

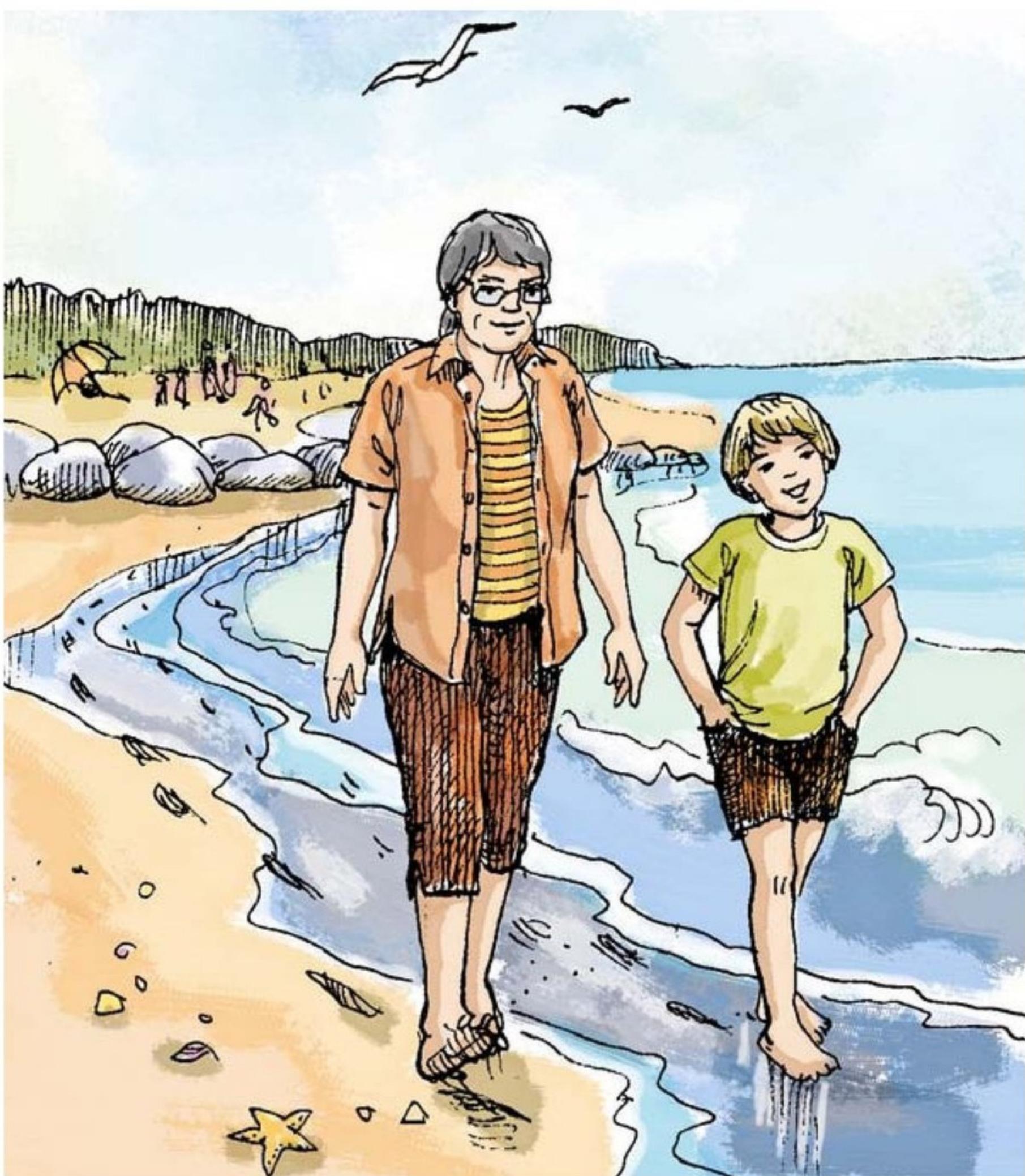
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Bats in the Attic



Written by Deborah Ambroza
Illustrated by Marcy Ramsey

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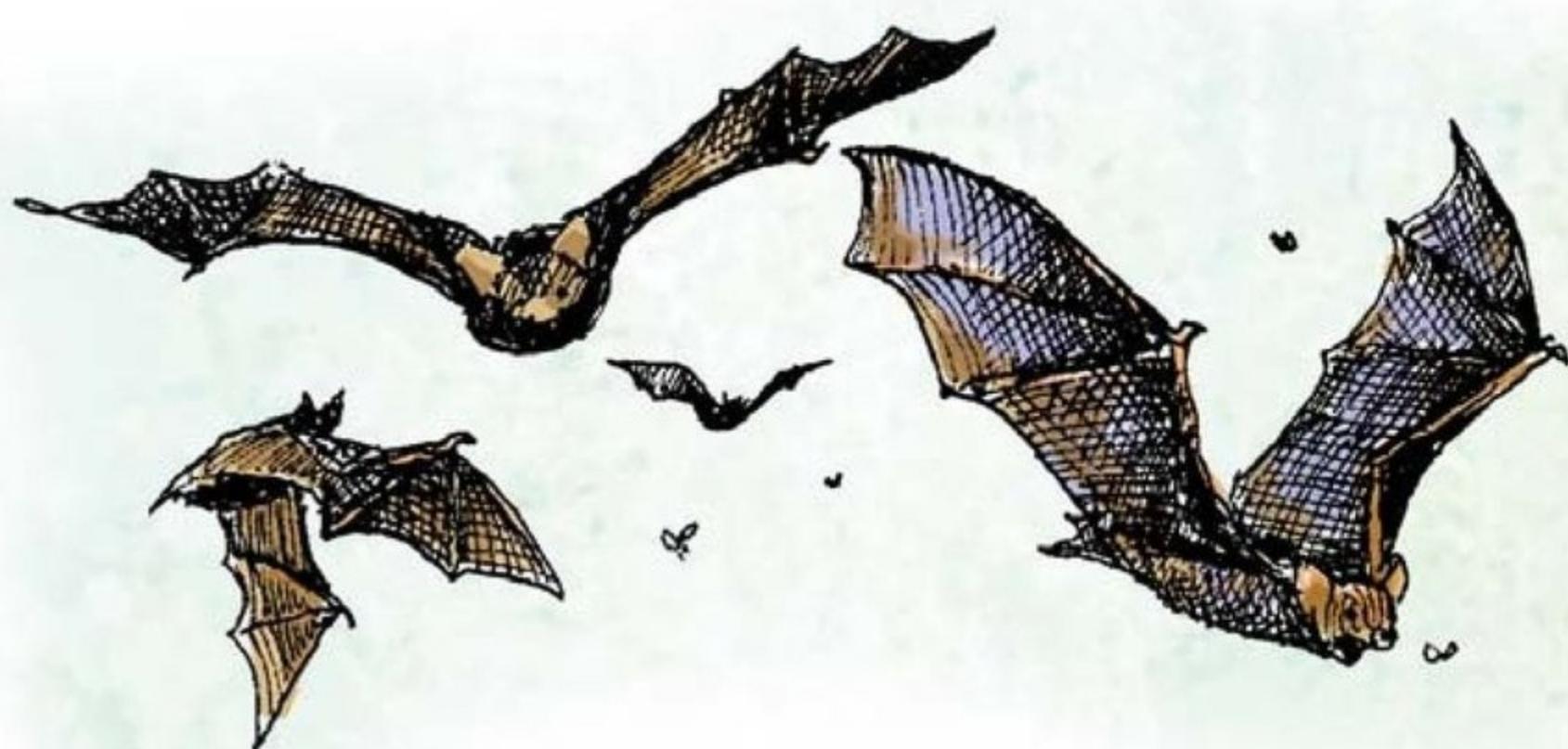
Table of Contents

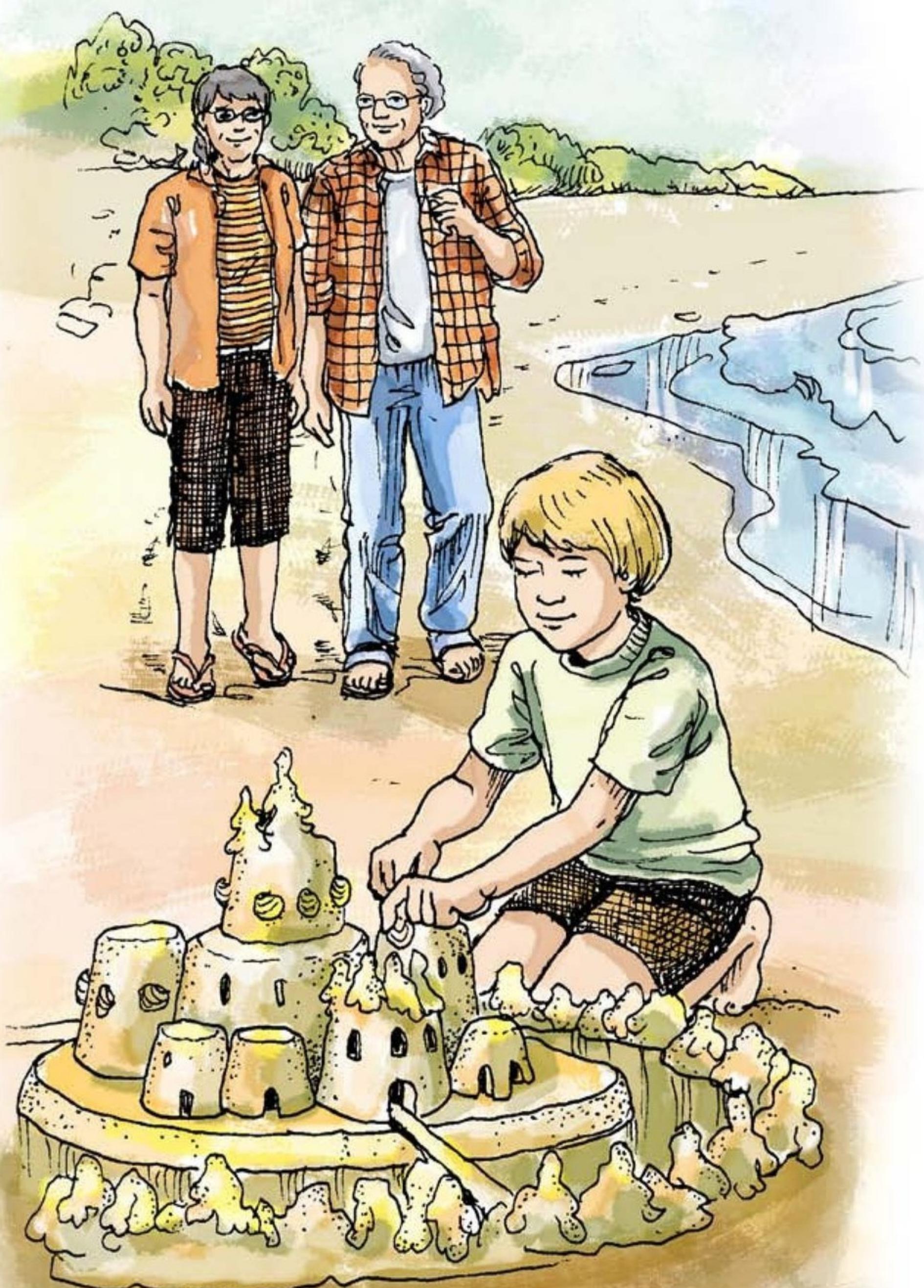
Introduction	4
Research	6
Blind as a Bat?	8
Searching for Bats	11
Clam Digging	14
Bon Appétit!.....	17
Goodbyes	19
Glossary	20

Introduction

When I was nine years old, I spent the summer visiting my great-grandmother, whom I called Gram. She lived in a large, gray cedar shakes house by the ocean. Gram let me pick which upstairs bedroom I wanted to stay in, so I chose the yellow one because its window faced the beach.

I had many adventures that summer, including ones with horseshoe crabs, sand castles, and ants. My latest adventure began when I heard some strange sounds outside my bedroom window. I looked out and saw winged creatures flying around the outside light. These brown, flying animals seemed to fly back and forth from the house. I thought Gram's house might have bats in the attic.





Research

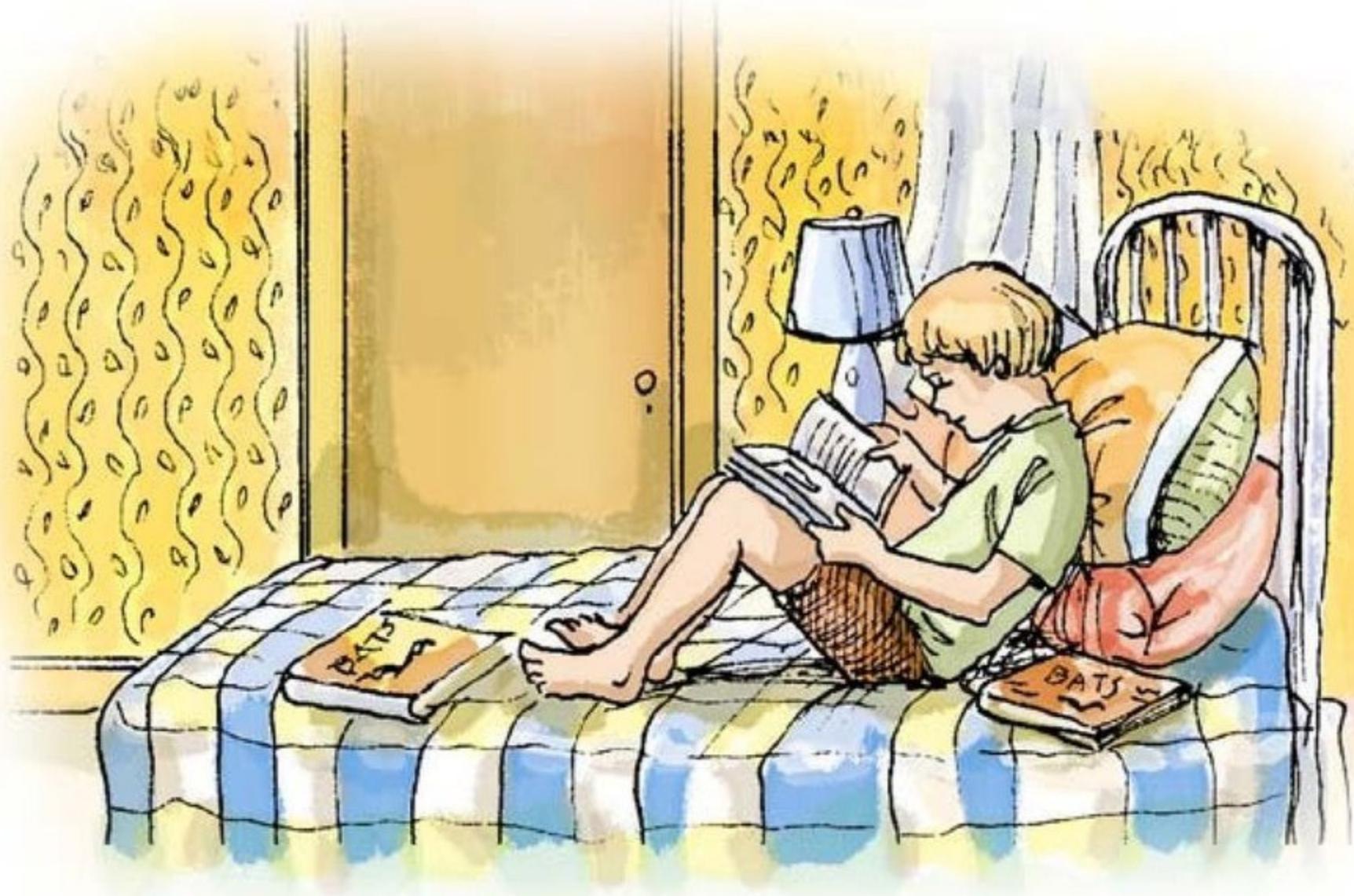
I had never climbed up the steep stairs to the third floor, but Gram had told me it was her attic. The strange sounds outside made me curious about what was in that part of the house. I decided to tell Gram about the bats the next morning. I planned to ask her if Jim could go with me to see how the bats were getting into the house. Jim was Gram's friend who helped her with chores around the house. He often stopped by to visit.

The next morning, while having a breakfast of oatmeal with lots of maple syrup, I told Gram what I had seen and heard the night before. Gram said she didn't think the bats were living in the attic but it would be a good idea to have Jim and me check it out the next time he came to visit. Gram suggested that I ride my bike to the library to read all I could about bats. I was surprised when she told me that she didn't want the bats to go away, but she didn't want them to live in her house either.



The town's library was small, and the librarian knew me from previous visits. That summer I had read books about sand castles, horseshoe crabs, and ants, as well as books about **tides** and the ocean. Now I wanted books about bats.

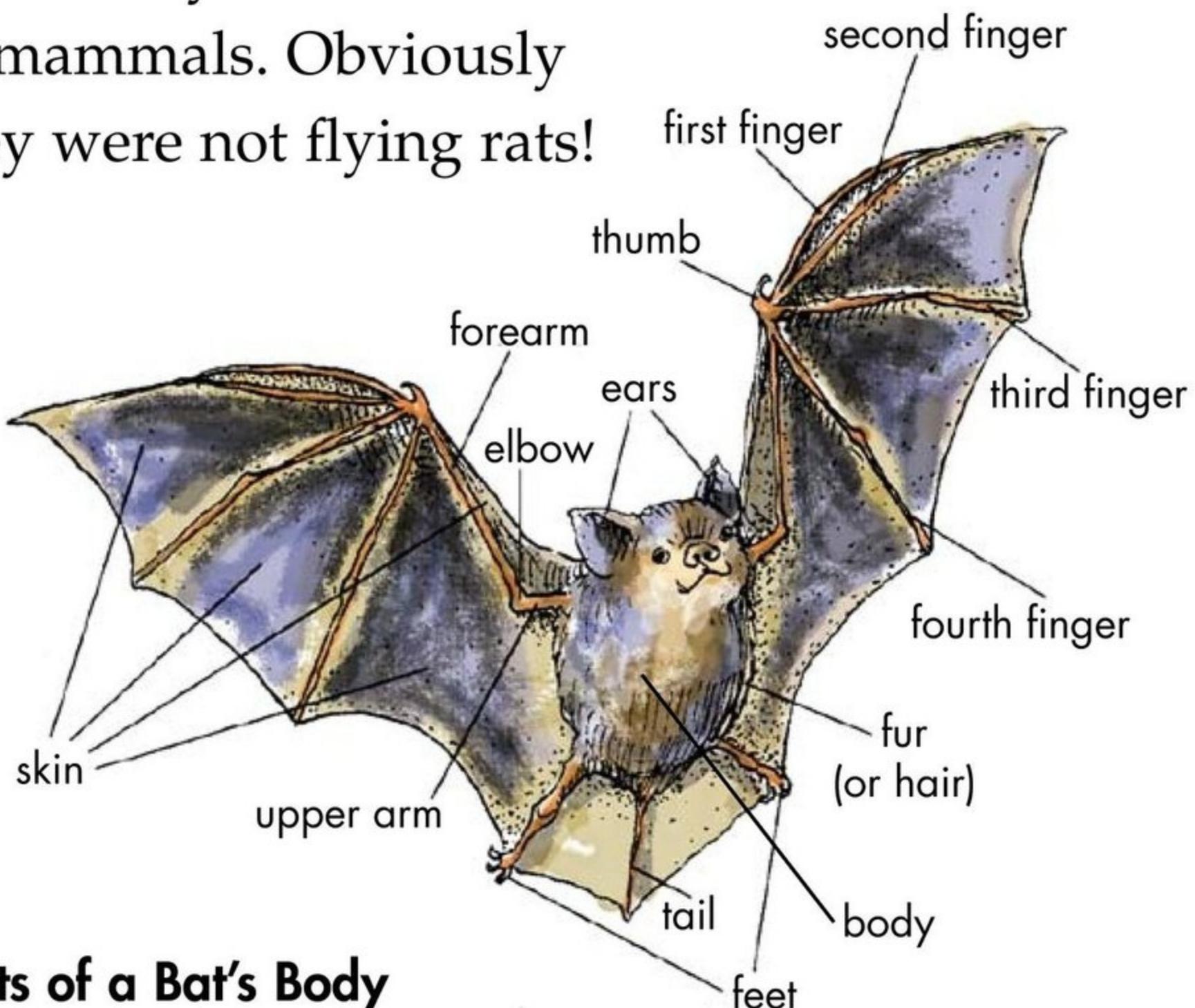
The librarian helped me find many books, and I sat down to look through them. Some books were too difficult, and some were too easy. I found three books that I thought would teach me what I wanted to learn, checked them out, and rode my bicycle home.



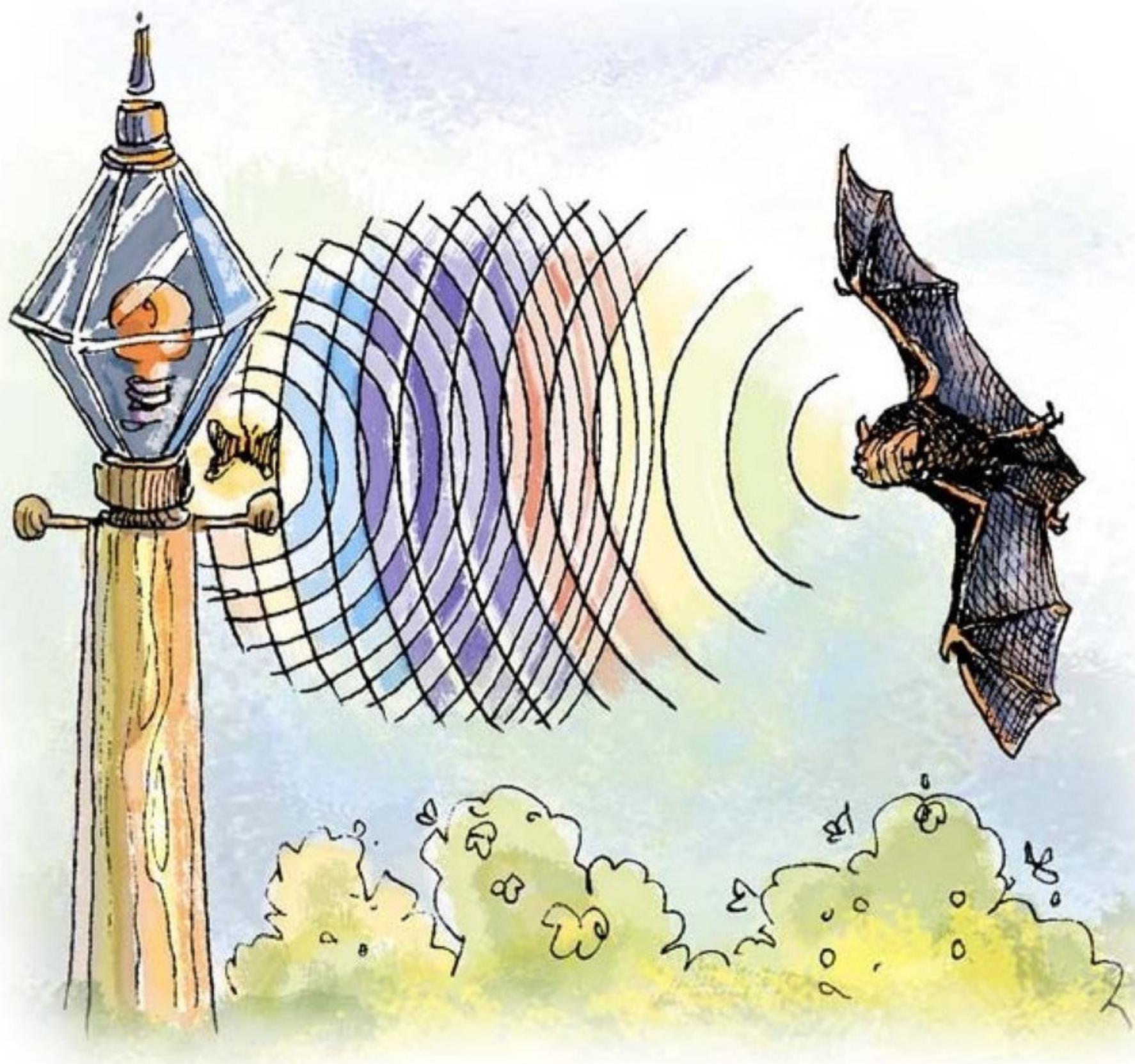
Blind as a Bat?

Bats are very interesting creatures. I learned that they are divided into two categories: megabats and microbats. Megabats can have a wingspan of six feet. Thank goodness the bats at Gram's were microbats, which are about the size of a hamster. Megabats live where it is warm all year, and they eat mostly fruit and nectar. Microbats live in many parts of the world and eat mostly insects. I was pretty sure Gram's bats were called *Eptesicus fuscus* (ep-TEAS-ick-us FUSS-cus), or big brown bats. Once I read further, I learned one bat could eat 600 to 1,000 mosquito-sized insects in an hour. Now I knew why Gram wanted to keep them near.

I first suspected bats were related to mice, but I read that bats are more closely related to humans. A bat's wing is like a human hand with four fingers and a thumb. The bat's arm has a forearm, an elbow, and an upper arm. Bats' fingers are long and have a double layer of skin connecting them. The skin is so thin you can almost see through it. Bats feed milk to their newborns, called **pups**, the same way other mammals do. Bats, like all mammals, have hair or fur on their bodies, are warm blooded, and have claws or fingernails. It was strange to think of those flying creatures outside my bedroom window as mammals. Obviously they were not flying rats!



Parts of a Bat's Body



I had heard the expression “*blind as a bat*” used by many people. In my reading, I found out that bats are not blind. They use their eyesight during daylight and early evening hours. At night, of course, they need more than sight to catch flying insects and to fly around without hurting themselves. They do this by using **echolocation**. A bat makes sounds from its mouth or nose that bounce off solid objects and echo back, which tells the bat the location of the object, including insects.

Searching for Bats

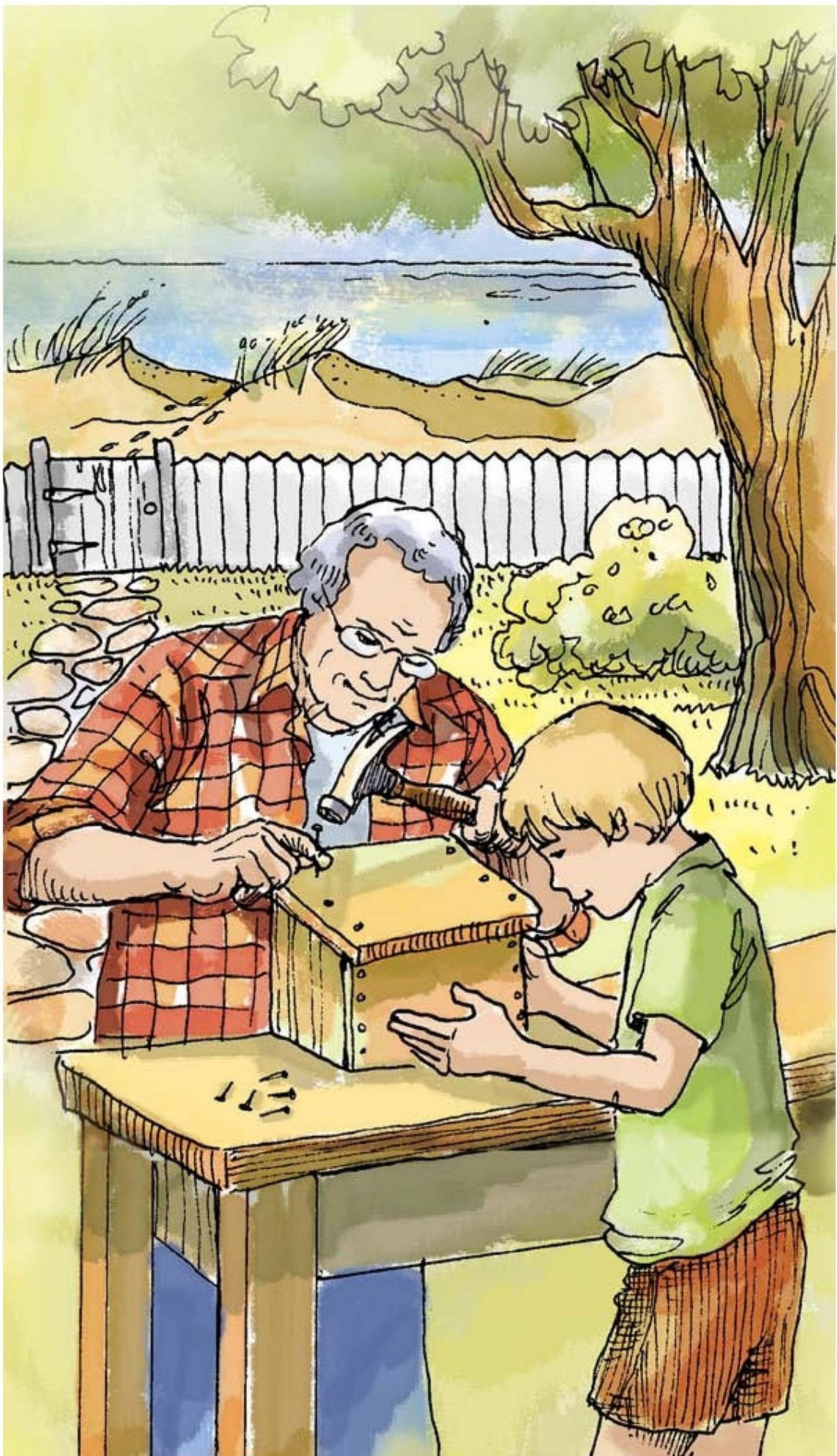
The next time Jim came for breakfast, I asked him if he'd go with me to look for bats in the attic. As we climbed the narrow, steep stairs, Jim told me not to touch any bats we found. I told him I had read that only a few bats have **rabies**, but humans still should not touch or frighten them. Jim was glad I had done some research. He said it was good we both knew what to do, and what not to do, to stay safe around wildlife.



The attic was full of old things, such as furniture, boxes, and old pictures. Jim shone a flashlight onto the ceiling, looking for bats. We also looked all over the floor for bat droppings. We found nothing. The bats had to be living in the walls.

In one of the books I had read, I learned how to remove bats from a house. The book said not to disturb bats during the summer months in case there were young pups that would not be able to follow their parents to a new home. Gram would have to wait a couple more weeks until September to take steps to protect her house against any more bats living in it. I gave her the book that explained how to keep bats out so she would know what to do.

I asked Jim to help me build a bat house. The bat house would attract bats so they would stay near Gram's house to eat insects. When we were finished, Jim fastened the bat house near the edge of Gram's roof where I had seen the bats coming and going at dusk. I hoped the bats would learn to live in the new home we made for them.

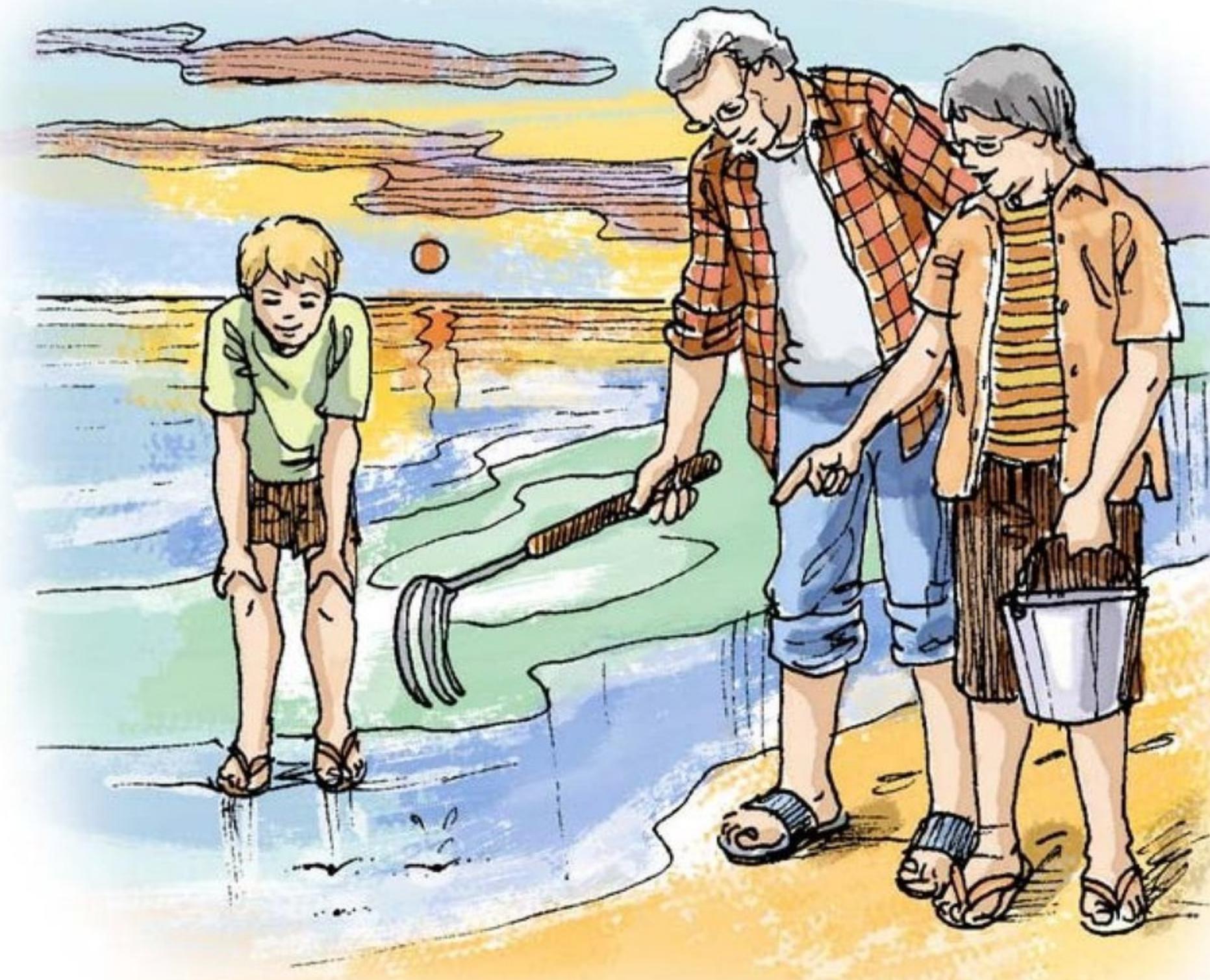


Clam Digging

My summer was coming to a close; Labor Day was just a week away. I loved living at the shore and was not ready to leave. I missed my family and friends in the city, but I wished we lived closer to Gram.

One evening, Jim and Gram told me they had a surprise for me. The next day we were going to go clam digging. There was a full moon that night, which meant the tide would **ebb**, or pull away from the shore, farther than usual. In the morning we would be able to dig clams that were normally covered by the ocean. We would need to leave Gram's house by 6:00 AM.

Gram, Jim, and I had a quick breakfast of cereal and orange juice. We had a short drive to a **secluded** beach. When we arrived, Jim handed me a wire bucket and a jug of water. He carried a potato hoe that looked like a rake with six long **tines**, and a big iron kettle. Gram carried a blanket and a picnic basket.



Gram and Jim showed me which **dimples**, or holes in the sand, should yield clams. Jim would find a dimple, put the hoe on the ocean side of the clam and push down, gently bringing the sand out. It was my job to grab the clam and put it into the bucket.

Clams dug down deeper into the sand to escape, so sometimes Jim had to keep digging. Clams also defended themselves by shooting a stream of water out of the hole as we stepped near them.

After a while, Jim handed me the hoe to try clam digging. I could not dig fast enough at first, but when I uncovered my first clam I was high-fiving Gram and Jim with happiness! Gram would swoosh the bucket of clams in the ocean water to remove sand from their shells.

Sometimes seagulls would see a clam's **snout** near the surface, grab it, and fly off with it for a meal. I shooed the gulls away when they came too near to our digging. Gram told me that we might dig up a few **bloodworms**, as their holes in the sand look very similar to clam holes. I was very glad we didn't find a bloodworm that day; they can give humans nasty bites.



Bon Appétit!

Once we had collected quite a few clams, Gram and I looked for **driftwood**. We were at a private beach where we were allowed to build a fire. When we had our arms full of all sizes of wood, we headed back to Jim. He had the bucketful of clams and was washing the last ones in the ocean. Gram put the clams into her kettle and poured the jug of water over them to remove as much sand as possible. Jim built the fire, poured the water off the clams, and set the kettle atop the fire to cook. As the clams steamed, Gram sat on the blanket watching Jim and me make a sand castle.





Gram called us when the clams opened their shells. She put some salt, pepper, and butter on them. They were a grayish color when we dug them. Now cooked, they were almost white. Gram put one on a plate and showed me how to remove the skin on the snout. Then she gave it to me to eat.

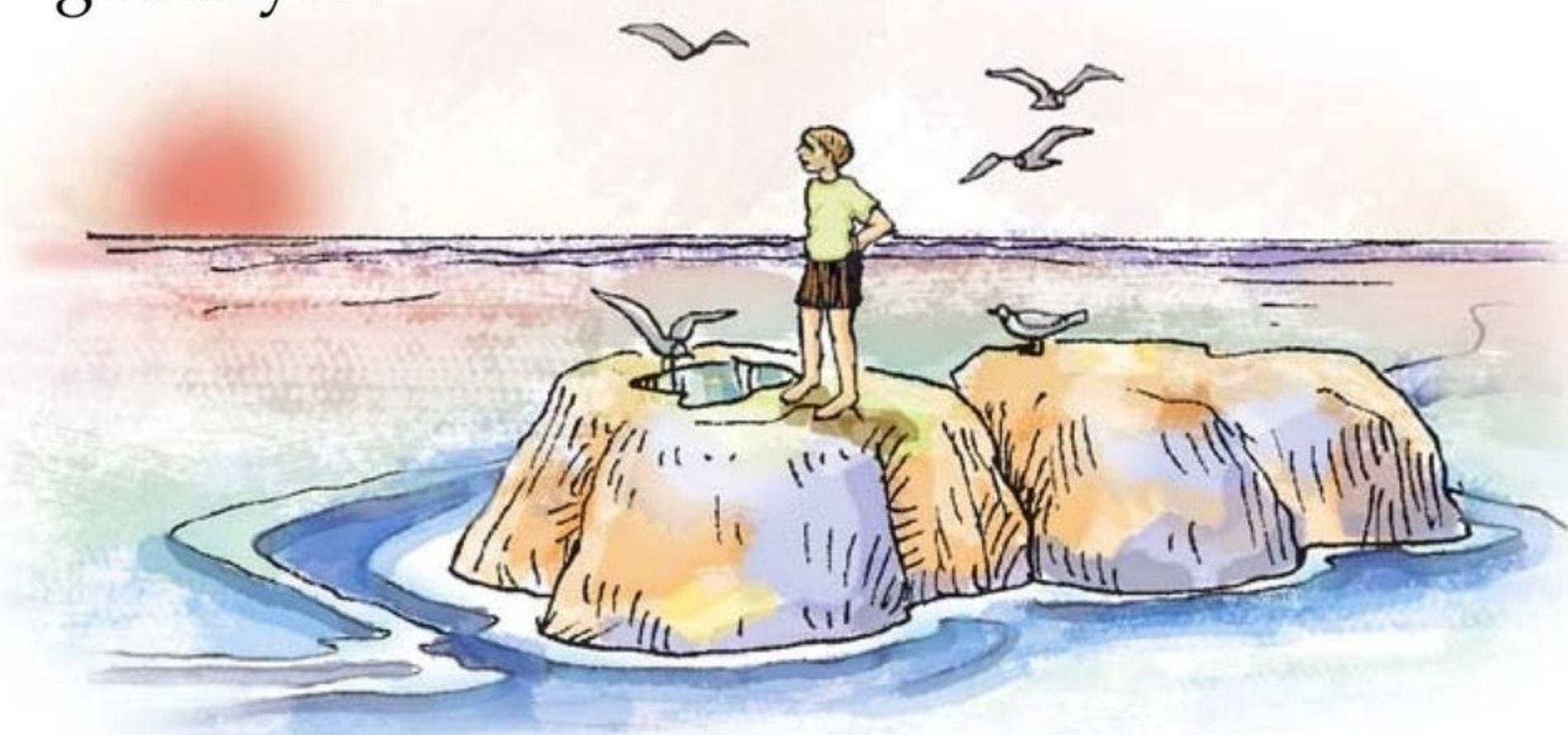
“Bon appétit,” said Jim. “Enjoy!”

The clams were delicious. With fresh bread and ice-cold lemonade, this was the best meal I had ever tasted.

Goodbyes

Gram, Jim, and I went for a long walk on the beach and **waded** along the shore after our lunch of delicious clams. I was feeling sad that I would soon be taking the train back north to the city and home. Gram noticed that I was unhappy. She gave me a hug and told me not to worry. “You’ll be back soon—now that you have sand in your shoes.”

Seagulls kept flying to a pair of huge rocks nearby. Jim helped me climb to the top so I could see what the birds liked so much. On top, I found a small pool of water. I felt very tall standing on the rock. I could see far out into the ocean and up and down the beach. This was a perfect place for seagulls to perch. This was a perfect place for me to say my goodbyes.



Glossary

bloodworms (<i>n.</i>)	worms found in tidal areas that can be up to 15 inches long (p. 16)
Bon appétit (BONE ah-puh-TEE)	French expression meaning “good appetite” or “enjoy your meal” (p. 18)
dimples (<i>n.</i>)	indentations on a surface (p. 15)
driftwood (<i>n.</i>)	pieces of wood found washed up from the tide on a beach (p. 17)
ebb (<i>v.</i>)	to drop in level as with a lowering tide (p. 14)
echolocation (<i>n.</i>) (EK-o-low-KAY-shen)	the process of locating objects by bouncing sound waves off of them (p. 10)
<i>Eptesicus fuscus</i>	the scientific name for big brown bats (p. 8)
pups (<i>n.</i>)	very young bats (p. 9)
rabies (<i>n.</i>)	a deadly disease caused by a virus that is usually passed on through the bite of an infected animal (p. 11)
secluded (<i>adj.</i>)	hidden away, with few people around (p. 14)
snout (<i>n.</i>)	the nose and mouth of a clam (p. 16)
tides (<i>n.</i>)	the rise and fall of the ocean occurring about every 12 hours (p. 7)
tines (<i>n.</i>)	prongs, like the points of a fork (p. 14)
waded (<i>v.</i>)	walked in the shallow water (p. 19)

Note about the series: *Bats in the Attic* is the third book in a three-part series written by Deborah Ambroza. The first two books in the series are: *Horseshoes Aren't Just for Good Luck* and *Ants in My Bed*.

Bats in the Attic
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Illustrated by Marcy Ramsey

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