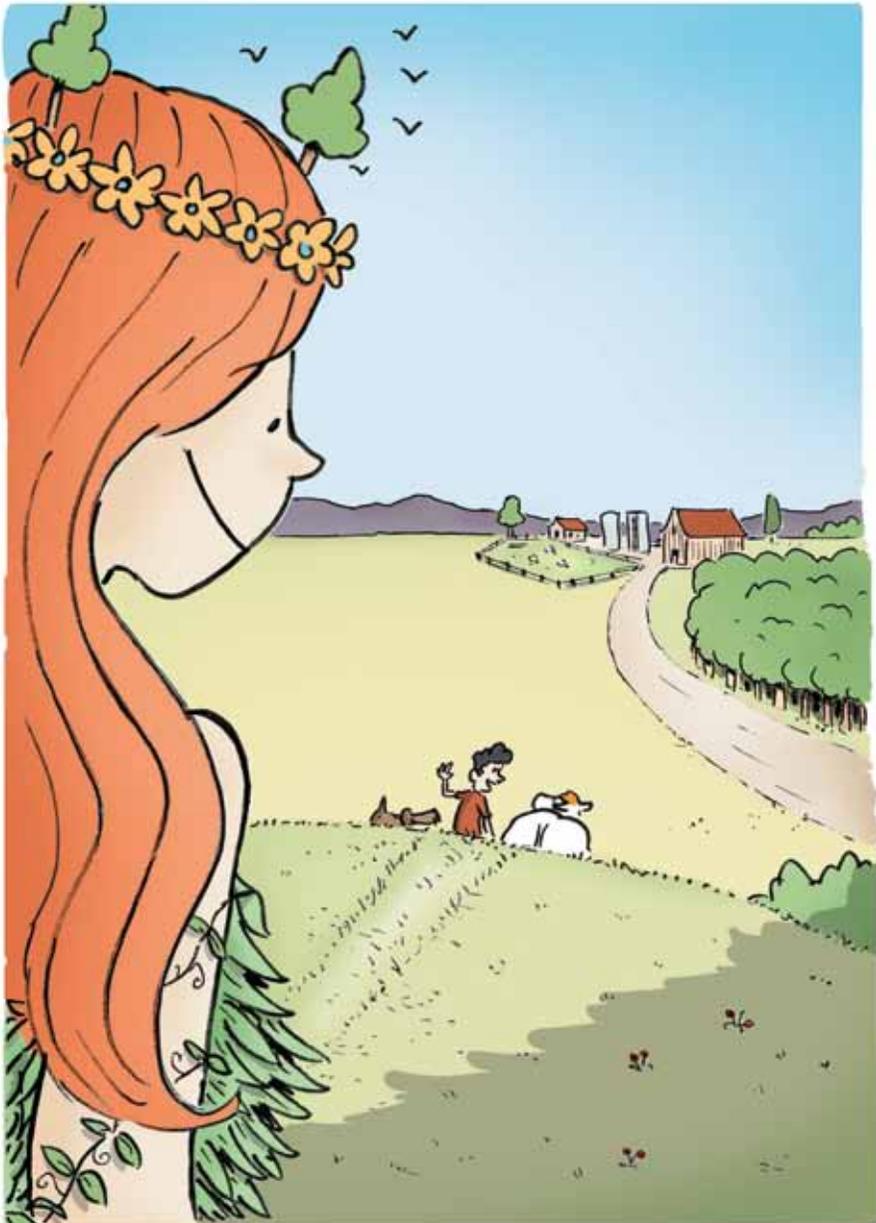
Chapter 6

Stillness descended on the meadow. Cornelia and Dudley blinked their eyes, shook their heads, and looked all around. Owen seemed to be in a trance. Everything was shimmering with light. The grass nearby and the leaves above were radiantly green. The water in the pond next to them sparkled like liquid diamonds.

Dudley pulled on Owen's shirt with his doggy teeth. "Owen, snap out of it," he said. "Cornelia and I had a dream about Mother Nature. She told us a secret."

Owen, still a bit dazed, told them he had a dream, too. How could they all have had the same dream? Could it have been real? They couldn't know for sure, except there was a faint aroma of cinnamon and clove and orange blossoms lingering in the air.

The spell was broken when Owen realized it was getting late in the afternoon. The three friends leapt to their feet and hurried back to the farm.



Chapter 7

Gus the goat held the gate open. They returned just as Farmer Frank was coming back from his day at the market. All the animals of the barnyard were eagerly waiting. Cornelia, Owen, and Dudley were out of breath but excited to share the news. So Cornelia addressed the crowd right away.

“Dear friends, ” said Cornelia, “we were able to meet with Mother Nature.”

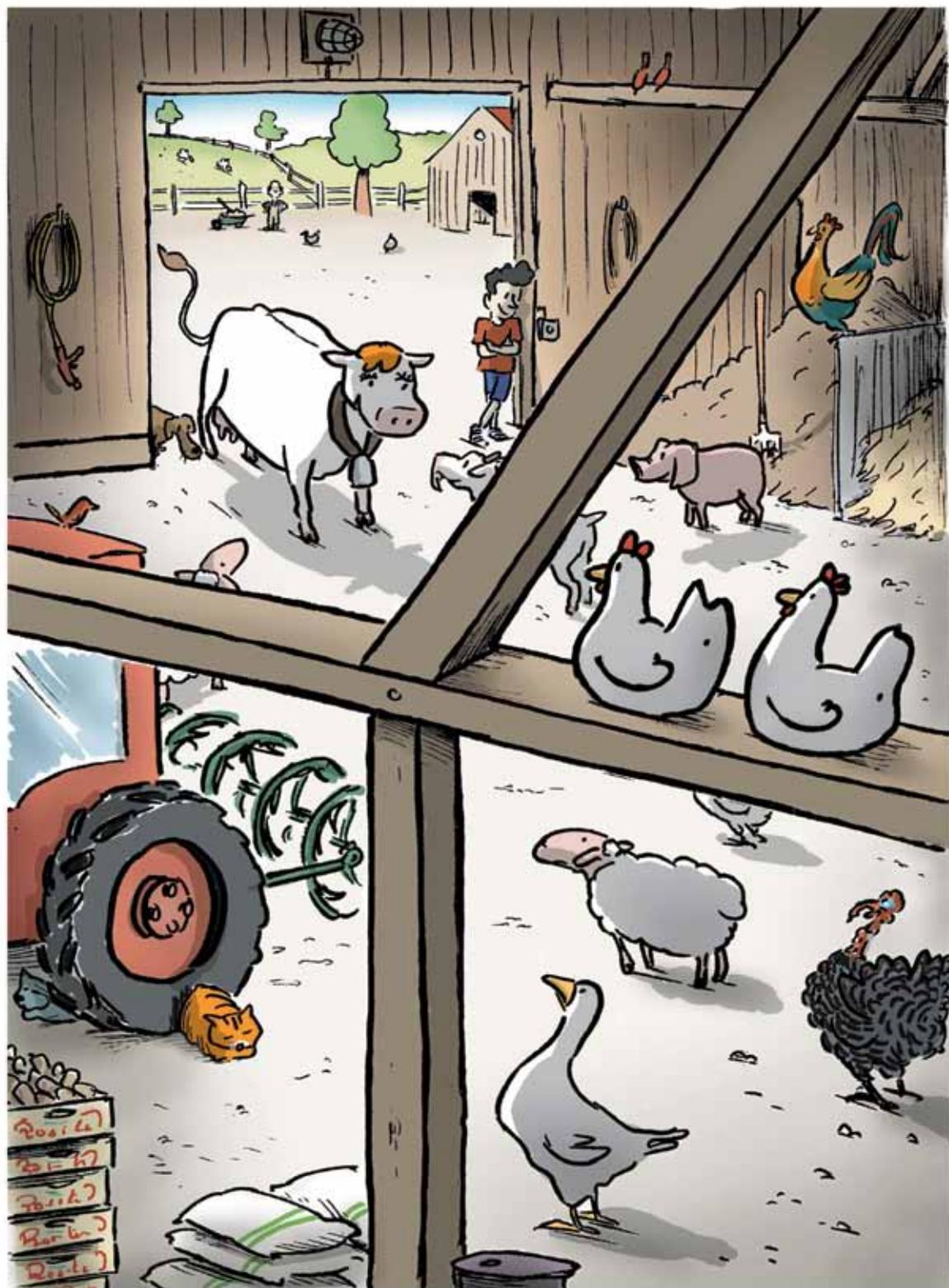
There was a great hubbub among the animals.

“We knew you could do it!”

“What did she say, Cornelia?”

“Tell us what you learned!”

“As you know,” Cornelia continued, “Mother Nature is everywhere, but she kindly changed into human shape so we could have our heart-to-heart. And the good news is . . .”



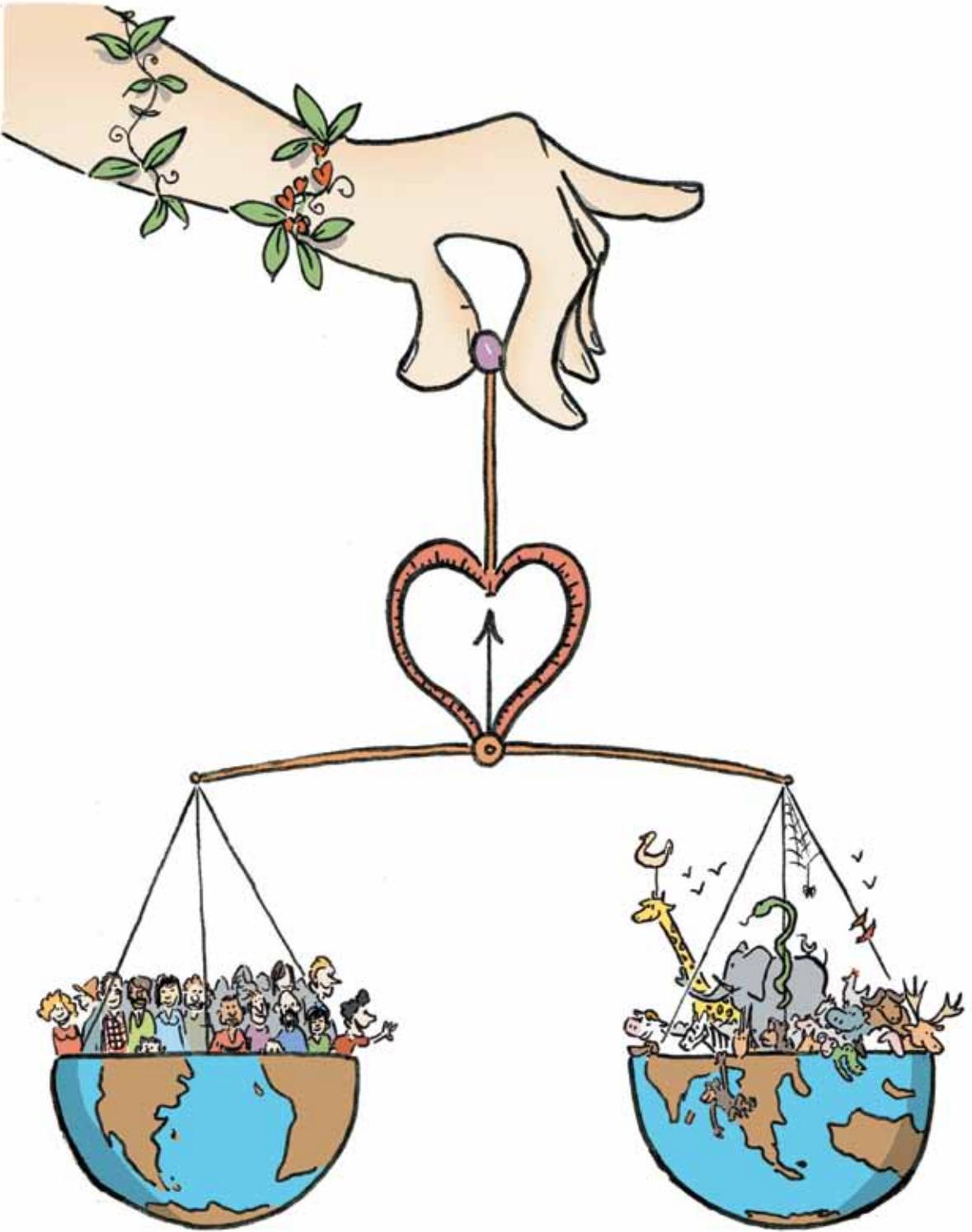
Before she could get another word out, Farmer Frank came walking toward them. He gave a wave with his arm as if he wanted them to wait.

“Oh, twisted twigs!” said Owen. “I think I’m going to get in trouble for taking you guys out all day.”

Farmer Frank came and stood beside Owen. Instead of disciplining his nephew he said, “Please, go on, Cornelia.”

She felt a bit shy but continued. “We sat under a tree to rest. Whether we had a dream or saw a vision, we’re not sure. But somehow Mother Nature told us an ancient secret of our planet. This secret has almost been forgotten. It’s a secret that must be shared.” Cornelia cleared her throat and paused for effect. “*We are all the same!*”

The animals looked at one another. Had their dear Cornelia lost her mind? “How can Pickles the pig be the same as Owen the person?” one brave voice asked.



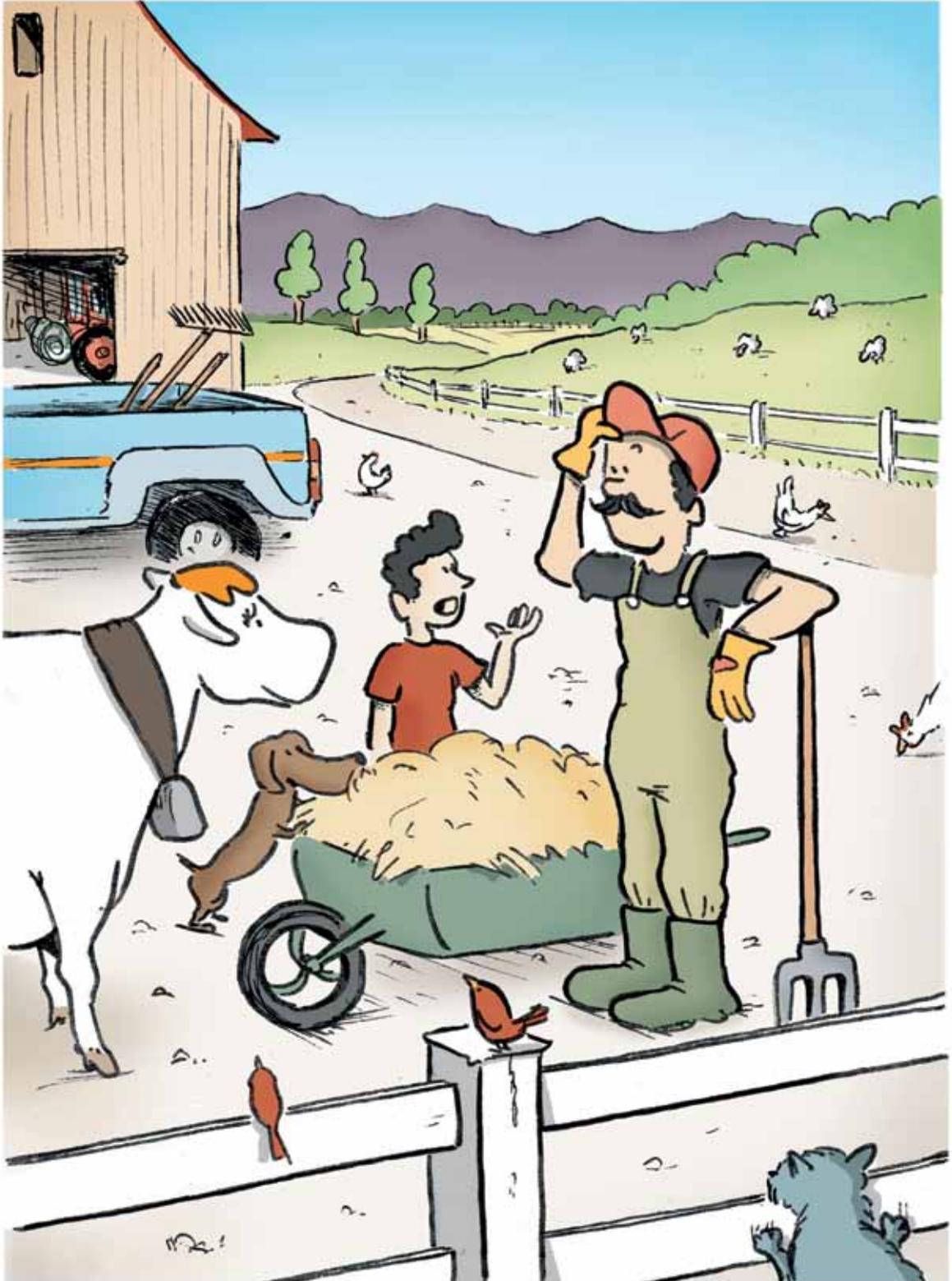
“How can Cornelia the cow be the same as Dudley the dog?” shouted another.

There was a great to-do among the animals and a lot of grumbling.

“Our hearts are the same,” continued Cornelia above the hubbub. “We all need love, and we all want to live our lives. So when you meet another being, and you remember the secret, you will always treat the other well and do the right thing.”

There was a lot of murmuring among the animals.

“What do you think, Uncle Frank?” asked Owen. “Do you understand what Mother Nature said?”



Chapter 8

Farmer Frank didn't answer right away. He saw the eager faces of his animals. He looked out proudly past the barn to the green fields. He had spent years of his life pouring his heart into making the acres of rock and stubble into healthy green pasture. His farm was the jewel of the county. His fruits and vegetables were the best. His hard work had paid off.

But there was always a tug at his heart-strings. Taking the animals that he raised and who trusted him to town only to leave them there was something that he wasn't proud of. Maybe it was time for a new beginning—time for a change.

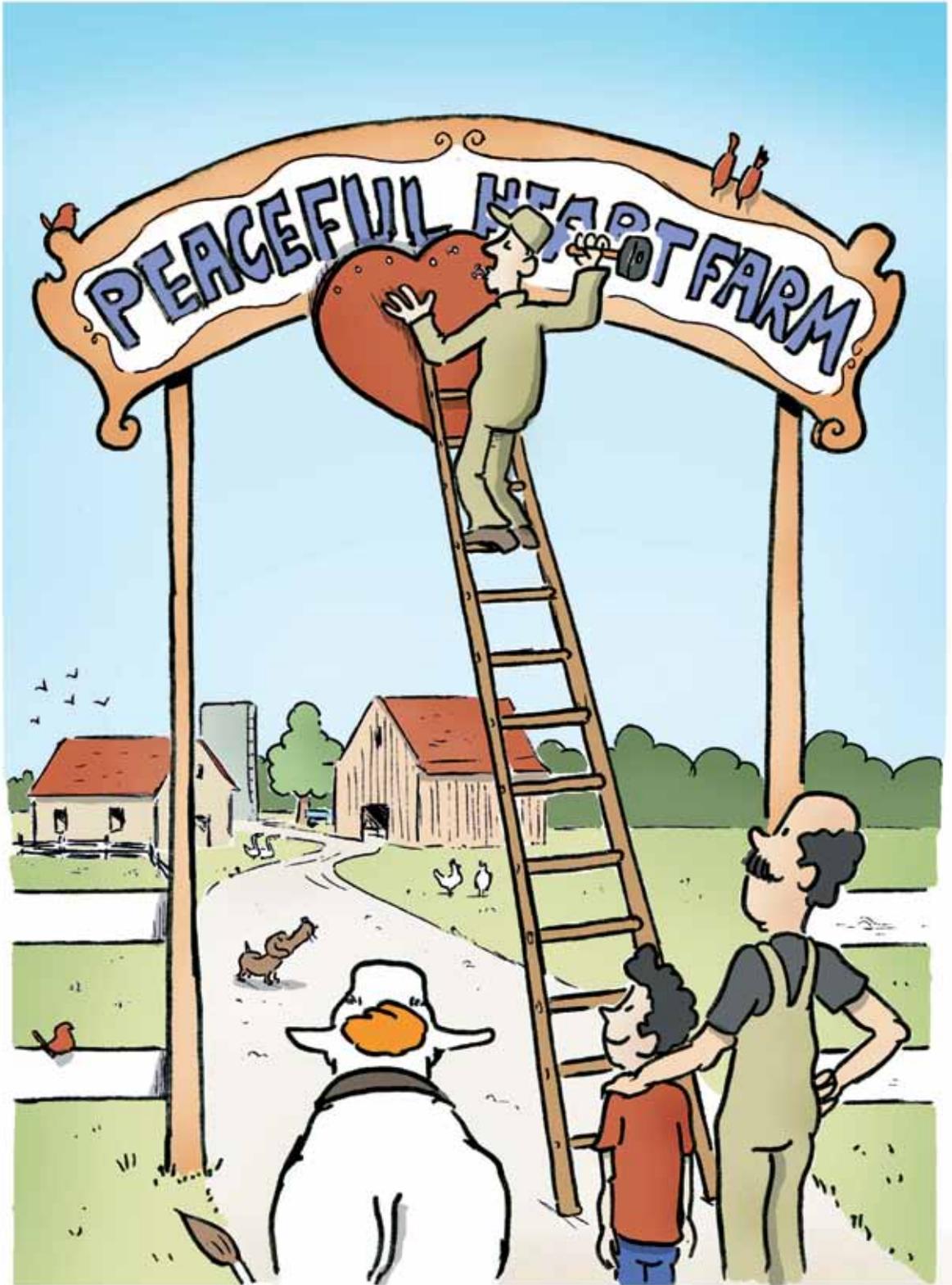
Farmer Frank looked at Owen in a new light. Here was his nephew, much wiser than his years, opening a new door for him. Did he have the courage to go through that door?

Farmer Frank took a deep breath and put a hand on Owen's shoulder. "I'm proud of you, Owen. The secret makes a great deal of sense. I thank you along with Cornelia and Dudley for helping our planet."

And then he turned toward the animals. "After today, I will call our farm the Peaceful Heart Farm. I'll earn my living only by the fruits and vegetables I grow. There will be no more transporting animals to market. You are all free to live out your lives."

There was a stunned silence and then everyone burst out into loud cheering. Many tears of happiness were shed.

Owen thought to himself, *The secret does have super power just like Mother Nature said. It made Uncle Frank change his mind right on the spot. It's the power of kindness.*



Chapter 9

As they watched the carpenter attach the new PEACEFUL HEART FARM sign to the gate, each became lost in their own thoughts.

Owen was proud of Dudley. It seemed that Dudley, who was a rescue doggie, rescued Uncle Frank and all the animals of the barnyard.

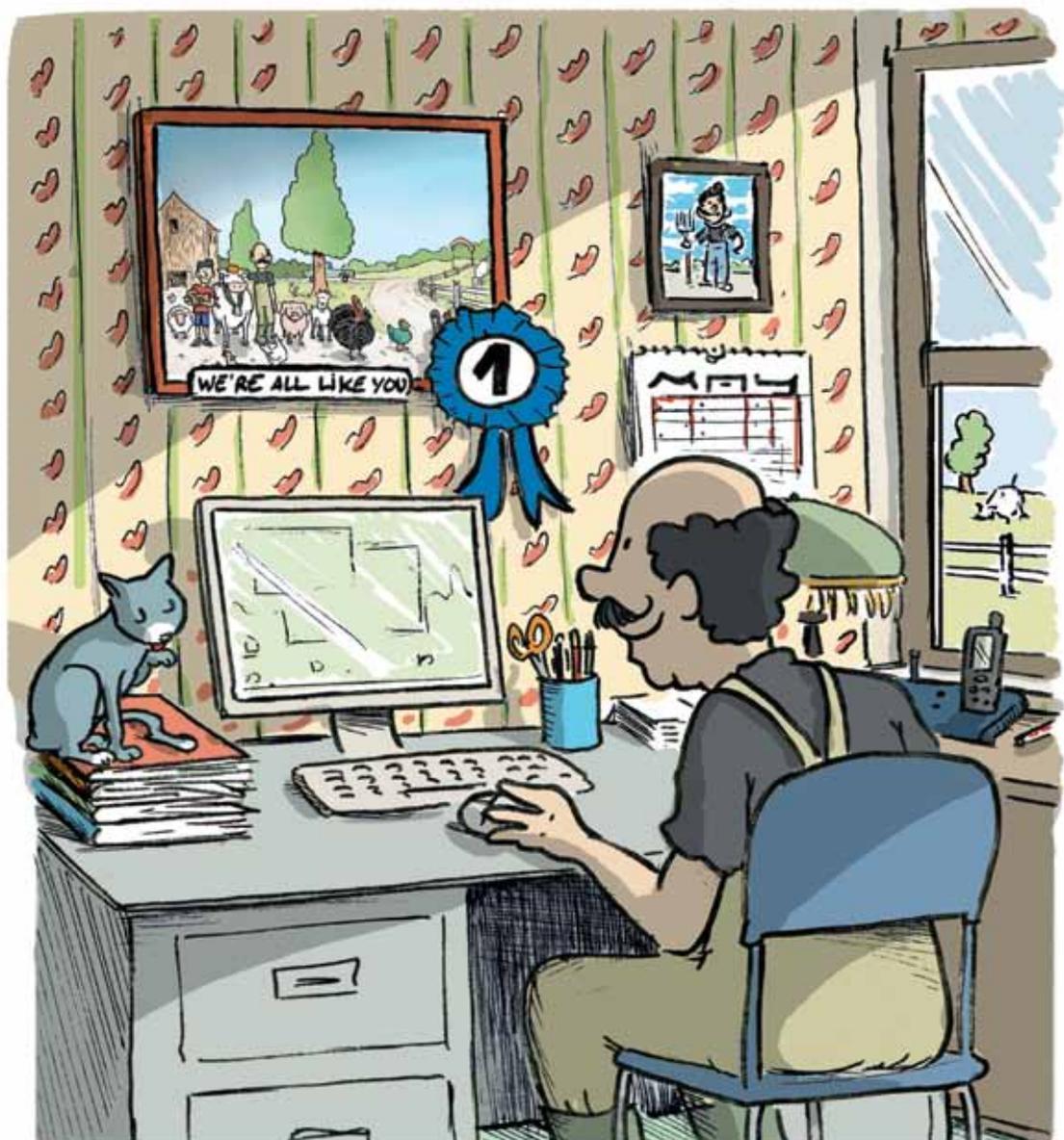
Cornelia's heart filled with joy. To think that now she and her barnyard friends would be able to spend a whole lifetime together. She felt something she had never felt before: that her life really mattered.

Dudley was wondering when it was going to be dinnertime.

When the new sign was ready . . .

“Come on, everyone,” said Farmer Frank. “Let’s get a family photo to celebrate this day.”

They all stood together. The carpenter snapped quite a few photos for them. The best one would be picked for the farm photo contest that was being held in town.



Chapter 10

Turned out they took first place in the photo contest.

Farmer Frank called all the barnyard animals together. He wanted to show them their winning photo. There was a lot of oooing and ahhhhing when Cornelia exclaimed, “Look, everybody! There’s Mother Nature in the back!”

“She photobombed the picture for fun!” Owen laughed in amazement.

“The judges for the contest didn’t say anything about seeing Mother Nature there,” said Farmer Frank.

“You have to believe in her to see her,” said Owen.

“I think you’re right about that, Owen!” chuckled Farmer Frank.

The animals felt giddy and lighthearted.

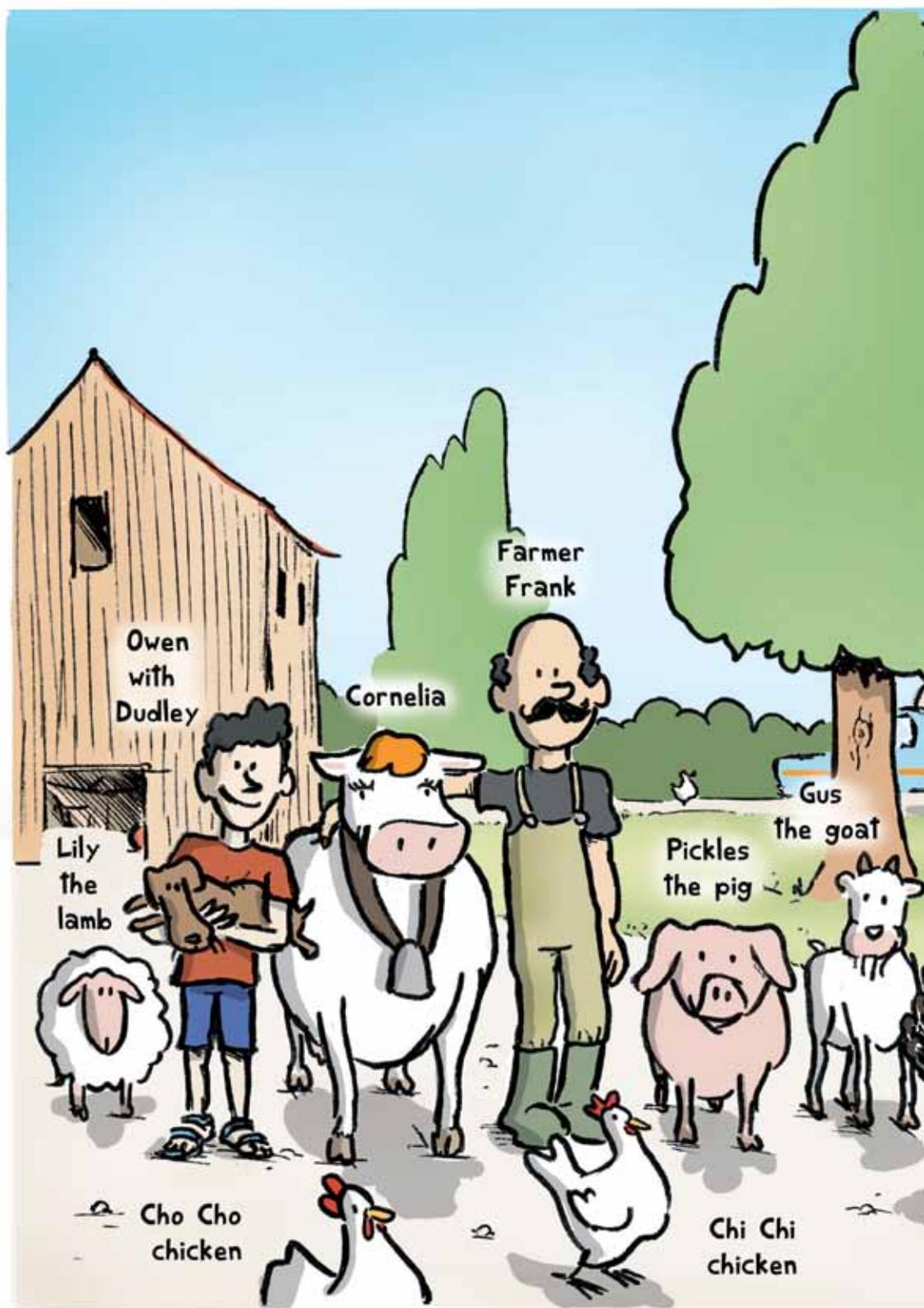
They were talking among themselves about a new day that was dawning.

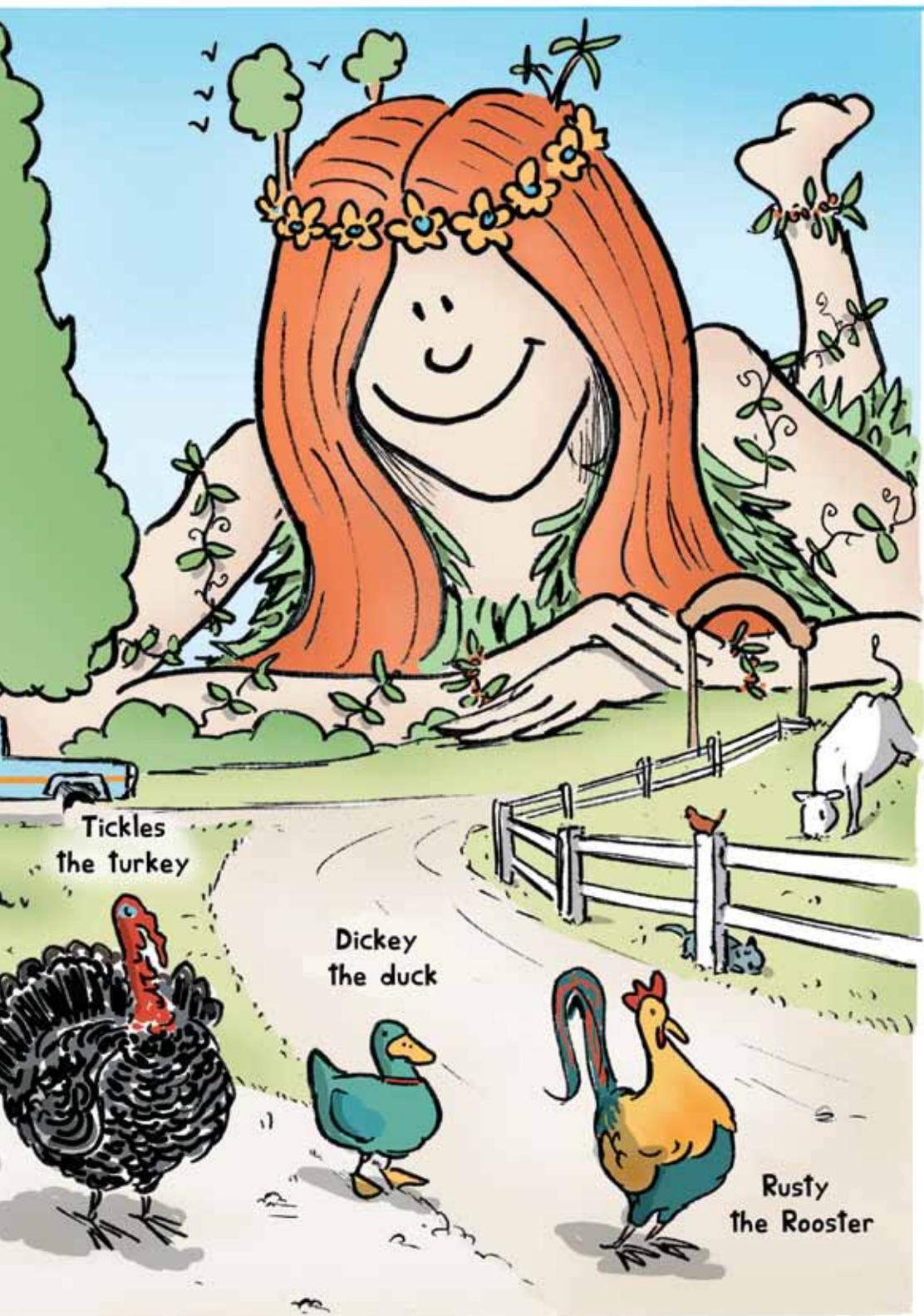
Dudley wagged his tail and said, “We’ve got to spread Mother Nature’s secret around.”

Cornelia threw back her head and agreed with a loud, “Mooooo.”

“Does the photo have a name, Uncle Frank?” asked Owen.

“The judges called it the Peaceful Heart Farm. But we have our own special name for it: ‘*We’re All Like You!*’”

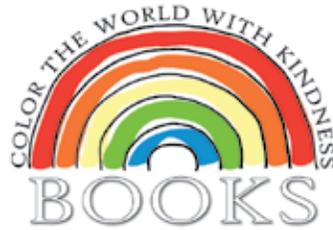




Tickles
the turkey

Dickey
the duck

Rusty
the Rooster



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