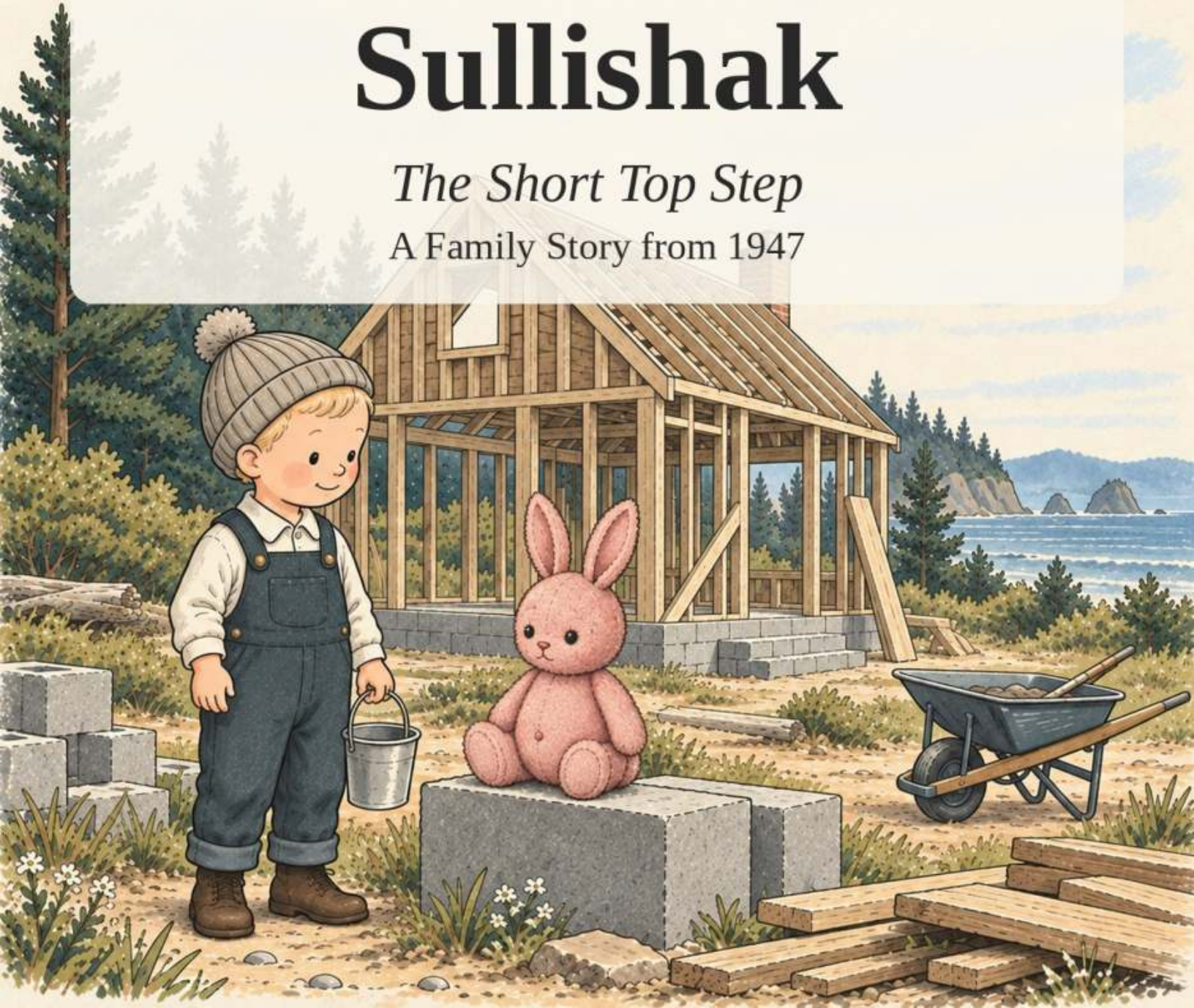
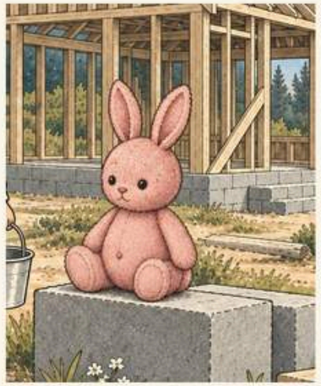
Squeaky Bunny at Sullishak

The Short Top Step

A Family Story from 1947





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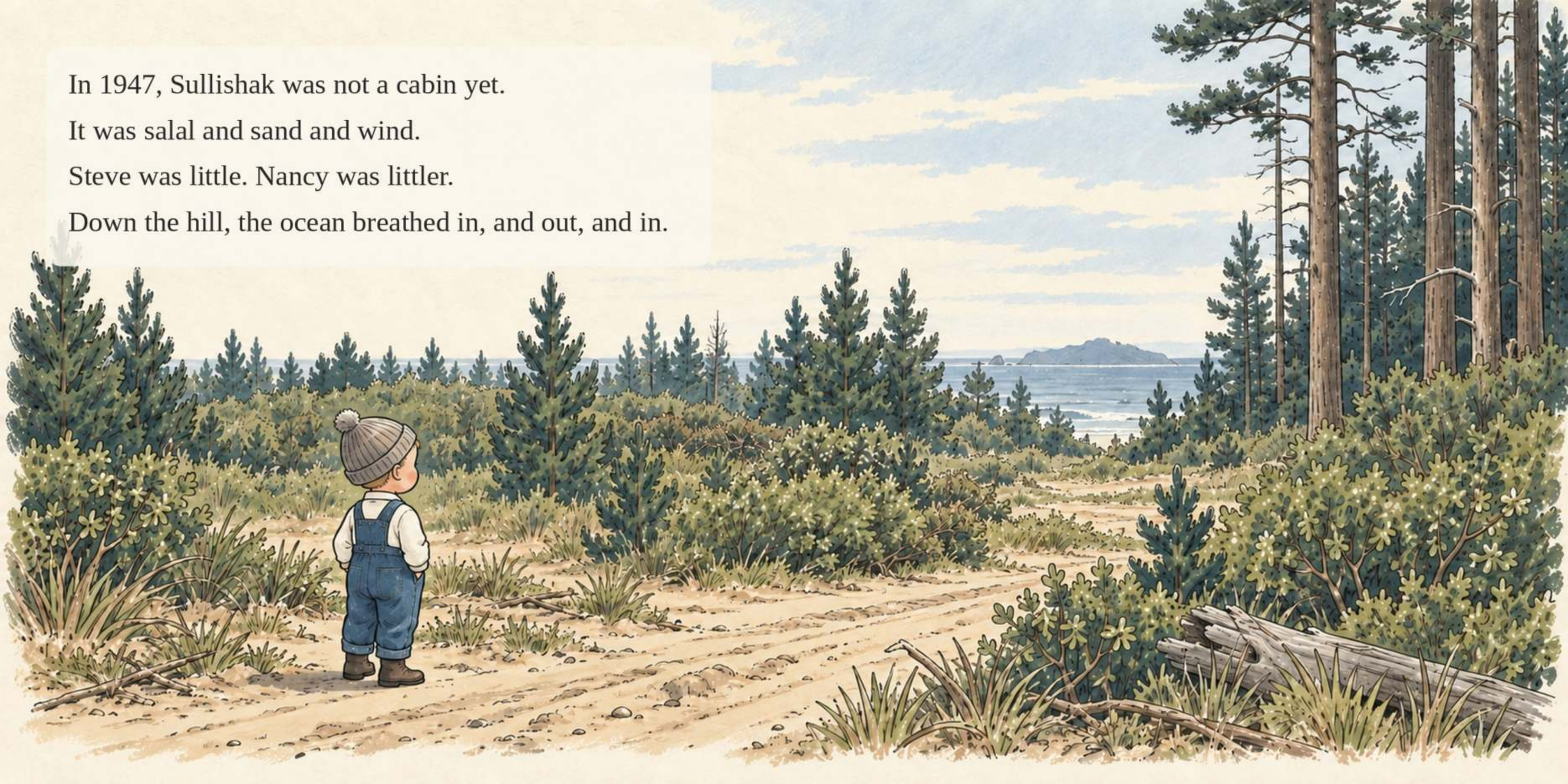
A Family Story from 1947

Family share copy — October 2026 — not for sale. *For everyone who has ever slept upstairs at Sullishak.*

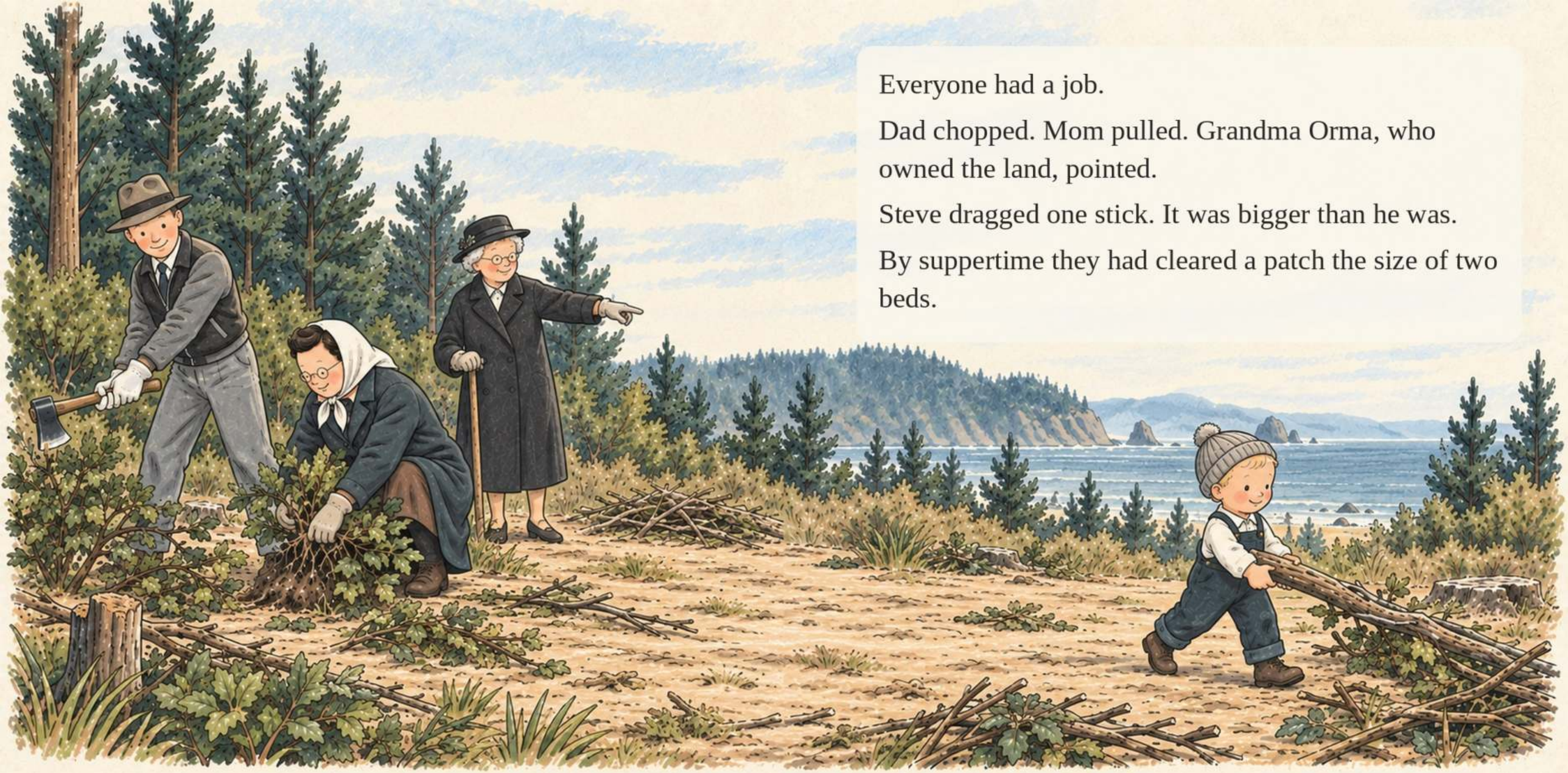


In 1947, Sullishak was not a cabin yet.

It was salal and sand and wind.

Steve was little. Nancy was littler.

Down the hill, the ocean breathed in, and out, and in.

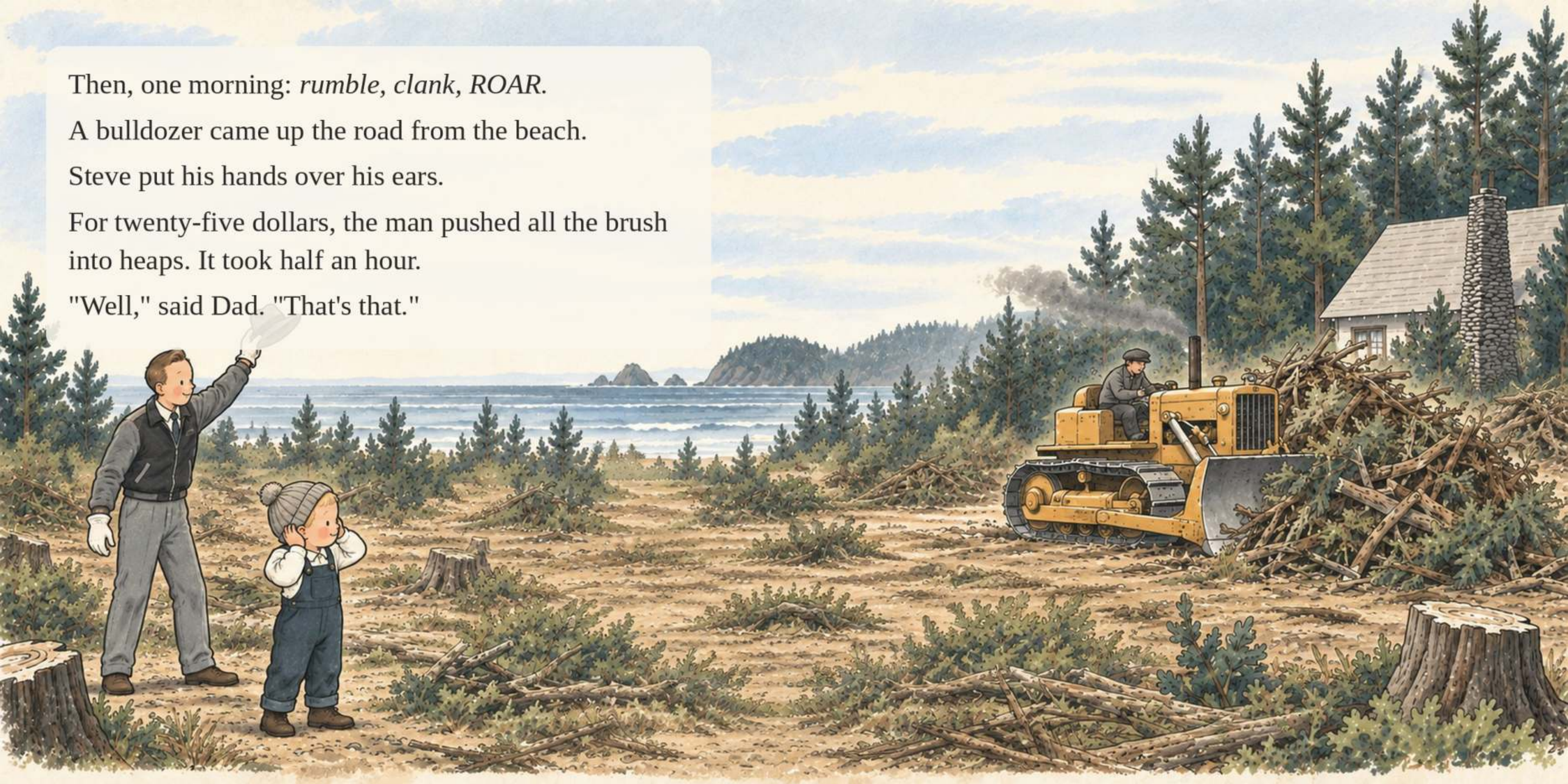


Everyone had a job.

Dad chopped. Mom pulled. Grandma Orma, who owned the land, pointed.

Steve dragged one stick. It was bigger than he was.

By suppertime they had cleared a patch the size of two beds.



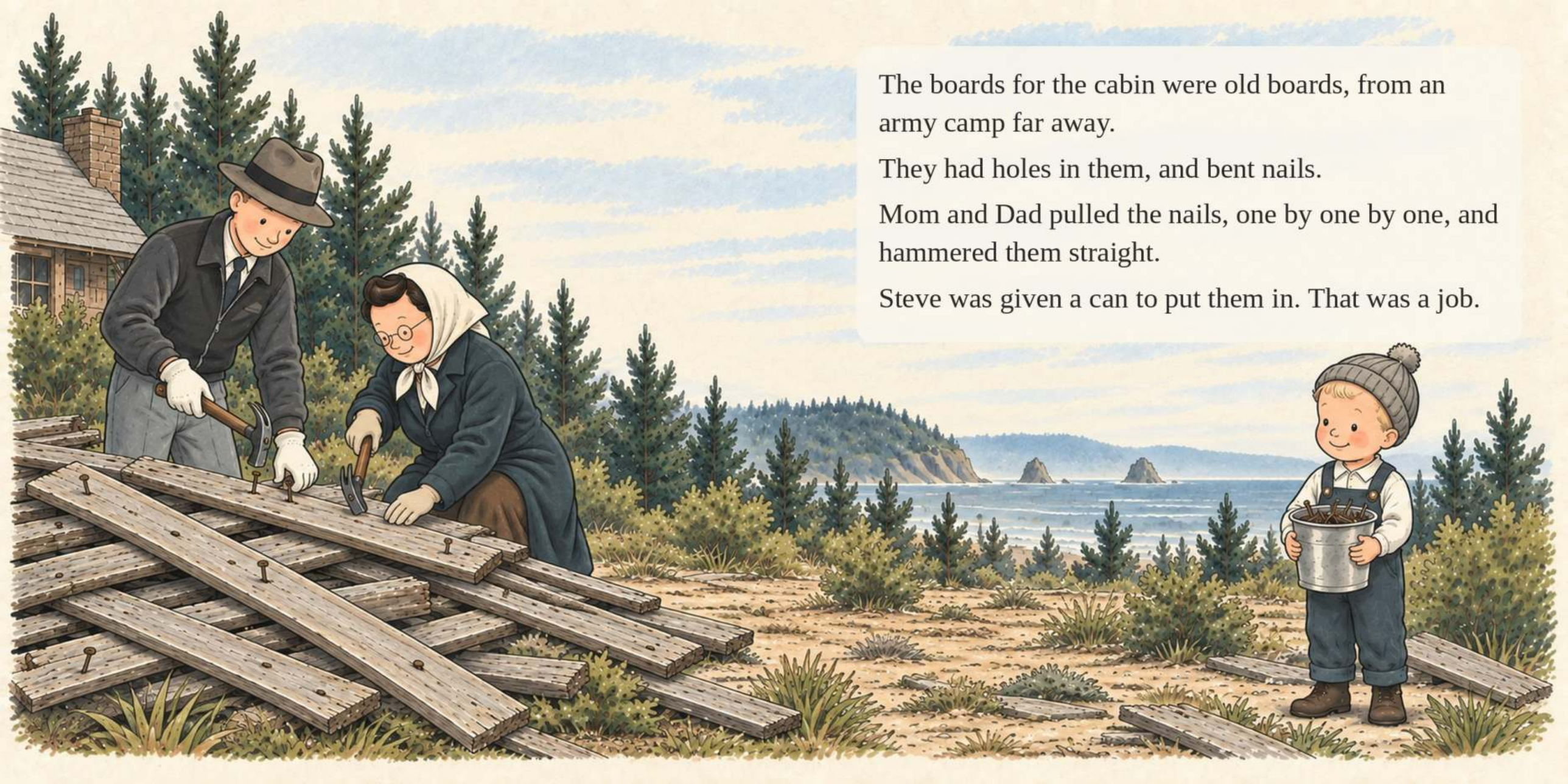
Then, one morning: *rumble, clank, ROAR.*

A bulldozer came up the road from the beach.

Steve put his hands over his ears.

For twenty-five dollars, the man pushed all the brush into heaps. It took half an hour.

"Well," said Dad. "That's that."

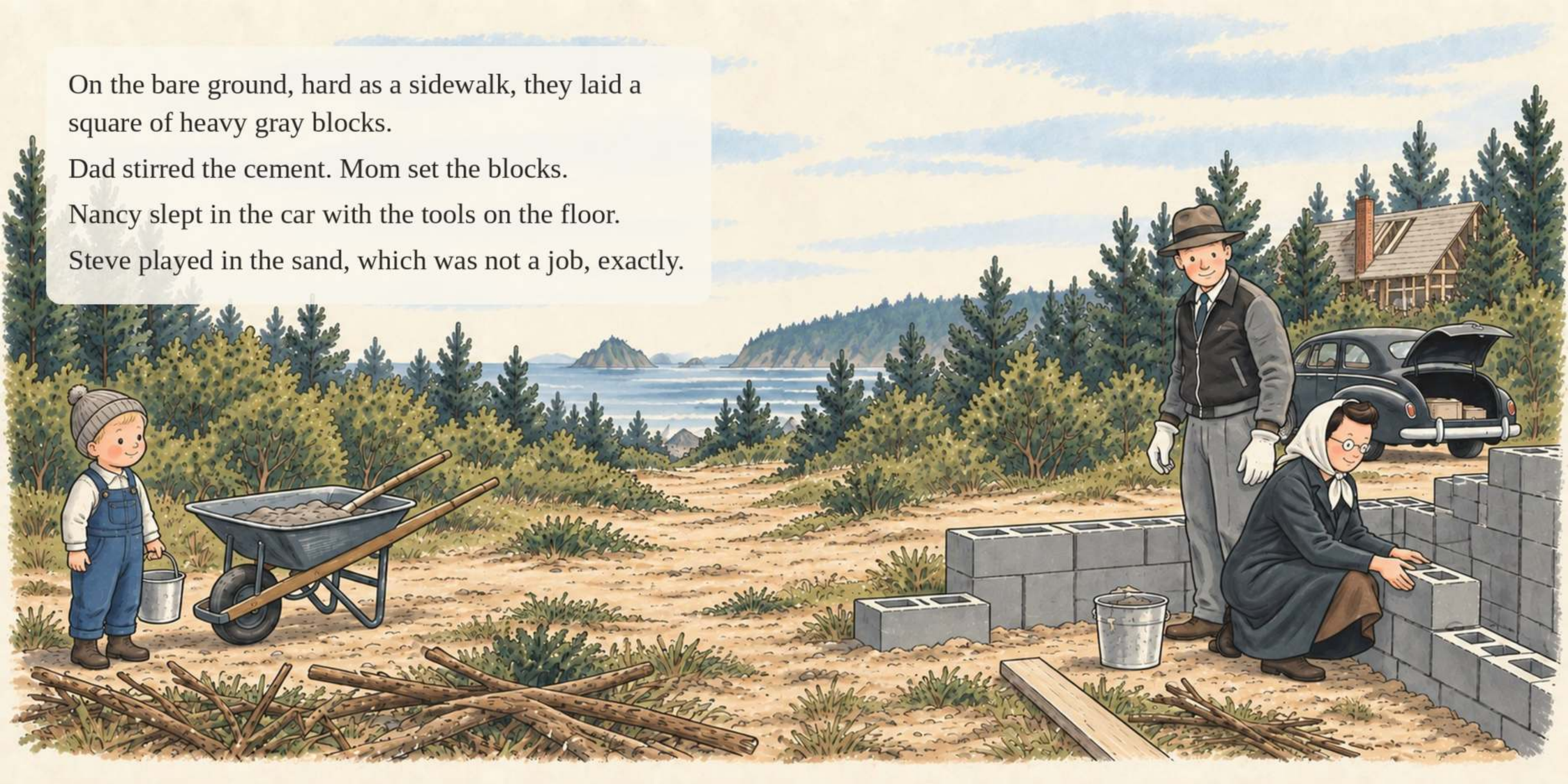


The boards for the cabin were old boards, from an army camp far away.

They had holes in them, and bent nails.

Mom and Dad pulled the nails, one by one by one, and hammered them straight.

Steve was given a can to put them in. That was a job.

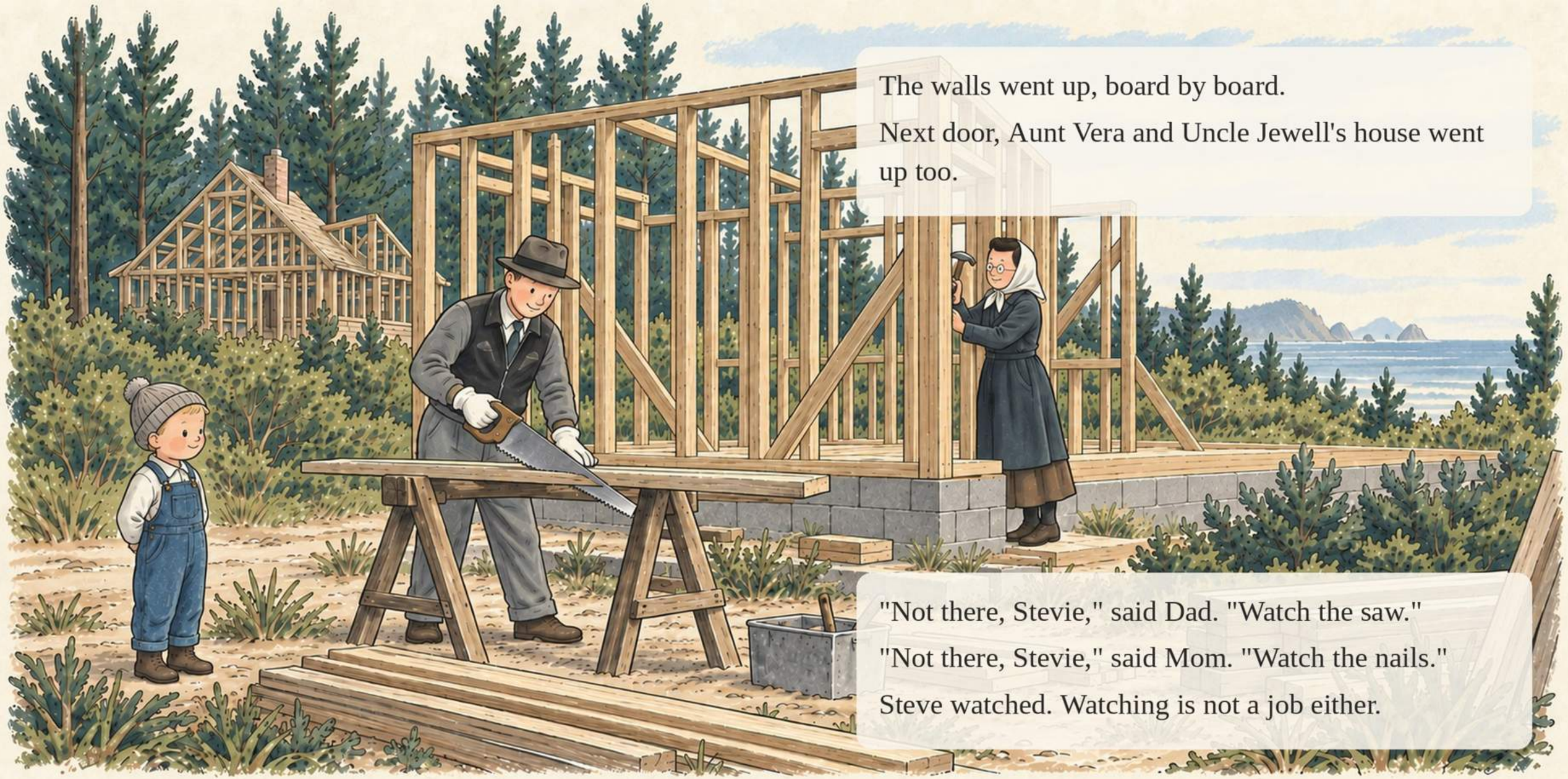


On the bare ground, hard as a sidewalk, they laid a square of heavy gray blocks.

Dad stirred the cement. Mom set the blocks.

Nancy slept in the car with the tools on the floor.

Steve played in the sand, which was not a job, exactly.



The walls went up, board by board.

Next door, Aunt Vera and Uncle Jewell's house went up too.

"Not there, Stevie," said Dad. "Watch the saw."

"Not there, Stevie," said Mom. "Watch the nails."

Steve watched. Watching is not a job either.

One Sunday a box came in the car from Salem.

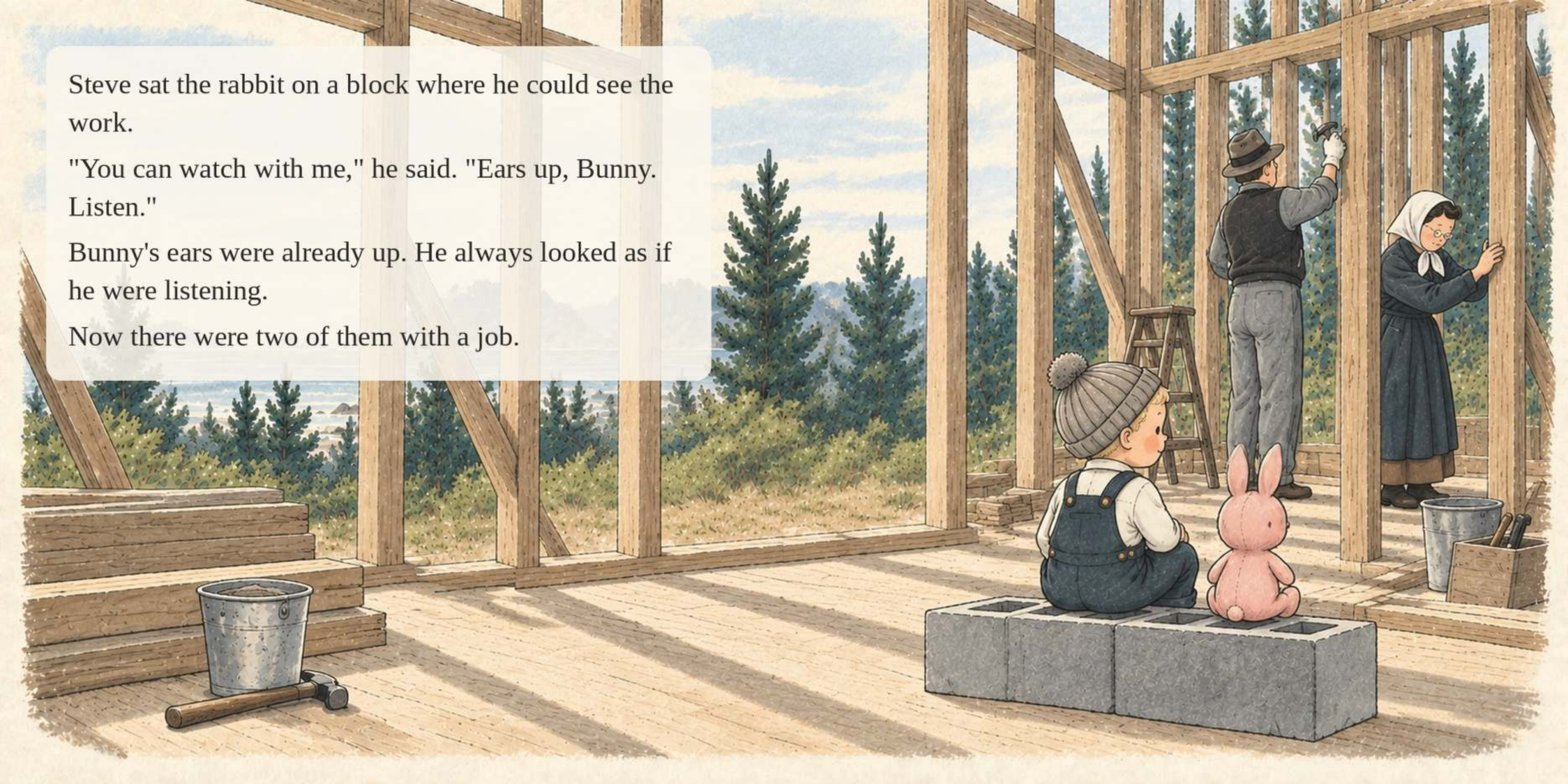
Inside were towels, and baby things, and sandwiches in paper.

And at the very bottom, sitting up very straight, a small pink rabbit.

His ears stood up. His eyes were two stitches. His belly button went *squeak!*

"Who packed the rabbit?" said Mom.

Nobody knew.

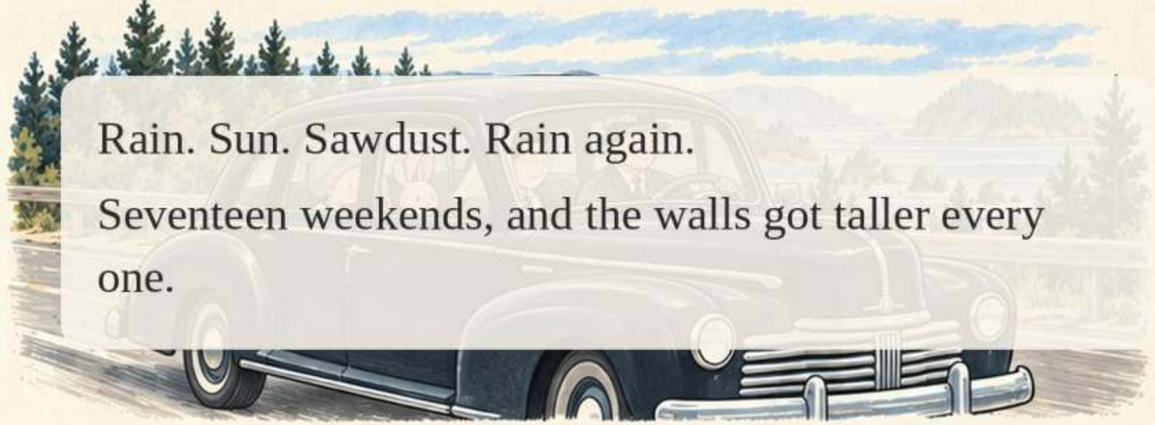


Steve sat the rabbit on a block where he could see the work.

"You can watch with me," he said. "Ears up, Bunny. Listen."

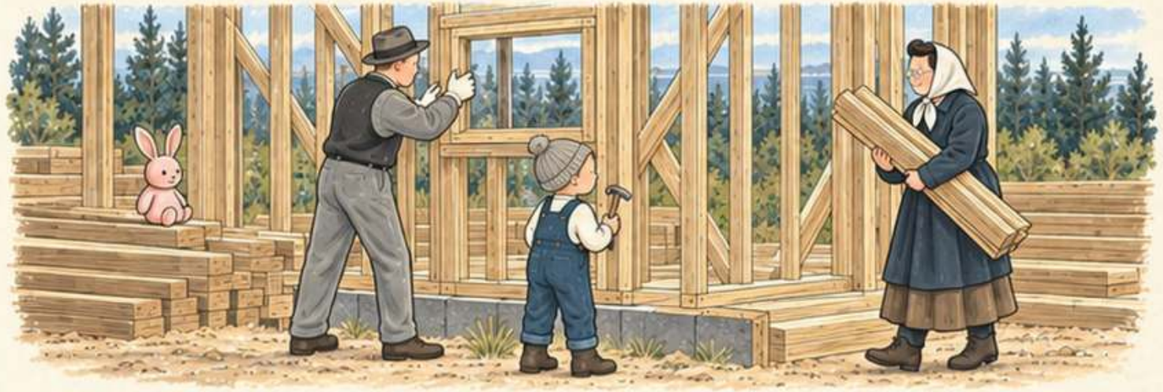
Bunny's ears were already up. He always looked as if he were listening.

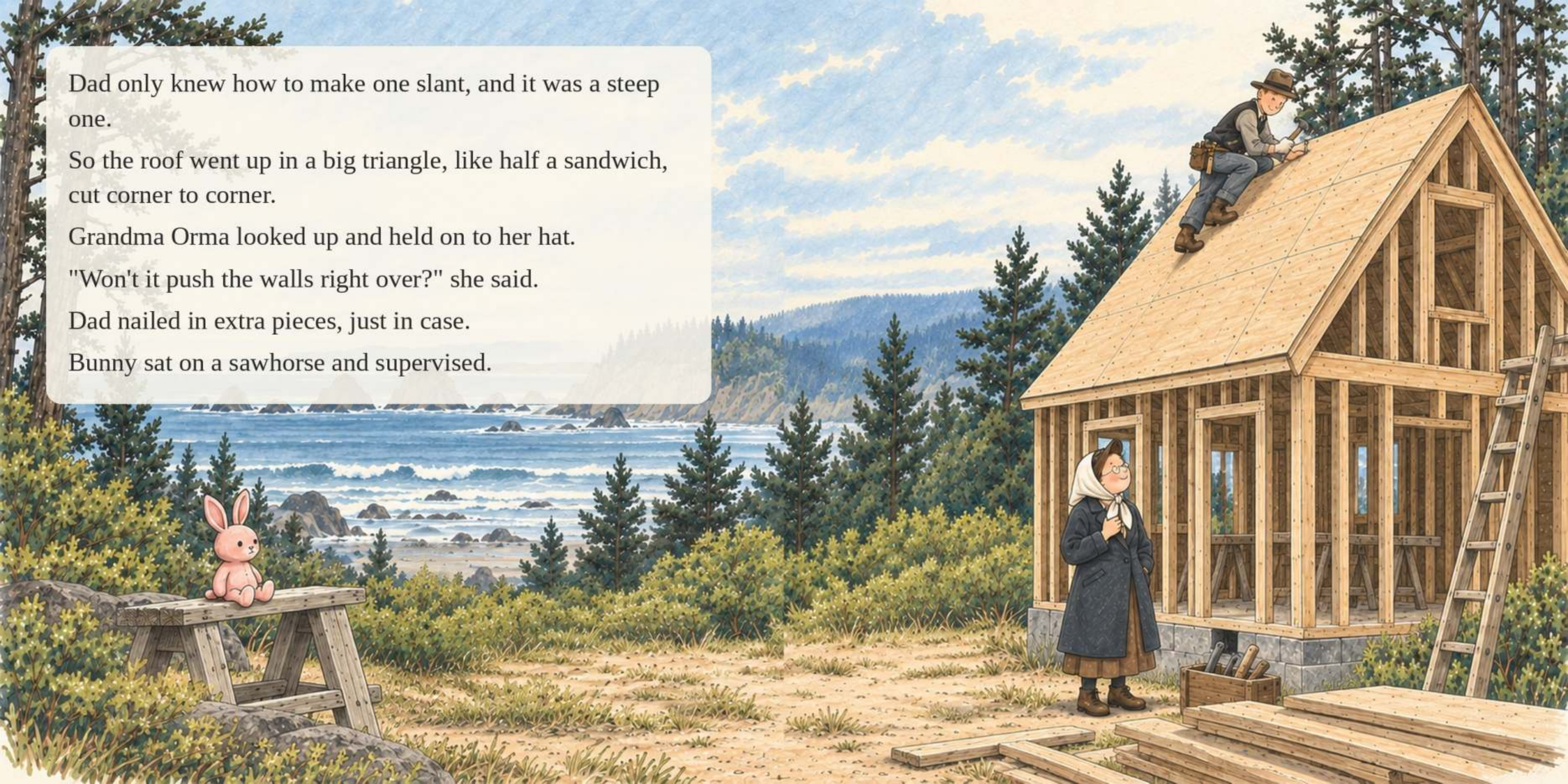
Now there were two of them with a job.



Rain. Sun. Sawdust. Rain again.

Seventeen weekends, and the walls got taller every one.





Dad only knew how to make one slant, and it was a steep one.

So the roof went up in a big triangle, like half a sandwich, cut corner to corner.

Grandma Orma looked up and held on to her hat.

"Won't it push the walls right over?" she said.

Dad nailed in extra pieces, just in case.

Bunny sat on a sawhorse and supervised.

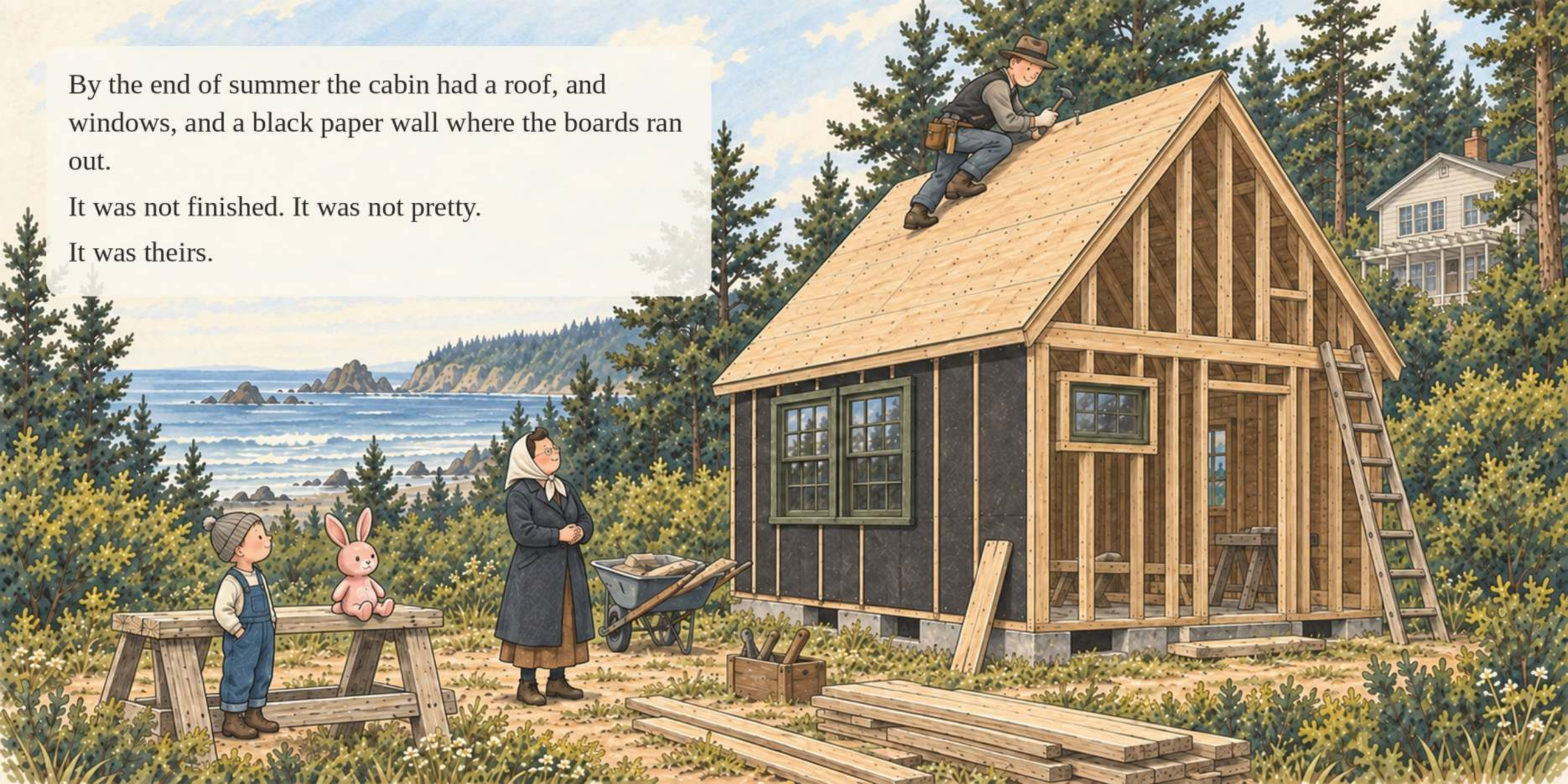
Dad built the stairs steep, too. At the top they didn't come out even, so the last step was a short one.

Steve carried Bunny up.

"Ears up, Bunny. Listen," said Steve, and took the last step — *bump*.

"That step is a mistake," said Dad.

"It's a good step," said Steve. "It's my size."



By the end of summer the cabin had a roof, and windows, and a black paper wall where the boards ran out.

It was not finished. It was not pretty.

It was theirs.

They slept at the auto court up the road, two dollars a night.

That night the wind leaned on the little room, and the ocean went *WHOOSH*.

Then, beside the pillow, very softly: *squeak*.

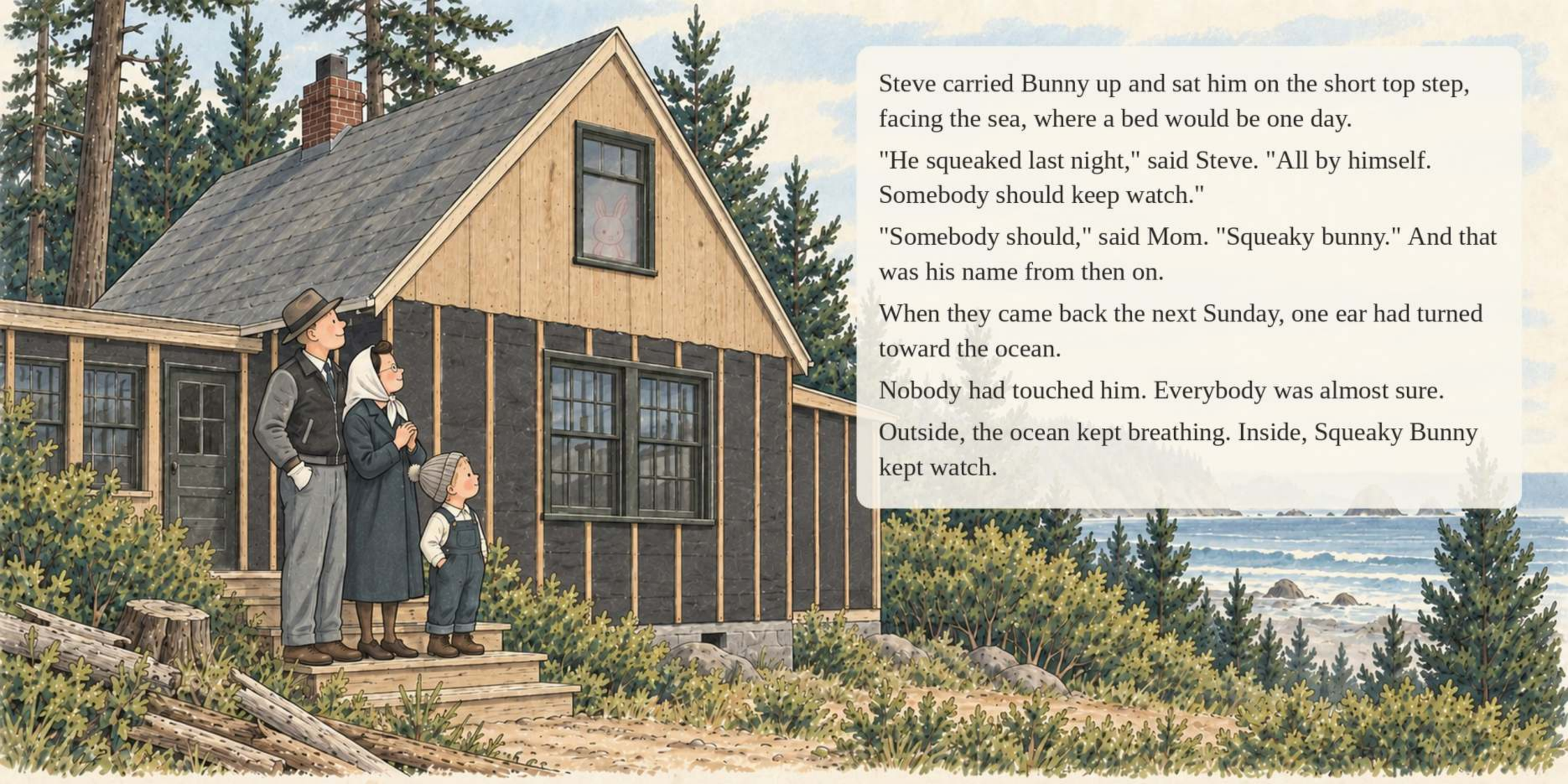
Steve had not touched him.

"Ears up, Bunny," he whispered. "Listen."

Whoosh, went the ocean, and back. Slow and long, like Nancy breathing.

It wasn't a monster. It was keeping time.

Steve breathed with it. And Steve slept.



Steve carried Bunny up and sat him on the short top step, facing the sea, where a bed would be one day.

"He squeaked last night," said Steve. "All by himself. Somebody should keep watch."

"Somebody should," said Mom. "Squeaky bunny." And that was his name from then on.

When they came back the next Sunday, one ear had turned toward the ocean.

Nobody had touched him. Everybody was almost sure.

Outside, the ocean kept breathing. Inside, Squeaky Bunny kept watch.

Spring 1947. Wes and Elsie Sullivan lay the foundation blocks, mixing the mortar by hand, while Steve, who was three, plays beside them. Two-month-old Nancy is asleep on the back seat of the 1940 Mercury.

This Really Happened

How the cabin was built. In 1942 Orma Sullivan bought four small lots at Lincoln Beach for twenty dollars a month. After the war her son Wes, home from flying a B-17, and his wife Elsie agreed to build a cabin if Orma paid the bills. They bought old lumber, doors and windows from Camp Adair, an army camp that was being taken apart, and pulled the nails at home in Salem. Clearing the salal by hand gave them a patch six feet by twelve in an afternoon; a bulldozer did the rest for twenty-five dollars in half an hour. Wes worked nights at a Salem newspaper, so the family built from Sunday noon to Tuesday, slept at a two-dollar-a-night auto court up the road, and kept it up for seventeen weekends and a two-week vacation. Wes could figure only one angle, forty-five degrees — so the roof is that steep, every stair is as tall as it is deep, and, because the stairs did not come out even, the top step is short. Vera and Jewell Lantz, Wes's aunt and uncle, built next door the same summer. The family first slept in the cabin in 1948.

Who was here before. People have lived on this coast for thousands of years. In the 1850s many peoples were moved onto a reservation that stretched more than a hundred miles along this shore, and Lincoln Beach was inside it. In 1894 the land was divided into allotments, and on November 19, 1894, Emma Taylor, a member of the Siletz tribe, received the eighty-five acres that include the ground where Sullishak stands. Her heir sold the land in 1925, and in 1927 George Betts divided it into lots. The Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians are a living nation, and their history is theirs to tell; to hear it from them, start with the tribe's own website.

Squeaky Bunny at the cabin. There was a Squeaky Bunny at Sullishak: about eight inches tall, pink and fuzzy, ears straight up, a squeaker for a belly button. He lived upstairs and helped the Sullivan children go to sleep. The house, the people who built it, the seventeen weekends, the steep roof, and the short top step are part of the family's real history at Lincoln Beach.

And now. In October 2026, after reading the longer book, Mary Lowd sewed a squeaker into a soft, pale pink rabbit with floppy ears and named her Sully. Mary plans to bring her to the cabin. What became of the first Squeaky Bunny is told in the longer book.

Read more in Sullishak History *by Dave, Steve and Wes Sullivan (2024).*