



TOR FRETHEIM - ØYVIND TORSETER

THE STORY



Translation © Kari Dickson 2019

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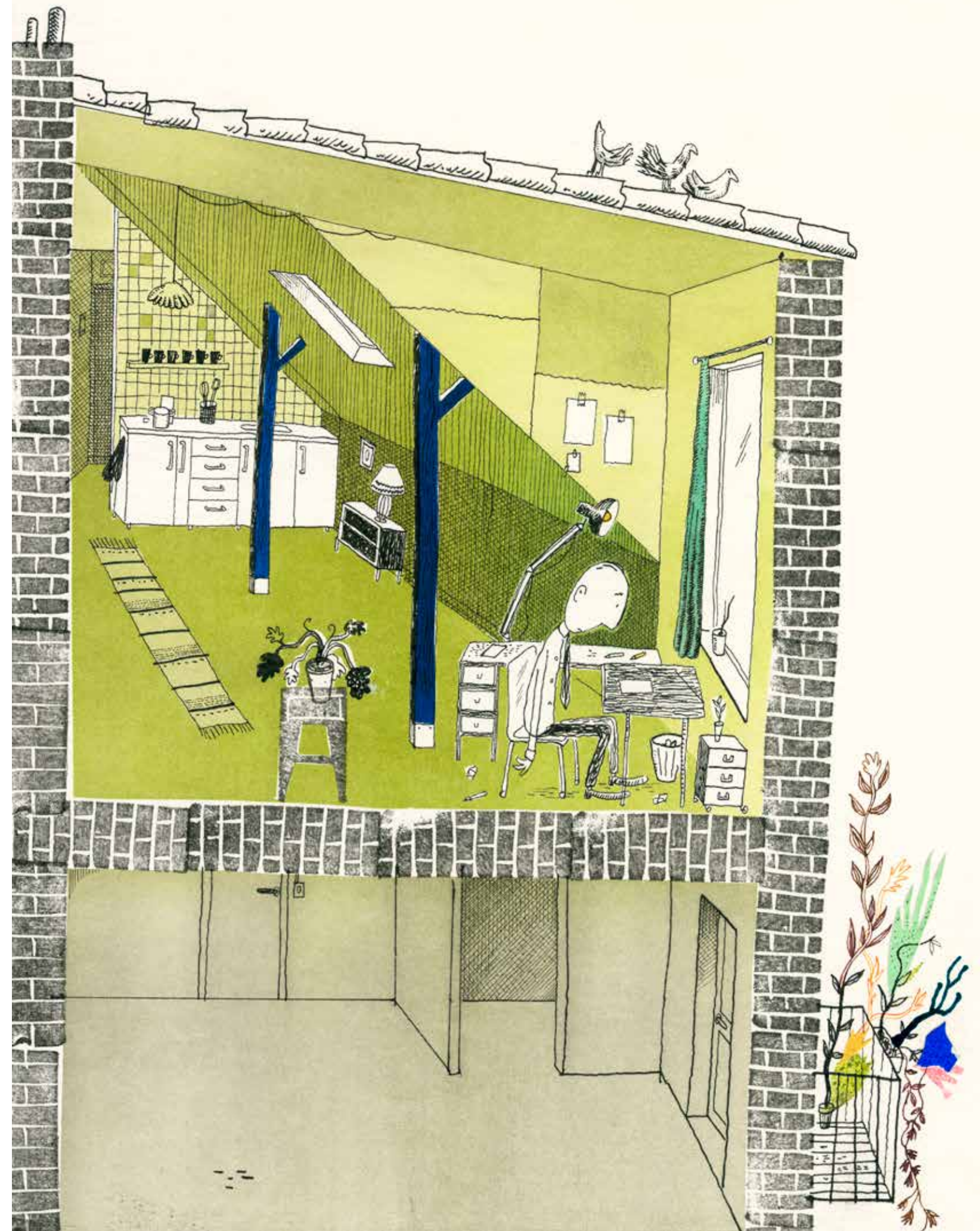
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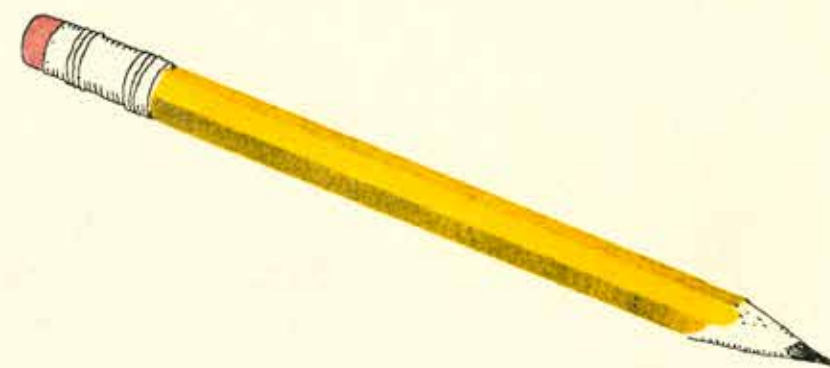
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An author sat down at his desk to write.
On the desk was a sheet of paper.
And beside the sheet of paper, a sharpened pencil.
The author stared at the blank page.



He sat there for many hours.



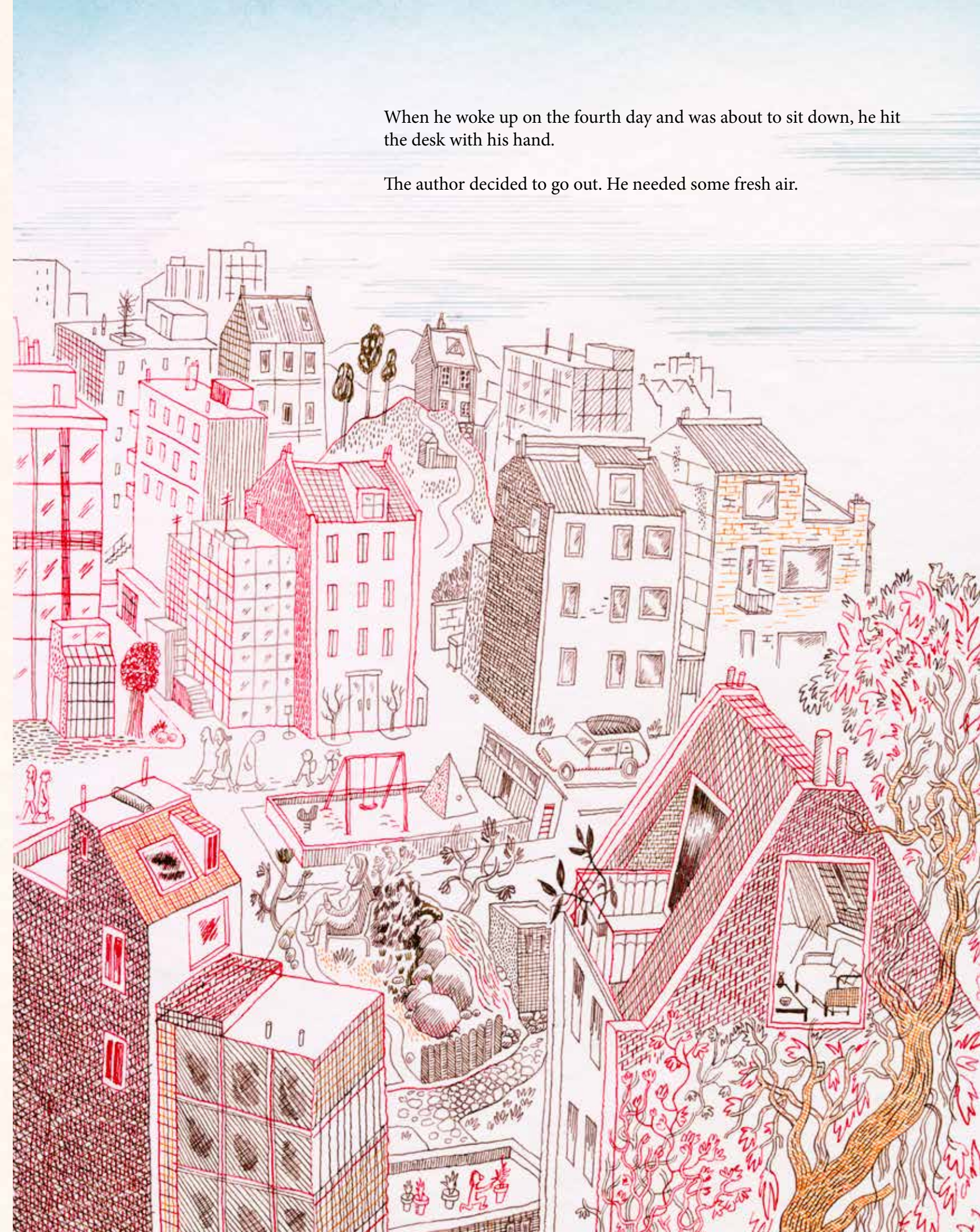
He was still sitting there the next day, with the same sheet of paper.
And the pencil was still as sharp.

And again the day after.



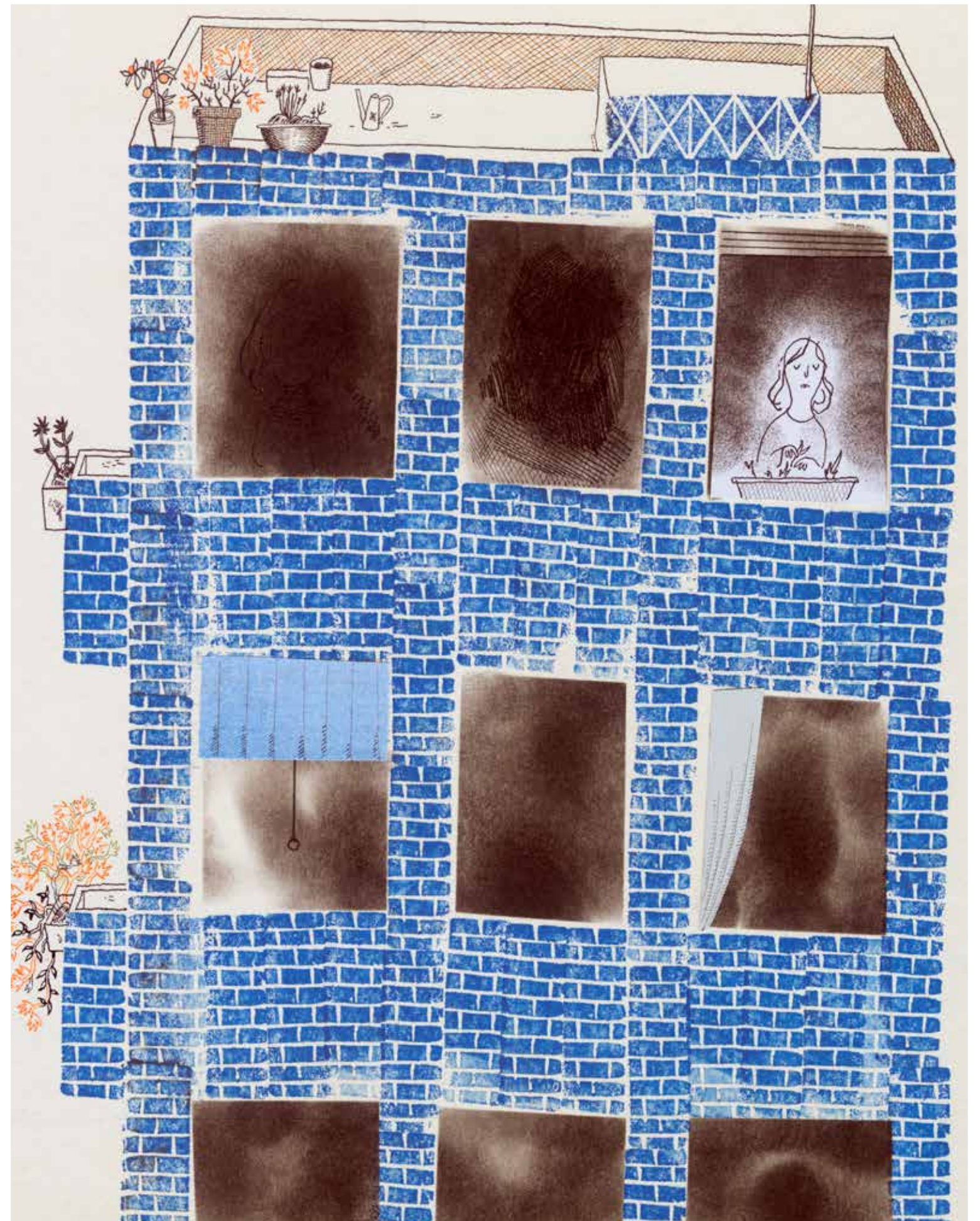
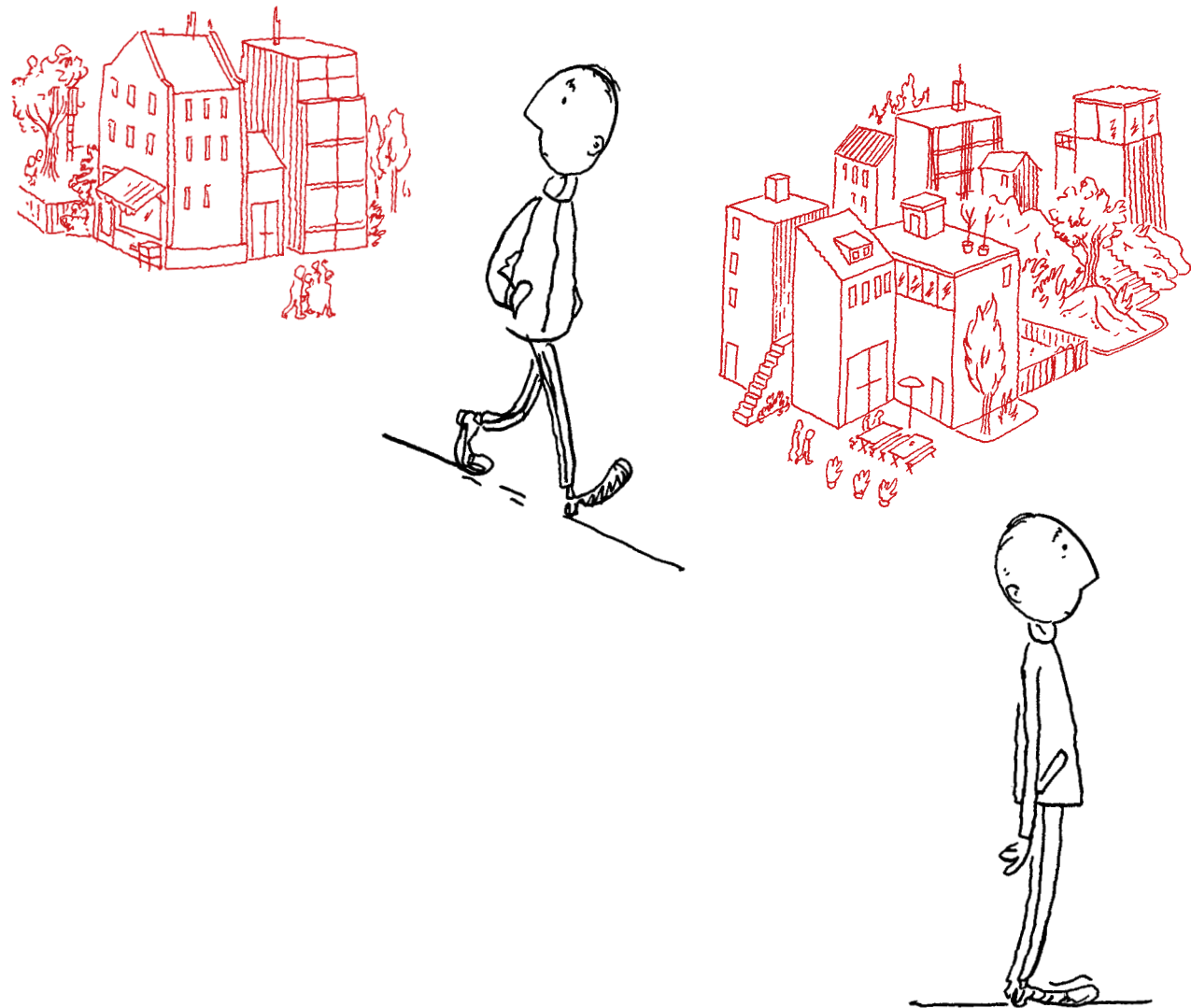
When he woke up on the fourth day and was about to sit down, he hit the desk with his hand.

The author decided to go out. He needed some fresh air.





He walked down some streets, crossed a couple of roads, until he came to a big building.





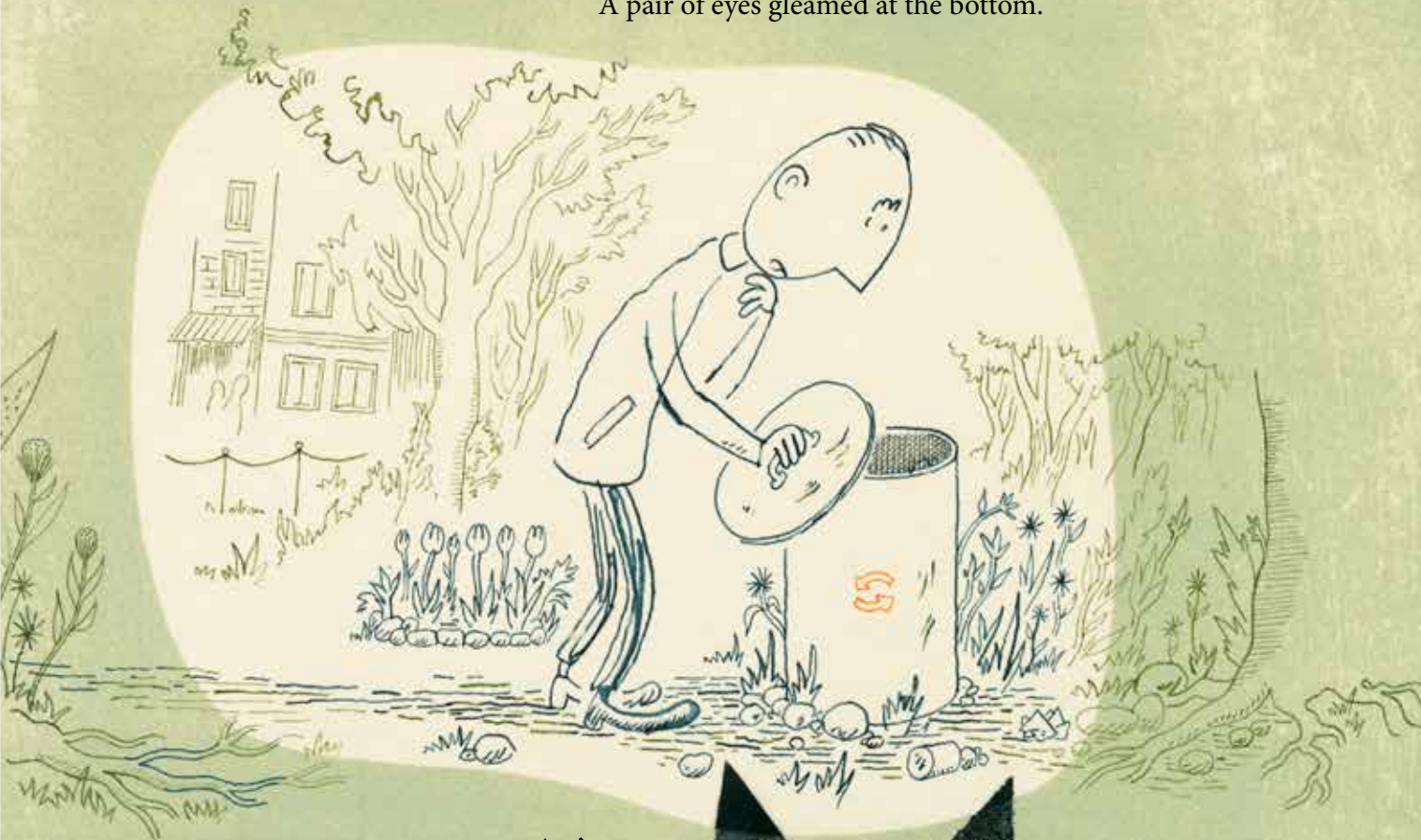
Lots of people lived there.
But only one lady was to be seen in one of the windows.
He watched her for a long time.
'Why are you looking at me like that?' she asked.
'I'm wondering why you are standing in the window,' he said.
'Why do you wonder that?' she wanted to know.
'Because I wonder if you are going to be part of my story,' he said.
'I don't like stories,' she said.
'I haven't written this story yet,' he said.
'Then it's best that you don't write it,' the lady said, and closed the window.
She is not happy, the author thought, and walked on.



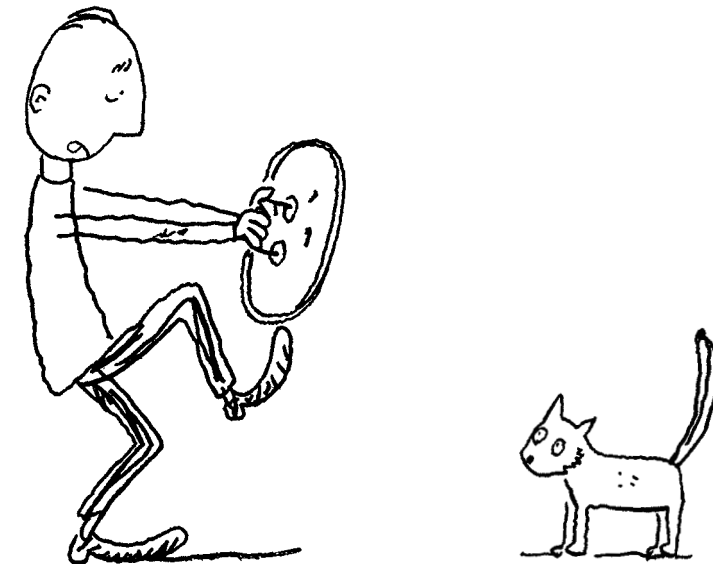
The author walked into a park, then stopped abruptly.
A litter bin was moving.
Something was scratching around inside.



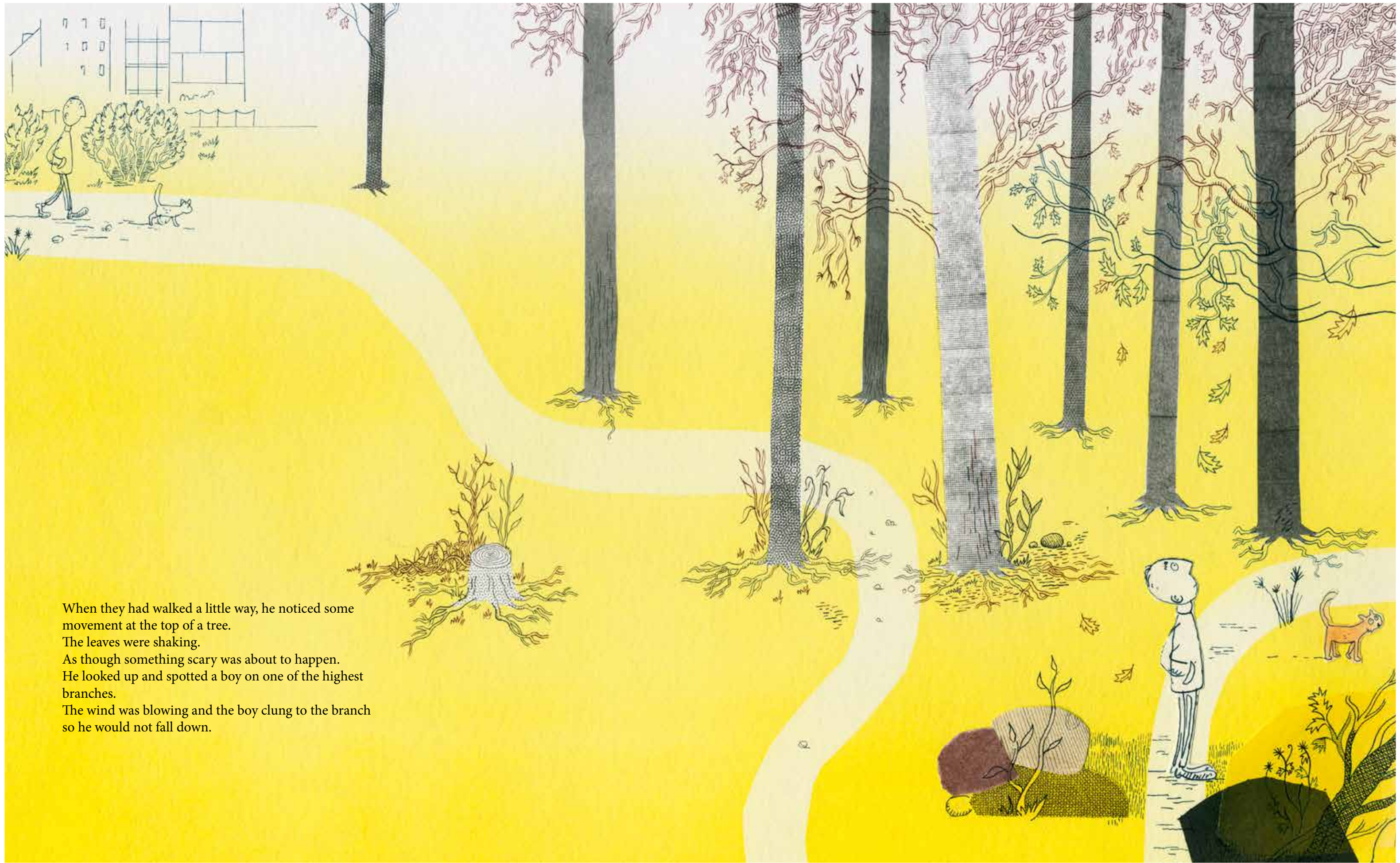
He tentatively lifted the lid.
He looked down into a black hole.
A pair of eyes gleamed at the bottom.



KATTEØYNE.
CAT EYES!

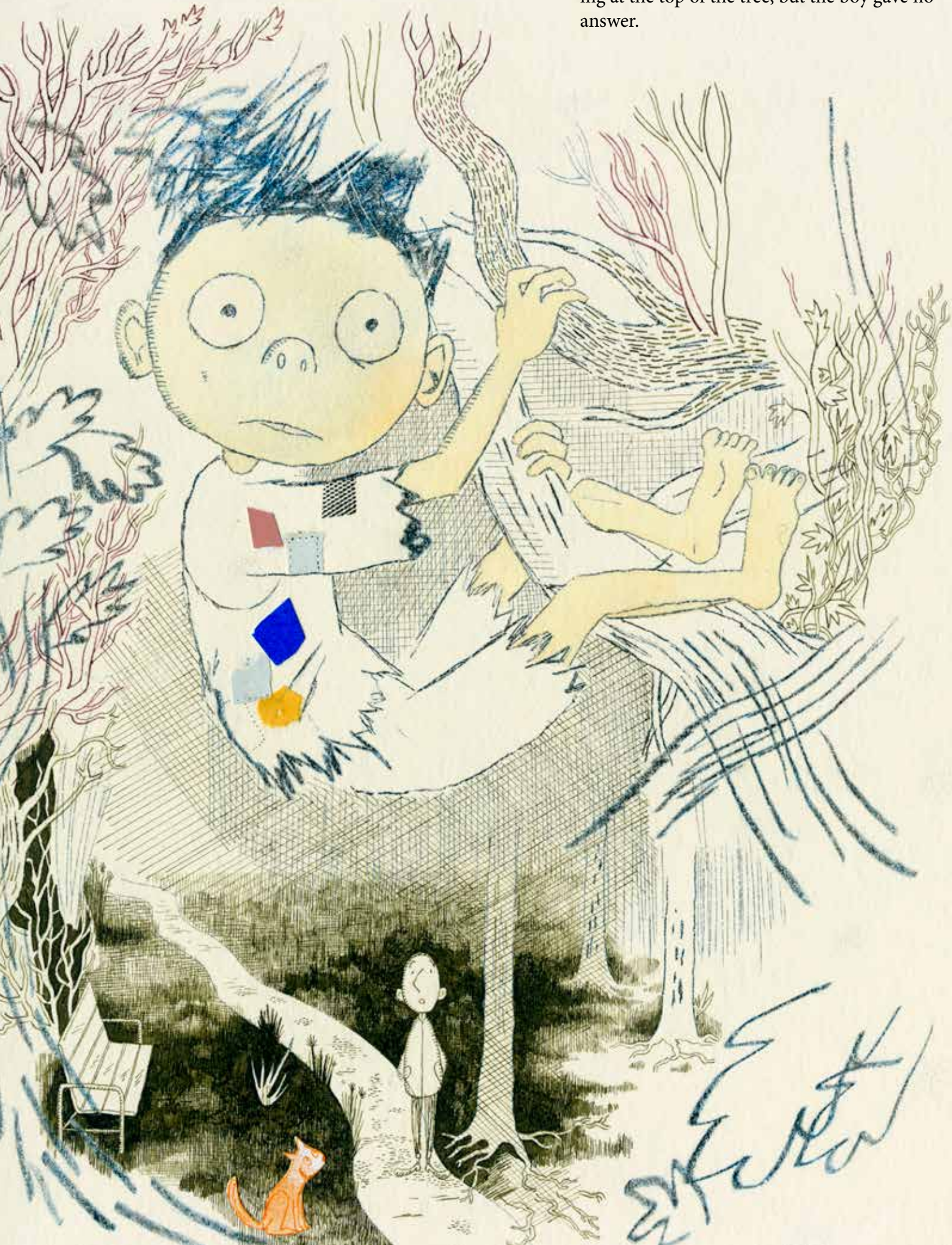


All his life, the author had been frightened of cats and wanted to slam the lid back on straightaway.
But before he could do that, the cat had leapt out.
'I don't dare have you in my story,' said the author.
The cat looked at him.
Thanked the author for rescuing him.
But the author did not believe him.
You can never trust a cat, he thought.
But when the cat walked on into the park with its tail in the air, he followed.
The author had always been curious.



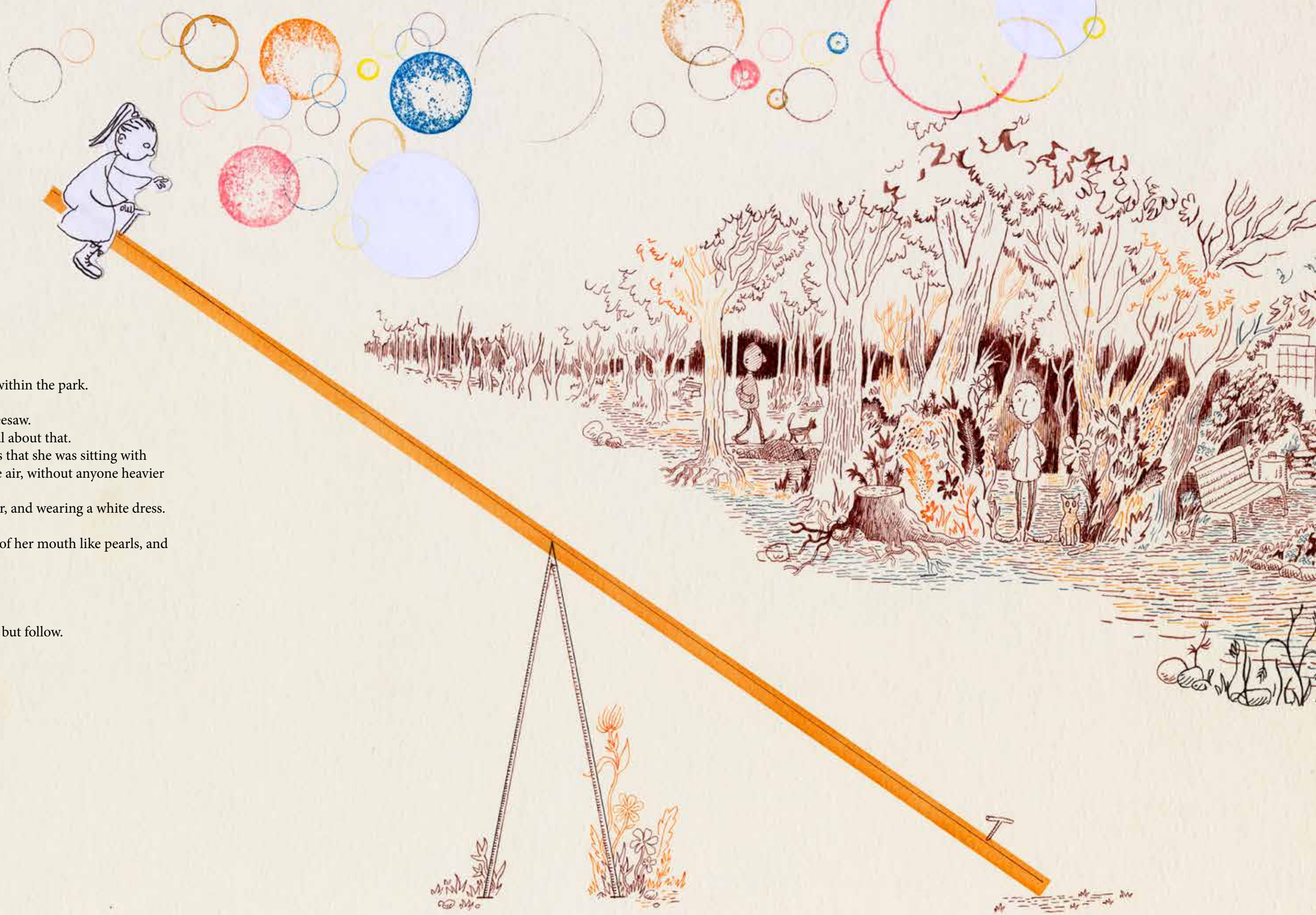
When they had walked a little way, he noticed some movement at the top of a tree.
The leaves were shaking.
As though something scary was about to happen.
He looked up and spotted a boy on one of the highest branches.
The wind was blowing and the boy clung to the branch so he would not fall down.

The author wanted to know what he was doing at the top of the tree, but the boy gave no answer.



He realised that the boy wanted to be left in peace and carried on.

There was a smaller park within the park.
A playpark.
A girl was sitting on the seesaw.
There was nothing unusual about that.
But what was unusual, was that she was sitting with
her legs dangling up in the air, without anyone heavier
sitting on the other end.
She was lighter than the air, and wearing a white dress.
She was laughing.
Her laughter tumbled out of her mouth like pearls, and
the author heard music.
He had to laugh as well.
The cat looked at him.
It blinked and walked on.
The author could not help but follow.





Evening came and the streetlights went on.
When they got to the end of the park, the cat turned and went back the
same way.
The author thought it was time to go home.
He didn't like being out in the gloaming, under the big trees.
Between the dense bushes.
Certainly not with a cat that frightened him.

Darkness fell over the park.
No laughter from the playground.
Not a single sound from anywhere.

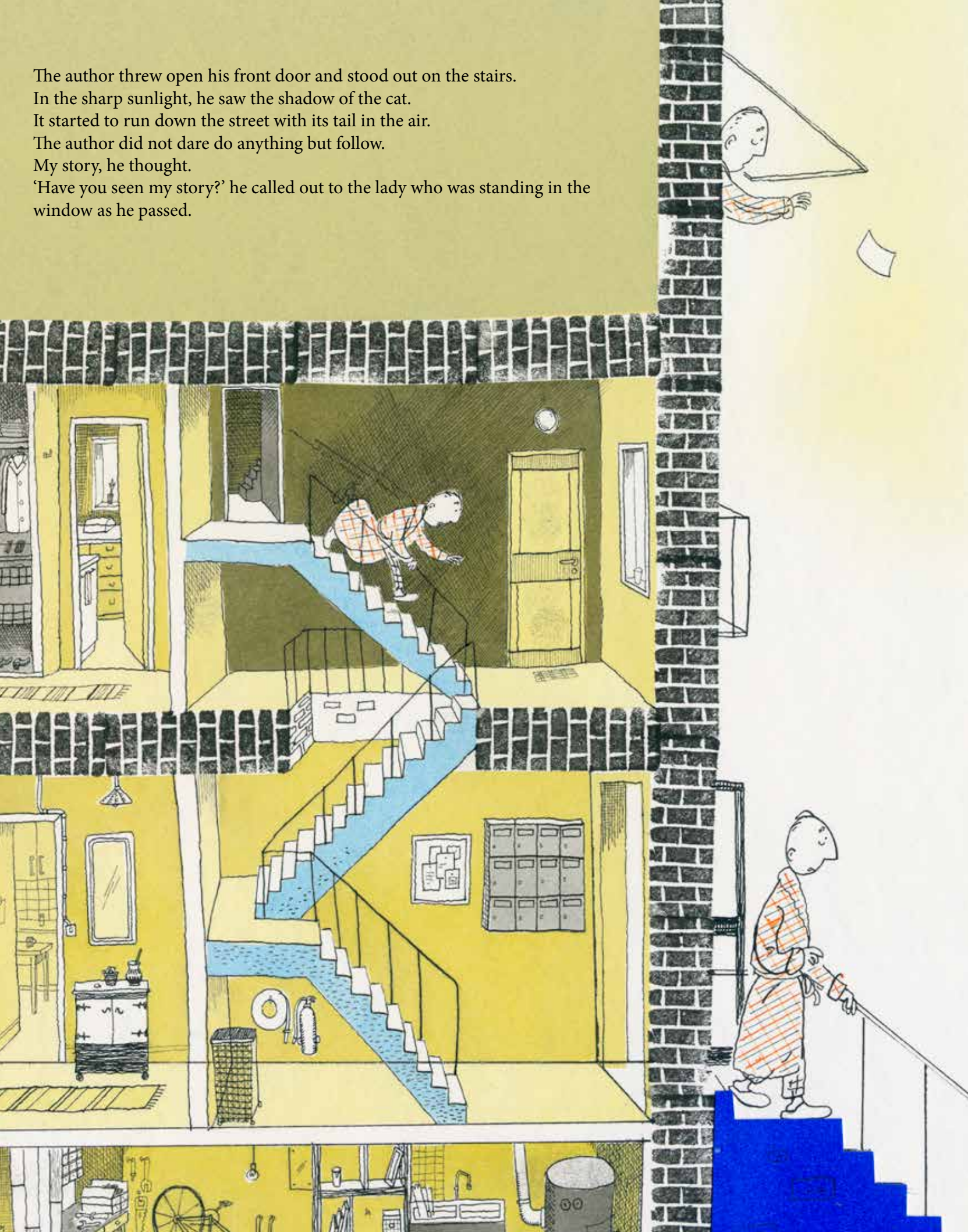
The author sat at home and wrote a story.
He wrote it and rewrote it, again and again.
He had no idea how many pages he had written.
And thrown away.
He did not know how many pencils he had sharpened and sharpened until he could no longer hold them between his finger and thumb.



Finally he was finished.
But ...
'What happened to my story?' the author cried.
It vanished before his very eyes.
He had opened the window, and a breeze came in.
And blew out again.
And disappeared.
And it managed to take with it all the sheets of paper.
Not a single sheet was left on the desk.



The author threw open his front door and stood out on the stairs.
In the sharp sunlight, he saw the shadow of the cat.
It started to run down the street with its tail in the air.
The author did not dare do anything but follow.
My story, he thought.
'Have you seen my story?' he called out to the lady who was standing in the window as he passed.

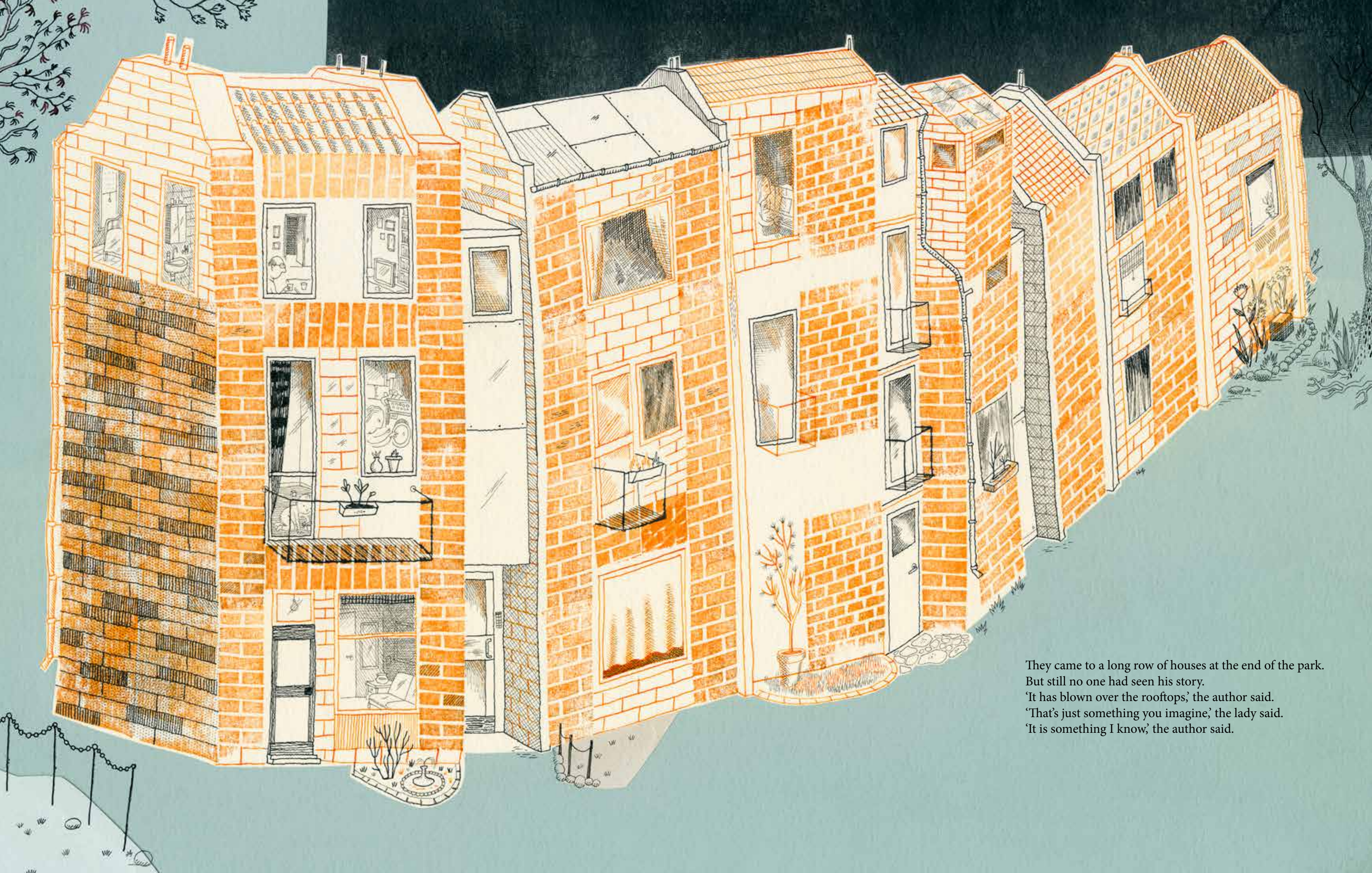


She had not, but this time she came down onto the street to join the author and the cat.

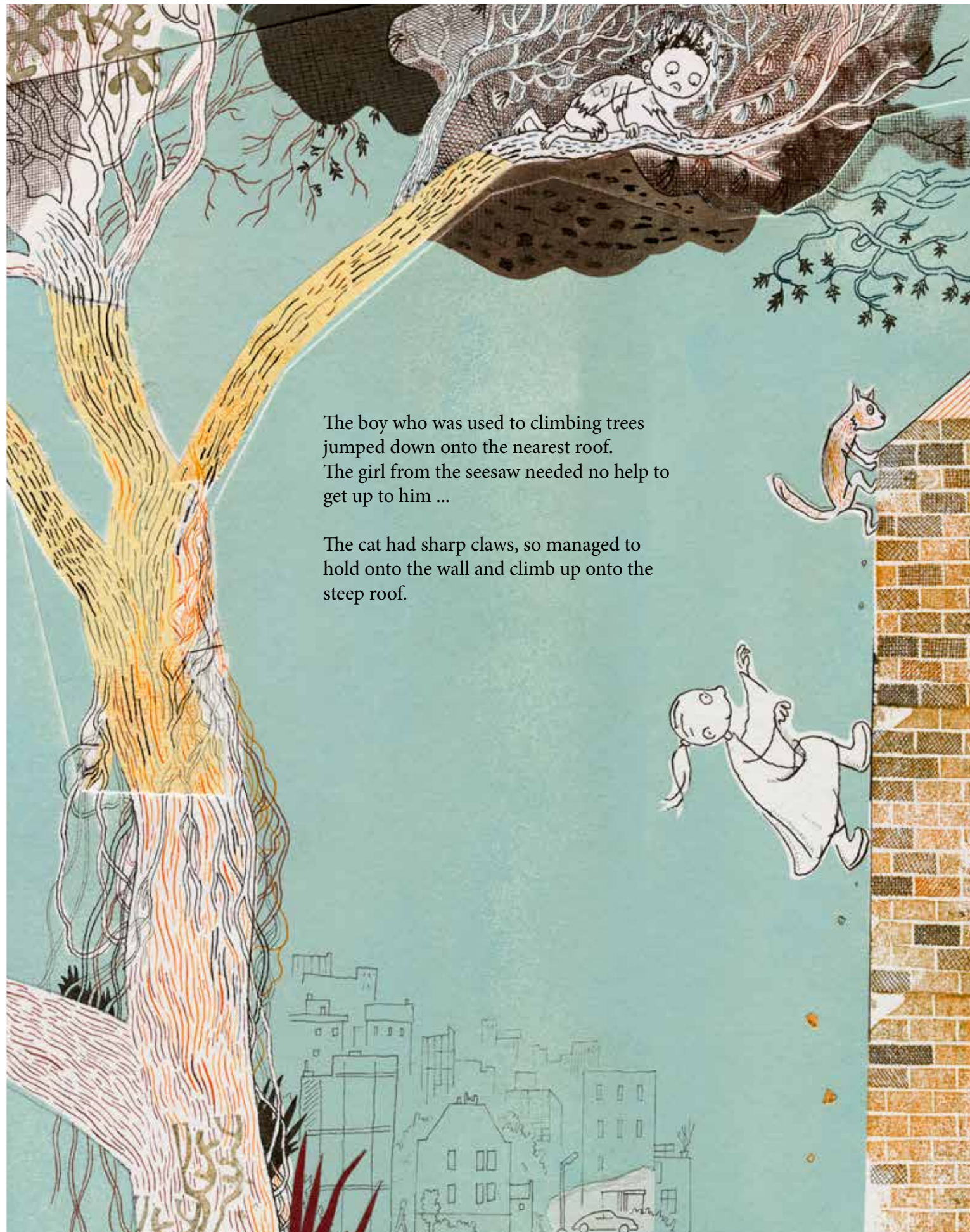


They ran past the empty litter bin and on into the park.
'Have you seen my short story?' he shouted up to the tree tops.
Without a word, the boy followed them, jumping from tree to tree.
The girl on the seesaw had not seen his story either.
She too ran after the author and the cat and the two others.



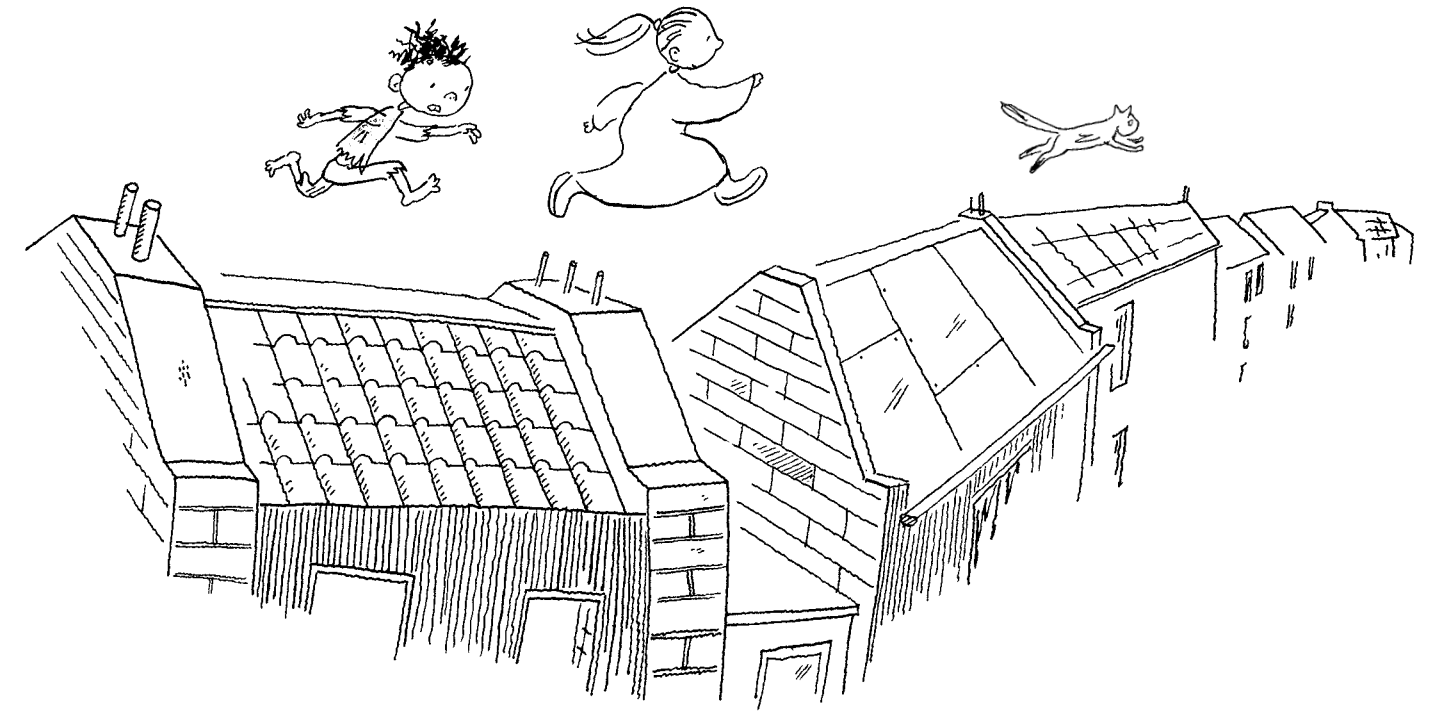


They came to a long row of houses at the end of the park.
But still no one had seen his story.
'It has blown over the rooftops,' the author said.
'That's just something you imagine,' the lady said.
'It is something I know,' the author said.



The boy who was used to climbing trees
jumped down onto the nearest roof.
The girl from the seesaw needed no help to
get up to him ...

The cat had sharp claws, so managed to
hold onto the wall and climb up onto the
steep roof.



The author and the lady stood on the ground and watched
them.

He was scared of heights.

She could not keep her balance.

'They'll get lost,' she said.

'There is only one way to the story,' he said.

Then they heard laughter as all three slid down the drain-
pipe at top speed.

'I didn't know cats could laugh,' she said.

'A cat can get tickles in its tummy too,' he said.

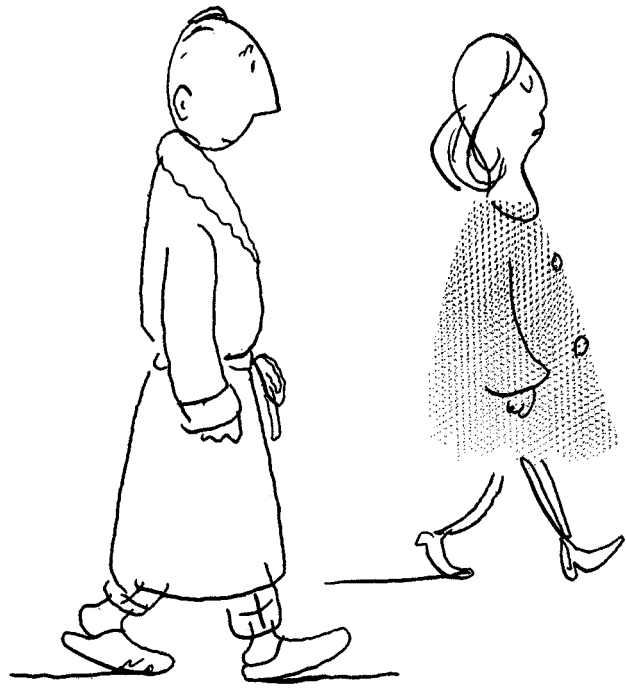
'They'll hurt themselves,' she said.

'They'll come to no harm,' he said.

'You're lying,' she said.

'I'm an author,' he said.



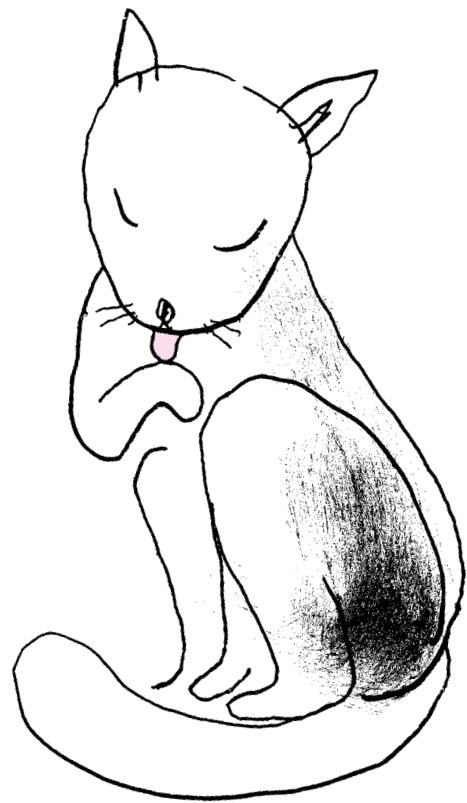


They had come to the last house in the long row of houses.
The cat jumped up onto the window sill.
It made itself comfortable, tucked in its tail, and started to purr.
The girl from the seesaw and the boy with the messy hair had to stand on their toes to see in through the window.
The author and the lady who had come with him stood behind them.
'I can hear a girl reading,' the author said.
'Do you know her?' the lady asked.
'I know the story,' the author said.
'It's a story about an angel,' he said.
'Angels don't exist,' the lady said.
'Angels exist when you believe in them,' he said.
'I don't believe in things I've never seen,' the lady said.
'Then you should look more closely,' the author said.
'I would recognise an angel with wings,' the lady said.
'The wings might be so small that it is hard to see them.'





The girl from the seesaw turned around and smiled.
The cat gave a loud miaow.
'I still haven't heard a single word,' the lady said.
'You have to listen more closely,' the author said.
'I hear what I want to hear,' she said.
'Then you might hear that she's reading about a boy who is
happiest in the tree tops,' he said.
'Why doesn't he want to have his feet on the ground?' she
said.
'He wants peace,' he said.
'Why?' she asked.
'I didn't write about that,' the author said.
'Why not?' the lady said.
'I promised not to tell anyone,' he said.



Now it was the boy who turned around with a secretive smile.
'You haven't written about me,' the lady said.
'I've written about you ever since I first saw you in the window,' he said.
'I haven't noticed anything,' she said.
'I wanted to make you happy,' he said.
'Are you going to take your story home again?' she said.
He shook his head.
'I don't own it any longer.'
'But you went looking for it.'
'The girl who is reading the story can keep it,' the author said.
He turned and looked for the cat.
The cat stretched its tail up as high in the air as it could.
And went on its way.





Another time, the author thought, I need to be bolder.
And write about the cat.
All stories have to be told again.



Dear Tor

*For several years, we have talked about you writing a picture book, and then you sent this gem of a book out of the blue. You were so happy about this book and about Øyvind's illustrations. It was your first picture book, and your last. We feel such joy and gratitude in our grief to be able to publish *The Story*. Because it is about you, Tor, and about us, and you have given us one final gift.*

*Thank you.
Ellen Seip, editor*

